Introduction

A history of moral change is, to a certain degree, a history of everything. This book is of more limited scope. It aims to explore the history of English moral reform – that is, of self-conscious, organised efforts by groups of concerned citizens to change moral values and to modify patterns of behaviour associated with them. It is argued that 'moral reform' as a category of social action was a particular preoccupation of the period between the Revolution Settlement of 1688–9 and the turn of the twentieth century and, more distinctly still, of the hundred years between the 1780s and the 1880s.

Moral reform identified

How is moral reform to be identified? It may help to begin with an attempt at definition by an actively engaged contemporary. In 1852 the *British Temperance Advocate* published an article: 'What the Temperance Society is NOT'.[1] In this article the author compared the work of a temperance society with the work of four other types of volunteer action. A temperance society was 'not a charitable institution' – though it helped to teach 'the true charity which restores to sound moral habits, to virtuous self-help and self-reliance'. Nor was it 'an educational society' or a 'sanitary association' – though its encouragement to self-management would assist members towards accumulation of the resources and will-power needed to raise their educational and environmental goals. Finally, it was not 'a political union' – though its members, by their self-control, proved themselves fit for recognition as citizens. In the context of its era a fifth distinction might have been added – a temperance society was not (yet) an organisation for religious evangelisation – though the majority of its members would have some link with a church or, more likely, a chapel.

Why, then, this anxiety to establish a distinct identity? Why was such a distinction valued? As this survey of voluntary action develops, a cluster of explanations will become apparent. The most significant link moral reform to, and distinguish it from, the activities of organised religious evangelisation, of

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[1] *British Temperance Advocate* 29 (1852), pp. 103–4.

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charitable relief-giving, of party politics and of public administration. Thus one of the reasons why moral reform and religious evangelisation remained distinguishable (if sometimes overlapping) activities during this period was that moral reform had the potential to avoid sectarian disputes about the type or extent of belief in a particular form of Christianity. Again, one of the reasons why moral reformers preferred to distinguish their mission as one of encouraging 'true charity' was that it distanced them from stereotypes of religion-based relief-giving which, in an age of political economy, were vulnerable to charges of encouraging habitual ('demoralising') dependency. The key reason why moral reformers invariably felt unease at becoming too closely associated with a political party or pressure group was the fear that this would run the risk of subordinating goals perceived as altruistic to goals perceived to be tied to sectional self-interest. And a major reason why moral reformers usually retained a strong commitment to voluntary status when they became associated with the development of schemes for the 'reclamation' of the young or undersocialised or the victims of cruelty and injustice was that it helped them to retain a living sense of personal responsibility for those they perceived as 'less fortunate' than themselves – a sense which most of them envisaged as difficult to preserve if the work was entrusted to professional or official agency.

If this was, broadly speaking, the rationale of moral reform, what of the objectives falling within its scope? Here, temperance gives us only one illustration of a complex and mutating range of concerns. Activists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attached the moral reform label from time to time to everything from repression of the profanation of the Sabbath to the encouragement of pure literature, from the suppression of the slave trade to the prevention of cruelty to animals and children. Temperance, charity organisation, prison reform, the abolition of capital punishment, reclamation of 'fallen women', promotion of 'social purity', all fell within the category for some or all of the period explored here.

In this they reflected changing practical priorities: the discovery of one form of moral depravity often led to the discovery of another. They also reflected changing perceptions of the moral sphere and its boundaries. That is, moral reform depended on a set of culturally evolving assumptions about the responsibility of individuals for their own actions – about their capacity to choose between vicious and virtuous conduct. Obviously a religious culture expressing its values in terms of sin and salvation will define this responsibility in terms distinct from the terms employed by secular utilitarians. A society which respects hierarchy and inherited rank will have a set of moral values which distinguishes it from one which promotes individual autonomy and freedom of contract. The extent of specialisation of professional knowledge will also have a bearing on expectations of moral responsibility, as will the degree to which a society endorses a specialisation of gender roles. All this makes a difference,

and unavoidably did make a difference to the goals which moral reformers
set themselves over the period between the later eighteenth and later nineteenth
centuries. During this period, as we shall be acknowledging, debate about moral
values, about moral standards of behaviour, was therefore constantly entangled
with debate about religious belief and organisation; philanthropy, education and
the legitimate scope and goals of public administration; labour management,
work discipline and public order; family structure, gender roles and the social-
isation of the young. At core it became a debate about the cultural control of
the 'animal appetites' – greed, lust, violence and (if it counts as an appetite)
indolence – all human propensities which have the potential to disrupt the ful-
filment of social obligation to family, employer, neighbours, civil authority and
God.[2] In a phrase, the limits of the moral are culturally determined in complex
ways.

   Beyond the issue of identifying certain values and patterns of behaviour
as objects of moral reform concern, of course, lies the further question of
agency. Whose culture did the determining of moral boundaries, and by what
mechanisms?[3] Without attempting to foreclose too much future argument, the
finding of this survey is that moral reform cultural elites can be most readily
located among 'the middling ranks' of English society. Sometimes the influ-
ence of these elites was powerful or persuasive enough to recruit support from
the world of the landed, titled and fashionable, and sometimes also from the
world of the labouring classes, especially skilled and semi-skilled tradesmen. As
noted above, the world of the middling ranks was not always (or even usually)
a culturally homogeneous world, and part of the appeal of moral reform was
its potential to build experimental bridges of co-operation across the chasms of
regional, occupational, gender and religious difference.[4] Yet, in one respect, it
was united – united in commitment to a belief in the utility and acceptability of
volunteer association as a means of mobilising support and taking public action.
The tradition of clubs and societies in English life was by no means a new
one.[5] And the uses to which volunteer association might be put were equally

[2] Cf. William Paley's classification of moral duties ('Towards God . . . other men . . . ourselves'),
   Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy (1785; reprinted 1978), p. 36.
[3] For the useful distinction, relied on here, between 'culture as a category of social life' and 'culture
   as system and practice', see W. Sewell, 'The Concept(s) of Culture', in V. Bonnell and L. Hunt
   (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley
   CA, 1999), pp. 39–47.
[4] On the tensions within middle-class culture, see A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (eds.), *The Making
   of the British Middle Class? Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity since the Eighteenth
   Century* (Stroud, 1998), pp. xv–xxxii; S. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*
   (Manchester, 2000), pp. 14–30.
[5] The tradition, it must also be noted, was not confined to England. The existence of a culture of
   voluntary association, spread by the later eighteenth century across the English-speaking world,
   has recently been extensively documented (P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580–1800*
   (Oxford, 2000)), and the culture was periodically reinforced during the century which followed,

available for the pursuit of projects of unvarnished self-interest (regional, occu-
pational, political) and for the promotion of projects of claimed communal
altruism. The tradition of moral reform, as it emerged, however, was firmly
based on a collective belief in the possibility – and desirability – of disinterested
service in the cause of human moral improvement. Whether that improvement
was envisaged as a 'reformation' towards the retrieval of a purer moral order
allowed over modern times to decay, or as a 'reform' towards the creation of a
more modern, more rational, refined and evolved set of cultural relationships,
remained an ambiguity to be resolved over time.[6]

Perspectives on moral reform

Meanwhile, moral reform as it developed also became subject to evaluation by
people other than its supporters. Not all of these were prepared to take moral
reformers' declarations of altruistic motive at face value and, as we shall see
in chapters to follow, there were moments when sections of the moral reform
project came under direct challenge. Such was the heat released that when, at
the end of the nineteenth century, a first generation of professional historians
began to record the achievements of moral reform activism, their attempts at
evaluation were themselves coloured by awareness of its contested reputation.
It is to these and following attempts at contextualisation of moral reform that
we must now turn.

Broadly speaking, we can identify three approaches – three framing narra-
tives – into which the English volunteer moral reform tradition has been inserted
over the last hundred years. The first of these approaches is probably still the
most widely recognised. This is the presentation of moral reform as an aspect of
the history of the development of capitalist industrial society. In this approach,
campaigners for moral reform make their appearance as either the knowing or
involuntary articulators of the new standards of labour discipline required by that
circumstance. The primary goal/function of moral reform, the argument goes,
was to break in a 'pre-industrial' population to the 'methodical way of life of ind-
ustrial capitalism'. 'The pressures towards discipline and order extended from
the factory, on one hand, the Sunday school, on the other, into every aspect of
life: leisure, personal relationships, speech, manners', explains E. P. Thompson
in his depiction of the era of 'Pitt's moral lieutenant, Wilberforce'.[7]

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especially among groups (temperance, antislavery, child-protection associations, etc.) linked to
Protestant evangelical networks. This study is limited to English materials, partly to make it
manageable, partly because of the distinctive cultural shape of English associational voluntarism
which stemmed from English society's distinctive ecclesiastical and social structure, and from
its political and public welfare systems.
[6] Cf. J. Innes, '"Reform" in English Public Life: The Fortunes of a Word', in A. Burns and J. Innes
(eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform* (Cambridge, 2003).
[7] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968 edn), pp. 442–
3, though cf. Thompson's warning against 'sentimentalizing' pre-industrial society at p. 451.

Thompson's critique of the coercive and disciplinary agenda of moral reform
was, in fact, a mid-twentieth-century reworking of a long line of moral criti-
cism of moral reform. Marx, in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, had identi-
fied 'economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of
the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the preven-
tion of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of
every imaginable kind' as incurable agents of the exploiting classes 'desirous
of redressing social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of
bourgeois society'.[8] Before Marx, the defender of the leisure pastimes of the
free-born Englishman, William Cobbett, had also identified moral reform as the
prop of an exploitive social order: faced with the prospect of enforced departure
to America in 1818, he had welcomed (rather prematurely) the opportunity of
moving to 'a free country [with] No Wilberforces!'[9]

By the time self-consciously professional historians began to create the story
of 'the English industrial revolution' in the early twentieth century the per-
spective had changed, though not the generally negative evaluation of moral
reform. What had infuriated Cobbett and drawn the contempt of Marx now drew
the puzzlement mixed with hindsight-assisted disapproval of the Webbs. Moral
reform was recognised as a precursor of social reform and therefore acknowl-
edged as a legitimate field of activity, but it was evaluated negatively for being a
conceptualisation of issues which was both unscientific and pre-modern. As the
Webbs summed up the moral reform activists of the 1780s, these were people
unable to distinguish between class interest and wider community need:

There is, to our modern feelings, something unsavoury in this combination of concern
for the spiritual welfare of the poor and for the security and profit of the rich, especially
when it led merely to attempts to deprive the lower orders of their margin of leisure and
opportunities for amusement.[10]

And because moralising volunteers were so unwilling to subordinate self-
interest to scientific evaluation of outcomes, they had continued to play an
ambivalent role in the development of a coherent, uniform, professionally
administered and adequately resourced set of national social policies designed
to achieve 'the prevention, not directly of pauperism but of destitution itself'.[11]

[8] Marx, in his commentary on 'Conservative, or Bourgeois Socialism', *Communist Manifesto*,
ch. 3.
[9] *Cobbett's Political Register*, 3 Oct. 1818, cited in J. and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer,
1760–1832* (1917), p. 238.
[10] S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, vol. xi: *The History of Liquor Licensing* (1963; 1st
publ. 1903), p. 162. See also p. 159.
[11] Webb, *English Local Government*, vol. viii: *English Poor Law History, Part II: The Last Hundred
Years* (1963; 1st publ. 1929), pp. 467–8; and see the ambivalent appraisal of the COS and
its work, viii.455–6; ix.791. The Webbs, and many labour historians after them, it must be
recognised, saw a continuing role for volunteer action, experiment and self-sacrifice, so long as
it was subordinated to state-determined priorities and not applied to produce merely 'feel-good'
outcomes.

6   Making English Morals

As this approach makes clear, for the Webbs, as for many labour historians
after them, the chief analytical failing of the moral reform approach was that it
privileged motive over outcome. Moral reform was tolerable as a way of mud-
dling through a transitional stage of social development, but an impediment
to the achievement of citizen social integration and material well-being when
it continued to value status-driven volunteer 'amateurism' in an age with the
resources and knowledge to do better.[12] The future lay with the democratically
legitimised, expert-advised, centrally organised state.

The Webbs, of course, had their own political axes to grind and it has been
noted that a certain amount of their 'historical' work was in fact material orig-
inally drafted for purposes of political persuasion.[13] That does not of itself,
however, invalidate what they, and others in their tradition of interpretation,
were arguing in the case of moral reform. Nor does it undermine the claim of a
major segment of early twentieth-century educated opinion to be making a pro-
fessional evaluation of the significance of past 'experiments' from the viewpoint
of 'present knowledge' as it existed at the time of writing.[14] If material well-
being and social efficiency were the assumed ultimate objectives of society, then
class-based volunteer initiative was bound to be both inefficient and oppressive
in its impact. Voluntarists *were* wasting scarce resources. Moral reform vol-
untarists were inappropriate, insensitive and counter-productive sponsors of
cultural change in a society based on a principle of equality in citizenship.

Yet, from the hindsight view of a later generation, two major blind spots limit
the persuasiveness of the 'labour discipline' approach to moral reform. The
first is its limited range of curiosity about moral reform goals: these goals were
assumed to be the thinly disguised expressions of material class interest and, if
they resisted this classification (as antislavery appeared to some to do), then they
became examples of selective conscience or even of 'false consciousness'.[15]

The other question which a labour discipline approach tended to sidestep was
the question of who represented the exploiting classes in moral reform move-
ments – the question of distribution of power *within* property-owning ranks.
Once again, it was Evangelicals such as Wilberforce ('Pitt's moral lieutenant')
who posed the most obvious problem, both because of their strangely yoked

[12] Webb, *English Local Government*, viii.456, 467–8.
[13] A. Kidd, 'Historians or Polemicists? How the Webbs Wrote their History of the English Poor
     Laws', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 40 (1987), pp. 400–17, esp. 410–15. See also
     D. Cannadine, 'The Past and the Present in the English Industrial Revolution 1880–1980',
     Past and Present, no. 102 (1984), pp. 114–31, esp. 132–42.
[14] G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain 1830–1990* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 155–60;
     M. Wiener, 'The Unloved State: Twentieth-Century Politics in the Writing of Nineteenth-Century
     History', *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), pp. 288–9.
[15] For the Hammonds' puzzled acknowledgement of Wilberforce's limited but genuine 'humanity',
     see *Town Labourer*, p. 245. For the classic argument that antislavery was a form of capitalist
     self-interest, embraced when it was realised that 'free labour' was more profitable than slave
     labour, see E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill NC. 1944).

priorities and because of their willingness on occasion to criticise vested inter-
ests and to alienate 'official opinion'. Yet, at various stages of the narrative of
modernisation, the same could also be said of *secular* moral reformers – admin-
istrative and professional elites in particular. Why, in addition, were captains
of industry so modestly represented in moral reform leadership? Eventually, a
revaluation of the relation between (and relative importance of) economic struc-
ture and cultural superstructure would emerge to encourage labour historians
to take culture as a variable in its own right,[16] but by that stage the emergence
of the working classes was not the only narrative of interest to historians of
culture change.

A second framing narrative with implications for the history of moral reform
movements has been one starting from the assumption that what most needs
explaining in modern national experience is not the history of conflict, but of
conflict successfully mediated or resolved. Once again, there is a sense in which
this narrative is a recycling of the world-view of a section of Victorian society
itself – the personal responsibility-taking, respectability-seeking section of that
society – and it is therefore no surprise to find the classic presentation of this
viewpoint in a work retrieving for a mid-twentieth-century audience the world
of nineteenth-century temperance. This is Brian Harrison's study of *Drink and
the Victorians*, first published in 1971. The cultural underpinning of that concern
with the evolution of stability and consensus, however, spread further than an
attempt by a new generation of professional historians to demonstrate their
technical skill by the interpretation of the fossilised remains of extinct cultural
species.[17]

One context prompting revaluation was the increasingly anomalous national
experience of English society itself by mid-twentieth-century standards of com-
parison. By rights, the 'first industrial nation' should have led the way in resolv-
ing its class conflicts in favour of the working classes. Yet the historical record
seemed, instead, to indicate a remarkable story of class politics deflected.[18] In
addition, the prestige of state-sponsored solutions to issues of class exploitation
had, by the 1960s, sunk; the reputation of the 'Fabian orthodoxy' as developed
by the Webbs and others had been damaged by exposure to the realities of
state totalitarianism of both radical right (by then defeated) and Soviet commu-
nist left (still 'flourishing').[19] In its place a new post-war generation of young

[16] H. Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians* (Oxford, 1984), chs. 6–7, esp. pp. 234ff.

[17] B. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians. The Temperance Question in England 1815–1872* (1971),
based on his Oxford D.Phil. thesis of 1966.

[18] Once again, there were precedents for this insight, most notably Elie Halévy's thesis on the role
of Methodism as a cultural bridge set out in his *History of the English People in the Nineteenth
Century* (6 vols., 1949 edn), vol. i: *England in 1815* (first publ. 1913), pp. 424–5. (My thanks
to John Walsh for a timely reminder about the relevance of Halévy to the historiography of the
subject.)

[19] Wiener, 'The Unloved State', pp. 295–7.

historians was moving, sometimes rebelliously, to identify not with the managers and policy elites of societies past and present, but with 'ordinary people' as the shapers of their own cultural worlds.[20]

One logical outcome of this broadening of interest from state to society, and from labour relations to culture, was a new-found interest in voluntary association generally. It became relevant to study the ways in which 'community' was formed on bases of religious, geographical, ethnic, age-group and gender loyalty as well as of class. It became relevant as well to investigate cultures of consumption in their own right rather than as facets of the problem of labour discipline. As mentioned above, the pioneering case study of this approach was Brian Harrison's *Drink and the Victorians*. Harrison was soon to use this case study as a strand in studies of 'moral reform' voluntarism as a general phenomenon of public life in 'post-industrial revolution' Britain.[21]

Harrison drew several deductions from his studies of moral reform efforts. First, moral reform motive could not be reduced to economic self-interest alone. Some of it clearly was so reducible, but much of it (including the impulse to control alcohol consumption) was a response to a variety of pressures, cultural and psychological as well as economic (some of which could be seen to have outlasted the industrial phase of capitalist society itself). Thus, while some labouring people sometimes opposed moral reform as a form of class oppression, others actively co-operated with the propertied classes through voluntary movements such as temperance and antislavery, even Sunday observance. Such 'working-class co-operation', while it clearly aided 'long-term [cross-class] co-operation', was not usefully interpreted 'as an example of "false-consciousness"' – rather as 'an important stage in the *growth* of working-class consciousness' as it fostered both organisational self-help and 'articulateness'.[22]

The problem, therefore, for Harrison, as he ultimately formulated it, merged into an aspect of a general quest for 'the sources of social and political cohesion in Britain since the industrial revolution', and Marx's denigration of moral reform movements as vehicles of class manipulation became a function of his own 'peculiar perspective': '[Marx] rightly saw that they were blurring class divisions; but because he foresaw an era of mounting class conflict, he underestimated their historical significance.'[23] Their fully restored historical significance was that they assisted the establishment of a pattern of integration

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[20] Kaye, *British Marxist Historians*, p. 205. See also Harrison, *Drink* (2nd edn, Keele University, Staffs., 1994), p. 13. All references to *Drink and the Victorians* are to the second edition unless otherwise noted.

[21] B. Harrison, 'State Intervention and Moral Reform', pp. 289–322; B. Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom. Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 4–5.

[22] Harrison, *Drink* (1st edn), p. 367. See also B. Harrison, 'Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, no. 38 (1967), pp. 119–23.

[23] Harrison, 'Religion and Recreation', p. 121.

of outsiders into a tradition of public debate about values which was accepted
as normal and serviced by 'political mechanisms [to] bring the idealist into
regular contact with the pragmatist'.[24] 'Nonconformists, women and articulate
working men' in turn challenged the status quo to educate and be educated in
turn about the practicalities of power. The outcome was a 'Peaceable Kingdom'
of citizens with the 'highly original quality . . . of *not killing one another*'.[25]

If this was a class struggle minimising revaluation of moral reform, an alter-
native line of revaluation developed in parallel over the period aimed to solve the
puzzle of 'stability achieved' not so much by investigation of relations *between*
classes as by exploration of the power relations between status and occupa-
tional groups *within* the morality-sponsoring middle class itself. Once again,
the starting point was a recognition that class loyalty was more complicated,
more culturally conditioned, than attribution based on economic self-interest
alone could explain.

A series of case studies of the dynamics of middle-class interaction in the
archetypal commercial centres of the north of England (and of Scotland) dur-
ing the formative decades of the industrial age gave strong clues. Most fully
developed among these studies was that of R. J. Morris on Leeds.[26] The Leeds
middle class of the 1830s and 40s, by occupational criteria and by patterns
of religious and political behaviour, Morris noted, was far from the monolith
of economic self-interest steadfastly pursued which orthodox Marxists might
hope to find. Indeed, virtually the only area in which class co-operation of
any reliably predictable sort could be located was that of voluntary associa-
tion. Voluntary societies, Morris argued, gave urban elites faced with the chal-
lenge of establishing their authority in an era of dislocation a way forward.
It was a way forward which avoided reliance on the state (which they dis-
trusted as deficient in moral legitimacy). It was a way forward which allowed
community-based co-operation to take place between citizens of otherwise
antagonistic religious allegiance. It was also a move which sidestepped the
immediate need to resolve cultural tensions within properted ranks about the
relationship between the laws of the market and the laws of God. In this

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[24] Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 6.
[25] Harrison, *Drink* (1st edn), p. 363; G. Orwell, epigraph to Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*.
[26] R. J. Morris, 'Organization and Aims of the Principal Secular Voluntary Organizations of the
Leeds Middle Class, 1830–1851' (Oxford D.Phil., 1970), thereafter reworked into a range of
chapters and articles culminating in *Class, Sect and Party: The Making of the British Middle
Class, Leeds 1820–1850* (Manchester, 1990). Other major studies sensitive to the role of cul-
turally based status assertion in middle-class self-presentation include T. Koditschek, *Class
Formation in Urban-Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 1990), chs. 8–9;
A. Kidd, 'The Middle Class in 19th-Century Manchester', in A. Kidd and K. Roberts (eds.),
City, Class and Culture (Manchester, 1985); S. Nenadic, 'Businessmen, the Urban Middle Class
and the "Dominance" of Manufacturers in 19th-Century Britain', *Economic History Review*,
2nd ser., 44 (1991), pp. 66–85.

way voluntary societies (often presented as having a moral reform purpose) became the early nineteenth-century 'basis for the formation of a middle-class identity'.[27]

As this line of argument indicates, Morris retained some of the labour history tradition of interpretation of moral reform as a project of class self-interest. The term 'class', however, is a much more culture-linked one than it once was, and the term 'self-interest' now embraces fully self-conscious class awareness of the need to preserve moral legitimacy. Volunteer subscriber-based association thus gives the key to explaining the successful stabilisation of early urban industrial society. And the documented dominance of commercial and professional men in voluntary associations gives the clue to urban middle-class priorities – not profit maximisation but 'a stable and moral order' in which 'market structures' are 'manipulated' to legitimise middle-class claims to civic leadership.[28] In this sense, the middle class becomes an 'elite-led class', with the elite proving its credentials by its energy and skill in hierarchical but community-based voluntary activity.[29]

These 'stability-explaining' approaches to moral reform certainly refine the 'labour discipline' interpretation. They also help to resolve issues which that interpretation was inclined to ignore or to present as paradox. From one direction they make sense of the *range* of moral reform enthusiasms – not just the enthusiasms focused on labour discipline but the 'consumption-disciplining' and 'citizen-training' ones as well. From another direction, they are able to give a plausible explanation for the dominance of cultural rather than economic elites in moral reform mobilisation.

These are major insights, both of them persuasive as far as they are developed. They do, of course, rest on their own assumptions – as all arguments must – and in this case the assumptions include a willingness to believe that, in English public life, cultural conflict has proved an educative experience because conflict has, broadly speaking, been a stage in a process of negotiated compromise.[30] As we shall see, not all observers of moral reform in its more coercive phases have been able to agree with this, and some would argue that the ghost of a

[27] R. J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780–1850: An Analysis', *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), p. 96, and see also pp. 109–13. Again, there are nineteenth-century precedents for this line of interpretation: see, e.g., Robert Vaughan, *The Age of Great Cities* (1843), pp. 296–7, cited in A. Lees, *Cities Perceived* (Manchester, 1985), p. 47.

[28] For the fullest statement of the case, see Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, ch. 13, esp. pp. 327–8 (from which the above quotations are taken).

[29] Morris deliberately particularised his conclusions to provincial urban communities of the early nineteenth century, but has recurrently noted their applicability at a national level, with formative 'after-effects' extending across the century: for his most recent statement, see 'Structure, Culture and Society in British Towns', in M. Daunton (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. iii: *1840–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 395–426, esp. pp. 415–23.

[30] See, e.g., Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 430–3; B. Harrison, *The Transformation of British Politics 1860–1995* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 162–3, 169–70.