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MANNERS, DEFERENCE, AND PRIVATE PROPERTY: OR, ELEMENTS FOR A GENERAL THEORY OF HIERARCHY

This is an essay about the nature of hierarchy. In it, I want to delve into hierarchy's most elementary forms: the way people avert their eyes or stand at attention, the sort of topics they avoid in formal conversation, what it means to treat another human being as somehow abstract, sacred, transcendent, set apart from the endless entanglements and sheer physical messiness of ordinary physical existence, and why something like that always seems to happen when some people claim to be inherently superior to others. It seems to me an investigation like this is important since it is only by beginning to ask such questions that we can begin to think about which of the qualities we ordinarily lump together in a word like "hierarchy" are really inevitable features of human social life, and which might prove dispensable.

This is also an essay about the origins of capitalism. As most of my readers will no doubt be aware, Max Weber many years ago made a famous argument in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930) that the rise of Puritanism in Europe was intimately related to the rise of a commercial economy there, and ultimately, that it played a key role in shaping the kind of near-monastic work discipline and obsessive strategies of accumulation that opened the way to modern capitalism. Weber's argument has been debated endlessly and I have no intention of addressing his specific arguments here. What really interests me, instead, is the confluence between what Weber describes and other, apparently quite different, social trends occurring at roughly the same time. One was a phenomenon that was called, at the time, "the Reformation of Manners," spearheaded in England by the Calvinists themselves, but in other parts of Europe, with equal gusto, by their Catholic equivalents. As Peter Burke (1978: 207) has pointed out, these campaigns were directed less at manners in the contemporary sense of the term than at popular culture. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Church authorities across the continent began a series of concerted campaigns to

eradicate what they considered to be immoral elements in public life and ritual. The result was a great deal of very fractious social conflict: in fact, many of the popular struggles between Puritan and Royalist factions in the years before the English revolution turned precisely on struggles over attacks on the place of festivals in popular life. At the same time though, even more profound changes seemed to be going on, much of it on a level that most people of the time did not seem to be fully aware of. Norbert Elias (1978: 70–84) has pointed out that the sixteenth century also marked the beginning of profound changes in people's immediate physical sensibilities in Western Europe. Specifically, he speaks of a broad "advance of thresholds of shame and embarrassment," an increasing tendency to repress open displays of anger or extreme emotions, but even more, displays of, or references to, bodily functions in everyday interactions. Basic standards of how one was expected to eat, drink, sleep, excrete, make love, shifted almost completely. The transition from the world of Rabelais to that of Queen Victoria was, in historical terms, so remarkably rapid—a mere three centuries—that historians have puzzled over the phenomenon ever since Elias first pointed it out. It seems obvious that all this must have been, in some sense, connected to the rise of Puritanism and the more formal "Reformation of Manners" it brought in its wake, but no one has offered any really plausible suggestion as to what that connection might be.

In this essay, I am going to make a suggestion based on the tools of comparative ethnography. I will start by picking up two hoary ethnographic categories called "joking relations" and "relations of avoidance." These are terms originally coined by European and American anthropologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to describe what they considered exotic and extreme forms of behavior prevalent in what they considered "primitive" societies. It strikes me that the logic of joking and avoidance actually provides a very useful means to begin to create both a rudimentary theory of manners, and a rudimentary theory of hierarchy. Armed with this theory, I will return to Early Modern Europe, and demonstrate just how all three of the processes described above—Weber's Calvinism, Elias's standards of comportment, and Burke's reform of popular culture—really are part of the same broad historical process—one that also brought about ideologies of absolute private property and the increasing commercialization of everyday life.

Now, I am quite aware that this approach might strike some as a bit idiosyncratic. Certainly, painting with such broad theoretical strokes has fallen out of fashion in recent years. Even anthropologists do not talk much anymore about "joking and avoidance." Such terms evoke memories of large dusty tomes about New Guinea or Nepal, pictures of people who seem to

have been intentionally photographed in such a way that you could never imagine having a conversation with them, arcane diagrams and absurd generalizations ("the Nayar say..."). Like most contemporary anthropologists, I approach most such tomes with a great deal of ambivalence—even find them, in some ways, rather creepy—if only because they are so obviously, and obliviously, products of imperialism. But I also think there are things in them that can be of enormous use to critical social theory. One reason is because the people who wrote them were often confronted with practices they considered so odd and exotic that they lacked any familiar rubric to fit them to. Living among a certain Melanesian group, say, a researcher discovers that a young man who happens onto one of his cross-cousins on the road is expected to insult him; that, in fact, it might even be considered an affront if he does not. The researcher coins a term ("joking relation"). Another, somewhere in Amazonia, discovers that, where he is cross-cousins are expected to behave in what seems to be exactly the same way. Even the insults are similar. *Something* was clearly going on here. If nothing else, in using terms like "joking relation," anthropologists were not simply inflicting Euro-American categories, raw, on the people that they studied.

If you look at the early history of anthropology, it was full of such moments of recognition and confusion, and resultant desperate efforts to make sense of what seemed utterly alien ways of defining material and social reality. The theoretical vocabulary of the day was full of peculiar-sounding terms like "joking partners" or "relations of avoidance," or outright borrowings from non-European languages: shamanism, mana, totem, and taboo. The next step was usually to discover that what seemed most alien was not actually all that alien at all: that something very much like joking and avoidance relations exist in middle-class households in Europe, that military units in the American Expeditionary Force in World War I ended up practicing forms of totemism around their regimental mascots and symbols—forms effectively indistinguishable from those practiced by Australian aborigines (Linton 1924). Were it not for those aboriginal practices, however, it is likely no one would have thought there was anything worth noticing in the odd practices surrounding the regimental insignia of army units. In a way, that first moment of estrangement, and second moment of back-translation, constitute, between them, the very essence of anthropology—a discipline that, after all, rests on the assumption that if it is possible to say anything true of human beings or human societies in general, then one has to start with the most apparently anomalous cases. It is a little disturbing, then, to observe that in recent years anthropology has largely stopped generating its own technical vocabulary at all, but has taken to importing buzzwords from Continental theory: biopower, governmentality, the body, or some new technical term

borrowed from Martin Heidegger or Gilles Deleuze. One wonders about the implications for the long-term viability of the discipline.

In this essay, then, I wish to return to what I take to be the Grand Tradition. Most of all, I want to show that tradition has an almost infinite capacity to generate new political perspectives—perspectives that are, at their best, radical in the sense of delving to the very roots of forms of power and domination. Hence the emphasis on hierarchy. I frame the issues in the way I do not just because I think it will help solve a longstanding intellectual problem about the origins of capitalism. I also believe a theory of manners opens the possibility of understanding how forms of social domination come to be experienced in the most intimate possible ways—in physical habits, instincts of desire or revulsion—that often seem essential to our very sense of being in the world, so much so that even our instincts for rebellion often appear to reinforce them. I do not claim to have found a clear way out of this dilemma; but in order to do so, it is at least helpful to be able to state clearly what the dilemma is.

Joking and Avoidance, Substance and Property

Let me turn, then, to the ethnographic literature on "joking" and "avoidance."

The first thing to emphasize about "joking relations" is that the name is somewhat deceptive. They are not really about humor.[1] In the anthropological literature, the expression "joking relation" does not really refer to a relation of people who joke with one another so much as it refers more to a relationship marked by playful aggression. "Joking partners" are people who are expected to make fun of one another, tease, harass, even (often) make play of attacking each other. They are relations of extreme, even one might say, compulsory disrespect and informality. Relations of avoidance, on the other hand, are marked by such extreme respect and formality that one party is enjoined never to speak to or even gaze upon the other.

Some ethnographers (e.g., Eggan 1937) use these term more loosely, describing a kind of broad continuum of types of interaction ranging from obligatory joking to relations of indulgent familiarity, then proceeding through relations marked by greater and greater formality and deference to those of extreme or literal avoidance. Used this way, joking and avoidance represent two ideal poles, and almost any relationship between two people could conceivably be placed somewhere on the continuum between them. Whether or not they take this view, anthropologists have always seen joking and avoidance as clearly opposed modes of behavior. In fact, they seem in many ways to be logical inversions of each other. Where joking relations

tend to be mutual, an equal exchange of abuse emphasizing an equality of status, avoidance is generally hierarchical, with one party clearly inferior and obliged to pay respect. One often hears the term "joking partners" in the literature, almost never "partners in avoidance."[2] In avoidance relations, contact of any sort between the two parties tends to be discouraged: such relations are full of stipulations about how the inferior party must not speak first or speak much or speak above a whisper, must not look the other in the eye, must never touch the other first or touch them at all, and so forth. Almost always, the inferior party must steer clear of any sort of reference to or display of such bodily functions as eating, excretion, sex, or physical aggression. One often hears of injunctions against seeing the other eat, touching her bed, behaving violently in her presence, making reference to excretion in casual conversation, and so forth. Emphases vary, but the general direction of such prohibitions remain surprisingly uniform throughout the world. And just as regularly, joking relations play up all that avoidance plays down: one hears constantly of joking partners engaging in sham fights and sexual horseplay, of lewd accusations and scatological jokes. In some cases, the aggressive element can become very strong: one hears also of joking partners privileged to throw excrement at one another, or even wax-tipped spears.

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

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

imagined—and so on. This is something that will become important later on, when I turn to the problem of hierarchy.)

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

> a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world... This is why the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows itself, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus... Next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth, through which it enters the world to be swallowed up. And next is the anus. All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic: it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation (1984: 317).

This is why joking relations can draw a parallel between contact between people (looking, touching, speaking, striking, sexual relations...) and such phenomena as eating, excretion, running noses, decomposition, open sores. What these latter all have in common is that they refer to different sorts of

stuffs and substances passing in to, and out of, the physical person—that is, to contact between bodies and the world.

Still, it is not enough to simply say that the joking body is continuous with the world. All of the forms of interaction most played up in joking (and by Bakhtin)—eating, sex, excretion and aggression—imply a very specific *kind* of continuity.

Joking partners "tease" or "abuse" one another; they toss insults, even missiles. At the same time, one hears again and again of joking partners privileged to make off with each other's possessions, and this sort of license is considered of a piece with all the others. There is a sort of symbolic equivalence at play: an equivalence, one might say, between the taking of goods, and the giving of bads. I would venture to say that this sort of idiom is a constant feature of joking relations— "relations," in their broadest sense: "between bodies, and between the body and the world." Take, for example, the famous symbolic identification of sex and eating, familiar to any anthropologist. As Levi-Strauss once pointed out (1966: 100, 105–6), if one conflates sex with eating, it's hard to see sex as an especially reciprocal activity. Eating is an inherently one-sided relation. Of course who seen to be the eater, and who the eaten, can vary with context: sometimes woman can be pictured as devourer (as, for example, in the case of *vagina dentata* motifs). Sometimes it's the man. "In Yoruba," he notes, "'to eat' and 'to marry' are expressed by a single verb the general sense of which is 'to win, to acquire'" (ibid: 105).

Still, if Yoruba treats sexual relations as analogous to consumption, or appropriation, other African languages frame it quite differently. In Kaguru, Thomas Beidelman points out (1966: 366), the term used for sexual intercourse can also mean "to insult," "to abuse," "to behave obscenely before others." It is also the word used to describe the behavior typical of joking partners. On the one hand, a taking of goods. On the other, a giving of bads.

One could continue with this sort of comparison indefinitely. It certainly does seem to apply to all the principal ways in which the joking body interacts with the world (if eating is the taking of goods, excretion is the giving of bads); or between bodies (joking partners threatening cannibalism against one another, or tossing dung, are doing more or less the same thing).

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

Here again, avoidance can be seen as an inversion of joking. On the level of avoidance the body is closed, all orifices shut off and nullified; nothing flows either in or out. The body is constituted as a perfect, abstract, and self-sufficient thing unto itself, with no need for exchange either with other

bodies, or the world. Now, this sort of separation itself can't imply a relation of hierarchy, simply because separating two things implies that there is no relation between them at all. But avoidance is ultimately hierarchical.

There is, it is true, a certain mutuality in relations of avoidance. If I were standing before the Queen of England, I wouldn't pick my nose or crack a dirty joke, and I would expect the same from her. On the other hand, the burden of avoidance would definitely be on me, and it is appropriate that any sort of contact ought to be initiated by the person of superior rank: conversation, eye contact, and the like. And further, if I *were* to pick my nose at the Queen, or crack a dirty joke, I could fully expect to be excluded from polite society till the end of my days; while if the Queen did so in my presence I would probably take this as a gesture of indulgent familiarity and perhaps reciprocate—though never quite so freely as she. Norbert Elias provides a telling quote from a sixteenth century manual on manners:

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

By the logic of my argument, picking my nose at the Queen would be much the same as thumbing my nose at the Queen; it would be a sort of joking attack.[3] It's my obligation then, to constitute her on the level of avoidance, as untouchable and self-enclosing; she, in her ability to initiate contact with me, is showing no such compunctions, and constituting me more on the level of joking.

If this seems a tenuous interpretation, there are many other sorts of evidence to back it up. Let me turn to an entirely different cultural milieu. In most Polynesian languages, the term *tabu* or *tapu* is used to describe avoidance relations, whether with one's father-in-law or with a chief. The word also means "set apart," "not to be touched," and, of course, "sacred."[4] However, it is the chief or the father-in-law who "have *tabu*" in relation to an inferior: that is to say, they are set apart, marked off, and separated from the world—a world which includes, as a residual category, everyone else, including their subjects (or affines as the case may be). The term has also had a curious history in modern social theory, because Emile Durkheim, in his work on religion, used the Polynesian concept of *tabu* to come up with a universal defini-

tion of "the sacred" as that which is set apart from the mundane world, not to be touched. Later, Erving Goffman (1956) borrowed Durkheim's concept in his analysis of everyday interactions in the modern West, arguing that, in our own society, the human person is ordinarily considered something sacred, because it is hedged about by invisible barriers, that it is off-limits to others, not to be touched. He had, apparently without realizing, come back to something very close to the original Polynesian idea.

The body in the domain of joking, one might say, is constituted mainly of substances—stuff flowing in, or flowing out. The same could hardly be true of the body in the domain of avoidance, which is set apart from the world. To a very large extent, the physical body itself is negated, the person translated into some higher or more abstract level. In fact, I would argue that while joking bodies are necessarily apiece with the world (one is almost tempted to say "nature") and made up from the same sort of materials, the body in avoidance is constructed out of something completely different. It is constructed of property.

Now, I realize that this is a somewhat daring assertion. Not least, because what is considered "property" in the first place can vary a great deal from culture to culture. But I think one can make out an elementary logic to the idea of property that can be said to be more or less constant. Interestingly enough, that logic is very similar to the logic of avoidance.

Social scientists are usually content to follow the jurists and define property as a social relation, a bundle of rights and privileges with regard to some object, held by a person or group of persons to the exclusion of all others. It is important to stress that this is not, fundamentally, a relation between a person and a thing. It is a relation between people. Robinson Crusoe (bourgeois individualist though he might have been) would hardly need to worry himself over property rights on his island, since no one else was there.

However, it is hard to find a long, detailed ethnography that does not contain the word "owns" in quotation marks somewhere between its covers—that is, whose authors are forced to place the word in quotes because a word which otherwise refers to ownership of property is also used in other ways that make no sense by this sort of definition. Let me produce one fairly random example. In an ethnographic account of the Lau Islands of Fiji, Laura Thompson (1940: 109–111, 126) notes that every aristocratic clan of those islands is said to "own" one species of animal, one type of fish, and one variety of tree. These species, she says, are *tabu* for them; to harm any member of them would be considered tantamount to harming their own selves. Far from having a right to exclude others from their property, these people are themselves forbidden to touch the things they are said to own. In fact, this is a fairly clear case of identification. A number of authors have pointed

out how many languages lack any verb for unilateral ownership: one cannot say "I own that canoe," merely that the canoe and I have a special relation to each other[5]—rather as in English, one uses the same word to say "that's my car" or "that's my boss." It's interesting to note that the English word "property" has two meanings. On the one hand, my property is something I own, that is, some thing that takes on its identity from me. On the other, one can also say "it is a property of fire to be hot"—here "property" is what makes something what it is, that gives it its identity.

One might call the latter sense of property ("it is the property of fire to be hot") property in its semiotic mode, in so far as its serves mainly to convey meaning. But what I want to emphasize is that even here, one finds the same logic of exclusion. To return to the Lau Islands: it was only aristocratic clans that "owned" species of animals or bird. Commoner clans did not; they were referred to collectively as "owners of the land" (L. Thompson, op cit.). And as Marshall Sahlins (1981) has observed, there was a tendency to merge such Fijian "owners of the land" with nature and natural processes, to identify them with what Bakhtin calls "the material bodily lower stratum"—the latter simply being the grotesque image of the body in its social incarnation. In other words, the aristocratic groups are set apart, marked off against a residual category which is more or less merged with the world. This is precisely the logic of avoidance.[6]

It can be much the same with individuals. The word tabu again provides a convenient illustration. Ethnographers of the Maori of New Zealand (Firth 1959, Johansen 1954, Shirres 1982, Smith 1984) often note that everyone was thought to have had a certain amount of "*tapu.*"[7] Actually, it was not quite everyone. Slaves had none (they were others' property); neither did most women (since most women could not own property). Otherwise, the extent of one's *tapu* varied with social position. The higher up the social scale, the more *tapu* one had. A chief's *tapu* for instance extended to all of his possessions: all of them were set apart, just as he was set apart, from the ordinary world, and it would be as dangerous for a commoner to touch the chief's things as to touch the chief himself. What's more, a great chief's *tapu* was so very powerful, his person was so sacred, we are told, that anything that did touch his person was as it were drawn into the charmed circle of his sanctity. "The pigs that were called by Hongi's name could never be eaten by other persons—such would be tantamount to eating *him*" (Firth 1959: 345). His property was an extension of his person, and his person was set apart from all the world.

If property is so closely related to avoidance, and if these two principles of identification and exclusion really are so consistently at play (and I think

they are), then is it really so daring to suggest that the person, in the domain of avoidance, is constructed out of property? Or, at least, of "properties?"

The etymology of the word "person" is itself suggestive. As Marcel Mauss pointed out long ago (1938 [1968]), the Latin *persona* is derived from an Etruscan word meaning mask; even when taken up in legal parlance as a term roughly similar to our word person, it still kept its implication of an abstract social being identified by physical objects: properties and insignia of various sorts. Slaves, and most women, had no *personae* for the same reasons that Maori slaves and women had no *tapu*.

Two important observations follow from all this. The first concerns exchange. Mauss (1925 [1954]) has also argued that in giving a gift, one is giving a part of oneself. If the person is indeed made up of a collection of properties, this would certainly be true. But it's important to bear in mind that the "self" in question is therefore a very particular kind of "self": specifically, that sort which is constituted on the level of avoidance. Gift-giving of the Maussian variety is never, to my knowledge, accompanied by the sort of behavior typical of joking relations; but it often accompanies avoidance.[8]

Second, in so far as it serves to construct a person in this way, a property need not have any practical use.[9] In ways, it is perhaps better that it does not. It simply needs to say something about its owner. This is a topic I have discussed at some length elsewhere (Graeber 1996), but here suffice it to say that the key thing is some larger code of meanings by which objects can do this, by which properties can be compared and contrasted. This need not be one of exchange value, but that it is a salient example, and I would argue that it is no coincidence that the generalization of exchange value as a medium for social relations has been accompanied, in Europe, by a generalization of avoidance. But this argument I will have to return to a little later on.

Before moving on to hierarchy, I should probably throw in a point of clarification. In treating joking and avoidance relations as extreme poles of a continuum that includes everything from playful familiarity to behavior at formal dinners, I do not mean to imply that all behavior must necessarily partake of one or the other. I certainly do not mean to suggest that all relations of respect imply subordination; even less, that all relations of intimacy involve some element of competition or aggression. What I am describing, rather, is a logic that—while it may come into play in some way or another in any social relation—is at best only one aspect of it. There are always other logics. I have said nothing, for example, of what anthropologists call "relations of common substance," where an entirely material idiom of bodily stuffs and substances can be seen as the basis for bonds of caring and mutual responsibility between human beings.[10] Sexual relations, after all, need not

be represented as a matter of one partner consuming the other; it can also be imagined as two people sharing food.

On Hierarchy

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

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

"Hierarchy" has become a very popular term in contemporary social science, though it is often thrown about so casually that when an author uses it, it's very difficult to figure out precisely what they mean. To say that a set of items are organized into a hierarchy, after all, is merely to say that they are ranked in some way. But there are all sorts of ways to rank things.

The notion the term most immediately brings to mind is what might be called a "linear hierarchy," a way of ranking a collection of items, as along a ruler, so that in the case of any two items, one can immediately know which is higher and which is lower than the other. The classic example of such a linear hierarchy is probably the Great Chain of Being, made famous by Arthur Lovejoy (1936). This was a system by which Medieval and Renaissance scholars tried to rank all living creatures from moss to slugs to humans and seraphim, according to the degree to which they were believed to possess a rational soul. Lovejoy points out that it is critical to such a system that there

can only be one criterion of ranking; as soon as others are introduced, the whole system will tend to dissolve into confusion (1936: 56–7).

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

Let me take up Dumont's arguments about the nature of hierarchy in a little more detail, since it seems to me that they are the source of a great deal of subsequent confusion.

These arguments go back to Dumont's original structural analysis of the caste system in India, and particularly, of the fourfold division of the *varnas*. It might be useful here to take a glance at his formal analysis of this system (Dumont 1970: 67)—which is actually quite brief. He begins by describing a simple linear hierarchy. Everything is based on purity. Brahmans (Priests) are considered purer than Kshatriyas (Warriors), Kshatriyas are purer than Vaishyas (Merchants), and Vaishyas are purer than Shudras (Farmers). However, after saying this, he immediately proceeds to explain that this ranking is worked out through "a series of successive dichotomies or inclusions"—thus implying the existence of a taxonomic hierarchy instead:

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

This is a little confusing but the basic idea is simple enough: at any point along the ladder, those on top could be seen as in some sense lumped together, insofar as they are all superior to those immediately below them. This is obviously true in a certain sense—particularly if one looks at things

from the perspective of those towards the top of the ladder. Still, framing matters seems to be an intentional effort to sidestep what almost anyone else would think is the single most important feature of any caste system: that from the perspective of those on the bottom, we are dealing with a system not of inclusion, but of exclusion. Actually, not even just from the perspective of those on the bottom. Would it not make more sense to frame things this way: The Brahmans, the group at the top, see themselves as set off from all others as particularly pure and holy. From their perspective, everyone else can even be seen as a kind of undifferentiated mass, shading into each other and even into non-human creatures in so far as all lack the purity of Brahmans. However, from the point of view of the next highest group, the Kshatriyas, the more relevant opposition is that which sets both they and the Brahmans apart against another residual category, which is again relatively impure. Then comes the opposition between twice-born and others—which would include both Shudras and Untouchables, who are so base they fall out of the fourfold scale entirely, and who Dumont therefore ignores entirely. And so on.

Probably it would be best to describe all such linear hierarchies as "exclusive" rather than "inclusive." The logic, it may be observed, would then be much the same as that of avoidance, since the higher group is set apart from a residual category composed of all the others.

If so, however, it may be easier to understand how social scientists can get away with fudging the distinction between two different kinds of hierarchy, or even insisting they are really the same. It is because any actual social hierarchy will tend to combine elements of both. Always, there are higher and higher levels of inclusion (from household to lineage to clan to tribe; or from household to parish to borough to county...), but also there is a series of ascending, increasingly exclusive, groups, who gain their exclusive status by being able to make a claim to represent the whole at every level.[11] Linear and taxonomic hierarchies thus tend to be superimposed.

Let me return once more to the traditional lineage system of the Maori. On the one hand, society was ideally organized according to what anthropologists would call a segmentary lineage system—a taxonomic classification of social groups. Every household belonged to a lineage, every lineage to a clan, every clan to a tribe. At each taxonomic level, each of these groups had its representative—called "headman" or "chief" in the literature—and that headman or chief was also said to "own" everything that belonged to his lineage, or clan, or tribe.[12] Needless to say, the higher up in the taxonomic hierarchy the representative, the more *tapu* he was said to have. But it's here that things become interesting, because (as I have pointed out) it is precisely in the notion of *tapu* that the element of exclusion comes back in.

What this means is that the greater the purview of any given representative, the more inclusive the group he was seen to represent, the more he himself was set apart from everyone else, including other members of his own clan or lineage.[13] As the head of clan, I stand for everyone else in the clan—especially, in dealings with outsiders. They are thus in a sense "included" in my political persona. But this in turn makes me a higher, more "exclusive" sort of person, fit to interact on an equal footing with other clan chiefs like myself, perhaps, but not with those included in me. And of course the status of the head of a tribe is even more exclusive.

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

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

It's here one has to move from the role played by joking and avoidance in the dynamics of personal relations, to the way a whole social class or stratum marks itself off from those it considers below it by the way its members conduct themselves towards one another. Norbert Elias (1978) has written at some length about the courtesy manuals Medieval lords and ladies used to set themselves off against their subjects. They are, he argues, primarily concerned with encouraging their readers to repress bodily functions (at least in the presence of their fellows), the control of both natural impulses and violent

emotions—and, as I've mentioned, the maintenance of a certain "threshold of embarrassment or shame." In other words, we are dealing with something along the lines of avoidance behavior, or anyway, behavior expected in situations of formal deference. The difference of course is that these standards were expected to be, at a certain level, mutual; in observing them, one was not setting the other person off against the world (a world which included one's own deferential self), so much as setting both off against those whose interactions were assumed to lack such refinement. And all this is quite explicit in the manuals, which constantly warned: one should not behave like a peasant or an animal.

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

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

The author doesn't note this—it hardly needs be said—but the "Man" he is referring to is Common Man; bishops and duchesses were not depicted as half tree.[14]

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

archical "official culture" of the time; a form of resistance against the static, lifeless asceticism foisted on the masses by the church and civil authorities.

Bakhtin was clearly on to something. But it seems to me that he drew the lines between what we now call high and low culture a bit too sharply. One of the virtues of the view of hierarchy I've been trying to develop is that no such sharp line need be drawn. Were the grotesque elements in the work of Bosch or Brueghel derived from popular culture, or from the elite's notions of what the common people were like? Is there any real need to ask? After all, it was not only peasants and journeymen, but merchants, monks and barons who took part in Carnival. If the emphasis in Carnival was quite clearly on the joking body—on sex, gluttony, violence and gay abuse—perhaps what we should really be asking is what all this meant to the different participants, and whether it was always the same thing.

What evidence there is implies there was a fairly wide continuum between two extreme points of view. For the loftiest, Carnival was an indulgence for the masses, a chance for them to play the fool and give vent to their base and sinful natures. Some of the more reflective developed a kind of functional theory: let the commoners work off a bit of steam, even play at turning the world upside down for a day or two, and it will make it easier for them to endure their lot during the rest of the year.[15] Even a minor knight or master craftsmen might often have taken part half with a feeling for fun, and half with one of veiled contempt.

To the lowliest, however—and even many of the not so very lowly—the joking element could seem genuinely subversive. And this is apparently true of the "carnivalesque" as a whole.

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

This last instance moves closer to the second subversive element in joking—which I think is also by far the more profound. In Carnival, not only

was hierarchy temporarily suspended or reversed, but the whole world was reconstructed as a "Land of Cockaigne," as the saying went, a domain in which there was nothing but bodies happily partaking of the world and of each other. Bakhtin implies that the grotesque, that joking and laughter, was a sort of universal solvent of hierarchy: that by representing a world of joking bodies and nothing more, the very fiber was stripped out of the structures of official culture so that even its loftiest pinnacles inevitably came crashing to the earth. Given the categories I've been using in this paper, this makes perfect sense. If one rejects the principle of avoidance altogether, if nothing is set apart or sacred, hierarchy cannot exist. In a joking world, there are only bodies, and the only possible difference between them is that some are bigger and stronger than others; they can take more goods and give more bads. And the implications of that for a view of the contemporary social order, and particularly for the moral standing of the high and mighty of the world, need hardly be mentioned.

As always, I must point out that I am aware that things are more complicated than this; I am dwelling on one particular aspect. For instance, there was an element in Carnival which stressed not joking struggle but an idyllic Golden Age: this was an important element in social criticism both among Church thinkers and popular rebels, and harked back to Classical themes (cf. Cohn 1970). Still, the analogy with joking relations is a useful analytic tool, if for no other reason than because it opens up all sorts of interesting possibilities. [16] This is especially true when one moves from public ritual to everyday practices. Bakhtin himself drew attention to the language of the marketplace (1984: 145–195) and popular idioms of abuse and obscenity in Medieval and Early Modern culture. Would it really be going too far to suggest that this involves something very similar to the reconstruction of the world on the bodily level that occurs in Carnival? If it does, this would be a perfect example of the practices of the lower strata apparently reinforcing the images and stereotypes entertained by the upper, though with diametrically opposed intent. And finally, this would not seem to be an isolated phenomena. There are societies aplenty in which the lower classes do seem to employ obscene language more freely, or at least more openly and consistently, than the more privileged ones. It is hard to escape the impression that this is, in effect, a kind of subversion—at least to the extent that it asserts an intrinsically subversive view of the conditions of human existence.

The Generalization of Avoidance

So far, I have been describing two different ways of looking at the human person: either as a collection of bodily substances ultimately continuous

with the world surrounding it, or as an abstract set of properties set apart from that world.[17] These are certainly not the only possible ways of conceiving the human person; but they can always, it seems, be expected to emerge in situations of hierarchy and formal deference.

At this point, I can return to Norbert Elias' argument about the "civilizing process" in Europe (1978 [1939]), and Peter Burke's notion of the reform of popular culture (1978: 207–243).

Elias' observations are mainly based on comparing primers used to instruct children in different periods of European history, beginning in the twelfth century, and ending in the eighteenth and nineteenth. What he discovers is a continual "advance in thresholds of embarrassment and shame" over time, an increasing demand to suppress any public acknowledgment of bodily functions, excretion, aggressiveness, death, decay—in fact, any or all of those things which are typically thought to be embarrassing or shameful within relations of avoidance. The most interesting aspect of Elias' material, from my own perspective, is how behavior which Medieval courtesy books represented as shameful only if done before superiors (say, blowing one's nose in the tablecloth), gradually came to be represented as embarrassing even if done before equals, then inferiors, and finally, as behavior to be avoided on principle, even if no one else is there.[18] In my terms, one might say that avoidance became generalized: in the sense that principles of behavior which once applied mainly to relations of formal deference gradually came to set the terms for all social relations, until they became so thoroughly internalized they ended up transforming people's most basic relations with the world around them.

Now, Elias himself is mainly concerned with feudal courts and the courtly aristocracy. If there was any motor driving the change, he suggests, it was the state's increasing monopoly on the legitimate use of coercive force, which compelled courtiers to contain their aggressive impulses, and thus introduced a general principle of self-control. But he also suggests that it was, in fact, when these new ideals expanded outside the courts, to affect the nascent bourgeoisie, that they began to be fully internalized psychologically. This expansion was something that largely occurred in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, when one first finds middle-class reformers denouncing the polished artificiality of courtly manners, claiming they act mainly to make invidious distinctions and place some people above others, and holding up their own standards of comportment as more honest, moral and spontaneous—and therefore, as fit to be adopted by society as a whole (Elias 1978: 42–50).[19]

Burke's "reform of popular culture" was part of this same movement. Essentially it came down to the attempt, largely on the part of middle class

religious authorities, to improve the manners of those below: most of all, by eliminating all traces of the carnivalesque from popular life. Burke lists among their targets "actors, ballads, bear-baiting, bull-fights, cards, chap-books, charivaris, charlatans, dancing, dicing, divining, fairs, folktales, fortune-telling, magic, masks, minstrels, puppets, taverns and witchcraft" (Burke 1978: 208), to name a few. In England, Puritans actually called their campaign a "reformation of manners"; in its name they went about shutting down ale-houses, enforcing laws concerning sexual morality, and most of all, outlawing popular modes of entertainment like May poles, morris dancing, and Christmas revels. In Catholic Europe, counter-reformation authorities were conducting analogous campaigns. Such campaigns almost always gen-erated a great deal of opposition, but overall, they were remarkably success-ful.

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

The question, then, is: are there any ethnographic precedents for some-thing like this happening? Have there been cases where spread of exchange relations led to different standards of daily comportment? Let me try to an-swer this briefly before returning to concepts of the person in Early Modern Europe.

One thing the ethnographic evidence makes abundantly clear is that, when relationships between two people, or two groups, are defined primarily around exchange (and not, say, by idioms of common substance), they have a strong tendency to also be marked by rules of avoidance. The classic example is relations between affines: particularly when two families are locked in extended cycles of marriage payments.

Where rules of avoidance do exist, and have been broken, very often some sort of formal exchange is required to set things straight. Sometimes these take the form of fines. But they do not need to. MacAllister (1937: 131) recalls the case of a Kiowa-Apache man who accidentally bumped into his

mother-in-law, a person he was forbidden ever to touch. To make up for it, it was arranged for the two of them to exchange horses. Similarly, according to Roy Wagner (1967: 176), something similar is common practice among the Daribi of New Guinea, where a man should never even cast eyes on his wife's mother. Should he happen to do so by accident, the two have to meet and exchange male and female goods of equal value before they can go back to their former situation. Clearly, in neither case are we talking about a punishment or compensation; both parties ended up with things of exactly the same value as they had before. Rather than being a matter of reparations, it appears to be a simple matter of repair. Two people have come into contact who should not have done so. The resulting rift in the shell of avoidance can only be patched up by means of an exchange, because the act of exchanging goods itself transposes relations from the level of bodies and substances and back to that of abstract properties again.[20]

More often, if there's been a violation of the rules of avoidance, a minor fine is levied on the lower-status party (the one on whom the burden of avoidance lies). But even here, the fines are more than simple recompense; the very act of giving them also acts to restore relations to their appropriate level of abstraction. And the same goes for fines levied for actual damage to the person or property of others, or for that matter, affinal payments—in fact, for all those varied kinds of transaction which typically knit together to form what anthropologists refer to as a "gift economy."

Even more interesting for present purposes is what happens to a society when such networks of formal exchange become so important that they could be said to be the main institution setting the terms of social life. In such societies, everyday standards of interaction often begin to resemble what would in other societies be considered mild avoidance.

I am not the first to make note of this phenomena. But earlier anthropologists seem to have lacked a language with which to describe it. Some appealed to Weber. Margaret Mead, for instance, saw the Manus of the Admiralty Islands of New Guinea as practicing "a kind of capitalism," which, she said, was rooted in an ethos of asceticism and self-denial (1930, 1934, 1937). Alfred Kroeber spoke of the "entrepreneurial spirit" of the Yurok Indians of California, which he said arose from something like a Puritan ethic (1925, 1928). To the modern ear, such terms really don't seem appropriate. If New Guinea fishermen can be capitalists, the word "capitalism" loses most of its explanatory power, and one would have to come up with an entirely new term for the heads of joint-stock corporations employing large numbers of clock-punching wage-laborers. But I don't think it would be wise to dismiss such authors' insights out of hand. What the Manus and Yurok did share was something quite reminiscent of Euro-American ideas of private

property, and shell money which functioned as a kind of currency. Property could be bought and sold according to an abstract medium of value. Both were also societies in which the exchange of property was one of the main ways in which relations between people worked themselves out: even, sometimes, relations between the closest kin. Much of the commonplace drama of daily life seems to have turned largely on who had been given what, who owed what, who accepted what from whom. And, significantly enough, it is within relations most mediated by exchange that "asceticism" was most in evidence. "Sex," the Yurok dictum had it, "drives away money."[21] It was as if within such relations, the human person itself had to be hedged around with exclusive restrictions as severe as those surrounding property.

All these examples suggest that there can, indeed, be relations of avoidance that are not immediately concerned with constructing hierarchical relations between people, or even with setting one class off against the rest of society. When two people exchange horses with one another, they are marking their equivalence, as persons, by identifying themselves with two possessions of equivalent value. Similarly, in the Manus or Yurok cases, it was the existence of money—an abstract system by which the value of just about any piece of property could be compared—that made all persons comparable as well. In contexts involving exchange, persons were defined by what they had; since money made all property at least potentially equivalent, then people were as well. And the actual process of exchange meant that in practice, people were constantly establishing such temporary equivalences.[22]

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

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

All this might have been in keeping with the hierarchical principles of the time, but it was little conducive to the development of a market in land. In England, most land only became freely disposable after the first great wave of enclosure movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In an open field system, a farmer might have exclusive right to grow wheat on a given plot, but would have to open their own fields, after the harvest, to anyone in the village with sheep who wished to graze them on the stubble; fences had to be taken down during the agricultural off-season. With enclosure, fences were replaced by hedges and walls that make clear the owner's right to exclude other members of the community from it at any time. In other cases enclosures involved bounding off stretches of meadow or forest that had always been considered part of the village common—the exploitation of such common lands, one might add, having long been the key to the survival of the landless or poorer villagers. Ownership of enclosed land did not depend on membership in any larger group; it was an exclusive right of access held by a single owner "against all the world" (Thrupp 1977; E. P. Thompson 1976); hence, it could be freely bought and sold. Such land was, effectively, private property—even if it took the law some time to fully recognize this: since it was only around the time of the Restoration that jurists were willing to officially recognize a *dominium* belonging to anyone but the King (Alymer 1980).

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

> To every Individual in nature is given an individual property by nature, not to be invaded or usurped by any: for every one as he is himself, so he hath a self propriety, else could he not be himself, and on this no second may presume to deprive any of, without manifest violation and affront to the very principles of nature, and of the Rules of equity

and justice between man and man… Every man [is] by nature a King,
Priest and Prophet in his own natural circuit and compass, whereof no
second may partake, but by deputation, commission, and free consent
from him whose natural right and freedom it is." (in MacPherson 1962:
140–141).

In other words, a man's person—his body, like his chattels—were his
exclusive property, and therefore he had the absolute right to exclude "all
things hurtful and obnoxious" from it.[23] Even the king could not trespass on
this right. This was perhaps the first political evocation of the principle that
(as Goffman put it) the human person was sacred. The fact that, by the time
of the English revolution, such an argument could make sense to an audi-
ence of common soldiers does show that concepts of private property had
indeed played a large role in reshaping popular conceptions of the person.
And, as MacPherson notes, this doctrine—he calls it "possessive individual-
ism"—became the basis of notions of political freedom that emerged at the
time, and which have remained the foundation of prevailing theories of the
rights of man to the present day (ibid.: 142–159).

MacPherson's arguments inspired a lively debate (e.g., Laslett 1963,
MacPherson 1964, Arblaster 1981), but this fundamental insight has never
been seriously challenged. Modern individualism was not only an ideology
which developed through the rise of the bourgeoisie, it emerged first and
foremost through metaphors of property. The assumptions already implicit
in authors like Hobbes and Locke became more explicit in the doctrines
of British Mercantilists and French Physiocrats, and eventually became the
basis of political economy: that private property was a natural institution,
in that its logic predated the emergence of any larger human society—that,
in fact, society itself had to be created because of people's need to safeguard
their property and regulate its exchange. Where an earlier, hierarchical view
assumed that people's identities (their properties, if you will) were defined by
their place in society, the assumption was now that who one was was based
on what one had, rather than the other way around.[24]

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

Education and the Fate of Youth

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

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

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

The obvious place to look is in the education of children. Elias' material, for example, is almost exclusively drawn from manuals meant to instruct youth. What I am going to do in this section, then, is provide a very brief sketch of ideas of education and the public role of youth in Medieval and Early Modern societies: one which I think makes clear why the emergence of a regime of wage labor should almost inevitably have led to projects of social reform. It is not exactly an explanation; but it does lay out the outlines of what a full explanation might be like.

In the Middle Ages, just about everyone who did know how to read had learned their letters at least partly from "courtesy books"—books which were produced in remarkable numbers. The first were in Latin, and meant for the education of the clergy and perhaps the higher nobility. By the fourteenth

century, however, vernacular courtesy books, catering to an increasing de-
mand for literacy among the less exalted nobility, and many of the merchants
and tradesmen in the cities, had become common (Nicholls 1985: 57–74).[25]
As Philippe Aries (1962: 381–383) remarks, these books often covered a
wide variety of topics—ranging from advice on cutting one's fingernails to
advice on choosing a suitable wife. They also had a strong tendency to mix
precepts on how to eat at table with precepts on how to wait at table. This
latter is significant: because the period when young people were learning
manners was almost always the one in which they were also expected to be
in domestic service.

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

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

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

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

daughter as a maid for a minor member of the local gentry, and so on (Laslett 1972, 1977, 1983; Wall 1983; Kussmaul 1981).

This condition was expected to last until the age of twenty-five or even thirty: in part, because no one was expected to marry until they had accumulated enough resources to set up an independent household of their own. Wage-labor, in other words, was basically a life-cycle phenomena, and "youth," or adolescence, the period during which one accumulated the resources to establish oneself as a fully mature, autonomous being. It was also the period during which one learned one's future trade. Even farm service was, in effect, a form of apprenticeship.[26] Servants in husbandry—no less than dyer's or draper's apprentices, or, for that matter, knight's pages—were in training, and though the technical know-how one picked up in such circumstances was undoubtedly distinguished, in the abstract, from more commonplace matters of deportment and propriety, in practice the process of learning them was more or less the same.[27]

In the Middle Ages and, if anything, even more in the Early Modern period, idioms of youth and age were the most common way people had of talking about authority. It was a commonplace of Renaissance theory that aging was a long process of the drying-out of the body; that young people were as a result dominated by their "animal spirits," and hence prone to violent lusts and passions and every manner of excess; and that it was only when a man reached about the age of thirty, when physical strength began to decline, that his soul or powers of reason (the two were considered more or less the same thing) was deemed capable of overcoming them (Thomas 1971: 208–210, 1976). Thirty was also the age at which his first child should be born, thus establishing once and for all his social persona as a settled householder and full member of the community, with all the responsibility that entailed. "For young men to command," on the other hand, "was against the 'law of nature': they must obey until they had achieved mastery of their baser desires" (Brigden 1982: 37–38). Incapable of autonomy, they had to be kept under the watchful eye and firm hand of some mature master—one, ideally, who was not a kinsman, since kinship was thought to somewhat compromise authority—for their energies to be put to proper use.

It should be clear enough how all this relates to the logic of joking and avoidance. It's not just that youth were considered unformed: their typical vices were the carnal ones of violence and debauchery. They were by nature riotous, rebellious against the legitimate authority of their elders. Mature men, on the other hand, were rational and self-contained; they were the masters of autonomous, bounded, self-sufficient households. But the notion that service had an educational value added a complex play of theory against practice to this relatively straightforward way of representing things. In any

relation of avoidance, the burden of avoidance is always on the inferior par-
ty. Masters may have had been seen as more refined or disciplined in their
spontaneous comportment (they had better manners), but, still, it was their
servants who had to perform the acts of formal deference.[28] In practice, it
was by such acts, and by respectful obedience before their masters, that they
constructed the latter as higher, more abstract beings—*at the same time as*
they gradually internalized those same disciplined comportments so as to be
able to ultimately pass on to the status of master themselves.

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

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

All of this happened so gradually, though, that the underlying assump-
tions people had about the meaning of wage-labor need never have been
seriously called into question. Traditionally, wage-labor had been no more a

permanent state than was adolescence—it was, in fact, the means by which adolescence was overcome. Even after it had become a permanent status, it was still imagined as a process of transformation. In the eyes of their employers, the laboring classes were not so much undisciplined and carnal by nature (a joking residue, a base stratum whose vices could be held out as a evidence of those employer's own innate superiority) as rambunctious adolescents who needed to be disciplined and reformed through carefully supervised labor.

Casting things in this way at least makes it easier to understand why the actual social struggles which surrounded the commercialization of English society and the emergence of a proto-bourgeoisie took the form that it did: to a large extent, endless quarrels over the place of youth in the community, and struggles over popular festivals and entertainments. Let me return briefly here the Puritan "reformation of manners" in Tudor and Stuart England.

English Puritans

English Calvinists ("Puritans" was, in fact, a term of abuse) were mostly drawn from the "middle stratum" of their communities, the one which, as I've said, was most thoroughly caught up in the emerging national market. They were also the prosperous householders who employed the largest numbers of local youth as servants. The retreat of the aristocracy from rural life, along with much of the gentry (Stone 1965, Laslett 1965: 180–81) left such people in a strategic position in most villages, one which they were quick to take advantage of. Godly reformers circulated pamphlets and bibles, pooled funds to hire preachers, and tried as best they could to win control of both the borough and the parish governments. As churchwardens and magistrates, they began stripping away everything they found distasteful in traditional worship. Bells no longer tolled at funerals, nor was corn thrown at weddings; bagpipers and fiddlers were to have no part in religious ceremonies (Thomas 1971: 66–67). Most of all, their attacks were aimed at calendar festivals, especially carnivalesque rituals like Christmas and May Day, and the ongoing festive life of the village green.

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

> What were the campaigns for the Reformation of Manners if not attempts to suppress all the great obstacles to the subordination of youth: holidays, when the young people were released from their masters' supervision; theatres, to which they flocked to be corrupted; alehouses, which threw them into disorder, there being "many drunkards short of twenty years old"; gaming, "a pernicious thing and destructive of

youth"; maypoles, which encouraged "the rout" in their insolency towards the "ancient and the honourable" and taught "young people impudency and rebellion": dancing, for "where shall young men and maidens meet, if not at the dancing-place?"; sabbath-breaking, by "servants and…the younger sort"; and all the annual rites of misrule when youth temporarily inverted the social order? (Thomas 1976: 221).

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

The more radical Calvinists developed a utopian vision in which such authoritarian families were the only hierarchical organization that really needed to exist. The ideal community would be governed by an assembly of "elders," who were simply the heads of larger households. In New England, where Puritans were actually in a position to put some of these ideals into practice, the chief men of a community were given legal authority to place any young man and woman determined to be living alone in an "unruly household" as a servant in the households of more respectable elders—by force if necessary (Morgan 1944: 45–47, 85–89).

In other words, the Puritans did not see any distinction between projects of social reform directed at the lower classes, and the process of educating the youth. The two categories were not fully distinguished: they formed, as it were, a kind of unruly residual; the solution in either case being the imposition of domestic discipline. In their ideal society, anyone without the means or discipline to support a family should be incorporated into a larger household, working under the pay and careful direction of a disciplined master, who would also be responsible for their catechism and moral instruction.

As one might imagine, this vision, or the prospect of reducing collective ritual life to a matter of sermons and bible-reading, did not inspire uniform enthusiasm among parishioners. English villagers seem to have had a particular aversion to being preached at. "When the vicar goeth into the pulpit to read what he himself hath written," observes one Stephen Gardiner in 1547, "then do the multitude goeth straight out of church, and home to drink" (Thomas 1971: 161). And once called so into question, everyday habits like

stopping off at the local alehouse after a day's work, or piping on the vil-
lage green, became overt political issues. May Day celebrations (the English
equivalent of the continental Carnival) became perhaps the greatest single
particular focus of contention.

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

In some cases they lead to open confrontation:

> A Star Chamber case for 1604 tells how a group in the country parish
> of Alton, Southam, procured a minstrel and danced on Whitsunday.
> When the constable and church warden tried to arrest the musician,
> they were overpowered by his supporters who moved him to another
> part of the village, locked him in a house and, posting one of their own
> number on the roof to keep watch, continued to dance merrily on the
> lawn to the strains of the music that came out through the open window
> (Wright & Lones 1938: 299).

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

Usually, in any community in which a cadre of Calvinist zealots were
attempting to reform society, there were also village notables—tradition-
ally minded ministers, minor gentry, prosperous yeoman farmers—who saw
them as fanatics and prigs: "precise fellows," "busy controllers," as they were
often called, determined to undermine the ancient ways. Such men often
found themselves the unofficial leaders of anti-Puritan factions, and were
to be found holding court at the local alehouse or hosting a dance in their
cottages each Sunday, as surely as the godly themselves would be at their
sermons (Hunt 1983: 150–151; Collinson 1983: 408–409).

> The conflict between Puritans and "honest good fellows"—or, from the
> Puritan point of view, between the godly and the profane—divided vir-

tually every parish in southern England. In Wiltshire and Dorsetshire in the 1630s, it was the custom in many parishes to balance the factions by choosing one Puritan and one "honest man" as churchwardens. This conflict was far more ubiquitous and intense, I would argue, than antagonisms based explicitly on social class or even economic interest (Hunt 1983: 146).

Though one suspects these other issues were usually entangled in the larger one. Hunt also suggests that what was really at issue was a conflict between two very different images of community (ibid.: 130–136). The Puritan one I have already described. The one that rose in opposition to it was less clearly articulated, but it seems to have been largely based on the ethos long implicit in the very popular festivities and rituals which had now been thrown so starkly into question. As a result, opposition to Puritanism followed the same dual nature as Carnival itself: the same combination of joking aggression and idealistic utopias.

At its simplest, opposition to the Puritans might be simple mockery: disruptive catcalls during sermons or catechisms, rude dramas improvised late at night at the local ale-house. If someone could come up with an excuse to carry out a charivari against one of the "Saints," then that was best of all: common suspicion, after all, was that behind their fastidious exteriors, Puritans were really utterly depraved (Hunt 1983: 145). Finally, as festivals like May Day became political issues, their subversive side was played up more and more: it was in the sixteenth century, for instance, that plays and ballads about Robin Hood began appearing in May games throughout England (Wright & Lones 1938 II: 230–231; Hutton 1994: 66–67).

Alongside the abuse there was—here too—a more utopian side. Festivals had once been moments to define a community of equals: now, after they had been pulled out of the fabric of everyday life and challenged from above, that definition began to acquire a whole new meaning. Like Carnivals on the Continent, they came to commemorate a golden age when, it was imagined, equality and physical happiness were not yet things of the past. Festivals were times for merry-making; once, all England had been merry. Note the way in which the expression "merry England" was originally employed: "I perceive you are a Puritan outright, you are one of those new men that would have nothing but preaching. It was never a merry world since that sect first came among us" (Collinson 1983: 1). "The simple sort, which cannot skill of doctrine, speak of the merry world when there was less preaching, and when all things were so cheap, that they might have twenty eggs for a penny" (Hunt 1983: 148). Or even: "It was never merry England since we were impressed to come to the church" (Thomas 1971: 151). In later centuries Tory politicians

would make the maypole and merry England into nostalgic, sentimental images in support of reactionary politics. In the sixteenth century, this imagery was nostalgic—and even, in a sense, reactionary—but the implications were very different. It reflected, for instance, the constant complaints over the loss of "good neighborhood," of the solidarity and mutual aid—seen especially in the sharing of food, or the collective charity of church-ales, soul-ales, and the like—that people assured each other had been the universal rule in those abundant days before greedy yeomen and Calvinist preachers conspired to destroy it. As time went on, the past came to look more and more like the Land of Cockaigne.

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

Perspectives

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

In fact, though, all these perspectives tend to be available to anyone, whatever their social station, and tend to be invoked by the same individuals in different contexts. This is precisely what makes hierarchy such a powerful social principle: though I also think it would be clearly wrong to conclude, as some do, that hierarchy is an immutable, all-encompassing system that will always be able to absorb any challenge thrown at it.[30] Carnivalesque rituals of rebellion might have served, in the eyes of the masters, as means of reinforcing social order, but they had a notorious capacity to spiral out of their control. Rebellions do occur, almost everywhere. Hierarchies have been smashed and uprooted—even if the principle, the potential for their re-emergence, can never perhaps be completely eradicated, rooted as it is in the most fundamental dynamics of social life.

The second half of the essay focused specifically on the question of manners and private property. Rather than rehearse the argument again, let me end with a note of comparison, by comparing my own analysis with the work of Louis Dumont, whose actually has some very interesting things to say on the passage from hierarchical societies to ones based on principles of commercial individualism (Dumont 1981, 1986).

Dumont conceives hierarchical societies, most of all, as holistic ones. A social hierarchy is a system whereby different groups are ranked in relation to a whole.[31] If one group is ranked higher than another, it is always because it is the one that represents the totality to which both of them belong. To return to the Hindu caste system, again, Warriors are exalted because as kings and temporal rulers, they represent society as a whole; Priests rank even higher because they represent humanity before the entire cosmos. By Dumont's logic, everything really is about inclusion (it is just that, in a sort of Orwellian sense, some are a little more included than others). To talk of "exclusion" would be to invoke an entirely alien logic. In fact, Dumont argues, one simply cannot speak of exclusion in a hierarchical system. The term only makes sense where one is dealing with a society based on principles of individualism. This, he argues, is what really destroyed the old hierarchical world of the Middle Ages. The rise of a commercial society brought with it an ideology of individualism. This constituted a fundamental break with everything that had come before. Ideologies of individualism meant that each human being came to be seen as unique, and therefore, of incommensurable value. If the value of humans could not be compared, then no one could be held superior to any other. If no one could be held superior to any other, then there was no plausible reason to why one should have more or less access to the good things in life, to the pursuit of property, or happiness, or however one might care to phrase it, wherever it be found. Ideologies of human equality are thus really side-effects of individualism. Of course, in

practice, egalitarian ideals are never fully put into practice. Often even in the most egalitarian societies, such as the United States, there are certain glaring exceptions, where certain categories of people are indeed excluded from the national community. The American "color bar," according to Dumont, is just such an ideology of exclusion, and as such it has nothing in common with hierarchy. It is a fundamentally different type of thing.

Dumont's arguments about individualism are nothing if not insightful and I would hardly propose they simply be thrown away. Still, the political implications are, as so often in his work (Robbins 1994), profoundly unsettling. My own insistence that social hierarchies are always combinations of inclusion and exclusion has entirely different implications. First of all, one need posit no absolute break between the two periods. Take the ideology of Puritanism as an example. It was clearly hierarchical; only, in place of the endless gradations characteristic of a feudal system, one is left with a minimal hierarchy of two or perhaps three levels. Women, children, and servants were encompassed within the personality of the householder; and, in all but the most radical versions, of householders encompassed by the King or State. Neither was the Puritan concern with "the darker parish" and floating population of "masterless men" notably different than contemporary concerns with an immoral and overly fertile "underclass." In fact, as some historians of the time have noted (Hill 1972, Hunt 1984), Puritan opinions on this subject—that the problem of poverty had nothing to do with real wages, but was really rooted in the poor's own lack of morality and self-control, their unwillingness to create proper families—have an uncanny resemblance to those employed by American conservatives today. Rather than hierarchies being swept away, it is more as if the hierarchical residual was squeezed down, its imagery becoming all the more intense having been so.

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

to think about. No hierarchy is ever immutable. Indeed, like capitalism, one could well argue that all hierarchies by their own internal logic must necessarily create images of rebellious disorder—images, indeed, of their own negation—that they then have to exert enormous amounts of energy to contain, so as to ensure that they do not burst out of the level of the imaginary. Such systems are always vulnerable. But by the same token, any genuinely egalitarian system must, it seems, adopt equivalent mechanisms, to stand guard against its own deeply embedded hierarchical possibilities.[32]

Allow me a final word on those hierarchical possibilities. One of the dangers of muddled terms is that they make "hierarchy" (usually defined in two or three different ways at once) as an inevitable feature of social life. To a certain degree, of course, it is. There will always be nested sets of categories, and people will always have a tendency to rank some things as better or worse than others. But none of this has any necessary social implications one way or another. What we are used to thinking of as social hierarchies are a particular constellation of these principles, and as Arthur Lovejoy (1936) pointed out, fairly unstable ones, since in order to impose a single all-encompassing hierarchical system, you need to measure everyone on a single scale; the moment one begins to introduce more than one criteria (refinement, rationality, money, grace, etc) into the Great Chain of Being, the whole thing falls apart. Obviously, this alone is not enough to destroy a hierarchical form of social organization. As Dumontians regularly point out, the usual solution is to create a hierarchy of scales: so that in a caste system, for instance, the scale of purity is the highest, which is why Brahmans are the most exalted sort of people, the scale of power second, the scale of wealth comes after that, and so on. This is certainly true to an extent, but—even aside from the fact that it's never clear if the system is really so unified as Dumontians like to make out—there are very real limits to how many different axes of discrimination can be absorbed. Multiply linear hierarchies endlessly, and any such system will, inevitably, fall apart. A million different modes of discrimination is, to all practical intents and purposes, identical to no mode of discrimination at all.

Endnotes

1   Failure to recognize this is the weakness, I think, of much of the existing theoretical literature on the subject. Mary Douglas' essay on "jokes" for instance starts out as an analysis of joking relations. The result is a brilliant reflection on the nature of humor, but, it seems to me, is of little use in understanding the nature of joking relations in the traditional anthropological sense of the term.

2   Though cf. Stasch 2002.

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

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

5   Tikopians for instance identify a man with a canoe by a term Raymond Firth translates as "linked," the same term that is used for, say, bond-friends (1965: 257–8).

6   Claude Levi-Strauss (1962) has made the point that totemic systems are not really about identity but analogy, that is, they are not saying clan X are like bears or clan Y like eagles, but that the relation between clan X and clan Y is like the relation between bears and eagles. This is, of course, a very famous argument. However, in a later work (1966), he also noted that such totemic systems usually develop between groups that all share a roughly equal status; and makes the intriguing suggestion that, when one begins to hear that clan X really do resemble bears, it is usually because some element of hierarchy has entered in. If nothing else, this certainly seems to work for the Lau Islands.

7   And the Maori seem to have been typical of Polynesian societies in this respect.

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

9   When Shakespeare's Henry V refers to France as another jewel for his crown, he is expressing perfectly the equivalence of ornaments or insignia and what we like to call "real property," in terms of signification. Though on this, see also Graeber 1996.

10   Which often accompany what Marshall Sahlins (1972) has called "generalized reciprocity. "

11   True, different systems lean more or less heavily to one side or another. The Indian caste system, certainly, presses down very hard on the linear side; the Nuer seg-

mentary system, to take a famous example, lean with equal weight in the opposite direction. But I doubt one can find any society based entirely on one principle and not the other.

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

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

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

15   Burke (1978: 199–204) notes that the metaphor of "letting off steam" began to be employed the moment it was technically possible; before that, the preferred metaphor was letting off pressure in a wine cask. Even at the time, though, many objected that, as safety-valves go, popular festivals made extraordinarily poor ones, considering how many genuine rebellions grew out of such festivities (see Bercé 1976; Burke op cit.; Davis 1980). Bercé for example provides vivid accounts of preparations for carnival in French cities during the 16th and 17th centuries, during which the soldiers manning the city walls would systematically turn the cannons on the parapets around so they would face into the town, in case of any serious trouble.

16   Anyway it strikes me that it can be more potentially revealing, for the analysis of rituals such as Carnival, than, say, Victor Turner's notion of liminality and communitas (1969)—terms often thrown around so very casually that their use can stifle further discussion more than encourage it.

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

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

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

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

21 For Manus parallels, see Mead 1934: 191, 308.

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

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

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

25 The literate class and the courteous class tended always to be one and the same.

26 It's not so much that "apprenticeship and service were confused" as Aries puts it (ibid.: 366–367) than that they were never really distinguished to begin with.

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

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

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

defining a social class in terms of a stage in the life-cycle—was inherently contra-
dictory.

30   Any more than capitalism, about which very similar arguments are often made.

31   He also seems to assume that all holistic systems must be hierarchical; but this is
     another issue.

32   I have elaborate this argument in an earlier work (Graeber 2004: 24–37).

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