

MORAL ECONOMY:
CLAIMS FOR THE COMMON GOOD

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ABSTRACT

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The cases, issues, and theoretical convictions of the social science work on the concept ‘Moral Economy’ are explored to develop a full understanding of what divergent theories and accounts share in common and to gauge the philosophical relevance of Moral Economy. The work of E.P. Thompson, James Scott, William Booth, Thomas Arnold, and Daniel Little are featured along with contemporary cases of Moral Economy. Conceptual clarification is guided by the categorization of common qualities including the scope of application, whether it is used historically or normatively, relevant time frame, nature of the community, goals that motivate practitioners, and how people are epistemically situated in relation to the Moral Economy under consideration. Moral Economy is identified here as a community centered response, arising from a sense of common good, reinforced by custom or tradition, to an unjust appropriation or abuse of land, labor, human dignity, natural resources, or material goods; moreover, it is the regular behaviors producing social arrangements that promote just relations between unequal persons or groups within a community to achieve long-term social sustainability.

I argue that the moral economists are right to insist that people regularly make collective claims and take action on behalf of their communities for reasons that are not primarily self-interested. Furthermore, I demonstrate that social ethics and political behavior are culturally and temporally contextual, i.e. non-ideal. Moral Economy must be understood as economic through behaviors and relationships of exchange not limited to the market or following (neo)classical economics. Importantly, Moral Economy recognizes that this system of exchange is embedded within the larger society. Building upon that, I maintain that all communities are embedded to some degree, so Moral Economy is not limited to peasant contexts or historical periods. It is not an ethical theory, but a system of practice. Moral Economy is guided by a commitment to the ethos of the common good.

The debate between Moral Economy and political economy is laid out with special attention given to the disagreements between their two most identifiable figures, James C. Scott and Samuel L. Popkin. While Moral Economy and political economy may have originated from the same general considerations regarding the political and economic influence on individuals and society, they have taken distinctly different trajectories. Later Moral Economy is compared with several political philosophies including Liberalism, Socialism, and Anarchism. While Moral Economy may share more in common with Anarchism and Socialism, I contend it is more compatible in practice with Liberalism.

Key words: common good, community, embedded economy, justice, moral philosophy, peasants, reciprocity, social philosophy

For Elaine and Chris with eternal love and gratitude.

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CHAPTER 1: Principal Contributions to Moral Economy in Academic Literature

Introduction

How is it that societies and communities within society have functioning systems of social, political, and economic relationships without first establishing formal laws and basing interactions off of a coherent unified formal philosophy? It is evident to anyone who has seriously considered social relationships that there is no social contract that precedes social behavior. Most communities do not have recognized formal theories of economic behavior from which they derive their actions or base their decisions. Even Western communities in which many individuals are well aware of political philosophies, economic theories, and formal systems of ethics rarely base their laws or behaviors on such theories. In fact, academics often find it frustrating and confounding that once a theory is developed and disseminated, people rarely apply it directly and often act in ways contrary to the supposedly practical theory. This is not to suggest that there is no system of norms or values at play in political, social, and economic behavior. It does suggest, however, that those norms and values are not necessarily aligned with or derived from the formalized theories meant to guide good behavior.

Moral Economy is one of several recognized systems of normative behavior that originate from lived experience and people's intuitive sense of justice. It may be compatible with some formalized top-down theories and it may even be possible to formalize it as a coherent theory, but it did not originate as theory and does not depend on any such theory to function adequately in many communities. Moral Economy occupies the same space as many Western political, economic, and ethical theories, but it also addresses issues ignored by them, especially

considerations of exchange and social behavior that are not neatly divided into those three categories. As we will see in the following chapters, Moral Economy has many variations and can be expressed in diverse contexts.

In this chapter I review the most influential contributors to the contemporary idea of Moral Economy. What follows focuses primarily on the theory and character of Moral Economy as understood by academics from various disciplines. Through a careful literature review, I articulate how influential academics perceive ‘Moral Economy’, including what it is, the appropriate scope of its application, and how to understand it from a contemporary Western viewpoint.

E.P. Thompson is of central importance to understanding Moral Economy through the lens of the academic and outsider. He approaches Moral Economy historically, both through his method and cases. Sociologist James Scott considers more recent communities that engage in Moral Economy. Scott understands Moral Economy primarily as a system of norms for peasant or subsistence place based communities. Following Thompson and Scott, the work on Moral Economy has grown in number and expanded in scope. Social scientists are most eager to dissect and describe cases in which Moral Economy explains social behavior. Arnold argues for a broader understanding of Moral Economy to include social goods, while Busch applies it to standards that proliferate in our modern marketplace. The humanities are not as active in engaging with Moral Economy theoretically. However, philosopher Daniel Little shows that there is significance in evaluating Moral Economy through the philosophy of social science.

After reviewing the most influential theories and studies about ‘Moral Economy’, I turn the project of identifying the central tenets of Moral Economy, common qualities evident in the

various theories and cases, and develop a working definition of ‘Moral Economy’ that is compatible with the dominant academic contributions, useful for practitioners and advocates, and meaningful for future academic research and development of the concept. Chapter two also considers theoretical and conceptual analysis of ‘Moral Economy’ not covered in this chapter. My analysis points to the wide variety of application of ‘Moral Economy’ by academics, adds legitimacy to the existence of Moral Economy by practitioners and communities outside of academia, and highlights the difficulties of applying or considering a concept that does not have a coherent or consistent definition. Chapter three moves the conceptual discussion further by giving more reflection to particular contexts in which Moral Economy operates and common elements of Moral Economy such as tradition, violence and protest, embeddedness, and consideration as to how it relates to economics and Western ethical theory. Chapter four takes up the debate between James Scott and Samuel Popkin regarding the relationship between Moral Economy and political economy. Specifically, Popkin responds to Scott and other “moral economists” that they are interpreting things that are not actually indicated by human behavior and what they identify as unique to Moral Economy can actually be found within political economy. Additionally, I articulate my own perspective on the debate, and draw upon historical information about the political economy/Moral Economy divide, as well as include other voices in the debate over Moral Economy’s relationship to political economy. In chapter five, I compare Moral Economy with three political theories including, Liberalism, Socialism, and Anarchism. I also examine how each one would respond to two different social issues that are important to Moral Economy, small business ownership and the care of a vulnerable and dependent member of the community. I conclude by reviewing what I perceive to be the most central elements of Moral Economy as well as responding to several potential objections.

Moral Economy initially caught my interest because of its connection with food production, access to food and basic resources, and with its historical and contemporary relevance to agrarian peasant communities. In most of the literature on agricultural systems, agrarian communities, and food, the concept ‘Moral Economy’ is absent. Nevertheless, Moral Economy struck me as an important, yet vague notion that helped clarify and give perspective to the dynamics between people as they work to produce, sell, and procure the most basic of human necessities from the land.

Philosophy and Moral Economy

‘Moral Economy’ is circulated as a useful but unclear concept in the disciplines of economics, sociology, cultural geography, history, and anthropology. While it is unfamiliar and very seldom addressed in philosophy, philosophy has something to offer in understanding the concept as well as critiquing it. Philosophical analysis can meaningfully contribute to Moral Economy theory by asking broad (meta-level) questions that may be overlooked by other academics, working through the logical consequences of a proposed theory, questioning assumptions, carefully analyzing the use and meaning of ‘Moral Economy’ across disciplines and between academics and non-academics, contextualizing social science research on Moral Economy with relevant social and political philosophy, ethics, and epistemology, and raising additional questions or ideas for further inquiry. Philosophy can also be useful in making sense of Moral Economy cases by considering the potential scope and limitations of applying Moral Economy in various contexts, caution regarding misuse of unsuitable cases in Moral Economy theory, and comparison with other roots up systems and top down theories that engage with the

same sphere of social interaction. Philosophers may even have something to offer practitioners of Moral Economy by offering rigorous arguments and defensible justification for claims and/or counterclaims originating from Moral Economy. Moreover, Moral Economy may have something to offer philosophy in the domains of social and political philosophy, development ethics, environmental philosophy, phenomenology, existentialism, philosophy of technology, and practical ethics. Fundamentally, Moral Economy challenges philosophy and other academic disciplines to recognize the existence of a functioning, coherent system of norms that developed and continues to develop from shared experience and local conditions.

The concept ‘Moral Economy’ lacks a consistent definition and defined range of application. One important goal of this dissertation is therefore to analyze what ‘Moral Economy’ is. To help accomplish that goal, I first set forth some of the most prominent examples of ‘Moral Economy’. Presenting the cases that have helped shape the concept will both give the reader a sense of the scope and connection between the cases, and will set the stage for a more rigorous evaluation of the concept ‘Moral Economy’ itself. As a starting point I offer a working definition of Moral Economy that I hope functions as a better descriptor of what has already been addressed in the literature as ‘Moral Economy’ and can indicate the potential for further normative arguments in support of ongoing and future struggles for community justice. I understand Moral Economy as the community based response, arising from a sense of common good, upheld by custom or tradition, to an unjust appropriation or abuse of land, labor, human dignity, or material goods, with the objective of producing social arrangements that promote just relations between unequal persons or groups within a community to achieve long-term social sustainability. This definition is not identical to what other authors have proposed and may be met with some dissent. Nevertheless, it serves as a basis for exploring Moral Economy.

E.P. Thompson and Moral Economy of the English Crowd

The person who is most often cited as the central figure in 'Moral Economy' as used in the social sciences is historian E.P. Thompson, who in the late 1960's and early 1970's described several historical cases of social unrest in England. One of Thompson's cases involved the working class response to bread sales, shortages, and adulterations in the 1800's. The case appears in both a 1971 article "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century"¹ and again in his later book *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture*, published in 1991². For many generations the British government set standards for bread and grain sales at market. Throughout the 1500's, 1600's and the early 1700's the government enforced what Thompson calls the paternalist model, which typically aligned with the common law and custom. The paternalist model kept marketing in large measure to be direct from the farmer (or miller) to the consumer. Farmers would bring their grain to market in bulk and be controlled in that they had designated opening and closing times, they needed to use standard measures, they were required to sell to anyone who could pay, and that prices were required to be maintained throughout the day (to prevent withholding grain or spiking prices at the end of the business day). Moreover, the working people had access to the market before wholesalers could make their purchases. The farmers were prohibited from selling their standing crops or making purchases to sell again.

¹E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* no. 50 (1971).

² E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1991).

In addition to the restrictions on farmer to customer sales, millers and bakers were also regulated in their market interactions. Like farmers, millers and bakers had an important social role, and were not simply individual professionals with the goal of accruing wealth. As Thompson writes, “From market-supervision we pass to consumer-protection. Millers and – and to a greater degree – bakers were considered as servants of the community, working not for a profit but for a fair allowance.”³ They were required to not charge differential prices from different purchasers, light-weight the loaves, or use inferior grain or flour in the product sold to the poor. To put the sales of grain, flour and bread into perspective, Thompson estimates that a laborer with a family would typically spend half their weekly income on food, and in times of high prices *the cost of bread alone* could be half their income⁴ (leaving little for other food or necessities). During the period in which the paternalist model was enforced by the English government, a farmer, miller or baker who was perceived as engaging in any of the improper marketing practices could expect to be called out on their deceitful dealing by local magistrates. It was not uncommon when the paternalist model was strongly enforced to find the local magistrates monitoring the markets to keep a watchful eye for such improper practices.

In the mid-1700s as roads were making transport easier and as industrializing towns grew at break-neck pace, the need for a middleman to make more of the grain and bread sales eventually challenged and deteriorated the government support for the paternalist model of sales. The moral demand for customary standards however, remained strong. Any middleman, farmer, miller, or baker who was believed to practice unfair marketing could expect informal retribution. Official monitoring of the markets and responsiveness to claims of improper practices had

³ Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." p. 83.

⁴ Ibid. p. 92

decreased and were sporadic. Monitoring and enforcement (through direct challenges to the practice or retributive actions) became the responsibility of the working class members of society. The new free market model allowed farmers to sell when they wanted to, not requiring them to make all of their grain available. This meant they could hold onto stocks until they believed they could demand a higher price. There was no longer an official requirement that sales to wholesalers wait until individuals have had a chance to buy direct, thus leading to a mark-up on most sales to consumers. And the bakers could sell any bread of any quality to whomever they chose, which tended to either exclude the working poor or leave them only the option of inferior loaves. Not only could bakers differentiate the quality of loaves by price, but they could refuse sales to anyone they did not want to engage in business with. They were no longer obligated to produce a value level product or sell to the poor.

Furthermore, during periods of poor harvest and dearth, merchants had more economic incentive to sell outside their locality to attain a higher price. At this same time, their neighbors believed they had an even stronger moral imperative to keep the grain and goods available for local sale and consumption. Thompson explains that the paternalist model did not end all at once, but was occasionally resurrected.

Hence the paternalist model had an ideal existence, and also a fragmentary real existence. In years of good harvests and moderate prices, the authorities lapsed into forgetfulness. But if prices rose and the poor became turbulent, it was revived, at least for symbolic effect.⁵

In response to the behaviors under the new laissez-faire market, the poor and working class responded more directly, loudly, and forcefully, especially when they perceived complacency by

⁵ Ibid. p. 88.

the government for unfair practices. Food riots became more commonplace, merchants were threatened, hidden stores of hoarded grain were opened, plundered and destroyed, sellers were given ultimatums as to the “right” price of their products, fields were burned, and carts and canals were made unusable for transport. An additional degree of anger tended to arise with the export of grain during times of dearth. Responses were not limited to attaining the grain itself, but appear to send a message to the farmers, millers, wholesalers, exporters, or other hoarders that their practices were not just, fair, and appropriate. Evidence of this in Thompson’s history can be derived from the accounts that grain was sometimes destroyed or strewn about to make it unusable, and hence, unprofitable.⁶ Although the paternalist model was no longer official law or formally enforced, Thompson observes that the paternalist model remained the source of legitimation for the crowd.

Thompson analyzes the behavior by stating “the point here is not just that prices, in time of scarcity, were determined by many other factors than mere market-forces... It is more important to note the total socio-economic context within which the market operated, and the logic of crowd pressure.”⁷ He continues, “riot was a social calamity, and one to be avoided, even at a high cost. The cost might be to achieve some medium, between a soaring “economic” price in the market, and a traditional “moral” price set by the crowd. That medium might be found by the intervention of paternalists, by the prudential self-restraint of farmers and dealers, or by buying-off a portion of the crowd through charities and subsidies.”⁸

⁶ Ibid. p. 100, 110, 111, 114.

⁷ Ibid. p. 125.

⁸ Ibid. p. 126.

Thompson appears to be most concerned with large uprisings from the “mob” or “crowd”, and while acknowledging the more common disputes between sellers and consumers, does not emphasize them in his account of Moral Economy. He interprets these large “risings of the people” as demonstrating discipline and deep-rooted behavior patterns that repeat spontaneously throughout the country after being absent for long stretches of time. Thompson states, “The central action in this pattern is not the sack of granaries and the pilfering of grain or flour but the action of “setting the price”.”⁹ Such behavior harkens back to an earlier period when emergency legislation was enacted in the 1600’s, thus suggesting that popular memory was exceptionally long. It is the popular uprising and the collective memory, more than the individual sense of injustice or the personal struggle for survival that provides support for Thompson’s Moral Economy. In his account, Moral Economy is necessarily a collective or social expression of values.

Thompson cautions the reader to not read into the protests overt articulate political intentions or explicit moral or political theory. One may be able to retroactively connect theories or political goals to the uprisings, but the participants in such uprisings were not explicitly arguing for such extended or abstract ideals. Thompson also suggests that along with the paternalist model, the Moral Economy expressed in the English uprisings is also extinct. He writes, “But the death of the old Moral Economy of provision was as long-drawn-out as the death of the paternalist intervention in industry and trade. The consumer defended his old notions of right as stubbornly as ... he defended his craft status as an artisan.”¹⁰ Thompson concludes, we are left today with free-market economic ideals and institutions, political economy

⁹ Ibid. P. 108.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 132.

(supposedly free from values and moral sentiment), and Moral Economy diminished to optional charity and religious expression.

As a historian, Thompson helps to provide historical context by comparing our current dominant economic reality and values with those of eighteenth century England. He reflects,

Today we shrug off the extortionate mechanisms of an unregulated market economy because it causes most of us only inconvenience, unostentatious hardships. In the eighteenth century this was not the case. Dearth was real dearth. High prices meant swollen bellies and sick children whose food was coarse bread made up from stale flour. ... But if the market was the point at which working people most often felt their exposure to exploitation, it was also the point – especially in rural or dispersed manufacturing districts – at which they could most easily become organized. Marketing (or “shopping”) becomes in mature industrial society increasingly impersonal. In eighteenth-century Britain or France ... the market remained a social as well as an economic nexus. ... The confrontations of the market in a “pre-industrial” society are of course more universal than any national experience. And the elementary moral precepts of the “reasonable price” are equally universal.¹¹

Thompson’s account of Moral Economy has been the starting point for numerous other academic accounts of Moral Economy as well as some critiques to the notion itself. He is not the originator of the concept itself, but his account provides some demarcation of the notion and a launching pad to many others who have taken up the idea of Moral Economy in various contexts and disciplines. Yet, his own account of the English uprisings suggests that ‘Moral Economy’, at least his notion of it, has limited extension and is relegated to history as well as food and agricultural contexts, not applicable to contemporary periods or future demands for justice pertaining to other material or social goods.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 134 - 135.

James Scott and Agrarian Peasants of Southeast Asia

Another academic who is well recognized for his work on Moral Economy is the sociologist James Scott. His cases are drawn from peasant rice farmers in Southeast Asia. In his most direct work on the topic, the book *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, Scott briefly defines ‘Moral Economy’ as “the peasants’ notion of economic justice and their working definition of exploitation”.¹² His account deals exclusively with peasants, and the definition suggests Moral Economy is only applicable to peasants. The peasant is both “a rural cultivator whose production is oriented largely toward family consumption needs” and “part of a larger society that makes claims upon him”.¹³ Still there are a few different relationships involved. One is the tenant farmer in relation to the landlord, another is the small landholding farmer in relation to the large landholders or local agricultural market more generally, the relationship between the laborer and his employer (usually a large landholder), as well as the relationship between peasants in a community and the demands of the state (including taxes, market changes, and political demands). In all of these, the profession is some form of food production and the goal is to conserve minimal standards to protect the future ability to make an adequate living producing food.

The emphasis for Scott is on the working conditions and terms of economic exchange for peasant communities. Peasant communities, unlike other communities have to be even more careful about their economic situation because they exist very close to the margin and one season of poor harvest could devastate the peasant family. As a result they have a *subsistence ethic* of safety-first principle to avoid catastrophe, even if in good years this means paying more to insure

¹² James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant : Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

¹³ Ibid. p. 157

themselves against collapse in bad years. That is why even when opportunities arise to earn large amounts of money for a season or short period of time by doing something different, most peasants prefer to remain on their land earning a smaller but more reliable income and having the resources (land, crops) to guard against any volatility in the larger market. To industrialists, investors, and state bureaucrats, such behavior appears irrational and backwards. But Scott maintains that the peasants are acting based on sound reason that has helped prevent them from individual destitution and collective collapse for hundreds of years. Should they attempt to strike out into the unknown as it were, to make great sums of money by trying some new venture and fail, they would be in much worse shape than they had been if they remained doing what they had always done. It is possible that they also would not be able to return to their previous occupation or their historic homestead. Scott outlines his basic argument for the subsistence ethic,

Living close to the subsistence margin and subject to the vagaries of weather and the claims of outsiders, the peasant household has little scope for the profit maximization calculus of traditional neoclassical economics. Typically, the peasant cultivator seeks to avoid the failure that will ruin him rather than attempting a big, but risky, killing. In decision-making parlance his behavior is risk-averse; he minimizes the subjective probability of the maximum loss.¹⁴

Moreover, Scott, supported by Karl Polanyi and Barrington Moore, suggests the subsistence ethic arose from the practical needs of cultivators, but it “was socially experienced as a pattern of moral rights or expectations”.¹⁵ Stability of the quality of life, minimal standards for food and purchasing power are central motivators behind the subsistence ethic. It is also a social ethic,

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 4

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 6

applying to all people, but especially monitored on behalf of the most marginal and vulnerable in the social sphere.

It appears from Scott's account of Moral Economy that it is a particular kind of social justice. It is not justice as a pure kind of fairness, as when the amount of work one does leads to a fair amount of reward. It is not about merit per se or even rewarding effort. Nor is it about egalitarianism, as different levels of wealth and class are accepted. Moral Economy is to some degree about subsistence, but that is not all there is to it. It also requires legitimate use of power, or preventing exploitation of peasants by landlords and the state. Exploitation is not the same for all groups, so Scott explains that for peasants, "At the core of the notion of exploitation is the idea "that some individuals, groups, or classes benefit unjustly or unfairly from the labor of, or at the expense of, others"."¹⁶ A shared notion of injustice suggests a norm of justice. The norm of justice is moral, but it is not an abstract theory of justice or an applied ethical theory. It arises from the context and cannot be arrived at deductively. The other important aspect of Moral Economy for Scott is reciprocity. He explains, "It means that a gift or service received creates, for the recipient, a reciprocal obligation to return a gift or service of at least comparable value at some future date".¹⁷ Such an idea of reciprocity or gift exchange can also be found in Marcel Mauss' anthropological text *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*.¹⁸ The gifts cannot be equal, because the landholder as the patron has different resources to offer the peasant as client. What is required is that they be comparable values of exchange. For example, the patron may provide land, economic security in the forms of loans, decreased rent, or increased wages, and perhaps extra grain or seed during difficult periods. The

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 157-158

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 167

¹⁸ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift; Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London,: Cohen & West, 1954).

client can offer deference to his patron, additional labor, or a greater percentage of the harvest during above average seasons. Scott argues that the need for reciprocity arises from the agricultural and ceremonial cycles of agrarian communities. He emphasizes,

It is critical to understand that the obligation of reciprocity is a moral principle par excellence and that it applies as strongly to relationships between unequals as between equals. ... While the exact nature of the exchange will typically reflect the needs and resources of both patron and client over time, as a general rule the patron is expected to protect his client and provide for his material needs whereas the client reciprocates with his labor and his loyalty.¹⁹

The moral principle is a right to subsistence, and Moral Economy becomes most evident when this principle is challenged by different economic demands. Scott focuses on when the demands become so great that they give rise to rebellion or other community wide resistance measures. He is less concerned with the outcomes of the rebellions, that is, whether they were “successful” in terms of meeting peasant demands, and more concerned with the conditions that give rise to such rebellions and the character of the rebellion. He examines the impact of colonial change and increasing capitalist economic demands on the regions of Burma and Vietnam during the first half of the twentieth century. The characteristic changes affecting these regions included: growing inequality in landholding, population growth, increasing fluctuations of producer and consumer prices and market valuation, loss of “slack resources” (such as gleaned grain, collected fuel, and common pasture), deterioration of village redistributive mechanisms, and colonial protections of private property rights. The impacts of these changes effected the peasant population by strengthening the landholders’ position in relation to tenants, improving the bargaining position of landowners and worsening it for tenants and laborers, tenants have

¹⁹ Scott. p. 168-169

greater need for credit and decreased ability to attain it at reasonable rates, loss of alternative economic resources for tenants and laborers, and landowners decreased need for tenants and laborers.²⁰

An example of Moral Economy of the peasants is demonstrated in the rebellion led by Saya San in Lower Burma from late 1930 through June 1931. Unlike some peasant rebellions, this one had central leadership based on Saya San and his understanding of (folk) Buddhism. However, the grievances are very similar to those sparking other rebellions in Southeast Asia during this period. The overarching goal was the destruction of the existing state. Peasants were motivated to eliminate the state to avoid the repressive and regressive taxes. Scott characterizes the tax burden of Southeast Asia during the colonial period as one of the two major threats (along with rents) that threaten the peasants' welfare. Scott states, "the fiscal policy of the colonial state increasingly violated the Moral Economy of the subsistence ethic".²¹ While taxes were not new phenomena, the colonial taxes were different both in kind and degree than the taxes imposed by pre-colonial powers. One difference was that the taxes were primarily regressive in that they applied equally to all individuals regardless of ability to pay or subsistence needs. Head taxes (Vietnam) or capitation taxes (Burma) were the most regressive taxes, but land taxes and excise taxes were also heavy and regressive. Due to the colonial state's bureaucratic nature it was also more difficult to evade taxes. They had extensive records of land and people as well as the manpower to collect the taxes that earlier chiefs and princes typically lacked. Moreover, the scope of what was subject to tax seemed to include nearly every necessity, good, and service including rights to forest products, fish, minerals, food, and fiber. Scott remarks, "the

²⁰ Ibid. p. 66

²¹ Ibid. p.92

power of the colonial order in the countryside finds expression precisely in its capacity to stabilize its income at the expense of its rural subjects.”²²

Scott appears to be considering ‘Moral Economy’ as relevant only for a non-Capitalist or immature market economy, similar to Thompson. Moreover, while he tries to make a case for Moral Economy as cross-culturally relevant, and extending into contemporary periods as well as historical, he limits Moral Economy to peasant peoples and peasant villages.

Moral Economy of Joint Forestry Management in India

A variety of accounts related to contemporary forest management in India are gathered in a book edited by Roger Jeffery and Nandini Sundar called *A New Moral Economy for India's Forests? : Discourses of Community and Participation*.²³ In their introduction, the editors make the most direct connection with Moral Economy of any of the contributors. They are clearly influenced by E.P. Thompson and Scott. They assert, “In the contests over the Moral Economy of the forest in India, as in all other contexts, the state and other actors have historically been forced to recognize the moral legitimacy of the claims of local people to have access to the forests, often in response to movements of resistance.”²⁴ Continuing they state their overarching argument and motivation for the text,

We argue here that since the early 1980's, social forces in India and abroad have combined to attempt to create a new Moral Economy for subordinate groups in Indian forests. The moral claims of local people are being recognized, but generally not on the

²² Ibid. p. 94

²³ Roger Jeffery and Nandini Sundar, eds., *A New Moral Economy for India's Forests? : Discourses of Community and Participation* (New Delhi Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1999).

²⁴ Ibid. p. 18.

basis of the historical rights of people and the traditional duties of a paternalistic state alone. ... This new Moral Economy of Indian forests is still in the making, as different participants understand terms such as 'community', 'participation' (and of course 'community participation') in radically different ways.²⁵

Jeffery and Sundar explain that India's forest management from the 1950's through the 1970's was similar to most countries in that it was centrally managed. A few instances of community based or community collaboration in forest management existed, but were not well known and not representative of Indian forest policy. In the 1980's a move toward more community participation developed, but often suffered because of limited participation and officials being more comfortable interacting with elites who did not represent or comprehensively understand the needs and potential within their villages. The editors of this volume set the stage for subsequent accounts and arguments by analyzing the problematic terms, because they believe that "In the new Moral Economy that is developing around Indian forests, the terms 'community', 'participation', and 'sustainability' have emerged as significant grounds for contestation."²⁶

Not all of the contributors to *A New Moral Economy for India's Forests?* accept the thesis advanced by Jeffery and Sundar, hence the questioning expressed in the book's title. Additionally, while some chapters exclusively address the joint forest management program, others consider forest management relationships that fall outside of the JFM scope. Amita Baviskar's chapter, "Participating in Ecodevelopment: The Case of the Great Himalayan National Park" highlights some ideas relevant to earlier cases of Moral Economy, such as resistance to change that threatens subsistence, notions of participatory and distributive justice,

²⁵ Ibid. p. 18

²⁶ Ibid. p. 53

and legitimacy of power. However, unlike the earlier accounts provided to represent Moral Economy, Baviskar does not identify her account as Moral Economy per se, and does not grapple with the theoretical aspects of the concept as either explanatory or normative. I identify it as fitting into the Moral Economy paradigm because it interweaves aspects of community values, collective action, resistance measures, and norms of justice.

In rural India the government and international organizations wanted to set aside a large parcel of land in Himachal Pradesh to create a national park, the Great Himalayan National Park. The project was funded by the World Bank and was an attempt at eco-development. Not many people lived within the boundaries of the intended park, but villagers nearby and seasonal migrants depended on natural resources within the area designated to become the Great Himalayan National Park. Park developers and their funders required an end to the use of the land for resource extraction, grazing, and other previous activities. The local people and other regular users of the designated area had a wide variety of opinions and interests in the forest and lands that were in question. Thus, they could not be adequately represented as a singular homogenous community with a delegated representative or small group of representatives to communicate and plan on their behalf. Nevertheless, few were in favor of being kept out of the area and halting their use of the land. For hundreds of years sheep and goats had foraged on the pastures. The villagers on the periphery of the park area were organized in such a way to rotate use of the pastures and limit the number of livestock grazing at any one time. Wood, both kindling for fires and timber for building materials, was harvested from the forest. Hunting and trapping had occurred in the park area, and herb collectors took annual yields of wild herbs to sell for medical applications. For the most part, the long-standing activities conducted within the park area were for subsistence needs and part of the local economy. These activities were now

the target of the park authorities and conservationists as they tried to prepare the area and the people for the development of the national park.

However, not only were the grazing, hunting, wood harvesting, and herb collecting part of the local's traditional way of life, they had formal rights to continue their activities inside the park area. In an unchallenged and unaltered report from the 1880's, villagers rights to graze, collect herbs, and permission to attain a certain quota of construction timber are laid out in detail. Villagers know their rights and can even refer to the source. Park authorities tried to get input from villagers in the area, but they often did so in a haphazard way, by talking with people they meet in passing or individuals who wish to speak with them. There was no effort to bring local people into the planning, or daily operations of the park. No attempts to negotiate with villagers about the conditions of the park use, and no opportunities for sharing authority or responsibilities were offered. Also, park plans were only prepared in English, a language most villagers are not familiar with and which even some low ranking park bureaucrats are not fluent.

Yet, the locals and migrants know that their traditional resource extraction will be punished by park authorities. In response, they have become savvier about how and when they enter the area and use or remove resources. Because they are unable to stop the park development altogether, they are taking small steps to secure their traditional legal rights to the area. Additionally, several meetings were set-up by park authorities to both inform the local villagers about the park development and receive feedback from them. People in large part protested the meetings by choosing not to attend. Protestors indicated that by staying away from the park authorities and refusing to participate in the meetings they were refusing to be complicit in a process that will strip their traditional rights. Park authorities want local people to be involved in the park by complying with the restrictions on resource extraction, keeping their

livestock out of the park, and becoming guides and porters. In other words the role of the local is pre-determined by the visionaries of the Great Himalayan National Park. On the whole, people who have traditionally depended on the area for their livelihood have responded through actions that they are not willing to follow the script set forth. They resent being pushed to the fringes of participating in the future of their customary homeland, and refuse to surrender their rights to use the land for traditional subsistence purposes.

The account of the villagers' response to eco-development represents one of many variations of accounts that suggest social responses to their livelihoods and way of life represent more than a simple monetary transaction; their economic interactions have moral and social force, and are not simply rational calculations of market forces. Moral Economy may be applied to their case because there is economic value in their utilization of the area neighboring their villages, they believe that tradition and formal rights confer legitimacy to continue to use the land as they historically have, their traditional resource rights are being threatened, and they either explicitly have argued against such measures or more frequently have evaded alterations to their livelihoods by refusing to cooperate and surreptitiously continued to use the area in traditional ways.

Social Science Applications of Moral Economy

Although the first three studies discussed here all pertain to peasant or rural communities in what might be described as developing nations contexts, some theorists utilizing the framework of Moral Economy have argued either in general for an expansion of the concept Moral Economy or have applied it to contexts that clearly reside outside those envisioned by E.P.

Thompson and Scott. Most of the Moral Economy cases are developed by social scientists. Also, while the most prominent cases involve agriculture, food, or subsistence goods there are many cases extending beyond those dealing with agriculture and food. I cannot examine all of the cases of the concept Moral Economy applied, but I will review three of them from the social sciences here: fair trade foods, grades and standards, and social goods. Other contexts include nation building and state power,²⁷ labor and unions,²⁸ class,²⁹ welfare and benefits programs,³⁰ retirement and aging,³¹ AIDS/HIV care,³² and organ transplant.³³

²⁷ Laleh Khalili, *Politics of the Modern Arab World : Critical Issues in Modern Politics*, 4 vols. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009); Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang, *Re-Envisioning the Chinese Revolution : The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memories in Reform China* (Washington, D.C.

Stanford, Calif.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Stanford University Press, 2007); Geert Arend van Klinken, Joshua Barker, and Cornell University. Southeast Asia Program., eds., *State of Authority : The State in Society in Indonesia*, Studies on Southeast Asia (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2009); William Andrew Munro, *The Moral Economy of the State : Conservation, Community Development, and State Making in Zimbabwe*, Monographs in International Studies. Africa Series No. 68 (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1998); Andrew Burton and Hélène Charton-Bigot, *Generations Past : Youth in East African History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).

²⁸ James Bernard Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor : Aristotelian Themes in Economic Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

²⁹ Stefan Svallfors, *The Moral Economy of Class : Class and Attitudes in Comparative Perspective*, Studies in Social Inequality (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006); Geoff Dench, *The Rise and Rise of Meritocracy* (Oxford, UK ; Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub. in association with The Political Quarterly, 2006).

³⁰ Ingo Bode, *The Culture of Welfare Markets : The International Recasting of Pension and Care Systems*, Routledge Advances in Sociology 35 (New York: Routledge, 2008); Steffen Mau, *The Moral Economy of Welfare States : Britain and Germany Compared*, Routledge/Eui Studies in the Political Economy of Welfare 5 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003); Steffen Mau and Benjamin Veghte, *Social Justice, Legitimacy and the Welfare State* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

³¹ Martin Kohli, "Retirement and the Moral Economy: An Historical Interpretation of the German Case," *Journal of Aging Studies* 1, no. 2 (1987); Meredith Minkler and Carroll L. Estes, *Critical Perspectives on Aging : The Political and Moral Economy of Growing Old*, Policy, Politics, Health, and Medicine Series (Amityville, N.Y.: Baywood Pub. Co., 1991).

³² Nicoli Nattrass, *The Moral Economy of Aids in South Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³³ Aslihan Sanal, *New Organs within Us : Transplants and the Moral Economy*, Experimental Futures (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

Goodman – Fair Trade foods

Similar to many social scientists who apply the language and concept of Moral Economy, Michael Goodman considers Moral Economy as a current and ongoing occurrence. He examines international fair trade foods in an article appropriately descriptive of his project “Reading fair trade: political ecological imaginary and the Moral Economy of fair trade foods”.³⁴ Goodman’s application of Moral Economy suggests an extension from the spatially connected, face-to-face community dynamics observed by many earlier Moral Economy theorists. Still, there is significant continuity in his application of Moral Economy to fair trade foods through the agricultural aspect, the economic decisions made by consumers that are informed and motivated by ethical considerations for the others involved in the exchange, and through the sense of community developed by fair trade marketers and advocates. Applying Moral Economy to this context also suggests that it is not restricted to pre-market or immature markets and that peasants are not the only ones involved in envisioning and enacting moral economic ethos’.

Most of the relations addressed by Goodman are through South farmer cooperatives selling their tropical and sub-tropical food commodities to Northern consumers who are willing to pay a premium for knowing that premium will help provide a better life and conditions for the farm families and communities producing those goods. While some products are organic or have other environmental or health advantages, the fair trade movement focuses on paying a better price to farmers to bring improved social and economic conditions. There are some labels for fair trade, but connecting producers with potential consumers depends heavily on developing a moral imaginary through images, stories of the farms and farmers, evidence indicating how fair trade

³⁴ Michael K. Goodman, "Reading Fair Trade: Political Imaginary and the Moral Economy of Fair Trade Foods," *Political Geography*, no. 23 (2004).

improves lives, and testimony from other converted consumers. Goodman observes, “Fair trade’s Moral Economy is written on the commodities trafficked from one part of the globe to another, connecting these places in a novel economy of semiology.” Hence, due to spatial distance between producers and consumers, community and moral connections rely on the narrative developed by marketers and advocates to connect people who otherwise would only share anonymous indirect relationships through commodity goods. Fair trade works to encourage consumers to be morally reflexive in a modern marketplace that often provides little information about the source of the food. Unlike meeting the farmer at a farmer’s market, fair trade also tries to promote transnational justice, redistributing wealth from the North (Europe, USA, Asia) to the South (Latin America, Africa). The fair trade goods Goodman considers are also products that cannot easily be produced in Northern nations, such as coffee, chocolate, tea, and bananas. These goods therefore do not interfere with local food production in the North as they are best sourced from Southern regions.

Coffee and chocolate are not *necessarily* fair trade foods; so what causes them to become fair trade? The material production is somewhat different, but perhaps imperceptible to most. They require that direct purchasers provide a premium price over the conventional product and interact with the farmers in a respectful manner, which may include being responsive to their concerns and requests, paying them on time, treating them with dignity and perhaps more. There are production standards that typically encourage reduced or no pesticide application as well as quality standards for selling the product to a discerning consumer. Moreover, beyond the socio-ecological production, fair trade is produced through the discursive/semiotic production. If the fair trade label along with some narrative about it is not connected to the product, then the item is undifferentiated from all of the other coffee or chocolate on the market. A potential consumer

would wonder why the price was higher as she reached for the apparently equivalent package of coffee with the lower price. Both the physical production and the moral imaginary need to exist for a product to authentically be fair trade. Goodman affirms, “the connections in fair trade networks are as much discursive as they are material.”³⁵

How can fair trade foods be part of Moral Economy? For Goodman, this question must be answered by interpreting the way he uses Moral Economy, because he does not make an explicit argument for Moral Economy and neglects to develop a definition of Moral Economy, even one particular to his case. One aspect supporting the use of Moral Economy for fair trade goods is that they establish a relational ethic. Goodman asserts, “this relational ethic is an expansive ethic that establishes what David Smith terms an “ethics of care”, working to extend the consumers’ sense of caring beyond the ‘here’ and ‘now’ to include the ‘there’ and ‘then’ of producers’ place-based livelihoods.”³⁶ Perhaps most directly he explains,

Holding the networks together then, is this sense of Moral Economy that entreats moral connections and responsibilities all along the commodity network in the pursuit of alternative development. The imagination of fair trade is as much ethical as it is political, becoming further politicized through the ethical visions and operation of the network relative to more conventional food networks.³⁷

In one sense then, fair trade fits with Moral Economy by developing moral relationships through increased information and moral reflexivity between people who want to be just in their purchase of consumable goods and the people who rely on producing and selling farm products to sustain their livelihoods. It also indicates the awareness of existing less desirable economic relationships,

³⁵ Ibid. p. 902

³⁶ Ibid. p. 903

³⁷ Ibid.

such as exploitation or simple disregard for anything other than the price and quality of the commodity.

An additional aspect particular to this context is what Goodman calls an “ethics of partiality”. Drawing on David Smith’s moral philosophy, Goodman explains that some people deserve more care than others, in particular poor indigenous producers who have long been marginalized and exploited by Northern importers. Goodman argues for solidarity of difference, “that is, while encompassing and utilizing the situated differences between producers and consumers, fair trade looks to transcend these differences with a move toward a more social justice-like vision of equality in “the good life”.”³⁸ One notable difference in this account compared with the ones discussed earlier is the direction of Moral Economy. Instead of originating with the poor producers, it appears that the moral demands stem from Northern advocates and consumers who are better situated financially. Their demands create and sustain the fair trade market even though they may converge with the desires of the poorer (peasant) producers.

Busch – Grades and Standards

Lawrence Busch makes an argument for extending the notion of Moral Economy to omnipresent grades and standards. Grades and standards certainly express particular norms, but they typically go unquestioned because they appear to be objective. Unlike the forest resources in India, the subsistence needs of peasant farmers or the basic requirement for fair food prices, standards are rarely something the average person feels compelled to engage with. Moreover,

³⁸ Ibid. p. 906

they are usually decided by a very limited number of people deemed “experts” in the area to which they pertain. Busch argues that, “by ignoring standards and the disputes about them, we risk missing one of the most important aspects of the transformation of agriculture and contemporary rural life itself for it is through standards that the Moral Economy is produced and reproduced.”³⁹ He is fully aware of the Moral Economy perspectives made famous by E.P. Thompson and Scott, and considers Marx and Smith’s views about the role of markets. Busch explains that under the current practices applied to standards and grades they are a way to produce objectivity in the market, cannot be comprehensively articulated, are subject to future renegotiation, and are always discussed in practice as subject to complete specification.

Goods or commodities are probably the most obvious subject when it comes to grades and standards. Walking through the grocery store consumers can see what has been rated ‘Grade A’ meat or dairy, what has met the requirements to earn the seal ‘organic’ ‘rainforest alliance certified’ or ‘united egg producer certified’, and less perceptibly what foods and products have failed to comply with the standards by their absence from the store. Busch outlines other less obvious but omnipresent standards that impact contemporary society. Standardization of workers occurs through training, discipline and surveillance, as well as standardization of capitalists by incentives to accrue wealth and enforced by financial institutions. Markets require standardization for efficiency, uniform pricing, and packaging of goods, perhaps adding barcodes or uniform price tags. Even standards themselves become standardized so they can produce consistent results. Other forms of standardization that may go unperceived include standardization of those who make the standards, standardization of consumers, and standardization of the environment. Standards can be set in different ways, and whether it is

³⁹ Lawrence Busch, “The Moral Economy of Grades and Standards,” *Journal of Rural Studies*, (2000). p. 274

government bodies, industry leaders, special standard setting bodies or purchasing agents, who is involved in the development and implementation of the standards makes a substantial difference.

The general thrust of Busch's argument is that even "in contemporary capitalist societies agricultural Moral Economy is expressed through standards for food and agricultural products."⁴⁰

Comparing his argument with those forwarded by E.P. Thompson and Scott, Busch reflects,

The Moral Economy of standards is similar to those described by Thompson and Scott in several ways: (1) It consists of sets of practices that are never fully articulated as political economy or as philosophical ethics. (2) Violations of each of these forms of moral economy may lead to both individual and collective responses aptly summed up in Hirschmann's concepts of exit, voice and loyalty. (3) both forms of Moral Economy refer to mutual obligations, but neither lay claim to a philosophical ideal of equality of obligation.⁴¹

Busch does not find it problematic to apply Moral Economy to a capitalist market or to people who are at a comfortable distance from subsistence living. Yet, questions of legitimacy, justice, and concern for the winners and losers remain.

Arnold – Social Goods

In "Rethinking Moral Economy",⁴² Thomas Clay Arnold clearly situates his critique of the prevailing concept of Moral Economy and an alternative proposal against the background provided by E.P. Thompson, Scott, Polanyi, Popkin, and William Booth. His observations about dominant themes in Moral Economy include the view that embeddedness matters (in contrast to

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 282

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Thomas Clay Arnold, "Rethinking Moral Economy," *The American Political Science Review* 95, no. 1 (2001).

autonomous economies), that transition from an embedded economy to an autonomous one generates violent uprisings, and a focus on pre-market or nonmarket societies (including peasant communities and Third World contexts). Arnold takes issue with these assumptions. He does believe that collective action is important to Moral Economy, but that conflict and resistance need not turn violent, and that they are not necessarily the result in a transitional economy.

One case he uses to argue against the embeddedness and pre/nonmarket economy assumption is that of Owen's Valley California where water access was disputed when the city of Los Angeles pursued access over the valley's water. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, the rural white settlers refused to submit to the demands for water diversion by the urban white settlers and held protests as well as bombing the city's water structures in the valley. The rural settlers wanted the water for local consumption and to build their own markets and development projects. Arnold explains, "This valley of expectant capitalists saw the opportunities and markets associated with mines, railroads, and reclamation as their commercial salvation. Unlike the communities in Burma and Vietnam studied by Scott, security lay in perfecting, not rejecting, the spirit of enterprise."⁴³ While holding this case as one that ought to be considered relevant for Moral Economy, Arnold argues against the prevailing conception by saying, "Given its emphasis on resistance to commercial incorporation, the prevailing conception of Moral Economy cannot explain the moral indignation and rebellion of a non-market valley in California desperate for commercial incorporation."⁴⁴

Arnold proposes that we ought to look at social goods as the source of collective action, which is the basis of Moral Economy. It does not matter if these goods are food or consumables,

⁴³ Ibid. p. 89

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 90

or if they exist in embedded economies or contemporary Capitalist markets. He draws on Michael Walzer to develop an extended version of social goods applicable to Moral Economy. Arnold goes on to suggest focusing on social goods, that is, any good that has social meaning and value, ought to be basis of 'moral economic' claims and behaviors. He writes, "Even goods considered pure commodities are social, for they consist of shared understandings about the beneficial characteristics attributed to a given object. Any identification of an object as a good unavoidably draws on culturally constructed and culturally transmitted ideas about human needs, wants, and benefits."⁴⁵ Social goods help to identify the individual and the collective. They help to shape lives and relationships, including social roles. Arnold provides a theory as to how these social goods motivate collective action,

Under certain circumstances, this identity-related value overrides their narrower commodity value. Choices in these instances may well reflect rationales other than the strictly economic. Equally important, at least from the perspective of a theory of moral economy, deeply valued identities and relationships are latent but easily triggered sources for assessing the legitimacy of both proposed and emerging developments.⁴⁶

He offers examples that have economic value, but which have additional (perhaps greater) social value such as rice in Japan, tobacco in Missouri, and water in southwest United States. In each of these cases the identity of individuals and the identity of the society or community are deeply connected with the good. He also believes social goods have multiple and nested meanings. They are experienced by individuals, but are symbols of a shared way of life and culture. These examples also support his argument that the pre-market and market economy distinction is irrelevant for Moral Economy. For Arnold, Moral Economy is about the cultural

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 91

value of goods and it is best understood as a lens through which to analyze and explain the value of social goods. It remains connected with notions of collective practices and collective action especially evident when the social goods are threatened, which may be interpreted as an attack on the community or culture itself. The threats, attacks on, or deviation from the social good represent a challenge to the legitimacy of social practices and social relationships. The community upon recognizing this challenge resists and fights back.

Humanities Applications of Moral Economy

Although Moral Economy garners relatively little attention in the humanities, a few academics have addressed it. Compared with the use in social sciences, humanities approaches Moral Economy from a more analytic perspective and tries to tease out the meta-level assumptions and implications. Humanities, particularly philosophy, looks to social science work as the source material on Moral Economy, then attempts to examine it carefully to raise questions or make observations that were implicit or ignored in the case studies approaches. Philosopher, Daniel Little, evaluates the methods and analysis employed through a Moral Economy approach compared with several alternative theories used to explain uprisings in peasant China. Little primarily evaluates Moral Economy through the philosophy of social science.

Daniel Little – Peasant China

In his book *Understanding Peasant China: Case Studies in the Philosophy of Social Science*,⁴⁷ Daniel Little carefully examines the concept of Moral Economy as put forth by James Scott and criticized by Samuel Popkin. Little's book, however, is a work of larger scope than Moral Economy alone as it examines explanatory models within social science. Similar to both Scott and Popkin, the context is agrarian change in Asian peasant societies. However, Little considers a vast array of cases not limited to post-colonial Vietnam and theorists who deal with Moral Economy outside of peasant studies. As a philosopher, Little is motivated by a variety of questions rather than an attempt to support a social hypothesis. Many of the questions arise from debates between social theorists as to what model is most explanatory of observed social phenomena such as economic tensions, levels of economic connectedness, peasant uprisings, and economic stagnation (or failure to breakthrough). The two broad explanatory approaches Little is concerned with include the rational choice theory and historical materialism. Both could be considered with regard to the concept of Moral Economy as an explanatory model of peasant behavior to economic challenges. Little's analysis helps illuminate the Scott-Popkin debate, which I will take up in greater depth in chapter four. However, it is valuable to outline his broad considerations pertaining to that dispute.

Little asks "What relative weights do (1) moral values and group solidarity and (2) individual rationality and competition have in explaining important features of agrarian societies

⁴⁷ Daniel Little, *Understanding Peasant China : Case Studies in the Philosophy of Social Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

in Southeast Asia?”⁴⁸ He also believes that understanding these debates can help understand the logic of social science. In particular, “The Moral Economy debate raises issues concerning the role of rational decision-making models in applied social science and problems about how social science should analyze norms and values.”⁴⁹ Such a debate not only can be evaluated for how it approaches theoretical models, such as collective action theory, but can also be considered in terms of the scope of research, what assumptions it makes about individual motivations and collective behavior, the data sources and empirical methods involved, and the logic of the arguments derived from the cases. Furthermore, Little provides a wider lens as far as theoretical and explanatory models, historical context, critiques from philosophy of social science, and a more detached approach to the cases than the social scientists do within their own work.

Conclusion

While ‘Moral Economy’ is a term and a concept that numerous scholars deliberate about and use in scholarly publications, one can easily see the variety of approaches to it. Is one understanding of the concept more accurate or does one description of it better characterize the phenomenon with which it is meant to illuminate? Is a limited scope a safer way to describe what has occurred in a particular social interaction or is a broader scope more telling of how ordinary people think about their values in the public sphere? Although there is substantial overlap between the theorists, there is divergence as well.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 4

⁴⁹ Ibid.

I do not expect this dissertation to cover all philosophically relevant aspects of Moral Economy as it now exists in the literature or at community level implementation. My focus here is to draw connections and comparisons between some of the most influential and significant contributions in Moral Economy, question some of the assumptions made by scholars and researchers of Moral Economy, examine an academic debate about the categorization of Moral Economy, tease out some of the philosophically interesting ideas about justice, embeddedness, protest and resistance, as well as situate Moral Economy within political philosophy while challenging some assumptions of modern political philosophy.

CHAPTER 2: Clarifying the Concept ‘Moral Economy’

Introduction

The concept and term ‘Moral Economy’ has been used by academics since at least the early 1900’s. Some of the earliest uses suggest it is a way of conceptualizing an ideal social ethic. The philosopher Ralph Barton Perry used it to describe his own theory of ethics.⁵⁰ Since the 1960’s it has primarily been employed by anthropologists, sociologists, cultural geographers, political scientists, and economists. ‘Moral Economy’ is not a consistently applied or well-defined concept however. During my initial research on the topic of Moral Economy, I naively believed that I could simply compare and contrast the various definitions of the working concept and apply a fairly straightforward analysis. I soon discovered that such a project would not be possible. With so many theorists and academics discussing ‘Moral Economy’ in their work, but utilizing a multitude of contexts, cases and even definitions, it can become burdensome trying to follow the discussion. This chapter seeks to highlight characteristics that shape Moral Economy, help organize what counts and what falls outside of Moral Economy, and the goals and values motivating the expression of Moral Economy. At the outset I address why a coherent and complete definition of ‘Moral Economy’ has been difficult to produce. Later, I work through some of the central ideas in various theories of Moral Economy, drawing upon the particulars of the cases intended to demonstrate Moral Economy in practice. This produces a kind of typology in which I evaluate whether certain features prevalent in many cases and articulated in the corresponding theories are indeed essential or necessary for ‘Moral Economy’ or whether they

⁵⁰ Ralph Barton Perry, *The Moral Economy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909).

occur coincidentally or have an indirect relationship with ‘Moral Economy’. From this analysis and typology, I develop and argue on behalf of my definition of ‘Moral Economy’.

Challenges in Understanding Moral Economy

First of all, the literature on Moral Economy is confusing due to inconsistencies in the application of the terminology. Some theorists build on or respond to each other’s work, but not everyone does that. Moreover, when they do connect with another individual’s idea of ‘Moral Economy’ they may take issue with some way it is used or defined, or they may simply extend it into a context where it was not clearly applied by earlier sources. Can we be sure that authors in the area of ‘Moral Economy’ are engaged in a discussion about something consistent rather than talking past one another?

A second source of confusion for a reader of ‘Moral Economy’ literature lays in the absence of any clear and consistent definition of just what ‘Moral Economy’ is or what it means. Some academics working on what they describe as Moral Economy fail to define or even describe in general terms what they take Moral Economy to be or how their work fits into a larger body of theory and research under the heading of Moral Economy. This happens when a work’s title or subtitle highlights that it is the “Moral Economy of X” and the body of the work addresses the topic area “X”, but does not explain how Moral Economy is relevant to “X”. Even more egregious is when Moral Economy is mentioned in the title, subtitle, abstract, or introduction, never to again be referred to in the body of the paper. One may expect a prominent place for the concept ‘Moral Economy’ in such an article or book, but find that it could actually be avoided altogether. For example, the book *The Soul of Capitalism: Opening Paths to a Moral*

Economy by William Greider does not address what ‘Moral Economy’ means.⁵¹ One cannot even find the phrase in the index or in a chapter title or section. Perhaps the authors of these books and articles believe the phrase ‘Moral Economy’ is self-evident, or that we need not look any further than the combination of ‘moral’ with all its connotations about behaving well or social values, with the word ‘economy’ with its assumptions about free-market capitalism as the norm.

Another issue Moral Economy faces is the lack of a precise definition. In some instances, the phrase ‘Moral Economy’ is regularly used to describe some situation or set of conditions, but it has a vague or implicit definition. Many instances of narratives by sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural geographers fall in this category. They cite a source from which they derive their idea of ‘Moral Economy’, which they take to be sufficiently descriptive and well supported, as the origin of the concept to which they refer. In doing so, a well read academic may be able to interpret the intended meaning and intellectual heritage of the current ‘Moral Economy’ usage. However, it is still vague for most readers and leaves too much room for misinterpretation. A clear-cut, specific definition would be helpful for the reader and would make misinterpretation of the arguments built on Moral Economy less likely.

There appears to be little guidance in delimiting ‘Moral Economy’ generally and sometimes even individual authors hastily write about ‘Moral Economy of X’ without hesitating to clearly describe what they believe Moral Economy to be in a broader sense. Just what is ‘Moral Economy’? Is it possible to define it, or is it more like Wittgenstein’s ‘game’ with a family resemblance? Moreover, in the atypical situations in which there is a clear definition of

⁵¹ William Greider, *The Soul of Capitalism : Opening Paths to a Moral Economy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

‘Moral Economy’, the definition does not align easily or consistently with other precise definitions. Generally categorizing the variety of meanings for ‘Moral Economy’, some concern themselves with virtuous market practices such as being fair with prices, weights and measures, transparency, and honesty; an utopian economy based on goodness and justice; other ‘Moral Economy’ publications consider only pre-market economies with person to person direct exchange of goods and services; others emphasize resource limited economies such as those in times of war, famine or natural disaster; and yet others draw attention most to communal resilience and social sustainability.

Fourth, ‘Moral Economy’ literature has changed over the past few decades and has moved out of peasant studies where it was actively developed by E.P. Thompson, James Scott, Eric Wolf, and Scott Migdal, with lineage from Karl Polanyi and Marcel Mauss, and critique by Samuel Popkin. Although Moral Economy may remain relevant for peasant studies, other fields have picked up on the concept and reshaped it, sometimes without acknowledging, perhaps without even knowing, the earlier usage in peasant studies. As a result of expanding usage and extension into a variety of contexts and disciplines, Moral Economy no longer appears to be a singular or unified concept. Can we make sense of Moral Economy as a singular concept now that its scope has expanded so extensively? Would ‘Moral Economy’ still be meaningful if it has a multitude of appropriate definitions and applications?

Considering the expanded application of Moral Economy, E.P. Thompson carefully reflects in his later essay “Moral Economy Revisited”, “If the term is to be extended to other contexts then it must be redefined or there will be some loss of focus.”⁵² Continuing, “But where

⁵² E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1991). p. 338

are we to draw the line? Pirates had strongly transmitted usages and customs: did they have a Moral Economy.”⁵³ He also identifies a concern I face in working with moral economic literature, “But if values, on their own, make a Moral Economy then we will be turning up moral economies everywhere.”⁵⁴ The potential problem of being too inclusive or drawing the circle too large raises the risk of eroding the meaning and value of the concept. Of course, while defining Moral Economy it is important to maintain focus and meaning. We do not want to define it in such a way that every social interaction or economic behavior is Moral Economy. However, I think understanding Moral Economy will illuminate it in our own society and help us see it in other contexts where it has not been identified or given attention. It should not be a surprise then that broader awareness of Moral Economy as a theory will turn up more cases than identified at its introduction.

One thing is certain, Moral Economy is a theory, not a natural object. It cannot be a ‘thing-in-itself’. It actually exists, but it does not exist independent from society or the academics who see it as a way to perceive social dynamics. To help sort through the nuances and numerous conceptions and applications of the concept ‘Moral Economy’, I present a typology that organizes the dominant themes and approaches to it. The categories addressed include, type of theory, scope of application, time frame, community membership, goals of Moral Economy, and relationship to Moral Economy. The first three categories break down along on a general dichotomy and each option is represented by one or more contributors to the Moral Economy literature. The types of communities expressing Moral Economy are not mutually exclusive, but Moral Economy theorists typically choose to focus on either local place

⁵³ Ibid. p. 339

⁵⁴ Ibid.

based communities or communities that are not connected by place. The goals of Moral Economy, including fairness, legitimacy, reciprocity, subsistence, common good and community resilience, are all relevant and represented in some of the literature, but are here evaluated as to how necessary or central they are to 'Moral Economy'. I also bring up an issue that I have not encountered in the literature regarding the relationship individuals have to 'Moral Economy', specifically whether they approach it as lived experience or as observed from outside the community. Later, my reflections on the nature of 'Moral Economy' are developed in greater detail, leading to a synthesized definition based on existing definitions and applications. Even if a definition cannot be agreed upon, I sincerely hope my organizational typology makes it clearer just what 'Moral Economy' is in the literature and how it can be used without losing its meaning or impact.

Type of Theory – Normative or Descriptive/Historical

By characterizing something so complex as a social movement or historical change, the academic and outside observers understandably need some kind of organizational tool to help them make sense of the phenomenon. The tool they use may be a theory that makes some generalizations about the various interactions, types of people, their motives and goals, as well as how it all fits into a wider analysis of social science or history. Moral Economy could thus be regarded as a theory of human behavior. It may be a way to make sense of certain events in history or in recent past. It may also be a way for people from a culture and society outside of the one observed to make sense of the social dynamics occurring there. If we take Moral Economy to be this kind of theory and to avoid claims about what party is more justified in their

motives, goals, and behaviors, then Moral Economy is a descriptive theory. A theory, even more than a mere descriptive account, is tainted by the theorist's past, education, and social circumstances and laden with values that the observer brings to the analysis. Nonetheless, there exists no intention in this type of theory to choose a victor or label one party better while the other is worse or unacceptable. If there is a winner, it is based on the outcome of the interaction, not on the preference the author has for one group over another. I identify E.P. Thompson's use of Moral Economy as this sort of theory – descriptive and historical in its intent. Thompson tries to remain emotionally detached and present an explanation for a historical case.

On the flip side of this descriptive or historical understanding of Moral Economy, we find authors such as Thomas Arnold, Lawrence Busch, and William Booth, who are willing to connect moral evaluation to social interactions characterized as Moral Economy. Authors who intend Moral Economy to be a normative theory also appreciate the work it does in organizing our understanding of the described events. However, they make it clear that one party is more justified in their actions. Additionally, they interpret the actions of the people involved as having normative value. Generalized, this can be understood as both group P being evaluated as more justified in their actions against group Q, *and* group P believes they are doing the right or moral thing in responding to group Q. The normative theory then has two elements that often function jointly, but do not need to occur together. First, a normative version of Moral Economy presents the judgment from the outside theorist that one group is more morally acceptable. Second, that that group believes they are morally justified. The authors who take Moral Economy to be a descriptive theory do not express the first aspect, and will only identify the second when there is considerable evidence to support that (such as interviews, surveys).

Scope of Application

As mentioned above, many accounts of Moral Economy trace their scholarly lineage to E.P. Thompson or James Scott. Both of these authors dealt solely with pre-industrial or industrializing societies and focused on agrarian communities and agricultural goods. Although not all individuals involved in the English bread riots or the Cochin China rebellions were peasants or agricultural people, they were living in relatively rural communities compared with our globalized metropolises. Features such as face-to-face market transactions with the producer of the good and direct access to their employer or lenders, characterize both cases. As a result some may believe Moral Economy is only applicable to rural/agrarian communities, to peasants, and to pre-industrial or non-capitalist market economies. Thompson resists extending Moral Economy much beyond this. He clarifies, “my own usage has in general been confined to confrontations in the market-place over access (or entitlement) to “necessities” – essential food.”⁵⁵ Scott limits his account to peasants, particularly those in the developing world. Additionally, although Daniel Little never argues against the application of Moral Economy beyond this context, he keeps his focus within it. He addresses cases of agrarian communities and peasant people in nineteenth through mid-twentieth century China in his philosophical text, *Understanding Peasant China: Case Studies in the Philosophy of Social Science*.⁵⁶ Marcel

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 337

⁵⁶ Daniel Little, *Understanding Peasant China : Case Studies in the Philosophy of Social Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Fafchamps similarly limits his discussion about Moral Economy to peasant communities. He specifically addresses peasant solidarity networks of mutual insurance.⁵⁷

Alternatively, some authors have made it their project to carve out new applications and contexts for Moral Economy. Thomas Arnold is most explicit about this.⁵⁸ He acknowledges Moral Economy's peasant studies and immature market economy origin in his project. Pushing the sphere of relevance, Arnold argues for Moral Economy's service in social goods. He articulates his project by stating, "Combining overlooked aspects of early moral-economic analysis with insights drawn from recent studies of community and collective action, I recast the concept in light of the constitutive, communal, and especially, nested properties of social goods."⁵⁹ Lawrence Busch is not as explicit about how Moral Economy extends beyond its earlier peasant context. However, he does carefully explain how grades and standards are relevant for Moral Economy.⁶⁰ Grades and standards are increasing in prevalence and importance as consumers in modern markets are typically several steps removed from the producers and may even lack direct interaction with the seller. Similarly Goodman makes the case for including the global market for fair trade foods into the sphere of relevance.⁶¹ Most authors currently publishing on moral economy have moved beyond the focus on peasants, agrarian communities, and immature markets. In my research I could not locate any source

⁵⁷ Marcel Fafchamps, "Solidarity Networks in Preindustrial Societies: Rational Peasants with a Moral Economy," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 41, no. 1 (1992).

⁵⁸ Thomas Clay Arnold, "Rethinking Moral Economy," *The American Political Science Review* 95, no. 1 (2001).

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 85

⁶⁰ Lawrence Busch, "The Moral Economy of Grades and Standards," *Journal of Rural Studies*, (2000).

⁶¹ Michael K. Goodman, "Reading Fair Trade: Political Imaginary and the Moral Economy of Fair Trade Foods," *Political Geography*, no. 23 (2004).

published after 1992 that explicitly or implicitly limits ‘Moral Economy’ to its earlier peasant studies context.

Agrarian or peasant communities express Moral Economy in a richly interwoven and more evident form that is easy to identify. They also used to be the dominant type of community when travel and trade was limited, community members were more likely to retain a lifetime affiliation with their town, and communication technology limited by ink and pen. At that time the precarious nature of human existence was palpable. Where communities are still removed from many influences of globalization and are largely agrarian, the version of Moral Economy articulated by E.P. Thompson and James Scott continues to replicate itself. However, most people in the world now live in such a way that they are better connected to the world market and less connected with local agriculture. Nevertheless, they still embrace and behave in ways consistent with the goals of Moral Economy and should be identified as having a Moral Economy that unites their community.

Appropriate Time Frame

For some academics, Moral Economy is reserved for historic time periods. They may believe that it just is not relevant in our contemporary industrial and post-industrial economy. Moral Economy is truly a phenomenon of the past. Although it is not necessary that someone who focuses on peasant or agrarian communities would also maintain that Moral Economy is restricted to a bygone era, my evaluation of authors in this area suggests there is considerable overlap. Those who limit Moral Economy to peasants are more likely to consider Moral Economy a phenomenon of the past, and vice versa. E.P. Thompson certainly falls into this

category. He writes, “The breakthrough of the new political economy of the free market was also the breakdown of the old Moral Economy of provision.”⁶² Thompson sees the move to industrialization and expanded markets with its more impersonal exchanges as the process of extinction of Moral Economy, while political economy takes its place. There is some sense of nostalgia in this account of Moral Economy, as one feels like the desirable aspects of Moral Economy with its personal transactions, more consideration for the person on the end of the transaction, and more pride or art involved in the trade, is forever lost to faceless mass production and undistinguished mass retail.

While James Scott does not say that his account is historical, it seems that the type of peasant existence that defines the context of his work on Moral Economy is disappearing and becoming an anachronistic way of life. With widely adopted large scale farm machinery and agricultural production that looks more like a factory than a field, one might argue that the peasants of today are radically different from those of the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth ones that form the basis of Scott’s arguments for Moral Economy. Similarly, Fafchamps limits his analysis to historical period by referring only to “primitive and other preindustrial societies”.⁶³

Although it is less clear that Daniel Little follows the trend of limiting Moral Economy to a historical period as he wrote specifically about peasant societies, I tend to interpret him as being open to the usage of Moral Economy in contemporary cases. Primarily I do this, because he uses Moral Economy as one of several possible lenses for the social scientist to make

⁶² E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* no. 50 (1971). p. 136

⁶³ Fafchamps, "Solidarity Networks in Preindustrial Societies: Rational Peasants with a Moral Economy."

generalizations and theory. Nothing inherently limits the application of this lens to the past and Little never makes the case that it should be reserved for historical cases.

Conversely, the majority of writers utilizing the term and concept 'Moral Economy' in their work assume it can and does apply to contemporary social contexts. However, only a few make the explicit case for the application in current and future situations. Again Arnold, as one author who is well aware of 'Moral Economy's' past academic context and who actively wants to expand that, expresses in a footnote addressing William Booth's theory of Moral Economy, "the issue at the center of my social goods version: how and why moral economies (some even contrary to the spirit of the modern market society) emerge within *commercialized* market societies."⁶⁴ This suggests that both Arnold and Booth believe Moral Economy can and should be applied within contemporary contexts. Arnold's commercialized market societies are contemporary societies, the same ones most of us live in today. Moreover, several of Arnold's examples of cases in which he interprets a social dynamic as Moral Economy are undeniably contemporary commercialized societies, such as an election in Somerset County Maryland in the 1990's, and the continuing cultural value of rice in Japanese society.

The strongest evidence that Moral Economy is relevant to contemporary contexts is expressed not by an argument, but by the fact that so many authors writing about Moral Economy connect their analysis to contemporary contexts without feeling the need to make the argument. Whether it is connected to health and aging⁶⁵, AIDS⁶⁶, organ transplant⁶⁷, mental

⁶⁴ Arnold, "Rethinking Moral Economy." p. 88 (emphasis added)

⁶⁵ Phillip G. Clark and University of Maine. Canadian-American Center., *The Moral Economy of Health and Aging in Canada and the United States*, Canadian-American Public Policy, (Orono, Me.: Canadian-American Center, 1995).

⁶⁶ Nicoli Natrass, *The Moral Economy of Aids in South Africa*, Cambridge Africa Collection (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

health⁶⁸, class⁶⁹, women's work and production⁷⁰, or religion⁷¹, Moral Economy is readily applied to a variety of contexts all within a contemporary time period. I too embrace the application of Moral Economy within contemporary contexts. Some of the specific issues dealt with in a historic period were different from what contemporary situations present, but that is expected as new situations present themselves, generations have different perspectives, and the conditions for contemporary people have altered. These changes may make it appear that Moral Economy is relegated to an older era, but the reality is that Moral Economy is expressed differently and in regard to the challenges and conditions of its time, whatever time period that may be. Some of the older concerns are no longer worrisome (food labels, weights and quality have largely become standardized), but new ones crop up (how should we handle international trade?), while others persist with different alternatives (how should we care for elderly and terminally ill members of the community?). Governments and large firms may have an interest in quieting Moral Economy or perpetuating the belief that it is merely history because it could potentially resist or undermine their interests. In spite of that, Moral Economy is alive now and can endure into the future. It depends on the people of a community to recognize their shared dependency, embrace common values, and be willing to take action on behalf of the community.

⁶⁷ Aslihan Sanal, *New Organs within Us : Transplants and the Moral Economy*, Experimental Futures (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁶⁸ Carl I. Cohen, "The Political and Moral Economy of Mental Health," *Psychiatric Services* 48, no. 6 (1997).

⁶⁹ Stefan Svallfors, *The Moral Economy of Class : Class and Attitudes in Comparative Perspective*, Studies in Social Inequality (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006).

⁷⁰ Ramona L. Perez, "Challenges to Motherhood: The Moral Economy of Oaxacan Ceramic Production and the Politics of Reproduction," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 63, no. 3 (2007).

⁷¹ Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy : The Challenge of Capitalism* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Community

Many Moral Economy accounts are focused on communities both as the subject of observation and reflection, but also as having some normative value for Moral Economy. Community may be defined variously, sometimes as a group of people organized by place and proximity, by some political organization or districting, by relationships of economic transactions, through shared cultural customs and values, or organized around a particular purpose. In the earlier accounts within the Moral Economy literature and accounts focused on peasant communities, these elements tended to overlap. A community was connected through place, proximity, political delimitation, economic relationships, shared customs, shared cultural identity, *and* common purpose. Understanding all of these elements together in identifiable groups was helpful for making the case and avoids ambiguity and complexity. The same cannot be said for most contemporary applications of Moral Economy. Still, I maintain that a sense of community can arise from any one of the connections and of course requires interactions between the members within the community that establish a common set of norms, shared language, and identification with other members as fellows of the community.

Residents of a particular place may identify as a community connected only by location and environmental conditions, but find that their value systems are more closely aligned with others who live outside their local community. Communities that share values but not a place may meet face to face or be connected through communication technology that facilitates a shared sense of community that is not restricted to one location. Societies and nations may have many communities within them, communities may overlap and individuals may be part of more than one community. For example, an individual person may simultaneously be members of their religious community, an economic community, a cultural community, and community organized

around a shared goal. These communities may overlap in large measure or be nearly exclusive from each other with the exception of joint membership of a few individuals. Communities may transcend and extend beyond political boundaries. They are not necessarily identical with municipal, state, province, or national districts. In all cases, the kinds of communities that can be identified as communities of Moral Economy share values that, even when unrealized, can unite members around a shared vision of the good life. A singular world-view and absence of dissent is not required for community. Some individuals may challenge the values, but ultimately be persuaded to adopt the general vision of the community through reflection or social pressures. Furthermore, while place may be different for members of a Moral Economy, they do need to have a similar subsistence needs. As human beings we all share the need for potable water, clean air, adequate calories and nutrients, and a certain range of climate conditions. Different moral economies may have more specific constraints for meeting their subsistence needs.

Goals Served by Moral Economy

Regardless of whether a researcher takes the position of believing Moral Economy has normative force and social interaction that ought to be promoted, or they are simply trying to make sense of what the case is before them and then apply Moral Economy as an organizational or theoretical tool, it seems clear that Moral Economy is, at least in part, defined by its goals. What do the people involved with protests, movements, and resistance identified as Moral Economy by outsiders want to achieve? What are the characteristics of a smoothly functioning Moral Economy? What goals are common for Moral Economy and what, if any, are necessary or defining goals? In this section I examine the most frequently identified goals in the literature

including, fairness and justice, legitimacy, reciprocity, subsistence, common good, and community resilience.

Fairness/Justice

One of the most consistently discussed goals of Moral Economy is that of fairness or justice.⁷² Scott's short definition of Moral Economy explicitly addresses justice. He writes that Moral Economy is the peasants' "notion of *economic justice* and their working definition of exploitation – their view of which claims on their product were tolerable and which intolerable."⁷³ Justice is a foremost concern in Scott's analysis of Moral Economy as he addresses it in great detail in a chapter titled 'Implications for the Analysis of Exploitation: Reciprocity and Subsistence as Justice'.⁷⁴

Similarly for Thompson, the motivation he interprets for the bread riots and anger of the English mob or crowd originated from a sense of injustice and the pushing back to something they believed was more fair or just. The idea that someone outside the community could export

⁷² I am keeping these together for the purpose of my typology because they tend to be used synonymously. However, I do acknowledge that they are not always interchangeable and sometimes mean very different things in both the definition and the desired outcome.

⁷³ James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant : Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). p. 3 (emphasis added)

⁷⁴ Ibid. pp. 157-192

grain grown with community resources, without first offering it for sale to members of the community from which it originated, appeared to many as a kind of robbery. It was robbery regardless of the fact that one member of the community made a profit by exporting it or that there was neither law nor law enforcement to stop such export. Other injustices Thompson describes were the outrage many felt at hoarders of grain who kept it out of the market to drive up the price, and the dishonest sale of low quality bread as high quality. Thompson points to certain behaviors of the crowd as evidence that they truly were morally outraged and felt it was an injustice, as opposed to expressing dissatisfaction for some other reason. For example, "Roads were blockaded to prevent export from the parish. Waggon's were intercepted and unloaded in the towns through which they passed. The movement of grain by the night convoy assumed the proportions of a military operation."⁷⁵ Thompson remains convinced that such acts are expressions of moral discontent and the belief that merchants, farmers, and middlemen were unfair in their business practices. He writes,

Indeed, if we wish to call in question the unilinear and spasmodic view of food riots, we need only point to this continuing motif of popular intimidation, when men and women near to starvation nevertheless attacked mills and granaries, not to steal the food, but to punish the proprietors. Repeatedly corn or flour was strewn along the roads and hedges; dumped into the river; mill machinery was damaged and mill-dams let off.⁷⁶

As much as the actions of people indicate their motivation, one may be tempted to doubt what was really behind the riots, squabbles, and vandalism. It could be possible, especially in historical analysis, that we are projecting something onto the people that could be explained in significantly different ways. To support his analysis, Thompson adds valuable written materials,

⁷⁵ Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." p. 100

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.114

including pamphlets, notices, letters, and newsprint, from the time that indicates the source of the anger and motivation of the protests. One detailed notice to exporters read,

Peter Clemeseson & Moses Luthart this is to give you Warning that you must quit your unlawful Dealing or Die and be Damed your buying the Corn to starve the Poor Inhabitants of the City and Soborbs of Carlisle to send to France and get the Bounty Given by the Law for taking the Corn out of the Country but by the Lord God Almighty we will give you Bounty at the Expençe of your Lives you Damed Roagues...⁷⁷

It is clear from this notice that the author(s) were angry in particular with the export of grain to France and out of the local province Carlisle. They could have been simply upset with it because it meant higher prices or less grain available locally. These would have been appropriate reasons to be angry, while being practical or rational. From this passage alone we cannot be convinced that the motivation stemmed from a belief that the practice was unfair or that it was an injustice. However, other writings convey that message. One example Thompson cites comes from the author Rev. Charles Fitz-Geffrey who denounced hoarders of corn as, “these Man-haters, opposite to the Common good, as if the world were made onely for them, would appropriate the earth, and the fruits thereof, wholly to themselves.... As Quailes grow fat with Hemlocke, which is poison to other creatures, so these grow full by Dearth.”⁷⁸ The focus in this passage is the common good and how the hoarders benefit individually at the cost of their fellow man. While Thompson does not commonly use the terms ‘just’, ‘justice’, or ‘fair’, his evidence and analysis suggests the anger was based largely in a sense of injustice being done upon the working poor, particularly in times of dearth. Even those individuals who may not have suffered much from the practices that were at issue, appeared to have recognized the injustice within them.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 99

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 132

Thompson suggests, “This hostility to the dealer existed even among many country magistrates, some of whom were noted to be inactive when popular disturbances swept through the areas under their jurisdiction. They were not displeased by attacks on dissenting or Quaker corn factors.”⁷⁹

Author Michael K. Goodman connects fair trade with Moral Economy through their shared interest in moral justice.⁸⁰ Goodman comments, “the tall order that fair trade sets out includes nothing short of the tripartite slam-dunk of “social, economic, and environmental justice” built through the connection of Southern livelihood struggles to ethically reflexive lifestyles and concerned shopping choice.”⁸¹ Instead of protesting injustice, participants in fair trade promote international economic justice through an alternative market. Goodman argues, “Philosophically, this type of Moral Economy conforms to an “ethics of partiality” that holds that some deserve more care than others. Partiality is born of the economic differences and inequalities between producers and consumers and, at a grander scale, the North and South. Cultural difference also plays a role in the functioning of this Moral Economy.”⁸² While Thompson’s subjects were trying to maintain the morality they had come to expect in the market transactions with their fellow men, Goodman’s subjects are working to develop transparent and ethically considerate relationships in global market transactions. The idea is that fair trade is “fairer trade” or more just trade than current conventional trade. Inherent in this is the idea that we not only trade money and goods, but we also have a relationship and are bound to the people

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 95

⁸⁰ Moral justice being that which satisfies peoples’ sense of what is morally right, as opposed to legal justice or other kinds of formal justice. Legal justice may overlap with moral justice, but they are not the same and correspondence between them is not necessary.

⁸¹ Goodman, “Reading Fair Trade: Political Imaginary and the Moral Economy of Fair Trade Foods.” p. 893

⁸² Ibid. p. 905

who make our goods even if we never see them or speak with them directly. Fairness means taking their needs, such as that for a living wage that reflects the work they put into the good or safe working environment and decent living conditions, into consideration when making our purchase. Unlike conventional marketing of goods, fair trade explicitly recognizes that there is a moral element involved in every purchase decision and economic transaction.

In “Rethinking Moral Economy”, Thomas Arnold identifies justice as one of the possible goals of Moral Economy, both of the more traditional theory of Moral Economy as well as his expanded notion.⁸³ One of his central cases, the Owens Valley residents’ outrage at water diversion from their region to Los Angeles, was driven by a sense of injustice and a determination to set things right to achieve justice for the community by regaining control of their local water resources.⁸⁴ Arnold also writes that his “concept of Moral Economy is consistent with and supportive of Walzer’s general theory of justice” in that “each social good is its own sphere of justice”.⁸⁵ Social goods form the basis of Arnold’s updated theory of Moral Economy, thereby making justice a central, and perhaps necessary, aspect of Moral Economy.

Many other examples of Moral Economy’s connection to justice and fairness abound in the literature. In fact, most writers who evoke Moral Economy, even those who do not start from E.P. Thompson or Scott, identify justice or fairness as one of the critical aspects of Moral Economy. I take justice to be central to a complete theory of Moral Economy, but acknowledge justice can be conceived in various ways. Likewise, injustice can be felt and responded to in a multitude of ways.

⁸³ Arnold, "Rethinking Moral Economy."

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 89

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 90

In several of the cases I examined, there seems to be an emphasis on the engagement or participation within the community and in the process of determining the terms of justice. Subsistence, as Scott addresses it, ought to be in large measure determined by the peasants themselves rather than some other party. Having reliable access to material needs could be accomplished in a sort of bureaucratic distributive justice arrangement, but such an arrangement fails to take into account the participation of those people who are most affected by the arrangement. A Moral Economy approach to meeting subsistence needs for example, would involve a transparent social process where people at various levels of society could work together to decide on an appropriate arrangement to meet material needs while supporting social relationships. This process need not be formal in the sense of committee meetings and policy construction. However, the way in which the process of addressing social needs is conducted must be fair to all parties, and all stakeholders should be involved or represented. To meet a basic standard of procedural justice, the stakeholder groups should be engaged together from the beginning of the process so no person or group is excluded while others make decisions that affect them. Moreover, the type and degree of engagement, which can be facilitated by the procedures, makes a significant impact. Participation can range from being a passive recipient of information, to casting an anonymous ballot to indicate a preference, to stating in one's own voice what they want, to actively carrying out the action that was agreed to, all the way to setting the conditions of the process by which decisions are made. The absence of participatory and procedural justice lends itself to paternalism at best, where one group thinks they know best what the other needs or wants, or worse to a complete disregard of the other, their needs, their standing within society, and their worldview. The type of participation is addressed through procedural justice, which will ideally allow full engagement in setting the terms of the exchange, the quality

of the process, and the ability to accept, reject, modify or propose counter-offers throughout the process.

Legitimacy

Closely connected to justice and fairness is the idea that a practice is legitimate and that the people practicing or institutions supporting a practice have legitimate authority. E.P. Thompson is particularly interested in the connection between legitimacy and Moral Economy (or more accurately, illegitimacy and moral outrage). Early in his important article, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century”, he discusses how the perception of illegitimacy of power forms the basis of their outrage and motivates the crowd to take action. Thompson writes,

It is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimizing notion. By the notion of legitimation I mean that men and women of the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community.⁸⁶

In this passage it is not clear that the crowd took issue with a particular person, group or action, but that when they felt their traditional rights and customs were under attack they were legitimated in their defense against an illegitimate power or system. Quite often the problem was clearly identified as coming from certain people or groups of people (such as merchants or traders) and the response to the illegitimate demands or actions was direct. Thompson clarifies,

⁸⁶ Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." p. 78

It is of course true that riots were triggered off by soaring prices, by malpractices among dealers, or by hunger. But these grievances operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking, etc... This in turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the Moral Economy of the poor. An outrage to these moral assumptions, quite as much as action deprivation, was the usual occasion for direct action.⁸⁷

Just in case there was any doubt about the argument Thompson was making through his historical accounts, he explicitly asserts that the moral outrage at the illegitimacy of the practices was just as much the reason for the anger and riots as the material conditions caused by the practices. It was not just that the people were malnourished, but they were morally outraged by the practices that contributed to their malnourishment.

While Thompson considers questions of legitimacy pertaining to market practices important to Moral Economy, one can easily see that it is central to James Scott's idea of Moral Economy. In fact, it is so wrapped up with his focus on justice, reciprocity and subsistence ethic, that it is difficult to tease it apart. Scott explains how perceptions of legitimacy are what give landlords their power and position as well as eliminate that power when legitimacy is lost. "A landlord who fails to honor his obligations becomes a "bad" landlord. So long as the failure is an isolated case, this judgment reflects only on the legitimacy of that particular landlord. Once the failure becomes general, however, the *collective legitimacy* of landlords as a class may be called into question."⁸⁸ Scott continues, "Our knowledge of the priorities and needs of peasant cultivators suggests that they had criteria of performance by which to *judge the legitimacy* of

⁸⁷ Ibid. pp. 78-79

⁸⁸ Scott. p. 51 (emphasis added)

landed power and those who exercised it.”⁸⁹ Scott explains the basis for legitimacy of tenure systems comes from the tradition of giving priority to the cultivator’s subsistence needs. The tenant/client is dependent on the landlord/patron for certain things and in exchange works the land on their behalf. Scott summarizes, “Thus, the crucial question in rural class relations is whether the relationship of dependence is seen by clients as primarily collaborative and legitimate or as primarily exploitative.”⁹⁰ As both reciprocity and right to subsistence form the basis of Moral Economy and legitimacy is what holds both in place, legitimacy plays a central role in Moral Economy for Scott.

Arnold discusses the role of legitimacy in Moral Economy through analysis of E.P. Thompson. He writes, “As employed by Thompson, legitimacy is recognition by a community that a given state of affairs conforms to known and accepted rules and principles.”⁹¹ Arnold also observes legitimacy as a shared quality among moral economists, but one that does not get a lot of explicit attention. “Moral economists loosely share this view but too often couch legitimacy in the diffuse language of shared universes or traditional norms and obligations.”⁹² As he goes on to discuss several cases identified as Moral Economy, Arnold argues that in addition to strictly economic rationales, legitimacy must be considered. “Equally important, at least from the perspective of a theory of Moral Economy, deeply valued identities and relationships are latent but easily triggered sources for assessing the legitimacy of both proposed and emerging developments.”⁹³ Additionally, as he makes the case for social goods, Arnold ties their value to

⁸⁹ Ibid.(emphasis added)

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 170

⁹¹ Arnold, "Rethinking Moral Economy." p.90

⁹² Ibid. p. 90

⁹³ Ibid. p. 91

legitimacy, which supports Moral Economy. Arnold states, “Given their nature and meaningfulness, constitutive and intrinsically communal social goods are sources for shared notions of legitimacy.”⁹⁴

The issue of legitimacy of power is quite pervasive in Moral Economy literature. Although I am unable to give detailed accounts of the role legitimacy places in each case, the following examples suggest some of the concerns with legitimacy. Andrew Sayer considers legitimacy to be central to the definition of Moral Economy and deeply intertwined with the customary norms and ethical values that shape it. He writes,

I want to use the term ‘Moral Economy’ to refer to the study of the ways in which economic activities, in the broad sense, are influenced by moral-political norms and sentiments, and how, conversely, those norms are compromised by economic forces; so much so in some cases that norms represent little more than legitimations of entrenched power relations.⁹⁵

From this perspective, it is existing power relations that give rise to or support for norms rather than the norms working to shape power relations. Should Sayer’s interpretation be true, norms will change along with or because of changes in power relations and do not provide the impetus for initiating a shift in power.

John Bohstedt distinguishes between two distinct types of legitimacy. He explains,

Legitimacy actually has two connotations which are conflated in most discussions of the Moral Economy. One is a moral legitimacy, the rioters’ internal conviction that they acted by right. We have already seen that they found moral legitimacy in their own needs

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 92

⁹⁵ Andrew Sayer, "Moral Economy and Political Economy," *Studies in Political Economy*, no. 61 (2000). P. 80

and the folkways of mutual aid. The other is a more external form of legitimacy, the practical or prudential regard for the law that might shield them from criminal charges.⁹⁶

Thus, Bohstedt separates moral legitimacy from legal legitimacy. While they may be the same in some situations, individuals have to consider both aspects of legitimacy.

Often the case for legitimacy as the foundation for Moral Economy is never made; it is simply stated or assumed. Legitimacy is taken to be the critical connector between practices, transactions and relationships, and the moral acceptance or condemnation that follows.

Moreover, legitimacy, however it is defined, plays an important role in every self-identified account of Moral Economy. If something is legitimate, then the social contract is maintained and the normative expectations hold strong. When a practice or system is illegitimate, then the social contract has been weakened or dissolved, and the current state of affairs appears to some parties as morally wrong. Both legitimate and illegitimate economic relations are included in Moral Economy because they are both relevant to the principle that the bonds of the social contract affect the moral sentiment and normative expectations. Legitimate economic relations function smoothly in the background of any community with economic exchanges. Illegitimate economic transactions bring Moral Economy to the foreground, highlighting the value system that has been challenged by the violation of that system. Legitimacy is a central and necessary element of Moral Economy.

Reciprocity

⁹⁶ John Bohstedt, "The Moral Economy and the Discipline of Historical Context," *Journal of Social History* 26, (1992). p.

Tightly interconnected with legitimacy is the type of exchange relationship between people. Reciprocity demands equivalent exchange between both equals and unequals in society. Reciprocity is central to Scott as one of the two pillars of peasant justice, along with subsistence. Not all Moral Economy scholars explicitly argue for reciprocity as a necessary aspect of Moral Economy, but reciprocity is implicit in nearly every case examined by moral economists. Scott makes his case for reciprocity asserting,

The moral principle of reciprocity permeates peasant life, and perhaps social life in general. It is based on the simple idea that one should help those who help him or (its minimalist formulation) at least not injure them. More specifically, it means that a gift or service received creates, for the recipient, a reciprocal obligation to return a gift or service of at least comparable value at some future date.⁹⁷

For peasants and their landlord, employer, or patron, this equal exchange cannot be the same thing as they each have different things to offer. The peasant provides his labor cultivating and harvesting, caring for livestock, building structures, maintaining tools as well as his deference and loyalty. The landlord provides protection, infrastructure, insurance of subsistence, and capital for investment. Another way to think about reciprocity is in terms of rights and corresponding obligations. In the case of peasant/landlord reciprocity, landlords have a right to expect their tenant will do what he can to produce a good harvest and remit a share of that harvest. They also have an obligation to protect the tenant from starvation, foreseeable harms, and to invest in the roads, irrigation, tools, crop and animal inputs required for production. The tenant has a right to subsistence, social inclusion, protection and loans. Obligations the tenant is expected to meet include the labor required to produce crops, care for livestock, transfer a set share of the harvest, and loyalty to the landlord. They both have a right to respect, which entails

⁹⁷ Scott. p. 167

an obligation to respect the other party as long as the social contract of reciprocity remains. The reciprocal relationship of exchange extends beyond peasant communities to all kinds of contexts in which there are individuals or groups who exchange different things of relatively equal value. Even whole communities have a reciprocal relationship with their state.

Of course not all exchange between peasants and landlords or any parties that have unequal social and economic standing exhibit reciprocity. Only relatively equal exchanges; thus the close connection with legitimacy and justice where exchange is evaluated based on its level of reciprocity. Just as norms of justice and legitimacy work to establish an acceptable reciprocal exchange, long-standing norms of reciprocity likewise influence what is considered just, legitimate and moral. When exchanges are not reciprocal they are perceived by the exploited party as unfair and illegitimate. It is at this point that the exploited party would resist further exploitation, refuse to comply with expectations, and may act to impose a cost burden on the exploiter. In other words, the contract between the two parties is broken once one party willfully breaches it. Scott discusses violations of reciprocity stating,

It is clear that the power of some and the vulnerability of others make for bargains that violate common standards of justice. If the exchange of equal values is taken as the touchstone of fairness, the actual bargains men are driven to cannot then be taken as an indication of value and, hence, of equity. A tenant's need for food may be a measure of his dependency and of the power those who control the supply of food can exercise over him, but it can never be a measure of the legitimacy of that power.⁹⁸

Breaches in the reciprocal relationship are more evident between unequals and usually considered more serious when the violation is initiated by the more powerful party to the detriment of the more vulnerable. Violations of reciprocity can also occur between equals and

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 163

could result in other social costs, such as exclusion from community participation or the refusal by others to assist during periods of hardship.

While reciprocity draws attention to dependency and the receiving of goods, services, or social inclusion, it also emphasizes the responsibility one has to give at least as much as has been received. One may not want to ask too much of others, because doing so makes him indebted to them at a later time. Alternatively, they may want to help when it is easy and convenient so they can call upon the other for help when they require assistance. Scott articulates what that means for peasants,

As soon as a peasant leans on his kin or his patron rather than his own resources, he gives them a reciprocal claim to his own labor and resources. The kin and friends who bail him out will expect the same consideration when they are in trouble and he has something to spare. In fact they aid him, one might say, because there is a tacit consensus about reciprocity, and their assistance is as good as money in the bank against the time when the situation is reversed.⁹⁹

The same relationship is at play in the exchange of gifts and other items not necessary for survival. Marcel Mauss also makes a good case for reciprocity in cultural, religious, and social relationships in *The Gift*. In gifts, and particularly in the case Mauss examines of the potlatch, there are three obligations: to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. Doing each well is necessary for establishing and maintaining good social and spiritual status. The acts of giving, receiving, and reciprocating well, meeting or exceeding expectations, is applicable to all socially relevant exchange and therefore to Moral Economy. Mauss explains, “One must voice one’s appreciation of the food that has been prepared for one. But, by accepting it one knows that one is committing

⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 28

oneself. A gift is received ‘with a burden attached’.”¹⁰⁰ One can likewise perceive the three obligations at play when receiving an invitation to a wedding or birthday, assistance from a colleague on a project at work, or caring for a family member (especially a parent or elder who helped raise you). In discussing Hindu norms of reciprocity Mauss states, “Contracts, alliances, the passing on of goods, the bonds created by these goods passing between those giving and receiving – this form of economic morality takes account of all this. The nature and intentions of the contracting parties, the nature of the thing given, are all indivisible.”¹⁰¹ As Mauss explains it, reciprocity is just as much about reinforcing relationships between people as it is about the thing given or service received. The relationship of reciprocity is never completely fulfilled. It is an ongoing relationship that connects people in a personal system of exchange. While it is often a beneficial relationship, reciprocity, including the kind exhibited in the exchange of gifts, is not always desirable. The obligation to give, to reciprocate, is sometimes a burden that one would rather avoid. Mauss points to Germanic law, stories, and language in which the word ‘gift’ has double meanings, both offering and poison.¹⁰²

In many contexts reciprocity is assumed and therefore easy to overlook, but constitutes a central component of Moral Economy. Modern market economies use money as their currency rather than reciprocity, but modern societies still function as a result of norms of reciprocity and the relationships that are maintained through reciprocity. Reciprocity does not need to be limited to peasants or gifts, it is reproduced whenever the acceptance of a thing or service leaves the

¹⁰⁰ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift; Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London,: Cohen & West, 1954). p. 41

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 59-60

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 62-63

recipient with an obligation to give something of equal or greater value. Pay it forward or pay it back, then expect the cycle to repeat.

Subsistence

Subsistence primarily concerns whether a family or a community has enough basic resources to feed and care for themselves over the long term. One may have enough to eat for the day, but if they cannot be confident that they will continue to have adequate nourishment in the future, then their subsistence is in jeopardy. In this way subsistence is akin to food security, although subsistence extends to necessities other than food. Subsistence is one of the pillars of James Scott's theory of Moral Economy. For Scott, subsistence, along with reciprocity, defines Moral Economy. He articulates the relevance of subsistence and reciprocity as well as justice and legitimacy by arguing,

The peasant's idea of justice and legitimacy, our analysis suggests, is provided by the *norm of reciprocity* and consequent elite obligation (that is, peasant right) to guarantee – or at least not infringe upon – *the subsistence claims* and arrangements of the peasantry. Thus, a central feature of the peasant's reaction to the violation of his rights is its moral character. By refusing to recognize the peasantry's basic social rights as obligation, the elite thereby forfeits any rights it had to peasant production and will, in effect, have the normative basis for continued deference. Defiance is now normatively justified. A peasant whose subsistence hangs in the balance faces more than a personal problem; he faces a *social failure*.¹⁰³

Scott argues that subsistence depends heavily on the social relationships between the client and patron. Subsistence is not then a matter of luck (good weather leading to good

¹⁰³ Scott. pp. 188-189

harvest), hard work (a motivated tenant farmer), skill or technology. While luck, hard work, skill, and technology factor into the agricultural harvest, subsistence is in large measure determined by how all parties in the client-patron relationship react to these things as well as each other in every possible situation. The patron can make demands of his client but is morally prohibited from seizing his subsistence. In this sense there is reciprocity, each party takes something and each gives something in the relationship. To the client/peasant and patron/elite this relationship is presumed just and legitimate. Therefore, an alteration that upsets reciprocity or subsistence changes it into an unjust relationship and illegitimate actions.

Scott believes subsistence is not merely a practical claim or a term of the social contract, but is a moral claim. He also suggests that it differs based on the client-patron relationship. He maintains,

Inasmuch as the moral claim of a right to subsistence derives in large part from an existential dilemma, it characterizes many sectors of the population for which subsistence is problematic. The actual content of that moral claim has, moreover, a direct relation to the claimant's sources of subsistence. Thus, for smallholding peasants, the claim might include continued access to the land, assistance from larger landholders during hard times, and remissions of taxes following a bad harvest. ... For an agricultural laborer its special features might be guaranteed employment, gleaning rights, a stable real wage, loans or assistance at times of need, and a tax load that varies with his capacity to pay.¹⁰⁴

Subsistence is of course applicable to every living being, but peasants feel a heightened awareness of it. Because Scott is solely concerned with peasants as the subjects for Moral Economy, subsistence does play an important role. Moreover, subsistence means a quality of life that is respectable and recognizes the person rather than merely meeting daily caloric intake or seeing someone as a consumer or a statistic.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 179

Other Moral Economy scholars focused on peasants tend to argue that subsistence is strongly connected to Moral Economy. E.P. Thompson's account of food riots in eighteenth century England are connected to subsistence needs,¹⁰⁵ Marc Edelman considers subsistence a serious ongoing issue within peasant and Moral Economy discussions,¹⁰⁶ and Marcel Fafchamps writes in support of subsistence as an ethical claim.¹⁰⁷ Fafchamps concludes his article by asserting, "there is no contradiction between the formalization of peasant behavior presented here and the central idea of the Moral Economy of peasants – that is, that ethical values of precapitalist societies emphasize solidarity as a moral obligation and subsistence as a right."¹⁰⁸ However, for other groups, should Moral Economy's context and application expand, subsistence does not play a central role. Subsistence should be integrated into the concept 'Moral Economy', but it may not always be as pronounced or direct as it was in Scott's research. In some cases, subsistence may have more to do with the dignity of care or the cultural practices that nourish the spirit rather than the body. I consider subsistence a necessary component of Moral Economy as it functions together with a particular notion of justice and legitimacy to give rise to a normative social system that is unique from other social systems, political theories, and political economy.

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century."

¹⁰⁶ Marc Edelman, "Bringing the Moral Economy Back In... To the Study of 21st-Century Transnational Peasant Movements," *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 3 (2005).

¹⁰⁷ Fafchamps, "Solidarity Networks in Preindustrial Societies: Rational Peasants with a Moral Economy."

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 167

Common Good

My own read on subsistence as it pertains to Moral Economy is that it extends beyond the sufficient nourishment of individuals to something that could be characterized as the common good.¹⁰⁹ The common good pertains to the general welfare, social as well as physical of all people, especially the commoners and most vulnerable in the community.¹¹⁰ A common good is shared equally with everyone in the community. It may require self-sacrifice, but more often contributes to individual good. Alasdair MacIntyre emphasizes the inseparability of dependent and independent existence in society, “So I and others find in a certain kind of cooperation a common good that is a means to and defined in terms of our individual goods.”¹¹¹ As seen in MacIntyre’s quote and in particular Moral Economy cases, acting in the spirit of the common good entails cooperative behavior with a sense of mutuality.

Common good is more than a material thing or property, but it does reinforce public use and holding property for the community. It is also a sense of solidarity that what is done is for the good of all. The common good is available to everyone regardless of status or wealth. Common good suggests both that everyone’s basic needs are met and that there is a special interest in protecting and empowering the people who could easily be overlooked or exploited. It suggests that ensuring the most vulnerable have essential provisions is not only good for them but good for the entire community. It is a common interest that members have enough food, clean water, adequate housing and transportation as well as integration in social life that helps

¹⁰⁹ “We are many, we are one”. Never “I am one”.

¹¹⁰ Throughout the Moral Economy literature there is the sense that something like the common good is integral to the sense of justice expressed and necessary for social sustainability. However, I never found it articulated in the terms I describe here.

¹¹¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, The Paul Carus Lectures (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999). p. 114

maintain the Moral Economy and make life in that community satisfying. When the common good is not achieved, there will be at least some segment of the community that becomes distressed and discontent.

MacIntyre also rightfully cautions us to not confuse public goods of the nation-state with common good. He argues that while those public goods are important, they do not and cannot represent true common good.¹¹² I agree with his analysis that the common good is political as well as social and ethical and find that the political element is what is at play during protests, legal battles, and attempts to change policy to correspond with what the common good entails.

A sense of the common good is apparent in all of the cases of Moral Economy that I have encountered. Participants regularly exhibit the understanding that they benefit from a community in which even the most vulnerable are treated well, as well as a more altruistic response that they want what is good for their neighbors and fellow community members. Just like the continuity of a Moral Economy requires constant collective actions of its members, the common good arises through daily practice and interaction. MacIntyre describes, “we learn what our common good is, and indeed what our own individual goods are, not primarily and never only by theoretical reflection, but in everyday shared activities and the evaluations of alternatives that those activities impose.”¹¹³ The spirit of common good is more often articulated by the participants in a Moral Economy than it is by the theorist, perhaps because the outsider does not share in that community’s common good. Nevertheless, some evidence of shared common good must be present in any Moral Economy, even if it is taken for granted and so engrained that it is never articulated.

¹¹² Ibid. p. 132

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 136

Community Resilience

For some authors the idea of Moral Economy connects easily with the goal of community sustainability or community resilience. Sometimes the community resilience is one based on identity, traditions, and continuity of lifestyle. Other notions of community resilience pertain to the actual physical existence of the members, their heirs, and their presence in a particular place. Ramona Perez addresses both the identity of Oaxacan women in Atzompa Mexico as using their identity as skilled ceramics glazers to sustain their own cultural community and economically promote their broader local community.¹¹⁴ In a community that has long faced severe poverty, the economic activity literally preserves their physical existence by providing money for food, shelter, clothes, and other resources. It is also identified both by the women and by outsiders as something unique and valuable about their community.¹¹⁵ The women consider their economic activity as something that helps them maintain both the physical and cultural existence of their community.

Typically the focus of a case study considered by moral economists consists of a community or group within a larger community. Ceramics producing women constitute this community within the larger Atzompa and Oaxacan communities. For Scott, the client class or peasants deserve special focus within broader agrarian communities in Vietnam. Scott's interest is primarily about the basic needs peasants have for physical survival, namely food, fiber, land

¹¹⁴ Perez, "Challenges to Motherhood: The Moral Economy of Oaxacan Ceramic Production and the Politics of Reproduction."

¹¹⁵ Perez argues that it is a double edged sword because the glaze that is characteristic of their ceramics contains lead, which has contributed to infant mortality and illness in individuals throughout the community.

access, and liquid assets. He does indirectly suggest that Moral Economy is important for the continuation of the peasant class as it exists at the time of the study. E.P. Thompson also considers the community of working poor within the larger English community.

Arnold makes an explicit case for the connection between Moral Economy and community sustainability. In particular because he considers social goods as central to Moral Economy, and social goods impact the identity of communities, cultural or social identity is most affected by specific goods and practices. Some social goods are also essential for community or even human survival, such as water or rice (food). Arnold asserts, "Water is a vital medium for social and political relations, a medium at the center of processes of community, even regional self-identification" and "Subordinating the disposition of water to the integrity of community is legitimate because the autonomy, welfare, and identity of western communities are tied directly to water."¹¹⁶

In "Household and Market: On the Origins of Moral Economic Philosophy" William James Booth considers the classical Greek household origins of Moral Economy as a natural economy allowing the master the leisure to pursue thought and activities more important than maintenance of the household or procurement of wealth.¹¹⁷ In Greek society not all residents were considered members of the community. Although necessary for the functioning of the city, laborers, slaves, merchants and others involved in provisioning the city were excluded from the community and sharing in its *philia*. Booth explains that classical Greek notions of economy keep the market apart from the political community. A well ordered household and a well ordered city were important for the good life. Moreover, ideas about what the good life consists

¹¹⁶ Arnold, "Rethinking Moral Economy." p. 93

¹¹⁷ William James Booth, "Household and Market: On the Origins of Moral Economic Philosophy," *The Review of Politics* 56, no. 2 (1994).

of support an embedded economy but distance the Emporium to the outskirts of the city and relegate it to members on the lower levels of the community and to foreigners. Booth interprets classical Greeks as believing,

The good economy is embedded in the well-ordered community and its hierarchical relations. Everything and everyone are in their appropriate places. Seen from the standpoint of the *oikos*, the world of the market and money-making is anarchical, *ataxia*, something without order, in brief, a corruption of community and accordingly, a perverse moral location of the community.¹¹⁸

Thus, the money or market economy challenges the well ordered community, which was essential to the good life of Greek citizens. The Emporium was considered dangerous to the embedded community and while permitted a place in society, it was kept at a distance spatially, politically, and ethically. Money was also a threat to community because,

Money is blind and indifferent to the (noneconomic) attributes of the possessors and for that reason it is rootless, not grounded in the order of the community. Money, those who pursue it, and the institutions in which they conduct their business are also rootless in this second sense: the boundaries of the community – the most important ones that is, not the city's walls but its relations of solidarity, its mutuality or *philia* – are of no concern to them.¹¹⁹

Hence, money and the market may be necessary for material provisions, but they simultaneously challenge the community by threatening to override its noneconomic values with (misguided) economic ones. While contemporary communities in all their diversity differ from classical Greece, the tension between community noneconomic values and rootless economic values still exists. This tension is central to discussions of Moral Economy.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p.213

¹¹⁹ Ibid. pp.219-220

An assumption nestled in each of these accounts is that the resilience of a segment of the community contributes to the sustainability of the community as a whole. The community also finds its identity largely in its values and traditions, both of which Moral Economy can help maintain. While community resilience is not identical to Moral Economy, I do believe some degree of community values, which depend on the continued existence of the community, is required for a comprehensive understanding of Moral Economy.

Relationship to Moral Economy

One difficulty I kept encountering while working through the literature, which was never addressed by other writers, is that the nature of Moral Economy exists and can be understood through two distinct epistemic lenses. This is a recognized issue in the social sciences where an outsider, typically an academic, observes, analyzes, and characterizes the behavior and social systems of other groups of people. Some researchers in the social sciences address this difference of epistemic standing through the emic/etic distinction.¹²⁰ Marvin Harris describes the way anthropologists employ the distinction, “emic refers to the presence of an actual or potential interactive context in which ethnographer and informant meet and carry on a discussion about a particular domain.”¹²¹ He continues, “etics...is defined by the logically nonessential status of actor-observer elicitation.”¹²² Simply put, an emic approach takes the words and perspective of

¹²⁰ Marvin Harris, "History and Significance of the Emic/Etic Distinction," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 5, (1976). Harvard Graduate School of Education, "Foundations of Qualitative Research in Education: Emic and Etic Approaches", President and Fellows Harvard University <http://sites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=qualitative&pageid=icb.page340911> (accessed July 14 2014 2014).

¹²¹ Harris, "History and Significance of the Emic/Etic Distinction." p. 331

¹²² Ibid.

the participants while the etic approach uses theories, methods, and concepts from outside the setting. The outside observer is so common in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and history, that it may not normally require any comment within those disciplines. Nevertheless, I found it to be a noteworthy relationship that was not explicitly considered in the Moral Economy literature.¹²³

The emic/etic distinction is helpful for understanding the relationship of the two broad categories of people involved in Moral Economy case studies. However, both emic and etic still relate to the researcher or outsider and I contend that there is an important perspective that is only present within and between participants. When ‘Moral Economy’ is discussed, the practices, norms and values of actual communities are considered. I characterize this as ‘lived Moral Economy’, or the Moral Economy of a community as embraced and produced by its participants, its members. In lived Moral Economy, participants express their values and norms through the interactions they have with others in their community. They tend to take these values and norms for granted when things go smoothly and are seldom forced to articulate them or respond until they are questioned by an outsider or challenged by a norm deviating party from within the community. In lived Moral Economy, the customs and norms might not be spoken about and the participants may not even have the adequate language to describe them or their behaviors that reinforce the Moral Economy. Lived Moral Economy is experienced through the expectations we have for other people and ourselves, through individual transactions and interactions, and as highly contingent, contextual, and integrated with all other aspects of our personal life and social dynamics.

¹²³ Scott discusses his own personal relationship with the communities in which he embeds himself for a couple of years, but he does not expand on this idea of the outsider in his work on Moral Economy. It does receive more attention from Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

The authors of most Moral Economy accounts are outsiders to the community they observe. They tend to be approaching the community and the system of economic relations through the lens of a researcher. I call this perspective ‘observed Moral Economy’. Observed Moral Economy is similar to what is called an etic approach, but also includes the emic approach to social research when the researcher actively elicits feedback from the participants. As an outside observer, Moral Economy can more easily be distilled from the other complex factors that affect individuals in ‘lived Moral Economy’. The relationships are clearer and explanations may suggest an inevitability of events. They are also informed by disciplinary methods and assumptions, perspectives from another culture, and the expectation that the lived experience needs to be conveyed for an audience that is even more removed from the Moral Economy experienced than the subjects of such research.

Nearly all of the writing about Moral Economy tries to portray lived Moral Economy. The difficulty with this approach, especially when it is not acknowledged, is that the outside observer brings a different perspective to the narrative. Even if the observer does not influence actual events or values within the community they are studying, their worldview does impact the way such events and values are described and evaluated within their writings and presentations. Of course, the presence of an outsider, even a well-meaning passive observer, may impact the way people behave. Both the worldview of the observer and the presence of the outsider can distort the account readers get of Moral Economy. As suggested above, lived Moral Economy is difficult to tease out from other aspects of our life as social beings. This could account for the paucity of Moral Economy accounts from within the identified Moral Economy community.

Reviewing the characteristics expressed in the Moral Economy literature and impacting the way it is characterized, the chart below lists the categories on the left with the common

characteristics to the right. The particular characteristics of each category as outlined here are mutually exclusive in some cases, such as with the scope of application and time frame, while others can be multiply realized, such as the goals of Moral Economy.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Particular Characteristics</u>	
Type of Theory	Descriptive/ Historical	Normative
Scope of Application	Peasants/ Agrarian	Widely applicable contexts
Time Frame	Historic	Contemporary
Community	Place based and culturally unified	Diffuse, Connected by values and shared vision of good life
Goals	Fairness & Justice	Legitimacy of Power
	Reciprocity	Subsistence
	Common Good	Community Resilience
Relationship to Moral Economy	Lived	Observed

Table 1: Possible Characteristics of Moral Economy

Further Reflections on the Nature of ‘Moral Economy’

Outside of the categories addressed in my typology, there are other features that shape Moral Economy, distinguishing it from other systems, theories and paradigms. I contend that Moral Economy as referred to by academics is more of an ideology than referring to a state of affairs or a particular transaction. Moral Economy is the big picture of the social system mixed with the goals (realized and unrealized), values, customs and norms. Like the concepts ‘justice’ or ‘democracy’, ‘Moral Economy’ is most evident when it is desired but challenged. When ‘Moral Economy’ is functioning smoothly it is difficult to observe because it is so integrated into the fabric of the community or society. Moreover, the reality of social interaction, politics, and

policy can get closer to or further away from achieving the goals and ideology of ‘Moral Economy’. That is to say that for the participants within any Moral Economy, their Moral Economy is dynamic and shifts along a spectrum based on various factors such as compliance with norms, alterations in values, specific challenges or opportunities present based on their environment, relationship with other communities, attitudes and behaviors or individuals within the community and other factors that affect the lived experience within the community. All communities have some kind of Moral Economy because there are some norms that include a notion of justice, legitimacy, and priorities regarding subsistence, even if they are few and broad, that pertain to all members of the community. It may be possible for some individuals to be unattached and not part of any community, but this is rare and they nonetheless come into contact with other people who are members of communities and who are subject to a Moral Economy.

Definition of ‘Moral Economy’

Having evaluated the central features of Moral Economy, I propose we understand Moral Economy as *a community centered response, arising from a sense of common good, reinforced by custom or tradition, to an unjust appropriation or abuse of land, labor, human dignity, natural resources, or material goods*. The positive counterpart is *the regular behaviors producing social arrangements that promote just relations between unequal persons or groups within a community to achieve long-term social sustainability*.

Because Moral Economy is most apparent when it is responding to violations or challenges, I placed the negative component of the definition first. However, the second, positive

part of the definition is what I identify as a smoothly functioning Moral Economy. A community centered response means that the good of the community is foremost in the evaluation of the behavior or situation and that the community values are the basis for determining what is just or unjust. The community does not have to, and often will not, act as a unified group. One party within the community may be deemed the instigator who is undermining the communities' Moral Economy, or there may simply be differences of opinion as to how to respond to an external challenge. The moral evaluation and response is informed and reinforced by something that was already present in the culture of the community, most commonly shared norms or traditions. These norms and traditions do not need to be tailored to the particular situation, but they are something that members of the community draw upon for social and moral guidance and justification for their actions. Moral Economy pertains to land, natural resources, and material goods because all of these are necessary for basic subsistence. They also can have spiritual or cultural value for a community. Labor and human dignity are the human components and separate Moral Economy from a simplistic notion of distributive justice. Regardless of the quantity or quality of resources, people matter and should not be treated as mere means or left behind in a race to accumulate wealth. Justice brings together the ideas of fairness and legitimacy that were identified as necessary components of Moral Economy. Social sustainability pertains to social resilience, the common good, and subsistence. Social sustainability also suggests that the community survives any one member and that cultural norms and values are transmitted through generations along with the assurance of prerequisite physical and social subsistence.

Outside of the Circle

Throughout most of this chapter I focused on what Moral Economy is and the many features that contribute to Moral Economy. Returning to an earlier worry though, it is crucial to identify what Moral Economy is not, so as to keep the concept meaningful. With that in mind, the following section identifies what does not count as Moral Economy. These are the opposite qualities or aspects of the ones addressed earlier and in the following chapter, so I do not extensively argue for them here, but provide them to explicitly articulate what falls outside of the circle. Broadly speaking, they fall into one of five categories that relate to the nature of Moral Economy: community, authority, plurality, moral quality, and engagement.¹²⁴ Matching just one of the following features disqualifies a theory, political/social system, system of norms or mores, and behavior as Moral Economy.

1. Community considerations:

- a. It¹²⁵ is not Moral Economy if individuals do not identify (words or actions) as a community.
- b. It is not Moral Economy if it is rootless, lacking some connection to history or basis in tradition.
- c. It is not Moral Economy if it has no interest in the general good of the community from which it originates.
- d. It is not Moral Economy if it is entirely disconnected from basic provisions and subsistence of human social and physical life.

¹²⁴ Remember the acronym CAP ME.

¹²⁵ "It" refers to alternative systems of norms, social or political systems, alternative theories, or kinds of behavior.

- e. Moral Economy does not require a unified response by all community members, but does require a sizable minority to behave in a similar or reinforcing manner.
2. Authority
- a. Moral Economy is not given by god or an authority.
 - b. Moral Economy does not require any adherence to metaphysical commitments, but it is compatible with religion or the sense that morality originates at a higher level.
 - c. Moral Economy is not a top-down philosophy, but a bottom-out system of norms and corresponding behaviors.
 - d. It is not Moral Economy if invention of tradition is imposed to provide the cover of legitimacy for a shift in values or practices.
 - e. Moral Economy does not require, but could be compatible with, formal law, official law enforcement, prosecution, punishment and sentencing.
 - f. Moral Economy does not require the state for existence, maintenance, or authority.
3. Plural nature of Moral Economy
- a. Moral Economy is not reducible to a set of ideas or rules.
 - b. Moral Economy may not be sufficient as a singular moral, social, or political system.
 - c. Moral Economy is not universal or stable in time, place or membership.

4. Moral Quality

- a. Moral Economy is not hedonistic or compatible with ethical egoism.
- b. Moral Economy does not promote wealth accumulation (for state, firm, or individual).
- c. It is not Moral Economy if one of the goals is to harm, exploit, manipulate, violate, or steal from others, inside or outside of the community. Exceptions include defending the community in proportion to the opposing force or to inflict pertinent cost for violating the community's Moral Economy.

5. Engagement

- a. It is not Moral Economy if it is not actively embraced or practiced.
- b. It is not Moral Economy if community members are apathetic or disengaged.
- c. Moral Economy is rational from a practical, embedded perspective.
- d. It is not Moral Economy if it does not make demands on others (responsibility, obligations, reciprocity).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have drawn upon the Moral Economy literature to develop a comprehensive conceptual picture of what 'Moral Economy' is and how it functions in academic writing. Differences exist among scholars regarding the type of theory Moral Economy is, with some treating it more historical or as a descriptive account of human behavior while others regard it as a normative theory that has moral force. I can see how and why a Moral Economy scholar or social scientist might find 'Moral Economy' to function as a descriptive theory. It can

help explain behaviors associated with complicated events or changes in communities.

Nonetheless, I recognize Moral Economy to be valuable normative theory that helps advocate for certain parties and justifies community centric behavior. The scope of application divides scholars into two camps, one focuses on peasant or agrarian communities while the other applies Moral Economy widely. My approach to Moral Economy extends its application far beyond its original agrarian context. It is still relevant in agrarian communities but should not be limited to them alone. Similarly, I argue that Moral Economy can and should apply to both contemporary and historic time periods rather than relegated to a former era. Contemporary applications require the further extension of community to include diffuse communities connected by their value systems and shared vision of a good life as well as those that are united by place and long-standing culture. The goals I have highlighted in this chapter may not be the only goals for Moral Economy as a theory or as expressed by a particular community. However, I emphasized fairness and justice, legitimacy, subsistence, reciprocity, common good, and community resilience, because together they serve to produce Moral Economy both in the experience of lived Moral Economy and for the outside observer. The goals are necessarily general, but become enriched through the community norms, values and practices, the specific situation to which they are applied, and the people who put them into action.

CHAPTER 3: Context, Relationships, and Engagement:

Economics, Ethics, Tradition, Protest, Resistance, and Embedded Economy

Introduction

Establishing the basic elements that contribute to a working definition of Moral Economy goes a long way to understanding what it is. Nevertheless, there are other aspects of Moral Economy that help provide the contours of the concept as well as contextualize it within philosophy and other areas of academic scholarship. Both lived and observed Moral Economy require further reflection and analysis at a meta-level that has been lacking in the contemporary literature. In this chapter I examine the two terms that name ‘Moral Economy’, exploring how both economics and ethics operate in this concept and relate to its real-world applications. Later the role of tradition is considered, specifically regarding how informal and formal tradition along with laws, motivate claims and responses to assaults on a community’s Moral Economy. Due to the prevalence of protest and violence in some of the most influential early work, the role of protest and violent behaviors in Moral Economy is examined. These behaviors may not be essential for Moral Economy, but they draw a lot of attention from outsiders and foreground the engagement of members within their Moral Economy community. Finally, I investigate the notion of an embedded economy by reviewing the literature on embedded economy from Moral Economy scholars and their sources. I argue that a disembodied economy is a fiction, but that embeddedness exists on a scale with Moral Economy being highly embedded and modern capitalist market economies far less embedded.

‘Economy’ in Moral Economy

As demonstrated through the cases examined in the first chapter, Moral Economy is not economic in the capitalist, free-market sense. It is not a neo-classical economy that is driven by supply and demand; and while it has more in common with classical economy that takes ability and willingness to pay into consideration when setting the price, it is not merely a classical economy either. Moral Economy is economic in the broad sense as a system of exchange. Furthermore, it is an institution, but often takes the shape of an informal institution. Markets are often part of a Moral Economy, but some of the most valuable goods (clean air, mothers’ labor, cultural symbols) are not for sale, while others are priced far below their actual value so they are available to everyone (water, education). Western observers often look for examples of Moral Economy in the marketplace. While examples can indeed be found there, directing our attention only toward goods available for sale and the transactions that complete such sales misses the bigger picture of a community’s Moral Economy. Bartering, exchanging favors, dividing labor between and within families, household labor and production, recycling and repurposing materials, conservation, tithes, gifts, inheritances, holding something in trust, public investment, boycotts, and even social network campaigns are all part of an economy. It is in these economic relationships and behaviors that Moral Economy flourishes and is more pervasive than the types of economy readily found in the marketplace.

In the next chapter, the relationship between Moral Economy and political economy is given substantial consideration. Likewise, economics shares a complex historical relationship with political economy. Throughout the nineteenth century, political economy and economics were largely indistinguishable, but moving toward the twentieth century, economists shifted their focus primarily to the marketplace and developed tidy conceptual models and mathematical

formulas that could be applied more like a science. Communications professor Vincent Mosco points out, “Not unlike the way Newtonian mechanics came to mean physics, the neoclassical approach came to mean economics. But the process of normalizing economics was one of continuous intellectual and political ferment that itself merits a volume on the political economy of economics.”¹²⁶ While Adam Smith’s 1776 *The Wealth of Nations* marks the beginning of formal theory on capitalism, economics as a distinct discipline has evolved over time, shedding its interest in political concerns. Even political economy has shifted toward this direction to a lesser degree, perhaps trying to maintain a connection to its increasingly authoritative and respected offspring. According to the authors of the 1948 *Dictionary of Modern Economics*, ‘political economy’ was no longer needed to address the big social and political issues. The authors indicate a narrowing of economic focus in writing,

Originally, the term [political economy] applied to broad problems of real cost, surplus, and distribution. These questions were viewed as matters of social as well as individual concerns... With the introduction of utility concepts in the late nineteenth century, the emphasis shifted to changes in market values and questions of equilibrium of the individual firm. Such problems no longer required a broad social outlook and there was no need to stress the political.¹²⁷

The quote suggests professional economists were moving away from the traditional scope of political economy not only because they wanted to narrow the discipline and treat it more as a science, but because they thought the world was changing in such a way that economic problems were no longer social and political in nature, but could be dealt with from the perspective of the private firm. I contend this shift not only cleaved economics from political economy, but

¹²⁶ Vincent Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication*, 2 ed. (London UK: Sage Publications, 2009). p. 21.

¹²⁷ Julien Ashton Ripley Byrne Joseph Horton, Morris Bartel Schnapper, *Dictionary of Modern Economics* (Public Affairs Press, 1948).

changed political economy so that it was blind to the realities of persistent social, political, and moral features of economic relations. In other words, actual economic behavior and relationships between people, power structures, and governments did not shift in ways that corresponded to the new economic theories and assumptions.

Economics and the term ‘economy’ in particular currently are delimited to certain areas of life, separated from the majority of peoples’ lives. Paul Thompson notes, “There is ambiguity in the word ‘economy’. Before World War II, it generally meant a kind of behavior. Recently it has come to refer to a particular domain of social relations, a system of laws and norms.”¹²⁸ Moral Economy is consistent with the older concept of ‘economy’ because it incorporates the behavior of all people who consciously choose how to act and react in situations pertaining to labor, production, distribution, and consumption.

Furthermore, Moral Economy is economic because it imposes costs on those who challenge norms and customs of the community. Specifically, when a person or group within the community believes their norms have been violated they will act in ways that make it more difficult for the violator to achieve what they want. For example, if an employer reduces the benefits they offer to their employee, the employee(s) will slow down production or take unapproved leaves of absence to both protest the benefits reduction and impose a real cost burden on their employer. Another example could include a citizen protesting what is perceived as an unjust law by willfully violating the law in such a way that it frustrates the functioning of the state and places some cost (time, money, resources, unwanted negative attention) on them. Even firms may be subject to costs by campaigns that publicly criticize or raise doubts about their product, service, or business integrity. The imposition of costs is meant to garner attention

¹²⁸ Paul B. Thompson, personal communication.

to the perceived injustice, make the violator feel some of the pain, and motivate them to change their practice to meet the demands of the resisters. When done right, the cost should be in proportion to the violation experienced by the protestors, relevant to the response to the initial infraction, and convince the aggressor that the costs accrued from their unjust behavior are not worth the potential gains now or in the future.¹²⁹ Moral Economy resists unfair demands and challenges to norms and customs because they are not bearable costs, for individuals or the community as a whole. The demands or violations are not bearable if they threaten the subsistence of members of the community, reduce the overall standards of living in the community, shift collective resources into private ownership, or threaten the social sustainability of the community. If the costs were bearable we would be more likely to see compromise or a shift in the customs rather than defiance, protests, and violent uprisings.

There are some costs that would be unbearable to any human being. However, there are other community customs and norms that are not universal or may be unusual across the world. Many particular customs and norms and the specific systems of Moral Economy arise from local conditions and the natural resources or environmental conditions necessary for survival. They are not universal, but differ by place, time, alternatives, membership, and particular issues. Moral Economy is not the same for all communities and it may not even remain the same for the community over time. It is dynamic and highly contextual, subject to change when conditions change.

¹²⁹ Ideally, the protestors would even be able to convince the aggressor that their actions are unjust; thus, causing a change of heart in the aggressor so they perceive justice along the same lines as the other members of the community.

Relationship to Morality

Given the explicit connection to ethics in its name, it is only natural to ask what the connection between ethics and Moral Economy is. In what way or ways is a Moral Economy ethical and related to the study of ethics? The terms ‘moral’ and ‘morality’ are wrapped up in the discussion of ethics, and are sometimes used interchangeably. ‘Moral’ and ‘morality’ are highly ambiguous terms though, having many meanings and stirring up disagreement even among contemplative individuals. ‘Moral’ could simply refer to something that is socially acceptable, such as norms of etiquette or laws. However, ‘moral’ tends to mean something more than that and may even conflict with some social norms and laws. Religion is sometimes associated with morality because it imposes norms of behavior that supposedly originate outside of any individual and have authority beyond fallible humans. Morality does not depend on religion and can even call certain religious practices or beliefs into question. Nonetheless, numerous moral systems draw upon an authority outside of the practice or practitioners of its dictates. It is a higher standard of right action that can serve as a guide or a judge for actual behavior (sometimes even including thoughts and intentions). For some philosophers, such as Hume, “moral science” simply corresponds to social science. Whereas, for many others ‘morality’ refers to a code of conduct. It can also be considered a system of cultural norms or socially acceptable behavior. Morality could apply only to the individual, to a group, to a society, originate organically through the practices of the group or society, be developed by an individual who wants to impose it on others, be universal or particular, and vary widely in substantive content. Regarding descriptive moralities Bernard Gert’s asserts,

Most societies have moralities that contain all three of the above features [purity or sanctity, loyalty to the group, and minimizing the harms human beings can suffer]; most societies also claim that morality has all three of the above foundations, religion,

tradition, and rational human nature. But, in the original descriptive sense of “morality,” beyond some concern with avoiding and preventing harm to some others, there may be no common content, nor may there be any common justification that those who accept the morality claim for it. The only other features that all of the original descriptive moralities have in common is that they are put forward by a group, usually a society and they provide a guide for the behavior of the people in that group or society.¹³⁰

Some authors perceive tradition and rationality to be at odds with each other. For example, Edward Shils identifies tradition as the unreflective acceptance of past norms, whereas beliefs are arrived at through rational reflection.¹³¹ When such a distinction is made, morality and ethics will be associated with either tradition or reason. As we will see with Popkin, morality often is aligned with tradition. I do not find tradition and reason to stand in opposition from each other. Not only is tradition compatible with reason, tradition is best served when it is thoughtfully considered before replicating or disseminating. Additionally, like Hobbes, I believe natural reason allows rational people to understand morality. This position affects how I align Moral Economy with ethics.

Because normative morality is closely associated with ethical theories, and I indicated in the last chapter that Moral Economy is not principally an ethical theory, but a system of practice, I will not evaluate it here from the perspective of any particular ethical theory or even as a normative type of morality. It is not appropriate to compare or judge Moral Economy against dominant Western ethical theories. Moral Economy does not aspire to or adhere to any of them and has different origins, motivations, and justifications. A particular Moral Economy, as opposed to ‘Moral Economy’ in general, could be evaluated as a normative system of ethics, but that is not my project here.

¹³⁰ Bernard Gert, "The Definition of Morality," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, no. Fall 2012 (2012).

¹³¹ Edward Shils, "Tradition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 2 (1971).

I identify three categories in which Moral Economy could be understood with relationship to ethics. The first is that it is not directly ethical, but simply rational decision-making, prudent actions, or based on another kind of non-ethical claim of or motivation. Second, that it is associated with morality, but based on personal values and personal motivation alone. Third, that its moral element is motivated primarily by social values or social ethics. This categorization only addresses alternative perspectives regarding how Moral Economy could be related to ethics broadly; it does not make any particular claims for or evaluation of any particular Moral Economy, other theories, or systems of morality. The rationale for this discussion stems from an observation regarding various standpoints expressed in the Moral Economy literature.

Not directly ethical

With a name like '*Moral Economy*,' most people would initially assume some connection with ethics. However, some respondents to Moral Economy may reject this assumption and find the theory and associated behavior to have nothing directly to do with ethics. Popkin fits into this category. As I will examine in greater detail in the following chapter, Popkin finds the behavior identified by the moral economists to indicate prudential practical decision making. Moreover, this position views Moral Economy as confusing itself with political economy, which is rational rather than ethical. According to Popkin, the two spheres (reason and morality) do not overlap. Someone who maintains that the decision processes and behavior identified as Moral Economy actually has no moral basis likely separates all economic behavior from moral behavior. That is, they adhere to a distinction between the "passions" and the "interests" where social, emotive, and

moral goals are part of the passions, and interests are separated as being narrowly rational and unique to economic motives. As Granovetter describes in “Economic Action and Social Structure”, this long-standing arbitrary separation between the “passions” and “interests” is the same separation that has kept sociological examination out of the discipline of economics.¹³²

Granovetter explains,

Economists rarely see such goals [sociability, approval, status, power] as rational. ... This way of putting the matter has led economists to specialize in analysis of behavior motivated only by “interest” and to assume that other motives occur in separate and nonrationally organized spheres. ... The notion that rational choice is derailed by social influences has long discouraged detailed sociological analysis of economic life...¹³³

If Granovetter’s analysis regarding the partition between economic decision making and other social decision making is accurate, then those who subscribe to classical and neo-classical economic theory will continue to separate economic from non-economic motives and behavior. Such a separation extends beyond Moral Economy to any interest in merging social and economic spheres or analyzing economic evaluation and behavior through the lens of sociology and social ethics. Popkin’s rejection of the moral in Moral Economy is not necessarily the only rationale for separating Moral Economy from ethics, but it indicates how and why such a position could be held.

¹³² Mark Granovetter, “Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness,” *American Journal of Sociology* 91, no. 3 (1985).

¹³³ Ibid. p. 506

Motivated by personal values only

Some individuals identified as accepting Moral Economy may actually believe that their decisions are ethical or based on values, but not intended to serve as representative of the community. This restricted ethical approach assumes that a particular interaction or transaction should have occurred in a more ethical way, but and makes no broader claims for the community. Furthermore, it does not see itself as fitting into a broader social dynamic, or as representative of a major social phenomenon. After the particular events or relationship have been satisfactorily resolved, the individual will likely move on without giving further thought to expanded application or the theory of Moral Economy. One can imagine that individuals partaking in certain rebellions, types of resistance, or claims that are identified as Moral Economy were motivated by personal values alone. These individuals may not be aware of their action's identification within the Moral Economy theory or ideology. They have a deeply held sense of right and wrong and the belief that they need to speak out or respond to perceived injustice. If consulted on why they made their claim or participated in a protest, they would speak subjectively and focus on the recent tension. They might say something like "I thought it was wrong that the miller could sell flour ground from grain grown in our fields to communities far away. That flour should stay in my town and be available for use by my family".

Based on my research of the Moral Economy literature I did not find any author who identified their position as based on personal values alone, however this seems to be a plausible position for those individuals who engage in lived Moral Economy. They may have some sense of what is socially appropriate, ethically acceptable, and personally advantageous, but not conceptualized into a unified theory such as the one presented by academics through broad scoped meta-analysis. In this respect it would be indirectly social, but responses would not

consciously be motivated by social interests. Personal values would have been informed by an upbringing and life experience within the community and applied in social settings. Also, in highly integrated communities and closed communities, separating personal values from social values may not make sense as individuals largely adopt social values as their personal values.

Because individuals who argue their moral claims from personal values alone are unlikely to write or communicate to large audiences, their perspective is the least likely to be detailed. Access to their position would require interviews or extrapolating limited amounts of data retrieved from letters, legal briefs, or recorded comments. I would continue to identify such behavior as contributing to Moral Economy if the individual could identify it as originating from their own sense of social justice, but would not be inclined to include it in Moral Economy if they behaved solely for personal gain or out of personal interests alone.

Motivated primarily by social values

The most dominant position regarding the relationship between normative values and collective action in the Moral Economy literature is that claims and protests are motivated by social values. Writers also acknowledge that personal values play a role, but the emphasis on the good for the broader community motivates action.

Daniel Little presents this widely assumed feature of Moral Economy in a direct and well argued manner. Little calls the social values or socially normative aspect of Moral Economy ‘political culture’. He writes,

In the context of peasant collective action, the point may be put in these terms: most political action involves a normative component that cannot be reduced to narrow self-

interest. So the conception of political rationality must be extended to include such actors as local religious beliefs, kinship loyalties, moral and political commitments, ideology, and the like. We may refer to the ensemble of such factors as local political culture.¹³⁴

Little continues to define ‘political culture’ concisely as “a shared tradition defining the moral and social worldview within which individuals locate themselves.”¹³⁵ These values are shared by a community and work to motivate collective action by the community for the community. While there may be benefits to the individual and personal values that also support the behavior undertaken, it is important to Little and other moral economists to acknowledge that the nature of the values and the behavior is collective or communal. Moreover, these social norms are not universally shared. Little asserts, “groups with different historical experiences and different material circumstances may possess very different political cultures and may react to changing circumstances in divergent ways – rebelliousness, resignation, emigration.”¹³⁶ Therefore, we must not assume that all communities respond the same way to similar situations. A great many factors come into play when a particular community faces a challenge. Some individuals will be motivated early on to take action on behalf of their community even in bad conditions and with unfavorable odds, whereas others wait until it impacts them directly or for the conditions or odds to improve. Regardless of how a community responds, Little adeptly argues, “political behavior is often driven by a set of motives that are richer than a narrow calculus of self-interest.”¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Little. pp. 181-182

¹³⁵ Ibid. p. 182

¹³⁶ Ibid. pp. 182-183

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 184

Although most moral economists subtly suggest social values at play for behavior deemed to fit the Moral Economy ideology, Arnold explicitly argues for it. Arnold states, “my concept addresses the narrower issue of collective action that emanates from *communal perceptions* of legitimacy. This reorientation brings into even sharper relief the central role of social goods on the identities, obligations, and relationships of both persons and a people.”¹³⁸ Throughout his argument for understanding Moral Economy through social goods, Arnold emphasizes the position that social goods affect the identity of a community and community identity affects individual identity. As a result, it is not possible to completely pull the individual apart from her community, and it is impossible to completely separate social values from an individual. Arnold asserts,

Constitutive social goods establish and symbolize important senses of self. They reflect a manner of individual and collective identification that is characteristic of human beings. Humans acquire "concrete identities" through the ways in which they conceive and create, and then possess and employ social goods.¹³⁹

Pertaining to social goods then, any response will be informed by social values. When the action is collective and focused on social goods, social values must necessarily be a motivator.

From the perspective of the outsider or retrospectively, the collective nature of behavior reinforcing Moral Economy appears obvious. From within the lived Moral Economy I contend that it is less obvious, but still possible to believe there is a system of social values, an ethical system that is above and beyond any participant, which motivates morally right action. The

¹³⁸ Arnold, "Rethinking Moral Economy." p. 90 (emphasis added)

¹³⁹ Ibid.

social values at play in moral economic behavior may or may not align with a coherent ethical theory, but convey the feeling that “we are all in this together for the greater good.”

Connection to Law and Tradition

Ever since E.P. Thompson connected Moral Economy to the paternalist model in England, moral economists have looked for evidence in both formal law and informal tradition to support claims that uprisings and responses to dominant power indicate Moral Economy was approved of and flourishing in the society. Many moral economists use both formal law and informal tradition as evidence, although they are not at all the same justification for Moral Economy. Others may use one or another, or perhaps even dismiss the presumed need to justify social responses in historic terms. This latter perspective I take as endorsing Moral Economy as dynamic and responsive to the particulars of the situation and context.

Laws

Laws, whether statutory law or case law, can be used to provide authority and enforcement for maintaining the values expected in any one Moral Economy. When they are aligned with the goals of Moral Economy and reliably enforced, laws do a fairly good job of maintaining the desired social order within a community. While community members may want to turn to formal laws for authority, they also turn away from them when they are not consistent with their values or when they contradict common norms. Statutory law tends to lag behind case law and shifts in social norms. Laws are only useful so far as they are known and enforced.

Codified laws lose credibility when they are not transparent, enforced inconsistently, or not enforced at all. Case law and social norms tend to be widely acknowledged and enforced. Commoners are not expected (or allowed) to enforce statutory law, but are permitted or expected to put social pressure on others to enforce common norms and customs.

Thompson discusses the shift in authority and enforcement of the paternalist model writing, “The paternalist model existed in an eroded body of Statute law, as well as common law and custom. It was the model which, very often, informed the actions of Government in times of emergency until the 1770s; and to which many local magistrates continued to appeal.”¹⁴⁰ Thompson suggests statute law added some authority to the paternalist model, even though it was applied selectively and inconsistently. He also indicates that statute law was reinforced by common law and custom/tradition. Furthermore, Thompson emphasizes the power that laws have for commoners even when magistrates stop enforcing them. Regarding the shift in enforcement of the popular Corn Laws, “In many actions, especially in the old manufacturing regions of the East and West, the crowd claimed that since the authorities refused to enforce “the laws” they must enforce them for themselves.”¹⁴¹ Thompson also comments about a “law-giving mob”, suggesting that the real authority resides in the people, who accept or resist formalized laws through their actions and can shape them by imposing social costs on the authorities.

In addition to Thompson, others who look to statutory laws to indicate or justify social interactions as Moral Economy include, Lawrence Busch, who wrote about the formalization of moral economic expectations in the form of grades and standards,¹⁴² Severyn Bruyn, who

¹⁴⁰ Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." p. 83

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p. 110

¹⁴² Busch, "The Moral Economy of Grades and Standards."

discusses the relationship between formal laws and social norms in modern civil society,¹⁴³ and Michael Goodman who argues for a Moral Economy interpretation of the international fair trade market for labeled and standardized consumable goods.¹⁴⁴

Informal Tradition

“How do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word. Tradition.”

Tevye (Fiddler on the Roof)

Tradition is widely appealed to in all of the social sciences that consider Moral Economy. Anthropology, history, and sociology, as well as peasant studies commonly refer to tradition or custom as having considerable influence on behaviors, norms, social structure, and even politics. Yet, the nature and formal properties of tradition seldom receive the level of attention directed toward the content and application of specific traditions. Unlike law, tradition is more difficult to demarcate; though it appears more influential in certain communities. In his focused consideration on the essential nature of tradition, Edward Shils states,

Traditions are beliefs with a particular social structure; they are a consensus through time. In their content they might well be atemporal ... and they might not even have a temporal (traditional) legitimation. But even then, they have a temporal structure. They are beliefs with a sequential social structure. ... The sequential structure of traditional beliefs and actions can itself become a symbolized component of the belief and its legitimation.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Severyn T. Bruyn, "The Moral Economy," *Review of Social Economy* 57, no. 1 (1999).

¹⁴⁴ Goodman, "Reading Fair Trade: Political Imaginary and the Moral Economy of Fair Trade Foods."

¹⁴⁵ Shils, "Tradition." p. 126

The pastness of beliefs does not have to be continuous or perfectly replicated, but needs to be perceived and treated with deference by some members while merely followed as given by others. Shils also identifies moral beliefs that “assert the moral rightness or superiority of institutions or society of the past and which assert that what is done now or in the future should be modeled on the past patterns of belief or conduct are traditional beliefs.”¹⁴⁶ While Shils emphasizes traditional beliefs, I contend tradition also encompasses custom, or traditional behaviors as well as beliefs. Customs may be expressed only during rare occasions which call for it (such as in periods of dearth), through rituals (harvest festival), or in daily life (family gathering for mealtime).

Not all societies have laws readily adapted to respond to challenges of certain market or political pressures. If a phenomenon is being experienced for the first time or if the society does not have widespread literacy or the use of written law, it likely lacks the formalized resources to resist illegitimate practices. Nevertheless, this is not to say that they lack in resources entirely. The tools they have are those of informal traditions, common practices that have been passed down through the spoken word and in demonstrating values in parallel contexts. Recognizing this, several moral economists focus on tradition or informal practices that have historical basis as supporting interpretations of Moral Economy.

James Scott argues that Moral Economy arises from the “peasantry’s “little tradition” of moral dissent and resistance.”¹⁴⁷ Throughout *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, Scott continually refers to and draws on the little tradition of peasant communities as supporting the behaviors he observes and events and trends he analyzes. Pertaining to subsistence, Scott

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 136

¹⁴⁷ Scott. p. viii

maintains, “There is strong evidence that, along with reciprocity, the right to subsistence is an active moral principle in the little tradition of the village.”¹⁴⁸ Landlords and the well-off have a moral responsibility to help their tenants and less fortunate neighbors. Scott quotes a sharecropper as saying, “A man of his means was supposed to loan his tenants rice and help when times were hard. That’s part of being a landlord.”¹⁴⁹ The sense of obligation expressed in this quote arises from past experience with the tenant/landlord relationship, as well as the traditional belief that well off classes need to both contribute to maintaining subsistence levels for their less well off counterparts and reciprocate their work with something fitting their needs. In addition to its application in Southeast Asia where Scott focuses his research, he finds that this tradition of supporting subsistence rights also applied in preindustrial Europe. Just as in Burma and Vietnam this traditional right to subsistence attempted to minimize the danger of going under, but it did not address wealth disparity. So long as the material conditions for human needs were met, the subsistence right was achieved and wealth accumulation by the upper classes was free to expand.

The other essential component of Scott’s argument for Moral Economy, reciprocity, is also supported by tradition. Scott explains,

The peasantry’s defense of traditional reciprocity in such cases is no mindless reflex. It is motivated by the fear that a readjusted balance will work against them. A classic example of this situation is the English agricultural uprising in the 1830s when farm workers, whose bargaining position had eroded, invoked traditional local customs of hiring and employment against the commercial innovations of landowners.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 176

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 180

Both reciprocity and the right to subsistence create peasant justice or Moral Economy according to Scott and both are supported by tradition. It is particularly when this tradition is challenged that peasants speak out and may act out in a protest or rebellion. All the while the tradition is there supporting the peasant notions of justice. Hence, this little tradition is not necessarily supported by law or written documents, and it does not strive to create new rights. Scott asserts, “The struggle for rights that have a basis in custom and tradition and that involve in a literal sense, the most vital interests of its participants is likely to take on a moral tenacity which movements that envision the creation of new rights and liberties are unlikely to inspire.”¹⁵¹ Scott’s rich account of how peasants draw on traditional norms of social relations and justice is indicative of what other authors presume to be the basis for Moral Economy.

These traditions were of course understood by the elites, landlords, and merchants and were continually used against the peasants. Scott recounts a case in which basket size was used as a way to take more from the peasants while still using a single basket, “The most transparent and despised method of circumventing local traditions was to devise a “landlord’s basket” that held more.”¹⁵² While tenants were responsible for paying their landlord in crops determined by a set number of baskets, a standard village basket was smaller than the landlord’s basket. The exact difference in size mattered less than the fact that it was larger; that made the exchange unfair. Moreover, it was often the case that to the tenant the capacity of the landlord’s larger basket was uncertain. Tradition thus can be a valuable resource for commoners, but can also be manipulated by elites or outsiders for their own advantage.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 192

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 71

Other Moral Economy contributors who emphasize the role of tradition include Ramona Perez, who highlights the traditions which are and are not reproduced in modern Atzompa.¹⁵³ She indicates that to maintain some traditions, such as crafts, other traditions have had to be broken, such as traditional gendered role of women remaining outside politics. Seemingly inconsequential aspects of culture, such as traditional dress, have also contributed to community sustainability on one hand and the performance of traditions for outsiders on the other. Sean Cadigan identifies the employment of traditional subsistence fishing practices that reemerge when newer market arrangements fail to yield the profits or provisions they promised.¹⁵⁴ Cadigan explains, “The desire of fishing people for a competency independent of fish merchants was the basis of their Moral Economy. Newfoundland settlers drew on the customs and traditions of their southeast Irish and southwest English homelands to enforce community norms and values.”¹⁵⁵ Whether working with laws or independent of them, traditional moral beliefs and customs provide the inspiration and legitimacy to community members to act in accordance with their Moral Economy.

Dynamic or Reactionary to Situation

More recent accounts and theories of Moral Economy suggest that the basis for values or sense of justice is less entrenched in traditional norms or historic examples. These cases often suggest a new application of the general Moral Economy ideology. Or they point to specific

¹⁵³ Perez, "Challenges to Motherhood: The Moral Economy of Oaxacan Ceramic Production and the Politics of Reproduction."

¹⁵⁴ Sean Cadigan, "The Moral Economy of the Commons: Ecology and Equity in the Newfoundland Cod Fishery 1815-1855," *Labour/ Le Travail* 43, no. Spring (1999).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 15

examples of communities coming together around a certain issue for the first time. The members of such a community may share the same values and sense of justice, but do not base it on tradition or a shared past.

Acknowledging the presence of traditions and the invocation of tradition as supporting Moral Economy by some theorists, Arnold argues that legitimacy is really what is at the core of Moral Economy. He suggests that tradition or “shared way of life” does not get at the sources of discontent or of justice. He sees his social goods theory as getting around the problems of tradition while maintaining the values that resonate with communities. Arnold writes,

Given their nature and meaningfulness, constitutive and intrinsically communal social goods are sources for shared notions of legitimacy. Roles, identities, and communities grounded in social goods contain within them the criteria for evaluating specific developments as appropriate or inappropriate, at least for those who recognize the goods in question as social goods.¹⁵⁶

Arnold proceeds to use water as a social good to demonstrate how Moral Economy conceived in this way transcends boundaries of embedded economy, community traditions, or premarket communities. The “Moral Economy of X” approaches cited earlier take a similar approach to Moral Economy even when they do not address their particulars as social goods per se.

Rebellions and Protest

Some of the most well known literature on Moral Economy focuses on rebellion or protests. However, Moral Economy has been used in contexts where no identified or evident

¹⁵⁶ Arnold, "Rethinking Moral Economy." p. 92

rebellion or protests took place. What then is the relationship between Moral Economy and protest? Does Moral Economy depend on rebellion or protest for expression? Is it mere coincidence that many cases discussing Moral Economy also draw attention to associated rebellion or protest? Does protest and rebellion illuminate more clearly than other social interactions the values and behaviors comprising Moral Economy? While rebellion and protest are discussed at length in many sources, this connection between Moral Economy and protest is largely absent. Below I propose several possible classifications for the relationship between Moral Economy and rebellion. One way to understand the role of protest and uprising is that Moral Economy requires them as an essential feature or as the primary demonstration of values embraced in the community. A second interpretation understands them as common occurrences, but not necessary for the existence or success of a Moral Economy. A third perspective may evaluate rebellion or protests as relatively rare or merely coincidental, certainly not necessary for Moral Economy to exist or function smoothly. Due to the absence of this meta-level discussion in the literature, I identify authors by interpreting their published writing, rather than their own identification with one category over another.

Moral Economy requires rebellion or protest

E.P. Thompson highlights the violations of the Moral Economy and the transition from Moral Economy to market economy with the “riot”. He opens his seminal article with a discussion about “this four letter word.”¹⁵⁷ Riots and uprisings dominate to such a degree that it is possible his article could be misread as a history of food riots or peasant protests in

¹⁵⁷ Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." p. 76

seventeenth and eighteenth century England. And virtually every instance of the Moral Economy becoming visible is one of riot or similar protest in response to an injustice at some level or to the shift to different economic system. Regarding the nature of riot in his study Thompson reflects,

It has been suggested that the term “riot” is a blunt tool of analysis for so many particular grievances and occasions. It is also an imprecise term for describing popular actions. If we are looking for the characteristic form of direct action, we should take, not squabbles outside London bakeries, nor even the great affrays provoked by discontent with the large millers, but the “risings of the people”... What is remarkable about these “insurrections” is, first, their discipline, and second, the fact that they exhibit a pattern of behaviour for whose origin we must look back several hundreds of years: which becomes more, rather than less, sophisticated in the eighteenth century; which repeats itself, seemingly spontaneously, in different parts of the country and after the passage of many quiet years. The central action in this pattern is not the sack of granaries and pilfering of grain or flour but the action of “setting the price”.¹⁵⁸

While the rioting worked to set the price to the morally and socially accepted level, Thompson acknowledges that riot is not all there is to Moral Economy. He states, “this Moral Economy impinged very generally upon eighteenth-century government and thought, and did not only intrude at moments of disturbance.”¹⁵⁹

Clearly Thompson believes that Moral Economy is more than riot and social uprisings, but does he think they are necessary for Moral Economy? Although he never states it directly, we can infer his belief that they are closely intertwined from statements such as, “One symptom of its [Moral Economy] final demise is that we have been able to accept for so long an abbreviated and “economistic” picture of the food riot, as a direct, spasmodic, irrational response to hunger – a picture which is itself a product of a political economy which diminished human

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 107

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p.79

reciprocities to the wages-nexus.”¹⁶⁰ When people stop fighting in an open and assertive manner, Thompson suggests Moral Economy withers allowing countervailing forces to have the social and political power to replace Moral Economy.

Rebellion or protests are common occurrences, but not necessary for Moral Economy

Rebellion is such a dominant theme in Scott’s account of Moral Economy, that he even features it in the subtitle of the book and dedicates the entire final chapter to speculating about the conditions which give rise to rebellion as well as those that reduce the possibility of rebellion.¹⁶¹ Throughout the course of Scott’s study of Southeast Asian peasant communities and his argument for Moral Economy, rebellions feature prominently. He examines the Depression rebellion of Cochinchina, the Saya San Rebellion in Burma, and the Nghe-Tinh Soviets in Vietnam, all occurring from the mid-nineteen twenties through the early nineteen thirties. These regions were still under colonial rule and faced economic pressures because of increased taxes, increasing global commodity trade, and the impact of economic depression throughout much of the world.

Regarding the conditions for rebellion, Scott contends that exploitation may be necessary for rebellion, but it is not necessary. One can also learn about the kind and degree of exploitation based on the nature of the rebellion. He states,

The fact that agrarian revolt involves substantial numbers of peasants acting simultaneously out of anger itself suggests what forms of exploitation are most explosive. At a minimum we would expect that an increase in exploitation that touches many peasants similarly, that is sudden, and that threatens existing subsistence arrangements would be especially volatile.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p.136

¹⁶¹ Scott.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Contributing factors to rebellion include demographic change, production for the market and growth of the state. Moreover, variability of real income, ecological vulnerability, mono-crop vulnerability and price-system vulnerability all impact the lived experience of the peasants compounding the injustice of exploitation.

Scott indicates that the absence of rebellion is not an indication that there is no exploitation. In doing so, he also suggests that rebellion is commonly associated with Moral Economy, but not necessarily. Local forms of self-help may help soften the blow peasants experience as a result of exploitation and other hardships.¹⁶³ There may also be assistance from patrons or the state that can help offset short-term or occasional adversity. Religious or other oppositionist structures can provide protection and assistance to allow peasants to either adapt or get through a difficult period. Additionally, the realization that police and state responses to rebellion will be swift and brutal, making protest and rebellion unsuccessful, will also work to constrain public displays of unrest. Scott suggests that we look to other sources such as myths, jokes, songs, linguistic usage or religion for deviant values and an indication that peasant/elite relations are not harmonious.

Like Scott, Little recognizes the occurrence of rebellions throughout the world, especially among peasant groups. Little's examples are drawn from China and examine transitional unrest as traditional Chinese agrarian folks responded to modernizing pressures. Little appropriately identifies rebellion as a type of collective action. He believes clarification of collective action leads us to understand, "collective action involves at least the idea of a collective goal (that is, a goal which participants in the event share as the aim of their actions), and it suggests some

¹⁶³ Ibid. p. 204

degree of coordination among individuals in pursuit of that goal.”¹⁶⁴ In addition to collective intentionality and coordination, a collective action (such as a mass demonstration) can be evaluated by its immediate goals and long-term aims, whether it is meant to collectively serve private interests or group interests, and assurance of success. Little is careful to make a distinction between some rebellions meet the criteria of a collective action while others do not. Only those that meet the criteria of a collective action should be considered within the framework of Moral Economy.

Bearing in mind that Little is evaluating Moral Economy along with several other theories of social movements as part of a philosophy of social science project, Little finds the Moral Economy ideology to be relevant in explaining peasant rebellions, but incomplete.¹⁶⁵ Instead he sets out conditions that create the ideal rebellion, which integrates both collective and individual rationality.¹⁶⁶ Although rebellions may arise as part of the Moral Economy behavior, they need not due to many various local conditions. Little writes, “a local political culture can (*but need not*) motivate individuals to undertake actions and strategies that favor their group interests, and to persist in these strategies even in the face of risk and deprivation.”¹⁶⁷ He continues to discuss how material factors play a role in why peasants do or do not rebel and the nature of the rebellion and outcomes. Material factors such as geography, ecology, agriculture, demographic trends, and commercialization all impact the collective decisions to rebel and how to proceed. Little explains, “Material and ecological factors are relevant to explanation of collective behavior, but they all work through their influence on the political behavior of

¹⁶⁴ Little. p. 147

¹⁶⁵ To be fair, he finds all three of the theories he evaluates, (Millenarian, Class-Conflict, and Local Politics theories) to be incomplete. His view integrates elements of each but does not fit neatly with any one of them.

¹⁶⁶ Little. p. 176

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 183 (emphasis added)

participants; and this means, generally, that they influence the incentives, constraints, and opportunities available to agents in given times and places.”¹⁶⁸ Little suggests that rebellions are not a surprising outcome of social movements or extreme pressures on peasant communities, but protests and rebellions are just a few of the possible responses available. This leads to the inference that although Moral Economy becomes externally apparent through violent resistance, a multitude of alternative responses make protest and rebellion optional.

Rebellion or protests are rare or coincidental, and not necessary

Many contemporary applications of Moral Economy do not mention protests. The absence of discussion pertaining to riots, protests, and uprisings, suggest they do not believe they are necessary to fit within the Moral Economy ideology/identification. It is also possible that some moral economists who do not articulate a connection between Moral Economy and protest think rebellion and protest are irrelevant to Moral Economy.

Non-violent protest and civil disobedience receive less attention from Moral Economy scholars than violent uprisings. My supposition is that civil disobedience is more common than violent uprisings, but less observable by outsiders. James Scott emphasizes many kinds of responses subordinate classes have to domination. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, he asserts, “Most of the political life of the subordinate groups is to be found neither in overt collective defiance of powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 185

in the vast territory between these two polar opposites.”¹⁶⁹ Well regarded public figures such as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. provided motivation and reasoning on behalf of non-violent resistance. Religious perspectives on non-violence are also found in the teachings of Tibetan Buddhist Dali Lama, and Christianity’s central figure Jesus Christ’s. None of these figures can rightfully be said to have developed the idea, but advanced an existing and effective approach to addressing hegemony.

I also maintain that per issue, civil disobedience is likely as effective, if not more so, than violent rebellion, because it imposes targeted costs and allows the perpetrator to save face or even reintegrate themselves within the community, thus reinforcing rather than destabilizing the Moral Economy. Boycotts, sit-ins, symbolic rituals, public performances, social pressure, ostracism, letter, whisper or social media campaigns, refusal to comply with laws or demands, and the development of alternative (black) markets, are all potentially successful methods of non-violent resistance that can be used to reinforce community customs and norms. Moreover, simple evasion, anonymity, or emigration is more appealing to some people than any kind of response to exploitation, domination, and other challenges. Non-violent approaches are simpler, more targeted to the issue, less costly, less likely to garner violent retribution, and allow more people to participate.

Furthermore, all of the attention on protests and rebellions emphasizes the attacks on Moral Economy rather than the ongoing maintenance or reproduction of it. I contend, as mentioned earlier, that Moral Economy is maintained and reproduced in daily life through the actions and norms of community members. Thus, most of the time there is no protest, rebellion,

¹⁶⁹ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). p. 136

or violent uprising. A smoothly functioning Moral Economy does not require one. Only when human dignity, norms about property, provisions, and resources are threatened would any kind of response be called for. Even then, non-violent resistance is more likely the first approach, followed by extreme measures, sometimes violent, when reminders of norms and non-violent resistance prove ineffective.

The Embedded Economy

One aspect of Moral Economy that continues to present itself throughout the literature is the notion of the embedded economy. The idea of the embedded economy can be traced to Karl Polanyi and his expansive economic work *The Great Transformation*.¹⁷⁰ Even Moral Economy literature that does not cite Polanyi or use the terminology of embedded economy or embeddedness often contains an assumption about an embedded economy. What is embedded economy and how is it relevant to Moral Economy? As with many other qualities that repeat themselves in the moral economic literature, I also question whether this is an essential or necessary part of Moral Economy, or whether it is something peripheral and unnecessary. I begin by reviewing Polanyi's ideas of embeddedness, then turn my attention to contributions by E.P. Thompson, James Scott, William Booth, Mark Granovetter, and Thomas Arnold. My reflections regarding the relationship between embedded economy and Moral Economy conclude the section.

Embeddedness as it is used by Moral Economy theorists can be traced back to Karl Polanyi. Thus, while Polanyi did not argue for Moral Economy or address it directly, his idea of

¹⁷⁰ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, [1st Beacon paperback ed. (Boston,: Beacon Press, 1957).

embeddedness deserves attention here. Briefly, Polanyi contrasts the modern liberal market economy known to most Westerners at the time he wrote in the nineteen forties, with a type of market that had served civilization for hundreds of years prior to the dramatic shift brought about through new thinking of the place of the market relative to society. Classical economics and the industrial revolution brought forth a great transformation for society by attempting to disconnect the economy from the rest of society. What had previously served many generations of human beings in their exchange of goods was a market that was part of or embedded within the larger society and responsive to social as well as economic demands. In the new Introduction to *The Great Transformation*, Fred Block succinctly identifies Polanyi's concept. "The term "embeddedness" expresses the idea that the economy is not autonomous, as it must be in economic theory, but subordinated to politics, religion, and social relations."¹⁷¹

According to Block, Polanyi's understanding of an economy is that it cannot successfully be disembedded from society. The theory of a laissez-faire market pushes for a complete disembedding from society to allow the market rational to operate smoothly. However, Polanyi sees this as impossible, writing, "Our thesis is that the idea of a self-adjusting market implied a stark Utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society."¹⁷² Polanyi continues to explain that people understand that they are being threatened by attempts to disembed their economy from society and they take measures to prevent it and protect themselves. Part of the problem with laissez-faire economics is that it treats land (nature), labor (human beings) as commodities where they are not real commodities. Following from this Polanyi makes a moral argument that "it is simply wrong to

¹⁷¹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon, 2001).

¹⁷² Ibid. p.3

treat nature and human beings as objects whose price will be determined entirely by the market. Such a concept violates the principles that have governed societies for centuries: nature and human life have almost always been recognized as having a sacred dimension.”¹⁷³ Additionally, Polanyi argues that the liberal state is necessary for a market economy because it must manage both the flow of money and human resources.

Thompson conveys an understanding of the transformation Polanyi explains, but Thompson does not invoke the language of embedded economy. Instead he describes the marketplace as being both a location within society and being less of a metaphor. In this sense the economy was physically embedded in the society and was not easily separated from it. The traders, merchants, producers, and consumers were directly visible and interacted with each other rather than through a series of middlemen. Outrage at an economic injustice or unfair dealing could be addressed to the culprit directly. The move toward middlemen and extended trading with distant markets resulted in distancing between the producer and consumer and a growing separation from the responsible actors in unjust market practices. In other words, new trade practices effectively disembedded the market from society. Consequently, the prevailing market economy permitted exploitation, unfair business practices or an overriding of traditional reciprocal relationships to take place with impunity.

While James Scott does not address the embedded economy concept extensively, his ideas represent an application of it. Moreover, in a footnote in the first chapter he credits Polanyi as being formative to his work. Scott quotes Polanyi’s distinction between primitive and market

¹⁷³ Ibid. p. xxv

economies, “It is the absence of the threat of *individual* starvation which makes primitive society, in a sense, more human than market economy, and at the same time less economic.”¹⁷⁴

Scott contrasts the market economy which emerged in Cochinchina and Lower Burma during the first half of the twentieth century with what had been the normal socio-economic expectations of the agrarian peasants from at least the nineteenth-century.

The impact of market integration on the subsistence guarantees of the peasantry is simply that it unifies and homogenizes economic life for those it embraces and, for the first time, makes possible a failure of social guarantees on a far larger scale than previously. ... A deterioration in a peasant’s welfare and bargaining position could thus normally be attributed to such local conditions as labor supply, crop losses, and warfare. The penetration of the world economy, however, steadily eliminated the local idiosyncrasies of fragmented subsistence economies. ... crops grew more or less as before, but the remaining securities of tenancy or rural labor were eliminated and claims on the cropped were pressed remorselessly. Elites failed to observe the minimal obligations that the Moral Economy of the peasantry required of them. Such a large-scale rupture of interclass bonds is scarcely conceivable except in a market economy.¹⁷⁵

For Scott, the embeddedness of the peasant economy is an assumed, but not highlighted component of Moral Economy. Due to the fact he does not discuss embeddedness in detail I am neither able to analyze his position on the embedded nature of Moral Economy nor contrast it with other conceptions of embeddedness.

William Booth, on the other hand, draws considerable attention to the embedded nature of the Moral Economy. He is informed by Polanyi and applies the embedded economy lens to the classical Greek economy. For Booth the idea of an embedded economy is central to

¹⁷⁴ Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant : Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. p. 5

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 90

understanding the moral economic argument. He believes that economics must see the economy as embedded to be meaningful and useful. Booth asserts,

Any human community – the household or the city – has thus to ask itself this primordial question concerning the location of the economy in its hierarchy of goods. Not to subordinate the economy to those rank-ordered goods is, in a basic sense, to render the community incoherent from the point of view of justice – to cause perverse distributions of goods and allow wealth itself to become the chief good.¹⁷⁶

Specific to the arguments in classic Greek philosophy (Nichomachean Ethics, Oeconomicus, and Memorabilia), Booth finds solid support for embeddedness. He contends,

These classical texts unfold the idea of embeddedness as a cluster of propositions stating that the economy ought to be located in the (hierarchical) order of persons and their (again rank-ordered) goods. They mean embedded in the community, bound by its *philia* or mutuality, and therefore not universal. Conversely, they understand the market economy as disembedded and abhorrent, because of its lack of order (its conventional equality), its indifference to or neutrality as to the good, and the fact that it relaxes the tight bonds and mutuality of the community.¹⁷⁷

Booth also suggests Moral Economy's inclusion of embeddedness is problematic for certain contemporary applications. Moral Economy with its embedded economy stands in opposition to democracy, which makes things, people and ideals equally valuable. He argues that either we will need to choose a modified Liberalism and taking the democracy path, thereby shelving most of what is included in Moral Economy, or follow Moral Economy's embeddedness to its logical conclusion, which will end in an unsatisfactory pluralism.^{178, 179}

¹⁷⁶ William James Booth, "On the Idea of the Moral Economy," *The American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (1994). p. 663

¹⁷⁷ Booth, "Household and Market: On the Origins of Moral Economic Philosophy." p. 231

¹⁷⁸ Booth, "On the Idea of the Moral Economy." p. 664

For a detailed focus and an updated perspective on embeddedness, many scholars find Mark Granovetter's "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness" to provide a clear and quality assessment.¹⁸⁰ As a starting distinction Granovetter contrasts,

Much of the utilitarian tradition, including classical and neoclassical economics, assumes rational, self-interested behavior affected minimally by social relations... At the other extreme lies what I call the argument of "embeddedness": the argument that the behavior and institutions to be analyzed are so constrained by ongoing social relations that to construe them as independent is a grievous misunderstanding.¹⁸¹

Granovetter explains that embeddedness of economic behavior has been a widely held view by sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and political scientists and is associated with the "substantivist" school. It is contrasted with the dominant position in economics and which has been developed in anthropology as the "formalist" school. Granovetter sees both as having problems. The substantivist school that influences the Moral Economy theory comes across as oversocialized to him, whereas classical and neoclassical economics is undersocialized.

Granovetter asserts, "the level of embeddedness of economic behavior is lower in nonmarket societies than is claimed by substantivists and development theorists, and it has changed less with "modernization" than they believe; but I argue also that this level has always been and continues to be more substantial than is allowed for by formalists and economists."¹⁸² In his analysis he remains completely focused on modern capitalist economies, making any comparison with Thompson or Scott difficult. However, Granovetter concludes the article by stating that "most behavior is closely embedded in networks of interpersonal relations and that such an

¹⁷⁹ I do not find pluralism to be inherently unsatisfactory.

¹⁸⁰ Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness."

¹⁸¹ Ibid. pp. 481-482

¹⁸² Ibid. pp. 482-483

argument avoids the extremes of under- and oversocialized views of human action.”¹⁸³ I expect he would find more mindful attention to embeddedness to benefit Moral Economy theory in preventing an oversocialized analysis.

Arnold attempts to address the suggested challenge to contemporary Moral Economy that Booth raises by arguing for the applicability of his “social-goods” notion of Moral Economy to modern democratic society and the continuity of it with the central tenets of Moral Economy that arose from peasant theory. Arnold argues for embeddedness as a key aspect of Moral Economy. He draws on Polanyi, E.P. Thompson, Scott, and Granovetter among others. Briefly, his argument for social goods gains proposes, “social goods and their attendant moral economies are characteristic of modern as well as premodern communities.”¹⁸⁴ Finally and importantly, he responds to both Booth and Granovetter’s challenge of over- or undersocialized conceptions of economic behavior arguing, “Because of the mutual, constitutive, and subjectively meaningful properties of specific social goods, Moral Economy is embedded in concrete, ongoing social relations, not in generalized mechanical moralities or romanticized pasts.”¹⁸⁵ Thus, Arnold contends that Moral Economy and embedded economy currently exists in our contemporary lives even in urban or diffuse communities that embrace shared social goods.

From my perspective, embeddedness may apply to all functioning economies. After all, is it really possible for the market of a society to be completely unresponsive to social, political, religious influences and moral pressures? An idealized fiction can be told about the market economy of contemporary societies that it is disembedded, concerned only with atomized

¹⁸³ Ibid. p. 504

¹⁸⁴ Arnold, "Rethinking Moral Economy." p.94

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

consumers, and that it need not pay attention to non-economic social features. Such a fiction fails to acknowledge that people are never just a consumer, nor are they just a citizen, or just a worker. They have many facets and they interact with other people on a regular basis, so we should expect in any economy that social and moral influences will make their way in. However, the narrative that people understand about their society and their role in it will impact the way they interact with others and their decisions, economic and otherwise. As a result, it is possible that some economies are more embedded than others. I agree with Polanyi that the economy cannot be successfully (functionally) disembedded from society. But even attempts to disembed and to move in that direction can have problematic consequences.

Nevertheless, the Moral Economy narratives and arguments coming out of peasant studies and anthropology also make a strong case that societies have had deeply embedded economies, more deeply embedded and connected than modern market economies familiar to us in the developed Western world during the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. The expectation that market transactions and the economic institution as an entity ought to be responsive to social, political and moral demands, may actually help to make it a reality. When a critical mass of diverse members in a society interacts in such a way that assumes the economy and market should adhere to social demands and moral norms, it is much more likely to do just that.

Embeddedness requires a hierarchy of values and is shaped by a number of factors such as time, location, history, and individual member preferences. Booth suggests that while this worked in classical Greece, it will cause problems in contemporary Western society. I would argue that it had its own problems for servants, transient individuals, women, and other non-master individuals in ancient Greece. Liberalism also does not always produce the egalitarianism

it holds dear. It sometimes harms those which it intends to help or protect. Both Moral Economy and liberal market economies are imbued with values and norms. All societies and ideas about the good life are shaped by values, even those which espouse to be value neutral or have limited awareness of their values. One of the differences is that Moral Economy acknowledges its moral influences, whereas market economy regularly ignores them. Because Moral Economy can be more transparent about its influences and is more responsive to social pressures, it has greater potential to fit the normative and social expectations of its members. Yet, like any economy the possibility for abuse and corruption is possible.

Conclusion

More than just a concept to be analyzed, Moral Economy is contextualized by the practices and relationships surrounding it, forming it, and the people whose practices of engagement reproduce it. Observed Moral Economy is associated with the disciplines that pertain to its practices, but it is not dictated by prevailing theories or definitions of either economics or ethics. Relationships between people, place, their government, their law enforcement system, their ancestors, and their history heavily influence the role law, tradition, and emergent norms impact their sense of justice and response to perceived injustice. Daily practices of engagement advance an embedded economy thereby reinforcing a lived Moral Economy. Engagement is heightened when a community's Moral Economy is threatened. Consequent responses ranging from avoidance to social cost and peaceful protest to violent rebellion further shape a Moral Economy. The meaning of Moral Economy from the perspective

of one who lives and experiences it as an active social force arises from their context, relationships and engagement.

CHAPTER 4: The Moral Economy vs. Political Economy Debate

Introduction

The previous chapters have suggested that the concept of Moral Economy is an unsettled one. A significant challenge to Moral Economy has been posed by a subset of political economists, who attempt to show that the same behaviors can be better explained through a rational actor framework. While this Moral Economy versus political economy tension exists generally, the two dominant figures whose work defines the disagreement are James Scott and Samuel Popkin.^{186 187} Additionally, Daniel Little has contributed to the discussion in a meaningful way through his analysis of the tension and arguments in *Understanding Peasant China*.¹⁸⁸

In this chapter I begin by first outlining alternative ways to view Moral Economy relative to political economy. In the course of that discussion I then provide historical context to the relationship between Moral Economy and political economy. Third, I discuss the tension between the two approaches as they are articulated by James Scott and Samuel Popkin, describing the key areas of disagreement between Scott and Popkin. Fourth, I weigh in on the debate by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of Popkin's critique of Moral Economy. Next, I turn to Daniel Little's analysis of the debate as seen through the lens of philosophy of social science where he compares Moral Economy with several other social science approaches to

¹⁸⁶ James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant : Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

¹⁸⁷ Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant : The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

¹⁸⁸ Daniel Little, *Understanding Peasant China : Case Studies in the Philosophy of Social Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

determine what offers the best means for understanding peasant behavior. Later I review Sayer, Feeny and Brocheux's contributions to the debate on the merits of the Moral Economy or political economy approach. Finally, I emphasize the value of the debate between moral economists and political economists. Having worked through the competing arguments, I align my position with James Scott and other moral economists who maintain not only that Moral Economy exists, but that it is not adequately accounted for in political economy.

Relationship to Political Economy

Political economy seems to the casual observer to have a lot in common with Moral Economy. Both Moral Economy and political economy can be examined through the social sciences, they both consider the behavior and relationships of mid-large sized groups of people who are engaged in public behavior and they both have something to do with political and economic aspects of life. In contemporary Western society, political economy reigns supreme in matters pertaining to political aspects of economics and state or international level macro-economic issues. The Encyclopedia Britannica describes political economy as,

Academic discipline that explores the relationship between individuals and society and between markets and the state, using methods drawn from economics, political science, and sociology. The term is derived from the Greek terms *polis* (city or state) and *oikonomos* (one who manages a household). Political economy is thus concerned with how countries are managed, taking into account both political and economic factors.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ *Britannica* (2013), s.v. "Political Economy."

While nuanced positions have been forwarded on the relationship between moral and political economy, I have organized them into two categories for the purpose of my typology on Moral Economy. Assuming that someone has considered the relationship and maintains that Moral Economy does indeed exist, they fall either into the camp that holds Moral Economy as a subset of political economy or believes Moral Economy is distinct from political economy. Of course, there also exists the possibility that one could think Moral Economy does not exist or only exists as theory created by erroneous academics.

Subset of Political Economy

Political economy as we know it today largely owes its origin to thinkers in the eighteenth century, when the foundations of political economic theory were being laid. One of the best known contributors to the ideas in political economy is Adam Smith. Smith is famous for *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, where he argued for free trade between nations which was responsive to consumer demand.¹⁹⁰ While Smith is better known for his economic theory in *Wealth of Nations*, he was also a social philosopher who was trained in moral philosophy as a student of Francis Hutcheson at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. Smith also wrote an important and practically oriented book on moral theory, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Adam Smith, R. H. Campbell, and Andrew S. Skinner, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

¹⁹¹ Adam Smith and Knud Haakonssen, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

That political and Moral Economy were closely connected for Smith, then should not come as a surprise. Yet, due to his influence on classical and neo-classical economics, which has sometimes been considered lacking moral consideration for individuals or even society as a whole, the case connecting Smith's belief that Moral Economy is a part of political economy needed articulation. G.R. Bassiry and Marc Jones make that case in "Adam Smith and the Ethics of Contemporary Capitalism".¹⁹² Bassiry and Jones argue that Smith's primary motivations in developing his economic theory were ethical. Smith is supposed to believe that even with its potential pitfalls; a market driven consumer based economy system would be socially and ethically superior to the dominant mercantilism of his day. They find that maximizing choice and liberty were important aspects of the alternative approach Smith advocated, as was the compatibility with democracy. Importantly for our consideration, Smith explicated his fears about capitalism, which appear to be primarily moral considerations that could easily be identified as moral economic. They include, "impoverishing the spirit of the workers and the work ethic more generally, creating cities in which anonymity facilitated price-fixing, expanding the ranks of the idle rich, inducing government to foster monopolies and selective privileges, and separating ownership and control as the scale and capital requirements of business firms increased."¹⁹³ Having come from an intellectual tradition in which moral and economic considerations were more readily entwined, having contributed significant theories to both and having expressed fears that align with Moral Economy, I classify Adam Smith as someone who believed Moral Economy was (or could be) a subset of political economy. That his name and narrowly interpreted versions of his economic theory have been utilized to justify economic

¹⁹² G.R. Bassiry and Marc Jones, "Adam Smith and the Ethics of Contemporary Capitalism," *Journal of Business Ethics* 12, no. 8 (1993).

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 623

behavior in opposition to moral economic claims and values is no more Smith's fault than religious zealots using God's name and holy books to justify hate and motivate actions contrary to what the religion teaches.

Additionally, I include another well known Scottish moral philosopher as someone who would keep Moral Economy within the category of political economy, David Hume. Hume was a contemporary and friend of Smith and is given more attention to his contributions to moral philosophy than Smith. Hume was widely influential on several topics including his empiricist epistemology, secularizing inquiry of human nature, and his moral and political philosophy. Hume's critique of rationalist approaches to social matters, such as justice, are in line with the critique of rational approaches to political economy that moral economists make.¹⁹⁴ His emphasis on the sentiments, especially benevolence, could be used¹⁹⁵ by moral economists to answer the question as to why people would have a sense to put themselves out on behalf of their neighbor without any clear benefit for themselves. Hume's philosophy on morals and social intercourse is entirely consistent with Moral Economy ideology. I think he may find it odd that political economy veers away from the sentiments, because we can only truly understand human interaction through the conjunction of sentiment and reason. Throughout *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume argues for sentiment and reason coming together to support decisions directed to social interaction. He is clearest in the Appendix, avowing,

It is requisite a sentiment should here display itself, in order to give a preference to the useful above the pernicious tendencies. This sentiment can be no other than a feeling for the happiness of mankind, and a resentment of their misery; since these are the different ends which virtue and vice have a tendency to promote. Here, therefore, reason instructs

¹⁹⁴ Sometimes the rationalist approach is simply rejected rather than explicitly critiqued.

¹⁹⁵ Utility being a virtue for Hume.

us in the several tendencies of actions, and humanity makes a distinction in favour to those which are useful and beneficial.¹⁹⁶

Note that Hume understands sentiment to be directed to the benefit of mankind. It is not reserved for a selfish kind of love or solely useful and beneficial for one's self, but to improve the happiness and reduce the misery of mankind collectively.

Discussing human conventions and their relationship to justice, Hume dismisses the suggestion by some that convention is like a promise to justice. Instead, he argues, "But if by convention be meant *a sense of common interest*; which sense each man feels in his own breast, which he remarks in his fellows, and which carries him, in concurrence with others, into a general plan or system of actions, which tends to public utility; it must be owned that, in this sense, justice arises from human conventions."¹⁹⁷ Justice was understood by Hume as something that could only be relevant when society was so expansive to include people who were not close relations and who did not share the identical goals and values. Moreover, it only necessitated application when resources were limited, so that demand exceeded supply. Because the human convention which supports justice is a sense of common interest, and not a promise, it could be rightly demanded even when there was no formalized law underlying it, no written record or no spoken utterance. Collective existence and social relations using limited resources combined with a sense of common interest could rightly prompt claims and behaviors consistent with those supported by Moral Economy theory/ideology. Although Hume did not articulate a direct response to this matter, his moral philosophy indicates he would unify Moral Economy with

¹⁹⁶ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. J. B. Schneewind (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983). p. 83

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 95 (emphasis added)

political economy, not as a subset, but as an indispensable informing component of understanding human relations.

Unique from Political Economy

Whether considered good or bad, some contributors to Moral Economy maintain that it is not a part of political economy. E.P. Thompson clearly believes that Moral Economy withered as political economy became more dominant. He suggests that there is no place for Moral Economy within political economy, and perhaps they are not even compatible. Thompson avows, “The breakthrough of the new political economy of the free market was also the breakdown of the old Moral Economy of provision.”¹⁹⁸ Earlier in his landmark article Thompson argues that, “The new economy entailed a de-moralizing of the theory of trade and consumption no less far-reaching than the more widely debated dissolution of restrictions upon usury. ... [De-moralizing] meant, rather, that the new political economy was disinfested of intrusive moral imperatives.”¹⁹⁹ As the more morally rich local economic tradition gave way to the more anonymous trade based economy, so too, Moral Economy gave way to political economy. In Thompson’s analysis, political economy is free from the ethical considerations that defined and motivated Moral Economy.

In his article discussing both moral and political economy, Andrew Sayer also expresses his belief that Moral Economy and political economy are different. Moreover, he shares the historical understanding Thompson suggests that Moral Economy dominated the past and

¹⁹⁸ E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* no. 50 (1971). p. 136

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 89-90

political economy has come to replace it. Sayer identifies Smith and Hume as including moral sympathy in their economic as well as ethical theories. He states,

But Hume and Smith were also aware of the extent to which moral sentiments decline with distance. ... While they still retained a social conception of morality, others did not and liberal thought became increasingly influenced by formal conceptions of morality involving self interested, seemingly asocial individuals, merely respecting each others rights.²⁰⁰

Sayer does not imply, as Thompson does, that Moral Economy and political economy are incompatible. Instead, he identifies the social separation occurred at the same time moral philosophy separated from economic theory. At the end of the nineteenth century “this shift in moral philosophy towards Kantianism was followed by the divorce of the study of moral and political economy.”²⁰¹ Simultaneously, “economic activities became increasingly “disembedded” from earlier social attachments.”²⁰²

In an article by Pierre Brocheux responding to the debate over moral and political economy between James Scott and Samuel Popkin, Brocheux asks bluntly whether political economy has been substituted for Moral Economy.²⁰³ He responds to this suggestion writing, “there is no inherent opposition between a Moral Economy and a political economy approach, except on an intellectual plane. The political economy approach did not override the Moral Economy, but meshed with it.”²⁰⁴ While not defeating the Moral Economy approach, Brocheux

²⁰⁰ Andrew Sayer, "Moral Economy and Political Economy," *Studies in Political Economy*, no. 61 (2000). p. 86

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Pierre Brocheux, "Moral Economy or Political Economy? The Peasants Are Always Rational," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 42, no. 4 (1983).

²⁰⁴ Ibid. pp. 801-802

also does not indicate that Moral Economy is a type of political economy. He suggests instead that they are different but work together in real world social, political, and economic contexts. Concluding his article Brocheux states, “*both* approaches have their rationality.”²⁰⁵

Furthermore, while arguing against the soundness of the Moral Economy approach, David Feeny clearly identifies moral and political economy as inhabiting different spheres.²⁰⁶ Feeny also draws on the debate between Scott and Popkin to illuminate this difference. He reasons, “we can see an interesting difference between Popkin’s political-economy approach and Scott’s moral-economy approach. Scott explains peasant rebellion in terms of moral outrage. ... In contrast, Popkin uses a model of self-interested decision making to explain participation.”²⁰⁷ Both Brocheux’s and Feeny’s arguments highlight the disagreement over moral and political economy between Scott and Popkin indicates that they too maintain a divide between the two approaches.

The Scott/Popkin Debate

James Scott’s compelling text, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, was first published in 1976.²⁰⁸ It is notable that Scott had Popkin review his manuscript before the book was officially published. In his forward, Scott acknowledges their differences and believes Popkin’s review helped clarify his thinking and

²⁰⁵ Ibid. (emphasis added)

²⁰⁶ David Feeny, "The Moral or the Rational Peasant? Competing Hypotheses of Collective Action," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 42, no. 4 (1983).

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Scott.

strengthen his arguments.²⁰⁹ Popkin, who published his rebuttal to Moral Economy theorists, not limited to Scott, was quite familiar with Scott's work on this topic. Popkin published *The Rational Peasant* a few years after Scott's book. *The Rational Peasant* includes an extended argument against Moral Economy complete with case studies based on his research in and on Vietnam. Soon after the book was published, he also published an article which presents a tighter and more focused argument against Moral Economy.^{210 211} I have not found any additional exchanges between Scott and Popkin pertaining to Moral Economy. The debate between Scott and Popkin is one that is largely presented to us through the perspective of other scholars of Moral Economy, such as Dan Little, Andrew Sayer, and others.

As I reviewed the "debate", I noticed that most of it focused on peasant and precapitalist societies. While this makes sense in an academic debate between Scott and Popkin at the time, it does not fully capture the Moral Economy theory as it has developed or as I comprehend it. Due to the nature of the debate, most of the differences between Scott and Popkin's positions are explicated in Popkin's responses and are more subtle in Scott's earlier work. Popkin offers a number of generalizations about the Moral Economy position, which he acknowledges are not as complete or nuanced as the original authors' arguments. The key disagreements between Scott and Popkin include interpretations about a) peasant subsistence, b) patron-client relationships, c) village structure, d) investments and gambles, e) free ridership, f) reciprocity, g) rationality of peasants, and h) protests and rebellions.

²⁰⁹ Unfortunately I was unable to access the earlier manuscript and Popkin's review notes, which may have indicated more precisely how Popkin's comments helped shape *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*.

²¹⁰ Samuel Popkin, "The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Peasant Society," *Theory and Society* 9, no. 3 (1980).

²¹¹ While the book *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* has been widely cited, Popkin's article "The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Peasant Society" is rarely cited. I only happened to find it by reviewing Popkin's CV and then conducting a focused search for it.

Key Disagreements

Peasant Subsistence

A particular understanding of agrarian peasant subsistence holds Scott's theory of Moral Economy together. Subsistence for the peasant family is similar to what development ethicists mean when they talk about food security. Subsistence includes food security for the long term, but also includes the means to earn a living and for the survival of the family long term. It can also include housing, education, resources to participate in community traditions and religious rituals, tools, and farm animals. Scott observes that peasants live with unstable economic conditions. They may have abundant harvests one year, but then suffer a poor harvest resulting from a drought another year. While falling below the subsistence level always has dire consequences, it is more worrisome for agricultural peasants than for other classes and occupations, because the harvest and income are contingent on numerous factors out of their control, significant input costs are required, and crop cycles can be lengthy. It is also unlikely for a family which has fallen below the subsistence level to make it back out of the disaster level, due to input costs, and health and credit problems that follow from falling below the subsistence level. As a result, he argues peasants make economic decisions based on a principle of "safety-first". Making his case, Scott explains, "Typically, the peasant cultivator seeks to avoid the failure that will ruin him rather than attempting a big, but risky, killing. In decision-making parlance his behavior is risk-averse; he minimizes the subjective probability of the maximum loss."²¹² It isn't that peasants do not understand the logic behind neo-classical economics; it is

²¹² Scott. p. 5

that such logic is not well suited to their lived conditions. The question a peasant is more likely to ask is “What is left?” not “How much is taken?” Scott also assumes that most peasants are in this predicament of being close enough to the disaster level should any one harvest turn out worse than normal that they are not going to gamble with their surplus from a good harvest.

Patron-client relationships

The patron-client or lord-tenant relationship is presented by moral economists such as Scott as being an important part of maintaining subsistence. Although less reliable than kin, the patron is presented as having close personal relationship with their client, often as regards several aspects of their livelihood. In addition to renting or leasing their land from their patron, a client may engage in other loans, cash assistance, or food assistance with their patron in exchange for their labor, rent payment, and deference. While this often results in a sizeable payment from the client in some seasons, it is believed that it prevents falling below the subsistence level, into what Scott describes as the disaster level, in other years. These large payments (in crop harvests and/or currency) stand in opposition to what could be a more risky strategy of profit maximization. Scott’s position argues that the safety-first principle precludes profit maximization because of its potential devastating outcome. Peasants are aware of the profit they could make in one season if they took more risk with the market or with a flat tax, but reason that such an approach will not work in the long-term and they choose to preserve their long-term security.

In his description of a Philippine governmental proposal to move share-croppers to fixed-rent tenants, Scott remarks, “While the tenant might do far better in a good year, the new

leasehold arrangements shielded him less against disaster.”²¹³ The government was offering an apparently favorable low fixed-rent for those who wanted to accept such a lease agreement, but they would be responsible for that rent regardless of harvest and market conditions. The farmers who chose to become tenants were those who already had favorable conditions, steady harvests, and strict landlords, whereas the farmers who chose to remain sharecroppers tended to have small plots, variable conditions, variable yields, and generous landlords. Scott cites one tenant’s rationale, “I will have to pay higher rent all my life [under sharecropping] but I can at least get food to live on now.”²¹⁴ Overall, Scott argues that while patrons do make some burdensome claims on their clients, the relationship is beneficial enough for clients to remain in the relationship provided the patron maintains his end of the arrangement by providing for the security and subsistence of the client. Moreover, Scott maintains that the client prefers to have a single patron with whom many economic exchanges are made.

Popkin acknowledges the prevalence of patron-client relationships in peasant Asia, although he disagrees with Scott on several aspects about the nature of that relationship. Popkin does not accept the idea that patron-client relationships are symbiotic, but suggests they are more often competitive or parasitic by one or both parties, depending on the opportunities available to them. He believes both parties will try to get the best deal possible for themselves, and that clients as well as patrons actively seek to improve their position in society and economically. Popkin downplays the safety-first equation peasant clients make regarding subsistence, instead arguing that even agricultural peasants are regularly searching for ways to improve their lot. He makes the case that tenants recognize when they are in a better bargaining position and they use

²¹³ Ibid. p. 49

²¹⁴ Ibid. p.50

this position to demand more than subsistence level wages from their landlords. Additionally, patrons continue relationships with their clients because they can ask more of them than if they were on more even terms. He even suggests patrons intentionally prevent clients from rising out of their peasant client status by not encouraging literacy or other skills and keeping them from developing direct connections to markets for their goods. Popkin argues, "Peasants are often forcibly blocked from the market for the same reasons: development of market skills can help the peasant to demand more, or even to do without his patron."²¹⁵

Moreover, he believes that peasants recognize that the dyadic relationship between patron and client is not in their best interests and that they would prefer "multi-stranded" relationships to help meet their social and subsistence needs. Putting ones eggs all in one basket is a poor subsistence strategy, because if the patron for any reason does not have the resources or the client loses favor from the patron, they are then left in an extremely precarious position. The reason for the dyadic relationship between patron and client arises from the patron's power and desire to control the client as well as providing a disincentive for collective bargaining.²¹⁶ Finally, he suggests Scott overlooks the fact that not all tenants are clients. Clients are those tenants who have secured a more favorable relationship with their landlord, who is now not just the landlord, but is their patron.

²¹⁵ Popkin. p. 75

²¹⁶ Popkin, "The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Peasant Society." p. 429

Village structure

The social unit that applies most to Moral Economy in the Scott/Popkin debate is the village. While both Scott and Popkin sometimes write in a generalized way, they both focus on the peasant village of nineteenth and twentieth century Southeast Asia. Scott does not define the peasant village clearly, but suggests it is one in which everyone knows everyone else, membership is fairly stable (few people enter or leave other than birth, marriage, and death), village leadership makes most of the important public decisions (not the state), village life profoundly impacts family and individual persons' identity and lived experience, and the village serves as the nexus for traditions and welfare. As a result, the village structure and norms create the conditions for Moral Economy. The village provides informal social guarantees which "represent something of a living normative model of equity and justice."²¹⁷ Scott observes, "Few village studies of Southeast Asia fail to remark on the informal social controls which act to provide for the minimal needs of the poor."²¹⁸ He also suggests that the legitimacy and coherence of the village was what it could provide to its members during their most trying periods. There is social pressure placed on the wealthiest members of a village to help the poorer members. In turn the wealthy members receive prestige. In this way the wealth of the village is spread. The standard of living is judged based on other members in the village. Reciprocity also impacts the level of work in the village as a neighbor who helps with the harvest will expect assistance with his fields as well.

Popkin accepts the village as the principal unit. He distinguishes between the corporate and open villages. The corporate village is the type under consideration. He describes them as

²¹⁷ Scott. p. 41

²¹⁸ Ibid. p. 43

having a clear notion of village citizenship, regulation of the local economy, imposing certain forms of discipline, holding common land, and collecting taxes. However, he questions how successful the village can actually be in providing for its members. On one hand, his assumptions about free-ridership entail personal investment over social insurance. Popkin also questions the ability to determine need. Additionally he argues, “the demand for insurance will rise as life becomes more risky, but supply will fall as the probability that premiums will be paid declines.”²¹⁹ Popkin distinguishes between short-term and long-term need and investments. He contends that peasants will “rely on private, family investments for their long-run security and that they will be interested in short-term gain vis-à-vis the village.”²²⁰ Contrary to the moral economist theory of collective rationality and social norms leading to collective security, Popkin argues, “Village processes are shaped and restricted by self-interest, the difficulty of ranking needs, the desire of individual peasants to raise their own subsistence level at the expense of others, aversion to risk, leadership interest in profits, and the free rider problem.”²²¹

Investments and Gambles

Popkin wants to emphasize that peasants will employ economic rational thinking like other people and will engage in profit maximization whenever possible, specifically neo-classical economic behavior. This kind of profit maximization behavior is precisely what he means when he refers to “the rational peasant”. Popkin seems to believe that Scott’s safety-first principle precludes profit maximization by peasants. While it is true that Scott does argue that the safety-

²¹⁹ Popkin.

²²⁰ Popkin, “The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Peasant Society.” p. 426

²²¹ Popkin. p. 38

first principle is widespread, he does not suggest they are mutually exclusive or that peasants are incapable of making economic decisions with a neo-classical economic calculus.

Some of Popkin's responses throughout *The Rational Peasant* and his follow-up article are compatible with Scott's, but Popkin understands the lived reality of peasants differently. Therefore, he expects they will make different decisions than Scott proposes. For example, Popkin asserts, "Peasants often are willing to gamble on innovations when their position is secure against the loss and when a success could measurably improve their position."²²² I doubt Scott and Popkin would disagree on this point. However, Popkin believes peasants are in a secure position much more frequently than Scott does. Popkin cites regional proverbs that encourage a frontier spirit as support for risk taking behavior.²²³ The safety-first principle then is only part of the story according to Popkin. The peasant may act cautiously and want insurance or another social safety net in some circumstances, while they take gambles and act upon high risk opportunities in others.

Scott even offers a pre-emptive response to Popkin and critics with the similar charge, indicating that peasants do indeed take risks and make investments beyond the needs of subsistence. He clarifies,

The safety-first principle thus does not imply that peasants are creatures of custom who never take risks they can avoid. When innovations such as dry season crops, new seeds, planting techniques, or production for market offer clear and substantial gains at little or no risk to subsistence security, one is likely to find peasants plunging ahead. ... The argument I am making about the economics of subsistence is meant to apply in its full force, then, only to those cultivators who share a common existential dilemma. For those peasants with very low incomes, little land, large families, highly variable yields, and few opportunities, the pattern of safety-first, should hold quite consistently. For peasants with

²²² Ibid. p. 21

²²³ Popkin, "The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Peasant Society." p. 425

high incomes, abundant land, small families, reliable crop yields, and outside employment opportunities, the argument probably is not applicable.²²⁴

Thus, less disagreement exists between Scott and Popkin on this point than may be suggested by Popkin and other observers of the Moral Economy versus political economy debate.

Free ridership

A problem that concerns Popkin about Moral Economy's theory of insurance and collective action is the worry that free riders will benefit from the contributions of some members of society without themselves contributing. Many insurance arrangements and collective actions bestow collective benefits from which non-contributors cannot be excluded. Popkin explains the political economic understanding that, "Unless the expected benefits outweigh the costs, the villager can be presumed not to contribute to collective action."²²⁵ A cost-benefit calculus factors here as being the primary logic for peasant decision making pertaining to a collective good.

Scott and other moral economists are less concerned about free ridership. In part they see the cost-benefit calculus as being in the peasants favor more often than not. Moreover, they believe that moral considerations and the interest in community well-being or solidarity with others in a similar predicament will outweigh individual factors in decision making. Additionally, moral economists suggest that in a small community, social conditioning and expectations of others will motivate certain behaviors that benefit the society. Scott never

²²⁴ Scott. p. 24-25

²²⁵ Popkin. p. 24

mentions ‘free-rider’ at any point in *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* or any of his subsequent related publications.²²⁶ So it is clear he did not consider it a serious threat to Moral Economy theory or practice. Although he does not respond directly to Popkin’s legitimate concern regarding free-riders, his understanding of reciprocity suggests that free riding is more difficult in a small community when people know each other. If someone benefits from a service or financial assistance, the person or group will rightfully expect to be repaid in time with a comparable service or assistance. Scott explains, “the village norms which may assure a poor man a patch of communal land and food also require him to provide labor when village officials or notables call for it.”²²⁷ What initially could be deemed free-ridership would later be repaid in kind.

Popkin accurately identifies the free rider issue as being a major difference between the Moral Economy and political economy approaches to peasant institutions. He summarizes,

If the Moral Economy views are correct, there is a community orientation whereby the free-rider and leadership problems are easily overcome by proper socialization to norms placing a high value on voluntarism. If, on the other hand, there are substantial problems of organization, individuals may withhold contributions and projects may not be undertaken or may be carried out in ways that are less than optimal.²²⁸

Popkin assesses free-rider problems as widespread and problematic to the goals of Moral Economy and that they are underestimated in Moral Economy theory.

²²⁶ Scott; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State : How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale Agrarian Studies (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 1998); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak : Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); James C. Scott and Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance on South-East Asia* (London ; Totowa, N.J.: Frank Cass, 1986).

²²⁷ Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant : Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. p. 28

²²⁸ Popkin. p. 25

Reciprocity

Just as free-rider problems were something that primarily concerned the political economy side of this debate, reciprocity likewise concerns the Moral Economy side far more than its challenger. Scott makes a great deal about the role reciprocity plays in Moral Economy. In many ways it is the enforcer of social norms that hold Moral Economy together in practice. Scott evaluates it as one of his four potential standards of justice and deems it to be a reliable standard of justice for peasants. He identifies, “the moral idea involved is that one should return “favors” out of gratitude and that, consequently, equal exchange defines a fair relationship.”²²⁹

²³⁰ In nearly every exchange in peasant life, reciprocity plays a role. Scott draws our attention to the nature of agricultural cycles which function well using a system of exchanging services or goods of comparable value. Throughout Scott’s case for Moral Economy reciprocity comes up as the guarantee between peasants, as the balancer between patron and client, landlord and tenant, and wealthy and poor peasants. It applies between equals as well as between unequals.

Reciprocity is not merely a social norm that could fall away. Scott argues that the norm of reciprocity is the foundation for legitimacy and the basis for the moral claims made by peasants. Reciprocity holds the community together and contributes to the maintenance of civil interaction.

Popkin acknowledges reciprocity played a role in peasant life in pre-colonial periods, specifically pre-colonial Vietnam. However, he emphasizes reciprocity is stronger through

²²⁹ Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant : Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. p. 162

²³⁰ C.f. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift; Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London,: Cohen & West, 1954).

family and preferable to the more risky form of reciprocity with other village members or the state.²³¹ In Popkin's view, reciprocity is less common than Scott believes and is not central to the economy of peasants. He asserts,

From political economy assumptions it follows that villagewide insurance schemes will be highly specific and limited due to problems of trust and consensus, and that welfare schemes will be greatly restricted and restrictive. Further, reciprocity will be strict and limited to equals, and the village leaders will help less fortunate villagers only if it does not affect the long-run welfare of the better-off villagers.²³²

From this perspective, reciprocity cannot be assumed between villagers and is highly contingent and constrained. In addition to changing the frequency with which reciprocal exchanges are enacted, this limited version of reciprocity also reduces the moral claim or obligation that any party could attach to such a relationship.

Rationality of individuals and social groups

As one might expect, rationality is an important aspect of evaluating peasant behavior for Popkin. He wants to draw attention to the individual in his critique of Moral Economy. Moral Economy suggests that the decisions made by peasants are largely in the interests of the village or community. Popkin responds to this by acknowledging that there are times when peasants expand their consideration for friends, neighbors, and the village. However, he believes they retain primary concern for themselves and their family. The rational actor is the *individual* even

²³¹ Popkin. p. 28

²³² Ibid. p. 47

when they have interests for others. Because rationality can be used to suggest numerous ideas, Popkin clarifies,

By rationality I mean that individuals evaluate the possible outcomes associated with their choices in accordance with their preferences and values. In doing this, they discount the evaluation of each outcome in accordance with their subjective estimate of the likelihood of the outcome. Finally, they make the choice which they believe will maximize their expected utility.²³³

In addition to drawing our attention to the rationality of the individual, Popkin also attempts to discredit the logic moral economists' use to base behavior on collective rationality. He argues,

The Moral Economy predictions about collective security, based on assumptions of collective rationality, are borne out partially at best: village processes are shaped and restricted by individual self-interest, the difficulty of ranking needs, the desire of individual peasants to raise their own subsistence level at the expense of others, aversion to risk, leadership interest in profits, and the free-rider problem.²³⁴

Protest and Rebellion

Protest, rebellion, and social uprisings are central to many accounts of Moral Economy, starting with E.P. Thompson's classic historical account, which built the theory for Moral Economy from popular protest. Both Scott and Popkin see protest and rebellion by peasant groups as evidence that, along with other factors, indicates the presence of discontent with the current social situation. Thus, protest and rebellion, or lack of it when it might be expected, provide evidence for their respective theories. This approach of reading protests, rebellions, and peasant uprisings as supporting a particular theory of peasant behavior comes across as more

²³³ Ibid. p. 31

²³⁴ Ibid. p. 38

scientific, empirical, as well as historical. Both Scott and Popkin evaluate South East Asia in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, so it might seem as though their examples could be compared side by side with each other. However, my attempt to do just that has indicated that a comparison of their more empirical evidence is not straightforward. They may be looking at the same broad region during the same time period, but rarely do the events under examination correspond with each other. Even when they do examine the same event, the story told and evidence provided are difficult to compare. There are also several aspects about protest and rebellion that need to be disentangled. Protest and rebellion are not just about the visible event, but include in this context the motivation and potential for rebellion, the intentions of the people engaging in it, the type of protest or rebellion being planned (if planned) and to a lesser degree, the outcome of the protest or rebellion.

Scott is more interested in the potential for protest and rebellion than in the outcome of such events. In other words, he seeks to know WHY a rebellion took place rather than WHAT happened after it started. This is consistent with Moral Economy's focus on social relations and behaviors that have a normative basis, because the conditions for protest are more indicative of the sentiment regarding the moral rightness or wrongness than the resulting situation. Thus, Scott does not emphasize peasant revolution, a successful rebellion, because it does not offer any more insight than an unsuccessful rebellion. Scott also acknowledges the absence of rebellion under conditions of exploitation and misery, that is, under similar conditions that provide the impetus for rebellion in other cases. He offers a multi-stranded case for resistance to exploitation and oppression through other means of resistance.

Pertaining to the conditions giving rise to rebellion, Scott observes the increased vulnerabilities faced by Southeast Asian subsistence peasants in the early twentieth century.

“The more brittle and explosive agrarian structure was largely a product of the interaction of three forces: demographic change, production for the market, and the growth of the state.”²³⁵ These factors taken together undermined the bargaining power of the peasants relative to land owners. Of course, not every family was equally vulnerable. Real income played a significant role in vulnerability (proximity to the disaster level). Additional factors that contributed to real income include: natural yield fluctuations, world market fluctuations, and mono-crop price fluctuations. Furthermore, peasant social structure also affected the likelihood that peasants would respond to exploitation with revolt or rebellion. Scott is not convinced that peasantries with a “strong communal tradition and few sharp internal class divisions” will be more explosive than ones “with weak communal peasantries and sharper class divisions.”²³⁶ While the impact of economic shocks will be felt more uniformly in the first type of community and they will have greater capacity for collective action as a result of their traditional solidarity, the second type of community would be more vulnerable to market forces and have fewer alternative resources to counteract the economic shocks.

In his account of the depression revolts, Scott indicates that taxes played a significant role in the motivation of peasant communities to protest and rebel. As taxes became more uniform and enforcement was increased, the burden of taxes became overwhelming for some peasants. Moreover, the way taxes were levied, without respect to varying conditions and market forces, put peasants in a much more precarious position than when landlords or village leaders collected taxes with consideration for seasonal fluctuations. The revolts in Northern Annam in 1930 are forwarded to bolster Scott’s case that Moral Economy can be determined through the nature of

²³⁵ Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant : Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. p. 196

²³⁶ Ibid. pp. 201-202

the revolt and indicate the reason for it. Head taxes imposed by the colonial state initiated several peasant responses including: protest marches, the destruction of tax offices and tax receipts, refusal to pay taxes, fleeing the villages, notables and headmen were threatened with death if they attempted to collect taxes from the poor, tax collector was attacked, public buildings were burned, alcohol warehouses were plundered, officials assassinated, forest guard posts destroyed, rice stores seized, and a salt convoy attack. In an effort to show the relationship between these events and their expression of Moral Economy Scott contends,

Just as the burning of tax lists expressed the determination to serve local subsistence claims before those of the state, many of the assassinations and pillages seemed directly motivated by the belief that the wealthy and those in authority had an obligation to share their resources with the poor in times of dearth – and, failing that, the poor then had the right to take what they needed by force.²³⁷

Furthermore, Scott highlights the collective nature of these acts including the participation of sizable numbers of villagers in the assassinations and destruction of offices and public buildings.

While rebellion is sometimes thought to be characteristic of Moral Economy in action, Scott carefully articulates several other behaviors that indicate a moral economic ethos without protest or rebellion. To be clear, he contends that rebellion actually is a relatively rare response to violation of Moral Economy norms. Often the peasantry will desire a change in the conditions or political structure but determine they lack the resources to revolt or to do so successfully. Instead of rebellion, vulnerable and exploited peasants respond through individual and collective adaptive strategies. These consist of: using local forms of self-help, involvement in other sectors

²³⁷ Ibid. p. 145

of the economy, reliance on state-supported assistance programs, and taking advantage of religious or oppositionist institutions for protection and assistance.

On the topic of protest and rebellion, Popkin observes its occurrence, but draws different interpretations regarding its potential and conditions for it as well as what it means. Contrary to Scott and moral economist contentions that it is the last resort in a response to exploitation and deteriorating conditions and threatened subsistence for the peasantry, Popkin argues protest is more likely among peasants whose conditions are improving. Discussing a protest in a Japanese village in the 1920s, Popkin reasons,

Although conditions of tenancy were comparatively good around urban and industrial centers, protest and militancy were widespread, for there was little fear of reprisal. Subsistence therefore, is not fixed at a culturally given level. Economic shares are based on the terms of exchange, and protest frequently occurs when the balance of exchange is *improving* in the favor of the tenant.

Popkin also invokes an example of English peasants during the fourteenth century, when Black Death decreased the population. His basic argument suggests that given an opportunity to improve their conditions, regardless of their starting point, peasants are likely to take it. Hence, protest and rebellion should not be used as indicators of exploitation, oppression or Moral Economy theory. Instead, peasants, like other people are rationally self-interested and are always striving to improve their circumstances.

Popkin takes up four examples of peasant movements in Vietnam to argue that protest and rebellion do not provide sufficient evidence for Moral Economy theory.²³⁸ He takes issue with Scott's suggestion that peasant protests are restorative in nature as they try to reinstate pre-

²³⁸ He examines the Catholics following Japan's surrender in 1945, the Cao Dai sect in the early 20th century, the Hoa Hao religion from the early 1900's through WWII, and Communist movement since the 1930's.

capitalist traditions and prefer subsistence agriculture, and that “they represent a collective response in the collective interest of the peasantry.”²³⁹ Instead, he argues, peasant political movements “seek not to restore traditional practices and institutions, but to remake them; they seek not to destroy the market economy but to tame capitalism.”²⁴⁰ Additionally he does not believe there is a clear connection between rebellion and subsistence threat or decline, because numerous cases can be found where peasants in poor and economically deteriorating villages do not protest. An example he provides compares the peasant protests of 1930 to 1931 in Northern Annam with a subsistence crisis suffered in the same region one hundred years earlier. Although the earlier period had a worse famine than the one experienced in the early 1930s, and thousands of people died as a result, there was no protest in response. Popkin concludes, “The difference between the two reactions was not level of misery: it was organization, particularly communication and coordination.”²⁴¹ Finally, he again challenges the collective nature of the Moral Economy theory by arguing the threat (if there is one) is to individuals, not to an entire class or group. Popkin also interprets Scott as underestimating the challenges of organizing collective action including providing effective leadership, clearly articulated goals, and sufficient incentives. He maintains, “As long as the only results of contributing to the common goals are common advantages, the peasant may leave the contributions to others and expend his scarce resources in other ways. Collective action requires more than consensus or even intensity of need. Yet, Popkin does acknowledge that ethical or altruistic reasons may provide the incentive, however rare.

²³⁹ Popkin. p. 245

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid. p. 248

Scott presents yet another alternative response to revolt is through private communication, subtly disguised language, and artistic expression that convey ambiguous or hidden meanings. In Scott's early work on Moral Economy he hints at this idea which becomes fully developed in a later text, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.²⁴² When the peasantry is exploited, faces a subsistence crises, and work suffer a crushing force from their opposition if they were to revolt, it makes good sense that they will continue to act in their own interests through other more subtle means. In addition to the adaptive strategies mentioned above, expressions of resistance may be seen in the ways the peasantry conducts its behavior in private, in public, and in direct interaction with the landlords, government officials, or other oppressive individuals and groups. Scott emphasizes that the absence of defiance does not by itself indicate that class relations are harmonious. Rebellion or its absence does not alone indicate the values of the peasantry, but the combination of those values along with the capacity to act. Because Moral Economy is most interested in the values, other evidence must be explored. Clues to the regard an oppressed individual or group has for their oppressors may be found in various aspects of their language. How they greet and interact with their oppressors and in a public forum make up what Scott calls the public transcript, whereas the way they communicate with their family, close friends, and other members of the oppressed group make up the hidden transcript. It is through comparing the hidden and public transcripts which provide the best insight into the sentiment and moral evaluation of the individual or group. While subordinate groups sometimes gain a reputation as being liars by the dominant persons, Scott encourages us to see the disparity between the hidden transcript and the public transcript as a kind of performance used as a survival mechanism. He writes, "At its most elementary level the

²⁴² Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.

hidden transcript represents an acting out in fantasy – and occasionally in secretive practice – of the anger and reciprocal aggression denied by the presence of domination.”²⁴³ While the hidden transcript of the subordinate is usually concealed, there are times and various ways it can find its way into public expression. Scott explains,

Subordinate groups have developed a large arsenal of techniques that serve to shield their identity while facilitating open criticism, threats, and attacks. Prominent techniques that accomplish this purpose include spirit possession, gossip, aggression through magic, rumor, anonymous threats and violence, the anonymous letter, and anonymous mass defiance.

Moreover, poetry, folktales, jokes, performance art such as song and theatre, visual symbols and art, rituals of reversal such as carnival, and other euphemisms are presented as part of the publicly expressed hidden transcript.

Scott emphasizes the importance of looking beyond the direct protest or the violent revolt to appreciate the values of the subordinate classes and their opposition to the actions and values of the dominant group. Scott maintains,

Taking a long historical view, one sees that the luxury of relatively safe, open political opposition is both rare and recent. The vast majority of people have been and continue to be not citizens, but subjects. So long as we confine our conception of the political to activity that is openly declared we are driven to conclude that subordinate groups essentially lack a political life or that what political life they do have is restricted to those exceptional moments of popular explosion. To do so is to miss the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Ibid. pp. 37-38

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 199

In this way he indirectly responds to Popkin's critique that some peasants failed to rebel or protest, while other less oppressed groups did.

Popkin's false and misconstrued claims

In all fairness, Popkin does a good job of characterizing Moral Economy, although he rightfully cautions his readers that his account is necessarily condensed from numerous authors and is therefore more generalized and less nuanced. He also sometimes responds to authors other than James Scott, including some who do not present Moral Economy exactly as Scott does. Nevertheless, I detected several points on which Popkin either misinterprets the arguments by Scott and moral economists or makes outright false claims about them.

The conclusion of his first chapter is rife with problems, such as his suggestion that, "The emphasis of moral economists on stable systems upset by the penetration of markets and national governments leads to the assumption that decline, decay, erosion of bonds, or loss of legitimacy are necessary before new forms of organization will take root among peasants."²⁴⁵ He wants to counter this misconstrued claim by arguing instead that subsistence crises are not necessary for peasants to support revolution(aries). In all my reading on Moral Economy, I have never seen a moral economist argue for such a causal or necessary claim. Scott does not make it or imply it, but maintains that rebellion may be one way to observe the breakdown of Moral Economy. Rebellion or revolution (successful rebellion) neither requires decline, decay, or loss of legitimacy, nor do they always lead to rebellion.

²⁴⁵ Popkin. p. 28

Popkin goes on to claim that because moral economists such as Scott seek economic floors for peasant subsistence, then only better off peasants will pursue innovation and that private ownership of new technologies and innovations would not be of any benefit to smallholder and tenants.²⁴⁶ This line of reasoning suffers from a disconnect between its premise and its conclusion. While peasant focused moral economists like Scott do emphasize the importance of subsistence safety level, that has nothing to do with their interest in innovation. Also, should someone else innovate technology, they may be interested in it depending on numerous factors. What Popkin fails to understand is that peasants of all levels innovate when they can to serve their purposes and that while some technology may be rejected, other new technologies will readily be accepted.

Popkin also makes a blatantly false claim, “Moral economists have argued that, from the perspective of peasant welfare, peasant society is moral, economically efficient, and stable.”²⁴⁷ This characterization has no basis in actual Moral Economy theory. The protests, rebellions, and numerous forms of adaptive behaviors indicate that peasant society is often anything but moral, although it contains an ethical system and socially normative expectations. Economic efficiency almost never comes up as an issue for moral economists as it simply is not a significant concern. It is a concern for political economists, so perhaps Popkin is searching for a way to differentiate the two positions. Finally, while social stability can provide some benefit for peasant society, a stable but exploitative system is certainly not in the best interests of peasants.

In addition to these problematic claims, Popkin engages in a line of reasoning which is not based on any claims by Scott or moral economists. Popkin claims,

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 29

If it is accepted that peasants will innovate only as a last-grasp attempt to keep from going under, then it is easy to overlook the many occasions when peasants will innovate, in the absence of crises, in order to raise their production floors. In the same vein, if it is assumed that peasants have a fixed view of proper income, that they will not strive to raise their income beyond that level, and that they are not interested in new forms of consumption, then it is easy to justify forcible, coercive development policies as the only means to extract a surplus from the peasantry for industrialization.²⁴⁸

At points like these I wonder whether Popkin actually read Scott carefully, because not only did Scott not make these claims but he also made the effort to identify when peasants would innovate and work to raise their income level. Popkin's argument here serves as both a strawman and a red herring. The antecedents in these conditional premises have never been the basis of Moral Economy or Scott's project. Perhaps Popkin is worried that agreeing with moral economists on many of their premises will weaken his case. Nonetheless, this is merely one of many places in which moral economists and political economists agree.

Where Scott and Popkin find common ground

As I compared the arguments and evaluated their premises, I was pleasantly surprised to find a number of points of agreement between Scott and Popkin. First, they both recognize that peasants face various and frequent challenges to their agricultural endeavors as well as to their economic stability. Second, they both acknowledge that landowners sometimes undercut peasants even further through their demands. Third, they both believe that provincial and state government does not provide complete protection for peasant welfare. Fourth, both Scott and Popkin understand that peasants desire a good life for themselves and their family. Finally, they

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 29

both argue that peasants innovate and invest when they can. On some points, such as the last one, there is misunderstanding. Often, their starting points lead them to different conclusions. Still, at their core, they agree on these fundamental premises.

Dan Little's analysis of the debate

Dan Little offers a helpful perspective to understand the Moral Economy versus political economy debate as he unpacks it in a dedicated chapter of *Understanding Peasant China: Case Studies in the Philosophy of Social Science*.²⁴⁹ His analysis is part of a larger project which evaluates four various social science approaches to understanding peasant societies. Little identifies James Scott with the Moral Economy approach and Samuel Popkin with the political economy approach. Initially Little asks, “First, are typical peasants in Southeast Asia motivated chiefly by self-interested rationality or shared communal values? Second, what social arrangements, institutions, and patterns of collective behaviors do these motives foster?”²⁵⁰ He identifies three core disagreements between Scott and Popkin. First, they disagree about individuals’ motivation and decision making. Second, they have disagreements about the social, political, and economic institutions familiar to peasants in Southeast Asia. Finally, they disagree about the goals, motives and processes of peasant collective action.

Little proposes evaluating these theories and how they compare through the use of a model village based on commonalities shared in many diverse villages in various times and places. The model villages is relatively stable, isolated from outside intervention and resources,

²⁴⁹ Little.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 29-30

villagers are aware of the history and activities of other villagers, it embodies many shared values, and social relations within the village are multi-stranded. Using rational self-interest combined with the village arrangements, Little partakes in a thought experiment to see how far Popkin's argument for political economy can go in achieving the results expected by Scott's Moral Economy. Little contends that game theory, such as the conditional cooperation version of the prisoners' dilemma, indicates "patterns of reciprocity and cooperation would emerge spontaneously".²⁵¹ This is in keeping with Scott's argument for Moral Economy in peasant villages. The model village also provides the right conditions for community collective action and a set of sanctions and benefits to deter free-rider impulses of individual members. Group size affects the model village indirectly. Small groups will be less threatened by free-ridership problems because the benefit to cost ratio is higher than in a large group. Little identifies several types of collective action that would clearly be successful in a model village. He expects person-to-person mutual aid, risk-sharing or disaster insurance schemes, and generalized cooperation (such as flood relief) projects to succeed in the model village. However, the more challenging type of collective action is redistributive practices. Recall that Popkin rejects the moral economist argument that such redistributive practices were part of peasant society. Little also cautions that such a practice would not follow using *only* rational self-interest and the structure of peasant social arrangements. Redistributive actions would harm the affluent members of the model village and would therefore not be in their rational self-interest.

Having taken rational self-interest as far as it could go toward the benefit of the community, Little turns to the role of moral values in social life. Little agrees more with Scott

²⁵¹ Ibid. p. 43

that moral values play an important role in society. However, he finds Scott's account of individual motivation "sketchy". Nonetheless, he contends,

To explain individual peasant action, it is necessary: to understand the meaning of the social relations that constitute the context of the action, to know the norms that the actor would consider relevant to action in these circumstances, and to know the actor's perceived material interests. This is manifestly more complex than the theory associated with the political economy approach.²⁵²

Little identifies two mechanisms that Scott cites to support the subsistence ethic, including that reciprocity is expected in traditional society and that a variety of forms of social coercion reinforce shared values and punish those whose behavior does not conform. Little assumes a mix of motives; both rational self-interest and moral motivation affect individual decision making and behavior motivation.

Regarding the challenge Popkin poses to Scott that individuals are the decision makers, not the community, Little provides a way to accept Popkin's adept observation without it being a setback for Moral Economy. Broadly, he points out, "Social entities (systems of shared values) cause social changes (rebellions), but they do so through individual-level processes."²⁵³ In a later chapter, Little proposes understanding a more comprehensive political culture. He defines 'political culture' as "a shared tradition defining the moral and social worldview within which individuals locate themselves."²⁵⁴ He goes on to argue,

A local political culture can (but need not) motivate individuals to undertake actions and strategies that favor their group interests, and to persist in these strategies even in the face of risk and deprivation (that is, in circumstances where the political strategy imposes

²⁵² Ibid. p. 57

²⁵³ Ibid. p. 63

²⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 182

extensive costs on the individual's interests). This treatment of political culture leads to a sensitivity to the point that political behavior is often driven by a set of motives that are richer than a narrow calculus of self-interest.²⁵⁵

In other words, local political culture provides the motivation, inspiration, and justification for acting in accordance with community interests, but individuals must behave consistently with local political culture for it to be maintained and reproduced. Little leaves it to Scott and other moral economists to work out the finer details of this causal mechanism.

The empirical dispute between Scott and Popkin should be straightforward. However, Little finds them difficult to compare because they differ in scope. Colonialism and commercialization likely had an effect on redistributive mechanisms, so comparing pre-colonialism with colonial or post-colonial periods would yield different observations. Scott and Popkin both address revolts throughout the eighteenth through mid-twentieth centuries, but they are not always discussing the same revolts. Scott also draws attention to acts of repression, non-violent resistance, and survival that Popkin overlooks. Additionally, while both Scott and Popkin concentrate on the same broad area of the world, regional variation within that area could be observed. Moreover, "In both studies the data are thin, subject to interpretation, and largely take the form of interpretations offered by other observers. The empirical cases offered by Scott and Popkin are indeterminate." Hence, it is extraordinarily difficult to compare the competing theories simply by evaluating the analysis of their cases because the cases do not align. Contrary to what either Scott or Popkin would have us believe about the incompatibility of their theories, Little maintains that they are complementary and both have a place in a more comprehensive theory of peasant studies.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 183-184

Other analyses of political v. Moral Economy

Sayer

In his article “Moral Economy and Political Economy” Andrew Sayer provides a more reflective and historical analysis of the relationship between Moral Economy and political economy.²⁵⁶ He approaches the discussion from the perspective of radical political economy and understands Moral Economy to be compatible with radical political economy. Sayer examines Moral Economy and political economy as kinds of inquiry and as objects of study. Moral Economy encompasses both positive studies and normative assessments. He uses “the term “Moral Economy” to refer to the study of the ways in which economic activities, in the broad sense, are influenced by moral-political norms and sentiments, and how conversely, those norms are compromised by economic forces.”²⁵⁷ Sayer provides historical perspective regarding the relationship between Moral Economy and political economy by reminding the reader of the influence of Enlightenment figures such as Hume, Ferguson, and Smith who understood moral sentiments to provide the cohesion for society. However, as traditions were being shook up and undermined, the endeavor of providing a rational moral order was pursued by intellectuals. This pursuit directed early classical political economy. While Hume and Smith recognized the decline of moral sentiments with distance, Sayer identifies Kant as the figure whose work was used to completely divorce moral from political economy. Combined with division of labor, competitive markets, and other outside events, moral considerations became increasingly unrelated to the function of economic activities. Sayer also draws on Habermas to round out his analysis of the

²⁵⁶ Sayer, "Moral Economy and Political Economy."

²⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 80

historical separation of Moral Economy from political economy, “the development of capitalism turned questions of validity into questions of behavior, and this is what has happened to many of the fundamental questions of Moral Economy.”²⁵⁸ Likewise, the study of economics has shifted,

Like economic behavior itself, the study of economics has become de-valued in the sense that moral values have been expelled from consideration. Conversely, values and norms have been de-rationalized so that they become mere subjective emotional dispositions, lying beyond the scope of reason. Thus, the (attempted) normative-positive split reflected a real subjectivization and de-rationalization of values on the one hand, and the de-valuation and expulsion of moral questions from matters of the running of economies on the other.²⁵⁹

Sayer aptly connects this split in intellectual spheres with the positive feedback mechanism leading to more entrenchment in its own sphere as well as greater possibility for conflict between them in the lifeworld.

Acknowledging that the influence of moral considerations has dramatically changed as it affects economic behavior, Sayer cautions us to not become nostalgic about pre-market or pre-capitalist economies. Instead of being freed from making moral decisions, we are now responsible at every turn to make them ourselves without traditional conventions to rely on; thus, contemporary moral-economic decisions are ever present but more difficult. However, this also frees us from some oppressive relationships and allows us to construct more fair and just ones, especially as regards responsibilities of care. Sayer also reminds his readers that markets and economic institutions are still socially embedded today, even if they are embedded differently and that we have been conditioned to downplay their embeddedness.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. pp.86-87

²⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 87

He provides a framework and extended set of questions that offer a springboard for continued academic work as well as policy development and economic involvement with Moral Economy. One way he does this is discussing the contemporary relationship various institutions have with Moral Economy, including from distant to intimate: markets, bureaucracies, networks, associations, and families. His questions are both broad and simple, but deserve attention in both institutional settings and academic ones. For example, Sayer asks

What are economies, or economic activities for? Whose keeper are we? Who is our keeper? How should we discharge our responsibilities to others? What standard of living should people expect? Should there be limits on pay and income from capital? What things should not be commodified or treated as if they were commodities? To what extent is profit or unearned income acceptable?²⁶⁰

These kinds of questions are the ones that used to be the subject of economics, political economy, and political philosophy. They need to be asked again, and again as they are never settled for longer than a generation.

Sayer argues that Liberalism is incapable of providing a comprehensive and satisfying response to the questions Moral Economy raises.

Moral Economy falls outside the comprehension of liberal theory, for which each individual – implicitly male and adult – is responsible to himself and for respecting the rights of others, and any other responsibilities are of a contractual nature, entered into freely; hence Liberalism's difficulties with families and relations between unequals, particularly for infants and parents. In its economic guise, it turns moral-political values into subjective individual preferences realized through making contracts with others.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

He also argues that Marxism misses some of the important aspects of Moral Economy. Its emphasis on capital is also too narrow a focus to answer the broader social questions associated with Moral Economy.

Sayer also makes the important connection between the politics of time and Moral Economy. Time is seldom addressed in economic theories, including Moral Economy, even though it is of great consequence to both paid and unpaid labor. He mentions the length of the working day, responsibilities of parents and other caregivers, the pressure placed on workers of all stripes, as well as social value of paid labor as higher than that of unpaid labor. Although he does not examine this aspect in great detail, it offers a keen observation into the realm of relevance for Moral Economy, one that is due for closer inspection.

Concluding, Sayer is makes a sound and succinct for radical political economy to take seriously the questions, core assumptions, and impetus Moral Economy provides. Yet, as a radical political economist, he hesitates to take Moral Economy as a substitute or replacement, instead suggesting it be integrated into political economy. He reasons,

If we fail to acknowledge that economic activity is at least, in part, morally guided, and that even where it is not, it has moral implications, economic action appears to be wholly a matter of power and self interest. If this happens, political economy reflects the domination of the lifeworld by the economic system, accepting the latter's priorities, and reflecting rather than challenging the de-moralization of economy.²⁶²

I understand Sayer to propose that over time the academic disciplines of political economy and economics will influence the reality of economic activities. Reality and theory are more deeply

²⁶² Ibid. pp. 98-99

enmeshed and influence each other more than earlier “observations” would suggest. Thus, how we observe the world and what kind of world we want or ought to have are closely connected.

Feeny

In a special edition of the *The Journal of Asian Studies* based on their professional organization’s meeting shortly after Popkin’s work responding to Scott was published, there were a couple of articles that provided additional perspectives from Asian studies and peasant studies perspectives. One of these was by the economist David Feeny, entitled “The Moral or the Rational Peasant? Competing Hypotheses of Collective Action.”²⁶³ Like Popkin, Feeny has numerous reservations about Moral Economy and narrows his analysis and criticism to Scott alone. Feeny understands Moral Economy narrowly through the Scott/Popkin debate and its origins in E.P. Thompson’s work. Only protests and peasants feature as relevant in his analysis. He contends that while Scott offers an appealing feel good story about peasant rebellion, it lacks adequate empirical support. Both long-term and wide-reaching quantitative data on household income levels, and property changes are demanded in support of Scott’s argument. While such data would be desirable and would reinforce Scott’s argument if they were consistent with it, given the time, place and nature of Scott’s research such extensive and comparable data is simply unavailable. Not only does Feeny refrain from accepting the possibility that Moral Economy may explain peasant behavior and sentiment because it is not well enough supported, but he proposes alternatives, that he acknowledges have less merit, as theories Scott needs to address to make a

²⁶³ Feeny, "The Moral or the Rational Peasant? Competing Hypotheses of Collective Action."

complete case for Moral Economy. His approach appears to be one of setting the standards higher for alternative theories than for the prevailing one.

One pause Feeny raises that is worth consideration is how best to understand some of the observed and recorded behaviors already offered as evidence. Crop diversification, suggests Scott, provides evidence of risk aversion and his safety-first principle. Feeny astutely points out that there are several varied reasons for crop diversification, some which may arise from risk aversion and others do not. Hence, Feeny maintains, “while the safety-first principle model itself is plausible, its predictive powers are moderate.”²⁶⁴

While on most aspects of peasant behavior and rebellions, Feeny agrees with Popkin that a utility maximizer model better explains the phenomena than a Moral Economy model, he does concede that Moral Economy may better explain the intense commitment of political leaders. He writes that “Although Popkin stresses the importance of the intensity of the commitment of the leadership needed to organize the self-interested peasants, he does not adequately explain the motives of the leaders, who do not appear to have acted solely on the basis of their own self-interest.”²⁶⁵ Feeny leaves space to ponder whether there is something different about leaders that allows them to consider matters beyond their own self-interest, or whether they are not unique but demonstrate a widely shared human trait.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 772

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 781

Brocheux

Continuing the discussion started in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, historian Pierre Brocheux takes a careful and measured look at the Scott/Popkin debate in “Moral or Political Economy? The Peasants are Always Rational.”²⁶⁶ As with Little, Brocheux acknowledges the wider Moral Economy versus political economy tension, but continues to discuss the debate focused on its two flag-bearers, James Scott and Samuel Popkin. Brocheux remains open to the compatibility of moral and political economy approaches to understanding social behavior. However, he cautiously teases apart phenomena such as patron-client bonds and mutual aid responses to oppression and for ensuring economic safety.

Like Little and I determined in reviewing both Scott and Popkin’s cases, Brocheux observes that their representative revolts are not comparable because they do not occur at the same time period or same location. Brocheux takes it a step further and distinguishes between protest movements that express a defensive reaction or demonstrate an entrepreneurial spirit from the larger revolutions which sought to change the political and public sphere in a radical way. He argues that defensive revolts are incomparable with transformative revolutions. Brocheux also judges Scott to have underestimated the relevance of the Indochinese Communist Party as he focused on peasant behavior. Moreover, he deems the economic state of the region to be coincidental to an already growing unrest in the case of the Depression rebellions, which Scott uses as evidence to build his case for Moral Economy. Brocheux writes, “the depression was only incidental to the political upheaval of 1930-1931 but was used in the communist propaganda of the period.”²⁶⁷ He is sensible in noting that social movements are complex,

²⁶⁶ Brocheux, "Moral Economy or Political Economy? The Peasants Are Always Rational."

²⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 796

ambiguous and contradictory, working at times to both defend and reject the structures and values of the past. Nevertheless, he agrees with the moral economist interest in protest movements as they “reveal the structure of the peasant world.”²⁶⁸

Brocheux concludes by arguing for incorporating both moral and political economy as explanatory approaches to understand history as it was. They both provide insight and in many ways represent the tensions between various groups and even within the peasant individual who is multi-dimensional.

What the Moral Economy/ Political Economy debate can teach us

While the debate between Scott and Popkin and their observers is interesting in itself, it is important for this project as an indication of the dialogue that has moved Moral Economy theory from its earlier phase to its current position as one that has increased uptake and application along a wide spectrum of studies. One of its most basic lessons is as a demonstration of something universal, that the same phenomena can be perceived very differently depending on what angle it is viewed from and what theoretical lens is applied. As far as this particular debate is concerned, much of the framing done by those outside of the debate, which provides a less personal and perhaps more clear understanding of the outlines of the debate than if it were only between Scott and Popkin themselves. The difference is akin to that between viewing an event as it unfolds through the news media versus learning about it through historical study which provides some distance as well as more context to the event.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 795

Another lesson that is broader than Moral Economy, but applicable to forwarding any new approach or theory is that entrenched positions can cause their adherents to be oblivious to common positions/agreements. In trying to draw a sharp distinction between the political economy and Moral Economy approaches to village level economics, Popkin went too far in accusing Scott of radical beliefs about peasants' refusal to invest in new technology. As the challenger to the dominant economic theory, Moral Economy, while compatible in some aspects, will have to accept that it might be accused of positions different from and more extreme than it holds. Some of this may be the result of confusion and some a desire to not give way to the new theory.

Despite having many criticisms and reservations about Moral Economy and arguing against its acceptance as an explanatory tool or as a theory of economics, Popkin did a valuable service in the advancement of Moral Economy by initiating the controversy and raising awareness about Moral Economy. Careful and serious critique can help a newly developing theory or approach if it is respectful and taken into consideration by burgeoning scholars. The critique Popkin presented and attention it produced helped to introduce people to Moral Economy who might not have come across it otherwise. Popkin was on the whole was a fair critic and raised serious concerns that others coming at Moral Economy from a political economy perspective would share. Being picked up by Daniel Little in his cross-study of social science approaches helped to further the seriousness and quality of the debate. Little's acceptance of Moral Economy as one of several contributors to a composite approach to social science further benefited Moral Economy as a valuable paradigm.

Had Scott's book been published and received little attention or only acceptance by a limited readership, the ideas it expressed would not have stood out. I am confident that Scott

recognized how challenging his argument was to political economy, but his potential audience may not have realized it if it were not clearly contrasted by Popkin's response and the offshoots of their debate. In short, the debate highlights the differences in the positions and helps articulate why the newer theory developed and what is at stake.

Furthermore, the debate highlights the weaknesses and strengths of each position and makes them more useful by clarifying and improving the positions. For example, divergent positions over the impact of free-riders in village insurance arrangements might not seem like a significant issue for either position as it is fairly settled on each side; that is until it is challenged by the other. Such a challenge serves as the impetus to revisit and critically assess the issue.

The Moral Economy theory calls into question ideas about economic exchange that were once so universal they were not acknowledged by name. As the background of economic theory shifted, some aspects that were taken for granted have been lost if not in practice than at least in the theory constructed to view real economic exchange. Moral Economy highlights the assumptions that people in close-knit communities have about economic security, economic exchange, and what is appropriate to be included in the market as a saleable good. Over time everyday forms of exchange and relationships connecting those exchanges have been severed and the study of economics has fragmented so much that it does not acknowledge micro-level subsistence behavior as relevant to its study. Moral Economy brings back an interest in these types of exchanges, behaviors of resistance, and values for justice, legitimacy, and respect that trump the value of efficiency and wealth accumulation for its own sake.

Moral Economy brings normative considerations back into focus for all levels of the economy, local formal and state-level formal and informal economy, with the potential for

international/global formal and informal economies. The Moral Economy debate helps raise questions about what ought to be part of the economy. By engaging with individuals and groups who do not initially latch onto the same position such questions have more potential for actually shaping changes in society. Questions about whether staples such as basic food items and water ought to be subject to the same fluctuations in the market. Moral Economy debate can address how unpaid labor such as childcare and eldercare are addressed in local or state economy. Moral Economy is well suited to raise arguments about what the most fair arrangement of taxes could be and why. The debate is a spark for more public discussion about what ought to be part of the formal economy, informal economy, or beyond the perimeters of economic consideration.

The debate highlights the various interpretations about acceptable class inequity and widely divergent quality of life in society. Moral Economy asks if such economic disparity between members of the same society is acceptable not only from an efficiency standpoint, but from a moral one. While political economy provides quantitative analysis about median income, Moral Economy makes qualitative evaluation of the different positions about who is well-off, living on the margins (subsisting), and is unable to subsist without help. While the quantitative analysis should not be ignored, qualitative evaluation provides a more complete understanding about the needs for a social safety net as well as economic arrangements and taxes.

As with many debates the question of evidence is of interest. What counts as evidence and how much evidence is required to adequately support a novel or challenging theory? How should the evidence be treated and presented to others? The appearance of supporting evidence initially helps each party in their case, however, the reader/observer is wise to realize the evidence (particular cases and historical data) as well as the language can be manipulated to support the argument one desires. The more information and evidence the better and it must be

comparable to do appropriately do a compare/contrast study. In some cases, such as social science where the events are historical rather than current, the kind of information available will be different and may be more limited than at earlier times. However, lack of data does not mean no judgment can be made as some insights are still found from limited data. Theory as well as empirical evidence and narratives provide useful insight into the workings of human relationships as they pertain to economic matters.

CHAPTER 5:

In the Scheme of Things: Moral Economy and Political Philosophy

Introduction

Moral Economy has never been presented by its advocates as a comprehensive political theory. It does not appear to have the breadth and scope of a political theory in the conventional sense. Nevertheless, we may learn something about how Moral Economy functions and how it is perceived by its academic supporters by examining it in relation to several dominant political theories. In the following chapter I examine Liberalism, Socialism, and Anarchism and evaluate how they compare with Moral Economy. All of these theories impact the perception of Moral Economy in educated observers and advocates. They may have limited impact to the individuals identified as participating in moral economic social exchanges.

One notable difference between Moral Economy theory and other political theories is that it is based on observations and historical analysis about the way political and social units actually function, what the communities present as shared values and goals. This ground up approach is unique because it enters the discussion with theories that were developed first by learned individuals and then introduced into society in an effort to move it in a new direction. While particular individuals are notable for their contribution to understanding Moral Economy, they do not play the same role as Kant or Mill do to Liberalism, or as Marx plays to Socialism. E.P. Thompson, James Scott and others who draw attention to examples of Moral Economy and the values embedded in everyday actions, take their cue from what is already occurring in society

rather than proposing an utopian vision. Given this distinct perspective, I hope political philosophy can also adjust its premises based on a better understanding of Moral Economy.

The following chapter presents three major political theories or movements, including Liberalism, Socialism, and Anarchism. In each section I offer an overview of the political theory, compare it with Moral Economy, and suggest ways Moral Economy would respond to its central tenets. Liberalism, Socialism, and Anarchism are not the only political theories which could be compared with Moral Economy.²⁶⁹ However, I selected them based on their influence on the social and political spheres within which many of the historic and contemporary Moral Economy case studies arise. They also all continue to influence individuals' assumptions about what Moral Economy responds to in the public political sphere.

Following a review of each political theory, I compare it with Moral Economy to highlight commonalities and differences. I also analyze how compatible each theory would be with Moral Economy if both were applied in real social and political settings in our contemporary world. Next, I propose two archetypal cases that demonstrate the values and priorities a Moral Economy community would be interested in, a small local business in the community that makes and sells edibles, and the care or obligations owed to dependent members in a community such as a person with a debilitating disease and no family. I evaluate how Moral Economy as well as the three political theories under consideration would guide public response. Finally, I argue that while Moral Economy may not be a comprehensive political theory, it does have elements that need to be considered in political philosophy.

²⁶⁹ Other political theories that may be of interest to compare include Conservatism, Communitarianism, Libertarianism, Monarchism and Imperialism.

Liberalism

Liberalism as a political theory has a varied and wide reaching scope. There are many branches of thought and specific theories, owing in part to its long and rich history in Western political philosophy. While I will try providing as complete an overview as possible, I focus on classical liberal political theory articulated by John Stuart Mill, as well as drawing upon Rawlsian liberal ethics.

Liberty

If any single value unites different strains of Liberalism it is liberty. Liberty pertains to personal freedom, but how that is understood can vary from one person to another. Two general notions of liberty as it pertains to the public sphere and responsibilities of government are negative liberty and positive liberty. Negative liberty requires that no coercion or limits are placed on people's ability to do what they want. They should not be enslaved, imprisoned, or in any other way coerced to do something against their will. In his seminal paper, Isaiah Berlin articulates the notion of negative freedom in clear terms.

I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity. Political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others. If I am prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do, I am to that degree unfree; and if this area is contracted by other men beyond a certain minimum, I can be described as being coerced, or it may be, enslaved.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberalism and Its Critics*, ed. Michael Sandel (New York: New York University Press, 1984). p. 15-16

Proponents of negative liberty will argue that the state is responsible for protecting citizens from coercion. If they support negative liberty alone, they may argue that the state is limited to protect its' citizens from interference from others. John Stuart Mill, for example, was concerned with the overreach of political rulers, religious authorities, and laws that restrict and censor individuals. In *On Liberty*, Mill argues,

That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot fully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise or even right. ... The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it.²⁷¹

Positive liberty takes the idea a step further. Not only do they presume absence from coercion, but positive liberty entails self-direction or autonomy. A truly free person is one whose actions are her own and who acts to pursue her own ends. Most contemporary proponents of Liberalism accept positive liberty as the ideal. Positive liberty requires certain material and social resources are available to the individual. The state is responsible for providing the necessities for individuals to pursue their ends. The state and other members of society may not limit an individual's actions so long as they do not hurt others, but they need to have the basic social and material goods to be self-directing, such as education, adequate nutrition, and equal access to opportunities.

²⁷¹ John Stuart Mill and John Gray, *On Liberty and Other Essays* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). p. 14

Rights

Corresponding to liberty are the rights individuals have that protect them from coercive forces, and ensure they receive legal protection, social support and perhaps material goods to act in an autonomous manner. In order to ensure both negative and positive liberty, individuals are given political rights which they may use as claims against others who try to limit their liberty and claims upon others, including the state, which have corresponding responsibilities to fulfill their rights. Some of the best known rights are identified by Mill as “liberty of thought and discussion”, which are also known as rights of free-speech, free-thought, and freedom of the press.²⁷² Rights work as the legal and political means by which liberties are supported and enforced. When a particular right is not protected by law, people will make an argument indicating the right is based on some widely agreed upon principle or is similar to other recognized and protected rights to such a degree that the right in question deserves legal protection. Once a right has legal status it provides individuals with legitimacy in their claim for upholding the right, and recourse when the right is violated. Additionally, the right entails responsibilities for other people or obligations the state must meet in order to meet the right. Without rights, the liberties discussed by liberal (or any other) political philosophy would remain abstract and would not reflect the lives of the people they were intended to address.

Property

While John Locke is best known as the theorist with whom private property protection becomes entwined with Liberal political theory, most liberals take private property for granted

²⁷² John Stuart Mill, David Bromwich, and George Kateb, *On Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

within a liberal society. Liberalism maintains that an individual or family can hold a parcel of land with all its resources as their own to do with as they wish. The expectation is that private property makes people more connected to the place, more likely to take care of it or improve it, and on the whole make them better citizens. Part of the role of government then is to protect private property rights, help maintain records and order, and adjudicate legal disputes about property and resource use. Locke makes a theological and teleological argument for property asserting,

God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it them for their benefit, and the greatest conveniences of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the Industrious and Rational... So that God, by commanding to subdue, gave Authority so far to *appropriate*. And the condition of humane life, which requires labor and materials to work on, necessarily introduces *private possessions*.²⁷³

Although few liberals would be inclined to make such an argument now, many still believe private property makes individuals more productive, distributes the means for survival in an acceptable way, prevents deterioration of the land presumed in commons arrangements, and by connecting with a place private property owners become stewards and better citizens than those without property. Moreover, private property is believed to be connected with freedom. In summarizing the classical liberal position connecting property with liberty, Gaus and Courtland explain, “unless people are free to make contracts and to sell their labour, or unless they are free to save their incomes and then invest them as they see fit, or unless they are free to run enterprises when they have obtained the capital, they are not really free.”²⁷⁴ They go on to note

²⁷³ John Locke and Peter Laslett, *Two Treatises of Government*, Student ed. (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). SS34-35, pp. 291-292.

²⁷⁴ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford: The Metaphysics Research Lab, 2011), s.v. "Liberalism."

that supporting the idea that liberty requires private property can be implemented in many ways, from a libertarian, to near-anarchist, to very left approach that allows for a social minimum.

Equality

The idea of equality is prevalent in many liberal theories of political philosophy. However, as a concept “equality” unqualified is quite vague. It could mean as some have suggested, equal opportunity, equal protection under the law or constitution, equal value in the view of God or society’s moral evaluation. It may also mean each individual has the same influence in political decision making, such as in a truly representative and fully participatory democracy. Equality can also be taken to impose entitlements and limits to material resources and wealth. Throughout history equality has also been reserved for certain groups of people within society. People of a particular gender, class, race, religion, age, or other status may be of the group that is equal among their peers, while others who do not meet these limited criteria (or may not even be formally recognized as people) were excluded.

John Rawls’ work on ‘egalitarian’ Liberalism is widely recognized as supporting a liberal approach to social justice. Rawls argues for two principles of justice that ensure every person has an equal claim to equal basic rights and liberties which would be compatible to all people, and that any inequalities are under conditions of fair equality of opportunity and be of the greatest benefit to the least advantaged members of society.²⁷⁵ He explains,

The two principles express an egalitarian form of Liberalism in virtue of three elements. These are a) the guarantee of the fair value of the political liberties, so that these are

²⁷⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

not purely formal; b) fair equality of opportunity; and finally c) the so-called difference principle, which says that the social and economic inequalities attached to offices and positions are to be adjusted so that, whatever the level of those inequalities, whether great or small, they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.²⁷⁶

While such a position has been associated with welfare-state capitalism, Rawls supports a market Socialist regime as more just than welfare-state capitalism. Regardless of how the ideas are manifest in a particular government structure, the important thing to notice is an emphasis on broad equality and its connection with justice. In contrast with a cut-throat competitive public sphere which only protects equality of opportunity, but allows merit or other devious methods to result in a widely unbalanced distribution of resources, Rawls' equality supports fairness of both opportunity and material wealth distribution. To have anything less would be unjust and one role of society and governments is to protect, preserve, and promote justice. Although Rawls viewed his political Liberalism as limited to providing a neutral political framework, he provides substantial support for a more comprehensive theory that supports a notion of the good, an ethical theory focused on justice, and a more robust examination of the relationship between the individual person and society, than many previous liberal theories.

Individual Autonomy and Reason

One assumption liberals make that shapes their notions of liberty, rights, and equality is the focus on the individual person. More specifically, they expect and encourage an individual who is autonomous to make their own decisions, and has the rational capacity and inclination to

²⁷⁶ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). p. 6

think about their own best interest. Exceptions in both theory and policy exist to account for the reality that not every person is an autonomous rational person; children, severely mentally or physically disabled persons, and persons imprisoned for criminal offenses for example, need to be addressed differently to account for their insufficient rational capacity and/or lack of autonomy. Nonetheless, the general population of adults is assumed to be free to make their own decisions, rationally capable of doing so, and also free to act on those decisions. This assumption forms the basis of notions of individual liberty, freedom from government or other types of social control and coercion, legal rights to bodily and communicative freedoms, and the belief that every individual is equal (in whatever way is construed in a particular state) before the eyes of the law.

Tolerance for diverse ideas of the good

One reason why so many variations of Liberalism exist is part of Liberalism's core tenets supports tolerance for many ideas of the good. Liberalism attempts to establish a political framework without getting too deep into an ethical system. As a consequence, Liberalism recognizes that reasonable people may pursue different ways of living that are compatible with each other. It does not focus on imposing one of these ethical systems over the others so long as they all can maintain tolerance of each other and fit within the general liberal framework. As a political theory that gained traction during the Protestant reformation in Europe and henceforth spread to many places and cultures throughout the world, Liberalism works by creating a coalition of supporters who want to maintain their own entrenched ethical and religious convictions while living in a relatively peaceful cohesive state.

The idea of tolerance has been around for much longer than Liberal political theory, but Mill, along with Kant, contributed to the widening of the concept from religious tolerance to a broad tolerance for the good life of one's choosing. Tolerance need not be restricted to already widespread religious, ethical, or cultural systems, but extend to an individual's decision of how he wants to live his own life. In *On Liberty* in chapter three on Individuality, Mill argues against the hold that church, custom, and mediocrity have on those who are more enlightened or have a strong character. He praises eccentricity and says, "the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service."²⁷⁷ Mill goes on to assert, "There is no reason that all human existences should be constructed on some one, or some small number of patterns."²⁷⁸ In this quote he suggests that not only will variance from the norm be accepted, but that it is desirable.

Compatibility Analysis

Like Liberalism, Moral Economy requires some liberties and supports many of the same rights. Freedom of association, freedom of thought, and freedom of speech are all supported by Moral Economy. Other freedoms, such as the freedom of religion are compatible with Moral Economy, but Moral Economy does not address those freedoms.

Moral Economy recognizes individuals and on some issues prioritizes the individual perspective/individual rights. However, Moral Economy emphasizes the collective nature of human life in society. Thus, it draws attention to the community and also highlights justice issues on behalf of the most vulnerable in the community. Those who are most exposed to the dangers

²⁷⁷ Mill et al.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 131

of shifting markets, natural disaster, and food insecurity deserve more protection than individuals who are better situated. While there is some humanitarian interest in social welfare or insurance protection for vulnerable individuals, social welfare is also recognized to be in the interest of the community as a whole.

Regarding property, Moral Economy accepts private property so long as it is distributed by a fair process and without great disparity. It also accepts and promotes collective/common property. A mix of private and communal property is evident in many communities identified as expressing moral economic claims. Typically the argument against privatizing the commons is not a theoretical one, but based on the perceived injustice of how it was privatized, by whom, to what purpose, and the effects the privatization had on previous users. Moral Economy theorists do not argue that private property should be abolished altogether, but they are more sensitive to the claims for the common-pool resources, and want to carve out a place for collective use and maintenance of the commons. Another important aspect of Moral Economy is that it demands limits on private property so that community considerations come before an interest in personal gain. Private property could be argued to be for the collective good. For example, moral economists and individuals engaged in moral economic claims will argue against unrestricted free trade. Some things ought not to be for sale, others should not be on the open market until community needs have been satisfied. Some goods that are kept out of the market sphere remain privately held, while community needs may best be satisfied by private ownership of resources.

Moral Economy does not argue explicitly on behalf of equality. Based on my readings of diverse accounts and arguments for it, Moral Economy appears to be compatible with a strong principle of equality, but also could also allow distinctions between groups of people. Equal

protection before the law appears to be fundamental, but class equality or strict egalitarianism is not demanded.

Moral Economy comes up against Liberal political ideas with great frequency. Liberalism is increasing in many local areas and regions where traditional ways of life and the values that support that traditional society clash with the values and practices Liberalism brings. While Liberalism proclaims support for many varieties of the good life, its formal tolerance is often employed as a shield to convert local people to conform to modern capitalist or other imposed value systems. Liberalism is also so widespread globally, that even when a community chooses to act in ways contrary to liberal values, they do so with at least some awareness that they are subverting a dominant system of political values. A community that has a long history of subsistence agriculture must confront the fact that they are now part of a global market where liberal values control institutions, including the markets they depend upon, nongovernmental organizations, as well as state and international government. To continue subsistence agriculture, the community and its members will need to confront opportunities that could alter what it means to farm within a liberal global system.

However, Moral Economy may be compatible with Liberalism as one idea of the good life. As such it need not come into conflict with Liberalism, but Liberalism also will not have much to say about particular claims. The most likely place where Liberalism and Moral Economy could come into conflict would be about the role of property, especially common property and common-pool resources, and the role and function of the markets. Moral Economy makes more explicit the value of the commons and common-pool resources and supports strict formal as well as informal controls on the market of goods. Liberalism also tends to advocate a hands-off approach to markets when it does not produce immediate severe harms to individuals.

Moral Economy proponents are more perceptive of the slow degradation open markets can have on both individuals and the community as a whole. Sayer contends, “Liberalism’s characteristic concern with the intrusion of the state into other spheres has been matched by a blindness to the intrusions and distortions of life produced by markets, money and capital. A key area in which a revived political economy needs to develop is in the interaction between these spheres.”²⁷⁹ Moral Economy offers one type of response to the interaction between the state and markets.

The other major source of potential conflict between Liberalism and Moral Economy would be in cases where liberals perceive some injustice perpetuated under a Moral Economy system, even when it is accepted by individuals in the community. Examples could include the economic and social standing of women in a community, the ability to restrict selling one’s property to anyone willing to pay the asking price, a limitation on what someone can do with their property (or common-pool resources), and discrimination of foreigners or other “outsiders”. Some communities may deem certain inequalities and restrictions as important for maintaining their way of life. These inequalities and restrictions could be problematic for liberals even if they do not negatively affect individuals outside of that community. Additionally, they may have unintentional widespread impacts that do affect individuals outside the community, which would increase chances that liberals would openly attack Moral Economy practices or values.

Moral Economy proponents will need to fight their own battles and cannot rely on Liberalism to support them either theoretically or in particular practical matters. Also, within a global liberal political theory, the space for Moral Economy is at the local level. While it has always emphasized the local community, the connections between people have expanded with communication technology, faster and more frequent travel, and international treaties. This

²⁷⁹ Andrew Sayer, "Moral Economy and Political Economy," *Studies in Political Economy*, no. 61 (2000). p 94

expansion has suited the spread of liberal theory and values, but may make Moral Economy proponents feel like they and their values are being squeezed out. I argue there is still space for Moral Economy, but it will continue to be the local space it has always has. Moral Economy is not conducive to scaling up in the way Liberalism is. The local space need not be a marginalized space, although it may feel relatively small. If many moral economies exist in many communities and among likeminded people, Moral Economy could continue to not only exist but thrive in a liberal international arrangement.

Socialism

Socialism is an important political theory to compare with Moral Economy because it has had influence on global political movements throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. Some of these forces have come into direct contact with communities espousing a Moral Economy ethos. Moreover, while communist political systems are declining, the ideas developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels promoted by Socialism have had a significant influence on political thought. Throughout the twentieth century, Socialism has been the dominant alternative to Liberalism. If Moral Economy is not aligned with Liberalism, then some may suggest it is better supported by Socialism. As with Liberalism, there are principles it shares with Socialism; equally true is that there are areas of tension between Moral Economy and Socialism which make these seeming allies an uncomfortable fit. Because Socialism owes much to the philosophy and passion of Karl Marx, I start with his contributions. Later I look forward with the vision presented by the Democratic Socialists of America in their public report.

Economics drives society

Marx's work is well known for making the connection between the economic relations of society and other relations including political, intellectual and religious. Unlike Liberalism, which tries to take a hands-off approach to the market and economic activities, Marxism and Socialism strive to draw attention to it. Throughout his extensive writings, Marx developed the theory of historical materialism, which was presented as a social-scientific explanation of how people throughout history have related to each other through economic systems based on material production. In the earliest prehistoric societies, land and natural resources were commonly held; during ancient and middle ages periods the feudal system persisted which held one class of people as agricultural workers (serfs) for the management and protector class (lords). At the time Marx was writing, capitalism was becoming dominant and required a wealthy class of investors who hired a working class to mass produce material goods for a commodity market. He anticipated that capitalism, like earlier systems, would collapse and would be replaced by a more egalitarian economic system. Marx provides a succinct account of historical materialism in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

In the social production of their existence, men enter into definite, necessary relations, which are independent of their will, namely, relations of production corresponding to a determinate stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which there arises a legal and political superstructure and to which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, it is their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – what is merely a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within the framework of which they have hitherto operated. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. At that

point an era of social revolution begins. With the change in the economic foundation the whole immense superstructure is more slowly or more rapidly transformed.²⁸⁰

An important point to observe about historical materialism is that it indicates economics is not a realm that can be separated out from the rest of human existence. Economic systems shape human lives even when they are not directly participating in wage labor, purchasing or selling goods. The economic system people participate in impacts their social relations, political possibilities, arts, literature, philosophy, and all other areas of life. The economic system is also not of their choosing, and by themselves individuals cannot change the system.

Capitalism Corrupts and Oppresses

Socialists tend to argue for relative social and economic equality for all people. They have seen other systems of economics from mercantilism to capitalism that concentrate considerable wealth and power in the hands of a limited few, while the majority of people struggle to get by or lack adequate resources to live a dignified life. There is an outrage and deep seated sense of injustice at these systems as well as toward the individuals who profit at the expense of others. The workers or proletariat deserve more than what they have been offered thus far. Moreover, Socialism maintains they deserve, as a result of both their human dignity and contributions to society, to have adequate social services, earnings reflective of their productivity, and a safety-net that supports them even when they are too old or infirm to work. According to the public document of the Democratic Socialists of America, "The capitalist market economy not only suppresses global living standards but also leads to chronic

²⁸⁰ Karl Marx, "Preface and Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," ed. David J. Romagnolo (Foreign Languages Press, 1858) (accessed March 28 2013).

underfunding of socially necessary public goods, from research and development to preventative health care and job training.”²⁸¹

Not only do Socialists see capitalism as a terrible economic system, they also point out how both principles and practices of capitalism cause harm to people by creating inequalities along race and gender, promote violence as a means of making a profit as well as the careless destruction of the natural environment. Moreover, capitalism is perceived as undermining the democratic governments and the democratic spirit of the nations within which it functions. The Democratic Socialists of America highlight three broad values that lead them into the twenty-first century including democracy, liberty and solidarity. They declare, “We are Socialists because we reject an international economic order sustained by private profit, alienated labor, race and gender discrimination, environmental destruction, and brutality and violence in defense of the status quo.”²⁸² In explaining the problems of capitalism for workers and democracy they write,

In the workplace, capitalism eschews democracy. Individual employees do not negotiate the terms of their employment, except in rare circumstances when their labor is highly skilled. Without unions, employees are hired and fired at will. Corporations govern through hierarchical power relations more characteristic of monopolies than free markets. Simply put, the domination of the economy by privately owned corporation is not the most rational and equitable way to govern our economic life.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Democratic Socialists of America, "Building the Next Left: The Political Perspective of the Democratic Socialists of America" www.dsusa.org/wherewestand (accessed April 4, 2013). p 3.

²⁸² Ibid. p 2.

²⁸³ Ibid. p 3.

Recognizing both that Capitalism and the systems of economic and market function that pre-date it are ill suited for a society that values solidarity, liberty and democracy, a new vision and system must replace it.

Collective Control of Economy

With the assumption that the state is maintained and works on behalf of all people and with the input of all adults of sound mind, some Socialists expect the state to be best suited to determining what is best for society, then allocating and distributing resources accordingly. In the twentieth century this tended to result in central control by an oligarchy or a tyrant who oversaw mistreatment of individuals in the name of social good. Contemporary Socialists want to avoid these power grabs and horrific expressions of the utilitarian calculus by encouraging a large politically active public who interact with a responsive government, one which truly represents the values and diversity of the people. This kind of economy does not control micro-exchanges, but it does regulate heavily how businesses function, how they treat and compensate their employees, and how they interact with people from individual customers to whole communities. While some Socialists raise concerns about abuse of power and corruption under a state controlled economy, others point to the efficiencies available in public services and the social insurance that can be distributed more effectively. The Democratic Socialists of America articulate both of these beliefs as they write,

Control of economic, social and cultural life by either government or corporate elites is hostile to the vision of democratic pluralism embraced by democratic Socialism. The social welfare programs of government have been for the most part positive, if partial, responses to the genuine social needs of the great majority of Americans. The dismantling of such programs by conservative and corporate elites in the absence of any

alternatives will be disastrous. Abandoning schools, health care, and housing, for example, to the control of an unregulated free market magnifies the existing harsh realities of inequality and injustice.²⁸⁴

Consequently, they have identified their goals as economic democracy, global justice, and social redistribution. Economic democracy means “the direct ownership and/or control of much of the economic resources of society by the great majority of wage and income earners.”²⁸⁵ Global justice is understood as a way to ensure superior standards internationally for wages, working conditions, environmental standards and social rights. Steps toward global justice would include stronger enforcement on existing treaties on labor standards and the environment to prioritize social justice over corporate profit. It also would benefit from stronger international ties between trade unions to support fair wages, safe working conditions, and social rights. Social redistribution means just what it suggests, “the shift of wealth and resources from the rich to the rest of society.”²⁸⁶

Collective Good

Regardless of the specifics, all Socialist theories and groups espouse some value for the common or collective good. Marxist Socialists typically focus on collective ownership of the means of production, such as machinery, patents (or absence of patents), land and other property as well as money for investing in production and social programs. The Socialist Party of Great

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

Britain builds on the materialist idea of collective good to promote participatory democracy asserting,

Common ownership means that society as a whole owns the means and instruments for distributing wealth. It also implies the democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth, for if everyone owns, then everyone must have equal right to control the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth.²⁸⁷

They argue that it means nothing for the tools of society to be held collectively if the control is limited by a select few, regardless of who they are or their intentions. Common ownership logically necessitates common decision making power.

Contemporary Socialist organizations are more likely to extend the idea of common good to the ability to experience good quality of life and fair treatment or equal rights for all persons regardless of age, gender, sex, sexual orientation, previous class status, disability, race, nationality, and other qualities or personal attributes. Some groups' central focus is on collective good. The Freedom Socialist Party, for example, lists racial/national freedom, women's liberation, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality among its top values and priorities.²⁸⁸ These are also compatible with its promotion of universal human rights. Both of these extensions from material collective good to political and personal are shared by the Socialist Party USA. Socialist Party USA expresses their stance that,

Socialism is not mere government ownership, a welfare state, or a repressive bureaucracy. Socialism is a new social and economic order in which workers and

²⁸⁷ Socialist Party of Great Britain, "Our Object and Declaration of Principles" <http://www.worldSocialism.org/spgb/our-object-and-declaration-principles> (accessed September 26 2013).

²⁸⁸ Freedom Socialist Party, "Platform" <http://www.Socialism.com/drupal-6.8/?q=node/16&phpMyAdmin=ef6f882d5add4550a67686f87cc40ae7> (accessed September 26 2013).

consumers control production and community residents control their neighborhoods, homes, and schools. The production of society is used for the benefit of all humanity, not for the private profit of a few. ... People across the world need to cast off the systems which oppress them, and build a new world fit for all humanity.²⁸⁹

Compatibility Analysis

Socialism and Moral Economy would appear to many to be natural allies, and it is true they share several values and interpretations of how society, economy, and state should function. However, there are several important differences. I will first describe their commonalities, then explain where they part ways by endorsing opposing views and values. First, both Socialism and Moral Economy understand how intertwined economic relations are with other social forces, relations and values. Both recognize you cannot meaningfully separate the economic sphere from the political sphere; they are two aspects of one unified human society.

Second, both Moral Economy and Marxism, which has significantly influenced Socialism, agree that goods are more than just their exchange value. They want to de-commodify material goods, but for different reasons. Marx illuminated the labor (labor-time) required to produce it and sees labor power as a commodity in a capitalist system. Marxism also argues that surplus-value (capital accumulation) is unfair in that it enslaves workers, and it is also unsustainable, even under the best conditions. Moral Economy however, wants to highlight other values of material goods and natural resources including cultural, religious, personal/sentimental values. They would argue that many goods that appear to be commodities, that is equivalent to another because of what they are made of or how they are used, actually are

²⁸⁹ Socialist Party USA, "Socialism as Radical Democracy" <http://Socialistparty-usa.net/principles.html> (accessed September 26 2013).

not commodities at all once their social, cultural, religious, temporal and place values are appreciated.

Third, Moral Economy and Socialism are concerned about economic injustice, that is, unfairly appropriating another's goods or labor to accumulate personal or class advantage or accumulate personal wealth. Similarly they both raise concerns about wide economic disparity, the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Both wish to halt economic injustice and reduce or eliminate economic disparity.

Fourth, they both accept collective claims toward improving the living and working conditions of the common man. Both accept revolts, uprisings and revolutions as acceptable means to overturn corrupt and exploitative systems or practices. Finally, both Moral Economy and Socialism support social cooperation and common property with collective management of common pool resources. Thus, they both encourage some kind of direct participation in politics, which is sometimes described as a commitment to democratic process and democratic ideals.

Moral Economy disagrees with Marxism on the acceptability of private property, as it permits fair and just distribution of private property. Some forms of Socialism permit some private property, while others maintain that all property ought to be collectively held and controlled. Moral Economy typically promotes a mix of private property and communal property and aims for a relatively even distribution of private property whenever possible. Moral Economy does not aim for a redistribution scheme for property like some Socialist groups demand. Instead, they would aim to reduce disparity by providing low-cost options to poor

community members to purchase land or property when it becomes available while complying with local customs and respected laws.²⁹⁰

Secondly, Moral Economy parts ways with Socialism when it focuses on the local control rather than centralized control of material goods as well as social and political decisions. Socialism tends to centralize control of goods and political decision making, but believes it is in the benefit of society as a whole. Even democratic Socialism that calls on a large and active political public to vote, submit input or comments, and welcomes dissent, tend to expect that policies and programs will be carried out on a national or global scale. Although Moral Economy similarly encourages direct participation in the political process, it does so with the expectation that anything that can remain at the local level ought to be kept under local control among people who know each other. Similarly, Moral Economy pursues a vision of the good life for local, regional, and within shared interest areas. Socialism wants to enact its vision of the good life uniformly throughout the world.

Importantly, Moral Economy communities may not share the same views about the good life as Socialism. They might not require equality within their own functional community. They might be more tolerant of some practices, e.g. accumulating wealth, and less tolerant of others, e.g. personal expression.

In general, Moral Economy is tolerant of differences in class and economic status so long as they are not the result of oppression and unfair practices. Socialists may argue that differences in class and economic status are necessarily the result of oppression and unfair practices. However, Moral Economy is more meritocratic and less egalitarian than Socialism. Nevertheless,

²⁹⁰ Not all laws are respected laws; respected laws are a subset of laws.

Moral Economy proponents demand complete transparency and fair dealings, which are often lacking in the practice of capitalism.

Finally, Moral Economy promotes some favoritism in the form of family and neighbor connections. Strangers and foreigners, persons not integrated in the community or those only tenuously connected with it would typically receive less consideration. In the case of an interest group that adopts Moral Economy, the difference would be between members or stakeholders versus non-members or non-stakeholders. Socialists would argue against favoritism and for the notion that we are all members of society. However, the values of Moral Economy suggest that family, friends, neighbors and others who share our interests or values demand more of our consideration than strangers. They would not find this to be problematic because there is an underlying expectation that everyone is the member of some community and would likewise find support in that community. Moreover, the attempt to give every person equal consideration would be both burdensome and result in such diffuse benefits as to be devoid of any real meaning or value.

Anarchism

Due to Anarchism's manifold expression in theory, analysis and application it can be difficult to summarize. While this is true to some extent with every social vision or political theory it is even more so with Anarchism. Hence, I will not be addressing all versions or representations of Anarchism in this section but will focus on mutualism and social Anarchism.

Central Tenets of Anarchism

The most important feature of Anarchism is its demand that human society be free from government. Government is believed to be unnecessary, and a peaceful and prosperous society without government is possible. Often government and the “rule of law” are observed to become corrupt forces only interested in maintaining themselves, with little regard to the will or best interest of the people to which they apply. Some advocates for Anarchism argue that not only is a government society not desirable, but that it is actually harmful, even violent. In “Anarchism: - What It Really Stands For Anarchy” Emma Goldman defines Anarchism as “The philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary.”²⁹¹ According to Goldman, being free from government means finally allowing the virtues and abilities of each individual person to shine through. She writes,

Just as religion has fettered the human mind, and as property, or the monopoly of things, has subdued and stifled man’s needs, so has the State enslaved his spirit, dictating every phase of conduct. “All government in essence,” says Emerson, “is tyranny.” It matters not whether it is government by divine right or majority rule. In every instance its aim is the absolute subordination of the individual.²⁹²

In contrast with other established political theories, Anarchism is notable for its imprecise and diverse beliefs with the exception of its central tenet that society does not require an authority or bureaucracy to be stable, peaceful, and prosperous. This is indicative of the willingness of Anarchists to permit a multi-layered vision of Anarchism to stand in the same broad community and use the same term. While many Anarchists view Anarchism as communal,

²⁹¹ Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (Rockville, MD: Serenity Publishers, 2009). p. 37

²⁹² Ibid. p. 25

others view it as individualistic. While many view it as promoting peace, other Anarchists use rebellion and violence to push back against authoritarian politics and social forces.

In many other ways, Anarchism accepts and even promotes diversity and disorder. In *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, James Scott highlights several examples, including the problems many people experience with highly planned cities and neighborhoods. Citing the work of Jane Jacobs, he notes that chaos and disorder are much more tolerable, even desirable, in the lived city than the designs of city planners and architects. Scott, summarizes “it became clear that the effort by urban planners to turn cities into disciplined works of art of geometric visual order was not just fundamentally misguided, it was an attack on the actual, functioning order of a successful urban neighborhood.”²⁹³ This example as well as those of seemingly chaotic but highly productive gardens and non-institutionalized disruptions for extending rights, indicate that in what at first appears to be order can actually be dysfunctional, while what looks like chaos can actually be orderly and highly functional.

Absence of hierarchy

The distinguishing feature of Anarchism permits it to take many forms. Because its development is not limited to a centralized group of authoritarian figures, Anarchism can and does change based on how the adopters of its central belief wish. While some non-Anarchists view the lack of hierarchy as a problem that invites chaos and violence, it is precisely the lack of hierarchy that suggests to many Anarchists that individuals need to be involved directly with their community, thus making cooperation more important than with other political systems. The

²⁹³ James C. Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

absence of hierarchy that Anarchism seeks to achieve is also a critical way of achieving complete freedom and liberty. In contrast with social, collectivist, and mutualistic Anarchism, the Libertarian strain of Anarchism puts individual liberty center and permits significant disparities in wealth and power between individuals.

Anarchism promotes liberty and freedom in place of hierarchy and domination. Goldman offers a poetic and powerful summary of these values as they are held in Anarchism writing,

Anarchism, then, really stands for the liberation of the human mind from the domination of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government. Anarchism stands for social order based on the free grouping of individuals for the purpose of producing real social wealth; an order that will guarantee to every human being free access to the earth and full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations.²⁹⁴

Rather than providing comfort, insurance, or opportunities, Goldman and other anarchists view social institutions such as religion, property laws and norms, and government as holding individuals back from the full potential of human life.

Valuing an absence of hierarchy conversely entails valuing independent thought and judgment. Even collectivist and mutualist Anarchists support individuals expressing their own views and making decisions that result from reflection rather than obedience. James Scott discusses the idea of ‘anarchist calisthenics’ which encourages people to “break some trivial law that makes no sense, even if it’s only jaywalking. Use your own head to judge whether a law is just or reasonable.”²⁹⁵ After putting anarchist calisthenics to practice, Scott cautions that the process of deciding what law is unreasonable and determining what context is appropriate for

²⁹⁴ Goldman. p. 44

²⁹⁵ Scott.

breaking some trivial law is more complicated than it may seem on face value. Having to evaluate for oneself the reasonableness of laws and social norms challenges us to be reflective about their purpose and our role in society, whereas blindly following them does not.

Scott also discusses how following the official order and obeying all rules imposed by society can be an effective way to demonstrate how problematic they really are. He highlights the case of Parisian taxi drivers who, when upset with the authorities about fees or regulations, “bring traffic in Paris to a grinding halt. Knowing that traffic circulated in Paris only by a practiced and judicious disregard of many regulations, they could, merely by following the rules meticulously, bring it to a standstill.”²⁹⁶ Officials and bureaucrats who tend to see society at the macro level either fail to understand the activities that occur at the level of human interaction or assume that imposing order in a top-down fashion will make individuals fit neatly into the planned society. Anarchism takes a stand for meaningful interactions at the person-to-person level, seeing society as something that organically arises from the multitude of exchanges and relationships rather than something to be imposed by city planners. Eliminating hierarchy means removing government officials and city planners in exchange for the contributions from mentally and socially engaged people.

Mutuality

While some Anarchists reject the need for society as well as for government (c.f. Goldman), most Anarchists maintain that we need society and benefit most as individuals when we work together. Murray Bookchin, for example, has been resolute in arguing for Social

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

Anarchism as the original and best version of Anarchism as opposed to “lifestyle Anarchism”. Lifestyle Anarchism emphasizes autonomy, while Social Anarchism promotes freedom from domination. He promotes the belief that freedom in society, and not autonomy, is central to Anarchism. Personalistic lifestyle Anarchism is growing in dominance among Anarchists and has come to exemplify what is meant by “Anarchism” in the public perception. Bookchin critiques,

Anarchism’s lifestyle tendencies orient young people toward a kind of rebellion that expresses itself in terms of narcissism, self-expression, intuition, and personalism – an orientation that stands sharply at odds with the Socialistic core of Anarchism, that was celebrated by Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Malatesta, among so many others.²⁹⁷

Bookchin further argues that Social Anarchism is not only compatible with democracy, but is likely the best way to achieve direct democracy. Bookchin represents those Anarchists whose theory crosses over into Communalism. He promotes, “democratic libertarian social institutions.”²⁹⁸

Democratic participation

In addition to standing up against the deteriorating effects that lifestyle Anarchism has on Anarchism generally, Bookchin is an outspoken supporter of direct democracy. He does not believe representative democracy is true democracy. Democracy is also essential for the success of Anarchism in real societies. Bookchin states, “Bereft of its democratic dimension, Anarchism

²⁹⁷ Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left* p. 164

²⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 152

may indeed come to denote little more than a “collection of individuals, no more and no less.””²⁹⁹ A strong democracy also requires dissensus. Bookchin explains,

In majority decision-making, dissent plays a creative role, valuable in itself as an ongoing democratic phenomenon. Even after a minority temporarily accedes to a majority decision, the minority can dissent from the decision on which they have been defeated and work to overturn it. They are free to openly and persistently articulate reasoned and potentially persuasive disagreements.³⁰⁰

Thus, every persons’ voice and view matters to the debates in direct democracy. Even if your position does not sway the majority, it does make a difference that it be part of the discussion.

Direct participatory democracy reinforces the commonly held Anarchist belief in egalitarianism, that is, everyone’s voice or position is equally valuable and there are no individual people or classes which are more valuable than others. While some Anarchists, such as Robert Paul Wolff³⁰¹, dissent from Bookchin’s position, direct democracy is desired by many Anarchists.

Compatibility Analysis

I consider Anarchism to be the closest to Moral Economy of the three political theories examined in this chapter. They share many of the same values and goals for society. However, as with Liberalism and Socialism, there are several important differences which make these allies distinguishable.

²⁹⁹ Murry Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left: Interviews and Essays, 1993-1998* (Edinburgh: A.K. Press, 1999). p. 151

³⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 149

³⁰¹ Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

First, and most importantly, Moral Economy rejects the central tenet of Anarchism, the disbanding or overthrow of hierarchy and government. Moral Economy does not explicitly argue for the absence of hierarchy or government, but demands a responsive, transparent, and accountable leadership. Like Anarchists, Moral Economy advocates are disappointed and even angry about political maneuvering for personal gain, unreceptive “representatives”, unfair laws, corruption, and uneven enforcement of socially supported laws and customs. Unlike Anarchists, their response is not to throw out the hierarchy or government altogether, but to stand up in various ways to indicate dissatisfaction and demand improvements in government, law, and other institutions within society.

Additionally, Anarchism, even social and mutualistic Anarchism, values the individual and freedom more than Moral Economy. Moral Economy does value the individual, respects autonomy and social freedom, but emphasizes the community above individual desires that are unnecessary for a good life by community norms.

As indicated earlier, there are numerous qualities and values on which Moral Economy and Anarchism agree. Both Moral Economy and Anarchism are well suited to function in small scale social groups, whether place-based local communities or interest groups of like-minded persons. To make an individual’s voice heard or contributions matter, it is preferable to be in a small community rather than a large one where a single person would be relatively insignificant. Likewise, they both value individual participation in government, political, and economic matters such as direct participatory democracy. This value is shared with Socialists as well.

Furthermore, both Anarchism and Moral Economy value the function of society over the form. Structure can be a useful guide, but when it restricts desired function, it is opposed. Scott

expands on this idea writing, “The more highly planned, regulated, and formal a social or economic order is, the more likely it is to be parasitic on informal processes that the formal scheme does not recognize and without which it could not continue to exist, informal processes that the formal order cannot alone create or maintain.”³⁰²

Finally, both Moral Economy and Anarchism recognize that breaking rules/laws is a powerful act that can be used to speak when voices are not able to be heard by officials. In addition to large uprisings, demonstrations and riots, both condone law breaking as a way to express dissatisfaction with the law or process. They also both indicate that law breaking is a form of speech, one typically used when the approved political or legal channels prohibit free speech or when the political process is perceived to be too complicated, closed off or unjust. Even if an individual may legally be permitted to speak about a disagreement over some law, they may feel their perspective will not be heard, understood, respected or they fear retaliation. In response then, such an individual or group may alternatively choose to refuse to follow a law, perhaps even intending to be caught and charged with an infraction to make a point. Both Moral Economy and Anarchism would see such acts as valid oppositional speech.

Comparing Typical Cases

Moral Economy can find common ground with each of the alternative political theories examined here. However, Moral Economy tends to be narrower in scope than each of them. It emphasizes only a few of the issues that make up the political landscape, leaving others to be decided within their own particular communities. I want to now focus on two of those issues by

³⁰² Scott. p. 45

using hypothetical, yet representative cases and compare how Moral Economy would respond and how each of the three political theories addressed in this chapter could be expected to respond.

In each of the cases and within each of the expected responses from the four political theories, I assume that the community is unified in support for their particular political system. These are both hypothetical and idealized communities where they function in accordance with the political theory that motivates them, and where there may be dissent about the particulars within society (if the system accepts dissent), but there is no opposition to the political system within which the community functions.

Case 1: Small Business

Consider the case of a family that wants to open and manage a small business. The potential owners consist of a single man, his parents, and cousins. The business is not a franchise and is a brick and mortar shop, perhaps a candy and gifts store.³⁰³ How would each political theory respond to such a proposition?

Moral Economy would welcome a small business of this sort. The adherents of Moral Economy would expect that a small business comply with all the customs of the community in which it is based, pay taxes so long as they were fairly leveraged and appropriate for the size of the business, make their products available for all members of the community at a reasonable price while still permitting some profit for the owners/managers. They would expect that workers are compensated fairly. Should community leadership want to examine the business more

³⁰³ This business is based on the small business of a friend – *Confections for Any Occasion* by Joel, Theresa WI

closely, they would be able to find clear, complete, and accurate records that indicate all transactions were fair and consensual.

They also would likely expect that raw resources or products made in the community that were suitable for sale in the candy and gifts store would be respected. Consideration for other goods from the community could occur either by making their inventory purchases from within the community whenever possible or competing fairly with other businesses while ensuring accessibility to community members (shoppers). Moral Economy would fully expect that any product sold in the shop is what it is advertised as. For example, a candy listed as dark chocolate ought to truly be a dark chocolate with a certain percentage of cocoa and cocoa butter. It is also expected to be free from additives, fillers, and potentially toxic substances. To knowingly include anything other than dark chocolate in this candy would be to engage in deceptive business practices, which would be strictly prohibited by Moral Economy. The owners should expect to be responsive to community suggestions and complaints or be susceptible to retribution in various forms from public quarrel, boycotting business, petty theft, vandalism of the shop, public demonstration or destruction of their product. As business owners and members of the community who may hold more sway and influence than some others, they are also expected to stand firm for fair business practices for the entire community in both leading by example and making statements to such effect whenever appropriate.

Liberalism would similarly welcome such a shop in the community. The owners would also need to respect all laws, and would be free to determine what additional social customs they wish to follow. They would be free to set the prices of their goods at any rate they wish. They would be welcome to make a profit as long as it was lawful. If prices were out of reach of some community members, a liberal government would not interfere. The success of the business

would be determined by the response of customers, wherever they were located, to the products and prices freely set by the owners. In practical terms, the candy and gift shop may be forced to alter their product or prices in accordance with customer wishes so they could stay in business or make a greater profit. Nevertheless they would not be regulated to set prices at a specific level by a liberal government. The regulations they should expect would be that they do not discriminate against customers for irrelevant reasons, they pay taxes, and follow all laws including those for food safety. However, purity expectations and transparency of ingredients may not be regulated or enforced. If there were any major disagreements with customers, they would expect to be resolved through a formal legal process. Retaliation by customers would not be accepted by a liberal government and violent or destructive retaliation might result in criminal conviction of the perpetrators. The owners would be welcome to participate in the community or source their products from the community, but there would not be any expectation or requirement to do so. The shop could compete with other shops at whatever level it desired, but it would similarly face competition from other shops free from formal limitations. A small start-up would then have a greater challenge in succeeding with competition from long established businesses, businesses with greater reach (regional, global, online), and businesses that could purchase lower priced inventory and raw products.

A Socialist government may prevent the opening of a small family owned business, especially if it felt it was not in the best interest of the state or community, or if it perceived the rewards of such a business would be too concentrated in one family.³⁰⁴ On the other hand, a small business would be more welcome than a corporation or global franchise. The business (idea, name, supplies, and products), and the shop would be considered property. Personal

³⁰⁴ It might consider such a shop a frivolous waste of resources, or as something that would exacerbate health problems of citizens, etc...

property being prohibited, the shop could only exist if it had joint ownership with the community where the managers³⁰⁵ had permission from the Socialist government to operate such a shop on that property. If the business is permitted to open in the Socialist community, it can expect more direct involvement and regulation by the government than such a business would in either a Liberal government or under Moral Economy. The involvement may be at a similar level as with Moral Economy, but it will be initiated primarily by the Socialist government under the direction of the citizens, instead of directly by the citizens. The managers would be permitted to make a living comparable with that of other citizens, but profit beyond that point would be limited or prohibited. Prices for their goods could be regulated to help both with accessibility of their products to citizens as well as to limit income inequality in the society. Alternatively, they may be permitted to make a significant profit, but be taxed heavily so as to contribute that wealth to community programs, infrastructure and to offset the lower incomes of other citizens.

Anarchism would likely welcome such a shop, especially because it is a small one with little to no hierarchy. There would not be government and regulations to contend with, which may benefit the owners in some instances, but they would also need to deal more directly with their neighbors and other community members on an ongoing basis to ensure they were integrated smoothly into the function of the society. There would be informal pressure put on the owners to make a fair but not outlandish profit; although this would be through social pressure and not laws. Similarly there may be some pressure to purchase supplies from the community, but it may be more dispersed than in Moral Economy. The business and owners may or may not be expected to comply with social norms and customs (or norms may be quite relaxed). If there are disagreements, they could result in more diffused reaction than under any of the other

³⁰⁵ The same persons who were described as owners in previous scenarios would here be considered managers because they would share ownership of the business with the society/government.

systems. At a minimum, the owners would be primarily responsible for handling any difficulties or disagreements and could not rely on law enforcement, a legal process, or even an organized government to adjudicate disputes or “crimes”. The owners would be expected to be engaged in their community, although this could be expressed in various ways depending on the social expectations and capacities of the owners. If candy making and managing a shop was what the owners really wanted to do, an Anarchist society would encourage and welcome such skills and would further encourage ongoing development of their creativity and capacities, rather than regulate and restrict them.

Case 2: Severely Disabled Person

Consider the case of an adult female who is quadriplegic and moderately psychologically challenged by cycles of depression and anxiety. She cannot walk or work with her hands, and has problems with fatigue. She can see, hear, speak, read, and think as well as any other typical adult. Her condition will not improve over time and she cannot live independently or work for a traditional employer. Her parents used to take care of her, but recently died. How would each of the four social-political systems respond to this severely disabled member of their community? I raise this case under a chapter focused on political theory because social support for the most vulnerable in society is an important aspect of Moral Economy. Moreover, care and social integration of disabled persons is increasingly recognized to have both economic and political impact as well as personal and social effects. While some political theories explicitly address welfare for those who cannot take care of themselves, others do not. Comparing all four theories on this case will highlight those differences.

Moral Economy would see this woman as the responsibility of the society. If her parents or other family could still provide primary care and economic support, that would be promoted. There would likely be an effort to coordinate her care through a group of designated care givers, perhaps nurses, neighbors, family friends, and other community volunteers. She may be encouraged to do whatever work she could so as to give her a purpose and contribute to the community. However, she would not be forsaken even if she could not work. Part of the community interaction would be to make community gatherings accessible so she felt she belonged, and to also reduce the affects of anxiety and depression. The resources to provide her care would be from individuals, charitable collections, and perhaps a community insurance fund. Depending on the resources and priorities of the community, she may or may not be able to access cutting edge medical treatment or designer medications. Nevertheless, she would always know that people care and are dependable in assisting her through her natural life in the community.

Liberalism would want to ensure this woman was able to live as fully free in society as possible. A liberal society would make buildings and infrastructure accessible. Laws would be enacted to prevent harm or discrimination of people who are physically handicapped, and there may also be a government support program for disabled people to provide them with medical care and other necessities. She would have the same legal rights, and because she is of sound mind and can speak independently, her autonomy regarding her care and other decisions for her life would be respected. If she wanted to work and was able to do so, a liberal society would promote workplace adaptations to facilitate it. She would be as welcome at public events as anyone else. Nonetheless, outside of medical assistance and basic care, it is not clear who would be involved in supporting her on a daily basis if she did not have family to do that work. She

would have a social safety net provided by the government, but there would be some rather large holes remaining. Day to day assistance and social engagement would be left to neighbors, charities, or volunteers.

A Socialist society would want to ensure that she has as high a quality of life as any other able-bodied citizen. The idea that each individual should contribute what they can and be provided what they need would apply to this woman as well as every person in society. If she could contribute, then she would be expected to do so at whatever level matched her capacity. Conversely, her economic, medical, and basic living needs would be met through government programs or collective arrangements. Her quality of life would be seen as a reflection of the quality of life of the society and the success of the Socialist government. She would of course enjoy all the same rights and privileges of other citizens as well as rights to be free from discrimination and rights entitling equal access. She would be expected to support Socialist values and Socialist society. Socialism does not suggest anything more explicit, and like Liberalism, it is unclear how her care would be provided outside of government programs.

Anarchism would likely care for her by drawing on a principle of mutuality. Her care will not be organized centrally, but by whatever friends, neighbors, and other community members coordinate on their own. In the best case this may mean plenty of loving support, but it could also result in gaps where her needs go unmet. There would be no government or hierarchy to formalize rights, enact laws promoting accessibility, develop infrastructure development that enables accessibility, manage or regulate a medical system, or coordinate a system of benefits. While this may not matter much under the best scenario where other people are respectful and willingly step up to care for her, it is more likely to make her vulnerable and less able to participate fully in society. If her needs went unmet there would be no formal recourse either

legal or bureaucratic for her to pursue. The social support structure would be insecure, even if other people have a desire to help. Additionally, the caregivers would not have as much reliable institutional support or resources as they would under the previous three systems.

A Place for Moral Economy in Political Theory

At the outset of this chapter I acknowledged that Moral Economy does not hold the same position in political theory as the other theories I examined. Part of this may be because of its development as a ground-up approach noted by historians and anthropologists instead of designed by philosophers and political scientists. It is also important to examine some of the particulars of Moral Economy to determine whether such a categorization is even possible or if Moral Economy is something different in kind. First, does Moral Economy compete with other political theories? To this I argue that it can when it finds itself in opposition to a political system or proposed political theory that challenges its core values. I do not think Moral Economy seeks to supplant or conquer other social systems, but prefers to find its local niche and be left unrestricted. Some political theories aim to enact a perfectionist set of values that apply to every person. Socialism is one such theory, so that while Moral Economy and Socialism may actually agree on many particular values, the aspects on which they disagree can be extremely contentious and because neither wants to be modified in the face of the other, these seeming allies are actually competitors in the same social and political sphere.

Second, can Moral Economy work alongside another political theory, specifically, at a different scale? In contrast with Socialism, Liberalism and Moral Economy appear at the outset to share far fewer values. Nevertheless, because of important principles in Liberalism for

autonomy and tolerance for diverse ideas of the good, Liberalism actually makes room for Moral Economy by working on a different scale. One could imagine a Liberal nation with hundreds of smaller political communities that include Moral Economy based communities. As long as the Liberal state was fairly leveraging taxes and enacting just laws, while also not interfering with local customs, community decision making, and community social support, then the two systems could coordinate at different levels amicably.

Moral Economy may not express itself in the way other theories in political philosophy have, as a coherent pre-meditated design for social function and political organization. However, by taking in the full picture of what communities have already done successfully and what values motivate them, Moral Economy offers a plausible and effective theory that can be further expounded to build strong communities of the future as well as provide a better understanding of the flourishing communities of the past. Moral Economy does not need to fit in with other political theories and political philosophy in the sense that it arise in a similar fashion or be distributed through books and propaganda. Indeed, it has already demonstrated a widespread acceptance by tapping into people's inherent sense of justice and collective good. It does need to fit in to another system that permits it space (political, physical, and intellectual) to thrive because we now live in a globalized world, and the days of closed communities are gone for most and coming to an end for the last remote bastions. Globalization and internationalism does not mark an end to Moral Economy, but a restructuring of it. Moral Economy can and should remain a strong political paradigm in support of local communities, communities of likeminded people, and communities united by family ties, religion, or culture.

Perhaps, globalization even requires a political system to handle the local and micro-level social, political, and economic issues. At their best, Liberalism, capitalism, and globalism are

well adept at seeing things on a grand scale. Nonetheless, they do not adequately address individual transactions or minor disputes; they do not want to be bothered by the small stuff that is the basis of an individual life or the building of community ties. Adam Smith is famous for waving this away as the work of the invisible hand. The invisible hand is not invisible, but pervasive in small economic but non-monetized social exchanges rich with value. Regardless of whether our globalized world needs Moral Economy, I contend it remains compatible within our current system.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

Having circumnavigated the topic of Moral Economy and examined it from various angles, it is worth reviewing the most important qualities of Moral Economy. The following section endeavors to do that from my perspective, without leaning on earlier contributors to this important theoretical and social behavioral work.

Important Features Reviewed

From my perspective, the common good is of central importance to a notion of Moral Economy that is both relevant to contemporary communities and consistent with historic accounts. While rarely articulated by theorists, accounts or claims of individuals from a lived perspective argue for the common good. The common good is both for the commoner, and for collective benefit. It presumes that the community is better off when the least well off is allowed full standing by respecting human dignity, insisting on fair and transparent transactions, and doing what is possible to ensure a subsistence minimum. The common good also encourages sharing resources, inclusive community rituals, and a community orientation. It acknowledges the social nature of human beings and the mutual dependency inherent in that. Moral Economy does not accept claims that harm one individual for the benefit of another. It encourages claims that limit wealth accumulation, and prevent profit or higher status from exploitation, overworking or under-compensating someone else's labor. Moral Economy provides a platform to resist unnecessary negative double binds and the treatment of public goods as private ones. The common good requires that goods that either originated from the community or are

necessary for subsistence minimum (food and material resources) and social sustainability (cultural knowledge and social goods) remain in the community to be shared among everyone. The common good is both a sense that arises from a community and helps keep a community whole and connected. The common good is the normative force that shapes claims about what is just and fair, what is honest or legitimate. Without a shared notion of common good, the claims and behaviors would not be coherent as a social force and may cease to be identifiable as Moral Economy.

The second thing I want to stress is that context is significant and highly influential. Moral Economy is not moral relativism, but particular needs, claims, and behaviors are highly dependent upon the context within which they arise. Moral Economy is consistent in that it always is connected with history and a historical narrative, always relates to human biology through basic physical and social needs, and it strives to achieve social sustainability³⁰⁶ by reinforcing the common good. Outside of those aspects, context will shape the expectations people have regarding food and other material needs, cultural traditions, social norms, child rearing, caring for the infirm, and treatment of non-members. Other communities influence each others' Moral Economy by putting economic pressure on them, expecting trade, taxes, or gifts, and attempts to assimilate or eliminate the other community. Even factors outside of human control heavily influence communities and their Moral Economy. Climate and environmental conditions, geography, local flora and fauna, and the ability of communities to adapt to their local conditions significantly impact subsistence norms, community claims, and collective responses. Combined with the wide variability of human nature ranging from aggressive to reserved tendencies, and optimistic to pessimistic predisposition, it should not come as a surprise

³⁰⁶ Continuity, not stability

that there is enormous variability in the particular claims made and the types of responses enacted. In the real world, we should not expect communities with different cultures, membership, location, and throughout time to adhere to an unchanging system of norms, stagnant conception of justice, or behave uniformly. For example, one community that faces increased pressure from state taxes and threats to subsistence may rise up in direct protest, while another community may quietly resist through forms of evasion and express frustration through performance arts.

Unlike other political or ethical theories, relationships receive more attention in Moral Economy than the inner subject of any individual. Relationships may be between different classes, members of a family, buyers and sellers, landlords and tenants, between one community and another, and notably between each and every member with every other member of her community. Moreover, these relationships fail to exist if action is not taken to maintain them. There is no economy if there is no exchange, and there can be no exchange without the behavior that contributes to exchange. That is why Moral Economy is first lived, and only subsequently analyzed and turned into theory. Behavior creates and maintains relationships, those relationships motivate ongoing behavior that creates a Moral Economy, later on that Moral Economy can be articulated, justified, and defended.

Moral Economy must also pertain to exchange. These exchanges may be the kind that could occur in a marketplace, but others are not typically associated with selling or buying. Services, material things, social knowledge, cultural goods, gifts, and favors all find a place in the Moral Economy. As well as being a system of exchange in a general sense, Moral Economy also has an expectation of reciprocity. Gifts are paid back later by the reciprocal exchange of an even grander gift, favors are repaid when needed by the earlier giver. Some reciprocity is paid

forward rather than back to the original giver, as in the case of passing along knowledge and cultural goods to young people, the next generation, instead of back to the elders. Sometimes reciprocity occurs in a lateral direction as in helping a neighbor who suffered a poor harvest (or was laid off from the factory) when your personal finances are secure. The reciprocal quality in Moral Economy means that exchange continues to circulate within the community and that an obligation is placed on the receiver of goods, services, favors, or gifts to repay in an equivalent or greater way to the original giver, or to another party when they have some need. Reciprocity means that a substantial amount of economic exchange occurs without money or being accounted for in formal financial registers. It functions as a personal insurance for individuals who have provided a service or given a gift, while also being a social insurance for the Moral Economy community by connecting them in a web of exchange and social obligation.

I agree with many of the moral economists who emphasize subsistence in Moral Economy. However, my understanding of subsistence extends beyond food to include any material resource necessary not only for physical survival, but also for inclusion within the Moral Economy. Regarding food, mere calories may be insufficient if certain kinds of food are defining of a Moral Economy. Regarding shelter, biology has minimal requirements compared to those stressed by certain communities and norms of acceptable housing. Regarding transportation, our human bodies provide ample means for movement, but the demands of our Moral Economy may require other modes of transportation for full inclusion in the community. Subsistence requires that all of the minimums for physical and communal needs be met, or good faith efforts have been taken by those with means and the reciprocal obligations to meet them for members of their Moral Economy. Moral Economy entitles individuals to make demands upon others to allow them to meet their minimal subsistence needs. These demands do not result in an

altruistic handout, but require the claimant to have met certain expectations or place an obligation upon them for future exchange. Such subsistence demands may alternatively be a way of challenging unfair practices of labor management, taxation, or uneven exchange. In any case, Moral Economy must directly or indirectly pertain to subsistence.

Objections Considered

Throughout several sections of this text, I have contemplated objections to Moral Economy and particular theories of it. I fully realize that among moral economist theorists, my interpretation of Moral Economy may be met with some resistance. Matching everyone else's version of Moral Economy is not my concern, but maintaining continuity with the most influential theories is important. Moreover, it has been my goal that this work produce a coherent and useful conception of Moral Economy. That is why it is important to respond to the concern that my definition and understanding of Moral Economy is too broad and includes too much or too many cases to be useful or relevant.

Moral Economy is broadly relevant and widely dispersed, so it can seem omnipresent. It is present in the vast majority of communities with an established system of exchange. Moral Economy is one type of exchange system that expands the perspective of what an economy is or can be, in comparison with the limited market-based, monetized classical and neo-classical economic paradigms. Compared with (neo) classical economics, Moral Economy is better equipped to account for the "externalities" in other systems and avoids the fragmentation of public and interpersonal exchange. It also provides a relatively wholistic perspective on exchange where economic, political, and moral behavior remain integrated in social life. This

broad and wholistic quality is not undesirable as some may argue, but is inherent in Moral Economy and yields a more complete account of real exchange and exchange related relationships in and between communities. It avoids being so broad as to be useless by having a specific moral quality, deep connection to history and traditions, expectations for engagement and reciprocity as well as a focus on subsistence and community.

A second objection I anticipate, particularly from those who reject Moral Economy is that as a theory, or even a heuristic, Moral Economy is not stable enough and is too contextual a concept and system. They may further have concerns that it is too anecdotal or subjective a perspective. This objection may have originated from a desire to reduce human behavior into a tidy universal theory. For those who require such an account, Moral Economy will surely disappoint. However, Moral Economy simply reflects the real shifts in human communities and environments in their diverse conditions rather than imposing false stability. It cannot be universal because that would fail to recognize the variety inherent in the human social condition. Moreover, due to Moral Economy's emphasis on the common good, which values the perspectives of all members of the community, no single voice is more authoritative than another. All perspectives are valid points on a necessarily qualitative or narrative account of events, relationships and values.

A third potential objection, most likely from a moral economist with a narrower notion of Moral Economy than my own, could argue that Moral Economy should be restricted to peasant or closed communities. They may object that it is not relevant to contemporary capitalist cosmopolitan "communities". I agree that it is easier to perceive Moral Economy in closed communities (especially as an outside observer). The context is also significantly different from contemporary cosmopolitan communities. Nevertheless, there is a system of values and norms

embedded in contemporary capitalist cosmopolitan economies and to an even greater degree in the many communities within them. Counter-currents and alternative markets in contemporary society may exhibit a more observable Moral Economy, but this also helps foreground the Moral Economy that we take for granted in our own communities.

Finally, someone might object to my use of ‘community’ throughout my analysis and in the development of my synthesized conception of Moral Economy. Specifically, they may claim that ‘community’ is vague, insufficiently defined, too mutable, and with membership continually shifting. I respond there is nothing unusual about my conception of community. Membership in real communities tends to define itself through self-recognition, relationships of mutual recognition, or official status. In every community there will be some change in membership on an ongoing basis. It has always been the case that new people enter through birth into the community, immigrating, or joining allegiances, while others leave through death, emigration, or breaking allegiances. Almost every community also has at some point individuals who are in a transitional stage or whose membership is limited for various reasons. The struggles theorists have with the concept of community says more about the difficulty academic theories have with addressing continual and predictable change than any problem the community perceives in determining membership, shared values or defining qualities.

Final Comment

Moral Economy is not new, but contemplating the concept ‘Moral Economy’ is a valuable step toward understanding the embeddedness of people within their communities, economy, moral system, social norms and traditions. If we reflect on our own lives, we can see

our own embeddedness within multiple intersecting communities and realize that Moral Economy is relevant and perpetually reproduced in our contemporary urban communities.

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