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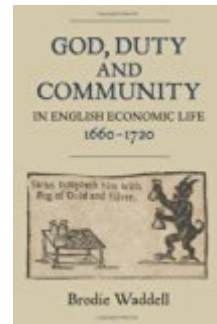
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Brodie Waddell. *God, Duty and Community in English Economic Life, 1660-1720.* Studies in Early Modern Cultural, Political and Social History Series. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012. xii + 273 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84383-779-4.

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In his first book, *God, Duty and Community in English Economic Life*, Brodie Waddell seeks to bring the realm of culture to bear upon the economic life of late Stuart England. This period has tended to be subsumed within the story of how the “moral economy” was vanquished by the market in the eighteenth century, to the neglect of what Waddell sees as its distinctive economic culture. But more than seeking to fill a gap in this literature, Waddell seeks to challenge its underlying teleologies.

The introduction sets out the author’s critique of existing historiography in an admirably forthright manner. Waddell notes that notions of early modern social change have been informed by a series of teleological transitions—from feudalism to capitalism, community to society, and so on. Although Waddell draws inspiration from E. P. Thompson’s idea of the “moral economy,” he notes that in the work of Thompson and many of his followers, the moral economy always appears to be doomed to defeat by the amoral market: the tide of modernization runs one way. Furthermore, Waddell criticizes those Thompsonian treatments of the relationship between culture and material life that reduce “the ‘moral economy’ to a superstructural facade supported by the ‘real’ economy” (p. 12). In addition, Waddell seeks to rescue his period’s plurality of economic cultures, with a particular focus on the overlooked humble majority.

Waddell does this in three thematic chapters. The first examines the continued impact of religious beliefs on economic relations, demonstrated largely through cheap print. Waddell presents a huge array of material showing the persistence of Christian commandments to be charitable, along with many instances of the miserly

being punished for their sins by a vengeful God, accounts familiar to anyone versed in sixteenth-century popular literature. In fact this is potentially a problem for Waddell. He appears to have uncovered a seam of popular religious attitudes on the surface largely untouched since the previous century, which might bring into question his claims about the distinctiveness of the late Stuart period.

The era’s particular features come across more prominently in the two subsequent chapters, however. Chapter 2 focuses on the way that patriarchal ideologies continued to structure economic relationships, from the household economy to the parish and beyond. Because patriarchy carried with it responsibilities, those with a duty of deference also possessed a powerful bargaining chip which they could use with their rulers, often through petitioning. But lest we slip back into nostalgic laments for a lost age of communal harmony, Waddell recognizes that this was also an ideal that sustained inequality and legitimized harsh social discipline. Perhaps this explains in part why it was apparently resurgent after the disruptions of the civil war and interregnum.

Where chapter 2 brings out the authoritarian aspects of later Stuart patriarchal culture, chapter 3 examines the exclusionary implications of another ethos that Waddell finds to be in rude health despite historical claims to the contrary: that of community. Far from being sacrificed to a rising individualism, Waddell argues that communal belonging continued to be essential to economic success, but the chapter as a whole focuses less on the workings of economic networks than on the evocation of various “imagined communities” for ideological purposes, start-

ing with the broadest of all, the community of mankind. The other communities that Waddell explores are more particularistic: religious, national, and local affiliations were all dependent on policing the boundary between insiders and outsiders, who were all too often viewed as threatening the rights and privileges of group members. Waddell sees the importance of the national community as rising in the period, but also resurgent were urban corporations and trade guilds, experiencing a revival after the mid-century's stresses, though in their cases this would not be sustained. Waddell's conclusion seeks to identify other broad transitions, although he is at pains to show this as a nonlinear process. Popular religiosity was in full vigor, even as the established church gradually lost some of its formal powers to enforce moral conduct on congregations. Certain communal bonds were growing stronger, notably, the nation and the parish.

Overall this is a valuable discussion of the persistence of moralized conceptions of material life in an era more celebrated for the contribution of a minority of intellectuals. Waddell's book is richly researched, and it is refreshing to read something by an author with a clear sense of what he wants to contribute to the field. Certainly Waddell demonstrates the enduring importance of concepts, like "providence" and "patriarchy," to contemporary economic attitudes. He is to be congratulated for not simply challenging established narratives, but for making suggestions about how to replace them. That said, I do feel that the distinctiveness of the period might have been foregrounded more strongly, particularly in terms of the changing economic setting. Sometimes Waddell alludes to this context, but the actual economic lives of those he is most interested in are rarely at the forefront. Of course there are huge evidential problems in charting plebeian economic lives, but it is hoped that future studies will attempt to consider how the normative standards described here shaped everyday economic relations, as well as petitions and protests.

Perhaps the most important question to ask of this work, however, is how well does it achieve its goal of presenting an alternative to the dominant models of early modern social and economic change that, to the author, are tainted by teleology. Here, many of Waddell's points hit home: the dichotomy between the market and the moral economy surely does not do justice to the complexities of change. But sometimes the anti-teleological line can be overplayed. For example, the author asserts that evidence for continued corporate sentiment in chapter 3 refutes Keith Wrightson's suggestion that communal associations were becoming

more selective. But when Waddell discusses how handicraft workers, "frustrated with the ineffectiveness and employer-orientation of some eighteenth-century companies," found "new forms of fellowship and collective power in the trade-based societies that sprang up in several parts of the country" (p. 225), this sounds rather similar to the process described by Wrightson. Doubtless the proliferation of such communities demonstrates the continued appeal of occupational fellowships, but the fact that some were being refashioned in response to perceived failings of established companies also suggests a decline of one form of corporate association in the light of economic and social change.

Is it necessarily Whiggish, then, to suggest that certain visions of community were indeed becoming threatened by new market practices, and associational forms? Fen drainers might have faced much local hostility, for example, but they could gain support at a national level. An appeal to one community (the nation) could be deployed to undercut the claims of another (the locality), and perhaps the state was becoming more responsive to the former than the latter. And fen drainers, like other "improvers," could deploy the discourse of political economy to support their claims.

Of course political economy is a well-worn subject, and Waddell is right to show that this discourse by no means dominated the economic culture of the late Stuart period. But such emerging discourses could be used to cut through the claims of established moral communities. Not that they were monopolized by the rich and powerful; witness the East India Company's failure to defend its right to import printed calicos in the face of protests from domestic manufacturing interests, supported by popular unrest. Here, Waddell's account of the mobilization of patriotic values seems not so far from some of those approaches critiqued in the introduction as being overly "instrumental," in which ideals were deployed tactically in clashes of interests. Moral stances were not masks to be taken on and off, but the participants in such conflicts had more to lose than their values; people's livelihoods were at stake, too.

All this boils down to a larger question for historians interested in reconciling the cultural and the economic: what do we do with the concept of "interest"? To put it another way, is there a danger of replacing the "under-socialized" caricature of "homo economicus" with economic actors that sociologists would describe as "oversocialized," the passive bearers of internalized norms and values? Doubtless "religiously inspired archetypes ...

left an indelible impression on the economic lives of ordinary people” (p. 65), but we should not neglect the role of material self-advancement or preservation (and other forms of “acquisitive” behavior—the acquisition of reputation, for example) as a motive force in economic life. In other words, we need to find a place for “interest,” which, after all, was a concept with which early modern English people were very familiar. The language of interest could be, in some respects, demoralizing; or rather it allowed certain moral values and communities to be ignored in favor of others, including the right to preserve that most exclusive of imagined communities, the self.

Consideration of issues of interest theory might be taking us back into the well-studied realm of elite political economists and theorists. But a full picture of economic lives and cultures needs to consider the interaction of potentially rival values and those who bore them. And this links back to the changing economic context of the period. Increasing engagement in long-distance markets could encourage farmers or manufacturers to refashion their communal loyalties in a way that undermined neighborly commitments; participation in the emerging stock market might suggest a different scale of economic values to those recounted in this book. When the author discusses the example of a London cleric who attacked covetous practices from his City pulpit only to find himself out of a job, Waddell writes that “his habit of excommunicating usurers made him enough powerful

enemies to ensure that he was soon dismissed from this post, but his assumptions about the link between pride, riches, and idolatry were hardly controversial” (p. 39). His fate might suggest the opposite, however, and the volume of printed attacks on various forms of economic immorality might suggest that the confrontation of divergent moral economies was far from uncommon in the period. In which case, does the clash between the market and other moral economies, if not the moral economy, have some explanatory power still?

The market mentality might have been “merely one impulse among many” (p. 229), but we can still argue that it had the potential to override other impulses, solidarities, and values. Waddell’s book ends by questioning whether the apparently amoral market values of contemporary neoliberalism are the inevitable end-point of capitalist modernity: “even today the logic of ‘free market capitalism’ is only one of the many ‘moral economies’ that inform our thinking and behaviour” (p. 231). Neoliberal economics may or may not offer a convincing model of the way that the world works, but that does not necessarily lessen its ideological appeal—fair trade, cooperative businesses, and vegetarianism notwithstanding. There is still a story to be told about how this particular moral economy achieved its present-day preeminence. Perhaps the early modern period can still be a chapter within it.

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