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**Luxury and Labour:
Ideas of Labouring-Class Consumption
in Eighteenth-Century England**

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

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This dissertation may be photocopied

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Illustrations

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Declaration:

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at any other university. None of the work that appears here has previously been published.

Abstract

This thesis examines changing ideas of labouring-class consumption in eighteenth-century England. Recent social and economic history has rewritten eighteenth-century England in terms of the formation of a commercial society. Against this backdrop, intellectual and cultural historians have uncovered the formation of concepts and practices appropriate for a civilised commercial society. Yet, in spite of the growing evidence that they were increasingly participating in the developing world of goods, little work has focused on the public discussion of the labouring classes' consumer desires.

The study is based on the close analysis of pamphlet literature discussing the labouring classes. It tracks the ideas through which the propertied classes viewed labouring-class consumption and attempted to determine the exact status and function of their desires in a commercial society. From within an early eighteenth-century position which viewed the appetites of the poor as being a species of luxury, the thesis tracks the emergence of categories and concepts that made it possible to recognise the labouring classes' consumer desires as part of commercial society's progressive development. In the later years of the century, this optimism faded as the interests of capital accumulation and the demands of labourers were increasingly recognised to be contradictory.

Ultimately, the thesis argues that we cannot understand the ideological representation of the needs and desires of the poor without also tracing the changing conceptualisation of their labour, in the same way that we cannot understand the formation of a commercial society without reference to proletarianisation and the attack on customary culture. The coalescing practices of a commercial society, and their ideological expression, rested upon the ever greater alienation of the labouring classes, from their human needs and powers.

Luxury and Labour:

Ideas of Labouring-Class Consumption in Eighteenth-Century England

Introduction

In 1738, Thomas Andrews, a Wiltshire parson attempting to make sense of the riots which had engulfed the weaving districts that year, wrote that the miseries of the poor were in no small part due to ‘the great Luxury of the present Age, which extends itself to, and corrupts, all Ranks and Degrees of People’. ‘Luxury’, he claimed, ‘descends like a devouring Torrent on our middling People’. But it did not stop there. ‘Nay sometimes’, he exclaimed, ‘it humbly enters the lowly Cottages of our Poor themselves’.¹ Such claims by the propertied concerning the habits of the poor are familiar to historians of eighteenth-century England. Quite definitely less familiar is the sort of claim made by a retired merchant, Malachy Postlethwayt, nineteen years later.

In the midst of a period of high food prices, war taxation and widespread rioting, Malachy Postlethwayt suggested that, ‘instead of urging the diminution of the home consumption of our native commodities, is it not better to make all things so plentiful and so cheap, that the people in general may become greater, instead of lesser consumers thereof?’ And in case there was any ambiguity about who he meant by ‘the people’, Postlethwayt emphasised he was referring to the entire population. The value of home commerce, he argued, included expenditure on lodging, food,

¹ Thomas Andrews, An Enquiry into the Causes and Increase and Miseries of the Poor of England (London, 1738), pp. 22-24.

clothing and the conveniencies and superfluities of life by ‘every inhabitant of the nation’.²

It is the contention of this thesis that these divergent statements represent markers in a transformation of social thought in eighteenth-century England. Behind their stark opposition lies a process of social and ideological change in which the needs, wants and desires of the labouring classes were projected through the categories and concepts of a developing capitalist society. The essential argument of the thesis is that the eighteenth century witnessed the formulation of a set of concepts and categories with which the labouring classes could be admitted into, and at the same time excluded from, the developing consumer society in the emergent capitalist order.

From this statement it will be clear that I am committed to the Marxist thesis that social being determines social consciousness, that there is a dialectical relationship between ideal forms and social and economic change. I also contend that the changing concepts and categories that form the primary focus of this study functioned as ideology. Inextricably bound to the coalescing English bourgeoisie, these ideas operated to conceal and distort the truth that the transformation to a commercial society in the eighteenth century depended upon the progressively intensified estrangement of the emerging labouring class from both the activity and products of its labour. In the first part of this introductory chapter, I will briefly explore the immediate historiography into which this thesis intervenes, the history of

² Malachy Postlethwayt, *Britain’s Commercial Interest Explained and Improved. In a Series of Dissertations on Several Important Branches of her Trade and Police* (London, 1757), pp. 12-13, 372-373.

ideas about the labouring classes. The second and third parts will develop the historiographical and methodological issues that the thesis raises and addresses.

Part I:

The field of history of ideas concerning the labouring people of eighteenth-century England continues to be thinly populated. What writing there has been shares a common set of methodological and analytical concerns which derive largely from the priorities of political economy. The prime category of investigation in the existing historiography has been the wage. Edgar Furniss's seminal book of 1918, The Position of the Labourer in a System of Nationalism, argued that mercantilist thought was predominantly concerned with the balance of trade and with a conception of labour as a national 'stock of goods'. The prime concern of the dominant strand of mercantilist thought was to reduce the price of this stock by maintaining its wages at as low a rate as possible.³ A. W. Coats's article of 1974 offered a more nuanced interpretation. Returning to the same pamphlet writers who had comprised the core of Furniss's empirical matter, Coats recognised that the middle decades of the eighteenth century saw a sea-change in attitudes. Coats analysed this change in terms of the conception of the function of wages in the economy. Contemporaries now recognised, he argued, that labourers might be more productive if they were permitted to enjoy the fruits of their labour in the form of higher wages. This set the

³ Edgar S. Furniss, The Position of the Labourer in a System of Nationalism: A Study in the Labour Theories of the Later Mercantilists (1918; reprinted New York 1965), pp. 7-9, 22-24.

scene for Smith's leap into political economy.⁴ Recently, John Hatcher has returned to the territory to investigate conceptions of labour and leisure over five centuries, muddying the image of simple change by demonstrating the presence of humanitarian sentiments towards labourers before the eighteenth century, and the persistence of apparently outdated attitudes beyond Coats's demarcation point.⁵

These studies tell us important truths about the social thought of eighteenth-century commentators. Their perspectives, and most of their sources, all appear in some form in my own argument. Yet I do not share their categorial fixation on the wage. Their dependence on the categories of political economy, I suggest, produces a historical knowledge which assesses the quality of 'economic' thought by the standards of a limited science. It also sees the wage as a straightforward 'reward' for labour; a simple means to the end of securing commodities, rather than as a historical development in itself, performing a specific role in capitalist societies.

For the same reasons, these studies have also largely neglected to examine the conceptions of need, desire and want in eighteenth-century social and economic thought. Hatcher's recent survey article, cited above, has made reference to the existence of a debate over 'luxury'. However, he characterised it simply as an eternal debate, shaped by the ongoing dilemma over the boundary between luxury and necessity.⁶ As John Sekora showed in 1977, there was far more at stake in discussions of luxury. *The peculiar intensity of debates on luxury in the eighteenth*

⁴ A. W. Coats, 'Changing Attitudes to Labour in the mid-century', in M. W. Flinn and T. C. Smout (eds.) *Essays in Social History* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 63-84.

⁵ John Hatcher, 'Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought Before the Nineteenth Century', *Past and Present* 160 (1998), pp. 64-115.

⁶ Hatcher, 'Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought'.

century, he argued, derived from the very particular historical conditions of the emergence of a recognisable commercial society and capitalist economy.⁷ Part of the task of this study is to reconnect this debate with the question of the representation of the labouring classes. I want to focus on the discussion of their needs, wants and, in particular, their consumer desires. This will help to examine the relationship between changing conceptions of luxury and changing conceptions of the function of labour and of labouring-class subjectivity.

The fact that the concept of luxury has been ignored in studies of ideas about labour mirrors the neglect of questions of labour in the recent efflorescence of interest in the role of the passions and desires in a commercial society. The work of intellectual historians like J. G. A. Pocock, Donald Winch and Istvan Hont, has wonderfully illuminated the intellectual labour of the *philosophes* of the Scottish enlightenment and the canonical thinkers in the genesis of English political economy. Pocock's genealogy of civic humanism and Winch and Hont's work on the origins of classical political economy has given the debate on luxury a fine pedigree in the eighteenth century.⁸ Yet contextualisation, for this school, tends to mean only the intellectual milieu of canonical writers. Even those historians of thought who have stressed the relationship between the developing capitalist market economy and the

⁷ John Sekora, Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett (Baltimore, 1977).

⁸ J. G. A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton, 1975); idem., Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge, 1985); Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment (Cambridge, 1983); Donald Winch, Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834 (Cambridge, 1996); Christopher J. Berry, The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation (Cambridge, 1994); J. A. W. Gunn, Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought (Montreal, 1983).

accommodation with the passions, like Albert Hirschman and Joyce Appleby, have left the relationship largely unformulated and extremely vague.⁹ In part, this is because of the remarkable crudity of the conceptual apparatus with which intellectual history approaches the relationship between social consciousness and social being. Winch has urged that it is, 'unwise for intellectual historians to commit themselves to the view that ideas reflect events'.¹⁰

It is not my intention to disparage intellectual history or argue for some spurious chronological and philosophical supersession of its concerns. Rather, I urge the ultimately inextricable relationship between all streams of thought and the historical conditions of their production. It is my contention that, within the writings of the pamphleteers of the period, we can trace developments in social thought that express the social and economic transformations of the period in the form of ideas. I want to suggest that this literature formed part of a layer of thought that mediated the relationship between the matter of public debate and the high enlightenment's finest intellectual labour. Correspondingly, my task is also to trace the mediations through which historical developments registered in social, economic and political change were transmitted into thought. This allows us to trace the relationship between high ideas and low and between the ideal more generally and social and economic change. Intellectual history neglected the labouring classes, not only because of its categorical concern with 'labour' as a factor in political economy, but because the main writers

⁹ A. O Hirschman, The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph (Princeton, 1977); Joyce Appleby, Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England (Princeton, 1978), and idem., 'Consumption in Early Modern Thought' in John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), Consumption and the World of Goods (London, 1991), pp. 162-177.

¹⁰ Winch, Riches and Poverty, p. 7.

on the subject tended to be pamphleteers. This methodological horizon was shared by Furniss, Coats and Hatcher. Their work satisfied itself with amassing simple quotes and statements, seeing these as sufficient to convey the historical meaning of the work precisely because pamphlets were perceived not to warrant serious treatment.

My own work has endeavoured to examine these writings more seriously. While they may not demonstrate the requisite analytical rigour that might endow them with a place in the canon of intellectual development, they are worthy of study for the historian of social thought. I have focused primarily on pamphlets because they offer writings of sufficient length to permit the analysis of their construction as texts which possess at least a minimal imperative to rational coherence, and to allow me to examine the relationships between their categories and concepts. They are also often of sufficient immediacy to trace direct relationships between policy initiatives, urgent issues of discussion and specific events.

Issues of time and space have prevented me from adequately addressing the changing formal conventions of the pamphlet genre. Broadly speaking, there was a discernible shift in style from exegesis to empirical argument over the eighteenth century. Pamphlets also became longer as their relation to newspapers changed.¹¹ As the latter became more widespread and more important, the pamphlet ceased to be the primary mode of contributing to a public debate, becoming instead a place for more considered and lengthy exposition. For these reasons, I have tempered over-reliance on pamphlet literature by referring to books, poems, prints, journals and

¹¹ For popular literary culture and the rise of the newspaper as a cultural form, see Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (1992), pp. 173-192.

periodical essays where possible. But, in the end, concerns of time have dictated that the benefits of studying a long run of one genre outweighed those of catering to dubious notions of 'representative' thought.

Their readership can be taken to reflect what we know about their authorship. Their authors were chiefly from the propertied middle classes but reflected the diverse historical composition of these classes over the eighteenth century. They were the work of hack journalists, professionals, social reformers, MPs, projectors, well respected philosophers, churchmen and scores of the anonymous advocates of economic and political interest groups in the state, seeking to win over public opinion: representatives of farmers, merchants, manufacturers, shopkeepers, hawkers, peddlers and distillers. The issue of who actually read them, and how they might have been read, is pertinent up to a point. I have indicated, for example, where a text is known to have been widely reprinted. Certainly many of these texts reveal an interesting implied reader and I have addressed this where I have felt it to be important. Nevertheless, since the concern of this thesis is tracing developments in thought as part of social transformation, this issue is not my primary concern.

In treating them somewhat in the manner of representations, I am echoing the terminology of the cultural historian.¹² But this is an identification that I want to

¹² I am using 'cultural history' to denote a bloc which embraces many forms of historical enterprise which might not perceive themselves as being strictly speaking, cultural history. However, I consider that the 'linguistic turn', 'post-modern history' and cultural history' share the same fundamental epistemological and ontological position, the same conceptions of the project of history and the same general field of study. See Roger Chartier, Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations (Cambridge, 1988); Mark Poster, Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges (New York, 1997); Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (eds.), A New Philosophy of History (London, 1995); Lynn Hunt (ed.), The New Cultural History (Berkeley, 1983); Richard T. Vann, 'Turning Linguistic: History and Theory and History and History and Theory, 1960-1975', in Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (eds.) A New Philosophy of History (London, 1995), pp. 40-69;

resist. For cultural historians, the pamphlet represents part of the flourishing print culture of the eighteenth century within which can be found a rich fund of the categories, demarcations and constructions of meaning that comprise a 'culture'. When compared with the neglect of such sources by historians of ideas and intellectual historians, this can appear as a liberation. But, as I will argue below, it can perhaps be seen as more of a 'repressive desublimation', an apparent release from intellectual alienation which only serves to impose its own, more insidious, limitations on historical cognition.¹³

My methodological approach to pamphlet literature draws from, and yet sharply diverges from that of the cultural history that breathed new life into these sources. Cultural history's great contribution has been to insist that the full panoply of cultural artefacts are open to serious study. In eighteenth-century studies, this has opened up to view an expanding print culture of newspapers, periodicals, journals, books, trade catalogues and prints whose production and distribution have become a subject for social and economic studies in their own right.¹⁴ Cultural history has brought techniques of textual analysis to a body of material neglected by intellectual history, placing the commonplace assertion and categories organising the experience

Hayden White, The Content of the Form: Narrative, Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore, 1987); Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (London, 1970); idem, The Archaeology of Knowledge (London, 1972); Michel de Certeau, The Writing of History (New York, 1988); J. Goldstein (ed.), Foucault and the Writing of History (Cambridge, Mass., 1994); Colin Jones and Roy Porter (eds.), Reassessing Foucault (London, 1996).

¹³ The concept of 'repressive desublimation' derives from Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man (London, 1994), pp. 56-83.

¹⁴ See for example, James Raven, Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England 1750-1800 (Oxford, 1992); Timothy Clayton, The English Print, 1688-1800 (London, 1997). John Brewer, The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1997), pp. 125-201, 427-492.

of everyday life to the forefront of historical investigation.¹⁵ However, its roots in French structuralist and poststructuralist theory have endowed cultural history with a tendency to aestheticise history and a blindness to issues of ontology. The recognition that everything is potentially burdened with meaning, is not enough to justify the collapse of all cognitive realms into the domain of the merely cultural, just as recognising that everything has some aesthetic content does not do away with the necessity of investigating the historical formation and historical necessity of the category of the aesthetic.¹⁶

In collapsing the study of history into the study of discourses and in construing agency as reducible to struggles to appropriate meanings and forge marginal identities, cultural history produces a thin version of politics. It also possesses an inherent tendency that drives it away from issues of determination. We can see a concrete example of this in Mitchell Dean's The Constitution of Poverty. Dean's central argument is that the late eighteenth century saw a 'discursive break' with the 'discourse of the poor' and the formation of the classical liberal discourse of poverty. While Dean's work contains important truths, the centrality of the category

¹⁵ See, for example, Kathleen Wilson, The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785 (Cambridge, 1995); idem., 'The Good, the Bad and the Impotent: Imperialism and the Politics of Identity in Georgian England', in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, The Consumption of Culture: Image, Object, Text (London, 1994), pp. 237-262; idem., 'Citizenship, Empire and Modernity in the English Provinces, 1720-1760', Eighteenth Century Studies 29 (1995), pp. 69-95; Lawrence E. Klein, Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge, 1994); idem., 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England', in J. Still and M. Worton (eds.), Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices (Manchester, 1993), pp. 100-115; idem., 'Politeness for Plebes: Consumption and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England', in Bermingham and Brewer, Consumption of Culture, pp. 362-382.

¹⁶ For the observation that the post-modern can be formulated in part at least as marking the collapse of all realms into the cultural, a disastrous aestheticization of social reality, see Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (London, 1991), pp. ix-x; J. M.

of the discourse, or structure, entails that changes over the eighteenth century are flattened out underneath the prevailing ideal formation. This inevitably produces a sharp discursive break which is not open to any form of determination. Instead we are left with an idealist history of indeterminate and abstract textual systems.¹⁷

The central cognitive categories I employ are significantly different. The thesis that social being and social consciousness are dialectically related leads away from the cultural historian's emphasis on 'representations' or 'discursive constitution'. The writings that constitute my corpus of sources are treated as representations in as much as their authors attempted to present a coherent perspective on the social reality they perceived. But crucially, as representations, they are seen to mediate the relationship between social consciousness and social being, and not to construct the latter out of the former. Consequently, I treat them as a part that must be viewed dialectically, as they operated within a whole complex of social historical relations over time. To proceed in this way, as Marx and Engels put it, is to explain the formation of ideas from material practice, and not to 'take every epoch at its word and believe everything it says and imagines about itself is true'.¹⁸ I remain committed to the view that the ideal and the material are dialectical categories; they can be individuated only the better to demonstrate their interrelationship and fundamental

Bernstein, 'Introduction' to Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Essays in Mass Culture* (London, 1991), pp. 17-23.

¹⁷ Mitchell Dean, *The Constitution of Poverty: Toward a Genealogy of Liberal Governance* (London, 1991). See also Keith Tribe, *Land, Labour and Economic Discourse* (London, 1978).

¹⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, edited and introduced by C. J. Arthur (London, 1982), p. 67.

internal unity. Consequently, there is a dialectical, mutually transforming relationship between self-conscious historical agents and their material conditions.¹⁹

Part II:

Cultural history shares a common orientation and common limitations with the histories of the 'consumption turn'. They are united in their tendency to obscure the position of labour in capitalist societies. Whatever its practitioners might say to the contrary, there is an ineluctable inner unity between cultural history's essential trajectory and that of the historical sciences that the cultural historian might reject as positivistic. For the agent of cultural history's struggles to forge marginal identities and appropriate discourses to their own individual ends bears an uncanny resemblance to the universal individual consumer of economic history, while the fascination with media, communications systems and identity formation reflect concerns and concepts central to late twentieth-century consumer societies.²⁰ We can see this through a brief survey of the historiography of the consumption turn. Central to this historiography has been the privileging of an individual agent who operates in

¹⁹ The literature on dialectic in Marxism is considerably larger than is often appreciated. Canonical statements can be found in Friedrich Engels, Anti-Duhring: Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science (London and Moscow, 1934); V. I. Lenin, Marx, Engels, Marxism (Moscow, 1984), pp. 13-20, 62-68; Georg Lukacs, 'What is Orthodox Marxism?' from his History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics (London, 1990); Herbert Marcuse, Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory (Boston, 1969), pp. 62-169, 273-323; Joseph McCarney, Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism (London, 1990).

²⁰ See Poster, Cultural History, pp. 108-133; Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life (New York, 1991); For a debate on the political credentials of the discursive turn, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (London, 1985); Patrick Curry, 'Towards a Post-Marxist Social History: Thompson, Clark and Beyond', in Adrian Wilson (ed.), Rethinking Social History: English Society 1570-1920, and its Interpretation (Manchester, 1993), pp. 158-200; Peter Osborne, 'Radicalism Without Limit? Discourse, Democracy and the Politics of Identity', in Peter Osborne (ed.), Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism (London, 1991), pp. 201-225.

a marketplace of possibilities. The history of eighteenth-century England becomes, for this historiography, one of the flowering of possibilities, choices and options.

The consumption turn in historiography can be provisionally dated to the publication of McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb's Birth of a Consumer Society. This book depicted eighteenth-century England as a nation entering a commercial modernity which both unleashed and satisfied desires pent up over the course of previous history. McKendrick, in particular, embellished his heroic narrative with a florid rhetoric comprising manifold metaphors of birthpangs and paeans to flowering youth.²¹ Such exuberance has tended to bring the whole concept under fire, both at the time of publication and more recently. However, in the work that has followed, the 'consumption turn' in studies of commercialisation has been impressively consolidated.²²

This consolidation has seen a profusion of histories of marketing, business strategy and entrepreneurialism, greatly expanding our knowledge of eighteenth-century distribution networks and of middle-class consumption, but leaving largely unquestioned the category of the consumer. For these writers, taking their cue from McKendrick's own concern with the business of selling, the consumer was simply endowed with desires which reacted to stimulation, unleashing their need to emulate.²³

²¹ Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialisation of Eighteenth-Century England (London, 1982).

²² See John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), Consumption and the World of Goods (London 1991); Bermingham and Brewer, Consumption of Culture.

²³ See McKendrick's contributions to Birth of a Consumer Society; see also Eric Robinson, 'Eighteenth-Century Commerce and Fashion: Matthew Boulton's Marketing Techniques', Economic History Review 2nd series, 16 (1963-4), pp. 39-60; Joan Thirsk, Economic Policy and

Brewer, meanwhile, has gone on to develop his and Plumb's work on commercialisation and leisure in what might be termed a social history of culture. Showing a sophisticated theoretical apparatus derived from social theory, Brewer's work has connected the commercialisation of British society to the development of middle-class political culture, the emergence of a fiscal military state and the commodification of culture in the eighteenth century. It is a truly impressive corpus of work.²⁴ Yet, Brewer's own concerns rarely stretch to considering the question of the labouring classes' relation to this expanding world of goods.

The labouring poor figure rarely in either of these histories. Ostensibly, this is for reasons of source survival. However, the approach used fundamentally affects the ways in which the labouring people could plausibly enter the narrative even if the sources existed. Their needs and their consumer desires are assumed to be fundamentally identical to any other social agent, and their class determines only the wage they will possess when they enter the market for goods. Class therefore

Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England (Oxford, 1978); Hoh-Cheung and Lorna H. Mui, Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England (London, 1987); Beverly Lemire, Fashion's Favourite: The Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660-1800 (Oxford, 1991); E. L. Jones, 'The Fashion Manipulators: Consumer Tastes and British Industries, 1660-1800', in L. P. Cain and P. J. Uselding (eds.) Business Enterprise and Economic Change (Ohio, 1973), pp. 199-220. What theoretical weight these histories have given the 'consumer', has largely come from Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York, 1912). McKendrick's work has received trenchant criticism in B. A. Holderness's review in English Historical Review 99 (1984), pp. 122-124; Jean-Christophe Agnew 'Coming Up for Air: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective' in Brewer and Porter, Consumption and the World of Goods, pp. 23-25.

²⁴ Brewer, Pleasures of the Imagination; idem., "'The Most Polite Age and the Most Vicious': Attitudes Towards Culture as a Commodity, 1660-1800', in Brewer and Bermingham, (eds.), The Consumption of Culture: Image, Object, Text (London, 1994), pp. 341-361; idem., 'The Commercialisation of Politics', in McKendrick et al., Birth of a Consumer Society, pp. 197-262; idem., The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783 (London, 1989); Roy Porter, 'Material Pleasures in the Consumer Society', in Roy Porter and Mary Mulvey Roberts (eds.), Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 19-35; Peter Borsay, The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770 (Oxford, 1989).

becomes a matter of a consumer's spending power rather than a structural determinant of experience.

The work that has emerged from cultural anthropology has, with a few exceptions, replicated this blind spot. This historiography has taken its inspiration from cultural anthropologists such as Mary Douglas and Clifford Geertz.²⁵ The world of goods of eighteenth-century England has obviously been grist to the mill of historians studying the social meaning of the everyday objects through which culture is constructed. The most interesting work has melded interpretation of the social meanings of objects with the categories that have enabled them to establish limits on the capacity of historical agents to produce meaning.²⁶ However, this school also has a tendency toward interpretative nominalism, constituting consumption as historically autonomous; free of historical determinations. The obvious truism that, could we imagine them without any relation to historical forms of production or consumption, objects would have no meaning, is turned into a historical absolute. Without any relation to specific modes of production, this makes 'the market' nothing more than an efficient system for providing us with neutral objects, ready for us to project

²⁵ Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption (London, 1978); Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York, 1973); Grant McCracken, Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities (Bloomington, 1988); Arjun Appadurai, The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective (Cambridge, 1986); The seminal work in this field is still Marcel Mauss, The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies translated by W.D. Halls (London, 1990). See also Georges Bataille, Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939 (Minnesota, 1985), pp. 116-130.

²⁶ Hans Medick, 'Plebeian Culture in the Transition to Industrial Capitalism', in Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds.) Culture, Politics and Ideology (London, 1983), pp. 84-112; Stana Nenadic, 'Middle-Rank Consumers and Domestic Culture in Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1720-1840', Past and Present 145 (1994), pp. 122-156. See also Sidney W. Mintz, Sweetness and Power (London, 1985).

meaning onto and then struggle over. Class becomes once more a mere inflection of spending power.²⁷

While these various historiographies of the consumption turn have uncovered a rich material culture and explored a wealth of meaning investing the ever-growing cultural field, what this amounts to in terms of historical cognition is a bloating of one field of study and its new historical hero, the consumer, at the expense of any sense that capitalism, historically, amounts to anything more than a market. Lost is the notion that it is a historically specific system whose unity is premised on a structural antagonism which endows it with a historical motion towards destruction.

I would argue that what unites all these histories of the commercialisation of eighteenth-century England is a fundamental inner unity with the historical concerns, categories and cognitive limitations of liberal political economy. In prioritising the history of commercialisation, all focus on the *surface* of capitalism. They collapse the concept of capitalism as a system into the practices of commodity exchange that characterises its ideal aspect. The alternative history of capital accumulation fades into the dim background as new commodities dazzle and delight. The labouring people *as* labouring people, as engaged in productive activity, are absent from such a history. The categories that informed the historical study of productive activity and its relation to human experience are not permissible. Labour, where it is treated,

²⁷ Timothy Breen's work on the meaning of objects in the Anglo-American Atlantic economy tends towards this celebration of the liberatory potential of the commodity in emphasising the possibilities for social solidarity inherent in networks of consumption. Identities can be forged and re-forged at will, and class, again dethroned from any primary function within capitalism, merely becomes one identity among many, an inflection measured through a variation in spending power. Timothy Breen, "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century", *Past and Present* 119 (1988), pp. 73-104; idem., 'The Meanings of Things: Interpreting the

becomes merely the means toward the end of consumption that classical political economy and capitalist society more generally always maintained it was.

Yet there is an alternative history of eighteenth-century England which has focused on the social groups and historical processes that have been necessarily ignored by the histories of commercialisation. This school of empirical social history has grown up around the work of two of the founders of the Communist Party Historians Group, Eric Hobsbawm and E. P. Thompson. The work of the latter, in particular, inspired generations of social historians, generally on the political left, to uncover the struggles that accompanied the period of what Marx called 'primitive accumulation'.²⁸ Beneath the developmental narratives of industrialisation, agricultural improvement and commercialisation, these historians have found a history of bitter conflict between an emergent labouring class and its increasingly distant and hostile propertied opponents. The field was opened up by Thompson, whose series of studies of eighteenth-century England showed how capitalist agriculture gradually detached, first the middling sorts, and then the gentry from the obligations of a customary culture. The norms internal to custom, once rooted in the relations of peasant economies, increasingly became the vocabulary of the plebeians and eventually formed the first proletarian consciousness.²⁹

The culmination of the work of the school of historical thought that developed out of Thompson's work can be seen in the recent synthesis by Douglas

Consumer Economy in the Eighteenth Century', in Brewer and Porter, Consumption and the World of Goods, pp. 249-251

²⁸ Karl Marx, Capital, Volume 1, translated by Ben Fowkes (London, 1976), pp. 873-940.

²⁹ E. P. Thompson, Customs in Common (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 1-15.

Hay and Nicholas Rogers. This argues that the formation of a market economy came at the end of a multi-directional assault upon the meshes of customary obligation that debunked the residues of the 'moral economy' in ruling class ideology. This process left the labouring classes with a rich fund of experience of exploitation to carry with them into the nineteenth-century struggles.³⁰

Thompson was always aware, in a way that his opponents and some of his supporters were not, that the historiography of commercialisation and the historiography of embryonic class struggle were inextricably internally related. Too often, subsequent writing has seized on his scepticism toward the notion of a consumer revolution to argue that he repudiated the emerging history of commercial development. Opponents have interpreted his 'moral economy' writings as nostalgic longings for a mythical time before the market.³¹ And, too often, his putative supporters have been quick to decry any work that examines the relationship between the labouring classes and increasing consumption of commodities, seeing in it tacit

³⁰ Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers, Eighteenth-Century English Society: Shuttles and Swords (Oxford, 1998); In this highly impressive synthetic work there is a notable absence of discussion of popular consumption. See also E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, 1965); Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act (Harmondsworth, 1975); idem., Customs in Common; Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, E. P. Thompson and Cal Winslow, Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England (Harmondsworth, 1975); Peter Linebaugh, The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century (Harmondsworth, 1991); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, The Many Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic (London, 2001); J. M. Neeson, Commoners: Common Right, Enclosures and Social Change in England, 1700-1820 (Cambridge, 1992); Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth (eds.), The Moral Economy and Popular Protest: Crowds, Conflict and Authority (London, 1997); idem., Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland (Liverpool, 1996); R. W. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850 (Cambridge, 1973); John Rule, The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth-Century Industry (London, 1981); idem., The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750-1850 (London, 1986).

³¹ See, for example, Jan deVries, 'Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe', in Brewer and Porter (eds.),

endorsement of the free market and the culture of acquisitiveness.³² Such dichotomous views of custom and commerce have effectively left the terrain of empirical studies of labouring-class consumption free for the less progressive to roam in.

However, some formulation of the relationship between custom and the consumption of commodities by the labouring classes, and between commercialisation and capital accumulation is necessary. It is now effectively undeniable that a broad stratum of English society, including considerable numbers of the labouring classes, experienced a considerable enrichment of their material culture in the eighteenth century. Work on inventories, import records, excise returns, patents and poor law documents has shown a diffusion of more and new commodities through the social order. But, despite the warnings of many of the foremost historians of these developments, very little of the work that has followed has sufficiently examined the possibilities of socially or historically specific patterns of consumer behaviour.³³ Instead, the consumption turn has come to be seen as antagonistic to the historiography of labour.

Consumption and the World of Goods, p. 128; A. W. Coats, 'Contrary Moralities: Plebs, Paternalists and Political Economists', Past and Present, 54 (1972), pp. 130-3.

³² See R. W. Malcolmson, Life and Labour in England 1700-1780 (London, 1981), p. 249.

³³ See Lorna Weatherill, Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760 (London, 1988), *idem.*, 'The Meaning of Consumer Behaviour in Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth-Century England', in Brewer and Porter, Consumption and the World of Goods, pp. 206-227; John Styles, 'Manufacturing, Consumption and Design in Eighteenth-Century England', Brewer and Porter, Consumption and the World of Goods, pp. 527-554; *idem.*, 'Custom or Consumption? Plebeian Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England' Paper Presented to the Conference on Luxury and the Marketplace in Eighteenth-Century Europe, University of Warwick, July 1998; Maxine Berg, 'New Commodities, Luxuries and their Consumers in Eighteenth-Century England', in Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (eds.), Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850 (Manchester, 1999), pp. 63-87; Peter King, 'Pauper Inventories and the Material Lives of the Poor in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', in Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela

An interesting attempt to bridge this persistent dichotomy was made recently by Jan de Vries. De Vries's concept of the 'industrious revolution' imaginatively side-steps what he perceives as over-enthusiasm among the advocates of the consumer revolution, whilst retaining the empirically sound conviction that the eighteenth century witnessed a conspicuous growth in consumer demand that fuelled the processes of industrialisation. Demand increased in the face of stagnant or falling wages, he claims, because a broad swathe of proletarian and proto-industrial households began to change their behaviour. Once they had preferred leisure to work, displaying what economists call a 'backward-sloping demand curve'. However, the new world of goods on offer from the seventeenth century onwards led them to trade in their leisure for a harder work regime for the benefits of more material rewards. De Vries's work ultimately fails to convince for familiar reasons. De Vries's insistence on constituting this historical process as an instance of consumer choice limits the ways in which he can conceptualise this issue. In the end, as he himself admits, he is faced with a straight choice between interpreting this as a rational decision in favour of the 'world of goods', or a regime enforced upon working people which enmeshed them in market relations. He is forced to opt for the former because, for him, the latter smacks of the romanticisation of a mythical pre-lapsarian irrationality. Maximising behaviour, he claims, has always existed to some extent.³⁴

Yet who would question that human behaviour across the centuries has not had some rational content? De Vries operates with a stark and unreal dichotomy for

Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 155-191.

³⁴ deVries, 'Purchasing Power', pp. 85-133.

explaining the behaviour of proto-industrial workers. Did they jump or were they pushed? And, as work by Hans Medick and John Styles has shown, there is neither sense nor necessity in maintaining these dichotomies. Both have pointed to the dynamic intertwining of emerging market relations and customary norms and practices. Such practices possessed a rational content which is not evident to de Vries because of his reliance on dichotomous categories.³⁵

Like these latter writers, I refuse the terms of this dichotomy. Instead, I argue, customary and market relations developed in a dialectical, if contradictory relationship. In similar fashion, I refuse the dichotomous opposition between the historiography of labour and that focusing on commercialisation. By returning to Marx's analysis of capitalism, I argue, it is possible to re-establish the dialectical relationship between commercialisation and the processes of capital accumulation that underpin the historiography of labouring people.

Part III:

For Marx, capitalism was understood as the dialectical unity of two spheres: the sphere of commodity exchange, the surface appearance of capitalist exchange relations, and sphere of accumulation, the inner essence of capital formed by the destructive contradiction between capital and labour. These two form moments in the dynamic entity that is capitalism.³⁶ Any history of practices in the sphere of exchange

³⁵ Medick, 'Plebeian Culture', pp. 84-112; idem., 'The Proto-Industrial Family Economy: The Structural Function of the Household and Family During the Transition from Peasant Society to Industrial Capitalism', *Social History*, 3 (1976), pp. 291-315; Styles, 'Custom or Consumption?'.
³⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, translated by Martin Nicolaus (London, 1981), pp. 115-401; idem., *Capital, Volume 1*, translated by Ben Fowkes

must also incorporate its relationship with the sphere of accumulation. Therefore, we cannot understand changing concepts of need, desire and want without understanding changing practices of production as well as consumption. And, I would argue, it is through changes in production that human history derives its motive force and its determining features.

Capitalism, Marx argued, was a necessary historical stage which permitted the rational development of humans' productive powers. However, its dependence upon alienating humans from their productive capacity ensured that further development could only come through the destruction of private property and estranged labour. In the same way, human needs and wants became subject to the needs of capital accumulation. The relation between the commodities produced by human labour and the needs of labouring people became increasingly mediated to the point where commodities defined and created the boundaries of the real and artificial needs of humans. In accordance with the needs of capital, natural needs became limited to whatever was necessary to reproduce humans as living labour. Correspondingly, every other need was seen to be an artificial need, or an imaginary want. Artificial needs were called so because they were understood as abstract needs to 'have', dominated by the abstract 'sense of having'.

Under capitalist society, labour became a travesty of the true potential of productive activity, and the consumption of commodities became a travesty of the

(London, 1976), pp. 270-338; idem., '1844 Manuscripts' in Early Writings, translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London, 1981), pp. 279-400; Istvan Meszaros, Marx's Theory of Alienation (London, 1972), pp. 123-159; C. J. Arthur, Dialectics of Labour: Marx and his Relation to Hegel (Oxford, 1986), pp. 20-34; T. I. Oizerman, The Making of the Marxist Philosophy, translated by Yuri Sdobnikov (Moscow, 1981), pp. 321-327.

potential needs of humans. Marx considered that humans possessed the potential to develop their productive and creative powers in unalienated labour. This would permit them to also develop their needs; to expand their senses beyond the sense of having and to need more. It was not the consumption of a wealth of material goods that alienated, but the sale of labour as a commodity and the consumption of goods in the form of commodities. Capitalism created a wealth of goods but estranged people from the development of their powers and needs. Consumption of commodities was based fundamentally on the 'sense of having', and not on fully developed human needs and senses. Humans under communism were to possess a 'wealth of needs'.³⁷

It is in relation to this conception of history that the developing concepts of desire, need and want that I trace in the thesis functioned as ideology. The historical labour of the writers examined here was to adapt concepts of desire to the needs of an emerging social order built on the contrary needs of capital and labour. This meant defining needs and wants increasingly in relation to a sphere of circulation dependent on cultivating the 'sense of having' but stunting the full development of human senses. The alienation of human powers and needs was necessarily obscured.

This thesis is structured around a form of teleology, arguing that human history is essentially rationally intelligible and attempting to discern the determining tendencies at work at any given point in time through reference to both past and

³⁷ Situating Marx's concept of alienation as part of a tradition of 'distaste for the fruits of capitalism' is a mistake. Marx saw the overcoming of alienation as fulfilling the promise made by capitalism's provision of a wealth of sensuous objects. For a common misunderstanding of this crucial point, see John Brewer and Roy Porter, 'Introduction', in Brewer and Porter, Consumption and the World of Goods, p. 3; For a valuable corrective to the perception of the status of consumerism in Marxist theories of modern capitalism, see Ernest Mandel, Late Capitalism, translated by Joris De Bres (London, 1999), pp. 377-407. For textual authority, see Marx, Early Writings, pp. 322-334, 341-

future developments. Such forms of historical writing are highly unfashionable. Yet I remain committed to the view that history is unintelligible without reference to some forms of teleology. Teleological explanations are inherent in commonplace and everyday rational explanations for human actions, and they are inherent in historians' deepest assumptions, shaping their work even when they explicitly deny the fact.³⁸

We can explore the potential uses of teleological argumentation more concretely by examining one of the most obvious signs of this methodology at work in the thesis. Throughout the thesis, I discriminate between a 'progressive' and a 'conservative' ideology. My use of these categories is not dependent upon the validation of historical actors. I do not consider the consciousness of historical agents to be a sufficient explanation of their actions, the consequences of their actions or its historical significance. Instead, they represent what I see as tendencies or orientations towards key social changes in their historical moment. Therefore, they cannot be seen as my constructs. Rather, these categories arise from the dialectical relationship between the consciousness and ideas of historical actors, and their material circumstances. Therefore, they are categories which arise as a consequence of their partial consciousness of the totality of historical processes of which they were part.

Progressive ideology reflected a certain perspective or stance towards the social changes that its exponents saw around them. It roughly corresponds to a set of notions that prized merit over aristocratic entitlement, and that saw trade and

358; Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, pp. 5-42; Meszaros, *Alienation*, pp. 162-186; Oizerman, *Marxist Philosophy*, pp. 192-201, 217-247; Ollman, *Alienation*, pp. 131-157.

³⁸ Meszaros, *Alienation*, pp. 114-119; Oizerman, *Marxist Philosophy*, pp. 192-207; J. M. Bernstein, 'Grand Narratives' in David Wood (ed.), *On Paul Ricoeur's Narrative and Interpretation* (London, 1991).

commerce as an improving force in the world. Conservative ideology, by contrast, tended to espouse concepts like an organic social order, the importance of paternalistic social relations and religious reformation. However, the two should not be seen as dichotomous entities. The key to conservative ideology was its internal relation to progressive ideology. Its central premise was some recognition of the existence of the forces with which progressive ideology aligned itself. Conservatism was mobilised, however, by the conviction that the logic of these forces, at their extreme point, would undermine all order and stability. Therefore, it urged subscription to concepts and beliefs that it perceived to be obsolete, not because they were inherently right, but because they served the higher purpose of holding certain historical tendencies in check. Essentially, therefore, conservative ideology was internally related to the content of progressive ideology.³⁹

These categories also correspond to specific and determinate social groups over time. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, I argue, progressive ideology was espoused by writers sympathetic with the merchant classes, with improving agrarian capitalists and the financial interest. Conservative ideology, in contrast, sprang from the sentiments of those landlords and gentry who saw their social power in the localities and in the polity being eroded by the growth of new classes and the expansion of the military-fiscal state. Politically, we can see these tendencies as more or less correspondent to the political tendencies of Whig and Tory. But, as society changed, ideologies also had to change in order to maintain a minimal rational

³⁹ My use of these categories derives from Michael McKeon, The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740 (Baltimore, 1987) pp. 21, 205-211, 420-421.

coherence and to continue to express their historical tendency. We can see this by following progressive and conservative ideology further into the eighteenth century.

As the economic importance of the increasingly affluent commercial middling people became more manifest, assisted in part by the economic consumption and the ostentatious paternalism of the local gentry, progressive ideology could objectively function as a conservative force, fettered by its attachment to the more established trading classes. Many of the middling people, constituting a social force which was denied progressive representation, found temporary support and expression for their sentiments in the form of conservative ideology. This took political form in the coalition of interests that grew up around the opposition to the Whig oligarchy in the 1730s and 1740s. These processes produced a contradiction between the subjective intention of conservative ideology and its objective function. In such situations, it could operate in an objectively progressive fashion, enabling the further development of social and ideological change. I argue that, through these dialectical reversals, conservative ideology undermined its own intelligibility in its current form. Progressive ideology subsumed the objective progressive content and corresponding social groups that had developed within conservative ideology. Conservative ideology was re-forged in a new form, fit to better express the conservative tendencies within propertied society. These tendencies assumed the social form of the landed interest and merchant capitalists of the cloth-manufacturing districts, who both sought to protect their profits at the expence of any progress on the part of labouring people. The tendency to reversal, whereby progressivism could lapse into conservatism and conservatives inadvertently further progress, was inherent in the

categories I discuss because of their inner relation. The enactment of reversal was frequent because the reality they attempted to comprehend was contradictory and ever changing, and the changing ideas of historical actors also formed part of the process of change.

It has to be stressed that these categories and conclusions carry no moral freight. Progressive and conservative, therefore, are not moral categories in any recognisably Whiggish sense. As stated above, these are historical tendencies, and it is neither necessary or desirable to examine them within a moral framework. I am not espousing any distinction between fact and value. Instead, the emphasis is firmly upon revealing the inner logics of historical development.⁴⁰

Part IV:

To conclude this introductory chapter I will provide a brief summary of the argument of the thesis and outline the central claims of my work. This will be followed by a chapter plan which sketches out the structure of the study. In the early eighteenth century, the needs, wants and desires of the labouring classes were understood as fundamentally unruly and irrational appetites, appetites that the labouring classes were themselves unable to control through their lack of the rational capacities conveyed by property ownership. This reflected and distorted the reality

⁴⁰ This is a highly contested and confused debate in socialist theory. In the particular field of historical studies, it is manifested in the debate between E. P. Thompson and Perry Anderson. Thompson's highly moralistic attack on Walpole was effectively rebuffed by Anderson as unscientific. Thompson considered it terrible that Anderson could possibly 'defend' Walpole and 'condemn' Swift, this seemingly marking a litmus test of socialist commitment. See Perry Anderson, Arguments Within English Marxism (London, 1980), 83-99; E. P. Thompson, Whigs and Hunters,

that the production and consumption of the labouring people was shaped by a culture that had its roots in the particular needs of a peasant economy. Translated into the forms of labour of a developing capitalist economy, this created a contradiction between the aspirations of employers and the needs of their workers. At the same time, however, many middling tradesmen benefited from the excessive consumption of the labouring classes. The propertied classes were unable to think through the dilemma that labouring-class excess was beneficial to one branch of commercial power while at the same time depleting the labour effort.

By the 1750s, these conditions had contributed to substantial economic and social change. Attacks on customary culture continued apace, creating a larger proletariat. Many workers began to demonstrate sufficiently recognisable patterns of industry and consumption practices for contemporaries to begin to recognise their labour in the form of a commodity exchanged in a marketplace, and their consumption to be beneficial to home commerce. Accordingly they began to relate labouring-class practices to middling-sort notions of economical household expenditure and to incorporate labouring people into their vision of a commercial society in which all were united by the pursuit of rational pleasure. These ideological developments recognised the truth that labouring-class people were enjoying more commodities than ever before, but concealed the reality that the labour performed by workers was totally alienated by its mediation through commodity exchange, and by extension so were the objects they consumed. In addition, the inevitable failure of the

pp. 214-218, 258-269; idem., 'Agenda for Radical History', in his Making History: Writings on History and Culture (New York, 1994), p. 360.

labouring classes to match up to social expectations was used by some to point to the irreducibly different interests of propertied society and the labouring classes.

This recognition was more fully developed in the later eighteenth century. In the context of more intensive capitalist accumulation and unprecedented levels of organised resistance by the labouring classes across the spheres of production, distribution and consumption, contemporaries became increasingly aware that the good of society was not necessarily compatible with the material improvement of the labouring classes.

In these conditions, the needs and wants of the poor assumed a new significance. The developing science of political economy saw commerce as fulfilling ‘true’, animal needs and rewarding effort through the mechanism of wages. Those who sought to police society or maintain some paternalistic intervention on behalf of the poor, argued that men had needs and wants that were beyond the capacity of markets to fulfil, and that maintaining the essential structure of wage labour depended on addressing these supplementary desires. Both views reflected important truths about the operation of society and between them they succeeded, to some extent, in articulating a relatively stable position for the labouring-class consumer in the capitalist economy. But in, doing so, they concealed the essential truth that access to alienated goods demanded the alienation of humans from their productive humanity and the stunting of their potential to develop a true wealth of needs.

The thesis is organised chronologically, focusing on several moments of intense debate or perceptible crisis which prompted a particularly dense concentration of writing in the public domain. It is therefore divided into three broad sections,

grouped around the periods 1720-1739, 1745-1757, and 1766-1775. Each of these sections contains three thematically organised chapters. There are substantial, though not exact, continuities over time, allowing for the tracing of some running debates, such as those around the poor laws, or the spirits trade, over substantial runs of time.

Chapter one of the first section examines writers concerned with the function and status of trade and commerce in the nation. It focuses on their representation of the labouring people, erecting a framework within which to examine case studies more closely. Chapter two turns to the debate surrounding the poor laws, examining how technologies of reform and regulation articulated conceptions of labouring-class needs and wants. Chapter three focuses on debates surrounding the consumption of commodities by the urban poor. In particular, it concentrates on the discussion of the 'gin craze' and the attempt to regulate the spirits trade in 1736.

In section two, the thesis moves on to consider the 1750s. Chapter four again establishes the basic outlines of change through an examination of trade and commerce writers, showing the extent of transformation in the conception of the function and essential nature of the labouring classes. In chapter five we return to the question of gin and the urban poor, examining the debates of 1751 to establish how changing conceptions manifested themselves in the shifting terms of debate around this commodity. Chapter six again examines the debate over the poor laws. But, this time, these debates are set in the context of discussions of 'police' and the tighter regulation of social and commercial life which are shown to develop in line with notions of society as a system of exchange.

Section three is based around the debates on the condition of the labouring classes in the 1760s and 1770s. Chapter seven examines writings on the labouring people in the context of debates about the causes of scarcity and the functioning of markets. Chapter eight focuses on the ongoing attack on customary culture and on the luxury of the rural poor, situating these debates in the context of changing conceptions of 'needs' and the role of desire in a society which, it was becoming apparent, did not function in the interests of all its people. In chapter nine we return once more to the poor laws, looking at how the changing terms of debate created a new impetus to transform the terms on which the propertied offered subsistence to the labouring classes.

The conclusion indicates towards areas I have had to neglect and lines of inquiry I would like to follow up. Finally, I argue that histories of consumption and desire will always function as capitalist ideology for as long as they are studied and conceptualised ahistorically, written in conceptual isolation from labour and production, and for as long as they continue to treat the working classes as just another group of consumers. These debates have left us with pervasive categories for thinking about needs, wants, and desires. But, in their genesis over the eighteenth century, I argue, they have acted to conceal the truth that the formation of a commercial society, about which we have heard so much in recent years, depended upon a history of expropriation and estrangement.

Chapter One

Trade, Tax and Toil:

Luxury and Labour in a Trading Nation

The period between 1720 and 1740 saw a steady increase in foreign trade and the consolidation of mercantile, industrial and financial capital in British society.¹ This was premised upon the growing contradiction between the needs of capital and those of the labouring classes. The battleground between these forces was a customary culture that appeared to capitalists to defy both right reason and the national good. These years saw a number of sharp conflicts in industrial production. Employers, facing new national and international competition, sought to manipulate the terms of customary industrial relations, focusing in particular on the form of the wage, while labouring people defended what they saw as their property rights.²

¹ Maxine Berg, The Age of Manufactures: 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain (London, 1994), 116-135; S. L. Engerman, 'Mercantilism and Overseas Trade' in R. Floud and D. McCloskey (eds.), The Economic History of Britain 1700-1800, Vol. 1, 2nd edition (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 182-205; J. M. Price, 'What Did Merchants Do? Reflections on British Overseas Trade, 1660-1790', Journal of Economic History 49 (1989), pp. 267-284; On the entrenchment of the trading elites, see Peter Earle, The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730 (London, 1989), pp. 30-51; Richard Grassby, 'Social Mobility and Business Enterprise in Seventeenth-Century England', in D. Pennington and K. Thomas (eds.), Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays Presented to Christopher Hill (Oxford, 1978), pp. 355-381; D. V. Glass, 'Socio-Economic Status and Occupations in the City of London at the End of the Seventeenth Century', in A. E. J. Hollaender and K. W. Kellaway (eds.), Studies in London History Presented by P. J. Jones (London, 1969), pp. 373-392; Nicholas Rogers, 'Money, Land and Lineage: the Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', Social History 4, no. 3 (1979), pp. 437-454; P. G. M. Dickson, The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit in England, 1688-1756 (London, 1967).

² Berg, Age of Manufactures, pp. 98-115; R. W. Malcolmson, 'Workers' Combinations in Eighteenth-Century England', in M. C. Jacob and James Jacob (eds.) The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism (London, 1984), pp. 149-161; John Rule, The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth-Century England (London, 1981), pp. 194-216; Adrian Randall, 'The Moral Economy of the Gloucestershire Weavers in the Eighteenth-Century', in John Rule (ed.), British Trade Unionism: The Formative Years (London, 1988), pp. 30-35; Malcolm Chase, Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 33-69; Peter Clark,

These years also saw a new and acute phase in the struggle over the control of land. Aristocratic elites, seeking to defend the financial basis of their political power, exploited their estates and engrossed marginal lands with greater vigour. Equally, the country gentry and tenant farmers, facing stagnation in rents and demand, sought to make use of improving technologies and notions of property right in defence of their social and economic power in the localities.³

But the urge to defend the social basis of their power endowed the landed classes with a contradictory imperative towards ostentatious displays of paternalism. The legitimisation of their power demanded that they recognise social and political responsibilities to the middling and labouring people in their localities.⁴ Therefore, if

British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: *The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 351-356; for mercantilist thought on labour, see Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology*, pp. 129-157; Edgar Furniss, *The Position of the Labourer in a System of Nationalism* (New York, 1965), pp. 5-39, 117-157; Daniel Baugh, 'Poverty, Protestantism and Political Economy: English Attitudes Towards the Poor, 1600-1800', in Stephen B. Baxter (ed.), *England's Rise to Greatness, 1660-1763* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 75-78.

³ Martin Daunt, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1700-1850* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 25-61; R. Allen, 'Agriculture during the Industrial Revolution', in Floud and McCloskey, *Economic History*, pp. 103-108; M. Overton, 'Agricultural Revolution? England 1540-1850', in A. Digby and C. Feinstein (eds.) *New Directions in Economic and Social History* (Basingstoke, 1989), pp. 13-19; idem., *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 140-185; G. E. Mingay, 'The Agricultural Depression, 1730-1750', *Economic History Review* 2nd Series, 8 (1956), pp. 323-338; C. Clay, 'Landowners and Estate Management in England', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales Vol. 5: 1640-1750* (Cambridge, 1984); Jeanette Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 55-184; E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act* (Harmondsworth, 1975), and 'Custom, Law and Common Right', in *Customs in Common* (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 103-108; Douglas Hay 'Poaching and the Game Laws on Cannock Chase', in Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John Rule, E. P. Thompson and Cal Winslow, *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England* (Harmondsworth, 1975), pp. 220-224; Robert Malcolmson, '"A Set of Ungovernable People": The Kingswood Colliers in the Eighteenth Century' in John Brewer and John Styles (eds.) *An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1983), pp. 85-127.

⁴ The canonical study of this social imperative and its function as part of a theatre of power is of course E. P. Thompson, 'The Patricians and the Plebs', reprinted in his *Customs in Common*, pp. 16-96; see also Douglas Hay, 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law', in Hay et al., *Albion's Fatal Tree*, pp. 17-63.

the mercantile and financial bourgeoisie sought in general to revolutionise the means of production in the pursuit of greater profits, then the landed interest, while sharing the imperative to rationalise property holding and land use, did so with the intention, if not the effect, of slowing down or halting the process of social change.

The broad stratum of society that contemporaries recognised as the middling sort shared a similarly ambivalent relationship to big capital. Foreign trade stimulated the demand for and trade in new and older commodities. This demand was largely centred on the very social groups that benefited from the internal commerce that grew up in these years. The trading classes proliferated and profited from the advance of commerce. Yet many of the middling trading people existed on the brink of bankruptcy, maintained only by increasingly dense credit relations. They could view the financiers and speculators who administered and profited from public and private credit as parasites feeding themselves at the expence of the trading classes through the fiscal system. The state's shifting fiscal base under Walpole's regime placed the tax burden more squarely upon the commercial classes in the attempt to appease the landed classes. Consequently, while the trading middling sorts could recognise the fiscal-military state's importance in securing British trade, they could also experience it as a closed system of corruption, held in the grip of aristocratic and financial elites who profited from its power without regard to the nation's broader propertied classes.⁵

Paul Kleber Monod, 'Dangerous Merchandise: Smuggling, Jacobitism and Commercial Culture in Southeast England, 1690-1760', *Journal of British Studies* 30 (1991), pp. 163-180.

⁵ On the relationship between the middling people and commercial development, see the valuable survey in Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (Yale, 2000), pp. 290-303; see more detailed discussion in Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce,*

Their peculiar position also gave the middling sorts an ambivalent view of customary culture. As they profited from increasing trade, they sought to distance themselves from the labouring people through thrifty accumulation and a consumer culture that displayed their particular value and cultivated the 'sense of having'.⁶ For these people, the customary conceptions of need and right, of labour and leisure, appeared as lazy, excessive and irrational. Yet, as many of them were also still strongly rooted in local societies against which they defined their status, and as the labouring classes increasingly formed crucial sectors of their demand, their attitude to customary culture could not be wholly condemnatory. The adaptability of this culture ensured that new commodities like calicos, tobacco, snuff, spirits and tea were easily absorbed, penetrating and supplementing the particular rhythms of this particular consumer culture.

Gender and the Family in England 1680-1780 (Los Angeles, 1996), pp. 1-101; Earle, Making of the English Middle Class, pp. 41-51; Shani D'Cruze, 'The Middling Sort in Eighteenth-Century Colchester: Independence, Social Relations and the Community Broker', in Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (eds.), The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800 (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 181-287; Jonathan Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort', in Barry and Brooks, The Middling Sort of People, pp. 84-113; Hunt, The Middling Sort, pp. 101-125, 193-216; John Smail, The Origins of Middle Class Culture: Halifax, Yorkshire 1660-1780 (New York, 1994). On the fiscal-military state, see John Brewer, The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783 (London, 1989); Lawrence Stone (ed.), An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1688 to 1815 (London, 1994), Introduction; John Brewer, 'English Radicalism in the Age of George III' in J. G. A. Pocock (ed.) Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776 (Princeton, 1988), pp. 333-342.

⁶ On the distinctiveness of middling-sort/middle-class consumption, see Lorna Weatherill, Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760 (London, 1996), pp. 112-191; idem., 'The Meaning of Consumer Behaviour in Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth-Century England' in John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), Consumption and the World of Goods (London, 1991), pp. 206-227; Berg, Age of Manufactures, pp. 116-135, and 'New Commodities and their Consumers in Eighteenth-Century England', in Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (eds.), Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850 (Manchester, 1999), pp. 63-87; Hunt, Middling Sort, pp. 22-101; Earle, Making of the English Middle Class, ch. 10; Paul Langford, A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783 (Oxford, 1989), pp. 123-183.

This consumption was structured by needs that had little legitimacy among the middling and mercantile classes. Rather than emphasising independence and thrift, politeness and piety, the consumption of labouring people - particularly in proto-industrial manufacture - was based upon a conception of familial economy that derived from the long decomposition of the peasant economy. Its needs were not determined entirely by the nexus of exchange relations but by an economic logic that prioritised customary forms and levels of social expenditure and a marked preference for leisure. In the changed context of putting-out industry and a world market, this produced a tendency towards self-exploitation among workers in defence of their customary expenditure, generating an objective growth in production. However, it also produced an objective growth in their participation in commercial markets.⁷

The social and economic alignments that confronted and debated these phenomena were given political expression in the peculiar configuration of political forces around Walpole's state. Walpole managed a Whig oligarchy that promised a pragmatic government in defence of the 1688 Revolution settlement and which offered peace and prosperity to its mercantile, financial and landed elites.⁸ This was

⁷ See the enormously important essays by Hans Medick, 'The Proto-Industrial Family Economy: The Structural Function of the Household and Family during the Transition from Peasant Society to Industrial Capitalism', *Social History* 3 (1976), pp. 293-301; idem., 'Plebeian Culture in the Transition to Industrial Capitalism', in Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds.), *Culture, Politics and Ideology* (London, 1983), pp. 84-112. Medick draws upon the neglected work of the Soviet historian, A. V. Chayanov. See David Thauer, Basile Kerblay and R. E. F. Smith (eds.), *A. V. Chayanov: The Theory of Peasant Economy* (Manchester, 1986). See also Thompson, *Customs in Common*, esp. pp. 340-345; R. W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1973); E. P. Thompson 'Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', in *Customs in Common*, pp. 373-380; Keith Thomas 'Work and Leisure in Pre-Industrial Society', *Past and Present*, 29 (1964), pp. 50-62; Jessica Warner, 'Good Help is Hard to Find: A Few Comments About Alcohol and Work in Pre-industrial England', *Addiction Research* (1995), 2, 3, pp. 259-269.

⁸ Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 9-59; H. T. Dickinson, *Walpole and the Whig Supremacy* (London, 1973); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought in the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 486-505; J. A. W. Gunn,

increasingly opposed by a 'country' platform whose primary social basis was the landed classes. Its guiding concepts emerged from a combination of civic humanist political ideology and high church Toryism. Armed with these, it launched an attack on the corruption of a state increasingly held hostage to financial speculators, eroding the fundamental basis of virtue in destroying the political power of landed gentlemen. Country ideology was essentially conservative.⁹ However, the critique of state expansion gave the country platform room to encompass a far less conservative content. Its critique of oligarchy, corruption and fiscal oppression allowed it to function in an objectively progressive manner by giving voice to the aspirations of middling-sort tradesmen who perceived the state to be strangling British commerce in the interests of a few profiteers.¹⁰

The tendency to a dialectical reversal, whereby an essentially conservative ideology could function objectively to articulate progressive demands, and vice versa, was repeated in the broader sphere of social and economic thought. Progressive ideology had grown up around the aspirations of the mercantile and small industrial classes of the late seventeenth century. This ideology had articulated the need to

Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought (Montreal, 1983), pp. 96-120; H. T. Dickinson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England (London, 1977), pp. 121-163.

⁹ Isaac Kramnick, Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole (Oxford, 1968); Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, pp. 423-506; Dickinson, Liberty and Property, pp. 163-195; Gunn, Beyond Liberty and Property, pp. 120-164; Linda Colley, In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party, 1714-1760 (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 85-118, 177-236.

¹⁰ Brewer, 'English Radicalism', in Pocock, Three British Revolutions, pp. 333-342; Dickinson, Liberty and Property, pp. 181-192; Kathleen Wilson, The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism, 1715-1785 (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 122-136; Paul Langford, 'Property and "Virtual Representation" in Eighteenth-Century England', Historical Journal, 31 (1988), pp. 83-115; Nicholas Rogers, 'The Middling Sort in Eighteenth-Century Politics', in Barry and Brooks, Middling Sort of People, pp. 159-180; L. Davison, T. Hitchcock, T. Keirn, R. B. Shoemaker (eds.), Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1688-1750 (Stroud, 1992), pp. xi-liv.

capture foreign markets, to conceive of labour as an abstract and undifferentiated quantity, to recuperate the role of the passions, and to demarcate the boundaries of social conduct to allow social mobility while marking out the distinctions between ethical and polite culture and mere avarice.¹¹ Yet, as we will see in Part II, the capacity of progressive ideology to soak up the demands of middling people was limited. Progressive ideology could give voice to familiar middling values of industry, piety and thrifty accumulation, and to the imperative to reform the manners of the labouring classes.¹² To a greater degree, middling people attained access to the polite culture that had melded the urban elites together.¹³ But progressive ideology could not view with equanimity the indefinite extension of trade. And to cater to the demands of an idle and luxurious labouring poor was to indulge corrupt passions that ran counter to the public interest and threatened to dissipate the wealth of the nation.

¹¹ Joyce O. Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford, 1978); A. O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph* (Princeton, 1977), pp. 10-45; Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 189-211; Erin Mackie (ed.), *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from the Tatler and The Spectator* (Boston, 1998); pp. 1-33.

¹² For the role of middling tradesmen in reformation movements, see Davison et al, *Stilling the Grumbling Hive*, pp. xi-liv; Hunt, *Middling Sorts*, pp. 101-124; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 125-162.

¹³ Peter Borsay, 'The English Urban Renaissance: The Development of Provincial Urban Culture, c. 1680-1760', *Social History* 2, No. 2 (1977), pp. 581-603; John Brewer, "'The Most Polite Age and the Most Vicious': Attitudes towards Culture as a Commodity", in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds.), *The Consumption of Culture 1660-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London, 1995) pp. 341-361; Hunt, *Middling Sort*, pp. 172-192; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 90-99; Lawrence E. Klein, 'Politeness for Plebes: Consumption and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England', in Bermingham and Brewer, *Consumption of Culture*, pp. 362-382; C. Y. Ferdinand, 'Selling it to the Provinces: News and Commerce round Eighteenth-Century Salisbury' in Brewer and Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, pp. 393-411; R. S. Neale, 'Bath: Ideology and Utopia: 1700-1760', in Peter Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth-Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1680-1820* (London, 1990), pp. 223-242.

These same contradictions could also give conservative ideology a highly contradictory function. It sought to restrain social change, yet offered protection to the commercial classes, giving them a political vocabulary to explain the corruption in the state. It sought to reform the labouring poor in the interests of social order, yet was often forced, in defence of its paternalistic legitimation, to indulge customary culture in its manifold manifestations. In doing so, it gave valuable conceptual space for the articulation and recognition of the increasing consumption of commodities by the labouring classes. At the same time, the particular political idiom of the concepts through which these ideas were expressed conveyed at least some of the content of this consumption, and its nonconformity with the prevailing ideals of a polite and commercial society.¹⁴

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Part II:

‘Trade’, proclaimed Erasmus Philips, ‘is to the Body Politick, what Blood is to the Human Body; it diffuses itself by the minutest canals into every Part of a Nation, and gives Life and Vigour to the Whole’. In its train followed ‘The Aids, the Conveniencies, the Luxury of Life’, and it also encouraged the progress of ‘Arts and Sciences, Invention, Riches, Strength, Wisdom and Policy, Plenty, Liberty and Happiness’. Progressive writers, such as Philips, depicted Britain’s, but more

¹⁴ Michael McKeon, ‘Cultural Crisis and Dialectical Method: Destabilising Augustan Literature’, in Leo Damrosch (ed.), *The Profession of English Literature* (Wisconsin, 1992), p. 44; idem., *Origins of the English Novel*, pp. 167-176, 205-21; Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property*, pp. 191-193. For the social content of conservatism, see Thompson, *Customs in Common*, pp. 16-96.

particularly England's, rise to greatness as identical with its trading might.¹⁵ Yet such writers could not simply identify trade with progressive advance. The recognition that trade rested upon passions and appetites necessitated, even for the most thoroughgoing commercial advocates, that the conduct of trade was overlaid with a rationality that was seen to lie outside and separate from the motors of commercial endeavour. Subjective motives towards gain could attain rationality and virtue if they happened to coincide with the public good. In the wake of the South Sea Bubble in particular, progressive trade writers were keen to delineate the limits of 'virtuous' trade and to designate all that fell outside of this as 'luxurious'.¹⁶

For many progressive mercantile writers, the limits of virtuous trade - that which was useful to the public - were established by the demands of the theory of the balance of trade. Charles King, chief compiler of the three volume trade survey The British Merchant, argued that good trade could be identified with the exportation of manufactured goods, the re-exportation of colonial imports, and the importation of any raw materials that fed British manufactures for exportation. Correspondingly, the importation of anything that was mere luxury or pleasure, or cheaper substitutes for domestic manufacture, was bad trade. Joshua Gee, a friend of King's and fellow collaborator on The British Merchant, wrote his own highly influential tract in 1729,

¹⁵ Erasmus Philips, The State of the Nation with Respect to its Trade, Debts and Money (London, 1725), reprinted in Miscellaneous Works, Consisting of Essays Political and Moral (London, 1751), pp. 29-30; see also the anonymous works, A Proposal Humbly Offer'd to the Consideration of Both Houses of Parliament, for Encouraging and Improving Trade in General (London, 1721), p. 2; An Humble Proposal to the People of England for the Encrease of their Trade and Manufactures; whether the Present Uncertainty of Affairs Issues in Peace or War (London, 1729), p. 2.

¹⁶ For another example of such post-Bubble progressive tracts, oscillating between a paean to trade and exhortations to restraint, see A Proposal...for...Improving Trade.

echoing King's emphasis on the drain of British specie. Gee concentrated his ire upon the dangers of the taste for French imports. Teas, Coffee, Chocolate, liquors, Sugar, Muslins, Cambrics and China were driving money out of the country and providing Britain's enemies with 'the Sinews of War to molest us'.¹⁷

Gee's concern to direct the passions into productive trade was replicated in his treatment of the labouring classes. Like many of his contemporaries, Gee saw manufacturing labour as the wealth of the nation and his emphasis on exporting more cheaply than the French led him to advocate lowering the wages of labourers. This would, he argued, keep the price of exports down in the marketplace, and also ensure better labour. Gee depicted this as a virtuous coincidence of private and public interests. He urged that the interest in extracting the maximum labour from the poor and in creating a disciplined manufacturing work force neatly coincided with the virtue inherent in such reform. The labouring poor, Gee considered, existed in a state of untamed appetite analogous to the condition of those immersed in luxury. As far as he was concerned, the taste for French fashions was an example of self-regarding desire that ignored the public good and that was impossible to satisfy once it had been indulged. The manufacturing poor were constitutionally predisposed to the same condition. Only labour held their desires in check. Weavers were the paradigmatic example. Either their wages must be cut, he urged, or the price of food raised, for 'when corn is cheap [clothiers] have had great difficulty to get their spinning and

¹⁷ Charles King, The British Merchant; Or, Commerce Preserv'd, 2 Volumes (London, 1721) v.1, pp. 2-4; Joshua Gee, The Trade and Navigation of Great Britain Considered (London, 1729), pp. 20-28, 33-36. Very little is known about Gee. Charles King acknowledged his help in compiling the British Merchant, describing him as 'an eminent London merchant', R. H. I. Palgrave, Dictionary of Political Economy, (London, 1894-99).

other Work done'. The problem was that 'the Poor could buy Provisions enough with two or three Days wages to serve them a Week and would spend the rest in Idleness and Drinking'. The same applied to the under-employed. These were forced to starve or thief in order to 'supply their immediate necessities', and once engaged in such a life 'run from one evil to another, till at last, they come under sentence of felons, viz. transportation or the gallows'. The solution, in both cases, was constant employment. This would serve the ends of national utility and virtue, enlarging trade and ensuring subsistence to all the people, maximising their labour and reforming their morals. As Gee phrased it, 'the turning practice of this sort of people from idleness to labour, is also turning their minds and inclinations from lewdness to virtue'.¹⁸

Yet Gee's seemingly straightforward condemnation of labouring-class appetites was deceptive. This was no simple 'curse of Adam' or 'duty to labour'.¹⁹ For Joshua Gee considered that labour should bring pleasure and happiness to those who were forced to undergo it. Turning the colonies into plantations, Gee argued, 'would provide enough work to transform the poor, to the benefit of the nation and themselves. Good example and 'perseverance in the rules of industry', he claimed, would 'change the very inclinations of those idle and vagrant persons, who now run about the kingdom, and spend their time, and what they can any way come upon, upon their debauches'. The same was true with poor orphans in the Quaker workhouses, which Gee held up as exemplary reformatory institutions. The

¹⁸ Gee, Trade and Navigation, pp. 33-34, 38, 61-62. For other examples of this view, see Philips, State of the Nation, p. 34; King, British Merchant, pp. 14-15, 22; Edgar S. Furniss, The Position of the Labourer in a System of Nationalism (New York, 1965), pp. 5-39, 96-156.

¹⁹ Furniss, Position of the Labourer, pp. 84-95.

combination of teaching, reading and writing and employment in spinning worked to make such labour pleasing, 'and the emulation who shall do most and best, seems to be as much regarded by them; and they have as great desire to excel one another, as other children have at their most pleasing diversions'. Such constant application to work, he claimed, fixed the minds of the poor to industry, made it pleasurable to them, and consequently gave them enough money to purchase food and to 'provide themselves with cloaths and other necessities whereby to live comfortably' without raising wages. As Gee said, 'the poor are never happier, nor their minds easier, than when they have full employment; and when they are employed, riches are diffused over the nation'.²⁰

So the needs and desires of the labouring classes, and of proto-industrial manufacturers in particular, found some confined and distorted expression in the notion of the harmony of interests through labour. The labouring people were capable of a measure of both pleasure and rationality, in spite of their inclinations, through the mediating act of labouring in their own and the nation's interest. By labouring in the nation's interest, the poor would come to identify themselves with this interest. The labouring people were envisaged as children whose transition to useful members of society involved the delicate manipulation of desires, revealing the inner unity between the ideas underpinning Gee's and the Mandevillian universe that they, and most other writers of the period, sought to denigrate.

Among the most thoroughgoing progressive trade writers, the labouring classes' needs and wants, at least as far as they manifested themselves in the form of

²⁰ Gee, *Trade and Navigation*, pp. 36-38, 40, 98.

purchasing commodities, achieved a greater level of recognition. I will focus attention here upon two works, one by Daniel Defoe and one by Jacob Vanderlint. These two writers represent an extreme point in progressive commercial literature, appearing to possess none of the inhibition of writers like King and Gee. They represent far more recognition of the potential of commerce and of the role of the middling trading classes. In 1728, Defoe wrote that trade was 'the wealth of all the world'. It was a 'beautiful scheme' whose natural circulation dispersed the wealth of the world, unified the nations, civilised the savages and abolished the 'absurdity of Distinctions' and 'Titles without Merit'.²¹ For Vanderlint, writing in 1734, commerce was the very motor of society. It was the mutual wants of mankind that had led to labour and industriousness and it was the same labour and wants that powered trade across the world. 'All Nations of the World', he claimed, 'should be regarded as one Body of Tradesmen exercising their various Occupations for the mutual benefit and Advantage of Each other'.²² Accordingly, these writers paid far more attention to the benefits of home commerce and correspondingly less on the balance of trade. And, further, each can be seen to accord far greater importance to the involvement of the labouring people in this home commerce, not simply as producers, but as consumers.

Defoe's Plan of the English Commerce of 1728 presents the reader with the

²¹ Daniel Defoe, A Plan of the English Commerce: Being a Compleat Prospect of the Trade of this Nation as well of the Home Trade as of the Foreign (London, 1728), pp. 7-9, 13, 37-38, 41, 54, 61. See also Defoe's A Brief State of the Inland or Home Trade of England; and of the Oppression it suffers and the dangers which Threaten it from the Invasion of Hawkers, Pedlars, and Clandestine traders of all Sorts (London, 1730), pp. 6-7.

²² Jacob Vanderlint, Money Answers all Things: or, an Essay to make Money sufficiently Plentiful Amongst all ranks of People, and to Increase our Foreign and Domestic Trade (London, 1734), pp. 20-22.

most extended paeon to home commerce and the consumption of the labouring people available. Defoe was quite unambiguous in his advocacy of high wages for the labouring people. Labouring men and women were useful not simply for their labour, but also for their consumption. Trade in manufactures, he claimed, made all industrious people in England rich, for, 'as the trading, middling sort of People in England are rich; so the labouring, manufacturing People under them are infinitely richer than the same Class of People in any other Nation in the World'. And, he continued, 'as they are richer, so they live better, fare better, wear better, and spend more Money, than they do in other Countries'.²³

This relative wealth had two beneficial effects. First, it enabled better labour. 'All Foreigners', he claimed, 'grant that our Poor in England work harder than they do in any other Nation; so it must be own'd they eat and drink better in Proportion; and this is because they have better Wages'. This better standard of living made English workers happier and better labourers. 'Their labour', he argued, 'however hard and heavy it is, is performed cheerfully; a general sprightliness and Vigour appear among them; their Countenances are Blithe, and they are merrier at their Labour, than others are at their Play'.²⁴ The fulfilment of pleasure played a crucial role in ensuring better labour, in inspiring more industry and animating trade. But Defoe went further than Joshua Gee. Where Gee had urged that work itself could be pleasurable and become an object of labourers' desire when it provided a level of comfort, Defoe aligned that comfort explicitly with the consumption of more

²³ Defoe, *Plan*, p. 74.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 27-28.

commodities. Describing the lives of English labourers, he claimed that ‘their eating of Flesh-Meat such as Beef, Mutton, Bacon, etc., in Proportion to their Circumstances, tis’ to a fault, nay even to a Profusion’. As for drink, ‘tis generally stout strong Beer, not to take notice of its quantity, which is sometimes a little too much’, while ‘we see their Houses and Lodgings tolerably furnished, at least stuff’d well with useful and necessary household Goods’. Even, he claimed, ‘those we call poor People, Journey-men, working and pains-taking people do thus; they lye warm, live in plenty, work hard, and (need) know no want’.²⁵

The labouring classes’ consumption was seen to be of great utility to the nation, not solely for its effects on the well-being of the labourer, but also in its own right. For, as Defoe urged, ‘these are the People that carry off the Gross of your Consumption, ‘tis for these your Markets are kept open late on Saturday Nights; because they usually receive their Week’s Wages late’. The labouring and middling people together represented ‘the life of our whole Commerce’. ‘Tis by their Multitude’, he exhorted, ‘that all the Wheels of Trade are set on Foot’. In the midst of this hymn of praise, Defoe clearly depicts the customary forms of consumption of the common people as they were imprinted on polite middling literature. For these were not frugal and parsimonious consumers spending in accordance with notions of politeness, respectability or thrift. Rather, he claims, ‘by their Wages, they are able to live plentifully, and it is by their expensive, generous way of living, that the Home Consumption is raised to such a Bulk’.²⁶ Defoe here registers an important truth: that

²⁵ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 77-78.

the essential forms of customary consumption, though they might be anathema to middle-rank notions of prudence and frugality, were actually contributing to the increasing domestic commerce of the nation. It was the very irrationality of labouring people's needs and wants as depicted in the Plan, the same irrationality that denied them political and commercial agency, that made them economically useful.

Defoe argues that both better, happier labour and the objectification of this pleasure in the form of commodity consumption by the broad mass of the population can be of use to the trading nation. Yet nowhere does Defoe manage to establish any objective standard for limiting or directing this consumption. Therefore, he is forced to allow the subjective establishment of value, the riot of individuated desires, among the labouring people as well as the middling heroes of his piece. Nowhere is there a normative category for delimiting virtuous or non-useful consumption. The only description of actual labouring-class consumption is of an easy, expansive and generous expenditure which is theoretically unlimited in scope and scale. The poor are still not represented as possessors of commercial agency; buyers and sellers of property. Their utility as consumers appears almost like a Mandevillian happy coincidence; an unintended consequence of their predisposition to live well; a circumstance whose utility must be maximised by the wise legislator.

Crucially though, Defoe could not limit the economically useful predisposition to live well. He could recommend a greater aggregate level of consumption, but could not impose any objective standard for managing it. Denied true rational agency, his consumers could not *decide* to conform to any normative model. Consequently, Defoe had to admit that the poor could consume what he calls 'superfluities' as well

as necessities and conveniencies. In marked contrast to Gee and other mercantile writers of the time, Defoe's Plan remained resolutely neutral on the consumption of superfluities like brandy, oils, fruit, sugar and tobacco. Instead, he declares flatly that, 'if the poor have not the money, they can't spare it for Superfluities'. Implicit within this statement is the assumption that if they did have the money, they would be perfectly entitled to indulge themselves by consuming what many might consider to be superfluous goods. And, since the importation of foreign commodities receives none of the condemnation that other writers saved up for it, we should not be surprised to learn that the concept of luxury was barely mentioned. The whole debate on the nature and status of luxury was quietly set aside.²⁷

Jacob Vanderlint's Money Answers All Things represents an equally radical image of the power of commerce and trade.²⁸ For Vanderlint, too, the consumption practices of the poor were of importance, not simply in giving life to labour, but as an economic act of utility to the nation in itself. While Vanderlint did not want wages to increase, he also did not want the labouring people to 'fare harder, or consume less'. Indeed, were they to earn less, 'they being the Bulk of mankind would in this case affect the Consumption of Things in general so mightily that there would be a want of Trade and Business amongst the other Part of the People'. Vanderlint therefore recommended that the price of 'necessaries' be reduced to permit the poor to consume more of the nation's produce. And, in the earliest example of its kind,

²⁷ Ibid., p. 78. The only mention of luxury is in reference to the gentry, whose combination of extravagance and idleness represents the only occasion on which Defoe feels he can safely deploy this concept, see Ibid., pp. 37-38.

²⁸ Unfortunately, I have been unable to find out anything about Vanderlint.

Vanderlint went so far as to construct a budget that delineated how he thought the income of a London labouring-class household compared with its necessary expenditure. From an income estimated at 54 l. 4s. 10d per year, Vanderlint projected an annual expenditure of 43 l. per year which, he claimed, included:

Bread, Butter, Cheese, Meat, Small Beer, Roots, Salt, Vinegar,
Pepper, Mustards, Sugar, Soap, threads, Needles, Milk, candles,
Coals, Strong Beer, Repairs of Household Goods, Schooling, Rent,
Lying in Costs, Cloaths, Linen, Woollens and Shoes.

Yet, this relatively progressive view of what the poor might claim a right to was still only what Vanderlint called ‘their immediate necessities’: victuals, drink, and clothes to ‘defend them from the cold and weather’. The labouring people may have been ‘little more than half the Consumers they ought to be’, but no more than Defoe could Vanderlint envisage the labouring poor as commercial agents. Instead, consumption of commodities among the labouring people was a consequence of the nature of commerce, of commerce’s ability to diffuse wealth most effectively and most judiciously. It was not a system of exchanges that might include the poor on equal terms. Even his advocacy of cheaper woollen prices, to facilitate a greater consumption of clothing, was recommended only in terms of making it easier for ‘our own People who now go in Rags and almost naked’ to ‘purchase Cloaths’, not in terms of indulging their tastes in a marketplace.²⁹

But Vanderlint came close to articulating the terms on which the labouring classes might be encompassed within a system of commercial exchanges. Like Locke,

²⁹ Vanderlint, *Money Answers All Things*, pp. 68, 42-43, 70-76.

he saw the poor man's possession of labour as the basis of his right to subsistence.³⁰ Labour was their property and the basis of their property right in society. For Vanderlint, commerce performed the function of distributing subsistence to the labouring people and fulfilling the rich man's obligation to the poor. He even came close to recognising their labour as a commodity to be exchanged, describing labourers as 'somewhat like their Commodities, dear in proportion to their scarcity'.³¹ But, ultimately, Vanderlint, like Defoe and Gee could not truly accommodate the labouring classes' consumer desires because he could not truly envisage them making the rational decisions necessary.

His affinity with Defoe also extended to the question of limiting consumption. Where Defoe avoided the question of luxury altogether and finished up naturalising the consumption of superfluities as a consequence, Vanderlint went to the other extreme and tried to make sense of luxury. Luxury, he argued, must find its level according to the rank and status of the person involved.³² Vanderlint's attempt to retain the category of luxury entailed radically subjectivising it. It signified a quantifiable state of excess that was to be judged against the resources of an individual, their income. In attempting to limit the consumption of commodities among the labouring classes to necessities and decencies and in drawing up budgets for the poor, Vanderlint, like Defoe, was unintentionally preparing the ground for the

³⁰ For Locke's theory of subsistence rights derived from possession of labour as property, see Thomas Horne, Property Rights and Poverty: Political Argument in Britain, 1605-1834 (London, 1990), pp. 48-65.

³¹ Vanderlint, Money Answers All Things, pp. 100, 118.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 72-74.

eventual recognition that the boundaries of luxury and necessity were constantly changing.

These progressive writers might recognise the fact of needs and desires, as in Gee's displacement of pleasure into labour, or they might go further and recognise the fact and value of consumption, as demonstrated in Defoe's profuse expenditure or Vanderlint's budget. None of them, however, could describe this consumption as an act of commercial agency. There was no real possibility of universally projecting middling-sort notions of industriousness, thrift and accumulation onto the labouring poor. They might possess basic subsistence rights through their possession of labour and labour might be the means by which commerce fulfilled its jurisprudential function and distributed subsistence justly throughout the polity but, crucially, labour was not like a trader's property. It was not fully a commodity to be traded in a marketplace. It was still a substance or resource to be appropriated in the national interest. Where the subjectivity of labouring people was discussed at all, it was articulated in the form of the fixed or childlike imperatives that we might expect to find in progressive representations of customary culture. This had the dual consequence of expressing the growing volume and economic importance of the consumption of the labouring classes without permitting any normative judgements upon the proper objects of desire or proper levels of expenditure.

Until labour's status as a commodity became fully developed and fully apparent, the desires of labouring people would remain primitive and unformed - economically useful in spite of their essential nature - and the labouring people's rational capacity would remain exterior to, and in conflict with, their naturally

ordained appetites. This had the effect of naturalising the forms of consumption that were dominated by customary structures. It was an ideology that ultimately provided no conceptual tools for expressing and limiting the right to consume to excess or, more correctly, the right to indulge needs that were not recognised as consonant with the ideals of commercial society. All that such writers could do was to turn to concepts of luxury and necessity that they themselves recognised to be unstable and untenable when applied to commodity consumption. The difficulties in articulating an ideological limit to the consumption of the labouring classes reflected the real paradox that customary consumption was in part responsible for growing internal and foreign trade networks. As we will now see, the experience of this paradox was common also to conservative writers.

Part III:

Conservative writers of the 1720s and 1730s tended to be less interested in trade *per se*, and more in the condition of the nation as a whole. The state of trade was represented as an instance of a general crisis whose governing sign was luxury. But the concept of luxury worked differently for conservative ideology. For progressive writers, increasingly reconciled to the socially constitutive role of commercial desires, luxury's relationship to commodities required strenuous definition if it was to enter commercial discourse. Accordingly, luxury was mediated through prevailing theories of trade and commodity consumption and what it signified became ever more vague and indeterminate. What was left of the constellation of aristocratic figures signifying

processes of transformation, decay and dispersal that luxury had once evoked became the ever diminishing inheritance of conservative writers.

To the conservative consciousness, corruption could be seen to invade and infect every social and cultural field: Walpole's regime, the rise of the moneyed interest; the extension of credit; the proliferation of placemen; the delectations of refined London society; the general corruption of manners among the people; falling rents; the taste for Italian operas and French fashions and, not least, the decay of manufactures and trade could all appear in the form of luxury corroding the state from within.³³ Yet it was the very fact of its universal applicability that signified the increasing cultural incoherence of the concept of luxury in its aristocratic form. Within the framework of conservative ideology at the time, it became increasingly difficult to avoid some accommodation with the forces driving commercial expansion. Conservatives were reconciled to the reality that trade and commerce had overcome the social forms that their aristocratic vocabulary alluded to. However, they sought, retrospectively, to inject the present with the spirit of the values they espoused.

One manifestation of this desire was the defence of social relations based upon paternalism toward the lower orders and the related defence of the liberties of the poor as Englishmen under the law. As we will see, this position presupposed the ongoing dissolution of these relations and the increasing triumph of a new set of relations based on oppression and exploitation. Yet it also recognised the economic

³³ See for example, the London Magazine [hereafter LM](1735), pp. 184-185, 666-667; Gentleman's Magazine [hereafter GM](1735), p. 259; Seasonal Observations on the Present Declension of the General Commerce of England (London, 1737), p. 3; An Enquiry into the Melancholy Circumstances of Great Britain, More Particularly in regard to the Oeconomy of Private Families (London, 1740), pp. 3-9.

utility of such relations. Consequently, rather than seeking a return to organic societies of paternalism and deference, conservative thought aspired to infuse the present with the spirit of that which was passing; to effect some sort of historical compromise which would halt the progress of corruption without threatening the prosperity of the present. In the case of the debates over Walpole's excise bills, as we will see, conservative ideology, mobilised by the opposition coalition, legitimised the tendency to excess inherent in customary culture and further powered the dissolution of the relations and values they espoused.

In 1723, Walpole's administration had placed an excise on tea, coffee and chocolate which had raised little protest in or outside Parliament. In 1730, to broad approbation, Walpole repealed the salt tax, cutting its price effectively by two thirds.³⁴ When, two years later, he proposed to replace the salt tax, the parliamentary and press debates that ensued focused upon the breach of paternalistic principles in fiscal policy that this represented. The government, it was argued, was threatening liberty, property and commerce. It was also oppressing the poor through their essential articles of consumption.

Walpole had represented the salt duty in the form of a progressive tax that 'every man in the Nation contributes to according to his Circumstances and Condition in Life'.³⁵ For the opposition spokesmen in the press and parliament,

³⁴ Dickinson, *Walpole*, ch. 6; Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, pp. 100-114, 193; Patrick K. O'Brien, 'The Political Economy of British Taxation, 1660-1815', *Economic History Review* 41, (1988), pp. 1-32; Paul Langford, *The Excise Crisis: Society and Politics in the Age of Walpole* (Oxford, 1975), chs 2 and 3. For a detailed discussion of the capacious political discourse of the alliance of interests and the place of liberty in enshrining the patriotic status of commerce, see Wilson, *Sense of the People*, pp. 117-136.

³⁵ *Gentleman's Magazine* 2 (1732), p. 994.

however, it was hypocritical, oppressive and economically damaging. One MP pointed out that, only two years before, the government had considered it a tax ‘most Burthensome against the poor’ and ‘most pernicious to the Trade of this Kingdom’. In what became the standard argument against excises on ‘necessaries’, he noted that the administration seemed resolved to ‘grind the Faces of the Poor, in order to relieve a few of the Rich’. Tax should fall upon the ‘Luxuries of Mankind’ rather than the ‘Necessaries of Life’, since to tax the latter would mean raising wages to defuse ‘grumbling among the people’ and this would raise the price of British manufactures abroad. The opposition spokesman, Sir William Pulteney, summoned up images of a general excise upon all commodities in his speech on the same subject. ‘Every Excise is a General Excise’, he claimed, ‘if the Whole Body of the People, the poor, the Needy, the most Wretched, are obliged to contribute thereof’. The proposed salt tax represented ‘as general as any one that ever was invented under the most absolute Tyranny’. It was not only unjust to the poor to levy this duty upon a staple of their diets, it was also bad for trade. For any merchant or clothier knew that the high wages demanded by labourers were ‘the Chief Cause of the Decay of our Trade’ and the ‘the laying of such a Tax must make the Continuance of...high Wages absolutely necessary’, bringing the nation to ‘Poverty and Distress’.³⁶

Opposition arguments against the salt tax, therefore, turned upon the harmonising of the twin imperatives to defence of the national interest and paternalistic obligations. Merchants and manufacturers would suffer, trade would suffer and the poor would suffer. The positive vision of virtuous government that

³⁶ GM 2 (1732), pp. 993-994; GM 3 (1733), pp. 31-32; see also GM 2 (1732), pp. 615, 803, 1069-

informed conservative ideology rested upon the notion that it was possible to harmonise the interests of trade, land and the poor through a return to paternalistic principles and a keen defence of the liberties of the people more generally. The full ramifications of this vision become clearer when we turn to Walpole's excise bill of the following year.

In late 1732 and early 1733, rumours of a new excise on wine and tobacco began to circulate in press and parliament, mobilising in response a strong lobbying campaign on the part of the West India merchant interest and a broad based, extra-parliamentary campaign by middling-sort tradesmen and metropolitan and urban shopkeepers. Some of the more carnivalesque mock burnings and demonstrations mobilised sections of the labouring population. It was not simply the machinery of the excise that roused popular anger at the bill of 1733. Tobacco, as we noted before, was widely consumed by the labouring population and, in addition, many urban makeshift economies depended on the customary perquisites extracted by tobacco workers on the ships or on the quaysides.³⁷ This coalition of interests protesting at the excise's invasion of their liberties presented the Parliamentary Opposition with an opportunity to weld together a force capable of overthrowing Walpole by extending the reach of their conservative 'country' ideology to embrace the people as a whole.

Bolingbroke's Opposition launched an attack on the excise bill that centred on the fear of a constant and unchecked extension of excises into a general tax upon all

1070.

³⁷ Langford, *Excise Crisis*, ch. 4; H. T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 205-210; Wilson, *Sense of the People*, pp. 125-135; Linebaugh, *London Hanged*, pp. 153-183.

commodities. For Bolingbroke, this became the occasion of a searing indictment of the erosion of the liberties embedded in the ancient constitution and a defence of the values of non-partisan, paternalistic governance devoted to the preservation of a genuinely public interest. In the broader debate, ‘country’ patriotism served to defend the liberty and freedom of property owning Englishmen against the oppressive depredations of the state.³⁸ Walpole and his press responded by turning the Opposition’s complaints of the previous year back upon themselves. The Excise bill was in fact a piece of paternalistic and moral reform legislation to which only an unprincipled opposition could actually object. The Daily Courant, for example, claimed that ‘taxes should be laid, not on manufactures and necessities of Life, but on Things tending to Luxury only’, of which tobacco and wine were both fine examples. Likewise, the Whig London Journal argued that the bill was not only paternalistic, it was also progressive: ‘A General Excise, exclusive of the necessities of Life, and Trade’, it claimed, ‘is the most reasonable Thing in the world. For then it will be in everybody’s Power to tax himself and pay just what he pleases’. Consequently, the author argued, ‘the lower people, when they shall find themselves obliged to pay so much to the Government for the Luxuries of Tea, Coffee, Wine, Fine Linnen, Cambricks and other Follies of Life’ would ‘retrench their expenses, and be brought to a sense of their own Extravagance, sooner than by all the Divine, Moral and Philosophical Lectures in the World’.³⁹

³⁸ Dickinson, Liberty and Property, pp. 163-194; idem., Politics of the People, pp. 197-203; Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, pp.462-505; Kramnick, Bolingbroke and His Circle; Wilson, Sense of the People, pp. 128-131.

³⁹ GM, 3 (1733), p. 36; London Journal cited in Some Thoughts on the Land-Tax, General Excises, and the Least Burthensome Way of Raising Taxes, Occasioned by the London Journal on that

For the Opposition writers, exploiting the broad social base of popular anger at the excise bill meant addressing the concerns of middling-sort tradesmen, shopkeepers and merchants. It also meant justifying their support of extra-parliamentary activity which sometimes involved the labouring people of London and defending the poor from the charge of luxury. The political vocabulary of liberty and paternalism was accordingly stretched to embrace the diverse grievances of this contradictory coalition, effecting a highly unstable compromise between conservatism and the trading and commercial interests of Britain; between the preservation of rights and liberties and the power of consumer desires. Bolingbroke's *Craftsman*, for example, argued that liberty was not reducible to liberties of the body, but rather 'as Poverty and Slavery are commonly and very justly joined together, so I can never think, or speak of Liberty without annexing Some Ideas of Ease, Plenty and Prosperity to it'.⁴⁰ This conception of liberty allowed opposition writers to defend simultaneously the liberties of the trading interest and the consumer desires of the labouring people. But it meant abandoning any defence that rested upon necessities and embracing the vague and indeterminate world of tastes. Another writer argued that a great and powerful kingdom required that 'the People should live in Affluence by the help of Foreign Traffic, and that the Rulers should study to procure them all the Conveniencies of Life, with as much Attention as to furnish them with the

Subject (London, 1733), pp. 5-6; *GM* 2 (1732), p. 813; *The Rise and Fall of the Late Projected Excise, Impartially Consider'd by a Friend of the English Constitution* (London, 1733), p. 16.

⁴⁰ *An Argument Against Excises In Several Essays, lately Publish'd in the Craftsman and now Collected Together, By Caleb D'Anvers* (London, 1733), p. 21.

Necessaries of Life'. If they did not, he claimed, 'then Circulation of Wealth and Increase of Income would cease'.⁴¹

The defence of liberty against excises on commodities, then, forced conservative ideology into two related conclusions. First, it recognised the importance, and mounted a defence of, domestic consumption. Fog's Journal carried an article which argued that the plantation interests would be fatally injured by the excises since 'the great Consumption of our Plantation Goods, such as Sugar and Tobacco is mostly among the lower Sort of People, about 19 in 20 of the whole Body'.⁴² Second, it admitted the instability of the categories of the luxury and the necessary. The Craftsman's paternalistic defence of the poor took its writers into the territory of taste formation and the historical nature of categories with its discussion of tobacco consumption. Responding to the charge that the excise would only fall upon luxuries, the Craftsman replied that: 'Tobacco is grown so habitual to vast Multitudes of People, especially the Poor, that they can hardly subsist without it...therefore it can't properly be call'd a Luxury, any more than Sugar, Spice etc.'⁴³ Seven days later, the Craftsman argued that the doctrines of those who sought to suppress luxury 'savour more of Republican Principles than any I ever advanced'. Those who attacked luxury were 'guilty of the most ridiculous Sophistry, as regarding only the Necessaries and Superfluities of Life, whereas, in all civiliz'd countries, Conveniencies ought to have a Place, if these seeming levellers would have

⁴¹ Some Thoughts on the Land-Tax, p. 19.

⁴² GM 2 (1732), pp. 1065-1066.

⁴³ GM 3 (1733), p. 140.

any Distinction made between different Ranks of Men'.⁴⁴ The Craftsman had been forced, by its paternalist stance, to admit both the instability of its own aristocratic vocabulary and the contingent status of commodities. Its appeal to 'conveniencies' represented an unwilling recognition of the radical conclusions entailed by this admission. It was an effort to apply some mediating category to the debate, not because conveniencies were a right, but because the category was instrumentally useful in restraining the reversal that pushed conservative scepticism into progressivism again.

The Excise Crisis brought these tensions within conservative ideology to the surface. Faced with the necessity of defending the growing networks of domestic commerce from state interference and of addressing the presence and fluidity of consumer desires among the labouring classes, conservative concepts were capable of becoming unintentionally progressive in effect. Their very refusal to address questions of consumer desires in the way that Gee, Vanderlint or Defoe tried to, gave them a paradoxically radical potential. Liberty could come to be identical with pursuing greater material prosperity and luxury could lose its rigidly aristocratic aspect, sliding inexorably into its ever shifting, dialectical relationship with necessity as commodities became habitual through the mutable structures of customary culture. In the failure of the excise bill, we can also see the Pyrrhic victory of conservative ideology successfully frustrating the corrupt state that manifested the venality of public life at

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 145.

the cost of endorsing the forces of commercial development and legitimating the desire for new commodities among sections of the labouring classes.⁴⁵

For now, though, it will suffice to examine a last short case study. This exchange of articles from 1739 demonstrates the point at which the increasing incoherence of progressive and conservative ideology, in the forms we have been examining in this chapter, can be seen to be generating new ideological forms, more adequate to the conditions they had to express. In this exchange, we will be able to discern some of these categories and perceive the outlines of new ideological possibilities that would emerge more fully in the mid-century.

In late 1738, a series of risings began in the West of England's industrial and manufacturing districts. These involved the infamous Kingswood colliers, protesting over the prices of foods and the movement of coal out of the region. But, more importantly, it also involved the woolcombers and weavers of Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Devon and Somerset. These latter, operating through their trade and box clubs, were protesting at their employers' attempts to lower wages and impose payment in truck.

On 19 December, 1738, an article appeared in the Gloucester Journal on the subject of the riots. Thomas Andrews' Essay on Riots took the form of a fairly typical Tory attempt to hold Walpole's regime to account by eliding the workers' grievances against their employers with the Tory grievances against taxation levels. 'It is the chief business of a Government', he stated, 'to convince the People that it seeks their

⁴⁵ This was repeated in 1737 when Sir John Barnard prompted debate with his scheme to pay off the national debt. This time Walpole succeeded in staving off defeat. The debate was notable in making the taxes on necessities for the poor a battle-ground again. See GM 7 (1737), pp. 104-106, 720-731.

Happiness in and above all Things, because the Good of the People is the great End to which all Governments are established'. Andrews continued in similar stock-conservative fashion by adding that any government could do this easily enough by simply administering impartial justice amongst the people. This was particularly easy for a nation with such an 'Ancient Constitution' and, he added, with the benefits bestowed by trade.⁴⁶ This last betrays the true trajectory of Andrews' essay.

By 1739, we can see that Andrews' paternalistic concepts no longer refer to any practical conservative policy. At best, they evoke a spirit of paternalistic sentiment that was disappearing from social relations. Where they entailed specific policy, Andrews resorted to a series of progressive initiatives which contradict the spirit of the author's political trajectory. Government, he claims, must be like 'a loving Common Parent of many Children, to make use of its authority to relieve the Needy and Oppressed', which meant, in effect, to 'oblige all to conform to the common Rule of the Just and Reasonable'. Likewise, paternalism in fiscal policy meant taking off the 'burthensome' taxes on necessities and placing instead 'a tax upon the yearly income of all People of Substance'.⁴⁷

Equally, while Andrews did not address directly the question of the subjectivity or the essential nature of the labouring manufacturers, their needs and desires appeared in the essay in the form of natural drives. Alehouses must be closed

⁴⁶ Thomas Andrews, 'An Essay on Riots: Their Causes and a Cure. With Some Thoughts on Trade and a Method of Relief for the Miseries of the Wiltshire Manufacturers', from the Gloucester Journal Dec. 19, 1738, reprinted. in GM 9 (1739), p. 7. The author seems to have been Thomas Andrews, the Vicar of Burbage in Wiltshire who was also the author of a several sermons published between 1709 and 1731. See R. Watt, Bibliotheca Britannica (1824).

⁴⁷ Andrews, 'Essay on Riots', p. 7.

because they encourage the poor to ‘spend the Fruits of [their] Labour in Sottishness’, but, at the same time, a government that dispenses justice to the poor does not appeal to their reason, but works to ‘Charm Mankind’, ‘gain the love of Subjects and render the Disaffected loyal’. A just government, in other words, is the pragmatic answer since it caters to the wants of the poor, harnessing their capacity for pleasure and devotion to the ends of social stability.⁴⁸ In Andrews’ *Essay*, therefore, conservative ideology, in the form we have been examining in this chapter, appears to be at the point of dissolution; on the point of being subordinated and incorporated into a more stable commercial discourse from which it can re-emerge in a more culturally coherent form.

Andrews’ text inadvertently rendered the wants and desires of the poor natural, by very virtue of its unwillingness to deal directly with them. William Temple of Trowbridge’s famous reply, published a month later, shows us progressive ideology about to undergo a qualitative transformation in which it would subsume, transform and develop many features of the increasingly incoherent conservative ideology that Andrews attempted to deploy, adapting many of its concepts and themes to its own ends within its own transformed framework.⁴⁹

Temple’s reply refused the highly charged moral trajectory that pervaded Andrews’ text in favour of the authority of commercial logic and empirical observation. Temple was himself a clothier and he exploited this fact by filling his

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁴⁹ Temple is another about whom we know too little. Aside from being a Trowbridge clothier, we know that he wrote *A Vindication of Commerce and the Arts* in 1758, about which more in section 2.

pamphlet with details, figures, explanations and trade jargon to establish the veracity of his claims against Andrews' exhortations to virtue. Temple showed his readers his perception of how the industry actually operated, which is why his broadside has been used so much by historians of the Wiltshire weaving districts.⁵⁰ Yet Temple, like the writers examined earlier, had to shy away from the full progressive potential of his appeal to the improving power commerce and industry.

Temple could not extend the same capacity for improvement that he claimed for industry to the proto-industrial labourers it employed. For Temple, their appetites and desires were corrupt and destructive, tending more to luxury than to national benefit. 'The Poor', he claimed, 'have such high wages as furnish them with the means of Luxury and Idleness'. Like Joshua Gee, Temple argued that 'a Weaver and his Family may subsist, as well as the Poor do in many Counties in England by only working one half of his Time'. Small wonder then, he urged, 'that we see so much drunkenness and Idleness and Debauchery in the Manufacturing Towns'.⁵¹ For Temple, the relatively strong customary culture informing work and leisure patterns in these older manufacturing regions appeared in the form of irrational, childlike inclinations that had to be treated through maintaining low wages and high taxes. In dealing with such people, even truck payments could appear progressive.

⁵⁰ See for example Rule, *Experience of Labour*, pp. 43, 53, 88-9, 139-140, which is not to say, obviously, that we must not use Temple's writing for this reason. It is Temple's appeal to empirical standards of truth that enables historical knowledge of these industries. The only point to be made is that the truths Temple tells us are more than the sum of his empirical content.

⁵¹ [William Temple], *The Case As it Now Stands Between the Clothiers, Weavers and Other Manufacturers, With Regard to the Late Riot, in the County of Wiltshire, By Philalethes* (London, 1739), pp. 1-17.

Yet Temple also knew that the consumption of the labouring people, though it be excessive and though it was the occasion of idleness, was useful to the public in other ways. The recognition of this fact, together with a normative image of a labouring and consuming agent was forced through a pastoral opposition between the husbandman and the manufacturer. ‘Suppose’, he mused, ‘we compare the Body, Constitution, House and Family of the Poor diligent Husbandman and the debauched Manufacturer’. Again, Temple mobilised the authority of empirical observation in evoking the appearance of the bodies and material surroundings of these two ideal types. ‘You will’, he assured his readers, ‘see better Accommodation in the poor Husbandman’s House than in the manufacturer’s’. ‘One shall have a good Frieze Coat on, while the other appears as ragged as a Scarecrow; One shall have his House well furnished; with plain Bedding and all the Utensils provided by the Potter and Turner, while in the other you shall see nothing but Rags, Nastiness and bare Walls’.⁵² This empirical description of the material environment was not simply an index of relative virtues. Consumption of domestic utensils and clothes was also useful. For part of the problem with the manufacturing poor was that their depravity made them spend every spare penny on drink and these pennies should rather be ‘laid out at the Linen-Draper, the Haberdasher, the Grocer, and a Variety of other Trades, which prepare the Necessities of Food and Raiment and form domestic utensils’. The effects of this drunkenness stretched out beyond the labourer’s responsibility to his

⁵² Temple, *The Case*, pp. 24-25.

family: 'The consequence of his Debauchery, and not being under a Necessity of labouring, is an injury to himself, and every Trader but the Victualler and Maltster'.⁵³

Temple recognised both the fact of consumption and the possibility of a better, reformed consumption from his experiences of the Wiltshire weavers. Unable to see the weavers' family economy, structured by a residual customary culture, as anything but the vicious habits of luxurious drunkards, he nonetheless could see the potential in improving their growing taste for material improvement. In Temple's tract we come close to seeing the articulation of a model for a reformed, labouring-class subject, labouring hard for its material reward. But Temple's insistence on low wages and his displacement of the virtuous worker and consumer onto a pastoral idealisation of the humble husbandman demonstrate the limitations upon Temple's and his contemporaries' progressive vision. Until the labouring classes could be seen to possess a subjectivity that was not characterised by a childish and primitive inclination to indulge their appetites and could instead be seen to achieve true pleasure through rational agency, no such model could exist. And until the labouring classes could be seen as agents exchanging their labour as a commodity in a marketplace, they would not be seen as rational agents. When that happened, then the progressive recognition that the consumption of the labouring people was useful, and the recognition of their right to a reward for their labour would stand in a new relation to each other, and the fragments of conservative ideology would re-emerge, transformed and transmuted. As we will see in section two, the ideology of polite society was qualitatively transformed, according a new position to the labouring

⁵³ Ibid., p. 43.

classes, a position that could accommodate their consumer desires through a re-conceptualisation of their labour, and their subjectivity.

For now though, it will suffice to shift the focus onto a different arena of debate. The next chapter tracks these same debates and developments in the sphere of discussion over the laws regulating the poor. As we will see, the same concerns with the subjectivity of the labouring classes - with the relationship between their desires and their labour - can be seen replicated in the discussion of the problem of the poor laws. And, in this sphere, the question of shaping and reforming the poor was of acute importance.

Chapter Two

Reforming the 'Profligate Poor':

Poor relief and charity debates in the early eighteenth-century

Part I:

By the end of the 1690s, the fundamental legal structures of the poor laws that would dominate the practice of public charity throughout the eighteenth century were essentially in place. However, the early eighteenth-century commentators that we will examine here were discussing a system with a growing contradiction between the intentions built into the institutional fabric of the system and the mutating practices that sought to accommodate social and economic change. As a greater proportion of England's workforce became, at least in part, subject to wage labour, so a greater proportion became subjected to its irregular rhythms, its seasonality and its slavery to trade cycles and mercantile warfare. It has been estimated that, by the eighteenth century, forty to sixty per cent of English men and women would have expected to draw upon the parish at some point in their lives, whether through sickness, old age, unemployment or simply inability to support a family. And, just as doles, originally conceived of as temporary relief for the impotent, had become intermittent life-cycle relief for working people of all sorts, so the settlement laws, originally designed to

prevent movement between parishes, came gradually to serve the needs of changing production relations.¹

By the early eighteenth century, the settlement laws had been transformed into a complex machinery of inclusion, exclusion and surveillance that parish vestries could apply or ignore according to the local need for labour or the claims on resources. The 1697 Act had even enshrined this principle in law, conveying settlement to anyone who could establish themselves in a parish and not become chargeable. This was achieved by attaining an apprenticeship, performing public office or by the ability to pay rates themselves. In this way, the settlement laws could function simultaneously to foster and to impede social change, becoming, in effect, flexible tools for managing the supply of an increasingly mobile and wage dependent labour force. Poor law authorities, comprised of the 'chief inhabitants' of the parish - the rural and urban middling sorts - proved sophisticated operands of this machinery, implementing or ignoring them in accordance with the immediate interest of the parish or with the poor's adherence to their values: economic independence, discipline, industriousness and virtue.² The operation, if not the letter, of the laws,

¹ Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782* (London, 1990); Dorothy Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History* (London, 1926); Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge, 1998), ch. 2; T. Wales, 'Poverty, Poor Relief and the Life-Cycle: Some Evidence from Seventeenth-Century Norfolk' in R. M. Smith (ed.), *Land Kinship and the Life-Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 351-404; T. Arkell, 'The Incidence of Poverty in England in the later Seventeenth-Century', *Social History*, 12 (1987) pp. 23-48; B. Stapleton, 'Inherited Poverty and Life-Cycle Poverty: Odiham, Hampshire, 1650-1850', *Social History*, 18, 3 (1993), pp. 339-355.

² On the settlement laws, see Lees, *Solidarities of Strangers*, pp. 47-52; Norma Landau, 'The Laws of Settlement and the Surveillance of Migrants in Eighteenth-Century Kent', *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1991), pp. 391-420; Keith Snell, 'Pauper Settlement and the Right to Relief in England and Wales', *Continuity and Change*, 4 (1991), pp. 375-415; James Stephen Taylor, 'The Impact of Pauper Settlement, 1691-1834', *Past and Present*, 73 (1976), pp. 42-74; Steve Hindle, 'Power, Poor Relief and Social Relations in Holland Fen, c. 1600-1800', *Historical Journal* 41 (1998), pp. 67-96. For the role of the rural middling sorts in parish government, see Joan Kent, 'The Rural "Middling

was coming to reflect the priorities and criteria of the commercial middling ranks and their rural counterparts.

Yet the settlement laws also cemented the role of the gentry into the structures of the poor law. As Justices of the Peace, county gentlemen were the route of appeal for parishes seeking to question the return of a pauper to his or her supposed settlement. More importantly, perhaps, the Justice was the route of appeal for a poor person against a parish that sought to remove him or her. In this way, the law acted to perpetuate the paternalistic theatre so important to such gentleman 'patricians'.³

The structural limitations of the poor law, as Joanna Innes has observed, determined the shape of charitable activism in the eighteenth century. Charitable endeavours shaped themselves according to the gaps and omissions in public relief. Yet early eighteenth-century charitable forms also demonstrated the effects of the same economic and social pressures that were shaping public welfare. The growth of a highly seasonal, mobile and socially marginal urban proletariat, seamlessly moving in and out of immoral, disorderly and 'criminal' activity in the effort to 'make shift', shaped the social activism of urban elites and middling sorts.⁴

Charitable activity in the late seventeenth century began to appear increasingly in the shape of joint-stock companies, mobilising the new technologies of finance to

Sort" in *Early Modern England, 1640-1740: Some Economic, Political and Socio-Cultural Characteristics*, *Rural History* 10 (1999), pp. 24-31; H. R. French, 'Social Status, Localism and the "Middle Sort of People" in England 1620-1750', *Past and Present* 166 (2000), pp. 67-99.

³ Lees, *Solidarities of Strangers*, pp. 30-33; Marshall, *English Poor*, pp. 89-90.

⁴ Joanna Innes, 'The Mixed Economy of Welfare in Early Modern England: Assessment of the Options from Hale to Malthus (1683-1803),' in Martin Daunton (ed.), *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London, 1996), p. 145.

the ends of combining private gain and public benefit. The wartime years of the 1690s provoked a drought of investment opportunities, providing a great spur to such endeavours. Projectors, confident of the progressive potential of such ventures, sought subscriptions of capital for a bewildering range of projects that meshed seamlessly with the burgeoning instruments of finance capitalism: the Charitable Corporation, the York Buildings Company, the Westminster Hospital and, on a smaller scale, the provincial voluntary hospitals, charity schools and parochial workhouses. Such subscriptions proved greatly alluring to the urban elites and among the foremost subscribers and investors were the aristocracy and urban gentry. The stock market crash of 1720, which damaged the finances of so many speculating Tory gentlemen, coincided, as we will see, with a proposal for a reform of the poor laws that would float a gigantic corporation of the poor whose investors would receive payment in South Sea shares. While the crash may have dampened the ardour for some such projects, the subscription charity continued to be the dominant form of charitable investment into the mid century.⁵

But if charitable giving drew upon the expanding instruments of finance capitalism, an increasingly large part of the energy devoted to charitable and reforming activism came from the forms of association peculiar to the urban middling

⁵ Innes, 'Mixed Economy', pp. 149-150; Paul Slack, From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England (Oxford, 1999), pp. 119-122, 130-143; Donna Andrew, Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century (Princeton, 1989), pp. 44-73; David Owen, English Philanthropy (Cambridge Mass., 1964) pp. 36-50; Roy Porter, 'The Gift Relation: Philanthropy and Provincial Hospitals in Eighteenth-Century England', in Lindsay Granshaw and Roy Porter (eds), The Hospital in History (London, 1990), pp. 149-178. For concrete examination of these subscription charities in action, see Mary Fissell, 'Charity Universal? Institutions and Moral Reform in Eighteenth-century Bristol', in L. Davison, T. Hitchcock, T. Keirn and R. B. Shoemaker (eds), Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic

sorts of the early eighteenth century. As Margaret Hunt has shown, middling ideals of thrift, sobriety and industrious labour discipline - a form of Protestant piety on a trajectory towards secularisation - produced forms of association aimed at combating the vice, dissoluteness and idleness of the nation's rulers and its labouring people. Religious Societies and Societies for the Reformation of Manners complemented activity through subscription and the performance of local office through the poor law, making the middling people of towns and provinces a strong voice for the reform of society at the same time that they were exerting pressure on the state through their trade and industrial lobbying. In such ways, the tradesmen, shopkeepers, manufacturers and merchants of Great Britain could exercise considerable influence on a Parliament dominated by landed gentry.⁶

These social imperatives found ideological expression in both progressive and conservative ideology's thought on the poor. Progressivism's conviction that it was possible to harmonise private gain and public benefit was appropriate not only to the established mercantile and financial elites, but to those who saw themselves following a calling that mediated self-discipline and the social activism that buttressed the

Problems in England, 1689-1750 (Stroud, 1992), pp. 121-144; idem., Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Bristol (Cambridge, 1991).

⁶ Margaret Hunt, The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680-1780 (London, 1998), pp. 101-124; J. Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort', in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds), The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1500-1800 (Basingstoke, 1990), pp. 84-112; R. B. Shoemaker, 'Reforming the City: The Reformation of Manners Campaigns in London, 1690-1738', Davison et al., Stilling the Grumbling Hive, pp. 99-120. On lobbying, see John Brewer, The Sinews of Power, War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783 (Princeton, 1989), ch. 8; For a brief survey of the ways in which middling people influenced Parliament and government, see Davison et al., Stilling the Grumbling Hive, pp. xxiv-xli; Paul Langford, 'Property and "Virtual Representation" in Eighteenth-Century England' Historical Journal 31 (1988), pp. 83-115. Joanna Innes notes the importance of a core of Members of Parliament who specialised in social policy, motivated by lobbying groups and societies, and acting in the public good. Joanna Innes, 'Parliament and the Shaping of Eighteenth-Century English Social Policy', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 5, 40 (1990), pp. 79-82.

authority of the industrious individual. Progressive ideology oscillated between the urge to reform the profligate and luxurious poor and a recognition that trading wealth relied upon their continued subjection and exploitation. Once again, we can see progressive ideology driven towards social and economic conservatism by its inability to address fully the commercial potential of the labouring classes. Conservative ideology, though wedded to landed ideals forged in opposition to the brave new world of progressive self-formation and the accommodation with private gain, shared in the progressive horror at the profusion, dissolution and luxury of the poor. However, it was impelled to reconcile this with the need for legitimation through the performance of paternalism. Their paternalistic political vocabulary allowed conservatives to recognise some of the true cost of mercantile capitalism for those who laboured in its interests. It could also lead them into highly unstable coalitions with middling people which inadvertently functioned to push social and ideological development beyond the conservative tendencies of the Whig administration and of mercantilist policies.

Part II:

Laurence Braddon was well known to contemporaries, less for his skills as a barrister than for having unearthed the truth about the murder of the Earl of Essex by James II in 1683. For his pains, he had been imprisoned by James and then released by William III. By 1720 he was firmly ensconced as a solicitor to the lucrative Wine

Excise.⁷ Between 1717 and 1720, however, he also wrote a number of pamphlets suggesting an overhaul of the poor laws. These mark perhaps a high point of early eighteenth-century optimism regarding the possibilities of reforming the laws to make the poor productive. Braddon argued that ‘Interest’ was the ‘main spring which gives motion to the most considerable Designs in this world’ and, accordingly, every man was Duty-Bound, by all lawful Means consistent with the Public Good, to advance his own private Interest’.⁸ Braddon was at the cutting edge of progressive thought. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, his tracts demonstrated a formidable display of statistics, appropriate to political arithmetic and his preferred model of a reformed public relief system was in the form of a massive corporation, funded by subscription, that would operate through county administrations. The corporation would create colleges of industry where the poor would be set to work at wool manufacturing for exportation. In itself, this was unremarkable; mercantile writers in particular persistently called for the poor to be employed in the woollen manufactures.⁹ But what was interesting about Braddon’s proposal was his recognition that the desires and appetites of the poor themselves could be harnessed to the national good.

In 1717, Braddon had written that, although ‘Populousness may be made the Greatest Blessing’, equally, ‘it becomes a Burden and a curse, when the poorer Sort

⁷ See Dictionary of National Biography [hereafter DNB] ‘Laurence Braddon’, and J. Hutchinson, A Catalogue of Notable Middle Templars (London, 1902).

⁸ Laurence Braddon, An Abstract of the Draught of a Bill for Relieving, Reforming and Employing the Poor (London, 1719), pp. v-vi. For the category of interest and its role in mediating the passions and the interests, see A. O. Hirschman, The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph (Princeton, 1977), p. 45.

⁹ Braddon, Abstract, pp. 1-23. For other schemes to set the poor on work, see Some Considerations for Employing the Poor of this Kingdom, And for Improving the Linnen and Woollen Manufactures (London, 1737), pp. 3-12; A Proposal for the Employment of the Poor, and the Amendment of their Morals (London, 1737), pp. 1-3.

are left to themselves, and suffer'd to live in a wretched State of Ignorance and Idleness according to their own vicious and natural Inclinations'.¹⁰ Braddon did not propose to make them good Christians; as a good Calvinist, he recognised that 'nothing can reform [the poor man] but what shall change both Mind and Manners, and nothing can do that, but the grace which God alone can give'. But, as a good utilitarian, he sought to reform the poor in their separate capacity as members of the community who were to be made 'serviceable'.¹¹ In this task, their natural inclination towards vice was not entirely useless. Although it was necessary to reform the poor, this did not entail confining their desires or restraining their natural inclinations. It merely meant channelling them into socially useful areas. Braddon recognised that the poor were often unemployed because there was insufficient work for them. Accordingly, he suggested that if the Corporation provided waste lands for them to occupy and set up supervised employment in industry and subsistence agriculture, the poor would naturally incline towards independence and become industrious which would benefit the community.¹²

The importance of supervised employment was not simply to inculcate habits of industriousness but also to ensure that the poor received enough encouragement to labour well. To this end, Braddon proposed that all who worked for the Corporation should be provided with 'all necessary Subsistence'. This was reckoned into a weekly

¹⁰ Laurence Braddon, The Miseries of the Poor are a National Sin, Shame, and Charge: But by Making them Happy we shall remove that Guilt, raise the Glory, and Double the Wealth and Strength of Great Britain: and Pay old Debts without New Taxes (London, 1717), p. v.

¹¹ Laurence Braddon, A Corporation Humbly Propos'd, for Relieving, Reforming, and Employing the Poor..In a Letter to a Justice of the peace in Middlesex (London, 1720), p.15.

¹² Braddon, Corporation, pp. 6-7; *idem.*, Miseries, pp. 10-12.

diet which included beef, mutton, pork, bacon, fish, wheaten bread, suet pudding, table beer, milk pottage, butter and cheese. By the standards of workhouse provision across the eighteenth century, this was generous. But Braddon did not stop there. 'As for their Wearables and Furniture', he proposed that 'they shall be better provided for with these of all Sorts, than any Commonalty in Europe now have'. These goods were, however, to be 'proportion'd and applied according to their respective Sobriety, Ingenuity and Industry'. In order to 'reward and encourage Sobriety, ingenuity and Industry', there should, Braddon urged, 'be Differences both in their Habits, Diets and Lodgings'.¹³ Braddon recognised the importance of the taste for clothing among labouring people and proposed to use this desire in the interests of the nation. It was this recognition that justified his proposals to lend money to the poor to prevent them having to pawn their clothes and to reward industrious apprentices and servant girls who reached the end of their indentures by giving them 'so much in Apparel, Linnen of all Sorts proper, and of proper Household Furniture, and in Money to such a Value as the Officers..shall think such young men or maidens ought to have'.¹⁴ The appetites of the labouring poor were to be used to secure better labour.

Like Defoe, Braddon argued that the poor were useful for more than just their labour. High wages would benefit the nation in more diffuse ways. The employment of the poor in manufacturing, given a properly deployed army of divided labour, would have the effect of improving trade and industry and raising wages across the

¹³ Braddon, *Miseries*, pp. 27-30.

¹⁴ Braddon, *Abstract*, pp. 18-19.

whole nation. This, in turn, would benefit the landed and trading interests, for ‘the more Men receive for Wages, the better they can maintain themselves and Families’, and in so doing ‘they lay out the more Money in Eatables, Drinkables, and Wearables; which will the better enable both Farmers and Shopkeepers to pay their Respective Rents’.¹⁵

So, in Laurence Braddon’s works, we can see a position which is homologous with those of Mandeville and Defoe in the previous chapter. A naturalised inclination towards idleness and indulging appetites could be channelled to the nation’s benefit by directing it towards nationally produced and retailed commodities. But, as with the earlier writers, there was no agency about this. The poor made no decisions, they were assumed to be governed by their natural inclinations. The sum of reform was an outward conformity to the laws and economic imperatives of the community. Ultimately, there was no sanction against consumption either. Braddon might insist that ‘Prosperity consists of the whole subordination of all Persons’, but he did not mean to impede social mobility. Labour offered a career open to talents with a reward in commodities. And there was no way for Braddon to limit what the poor consumed either. His corporation officers might control their poor’s expenditure, but if their standard of living was to be tied to that of a broader labour force, whose own standard of life would rise as a consequence of the improvement of manufactures that would accompany full employment, then there was no limit, in theory, to what could

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 105-106. See also Braddon, *Abstract*, pp. x-xiii. Ironically, Braddon’s argument for the benefits of high wages was pitched against an argument that Defoe had made in 1704. Defoe had suggested that Sir Humphrey Mackworth’s scheme to employ the poor in make-work projects would lower wages in existing manufacturing sectors. See Daniel Defoe, *Giving Alms No Charity and Employing the Poor a Grievance to the Nation* (London, 1704), pp. 13-17.

be achieved or what could be consumed. Noticeably, however, while Braddon extended the range of possible consumption, this represented the horizon of possibility. The needs and wants that Braddon recognised were no more than those that he considered could be satisfied through the consumption of commodities. To find any consideration of other, less tangible, needs, we must turn to conservative ideology.

Part III:

Conservative ideology, as we will see in this section, expressed the aspirations of those who did not share in Braddon's enthusiasm for the subjective motive powers, and objective economic benefits of interests and passions. Its conceptual starting point was the corruption of these passions. However, as we will see, it could not ignore the possibilities inherent in the manipulation of desires. In addition, its political language gave it some ability to recognise, however imperfectly, the needs and wants that progressive ideology could not address.

Edward Knatchbull's Workhouse Test Act of 1723 was an amalgam of clauses designed to amend administrative problems with the existing structures of poor relief and give legal sanction to recent innovations at parish level. Sir Edward Knatchbull was a genteel and paternalistic SPCK activist whose activity in drafting and guiding this legislation through Parliament reveals the new interest shown by the Society in what Tim Hitchcock has called the 'parochial workhouse movement'. The initiative behind what became a movement co-ordinated at a national level by the

SPCK, had come at first from a series of parishes in the East Midlands and Essex which, seeking to lighten their burden of rates, had begun to use their rates and levy subscriptions to build parish workhouses, often placing them under the management of entrepreneurs like Matthew Marryott. The SPCK saw an opportunity to perform their paternalistic duty by bringing reformation to a whole new section of the unregenerate labouring population. Parish ratepayers also recognised that the contempt and abhorrence in which these institutions were held by the poor could be useful. From the first, therefore, these workhouses initiatives were stamped with a dual, and often contradictory, intention: to reform their inmates and to deter people from claiming relief. This dual function was embedded in the law by the 1723 workhouse test act which made it legally possible for a parish to deny relief to any claimant who refused to enter a workhouse.¹⁶ This unstable compound of instincts was replicated in the literature produced by the advocates of the parochial workhouses.

In some of the texts produced by the SPCK, we can see the recognition of the deterrent and reformatory functions of the workhouses. Here we will consider some of these texts: sermons preached by Thomas Trougher and Samuel Johnston, and the Account of Several Workhouses, the SPCK's famous guide to workhouse-building for aspiring and rate-conscious parish elites.

¹⁶ Tim Hitchcock, 'Paupers and Preachers: The SPCK and the Parochial Workhouse Movement', in Davison et al., Stilling the Grumbling Hive, pp. 145-166; idem., 'The English Workhouse: A Study in Institutional Poor Relief in Selected Counties, 1696-1750' (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1985), chs 2 and 4; Marshall, English Poor, pp. 128-134; Slack, Reformation to Improvement, pp. 133-135.

Trougher, the rector of Northwood on the Isle of Wight, repeated a familiar Anglican position on the duty of relieving the poor. The body politic had been made unequal, he claimed, in order best to generate benevolence. The rich were stewards of God's providential abundance and had a duty to dispense subsistence to the poor, since they 'have a Kind of Right or Property' in the riches of the earth. It also served the interests of the rich and the nation, since it lessened the rates on the parishes.¹⁷ All these authors presupposed that the poor were possessors of corrupt inclinations toward depravity and that the consumer desires of the poor were projected through this model of human agency. Johnston, a Yorkshire latitudinarian, argued that 'we are naturally inclined to Evil, and from our original Conception derive a Proneness to Iniquity; so that without Employment, we are under a necessity, as it were, of becoming what, by Nature and Original Corruption, we are disposed to be'.¹⁸ Trougher hoped that the house would enable 'those who were given to Excess and Riot' to 'learn Sobriety and temperance and instead of being the Pests of Human society may become happy instruments of much Good to it'. The various authors included in the Account agreed. They imagined parish workhouses operating as institutions for re-imposing a model of patriarchal family order, restraining the corrupt inclinations of the poor. The model was one that closely mirrored contemporary conduct literature, outlining middling-sort notions of virtue and

¹⁷ Thomas Trougher, The Best Way of Making our Charity Truly Beneficial to the Poor. Or: the Excellency of Work-Houses in Country Parishes to Prevent the Evil Effects of Idleness. In a Sermon Preached at Northwood in the Isle of Wight, 7 Sept. 1722 (London, 1723), pp. 7-14. See also Samuel Johnston, The Advantages of Employing the Poor in Useful Labour, and Mischief of Idleness or Ill Judged Business. In a Sermon Preach'd at St. Mary's in Beverley, October 10, 1725 (York, 1725), pp. 1-6.

¹⁸ Johnston, Advantages of Employing the Poor, p. 18.

prudence. 'The rules of governing such a House', claimed one of the authors of the Account, were 'no stricter than what are common in all regular Families'. As such, they 'oblige the poor to keep good hours, to refrain spending their little gains in Brandy Shops and Alehouses, to the Destruction of their Health'. They also obliged them to 'be mutually assisting to each other in sickness or in infirmities of old Age; to avoid the Temptations of Pilfering and House-breaking in order to supply their Wants, which are now much better provided for in all Respects, both for their Souls and Bodies', than 'when they liv'd on common begging, or in a miserable ruinous Cottage not knowing where to get the next Meal for themselves or their Children'.¹⁹

The emphasis of the regime was geared, not just toward habituating the poor to disciplined labour, but instructing them how to live in ordered families which were increasingly imagined as assailed by temptations that now took the form of commodities as much as sexual passion and idleness. A well-ordered family would emulate the discipline of the workhouse; 'no distill'd liquors to come into the House, nor any of the Poor to smoak Tobacco in their Lodgings, or the Workhouse'. In an ideological development that closely mirrored the social forces behind the parochial workhouse movement, paternalistic care was made conditional on a display of deference configured in the form of middling-sort notions of frugal householding.²⁰

Yet instilling habits of frugality did not entail not gratifying tastes at all. The

¹⁹ An Account of Several Workhouses For Employing and Maintaining the Poor; Setting forth the Rules by which they are Governed, their Great Usefulness to the Public and Particularly to the Parishes where they are Erected (London, 1725), pp. v-vi; Trougher, The Best Way, pp. 14-15; Hunt, Middling Sort, pp. 22-46, 147-172.

²⁰ An Account, pp. 7-8; Johnston, Advantages of Employing the Poor, pp. 21-27. See also An Account of Charity Schools Lately Erected in Great Britain and Ireland (London, 1709), pp. 5-6.

imperatives to paternalism and the interest in securing supplication dictated the need for some indulgence of appetites. At the Barking workhouse in Essex, it was claimed that ‘Bread and Beer are allowed to all without Limitation. They have Roast beef at the three great Festivals, and Plumb Puddings at Christmas’. And Trougher similarly urged that the inmates should be ‘dieted after the Manner and in respect of the Season of the year, according to the Custom of the Country’.²¹ An efficient, paternalistic reformation of the poor, it seemed, required some accommodation with customary notions of needs and desires and their satisfaction through customary forms of consumption. And, as Johnston realised, the labouring classes themselves, ‘in the spending of their Wages contribute to the Support of several others when they have Occasion to traffick for meat and Drink and Cloathing...and hereby a Circulation of Trade and Profit is promoted throughout the Nation’.²²

This accommodation with the utility of depraved appetites stretched, inevitably, to the deterrent function of the parish workhouses. The principle of the deterrent depended entirely upon utilising the poor’s aversion to confinement and regularity to lower the rates and enable some degree of useful reformation. As one correspondent noted, ‘the Advantage of a Workhouse does not only consist in this, that the Poor are maintain’d at less than half the Expence which their Weekly Pay amounted to’, but also that ‘the very great Numbers of lazy People, rather than submit to the Confinement and Labour of the Workhouse, are content to throw off the mask, and maintain themselves by their own Industry’. Workhouses, therefore,

²¹ *An Account*, p. 52; Trougher, *The Best Way*, p. 23.

²² Johnston, *Advantages of Employing the Poor*, pp. 12-13.

discerned the truth behind the masks of misery: that many of the current claimants of parish relief were in fact lazy, lying and avaricious cheats. But the workhouse did not operate by revealing the truth to the lazy poor and reforming their morals. Rather, it functioned by manipulating their imaginary fears and feeding their desire for liberty. For, 'a Workhouse is a Name that carries along with it an Idea of Correction and Punishment' and 'many of our Poor have taken such an Aversion to living in it upon that Account, as all the Reason and Argument in the World can never overcome'.²³ With this simple disavowal of the project of reformation, this correspondent admitted that such appetites were effectively natural, beyond the ability of any temporal power to reform. But, while it might not be possible entirely to reform the depraved appetites of the poor, one could indulge and direct their delusions in socially useful ways, ensuring that, at the very least, they would labour hard to avoid confinement. At this point we have come upon a familiar reversal whereby the inner unity of progressive and conservative positions becomes apparent.

In addition, as we will see in later chapters, the transformation of the family into a unit that imposed order on consumption was a development of enormous importance. In the mid-century, this image of a thrifty, accumulating household, situated amidst circulating commodities, would be significantly developed. In the period we are examining here, it remained a latent potential waiting upon a conception of labouring-class agency that did not presuppose an inherent corruption and stunted rational capacity.

²³ An Account, pp. 34-35, see also pp. 39-40.

For now, however, it is enough to observe that the parish workhouses succeeded in neither of their stated objectives. As Tim Hitchcock has shown, their minutes record innumerable struggles between inmates and master over the regulation of their time and consumption. Free-time, spirits and, in particular, tobacco became the subjects of intense micro-conflicts, battles over consumption that the inmates won as often as the masters. Hitchcock records paupers fighting for the right to sell or pawn their clothes to pay for the commodities that had become part of their customary expectations, petitioning the governors for the right to smoke in breaks between labour and the right to leave the house for evening hours of drinking.²⁴ These workhouse regimes became sites on which a battle was fought between an ideal of frugal living and prudent expenditure and a customary consumption that had adapted commodities that the middling sorts perceived as luxuries, unfit for such people. Yet, in recognising the need to indulge customary expenditure in some forms - feasts tied to the festive calendar and highly symbolic foods like beef and beer - and in indulging corrupt appetites and desires for liberty in the deterrence of relief claims, the parish elites and SPCK activists were recognising the existence of needs and wants that progressive ideology considered to be illegitimate and unregenerate. Second, they saw the utility of manipulating such desires to nationally useful ends, demonstrating their essential inner relation with progressive ideology and effectively undermining the impact of their reformatory drives. There appeared to be no middle ground in which desires could be authorised and controlled without slipping into indulging excess.

²⁴ Hitchcock, 'English Workhouse', pp. 167-215.

This point was, of course, central to Bernard Mandeville's critique of concepts of virtue and luxury. Luxury, he argued, was an unstable and largely meaningless category, while virtue was a mask assumed by hypocritical pride. Mandeville's celebrated attack on the charity schools, those institutions of moral reform so beloved of the SPCK reformers, represented another occasion for him to voice clearly the truths that remained half hidden in the texts of lesser writers.

His attack on the charity schools made many allegations that were not new. In particular, his criticism of their educational regimes drew on claims regularly made by mercantilist writers. Although some charity schools combined their emphasis on reading, writing and catechism with regimes of work in the form of spinning or picking oakum, most did not. It was this that fuelled the charge of progressive mercantile writers that such an education was wasted on those who would enter manufacturing industry.²⁵ This provided a foundation for Mandeville's mordant observation that the charity schools undermined the social utility of labourers by making them aware of better worlds.

Mandeville's attack on the charity schools is usually read either as an satirical attack on the hypocrisy of charity or as a heartless piece of invective against the poor. In fact, its true significance derives from Mandeville's view of the operation of society as a whole. The hypocrisy of charitable donors was only intelligible in relation to Mandeville's recognition of the essential relation of labouring people to commercial society. Deploying mercantilist conventions about the need to hold wages

²⁵ On the charity schools, see M. G. Jones, The Charity School Movement: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Puritanism in Action (Cambridge, 1938). For the regime of a charity school as

down, Mandeville in fact made the far more radical point that society did not exist for the good of all.²⁶ He argued that all men were fundamentally equal: equally self-motivated. Civilisation and morality were socially necessary masks donned to disguise the avarice of individuals. However, he also argued that a commercial society had an interest which ran counter to that of the poor, one which demanded their subjection to labour.

Mandeville was therefore able to assert that charity was nothing but a mask to disguise the exploitation of labour. To pretend otherwise was folly. This was not to argue against the practice of charity - Mandeville of all people recognised the utility of masks - but it was to militate against education.²⁷ Rationally, it made no sense to educate labourers. If they were aware of their interests, they would no longer exploit themselves and would become aware of the possibility of improving themselves by other, less arduous means. The ideal worker for a rational commercial state was 'sturdy and robust, never used to Ease and Idleness, and soon content as to the necessities of Life'. They were to be 'such as are glad to take up with the coarsest manufactures in every Thing they wear, and in their diet have no other aim but to feed their Bodies when their stomachs prompt them to eat'.²⁸ The only way for a commercial society to subsist, then, was to maintain its labouring population in a state of animal primitivism.

recommended by the SPCK, see An Account of Charity Schools, pp. 3-6. For hostile comments on the educational curriculum, see Some Considerations for Employing the Poor, p. 10.

²⁶ For recognition of the importance of this observation, see E. J. Hundert, The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 179-180.

²⁷ Hundert, Enlightenment's Fable, pp. 180, 190-192.

²⁸ Bernard Mandeville, An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools (London, 1723), in Philip Harth (ed.) The Fable of the Bees (London, 1970), pp. 292-293.

The error of the charity school lay in promoting a greater understanding amongst the poor and thereby unleashing greater desires. 'The less Notion a man has of a better way of living, the more content he'll be with his own', Mandeville claimed. To this end, it was requisite that 'great Numbers of them [the poor] should be Ignorant as well as Poor.'²⁹ Mandeville's satirical rhetoric only enhances his understanding that any concession to the appetites and desires of the poor, any attempt to accommodate and confine them, must be radically unstable. 'Civilising' the poor brought with it the danger that they might become ambitious commercial subjects and Mandeville listed many examples of urban labouring people who already demonstrated such tendencies: footmen, servants, thieves and beggars - the creations of a society founded on luxury - all demonstrated the same cool and calculating commercial cunning in their pursuit of self-aggrandisement.³⁰ Once unleashed, Mandeville claimed, such desires and ambitions, could not be restrained.

The force of Mandeville's satire scandalised progressives and conservatives alike. As we have seen, both tendencies within capitalist ideology were moving towards some recognition of the desires of the poor which did not contradict either their function as labour or the vitality of the social order. Mandeville's essay on charity told them that this was impossible. Contemporaries may have increasingly ignored or dismissed Mandeville's paradox, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to think its resolution in the terms of existing forms of capitalist ideology, progressive or conservative. Yet these ideologies were in the process of mutating and we can

²⁹ Mandeville, *Essay on Charity*, pp. 318, 294.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 275, 283, 296-297.

observe these changes at work more closely in two final pamphlets which emerged from the debate over the utility of workhouses in the 1730s.

Part IV:

By the mid 1730s, the parochial workhouse movement had run out of steam. Accusations of fraud against workhouse contractor Matthew Marryott, and a pamphlet exchange in 1731 alleging cruelty in the parish workhouses may have helped to dampen the ardour for such schemes in many parishes.³¹ So did the long term failure to affect the upward movement of rates. As the SPCK began to turn its attention towards the less controversial voluntary hospitals and infirmaries, public debate swung back towards the merits of another attempt to overhaul the administrative structure of the poor laws by overlaying the parishes with a greater authority.³²

In 1735, a committee set up to examine the laws 'relating to the maintenance and settlement of the Poor' reported its resolutions to the House of Commons, recommending a reform of the poor laws. At the head of the committee, and pioneering the bill that followed, was William Hay. Hay was a court Whig, supporter of Walpole and closely linked to Pelham, in whose county he was a sitting MP. He was one of a recognised group of MPs who specialised in social policy. By profession, Hay was a lawyer, as were many other poor law specialists in

³¹ See for example, *The Work-House Cruelty* (London, 1731).

³² Hitchcock, 'English Workhouse', pp. 233-241; Innes, 'Mixed Economy', p. 154.

Parliament.³³ At the same time that his committee reported to the Commons, Hay published a pamphlet entitled Remarks on the Laws Relating to the Poor. In this he laid out for the public his diagnosis of the problems embedded in the laws as they stood and his proposals for a reform.

Central to Hay's argument was his critique of the settlement laws. In this attack, Hay demonstrated an increasing recognition that the interests of a trading nation were not being served by laws which empowered parishes to remove migrant labourers at will. Hay inclined towards redefining the criteria of settlement by extending the principles enshrined in the 1692 and 1697 amendment acts. Rather than settlement being conveyed by apprenticeship, public office or rate-paying, Hay proposed that any man who could find employment for a year and not become chargeable should have legal settlement. 'It seems to me', he argued, 'that every Man has a natural Right to reside in any Place where he can best provide for himself and his Family in some Honest Calling'. This marked not only an extension of the principle of the 1690s acts, but an expansion of Locke's theory that labourers were entitled to subsistence through their possession of labour. In the Remarks, Hay argued that this right to subsistence was being impeded by the operation of the settlement laws.³⁴

³³ Stephen Taylor and Clyve Jones (eds), Tory and Whig: The Parliamentary Papers of Edward Harley, Third Earl of Oxford, and William Hay, MP for Seaford, 1716-1753 (Rochester, 1998), p. lxix. Joanna Innes also notes that Hay was assisted in his attempt to pass his bill by the Master of the Rolls, Joseph Jekyll. Jekyll, another MP who specialised in social policy, pioneered the Gin Act through the House in 1736 and the Licensing Act in 1737, Innes, 'Social Policy', p. 86.

³⁴ William Hay, Remarks on the Laws Relating to the Poor. With Proposals for their Better Relief and Employment. By a Member of Parliament (London, 1735), p. 11.

Encompassed in this right, we can also see some accommodation of needs and desires and the right of the poor to their fulfilment. Hay argued that to remove a poor man from a parish was not only an infringement of his right to obtain subsistence, it was cruel and oppressive in denying him a chance to make himself happy. ‘A Poor man is no longer got into a Neighbourhood, Habitation and Employment that he likes, but upon Humour and Caprice, he is sent to another Place where he can find none of these Conveniences’.³⁵ Indeed, even where the poor were allowed to settle, the parish relief continued the work of oppression by maintaining them in a state of hopeless material impoverishment. The parish might cater for subsistence, but it cruelly denied them the chance to improve themselves. ‘They are often lodged in such Houses as will not defend them from the Weather; cloathed in rags, that will not keep them warm, and proper Food to sustain nature’.³⁶

The solution, Hay argued, was a return to the educative and reformatory principle of the large institution. ‘It is a greater kindness to put a Man in a way of getting his Bread as long as he lives’, Hay urged, ‘than to relieve his present Necessity’. It would be ‘a Charity not confined to one Generation, but extends itself to the Posterity of the persons employed’ since the parents of such children ‘will be able to give them a better Education, and set before them a better example’.³⁷ Such a scheme would require the mobilisation of rates at a county level by large corporations. Every county would have a workhouse, a hospital and a house of correction. At the centre of the scheme was the workhouse. This would provide

³⁵ Hay, Remarks, p. 13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

employment for any person who wanted it and education and training for their children. In this way, ‘the Trade and Navigation and Husbandry, and the wealth of the Nation’ would be increased, ‘And what is most to be considered, the Morals of the Poor will be improved by a Sober Education and an Industrious habit, which will render this and future Generations wiser and better’.³⁸

In Hay’s scheme, we can see an increasing emphasis on the improvement of the poor’s rational capacity. It was not just the inculcation of labour that was being proposed in the Remarks, it was the progressive improvement of the poor through education and industry. It was also the adjustment of the laws to cater for their need and desire to move in search of gainful employment. Hay came close to recognising that the labouring people who fell under the settlement laws and who required the workhouses were self-governing agents, selling their labour for material reward. This is why his workhouses were not to be places of confinement. Rather, they would provide labour for ‘reasonable’ wages, leaving the poor with liberty to come and go at will.³⁹ What Hay was asserting here was not an abstract right to the liberty of movement, but one conveyed by the labourer’s function as mobile labour power. In Hay’s proposals for the reform of the poor laws, we can see progressive ideology attempting to accommodate a greater than ever range of needs and wants through the mediation of labour’s status as a commodity. As we will see, this was a crucial cognitive advance that would emerge fully in the mid century.

Hay’s proposals found enough support to produce a bill which was introduced in 1735 and again in 1736. Both times, it fell short of becoming

³⁸ Ibid., p. 54.

legislation. As Joanna Innes has suggested, this was probably due to the constitutional nervousness of MPs at the possible ramifications of such a radical upheaval in settled institutions and sedimented practices.⁴⁰ Reform would impinge upon the legal rights of existing charities, as well as the property of the multitudes of parish rate payers. But the failure to pass Hay's bill was also possibly because of the backlash against workhouses in general, embracing the large institutions of Hay's imagination as much as the smaller parish workhouses that dotted the English landscape.⁴¹

One published critique came from Thomas Andrews, the Wiltshire vicar whose Essay on Riots was examined in chapter one. In 1738, he published a substantial pamphlet entitled An Enquiry into the Causes of the Encrease and Miseries of the Poor and in it we can see conservative ideology, from its different perspective, straining to make sense of the same phenomena that confronted Hay.

In chapter one, we saw that Andrews was a Tory 'country' critic of Walpole's government and took the riots among the Wiltshire weavers as an opportunity to hold the whole regime to account. In the Enquiry, we see him launch a more thoroughgoing assault on society deploying the conceptual armoury of a paternalistic Tory Commonwealthman.⁴² Andrews also saw the earth as abundant and sufficient to feed all its inhabitants. If there were poor who lived in misery, this signified that there

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

⁴⁰ Innes, 'Mixed Economy', p. 160.

⁴¹ Hitchcock, 'English Workhouse', p. 241.

⁴² On the Commonwealthman, see J. G. A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton, 1975), pp. 436-461, but more especially, Isaac Kramnick, Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole (Oxford, 1968), ch. 9.

was something wrong in the commonwealth. What was wrong was in fact a chronic and diffuse corruption that embraced the 'ill policy of Administration, Negligence of Magistrates, Luxury of the Rich' and the 'Vice and Disorderly Habits of the Poor themselves'.⁴³

The workhouse represented, Andrews argued, another species of this corruption. The proposed institutions were not simply cruel, as Hay had argued the parish workhouses to be, they were an infringement of the fundamental liberties of the poor as Englishmen. To confine the poor to workhouses was a breach of the contract that underpinned any civil society. But the emphasis lay firmly upon the benefits of leaving the poor at liberty and the meaning of liberty itself was stretched to embrace notions of ease, comfort and plenty that recall Bolingbroke's words during the Excise debate. 'I can see no Reason', he argued, 'that can possibly induce a Christian and Free Society, to cut off its poor and impotent Members from the common Comforts of Life by putting them into a State of Confinement'. Such a policy only made sense if 'they have contracted vicious and idle Habits, and do not contribute as they are able, and ought to by work and Industry, to the Support of Society, and the Maintenance of themselves and Families'. It was clear to Andrews that 'an Industrious person, as he labours more chearfully, so will labour harder when at liberty than confined'.⁴⁴ Commonwealth political concepts were coming to signify material well-being and this well-being was recognised to enhance their capacity for labour. Non-economic needs and wants, which had found refuge in conservative

⁴³ Thomas Andrews, An Enquiry into the Causes of the Encrease and Miseries of the Poor of England (London, 1738), pp. 1-3.

⁴⁴ Andrews, Enquiry, pp. 8-9.

ideology's political vocabulary, can be seen to be disappearing into a conception of material welfare, of determinate desires which could be satisfied by material goods.

The same process was at work in his concept of the nature of the poor. The popularity of workhouses was, for Andrews, a consequence of the undoubted depravity of many of the poor. But, crucially, this depravity was not a given: it had causes. These included the weight of taxation, the advance of luxury, the absenteeism of 'great men' from their estates, corruption at elections, the effects of enclosure, the decline of apprenticeship and the remissness of Justices in regulating alehouses. Examining each cause, Andrews showed how luxury in fact infected all of them: it was evoked in every form, becoming responsible for the decline in public spirit, the ebbing of paternalism, the softening of manners, the growth of executive power, the decay of the ancient gothic constitution and the luxurious expenditure of all ranks of men.⁴⁵ In its form as a proximate cause of poverty and corruption - as expenditure - it swept through the social order. 'From our Great Ones, Luxury descends like a devouring Torrent on our middling People', he declaimed. 'Nor doth Luxury stop with these; but condescends to visit the Houses of our meanest Farmers and tradesmen; nay sometimes it humbly enters the lowly Cottages of our Poor themselves'. These last, in particular, were deserving of contempt, for they were 'frequently seen Treating and spending above their Abilities; their Wives and Daughters flaunting it in their Silks, satins, and the like Fineries, at the same time that, perhaps, they are not worth a penny in the world'.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

Yet for all its universal applicability, Andrews perceived a need to define luxury. He could no longer assume that his audience knew what it was. And in the effort to define luxury, Andrews lost his grip on it: 'By luxuries, I think, are to be understood, all those superfluities in our Houses, dress, Tables, Diversions, Entertainments, equipages, and in general, in all the Uses of Life, which do not make for the Honour, Dignity, Happiness or Conveniencies of Those who use them, or of the Publick', with the crucial added qualifier 'and all Things which are above a Persons Abilities'.⁴⁷ Andrews was perceptibly slipping into a relative conception of luxury, recognising the same radical instability that progressive writers like Defoe and Vanderlint had noted. Luxury was no longer a property of commodities, it was projected onto them as they came into contact with the income of an individual. Crucially, Andrews also had to differentiate between the subjective and the objective effects of luxury.

Phenomenologically, luxury was experienced as 'immoderate love' which harked back to the aristocratic concepts of country conservatism. But this subjective experience had no necessary objective public effects in itself. Rather, it was part of a milieu of factors which moulded the individual mind to 'corrupt and wicked practices' which culminated in crimes to satisfy a 'luxurious Appetite'. The economic effects of luxury were purely contingent. Andrews was only able to argue that it had public effects that ought to tax a commercial state in as much as luxury tended to be satisfied through consuming foreign commodities.⁴⁸ But luxury was not a property of

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

these commodities as foreign or exotic. It was still simply a relationship between income and commodity. Therefore, the public effects of luxury were reducible to the problem that Britain did not produce luxuries. Andrews inadvertently pointed to the purely economic problem that a taste for luxuries existed and the British could not satisfy it. Underneath the diffusion of luxury, therefore, lay a radically modern category system that differentiated between public and private, individuals and the nation. Luxury could only be reconnected to public consequences through the mediation of a concept of the national economy.

Andrews's principle concern lay in reforming the taste for luxuries among all ranks and injecting a spirit of virtue and public interest back into society. In urging the need to direct people's tastes away from foreign luxuries and anything beyond their ability to pay, Andrews drew upon a set of concepts that pointed forward to a fundamentally transformed ideology. Luxury's diffuseness was such that, if Andrews was to preserve his conservative ideals, he had to reject the original depravity of men in exchange for an emphasis on the corruption of virtue in the constitution of society. Men could be saved by returning to the spirit and order of Alfred's constitution; an organic society based on impartial paternalistic justice and gothic institutions. When transformed into concrete proposals, however, these appear more like progressive reform than conservative reaction.

A public education for children, for example, was to involve a corporation which would institute an ordered regime of more virtuous, 'less necessitous' and 'better objects of charity'. The demands of justice required, he argued, that taxes on commodities be abolished and replaced with a set of sumptuary laws. But these laws

were to be tied to income rather than order or status group. His advocacy of Alfred's organic state focused on the development of micro-authorities observing and regulating their populations and each other. They seemed more like police in gothic clothing than a return to the ancient constitution.⁴⁹

In arguing that men could be brought back to a spirit of virtue, or at least made less luxurious, Andrews laid out a model of human agency that would resurface in a more developed form in the mid century. The poor were, he argued, 'deplorably Addicted' to laziness, drunkenness and debauchery and were therefore not hopelessly corrupt through original sin, but capable of improvement given the right conditions. The right conditions could be provided by the reforms referred to above, but the unit upon which they depended was the ultimate authority in an organic conception of the state: the well ordered family.

Like the authors of the Account of Several Workhouses, Andrews turned back to the family as a site of authority through his conservative organicism. But, in picturing such a family, he not only situated it in a world of circulating commodities, as the Account had done, he also gave it a project. The family was to accumulate capital to keep it off the poor rates. This would enforce a regime of judicious consumption. In describing the denizens of the alehouses, Andrews gave a good description of the negative image of this ideal: 'Here the married man spends all the money he can shift for, whilst his Family is starving at home, or at the Parish', and here also, 'when Trade is good and our Manufacturers can earn a great deal of Money, all the Superfluous pence are thoughtlessly fooled away by the Topping

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 52-83.

Father, that should be wisely and carefully layed up to Subsist him and his Family, and keep 'em above the Parish when Trade is bad'.⁵⁰

As we will see in section two, this image of an economical family, carefully husbanding their wages in the name of a future dominated by trade cycles, came to dominate and shape policy suggestions concerning the poor laws. Combined with the discursive articulation of labour's status as a commodity, it would resurface as part of a higher form of commercial capitalist ideology. But, before we examine the shaping of this ideology in the middle decades of the century, we will turn to one last sphere of discussion to trace out the dimensions of and contradictions in early eighteenth-century thought concerning the consumer desires of the poor. Turning to discussions of the urban poor in the 1730s, chapter three examines what contemporaries considered to be their most dangerous luxury: the taste for gin.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 9, 51.

Chapter Three

The “Slow but Sure Poyson”:

Mother Gin and the Act of 1736

Part I:

To understand the anxieties raised by the Gin craze of the early eighteenth century we must understand the composition of London’s growing proletariat, the labouring people upon whom London’s growth as a large entrepot port and financial centre depended. The growth of this proletariat itself depended on migrant labour. Changing property relations and agricultural practices on the land ensured a supply of predominantly female migrants to feed the city’s demand for a flexible seasonal and casual workforce.¹ This created a population whose existence and whose culture contradicted almost every conception of order and every vector of authority characteristic of an early modern society.

The labouring class of London lived in conditions that contradicted older ideals of apprenticed and regulated labour and their daily lives contradicted accepted notions of ordered family formation. The city’s population was replenished by a predominantly female migrant population, vulnerable to the endemic disease of the city. The skewed sex ratio and high mortality this created ensured that there were plenty of women attempting to maintain lone-parent families. The inexact translation

¹ Peter Linebaugh, The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1991), pp. 7-74; L. D. Schwartz, London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 1700-1850 (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 11-57, 105-122.

of customary notions of the sexual division of labour into urban life meant that, while these women might be able to enjoy more autonomy, they were also a more precariously marginal workforce. Crowded into the decaying urban and suburban parishes, they may have had access to more employment but they were confined to certain trades and received a fraction of the wages of their male counterparts. The irregular work patterns of the capital also left a space in which the translated cultural practices of migrant workers could continue to exist in a dynamic relation with the imperatives of urban proletarian life. New commodities, available to anyone with enough ready cash or credit, flowed around London as nowhere else in Britain. But large sections of this working population lived in a state of permanent economic marginality, experiencing bouts of intense poverty. In such circumstances they fell on the parishes, resorted to theft, begging, smuggling or prostitution to survive.²

By the 1720s and 1730s, contemporary complaints of the idleness of labouring people were increasingly supplemented by accusations of luxury. The fine

² Linebaugh, London Hanged, pp. 14-16; John Gillis, For Better, For Worse: British Marriages 1600 to the Present Day (Oxford, 1985), pp. 161-189; J. R. Landers, 'Mortality and the Metropolis: The Case of London, 1675-1825', Population Studies, 41 (1987), pp. 71-76; Richard Wall, 'Some Implications of the Earning, Income and Expenditure of Married Women in the Population in the Past', in John Henderson and Richard Wall (eds.), Poor Women and Children in the Past (London, 1994), pp. 312-335; Nicholas Rogers, 'Carnal Knowledge: Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century Westminster', Journal of Social History, 23, 2 (1989), pp. 355-375; D. A. Kent, 'Ubiquitous but Invisible: Female Domestic Servants in Mid Eighteenth-Century London', History Workshop Journal 28 (1989), pp. 111-128; Tim Hitchcock, "'Unlawfully Begotten Upon Her Body': Illegitimacy and the Parish Poor in St. Luke's Chelsea', in Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe (eds.), Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840 (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 70-82; Schwartz, London in the Age of Industrialisation, pp. 19-22, 45-49; Maxine Berg, The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain (London, 1996), pp. 131-165; Michael McKeon, 'Historicising Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 166-1760', Eighteenth Century Studies, 28 (1995), pp. 298-301; Beverley Lemire, Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800 (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 56-71, 96-99; Jeremy Boulton, 'Going on the Parish: The Parish Pension and its Meaning in the London Suburbs', in Hitchcock, et al., Chronicling Poverty, pp. 19-46.

clothes worn by urban servants, the taste for playhouses and the growth of prostitution were all described as species of urban luxury poisoning the manners of the urban labouring people. In its urban context, luxury signified the destabilising of identities, the reduction of all to equality and the confusion of the social order. Even writers relatively untroubled by the proliferating commodity culture of the city worried that the extension of luxury to the labouring poor would undermine the nation's prosperity.³

For contemporary propertied commentators then, the urban environment was pictured as a nest of temptations for the vulnerable classes of people, more inclined to vice and sin. What most disturbed contemporaries, however, was gin drinking. In the controversy and the debates around the attempt to reform the gin trade in 1736, we

³ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce*, chs 2-5; John Styles, 'Custom or Consumption? Plebeian Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England', Paper presented to the conference on *Luxury and the Marketplace in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, University of Warwick, 1998; John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), pp. 327-384; David Thomas (ed.), *Theatres in Europe: A Documentary History: Restoration and Georgian England* (London, 1990); Henry William Pedicord, *The Theatrical Public in the Time of Garrick* (London, 1954), pp. 19-54; Vincent J. Liesenfeld, *The Licensing Act of 1737* (Wisconsin, 1984). For the contemporary debates see 'An Essay Recommending Sumptuary Laws against Dress and Equipage, for preserving the Distinction and Order so Necessary for the Different Ranks of Men', in *Gentleman's Magazine* [hereafter *GM*] 4 (1734), pp. 13-14; John Dennis, *Vice and Luxury Publick Mischiefs or Remarks on a Book entitled the Fable of the Bees or, Private Vices Publick Benefits* (London, 1724), pp. 53-55; *GM* 1 (1731), pp. 249-250; *Of Luxury, More particularly with Respect to Apparel, being the Substance of Two Discourses, on Timothy ii. 9. By a Country Clergyman* (London, 1736), p. 25; 'Petition of the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London, 1729-30' PRO L.C. 7/3, f.28 and *Universal Spectator*, 12 April, 1735, both cited in Liesenfeld, *Licensing Act*, pp. 206, 191; 'A Letter Humbly Offer'd to the Trading Citizens of London', *Hooke's Weekly Miscellany* 8 March 1735, in *Parliamentary History*, 9 (1735), pp. 945-946; Francis Hare, *A Sermon Preached to the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, at St. Mary-le-Bow on Tuesday January 5th, 1730* (London, 1731), p. 37. For the debate on theatres and their effects on low spectators, on which I hope to write at greater length, see Arthur Bedford, *The Evil and Mischief of Stage Playing: A Sermon Preached in the Parish Church of St. Botolph, Aldgate, In the City of London, 30 November, 1729, Occasioned by the Erecting of a Playhouse in the Neighbourhood* (London, 1735); Elkin Matthews, *Of the Use and Improvement of the Stage: An Epistle to Charles Fleetwood Esq.* (London, 1737); 'Of the present Degeneracy of the Stage', *London Magazine* [hereafter *LM*] (1737), pp. 432-433; *The Usefulness of the Stage to Religion and Government* (London, 1738); *The Craftsman*, in *London Magazine* (1737), pp. 304-306, 432.

can most clearly track the same relationships in the ideas of labouring-class consumer desires that were outlined in previous chapters. Studying the debates surrounding the 1736 Gin Act, we will see the familiar movement of ideas traced in other debates reproduced in a heightened form. The peculiar intensity of the debate over gin consumption and the starkly apparent consequences of the failure to successfully implement the 1736 law, make it clear that, in the case of gin, we have a particularly clear example of the inability of early eighteenth-century ideology or practice to strike a balance between limiting appetites without attempting to destroy them. And, once more, we will see early eighteenth-century ideology revealing and distorting the estrangement that underpinned the changing social order.

Part II:

The startling growth in gin consumption in the early eighteenth century was the product of the relationship between the needs and wants of urban migrants and the changing nature of the drinks trade in the capital. The practices that had created Saint Monday and which still punctuated the working day with drinking, had their roots in community-forming gift relations. They were increasingly out of step with the growing regulation of alehouses and the more capitalised and centralised structure of brewing in London. A demand existed for a cheap substitute to ale and beer and

the replacement, for many of the London labouring class, came in the form of cheaply distilled domestic spirits.⁴

Originally forged out of middling families' taste for sweetened foreign brandies, the market for spirits was soon supplied by a domestic industry peddling brandies, rum and gin distilled from farmers' surplus grain. By the 1720s, the domestic distillers were a powerful economic interest, embracing West India merchants, farmers, petty tradesmen in both capital and provinces and the Excise department. By 1730, one quarter of all government taxation revenue came from the drinks trade in one form or another.⁵

Given this coalition of interests, the only thing that could imperil the developing industry was the spread of the taste for spirits into the lower orders. Yet, because of the cheapness of distilling equipment and the ease with which gin could be produced, petty distilleries soon proliferated in the eastern and southern suburbs. The expansion in production was outrun by that in retailing. Gin shops, Chandlers,

⁴ E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 370-380; Hans Medick, 'Plebeian Culture in the Transition to Industrial Capitalism', in Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds.), *Culture, Politics and Ideology* (London, 1982), pp. 85-96; Peter Clark, 'The "Mother Gin" Controversy in the Early Eighteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5, 38 (1988), pp. 64-73; Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200-1830* (Harlow, 1983), 184-242.

⁵ John Chartres, 'English Spirits: Ersatz Good or New Taste, New Good? Paper presented to The Sweet Poison: Alcohol in European History Conference at the University of Warwick, Spring 2000; Clark, 'Mother Gin', pp. 65-70; Lee Davison, 'Experiments in the Social Regulation of Industry: Gin Legislation, 1729-1751', in L. Davison, T. Hitchcock, T. Keirn, R. B. Shoemaker (eds.), *Stillling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England 1689-1750* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 25-26; Jessica Warner, 'The Naturalisation of Beer and Gin in Early Modern England', *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 24 (1997), pp. 388-390; Louis Cullen, *The Brandy Trade under the Ancien Regime: Regional Specialisation in the Charente* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 1-18.

backstreet establishments, cellars and a multitude of hawkers and street vendors diffused gin freely into the labouring-class districts.⁶

While gin drunkenness plainly did not sweep through the labouring classes as a whole, significant and highly visible sections of the east London labouring people did frequent the dram shops and buy and sell gin in the streets. Women, in particular, excluded from many alehouses, made gin shops places for public drinking during the day. Artisan men also seem to have frequented such establishments.⁷ For such people, the taste for gin could signify both the persistent relative autonomy and the increasing alienation of their everyday lives. Drinking and the experience of inebriation could refer back to the practices of customary drink culture with its roots in a pre-capitalist social formation or forward to the cheap compensations of drunkenness.⁸

The response of propertied society to the growing market amongst the labouring classes of London was highly ambiguous. To many middling people and a government perpetually on the look-out for rebellion, the phenomenon of labouring-

⁶ Clark, 'Mother Gin', pp. 66-72; Clark, *English Alehouse*, pp. 238-241.

⁷ Clark, 'Mother Gin', pp. 64-71.

⁸ We can see the remnants of customary society forming a new urban, labouring-class culture in the forms in which industrial conflict was conducted. The punishment of transgression was applied to employers and blacklegs or, in the case of the calico riots, to consumers. The communal condemnation of individuals was transmuted into the forging of urban community ties against hosts of petty transgressors such as tradesmen, prostitutes and informers. It was at work in xenophobic riots against foreign merchants or against immigrant Irish labour. In the high profile riots over the Excise, the Captain Porteous affair and the Playhouse Licensing Act, we can see customary cultural forms in a dynamic dialogue between labouring people and the political nation of middling sort and polite society in opposition to the Whig administration. Popular Jacobitism drew on a script of festive events and symbols that testified to the dynamic relationship between customary culture and political discourse. See Thompson, *Customs in Common*, pp. 1-96; Linebaugh, *London Hanged*, pp. 7-41, 119-183; Robert B. Shoemaker, 'The London Mob in the Early Eighteenth Century', in Peter Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History* (Harlow, 1990), pp. 188-222; George Rudé, 'The London 'Mob' of the Eighteenth Century' in his *Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in Popular Protest* (London, 1974), pp. 293-318; Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 21-57; Paul Kleber Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688-1788* (Cambridge, 1989).

class drunkenness was unnerving and mobilised their reforming energies. For the landed interest, the Excise department and many middling tradesmen who sold or produced spirits, some regulation might be tolerable to regulate excess, but the trade had to be preserved in essence.

By 1729, the problem was sufficiently great to arouse the concern of London's two benches of Justices and certain sections of the metropolitan middling sorts. In 1729, an act was passed to place a duty of 5s a gallon on all spirits, demand a twenty pound licence for retailing spirits and issue ten pound fines for hawking gin in the streets. This was the culmination of a campaign by the Middlesex bench, the Royal College of Physicians and the Middlesex Grand Jurymen. Scrupulously avoiding any tax on distilling, this act testified to the lobbying power of the Distillers Company and the growing importance of the drinks trade to land and government revenue alike. Widespread evasion of the law led to its repeal in 1733 and gin production steadily continued to rise.⁹ In 1736, a new and more impressive coalition of reformers began to campaign against the gin trade. It was still centred on the crucial Middlesex Justices like Nathaniel Blackerby and Thomas Lane and the Westminster Justice Sir John Gonson, whose published Charges to the Grand Jury of 1728 had formed an important part of the campaign for the earlier act.¹⁰ This time, petitions from the urban middling people came in the form of presentments from the Grand Juries of Middlesex and Tower Hamlets. And vital additional activism came in

⁹ Davison, 'Gin Legislation', p. 28.

¹⁰ Davison, 'Gin Legislation', p. 29; Clark, 'Mother Gin', pp. 73-76. See also The Charge of Sir John Gonson, Knt. to the Grand Jury of the City and Liberty Westminster etc..At the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace, 24 April, Westminster Hall 1728 (London, 1728).

the form of SPCK and Georgia Colony moral reformers and philanthropists. This ecumenical organisation brought together progressives and conservatives alike and connected the urban magistracy with the reformation of manners campaign and with the House of Commons. Activism in the SPCK also united the reforming MP James Oglethorpe, the Bishop of London Edmund Gibson, the scientist and philanthropist Stephen Hales, Thomas Wilson - the son of the bishop of Sodor and Man - and crucially, the Master of the Rolls Joseph Jekyll, who was a friend of William Hay and whose backing would prove vital in passing, not only this bill, but the playhouse bill in 1737.¹¹

In 1735, the Grand Jury of the City of London presented to ‘complain of the late surprising Increase of Gin Shops and other Retailers of Distilled Spiritous Liquors’. Drawing on the petition of the College of Physicians made in 1725, they outlined the effects of gin on the bodies of the inferior sort. ‘To this practice’, they claimed, ‘is chiefly owing that our lower Kind of People are enfeebled and disabled, having neither the Will nor Power to Labour for an honest Livelihood’. Similarly, the Grand Jury of the City of Westminster reported that, because gin was sold so cheaply, ‘the meaner, though useful Part of the Nation, as Day-Labourers, Men and Women Servants and Common Soldiers, nay even Children are enticed and seduced to taste, like and approve’ of these liquors, ‘whereby they are intoxicated and get Drunk and are frequently seen in our Streets in such a Condition abhorrent to reasonable creatures’. Like the City’s Grand Jurymen, they emphasised that ‘many

¹¹ Jekyll, like William Hay, was a whig lawyer and a loyalist to Walpole, but not a courtier, Dictionary of National Biography, [hereafter DNB] ‘Joseph Jekyll’. For details on William Hay, see chapter 2.

are thereby rendered useless to themselves as well as the Community', either dying immediately through excessive drinking or laying the foundations of long and slow illnesses that would make them incapable of labour and lead eventually to death. A report made to the Justices of the Middlesex bench the following year also emphasised the problems of public order associated with gin drinking, arguing that consumers were 'often carried to a Degree of outrageous passion and become bold and daring in committing Robberies and other offences, for an immediate livelihood'.¹² Gin, it was argued, excited the poor to social disorder, made them incapable of labour and eventually ended their lives prematurely. When a bill to restrain the trade was initiated, a series of reform pamphlets were produced that elaborated on these themes. But, in doing so, they were compelled to address the problems of the economic utility of the gin trade and to account for the popularity of gin among labouring people. As we will see, there were different ways of accomplishing this end, but what they shared was an ambivalence about the role of luxury in the state and a concern to limit the consumer desires of the labouring poor. The next section will examine two pamphlets produced by the reform interest in 1736: one that demonstrates progressive ideology and one that can be called conservative. In both, it is argued, we can track the familiar dialectic in which the socially formative function of desires was incompletely recognised and one of the

¹² See A Presentment of the Grand Jury of the City of London, A Presentment of the Grand Jury for the County of Middlesex and A Report made to the Justices of the Peace for the County of Middlesex reprinted in Isaac Maddox The Expediency of Preventive Wisdom. A Sermon Preach'd Before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, the Aldermen and Governors of the Several Hospitals of the City of London (London, 1751), pp. 24-28. See also The Charge of J.... P.... To the Grand Jury of Middlesex, On Saturday May 22nd. 1736 (London, 1738).

indexes of this incompleteness was the representation of labouring-class needs and wants.

Part III:

The Trial of the Spirits, written anonymously in 1736, was the product of a churchman who seems to have been sympathetic to, if not an outright advocate, of the merchant interests in the state. It represents an attempt to argue the case for restraining the spirits trade through progressive ideology. The author started with the stock mercantilist claim that ‘the Strength and Riches of a National Community consist in the Health and Numerousness of its Labourers’. ‘If these be not preserv’d’, he asked, ‘where will you find Soldiers? How will the culture of your Lands, the useful Manufactures and Merchandize of the Nation be carried on?’¹³ The gin trade, as it hurt the labouring people, had to be considered useless and harmful. The problem lay not so much with the trade, but with the cheapness of the drink. In a thoroughly Mandevillian justification, the author wrote: ‘I cannot but allow that Mankind in a Trading nation especially, lives upon the Vices and Extravagancies of one another’. But, he suggested, there were limits to this rule in any community. ‘No Body of men, he argued, ‘ought to get Estates at the expence of the Poor, when that very Expence disables them from being Serviceable to the Community’.¹⁴

¹³ The Trial of the Spirits: or, Some Considerations Upon the Pernicious Consequences of the Gin Trade to Great Britain (London, 1736), p. 3.

¹⁴ The Trial, pp. 14-29.

‘Gin, is sold very cheap’, he argued, ‘so that People may get muddled with it for Three half pence and for three pence made quite Drunk even to Madness’. Consequently, ‘it comes within the power of Common People to purchase the hopeful Reputation of getting very Drunk at a very small Expence’.¹⁵ In a manner reminiscent of Mandeville’s condemnation of the pedagogical pretensions of the charity schools, the author of the Trial argued that the cheapness of gin was problematic because it unleashed unruly passions upon a society that depended on ordered labour. People drunk on gin forgot to pay their debts, leaving their families in want and poverty. Gin inspired them with a ‘false courage or Mock-Heroism’ and, as long as this false courage lasted, ‘His Majesty’s Peace must be broken’ and the ‘neighbourhood disturb’d’. When the money ran out, these people were compelled to obtain more, ‘otherwise the Hero will subside’. ‘Hence follow desperate Attacks, Highway and Street Robberies, attended sometimes with the most Cruel and unheard of Murthers’. For such people, fuelled by gin into a delusory grandeur, ‘the Fear of a House of Correction, Imprisonment or Danger of the Gallows make little Impression upon them, if any at all’.¹⁶ But, as with Mandeville’s observations on charity schools, there was nothing inherently bad about the delusory self-love generated by gin for this author. Its imaginary status was not the problem. The problem lay rather in the physical and social effects of gin upon the human constitution.

Gin ‘excited the worst Passions of the Mind’ and drove men to commit crimes. Worse than this, even should they escape the gallows, gin drinkers were lost

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

to the nation. For, 'the Fury at length being over, the hero subsides in proportion and sinks into a miserable invalid, his whole Strength and Courage being entirely demolished'. Conscious suddenly of the misfit between their aspirations and the realities of their lives, these people sank into melancholy and initiated a train of diseases that left the labouring man 'so stupid and enervated, that instead of being a useful member of the Community, he is actually become a scandalous Burthen to it'.¹⁷

The enervation of gin drinkers extended beyond their physical strength and into their appetites. In order to meet the landed interest's objection that the distilleries were useful in buying up and using the excess grain on the markets, the author of the Trial of the Spirits argued that gin also destroyed the natural and healthy appetites of the people and decreased the demand for farmer's foodstuffs. First, gin drinkers lived for fewer years than healthy labourers, so their aggregate consumption of foodstuffs must be less. 'The Pigmy generation of Animals they leave behind them, unfit for Labour and industry', would, he argued, 'rather see three half pence worth of gin, than a full Pot of Porter, or good wholesome Beer'. Gin destroyed the stomach of the drinker and depraved their appetite. Consequently, gin drinkers were quite incapable of the same consumption of bread, beer and meat as a healthy labourer. They became physically incapable of digesting wholesome foods, turning back to the gin shops as their only support, until 'the parish Workhouses are fill'd with their poor, starv'd families, Trade and Country deprived of their Manufactures and Labours'. Thus, the distillery was 'extremely hurtful to the landed interest'.¹⁸ Other useful appetites were

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 9-13.

harmd by gin drinking. To the effects on land might be added 'the visible Effect these Liquors have upon the Consumption of Tobacco...to which the Populace do not a little Contribute. The time it took a man to be drunk on gin would not allow, he claimed, 'time to puff out a dozen whiffs'. The author even briefly suggested that the woollen industry might also be hurt by gin consumption, since 'People given to this Liquor choose rather Nakedness for themselves and Family than abstinence from this comfortable cordial as they call it'.¹⁹

So the taste for Gin represented a species of desire that it was not useful for a commercial society to exploit. Differentiating it required separating out the structure of useful desire from that of non-useful passions. Non-useful passions decreased both the capacity for labour and natural appetite. But the capacity for agency in consumption was, as we have come to expect, extremely limited. The consumption of the labouring people was figured as formed by habit or custom. The gin shops, for example, were represented as inverted educational institutions, preparing their pupils for a life of indulging their worst passions. Such establishments were described as 'those Seminaries of Mischief the Gin shops, the Alma Mater of Rogues and Strumpets, that Educates and Shelters them and sends them out thoroughly accomplished to Execute any desperate, Bloody Purpose'.²⁰ Adam Holden, who was in all likelihood a merchant, and whose pamphlet was written in support of the Trial, claimed 'Lay but the Temptation before these Sort of People' and 'all the Laws in

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

being or that can be made consonant with the natural Right of the Subject can never prevent 'em from being drunk'.²¹

Accordingly, the author's proposal for reform was an excise which would simply 'put it out of the power of common people to make it their common Tipple, as they most frequently do now'. Once this was done, the people would be 'restor'd to their natural taste of bread, meat and beer' and 'necessary consumption' would be as great as ever. Like the progressive writers we have seen before, this author saw the consumption of the poor, determined essentially by their easy and expansive nature, as economically useful for as long as it coincided with the public good. It was not to be shaped and expanded so much as restrained from those commodities that harmed its capacity to be useful.

Turning to our second author, we find an apparently very different text. Thomas Wilson, the son of the Bishop of Sodor and Man, was active in the reformation of manners societies and the SPCK.²² His much reprinted tract, Distilled Spirituous Liquors the Bane of the Nation, represents a highly conservative diagnosis of the ills of the gin trade. It demonstrates a reaction against the progressive pieties concerning the utility of appetites, but one that ultimately resolves itself back into the premise that some ungovernable appetites have to be tolerated. And, as we will see, it contains a concealed model of human agency that prefigures the ideological transformation of the mid century.

²¹ Adam Holden, A Vindication of a Pamphlet Lately Published, Entitled 'The Trial of the Spirits' (London, 1736), p. 9.

²² See DNB, 'Thomas Wilson'.

For Wilson, the spirits industry represented ‘an upstart Trade, introduc’d upon the Luxury and Depravity of the age’. To protect the spirits trade was to prefer the private interest of distillers over that of the public’s interest in the sobriety of the poor. To assert that the two were identical, he claimed, was to give in to Mandeville’s diagnosis of society.²³ The spread of the taste for spirits was also a consequence of the spread of luxury throughout society. The poor had developed a taste for spirits through the bad example of their masters. In the south-eastern counties, he argued, farmers were responsible for introducing the fashion for spirits. Would they ‘return to their ancient Simplicity, Eating and Drinking without one Distiller in the Kingdom’, they would be better able to pay their rents. But, more importantly, they would not set an ill example to their servants. ‘Their Servants’, Wilson bemoaned, ‘love to imitate their betters and have convenient houses planted thick in every Village, where they have Gin in exchange for Coals, Candles, Small Beer, Bread and Cheese and Meat’.²⁴

Inevitably, urban life amplified these phenomena. ‘Is it not notorious’ he asked, ‘that Luxury and Extravagance were never at a greater height than at present, amongst the laborious and even the meanest part of Mankind?’ Instead of being content with ‘Beer and Ale brewed at home of their own malt, they must now have tea and spirits at six times the expence’. Like a disease, the taste for spirits spread into the labouring people, whereupon Wilson’s complaint ceased to be a simple

²³ Thomas Wilson, Distilled Spirituous Liquors the Bane of the Nation (London, 1736), pp. ix-x, 2; idem., Two Discourses Showing the fatal Consequences of Habitual Drinking of Distilled Spirits (London, 1736).

²⁴ Wilson, Distilled Spirituous Liquors, p. 29.

lament of luxury and became instead an appeal to commercial logic. It was not practical for any legislature that concerned itself with trade and wealth to allow such luxury. ‘The Evil is so Epidemick’, he argued, ‘that the greatest part of the nation, that Part which is the Strength and Riches of every Country, the Laborious hands, is intoxicated and enervated by a fatal Love of a slow but sure Poyson’.²⁵

Beneath the profusion of references to classical luxury, then, Wilson’s text manifested a deep anxiety about labour discipline in the nation, but more particularly in the capital. Wilson’s diagnosis was informed by a classical conceptual armoury that operated in a relationship with a highly pragmatic consciousness of the basis of British trading power. Accordingly, the danger that the gin trade posed to the unruly wage-based labour force in London was enacted by inverting the ideal of a well-ordered and organically conceived state, where familial order reflected that in the polity. These inversions were staged in the gin shops.

In Wilson’s pamphlet, the gin shops that littered the southern and eastern parishes were like micro-cities; tiny sinks of vice that replicated the logic of metropolitan luxury in miniature. Here, the vices of the depraved poor could be safely and profitably indulged. Consequently, he argued, ‘we see the Trade daily increasing’, encouraged by ‘the general Depravity of the lower Class of People’ who ‘run into a Taste for these pernicious Liquors and find it always at Hand, in every Street, Alley and Corner, tempting them to a Vice in which their depraved Inclinations want no Furtherance’. Every institution of public and private order, every locus of patriarchal authority was overturned in the gin shops. One only had to look into one of these

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 7, ix.

establishments to see ‘a crowd of poor ragged People, cursing and quarrelling with one another, over repeated Glasses of these destructive Liquors’. At their extreme point they enacted the transformation of men into beasts. ‘I am informed’, Wilson claimed, ‘in one place not far from East Smithfield.. a Trader has a large empty Room backward, where as his wretched Guests get intoxicated, they are laid together in Heaps, promiscuously, Men, Women and Children, until they recover their Senses’, when ‘they either proceed to drink on, or having spent all the time they have, go out to find wherewithal to return to the same dreadful pursuit’. And, he continued, ‘how they procure more money for this Purpose, many of them, the Sessions-Paper too often acquaints us’.²⁶

To the Gin-shops, Wilson argued, ‘we may justly impute that Deluge of Vice and Immorality, which more than ever within these few years, has overspread the Nation’. Gin was responsible for the ‘General Corruption of Servants, which every private Family feels and complains of’, for the ‘Idleness, Inability or Decrease of the common People’ and for the profusion of ‘lazy Sturdy Beggars’, ‘Street Robbers’ and ‘House breakers’. Even those labourers who turned up for work threatened disorder in their workplaces, frightening their employers with the prospect of ‘some Mischief from a drunken ungovernable Set of People’.²⁷

But, most of all, Gin killed its drinkers: ‘Thousands bring upon themselves by this cursed Practice, various Diseases that carry them off, if not suddenly, yet in the End, as certainly, as if they had been stabb’d through the Heart’.²⁸ The riches of the

²⁶ Ibid., p. vi.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 11, 8.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

nation were diminishing by their own luxury. Again, Wilson demonstrated this through images of familial disorder. Worse than the self-destruction of working people was the destruction of future generations by their own mothers. Women who drank while they were pregnant were guilty of murdering their children. Marshalling the power of scientific knowledge, he described how the children of gin drinking mothers 'come into the world half burnt up, upon the livers of some of which are found large Schirrous knots'. If they were to survive more than two or three years, he claimed, 'it would only be to drag on a miserable Life, a burthen to themselves and a load to their Country'. Even more horrifying was the 'notorious' case of the woman who, crazed by her need for gin, murdered her own child to pawn the clothes it had received from a charitable society.²⁹

Wilson might have considered the effects on the 'Riches and Strength of the Nation' to be reason enough to legislate against the substance, but he also had to consider the vexed question of the utility of the gin trade to the landed interest. He was compelled therefore, to echo the author of the Trial of the Spirits in his attempt to show that the gin trade was not as useful as the distillers liked to claim. Consonant with his concessions to mercantile conceptions of the utility of numbers of labourers, Wilson set out to demonstrate, using political arithmetic, that the quantities of farmers' foodstuffs consumed by gin drinkers was less than half that consumed by healthy labourers: 'As the demand for and Consumption of Spirits increases', he argued, 'the Stomachs of more People will be lost'. In doing so, he made important concessions to progressive views of the city as a centre of useful appetites. As well as

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 38-39, 10.

being a sink of vice and purveyor of luxury into the nation, London was the 'Great Stomach of the Nation' and, 'if that be vitiated and lost, even the most Distant Members will find a sensible Decay'.³⁰

But, in order to establish a standard of natural appetite that would stabilise this concession to desires and, equally importantly, to maintain a unity between his images of gin as a corruption in the body of the nation and the physiological description of gin's effects on the body of the labourer, Wilson drew heavily upon the work of the progressive scientist and moral reformer, Stephen Hales.³¹ In formulating the effects of gin on natural appetites, he referred to George Cheyne and Hales's accounts of the effects of such hot and dry liquors on the animal constitution. Besides drying up the natural appetite and destroying the stomach, Wilson argued that gin 'bewitched' its drinkers. But, where the author of the Trial of the Spirits had represented this delusion as an extension of the imagination, Wilson emphasised the power of gin to generate delusory feelings of warmth and comfort through the blood and stomach. It was this that gin drinkers craved when it wore off, not knowing that in drinking it they were actually destroying their capacity for true warmth and comfort. Rather than imagining themselves to be what they were not, these people were guilty of not knowing their true interest. This false pleasure obscured their real needs and real interest. It became a habit because custom was 'a second nature' -

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 14-18.

³¹ Hales was a physician, cleric and inventor. Fellow of the Royal Society, Trustee of the Georgia Colony and later on Vice President of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts and Commerce, Hales was also Chaplain to the Princess of Wales and inventor of the ventilation system installed in Newgate Prison, see DNB, 'Stephen Hales'.

which hardened to the point where reflection and thought became impossible.³² What was concealed within Wilson's account of luxury and corruption in the city, therefore, was an account of human subjectivity that owed far more to progressive than to conservative ideology. Embraced within his rhetorics of luxury was a conception of a reasonable human agent endowed with natural and useful appetites which required management. For Hales, gin was a 'bewitching poison' that 'carries men to their certain Destruction, in spite of the contrary Strong and natural Desire they have to live long and see good Days'. This desire was the foundation of the labourer's perception of his rational interest. Yet, Hales argued, so bewitching was this 'Infatuation' that, 'though they cannot, most of them, but be sensible they are manifestly shortening their days and just plunging themselves into their Graves; yet they will not refrain', When a man's 'Will and Affections are thus depraved', Hales continued, 'and he is delighted with this worst of Slavery, there are but little hopes of him'. To recover such a man 'he must be, as it were, forced into his Liberty and rescued, in some measure, from his own inordinate Desires'.³³ What Hales was developing here was an account of a desire that was not a real desire; a form of compulsion to consume; an addiction. What he narrated as slavery and Wilson as corruption and luxury, would return in the mid century in a new ideology that placed it in a dynamic relationship with rational commodity consumption. It is noticeable that, in these texts, the discussion remained tied to labouring people's ability to reproduce themselves as labourers and to reproduce the landed interest that fed them.

³² Ibid., pp. 39-52.

³³ Stephen Hales, A Friendly Admonition to the Drinkers of Gin, Brandy and other Distilled Spirituous Liquors, 1st edition, 1734, 5th edition (London, 1754), pp. 11-14.

There was no conception that labourers might engage in a rational exchange of commodities impelled by and satisfying their wants.

Part IV:

The capacity of progressives and conservatives alike to coalesce over the reform of the gin trade reflected their common unease with the drinking habits of the labouring poor. Accounts of the debates in Parliament show that, although the Distillers Company and the West India merchants began lobbying hard to influence whatever bill appeared, there was, for a while, broad unanimity in the House on the issue of raising the price of liquors beyond what the poor could afford. But this coalition broke down when it was proposed to appropriate some of the excise revenue from the spirits trade to the civil list. Opposition members immediately accused Walpole of corruption in funding the civil list on the back of honest tradesmen. This suspicion was enhanced by the obvious ambition of many of the reform lobby to set so many licences, fines and duties on spirits that the trade would be destroyed entirely. Country Whig and Tory oppositionists began to argue that the bill in the form in which it appeared at least, was a threat to the liberty of tradesmen to retail and also to the landed interest, whose need for the outlet provided by distilling was maintained in the face of the refutations provided by reform writers. Part of this argument depended on defences of the consumption of gin by the lower sorts, based upon imperfect paternalistic rights or upon Whiggish natural rights of the subject.

Some defences of the distilleries came in the form of progressive ideology. In 1735, a writer operating under the name of Eboranos argued that the distilleries catered to the need for employment in the nation. While he refused to countenance ‘immoderate drinking’, the cause of this lay, not with the distilleries, but with the drinkers. The commodity itself was innocent. ‘The True Strength and Riches of the Nation consist’, he claimed, ‘in the Numbers of People employed in the Manufactures of this Country’. Because they could be seen to replace dependence upon French Brandies, the British distilleries were considered to be a patriotic manufacture that must be improved. In addition to which, the distilleries kept up the consumption of grain which maintained farmers, improved revenues and employed many thousands in the manufacture and retail of spirits. For this writer at least, ‘the British Distillery is of more Value to this Kingdom in general than the mines of Potosi to the King of Spain’.³⁴

This defence was taken up by more explicit defences of the distilleries the following year. The author of A Proper Reply to a Scandalous Libel Intituled the Trial of the Spirits also emphasised the value of the trade to manufacture, agriculture and revenue. The aspiration to reform the ‘disorderly part of the trade’ was admirable, the author conceded, but this bill would destroy a useful industry. The author denied the claims that gin was any worse than any other drink. Consequently, it could not be the drink itself that was the problem, only its excessive use. Therefore, there was ‘no Necessity of destroying the Whole to prevent an Abuse of a Part’. The ideal solution would be a ‘Regulation consistent with the National Interest’ that would at the same

³⁴ Eboranos, A Collection of Political Tracts (London, 1735), pp. 35-38.

time 'preserve so valuable a Trade'.³⁵ The author of another pamphlet embodying a broadly progressive view enumerated the cost of destroying the spirits trade. Taking into account the 'vast Numbers of Families that are now supported by the Brewing, Compounding and Sale of Distilled Liquors', he calculated that there were 'near 100 000 Families now in this Kingdom, who owe the whole or chief Part of their Support to the Manufacture and Sale of such liquors'. Again, the aspiration to control drinking by the lower sorts was admirable, but this author suspected that the appropriation of revenues to the Civil List entailed further corruption in government. He even insinuated the possibility of a government plot to raise riots against the bill that would necessitate the increase of a standing army.³⁶ Neither defence denied the need to reform the drinking habits of the poor, merely the causes and the means of doing so.

However, such progressive defences of the spirits trade did contain a more radical potential, slipping into defending the right of the poor to drink gin. William Pulteney, the 'country' Whig opposition politician, took the same starting point as the Distillers' advocates.³⁷ There was no doubt that the trade needed reforming. The poor were guilty of immoderate drinking and it was growing to disturbing heights. However, Pulteney turned his defence of the distilleries into a political defence of liberty and justice and, in doing so, was compelled, as an opposition 'country'

³⁵ A Proper Reply to a Scandalous Libel Entitled, 'The Trial of the Spirits. In a Letter to the Worshipful Author (London, 1736), pp. 6-9.

³⁶ Occasional Remarks Upon the Act for Laying a Duty Upon the Retailers of Spirituous Liquors, etc...and for Licensing the Retailers thereof (London, 1736), pp. 5-20.

³⁷ A disappointed careerist, Pulteney was a Whig who went into opposition with Bolingbroke, Carteret and Chesterfield having been passed over for office in 1721. Receiving an office under Pelham, he became a loyalist in the 'Broad Bottom' until his death. DNB, 'William Pulteney'.

advocate, to extend his discussion across the people as a whole. Pulteney argued that the ‘constant and excessive use of Spirituous Liquors amongst the inferior Sort of our People’, was indisputably a problem, but one that could be attended to by a duty similar to the one imposed in 1729. But the current bill was an infringement, not only of the rights and liberties of the tradesmen and distillers, but of the people more generally. By this act, he claimed, ‘a poor journeyman or Labourer shall not have a Dram, shall not have a Glass of Punch, unless he can spare to lay out 8 or 10 s. at a time, which I am sure Two Thirds of our People cannot well spare to do’. Yet, if a man were rich or profligate enough, he could pawn his coat and commit as many debauches as he liked: ‘Let us leave the moderate use of such Liquors to all and take all proper Methods for preventing their being immoderately used by any’.³⁸

Pulteney’s country Whig politics led him into an attack on the hypocrisy that allowed luxury among some while oppressing the natural rights and liberties of the poor Englishman.

The author of a pamphlet in the form of a letter from a Member of Parliament to his ‘Friend in the Country’, possibly the work of Pulteney again, elaborated this argument into a more or less explicit defence of the harmonious union of the natural rights of the subject and the interest of a trading nation. ‘May not’ he demanded, ‘a proper Degree of the Consumption of Rum, Sugar and our own Spirits be not only Right but Beneficial to the Nation?’ But the same author also highlighted the problems inherent in applying such theories of natural right without any conception of commercial agency. Such rights were simply vectored onto a view of man as impelled

³⁸ See Gentleman’s Magazine VI (1736), pp. 576-578.

by naturalised appetites. As the author continued, ‘this Act will not alter the Nature of men, nor make them more sober’. The poor would simply turn to another drink and, consequently, it was ‘not to be expected that the bent of the People to live above their Circumstances will be reformed by this Act’.³⁹ There was a slippage inherent in the political concepts of natural rights whereby, even as the poor were endowed with rights, the juridical basis for reforming them disintegrated. Reformation depended on a pure calculation of national interest.

We can see the same slippage at work in country Tory writings from the spirits debate. These rested on a familiar conservative diagnosis of society and centred on defending the farming and landed interest from the depredations of government. They also rested on an attack on the administration’s repudiation of its paternalistic duties. Such conservatives urged the need for a paternalistic spirit in governance. In this case, that would embrace the poor’s right to drink spirits.

Bolingbroke’s paper, The Craftsman, made much of the government’s hypocrisy in attacking the spirits industry when it had nursed its growth on the grounds that it was a valuable domestic industry. The Ministers, claimed one writer, had represented ‘Mother Gin’ as ‘a Patriot and a Jacobite, tho’ I always apprehended her to be in the Interest of the other side’. ‘She came over’, the writer continued, ‘with King William, at the Revolution and hath received great Encouragement from the Government ever since’. The Craftsman suspected that the act’s relation to the

³⁹ A Letter from a Member of Parliament to his Friend in the Country Containing his Reasons for being Against the Late Act for Preventing the Retail of Spirituous Liquors (London, 1736), pp. 19-21.

Civil List was an indication that it was being done ‘for the sake of Lucre’.⁴⁰ This charge of hypocrisy and false reforming zeal extended to the supposed enthusiasm to reform the poor. In a mock debate between an Exciseman and an Innkeeper, the latter observes sardonically that ‘the common people, no doubt, are obliged to Those who take care of them’, but is sure that they are wondering ‘why should not the same care be taken of the Great People?’ Surely, he urged, ‘they are grown as extravagantly debauched in their way as the common people; and I’ll defy you to prove that the Country is not as great a Sufferer by it’.⁴¹

A series of letters, many supposedly from farmers, urged that the landed interest and the poor were united in needing and possessing a right to the distilleries. It was argued that the distilleries were of ‘great Consequence to the Landed interest to preserve’ and that to destroy them was to destroy the farmers and would lead to the ruin of landlords. A writer styling himself a ‘Man of Kent’ highlighted the double standard at work in a bill to destroy a drink liked by the poor. ‘I’ll warrant you it will be thought a mighty crime for a poor labouring man to take a Cheerful Glass his own way’, whereas it would of course be ‘a harmless thing to be drunk with French Claret and spend the rent of two or three acres of land for an Evenings Diversions of your Italian Geldings’. A paternalistic Parliament would ensure that industrious people would be able to have a ‘reasonable Use of that Commodity’.⁴²

This was a position fraught with difficulties. The almost universal concession

⁴⁰ *GM* (1736), pp. 310-312.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

⁴² *A Collection of Letters Published in the Daily Papers Relating to the British Distillery* (London, 1736), pp. 4, 12, 30, 7-8.

that the trade needed some sort of reform demonstrated that even those people who defended the right or liberty of the poor to drink spirits, did so in the full consciousness that they drank in a manner that even their defenders considered to be excessive. Their vocabulary of political rights, in relation to a labouring-class subject perceived to be incapable of true self-government, gave them no way of designating what a reasonable level of consumption might be and no hope of reforming the poor except through legislation to raise the price. Such writers also knew that their material interest in the survival of the trade tainted the virtue of such paternalistic or liberal arguments. The danger was always that they were merely exploiting the condition of the urban poor for material self-interest.

That contemporaries were conscious of this is clear when we turn to the satirical prints and poems that appeared in the wake of the passing of the Gin Act. These works, the product of Grub Street hacks and engravers, were broadly sympathetic to the opposition. One of them made pointed reference to a mock-procession by Distillers and London tradesmen that took place after the Act was passed. Accordingly, the prints demonstrate the dense meshes of signification and the poems the immense proliferation of mock genres and allegorical and literal references characteristic of the country opposition's literary wing in the Walpole years. Much of this literature was produced by hacks with broadly Tory allegiances. However, like a lot of this literature, the satire swings violently in both directions. The hypocrisies of the 'great' were mocked, but so were the pretensions and nostalgic yearnings of the country. Gin became a symbol of the contradictions inherent in late Augustan political and social thought and its particular qualities as a drink enhanced these chains of

association. Both form and content of these poems and prints revealed a melancholic recognition of the impossibility of positions based on virtue. All possible stances were implicated in the material self-interest that they saw infecting politics and in the process of removing it entirely from questions of virtue entirely.

This is most visible in a poem entitled An Elegy on the Much Lamented Death of the Most Excellent, the Most Truly-Beloved and Universally Admired Lady, Madam Gineva. This mock elegy enacts a satire that marks a continuity and a change in the tradition of wine and ale poems. But where wine was a burlesque drink that permitted the inferior to imagine themselves great, gin's qualities and socio-economic status demanded a more stringent and much darker satire. In this poem there is no virtue left in the world of politics and economics. The great ones who engineered the bill and steered it through parliament are guilty of base hypocrisy: 'Howe'er they gloss their late officious Zeal,/ With feigned Pretence to serve the Common-Weal;/ Envy we know, this harsh Restraint suggests./ (O why shou'd Envy enter Noble Breasts?)/ Jealous that beggars with the Rich shou'd vie,/ Dare to drink Drams and like their Betters Die'. And there is no solace in country politics to be had. 'Must we then lose alas! however loth,/ The blissful Privilege of drunken Sloth?/ Freedom and Property are then but Names?:/ Th'injurious Parliament our birth-Right Claims'. The satire extends into a mock-Golden Age of liberty and drunkenness in which 'open Drunkenness, devoid of Awe,/ reign'd without check, establish'd by the Law...Prompt We obey'd each Dictate of the Mind,/ Light as Air and common as the

Wind,/ Now whore, now Steal,/ Now Lie, now Swear, Now Fight,/ And bravely
Vindicate each natural Right'.⁴³

In such a world of universal corruption, Gin's astringent character and economic status permitted a darker satire that threw all certainties into a drunken frenzy that was followed by an intense melancholy. It functioned as the symbol of a corrupt society *par excellence*. Its 'bewitching' qualities became part of a critical rhetorics of society in which Gin, a product of corruption, became at the same time a balm for the experience of social contradictions. In the poem, these were enacted through a series of Mandevillian images of Gin's dark utility. Gin reduces the population of the 'grumbling parishes overstock'd with poor', makes men impotent and destroys women's wombs. The poet laments that, before the Gin Act, 'Mothers cou'd make the genial Womb a Grave and anxious Charge of Education Save;/ prevent with prudence their convulsive Throes,/ While the Embryo shun'd a World of Woes'. But, worst of all, the Act deprived the poor of a relief from their pain: 'Now Greedy Great-Ones their inferiors Grind/And Vice Monopolize of ev'ry Kind./In costly Riot they may waste their Wealth./ The Poor must rest content with temp'rate Health'. And, in a clever inversion of calls to primitive simplicity, the poet pictures gin as a true Golden Age of few needs and few desires: 'Can it be call'd an Act of

⁴³ An Elegy on the much Lamented Death of the most Excellent, the most Truly-Beloved and Universally Admired lady, Madam Geneva. Worthy to be perused by all Distillers, whether Simple or Compound (London, 1736). See also Mother Gin, A Tragi-Comical Eclogue, Being a Paraphractical Imitation of the Daphnis of Virgil (London, 1737); The Deposing and Death of Queen Gin, With the Ruin of the Duke Rum, Marquee de Nantz and the Lord Sugarcane etc.. And Heroic-Comic-Tragical Farce (London, 1736). The last was a play performed at the Haymarket that year. This section owes much to a paper delivered by Professor Anne Janowitz at the University of Warwick Luxury Project's Summer Assembly, 1997.

Publick Good,/ To take our Raiment from us and our Food?/ For food and Raiment,
with Life's ev'ry Sweet,/ Compriz'd of Gin, our *Summum Bonum* meet'.⁴⁴

This image of gin as an anaesthetic against poverty and exploitation recurs in many of the prints and the verses that accompanied them. The Funeral Procession of Madam Geneva [Fig. 1] represents a mock procession that took place in 1736. The Distillers, headed by a naked beggar, parade in solemnity through the poor parish of St. Giles while the local labouring people look on in woe. The verses have the infatuated poor bemoaning; 'now This Act, they cry, will lurch us,/ For Beer, a Quart's too great a Purchase./ No tis resolved Divine Geneva!/ We'll bravely perish e'er we'll ever leave ye:/ With that the brimming Glass they ply,/ And Poverty and Rags Defy'. The poet finally turns his mockery upon the reformers' zeal crying: 'O Jekyll how immense thy Merit!/ How great those Patriots publick Spirit!/ To strip the Poor of their Chief Pleasure,/ And Thousands leave to Starve at Leasure'. The theme of gin as a melancholic social glue, a 'Cheap Cordial for the Poor's Relief', binding the nation in a collective intoxication which prevents it from seeing its own corruption, recurs in a print which depicts a sepulchre 'to the mortal memory of Madam Geneva' [Fig. 2]. It is constructed from a still and distillers, soldiers and poor women and children are grouped around in mourning for the *ersatz* religion of a secularising society. In the Lamentable Fall of Madam Geneva [Fig. 3], a man and woman stand over the subject's inebriated body, proclaiming her death as a mock deity. While the woman laments that 'this act will starve us all', the man bears a sheet which enumerates the miracles performed by Madam Geneva; 'th'Afflicted she has

⁴⁴ Elegy.

caus'd to Sing/ the cripple leap and Dance/ All those who die for love of Gin/ Go to heaven in a Trance'. The accompanying verses describes the devastating effect of depriving the poor of their 'Cheap Cordial': 'With Oaths they storm their Monarch's name/ And curse the hands that form'd the Scheme...Queen Gin, for whom they'd Sacrifice/ Their Shirts, or Smocks, nay both their Eyes;/ Rather than she want Contribution,/ They'd trudge the Street without their Shoes on'. At a time when the common people were in riot in Edinburgh, when turnpike riots were breaking out in the West and when Jacobites were circulating seditious literature among the turbulent silkweavers, rioting in Spitalfields and Shoreditch, such imagery had obvious resonances for an insecure Whig administration.

But what these prints also capture, beyond their political and social signification, is an aspect of the drinking culture in which gin was consumed. Like the reformers, they emphasised the public drinking and the structure of excess that led to drunkenness and, in doing so, captured something of the customary roots of this culture. Unlike the reformers, the print engravers and Grub Street poets saw that part of the function of this extravagant and luxurious drinking among the poorest of London's labouring class, was social compensation. The carnivalesque culture referred to in some of these prints existed in this drink culture, but in a new, fluid, urban context where it existed in relation to wage labour and an increasingly commodity-saturated environment. And, while customary culture existed within the incomplete capitalist exchange and labour relations of the city, as the hacks realised, this was a fundamentally destructive dialectic. The carnivalesque inversions of the prints and poems appear in a truly melancholic form, filled with humourless laughter

and transient pleasures. Here, we can see a more melancholic conservative recognition of the existence of needs that were not satisfied by commodities. Even as the emerging capitalist order created new needs for commodities, these hack writers demonstrated some recognition that this process destroyed people and their needs, replacing them with units of labour whose only pleasure was the *ersatz* satisfaction of stupor.

As a final note, despite the defeat of their opposition and the passing of the Gin act into law, the coalition of landed interest, middling tradesmen and even their poorer customers soon rendered the legislation totally unenforceable. In the face of both orchestrated and spontaneous civil disorder, Justices and Excisemen simply gave up trying to implement it and recommended its repeal. This duly happened in 1743 and production of gin shot up, an indirect consequence of middling-sort tradesmen and crowd action, that often included labouring people, defending their liberty to drink.⁴⁵

By the 1750s, the production and consumption of gin had reached a far greater level, becoming a problem for towns and cities all over the nation. The reform and regulation of the gin trade would resurface in the reforming agenda of the government and, in the debates that followed, the representation of gin drinkers, as we will see in chapter seven, was transformed. In place of the transmuted festive culture of public drinking, whether in the form of luxury, natural right or melancholic necessity, there was an emphasis on private misery, loss of reason and addiction,

⁴⁵ 9 George II. c. 23. On the disorder following the Gin Act, see George Rudé, “Mother Gin” and the London Riots of 1736”, in his Paris and London, pp.53-63; Davison, ‘Gin Legislation’, pp. 36-41.

situated in a failed familial economy and indexed by material impoverishment. The conditions that gave rise to these representations and the realities they described - however inexactly - were a direct product of a transformation in material conditions that would have been impossible without the ideological impasse reached in the early eighteenth century. The ideological and practical problems faced by early eighteenth-century writers in fixing the place of appetites in the nation expressed the inadequacy of its concepts in the face of the complexities of wage and commodity relations. As we will see in the next section, the new ideology that expressed the extent of material transformation and enabled further development was founded on fragments of the old. But it was also founded on a radically different conception of the labouring-class subject and its relation to commerce and society.

Chapter Four

‘Commerce is the Source of Wealth of this Island’¹:

Labour and Consumption at the mid-century

Part I:

By the 1750s, it had become a popular cliché to state that commerce was ‘the strength of the nation’. Confidence about the improving power of commerce had never been greater. Accordingly, the destructive and contradictory relationship between the coalescing forces of mercantile, industrial and agricultural capital and the developing labouring classes had made customary culture even more clearly a preserve of the propertiless. The immersion of landed gentlemen and their tenants in commercial capitalist agriculture was gradually changing from a defensive strategy to protect rents, to become a positive identification with rational improvement. The landed classes’ dependence on state and private credit, on government bounties and national and international markets, had made it a developed economic interest in the nation. Many landlords and tenant farmers could more easily identify themselves with the ‘big bourgeoisie’ of industrialists, merchants and financiers, and with the state that guaranteed the bounties on lucrative exports, than they could with middling tradesmen.²

¹ Andrew Hooke, *An Essay on the National Debt etc...and National Capital* (Bristol, 1750), p. 1.

² Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 162-165, 209-218; E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 79-80; John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (London, 1989); Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785*

The breakdown of the community of interests between landed gentlemen and the middling trading classes also reflected the increased social, economic and political power of these people. By the mid century, the ever denser networks of internal commerce connected a proliferation of middling trades, nourished by meshes of credit that stretched across the nation.³ Their swelling ranks were reflected in an enhanced political influence and maturity. In a series of political episodes, starting with the celebrations of Admiral Vernon's victory at Porto Bello and developing through the Wilkes affair, a new and distinctly 'middling' political culture emerged, mediated through the forms of commodity production and print culture.⁴

Just as social and economic forces realigned during the 1740s and 1750s, so did political and ideological forces. As the coalition of interests that had opposed Walpole's form of oligarchy began to come apart, and the state resettled on the landed, financial and mercantile elites, so the middling sorts began to develop a political agency that was less parasitic upon gentry political paternalism. As country gentlemen increasingly moved away from the 'Country' programme, so the political aspirations of the middling trading classes, previously articulated from within this

(Cambridge, 1995), pp. 140-165; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven CT, 1992), pp. 63-65.

³ Hoh-Cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1989), chs 1, 2, 3 and 7; Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley, 1996), pp. 1-22, 46-73, 172-193; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 9-123 and 391-410; Penelope J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700-1850* (London, 1995); Colley, *Britons*, pp. 66-67; Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, 'Commerce and the Commodity: Graphic Display and Selling new Consumer Goods in Eighteenth-Century England', in M. North and D. Ormrod (eds.), *Markets for Art 1400-1800* (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 187-200; Beverly Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory* (Basingstoke, 1997), chs, 2-5.

⁴ This argument owes much to John Brewer, 'English Radicalism in the Age of George III', in J. G. A. Pocock (ed.), *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 323-342; Colley, *Britons*, pp. 79-91; Wilson, *Sense of the People*, pp. 27-83, 140-165; Langford, *Polite and*

essentially conservative ideology, began to develop their progressive potential and assume a form that would become truly radical in the 1760s.⁵

The same realignment can be seen in the more general strata of social and economic thought that forms the focus of this study. As the two social aspirations it had sheltered diverged, in line with their general tendencies, conservative ideology became increasingly incoherent in its 'country' form. The landed classes increasingly sought legitimisation of their social and economic power through a form of conservative ideology that retained elements of the 'country' programme, but which also articulated these from within the context of an irreversibly commercial society.

Equally, progressive ideology soaked up the social forces it had excluded in the early eighteenth century, adapting important elements of the country conservative demands of that period in the process. Progressive ideology can therefore be seen to have developed political and social aspirations that reflected its new basis in the swelling ranks of the commercial middling sorts. One of the features that it carried over from the early eighteenth century and developed into a new form was the emphasis on the justice and usefulness of enabling and increasing the consumption of commodities by the labouring classes. This was now articulated less in terms of paternalism than of the justice inherent in commercial transactions and the continued prosperity and improvement it would facilitate.

Conservative ideology, by contrast, can be seen to have moved further away from a conception of its paternalistic obligation to protect the poor's consumption of

Commercial People, pp. 9-58; John Brewer, 'Commercialisation and Politics', in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb (eds.), *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (London, 1982), pp. 197-262.

⁵ Again, this is an adaptation of Brewer, 'English Radicalism', pp. 323-342.

commodities as part of the duty as patrons and to develop instead a conception of necessary consumer discipline as part of a repertoire of deference to be performed by the poor. This served the dual function of legitimating the social order in commercial terms and simultaneously preventing excessive wage demands which might exert pressure on capital accumulation.

Part II:

We can first trace the outlines of these changes in social thought in the sphere of what might be called ‘high Enlightenment’ debate. These meditations on the nature of man and society provide a point from which to begin to outline changing ideas, before we move on to examine them as they were applied to the concrete issues of commercial policy and the problem of the labouring classes.

The extent of change in social thought can be registered in the transformation in the status of luxury. Montesquieu’s Spirit of the Laws, published in 1748 and translated into English in 1750, was possibly more popular in England than in France. This popularity was a product of Montesquieu’s capacity to articulate, in a sophisticated form, what most Englishmen felt to be true by the mid century. Montesquieu provided a framework for understanding how England’s form of government was fully consonant with the existence of luxury in the state.

By the 1740s, as we saw in section one, the spread of luxury had reached such universal applicability that nothing could be perceived as free from its influence. Correspondingly, the power of the concept of luxury in its aristocratic form as

corruption was diminished. For Montesquieu, luxury's diffusion was undeniable, but its meaning was decisively transformed. As the aristocratic signification lost its capacity to explain the condition of society, the potential for a definition that relied upon relative wealth, always present within early eighteenth-century debates, was unlocked. Montesquieu argued that luxury's consequences were entirely relative to the form of government pertaining in the state concerned. Luxury, he claimed, was the product of inequality and property relations. Therefore, its presence in a republic or democracy, whose perfect form was equality, was corrosive. However, in a monarchical state such as Britain luxury, could attain a positive force in a 'solid form'. Although it necessitated the destruction of the nobility by the commercial classes in Britain, luxury could find its perfect form if it was mediated by the liberty of the northern peoples and its embodiment in the British mixed monarchy.⁶

Montesquieu's definition of 'solid luxury', the luxury of a stable commercial state, was seized upon by British progressive writers. His synthesis of the traditional liberty of northern peoples, so beloved of Bolingbroke's opposition and the country Whigs, and the constitutional principles of the Revolution settlement, upon which the Whig establishment waxed lyrical, offered them a reassuring picture of national progress and particularity in which commercial development need not result in national decay.⁷

⁶ David Wallace Carrithers (ed.), *Montesquieu: The Spirit of Laws: A Compendium of the First English Edition* (Berkeley, 1977), pp. 116-124, 131-151, 163-181.

⁷ In addition to Thomas Nugent's translation of *Spirit of the Laws* in 1750, see also *Two Chapters of a Celebrated French Work, intitled, De l'esprit des loix, translated into English. One, treating the Constitution of England; another of the Character and Manners which result from this Constitution* (Edinburgh, 1750); William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vols. (London, 1765-1769); *A View of the English Constitution. By....Baron de Montesquieu. Being a Translation, by Francis Maseres* (London, 1781). See also J. A. W. Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property: The*

In Josiah Tucker's Elements of Commerce, written for the Prince of Wales in 1755 but never published, the improving power of commerce and the passions attained a more positive moral content. Tucker, an Anglican churchman with a keen interest in the emerging science of political economy, argued that commerce represented a progressive synthesis of God's injunction to follow a calling with the social passions he implanted in man. 'Mankind', he argued, 'under the influence of social and benevolent Affections, as naturally seek Society in order to gratify these Social Instincts, as they require Food for the Appetite of Hunger'. Society, therefore, represented the fulfilment of mutual wants among men. These wants need not be merely natural. They could be artificial and imaginary, with no immediate implication for their moral status. In a moralised recuperation of Mandeville, Tucker argued that men were motivated by self-love to fulfilment of their appetites. Reason, dethroned as the sovereign human endowment by the social affections, reappeared as a managerial force that corrected error and redirected the passions towards the forms of fulfilment that offered most gratification, those forms in which individual and public good coincided. The best way of ensuring the pursuit of the public good was rationally to choose to follow Christian morality, 'for this truly social System furnishes us with the strongest Motive towards restraining inordinate Self-Love'. Consequently, he argued, 'a man cannot act the part of a good Christian without being a good and useful Subject and a Public Blessing in every other Relation of Life'. With Tucker's formulation, we can see the Mandevillian problematic transcended as the passions

Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought (Montreal, 1983), pp. 237-242. The various citations and influences below also indicate that Montesquieu enjoyed influence at least as early as the first translation.

achieved a positive socially constitutive function. In Tucker's version of the socially progressive power of commerce, we can also see the unleashing of a potential that we saw in a more contained form in the works of Vanderlint and Defoe. For Tucker, commerce was not merely just, efficient and beneficial to the nation. It was universally morally improving.⁸

The theory of human subjectivity contained in Tucker's writings owed much to the considerable influence of Francis Hutcheson, held by contemporaries as the leading moral philosopher of the period. Hutcheson's System of Moral Philosophy, published in 1747, developed and elaborated an account of human subjectivity that can be seen as the subjective counterpart to Tucker's image of the mechanics of society. The System represents the fullest and most progressive development of almost thirty years of work on the goodness of the passions. Here, Hutcheson was able to accord the passions their richest character to date, describing the passions, self-love and the sentiments that generated them as intrinsically moral forces. Thus, humans possessed a potential capacity for benevolence that required cultivation. Philosophers like Locke and even Hutcheson's own mentor, Shaftesbury, who had emphasised the restraining role of reason, imperilled this capacity by urging the confinement of a force that needed to be developed to its full. This could happen when the sentiments of the subject coincided with the needs of the public or the

⁸ Josiah Tucker, The Elements of Commerce and Theory of Taxes (1755) unpublished manuscript, British Library, pp. 3-8. See also Josiah Tucker, A Brief Essay on the Advantages and Disadvantages which respectively attend France and Great Britain; with regard to Trade (London, 1753), pp. 1-2; John Nickolls, Remarks on the Advantages and Disadvantages of France and Great Britain with Respect to Commerce (London, 1754); B. W. Young, 'Christianity, Commerce and the Canon: Josiah Tucker and Richard Woodward on Political Economy', History of European Ideas, 22 (1996), pp. 387-390; Istvan Hont, 'The Rich-Country, Poor-Country debate in Scottish Classical

collective. Reason's role was re-articulated as managerial: it functioned as a corrective influence rather than a sovereign. All forms of progress, moral, social and economic, were made to depend primarily on the cultivation of sentiment and benevolence. Hutcheson's theory of subjectivity staged a progressive re-engagement of the passion-driven self with the society driven by pride.⁹

In the work of Hume, we can see progressive thought driving on to the point where it mobilises its own critique. Hume's work on commerce and luxury sought to demonstrate that wealth lay not - as many still thought - in money, but in the people, skills and materials of a nation. Equally, he sought to shift the motors of historical change from luxury and corruption to the awakening of desires through trade. Revealingly, many progressive writers misread him as arguing that rich countries would inevitably lose their trade.¹⁰ Hume's empirical methodology took him further than progressive optimism wanted to go. The same was true in relation to his writings on human subjectivity.

In his writings on human understanding, Hume countered Hutcheson's image of the passions' benevolent trajectory. Hume argued that the passions were prior to reason, but they had no necessary tendency towards benevolence as there was no natural or providential order in the world that founded justice. Particular individuals had instead to cultivate their natural capacity for 'sympathy' with others and this gave

Political Economy', in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue: the Shaping of the Political Economy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 285-287.

⁹ Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy. In Three Books* (London, 1755), Book I; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 248-265.

¹⁰ Hont, 'Rich-Country, Poor-Country', pp. 271-290.

rise to the moral distinctions that made humans see the *utility* of notions of virtue and justice. Equally, in his essays, the same logic applies. Where Tucker saw commerce as a providentially ordained harmony of subjective and objective goods, morally improving individual and nation alike, Hume accepted the broad framework without its progressive trajectory. Hume took the empiricism and relativism of progressive accounts to their extreme points, revealing in the process the romance concealed within progressive ideology. Seizing on Montesquieu's relativisation of luxury according to political organisation, he argued that luxury was a word of 'uncertain signification' which could be 'innocent or blameable according to the age, country, or condition of the person'. And what went for individuals was true for nations. Rich countries, he argued, had no reason to think that they would be so for ever. This was not because there was anything inevitable about their lapse into decline. Rather, Hume argued, empirical historical examples suggested that the commerce that impelled the move of one society from agricultural poverty to commercial wealth might stir up better competition in other nations.¹¹

Hume's writings can be characterised as a sceptical moment of self-doubt generated by the forces of progressivism. Equally, the impulse toward conservatism can be seen as a rebound away from the implications, not only of progressive arguments generally, but also from the radicalism of scepticism. We can see this with reference to Samuel Johnson. For Johnson, commerce led to the circulation of

¹¹ John Mullan, Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth-Century (Oxford, 1988), pp. 18-43; 'Of Commerce' and 'Of Refinement in the Arts', in Eugene F. Miller (ed.), David Hume, Essays Moral, Political and Literary (Indianapolis, 1985), pp. 253-280; Hont, 'The Rich Country, Poor Country Debate', pp. 272-284; Donald Winch, Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834 (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 67-73.

property and gave every man the hope of bettering his condition. To this extent, it was a progressive force that appealed to Johnson's suspicion of aristocratic ideology. Yet he also reacted against the Hutchesonian progressive psychology of the passions, seeing commercial desires rather in the form of an unceasing and restless self-love that was incapable of satisfaction. Directing this love towards the tokens of refinement and the pleasures of the city was a species of folly, but one that benefited the whole by providing every man with the opportunity of subsistence. And just as the mysterious operation of society, its incomprehensible coherence, was useful in directing the imagination towards things that benefited society, so the ranks and hierarchies of society were useful inasmuch as they preserved the property relations that kept men from ceaselessly competing with one another and destabilising the social order. Crucially, unlike the early eighteenth century conservatives, Johnson located the need for hierarchy in the same structures of imagination that powered commercial development. And conservatives in the later eighteenth-century would follow this logic, advocating the manipulation of the imagination to preserve the mysterious facades of social hierarchy.¹²

By the 1750s, therefore, the terms of debate around the status of commerce had truly been transformed. In the next section, we will see how this was expressed in the debates around the concrete question of the relationship between commerce and the labouring classes.

¹² Samuel Johnson, 'Review of Soame Jenyns' *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*, 1757' and 'The Adventurer, no. 67, 1753' in Donald Greene (ed.), *Samuel Johnson* (Oxford, 1984),

Part III:

The middle of the eighteenth century, as we saw, witnessed the further divergence of the propertied classes from the dictates of customary culture. Custom became, more than ever, an attribute of the labouring people and, as such, the object of attacks from both progressives who considered it to be a barbaric fetter upon improvement and conservatives who saw it as an instrument of labouring-class manipulation. Labouring-class resistance to attempts to break with customary restraints in the early eighteenth century had largely resulted in defeat over the long term. As the pressure on such regulations continued into the mid-century decades and as the prices of many foodstuffs began to rise, labouring people may have begun to find it harder to maintain levels of expenditure, previously dominated by customary conceptions of needs and desires, to which they had become accustomed. This produced subtle shifts in the behaviour of labourers. These shifts were particularly marked in London. As Hans Joachim Voth has argued, the mid century saw a decisive change in the labour-patterns of Londoners. Notably, labourers began to work more days in the week. In particular, the custom of Saint Monday and the festive political calendar came under pressure, while seasonal labour patterns which had characterised the experience of most labourers in the early eighteenth century, also began to disappear.¹³

pp. 261-265, 522-544. For this observation on the structure of Johnson's approach to hierarchy, see Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 209-210.

¹³ For the changed conditions of the years after 1750, see Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 72-74; Peter Lindert, 'Unequal Living Standards', in R. Floud and D. McCloskey, *The Economic History of Since 1700* (Cambridge,

Yet, despite this erosion of customary labour patterns, the consumption of commodities among these groups continued to grow. Labouring-class consumption was still concentrated around certain commodities with special resonance in terms of customary culture, such as tea and tobacco. But these commodities were increasingly surrounded by a growing cluster of petty domestic manufactures: knives, forks, ceramic dishes, clay pipes, tea-sets, as well as newer and higher quality linens and bedding. As Carole Shammas has argued, the presence of these new commodities indicates that the context in which labouring-class families consumed was changing also. These commodities indicate towards the increasing valuation of a domestic sphere, a household social space of growing importance. As the mode of industrial production depended less and less upon communities of labourers with a vestigial attachment to the land, so communal social practices were supplemented, if not supplanted, by a domestic sphere in which women's role became proportionately more important. The home became a site of increased material, ideal and emotional investment. By the 1750s, there were also many Friendly Societies in London, testifying to a growing awareness among sections of the labouring classes of the need to save, to accumulate money and to combine in defence of their livelihoods.¹⁴

1994), pp. 357-386; John Burnett, *A History of the Cost of Living* (Harmondsworth, 1969), ch. 3. On changing time-use, see Hans-Joachim Voth, 'Time-Use in Eighteenth-Century London: Some Evidence from the Old Bailey', (D.Phil thesis, Nuffield College, University of Oxford, 1997). See also the seminal article by E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', in *Customs in Common*, pp. 372-380; John Rule, *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England* (London, 1986), pp. 130-153, 255-260; John Hatcher, 'Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought before the Nineteenth-Century', *Past and Present* 160 (1998), pp. 85-91

¹⁴ Hans Medick, 'The Proto-Industrial Family Economy: The Structural Function of Household and Family During the Transition from Peasant Society to Industrial Capitalism', *Social History*, 3 (1976), p. 296; Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford, 1990), ch. 6; Carole Shammas, 'The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and

In the increasing consumption of commodities and the development of Friendly Societies, we can see the increasingly fluid boundaries between customary consumption and something more akin to the desire for accumulation, the development of the 'sense of having'. Ironically, in defence of their right to commodities and to a certain standard of living determined by the needs embedded in customary culture, substantial sections of the labouring class were beginning to behave more like vendors of their labour, recognising the status of their labour as a commodity and acting as such.¹⁵ In this situation, the changing working patterns of labourers would gradually transform the form and content of their consumption. Whatever uses they put commodities to, whatever meanings they had possessed in customary culture, were increasingly mediated by their status as commodities. As commodities, these goods existed prior to their needs, and were purchased with the wages of an alienated and commodified labour.

Examining the varieties of ideological response to these developments, we can see both the recognition of the growing consumption of commodities and of the compound nature of this consumption, strung as it was between customary consumption and modes of behaviour that fitted more neatly into developing notions

America', *Journal of Social History* 14 (1980), pp. 3-24. On London Friendly Societies, see M. D. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1965), pp. 292-295.

¹⁵ In such a context, we can perhaps make more sense of Jan DeVries's concept of an 'industrious revolution'. We might see the 'trading in' of the leisure patterns of a threatened customary culture as the product of a complex dialectic in which the concepts of choice and compulsion lie at extreme points of a continuum. Choice and compulsion are after all dialectical categories - the meaning of each presupposes the existence of the other. Therefore, it really makes no sense to have to 'choose' between them as explanatory frameworks. Explanation rather comes from their dynamic interrelationship in concrete situations. Jan DeVries 'Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe', John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1991), pp. 85-133.

of universal commodity exchange. In progressive writings, we will see the recognition that this consumption could and should be increased if the nation were to continue prosperous. Accordingly, the labouring classes were incorporated into models of industriousness and economical consumption that represented universalised versions of established middling-sort ideals. In conservative writings, we can trace a more negative conception of the utility of the desires of the labouring people; one in which the social affections and imagination that drove consumption could be manipulated to impose a form of consumer discipline upon the poor. Crucial to both was the key concept of 'oeconomy'.

The writings we will examine here were the products of a particular historical conjuncture. The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle gave British mercantile and commercial commentators much to think about. Trade and commerce showed much vitality in the years after 1748. The reopening of markets abroad brought a brisk demand for the familiar staple exports, while the demand for consumer goods seems to have risen at least until 1754. However, British arms had fared only moderately well against the French and the treaty left no one with any illusions about the prospects for a long peace. In addition, the revival of French trade in the Levant was seen to exemplify the ongoing rise in that nation's commercial power. The eyes of many commercial commentators were therefore firmly fixed upon France and the competition she seemed to present to British trade. The Pelham administration's rapid demobilisation of around 70,000 men from the navy and army in 1749 contributed to an acute

anxiety about the condition of the labouring classes as displaced soldiers and sailors sought employment, legal or otherwise.¹⁶

In 1750, a projector named Andrew Hooke addressed a pamphlet to Henry Pelham at the treasury, outlining a scheme to pay off the national debt. In it, he painted a highly favourable picture of the kingdom's position. 'Commerce', he argued, 'is the Source of the Wealth of this Island' and its wealth was truly vast. 'The Annual Superlucration, or Increment of Capital stock, over and above the Expenses of the People', he claimed, 'surpasses at this Day, the Revenues of the French King and doubles the Produce of the Mines of Peru and Mexico'. The wealth of the nation was visible to any who cared to look. Not only did it manifest itself in the 'luxurious manner of Living among the Great', but it dispersed throughout the meaner people. Merchants were almost indistinguishable from the gentry, he argued, and could anyone remember a time when 'Tradesmen, Farmers, manufacturers or Artificers and others of inferior Rank, were ever better cloathed or fed, or maintained their Families in a more decent manner than at present?'¹⁷ Hooke's rhetoric demonstrates the extent to which conservative concepts from the early eighteenth century had been subsumed into a positive progressive vision of the wealth of the nation. What would have been used as evidence of the luxury of the nation could now function as an index of

¹⁶ Colley, *Britons*, pp. 79-80; T. S. Ashton, *Economic Fluctuations in England, 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 148-149; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 162-182; Nicholas Rogers, 'Confronting the Crime Wave: The Debate over Social Reform and Regulation, 1749-1753', in L. Davison, T. Hitchcock, T. Keirn and R. B. Shoemaker (eds.), *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750* (Stroud, 1992), p. 78.

¹⁷ Andrew Hooke, *An Essay on the National Debt etc.. And National Capital: or, the Account Truly Stated, Debtors and Creditors* (Bristol, 1750), pp. 2-3, 33.

prosperity and progress. And as this progress included the labouring classes, it reshaped their function within the nation and their subjectivity.

In the writings of Josiah Tucker, as we saw above, we can perhaps see the high-water mark of mid-century progressive thought. In the Elements of Commerce, he outlined the terms on which the labouring classes could be included in commercial exchange. Labour, he suggested, was simply another form of commerce. ‘National and extensive commerce’ was simply another name for the ‘right and useful employment of the Individuals’ and this employment was ‘derived either from the natural or artificial wants of mankind’. Therefore, Tucker can be seen to have extended to the poor a transmuted version of Locke’s right of subsistence. But where Locke derived a right to subsistence from the poor’s possession of labour as a form of property, Tucker took the exchange of properties in commerce and drew from it a right to engage in commercial transactions with their labour. For, ‘nothing can be plainer than that every man hath a Right by nature to Subsist himself by his own Labour and Industry, in any way that is compatible with the good of the whole’. This freedom to buy and sell extended from the highest capitalist endeavours to the lowest petty exchanges. Whether in the form of monopolies, charter companies and by the statutes on apprenticeship alike, all were examples of the infringements of liberty by ‘privilege and the Tyranny of custom’.¹⁸

Tucker might extend a theoretical right to engage in commerce to the poor, but he had severe misgivings about their practical capacity to engage in such

¹⁸ Tucker, Elements of Commerce, pp. 81-82. For Hutcheson’s version of the same right, see Thomas Horne, Property Right and Poverty: Political Argument in Britain, 1605-1834 (London, 1990), pp. 80-82.

enlightened exchange. For Tucker, the labouring people were still in the thrall of the tyranny of custom. In 1754, he published an essay comparing the trade and commerce of Great Britain and France. In this, he gave far more concrete form to his complaints against monopolies and charter companies. He also aligned the dangers of these with his empirical observations on the nature of the labouring classes. Here, he observed that far too many of the manufacturing poor transgressed the boundaries both of the ideal universal commercial agent and of the particular responsibilities of those who sold their labour. One of the greatest disadvantages that Great Britain faced, Tucker argued, was the ‘want of subordination in the lower Class of People’. The poor must, he urged, be educated and policed into fitness for their liberty: ‘If they are Subject to little or no Control, they will run into Vice’ and ‘Vice is attended with Expence, which must be supported either by a high Price for their Labour, or by methods still more destructive’.¹⁹

Beneath this anxiety, we can see the familiar structures of a consumption dominated by customary culture. Tucker complained at the ‘combinations of journeymen to extort exorbitant wages’, the ‘money spent in drunkenness and debauchery’, the ‘unfaithfulness to their Trust’ and the ‘badness of their Work’. He argued that it was imperative to remove ‘all Temptations’ from the range of the manufacturing poor. This meant regulating the number of alehouses within a given area and the imposition of fines upon ‘cock-pits, skittle Alleys, Stages, Booths, Horse racing and all such Places of Resort of the Common People within their District’. But the solution, he recognised, did not simply lie in punishment. The poor must also be

¹⁹ Tucker, Brief Essay, p. 37.

encouraged to reform themselves. To this end, Tucker recommended that courts be set up to regulate the manners of the poor. These would 'discourage Vice, Idleness, Debauchery and...encourage Industry, probity and Fidelity in the lower Class of People'. The latter would be achieved by providing a gift of 40 shillings to any couple getting married who could provide a master's testimony that they had behaved well and show that they had saved three pounds in a year. This would be paid to them a year later, during which time they must still behave. Such couples would also receive 'good books' emblazoned with entreaties to industry and thrift which, he envisaged, 'would be kept as Family Pieces and Trophies and might excite the same laudable Emulation in their Posterity, which it had done themselves'.²⁰

For Tucker, then, the persistent manifestations of customary consumption represented a form of desire that was not rationally directed to the public good. The special task of labourers was to recognise that their affections and desires had to be governed by the social need for them to offer their labour at an internationally competitive price. If they failed to do this, then they must be compelled by a judicious and humane combination of discipline and encouragement, a combination that compensated for their failure to exercise sufficient rationality, while controlling and utilising the very same desires that the labourers were themselves misdirecting.

The naturally endowed consumer desires of the poor received a more positive expression in two pamphlets published anonymously in 1751 and 1752 respectively. The first, An Appeal to Facts Regarding the Home Trade and Inland Manufactures of Great Britain, was addressed to the Earl of Halifax at the Board of Trade. Its author

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-57.

began by outlining some basic laws of commerce. 'Production and Consumption', he claimed, are the Beginning and End of All Trade'. Trade was a consequence of the 'universal and necessary Dependence that Mankind has upon each other for their common safety and mutual Aid and Assistance'. The circulation of commodities answered these ends, imposing order on society and enabling its improvement through labour, adding beauty and value to common materials. Commerce, however, also bred competition and the preservation of British commerce depended on cultivating safe domestic markets before attempting to win back foreign ones. Calculating the probable average expenditure of each individual on home, food and clothing, he assessed that: 'Each Individual at a medium, pays six Pounds yearly to the Lands and Labour of this Kingdom and every one is a market to that value to his Country, the Encrease and Preservation of which ought to be principally regarded'. Improving the demand of this market would not be simply in the interest of the commerce of the nation, for commerce was itself 'a Means to Civilise Numbers of Idle People and Dispose them to Peace by Accustoming them to Industry'.²¹

We can find a more detailed exploration of the individual labouring-class consumer in the second pamphlet, written in 1752 and published anonymously under the title Reflections on Various Subjects relating to Arts and Commerce. This was occasioned by the debate that accompanied the bill to naturalise foreigners which quickly became known as the Jew Bill. The pamphlet addressed itself to the task of

²¹ An Appeal to Facts Regarding the Home Trade and Inland Manufactures of Great Britain and Ireland (London, 1751), pp. 9-14, 39-41, v. See also John Smith, Chronicum Rusticum Commerciale: Or, Memoirs of Wool etc, Being A Collection of History and Argument Concerning the Woollen Manufactures and Woollen Trade 2 vols (London, 1747), 2, pp. 530-531; Malachy

showing that the nation needed more workers if it were to stave off the commercial threat from France. This author argued that the nation had to emulate France's commercial 'police' by handing out bounties, training and other forms of encouragement to entrepreneurial manufacturers and merchants who could help break British dependence on French goods and help Britain undersell France in foreign markets.²²

Britain's prosperity, the pamphlet argued, rested firmly upon commerce and commercial states must necessarily, 'have their eyes on their neighbours'. Like Montesquieu, the author of this pamphlet saw luxury as a problem relative to different nations. It was only a vice, he argued, when it defied national character. National character set limits to the achievable. The English, he claimed, were animated by love of ease, spirit and ambition. As we shall see, this could be a disadvantage as well as a benefit.²³

Thus, national character always limited universal phenomena. Man, for example, had a 'universal right to society'. But individual nations required different things from their citizens. A trading nation, for example, required only that its citizens conform to the ideal attributes required for commerce. 'Industry, Sobriety of Life, good Oeconomy and a peaceable Demeanour', he argued, 'should give every man the Rank of Native in a trading State'.²⁴

Postlethwayt, *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*, By J. Savary des Brulons, translated by Malachy Postlethwayt with Additions (London, 1751), p. 544.

²² *Reflections on Various Subjects Relating to Arts and Commerce. Particularly the Consequences of Admitting Foreign Arts on easier Terms* (London, 1752), pp. 40-43.

²³ *Reflections*, pp. 18-21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Crucial here is the concept of oeconomy. Oeconomy was undergoing a process of historical bifurcation in these mid-century years and the author of the Reflections bears ample witness to this. In the early eighteenth century, oeconomy had contained within it two strands of meaning. By the 1750s, these were diverging. Derived from a tradition of political thought that stretched back to Aristotle, oeconomy described the proper distribution of power and justice within a household usually conceived of as that of a landed aristocrat. By the early eighteenth century 'oeconomy' had come to denote the order of households in a nation of trading families.²⁵ In the middle of the eighteenth century, the importance of domestic order was primarily conceived in terms of the expenditure of private households. Consequently, oeconomy developed a 'privatised' meaning that, while referring to its national correlate, no longer automatically connected the fate of the household automatically to the nation. The meanings of oeconomy were becoming stretched over diverging realms. It split to form, on the one hand, a body of knowledge concerned with the distribution of goods and justice in the nation and, on the other, a set of norms for the proper conduct of private households. For the author of the Reflections, this latter meaning could now embrace the labouring people.

Oeconomy signified the successful combination of national and private desires. These had to be managed by a rational recognition of true pleasures which unleashed the refining powers of commerce. In a free state like Britain, the author

²⁵ The origins of 'oeconomy' are usefully discussed in Keith Tribe, Land, Labour and Economic Discourse (London, 1978), pp. 80-98. However, Tribe subsumes all eighteenth-century usage into a 'discourse of political oeconomy that he sees stretching from Montchretien's use of the term in the seventeenth century. While there are important continuities, this approach obscures the historical

argued, the poor will not and should not be kept under despotic subordination. To hold down their wages was to oppress and starve the poor and to rob them of the imperative to work. 'The Poor are part of a free state as well as the Rich', he argued, and, because in a free commercial state capital and rents rose, the price of labour would also inevitably rise also. The only sensible policy for a trading nation was to ensure a free supply of labour. For, 'we may regard Labour as a Commodity amongst the rest which every man will buy as cheap as he can'. Therefore, the poorer sort, 'whose manufacture it is, are obliged to continually undersell each other', allowing their commodity to settle at its natural price. The natural price of labour would ensure labourers 'something more than a Day's subsistence, to provide for Days when [they] cannot work and for Children not yet able'. This 'overplus' was crucial, for, without it, there was no room for virtuous expenditure. There was nothing for the idle to waste and 'the thrifty lay by'. Virtue lay in oeconomy. But oeconomy, for this author, did not simply imply thrift. It entailed properly directed expenditure. For the capacity for virtue was underpinned by a basis in the human desires which provided the incentive to labour and enabled commercial development. For, the author argued, 'the Hope of Ease, however Remote or unlikely is the inducement to labour' and 'the Prospect of a better way of Life in the industrious, must excite Emulation in the Idle'.²⁶

Emulation and the desire to better one's condition powered both the capacity for moral and commercial improvement. This universal human attribute could achieve

dynamic that re-animated use of the term in the midcentury and ensured its bifurcation by the nineteenth century.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 53-64.

a rational form, if properly directed. Its rational form lay in the commodities that gave true pleasure to individuals and facilitated their refinement, while at the same time increasing the capital and furthering the refinement of the nation.

The difference between English and French workers, the author argued, did not consist in their morals or their labour, but in their customary habits of consumption. English workers' national character gave them a tendency towards exuberance that led them towards the false pleasures of drunkenness. By contrast, French workers directed their desires towards elegance and clothing. This represented a rational and true form of gratification. 'A love of Elegance', the author claimed, 'depraves not the health, nor injures the Understanding; if it may not be thought to refine both'. Moreover, 'the Passion for Dress cannot be gratified until a Sum is made up and therefore the Desire itself contributes to Produce Labour'. 'He that lays out his Money in Dress and decent Furniture, has a permanent Reward ever in his Sight, to make him pleased with the past Labours, encourage his future Industry and exert the Emulation of his Neighbour'. By contrast, 'the unhappy man who exhausts in an evening, the Industry of a Week, annihilates the reward of his Labour and deadens his Vigour from the Loss of Health and the next day's dissatisfaction'. Such consumption represented excess and luxury pleasures that were 'transitory and end wholly in a man's self'. In contrast, 'Cloaths and Furniture make not only the enduring riches of a Family, but contribute much to the Public Honour and Strength'. For this consumption benefited the clothier, the weaver, the

seamstress, the woolcomber and joiner as well as ‘numberless trades depending on dress and household furniture’.²⁷

And, as the individual family and the nation both accumulated, so they were both progressively refined. For, while it might be expecting too much to entirely change national characteristics, the author argued, ‘one would think a Suitable degree of Encouragement and Honour might give the Ambition of the vulgar a better turn and excite them to excel each other in cloaths and household ornaments’. The proper end of wealth, for this author, was ‘refinement, higher degrees of humanity and Virtue, with more agreeable manners’. With such rational and progressive consumption, ‘Vices themselves are civilised and refined away by politeness, the attendant of opulence’.²⁸

So, for this author, the probably false hope of ease animated labour which was then rewarded with commodities. The task of any legislature committed to a commercial police was to ensure that the commodities were ones that led to rational and true pleasure. This would ensure continued labour, refine the manners of the labouring family, increase their stock and benefit the nation’s home commerce. In the concept of good oeconomy as used in this progressive tract, we can see the articulation of a model of an industrious family morally and economically improving itself through its attempt to emulate others and acquire commodities. And, if these were the right commodities, the commodities themselves would contribute to the process of refinement, leading the family to perceive the good of labour and

²⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

‘oeconomy’. In the process, a false hope of ease, which indicates back towards the leisure preferences of customary culture, would be transformed into a real possibility of material and moral betterment mediated by the national interest, indicating forwards to the economic benefits of cultivating the ‘sense of having’ among the nation’s workers. Oeconomy had been transformed into a concept governing the economic conduct of all classes, representing the domestic face of the process whereby the labouring people were assimilated into the commercial nation through their offer of labour. As we will see, this model of progressive improvement through the cultivation of rational pleasures reverberated across mid-century writings on the poor in whatever sphere. However, the concept of oeconomy also appeared in conservative writings of the same period. And it is to the conservative construal of the function of oeconomy and the model of subjectivity it entailed, that we now turn.

Part IV:

David Hume’s essay Of Commerce represents the limits of the progressivism we saw in the pamphlet above. Hume, as we saw earlier, pursued the logic of progressive historicism to its conclusion, arguing that the empirical study of history and societies revealed that there was no necessary progressive narrative to the history of commercial societies. We might consider ourselves to be more fortunate and more refined than our forebears, but refined societies were not necessarily the best in all ways. Similarly, for Hume, commerce possessed a jurisprudential form. But the form

of natural law was stripped its moral content, its emphasis on moral improvement unleashing, instead, its latent utilitarian potential.²⁹

Unlike Tucker, Hume reviled neither the fact nor the force of custom. For Hume, sovereigns and those studying society must ‘take mankind as they find them’, for the long course of historical development had wrought infinite diversity amongst people and settled customs that now appeared as second nature.³⁰ This circumscribed the task of the reformer immediately, delineating the boundaries of possible improvement. Improvement itself was conceived in the sceptical form of whatever was possible and useful to a nation.

Discerning what was most useful required the empirical study of history. Hume argued that foreign trade empirically led to luxury and refined pleasures, awakening industry and delicacy among peoples. Once ‘roused from their indolence’, men were subject to endless wants and desires that could never be satisfied. Consequently, in Hume, we can read a decisive shift from an early eighteenth-century world characterised by abundance to a mid-century world in which desires were infinite and the world was characterised by scarcity.³¹ In such developed commercial societies, ‘every person, if possible, ought to enjoy the fruits of his labour, in full possession of all the necessities and many of the conveniences of life’. This was not because such enjoyment ensued from his possession or exchange of property as a natural right, but rather because the society would benefit from such relative equality. The benefit lay in the voluntary servitude that it enabled. For, Hume argued: ‘It is a

²⁹ Thomas Horne, *Property Right*, pp. 94-91.

³⁰ Hume, ‘Of Commerce’, p. 260.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

violent method and in most cases impracticable, to oblige the labourer to toil, in order to raise from the land more than what subsists himself and his family'. 'Furnish him with manufactures', Hume suggested, 'and he will do it of himself'. Once the labourer was accustomed to industry and its rewards, a government would find it easier to 'seize part of his superfluous labour [through taxation] and employ it in the public service without giving him his wonted return'.³²

In Hume's essays, concepts of virtue, right and justice appeared in a thoroughly instrumental form, undermining optimistic progressive notions of inexorable refinement and moral improvement. But few who might have agreed with Hume's exercise in negation could accept his conclusions. Conservative ideology took its charge from the same premises that Hume accepted. It took as given the basic structures of commercial society and human subjectivity, but attempted to revive affective beliefs in the name of a stability that Hume seemed intent on undermining. Regarding the poor, this culminated in the formation of a negative version of the progressive model of familial consumption and refinement in the national good. Conservative ideology, as we will see, countered a commercial vision of the improvement of the labouring people through their participation in home commerce with a vision that sought to re-found and preserve conservative conceptions of the social order, forged in the now transformed relations of landed society, resettling them in their new commercial context. For this conservative ideology, oeconomy functioned as a yard-stick of the poor's failure to conform to progressive expectations and as a set of disciplinary concepts with which to preserve

³² Ibid., pp. 265, 262.

order and deference among the labouring people. John Clayton's gravely mistitled Friendly Advice to the Poor, written in 1755, amply demonstrates the development of this form of conservative ideology.

In 1755, John Clayton had been chaplain of Manchester Collegiate Church for fifteen years. Clayton was a friend of Wesley's, and his home served as a meeting house for members of the Oxford movement whenever they were in Manchester. His pronounced high church Toryism made him despised by the local Whigs and this dislike must have been amplified when he openly declared for the Pretender in 1745. Despite this unpromising performance, Clayton was given amnesty and left undisturbed.³³ In 1755, the Bluecoat Hospital, one of Manchester's several charitable institutions, asked Clayton to give a sermon to their benefactors. This was then, 'at the 'Request of the late and present Officers of the Town', turned into a pamphlet and published. At the time that Clayton was composing his tract, Manchester possessed an established smallware and check industry, whose workers were well organised in trade societies. It also possessed a substantial hinterland of impoverished rural fustian weavers, supplemented daily by an expanding cotton industry which was beginning to attract migrant labourers from the surrounding farms to the town's suburbs.³⁴ Manchester, therefore, boasted a variegated and expanding industrial working class, providing plenty of matter for Clayton's indignant chidings.

Clayton's pamphlet contains none of the attacks upon opulence and luxury that were characteristic of the early eighteenth century. Instead, Clayton can be seen

³³ See Dictionary of National Biography, [hereafter DNB] 'John Clayton, 1709-1773'.

³⁴ Berg, Age of Manufactures, pp. 23-231; E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, 1980), pp. 299-300.

to accept many of the foundational concepts of progressive ideology. But a distinctive conservative position emerges from Clayton's tract and this position would develop throughout the later eighteenth century. Clayton began with the empirical observation that the poor of the town most certainly did not conform to the ideals of the complacent view of historical development that we saw outlined by progressive writers. 'Our streets still swarm with distressed Objects of every Kind', he claimed, while 'Hunger and Nakedness, abject Misery and loathsome Poverty may be found in every Neighbourhood'. Clayton argued that, in 'neglecting to help themselves', the poor were dissolving the relations of mutual assistance and reciprocal obligations that sustained society. Because they would not even try to act as fit objects of charity, despite the manifest liberality of the Manchester propertied classes, the poor were undermining their own claim to charity and paternal care.³⁵ When we turn to examine what constituted a fit object of charity for Clayton, we can see how much conservative ideology was emerging as a position within a society conceived as a series of commercial exchanges.

Clayton, like Hume, argued that the wants of man were the natural mechanism that impelled labour. The need to labour was no longer simply a matter of the curse of Adam or the apostolic injunction. 'We were..purposely subjected by our great Creator, to Variety of Wants; that these might prove so many spurs to quicken our industry', he claimed. Besides which, 'we are formed for Society and we are made liable to common wants and mutually dependant upon one another', so that humans had to work not only for their own profit, but 'for the Advantage of the

³⁵ John Clayton, Friendly Advice to the Poor, Written and Published at the Request of the Late and

Community'.³⁶ Yet this was no progressive paean to the motive power of the social affections. For progressive hopes would always be dashed by the force of custom among the poor. The generality of the poor, he argued, were characterised by 'an abject Mind, which entails their miseries upon them' and a 'mean and sordid Spirit, which prevents all Attempts at bettering their Condition'. Indeed, they were 'so familiarised to filth and Rags, as renders them in a manner natural'.³⁷

In delineating the extent of their depravity, Clayton illuminated the persistence of the structures of customary culture among Manchester's workers, the growing commodity culture that mediated custom and the extent to which conservative and in this case explicitly Tory paternalism was repudiating such behaviour. In Clayton's tract, the grant of paternalistic care became conditional upon the performance of an economised deference; a form of obedience as consumer discipline that was based upon a reconceived family unit.

The poor, he claimed, were persistently idle and lazy. 'Common Custom has established so many Holy-Days, that few of our Manufacturing Work-folk are closely and regularly employed above two third parts of their Time', which necessarily meant that their families went without or workers demanded higher wages from their employers and threatened exports. They also 'live so hand to Mouth, that every little Accident, that prevents a single Day's work, reduces them absolutely to the State of Paupers'. Nothing, he claimed, could persuade them to 'lay up any Thing in store against the Time of Distress'. Consequently, when one of the family fell sick or when

Present Officers of the Town of Manchester (Manchester, 1755), p. 3.

³⁶ Clayton, Friendly Advice, pp. 9-10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

prices rose, they were reduced to begging, parish rates or pawning 'their Cloaths and Goods and parting with every Convenience of Life in order to provide for present Subsistence'. If they worked six days a week, however, they could afford to save up in case of necessity. But such 'prudent forecast' was not to be expected from the poor as long as they were suffered to remain abject and to enjoy the security of knowing the poor laws would provide for them.³⁸

This lack of prudent forecast and absence of a sense of futurity was accompanied by 'bad management and want of oeconomy'. But oeconomy here lacks any of the associations with the pursuit of rational pleasure and the trajectory toward refinement. Clayton's is a far more dismal science. Here, lack of economy signified the gross misuse of meagre familial resources. Instead the poor indulged in intemperance and excess.

This excess was signified by the consumption of familiar commodities. 'Ale, gin, or tea mainly swallow up that slender Income which might have been turned to much better Account had it been laid out with the baker and the Butcher'. These were species of 'sinful luxury and shameless extravagance'. Yet luxury returns to Clayton's text in a form liberated from the aristocratic confines we saw in the early eighteenth century. In Clayton's book, the potential we saw in several conservative works of the 1730s had been fulfilled and luxury functioned to signify forms of irrational expenditure relative to a household income. Their chief transgression is the quantity of money and time, virtually identical in any case, that they consume. Central to Clayton's criticisms, then, is an imagined budget against which the poor should

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

account for their expenditure. 'Would they add the several Sums together, which are daily wasted in these dangerous Gratifications and reckon the amount at the Week's end', he urged, the poor would realise that 'however trifling these particulars may seem, they really lead into serious Mischiefs'.³⁹

Luxury's social dynamic still persisted in its new quantifiable form, but it was transposed from the sphere of public virtue to the economic order among private families. Luxury still inverted patriarchal order, spreading in the form of a contagion, but it did so in private and with very different effects to those characteristic of earlier debates on familial discipline. 'If the Husband wastes his time and squanders his Substance at the Alehouse, it is not improbable', Clayton argued, 'that the Wife and Children in their turns may fall into unwarrantable Expences at Home'. 'Experience tells us', he claimed, 'that these are often as wasteful at the Tea-Table, as the other is prodigal over his Cups'. Such irrational disorder and want of oeconomy could be evidenced by visiting the homes of the poor. 'It is no uncommon thing to see a Cottage, nasty even to a Degree of Infection, amply furnished with all the foolish Utensils pertaining to this Junketing and Riot', while 'the most necessary Goods for the Comfort and Conveniences of Life are miserably wanting'.⁴⁰ In Clayton's depiction of luxury, we can clearly see the outlines of the labouring classes' dynamic compound of customary and commodified cultures. And we can also see the extent to which the concept of luxury had become opposed to a norm of domestic economy conceived as rational and frugal expenditure.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 19, 22-23.

The poor were just as bad in their general use of money. 'Their whole aim is only to live', he complained, 'and their Want of Oeconomy so palpable, that their Money is generally spent before it is received and the Week's Wages forestalled by the current expences'. The poor could only too easily get credit, while their patronage of shops for foodstuffs meant that they paid far more than they need do for their necessities.⁴¹

For Clayton, the solution was simple: 'If Poor people would but be persuaded to do their best to assist themselves, much of this distress would quickly be removed'. It was incumbent upon poor families to shape themselves according to the model of familial economic virtue implicit in Clayton's text. The household was to possess a rigid sexual division of labour. Men were to be urged to labour harder and to 'renounce their play-days' or at least be content with one in a week. Patriarchy was given an economic content, as men were encouraged to oversee their domestic order, to ensure a rational use of time and resources rather than wasting time and money in the alehouse. Their wives were to manage the oeconomy of the domestic sphere. This meant spending wages wisely and frugally by buying from farmers in the market rather than from backstreet shops and 'huxters' [sic]. The moral and religious duties of a mother reappeared in Clayton's depiction in the form of the duties of an oeconomical housewife. 'The mistress of the house must bestir herself', he enjoined, 'and both institute and exactly observe such Rules of Regularity and good Order, as are the main foundation of true Oeconomy'. For, 'her precepts and her Example must

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

bring the family to that happy state wherein every member may know their respective Duty and be constrained to perform it faithfully'.⁴²

The housewife's role in such a labouring-class family had been substantially enlarged. She was to ensure that the domestic sphere displayed all the marks of respectable and decent self-sufficiency and economy for the outside viewer, implicitly the patrician. This meant managing the expenditure on food: avoiding 'trifling Niceties' in favour of 'substantial and nourishing' meals 'contrived to satisfy the natural cravings rather than the sensual Delicacy of Appetite'. She was also enjoined to repair clothing. 'The Purchase, whether of clothes or Goods, is a grievous burthen', Clayton acknowledged, 'but constant cleaning and mending costs little more than the labour and is an effectual way of making things last their appointed time, as well as showing them off to their best Advantage'. Cleanliness was also essential. Too often the bodies and homes of the poor were so unclean that they deterred charitable visitation. The poor might secure more compassion, Clayton suggested, if they were cleaner.⁴³

For John Clayton, the labouring-class family, located in a world of circulating commodities, was reconceived as a unit of discipline with which to control consumption. Like the progressives, Clayton presupposed a labouring-class subject fundamentally different from that of the early eighteenth century. He or she was organically endowed with a rational capacity and with desires that motivated him or her towards objects. But this had no progressive trajectory for Clayton. It was merely

⁴² Ibid., pp. 29-31.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 30-31, 34.

the ordained nature of the world. He entertained no notions of encouraging the poor to increase their consumption or of refining their manners through the cultivation of rational pleasures. For Clayton, the wants of the poor had to be managed by an 'economy' stripped of its progressive function and negatively construed as the proper allocation of resources for those of 'slender Income'. The poor had to be persuaded into self-sufficiency if the bonds of society were to be preserved. Accordingly, Clayton argued that it was incumbent on the poor to perform an appropriate degree of economic deference if they were ever to persuade their superiors that they were objects worthy of charity. As Clayton himself said, 'a general face of Cleanliness, Decency and Propriety, would appear in Poor People's conduct which could not fail of conciliating a general Esteem and benevolence towards them, the good Effects whereof would soon appear in the Increase of Charity in the rich, the diminution and Abatement of the Miseries of the Poor'.⁴⁴

Clayton asked no more of the poor than that they perform deference. There was no standard of inner belief and authenticity to meet. They simply had to outwardly affirm the relationship between patrician and deferent inferior in its new commercial form. But implicit in this performance was the suggestion that the poor were ultimately responsible for their own misery and that their desires, if unleashed in a world on the brink of scarcity, were dangerous and excessive. Needs, wants and desires must, Clayton argued, be confined by any means possible if the basis of the social order in moveable property, in capital, was to be maintained.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

These arguments in Clayton's work were to be substantially developed in the later eighteenth century. Indeed they were importantly developed during the debates on rising food prices and wartime taxation in 1757, when both progressive and conservative ideology in the forms outlined here came under heavy pressure from the transformed social and economic circumstances that came to characterise the later eighteenth century.⁴⁵ But, for now, we must return to the early 1750s. Continuing to pursue themes that I broached in section one, I move on in chapter five to examine how the material and ideological transformation whose dimensions have been the subject of this chapter manifested themselves in debates surrounding the spirits trade.

⁴⁵ For the material conditions of the debates on this subject, see J. A. Chartres, 'The Marketing of Agricultural Produce', in Joan Thirsk (ed.) The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 5 (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 450-472; Jeremy N. Caple '1756-7', in Andrew Charlesworth (ed.), An Atlas of Rural Protest in Britain, 1548-1900 (London, 1983), pp. 86-113; Nicholas Rogers, Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain (Oxford, 1998), pp. 64-67. For important contemporary contributions, see Malachy Postlethwayt, Britain's Commercial Interest Explained and Improved in a Series of Dissertations on Several Important Branches of her Trade and Police (London, 1757), pp. 12-21, 377, 3-5, 366-368; Populousness with Oeconomy the Wealth of the Kingdom (London, 1759), pp. 4-5; 'A Petition of the Bailiffs and Commonalty of the Borough of Tamworth, in the Counties of Stafford and Warwick, 25 Jan. 1757', 'A Petition of the Mayor and Burgesses of Borough of Stafford in the County of Stafford in Common Council Assembled, 1757' and 'A Petition of the Mayor, Bailiffs and Burgesses of the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme, in the County of Stafford', Journal of the House of Commons, XXVII, pp. 639, 656, 665; William Bell, A Dissertation on the following Subject: What causes principally contribute to render a Nation Populous? And What Effect has Populousness of a Nation upon its Trade (Cambridge, 1758); William Temple, A Vindication of Commerce and the Arts: Proving that they are the Sources of the Greatness, Power, Riches and Populousness of a State (London, 1758); Samuel Johnson 'Further Thoughts on Agriculture', Universal Visiter March 1756 in Donald J. Greene (ed.) Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, 10 (New Haven CT, 1977), pp. 121-122.

⁴⁵ Gentleman's Magazine, 27 (1757), pp. 71-73, 129.

Chapter Five

'New Species of Expenditure':

Tea, Gin and the Labouring-Class Domestic Sphere, 1745-1755

As we saw in chapter four, the concept of 'oeconomy' emerged in the mid century to express the new economic and social importance of the labouring-class domestic sphere. Households, conceived as private in relation to the public good, could be publicly accountable in terms of their adherence to the norms of domestic economy. Progressive writers were keen to encompass the labouring people within the ideals of industriousness and respectable domestic economy that the middling sorts had brought with them into social thought. By contrast, conservatives saw the same oeconomy less in terms of its potential to bring the labouring classes into the world of commerce, than as a new set of disciplinary apparatus; a set of norms against which to judge the conduct of labouring people and a new economic form of deference to be displayed by the labouring classes.

In this chapter, we will examine how luxuries became re-conceptualised in relation to the concepts of oeconomy that were to govern the labouring-class domestic sphere. We will also examine the new emphasis that this placed upon the role of women, both as embodiments of the positive potential of desires and as potentially destabilising elements in the national economy. The chapter focuses on two commodities that were the subject of debate in relation to the labouring-class domestic sphere: tea and, more importantly, gin. As we will see, these debates served to reveal and to distort the truth of labouring-class women's position in the national

economy, the truth that their position as consumers was always mediated by their relative position within the market for wage labour.

The same processes that produced a wage-dependent labouring population by the middle of the eighteenth century and created a market for the exchange of labour as a commodity were fixing the relative inequalities of position between men and women in this market. The distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' labour that had been inscribed into peasant economies was becoming translated into a distinction between male and female spheres of labour. This downgraded much of the work that women had performed in the peasant household economy, terming it unproductive domestic housework, while according lower status and therefore lower wages, to those forms of labour that *were* recognised as 'productive'. Despite their essential position in proto-industrial and fully proletarian family economies, the familial 'income' was becoming established as primarily male. Women may have enjoyed more opportunities for a range of employments and some cash income of their own, but the trades they could enter were restricted and the wages they received were rarely more than a third of those of their male counterparts.¹

Around the middle of the eighteenth century, the negative domestication of female labour - the removal from women of their status as productive, if unequal, partners in the variegated forms of labour that sustained the peasant familial economy

¹ Alice Clark, The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century (London, 1982); Maxine Berg, The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work In Britain (London, 1992), pp. 136-165; Hans Medick, 'The Proto-Industrial Family Economy: The Structural Function of Household and Family During the Transition from Peasant Society to Industrial Capitalism', Social History 3 (1976), pp. 291-315; K. D. M. Snell, Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900 (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 15-66; Michael McKeon, 'Historicizing

- began to attain some positive content. As many labouring families struggled to maintain levels and forms of expenditure to which they had become accustomed in the face of downward pressure on wages (partly achieved by exploiting the pool of cheap labour that women constituted) and increased incentives and pressures to work more days, so the relative importance of women as primary consumers increased.

Yet the middle class ideals of domesticity within which contemporaries attempted to enclose this new status sat uncomfortably with the experience of many labouring class families. It obscured the wage labour of women and the multifarious forms of family formation necessitated by the pressures of subsistence. It also ignored the cost that a patriarchally enforced domestic ideology could exact upon women, particularly in London. Excluded from many artisan trades, forced into sweated labour, denied access to many residual forms of customary culture and facing the prospect of destitution upon the break up of the family unit, women's experience of the fault lines of the sexual division of labour in the city could be horrific.²

In examining public discussions of gin and tea consumption, we will throw light upon the tensions built into these processes of change. In discussions of tea

Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760', Eighteenth-Century Studies 28 (1995), pp. 298-300.

² L. D. Schwartz, London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 1700-1850 (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 14-22, 45-50; Peter Linebaugh, The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 139-145; Anna Clark, Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995), pp. 14-18; Tim Meldrum, 'London Domestic Servants from Depositional Evidence, 1660-1750: Servant-Employer Sexuality in the Patriarchal Household' and Tim Hitchcock, 'Unlawfully Begotten On Her Body: Illegitimacy and the Parish Poor in St. Luke's, Chelsea', in Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe (eds.), Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840 (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 47-69, 70-86; D. A. Kent, 'Ubiquitous but Invisible: Female Domestic Servants in Mid Eighteenth-Century London', History Workshop Journal, 28 (1989), pp. 111-128. For middling domestic ideology, see Margaret Hunt, The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680-1780 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997), esp. chs 3, 5 and 6.

consumption, we will see testimony to the emergence of a conception of a labouring-class domestic sphere as a site of female-directed economical consumption and also of possible female subversion. The anxieties around tea consumption reveal tensions surrounding the possibilities for women to exercise power as consumers in the familial and national economy. In the discussions of gin, by contrast, we see a sharply contrasting picture of the effects of domestication. While the discussion was still inspired by the power of unsupervised women in the domestic sphere, the image of the gin drinking wife and mother was very different from that of the tea drinker. The gin drinker came to represent the abject misery and chaotic disorder that could characterise labouring-class domestic spheres. More specifically, the concepts that were forged to represent the gin drinking woman came to articulate a concept of addiction and false pleasures that referred directly to the particularly intense alienation of labouring-class women in the urban space.

Part I:

By the middle decades of the eighteenth century, tea had become big business. The East India Company alone imported 37 million pounds of tea by the 1750s and this may have represented only a third of what was actually brought in, the rest being supplied by a vast and sophisticated system of smuggling.³ The market for tea had

³ James Walvin, *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 15-19; Carole Shammas, 'Changes in English and Anglo-American Consumption, 1550-1800', in John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993), pp. 182-184; Hoh-Cheung and Lorna H. Mui, 'Smuggling and the British Tea Trade before 1784', *American Historical Review* 74 (1968), pp. 48-51. For a view that recognises the intersection of

also become socially diffuse by the 1750s and tea was a staple part of labouring-class diets. Sweetened with sugar, tea proved a cheap alternative stimulant that could, to some degree, compensate for beer as brewery and government control made this latter more expensive. Consumption of tea was still partly determined by customary practices. Even as they began to work longer weeks across the eighteenth century, labouring men punctuated their days with communal tea-drinking and adapted its rituals to their work. But more commented upon was the penetration of tea into the labouring-class household. Even as the importance of the labouring classes' household economy was being recognised by middle-class commentators, these new sites of sociability in proletarianised or proto-industrial labouring families were filled with the rites and paraphernalia of tea consumption. And, as Carole Shammas has noted, the adoption of tea as a staple commodity by labouring families was accompanied by a substantial material enrichment of the domestic environment as they bought cheap versions of china tea sets, kettles and cutlery.⁴ Labouring-class tea consumption was shaped by a heady brew of customary practice and new domestic norms.

smuggling and the politics of paternalism and opposition, see Paul Monod, 'Dangerous Merchandise: Smuggling, Jacobitism and Commercial Culture in Southeast England, 1690-1760', *Journal of British Studies* 30 (1991), pp. 163-180, but for a valuable reminder of the class content of smuggling before 1750, see the article that roused Monod's indignation, Cal Winslow, 'Sussex Smugglers', in Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson and Cal Winslow, *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth, 1977), pp. 119-166.

⁴ Sidney O. Mintz, 'The Changing Roles of Food in the Study of Consumption', in Brewer and Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, pp. 264-266; Carole Shammas, 'The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and America', *Journal of Social History*, 14, 1 (1980), pp. 16-19; Jordan Goodman, 'Excitantia: Or, How Enlightenment Europe took to Soft Drugs', in Jordan Goodman, Paul E. Lovejoy and Andrew Sherratt, *Consuming Habits: Drugs in History and Anthropology* (London, 1995), pp. 131-135.

The debate on the merits or otherwise of tea reflected these changes. During the early eighteenth century, most debate had revolved around its physical and moral effects. Tea had been seen either as an index of refined civility, or as a debilitating and effeminating luxury.⁵ By the mid century, tea drinking was firmly entrenched in the culture of the trading middling sorts. And the new social and economic importance of these classes stripped the accusations of luxurious excess of much of their force. But attacks on labouring-class tea drinking accelerated, turning on a new set of categories.

Simon Mason was an apothecary whose life was a model of the tribulations and precariousness of the middling tradesman. In a pamphlet entitled The Good and Bad Effects of Tea Considered, written in 1745, Mason demonstrated how far the debate had moved on and the new terms in which tea drinking by the labouring classes was to be condemned. Mason's basic argument was that, physiologically, tea was fundamentally harmless. But Mason balked at the idea of labouring people drinking this 'fashionable Liquor'.⁶ He argued that tea was 'very improper' for 'those who labour hard', such as 'the Man at the Plough; or Anvil', or even their wives, however they were employed. Such people would work far better were they to eat 'a piece of cold meat, bread or cheese, with a Pint of Ale'. In itself, this was not a new argument. But Mason also argued that labouring-class women were emulating their superiors in replicating the rituals of domestic tea-drinking and, in doing so, were

⁵ For progressive paeans to tea, see Duncan Campbell, A Poem Upon Tea (London, 1735); In Praise of Tea: A Poem Dedicated to the Ladies of Great Britain, By J. B., Writing Master (Canterbury 1736). For a debate in Parliament, ostensibly on smuggling, but embracing the qualities and signification of tea, see Gentleman's Magazine [hereafter GM] 4 (1734), pp. 302-306, 339-344.

⁶ Simon Mason, The Good and Bad Effects of Tea Consider'd (London, 1745), pp. 1-28.

subverting the class and sexual order.⁷ It was not tea itself or even the act of emulating, that was dangerous. Rather, it was the use of scarce resources such as time and money that aroused Mason's ire. While the men were out labouring hard for wages, he suggested, 'these poor creatures, to be fashionable and imitate their superiors, are neglecting their Spinning, Knitting and spending what their Husbands are labouring hard for', while 'their Children are in Rags, gnawing at a brown crust'.⁸ Tea consumption and the culture of drinking that had grown up around it, had become encased in a conception of domestic order and economy that rested upon a budgetary conception of expenditure; a conception in which time and money had become equivalents. Tea drinking was seen as embodying the danger of the development of a domestic space that depended on female desire.

These arguments were more developed by the 1750s. We can briefly see this with reference to two pamphlets of the period. In 1752, Thomas Alcock, the West Country reverend whose writing on the poor laws we will return to in more detail in chapter six, saw tea as one of a 'species of new expence' that prevented the poor from improving themselves. And as with tobacco, snuff and fine clothes, Alcock's chief complaint was that tea drinking was an irrational use of time and money. Tea might be fine in moderation for those with money enough to afford it, but 'for poor

⁷ Mason, *Effects of Tea*, pp. 33, 38–40. As Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace has argued, Mason here recognises the power of tea-table conversation to damage authority, if only in a limited manner; Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women Shopping and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1997), pp. 34–36.

⁸ Mason, *Effects of Tea*, pp. 41–42; see also John Newball, *A Scheme to Prevent the Running of Wool Unmanufactured* (Stamford, 1744), p. 12; for the debate over tea duties in 1744 and 1745, see 'Petition of the Dealers in Tea within the City of London', *House of Commons Journal* [hereafter *H CJ*] 24 (1745), p. 837; 'Petitions of Several Persons Entered as Dealers in Tea: Inhabitants within the City of Westminster and Borough of Southwark', *H CJ* 24 (1745), p. 838; 18 George II c. 26;

wretches, almost destitute of the common Necessaries of Life, to run daily into such idle Extravagancies', such expence was 'certainly a very ridiculous piece of Management'. 'The expence of the whole Apparatus of Tea, Sugar, Cream, Bread and Butter etc.', Alcock claimed, 'must be near treble that of Milk or Broth, or any other common wholesome Breakfast'. In addition to which there was the 'considerable Loss of Time' that 'attends this silly Habit, in preparing and sipping their tea; a Circumstance of no small account to those who are to Live by their Labour'.⁹

Equally, John Clayton argued that the female taste for tea and its customs disrupted the norms of familial budgetary 'oeconomy'. Clayton exhorted his readers to imagine what inversions occurred in the home of a labourer who neglected his patriarchal duties in overseeing the family's expenditure of the wages he earned. While he drank at the alehouse, Clayton argued, 'the Wife and Children in their Turns, may fall into unwarrantable Expences at Home'. And it was well known that 'these are often as wasteful at the Tea-Table, as the other is prodigal over his Cups'. It was a truth 'that cannot be disproved', he stated, 'that even this wretched price of Luxury, this shameful devourer of time and money, has found its way into the Houses of our Poor'. 'Would they but add together the several sums which are daily wasted in these dangerous Gratifications and reckon the amount at the Week's end', he argued, 'they would be convinced that however trifling these Particulars may seem,

George Bridges, *A Whip for the Smuggler: Or, a Curb to France. Shewing the Only Way to Prevent Wool Smuggling* (London, 1742).

⁹ Thomas Alcock, *Observations on the Defects of the Poor Laws and the Causes and Consequences of the Great Encrease and Burden of the Poor* (London, 1752), pp. 45-50.

they really lead into serious Mischiefs'. The domestic interior of a labouring-class tea-drinkers home served as an index of folly. For, he claimed, 'it is no uncommon thing to see a sordid Cottage, nasty even to a Degree of Infection, amply furnished with all the foolish utensils of this junketing and riot, where the most necessary Goods for the Comfort and Convenience of Life are miserably wanting'. 'And yet', he continued, 'the Price of the bare Appendages to the Tea-table, would have been quite sufficient to have purchased some more useful and (let me add), more reputable possessions'. Tea drinkers, he suggested, would quite happily forego 'a Bed, a Stool, a Table and a Candlestick', just to supply their habit.¹⁰ The debate over tea drinking therefore, was loaded with concerns over the potential power of labouring-class women as consumers in the domestic sphere.

When mid-century commentators turned their attention to the far more important issue of spirits consumption, however, the anxieties about tea paled into insignificance. At exactly the point when the arguments over the physical properties of tea were becoming less important, writers on the poor began to insist that tea drinking led inexorably to spirits. It was testament to the waning power of arguments for tea's inherent danger that it became guilty by association with gin. Mason, Alcock and Clayton all argued that perhaps the worst aspect of the taste for tea was that its properties and its ceremonies almost inevitably led to the consumption of gin.¹¹ And, just as tea's female encoding and symbolic association with public effeminacy was transformed into a literal concern with actual female consumption of tea in a domestic

¹⁰ John Clayton, Friendly Advice to the Poor, Written and Publish'd at the Request of the Late and present Officers of the Town of Manchester (Manchester, 1755), pp. 20-23.

¹¹ Mason, Effects of Tea, p. 42; Alcock, Observations, p. 49; Clayton, Friendly Advice, pp. 20-21.

space dominated by and dependent, on female desires, so gin's female encoding became similarly 'privatised'. A concern with public slavery and disorder was transposed into a concern with the catastrophic consequences of untrammelled female domination in the home.

Part III:

The legislative failures of the 1730s allowed the spirits industry to expand to reach its peak in the 1750s.¹² The domestic production and distribution of gin stretched across the extremities of the nation and the industry became accordingly more highly capitalised.¹³ At the same time, however, its relative economic and fiscal importance declined. The bounties increasingly tempted farmers to divert their grain into higher profit exports to the continent, placing pressure on the easy supply that had characterised the early eighteenth century. Equally, the growing revenue gathered from the tea trade increasingly displaced the fiscal importance of the spirits industry. Finally, the social crisis of the period following the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle created a powerful movement for social reform within propertied society. The demobilisation

¹² Lee Davison, 'Experiments in the Social Regulation of Industry: Gin Legislation, 1729-1751', in L. Davison, T. Hitchcock, T. Keirn and R. B. Shoemaker (eds.), Stillling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750 (Stroud, 1992), pp. 41-42.

¹³ John Chartres, 'English Spirits: *Ersatz* Good or New Taste, New Good?' unpublished paper presented to The Sweet Poison: Alcohol in European History, Day Conference, University of Warwick, 4 March, 2000.

and unemployment that came with peace created a ruling-class panic about urban criminality and drew attention to the condition of the urban labouring classes.¹⁴

One area of concern they focused on was the condition of labouring-class families. The number of irregular or clandestine unions was seen as contributing to the numbers of destitute women and bastard children who fell upon charity or the parish.¹⁵ The health and morality of the labouring classes also worried political writers concerned with the condition of the armed forces. The mortality regime of the capital was perceived to deprive the nation of a potential manpower that it could ill afford to lose.¹⁶ And gin-drinking, as we saw in chapter three, had long been seen as a threat to the health of the population.

But, of course, the concern for the stability of labouring-class families was not simply about population. It was also about women as consumers of commodities. Even the poorest of the labouring classes, those who inhabited the parishes of East London, had easy access to gin and had made it a part of their labour and leisure culture. Women may well have been its predominant consumers and frequented the dram shops of the capital whose numbers had consequently grown exponentially. But gin was also easy to buy to drink at home and most comment of the time focused on this aspect of gin consumption. For, however one controlled the dram shops, the

¹⁴ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989), p. 149; Nicholas Rogers, 'Confronting the Crime Wave: The Debate over Social Reform and Regulation, 1749-1753', in Davison et al, *Stilling the Grumbling Hive*, pp. 77-81.

¹⁵ John Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 9-98, 161-189; Hitchcock, 'Illegitimacy and the Parish Poor', Hitchcock et al., *Chronicling Poverty*, pp. 70-86; Nicholas Rogers, 'Carnal Knowledge: Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century Westminster', *Journal of Social History* 23, 2 (1989); pp. 355-375.

¹⁶ Donna Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, 1989), pp. 54-57; Linebaugh, *London Hanged*, p. 149; J. B. Landers, 'Mortality and the Metropolis: The Case of London, 1675-1825', *Population Studies*, 41 (1987), pp. 59-76.

chandlers who sold to the immiserated working classes of East London could still ensure that women were able to drink in the privacy of their own homes.¹⁷

Labouring-class gin consumption, it was argued, was causing widespread disorder in domestic economies, destroying valuable labouring and consuming families.

The conjuncture of economic change within British industry and trade and the social crisis of the late 1740s, left the distillers without the political support they had so conspicuously enjoyed in the 1730s. In addition, their control of the labouring-class market was threatened by the powerful breweries who were attempting to win back this lucrative trade with a cheap beer called Porter. In this context, the more highly capitalised end of the trade, anxious to preserve its entrenched respectable market, seems to have acceded to the likelihood of regulation and offered little opposition to the campaign for reform.¹⁸

The campaign to introduce a bill into Parliament began with a series of sixteen petitions from London and, crucially, from several provincial towns across the nation, including Bristol, Norwich, Manchester and Rochester. There was little opposition from the Distillers Company and only two pamphlets appeared to criticise the bill.¹⁹ The bill itself was a version of a duty first suggested by the broadly progressive Whig

¹⁷ In 1736, there had been around 8000 brandy shops and gin shops in the Bills of Mortality. A report of 1751 estimated that there were closer to 17 000, not counting the manifold alehouses and victuallers who retailed gin among their other goods. See Peter Clark, 'The Mother Gin Controversy in the Early Eighteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5, 38 (1988), pp. 68, 70-71; Davison, 'Gin Legislation', p. 42.

¹⁸ *HCI*, 26 (1751), pp. 55, 84-88, 94, 106-7, 114, 117, 133; Davison, 'Gin Legislation', pp. 42-43.

¹⁹ *The Consequences of Laying an Additional Duty on Spirituous Liquors, Candidly Considered by a Bystander* (London, 1751); 'The Humble Remonstrance and Petition of the Spirits' repr. in the *London Magazine* (hereafter *LM*) 21 (1751), pp. 170-171.

MPs Thomas Potter and Robert Nugent, both of whom were active in the social reform initiatives that came out of parliament in the mid century.²⁰ The bill, which imposed a tax of four and a half pence on the still-head and doubled licence fees, passed with little furore.

The pamphlet campaign of 1750-51 was the work of an influential group of writers, most of whom can be seen as broadly progressive in their approach. Of these pamphleteers, the one that least fits this description was the playwright, novelist and Middlesex Justice, Henry Fielding. Fielding's Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers represented a highly conservative approach to the social problems it painstakingly enumerated. While it was highly praised at the time, the Enquiry also said relatively little about gin. It certainly does not deserve the reputation it gained among historians for being the linchpin of the campaign. Fielding's Enquiry, written at the height of the 'crime wave' and derived from his experiences on the Middlesex bench, drew heavily upon Thomas Wilson's Distilled Spirituous Liquors the Bane of the Nation. Wilson's pamphlet of 1736 had argued that gin was a species of luxury, dispersing its canker into the bowels of the nation through the labouring classes. Fielding found it easy to reiterate much of Wilson's argument because, like Wilson, Fielding chose luxury as his guiding category. Gin drinking was, Fielding argued, 'a luxury of the Vulgar', a 'new kind of drunkenness, unknown to our Ancestors'.²¹ Like Wilson, he argued that it removed fear and

²⁰ R. T. Connors, Pelham, Parliament and Public Policy: 1746-1754 (D.Phil. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993), pp. 203-204.

²¹ Henry Fielding, An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers, etc., With Some Proposals for Remedying this Growing Evil (London, 1751), repr. in Malvin R. Zirker (ed.), An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers and Related Writings: The Wesleyan

shame, inspired criminal activity and killed the children of the poor. But, most of all, it destroyed useful labourers, soldiers and sailors. And in the emphasis Fielding placed upon the numbers of useful labourers, he approached a position more akin to the progressive stance outlined by the anonymous author of the Trial of the Spirits in 1736. It was the utility of stopping gin drinking rather than its inherent evil that ought to motivate reform.

This message was reinforced by the overall trajectory of Fielding's pamphlet for, though he used the category of luxury, he did so in ways which make clear the difference between the conservative tracts of the 1730s and those of the 1750s. For Fielding, luxury was relative to income. The luxury of the poor ought to be punishable because the poor were the most useful class of people, whereas the follies, vices and drunkenness of the rich were harmless and often beneficial. Fielding's naked instrumentalism was fit for a nation irreversibly founded upon commercial utility. As we will see in more detail in chapter six, Fielding might lament the passing of ancient liberties and bonds, but he also pragmatically legislated for the needs of a trading nation.²²

The true core of the reform pamphleteers of 1751 comprised a group united by their involvement in charitable and philanthropic activity and projects to promote British commerce. William Hogarth, Isaac Maddox, the Bishop of Worcester and Josiah Tucker, then ensconced in Bristol, were all public advocates of the project to promote the British Fisheries. Equally, all were involved in urban charity. Hogarth

Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding (Oxford, 1988), pp. 87-88. For Wilson, see Thomas Wilson, Distilled Spirituous Liquors the Bane of the Nation (London, 1736).

²² Fielding, Enquiry, pp. 77-84.

was active in the Foundling Hospital, Maddox was a prime mover behind the Worcester Infirmary and deeply involved with the London Hospitals, while Tucker was a keen promoter of the Bristol Infirmary and the Bristol merchant community alike. Commercial and moral improvement went hand in hand for these campaigners and their conceptualisation of the labouring classes and their taste for gin reflected this conviction.²³

In 1751, Isaac Maddox, the self-made son of an artisan, published his Expediency of Preventive Wisdom, devoting it entirely to the subject of labouring-class gin consumption. Like earlier campaigners, Maddox argued that gin was responsible for the violence, disorder and robberies of the recent years. It also killed many of its drinkers and destroyed their children. But Maddox also emphasised a new aspect of gin's malevolent powers. When gin killed or incapacitated its drinkers, it deprived the nation of labour *and* of consumption. 'How many Consumers of the general Product of the Nation are annually killed', he demanded and 'how many Commodities and how many Utensils does this pernicious Gin supplant or supply the place of?'²⁴ The nation stood to lose a market for manufactures as well as for the necessities of life.

²³ On the campaigns to promote the British Fisheries, see Connors, Pelham, Parliament and Public Policy, pp. 278-280. For the involvement of Hogarth, see Jenny Uglow, Hogarth: A Life and a World (London, 1997), p. 499. For Maddox's involvement in, and Tucker's sympathies with, the Society for a Free British Fishery, see DNB, 'Isaac Maddox' and 'Josiah Tucker'.

²⁴ Isaac Maddox, Bishop of Worcester, The Expediency of Preventive Wisdom, A Sermon Preached before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, The Aldermen and Governors of the Severall Hospitals of the City of London, at St. Bridget's Church, on Easter Monday, 1750. With a Dedication and Appendix concerning Spirituous Liquors (London, 1750), pp. iv, vi-viii, ix; See also idem. An Epistle to the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council, of the City of London and Governors of the Severall Hospitals; with an Appendix Containing the most material Extracts from the Sermon..concerning the Pernicious and Excessive Use of Spirituous Liquors (London, 1751) which repeats the arguments. Josiah Tucker's contribution confined itself to

Maddox's pamphlet fulfilled a potential contained within early eighteenth-century pamphlets such as The Trial of the Spirits. It synthesised the conservative emphasis on paternalistic defences of the consumption of commodities by the poor with the progressive conception of commercial expansion. Consequently, where the author of the Trial had urged that natural appetites were destroyed by gin drinking, Maddox, through the transformation of the status of desire, was able to extend the scope of appetites beyond the limitations of natural needs. Gin was now seen to endanger the desire for material reward that impelled labourers to work and to consume.

This power and drive to consume was embedded in the labouring-class household. Maddox bade his readers enter the homes of the poor and compare the material condition of the respectable labourer with that of the gin drinker's family. 'Look in upon the dwelling of a regular industrious workman of the like Occupation of the slaves to Gin', he urged and one could see that 'many Trades have been employed to provide Cloaths and furnish a homely but decent and cleanly habitation for himself, his Wife and healthy Children'. By contrast, 'the noisome, filthy abode of Gin-drinkers, if they have any settled abode at all, shall be void of every thing decent or even necessary'.²⁵ The early eighteenth-century conservative insistence on the connection between the order within families and the order of the nation was partially

a thoroughgoing political economic refutation of the utility of the spirits trade. See Josiah Tucker, An Impartial Inquiry into the Benefits and Damages Arising to the Nation from the present very great Use of low-Priced Spirituous Liquors (London, 1751), see esp. pp. 8-15 and Appendix, which includes a calculation of the commodities that were not consumed by gin drinkers. See also Serious Thoughts in Regard to the Publick Disorders, With Several Proposals for Remedying the Same (London, 1750), pp. 38-40.

²⁵ Maddox, Expediency, pp. ix-x.

re-asserted here through the mediation of the national economy. The domestic economy of private families was open to public scrutiny, Maddox claimed, because it was economically important that the poor consume commodities. Consequently, even though the homology between private and public order might have broken down, the public still had to concern itself with the economic order of private families.

And just as the early eighteenth-century conservative concern with family order reappears here in economic and political terms, so the satirical conservative image of gin as an *ersatz* Golden Age of few needs and confined desires, which we saw in chapter three, returns in Maddox's text in a literal and privatised form, becoming in the process a call to reform and improvement. For, 'this intoxicating Liquor, which consumes the little that they earn (and very little they do earn) does literally become their Victuals, drink and Cloaths; as Variety of Tradesmen daily find by sad Experience'.²⁶

The solution, for Maddox, lay in a form of economic paternalism; an intervention to regulate the private economies of the labouring classes on the grounds of the harm they caused to the nation's trade, commerce and social order and the moral and material degradation they entailed upon themselves. 'True Policy, Humanity and Religion' demanded that the legislature exercise 'care and compassion' to duty to prevent poverty and sickness. This meant using the powers vested in it by the people to ensure that they led industrious and useful lives and to regulate their consumption by reforming the distilleries and raising the price of gin. Only then could

²⁶ Ibid., pp. ix-x. See also the 'Petition of the Mayor, Sheriffs, Citizens and Commonalty, of the City and County of Norwich, in Common Council Assembled', *HCLJ*, 26 (1751), p. 88.

the nation maintain its military and commercial strength and ensure the improvement of its people's lives.²⁷

Gin was now assessed as it acted upon the balance of desires and rationality in the economy of a poor family. In contrast to tea, it could not be argued that gin was too expensive for the slender budgets of the poor. Gin drinking required no accoutrements of respectability, while gin itself was invariably cheap: one could, it was said, get drunk for a penny and dead drunk for two. Instead of arguing that it was uneconomical expenditure, therefore, the reformers used the empirical observations that even the very poorest in London insisted on drinking gin to argue that it wrought a very particular havoc upon domestic oeconomy.

The discussion of gin's operation upon the human body was transformed by the articulation of a new view of human subjectivity. The early eighteenth-century accounts, in which gin had been seen as either generating delusions of self-importance or of progressively destroying the human mechanism, were regrouped around a new conception of human subjectivity. Accordingly, gin was no longer seen as inflaming passions or unleashing inappropriate levels of desire among useful labourers. Rather, it was proscribed in relation to a conception of true, rationally directed desires, most famously formulated, as we saw in chapter four, by Francis Hutcheson.

Josiah Tucker, in his pamphlet of 1751, argued that gin's particular crime was its capacity to generate a short and violent heat which disturbed the brain and made it subject to delusions. Drinking spirituous liquors, he claimed, induced a kind of 'instantaneous Drunkenness where a man hath no time to recollect or think, whether

²⁷ Ibid., pp. xi-xviii.

he hath had enough or not'. The 'smallness of the quantity deceives him', Tucker claimed, 'so that his reason is gone before he is aware'. Gin produced a sudden and violent form of intoxication whereby the drinker was made 'mad and furious, without Sense or Duty, Fear or Shame'.²⁸ The drinker, having lost his or her reason, was unable to discriminate any longer between crime and legal conduct, between true, rational pleasure and the false and transient pleasures fuelled by intoxication.

This discussion of the balance of managerial rationality and social desires was concretised in relation to the relationship between gin and women. In the early eighteenth-century debates, the empirical observation that it was women in particular who frequented the gin shops of London. Such women, it was claimed, inverted patriarchal order, while their menfolk worked or frittered away their time in the alehouses. In the mid-century debate, the inversion of patriarchal order was relocated into the domestic sphere. Women's private consumption of spirits represented a new source of anxiety. Mother Gin, the symbol of public effeminacy and luxury, was becoming transformed into a literal mother in a real domestic sphere.

At its most progressive, this distinctly female domestic sphere could be a site of relative empowerment. Eliza Haywood, in an advice book to women 'of all the different Stations of Life', expressed the possibilities embedded within the emergent ideology of 'separate spheres'. Women, she claimed, desired power and the legitimate sphere of that power, the appropriate realm for its exercise, lay in the management of the domestic economy. The conduct of the House belongs justly to the Mistress', she argued and 'no man ought to marry a Woman whom he would not

²⁸ Tucker, *Impartial Inquiry*, pp. 21-22; see also Maddox, *Expediency*, pp. xi-xii.

trust with the Management of his Family'. And, contrary to those who 'imagine that the Management of Private Families is of little consequence', she argued, the conduct of the family was of supreme importance to the state. 'Ill conduct ruins private families', she claimed, spreading ill example throughout society. But it did not operate in the classic conservative manner, by inverting the layers of patriarchal power in the organic state of analogous households. Instead, for Haywood, it was the engines of commerce, emulation and fashion that spread ill example through the nation, resealing the widening gap between state and private families.²⁹

Gin was the worst form of ill conduct that could befall a family. Haywood argued that it 'destroys the faculties of the mind' and 'produces an immediate and temporary Madness'. Where other drinks made one sleepy and sullen, gin drinkers became 'bold, obstinate and filled with an extravagant Desire of doing Mischief'. 'Dram drinking' represented, Haywood suggested, 'the most expeditious way to deprive mankind of their Reason'.³⁰ Women's power in the domestic sphere was the consequence of a well managed and rationally directed desire for power by the female sex. Women's habit of drinking spirits undermined their capacity to manage the household. And, though she spent proportionately more time discussing the wives of middle and upper-class families, labouring-class women were no more exempt from the demands of oeconomy. For, 'where little is got, the more Oeconomy is needful to make it go further' and, 'if the Woman idles away her time, the man might as well

²⁹ Eliza Haywood, *A Present for Women Addicted to Drinking, Adapted to all the different Stations of Life, from a Lady of Quality to a Common Servant* (London, 1750), pp. 1-25.

³⁰ Haywood, *A Present for Women*, pp. 5-7.

Play too, her gossipings will get the better of his Activity and the Sisterhood of Tipplers will consume more than he ever could'.³¹

Like Maddox, Haywood argued that the interior of a gin drinking wife's home was an index of moral and material neglect. 'When you see the Kitchen in disorder, the Children half Naked and the House in a universal Litter, your Indignation will rise at the Thought of what Occasions it', she urged. 'You will, from that moment', she assured her readers, 'look upon a Dram Glass, as a more dangerous Instrument than a Blunderbuss'.³²

Haywood, however, was quite particular in the power she accorded to women in oeconomy. For most writers, progressive and conservative, oeconomy was the product of a greater female capacity for sentiment and desire which had to be overseen by the male breadwinner. Women embodied greater desire and men greater rationality, legitimating the presupposed sexual division of labour that confined women to the domestic sphere. However, this was not a monolithic tradition. At one end of the scale lay John Clayton, for whom oeconomy meant the patriarchal governance of women in the name of a performance of economic deference. At the other end, we can see a more positive image in which male rationality merely served, in Hutchesonian style, to correct errors in the female direction of the household's desires.

Female gin drinking, it was argued, was the ultimate consequence of the absence of vigilance among labouring-class men. And, as it destroyed the slender

³¹ Ibid., pp. 22-25.

³² Ibid., pp. 34-35.

capacity for reason among women, it signified the triumph of forms of pleasure not directed by reason. Countering this enlightened conception of social exchange, the reform writers in the gin debate can be seen to have formulated a set of images and concepts which outlined a theory of false desires, of transient and *ersatz* pleasures that killed the capacity for true rational pleasure, reducing people to compulsive and joyless forms of consumption that culminated in death. In other words, they began to formulate a recognisably modern concept of addiction. We will track this concept as it was used in three texts. The first is Hogarth's Gin Lane, the second a pamphlet written to accompany the publication of this print series and the final one, an anonymous poem that appeared in the General Advertiser the same year. Each one explores the desire for gin as a form of addiction that was both cause and consequence of the breakdown of labouring-class domestic economy in the city.³³

Hogarth's Gin Lane was part of a diptych of engravings. Its less shocking partner, Beer Street [Fig. 4], represented a scene of controlled and enlightened enjoyment, of pleasure harnessed to the ends of commerce. Beer Street is awash with desire. Labourers pause from their multifarious tasks to enjoy a well-earned rest from their exertions. The central group quaff nourishing English beer outside a prosperous looking alehouse while, in the distance, building workers and chairmen similarly refresh themselves. The labour they have interrupted is itself the consequence of the legitimate pursuit of politeness and fashionable opulence, while the copy of the King's Speech of 1751, encouraging the promotion of commerce and reform and being read by the Billingsgate fish sellers, denotes that the nation's governors share

³³ See also The Vices of the Cities of London and Westminster (London, 1751), pp. 27-28.

the common interest in commercial prosperity.³⁴ The social affections are fully at play here also in a scene full of laughter and barely suppressed sexuality. And, as Mark Hallett has shown, the formal character of the work reinforces the effect of its ostensible content. Beer Street claims the conventions of a satirical print that was becoming increasingly recuperated by polite art. The comic representation of fat and ribald plebeians and the symbols of sexual desire and urban heterogeneity were themselves becoming part of the graphic art of a polite and commercial society, rather than a comment on it. Beer Street's satire is one acceptable to polite society; it operates as a desirable commodity, reassuring its viewer that the comic identity of high and low is, in fact, universally beneficial and progress is for everyone.³⁵

Gin Lane [Fig. 5], by contrast, depicts the appearance of desire run insane. Gin Lane, materially located in the desperately impoverished parish of St. Giles, shows a different side of the city in which enlightened commerce is entirely absent. Here the economy is a dark, false and predatory one, peopled by those who profit from the destruction of labourers: pawnbrokers, distillers and undertakers. The material condition of the parish echoes the physical and mental destruction of the gin-sodden labouring people, whose insane compulsion drives them to pawn all their household goods and all their tools to secure a supply. Men are shown to have lost

³⁴ See 'The King's Speech on Opening the Session, Jan 17, 1751', in W. Cobbett, The Parliamentary History of England, From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803, 14 (London, 1813), p. 789, which recommended the MPs to 'make the best use of the present tranquillity for improving the trade and commerce of my kingdom; for enforcing the execution of the laws; and for suppressing those outrages and violences which are inconsistent with all good order and government and endanger the lives and properties of my subjects'.

³⁵ Mark Hallett, The Spectacle of Difference: Graphic Satire in the Age of Hogarth (London, 1999), pp. 204-206; See also Ronald Paulson, Hogarth, Volume III: Art and Politics (New Jersey, 1993), pp. 17-21; Uglow, Hogarth, pp. 498-501.

their reason, becoming no better than animals: one man beats himself over the head with a pair of bellows waving the corpse of a baby impaled on a spike, while another struggles with a dog for a bone. But it is women who embody addiction. One woman pawns all of her household goods to secure more money from Mr Gripe, compelled by the need to feel the all too transient pleasures of drunkenness again. The perversion and loss of social and familial affect is demonstrated in the mother who tips gin into her baby's mouth, while another does the same for her own decrepit mother. Finally, there is the central image of the mother, her body wracked with the disease that tells of her prostitution, a hollow and deathly smile smeared across her face, allowing her child to fall from her arms while she pinches more snuff. She is the embodiment of the transient pleasures of drunkenness triumphing over the capacity for rational pleasure embedded in the social affections.

Again, the formal characteristics of the print enforce the message of Gin Lane. Symbols and images familiar from the allegorical satirical prints of 1730s reappear in Hogarth's engraving in the context of a remorselessly naturalistic and literal representation of the most abject aspects of urban life, located in a recognisable part of the city and drawing on the pamphlet literature and newspaper reports of the day. The drunken form of Madam Geneva, symbolising the supposed demise of the distilleries, has become a real drunk, on the point of literal death. Gin's satirical function as an *ersatz* balm for a contradictory and disenchanting world reappears as a compensation for actual immiseration. Equally, the dark carnivalesque of the early prints returns, stripped of its melancholic satirical function, in a terrifyingly literal depiction of drunken insanity. Hogarth's print attempts to harness this real horror to

counteract the acceptable satire of Beer Street and to generate an impetus to reform.³⁶

The structure and content of addiction were pursued in greater detail by the anonymous author of a pamphlet published to accompany the publication of Gin Lane, Beer Street and the Four Stages of Cruelty. The author of the Dissertation on Mr Hogarth's Six Prints supplemented Hogarth's central images by conducting his readers on a tour of the world hidden by the crumbling walls of Gin Lane. In doing so, he drew upon the conception of domestic economy that we saw outlined earlier. For this author, the function of the husband and father was to labour for wages, while the function of the mother was to conduct the domestic economy according to the dictates of oeconomy.

This author was clear that men embodied the greater rational capacity. Gin affected the two differently, according to their different capacities. For a man, gin drinking was a form of emasculation. Though 'endowed with reason', is a 'slave to his Appetites and follows the Dictates of his senses, how wild and extravagant soever they be'. Consequently, he was subject to distempers, his mind was troubled with 'Anxieties', his money was spent and his life 'destitute of every rational pleasure'. To be reformed, a man had to be able to distinguish cause and consequences, good and evil and, in short, 'place himself under the Direction of his Reason'. Men habituated to drinking effectively became women: their strength was destroyed and their capacity for rational consideration diminished. The danger for men lay in the residues of customary drinking habits available cheaply and easily in the gin shops of the city.

³⁶ Hallett, Spectacle of Difference, pp. 26-219.

The author described men congregating in Gin shops or ‘meeting in private Cabals and sending for their Pints and Quarts at a Time, toping each other as long as they can see one another and while they have a Doit in their pockets’. Such hedonistic binge drinking represented an infraction of the patriarchal duties of rational observation entailed upon men by the sexual division of labour and its ramifications for the conceptualisation of the domestic economy.³⁷

This neglect left women unregulated. And the consequences of such neglect were disastrous. A woman, whose capacity for affect and desire was greater, would suffer even greater damage from gin drinking. Once habituated to spirits, the author claimed, ‘she will never be satisfied without it, whatever means she uses to procure a supply’. Men, he claimed, might be reformed. Their greater rational capacity gave them the chance of realising their folly, given due assistance from the legislature. But the woman habituated to gin became a unit of compulsive false desire; an addict who would do ‘any thing that will fetch a Penny’ that she might ‘have what she so continually longs for’.³⁸

The consequences of such addiction in the household of the labouring-class family are by now familiar. ‘Household Oeconomy, so requisite in a poor man’s family, has not the least Appearance among these wretched People’, the author lamented. ‘Cast your Eyes around the Room and take Notice of its Furniture’, he entreated, ‘What can you see that is not offensive, or carries not the marks of Misery and Wretchedness?’ ‘It will be much’, he claimed, ‘if there is any Thing worth Two-

³⁷ A Dissertation on Mr. Hogarth’s Six Prints, Lately Publish’d viz. Gin Lane, Beer Street and the Four Stages of Cruelty (London, 1751), pp. 4, 15.

³⁸ Dissertation, pp. 11-12.

Pence in the whole Apartment, either in Cloaths, Linnen or Woollen'. Everything the family had possessed was gone, sold to the pawnbroker 'to raise supplies to enable them to gratify their burning thirst for this intoxicating Liquor, Gin'.³⁹

Just as the absence of reason left desires unmanaged and resulted in false economy, so it produced false affect and false pleasure. 'Modesty is entirely laid aside' by gin addicted women. The true pleasures to be gained from domestic decency and respectability are replaced by 'the Enjoyment of their delightful Companion, the Gin Bottle'. Familial love too is replaced by the false love fuelled by gin, a love that leads mothers driven insane by gin to kill their own children. The children of gin drinkers could be recognised as they would be 'half naked, tho' in the coldest weather' and 'half starved for want of proper Nourishment', while their 'tender mothers', to 'stop their little gaping mouths...will pour down a spoonful of their own delightful Cordial'. 'What numbers of these little Creatures', the author demanded, 'who, had they grown up to maturity, might have proved Useful Members of Society', had been 'murder'd, I may truly say, by these inhuman, unnatural Wretches, their Mothers!'⁴⁰ This loss of potential was not simply conceived in terms of labour or even of consumer power: it was also a loss of human beings with a potential for material and moral improvement. 'O Monstrous Depravity of Human Nature!', exclaimed the author of the Dissertation: 'How capable of noblest Excellencies', he exhorted, yet 'how cover'd with Disgrace and Sunk in Corruption'.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 17, 26.

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 15-16.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 27.

The relationship between gin addiction, material impoverishment and the perversion of the social passions is perhaps most strikingly pursued in a poem published anonymously in 1751, entitled Strip me Naked, Or, Royal Gin Forever! As with Hogarth's print, it is instructive to compare this poem with the satirical products of the 1730s. Strip Me Naked contains thematic echoes of the earlier prints: the heroine of the piece is a woman, while the emphasis upon gin inverting patriarchal and social order is also present. However, the latter poem contains none of the formal freight of the mock elegies, odes and pastorals that proliferated in 1736. Instead, familiar images return alongside new ones, regrouped around a first person narrative that acts almost like a novel in identifying the reader, however reprovably, with the heroine. It takes the form of a series of utterances that come in rushes of intoxicated energy, reproducing the frenzied effect of drunkenness and signalling at the same time the desperate thinness and transience of the false affect generated by gin.

I MUST, I will have gin! - that skillet take,
 Pawn it. - No more I'll roast, or boil or bake.
 This juice immortal will each want supply;
 Starve on, ye brats! so I but bung my eye.
 Starve? No! This gin ev'n mother's milk excels,
 Paints the pale cheeks and hunger's darts repels.
 The skillet's pawned already? Take this cap;
 Round my bare head I'll yon brown paper wrap.
 Ha! half my petticoat was torn away
 By dogs (I fancy) as I maudlin lay.
 How the wind whistles through each broken pane!
 Through the wide-yawning roof how pours the rain!
 My bedstead's cracked; the table goes hip-hop -
 But see! the gin! Come, come thou cordial drop!
 Thou sovereign balsam to my longing heart!
 Thou husband, children, all, We must not part!

Drinks

Delicious! O! Down the red lane it goes;
 Now I'm a queen and trample all my woes.

Inspired by gin I'm ready for the road'
 · Could shoot my man, or fire the King's abode.
 Ha! my brain's cracked. - The room turns round and round;
 down drop the platters, pans: I'm on the ground.
 My tattered gown slips from me. - what care I?
 I was born naked and I'll naked die.

This amazing poem combines every element of the foregoing discussion. The decay of the domestic economy as the addicted mother pawns the family's possessions, the material decay of the domestic interior, the false hope and fake affect fired by gin, the 'cordial' for the 'longing heart', the illusory feelings of power that threaten all forms of patriarchal order and the dark hints of rape that emerge from the loss of care and respectability. Perhaps most of all, it conveys the desperate false need that characterises addicts. In addition, because of its first person narrative form, the poem aestheticises its subject matter and, perhaps more than Gin Lane, generates a sympathetic response that muddies the causal chain that is supposed to ensure the woman's culpability.⁴²

Strip Me Naked's capacity to reverse the causal chain that progressive writers established, connecting gin drinking with poverty, crime and death, directs us towards the capacity for radicalisation within the concepts of addiction. Progressive reform writers may have seen the destruction of gin drinkers as a human as well as an economic tragedy, but they nonetheless maintained that part of the culpability for urban drunkenness lay with the labouring classes themselves. However, almost despite their intentions, the reformers who represented gin consumption through

⁴² Strip Me Naked, Or: Royal Gin Forever! (London, 1751).

progressive ideology developed a set of concepts readily available for radical colonisation.

The concept of addiction emerged from the attempt to embody the dangers of untrammelled desire among women whose consumption was becoming essential to family and public economy alike. It served as an attempt to police the boundaries of acceptable, rational, social desires and false pleasures. The desire for gin became a false pleasure that justified intervening in and regulating the market for spirits in the name of the fate of progress and civilisation. But it also contained a more progressive potential by virtue of its capacity to articulate the costs of urban deprivation. By making gin responsible for all forms of urban degradation, from poverty to misery, crime, violence and death, reformers made it possible to establish a causal chain that went the other way and removed culpability from the poor themselves. Addiction could be the consequence of the manifold privations of urban life. The *ersatz* delights of drunkenness could be seen as compensations for the pain of experienced contradictions. The image of a drunken mother could symbolise the lies of a society whose sequestration of the land and whose need for casualised wage labour in crowded and disease ridden cities, deprived labouring people of customary forms of land use, customary forms of sociability and customary expectations of family formation. And, because the domestication of labouring-class women was connected to the triumph of wage labour, the image of a lonely, impoverished and alienated woman, drinking herself to death while desperately fuelling delusions of true affect, love and status, signifies total abjection; a condemnation of the costs of capitalist

‘improvement’. Tea may have come to stand for women’s power within the home, but gin came to signify the potential misery and loneliness that accompanied it.

But this ideological potential was not the only legacy of the gin debates of 1751. As we noted earlier, the opposition to the act was slight and ineffective. However, one interesting pamphlet, one of only two I have traced, indicates a route for conservative ideology that marks a progression from and repudiation of Fielding’s Enquiry. The author of the Consequences of Laying an Additional Duty on Spirituous Liquors, rejected Fielding’s argument that only the luxury of the poor was problematic. But he did so in terms that Fielding would not have contested. The offence of drunkenness was essentially the same in both ‘Patrician’ and ‘Plebeian’. The effect on the drinker was the same, whether rich or poor: ‘the passions are enraged’. Only the expression of these passions was different. The rich would tend towards wantonness, indecency and outrage, ‘while a self-occasioned necessity urges the other to acts of violence’.⁴³

Implicit within this pamphlet was the view that gin was another example of the abject nature of the poor. Poverty itself was a consequence of the play of the passions in a society built on inequality and this was the only thing that prevented the war of all against all. Taxing spirits more would make little difference, the author argued, as ‘the handicraft, the manufacturer, the labourer, will still have it in their power to purchase a debauch, though at a greater expence’. The ‘experienced perverseness of mankind, more especially where the gratification of a favourite

⁴³ Consequences of..an Additional Duty, pp. 4-5.

appetite is obstructed', led to the inevitable conclusion that 'the additional expence will be so far from being the means of preventing their endeavours to indulge themselves, or the consequences of that indulgence, that on the contrary, their inclination will grow stronger, even from the difficulty of indulging them'. Equally, 'by adding to their extravagance, their necessities will be increased and their temptation to illegal methods of supplying their wants proportionately augmented'. The commodity, the author argued, was innocent. It was its use that should be chastised. And if every commodity that was abused was to be taxed, 'even the necessities of life could not be procured without very great expence', not to mention the danger this would pose to 'some of the most valuable branches of commerce'.⁴⁴

This author, then, was beginning to outline a conservative view of the poor as being beyond any hope of rational conduct. Their passions and their social position dictated that they would go to any means to secure their ends, however irrational. In this text, conservative ideology can be seen to approach a social diagnosis that would be fleshed out in the 1760s and 1770s. Here, the condition that progressive reformers called addiction was seen as so deeply acculturated as to become natural. As conservative ideology became reconciled to the gulf that separated commercial society from its forebears, it began to argue that the condition of the poor in commercial society, the daily observed contradiction of the hopes for improvement cherished by progressives, was in fact the inevitable, if not natural, consequence of the triumph of commerce.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 12-13, 18; see also 'Humble Remonstrance...of the Spirits' *LM* (1751), p. 170, for a similar, though less forceful and less elaborated argument.

If the gin debates of 1751 were not to be repeated in the later eighteenth century with anything like the same ferocity, the debates around tea consumption and the luxuries of the poor certainly would. They would do so, however, in the very different context of the condition of the rural poor in a period of high food prices. For now though, we must return to the urban context that shaped the debates of the 1750. Chapter six returns to the context within which the gin debates should be placed, examining the discussion of the urban poor and the reform of the urban environment. It also considers the wider focus assumed by debates on the most ambitious reform of all, the reform of the poor laws. In this chapter we will examine how the ideological and material transformations we have examined in these last two chapters impacted on the ideas through which the ambition to reform the city was expressed.

Chapter Six

Policing the Labouring Classes, 1745-1753

Part I:

The social crisis of the 1750s was about more than spirits consumption. It prompted a more general meditation on the condition of the urban labouring classes.¹ Many of the urban poor were recognised to exist in conditions of material squalor, surrounded by disease and death. But they were also seen to be partaking of the luxury of a commercial society. Just as sections of the labouring classes were beginning to treat their labour as a commodity, so their makeshift economies, dependent on petty credit, illicit markets, parish relief and marginal criminality, were becoming more tightly interwoven with the urban and national 'economy'.² As the nation became re-

¹ Nicholas Rogers 'Confronting the Crime Wave: The Debate over Social Reform and Regulation, 1749-1753', in L. Davison, T. Hitchcock, T. Keirn and R. B. Shoemaker (eds.), Stilling the Grumbling Hive: the Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750 (Stroud, 1992), pp. 77-98. See also R. T. Connors, 'Pelham, Parliament and Public Policy, 1746-1754', (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993). These two works remain the only detailed examination of the 1750s extant. My debt to them will be apparent throughout.

² See J. B. Landers, Death and the Metropolis: Studies in the Demographic History of London, 1670-1815 (Cambridge, 1990). On the nature of the London workforce, see L. D. Schwartz, London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 1700-1850 (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 11-28; Peter Earle, A City Full of People: Men and Women in London, 1650-1750 (London, 1994); Peter Linebaugh, The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 221-326; John Rule, The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth-Century Industry (London, 1981), pp. 124-147; John Styles, 'Embezzlement, Industry and the Law in England, 1500-1800', in Maxine Berg, Pat Hudson and Michael Sonenscher (eds.), Manufacture in Town and Country Before the Factory (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 174-192; Beverly Lemire, 'Gender and Petty Credit During the Rise of Industrial Capitalism in England, c. 1600-1850', unpublished paper, pp. 1-14; idem., Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 95-140. For the role of the poor laws as old-age benefit, see, Lynn Hollen Lees, The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the

conceptualised as a mesh of commercial transactions, so the interweaving of makeshift economies with the greater circulation of commodities increasingly brought the practices of the poor to the attention of the middling ranks and the patrician classes. The emergence of concepts of 'police' at this time, the direction of private and public capacities in the interests of the good ordering of civil society, can be seen as part of the extension of the state's domestic face; an increasing perception of the need to regulate the commercial transactions that constituted everyday life.³ Like the attempts to dictate the form of wages paid to labour, the attempts to regulate the credit economy, the markets in second-hand and stolen goods and the terms on which parishes granted relief can be seen as parts of a general effort on the part of the propertied classes to define the boundaries of legitimate market conduct and delineate the appropriate behaviour for labourers and consumers in a commercial society.⁴

People, 1700-1948 (Cambridge, 1998), p. 56; T. Wales, Poverty, Poor Relief and the Life-Cycle: Some Evidence from Seventeenth-Century Norfolk', in R. M. Smith (ed.), Land, Kinship and the Life-Cycle (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 351-404. On the developing notion of 'rights' to relief, see Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe (eds.), Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840 (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 1-18; K. D. M. Snell, 'Pauper Settlement and the right to Poor Relief in England and Wales', Continuity and Change 6 (1991), pp. 375-415.

³ For the concept of police, see Donna Andrew, Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century (Princeton, 1989), pp. 6-7; Miles Ogborn, Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780 (New York, 1998), p. 46. For the European context of this concept, see Marc Raeff, The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change through the Law in the Germanies and Russia (New York, 1983). For the domestic aspirations of the eighteenth-century state, see Joanna Innes, 'The Domestic Face of the Military/Fiscal State', in Lawrence Stone (ed.), An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689-1815 (London, 1994), pp. 96-126.

⁴ Joanna Innes, 'The Mixed Economy of Welfare in Early Modern England: Assessment of the Options from Hale to Malthus' (c. 1683-1803), in Martin Daunton (ed.), Charity, Self Interest and Welfare in the English Past (London, 1996), pp. 144-145; Andrew, Philanthropy and Police, pp. 54-57.

Part II:

By 1745, the petty credit relations that sustained labouring-class families was becoming the focus of parliamentary attention. A group of pawnbrokers petitioned Parliament to bring in a bill to recognise the legitimacy of their trade and ensure this by policing more effectively the 'disorderly part'. Pawnbrokers had been consistently criticised for practicing an illegitimate form of trade which profited from others' labour through the charging of usurious rates of interest. However, by 1745, many London pawnbrokers were men of substantial property and standing and, at this level, pawnbroking was becoming a highly capitalised business. They sought now to legitimise their trade while, at the same time, distancing themselves from the petty pawnbrokers who filled the capital.⁵ The debate occasioned by this petition demonstrated that what was at stake was the role of credit in the economy and, to a degree, the appropriate form and social extent of credit networks.

The pawnbrokers advocates still maintained the paternalistic vocabulary and arguments of the country ideology of the 1730s, hitching it to arguments for their necessity in a commercial nation. Pawnbrokers, they claimed, were 'absolutely necessary in Places where Trade and Commerce flourish' as they performed an invaluable service in lending to the poor. Were the trade better regulated, they argued, the brokers could implement a reduction in interest charges that 'would be a

⁵ Lemire, 'Gender and Petty Credit', pp. 16-18.

great Relief to the honest and Industrious Poor', who used such credit to cover 'Accidents, Difficulties, Slow Wage Payments sickness and rent demands'.⁶

The opposition to the pawnbrokers' bid for legitimacy used many of the same accusations that had been levelled at the trade since the early eighteenth century. The interest that pawnbrokers charged was said to be usurious and contrary to ideals of fair exchange. But, far more important in these pamphlets, was the issue of extending credit to the labouring poor and the fitness of the poor for dealing with ready money on tap. The author of one pamphlet argued that pawnbrokers lay at the centre of a web of petty trades whose design was to entice and ruin the labouring people. They colluded with bawds, prostitutes and gamesters, all who made money from others' vice and folly. Journeymen and apprentices were tempted by prostitutes to steal goods entrusted to them by their masters. These were then brought to pawnbrokers who passed them on to fripperers who, in turn, distributed them around the country. And, once ensnared and turned to corruption, these labourers provided further custom for the pawnbroker. For they and their collaborators encouraged 'Drinking, Whoring and Gaming' by providing ready money. For, 'if you have goods to pawn to gratify any of these Inclinations there is not fear of Money'.⁷ Their interest charges preyed on the 'labouring People', helping to make them 'more poor, wretched and distress'd'. They provided the poor with ready money to go to the gin-shops, which

⁶ 'A Petition of Several Persons Under the Denomination of Pawnbrokers in London and Westminster', *House of Commons Journal* [hereafter *HCIJ*] (1745), pp. 723-733; *An Apology for the Business of Pawnbroking, By a Pawnbroker* (London, 1744), pp. 13-17, 25, 28-30, 36-41; 'A Letter from a Country Gentleman on the Usefulness of Pawnbroking', *Gentleman's Magazine* [hereafter, *GM*] 15 (1745), pp. 698-699.

⁷ *A Plain Answer to a Late Pamphlet Intituled The Business of Pawnbroking Stated and Defended* (London, 1745), pp. 8-9, 15-20, 26.

‘spoils them for common labour and in the end makes them Thieves and Vagabonds’.⁸ Urban life provided too many temptations to spend ‘without reflection’ and, as a contributor to the Gentleman’s Magazine argued, ‘a set of men are tolerated who raise fortunes by supplying luxury with the means of pleasures and flattering poverty with momentary succours’.⁹ Implicit within these reactions against the pawnbrokers was an emerging model of commercial agency which we have seen outlined in previous chapters. For these authors, the urban poor in particular were not yet considered capable of living up to it.

The debate on pawnbroking and credit produced a bill, but no act. It resurfaced again in a more developed form in 1750.¹⁰ Against the background of demobilisation, the perception that theft and violent crime against the propertied middle classes were at unprecedented levels, signifying a crisis in the condition of the labouring people, produced a consensus in Parliament for reform. Part of this reforming energy was directed toward the credit economy. The instruments of Parliamentary efforts were Sir Richard Lloyd, the solicitor general and his felonies committee and Sir William Yonge’s pawnbroking committee.¹¹

As Richard Connors has shown, Yonge was one of a group of reform minded members of Parliament who sat on the various committees appointed to the task of social reform. Indeed, the pawnbrokers Committee shared many members with the

⁸ Reasons Against Licensing pawnbrokers: Humbly Offer’d to the Consideration of the Legislature (London, 1745), p. 25, 31-32, 40-41; see also, GM 15 (1745), pp. 409-412.

⁹ GM 15 (1745), pp. 459-463.

¹⁰ Lemire, ‘Gender and Petty Credit’, pp. 15-16.

¹¹ Rogers, ‘Confronting the Crime Wave’, pp. 78-81, 88-89; Connors, Pelham Parliament and Public Policy, pp. 187-217.

large Felonies committee.¹² The context within which this committee considered the problem of the pawnbrokers was dominated by theft and the circulation of stolen goods. Yonge's committee also concerned itself with the problem of the struggle for the definition of dockyard perquisites. Pamphlets on this issue noted the existence of markets for the resale of goods 'pilfered' from the dockyards and of 'extraordinary Combinations betwixt the Robbers and Receivers'.¹³ The same fixation with receivers and the markets in stolen goods determined the discussion of pawnbroking.

The author of Serious Thoughts in Regard to Publick Disorders, supposedly a Justice of the Peace in the country, assumed the voice of a conservative concerned with the breakdown of order among the labouring people. The wave of 'murder robbery and all kinds of Felonies' all derived from 'the Torrent of Gaming, Extravagance, lewdness and Irreligion which has appeared among all the Ranks of People'. Pawnbroking, he claimed, like gaming and public houses, formed part of a criminal economy which circulated stolen goods and encouraged robbery. 'The greatest cause of Felonies and Robberies', he argued, 'is the receiving stolen goods and this is encouraged by Pawnbrokers, Shopkeepers, Gin-Shops, publick Tippling houses, or common Brokers of old Cloaths or Furniture'. The solution was not, however, the condemnation and abolition of pawnbrokers, the closure of second-hand clothes dealers or of public houses, but a system of licensing which, in the case of pawnbrokers, followed closely the stipulations of 1745. And pawnbrokers, like second hand dealers or any shopkeepers, were to be required by law to keep books

¹² Connors, 'Pelham, Parliament and Public Policy', p. 207.

¹³ Observations on the Buyers and Receivers of Stolen Goods, Particularly of lead, iron, etc.. taken for Buildings,... in a Letter to a Member of Parliament (London, 1751), pp. 5, 13-14.

recording where every item in their possession came from. The author demanded that all commerce, to be legal, should conform to the standards of transparent trade that governed rational commerce. Only these standards, enforced by law, could preserve order.¹⁴

Underneath a surface conservative rhetoric that seemed to point back to the early eighteenth century, the author of the Serious Thoughts conceded that order must be enforced from within a conception of rational commerce. Nowhere in the tract was there any critique of credit and the agency of the labouring classes. The principle that credit fuelled a valuable aspect of commerce appeared to have been ceded. The debate turned rather on how best to regulate the conduct of this commerce and ensure that it conformed to standards of lawful exchanges of property and deterred theft. Sir William Yonge's report, two years later, made twenty-one resolutions which basically reiterated the proposals embodied in the bill of 1745. It recommended licensing pawnbrokers, ordered that they kept books of all transactions, stipulated that they must be ratepayers in the parish and demanded that they detain anyone suspected of stealing goods. Its proposals did not become a new act until 1757 but, in its content and its context, we can see that the principle of the utility of credit for the poor had been won. The debate had shifted on to how to force the informal petty traders out of business.¹⁵

¹⁴ Serious Thoughts in Regard to the Publick Disorders, With Several Proposals for Remedying the Same; Particularly in Respect to Gaming, Publick Houses, Pawnbrokers and Receivers of Stolen Goods. By a Country Justice of the Peace (London, 1750), pp. 9-10, 13-14, 31-33, 35-38.

¹⁵ Connors, 'Pelham, Parliament and Public Policy', pp. 216-217; Lemire, 'Gender and Petty Credit', p. 16.

At the same time as the debate on pawnbroking was taking place, developments in the civil law were reinforcing the enhanced status of petty credit. As Margot Finn has shown, the late 1740s and 1750s saw the establishment of a series of courts of conscience, administering justice according to the principles of equity rather than through the lengthy and costly processes of the common law. This development marked the culmination of a struggle within the propertied classes over the merits of such courts. During the seventeenth century, the call for small claims courts to be established on equitable principles outside the common law was associated with Leveller appeals to simplify and democratise access to law. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, in the context of the politics of the Restoration and the later establishment of Whig ascendancy, the cause of courts based on equitable principles was associated with Tory principles and championed by Tory politicians. Over time, however, as Finn demonstrates, the Whig oligarchy came to see the benefits of equity courts for the particularities of plebeian debt. The 1740s and 1750s saw a wave of acts establishing equity courts to administer petty debts in London, Lincoln, Birmingham, St Albans, Liverpool, Canterbury, Boston, Sheffield and Yarmouth. The petitions advocating such courts frequently referred to the benefits they would bring for labouring-class families.¹⁶ In the writings of the 1750s, we can see the synthesis of Tory paternalist principles and more Whiggish notions of the justice and utility of such institutions to a commercial nation. The author of one petition, concerning the need for a court of conscience in the Liberty of Westminster, written in 1750, argued that ‘nothing in former times...rendered the Ancient lawgivers

¹⁶ Margot Finn, ‘Enlightened Equity: Petty Credit and the Reformulation of Law in the Eighteenth

more Eminent than the care of preserving the Poor from Oppression'. 'The Poor Labourer and Tradesman', he claimed, 'will find himself easy in the constraint which is put upon him to repay...by the gentle orders of Conscience equity'. In addition, lenders would be encouraged to 'supply the necessities of the poor borrower, when he sees it morally impossible for him to lose his money, so long as his debtor is in a condition to pay it', rather than being 'buried alive in the prisons of Marshalsea, Borough-Court and other inferior Jurisdictions'.¹⁷

However, the degree to which progressive ideology had accommodated itself to the possibilities embedded in the small claims courts, whether they were established on equity principles or otherwise, is evident from a pamphlet published in 1751 by a London barrister, Joshua Fitzsimmonds. Fitzsimmonds' pamphlet was a wide-ranging but fairly concise treatise on the law in general. In it, he espoused both a defence of the common law as an organic and evolving entity, adjusting itself to historically specific needs and a call to simplify and codify the law so that 'every Subject should have the proper means afforded him to attaining a Knowledge of the Laws by which he is bound'. This was coupled to a plea for petty debt courts, though not ones based on equity principles. Instead, Fitzsimmonds recommended inferior courts with gradated charges and costs. For by this means, 'the expence of proceedings would bear a proportion to the Cause of the Action', delays and costs could be avoided and 'useful credit among the lower Sort of People strengthened and

Century', unpublished paper presented to History Department Seminar, University of Warwick.

¹⁷ *Reasons for Establishing a Court of Conscience in the Liberty of Westminster* (1750), p. 1. See also *Reasons for Establishing Courts of Conscience in the City of Westminster, Borough of Southwark, Finsbury-Division and the Tower Hamlets* (1750); Finn, 'Enlightened Equity', pp. 16-17.

confirmed'. This was not merely essential to maintaining families whose wages were paid in arrears. It would perform a commercially progressive function. 'For Trade', he claimed, 'is a connected chain, the breaking of the last link of which, sensibly affects the first'. 'If', he argued, 'we consider the great Number there are of Labourers and working Men, tho' their Consumption of Goods, as Individuals, is not so great as the private Consumption of those in higher Ranks', it was still demonstrably the case that 'taken as a Body, the lower Rank of People, on account of their Numbers, consumer more Goods and of course are of more Consequence to Trade than any other Rank of men among us'. 'The less Credit these poor People have', he concluded, 'the less is their Consumption of Goods'.¹⁸ Fitzsimmonds' pamphlet sought to establish an institutional framework to enable greater and more secure access to credit in order to unleash the potential of the labouring poor, both as producers and consumers. We can see a more negative conception of police outlined in the most famous pamphlet of the period, Henry Fielding's Enquiry into the Late Increase of Robbers.

Part III:

Fielding had been appointed a magistrate for the city and liberty of Westminster and the County of Middlesex in 1748. His appointment was, in part, a reward for journalistic work for the Pelham administration, a fact that earned him the mockery of many of his old Tory companions who considered him a profiteering

¹⁸ Joshua Fitzsimmonds, Free and Candid Disquisitions on the Nature and Execution of the Laws of

trimmer and derided him as a 'trading justice'.¹⁹ However, Fielding's appointment was not simply a personal political movement. It was also indicative of the ongoing partial political rapprochement between the whig administration and its erstwhile opponents. Fielding might have been an appointee, constrained by loyalism to the King's ministers, but his 'social pamphlets' of the period demonstrate a distinctively mid-century form of conservative ideology, a form of conservative thought which had thoroughly acclimatised to the new realities of a commercial society.

The Enquiry, published in 1751, was the culmination of two years of ceaseless activity on the city benches in which Fielding had been instrumental in breaking up several gangs of robbers, receivers and raiding gaming houses. He had established networks of informers across London and a set of special constables whose sole function was pursuit of suspects through the street.²⁰ These years had given him the authority that ensured him an audience when he published the Enquiry. They had also shaped his analysis of the London labouring people.

Whereas Fitzsimmonds saw the consumer desires of the labouring people as sources of economic potential for the nation, Fielding viewed the same desires as requiring strong-armed policing. The Enquiry mobilised an impressive display of classical and historical learning, legal knowledge and empirical experience in its analysis. But the chief formal feature of Fielding's tract was its oscillation between

England, Both in Civil and Criminal Affairs (London, 1751), pp. 34-35.

¹⁹ Malvin R. Zirker, (ed.), Henry Fielding: An Enquiry into the Cause of the Late Increase of Robbers and Related Writings, The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding (Oxford, 1988), 'Introduction', pp. xvii-lx; see also idem., Fielding's Social Pamphlets: A Study of the 'Enquiry into the Late cause of Robbers' and 'A Proposal' for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor' (Berkeley, 1966); Martin C. Battestin and R. R. Battestin, Henry Fielding: A Life (London, 1989).

stock conservative concepts, familiar from the early eighteenth century and a pragmatic instrumentality in their application that prevented the Enquiry from ever mobilising the moral and substantive force that such concepts had previously possessed. Fielding's Enquiry resembles a Mandevillian resolution of the dilemmas of early eighteenth-century conservative ideology, in which the only response to the processes he describes can be nakedly Machiavellian 'policy'.²¹

Fielding argued that, over the course of time, the English commonalty had, through insufficient enforcement of feudal obligations, thrown off the restraints to their liberty. Trade had then begun to influence them, transforming their manners and customs, turning all into luxury, pride, craft, wealth and equality. But trade had brought refinement and power to the nation. The wise 'politician' had to recognise that there were 'many emoluments to compensate all the moral evils introduced by trade, by which the grandeur of the nation is carried to a pitch that it could never otherwise have reached'. The task of the politician was to promote these emoluments, while minimising the ill effects of moral evils.²² Fielding saw his task as providing an analysis that would help facilitate such policy by explaining exactly how far the politician could intervene in the case of luxury.

The cause of the increase of robbers was chiefly, Fielding claimed, the 'vast torrent of luxury which of late years hath poured itself into this nation'. His

²⁰ For Fielding's activities as a Justice, see Rogers, 'Confronting the Crime Wave', pp. 82-86; Zirker, An Enquiry and Related Writings, pp. xvii-lxxi.

²¹ Henry Fielding, An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers etc., With Some Proposals for Remedying this Growing Evil (London, 1751), in Zirker, An Enquiry and Related Writings.

²² Fielding, An Enquiry, pp. 70-71.

condemnation of luxury was, of course, thoroughly devoid of moral content. The fundamental problem was the luxury of the labouring people who, 'aspiring still to a Degree beyond that which belongs to them and not being able, by the Fruits of honest Labour to support that which they affect', chose to 'disdain the Wages to which their Industry would entitle them'. 'Abandoning themselves to Idleness', he claimed, 'the more simple and poor-spirited betake themselves to a state of beggary and starving, while those of more Art and Courage become Thieves, Sharpers and Robbers'.²³ The problem was that the civil power had not kept pace with the social changes associated with the transformation to a trading nation. However, the solution was not the eradication of luxury, for this was probably impossible. 'Bad habits in the Body Politic, especially if of any Duration', he claimed, 'are seldom to be wholly eradicated'. In a manner reminiscent of Hume, he argued, instead that 'Palliatives' be 'gently applied to suit the Taste and Genius of the People'.²⁴ A brief examination of the section Fielding denotes to urban diversions shows what he had in mind.

Fielding argued that the urban environment of London provided innumerable temptations to luxury. But the true problem for society lay not in luxury in general, but in the 'immense variety of Places' that the city provided 'for the Amusement of the Lowest order of the People'. If, he claimed, 'a Computation was made of the Money expended in these temples of Idleness by the artificer, the handicraft, the Apprentice or even the common Labourer, the sum would appear... much greater than such people can and should afford'. Such places thus became 'a certain Method

²³ Ibid., p. 77.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 78.

to fill the streets with beggars and the Gaols with Debtors and Thieves'. Magistrates lacked the power to intervene to control 'this branch of Luxury' and required some form of legislation to provide them with the tools to act. However, Fielding made it clear that he 'would be understood to aim at the Retrenchment only, not at the Extirpation of Diversion'. Even in seeking its restraint, he said, 'I confine myself entirely to the lower Order of People'. For the balance of accounting with such people placed their luxury on the wrong side of useful. 'Society' might derive 'some temporal advantage' from the luxury of the rich, but for those for whom 'Time and Money are almost synonymous...it becomes the legislature, as much as possible to suppress all temptations whereby they may be induced *too profusely* [my emphasis] to squander one or the other'.²⁵

Beneath Fielding's rhetoric of luxury, corruption and bodies politic, therefore, we can see a decisively reformulated conservative ideology. Luxury was a natural attendant of commerce and it was to be designated useful or non-useful according to the wealth and position of the individual concerned. Labourers were not to be denied amusement. Just as they were entitled to the fruits of honest labour, they were entitled to relaxation. All that they had to be denied was the capacity to indulge themselves beyond what they could afford. Implicit in Fielding's pamphlet is a world which accepts that labourers should enjoy the fruits of a commercial society, but

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 79-84. For a similar view of proper policy towards recreations and gaming, see The Vices of the Cities of London and Westminster, Trac'd From their Original (Dublin, 1751), pp. 26-30. Like Fielding's, this pamphlet is filled with the high-blown rhetoric of corruption, luxury, vice, immorality and irreligion, but its proposals are thoroughly utilitarian in their application. See also Charles Jones, Some Methods Towards Putting a Stop to the Flagrant Crimes of Murder, Robbery and Perjury and for more Effectually Preventing the Pernicious Consequences of Gaming among the lower Class of People (London, 1752), pp. 18-23.

which encourages politicians to ensure that this never exceeds what society requires of them. And Fielding introduces a note of conflict into the Enquiry, making clear the double standard and the antagonistic interests that underpin a commercial society and undermining the power of universalistic progressive pieties: 'To be born for no other purpose than to consume the Fruits of the Earth is the privilege (if it may be called a Privilege) of very few. The greater part of Mankind must sweat hard to produce them, or Society will no longer answer the purpose for which it was ordained'.²⁶

This prescription and the analysis that underpinned it seem, at first sight, to contradict the assumptions that underpinned the Fielding brothers' other chief project of the 1750s, the Universal Register Office. Opened in the Strand in 1749/50 and moving to Castle Court five years later, this sought, in the words of Henry Fielding, to 'bring all the world into one place'. It appeared in the wake of a series of experiments during the seventeenth century. Though the idea was not new, the exact purpose of the Register Office differed substantially from those which had legitimated its forebears. The advertising pamphlet began with the bald statement that 'Man is said to be by nature a Social Animal' and that society alone can satisfy all human faculties and provide for 'all the wants to which our Nature is susceptible'. From this, it followed that, 'in Proportion to the Opulence of any Society, the wants of its Members will be multiplied and secondly, the more numerous its members, the less likelihood will there be that any of these Wants should remain unsatisfied'. Society

²⁶ Ibid., p. 80.

created more wants and at the same time gave it the means to fulfil these wants, 'by the intervention of what is called trade or Traffick'.²⁷

What we see here is not in fact a departure from Fielding's concern with the luxury of the city. The implicit model of regulated and enlightened exchange that underpins the enquiry is made manifest in the Plan. For the Register Office was to be an information service that negotiated the complexity of advanced commercial societies. 'In large and populous Cities and wide extended communities, it is most probable that every human Talent is dispersed somewhere', Fielding claimed. Consequently, 'every person who stands in need of that talent, might supply his Want if he knew where to find it'. But, 'to know this is the Difficulty and this Difficulty still Increases with the largeness of Society'.²⁸

Careful examination of Fielding's pamphlet reveals little progressive zeal regarding the moral potential of commerce. Commerce has a capacity for improvement, but it is a limited capacity which seems to owe more to Humean empirical history than progressive historicism. Large and complex commercial societies fulfil their capacity for perfection when no talent goes unused and no want unrelieved. The Register Office, then, was conceived as an article of commercial police, permitting the centralising of information in one place and the mapping of a commercial city, a city comprised of talents and wants and traversed by commodities.

²⁷ [Henry Fielding] A Plan of the Universal Register Office Opposite Cecil Street in the Strand (London, 1751), in Bertrand A. Goldgar (ed.), Henry Fielding: The Covent-Garden Journal and A Plan of the Universal Register-Office, the Wesleyan Edition of the Complete Works of Henry Fielding (Oxford, 1988), pp. 4-5; See also Miles Ogborn, Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies 1680-1780 (New York, 1998), pp. 211-219.

²⁸ Fielding, A Plan, p. 5.

At the Register Office one could, in theory at least, buy or sell services, goods or labour, borrow money, rent or let lodgings, place advertisements and plan travel. In a society where time was money, the emphasis was upon remedying the difficulties of urban knowledge and fulfilling, as much as was possible, the enlightened ideal of transparent commercial exchange.²⁹ I would suggest, then, that the utilitarian aspect of the Universal Register office was internally related to the instrumental politics of the Enquiry. Both sought to use institutions to regulate and police the conduct of commerce which was merely an advanced species of the natural desire for social intercourse.

Much of the popularity of Henry Fielding's Enquiry derived from the broad consensus that existed over the need to regulate commercial and social conduct, to align it firmly with notions of the rational exchange of private property. The administration and the monarch signalled their intent in 1751 when the King opened the session of parliament. The speech urged the members of both houses to 'make the best use of the present tranquillity, for improving the trade and commerce of my kingdom, for enforcing the execution of the laws' and for 'suppressing those outrages and violences which are inconsistent with all good order and government and endanger the lives and properties of my subjects'.³⁰ In February of the same year, Parliament appointed a cross-party committee of sixty-nine MPs under the direction

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 5-7.

³⁰ 'The King's Speech on Opening the Session, Jan. 17, 1751', in W. Cobbett, The Parliamentary History of England, From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803, Vol. 14 (London, 1813), p. 789.

of the solicitor-general, Sir Richard Lloyd, to consider the causes of the robberies that plagued the propertied classes.³¹

The committee's work that year produced reports whose content shaped several legislative measures. At the centre of these measures we can see common assumptions about the need to regulate the urban environment and, in particular, the 'The Multitude of Places of Entertainment for the lower Sort of People'. They also shared a perception that labouring-class families needed supporting and policing. Too many were irregular unions or broken families, producing unruly children who resorted to theft because they knew no better. Both the Act for better preventing thefts and robberies' of 1752 and Hardwicke's Marriage Act in 1753 can be seen to have drawn their legitimation from the work of these social reformers. What met with far less consensus were the proposals that came from Lloyd's felonies committee regarding the poor laws.³²

Part IV:

The form of charitable initiatives at the mid century expressed the growing power of mercantile and financial capital and the growing aspiration to regulate the labour and consumption of the labouring classes. Commercial expansion developed

³¹ For details of the breakdown of the committee membership, see Connors, 'Pelham, Parliament and Public Policy', pp. 198-203, but key figures were Lloyd, Charles Grey, Henry Pelham, William Pitt, Charles Townshend, Henry Bathurst and General Oglethorpe.

³² Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society: Shuttles and Swords* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 37-53; John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 90-105. For the reports, see *HCI*, 25 (1751), pp. 159, 190. For the Act,

the potential contained within the smaller forms of joint-stock charitable activity seen in the early eighteenth century. The charitable foundations of the mid century were more developed forms of capital investment, staffed by financiers, merchants and contractors whose business expertise was directed towards maximising the efficiency and rationality of charitable investment and thereby demonstrating the harmony of private interest and public good. In its content, this charitable activity sought to police the reproductive regime of London's labour force. It aimed to encourage marriage, provide better care for pregnant women, rescue abandoned women and, finally, to rehabilitate prostitutes. The labouring-class family unit, the embodiment of a harmonious fusion of useful labour and useful desires, lay at the centre of these charitable foundations.³³

These principles and these forms of relief increasingly shaped thinking upon the need to reform the structures of public relief. The failure of initiatives to provide employment for the poor during the 1720s and 1730s drove reformers and particularly progressive ideology, towards an attempt to import the forms and aspirations of London charity into the poor laws. The bills that sought to overhaul the poor laws in the early 1750s demonstrated a series of efforts to combine private and public relief, to infuse public relief with the spirit of private charity. They also sought to place the labouring-class family at the centre of reform. Labouring-class children in particular, were to be encouraged to become self-sufficient, to maintain and improve themselves. William Hay's bill of 1747, Lloyd's own bill of 1752 and that of Lord

see 25 George II. c.6; Rogers, 'Confronting the Crime Wave', p. 88; Connors, 'Pelham, Parliament and Public Policy', pp. 207-209.

³³ Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, pp. 57-72, 75-90; Linebaugh, *London Hanged*, pp. 148-149.

Hillsborough the same year all sought to reshape the provision of poor relief around the needs of a labouring-class domestic economy and family unit. They also sought to channel the energies and drives central to private charitable activities into the forms of public relief, harmonising commercial agency with public provision.³⁴

All these bills failed in their tortuous career through Parliament. Undoubtedly, the contingent factors of time and complexity did not help but, ultimately, the forms of these proposals, despite the cross party composition of the committees that considered them, fell foul of the obduracy of the landed gentlemen and Tory interests. The corporations, as ever, threatened the power and the purses of the elites in closed rural parishes, generally Tory in composition. They also threatened the power of the gentry in the counties, erecting new centres of authority and diminishing the social power of justices by enabling the commercial middling sorts to serve as guardians of the poor. But the response of such conservatives was not dogmatic defence of the parish system. Rather, they too sought to use the virtues of both private and public charity to the somewhat different end of preserving the extant relations of power in whatever social entity they chose to focus upon, parish or nation.

This impression is reinforced when we examine one of the pamphlets that appeared during 1752 when the bills were in preparation. Sir Charles Grey was a Tory MP sitting for Colchester and a member of Lloyd's felonies committee. His Considerations on Several Proposals Lately made for the Better Maintenance of the Poor, was sharply critical of William Hay's Remarks, reprinted in 1751 and of

³⁴ For the importance of combinations of public and private charity at this time and the new emphasis on self-sufficiency, see Innes, 'Mixed Economy', pp. 157-160; Connors, 'Pelham,

Lloyd's report. Grey prefaced his attack with observations, reminiscent of Fielding and Clayton, that the social hierarchy achieved meaning in the overarching context of a commercial society. The interests of land and trade, he argued, 'are always the same'. The duty of gentlemen within this society was to maintain the social obligations attendant upon possession of land. This meant a paternalistic attention to the conduct of parish officers.³⁵

Like Fielding, Grey argued that society was characterised by a 'general corruption of human nature' and a depravation of morals which luxury and riches do always produce'. However, the existence of the poor laws and the charitable activity of the nation showed that, at least among the 'great and opulent', there remained 'such a spirit of benevolence and charity as cannot easily be described or sufficiently commended'. The laws, he argued, were essentially good and, as such, they merely needed to be re-invigorated by the charitable spirit that he claimed demonstrated the vitality and necessity of the social order. The poor laws, he argued, simply needed tighter overseeing to prevent particular abuses. In general, the settlement laws functioned well in preventing the poor from 'wandering' and helped to 'promote a good behaviour in the poor towards their own parish'. The poor laws preserved social hierarchy by giving the great an interest in charity and the poor an interest in deference.³⁶

Parliament and Public Policy', pp. 223-237; *HCI* 25 (1751), p. 289; Rogers, 'Confronting the Crime Wave', pp. 89-91.

³⁵ Charles Grey, *Considerations on Several Proposals Lately Made for the Better Maintenance of the Poor* (London, 1752), pp. iv-vi.

³⁶ Grey, *Considerations*, pp. v-vi, 2-9, 16-20. Grey praised Fielding's *Enquiry* for its analysis of the problems in society and applauded the hints contained at the end concerning the best way to make the laws work better. Grey urged Fielding to intervene in the debate more fully. When the latter did

Grey's pamphlet was answered by Sir James Creed. His Impartial Examination of Grey's publication ridiculed the notion that the laws functioned adequately, pointing to the miserable condition in which paupers were maintained and the cruelty and cost of settlement disputes. Lloyd's report, he argued, was wholly admirable as it aimed at 'preserving the rising generation from the Vices so glaring in the lower People'. It was beyond doubt that these proposals, if enacted, would 'heal these Disorders and raise up a Set of People inured to Industry and unacquainted with Debauchery'.³⁷

The full meaning and logical endpoint of such progressive optimism regarding the potential of the poor was explored in detail in Thomas Alcock's Observations on the Defects of the Poor Laws, also published in 1752. Alcock's pamphlet represents the most complete expression of the position implicit in Hay, Lloyd and Hillsborough's reform proposals and in Creed's rebuttal of Grey. Alcock's writing also took the formal emphasis on the improving potential of private charity to its most extreme point.³⁸

Alcock argued that 'the Business of the Poor was not rightly managed'. The intentions behind the poor laws were honourable and just. In particular, the aspiration to employ all the poor was admirable. But, because it had been consistently ignored,

so, in 1753, as Zirker rightly notes, Grey must have been dismayed by the substance of the proposals. See Zirker, 'General Introduction', p. lxxiv.

³⁷ [James Creed] An Impartial Examination of a Pamphlet Intituled, Considerations of Several Proposals (London, 1752), pp. 12, 42-43. A. W. Coats saw this as part of a trend toward more sympathetic poor law policy, reflecting economic thought's 'humanitarian' turn. See, A. W. Coats, 'Economic Thought and Poor Law Policy in the Eighteenth Century', Economic History Review, 8, 6 (1960), pp. 39-51.

³⁸ Little is known about Alcock, save that he was a graduate of Oxford University and became vicar of Runcorn in Cheshire. Aside from his writings on the poor laws, he published a tract against the cider tax in 1763.

the burden of relieving the impotent and the able bodied poor had become immense. The causes of this were the failure to discern true from false need and the neglect of the causes of poverty. Any law regarding the poor had to look carefully at the causes of distress as the claims of someone brought to poverty by his own 'ill Conduct' and those of one 'reduced by unavoidable misfortune' were in no sense equal.³⁹

This neglect had the twin effect of generating a massive burden of relief upon the propertied and creating the misguided belief among the poor that they had a right and privilege to maintenance. These two consequences both functioned to destroy natural motives towards sociability. Among the poor, the standing laws had 'a Tendency to hurt Industry, care and Frugality'. 'The Fear of one Day coming to Want', Alcock claimed, 'is a Strong Motive with most People to be Industrious, careful and Sober and to make use of their Youth and health and strength, to provide something for accidents, sickness and the imbecilities of Old Age'. The law that made people perceive a right to relief made them neglect the rational motive to provide for their future happiness. In doing so, they neglected a form of rational pleasure characteristic of mid-century progressive ideology, a form of delayed gratification. For the alternative was instant luxurious indulgence: 'The sluggard upon this presumption, is tempted to continue in Sloth, the Glutton as he receives his Gains, eats them and the Drunkard drinks them'. This, he argued, was the source of the 'new species of expense' that could be found among the poor. As we saw in chapter

³⁹ Thomas Alcock, Observations on the Defects of the Poor Laws and on the causes and consequences of the Great Increase and Burden of the Poor (London, 1752), pp. 6-10.

five, snuff, tobacco, tea, fine clothes and gin were all included in this category, described as new luxuries.⁴⁰

While such luxurious expenditure obstructed the operation of natural motives among the poor, it also served to erect a barrier to the operation of social affections among the rich. Alcock argued that God had implanted an 'innate Philanthropy' in men. 'The Principles or Passions of love, Pity, Compassion, Sympathy and so forth' he claimed, 'are wrought into our very frame'. In exercising these 'kindly Affections', men 'not only feel an immediate Pleasure' but, in fulfilling the will of God, they also catered to the remote and delayed gratification contained within salvation.

Philanthropy, therefore, can be seen as an almost Hutchesonian form of rational pleasure. The poor laws prevented the natural operation of these sentiments. The assertion of a right by the pauper made him ungrateful for the acts of social kindness performed by the payer of relief. This bred 'disrespect, ingratitude and contempt on the side of the pauper', untying the bonds of 'union, friendship and society' in the process by eroding the relationship of 'beneficence and thankfulness'.⁴¹ Alcock here attempted to positively reinvest the legitimacy of the social order by making it a conduit for the social affections. His vision of the social order represented a positive version of that of John Clayton, which we saw in chapter four. Where Clayton sought to preserve the existing social order by instrumentally translating it into the terms of a commercial society, Alcock made the social order's existence and legitimacy contingent upon the sentimental and affective content of relationships of paternalism

⁴⁰ Alcock, *Observations*, pp. 10-12, 45-50.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24. 14.

and deference. If these were not infused with love and affect, they were not valid. The poor laws, as they stood, rendered the social order less valid by reducing the progressive potential to indulge the social passions.

The solution, for Alcock, was a system of relief that reinforced the work of affect in society. It had to permit the natural motives in labourers towards care and self-sufficiency, while enabling the proper flow of the sympathetic affections that justified inequality. The existing laws, for example, in denying settlement to the poor, hindered workmen from settling in towns and parishes and developing manufactures and trade. As the laws stood, 'ingenious Artists can find no Encouragement'. Settlement laws also prevented the natural growth of population. A good set of laws would encourage labourers and enable them to marry and breed more children.⁴² In emphasising the need to allow the free movement of labour in and out of parishes, Alcock fulfilled and developed notions present in William Hay's Remarks of 1735, presenting yet another indicator that the realities and necessities of proletarian labour were superseding the fetishisation of place written into the laws.

Alcock also reiterated Hay's vision of the function of workhouses. These should, he argued, provide labour for all who wanted and were capable of it. They should be based on the district unit and should aim to be self-sufficient by developing the manufactures necessary to clothe and feed the poor. If possible, they were to provide manufactures for existing local markets also, furthering the attempt to make the workhouse a mirror of the ideal labouring-class subject for a commercial nation.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 19-20.

And, because workers were driven to work by natural motives to improvement, the workhouses should provide a system of promotions within the industry of the establishments. However, the workhouse was also to become the centre of a reform effort within each district. 'Those who frequent tippling houses, neglect to provide for their Families, refuse to labour and have no apparent way of getting a Livelihood', were to be forced into the workhouse where, should they refuse to labour, they would be moved into the more punitive regime of the house of correction. This, Alcock thought, would deter the poor and encourage them to realise that it was 'better to live among their friends and live at home': Thus 'care and Industry would Increase among the Poor...and great Advantage accrue therefore to the Public'.⁴³

Alcock's ideal therefore, was an industrious and economical family, naturally impelled to save up a proportion of their gains to make sure that they would survive the periods of scarcity inherent in manufacturing labour. The mechanism that would best ensure this was a version of the district workhouse scheme. But Alcock also sought to reinvest public charity with the social affections that powered society and commerce alike. Although it could not be done at once, he suggested, the best course would be to place the workhouses on a voluntary donation basis, replicating the forms of urban charity that seemed to have succeeded so well. 'There are', he claimed, 'more Houses of Oeconomy, Frugality and good management under a

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 55-63; See also William Bailey, A Treatise on the Better Employment and More Comfortable Support of the Poor in Workhouses (London, 1758). Bailey was the Registrar of the Society for Promoting Arts and Commerce. His pamphlet significantly develops the functions of the workhouse outlined in Alcock. In particular, Bailey emphasises the role of competing in local markets. Compare this with John Micklebrough, The Great Duty of Labour and Work and the Necessity there is at Present for Agreeing and Fixing Some Plan for a Work-House for the Poor of this Place (Cambridge, 1751).

voluntary, than under a compulsory method of support'. And Alcock also mentioned, with approval, the formation of Friendly Societies among the poor, a development that progressive and conservative writers alike would increasingly elaborate on during the later eighteenth century. Alcock's pamphlet marks the first moment in a new movement towards the total abolition of the laws, generated not simply by the feeling that they were eroding the charitable imperative, but that they were eroding motives towards self improvement, equally founded in the operations of the social affections that impelled commerce.⁴⁴

The following year, Henry Fielding published his anticipated intervention into the issue of poor law reform. His scheme can again be read as displaying a conservative approach to the reform of the poor laws, seeking rather to shore up the social order than to improve the poor. However, it differed markedly from Sir Charles Grey's defence of the parish system. Rather, Fielding seemed to attempt to appropriate Hay and Alcock's emphasis upon large institutions, developing his notion of a socially conservative police which patrolled the boundaries of legitimate commerce and social behaviour.

In his Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor, Fielding laid out a conservative case for reforming the system of poor relief in such a way that the social hierarchy would be strengthened and the national interest of a trading nation best served. First, the scope for improvement was far more circumscribed than for Alcock. 'Among civilised people', he claimed, 'that polity is the best established in which all the members...are obliged to contribute a share to the Strength and Wealth

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp 26-38; idem., Remarks on Two Bills for the Better Maintenance of the Poor, In a Letter

of the Public'. Given that labour was the share of the poor who possessed nothing but their labour to sell, the idle were worse than useless. Consequently, it would, 'in a merely civil sense, be the interest of such a society to lessen its numbers and by some means or other to shake off or lop off the useless and burthensome part'. It was simply the business of the 'wise and good legislature' to ensure that such radical measures were not necessary.⁴⁵ It was even possible, he suggested, that the laws were subject to 'inveterate defect'. Far from being defeatism, he argued, such an attitude was 'so rational and at the same time so decent a Conclusion that far from blaming it, I am almost overborne with it'.⁴⁶

Yet, despite these difficulties, he sought to enlist the services of the 'Men of Great Property' in charitable works because of their unique capacity to combine a view of the national interest with compassion and sympathy. But it was hard to be a genuine paternalist in the city. For who visited the homes of the London poor? Fielding provided the missing knowledge, evoking the sensations experienced by anyone who came into contact with their suffering. For he urged, 'if we were to make a Progress through the Outskirts of this Town and look into the habitations of the Poor, we should there behold such pictures of Human Misery as must move the Compassion of every heart that deserves the name human'.⁴⁷

Fielding's solution was what appears to have been an appropriation of

to a Member of Parliament (London, 1753), pp. 29-30.

⁴⁵ Henry Fielding, A Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor etc., For Amending their Morals and For Rendering them Useful Members of Society (London, 1753), repr. in Zirker, An Enquiry..and Related Writings, pp. 227-230.

⁴⁶ Fielding, A Proposal, pp. 231-232.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Alcock's scheme for houses of industry, paid for by a one-off rate that would make it possible to abolish the system of poor relief. Six thousand poor were to be housed in the massive building Fielding envisaged. This establishment would combine workhouse, hospital and house of correction, catering for every avenue of relief provided under the auspices of public and private charity under one roof, based on the county as an administrative unit. Fielding argued that such a massive scale was absolutely necessary for inculcating the orderly conduct appropriate for a modern and civilised society. First, a building of this size would restore the poor to the care of the great and take them out of the hands of parish officers, those of a mean condition. The county house was therefore envisaged as bolstering the authority of the traditional social hierarchy. 'Great men' would be needed to manage the poor in such a building and only a county-level endeavour of the size described would offer a sufficient salary to entice men with the requisite qualities. Yet, while its aspirations may have been conservative, its technologies were certainly modern. The county house was envisaged as providing education in diverse manufactures for those who passed through it. It was to create a reserve army of labour for local manufacturers to draw upon at will. Finally, its large size was seen to make the work of discipline easier and cheaper.⁴⁸

The institutions were also designed to restrict their inmates' ability to indulge their desires. The large size of the institutions provided a strictly demarcated liberty of movement. 'In small and crowded workhouses' Fielding claimed, 'where there are no Courts or outlets to admit the air, the Poor are often so distempered that their

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 257-258.

keepers are obliged by common humanity to let them frequently out', whereupon they inevitably went back to begging. There was to be just enough liberty of movement within the walls of the establishment to inculcate the moderate enjoyment of such pleasures. The poor inmates were also to be instructed rigorously in religion, not because it was inherently right, but rather because it was useful in confining disorderly appetites. For Fielding, the atheist's argument that religion was a political device to 'awe Men into Obedience' was 'a clear acknowledgement of the usefulness of it to the ends of Government'. Even for those who 'very seldom or never hear the word Religion mentioned', the notions of 'Heaven and hell when rung in the ears of those who have not yet learnt that there are no such places and who will give some Attention to what they hear, are by no means words of little or no significance'. 'Hope and Fear, two very strong and active Passions' could, he argued, 'hardly find a fuller or more adequate Object to amuse and employ them' and 'this more especially in a place where there will be so little of temptation, to rouse them or gratify the evil Inclinations of human nature; where Men will find so few of those good things, of this world, for which the other is every day bartered'. 'It is Religion alone', he argued, 'that can accomplish so great and desirable a Work'.⁴⁹

Fielding envisaged his county houses as functioning to mystify the poor in the interest of making them more useful subjects, less prone to idleness and luxury. Religion would play upon their ignorance and fears, manipulating them into reproducing their own subjection and conniving them into continuing to offer their labour. The world of circulating commodities provided too much temptation to

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 271-272.

properly ensure the reproduction of the social order. However, in figuring religion this way, Fielding demonstrated that religion was indeed an instrument of government, a set of affections and imperatives confined to the world of subjective perception. Fielding's configuration of the function of irrational belief would be developed in the later eighteenth-century forms of conservative ideology, receiving a greater charge as the sentimental revolution took hold of bourgeois thought and as the social order began to appear more fragile and more than ever dependent upon such manipulative 'state tricks'.

Fielding's contribution also prefigured the formal innovations in poor relief during the later eighteenth century. Like Alcock, Fielding envisaged that the county houses would make it possible to abolish the rates entirely. The cost of the institutions was great, he admitted, but no rational man could overlook the advantages of a one-off contribution towards the sum of £100, 000 to the annual expense of the rates. Fielding's scheme must appeal to a society founded upon the priority of private interest and the motive to profit. 'Private Interest, from this respect alone, will to every wise man recommend a scheme by which he may propose to be so great a gainer'. And this motive, 'in proportion as he is a good man, will be greatly enhanced by those arguments that relate to the Public'. For Fielding, as much as his contemporaries, the appropriate forms of relief were those that were built around the internal imperatives of men in a trading society. For Alcock, poor relief had to harness the progressive power of the social affections. For Fielding's more negative and conservative vision, man possessed drives towards his own interest which may or may not be supplemented by a perception of a public interest, which itself could be

reproduced to the maintenance and reproduction of the social order. Poor relief had to form itself around these realities, harnessing the profit motive and preserving the structures of the social hierarchy by whatever means were necessary.

Alcock and Fielding's attempts to rethink the forms of poor relief would be developed in greater detail in the later eighteenth century. The potential within schemes for a police of the poor and for the abolition of the poor laws would be developed in the changing context of the 1760s and 1770s. A series of grain shortages, an acute phase in the ongoing expropriation of land in the name of capitalist agriculture and the consequent rise in poor relief, all bespoke an intensifying class conflict that threw the structures of poor relief and ideas of reform into a new light. It is to this transformed material and ideal environment that we must now turn.

Chapter Seven

‘All Property is Threatened Across Party Lines’¹:

The Debate Over Wages, Profits and Prices

In this chapter, I shift the focus of the thesis onto the debates of the 1760s and 1770s. The concerns thrown up by these debates showed a marked change from those which had preoccupied mid-century writers. The focus of attention in discussions of the condition of the labouring classes shifted away from specific concerns with the urban poor and onto the standard of living of the labouring classes as a whole. Urban and rural manufacturers and the agricultural poor all became the subject of debates that ranged over wage levels, food price and the profits of commerce. The reasons for this change of focus are briefly surveyed below.

Part I:

The cognitive advances permitted by the ideological developments of the mid century enabled the pursuit of more rationalistic forms of commercial endeavour, further facilitating the greater concentration of capital in the hands of the industrial, commercial and agricultural bourgeoisie. The period witnessed an assault on the last of the English peasantry through the mechanism of enclosure, now with the unqualified sanction of Parliamentary statute. This further deepened the trend towards the creation of an entirely wage-dependent and price sensitive agrarian proletariat. The period also saw the development of a complex internal

and international market in agricultural foodstuffs. Sale now took place through factors and agents, buying and selling by sample. This left the market extremely vulnerable to speculation which could exacerbate the price rises consequent upon relatively small fluctuations in harvest size.²

For a wage-dependent workforce, such price rises could be disastrous. Labourers in agricultural areas might earn as little as six shillings per week, supplemented by a wife's earnings of six to ten pence. In some industrial regions they might earn seven or eight, with an additional four shillings from women's wages. For either, a rise in prices estimated at around forty per cent could be disastrous. Such price rises could result in dramatic reductions in a family's consumption of foodstuffs and a far greater fall in its consumption of manufactures. The consequent unemployment in manufacturing districts made these price rises potentially devastating events. At exactly this moment, the farming interests were attempting to place pressure on the British state to deregulate the market in foodstuffs. After the price rises and riots of 1766, the validity of the key Stuart statutes against grain market manipulation was affirmed by the executive and the judiciary alike. Yet, in the next six years, a tireless campaign by farmers, informed by free trade theory, led to the reversal of this decision and the overthrow of the Stuart statutes in 1772.³

¹ Timothy Cunningham, *An Essay on Trade and Commerce* (London, 1770), p. 52.

² J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 187-259; J. M. Martin, 'The Small Landowner and Parliamentary Enclosure in Warwickshire', *Economic History Review* 32 (1979), pp. 328-343; Mark Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy, 1500-1850* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 166-167; K. D. M. Snell, *The Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 138-227; J. A. Chartres, 'The Marketing of Agricultural Produce' in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* 5 (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 450-472; David Ormrod, *English Grain Exports and the Structure of Agrarian Capitalism, 1700-1760* (Hull, 1985), pp. 25-26.

³ Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers, *Eighteenth Century English Society: Shuttles and Swords* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 72-79; John Burnett, *A History of the Cost of Living* (London, 1969), pp.

In manufacturing districts, there was a similar assault upon the customary regulation of industry. Intense competition from new industries placed enormous pressure on manufacturing capital to break with the legal structures that governed industrial relations and to attack the residual customary culture of their workers. In the new industries themselves, the quest for higher productivity, less troubled by customary resistance, led to the more rapid use of machinery and pressure to lower industrial wages. The consequence was an objective sharpening of the contradiction between capital and labour in almost all spheres of production.⁴

The years between 1756 and 1772 saw unprecedented levels of labouring-class organisation in resisting these developments. The degrees of co-ordination of food riots, of strikes, machine breaking, wage disputes and petitioning demonstrated new levels of defensive cohesion within communities and across trades. This reflected the development of forms of industrial association in the shape of box clubs and friendly societies, aimed primarily at providing subsistence for sick workers but increasingly providing strike funds for trade disputes. Central

162-170, 178-188; P. H. Lindert and J. G. Williamson, 'English Workers' Living Standards During the Industrial Revolution: A New Look', *Economic History Review*, 36 (1983). For the debate on the regulation of the grain trade see Richard Sheldon, 'The Politics of Bread in Eighteenth-Century England', (Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1998), ch. 5. I am very grateful to him for allowing me to consult this work. See also Douglas Hay, 'The State and the Market in 1800: Lord Kenyon and Mr. Waddington', *Past and Present* 162 (1999), pp. 107-110. ⁴ For the various strands of the attack on customary regulation, see Hay and Rogers, *English Society*, pp. 97-114; R. W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England, 1700-1780* (London, 1981), pp. 146-153; E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', and 'Custom, Law and Common Right', in *Customs in Common* (London, 1991), pp. 97-184, 352-403; Neeson, *Commoners*, pp. 15-52. On the customary determination of wages, see E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, (London, 1968), pp. 344-37; John Rule, *The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1981), pp. 95-147; Adrian Randall, 'The Industrial Moral Economy of the Gloucestershire Weavers in the Eighteenth Century', in John Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism: The Formative Years* (London, 1988), pp. 34-47; idem., *Before the Luddites: Custom, Community and Machinery in the English Woollen Industry 1776-1809* (Cambridge, 1991). For the instructive case of the Spitalfields Silkweavers revolt, and other cases of struggle over customary perquisites and privileges, see Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 253-288; Andrew Charlesworth, David Gilbert, Adrian

to these struggles were notions of a just wage or a just price. For those sections of the labouring classes with residual connections to the customary culture of proto-industrial or peasant economies, these notions were structured by 'needs' that had become wholly unpalatable to large sections of the propertied classes. As the pressure upon their commodity grew, the residues of customary protection could assume vital importance.⁵ Where such structures did not exist, machine-breaking, collective bargaining and combination to withhold labour power was more common.⁶

Such a period of crisis did not simply divide capital from labour, it also divided sections of the propertied classes from each other. Manufacturing and agricultural lobbies blamed each other for the condition of the labouring classes. Perhaps more importantly, the lesser middle-class or middling-sort tradesmen and some industrial employers who depended on labouring-class markets could perceive this as yet more evidence that the state was in the hands of a clique of profiteers, intent on destroying the wider commerce of the nation for their own private interest: nabobs, speculators, engrossing landlords, merchant princes and aristocratic oligarchs. The plight of labourers could provide yet more evidence of

Randall, Humphrey Southall and Chris Wrigley (eds.), An Atlas of Industrial Protest in Britain (Basingstoke, 1996).

⁵ See, E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', in Customs in Common, pp. 185-258; Adrian Randall, 'The Gloucestershire Food Riots of 1766', Midland History 10 (1985), pp. 72-93; Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth, Markets, Market Culture and Protest in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland (Liverpool, 1996); Nicholas Rogers, Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain (Oxford, 1998), pp. 58-85; Malcolm Chase, Early Trade Unions: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 33-70.

⁶ For examples of machine breaking, proto-unionism and more modern-looking strikes, see Charlesworth et al., Atlas of Industrial Protest, pp. 18-31; Chase, Early Trade Unionism, pp. 39-42; Maxine Berg, The Age of Manufactures 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain (London, 1994), pp. 253-254; Richard Sheldon, 'The London Sailors Strike of 1768', in Charlesworth et al., Atlas of Industrial Protest, pp. 12-17; Rule, The Experience of Labour, ch. 4.

the corrupt and venal state that threatened the liberties and property of Englishmen.⁷

These grievances found political expression in the emergence of a radical reform movement around Wilkes. In Wilkite reform, middling political aspirations developed from under the umbrella of country ideology into a more rational form which foregrounded concepts of association, accountability and independence. The attack on the luxury and tyranny of the great formed an essential part of the rhetorical and explanatory force of Wilkite ideology. Not the least alarming aspect of all this for the big bourgeoisie, was the participation of sections of the labouring classes in this explicitly political programme. From this point on, the nation's governors would always be aware of the possibility of coalitions between the middling tradesmen and professionals who comprised the main body of Wilkite associations, and sections of the labouring classes.⁸

These social and political alignments within the state were also expressed in the prevalent forms of thought and ideology of the period. Under the pressure of the obvious conflicts within society, progressive ideology split increasingly between its economic and its jurisprudential or moral imperatives. As the national

⁷ John Brewer, 'English Radicalism in the Age of George III', in J. G. A. Pocock (ed.), *Three British Revolutions, 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 333-343; James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England 1750-1800* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 157-180; P. Lawson, and J. Philips, "'Our Execrable Banditti': Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Albion* 16 (1984), pp. 225-241; H. V. Bowen, "'The Pests of Society: Stockbrokers, Jobbers and Speculators in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain', *History* 78, 252 (1993), pp. 38-53; Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 184-104.

⁸ On the social charge and ideological content of Wilkite radicalism, see Brewer, 'English Radicalism', pp. 323-343; Wilson, *Sense of the People*, pp. 206-236; John Brewer, 'The Commercialization of Politics', in John Brewer, Neil McKendrick and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (London, 1982), pp. 197-262; idem., idem., 'The Wilkites and the Law' in John Brewer and John Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1980), pp. 128-171. On the intersection of this political ideology with the politics of the labouring classes, see George Rudé, 'Wilkes and

and international market began to appear more remote to human intervention, more subject to natural laws and increasingly devoid of moral content, these imperatives were beginning to be seen as antithetical, despite their actual inner continuity.

The same process was at work in the conservative ideology of the period. Its starting point was the increasingly evident gap between progressive notions of the potential within the labouring people and their empirically observed culture. Conservative ideology consisted of two connected but diverging strands: one which used the emergent science of political economy to justify the existence of inequality and confine the desires of the labouring poor; one which advocated the deliberate manipulation of their irrational tendencies in the interests of order.

All these strains of thought presupposed the essentially commodified status of labour and projected human desires and needs through this given fact. But both progressive and conservative ideology contained some recognition of the existence of needs and wants that were not catered for by the mechanisms of the emergent market. In both cases, however, these desires and needs were projected as essentially 'supplementary' to basic 'economic' needs. This testified to the increasing constitution of the economic as an autonomous field of human practice, leaving the desires that could not find form within this sphere as remainders; as reified 'artificial' wants and supplementary ethical or aesthetic 'needs'.

Part II:

The first group of writers we will examine can broadly be described as middling tradesmen and industrial employers, whose conceptual vocabulary indicates at least affinities, if not political allegiance, with the radical politics of the period. Drawing on the political vocabulary that had its origins in country politics, they lambasted farmers for their luxury and advocated the policing of the market in foodstuffs to ensure the comfort and ease of the poor. This position had been common enough during the mid-century decades, when it had been a stock trope of progressive ideology that commerce catered for all the wants of men. By the 1760s, a very different economic situation and the divergence of political economy and moral politics made it a radical plea for the maintenance of an ethical dimension to a commercial society.

The rising food prices, strikes and riots of 1766 prompted John Hustler to write a pamphlet which defended manufacturing labourers from the farmer's charge that it was the labourers' prodigality that was the cause of their distress. Hustler was a Bradford wool merchant and an active Quaker, projector and philanthropist. An ardent Whig loyalist and advocate of the English wool trade, his contribution to the debate over the nature of the distress of the 1760s shows us an example of progressive ideology under pressure from the recognition that the good of the nation was not always consonant with that of the labouring people.⁹

⁹ Dictionary of National Biography [hereafter DNB], 'John Hustler'.

Hustler argued that the end of government was the ‘safety and happiness of people in general’. This was best catered for by a judicious balance of the claims of manufacture, commerce and agriculture. But landowners had upset the balance. Their engrossing of land, its conversion from pasture to arable and the pursuit of profit through price manipulation were all ruining manufacture and commerce. The bounty on grain exports, in particular, was making bread too dear and was strangling the supply of other foodstuffs and wool.¹⁰

To destroy manufacture and commerce was to waste assets that had ‘made the country in many places populous and a moderate proportion of the people rich’. In addition, they had ‘furnished employment and wages’ which had ‘yielded a subsistence with a reasonable industry’ and had ‘kept the working people easy and cheerful’. If the avarice of farmers was not to destroy this progress, the legislature had to impose a police which would place the good of the whole above that of farmers and ‘provide manufacturing people with employment and a comfortable subsistence’.¹¹

Hustler waxed lyrical on the virtue of the manufacturing labourer. ‘Our manufacturers’, he claimed, ‘are as sober and industrious and frugal a people, as any other class in this kingdom’ and, ‘when provisions are moderate, many of them bring up large families reputably and save money; not to mention a remarkable truth, that a considerable part of the most thriving and industrious master manufacturers in this kingdom have risen from this set of people’. As it was, provisions were not moderately priced and it was only by working incredibly

¹⁰ [John Hustler], The Occasion of Dearthness of Provisions, and the distresses of the Poor: With Proposals for Remedying the Calamity. By a Manufacturer (London, 1767), pp. 18-19.

¹¹ Hustler, The Occasion of the Dearthness of Provisions, p. 36.

hard every week, he argued, that labourers and their families subsisted comfortably. They were, he urged, ‘the most laborious and ingenious people in the universe’ and the country that ‘wantonly and designedly thrusts unnecessary hardships upon them is unworthy of the inestimable advantages rising from them’.¹²

Hustler argued that it was English labourers’ disposition toward the achievement of an easy and comfortable way of life through labour that made them good workers. Yet he also recognised that they worked hard to maintain a ‘comfortable subsistence’, even when prices were high. For Hustler, the commitment to ensure that labourers could achieve this with more ease was an ethical one, dependent on the principle that society could operate in the interests of all. In other words, Hustler recognised that, strictly speaking, the nation had no necessary economic incentive to cater to certain desires. Labourers would ensure their own subsistence and this made the nation function as an economic entity. Yet, he urged, a commercial and civilised nation owed its workers the full panoply of benefits, expressed in the more vague terminology of ‘ease’, ‘comfort’ and ‘happiness’.¹³

This tendency toward invoking the ethical imperative in defence of the needs and wants of the labouring poor was more developed in Francis Moore’s pamphlet, published six years later. We know little about Moore, save that, like Hustler, he was a manufacturing employer, a linen draper in Cheapside, London. But Moore’s tract drew more explicitly on the moral freight of progressive ideology. In his writing we can see this moral potential more clearly as a distinct

¹² Ibid., pp. 28, 31.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 31, 36.

realm of appeal, invoked in an attempt to preserve the moral aspect of a commercial society.

Moore again argued that the strength of the nation derived from its commerce. Commerce was, he argued, 'a chain, fixed to the staple of our natural production which extends to every part of the known world'. Yet British commerce was increasingly oppressed, he claimed, by the avarice and luxury of the great. Moore drew upon the ideological imagery that Wilkites made such use of, deploying the residual rhetoric of country ideology against its original social base. Moore imagined 'luxurious' landlords 'sitting over meals declaring that the poor have never lived better'. He urged this imagined landlord to 'exchange situations with the poor family for only six months; it may prevent a fit of the gout'.¹⁴

By way of contrast, Moore drew on the emotional resources of sentimentalism to evoke the pity of the reader for his subject. 'The distresses of our fellow creatures', he claimed, 'are...so affecting as to shock humanity'. Any who did not believe this had only to ask the poor themselves. He recounted an anecdote of a conversation with a prematurely aged labourer from Basingstoke who, when asked what his wages were, said they were six shillings a week, that he

¹⁴ Francis Moore, Considerations on the Exorbitant Price of Provisions, setting forth the Pernicious Effects which a real Scarcity of the Necessaries of Life, must Eventually have upon the Commerce, Population, and Power of Great Britain (London, 1773), pp. 88, 69-70. The author of a tract purporting to examine the system of bounties of grain exports lambasted farmers for deceiving the legislature and the people into the conviction that land was the basis of trade. Commerce, he argued, was the foundation of British 'liberty, prosperity and power' and manufactures provided more labour for the people than land. The prosperity of the state must, he claimed, override all distinct interests. The labourer, artisan or merchant 'cannot benefit himself without benefiting the whole', but the 'landlord or corn jobber seeking an interest, indulges a selfish passion highly pernicious to the state'. Considerations on the Effects which the Bounties granted on Exported Corn, Malt and Flour, gave on the Manufactures of this Kingdom, and on the True Interest of the State (London, 1768), pp. 12-13. For a distinctly Wilkite sounding attack on enclosing landlords, see Stephen Addington, Enquiry into the Reasons for and against Inclosing the Open Fields (London, 1772).

had a wife and three children, none of whom could contribute to the family's income, and that a week's bread for the family cost him four shillings and sixpence. On top of this, he had to find clothes, fuel and rent. 'When I asked him how he lived', Moore claimed, 'he shook his head and said, "live! Sir we bide here"'.¹⁵

The purpose of such sentimental shock tactics was to arouse feelings of imaginative sympathy with the distressed object. As we saw in chapter four, the conceptual articulation and cultural effectiveness of such appeals to the social affections had developed in direct relation to the emergence of commercial social relations.¹⁶ Now Moore used them to urge the need to preserve the progressive social basis of society, to maintain the unity of its moral mission and its economic trajectory. The poor should be permitted a comfortable standard of living because it made them happier, better workers and more easy consumers: 'The spirit of emulation should always be cherished, that will brace the sinews of industry, and urge men forward in order to provide a more comfortable subsistence for their families'.¹⁷ 'We are too illiberal', he chided, 'in censuring our working people, because truly they have a taste for enjoyment; the old proverb says, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'. A good workman, he claimed, 'will dispatch more business with a little relaxation, leaving him a spark of English freedom, than he will ever do by compulsion; compel him to labour and you make him detest his

¹⁵ Moore, *Considerations*, p. 68.

¹⁶ For the growing importance of notions of comfort and ease in humanitarian sensibility, see John E. Crowley, 'The Sensibility of Comfort', *American Historical Review*, 10 (1999), pp. 749-782; Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London, 1986), pp. 1-32; G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1996), pp. 37-104; Michael Bell, *Sentimentalism, Ethics and the Culture of Feeling* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 11-73.

¹⁷ Moore, *Considerations*, p. 81.

work'. 'A good workman, like a good sailor will spend his money', he claimed, and in this way the nation would prosper and protect the liberties of all Englishmen.¹⁸

In the same manner, an author purporting to be a West Country maltster, writing in 1764, raged at the avarice of the engrossing farmer, the embodiment of the 'Canker of Monopoly' in the land. They pulled down cottages, oppressed the poor through the parish rates, starved the markets of grain and affected luxurious expenditure, all at the expense of the labourer. This 'distemper of monopoly and engrossing', he lamented, 'is become epidemical, and has reached far and near'. Worst of all, 'monopoly was ever deaf to the cries of the oppressed'.¹⁹ And he echoed Moore's call for the unity of economic and political liberties. 'Britons...are free; they work for hire, and the fruit of their labour they are entitled to lay out in such manner as they like and to the best advantage of themselves and their families'.²⁰

Yet, like Hustler, these writers were attempting to hold together divergent cultural realms. They evoked needs, wants and desires that were seen to be open to sentimental evocation, but were increasingly difficult to translate into economically justifiable policy. Each of these authors recommended the need for a police of commerce, to maintain its essentially progressive spirit against the corrupt influence of luxurious profiteering grandees. They mobilised sentiment to patrol commercial society, bringing it back to its non-economic content.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 80-81.

¹⁹ *Considerations on the Present High Prices of Provisions, and the Necessaries of Life*. By a West Country Maltster (London, 1764), pp. 10, 13, 15.

²⁰ *Considerations on the Present High Prices*, p. 21; *Considerations of the Effects*, pp. 25, 61-62. See also the articles in *The Gentleman's Magazine* [hereafter, *GM*] 36 (1766), pp. 398, 478-479.

As middling tradesmen, used to direct contact with the labouring classes in their capacities as employees and as customers, these writers achieved a perspective that enabled them to see the inequalities of the wage contract and the market in foodstuffs. Their own livelihoods depended on the maintenance of some vague conception of a 'decent' and 'comfortable' standard of living among these classes. Yet it was increasingly difficult to articulate this conception in the indefinite language of political entitlement, ethical responsibility and moral norm. The conception that they worked out was founded upon the basis of a view of the wage contract as a free act of exchange. The freeborn Briton had a right to the fruits of his labour which was freely exchanged. Second, the acceptance of wage labour as an exchange of property meant that they could only imagine needs and wants as divided into natural necessities and artificial wants. The abstract conception of labour as property was mirrored by an abstract conception of needs. They were either essentially natural animal needs, necessary for reproduction of the labourer, or artificial imaginary needs and wants whose attainment was dependent upon the means of purchase. These writers shared with the emerging political economy a view of this latter class of needs as essentially supplementary in nature. They simply urged the moral need to address them on the basis that the goal of society was moral as well as economic.

We can view this historical process of bifurcation from the other side in Nathaniel Forster's Enquiry into the Causes of the Present High Prices of Provisions, published in 1767. This fairly well known pamphlet represented an attempt to hold together the same diverging realms from the perspective of an educated Whig progressive with an interest in the science of political economy. Forster was a Whig establishment figure, both in political and religious terms. He

was rector of All-Saints, Colchester and the author of several sermons on the wisdom of the Church of England's *via media* and the rationality of religious toleration. He was also the author of a pamphlet defending the Parliament's actions in the Middlesex election in 1770, declaring Wilkes and his followers to be a wild faction, engaged in deluding the people and inflaming their tendency to wild imagination into a vengeful and violent madness.²¹ The *Enquiry* mirrors these ideological tendencies in the realm of economic and social thought. Forster admitted the force of political economy, yet attempted to maintain some relation between this rational system and the moral imperatives he saw embodied in society. His pamphlet makes clear the increasing difficulty of this task.

Forster broadly followed Hume's account of the historical development of commercial societies. Commerce played upon man's natural incentives to action: 'our wants and passions'. It commenced the 'circulation and perpetual exchange of labour which constitutes the life, health and strength of any nation'. Yet it also inevitably brought with it luxury or 'the wanton consumption of any commodities'. This was a necessary imperative to action and the source of the 'strong emulation in all the several states and conditions [of people] to vie with each other, and a perpetual restless ambition in each of the inferior ranks to raise themselves to the level of those immediately above them'. This could potentially lead the nation to catastrophe. The scarcity of the preceding year, Forster claimed, was attributable to the luxurious consumption of the great. Such opulence, at a time when taxes on necessities bore down heavily upon the poor, would inflame

²¹ See Nathaniel Forster, *The Establishment of the Church of England Defended Upon the Principle of Religious Liberty. A Sermon Preached at the Triennial Visitation of the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of London at Chelmsford, May 22, 1770* (London, 1770); idem., *A Defence of the Proceedings of the House of Commons in the Middlesex Election* (London,

revolt among the people.²² But Forster attempted to maintain some conception of justice beyond the pragmatic demands of order. The increase of wealth was commercial society's immanent function, the end to which it naturally drove. But this must not, he urged, 'become an end in itself'.²³

Forster professed himself committed to a justice that improved the poor. It was not good enough, he argued, to claim that the poor in England were better off than their continental counterparts. 'Their happiness' was the 'best barometer' of the strength of the state and, in a state as wealthy as Britain, their expectations would inevitably be higher. But, he asked, was their relatively easy condition 'any reason that they should not, if possible, be in a still better?'²⁴ Like Hume, Forster considered it just and pragmatic that the labouring people should taste the fruits of their toils. This cost him a straightforward view of history as moral progression.

To connect the demand for justice to the natural operation of society, he had to return to Mandeville's vision of commercial society and the political function of the legislator. The 'grand resource' of commerce and all legislation concerning it was avarice. This was the 'master spring of the whole machine'. The legislature alone was capable of discerning public interest and balancing the conflicting sectoral demands of the whole. It must use avarice in spite of itself to fashion a public spirit, 'even tho' it is a mere chimera'. Moral improvement, even justice itself, had to be conceived in a totally pragmatic way, acting in the service of higher, more vague goods: order and accumulation.²⁵

1770). See also *idem.*, An Answer to Sir John Dalrymple's Pamphlet upon the Exportation of Wool (London, 1781); DNB 'Nathaniel Forster'.

²² Nathaniel Forster, An Enquiry into the Causes of the Present High Prices of Provisions, in two Parts (London, 1767), pp. 45-47, 60-61.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 14-15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-21.

The cost of maintaining a thin progressive account of historical development was that Forster's advocacy of the poor had to be thoroughly mediated by the needs of the 'whole machine'. A country could be said to be in a 'flourishing and happy condition', when 'all of its hands are employed, and in consequence of such employments each individual enjoys the necessities of life in plenty and security'. Because the needs of the 'whole machine' determined that labourers should exchange an abstract property - labour - for wages, the needs of such labourers were slim. They were confined to what was necessary to maintain labour effort, 'the necessities of life'. The rest was artificial want, which could be indulged through money, but the demands of justice were fulfilled when labourers enjoyed the 'necessaries of life' in plenty.²⁶

Forster's pamphlet shows us an establishment Whig attempting to hold together the demands of the poor and the imperatives of a complex commercial society. In Adam Smith's work, we can see the articulation of an intellectually coherent and historically significant account of the natural operation of commercial society. Smith's work achieved a resolution of the problems revealed by the writers discussed so far. It did so by maintaining a thin conception of justice in his account of commercial society and consigning the remaining wants and needs to a sphere of moral philosophy that neither he, nor subsequent commentators, have been able to reconcile with the discourse of the natural-historical. In terms of his conceptualisation of the desires of the poor, this

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 38-40.

produced a mechanism for catering to needs and wants through the wage contract.²⁷

Smith reiterated the common progressive assumption, established by the mid-century, that labour was a 'sacred and inviolable' property. He then showed how the contract which owners of stock and owners of labour made with each other was a battle of self-motivated individual agents whose desire for gain would, if allowed to function naturally in a growing nation, ensure a 'liberal reward for labour'. This liberal reward was 'the necessary effect' and the 'natural symptom of increasing national wealth'. Smith's entrance into the debate on the condition of the labouring classes was accordingly entirely governed by the concern to demonstrate the veracity of his thesis. Comparisons over time and space were made from commonplace observations and price information to the effect that the money price and real value of wages had increased over the last century. From such comparisons, Smith was able to reason that, 'in Great Britain the wages of labour seem, in the present times, to be evidently more than what is precisely necessary to enable the labourer to bring up a family'.²⁸ This had the happy effect of encouraging the industry of the people and increasing wealth. A labourer worked better if he received encouragement and had some 'hope of bettering his condition'. Indeed, such was the power of this desire, Smith claimed,

²⁷ Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (eds.), Volume 1 (Oxford, 1976); I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds.), Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment (Cambridge, 1983); Keith Tribe, Land, Labour and Economic Discourse (London, 1978) chs 5,6; Vivienne Browne, Adam Smith's Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce and Conscience (London, 1994).

²⁸ Smith, Wealth of Nations, p. 91.

that workmen were in danger of over exerting themselves. This was the origin of the need for relaxation.²⁹

Given that labourers in modern commercial nations exerted themselves so much and sought to derive the maximum benefit from their property in labour, laws that may have been appropriate for previous stages in the progress of the nation now merely served the misguided interests of merchants, manufacturers and labourers. The Elizabethan apprenticeship statutes, Smith argued, were a 'manifest encroachment on the just liberty, both of the workman, and of those who might be disposed to employ him'. Just as they hindered 'the one from working at what he thinks proper, so it hinders the others from employing whom they think proper'.³⁰ Apprenticeship and, by extension, all such customary laws impeded the mechanisms of desire for gain from operating under natural conditions. Labourers, Smith considered, ought to be free to exchange their only property for the highest possible return. Equally, labourers who complained of the high costs of fuel in winter ought to bear in mind that their wages were always higher in Summer because of the value attached to it at that time, and 'save part of his summer wages in order to defray his winter expence'.³¹ Only in such ways would the British nation align itself with the natural laws that propelled its motion.

The framework of jurisprudence around which the Wealth of Nations is constructed has led many commentators to place it in the tradition of natural law philosophy, endowing it with the central aspiration to ensure happiness. However, as Vivienne Browne has shown, while the Wealth of Nations does indeed take its

²⁹ Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations: Books 1-3 (London, 1986), pp. 184-185.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

jurisprudence from the natural law tradition, it also empties it of its historical concern with the moral potentialities of individual moral agents. Instead, justice is conceived of as a lower order virtue; a rule based activity for determining infractions, rather than a framework within which moral agents progressively gravitate towards the brotherhood of men.³² For Smith, just as the happiness of society was reducible to its progressive state judged against the goal of increasing revenue, so the furthest extent of the progressive potential of labouring people in modern society - the limits of what was owed to them - was confined to their liberty to sell their labour and their capacity to save and prosper materially. Desires were rationally functional for society; there was no notion of their role in the moral transformation of any individual agent.³³

Smith did not neglect the moral agency of men in commercial society, but his Theory of Moral Sentiments expressed perfectly the widening gap between the ethical as a sphere of life and the socio-economic. The theory of the imagined spectator was an ethical transcendentalism absolutely dependent on the egoistic individual which underpinned Smith's Wealth of Nations. But the sphere of ethical action could not be translated simply into economic or political action. It could only be supplementary.³⁴ Smith's account of needs and desires was similarly bifurcated, admitting and denying the processes of alienation at work in the capitalist society he described. In the Wealth of Nations, Smith noted the effects

³² Notable for their attempt to do just this are Hont and Ignatieff. See Hont and Ignatieff, Wealth and Virtue, esp. ch. 1; Browne, Adam Smith's Discourse, pp. 110, 162-165.

³³ For an illuminating discussion of Smith's conception of the social function, and structure of desires, see Neil de Marchi, 'Altogether Endless Desires', in Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (eds.), Consumers and Luxury (Manchester, 1999), pp. 18-36.

³⁴ Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, edited by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis, 1986); Browne, Adam Smith's Discourse, pp. 23-99; Bell, Sentimentalism, pp. 49-51.

of the division of labour upon workmen. It stunted their intellect and made them like the machines or tools they operated. Consequently, they became dull and stupid, fit only for the alehouse. He recognised that the sophisticated moral agency of feeling individuals as outlined in the Theory of Moral Sentiments was not open to real labourers in real commercial society. But his only comment in the Wealth of Nations was the observation that workmen ought to have ideas to 'amuse' them during relaxation, that they might not spend their wages on drink.³⁵ Smith was unable to contemplate this as a serious consequence of commercial development because to attach anything more than a normative appeal to an ideal state of affairs would strike at the roots of capitalist society's essential nature and the universality of its categories.

Part III:

By the late eighteenth century, conservative ideology was developing and elaborating the position laid out by John Clayton, Henry Fielding and others in the 1750s, arguing that commercial society had unleashed desires which had brought tremendous prosperity, but which also had the potential to extend too far. Expressing the aspirations of improving commercial farmers and rationalising manufacturing employers, it argued that the very foundations of prosperity would be threatened if the needs and wants of the poor were indulged. The relative scarcity of foodstuffs in the wake of the increasing consumption of new

³⁵ See Istvan Meszaros, Marx's Theory of Alienation (London, 1972), pp. 293-295. As Meszaros points out, once he talks about man and his needs, Smith shifts from political economy to ethics and, as we have seen, the two, though sprung from the same historical categories, were no longer reconcilable. Meszaros also shows how, in invoking the social need to restrain workers

commodities allowed conservatives to argue that it was the desires of the poor themselves that caused scarcity. They seized upon progressive categorical distinctions between ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ needs and wants and applied them rigorously to the labouring classes. Conservatives argued that necessities and luxuries were relative to income, but that empirical observation showed the poor to consume what could be called luxuries at the expence of the very necessities at whose prices they protested. The poor could then justly be called the authors of their own misery. They provided different accounts of how labouring people had come to display such wanton desires, but they agreed on one central theme: the interest of the labouring people and those of society existed in antagonism and the desires of the poor had to be confined one way or another if the hierarchy that was supported by prosperity was to continue.

Conservative ideology also developed upon the negative ‘police’ sketched out by Fielding in the 1750s. It sought to impose greater discipline upon the working population in response to what it saw as their threatening demands. Yet the substance of this police, as we will see, made it operate in a very similar fashion to the developing conservative espousal of the system of natural liberty. In An Essay on Trade and Commerce, we can follow an example of this development. This pamphlet, published in 1770 and attributed to Timothy Cunningham, contains apparently progressive themes and concepts. However, these come to operate in a conservative manner, ultimately advocating that the poor be co-opted into a system that does not truly operate in their interests.

from spending their money in alehouses, Smith’s economic categories infect his moral statements.

The Essay was written as the second part of an attack on Malachy Postlethwayt's Britain's True Interest Explained of 1757.³⁶ Cunningham insisted that land and trade were species of the same activity. Therefore, to legislate against farmers as though they were not a branch of trade was misguided. The bounty, he argued, was a piece of good police, by which the interest of the nation was served. The problem and the cause of the distress of the nation lay in the fact that the interest of the nation and the interests of manufacturing labour diverged. For it was the price of manufacturing labour that was the problem.³⁷ Labourers were still attached to customary modes of behaviour, irrational in content and harmful in effect. What the nation required was a vigorous police of this branch of commerce, not land. Accordingly, like many of the manufacturing advocates cited before, he recommended attention to the French model and the institution of a Council of Commerce which would direct trade policy.³⁸

Similarly, he urged the need to police the labouring classes themselves, to ensure that they laboured hard for the nation. On the face of it, the aspiration behind this seems progressive in outlook. 'Constant employment', he urged, 'is the road to rational happiness'. Yet rational happiness did not simply mean the harmony of private and public interests. It meant the subordination of their desires and needs to those of national prosperity. We must, he proposed, 'by good police and a good set of poor laws, habituate the manufacturing poor to labour for six

³⁶ The first part had been entitled Considerations on Taxes and published in 1765. Both tracts repeat essentially the same argument and the latter will be used where the tracts are identical. Cunningham, Essay on Trade and Commerce; idem., Considerations on Taxes, As they are Supposed to Affect the Price of Labour (London, 1765). Edgar Furniss attributed this tract to William Temple of Trowbridge. While there is a definite similarity of content, there are noticeable stylistic differences between Temple's writings of the 1740s and 1750s and this tract of twenty years later.

³⁷ Essay on Trade and Commerce, pp. 101-148, 10-11.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 6-7, 10-11, 148.

days for the same sum they now earn in four days'. This could be attained by maintaining taxes on articles of labouring-class luxury, abolishing the poor laws and stripping out all the impediments to a 'free' contract between labourer and employer. By the force of habit, he speculated, labour might become 'more agreeable and entertaining to them'.³⁹

The moral function of police was strictly subordinate to its practical instrumentality. For the author did not expect reformation and moral improvement from the poor. 'We cannot suppose the lower sort of people to have enlarged ideas of the social virtues, nor of the happiness attending the practice of them', the author stated flatly: 'But surely they can perceive that it must be right to make themselves and their families happy'. And what did this restricted happiness entail? It amounted to the power to have, after six days labour, 'a small surplus after their necessities are paid for, to regale themselves and their families on the Sunday'.⁴⁰ Happiness attained the status of rationality simply by conforming to the dictates of a rationally intelligible commercial system. Rational happiness catered to the prosperity of the nation without entailing any individual transformation in the labourer.

Rather than improving the poor, Cunningham advocated some small accommodation with their consumer desires, still plainly informed by customary culture, in the hope of subordinating them more effectively to labour discipline. We can see this more clearly in his discussion of labouring-class luxury. Here, Cunningham explicitly recommended the indulgence of unregenerate expenditure on the part of the labouring people in exchange for a labour discipline that would

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 57, 69, 47.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 54.

effectively preserve the subordination of the poor and prevent them realising higher goals and satisfying enlarged desires. Like progressives, he recognised the indeterminate nature of the category of luxury. Its boundaries were arbitrary. It could only be fixed against the 'situation and circumstances of the consumer, and not on the things consumed'. Consequently, it could only be defined as 'an indulgence in unnecessary things, which are too expensive for the situation and circumstances of the consumer'.⁴¹ But luxury was not equally beneficial to all. Citing Montesquieu and re-inscribing a conservative position laid out by Fielding in the 1750s, Cunningham claimed that 'luxury is necessary in such a state as England' but that, 'as it descends it should gradually diminish, till it ends in a point among the poor'.⁴²

The highest goal that labourers might realise was the realisation that society did not operate in their interests. If they were permitted to indulge this thought, the force of their desires could be turned to attacking property itself. That this was already happening, he claimed, was evident from the recent riots. 'The lower sort of people', he recognised, 'have little or nothing to lose' and 'think every change may be in their favour, and they readily follow the standard of sedition, hoping to get something in the general scramble'. These were not deluded people. Rather, they instrumentally adopted any ideas which promised to upset the established order. And, just as their interests differed from that of the nation as a whole, so did their capacity for rationality. In their relative ignorance, they were able to perceive their interests as distinct, but their perception was still clouded by concepts which stressed their susceptibility to magic, illusion and

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 37, 44-45.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 45-46.

intoxication. The supposed 'liberty of the Englishman', as enshrined in the law, was a particularly intoxicating example. 'Our manufacturing populace', he complained, 'have adopted a notion that as Englishmen they enjoy a birthright privilege of being more free, and independent than in any country in Europe'. With Wilkes firmly in mind, the author described how the word liberty played upon their imaginations, operating 'like magic on the unthinking multitude'. For them, it seemed to sanctify any name that is joined with it. But their notions were, of course, specific to their interests and, consequently, 'their ideas of liberty are entering into illegal combinations, extorting money from the industrious, cutting work out of looms, breaking windows, to the great terror and injury of the sober inhabitants'.⁴³

The threat posed by the free play of labouring-class desires could not be greater. 'Unless a speedy reformation takes place among or manufacturing poor, unless some scheme be forc'd to extirpate idleness, restrain excess and debauchery, prevent vagrancy, enforce industry, keep the poor constantly employed and ease the land of the heavy burthen of the poor rates', he urged, 'real liberty will still be very precarious, for liberty without property is merely chimerical'. 'All property', he recognised, 'is threatened across party lines'.⁴⁴

The function of Cunningham's police, then, was to mystify the labouring classes and manoeuvre them away from their true interest. 'The labouring people', he urged, 'should never think themselves independent of their superior; for if a proper subordination is not kept up, riot and confusion will take the place of

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 56-58.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 52. See also *GM* 36 (1766), pp. 477-478, for a similar discussion of the connection of excessive consumption and political agitation.

sobriety and order'. Accordingly, when Cunningham talked of education, he meant a merely formal imitation of progressive ambitions. Cunningham reassured his readers that it was not necessary for the poor to be fundamentally reformed; 'any considerable degree of prudence and oeconomy among the poor would be unnecessary'. Rather, 'their expence should be constant; they should spend all they earn, but then spend it on necessaries for themselves and families and not to purchase superfluities, or the means of debauch'. In summary, he concluded, 'a prudent populace is never to be expected'. The task instead was 'to manage an imprudent one in such a manner, that their vices may be rendered as little hurtful to themselves or society as possible'.⁴⁵

A more developed conservative ideology can be seen to have emerged in the more common attack on labouring people launched from the agricultural sector. The 1766 crisis prompted many writers to spring to the defence of farmers and launch a counterattack on the advocates of manufacture. In these writings, we can see the farming interest referring back to the country ideology of the 1720s and 1730s to indicate their own moral status in the polity. But, ultimately, their position rested upon a simple opposition of the rationality of commercial agriculture and the irrational, luxurious and violent desires of the labouring classes.

The author of the Farmers Address to their Representatives lamented the condition of British farmers. 'We are', he bemoaned, 'a most oppressed and injured body of industrious men, sacrificed to the cunning and interest of a few of our fellow subjects'. Indeed, the farmers were a very bastion of virtue when

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 245.

compared with the luxury of the merchants and manufacturers. Was the merchant to be allowed to ‘parade in his coach and riot in a mode of extravagance and luxury scarcely to be credited, and the industrious farmer to jolt along in his wagons, or tramp on foot to the market in order to enable him to pay his servants wages?’ Far from being avaricious and self-regarding hoarders, he claimed, farmers were benevolent to the point of penury. They had raised their labourers’ wages and ensured them constant employment. Yet this benevolence could not long be supported when ‘every advantage arising from a free trade is prohibited to them?’ It was ‘extremely dangerous and generally fatal to trading communities to obstruct or divert the channels of commerce’. The act of 1766, which permitted the importation and enforcing of the laws against forestallers and engrossers, was not only an attack on free commerce, but acted to undermine private property. Referring to the food rioters of 1766, who had claimed that their redistribution of grain was sanctioned by the law, the author claimed that this act ‘gives public encouragement to sport with the corn farmers’ property’.⁴⁶

Luxury was not only the preserve of the wealthy merchants and manufacturers. A writer in the Gentleman’s Magazine asserted that, ‘if we compute the vast sums which are spent in strong beer, gin and liquors, for the sole purpose of debauchery, they will amount to an amazing total’. In addition, he continued, ‘if we add to these the millions paid for other luxuries such as tobacco, snuff, tea, sugar etc.. one would be apt to wonder how the labourers find bread’. If, on the other hand ‘in a time of plenty’, they would ‘abate of their drunkenness, sloth and bad oeconomy, and make a reserve against a time of scarcity, they

⁴⁶ The Farmer’s Address to their Representatives in Parliament (London, 1767), pp. 14, 21, 34.

would have no reason to complain of want or distress at any time'. If the poor would only 'consider the abuse they make of plenty, they need not wonder that God should punish them with scarcity'.⁴⁷ It also manifested itself in the violence of those who participated in the riots, 'those who luxuriously and riotously squander away their substance at alehouses and stews'. The rioters were people of this sort; 'profligate drunkards who plundered for drink and wantonness'. The primary responsibility for their condition lay with manufacturing employers who generally paid wages to their workmen far in excess of the farm labourer. It also lay with irresponsible hack writers who encouraged the poor to assert their rights as Englishmen.⁴⁸ The author of Two Letters on the Flour Trade agreed. Mobs were composed out of the 'drunken, lazy, and most abandoned part of the people, whose case is misrepresented, and whose distresses are greatly exaggerated by certain senseless and injudicious writers in the common newspapers'. He wondered that 'we have writers who endeavoured to justify these incendiaries in their vilest practices'. They were poor and wretched 'no matter by what means: though they refuse to work, or immediately spend what they earn in strong beer and Spirituous liquor, their poverty, it seems gives them a right to property'. Where the writers above seem to be responding to the practices of customary culture, the author of Three Letters to a Member of the Honourable House of Commons appears to be concerned with the rational actions of rioters who destroyed farmers' stocks, forcing them to bring them onto the market. Prices were, he admitted, problematic. However, only the madness of the desperate 'can possibly urge people to risk their lives in the execution of purposes, which if

⁴⁷ 'Letters on the High Prices of Provisions', GM 36 (1766), p. 478.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 34, 30.

a pitch unknown to all former ages'.⁵² Equally inevitable was its spread to the labouring classes. And it was this class, rather than engrossers, forestallers, or avaricious farmers, that was responsible for the high prices. A natural scarcity in some foodstuffs had been accentuated by the rising demands of consumers. For, 'as luxury increases or decreases, so consumpt [sic] increases or decreases likewise'. If, he suggested 'we attend to the manner of living amongst the lower class, we find many families living now upon animal food, that formerly seldom tasted it except on holy-days'. Wallowing in 'universal luxury', labourers now aspired to a greater standard of living than their forefathers: 'The lowest manufacturer and meanest mechanic will touch nothing but the very best pieces of meat, and the finest white bread, and if he cannot obtain double the wages for being idle, to what he formerly received for working hard, then he thinks he has a right to seek redress of his grievances, by riot and rebellion'.⁵³

The enormous quantity of land required to feed such an inflated demand had necessitated more cultivation than ever and this had led to the rising prices.⁵⁴ But Jenyns' work was no melancholic jeremiad. His main concern was to demonstrate the practical limitations imposed on legislators by the realities of nature and of modern society. The 'country' narrative that overlaid his work may have lent form to historical change, but gave it no meaning. For Jenyns, history simply figured as data that helped to demonstrate how reprehensible it was for

⁵² Soame Jenyns, Thoughts on the Causes and Consequences of the Present High Price of Provisions (London, 1767), p. 8; for a sympathetic review of Jenyns' pamphlet, see GM 37 (1767), pp. 595-599.

⁵³ Jenyns, Thoughts, p. 12.

⁵⁴ For essentially the same argument, see Adam Dickson, An Essay on the Causes of the Present High Price of Provisions, as Connected with Luxury, Currency and National Debt (London, 1773), pp. 22-26. Dickson was a Scottish minister, farming advocate and author of a best-selling and much reprinted tract called A Treatise on Agriculture (Edinburgh, 1762). See also his Husbandry of the Ancients (Edinburgh, 1778).

executed safely, would only tend to increase the evils they complain of?' The mobs destroying barns, granaries, corn and meal lacked 'sober reason'.⁴⁹ To legislate in favour of such irrational interests was to sacrifice the basis of society and prosperity.

The basis of society and prosperity, by contrast was accounted for in ways that increasingly removed it from the power of legislators to intervene. A relatively sophisticated account came from the pen of Soame Jenyns in 1767. Soame Jenyns came from a well-established family of Somerset gentry. He was MP for Cambridge from 1742 onwards and mixed in intellectual and literary circles.⁵⁰ Jenyns' Thoughts on the Causes and Consequences of the Present High Price of Provisions shows both the residual 'country' conservative rhetoric of the farmers' advocates and the way in which the emerging political economy that actually underpinned it could attain a conservative content.⁵¹

Jenyns argued that British society was saturated with luxury. This, he stated, was an inevitable consequence in any kingdom that pursued a successful commerce. The staggering increase in riches among merchants, stockjobbers, brokers, contractors and all who benefited from the expansion of British trade across the globe, had 'enabled men to increase their expences and carry luxury to

⁴⁹ Two Letters on the Flour Trade (London, 1766), p. 19; Three Letters to a Member of the Honourable House of Commons (London, 1766), p. 4. See more examples in GM 36 (1766), p. 522; GM, 42 (1772), p. 613.

⁵⁰ Jenyns wrote a famous tract titled A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil (London, 1757). Unfortunately, its fame derives from the fact that it was effectively demolished by Samuel Johnson. See his review of the essay in Donald Greene (ed.), Samuel Johnson (Oxford, 1984), pp. 522-543; DNB 'Soame Jenyns'.

⁵¹ Richard Sheldon has comprehensively discussed the debates on the grain trade and the place of law in this period. Sheldon brings out the emerging status of political economy and the arguments for free trade, particularly through highlighting the influence of Charles Smith's Three Tracts on the Corn Trade and the Corn Laws (London, 1766). However, in casting the debate as a straightforward 'Ancients vs Moderns' argument, I suggest, he might obscure some of the nuances of positions within the pro and anti intervention positions. See Sheldon, 'Politics of Bread', pp. 218-261.

labourers and progressive writers alike to claim that luxury was a moral category or that the poor possessed any rights that were being infringed. Such ideas led to foolish legislation that stopped up the founts of prosperity, promoting false notions that drove the poor to rebellion. Pragmatism shaped Jenyns' solutions, just as it coloured his analysis. There was no point in removing the bounties on grain exports, he argued, for these served to keep prices lower than they would otherwise be. All that could be done was to place a tax on 'superabundance' which would pay off the national debt and permit the lowering of taxes. Such measures, he argued, would prevent any need for legislation to infringe the property rights of farmers.⁵⁵

The increasing openness of farmers to political economic accounts of their commerce and the consequences of this development for their discussions of the labouring classes are more clearly visible in the writings of Arthur Young. Young shed the remnants of country ideology, preserved in Jenyns' tract, replacing it instead with a picture of competing, self-oriented interests in the polity.

In his Farmer's Letters and his Six Weeks Tour of the Southern Counties, both published in 1767, Young made an extended plea for the agricultural interest. Agriculture was, he urged, the true foundation of all commercial strength. The trade in necessities was a trade in real wealth; a wealth that, unlike manufactures, would not be vulnerable to the whims of fashion. It would be 'impolitic', Young claimed, either to 'prevent the free sale of the earth's productions' or to abolish

⁵⁵ Jenyns, Thoughts, pp. 22-23. See also GM 36 (1766), p. 478.

the bounty by which commercial pre-eminence could be established and other nations made dependent on British agriculture.⁵⁶

And, just as Britain's commercial strength was simple and rationally intelligible, so were the actions of the labouring classes. Young argued that manufacturing labourers acted according to simple imperatives guided by their perceived self-interest. It was crucial to realise that their interests were fundamentally different from those of their employers. Young deployed the old adage that, 'if four days earnings are sufficient to maintain them six, they will be idle the remaining two'. But here it is less a comment on a corrupt nature than a rationally intelligible disposition in relation to the operation of commerce. For Young recognised that 'Workmen work to live'. They did not work for their employers. For manufacturers, idleness was an evil because their employees had more time to reflect on how distasteful work was and to cheat or abuse their masters. But there was no moral condemnation here. Merely the observations of rational enquiry and the recognition of differing interests.⁵⁷ The solution for Young was that one should not listen too closely to the clamours of the labouring poor at the price of provisions, for this was merely their obvious interest in idleness and pleasure speaking. When provisions were dear, more and better work was done. Young maintained the rigorous political economist's distinction between the needs that had to be fulfilled in order to live, and the artificial wants

⁵⁶ Arthur Young, *The Farmer's Letters to the People of England: Containing the sentiments of a Practical Husbandman, on various Subjects of the Utmost Importance* (London, 1767), pp. 15, 33, 47. It is instructive to compare Young's sectoral advocacy of agriculture with the more universal appeal to the identity of interests of agriculture and manufacture espoused by William Harte. Harte's earlier tract was quoted with approval throughout the *Farmer's Letters*, yet they differed strongly on this point. See William Harte, *Essays on Husbandry* (London, 1764)

⁵⁷ Young, *Farmer's Letters*, p. 30.

that constituted luxuries. Riot, he claimed, was a species of luxury. It reflected an artificial want and not a need at all.

In the Six Weeks Tour, written in the context of a spate of disturbances among manufacturers and labourers, Young deployed the very best tools that political arithmetic could offer him to compile wage data and price information, allowing him to demonstrate that riots were unconnected to real needs. Accordingly, he “discovered” that the recent riots had taken place among those who had been paid higher wages. ‘Very far it is from my thoughts’, he claimed, ‘to assert or hint that our poor are too well paid’. But, he urged, ‘I must at the same time assert, riots and public disturbances form no just rules to judge by’.⁵⁸ What could confidently be asserted (but not evidenced) was that ‘sober and industrious workmen never riot’. Responsibility for such disturbances lay instead with ‘idle, drunken and unsettled and disorderly people’. A few of such people ‘getting together and talking over the price of provisions...inflamm[e] each other, and all of their own stamp’. But this was not the wild and insane excess depicted by the earlier farmer’s advocates. Young’s malcontents were perfectly rational in pursuit of their desires: ‘They know a riot is their best diversion; to stroll about in a party about the country eating and drinking at free cost, and having no work to do but mischief suits such geniuses to a hair’.⁵⁹ Riot and customary protest had assumed the form of a luxurious desire that did not justify any legislation that might interfere with the rational functioning of commercial agriculture.

⁵⁸ Arthur Young, Six Weeks Tour through the Southern Counties (London, 1767), p. 330.

⁵⁹ Young, Six Weeks Tour, p. 331; idem., A Six Months Tour Through the North of England (London, 1770); idem., Political Arithmetic: Containing Observations on the Present State of Great Britain (London, 1774).

Exactly how far political economy was penetrating arguments for commercial agriculture can be measured by examining the persistence of paternalism in the same period. Significant sections of the gentry, especially those who served as Justices of the Peace in the counties, maintained the need for some paternalistic regulation of the food market. This is demonstrated by the author of a pamphlet of 1777, himself a Justice, who attempted to address the question of rising poor rates. This anonymous author took issue with the notion that wages had risen and that they were more than adequate to provide the labouring classes with incentives to work hard. The case, he suggested, was absolutely the contrary.

Like Young, he deployed the tools of political arithmetic to show a labourer's real condition. The imagined budgets that had outlined the ideal domestic economy of the poor were brought into material reality as this writer drew up an account of the average prices of necessary provisions and the average pay of a farm labourer. Forty years ago, he suggested, a labourer might have got 1 shilling a day: now he could only expect to secure perhaps 14 pence. Yet the cost of living, as his index showed, had almost doubled. If an average family was supposed, in a week, to require 43 lbs bread, milk, 3 gallons of small beer, 10lb of beef or mutton, 4lb cheese, or 2lb of butter plus soap, candles and clothes, then it was plain that a week's earnings were now insufficient to buy these necessities. The cause of this was quite simple. Wages were not high enough. 'In truth', the author claimed, 'all orders and all degrees of men in higher stations, have long

been unthinkingly thriving at the expence of the poor. Few of them, for a long time past, have given the labourer his just hire'.⁶⁰

While this appears simply paternalistic and even slightly progressive, in truth this was a highly restrained call for justices to ensure that wages were set high enough for the labouring people to live on. Nowhere did the author challenge the fundamentals of policy or invoke a narrative of historical improvement. Rather, he recommended a highly pragmatic raising of wages to offer the labouring classes an incentive to go to work, to work well and to reproduce the social order. The reduced scope of such proposals reflected the expanded dominion of political economy, while the emphasis on a pragmatic need for the labourer to receive his 'just hire' demonstrates the inner unity between the essential content of this 'paternalism' and the various conservative writings we have explored in this chapter. There was no indication in this pamphlet that the author meant anything other than a just return for the offer of labour. This was certainly not a defence of customary rights or customary conceptions of need.

The debate over the persistence of a residual customary culture in the labouring classes forms the subject of the next chapter. This is, in some ways, a well-worked subject. Yet, as I will show, the changing conceptions of need, want and desire articulated above permeated discussions of the customs and habits of the poor just as much as the operation of the national economy.

⁶⁰ Reasons for the Late Increase of the Poor Rates: Or, a Comparative View of the Price of Labour and Provisions, Humbly Addressed to the Legislature (London, 1777), pp. 13-16, 28. See also Nathaniel Kent, Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property (London, 1775), pp. 261-265.

Chapter Eight

Customising Commodities and Commodifying Custom:

Leisure and Luxury, 1765-1777

As we saw in chapter seven, the period from 1765-1772 was marked by a sharpening of the contradiction between capital and labour and an attack on the structures of customary regulation across all spheres of production and distribution. This attack, launched in the name of bourgeois conceptions of property right and notions of improvement, also had ramifications for the residual customary practices of the labouring classes.

These practices, possessed of their own social logic, had played an important role in feeding the demand for commodities and in solidifying national and international markets. By the late eighteenth century, this consumption was still stamped with its roots in customary culture but was intimately bound up with increasingly sophisticated markets and commercial culture.¹ Expenditure on and wearing of fine new clothing, for example, was shaped by the customary calendar and its relation to marriage practices.² Leisure activities still shaped much labouring-class consumption and, accordingly, the late eighteenth century saw an increasing commercialisation of leisure. Fairs were attended by travelling provincial theatre companies and rural sports and games like cock-fighting, horse

¹ Hans Medick, 'Plebeian Culture in the Transition to Capitalism', Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds.), Culture, Ideology and Politics (London, 1982), pp. 89-96. On the values underpinning customary culture, see Bob Bushaway, By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England, 1700-1880 (London, 1982).

² John Styles, 'Custom and Consumption', unpublished paper delivered at University of Warwick, 1997; idem., 'Clothing the North: the Supply of Non-Elite Clothing in the Eighteenth-Century North of England', Textile History 26 (1994), pp. 139-166; Beverly Lemire, Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade Before the Factory, 1660-1800 (Basingstoke, 1997).

racing and cricket matches were increasingly supplemented by commercially run versions, structured around a paying spectator.³

Alehouses were increasingly transformed from their seventeenth-century function as the 'centre for communal and neighbourhood activities', imprinted with customary forms of behaviour, into crucial institutions in the growing inland trade. The increasing respectability of alehouse keepers, growing competition and capitalisation and the expanding power and reach of the breweries combined to fix alehouses firmly in the new context of a commercial society. Yet the communal norms and practices remained, albeit in a transmuted form, embedded in alehouse culture. Publicans offered and advertised commercialised versions of customary games and sports at the alehouse and the customary heavy drinking of Saint Monday did their profits no harm. Many alehouses became integral parts of the solidifying labour market, providing institutional support to Friendly Societies or acting as informal labour exchanges.⁴ Their role in the organisation of labour at a time of industrial conflict and their position as repositories of the excesses of customary consumption made them a source of renewed anxiety.

Tea drinking, too, was changing. Its adoption by the labouring classes had initially been structured by customary culture, but by the later eighteenth century, established drinking practices existed alongside more modern proletarian notions

³ John Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages 1600 to the Present* (New York, 1985), chs 4 and 5; Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1973) chs 1, 2, 3; Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution: 1780-1880* (New York, 1980), chs 1-2; Roy Porter 'Material Pleasures in the Consumer Society', in Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (eds.), *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 19-35.

⁴ Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200-1830* (London, 1983), pp. 152-155, 223-234; See also Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 33-70; E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', in *Customs in Common*, pp. 373-382; C. R. Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen: A Pre-History of Industrial Relations* (London, 1980), p. 25.

of domestic respectability. Consequently, the tea trade continued to mushroom in size around an enormous and socially diffuse structure of demand.⁵ But tea drinking too retained a residual connection to the customary forms that had first mediated its adoption. Workmen teamed together to purchase the equipment with which they brewed tea, punctuating the working day with sweet beverages that referred back to the customary habits of drinking beer during labour.⁶

The struggles over wages, prices and profits that characterised these years made these residual customary cultural forms, however mediated by their commodification, objects of enormous importance to the labouring classes. Customary use-rights in common land and perquisites in industry assumed great monetary or economic value as labourers became more proletarianised, more wage dependant and price-sensitive.⁷ Similarly, leisure activities became of immense significance to labourers working more days in every year and more

⁵ James Walvin, *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 17-23; Carole Shammas, 'Changes in English and Anglo-American Consumption from 1550-1800', J. Brewer, and R. Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993), pp. 184-185; Philip Lawson, 'Sources, Schools and Separation: The Many Faces of Parliament's Role in Anglo-American History to 1783', *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 14 (1995), pp. 19-24; H. C. and L. H. Mui, 'Smuggling and the British Tea Trade before 1784', in *American History Review*, 74 (1968), pp. 53-73; H. V. Bowen, 'An Expanding Empire of Commerce and Conquest: The East India Company and its Trade in Luxury Goods', unpublished paper delivered at The Luxury Project's Conference 'East and West: Luxury and the Exotic', 12-13 February 2000, University of Warwick.

⁶ Sidney W. Mintz, 'The Changing Roles of Food in the Study of Consumption', Brewer and Porter, *Consumption*, pp. 264-267; Jordan Goodman, 'Excitantia: Or, how Enlightenment Europe took to Soft Drugs', in J. Goodman, P. Lovejoy, and A. Sherratt (eds.), *Consuming Habits: Drugs in History and Anthropology* (London, 1995), pp. 129-131; Woodruff D. Smith, 'Complications of the Commonplace: Tea, Sugar and Imperialism', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1992), pp. 259-278.

⁷ J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 113-132, 165-176; K. D. M. Snell, *The Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 188; Jane Humphries, 'Enclosures, Common Rights, and Women: The Proletarianisation of Families in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', *Journal of Economic History* Vol. 5, 1 (1990), pp. 17-42; Mick Reed, 'Class and Conflict in Rural England: Some Reflections on a Debate', Mick Reed and Roger Wells (eds.), *Class, Conflict and Protest in the English Countryside, 1700-1880* (London, 1990), pp. 12-13; John Rule, *The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth-Century Industry* (London, 1981), pp. 124-147; Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 329-

closely supervised or controlled by the irregularities of wage payment and the webs of credit. They were invested with an intensity of feeling that referred to the loss of less tangible signifiers of wealth: community, land, and place. This intense feeling of loss, and the corresponding meaninglessness of their labour activity, encouraged many labouring-class men and women to invest many of these cultural practices with sacramental importance. It was probably the same outpouring of feeling, a yearning for values increasingly absent from work, and from consumption too, that fed the phenomenon of labouring-class Methodism. Labouring-class Methodism has been described as a public and communal version of the sentimentalism that the middle classes channelled into their private experience of novels.⁸

These developments fed the commercial infrastructure of the nation and kept many middling tradesmen above water. Yet, at the same time, this efflorescence of a highly mediated customary culture made contemporary commentators extremely anxious. Within the emerging common sense understanding of the functioning of a commercial society, this could only be seen to represent wasteful expenditure, irrational for those with slender resources at a time of intermittent scarcity. And, as we shall see, even those who recognised this customary culture for what it signified, did so without invading the territory of political economy. Essentially, as I will show, the preferred recreations of the

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⁸ For the sentimental content of labouring-class Methodism, see the classic analysis by E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 335-441; Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 237-287; Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London, 1986), pp. 22-23; G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1996), pp. 65-77. On sentiment in eighteenth-century society more generally, see the tremendously illuminating study by Michael Bell, *Sentimentalism, Ethics and the Culture of Feeling* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 1-73.

labouring classes were becoming construed as luxuries such people could ill afford.⁹

Part I:

Progressive political economists like Adam Smith and Josiah Tucker recognised that the labouring classes had some need for and some right to leisure and recreation. Smith argued that the liberal reward for labour enabled workmen to be 'animated by the comfortable hope of bettering his condition, and of ending his days perhaps in ease'. But it also naturally led to over exertion and a need for relaxation, 'which requires to be relieved by some indulgence, sometimes of ease only, but sometimes too, of dissipation and diversion'.¹⁰

For Tucker, the reasonable experience of pleasure was part of the potential for improvement embedded in all classes of society. As he argued: 'Human Nature is composed of two distinct principles, Reason and Inclination; Reason to direct and guide, and inclination to impel and move us towards different objects'. Reason and Christianity were identical for Tucker, so that a

⁹ Neeson, *Commoners*, pp. 15-53. For the contemporary contributions, see William Pennington, *Reflections on the Various Advantages Resulting from the Draining, Inclosing, and Allotting of Large Common Fields* (London, 1769), pp. 26-28, 46-47; Henry Homer, *An Essay on the Nature and Method of Ascertaining the Specifick Shares of Proprietors upon the Inclosure of Common Fields. With Observations upon the Inconveniences of Open Fields, and upon the Objections to their Inclosure, Particularly as they Relate to the Publick and the Poor* (Oxford, 1766), pp. 20, 39-40; *An Enquiry into the Reasons for and against Inclosing the Open Fields* (Coventry, 1767); *The Gentleman's Magazine* [hereafter GM](1766), pp. 81, 477-478; *Observations on the Present State of the Waste Lands of Great Britain, Published on the Occasions of the Establishment of the new Colony on the Ohio* (London, 1773), pp. 32-33; *The Advantages and Disadvantages of Inclosing Wastelands and Open Fields, Impartially States and Considered. By a Country Gentleman* (London, 1772), pp. 32-37; John Arbuthnot, *An Inquiry into the Connection Between the Present Price of Provisions and the Size of Farms. With Remarks on Population as Affected thereby. To which are added Proposals for Preventing Future Scarcity. By a Farmer* (London, 1773), pp. 44-46, 52-53, 55-56.

¹⁰ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations, Books 1-3* (London, 1986), pp. 184-185.

properly Christian life involved the rational direction of appetites and inclinations 'towards a right end'. Christianity would 'superintend the Gratification of our Desires' so that they were placed on 'innocent pleasures or lawful Enjoyments'. This would encourage industry and expenditure so that the wants of all would be supplied and 'social life..refined and improved'.¹¹ The same standards were applied to the labouring classes.

For both Smith and Tucker, these needs and rights derived from the status of labourers as property-holding individuals. Thus, the jurisprudential progressivism of writers such as Tucker and Smith was mediated by the social need for the labour of the poor. So, while their property in labour endowed them with needs and natural rights of pleasure, this was a conditional right of possession, a right to have some pleasure in return for the continued offer of their labour.

Seen through these progressive eyes, the material practices of many of the labouring classes appeared horrifyingly primitive and unruly. Just as the development of markets in recreation generated a recognition of the social need for pleasure, so it presented to the social commentator the efflorescence of a riotous and barbaric culture. The very diffusion of customary culture in a market context helped to produce an enlightened and commercially acceptable formulation of leisure against which its customary elements would be judged and found wanting.

Progressives veered between the conviction that the potential for some

¹¹ Josiah Tucker, 'Sermon on the Connection and Mutual Relation Between Christian Morality, Good Government, and National Commerce', in Collected Works of Josiah Tucker 7, 1774 edition (London, 1993), pp. 5-9. See also William Adams, The Duties of Industry, Frugality and Sobriety. A Sermon Preached Before a Society of Tradesmen and Artificers, in the Parish Church of St. Chad, Salop on Easter Monday, 1766 (London, 1766), pp. 15-16.

level of refined sentiment and rational self-governance was universal (depending for its fulfilment on the cultivation of feelings and imaginative sympathy) and the doubt that the labouring people were capable of fulfilling society's destiny. Their writings oscillate between an optimistic hope that the poor would fulfil their potential for refinement and the pessimistic observation that they seemed resolutely unregenerate. If this latter were indeed the case, the best that could be hoped of them was that they continue to provide labour for the nation.

Such writers were particularly vexed by the predilection of the poor for cruel sports.¹² Yet, even when progressives like Tucker were condemning the poor for their lack of sentiment, their writings reveal the intense feelings that were directed into the traces of customary recreation. For, despite what polite society preferred to think, cruelty and sensibility were not separated by the progress of history. Rather, they shared an inner logic of feeling as excess. Josiah Tucker complained that the sport of throwing at cocks was 'abominable' and 'unmanly...wantonness' in making a mere sport of 'inflicting pain and suffering on an animal'.¹³ This excess was not so very far from the reactions elicited and solicited by Henry Mackenzie's Man of Feeling of 1771. Mackenzie himself was concerned that his readers were taking the lesson of his book too seriously and effeminating themselves.¹⁴

But progressive writers took the historical origins of this customary culture at face value, placing it on the wrong side of society's progress. Tucker

¹² For the sentimental attack on cruelty to animals, see Langford, Polite and Commercial People, pp. 503-505; Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility (London, 1983); Malcolmson, Popular Recreations, ch. 5; Barker-Benfield, Culture of Sensibility, pp. 231-247.

¹³ Josiah Tucker, An Earnest Address to the Common People of England concerning their Usual Recreations on Shrove Tuesday (London, 1781), pp. 1-10.

¹⁴ Barker-Benfield, Culture of Sensibility, pp. 141-148.

urged that it was a great shame upon a people not to 'correct error and grow wiser' and reform so a 'bad a custom' after it is 'known to be so'.¹⁵ The nonconformist minister, Abiah Darby, widened his attack on the recreations of the unregenerate so that it included 'Horse-Racing, Cock fighting, throwing at cocks, Gaming, Plays, and other Diversions'. These represented 'heathenish practices' more like those of an 'ignorant savage than the recreations of 'enlightened understandings'. The true Christian, Darby argued, would emulate the primitive Christians and set themselves against 'all excesses, all Diversions, all the Customs and vain Fashions of the world'.¹⁶

This sentimental reaction to the cruelty of the labouring poor was, in fact, a repression of the very same excess that, for the middle classes, powered sentimental and civilised refinement. In the labouring classes, it was seen to manifest itself in values of community formation and communal celebration that the propertied classes no longer recognised. For the propertied classes the cultural practices through which these values were affirmed appeared as forms of excess; as barbaric sentiment and luxurious expenditure.

When we examine the structure of the concepts that progressives used to describe such cultural practices, we can clearly see that custom's formal structure of mutability, repetition and the authority of precedent had been wrenched from its historical origins in the culture of face to face communities. The form had been retained and substituted for its historical content of communal values and needs that derived from peasant economy. It became increasingly difficult to distinguish

¹⁵ Tucker, *Earnest Address*, p. 10.

¹⁶ Abiah Darby, *An Exhortation on Christian Love, to all who frequent Horse Racing, Cock Fighting, throwing at Cocks, Gaming, Plays, Dancing, Musical Entertainments, or any Vain Diversions* (Shrewsbury, 1769), pp. 17-32.

between customs and fashions, tastes and habits. And, as such, the ‘fashions, tastes and habits’ of the poor were open to validation in the terms of commercial utility. Was it useful for society to indulge these practices, given the level of expenditure they entailed? The Quaker poet, John Scott, for example, claimed that the poor were impoverished by their tastes for tea, ale and country fairs.¹⁷ The frequency of fairs made them ‘equally detrimental to the circumstances and morals of the laborious part of mankind’. They represented nothing but ‘pretences for the indulgence of inclinations, in the indolent and vicious; and temptations to those whom prudence or natural dislike to excess keep generally sober’. The horse-races, cock fightings, cricket matches and itinerant mountebanks which proliferated at these fairs represented ‘nuisances to society’. Revealingly, he followed this with an attack upon the taste for consuming novels.¹⁸ Both represented excessive and transgressive outpourings of feeling.

John Powell, the author of a long and rambling discourse on the condition of the poor, recommended a tax upon ‘all articles of luxury’ from the very highest down to ‘those of market towns and villages, Public Gardens, puppet shows, Horse-Races, Cock-Fightings, Bear and Bull-baitings, Cards, Gaming of every kind, heel carriages, swords, livery servants, packs of hounds, pointers, spaniels, greyhounds and Frizeurs’.¹⁹ Customary culture had, for these writers, become an

¹⁷ Scott was a poet of some note, author of *Amwell* (1775) and *An Ode* (1782). The former was a picturesque poem on a landscape and the second was an anti-war poem written at the end of the American War of Independence. As John Barrell has noted, he was also the author of *The Digests of the General Highway and Turnpike Laws* (London, 1778). See John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 224.

¹⁸ John Scott, *Observations on the Present State of the Parochial and Vagrant Poor* (London, 1773), pp. 123-128.

¹⁹ John Powell, *A View of Real Grievances with Remedies Proposed for Redressing Them: Humbly Submitted to the Consideration of the Legislature* (London, 1772), p. 358. Powell also describes the labouring-class desire for holidays as nothing but an excuse to ‘live in riot and debauchery’ *Ibid.*, p. 143. I have, unfortunately, been unable to find out anything about Powell. See, also, John Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities: Including the Whole of Mr.*

indistinguishable part of the luxury of commercial society. As such, it represented nothing but an excuse to consume to excess.

Powell used much of his pamphlet to launch a tirade against the perils of the alehouse. He raged at the numbers of 'those whose Income arises from Labour' who 'spend too much of their Time and Money in taverns and Alehouses'. These were, he claimed, the institutions of mis-education *par excellence*. In these 'detestable Nurseries of Vice', the labouring people could 'run into all excess of Riot and Intemperance, like the Votaries of a heathen Bacchus' and 'wallow in sensuality' instead of 'attending those place of worship where they might be instructed in the Nature of the Different branches of their Duty'.²⁰ In these establishments, 'various Inticements...are invented' for the labouring people, who were easily 'allured by various sports, pastimes, and Fooleries' till they were intoxicated and impoverished. The alehouses not only provided the well-known allures of 'Spirituious Liquors', but 'an Incredible Number of Entertainments'. These included 'Skittle Grounds, Bowling Allies, Shuffleboards, Billiard-Tables, Card-Clubs, and many other Kinds of Public and open Gaming', which gave the poor the chance to 'squander away their earnings, leaving their families to fall on the parish and their children to beg in the streets'.²¹ Again we see how the forms of customary culture, in their commercial context, had been subsumed under a generalised attack upon luxury and extravagance. Yet

Bourne's *Antiquitates Vulgares* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1777), p. 379 on cock-fighting in the northern colliery districts.

²⁰ Powell, *A View*, pp. 23-24, 28, 34.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18. See also *A Charge Delivered to the Grand Jury, at the General Quarter Sessions of the peace; Held at Guildhall, Westminster; On Wednesday, April 6th, 1763. By Sir John Fielding, Knt. Chairman of the said Session* (London, 1763), and *A Charge Given to the Grand Juries of the County of the City of Dublin, and County of Dublin By the Right Honourable Richard Aston, Esq.* (Dublin, 1763), reprinted. in Georges Lamoine (ed.), *Charges to the Grand Jury 1689-1803*, Camden Fourth Series, Volume 43 (London, 1992), pp. 389-399,

it was the internal logic of excess, characteristic of customary consumption, that was the real cause of anxiety.

The concept of addiction appeared again, lifted from its original context of the debates over gin drinking, and now applied to the broader predilection of the unregenerate poor for the pleasures of the alehouse. John Scott's evocation of a drunken, labouring-class *pater familias* echoed the descriptions of gin-addicted mothers.²² Slave to a hopeless compulsion, the drunken man was closer to death than desire: 'The head of the family, he on whose industry principally depends its subsistence, leans riveted to his seat, as by enchantment, for hours and days together'. Contaminating others with his example and 'lavishing in the present week, with the absurdity of a maniac, the wages procured in the past by the most strenuous exertion of his corporeal abilities', he was 'impenetrably deaf to the importunate cries of his suffering perhaps perishing wife and family'.²³

Custom, then, had come to mean mere habit, repetition and the irrational authority of precedent. The suitability of the recreations of the labouring classes was to be measured according to the standards of commercial rationality: for those whose resources were slender, they were irrational and unnecessary. Even for those able to afford them, they were irrational, unrelated to improvement through accumulation through indulging the sense of having.

We can examine the same inner logic at work in progressive discussions of tea drinking. Tea was seen as a new custom, reducible to a new habit. Its potential and its suitability for the labouring classes were subject to the manner in which it

399-410.

²² See chapter 5.

²³ Scott, *Observations*, pp. 57-58.

was drunk. They had generally considered tea to be one of the most potent symbols of civilisation and refinement in society. Tea seemed to represent the harmonious marriage of individual desire and public utility. It did not simply gratify individual desires, it also provided massive revenue to the government and fuelled spin-off industries and trades in the accessories necessary for truly refined sociable tea drinking.²⁴ For these writers, therefore, the adoption of tea by the labouring classes could be a mark of their progressive potential; an index of civilisation. It manifestly demonstrated the mutability of human wants and the motive power of desire in society. Progressive defences of labouring-class tea consumption turned on the commercial potential of such mutable desires.

The retired tea merchant, Stephen Theodore Janssen, giving evidence to the Parliamentary Committee on the tea duties in 1763, argued that 'Fashion and Pride' had made tea 'necessary' to the consumer. The lowering of import duties on tea in 1745 had allowed the 'Custom of Tea' to 'become universal throughout the Kingdom, amongst all Degrees of People'. 'A surprising Encase in the Consumption of Sugars' had been the result, 'to the great Improvement of the Sugar colonies' and the 'Encase of the Revenues'.²⁵ John Coakley Lettsom, a Quaker like Scott and a renowned physician and philanthropist, made a substantial examination of the economic and physical effects of tea drinking. In this, he described how the 'custom of drinking tea' had 'become universal'. Equally, an anonymous writer in the Gentleman's Magazine argued that tea, 'by habit, is now

²⁴ Lawson, 'Sources', p. 19. For the association with progressivism, see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping and Business in the Eighteenth-Century (Columbia, 1997), pp. 19-37.

²⁵ Stephen Theodore Janssen, Smuggling Laid Open, In all its Extensive and Destructive Branches (London, 1763), p. 287.

become universal'.²⁶ A nominal recognition of the importance of custom again turns out to represent a site of its progressive erasure. Custom was vanishing into the a-historical concepts of commercial society: fashion, taste and habit.

This universal 'Custom' could represent evidence of civilisation and progress and provide a socially acceptable form of pleasure for the labouring classes. Lettsom, for example, marvelled at the thought of an entire nation simultaneously enjoying the pleasures of civilised commerce and refinement. 'The pleasure which arises from reflecting how many millions of our fellow creatures are enjoying at one hour the same amusing repast' and the 'occasions it furnishes for agreeable conversation' or the 'innocent parties of both sexes it draws together, and entertains without the use of Spirituous liquors', afforded 'the most grateful sensations to a social breast'.²⁷ And John Scott also praised the ability of tea to provide a civil alternative to spirits for the workman. For 'there must be some relaxation from labour; the human machine cannot support perpetual motion; and what relaxation can be found in every respect more inoffensive, than the enjoyment of this intoxicating beverage'.²⁸ So tea could be a civilising repast and an amusing distraction that left men ready and able to labour.

But, of course, the very condition on which the labouring classes entered the universal brotherhood of civilised men, as those who had nothing but their labour to sell, dictated that they were a special case. Progressives understood this in terms of an individualised rational judgement made against a familial budget.

²⁶ John Coakley Lettsom, *The Natural history of the Tea-Tree, with Observations on the Medical Qualities of tea and Effects of Tea-Drinking* (London, 1772), p. 37. See also 'An Easy and Practicable Plan for Increasing the Consumption of Tea, Augmenting the Revenue, Suppressing Smuggling and Lowering the price of one Essential Article of Provisions, which by Habit is now Become Universal', *GM* 43 (1773), p. 60; and *GM* 37 (1767), p. 257.

²⁷ Lettsom, *The Natural History of Tea*, p. 49.

²⁸ Scott, *Observations*, pp. 56-57.

For Lettsom, the universalisation of tea drinking meant that ‘every person may be considered a judge of its effects’. Since ‘the constitutions of mankind are as various as the individuals’, it was best left to individuals to calculate whether or not tea might be good for them. Lettsom merely provided the information to make such a judgement. But it was possible for tea to be unsuitable for the labouring classes, even if it was judged physically harmless. And Lettsom himself detailed how this was to be reckoned. The custom of tea drinking, he claimed, could be harmful if the labouring classes were ‘too desirous of vying with their superiors, and imitating their luxuries’. Consequently, they ‘throw away their little earnings upon this fashionable herb, and are thereby inconsiderably deprived of the means to purchase proper wholesome food for themselves and families’. The yearly expenditure on tea, sugar, butter, fuel and accessories of two people ‘thus infatuated’, he claimed, could amount to more than ‘the necessary article of bread sufficient for a family of five persons’.²⁹

Tea drinking could appear as an irrational manifestation of excessive desire when it was invested with the inner logic of customary consumption. At this point, its status as a non-necessity, an artificial want, served to discredit it and legitimated condemnation of those labourers who drank it in such an irrational manner. John Powell argued that, ‘the Money that is laid out weekly...on Tea, Sugar, Snuff and Butter, which have but little Tendency to satisfy the Appetite, and promote Nutrition’, would ‘go along way towards furnishing them with bread, the most Essential Necessary of Life’. He complained that, ‘in some counties the gleaners have their tea, at stated hours, in the open field’.³⁰ Jonas

²⁹ Lettsom, *The Natural History of Tea*, pp. 37, 62-64.

³⁰ Powell, *A View*, pp. 253, 345.

Hanway, the famous merchant philanthropist and author of many jeremiads on the modern custom of tea drinking, complained that, while the common people undoubtedly had 'a title to their share' of 'pleasure and amusement', it was to be wished that they would apply it more rationally. Tea, he claimed, was unhealthy and used up time they could ill afford to waste. Day-labourers could be seen clubbing together to buy the equipment of tea making and breaking off from their work to enjoy 'this Chinese Drug'.³¹

But for those of a more nakedly utilitarian bent, the need and pleasure manifested in recreation presented an opportunity for legislators. Adam Smith argued that the state should give liberty to all those who 'for their own interest would attempt, without scandal or indecency, to amuse and divert the people by painting, poetry, music, dancing; by all sorts of dramatic representations and exhibitions, would easily dissipate' that 'melancholy and gloomy humour which is almost always the nurse of popular superstition and enthusiasm'.³² For those who expected the poor to improve themselves morally and to share in the refinement of society, their evident residual attachment to the inner logic of customary consumption pushed such writers toward a more conservative despair for their irredeemably primitive nature. Sentiment then became that which differentiated the poor and the propertied, a difference that began to harden in the late eighteenth century.

So what happened to the content of customary culture in the writings of

³¹ Jonas Hanway, Observations on the Causes of the Dissoluteness which Reigns Among the Lower Classes of People (London, 1772), pp. 72-73, and Letters on the Importance of the Rising Generation of the Labouring Part of our Fellow-Subjects, 2 Vols. (London, 1767), 2, p. 184. See also Reasons for the Late Increase of the Poor Rates: Or, a Comparative View of the Price of Labour and Provisions, Humbly Addressed to the Consideration of the Legislature (London, 1777).

³² Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, 2 Vols., R. H.

polite progressives? What happened to the norms of collective obligation, communal solidarity and sociable expenditure which held custom together? They found some expression in an abstracted and reified form in the historical writing of the period.

Part of the Gothic Revival and the renewed fascination with England's medieval past was an increasingly aestheticised interest in the customs and traditions of the historical common people.³³ In 1777, the Newcastle antiquary and topographer, John Brand, published his updating of Henry Bourne's Antiquitates Vulgares, entitled Observations on Popular Antiquities. This represented one way in which the historical roots of customary culture could be recognised. Brand's professed aim was to record the true customary culture of the past for a polite society which felt itself ever more removed from communal obligations. If this enabled the recording of many threatened practices, it also meant abstracting 'true custom' from its tenacious relationship with the living culture of the labouring classes. For Brand, the customs of tobacco smoking and throwing at cocks represented false custom, mere habits masquerading as the real thing. True, pure and authentically English custom lay in the dead or dying practices of a past increasingly assumed to be definitively 'other'. In their place, Brand advised the regulated cultivation of recreations deemed to be innocent according to the social need for labour. 'The Common People' he argued, 'confined by daily Labour, seem to require their proper Intervals of Relaxation'. He proposed that 'perhaps it is of the highest political utility to encourage

Campbell and A. S. Skinner (eds.), 2 (Oxford, 1976), p. 796.

³³ Langford, Polite and Commercial People, pp. 471-476. For treatments of the historical turn in eighteenth-century artistic genres, see Anne Janowitz, England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape (London, 1990); Barrell, The Idea of Landscape, pp. 1-63.

innocent sports, and Games among them' to prevent them from exercising themselves in more disturbing ways.³⁴

The norms and values of customary culture found truer expression in the sentimental laments of William Hutchinson. In 1778, Hutchinson, a Durham solicitor and a topographer in his free time, published his enormous View of Northumberland. It formed part of an increasing concern to place provincial cultures in some historical perspective, even as they became more tightly bound to a national culture. Hutchinson's was particular in including a section on the 'Ancient Customs' of the people of Northumberland. The emphasis of this section was entirely and strikingly upon the loss of values of 'benevolence, friendship, cheer, neighbourliness, good humour' and the public spirit that enabled decisions to be taken collectively in the interest of the whole. By contrast, 'this age', he complained 'is refined into insipidity: few of the old hospitable days return: sociability is sickened into unmeaning ceremony'. The opulent had retreated into their great halls and concerned themselves only with their 'own little circle' and the lower orders were becoming infected by this abnegation of responsibility. If this sounds like Oliver Goldsmith's Deserted Village or the sentiments evoked by Gainsborough's depictions of peasant life, it is no accident. Hutchinson's expression of passing values and sociability was bought at the price of the same aesthetic alienation and impotence. The sentiments that fuelled and were evoked by these works appealed to feelings that were no longer seen to animate good policy in a commercial state. They could only be expressed as aesthetic sentiment. And Hutchinson was also an aspirant novelist. Like Goldsmith, he revealed that it

³⁴ Brand, Observations, pp. v-ix, 315, 377-379.

was the historical cost of this alienation for poets and writers that really concerned him. 'In ancient times', he claimed, 'the bard was brought to the festive hall, to rehearse the Excellencies of our ancestors, to fire the breast with emulation, to inspire noble and bounteous sentiments', and to 'lift us through example into an adoption of the character of those heroes and men from whom we were descended.'³⁵

Part II:

As we saw in chapter seven, conservative ideology in this period tended to accept and foreground the presence of antagonistic interests in the polity, depicting society as a war of private interests. This war gave paternalistic and commercial conceptions of order their legitimacy. The labouring classes, either through habitual corruption or natural inaptitude, threatened the order and prosperity of the nation. Whether this was understood in terms of a residual 'country' narrative of a fall into luxury or in the terms of the newer political economy, the basic assumptions underpinning these writings were the same. The labouring classes had to offer their labour and if they would not offer it in sufficient quantities and with sufficient discipline, they would have to be coerced and manipulated into doing so. Correspondingly, their expressions of need were viewed as excessive and dangerous. Whether this was understood as a corruption

³⁵ William Hutchinson, *A View of Northumberland with an Excursion to the Abbey at Mailross in Scotland* 2 Vols. (Newcastle, 1778), 2, pp. 3-6. Hutchinson also published two sentimental novellas on pastoral or historical themes, *The Hermitage: A British Story* (1772) and *A Week in a Cottage: A Pastoral Story* (1775). For Goldsmith and Gainsborough's aesthetic protests at the consequences of luxury and enclosure in the countryside, see John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting* (Cambridge, 1980); Michael Rosenthal, *The Art of Thomas Gainsborough: 'A Little Business of the Eye'* (London, 1999), pp. 198-215.

that had become natural or a natural propensity toward corruption, the needs and wants of the labouring classes appeared fissured between a rigorous definition of the necessities requisite to reproduce the labouring body and an expansive concept of artificial wants. This latter came to account for most of the needs of the poor, serving as evidence of the need to confine the demands of the labouring classes. One of the chief artificial wants or luxuries of the labouring classes was the assertion of customary forms of recreation or the consumption of commodities in ways that smacked of customary culture.

For these writers, like more progressive ones, customary practices were reducible to the form of habits and ignorant prejudices. But for conservatives it became something more naturalised, a 'second nature' that legitimised the subjugation of the poor. Conservatives argued that the evidence of excess pointed towards the danger posed by the demands of the poor in a world constantly threatened by a natural scarcity. Custom in its form as habit, taste or fashion was judged according to needs of the economy and to be a luxury the poor could to be allowed to indulge.

We can see these themes in a pamphlet entitled An Inquiry into the Management of the Poor. The anonymous author of this pamphlet argued that the poor were naturally no more corrupt than the rich, but that God's ordination of inequality had laid a special duty towards labour upon them, without which all property would fall. Within this context, public houses were 'seducers of the thoughtless people into idleness, gaming, tippling and the squandering away those earnings, which are wanted at home for the support of their starving families'.³⁶

³⁶ An Inquiry into the Management of the Poor and into our usual Polity (London, 1767), p. 19.

The poor, he suggested, were incapable of reforming themselves. A wise and paternalistic legislature would set about closing alehouses, denying them licences and maintaining the duty upon ale and strong beer. 'Remove the Alehouse', it was claimed, and 'the opportunity, the temptation of getting drunk, as well as the power of spending the poor man's extra two-pence, are removed likewise'.³⁷

The excessive feeling generated by drink in alehouses led men away from their familial economic responsibilities. For this author, the want of management and care for their families demonstrated by the poor was also due to the excessive feeling generated by Methodism. The people had become fixated by 'the delusions of certain vain and fanatical teachers, who are greatly multiplied of late years'. On the one hand, this had made 'many pious people despondent'. On the other, it had 'given foundation to ignorant and enthusiastical persons to make themselves easy under the most unjustifiable irregularities of practice' by 'laying unwarrantable stress upon a certain mode of believing'.³⁸ The tendency toward such a luxury of feeling on the part of the poor extended into their indulgence of fanatical belief.

The fear of excessive expressions of need, want and desire by the labouring classes turned into naked class-hatred in the anonymously published Essay on Tea, Sugar, White Bread, and Butter, Country Alehouses, Strong Beer and Geneva and Other Luxuries. This pamphlet of 1777, probably the work of a Salisbury clergyman or Justice, argued that labouring people had fallen foul of the modern temptations of a commercial society. In his pamphlet, paternalism operates not to preserve the poor from their own tendencies, but to preserve society from the second nature of the poor. His feelings were most evidently

³⁷ *An Inquiry*, p. 19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

aroused by the image of a labourer in the alehouse.

It was at alehouses, this author argued, that the ‘unsuspecting countryman imbibes the first sentiments of a dissipated life, he is taught to game, drink, swear and to prefer a course of idle pleasure, to virtuous and honest industry’.

Becoming accustomed to such a regime, the labouring man quickly became a revolting and hateful character, whose inhuman unfitness to share in the benefits of commercial society was written in his face and clothes.

See the mad, ranting, roaring, reprobate Clown, with his right arm elevated; and much extended, with a mug in one hand spilling its contents on the party who holds it, with a stupid, mawkish, maudlin grin, and the tongue hanging out of the mouth, in a tattered greasy coat, appearing as a compound of dirt and rags, squalid wretchedness, and deformed nastiness.³⁹

This class hatred, expressed through the evocation of the revulsion of the refined at the physical appearance of its object, can be seen as the polite analogue of the excessive cruelty of the poor, a form of emotional excess that fed off the fears that the rebelliousness of the poor evoked. The poor, this author claimed, were irredeemable. The ‘cravings of a corrupt nature, debauch, inadvertency, and frequent temptations’ had ‘taken the place of reason and common sense’. Yet, since the wealth of the nation depended on their labour, ‘interest should direct every Magistrate, rarely, very rarely, to sign an instrument, [an alehouse licence] which in its consequence extinguishes not only every virtuous, every religious sentiment, but with very large strides tends to impoverish his fortune’.⁴⁰

And the same author detected similar forces at work in labouring-class tea

³⁹ An Essay on Tea, Sugar, White Bread and Butter, Country Alehouses, Strong Beer and Geneva and other Modern Luxuries (Salisbury, 1777), pp. 20.

⁴⁰ An Essay on...Modern Luxuries, pp. 16-19.

drinking. In this author's discussion, we can see the tension between a self-conscious and pragmatic invocation of pastoral themes and a nascent naturalisation of destructive desires. The author pragmatically performed a pastoral anger for his audience as he passed judgement on the objects of its wrath. The objects were not the commodities, but the stupid labourers who consumed them in the face of all rational sense. 'How notoriously' he lamented, 'the poor man's actions contradict the sentiments and principles of good oeconomy'. 'The poor Rustic' who 'hath nothing to support the necessaries of life but the labour of his hands' and 'expends that labour in Tea, Sugar, White Bread and Butter' was, 'to all intents and purposes, void of management and oeconomy'.⁴¹ Such people could certainly not be improved in the way that progressives hoped.

The pamphlet went on to place the corrupt nature of the labouring poor, their lack of conformity to the progressive commercial ideal, in a series of pastoral oppositions. The former life of the poor was explicitly situated in a Golden Age where they were 'honest, industrious, frugal and careful: the day was spent in labour, and the night in restoring nature by refreshing sleep: they were content to live at the smallest expence'.⁴² This scene was interrupted by the new 'modern luxuries' which proved temptation too great for such slender understandings and prompted the corruption, enervation and physical destruction of the labouring poor. Whereas once they had been happy with home-ground bread, now the poor demanded fine flour from the miller. The thin and polluted bread that it produced represented 'a dry contagion' which had 'spread itself deep into the country' and 'destroys more of its inhabitants than all the swords and fire-arms now wielded in

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁴² Ibid., p. 26.

America'. Not content with this, 'the poor country cottager pampers her appetite by covering it [her bread] with butter; and her thirst must be solaced with the juice of that Indian Shrub (which I most heartily wish had never found an entrance to these kingdoms) commonly called tea'.⁴³

The effects of tea on the body were familiar themes from the protests of country critics of the early eighteenth century. Tea disposed its drinkers to 'peevishness' and 'ill nature' over 'liberality' and 'generousness'. In short, it 'destroys the Englishman'. And that other 'pernicious Foreigner, called Sugar' inflamed the blood and the vitals'. The contrast with the Golden Age could be read in the faces of the poor. 'Where are now', demanded the author, 'the pleasing smiles, the dimpled damask cheek, which were accustomed to dance on and adorn the face of the artless, cheerful, innocent Country Girl?' Instead of these, we see 'the haggard, yellow, meagre visage...no more the delight of the honest jolly Swain'. If this loss of happiness through social change seemed to take the author towards the realms of aesthetic protest and impotence, he betrayed the self-conscious, almost mocking performance of pastoral in the last phrase of this passage. The true problem with all these commodities was that eventually 'they bring the man and his family to the parish, and fix them like a dead weight on the landed interest for life'.⁴⁴

In fact, what linked the commodities in his text was not just their modernity, but their consumption of time, the poor man's commodity. For, ultimately, they were all resolved into a single calculation. 'Join them all together and compute the expence, the loss of time taken in breaking and washing the

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 10-13.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

dishes, sweetening the tea, spreading the bread and butter, the necessary pause which defamation and tea-table chat afford' and 'they will largely account for half a day in winter, spent doing that which is worse, very much worse than doing nothing'.⁴⁵ This author was certain that the distresses of the poor were a consequence of their own corrupt nature in the face of modernity. 'Fine Flour, and Bread and Butter, together with Tea and Sugar', to which he added 'Spirituuous Liquors...and Ale-house strong Beer', were 'the foundation of almost all the poverty, and all the evils which affect the labouring part of mankind'. All that could be done, he urged, was to remove as many temptations to spend as possible. Alehouses must be closed, the poor must make their own bread and anyone drinking tea was to be removed from the poor books. Only in such purified and rationalised conditions could any motive to gain operate. The labourer with nothing to tempt him and faced with starvation would finally feel the rational motive of necessity and be prompted into industry.⁴⁶

Tea drinking, because it was an 'artificial want', became an index of the duplicity or the natural stupidity of the labouring classes. They wilfully failed to demonstrate good economy in the name of their interest in idleness and luxury. As the author of Considerations on Taxes argued, no one could complain of the oppression of the poor 'when it is considered what luxuries the poor manufacturers consume, such as brandy, gin, tea, sugar, tobacco, foreign fruit, strong beer, printed linens, snuff etc.'. ⁴⁷ And the agricultural writer, Walter Harte, suggested that the luxury of the common people was such that 'as much

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 7, 32-33.

⁴⁷ Considerations on Taxes: As they are Supposed to Affect the Price of Labour and our Manufactures (London, 1765), p. 53.

superfluous money is expended on Tea, Sugar, etc...as would maintain 4 million more of subjects in Bread'. The condition of the poor could therefore not be blamed on farmers or low wages.⁴⁸ Arthur Young was equally vociferous, complaining that tea was a 'vile superfluity' and a 'pernicious commodity that tends to our very ruin.' But, aside from advocating a tax on it, he also argued, like the author of the Essay on Tea, that all proven drinkers of the substance should be struck off the poor books.⁴⁹

Conservative writers undermined the progressive position on the rights of the labouring classes. Whereas progressives emphasised the right of the labouring man to his relaxation, to his just title and right to pleasure and amusement, conservatives used the actual manifestations of labouring-class pleasure to suggest that the labouring poor had no such right. They were not capable of positive rational pleasure. Instead, they were driven by a basic inclination, a fundamental drive toward their own narrow interest. Tea drinking was yet another example of this. It demonstrated that the poor were not rational and not eager enough to labour and save. For many conservatives, this justified the social hierarchy and implicitly licenced the maximum exploitation of labour. Increasingly, it also justified the rationalisation of the terms of labour in line with the needs of national prosperity through agrarian capitalism. Custom, in all its manifestations, was one of the targets. For most conservatives, rationality did not reside within the minds of the labouring poor. Increasingly, it rested in the system of natural liberty.

⁴⁸ Walter Harte, Essays on Husbandry (London, 1764), pp. 166-167.

⁴⁹ Arthur Young, The Farmer's Letters to the People of England: Containing the Sentiments of a Practical Husbandman (London, 1767), p. 173. See also Inquiry into the Management of the Poor and our usual Polity respecting the Common People (London, 1767), p. 25; GM 36 (1766), p. 478. Arthur Young's pronouncements on tea are too numerous to mention. However, they follow the conservative line delineated here, and can be found littered throughout his Tours of the South, North and East.

These ideological developments had very material consequences for the labouring classes when they confronted the question of the structure and function of the poor laws. It was through the poor laws that progressive writers considered they could best effect some reformation in the labouring classes. Likewise, it was the poor laws that conservatives most sought to reform. They aimed to bring them into line with their emerging conception of the nature of the labouring people, perceiving an increasingly urgent need to confine their wants, needs, and desires.

Chapter Nine

Houses of Industry, Parish Annuities and the Needs of the Poor, 1765-1772

After the abortive attempt to overhaul the poor laws in 1753, the costs of parish relief continued to rise. In 1754, Henry Fielding had reckoned the total expenditure of parish relief at 1000 000 l. per annum, whereas the parliamentary committee's report of 1776 yielded a figure of 1,528,163 l.¹ As we saw in chapter seven, the widening contradiction between capital and labour during the later eighteenth century resulted in a general decline in living standards among the labouring classes. Poor relief became an essential part of the survival strategies of the depressed rural manufacturers of East Anglia and the West Country.² In agricultural districts, the combined forces of intensified enclosure and the move away from service in husbandry, created an impoverished rural proletariat. Attacks on customary use-rights or employment regulations made poor relief more important, both materially and symbolically. It placed a premium upon the right that the poor felt they possessed

¹ Dorothy Marshall, The English Poor in the Eighteenth-Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History (London, 1926), p. 78. Parish relief in the 1760s has been estimated to have consumed a mere 1.5 per cent of national income. Yet the short term nature of much relief meant that parish doles were the experience of perhaps 20 per cent of the population. See Lynn Hollen Lees, The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1834 (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 41-45.

² John Rule, The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth-Century Industry (London, 1981), pp. 147-168; Andrew Charlesworth, David Gilbert, Adrian Randall, Humphrey Southall and Chris Wrigley (eds.), An Atlas of Industrial Protest in Britain 1750-1990 (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 1-32; Adrian Randall, Before the Luddites: Custom, Community and Machinery in the English Woollen Industry, 1776-1809 (Cambridge, 1991); Pamela Sharpe, Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy, 1700-1850 (Basingstoke, 1996), ch. 2.

in the form of parish settlement.³ Poor relief in the enclosed midland counties and in the poverty-stricken southeast grew during these decades and farmers could use the poor laws to shift the costs of maintaining a seasonal labour force onto the broader base of rate paying property holders.⁴

The particular misery of the rural workforce inspired new initiatives in the administrative reform of the poor laws. Most notable were the Houses of Industry, with the hundred as their basic administrative unit, that sprang up in Suffolk and Norfolk around 1765. These extended into the countryside and into the structures of public relief, the same forms of private charitable activity that had been at the forefront of the urban police initiatives of the 1750s. They were the work of associations of local gentry and patricians combined with the prominent middling tradesmen of the regions, reflecting their common aspiration to 'improve the poor and reduce the burden of rates upon their parishioners'. They met fierce resistance from the local labouring classes. In 1765, the workhouses at Nacton and Bulcamp in Suffolk were entirely destroyed in an organised rising. Labourers and artisans from miles around assembled, kidnapped the directors of the scheme and marched around the locality, forcing the local gentry to distribute their traditional symbols of

³ On the forms of relief, see Marshall, *The English Poor*, pp. 96-123; Lees, *Solidarities of Strangers*, pp. 27-30, 44-5; Norma Landau, 'The Laws of Settlement and Surveillance of Immigration in Eighteenth-Century Kent', *Continuity and Change* 3 (1988), pp. 391-420; K. D. M. Snell, 'Pauper Settlement and the Right to Poor Relief in England and Wales', *Continuity and Change* 6 (1991) pp. 375-415.

⁴ J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 84-85, 254, 256, 282; M. E. Turner, *English Parliamentary Enclosure: Its Historical Geography and Economic History* (Folkestone, 1980); K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 67-227; T. Hitchcock, P. King, P. Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 1-17; George R. Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 36-43, 85, 118-119, 143.

hospitality, money and beer. These 'rioters' legitimated their actions in the name of their liberty as Englishmen and their right to be relieved in their home parishes. Even those workhouses that were operational were the sites of prolonged localised struggle over the nature of the regimes and the rights of the poor within them.⁵

In urban manufacturing areas, the conflicts over poor relief took on a different hue. During the 1750s, institutional charities had concentrated capital in private forms of relief, aimed at establishing a police of the urban environment. The 1760s and 1770s saw an increasing dissatisfaction with such forms of charity and a diversion of resources into forms that were seen to encourage self-sufficiency.⁶ They modelled themselves on the developing forms of labouring-class association embodied most notably in the profusion of friendly societies during this period. These had originally been seen as defensive support networks for labourers and they became more important as employers increasingly sought to strip away customary regulations governing industrial relations and to place greater downward pressure on wages.⁷ Some of them became instrumental in the organisation of strikes and the interest of the propertied classes in such forms of association was as much about channelling the

⁵ Very little has been written on these institutions. They are generally overshadowed by the Gilbert Unions which followed them in the early 1780s. These earlier incorporations are mentioned, however briefly, in Anne Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (London, 1978), pp. 32-40; J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834*, (London, 1969), pp. 11-12. See also Paul Muskett, 'A Picturesque Little Rebellion? The Suffolk Workhouses in 1765', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History* 41 (1980), pp. 28-29; Snell, *Annals*, p. 73.

⁶ Donna Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, 1989), pp. 135-197.

⁷ Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 33-69; Rule, *Experience of Labour*, pp. 173-184; P. H. J. H. Gosden, *The Friendly Societies in England 1815-1875* (Manchester, 1961), p. 2; Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 351-352, 129-130, 353-356; Joan Lane, 'The Medical Provision of Eighteenth-Century Friendly Societies' unpublished seminar paper delivered at University of Warwick Social History of Medicine Seminar.

energies and resources of the labouring people into less confrontational schemes as it was about reducing the burden of poor relief.

These streams of local initiatives both reached Parliament in the form of bills. Thomas Gilbert's bill of 1765 sought to set up large administrative units, run by large sale investors, the 'guardians' of the poor while, in 1772, William Dowdeswell brought forward a bill to establish parish annuity schemes across the nation. Both trends would become more developed in the 1780s as Gilbert Unions were finally established and as middle-class radical critiques of the patrician structures of the poor laws sharpened.⁸ But this chapter will focus on the debates around the issues and initiatives described above. For, in these debates, the contested depictions of the subjectivity and the potential of the labouring classes was absolutely central. And, central to debates over these depictions, were the conceptions of their 'real' and 'artificial' needs, wants and desires.

Part II:

The principal criticism that reformers levelled at the system of poor relief, the criticism that animated the associations of gentry, clergy and local merchants and tradesmen who founded them, was neatly summarised by the Westmorland

⁸ Joanna Innes, 'The Mixed Economy Of Welfare in Early Modern England: Assessment of the Options from Hale to Malthus (c. 1683-1803) in Martin Dauntton (ed.), Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past (London, 1996), pp. 161-167; Poynter, Society and Pauperism, pp. 1-44. For the role of subscription charities in generating growing middle-class critiques of the structures of public relief, see Kathleen Wilson, 'Urban Culture and Political Activism in Hanoverian England: the Example of Voluntary Hospitals', in Eckhardt Hellmuth (ed.), The Transformation of Political Culture (Oxford, 1990), pp. 165-183.

magistrate, Richard Burn. In 1764, Burn, whose Justice's handbook was considered essential reading for everyone on the county benches, published his History of the Poor Laws. Burn argued that the parochial system was tyrannical, corrupt and inept. One of the fundamental problems with the poor laws was the power they vested in the overseers. This power, he recognised, had created an interest in manipulating the laws according to a calculation of the local need for labour. Paupers were permitted to stay long enough to cater for these needs but not long enough to gain a settlement. This cause also led overseers to pull down cottages and spend large amounts on litigation to secure removals.⁹

It was this conviction that underpinned the reformers who espoused the value of the Houses of Industry. Progressives and conservatives alike could agree on the need for such institutions to police the poor. One of the most enthusiastic advocates of the Hundred houses was the poet, sometime schoolteacher and friend of Samuel Johnson, the Reverend Robert Potter. Potter was also one of the directors of the Loddon and Clavering workhouse in Norfolk. For Potter, the workhouse represented a solution to the inequities of the parochial system which, he argued, maintained the poor in state of material and psychological misery. In evoking this misery, he willingly drew upon the resources open to a poet of some note. Potter described a rural pauper family's house as 'open to the roof like barns', 'damp and unwholesome', while their beds were 'filthy masses of unsheltering rags that beggar description, many of them

⁹ Richard Burn, The History of the Poor Laws: With Observations (London, 1764), pp. 210-212. See also A Bill Entitled, An Act for the Better Relief and Employment of the Poor, within that Part of Great Britain called England (1765), and A Scheme for the Better Relief and Maintenance and Employment of the Poor, Humbly Submitted to the Consideration of the Members of Both Houses of Parliament (London, 1765).

elevated from the bare earth only with a little straw'. Such 'cramped filthy and promiscuous conditions', he claimed, 'exacerbated by the overseers practice of lodging inmates with householders ...tends to extinguish every idea of delicacy'.¹⁰

The evils of parish relief were, he argued, part and parcel with the luxury of the age. Both were symptoms of the decline of paternal spirit toward the poor. There was real danger in the displays of opulence by the great in the sight of the deprived. Potter reprimanded the great and wealthy, warning that, 'while we are rolling thro' the kingdom in our post-coaches, post-chaises etc..the poor starve'.¹¹ The misery of the rural poor, displaced from their old homes and condemned to beg, stretched beyond the poverty of their material condition into a mental torture whose description, Potter hoped, would evoke the pity and sentiment of his readers. In his Considerations on the Present State of the Poor, Potter pictured a poor man in tormented anguish, 'turned out from a home to depend upon the precarious benefactions of the busy multitude....beset with all the apprehensions of immediate want, and too frequently abandoned to horror and despair'.¹² Given such human distress, Potter implored, 'owe we not to the painful hand of Industry and labour all the comforts and conveniencies of more elevated stations?'¹³

Yet this was not simple paternalism. It was more a matter of adding a paternalistic hue to the functioning of a commercial society. For, as Potter argued,

¹⁰ Robert Potter, Observations on the Poor Laws, on the present State of the Poor, and on Houses of Industry (London, 1775), p. 26.

¹¹ Potter, Observations, p. 31.

¹² Robert Potter, Considerations on the Present State of the Poor in Great-Britain, With Proposals for Making the Most Effectual Provision for Them (London, 1773), p. 7.

¹³ Potter, Considerations, pp. 17, 2-3.

any right that the poor could claim extended from their property in labour. 'The poor man's labour is his wealth', he agreed, and 'nature gives him a right to exert this to his own greatest benefit'. He might as well have quoted Adam Smith.¹⁴ And, like Smith, Potter recognised the power of a reward for labour. 'Encouragement', he claimed, was 'the soul of Industry'.¹⁵

But encouragement, as Potter realised, could not simply mean material necessities. When he referred to 'all the comforts and conveniencies of more elevated stations', Potter meant the right to less tangible pleasures, the pleasures of family domesticity and a place to call home. Picturing for his readers the return of an ideal rural labourer from his work, the poet waxed sentimental:

with pleasure he looks over his little domain; his children are come home from their school, he wonders at their improvement, and beholds them with transport; he feels no want; he finds everything neat and comfortable around him, and becomes every day more temperate more frugal, more industrious, to secure the continuance of the happiness he now enjoys.¹⁶

Paternalism had to step in where the mechanisms of a commercial nation were failing: it had to supplement the wages paid by employers protecting their profits. Such acts of paternalism, supplementing the operation of a commercial society, Potter argued, were the key to ensuring industriousness.

Accordingly, this image was central to Potter's conception of the reforming power of the workhouse. The same could not be said of the parish workhouses, those diminutive relics of Knatchbull's act and the reformation movement of the 1720s. These he described as nothing but 'parish prisons' where the poor 'instead of living,

¹⁴ Potter, *Observations*, p. 29.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

scarcely breathe under the arbitrary government of the several officers'.¹⁷ By contrast, the Houses of Industry were designed to inculcate habits of industry and economic deference. For, as Potter urged, 'a just attention to oeconomy is a becoming part of every man in every station of life'. Accordingly, once the pauper arrived at the House he or she was dramatically introduced to the life they would be expected to reproduce and the subjectivity they were to affirm henceforth. They were 'stripped of their filthy rags, made perfectly clean, and decently habited...provided with wholesome well dressed food proper for their station in life, and in liberal abundance'. Their beds were 'good well covered, and clean'. The poor were to be remade to become the very model of civilised and industrious labourers.

An intrinsic part of this reformation was, of course, the transformation of the pauper's consumption habits. A regime of appropriate consumption was laid down. The boundaries of necessary and respectable consumption were clearly marked out by highly symbolic commodities. It was stipulated that, under no account, should gin be permitted in the House. Removing strong drink from the diet and replacing it with wholesome food would, it was claimed, make them 'fitter to receive those good impressions which must necessarily be made on them by the forcible persuasion of good examples'.¹⁸ It was also wished that tea and tobacco could be excluded, but here the reformers faced more problems.

As Potter confessed, the practical problems of securing the consent of the

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁷ Potter, *Considerations*, p. 8.

¹⁸ Potter, *Observations*, p. 40; *Considerations*, pp. 13, 23.

poor to their confinement necessitated that the Directors make some concessions to forms of consumption they considered luxurious. Their dinner on Saturday and Sunday had been 'Pease Porridge', but the paupers had petitioned the Directors 'for bread and butter instead of it, which is found their favourite dinner because they have tea to it.' Potter claimed that when he had expressed some surprise at their being permitted bread, butter or tea, the inmates had said that 'they were permitted to spend two pence in the shilling of what they earned as they please, and they laid it all out in tea and sugar, to drink with their bread and butter'. He put a brave gloss on this highly symbolic defeat: 'indulgence renders it necessary to let them do as they please with it; but it would be better expended on something else'. And this was not the only defeat. The Directors had also to concede ground on the smoking of tobacco. This they managed to confine only to the workrooms. They stood firm however on the issue of spatial freedom. Although the inmates were 'cloathed in a warm and comfortable manner, and are in general pretty well satisfied with their situation...the confinement disgusts them; they are not allowed constant liberty without the yards...and this they dislike'.¹⁹

This fascinating snippet shows the poor maintaining some of the most symbolic components of both their customary and their more domestic consumption and retaining some of its excessive logic, even within the walls of the workhouse and in the face of the Directors' attempts to define their needs for them. However, the Directors probably felt that the benefits of getting them into the Houses and eroding

¹⁹ Potter, *Considerations*, pp. 23, 50-51.

the principle of a right to outdoor relief offset the failure to direct properly their consumer spending.

Many progressive reformers were attracted to the schemes for the concentration of parishes and the building of Houses of Industry because they seemed to offer the prospect of turning out improved, aspirant and industrious labourers. For such writers, the task of these Houses was to provide material comfort from rural unemployment and to civilise the poor by improving their minds and their habits through education. The various schemes for Houses of Industry shared the same basic features. All sought to provide shelter and labour cheaply within their walls, providing also education and labour for children and relief for the sick and infirm.²⁰

In 1766, in reply to criticisms levelled by Richard Burn, there appeared an anonymously written defence of the Nacton and Bulcamp Houses of Industry. This outlined, in some detail, the objectives of the Houses in terms of progressive aspirations. For a labourer facing unemployment, he suggested, 'here he may be employ'd till he shall find work elsewhere; but during his stay, if he be industrious, he will have many Encouragements and Rewards'. The same applied to those labourers whose earnings were insufficient to support their families. Here they would be permitted 'two pence in every shilling...out of the Profits of their Labour', as an 'Encouragement to Industry'. Hence such a man would secure 'a better Table, Lodging, and Fire than he can ever afford in seasons of the greatest Plenty' and,

²⁰ See A Scheme, pp. 5-13; A Proposal for.....Norfolk, pp. 7-18; A Bill for the Better Relief.

when the time of scarcity was over, he could collect 'a reward proportionate to his Industry'.²¹

The example of general industriousness would also have a reformatory and civilising effect upon the children of the poor. Children were to be subjected to a regime which combined education in reading and writing with useful labour. At the Nacton House of industry, it was claimed, 'Children are taught to read until they are five years old; and how pleasing it is to see them go from their School to the picking of Oakum, or turning the Wheels of the manufactory, not by compulsion but by Choice'. Such, the author proudly claimed, was the 'Effect of Imitation in the Youngest Minds, where a general spirit of Industry prevails! And how different a scene does this convey to the Reader's Imagination, from what every Country Village...presents to his Sight!'²² Such an education, it was hoped, would assist the young once they left the house or their service.

As for the aged and infirm, these were to be cared for in ways that reinforced the notion that labour received its reward through the attainment of ease and the satisfaction of desires. The House was to be 'an Asylum..in which he may pass the Evening of his Days with Ease of Body, Peace of Mind, and competence of Provision'. Likewise at Bulcamp, the 'evening of their days' would be made

²¹ An Examination of the Alteration in the poor Laws, Proposed by Dr. Burn, and a Refutation of his Objections to Workhouses, so far as they relate to Hundred Houses (London, 1766), p. 11. See also Considerations, p. 15. For a similar scheme for a system of incentives in Josiah Tucker, Manifold Causes of the Increase of the Poor, Distinctly set forth; Together with a Set of Proposals for Removing and Preventing some of the Principal Evils (Gloucester, 1760), pp. 28-30.

²² An Examination, p. 9; The same was true at Bulcamp, where, Potter claimed, they were rarely to be found still in the House, 'having been put into service often with farmers'. Potter, Observations, p. 43. See also Potter, Considerations, pp. 25-27.

‘comfortable’. Rescued from want and ‘consign’d to respect and tranquillity’, they could come and go as their strength and inclination permitted or, alternatively, stay in the house ‘where they have the liberty of decent rooms, where they form their little parties of conversation, sit around the fire and tell stories of ancient times’.²³

The reformers, as we have seen, attempted to address what *they* saw as the liberties of the poor, granting them indulgence to smoke, drink tea and eat bread and butter. They also attempted to portray the loathing of these institutions as an ignorant prejudice which showed a misapprehension of the true meaning of liberty. The author claimed that there was, perhaps, no benefit ‘more vehemently desired, yet less understood’ than liberty. No one, surely, he urged, would want to advocate ‘an unlimited Freedom and an entire removal of restraints’. The liberties of the poor were addressed in as much as they were compatible with the principle that idleness was an offence against the community. The concessions on petty luxuries and the high standard of life in the houses of industry made any further claims to liberty nothing more than frenzied and irrational licence, a classic case of artificial want. The fear of these houses was equally irrational. The author told the story of a woman who had such ‘terrible Apprehensions of entering into the House at Nacton, that the night before she was sent there, she attempted to destroy herself’. Having been introduced to the civilising process, however, ‘she was not only soon reconciled to it, but so fond of her Habitation that she declared she had never been so happy in her Life’.²⁴

Her irrational attachment to liberty, in other words, had been substituted for the

²³ An Examination, p. 11; Potter, Observations, p. 42.

²⁴ An Examination, p. 17.

satisfaction of other 'liberties' (or needs) in the form of material rewards for her labour.

Truly rational pleasure was to be unleashed by a regime which recognised the right and the motive to labour in exchange for material reward. This brought emancipation in the form of enlightened civilisation to a people imprisoned in prejudice and oppressed by false notions of freedom. But it also brought a more intense administration of the lives of its inmates as the Directors sought to discern and enforce categories of true and false needs upon recalcitrant paupers.

In the writings of the Quaker poet, John Scott, we can see the progressive aspiration for the moral improvement of the poor in its most developed form. Scott envisaged the Houses of Industry catering for a range of needs that the author of the Examination had not even begun to address. Scott employed the same techniques of aestheticised sentimental description in depicting the interior of a parish workhouse run by its 'petty tyrants'. In terms which directly appealed to the excessive feeling encoded into the sentimental imagination, Scott bade his readers picture and sympathise with its population of 'emaciated forms, with look of unavailing sorrow or surly discontent', which 'people like spectres the melancholy gloom within, and watch with earnest solicitude the motions of their implacable master'. Scott also evoked the terrors of the sublime, urging that 'no extensive stretch of the imagination is requisite to aggravate them into a resemblance of the enchanted castles of romance,

whose ferocious giants held their reign over miserable captives and subsisted on the fruits of rapine and murder'.²⁵

Scott, who was an active campaigner against the slave trade, combined this appeal to the terrors of historical forms of slavery with a keen consciousness of the potential of modern forms of slavery. Once he signed onto the parish, Scott claimed, the pauper found himself 'a slave to the vestry', fastened to their hard servitude by the indissoluble chain of inevitable necessity'.²⁶ Scott also contrasted the vast luxury in food, dress and architecture displayed by the accumulators of wealth with the diseased, mutilated beggars who frequent the same streets'. If any hierarchy were to survive, he argued, it depended upon the ability of society to provide a certain level of material and moral well-being for its people. This was to be guided by the standard of decency. For decency, he maintained, was 'a point beneath which none of the latter [the poor] should ever be permitted to experience depression'.²⁷

The settlement laws, which Scott described as 'an unwieldy fabric of heterogeneous designs, erected by the line of confusion with the stones of emptiness', had to be reformed. The founding principle would be one fit for a modern, commercial society; 'where a man has bestowed his labour and spent his money', Scott argued, 'he ought to be supported when the ability of labouring and the ability of spending terminate together'. Settlement and relief should be the reward for the continued and industrious offer of labour, offered to anyone who worked in the

²⁵ John Scott, Observations on the Present State of the Parochial and Vagrant Poor (London, 1773), pp. 45-46.

²⁶ Scott, Observations, p. 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

parish. If humans had a right to subsistence, they also enjoyed a supplementary and imperfect right to more imaginary pleasures. For it was these capacities that impelled them toward goal-oriented rationality. Accordingly, the act of bestowing value on objects could be allowed to take seemingly irrational and individual forms. In an image that was to become a familiar trope in descriptions of the rural poor, John Scott addressed the labourer's desire for a fixed place in the world; for a home and for land. 'Attachment to one situation', he claimed, 'is the natural consequence of long residence; and this foible seems to operate equally through all ranks of society'. This could account for why the cottager was 'as fond of his cottage as the tradesman is his shop'. There is, he explained 'a secret wish not easily accounted for, to resign the last breath of life on the same spot where it was received; there is often as unaccountable an affection for some particular convenience of habitation'. Such things, he admitted, were 'of little importance in reality', but 'they are of much in idea; and in idea exist many of our sublimest pains and pleasures'.²⁸

For Scott, the services of the Houses of Industry clustered around the uncertainties of wage labour. It buttressed the labouring-class family at its weak points, educating children, providing accommodation for the elderly and infirm and catering for unemployed families. Crucially, he advised that families should be kept together. Part of the cruelty of the parish workhouses had been the separation of families, depriving the poor of the tender pleasures of familial affection. Summoning up another scene of pitiful distress to move his readers, Scott described the pathetic

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

scene of spousal separation: 'The tender connection is broken; one is committed to the workhouse, the other is left to pine in artificial widowhood'. The removal of the unemployed father from his children was perhaps even more heart-rending, as 'the unfortunate parent, in that season of debility when the officious cares of filial affection are most requisite for the alleviation of those painful infirmities common to the greatest and meanest of mortals' was 'ravished from the arms of his dutiful and assiduous offspring, and transferred to the management of those whom interest is continually stimulating to oppression'.²⁹

There were certain needs, then, that could not be catered for through the raw mechanism of wage labour. Yet, even though Scott's writing attests to and recognises needs in labourers that reveal the extent of alienation, displacement and misery that came with rural poverty, the grounds upon which society ought to cater to them were fundamentally determined by wage labour itself. For Scott, as much the other writers, the services that the hundred houses offered and the needs they addressed were the condition of and as a reward for labour. Like wages and leisure, poor relief was to be entirely mediated by a life of alienating commercial transactions. And, if Scott's rhetoric seems more powerful and his sense of injustice more righteous, then it is salutary to observe that this derives from his abilities as a sentimentalist, an artist. He was appealing to an order of values and needs that was in the long process of becoming separated from the rules governing commercial and economic policy. Scott may have been attempting to hold them together but,

²⁹ Scott, Observations, p. 48.

ultimately, he was appealing to a reason that was increasingly invalid in the sphere of the moral, ethical and aesthetic and a sentiment that was increasingly invalid in the sphere of practical policy.

In the face of the obvious hatred that these foundations inspired, even after their completion, some progressives complained that the Houses of Industry contravened the natural liberties of the poor as Englishman. In place of these institutions, they tended to argue for a tighter parish police which would cater for the needs and wants of the poor. But this could encompass progressive and conservative strains.

A pamphlet entitled A View of Real Grievances with Remedies for Redressing Them, written in 1772 and attributed to one John Powell, outlined the dimensions of a progressive version of an effective parish police.³⁰ The anonymous author started from the assumption that it was the poor laws which had made the labouring people 'debased, burdensome and incapable of caring for themselves'. Once in this condition, the poor quickly fell foul of the luxuries of modern life. Alehouses, in particular, corrupted the poor. 'Those whose Income arises from Labour', the author declaimed, 'spend too much of their Time and Money in Taverns or Alehouses'. In such

³⁰ S. H. Halkett and John Laing's Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature (Edinburgh, 1926) simply lists this author, enigmatically, as 'Powell'. Nothing more is known. A very similar scheme was also outlined in 1764 in the Gentleman's Magazine. See 'Observations on the Laws in Force for Relieving the Poor, with Objections to Workhouses, and a Proposal for one General Law to make the Burthen more Equal', Gentleman's Magazine [hereafter GM] (1764), pp. 69-71, and a later appeal in Thoughts on the Present State of the Poor and the Bill Intended for Their Better Relief and Employment, By a Kentishman (London, 1776).

institutions, they could be enticed to squander away 'Money, Time, Health, Credit, and every Thing that is valuable'.³¹

Nonetheless, the author was clear that the poor possessed the potential to become industrious labourers and economical consumers. He recounted an anecdote of a parish 'where live three sober families' who, 'by keeping away from alehouses, and brewing a little wholesome, though not very strong beer, at Home', had 'never been burthensome to the Parish, even in time of sickness and Scarcity'. Even though 'there are Children in each of these Families, they never want the common necessities of life and are always decently clad'.³²

A good police would inculcate time, labour and consumer discipline, but it would do so with the aim of allowing the poor to fulfil their needs and wants. And, if they could not, the parish must help them in accordance with the right bestowed on them by labour. 'Time', the author of the *View* argued, reiterating the familiar trope of commercial ideology, 'is the poor man's stock in Trade', just as 'Labour' is 'the poor Man's only Commodity'. And, just as employers had a responsibility to 'reward them for good use of it', so the 'wise lawgiver will make it his principal study to render all ranks of people happy'. For labour in particular, he must 'procure to them the quiet enjoyment of the fruits of their industry, and enable them to purchase the necessities not to say the conveniencies of life upon easy terms'. The aged, in particular, had a 'just claim' to 'the rewards' of 'an honest, laborious, useful, vigorous, and virtuous Life'. Recognising these rights was not only just, but would be

³¹ *A View of Real Grievances with Remedies Proposed for Redressing them; Humbly submitted to the Consideration of the Legislature* (London, 1772), pp. 3, 17-18.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

the method by which ‘others of their own Sphere or Rank at least, will...be excited and encouraged to imitate their Example’.³³

Powell also recognised the need and desire for land. He conceded that ‘the Rights, properties, and Privilidges [sic] of the Poor have been in some places grossly Invaded in the division of the Commons’. However, the answer to this was not to recognise these rights and customary usages in law, but to exchange them for conditional tenant rights. Cottages and acreages should, he recommended, be let to the laborious poor to descend to their children on condition that they remain day-labourers. The poor would have property rights to land, recognised in legal contact, provided they remain proletarianised in every other way.³⁴

Just as the defence of the rights of the poor was conducted in terms that traded customary usages in for capitalist property rights, so also the liberties of the poor were established within the terms of the negative liberty appropriate to proletarianised labour. It was wrong, the tract argued, for those labourers in manufacture to have to submit to the customs of apprenticeship. This was an infringement upon their liberty to take their labour wherever they desired. Echoing Adam Smith, the View’s author argued that ‘all persons should have Liberty, Judgement, and circumstances to follow such Branches of their Trade as are most suitable to their Inclinations’.³⁵

The Houses of Industry utterly contradicted this aspiration. They were tyrannical institutions which instilled such fear into the poor that they preferred to die

³³ Ibid., pp. 135, 285.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 203.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 131.

in misery than be deprived of liberty inside their walls. Once inside, the corruption and barbarism of the poor would continue apace. They would lose all the benefits of familial love as they were separated from their wives and children. Indicating back to his earlier words on alehouses, the author reminded his readers that there were 'too many means already to un-domesticate People...and to render them indifferent to social advantages and Comforts of Life'.³⁶ Like the alehouses, the houses of industry would destroy the capacity for rational desire and the inclinations which motivated commerce, civilisation and improvement.

The answer for this author lay not in the use of such tyrannical and demoralising instruments, but in a closer administration of the existing system which would reform the nation into one great parish, establish accommodation for the aged, lend to the temporarily distressed poor and provide education and apprenticeships in agriculture or manufacture for the children of the poor. This would be accompanied by the establishment of an assize of bread, the closing down of alehouses and leasing out of properties of forty acres, made from the division of the commons, to 'industrious married people who have deserved well, by their servitude and sobriety'. This latter, it was confidently predicted, would 'produce an amazing change in the conduct of the common people and be a means of furnishing us with provisions in greater Plenty and upon cheaper terms'.³⁷

At the heart of Powell's tract, then, was a compound and contradictory image of a pastoral labourer, a proletarian worker with access to enough land to cater for

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 62-65.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 52-53, 100-101, 137, 201-202, 227, 345-358.

his fetishistic attachment, but not enough to make him self-sufficient. Powell's parish police was designed to enforce the operation of a pure labour market against the tyranny of custom and to brace up the same market at the points where it failed. Both this parish police and the ideal-type pastoral worker who sat at its heart appeared in a conservative form in the second pamphlet we will examine.

Thomas Mendham of Briston was a Norfolk Methodist preacher. His pamphlet, printed in 1775, was a direct reply to Potter's Observations. Mendham argued that the Houses of Industry represented an assault upon the liberties of Englishmen as established under Magna Carta, evoking recent memories of Wilkes's campaign against the government and the Middlesex election. Mendham argued that liberty was the 'unalienable right of every Englishman'. Yet he did not draw this right from the possession and offer of labour. The Houses of Industry, he suggested, enshrined the principle that it was permissible to infringe the liberties of certain Englishmen 'only because they ARE POOR' and represented a rejection of the principles of paternalism on the part of the gentry.³⁸

But this liberty must not, Mendham argued, be permitted to follow its logic. For the liberty of the displaced proletarian was no liberty at all. For the rural poor, even were the Houses of Industry to grant them the liberty of movement,

whither should they go? Should they wander abroad to mourn out their complaints, to tell the woods, the groves, the lofty trees, the purling streams, their sorrows? To tell them they are torn from their beloved places of their nativity, from their favourite abodes, ravish'd from the knees of their fathers, the kindness of their dearest friends - poor solace this to detached mortals, consigned to the walls, or at

³⁸ Thomas Mendham, A Dialogue in Two Conversations Between a Gentleman, A Pauper, and his Friend, Intended as an Answer to a Pamphlet Published by the Revd. Mr. Potter, Intituled Observations on the Poor Laws (London, 1775), pp. 29, 33-34.

most the boundaries of an HUGE SEPULCHRE, and who have little more to expect than the intervention of a few tedious hours, without hope of redress, until the icy hand of death shall consign them to eternity.³⁹

For Mendham then, the House of Industry embodied the fate of the poor torn from their homes and turned out upon the world, tormented by the memory of a past of pastoral simplicity. His sentimental rhetoric reveals that Mendham was bemoaning a spiritual lack which was traceable to the loss of land. The poor, he urged, needed to have a place, territorial and social. But, of course, Mendham could only evoke the pain of this loss for his readers by articulating it as an individual solitude; a painfully modern sense of homelessness. It was the lack of land, he claimed, which deprived the poor man, driving him to the alehouse ‘as soon as his spirit sinks under the load of complicated hardships, which his unabated labour is unable to remove’.

Drunkenness, looseness and improvidence, the acts through which the poor succumbed to the ‘luxury of the age’, were the consequence of despair. The poor, he argued, ‘have no property, therefore they have no courage’.⁴⁰

It was a duty incumbent upon all, Mendham warned, ‘to promote the present and future well-being of the Poor’. ‘Let the demolished cottages be rebuilt’, he exhorted his readers, ‘their little precincts restored, the parish schools established, industry encouraged, charity recommended’ and ‘the poor shall lift up their heads with comfort, shall enjoy their former privileges unmolested’.⁴¹ Mendham’s version

³⁹ Mendham, *A Dialogue*, p. 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56. See also Nathaniel Kent, *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property* (London, 1775), pp. 229-232. Kent drew up plans for the ideal cottages for a proletarian workforce that would possess the virtues of simplicity that characterised idealised peasant life.

of a parish police, then, was less an improvement of commercial society through the buttressing of its failings, than a fantasy of the restoration of a lost paternalistic spirit through the conscious recreation of traditional institutions. And, equally, his own version of the pastoral labourer articulated a desire to return the poor to a historical realm of lost innocence; a place and time before the cares of proletarianisation. In so doing, it both recognised labouring people's real experience of loss and distorted it by projecting the vision of a less alienated existence onto a vision of a traditional, feudal social order. And, ultimately, the intention was wholly consonant with one of the aspirations of Methodism: to address the growing inner desolation that accompanied the developing practices of disciplined wage labour.

Part II:

When attention turned to the urban and rural manufacturing poor, those with no chance of getting land, there could be little hope of invoking a historical form of property. Instead, many reformers looked to the emerging forms of independent labouring-class association. In particular, they turned to the institutional form which seemed to promise to inculcate most effectively the proper habits for the poor and which corresponded most closely to the model of an economic household: the Friendly Society. For reformers, their contributory schemes and their codes of conduct offered the framework of a largely self-financing reformatory institutional model.

In 1772, the well-known lawyer, constitutionalist and mathematician, Francis Maseres, published his scheme for establishing a parish annuity system.⁴² Drawing heavily on the nonconformist radical Richard Price's Observations on Reversionary Payments, published the year before, Maseres' project aimed to institute a parish annuity to be sold to the poor by the overseer with the poor rate as security.⁴³ The scheme was explicitly aimed at 'labouring men that live in towns and cities' since 'numbers of these are known to get so much by their labour that they can maintain themselves the whole week upon the earnings of the first three days of it', but instead spent their time in 'idleness and pleasure', 'drunkenness and debauchery'.⁴⁴ The higher tradesmen, Maseres claimed, routinely practised provision for old age through their clubs and societies and it was a wonder that 'it should not be generally practised by the labouring poor'. That it was not, he claimed, was not due to any constitutional incapability. It was that they lacked the rational incentive to do so. If, he argued, they had somewhere to put their money to secure a good return in their investment without fear of loss, it was probable 'they would frequently embrace it'. So much so, in fact, that Price's concern that starting payments of annuities before 55 or 60 would halt the incentive to industry too early represented, Maseres reckoned, unnecessary anxiety. With the right institutions in place, the poor could be relied upon to act rationally for 'the desire of procuring better annuities for their money will, it may be

⁴² Maseres appears to have been a well respected public figure of the period; an intellectual polymath and ardently Protestant whig politician. Dictionary of National Biography, 'Francis Maseres'.

⁴³ Francis Maseres, A Proposal for Establishing Life-Annuities in Parishes for the Benefit of the Industrious Poor (London, 1772); Richard Price, Observations on Reversionary Payments; On Schemes for Providing Annuities for Widows and for Persons of Old Age (London, 1771); Poynter, Society and Pauperism, pp. 35-36.

⁴⁴ Maseres, A Proposal, pp. 5-6.

presumed, incline them, for the most part to choose a more distant period for their commencement'.⁴⁵

Maseres urged that the annuities would awaken a spirit of industry and a will to improve themselves among the poor which, once operational, would grow to the benefit of all. For, 'once the person has secured themselves against the dangers or distresses in their old age by employing some of their first savings in the purchase of these annuities', their further savings would be 'employed in advancing themselves in the world some other way, such as the purchase of a house, or a bit of land, or some stock in the public funds, or the furniture of a house, or a shop or the like'.⁴⁶

Maseres hoped that an institutional framework that appealed to the enlightened self-interest of labourers would encourage them to aspire to property-ownership, to cultivate the habits of accumulation and indulge the sense of having. Yet he was also careful to maintain the basic conditions of proletarian life which were essential for the prosperity of society. The parish annuity scheme must not tie labour to any one place. The glory of this scheme, he exclaimed, was that it did not matter where the worker expended his energy, 'he can buy his annuity in whichever parish he settles in, and move in the meantime too'.⁴⁷

The bill based upon Maseres' scheme fell in the House of Lords. However, the possibilities of contributory schemes continued to provoke thought on the reform

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 7, 9, 30.

⁴⁶ See A Bill to Enable the Rectors, or Vicars, Churchwardens, and Overseers of the Poor, in many of the Parishes of England and Wales, to grant Annuities for their Lives (1772); Francis Maseres, Considerations on the Bill now Depending in the House of Commons, For enabling Parishes to Grant Annuities to Poor Persons (London, 1773), pp. 15-16.

⁴⁷ Maseres, Observations, p. 20.

of the poor laws.⁴⁸ Maseres and other progressives dreamed of unlocking the ambition, desires and social aspiration of the labouring people. Yet they also sought to maintain a rigid demarcation between the necessities of subsistence and the indulgence of their artificial wants. And the labouring classes inevitably failed to live up to the expectations of the progressives. They regularly failed to mould their desires to the needs of the nation.

The Friendly Societies themselves were often seen as one example of this failure. The original appeal of such organisations had not simply been the prospect of disencumbering polite society of its dependent population. It had also been that they offered a cheap technology for restraining the labouring classes' tendency to excessive indulgence. Many Friendly Societies inveighed against drunkenness or excess on the part of their members and this plainly informed the enthusiasm of their advocates in reforming circles. Yet, ironically, it was the concrete forms of social aspiration embedded in these collective forms which reformers found most uncomfortable. For many commentators, the Friendly Societies were marred by their proximity to trade combinations. Powell, for example, saw a threat in the accumulation of funds in the hands of the 'labouring and indigent poor'. For, he said, they 'often apply it in support of themselves and Families, when they enter into any confederacy to raise their Wages, or by any other illegal Combinations'. These would not only injure trade and agriculture, but occasion 'Riot and a Contempt of Law and all Order'. In other words, it was the labourers' very exercise of their commercial subjectivity - their attempt to protect or raise their value as a commodity through

⁴⁸ See Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*, pp. 35-39.

enhanced wages - which made the societies, as collective forms, so dangerous. Part of the attraction of Maseres' scheme for this author was its appropriation of funds into the hands of parish officers.⁴⁹

This aspect of the contributory schemes fuelled the interest of conservative writers, looking chiefly to shed the obligation to maintain such a large burden of poor relief. Progressives and conservatives were united by the ambition to secure as much labour as possible while resisting the logic of social entitlement.

The author of the Inquiry into the Management of the Poor of 1767, which we examined briefly in chapter eight, could see definite advantages to the friendly societies. Their effects on the morals of the manufacturing poor were marked, he claimed, and they would 'undoubtedly prevent many poor families from becoming chargeable to the parish'. It would be a good idea, he continued, if they could be encouraged to flourish and be regulated under the stewardly eye of gentlemen and persons of circumstance.⁵⁰ A bit of paternalism, judiciously applied, he argued, could serve the national economy well.

The problems of the poor, this author argued, were largely attributable to the institutions of the poor law. These were corrupting people by enlarging their needs and consequently indulging artificial wants. Particularly to blame were the big workhouses. It was their very success in supporting the poor, the development of

⁴⁹ Powell, A View of Real Grievances, pp. 143-145.

⁵⁰ An Inquiry into the Management of the Poor, and our Usual Polity respecting the Common People (London, 1767), p. 74. Rose's Act of 1793 attempted to do exactly this and many gentlemen did attempt to play a paternalistic role in their local working men's clubs. Seen this way, Rose's Act of 1793, which has often been described as merely 'cautious', might be re-read as a conscious attempt to impose a framework of law over the existing Friendly Societies to make them liable for their funds and to encourage public registration of their rules and orders. It was, perhaps, in equal

material well-being that progressives were so proud of, that was at the heart of the problem. These workhouses, he suggested, introduced the poor inmates to a standard to life to which they could not otherwise aspire: 'From the time the poor are admitted and have changed their own coarse and slender diet for the comparative luxury of these houses, the whole expence of their maintenance is thrown upon the parish'. He went on to protest that, 'their entertainment there is generally such that I apprehend the greatest part of the poor, especially the idle and improvident, which I am afraid sometime makes up a considerable majority' were 'so well satisfied with their situation, which is usually better than they can ever probably procure for themselves, that they are ready to find any pretext for continuing there as long as they possibly can'. Indeed, the totality of the laws for the relief of the poor did little more than breed 'a universal meanness and degeneracy from our true ancient spirit'.⁵¹

Beneath the 'country' rhetoric of corruption and luxury lay a harsh sense of economic and political utility. Education for the young, for example, the jewel in the crown of progressives, was directly counter to the national interest. 'Young persons so educated', he argued, would develop high expectations of social aspiration. 'But how', he demanded, 'are these expectations to be satisfied? It is impossible that they should'. Those who sought to reform the poor through education were in danger of 'weakening or even utterly effacing those great motives to frugality and

measure, an exercise in the state policing of combinations, and in the further undermining of the parish system. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*, pp. 38-39; Clark, *British Clubs*, pp. 371-372.

⁵¹ *An Inquiry into the Management of the Poor*, pp. 77, 18.

industriousness...the desire of procuring for ourselves a comfortable and independent support in sickness and in health'.⁵²

Central to the mechanisms of a commercial society was the recognition that wage labour was intrinsically meaningless and hateful. The natural ambition toward ease operated, fortuitously for the nation, to support prosperity by compelling those who knew no better to labour for others. Consequently, the unlocking of ambition here represented a threat to not only the stability of society, but its prosperity: 'All other teaching which is not accompanied with labour, will be utterly unprofitable both to themselves and the public'. Instead, he urged, the legislature should inure the poor to 'the lowest and most early labour', for 'the love and practice of labour make the principal part of the true religion of the great bulk of mankind'.⁵³

Cultivating the ignorant notion that labour was a duty owed to higher powers, self-consciously encouraging a religious sensibility that acted as an opiate or an illusion, would keep the aspirations of the labouring people within the boundaries that were necessary for the preservation of inequality. In fact, the author claimed, ignorance was a state of innocence from the cares of modernity. 'The condition of the industrious, sober, and virtuous labourer', he argued, 'perhaps ought rather to excite envy than pity'. 'His cares seldom exceed the limits of the day' as he 'sits down to enjoy his homely frugal meal with cheerfulness and appetite, the natural reward of his virtuous labour, in vain sought after by pampered luxury in the most exquisite delicacies'.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid., pp. 15, 17.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 91-92.

In the same way that this author recommended a judicious measure of paternalistic support for any institution that would keep the labouring classes off the poor rates, so he recommended appropriating the technologies of a parish police, turning them to the ends of deterrence and discipline. Alehouses were to be closed down and the duties on strong ale, that ‘most dangerous and pernicious of luxuries, the luxury of the common people’, must be maintained. Parish employments were to be provided for paupers in their homes, with gratifications provided for good work. Most importantly, perhaps, the ‘superior people of each parish’ should make ‘an inquiry into the state and behaviour of the common people’. This would determine whether they or their inmates were employed, with all the implications this had for the laws of settlement. It would also determine their habits of consumption. The cost of bread, butter, tea and sugar, he argued, was ‘too expensive...for the common use of the poor’. Proper regulation of the poor might, he hinted, involve attention to such habits. Such police would allow a true picture of the condition of the poor to emerge and would consequently rationalise the terms of social responsibility. If the poor were still immiserated after this, he suggested, then they would know that they only had themselves to blame.⁵⁵

This author’s advocacy of the pragmatic manipulation of the ignorant affections of the poor was a common conservative stance. A letter to the Gentleman’s Magazine suggested that the problem with the poor laws was their inability to determine real misery and distress. The author recommended using the ‘Colleges of

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 21-22, 46-47, 73-74, 91-93. For similar conservative statements of the virtue of a parish police, see Thoughts on the Present State of the Poor, pp. 21, 31; Five Letters on the State of the Poor in the County of Kent (London, 1770), pp. 4-8, 12-16.

Labour' to terrify the poor into industriousness. All 'common beggars, idle dissolute and abandoned people' should be committed to these institutions 'without exception'. 'The very terror of such an undertaking', he suggested, 'would frighten many of these vagabonds beyond the seas, others would betake themselves to honest labour, many who are now drunken and idle would become sober and industrious'.⁵⁶ The author of the Essay on Trade and Commerce argued that 'Loss of Liberty, fear of punishment, hunger, thirst, etc..must be opposed to idleness, love of intoxicating liquors, gaming, lust, etc'. The poor, then, must be 'laid under an absolute necessity to labour, by a dread of stripes, or a fear of the want of necessities, and of living on bread and water'. The workhouse therefore, must become 'AN HOUSE OF TERROR'.⁵⁷

We can see the manipulation of the prejudices of an ignorant populace as the negative conservative analogue of the progressive wish to rouse the poor out of primitive barbarism by manipulating their social affections. Equally, the progressive desire to encourage the goal-oriented calculative rationality of the labouring people had its conservative analogue in the attempt to construct institutions that would manipulate a self-interest narrowly conceived and void of any social orientation. Underpinning this conservative conception of a labourer's interest was the recognition that labour had become meaningless, instrumental and alienated. But where progressives attempted, to some extent, to offset the effects of this alienation, conservatives assumed it to be part of a natural orientation toward ease. The 'natural disposition..to indolence and ease', which motivated human beings would,

⁵⁶ GM 35 (1765), pp. 615-616; GM 39 (1769), pp. 372-373.

⁵⁷ Essay on Trade and Commerce, p. 242.

conservatives claimed, push people towards laziness and luxury if there were no way of compelling them to labour.⁵⁸ The law that gave the poor a certainty of relief created dependence and sapped labour effort. The logic of this position was, of course, abolition of the poor laws.

Arthur Young, in his Farmer's Letters, probably came closest of anyone to advocating the abolition of the poor laws. Young objected that the provision of poor relief was indiscriminate and ill-defined. 'Every Thing provided by the several acts of Parliament for their use, is indefinitely expressed', he complained: 'Money, lodging, apparel, food, etc..as may be wanted, are all uncertain'. Parish officers' control and discretion made the poor 'dependent on the parish for all'. This, he argued, distorted the simple social imperative to save. If the poor were 'indefinitely diligent, sober, and industrious, while they are young in health, what is the consequence? Why they lay up a small sum monthly to support them easily and comfortably when aged or in sickness'. But, 'suppose they're idle, drunken and worthless -What attends such a contrast? - Why precisely the same effect as the other conduct is attended with; ease and comfort either in sickness or age -not from themselves indeed - but the parish'.⁵⁹

Implicit in Young's tract is the argument that the truly industrious poor would not need relief and that those who asked for relief should not have it. Young recognised a moral imperative for Englishmen to maintain a certain standard of living, but this remained at the level of a normative entreaty, of little guidance in terms of practical policy. 'That the poor ought to be well fed -well cloathed - and live in that

⁵⁸ GM 48 (1768), p. 156, GM 53 (1773), p. 67.

⁵⁹ Arthur Young, The Farmer's Letters to the People of England: Containing the Sentiments of a Practical Husbandman, on various subjects of the Utmost Importance (London, 1767), pp. 161-163.

comfortable manner requisite to Englishmen, is a point of undoubted consequence - and which cannot be contradicted', he admitted. However, that they should 'live in this manner, at the expence of the Publick, in a loss of a part of their labour, is the grievance I at present complain of'.⁶⁰

Indeed, lurking in the Farmer's Letters is the argument that the natural way to secure good labour was through the motive of hunger. In this context, the poor laws appeared as a distortion of a mechanism which was coming to be seen as naturally ordained. It offered incentives for labourers to exercise their love of ease and live in irrationality. 'I never yet knew', he claimed, 'one instance of any poor man's working diligently while young and in health, to escape coming to the parish when ill or old'. Parish relief catered to what Young saw as the manipulative machinations of the poor. Inside his rhetoric, we can discern the persistence of recognisable features of customary culture and older needs. Young mocked those who argued that the poor should have the incentive of land as it raised their utopian hopes to the level of irrational fervour. 'Some will aim at taking little farms' with the consequence that, 'if by any means they are disappointed in their endeavour, they consider the money they have already saved as of no future value, but spend it long before they really want it'. One of the most scandalous objects of this irrationality was tea. 'Numerous families', he claimed 'that are completely cloathed by the parish will let their cloaths drop into pieces without being at the trouble and expence of ever mending them'. At the same time, 'they have every day drank their tea sweetened with nine penny sugar'. 'The present laws relative to the support of the poor', he concluded, 'are universally

⁶⁰ Young, Farmer's Letters, p. 168.

encouragers of idleness, drunkenness and tea-drinking amongst them and...as such they are highly pernicious to the welfare of the kingdom'.⁶¹

The solution, for Young, was to overhaul the laws completely and bring them into line with a more rational conception of necessity. The principle of relief for any able-bodied poor had to be swept away. Houses of Industry must simply cater for the impotent and take away the children of the poor who applied for relief. This latter interestingly inverted the progressive principle of providing for children in the Houses. Young stipulated no pedagogical regime for the child. It would simply be removed from its family, making the workhouse truly an instrument of terror. Finally, outdoor relief would be restricted to 'those who cannot maintain themselves, and who could not have saved a sufficiency to support them'. But for those 'healthy strong young people', who 'spend in superfluities (particularly tea) and lose in good times by their not working a full portion of labour - what would maintain them when sick or old', Young had only harsh words; 'such should have no relief from the Publick'. The guiding principle of any new set of laws must be that the poor ought 'never again to have a certainty of being maintained by others, when a day of work comes'.⁶²

By the mid 1770s then, the prospect of abolishing the poor laws already existed, in an undeveloped form, within the imaginations of contemporary social commentators. This was underpinned by a harshly economic concept of 'necessity': that level of subsistence necessary to reproduce the labouring body and to leave intact

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 170-171.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 177-179.

the 'natural' motive to engage in meaningless and hateful labour. Central elements of the world-view underpinning political economy were in place. Correspondingly, we can see the development of moral 'remainders', taking the form of paternalism, ethical progresivism and sentimental representation. In mainstream propertied-class social thought, these remainders, addressing needs and wants that exceeded the world of political economy, increasingly diverged from the world of practical policy, seen to be informed by the natural operation of social and economic laws. Perhaps we can say that, by the late eighteenth century, the consumer desires and human needs of the labouring classes had, to a larger degree than ever before, been fixed into the liminal position they would continue to occupy in capitalist society.

Conclusion

Part I:

By the 1770s, England was a commercial society both in practice and in ideological expression. And as we have seen, the increasing commodity consumption of the labouring classes was a recognised fact within this ideology. Perhaps the central narrative running through the thesis has been the formation of the notion of a universal consumer; the creation of a conception of consumption that could embrace even the labouring classes. The way in which the labouring classes were imagined as consumers can be seen to have changed in line with the development of the relationship between the nation and commercial exchange. The transformations in one, were expressions of the transformations in the other.

In the early eighteenth century, the needs of the state were defined by mercantilism's demand for labour and the neo-classical tradition, in which the nation was threatened by luxury and corruption. Consequently, the labouring classes were encased within one ideology that saw them as units of labour power, and another that saw them as citizens of a lesser capacity or as dependents, endowed with liberties but incapable of political or economic agency. In neither case were the labouring people imagined as commercial agents, capable of self-government and engaged in the rational pursuit of their desires. Yet the growing prosperity of the commercial middling sorts depended, in part, upon the developing market among the labouring classes. Articulating this emergent interest and the consumption upon which it depended, within the terms of existing ideologies, proved to be difficult. But it was even more difficult to contain it once

it was recognised. In the mercantilist tradition, the labouring classes' consumption of commodities could be seen as, at best, an example of the Mandevillian paradox of private vices feeding the public good. In the neo-classical and paternalist traditions labouring people could be seen to possess inalienable liberties, or to demand paternalistic governance. Increasingly, such rights and liberties were seen to be permeable to material notions of comfort and convenience, entitling the poor to an indeterminate and potentially unlimited level of material welfare.

By the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the expansion of domestic commerce was fully recognised to constitute a powerful economic interest in the nation. Correspondingly, the consumption of commodities by labouring people achieved a new and higher form of ideological expression. As the nation became conceptualised as a web of commercial transactions, and as labour became seen as an exchangeable commodity, the labouring classes were increasingly incorporated into the more progressive visions of commercial improvement. The labouring classes' consumption was recognised as a way of improving the nation and themselves simultaneously by extending the socialising benefits of commerce across the whole of society. Paternalistic notions of a right to comfort and convenience were fused with progressive notions of improvement through rational exchange, offering the labouring classes the chance to share in the moral and material rewards of society's progressive development. And as wage-labour came to be seen as an act of exchange, so domestic economy came to be seen as the management and distribution of material resources. The labouring-class home became a central category in social descriptions of the poor; a site of potential consumer agency through which the family could improve itself. Even the more conservative commentators recognised the viability of and

necessity for these concepts. But, rather than seeing it as the location of progressive development, they re-articulated the labouring-class household as a site of consumer discipline, arguing that economy should be a new form of deference. By cultivating domestic economy, they argued, the poor could be made responsible for their own condition while the social order, now seen to underpin the accumulation of wealth, could be infused with a new legitimacy. The fitness of new and old commodities was accordingly assessed against an imagined budget.

The writings of the mid century also reveal that the assessment of moral and material condition through the construction of household budgets had become universal. The habits of the labouring classes were assessed with reference to an imaginary budget that determined their entitlement to commodities according to their projected income and expenditure. The economic agency of labouring-class families, situated in the home and available through projections of their resources, became an object of knowledge and an ideological battleground.

By the later eighteenth century, the optimism of more progressive writers was fading, and notions of the potential of the labouring classes, as expressed through their consumption, faded with it. The complex national and international markets assumed an ever more autonomous and self-functioning appearance, expressed in ideological form through the developing science of political economy. This assumed a central tension between the infinite wants of men and the scarcity of resources. The propertied classes of all sorts began to coalesce around the central categories of political economy, recognising a hardening distinction between the 'natural' animal needs of the body, which could be catered for through the wage mechanism, and potentially infinite 'artificial wants'. The right to necessities was catered for through wages, while the right to artificial

wants depended on the extension of labour effort and the achievement of a greater reward. Even those commentators who urged that there were needs and want that the market could not cater for, could only express these in the form of moral, ethical and increasingly aesthetic goods. The jurisdiction of these needs could supplement, but not essentially interfere with the operations of political economy. In this period, the imagined budget present in the mid-century writings, was increasingly becoming a material component of investigations or projections of the condition of the poor. Comparisons of wage and price information, and constructions of 'typical' labouring-class family budgets became more common tools in the struggles to determine the causes of scarcity and poverty in a wealthy commercial nation.

At this point, the position of labouring-class consumers appears to have reached a recognisably modern position. Thought on the consumption of the labouring classes can be seen to oscillate between two connected strands of thought. On the one hand, political economy constructed a sophisticated knowledge of the functioning of a commercial society. In this developing ideology, the labouring classes were admitted into the universal category of consumers, endowed with needs that were always in excess of resources, but only entitled to satisfy their wants through access to money. For the other ideological strand, needs and wants were historically mutable, individually variable and it was one of society's duties to ensure that all had access to a certain level of material and mental comfort. But this alternative strand of thought could only imagine supplying society's defective satisfaction of desires by supplementing the existing system of exchange by the exercise of a judicious paternalism or a morally progressive police.

Yet, as I have argued throughout, to properly understand the processes of change outlined here, we have to return to the sphere of accumulation. For, as we have seen, this story of the formation of modern conception of consumption is incomplete and deceptive if left to stand alone. It corresponds only to how the consumption of commodities was understood by contemporaries, leaving us with a limited and partial perspective. This thesis has attempted to see consumption as part of a historical whole, analysing the narrative outlined above as the ideological expression of the view from within the sphere of exchange, incomprehensible without the corresponding developments in the sphere of accumulation. So, changing conceptions of consumption cannot be understood without, and derive their peculiar character from conceptions of productive activity. It is the changes in the status of the laboring classes *as labour* which gives us insight into the historical meaning of the formation of the labouring-class consumer.

In the early eighteenth century, as we saw, labour was seen as a substance or a duty to be extracted from beings who were perceived as less rational and incapable of true self-governance through their lack of property. These projections derived their force from the growing contradiction between an emerging capitalist rationality and the customary culture of proto-industrial workers, still vestigially attached to the land.

By the mid century, labour was recognised to be a commodity, an alienable property, exchangeable in an imagined market. In defence of their standards of living, many workers in urban areas, where the attachment to customary culture was weaker, began to behave more like the rational commodities that wage labour was making them, working more hours over more

days, and beginning to save and accumulate. The growth of this proletariat signified the further extension of estrangement across the labouring classes.

By the later eighteenth century, as capital was increasingly freed from customary restraints, the drive to accumulate wealth extended across every sphere of production, distribution and exchange. The 1760s and 1770s saw the beginning of a decisive assault on the residual manifestations of customary culture across the nation, an assault that would go a long way to completing the process of estrangement and alienation in production and consumption. As the propertied classes coalesced around the fundamentals of the emerging science of political economy, capital and labour moved into more violent contradiction and the productive activity of labouring people achieved historically unprecedented levels of estrangement. Human powers and needs became subject to the movement of commodities and the categories and concepts that dominated bourgeois thought at the end of the eighteenth century should be seen as the ideological tools they were, obscuring the processes of alienation from the acts of production and consumption.

So, the narrative of the formation of a conception of consumption and a projection of a consumer which could incorporate the labouring classes is impossible to comprehend without the intertwined history of the formation of the labourer and of a class society. Ultimately, the development of a commercial society in the eighteenth century rested upon the existence of a class of producers whose chief characteristic is the sale of their productive activity. Any understanding of the ideas through which the consumption of the labouring classes was expressed must see these ideas also as ideology.

Part II:

Time and space have determined that this represents the furthest extent of the thesis. Chronologically, I have cut the study off at the end of the 1770s. Yet a brief survey of the substantial secondary literature on the 1790s and 1800s indicates the possibilities for extending the scope and scale of the study in this direction. The work of Donald Winch and Hont and Ignatieff, for example, has shown the importance of these decades in the solidification of classical political economy. The growing hegemony of political economy in the sphere of thought on poor relief has also been amply demonstrated by J. R. Poynter and Mitchell Dean. The proposals for the reform of the poor laws from this period demonstrate the deepening of trends that we saw developing in the 1760s: Bentham's pauper panopticons, Rose's Act to regulate Friendly Societies and Malthus's suggestion that the entire structure of the poor laws be overthrown in line with the natural laws of societal development in a world of scarce resources, all represent substantial elaborations on ideas that we saw in chapter nine.¹ Correspondingly, The Reverend David Davies and Frederick Eden's vast collections of data on the condition of the English labouring classes represent extensions of the logic that we saw producing imagined and then reconstructed budgets for describing and analysing labouring-class consumption patterns. With Eden and Davies, the

¹ J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834* (London, 1969), pp. 45-186; Mitchell Dean, *The Constitution of Poverty: Toward a Genealogy of Liberal Governance* (London, 1991), pp. 68-154; A. W. Coats, 'The Classical Economists and the Labourer', in A. W. Coats (ed.), *The Classical Economists and Economic Policy* (London, 1971), pp. 145-166.

domestic economy of the labouring classes had become an object of scientific knowledge through the compilation of data.²

The political and social debates of the years of the French Revolution also show the elaboration of debates that began in the 1760s and 1770s. It is well established that these years saw the formation of a conservative consensus in the bourgeoisie around the fundamentals of political economy, illuminating the lines of continuity between whiggish progressivism and Tory conservatives that we have seen so often.³ But perhaps the most important development was the establishment of a dynamic relationship between a strain of the political radicalism we saw emerging in the 1760s, and the defensive organisations of the labouring classes, developing at the same time.⁴

As Colin Jones and Rebecca Spang have shown, as the French Jacobins were attempting to forge their new society around ideals of equality, they were also contributing to the debate on the boundaries of luxury and necessity in a new society characterised by vibrant commerce.⁵ While study of English radicals and their heritage in the debates over luxury and commercial society is in its infancy, Gregory Claeys has recently shown that the contradictory effects of commercial

² David Davies, The Case of the Labourers in Husbandry Stated and Considered (London, 1795); Frederick Morton Eden, The State of the Poor and History of the Labouring Classes in England (London, 1797); John Burnett, A History of the Cost of Living (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 166-187.

³ H. T. Dickinson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain (London, 1977), pp. 195-169; idem., The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 221-255. Isaac Kramnick (ed.), The Portable Edmund Burke (London, 1999), pp. ix-xl, 194-213, 416-474; Don Herzog, Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders (Princeton, 1998), pp. 19-38; Dickinson, Liberty and Property, pp. 270-317; idem., Politics of the People, pp. 255-286. For conservative political culture and the manipulation of customary luxury, see Nicholas Rogers, Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain (Oxford, 1998), pp. 176-215.

⁴ The classic statement of this thesis is, of course, E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, 1968).

⁵ Colin Jones and Rebecca Spang, 'Sans-Culottes, Sans Café, Sans Tabac: Shifting Realms of Luxury and Necessity in Eighteenth-Century France', in Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford,

prosperity found their way into the writings of prominent English radical thinkers like Paine, Thelwall, Godwin and Hall. While radicals like Paine and Thelwall sought to extend the fruits of labour into a political right and bring the benefits of commercial society even to the poor, those in the Republican tradition, like Godwin and Hall developed political economy's observation that wealth was the power to command labour to show that commercial societies required the impoverishment and alienation of its labourers. In other words, English radicals, brought into contact with organised labour and the question of poverty by the hungry '90s, were beginning to outline the intellectual dimensions of early socialist thought, recognising both the potential benefits of commercial society and its costs for labouring people.⁶

Developing these themes as part of an extension of the project is a large undertaking and one that has proved beyond the bounds of the possible in this thesis. However, it is a direction that I hope subsequently to pursue. This thesis has confined itself to tracing the changing representation of the labouring classes and their consumer desires over the eighteenth century, and connecting these changes to the social and economic transformations that made England a commercial, capitalist, class divided nation.

(eds.), *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 37-62.

⁶ Gregory Claeys, 'The Origins of the Rights of Labour: Republicanism, Commerce, and the Construction of Modern Social Theory in Britain, 1796-1805', *Journal of Modern History*, 66, 2 (1994), pp. 249-285.

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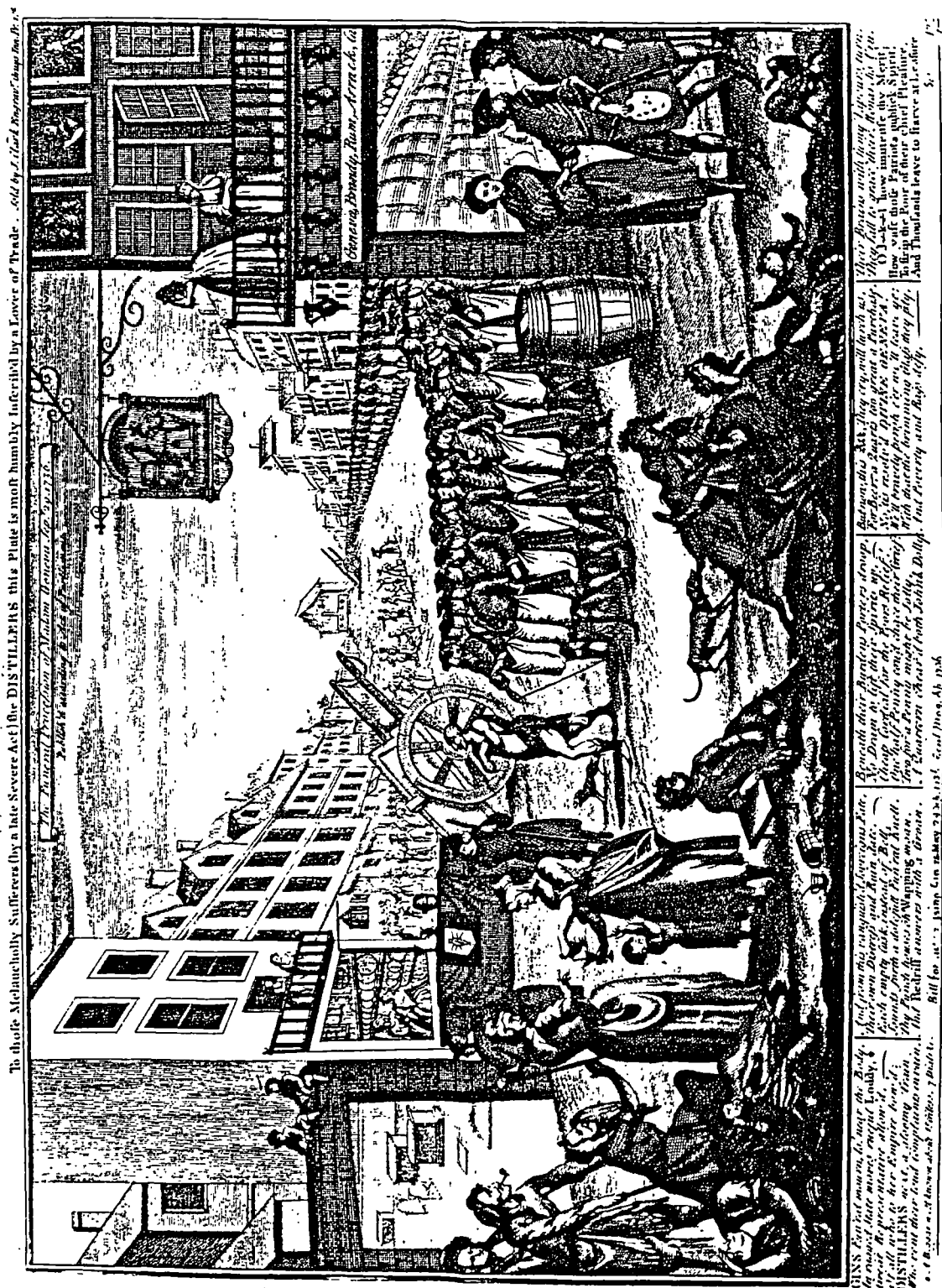
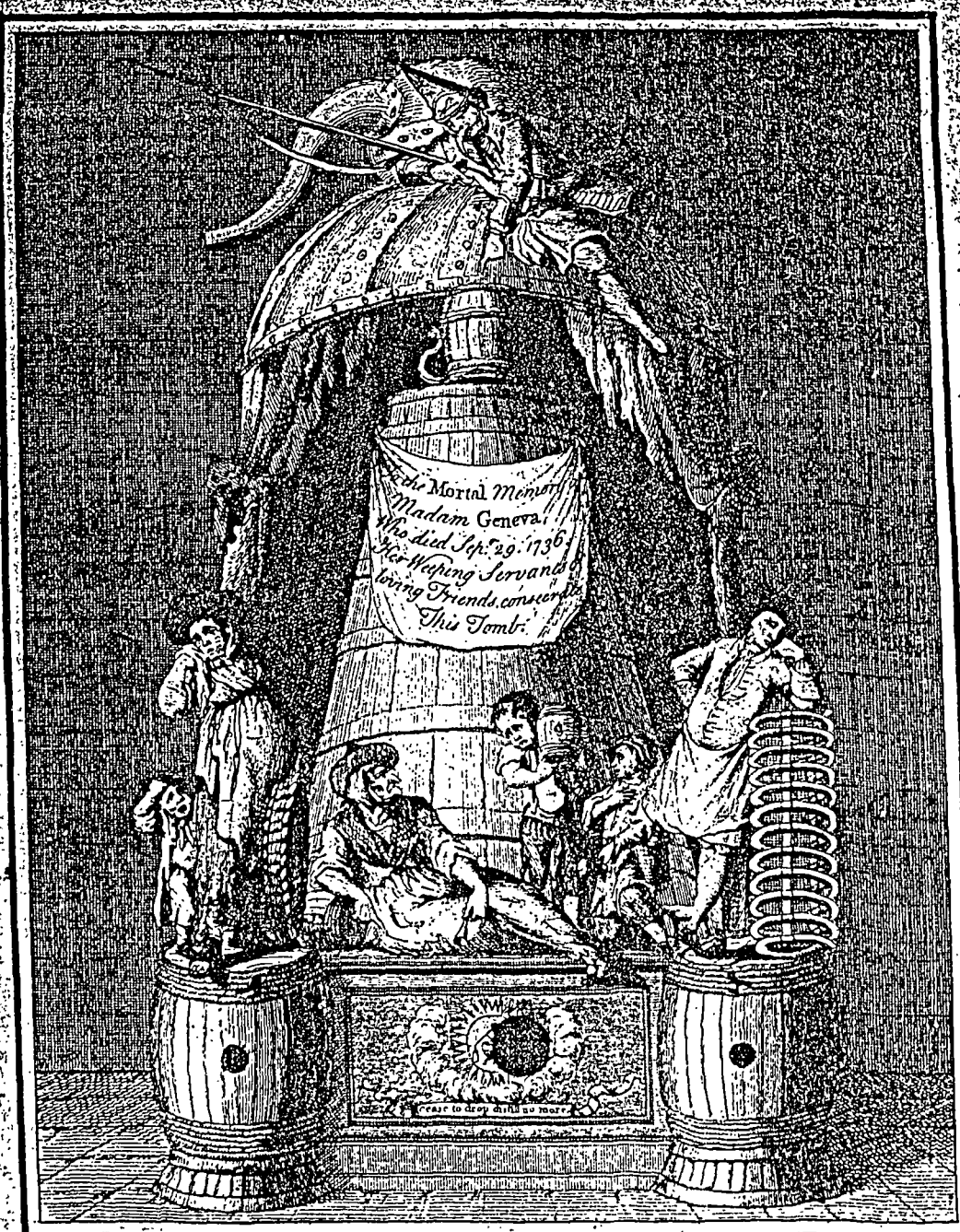


Figure 1: Anon., The Funeral Procession of Madam Geneva, engraving, Sept. 29, 1736, British Museum, 34.9 x 22.8



To thee kind comfort of the starving Poor!
To thee Geneva, that art now no more!
This sad but gratefull monument we raise:
Our Arms we yield, no more our Sun shall blaze.
So, where Supreme her mournful Genius lies,
And hollow barrells echo to her cries;
On casks, around her Sad Attendants stand;
The Bunter Waps with basket in her hand,
His wide Worm the sad Distiller's ience;

The Boy with heavy heart for Succour Sues;
What gave her birth now helps her Tomb to build.
The Tub a Spire, A Globe the Can unfill'd,
High in the Air the Still its head doth rear,
And on its Top a Mournfull Granadeer
The Clean white Apron as a Label shewn
The dreadful cause of all our Grief makes known.
Nither repair All ye that for her Mourn,
And Drink a Requiem to her Peacefull urn.

Published according to Act of Parliament Octob. 1736. Sold by J. Pringlles of London and Westminster. For Bill. see Gent. Mag. A. 1736.

Printed by J. Smith, 1736.

Figure 2: Anon., To the Mortal Memory of Madam Geneva, Who Died Sept. 29, 1736, engraving, Sept., 29, 1736, British Museum, 19.4 x 25.7

THE LAMENTABLE FALL OF MADAM GENEVA.



The Lion appears, and Madam Cries
In deep Despair, Expell'd to Town,
Her Sakers, Coblers, and Cold Watchmen,
With Bawls and Whores as drunk as Cuckum.
All Minding with the Common Theme,
Refuse to hear her Pining Lament.

Whilst Much Sighs, and Lament,
In Teber Streets, all lament,
Forward by the King's Indignation,
This is brought to utter desolation.
With Curses, they, from their Mark's name
And drive the Standards that joined the Scheme
From the City, and the Town, at the same time.

All Billingsgate their Case Bemoan,
And Kinsfolk Change in Mourning's house.
Sighs for whom they'd Sacrifice
Their Dicks, or Stocks, may both their Eyes:
Rather than the want Contribution
They'll trade the Livestock, without the Sheep, or

Figure 3: Anon., *The Lamentable Fall of Madam Geneva*, engraving, Sept. 29, 1736, British Museum, 29.5 x 30.8

BEER STREET.



*Beer, happy Produce of our Isle,
Can sinewy Strength impart,
And wearied with Fatigue and Toil
Can cheer our mellowed Soul.*

*Labour and Art upheld by Thee
Successfully advance,
We quaff Thee, happy Juice with Glee,
And Water leave to France.*

*Quintessence of Health, thy grateful Taste
Rejoice the Cup of Life,
And warm each English generous B-
With Liberty and Love.*

Figure 4: William Hogarth, Beer Street, engraving, 1 Feb, 1751, British Museum, 30.2 x 35.8

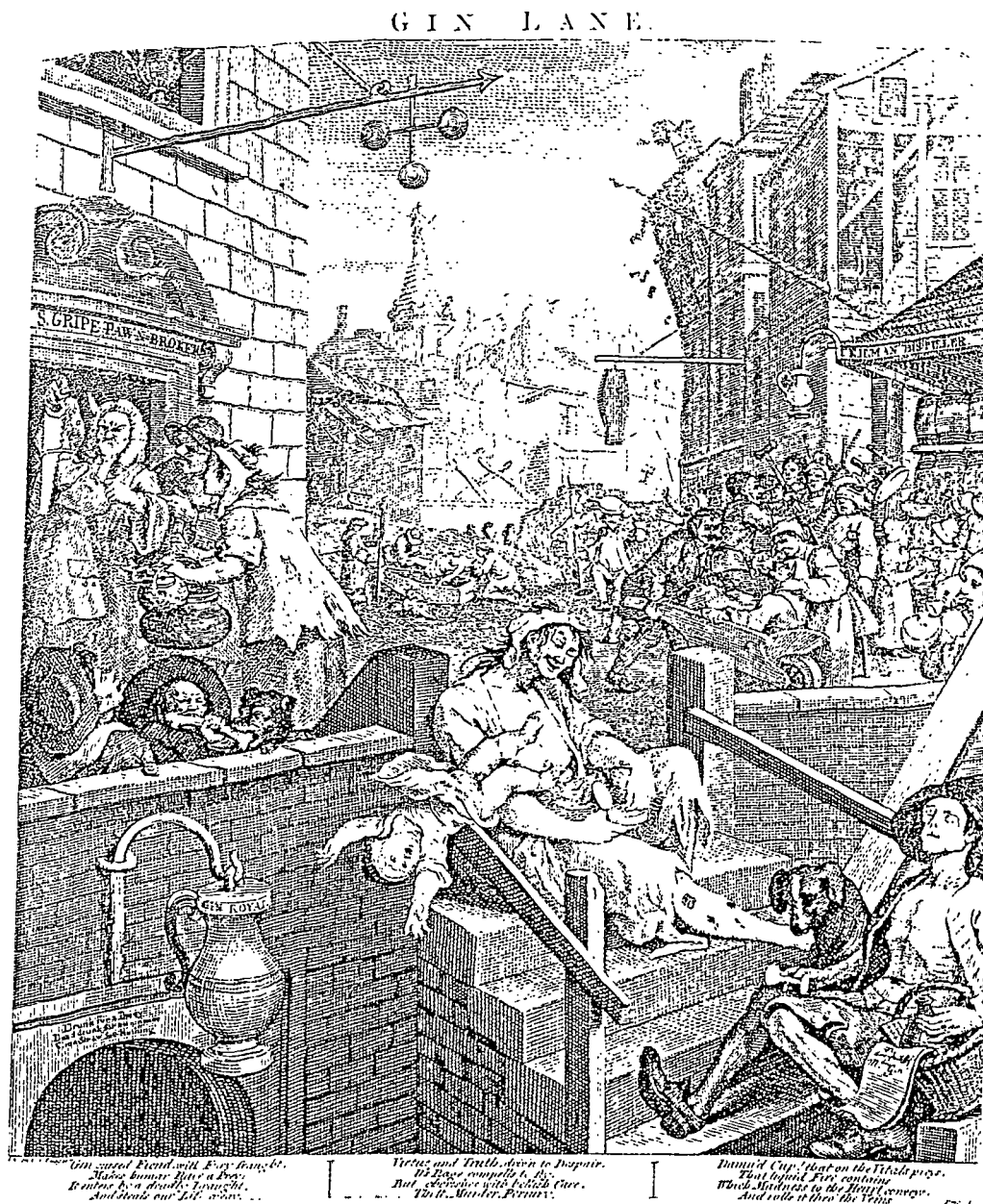


Figure 5: William Hogarth, Gin Lane, engraving, 1 Feb, 1751, British Museum, 30.2 x 35.2