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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER XXI

INVOLVEMENT POISE

During interplay in Dixon, participants tended to set aside such of their attributes and qualifications as were considered irrelevant and to interact chiefly on the basis of rights and obligations felt to be relevant. Persons expressed in this way that they were not so bound and tied by their social roles that they could not set some of them aside for a time and act in terms of others. A neighbor or relation who came to help with the harvest would expect to be accorded a few ceremonial gestures at the beginning and end of the day's efforts, but during the work he would take his place alongside members of the immediate family and any paid help, and tactfully restrict himself to the role of a worker. At a community social, the oldest and youngest persons present might dance together, a woman of seventy and a boy of ten, and while they and the others would joke a little about this, during most of the dance the couple would act simply in the capacity of dancers.

We have considered the fact that during euphoric interplay participants express immediate involvement--and immersion, as it were--in the proceedings of the interplay. It must be carefully stated, however, that while participants regularly expressed unthinking involvement in the proceedings, it was felt that there

ought to be a definite limit to this involvement, and participants made quite sure to express or feign that this limit existed.[1]

Whatever the occasion, it seemed that the individual felt strongly obliged to show that he was not fully constrained by the events at hand; that he had a self available for interaction that could not be overwhelmed, a self that was not bound by any uncontrollable impulse to act, a self that was free to answer to the interaction not merely for the moment but wherever it might lead. Instead of conveying merely an involvement in the proceedings, the participant conveyed a delicate balance between involvement and self-control. He expressed the fact that regardless of what happened during the interplay, or what commitments he had outside the interplay, he could exercise self-control.

Participants, then, expressed the fact that they could temporarily dissociate themselves from those of their statuses which were defined as irrelevant for the interplay. They also, as suggested, expressed the fact that they were not completely constrained by the events at hand which occurred in the interplay although they were to a degree spontaneously involved in the interplay. Participants gave the appearance that they had mobilized their selves for the interaction at hand, rigidly bound by only

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[1]An historical treatment of changes in the etiquette of self-control is given in Norbert Elias, Über den Prozess der Zivilisation (Basel: Haus zum Falken, 1939), especially Vol. I, chap. ii, "Über die 'Zivilisation' als eine spezifische Veränderung des menschlichen Verhaltens."

one obligation--the obligation to sustain continued communication with the others present. Failure to exercise this control and this readiness for interaction meant that the participant could not be trusted to act so as not to disrupt the involvement of others in the interplay; the appearance of someone acting with insufficient self-control itself caused others to become ill at ease.

In this chapter, some of the factors involved in poise--the handling of oneself during interplay--will be considered. While poise is a tenuous thing to study objectively, and a difficult thing to report upon, it is a factor that can hardly be avoided in a general study of interplay.[1]

Ego Control

Co-participants during interplay are in a vulnerable position with respect to one another. They are obliged to make themselves accessible to one another and to treat each other with forbearance. They must therefore run the risk that one among them may take unfair advantage of the communication opportunities that have been entrusted to him. Linguistically or expressively,

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[1]It would seem that the only sizeable literature on poise is to be found in books on etiquette and manners. On the whole, this material has been scorned by social scientists, presumably because the significant observations on the moral norms of interplay contained therein are indiscriminately mixed in both with personal exhortations as to how individuals ought to behave and with optimistic claims as to how leaders of circles now extinct (or becoming so) actually conduct themselves. In scorning these works we have also, of course, scorned to study many fundamental aspects of social interaction. Unfortunately, some students have similarly by-passed Simmel's treatment of "sociability" because of the courtly bias in some of the standards he describes.

he may abuse his position by conveying a message that accords an improper valuation to himself or to others present.

1. One of the most explicitly recognized rules of interplay on the island is that each participant control and restrain his own demands for approval and esteem.[1] At the linguistic level, it was felt that persons ought not to "blow their own horn," to brag, or in general to convey a message whose purport redounded in their favor. At the expressive level, it was felt that persons should not attempt to become the center of attention too frequently or hold this position too long once it was obtained, or in general attempt to manipulate the physical situation in order that it might express something favorable about them.

In general, when persons were involved in conversation,

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[1] Societies of course differ in rules regarding modesty, but certainly modesty during communication is stressed in many non-Western cultures. For example, see Hsien Chin Hu, "The Chinese Concept of 'Face'," American Anthropologist, n.s. XLVI (45-64), 49.

"The over-estimation of one's ability, the exaggeration of one's capacity, designed to elevate one above one's fellows is frowned upon by society. . . . A person given to boasting will not have the sympathy of his group when he fails; rather will he incur ridicule. A person with such poor judgment of his powers is termed "light and floating" (ch'ing-fou) in character; a person serious in his endeavors but careful in reckoning his abilities and circumspect in his dealings with others is called "sinking and steady" (ch'en-chuo) or "reliably heavy" (wen-chung). The former type of personality cannot be trusted, but the latter is a good citizen and a trustworthy friend. Now it is not easy to gauge one's capacity exactly at every point nor is it possible to foresee the outcome of every venture, so it is wise to underestimate one's value. In this way one will always have the satisfaction of hearing one's friends deny this inferiority . . ."

"A person 'without self-training' is one who shows no consideration for others or is given to boasting."

they made an effort to keep the topic of conversation away from anything having to do with their own praiseworthy accomplishments. If this topic could not be avoided, then there was a tendency for the individual to minimize and detract from his accomplishment, or to treat it in a joking manner as a means of signifying that it was not to be associated with the self involved in participation. The more recent and the more praiseworthy the accomplishment, the more the individual seemed to feel obliged to show that he had not taken it too "seriously."

Perhaps the clearest evidence of crofter circumspection in self-references is to be found in their use of the term "I." If a sentence could be phrased in such a way as to omit the term, it was omitted. For example, in giving advice, an islander did not say, "I think you can do it this way," or "This is the way I do it," but rather, "Some folk do it this way," or "Let's try it this way," or "Maybe it'll work this way." Strangers from off the island who unselfconsciously followed the habit of beginning many statements with the phrase "I think that . . .," or "I feel that . . .," or "In my opinion . . .," were felt to be improperly concerned with self and caused the islanders some tension during interaction.

It is helpful to look at this general rule of restraint in terms of some of the offenses that are committed against it. There were a few persons in the community, drawn from among those who had had much contact with the outside world and were rising in class status, who seemed to have become demoralized in regard

to ego discipline.[1] These faulty persons would employ strategies that were transparent to others in order to bolster the valuation they felt others were making of them. They would tell stories that presumed to be of interest in their own right but which in fact merely provided the speaker with an opportunity of telling of events which redounded in some way in his favor, or they would introduce a topic of conversation that would inevitably lead another participant to mention matters in which they had excelled. Or they would loudly claim complete incapacity for the act they were about to perform, pretending to establish a definition of self that would not be embarrassed by the failure that was about to follow, and then perform the act successfully. Or they would ask the opinion of someone present on such matters as the weight of one of their new lambs or the condition of their Italian rye grass, leaving this person questioned with no way out but that of a compliment. Or they would make the kind of flat denial of personal qualifications which forced others into denial of the denial, i.e. they would "fish" for compliments. Or they would make light of their accomplishments in an insufficiently convincing fashion. And they would attempt to monopolize the conversation. These persons had a reputation throughout the island for this kind of behavior and they were felt to be burdensome in conversation. Up to the age of about thirty they were explicitly criticized, albeit in a joking way, for being braggarts.

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[1]See the discussion of faulty persons in chapter xx.

2. In Dixon, those of the fully adult generation who had not had more than average contact with the outside world showed strict circumspection in dealing with their selves. It was felt that during interplay each participant ought to be able to hold at a distance his involvement in an event that had occurred previous to the interplay or was scheduled to occur immediately after the interplay. It was felt that while he was a participant these extraneous matters, however crucial for him, were to be left unmentioned or referred to lightly. Thus, while islanders seemed to have a deep, genuine concern for the welfare of their children, a parent whose two children had the flu would contain his anxiety and suggest to those with whom he happened to be conversing that it was true the situation was a little awkward. Persons returning from the very real hazards of a day's fishing in a bad sea, or from the hardships of a day in the peat banks, tended to underplay in a marked way the dangers, the hardships, and the rewards and losses of their activity. In making self-references in the presence of non-islanders, it was common for an islander to belittle himself, modestly referring to himself as merely a crofter.

3. During interplay, an islander was expected to dissociate himself modestly from any event which occurred during the interplay that gave evidence to others of his desirable qualities. Thus, at socials, persons winning a prize would laughingly discount their deed by such a phrase as, "The de'il's kind to his een." In making a good shot at billiards, it was required that the player give a convincing expressive demonstration that he

did not take his luck or skill too seriously. The youngest players, especially when first learning, often did not have themselves in control in this way, and would convey an expression of pure pride at making a good shot. This was thought to show weakness of character, and caused some embarrassment. Players of the middle age group--twenty to thirty--were aware that they ought not to take too much open pleasure in their good shots and would only allow their true improper feelings to escape for a moment before cutting off the flow of improper signs with a sarcastic remark, an openly posed sneer, or a boisterous challenge to the next player. The older players, whether beginners or experts, in the main had themselves beautifully under control, and could make a good shot, express delight in the accomplishment, laugh heartily and aggressively in reference to the effect of this shot on the opposing team, and never give the impression that they are judging themselves by the shot. After such a shot they could say, "Class will tell, don't you know," and perfectly convince everyone present that they were not taking their excellence seriously. During the athletic contests held at the annual gala day, the same kind of self-control was to be found. Only in the case of two competitors, who seemed to have seen themselves as athletes, did a too-earnest attitude appear and a too-serious enjoyment of winning.

4. Participants tended also to try to dissociate themselves from any role of special honor they may have been accorded in the interplay or social occasion. At the concerts, performers would take their places in the audience like anyone else, even

paying the entrance price. At the turn before their own, they would unobtrusively leave their seats and make their way backstage via the kitchen. After giving their performance they would return to their seats in the audience by the same unobtrusive route. And usually they would not come back to their seats with special expressions of elation but would give the impression of being in the same quiet mood as the audience. Those organizing or M.C.'ing socials or concerts also tended to handle their special role in a way implying that they took no personal credit for it. Those without too much experience would often attempt too strongly to apologize for their special status, on the ground that they were unworthy vessels, and cause some embarrassment and dysphoria by little speeches of self-depreciation. But in the main those who led the socials were able to talk to the audience and move through the hall bent on organization tasks without giving the feeling that they had taken their honor too seriously, or had become distracted and confused because of it, or were trying to put too much of themselves into it.

It seemed in Dixon that actors who possessed attributes which others were required to suppress from consciousness during interplay were often more alive to the disturbing effect of their peculiarities than were the other persons who had to contend with them. Persons were always mentioning their shortcomings and attempting to dissociate themselves from these attributes so that in some magical way the person present to the others would not be the disturbing one. If a commoner found that he had to chair a political meeting because a minister or a member of the gentry

could not be found to do it, he would introduce his introduction with an apology, attempting to convince the audience that he, at least, was not taking his honorific role seriously and that the person before them actually was not the kind to presume to such a station. A man who felt that others felt he was henpecked would jokingly admit that his wife made all the decisions. A thirty-five year old woman, somewhat ugly and with little chance of getting a husband, would joke at her younger sister's wedding, saying that if she knew there were going to be all those presents she would get married herself. In guessing the weight of a parcel of groceries or the number of beans in a jar--typical competitions for raising money at socials--almost everyone making an effort would loudly and forcibly claim that they were no good at such things and were bound to be way off. The same remonstrance occurred when someone took a billiard shot for the first time. And very frequently when conversation sprang up between adults and an old person, the old person would hastily make a depreciating remark about himself, saying "Wasn't that pretty good for an old man," or "That's as good as an old man can do." In all of these instances, the apologetic actor apparently felt that those present would be spared the effort of making forbearance allowances for him if they could be shown that he himself did not judge himself by the standards by which he was inadequate, or that he did not take himself seriously.

Sometimes this kind of interactional footwork succeeded and euphoria was maintained and even strengthened. Usually, however, the person apologizing for himself would sound insincere or

too apologetic; in any case, the ruse often failed and increased the discomfort of others present.

5. The sense in which individuals were required to hold themselves off from any overinvolvement and to hold themselves ready for interaction is illustrated by events which are a matter of life and death.

At times when life is threatened, it becomes extremely difficult for persons to maintain themselves poised for interaction; they often forget themselves as communicators and become solely concerned with survival.[1] Behavior under these circumstances--whether the person in danger forgets himself or does not--becomes, apparently, a memorable thing, and accounts of behavior under stress are often repeated. Thus, through two world wars the island's men had been recruited as seamen and many of them experienced sinkings. Tales are told of the composure that some seamen showed under these threats, behaving as participants in interaction and not merely as men with their own lives to save, and also tales of persons who completely forgot themselves. During the last war, the island was strafed a little, and tales are still told of how persons reacted.

A woman in her thirties who had worked for a time as a clerk in one of the Dixon shops said: "Well, we heard this shooting so we all went to climb into the shelter. Old Jimmy Scott [the then manager of the shop] was behind me and got excited and said, 'Haste du lass,' and gave me a push. I fell on my hands and

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[1] A clear example of this is found in so-called "gallows humor." In situations of extreme deprivation, it is thought praiseworthy to joke about the situation and demonstrate that one still has a self free for the interaction. See the article on this subject by A. J. Obrdlik, Amer. J. Sociol., XLVII, 715-716.

knees and tore them and laughed. I don't think I ever laughed louder." (The teller went on to suggest that it was not so much that Jimmy lost social control of himself but that he attempted a ludicrously thin veil of concern for others.)

During the research Dr. Wren, in testing out his new sailboat with two commoners, a youth of fifteen and a young man of twenty-six, capsized in a rough wind. All three managed to survive although only the doctor could swim. Apparently for a moment it was each man for himself until each had managed to straddle the upturned hull. For the youngest survivor the image of the three of them forgetting each other was memorable, and he repeated the tale many times as a subject for humor.

6. There were times when a particular task required momentary placing of one's body in a position where the give and take of communication could not be easily maintained. At such times persons either tended to avoid entering into interaction or attempted to initiate interplay and by jokes and comments show that the self that could not properly participate was not their real self but one so unrelated to them that light jokes could be made about it. Thus, in carrying a sheep from one enclosure to another, or in lifting a hundredweight sack of feed from the pier dolly to a truck, or in straining a crowbar to free a piece of rock in the quarry, men would often seek out the eyes of others and initiate a momentary smile or openly feigned gesture of strain. Instances such as the one mentioned below were common:

A crew of men are unloading the steamboat on a Friday night. A wall of crates gets built up and a young member of the crew finds himself leaning up against them to hold them up. The special hook used to grasp the boxes cannot be found, so the crane cannot relieve the man of his burden. In order to keep the crates from falling he must use all of his body and not turn or twist an inch. The rest of the crew burst out laughing at the sight of someone completely constrained in this way. He blushes and laughs.

Emotional Control

During interplay in Dixon, individuals tended to hold

themselves back from becoming completely involved in and committed to any particular response they were making to the situation. This restraint characterized both linguistic and expressive communications. The mere appearance of anyone unreservedly throwing himself into an activity or linguistic message tended of itself to make those who witnessed it ill at ease. (Only children were permitted the luxury of complete expression.) It was also felt that such behavior made unfair claims on all the participants, for if a working acceptance was to be maintained after someone had indulged himself in a free response of this kind, then the line established by the uninhibited response would have to be followed by the other participants. They would have to do all the accommodating, for in fully committing himself the offender ceases to be able to apply tact and make allowances for events which might yet occur. Visitors to the island frequently caused tension in this way, for example, by too heartily enjoying a dance at the social, or by running to get somewhere, or by becoming so involved in a political discussion as to fall into using profanities in the presence of women.

1. When engaged in a task in the presence of others, islanders tended to inhibit any angry "takes" to unexpected task frustrations. A crofter, finding one of his lambs tipped over in a wet ditch and weakened by a night of cold, would just shake his head. A person on a picnic accidentally breaking the glass around the cork in a thermos bottle would not swear. Very irksome lengthy tasks would be undertaken, such as taking out a few leaky planks from the side of a rowboat and replacing them with sound ones, or

fitting a cabinet into a kitchen, and no outburst would ever occur. When a machine in the woolen mill broke down, it was only the manager, a non-islander, who would go into a tantrum.

In the presence of task frustrations, islanders commonly attempt to define the situation as one that ought to be approached quietly and slowly. In acting in this stoical way, they leave themselves free to continue with social interaction, safe from any impulsive entanglement that would force them to withdraw from interplay.

2. A special case of overcommitment is found in what are sometimes called emotional outbursts. It was understood that persons have a breaking point beyond which they lose control of themselves and become totally involved in an affective response to the situation. Fits of anger or laughter, crying spells, and temper tantrums are cases in point. In many such cases, the individual's action would become all "take" and no reply, and the take would be such that frequently all that others could do was allow the offender to become the center of attention or studiously avoid looking at him. Participants tended to feel that they had on their hands an object of attention but not a full-fledged fellow-participant. Whether the offender had given himself up to laughter, tears, or rage, he was felt to have put himself in a position where it was impossible for him to respond to the ongoing events in the interplay. In Dixon these kinds of outbursts were expected of children more than of adults, and adults who were faulty in this regard tended to be not merely persons who lost control of themselves in these ways but persons for whom

special handling was required because it was thought they might be capable of this kind of behavior.

As previously suggested, islanders tended to suppress signs of strong emotions at such times as arrivals and departures. An illustration is given below:

A well-liked young islander, John Neil, is leaving the island for a prolonged voyage as a ship's engineer. On the eve of his departure he spends his time, as he ordinarily would have, playing billiards at the hall. During the game no allusion is made to his approaching departure, and it is not thought peculiar that he should spend his last night at home in this way. As the time for the play to end approaches, William Crosely, in his fifties, a natural leader in the community and a warm friend of John's, makes ready to leave.

Croseley: "Well, lads, it's time I was off. Good night, John."

John, who apparently fails to get the slight glint of humor in Croseley's voice, says in feigned light disapproval: "Are you no going to say cheerio, Will; I won't be back for eight months."

Croseley, smiling broadly as a sign that he has caught John out and has gotten a rise out of him: "So you won't." Croseley crosses over and shakes hands with John, lightly wishes him good luck, and leaves. When the game finally breaks up everyone says good-bye to John, no one bothering to shake hands. Throughout no emotion has been shown.

Eight months later John returns. He has been to Singapore. After coming to Capital City he gets a free ride to Dixon on one of the local fishing boats which had been in to Capital City for repairs. A few clusters of persons await his arrival. In one cluster is his betrothed and her girl friend, in another a few of his male friends. As the boat comes alongside most of the persons on the pier wave a little to John. As the boat is made fast he steps off, nods to his betrothed, shakes hands with his close boy friends, and immediately launches into a discussion of the repairs that have been made on the local boat and how its engine is standing up. A few persons come up and shake his hand but each time there is no insistence that John make more than one or two statements on the subject of himself or his voyage. He is allowed to fall back immediately into the discussion that is being maintained concerning the local boat.

During crises such as deaths, crying, too, is suppressed, although sometimes not altogether successfully. For example, Alice Simon, twenty-four, admits that she has cried at the four

deaths that have occurred in her immediate family, although these are the only occasions when she admits to having lost control in this way. Interestingly enough, during romantic movies shown in the darkened community hall, many women feel it all right to weep. Presumably at these times there is no interaction that can be embarrassed by their actions.

Protective strategies are often employed to save participants from the embarrassment caused by a display of uncontrollable emotion. In Dixon, when persons had become emotionally involved in the proceedings of an interplay to the degree where they felt they were no longer in control of the situation, and where it was not feasible for them to withdraw in an orderly manner from the interaction to protect themselves and it, they tended to cast their eyes downward and turn their faces away. In this way an attempt could be made with the voice to suggest that everything was in control and that the current message was being responded to, while in fact expression in the eyes and face suggested that the individual was still bound in response to the earlier disturbing message. Of course, other persons in the interplay often assisted the individual in the exercise of his barely permissible act of concealment by tactfully not directing questions to him until they felt his voice could handle it without showing emotion.

On Control of Taking

In Dixon one of the most dramatic and consistent ways in which persons were required to show that they were in control of

themselves was in the acceptance of indulgences. When one person accepted anything that was gratifying while in the presence of others, and especially when the means of indulgence could be considered limited in the sense that others present might be correspondingly deprived, then a preliminary refusal of the indulgence or a request that it be lessened was almost always given the participants in the interplay. On the rare occasions when this preliminary refusal was not forthcoming, or when it was too obviously in contradiction with the expressive behavior of the individual, or when acceptance and eagerness were not made a joke of, then dysphoria followed.

Interplay during meals was perhaps the time when self-control regarding desires was most consistently expressed. When being served food, the recipient conveyed the fact that the serving was ample by the use of such stock phrases as, "That's any amount." When a second helping was offered, as it invariably was, the recipient would either refuse and wait for at least a second round of requests, or positively refuse, or qualify an acceptance by very standard phrases such as "just a peerie corn, please," or first ask if all present had had enough. On many occasions the hostess, after a meal, would ask if anyone wanted any biscuits with their tea, obtain a "no" from everyone, then bring biscuits out, which were then eaten by everyone. At tea-time during socials, when persons went around the hall with wide trays of biscuits, buns, and sandwiches, it was felt proper to refill one's plate as frequently as desired but was felt improper to have more than three pieces of food on one's plate at a time

or eagerly to seek service before the person with the tray had come within a few feet of one. It should be added that it was necessary to do more than merely follow the verbal forms of preliminary refusal; if a discrepancy was obvious between the linguistic component of the trial refusal and the eater's expressive behavior, then he was felt to be in some way a faulty participant.

Mealtime in the hotel kitchen. Mr. Tate feels he has gotten more than his share of apple tart and more than he desires. He says to the hotel maid, "Here, Alice, take some." He cuts off a third of his tart, preparatory to passing it. Alice remonstrates, "No, maybe Jean [the other maid] wants some." In saying this, however, her eyes are fixed on the tart and her tone is abstracted and unconvincing. Jean refuses any more tart, and everyone at table feels a little embarrassed at the sight of uninhibited desire.

Similarly, when a person was chosen as next in turn to play billiards, and was aware he had a right to his turn by the system of rotation, he would almost always offer a mild disclaimer.

In general, the please or request intonation which preceded any verbal request seemed to serve not merely the purpose of conveying the fact that the other was not being ordered or presumed upon, but also that the person making the request was not completely bound by the indulgence he was requesting.

During many economic transactions on the island, an effort was made to demonstrate that an affection for money, though understood to be strong, was not overwhelming. In the hotel, the maids would share their tips with the kitchen staff and would do this with a gesture indicating that a tip was not something to conceal from other workers out of greed. So, too,

the managers of the hotel always seemed to find it a little difficult to take payment from the hotel guests; of their own accord they would reduce to an even sum the bills of younger guests and would not charge for extra meals that guests were sometimes forced to take because of a delay in transportation service. Similarly, when someone not a neighbor, or friend, or relative was hired for a day's work, there would be no bickering over payment, and the hirer would always try to add something extra to the payment. Again, when islanders sold dairy products to outsiders, or took in their laundry, a round sum was usually charged for the service, the server tending to make some voluntary sacrifices (whenever necessary) in order to do so. So, too, the bus driver would go a little out of his way for a passenger and feel that it was, in a sense, beneath him to charge for the small extra cost of this service to him. And when islanders came down to the pier to buy fish from the two local boats, the skippers would feel awkward about having to fix a price and would set some low round figure. So, too, when one crofter gave another a haircut (there are no barbers on the island and the islanders scrupulously adhere to the maritime tradition of neat haircuts), the temporary barber might accept a package of cigarettes but no money. And, similarly, if someone obliged a neighbor and slaughtered a sheep (technically illegal), the actor would be given a meal, or a package of cigarettes, or a drink, not money.

Control was also exerted in accepting small ceremonial indulgences from others. When a bag of sweets would be offered,

only one piece would be taken at a time, and never more than three or four pieces altogether. At parties and weddings, when the host would take his bottle and shot glass and go from one guest to another giving each a drink, the men would drink the whole shot glass the first round but on successive rounds later in the evening only a part of the glass would be drunk.

It should also be added that Dixonites made an effort, in undertaking any pleasurable activity, to show that they were not too eager to do so. Thus, persons would usually come slowly to the table for a meal. When seated to play "500" or another game, they would not rush into the game with passion but allow a few minutes for general talk as a kind of warm-up. If a man came too early for billiards, or attempted to hasten the beginning of a game, he was lightly chided for being over-concerned. In drinking any alcoholic beverage, men invariably preceded each gulp with a slight pause during which the drinkers would look each other in the eye and say "cheers;" to take a drink without this ceremonial recognition of the others present would express, among other things, overeagerness to drink. A man approaching a girl at a community dance in quest of a dance would tend either to walk slowly or to run with openly feigned eagerness.

On Control of Keeping

Those who possessed supplies of indulgences tended to show (and exert) control over selfish enjoyment of them.

When neighbors dropped in during the day or evening, as often occurred, the offer of a cup of tea was the minimum re-

quired gesture of friendliness. No household crisis could excuse the hosts from this offering. Failure to make the offer would not only be considered a discourtesy but would also show that the household was itself operating under too much economic constraint. Similarly, few meals are prepared but that extra fish or potatoes are included, so that second helpings can be pressed on each participant and so that no one will have to decide whether or not to take the last piece. (A woman who counts the potatoes she boils for dinner, allowing a fixed and limited number to each participant, is considered mean and is gossiped about.) If a container of bought food, such as beets, pilchards, or corned beef, were wholly consumed, then the hostess would almost always offer to open another. Interestingly enough, when men are alone together on a job of work, lambing or casting peats, for example, one among them will take on the role of housewife for the duration of a meal and will make sure that extra cups of tea are pressed on everyone. One or two men will have thought to bring milk for the tea and as a matter of course will pass it around to everyone.

As in the rest of Britain, biscuits and candies--which islanders of all ages loved dearly--were strictly rationed. Each person thus had a supply of indulgences to do with as he pleased; he could consume them himself, or give them to others as expressions of friendship and respect, or use them as a means of ingratiation. Rarely is an adult seen openly consuming self-purchased sweets but that the consumer offers the perceiver a share. Persons who wanted to consume sweets or cigarettes in

the presence of many persons, e.g., at an auction, frequently employed the strategy of limiting the offer to those closest as a kind of adaptive compromise. And while islanders would furtively pop a candy into their mouths when they felt they would be unobserved, it seemed that most islanders used the greater part of their sweet ration for ceremonial purposes, as a means of communicating involvement in others and control over private passions. So, too, in the fields around the community hall during a social, men cache bottles of liquor which they are forbidden by law and custom from bringing into the hall, and throughout the night each owner of a bottle brings knots of men out with him to have a drink. In a place where liquor is costly, difficult to obtain, and dearly loved, the passing around of one's bottle is not only a way of conferring high esteem upon the recipient but is also a genuine act of self-control, showing a manly capacity to hold off one's thirst and recognize the social amenities. Cigarettes, which are extremely costly on the island,[1] are similarly used as part of the island's sign equipment--part of its ceremonial language. At parties, the host will pass around a box-full. A dinner guest will show his respect for his hosts by elaborately offering cigarettes to everyone present at the end of the meal. On the most routine work occasions, a person taking out a cigarette will make at least a gesture of offering one to his nearest fellow-worker. And each time this ceremonial language

[1]At over fifty cents a package, annual expenditure by some crofters on cigarettes is greater than the annual rent they pay for their cottage and land.

was used, the speaker indicated to those around him, partly by the patterned equanimity with which the offer was made, that his poise could not be threatened by the passage of a valuable from himself to another.

In the last two sections it was suggested that persons exercise self-control in accepting things from others and that persons exercise self-control in the attachment which they express to things they already have. It is apparent that if each person in a two-person interplay is to demonstrate both of these kinds of self-control, and if neither participant is to sacrifice or fail to obtain what he dearly desires and feels properly his due, then a kind of tacit cooperation will be required between the participants. Each will have to act in such a way as to make it possible for the other to show generosity without losing too much by it.

For example, when a person pays a visit to a friend, it is expected that he will volunteer to leave before he really wants to and before he thinks his hosts really want him to leave. It is expected that his hosts will remonstrate and coax him to stay.[1] When a person sells something small to a friend, it is expected that the seller will place a lower price on the article than the buyer is willing to countenance, and that the buyer will

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[1]The social mechanism whereby both parties to an exchange feign willingness to accept deprivation seems to be quite generally found in societies. See, for example, Raymond Firth, We, The Tikopia (London: Allen and Unwin, 1936), in describing courtesy patterns, p. 310:

"Night comes on. The man, out of politeness, 'to make his face-good,' makes a show of going, but is pressed to stay and sleep with the family. He does so."

place a higher price than the seller thinks is fair. There regularly follows a process of reverse bargaining, with the parties reaching about the same selling point as they would have under normal bargaining procedures. Both individuals show that they have not been petty and yet lose little by showing it. When one commoner hires another by the day for his special skill as painter, mason, or cabinet maker, then after lunch--which the guest-worker eats with the family he is working for--the worker makes the first move to get back to work, and the host makes a counteractive move to prolong the mealtime conversation with a second or third cup of tea. Some additional everday illustrations may be given:

Three men are helping William Croseley dig his garden. Lunch time approaches.

Croseley: "Well, that should do it for now, let's get some lunch." (He puts aside his spade and starts wiping his rubber boots on the grass.)

The workers continue for a moment longer, showing no haste to finish.

Croseley: "Come on now."

The workers put aside their spades and start wiping their feet on the grass.

Croseley: "Surely that will be enough." (He has waited to say this for a moment, but not long enough for the men to have cleaned their boots.)

The workers keep wiping their feet for a few moments after they feel they have them clean enough.

(Everyone feels that everyone else has behaved properly; no dysphoria is felt.)

There are four men in the billiard room and all are engaged in playing a game. One of the men is Andy Dawson, the caretaker of the hall, who, properly speaking, ought to be taking care of the room, not playing in it. Ted Allen, a steady player, comes in.

Dawson: "Here, you go ahead, I've played enough." (Makes gestures of quitting.)

Allen: "No, no, finish the game, Andy."

Dawson: "Here, boy."

Allen takes up the cue.

A young man is taking his guest home on a wet night by motorcycle. It is agreed that the guest will walk from the turn of the road, a mile away from the host's house and half a mile away from the guest's house.

Guest, a couple of hundred yards from the turn in the road: "This will do nicely. You go on home now."

Host: "Don't be daft, boy, it's terrible wet." He drives on until the bend is reached.

Guest: "Let me down, boy."

Host: "I'll just make the turn up here a bit." He drives on for another quarter mile before dropping his guest.

It has been suggested that when two persons compete over some matter each may "lean over backwards" in an effort to show that he is not overly involved in the issue. In the case of indulgences, information as to which of the two is the less involved in the indulgence can be reserved for transmission in the second round of offers and refusals, the first round being devoted to showing that neither person is too much concerned with the indulgence. The difficulty in this "after you, Alphonse" interchange is that participants sometimes are unsure as to how many circuits of offer and denial must be made before valid information about the other is forthcoming. Each participant comes to feel that he ought to take into account the fact that the other is merely being polite and so waits for an extra round of offers or denials. There is a degradation of the meaning of refusals or offers, and the communication circuit ceases to be useful for the passage of information. To use a term from communication engineering, a kind of "hunting" occurs. Thus, when one woman on the island wanted to find out if a guest really did want some more food, she found it expedient to break into the circle of offers and denials, repeated offers and repeated refusals, by

grabbing the guest, changing the mood of the interchange, looking deep into his eyes, and saying in a serious tone, "You're not just being polite, are you?"