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CHAPTER 2

Social Control in Early Modern England: The Need for a Broad Perspective

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In 1985, toward the beginning of a book entitled *Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment and Classification*, the British sociologist of deviance Stanley Cohen made the following comments:

The term “social control” has lately become something of a Mickey Mouse concept. In sociology textbooks, it appears as a neutral term to cover all social processes to induce conformity ranging from infant socialization through to public execution. In radical theory and rhetoric, it has become a negative term to cover not just the obviously coercive apparatus of the state, but also the putative hidden element in all state-sponsored social policy, whether called health, education or welfare. Historians and political scientists restrict the concept to the repression of political opposition, while sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists invariably talk in broader and non-political terms. In everyday language, that concept has no resonant or clear meaning at all.

It is therefore not surprising that Cohen should comment “all this creates some terrible muddles.” Yet the various contributions gathered here in this volume are dedicated to discussing historical aspects of this “Mickey Mouse concept” and, it is to be hoped, creating some sort of cosmos from the chaos of the “terrible confusion.” If I may state my own position, the term “social control” is one which I have not used much in works I have written, largely because of an awareness of its imprecision: I have generally found the term “social discipline” a more useful one, although I accept that this term too entails a fair degree of confusion, while I am aware that the term enjoys little currency among historians of early modern England. I have, more particularly, been anxious not to employ the term “social control” when discussing law enforcement and the punishment
of crime, despite the tendency for historians to use the concept when discussing such matters, simply because of my awareness of the breadth of its connotations. Indeed, historians’ usage of this term has frequently reflected a distressing tendency for practitioners of history to borrow and apply concepts from another social science without sufficient precision and without proper awareness of the resonances of those concepts. What I would like to do in this essay is to explore some of the complexities of what social control in some of its broader ramifications might involve in the historical context I know best, early modern England.

The term seems to have entered sociological discourse largely through the writings of Edward Alsworth Ross, one of the founding fathers of American sociology (see introduction to this volume). His book *Social Control: A Survey of the Foundations of Order*, published in 1901, gave a broad definition to the concept and delineated both the formal and the informal ways in which society constrains the individual, bringing together the influence of both external norms and internalized processes. His objective in writing the book, it has been claimed, was “to synthesise the old and the new, to infuse an impersonal industrial society with the idealized virtues of the face-to-face community in which he grew up.” Raised in the moralistic and agrarian Midwest, Ross’s sociology seems to have been the outcome of a personal transition that he made from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* as United States society became more urban, more sophisticated, and more overtly racially and culturally complex.

Thus the concept of social control, in its original form, places Ross’s work firmly in the context of the major concern of the classic sociology: namely, attempting to understand and explain the workings of that allegedly new and complex industrial and urban society of the nineteenth century that had apparently replaced the pre-existing traditional forms of social organization. Indeed, the concept of social control for Ross seems to have performed roughly the same function as did the *conscience collective* for Durkheim as an explanation of social cohesion. The concept whose usage had become so loose by the time Cohen wrote as to render it, in his opinion, almost useless, was in fact central to the United States’ sociological tradition. Thus, social control was a concept of major importance to the Chicago School of the 1920s, not least for Robert E. Park, one of the major figures in that school. In the weighty *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, which Park published with E. W. Burgess in 1924, it was commented that “all social problems turn out finally to be problems of social control” and that social control should be “the central fact and the central problem of sociology.” Currently, even in the United States, social control has lost this primacy in the pantheon of sociological concepts. But for many years it provided, in both North America and elsewhere, a means of getting a grip on the multifaceted ways in which societies attempt, consciously or otherwise, to achieve some form of coherence, taking in such primary institutions of social control as the family, the neighborhood, and the community, and such secondary ones as the police, the courts,
the press, and political machines. I would argue that, in our efforts to consider social control in its historical context, we should attempt to bear in mind this broad usage. To return to a point made earlier, we must deplore the way, as one scholar has put it, that “historians have borrowed the sociological concept of social control as applied to the control of deviant behaviour: thus the strong emphasis, in historical writing, on coercion.”

The State and Religion

But to begin our discussion of social control in early modern England let us, nevertheless, turn to an act of coercion. In 1680 a man called John Marketman was publicly executed at West Ham in Essex after being convicted for murdering his wife. This is, perhaps, social control at its rawest: an assertion of the power of the monarch’s law, with the convicted felon dying before what was described as “some thousands of sorrowful spectators.” Yet embedded in the rituals of execution was a view of what we might call social control that went far before the simple act of public execution. Stanley Cohen, as we have noted, when pondering the problematically open-ended nature of the concept of social control, commented that one problem is the way in which sociology textbooks tend to include under social control “all processes to induce conformity from infant socialization to public execution.” John Marketman, who had certainly never read a sociology textbook, would have shared this view. According to a pamphlet describing his death, he made a speech from the gallows in which he declared that

he had been very disobedient to his too indulgent parents, and that he had spent his youthful days in profanation of the Sabbath and licentious evils of debaucheries beyond expression, and that he had been over penurious in his narrow observance of his wife’s ways, desirous that all should pray to the Eternal God for his everlasting welfare, and with many pious expressions ended this mortal life.

This was, in fact, the standard gallows speech of the type that is recounted in pamphlet after pamphlet describing the public execution. And, on almost every occasion, those on the brink of being executed told how the crimes that had led to their terrible but deserved fate had been prefaced by disobedience to parents as a child and by youthful debauchery, while like Marketman they usually followed the clergymen who offered them spiritual advice in their last hours and recast their experience in the context of the ongoing battle between good and evil, ending their personal narrative with an epilogue on repentance and redemption. The public execution, therefore, serves as a useful introduction to some of the broader dimensions of social control in our period.
Public executions do, of course, focus our attention on one of the main agencies of social control: the state. This entity remains difficult to define for early modern England, but it remains clear that with the public execution of convicted felons, the public whipping of petty thieves, and the public setting on the pillory of speakers of seditious words, we—like the contemporaries attending these spectacles—are witnesses to displays of state power in which the social control ambitions of central authority and its local representatives seem all too overt. Yet the influence of the state was working in ways more subtle than these open manifestations of the power of the authorities. Perhaps the most accessible evidence on this point lies in the way in which local communities, or sections of those communities, found it useful to invoke higher authority when faced with troublesome neighbors.

Consider, for example, a scrap of evidence from the obscure Worcestershire village of Feckenham. In 1612 a number of the inhabitants of that village sent a set of “articles” to the county justices about the misdoings of John Leight, a laborer of that parish, whom they wished the justices to bind over to keep the peace. Leight was fairly typical of the disorderly nuisance offender of the period. He was an alehouse haunter, a drunkard, a blasphemous swearer, and would spend money in the alehouse rather than go home to his wife and children, who were in receipt of poor relief. He was a slanderous person, a man of lewd life and conversation, and a man who would sooner lurk in the alehouse than go to church on the Sabbath. He gossiped about his neighbors in the alehouse and eroded family and household discipline by encouraging the sons and servants of his more respectable neighbors to join him in his drinking. That his neighbors were anxious to invoke the county bench to act against this local nuisance is a neat, and very typical, illustration of how “community” notions of social control as offered by the agents of the state was something that was sought from below as much as it was imposed from above. And on the level of more serious crime, many of those who died on the scaffold suffered this fate not because of the action of some “police” agency, but rather because of the action of the person offended against, who had decided to invoke the state law.

But as John Marketman’s dying speech from the scaffold makes clear, social control involved not only the input of the state but also that of religion. The Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation are two very old friends for historians of the early modern period, and in earlier generations considerable time was devoted to attempting to discern connections between the new religious ideas and the social structure of the period, the most celebrated outcome of these musings being the rather different sets of connections between Protestantism and capitalism made by Max Weber and Marxist thinkers. Among English historians at least, there has been something of a retreat from this type of paradigm, but nevertheless there is considerable value in addressing the social control, or perhaps more accurately the social discipline, aspects of Protestantism.
I would contend that current thinking here runs along two tracks, and that these two tracks serve handily to lead us to two areas of major importance. The first of these is the social. The old connections between Protestantism, or more specifically that English brand of Protestantism known as Puritanism, and a rising middle class are no longer tenable. There has been, however, a more subtle analysis of the differential appeal of Puritanism to various social groups that is centered on considerations of power rather than wealth (and, of course, it was the wealthy who tended to wield power, frequently in the very overt and direct form of local office holding). A religion that stressed the need to preserve God-given social hierarchies and that also laid considerable emphasis on humankind’s innate sinfulness would make a lot of sense to the justices of the peace who ruled England’s shires, the merchant elites who governed England’s towns, and—in at least some cases—the parish constables and churchwardens who were responsible for law enforcement in local communities.\(^{11}\) In the post-Reformation official mind set that equated the good Christian (as defined in England by the Church Settlement of 1559) with the good subject, religion would obviously have a crucial role in the control of crime and delinquency: witness that innovation of the Tudor period, the active presence of the clergy on the gallows when felons were executed.\(^{12}\)

Yet religion is essentially about personal belief, and in effect the Reformation’s most important battlefield was the mind of the individual believer. Thus one of the objectives of the Reformation was to create a new human being and to promote in the individual Christian a rational and internalized view of Christianity that would inform his or her everyday belief.\(^{13}\) Puritanism as a social force is very familiar in English historical writing. But if we are to understand the full impact of the Reformation as an agency of social control, we have to recognize its psychological dimension: the control of human beings best came from within, rather than from an external coercive agency. I would contend that realization of this point should be of central importance to any broad study of social control in early modern Europe or in any other social context.

But individuals, for the most part, are raised in families. In almost all societies, one suspects, the family is the primary institution of socialization, the milieu where culture is transmitted from generation to generation, and society thus made possible. Despite considerable work on the history of the family in our period, however, there is still some uncertainty as to how exactly the processes of socialization (certainly of very young children) operated, while such sources as we have bearing on this issue are very heavily skewed toward the rich: how a Suffolk weaver and his wife or their equivalents among the Yorkshire yeomanry might have gone about socializing their children are, as yet, uncertain matters. There is a large amount of contemporary normative literature on family life (notably the “conduct books” that were so frequently published in the Elizabethan period and the seventeenth century), but this is usually very conventional and nonspecific, while
such memories as we have of the experience of childhood were written many years after the experience took place, of necessity missing the early months or even years of childhood, and were—to return to a point I have just made—very much the product of the middling and superior strata of society. Conversely, what is obvious from the books of instruction on how to raise families (many of which were, in fact, written by clergymen) was that the widespread belief in the family as an agent of socialization was becoming more focused and was constantly reiterated. The image of the godly household supplemented and reinforced existing notions of the family as the primary unit of political organization. But in this period, the “family” did not just include kin. The presence of apprentices in many households, and the common custom of sending adolescents out to work as live-in servants, meant that the family as a unit of control and socialization affected others than the immediate blood or affinal kin of the head of the household. The phenomenon of apprenticeship was of central importance in the early modern period: an examination of it would, therefore, seem to offer some deeper insights into the workings of social control in that era.

The World of Work

In England, as in many other European states, apprenticeship was a phenomenon of considerable importance, imbricated into the economic practices and assumptions of the period, and involving a high proportion of young people, especially males. Apprenticeship was thought to offer considerable advantages. It provided a secure future for a child, with a guarantee of employment at the end of training and the benefits of belonging as an adult to a trade or craft organization. The apprentice was legally bound to his master, who during the term of the apprenticeship enjoyed what were essentially parental rights over him. The apprentice lived with his master’s family, was provided with food, shelter, and clothing, and thus the child learned not only technical craft skills but also the way of life of the craft or profession that was being entered. Apprenticeship was thus in many ways a method of raising and educating children and had both implicit and explicit social control functions, the most efficient of these being the master’s right of “moderate” physical correction over the apprentice.

Apprentices were, in fact, extremely varied in their social composition, although it is possible to divide them into three broad groups. The first of these, the “typical” apprentices, were those boys (and less frequently, girls) who were apprenticed to learn the skilled crafts and trades typical of an early modern economy and who were eventually to become members of what historians of England are now becoming accustomed to think of as the “middling sort.” Second, however, there were those boys who were bound apprentice to masters who rep-
resented the upper stratum of urban society, the richer merchants and tradesmen. In many cases this type of apprenticeship was seen as offering a means of upward social mobility, and it was here that apprenticeship as a means of socialization into a set of cultural expectations different from that which the apprentice might formerly have experienced was at its most important. Third, and most problematically, there was, as an aspect of the poor relief system, the enforced binding out of poor children to sometimes unwilling masters.

Ideally, however, the relationship between the apprentice and his master was one into which the apprentice, or at least his parents, and the master entered willingly. And the formal contracts that set out the details of apprenticeships normally included clauses demonstrating that part of the relationship was the assumption of control over the apprentice by the master and the imposition of the constraints that the period felt appropriate for youth. Thus, when the Wiltshire husbandman William Selman apprenticed his son Richard to a broadweaver in 1705, the contract set out the following directions for the apprentice: “Taverns and alehouses he shall not haunt, dice, cards or any other unlawful games he shall not use, fornication with any woman he shall not commit, matrimony with any woman he shall not contract. He shall not absent himself by night or day without his master’s leave but be a true and faithful servant.” Control was obviously seen as a major concern in this and the countless other contracts of apprenticeship in the early modern period.

The apprenticeship of poor children also had considerable social control overtones. Let us consider an order made by the Somerset assizes in March 1638. As part of a general clampdown on the disorderly, apparently sparked by “the great increase of bastards that are chargeable to parishes,” the court ordered that

for prevencion of charge that cometh upon parishes by children which live idly and be fittinge to be bound forth apprentices, this court doth require all justices of peace that they take speciell care for the bynding forth [of] apprentices: and yf the parents of poore children shall refuse to have their children bound forth apprentices in such cases where the officers of the parish shall desire it and the justices of the peace doe approve thereof, then the justices of the peace shall send the parents of such children to the house of correccion whoe doe soe refuse or oppose the binding forth of their children . . . such parents there to remayne untill they shall willingly submitt themselves to the order and direccon of the justices in that behalfe.

Despite parental objections, the justices were empowered to bind the children of the idle poor as apprentices, while those who refused to take apprentices, or who treated them so badly that they ran away, were to be bound over to the next assizes “there to be dealt withall as this court shall think fitt.” In fact, the court envisaged making those refusing to take apprentices pay the costs of their
prosecution and also pay "such money as this court shall thinke fitt" to the poor relief funds of their respective parishes, "to the end that others by their punishment may take example not to be soe obstinate and troublesome hereafter."\textsuperscript{18}

At the best of times, the relationship between the apprentice and his master was an inherently problematic one, but the practice of enforced apprenticeships meant that many heads of household, perhaps with already strained resources, now had the responsibility of feeding and raising another, and probably recalcitrant, child laid upon them. Details of breakdown in the relationship between master and servant, however, demonstrate that both parish apprentices and those apprenticed by more traditional means were likely to represent problems for the social control aspects of apprenticeship.

Early modern apprentices, like any group of (especially male) young people, attracted the attention of the social commentators and moralists of their time. There was a body of normative literature, although as ever the historian is left uncertain of its impact.\textsuperscript{19} Certainly there were contemporary complaints enough about apprentices’ unruliness and their tendency to neglect their duties, consort with prostitutes, haunt taverns, and riot. Entries in the court records of the period both add substance to these generalized complaints and also provide examples of ill treatment of apprentices.

Apprentices were sometimes brought to court for stealing from their masters. One such was John Game, who was convicted and branded in 1639 for stealing £5/6/6 (a considerable sum) from his master, Henry Stone, of Minterne Magna in Dorset. Game was apparently a parish apprentice, and the court ordered that he should be discharged from Stone’s service (one suspects that Stone was all too glad to see the back of him) but was to be bound to another master as speedily as possible.\textsuperscript{20} Another thieving apprentice tried by the South-Western assizes was Joseph Griffen, charged in 1648 with stealing money from his master, Richard Hunt. Griffen was deemed to be below the age of criminal responsibility and was therefore not convicted. Hunt was anxious to get rid of him, yet refused to return to Griffen’s father the £5 and three pecks of wheat that had been paid at the time when Joseph Griffen’s indentures had been signed.\textsuperscript{21}

It is therefore possible to find considerable evidence of apprenticeship malfunctioning. Yet, generally, it seems to have been a widely accepted phenomenon that usually worked reasonably well. And it had, we must reiterate, marked social control functions. In a period when youth was seen as an especially problematic stage in the human life cycle,\textsuperscript{22} apprenticeship took young people, especially young males, into a context where they were subjected to the discipline, potentially backed by physical punishment, of a master’s control. There they were socialized for adult life by learning a trade, thus preparing them for the world of work and also teaching them those disciplines that would allow them, in turn, to set up as heads of household. Most of what we know about apprenticeship, of course, comes from official and legal records, and we are in need of a study
of the phenomenon from the apprentices’ point of view. What is obvious is that in London at least, and perhaps in other major English cities, by the seventeenth century there existed an apprentice culture, in which youths in service showed shared values and a shared awareness.23 And an aspect of this culture was shared leisure activities.

A Popular Play

The institution of apprenticeship is, therefore, clearly one that would be important in any discussion of social control in the early modern period, involving as it does the themes of household discipline, workplace discipline, and the control of young people, especially young males. But, to push my examination of the broader themes that a discussion of social control might involve, let us take apprenticeship as a somewhat unlikely springboard to another dimension of social control, the role of popular entertainment, and in particular the drama, in the enforcement of social norms.

It is possible to see a number of items of cultural production, familiar enough by the eighteenth century, in which the theme of the bad apprentice figured prominently. Perhaps the most striking, in that it depended on visual images, was William Hogarth’s *Industry and Idleness* print series. This traced the fortunes of two apprentices, Tom Idle and John Goodchild, who begin service together in the same London workshop. John was the good apprentice, who eventually rose to fame through the time-honored combination of hard work and marrying the boss’s daughter. Tom Idle, conversely, displayed the paradigmatic characteristics of the bad apprentice: he neglected his work, fell into bad company, gambled, drank, and consorted with prostitutes, turned to crime to provide the financial support for these activities, and was eventually hanged at Tyburn. The model Tom Idle represented was, in fact, a familiar one, corresponding as it did with the “Last Dying Speeches” made by convicted criminals as they stood on the gallows.24 These characteristically insisted that it was youthful wrongdoing and the resulting small delinquencies that led inexorably to more serious offenses, and the gallows. Moreover, from the early eighteenth century it was possible to read compendia of criminal biographies in which the theme of the unruly apprentices, and the way in which youthful vices, if unchecked, could lead to serious crime and an untimely death at the end of a rope loomed large.25 The theme of the idle and delinquent apprentice was absolutely central to cultural concepts of the origins of criminal behavior in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and, as I have suggested, by the mid-eighteenth there was a range of visual and print sources that reinforced this centrality.

From 1731 this range was extended by an unexpectedly popular play, George Lillo’s *The London Merchant*. Lillo was one of those recurring figures in
the history of the arts, a man who enjoyed massive popularity in his own day, but who is now largely forgotten and whose works are never performed. He was born in London, probably in 1693, of Dutch and English parents, and followed his father by being a goldsmith-jeweler by trade and a Dissenter by religion. He died in 1739, by that time a reasonably prosperous businessman, and was buried at St. Leonard’s, Shoreditch. Apart from these details, little is known of his life, except that he spent all of it in London and that he supplemented his business activities by becoming a successful and well-regarded playwright. He wrote eight (or possibly nine) dramatic works, including a ballad-opera, Sylvia: Or the Country Burial, a patriotic masque, Britannia and Batavia, and Marina, a reworking of Shakespeare’s Pericles written to cash in on a vogue for the Bard’s works. He was best known, however, for his domestic tragedies, The London Merchant and Fatal Curiosity, and for plays written in the heroic tradition, the most noteworthy of these being The Christian Hero of 1735. His domestic tragedies in particular were thought of as the prototypes for an important dramatic genre and were regarded on the continent as the model for tragédie domestique et bourgeoise. Henry Fielding, who produced Lillo’s Fatal Curiosity, declared that the play gave its author “title to be the best tragick poet of his age.”

It was, however, The London Merchant: Or, the History of George Barnwell, first performed at Drury Lane Theatre on Tuesday, June 22, 1731, which made Lillo’s reputation. Adapted from a story line provided by a seventeenth-century ballad, the plot told of the downfall of George Barnwell, apprentice to a London merchant called Thorowgood, who developed an attachment for a prostitute named Millwood, robbed his master, and then murdered and robbed his uncle for her, and eventually ended up with her on the gallows. From the first night the play was a great success. Lillo’s previous work, his ballad-opera Sylvia, had not been well received, and apparently many of those who attended the first night of The London Merchant had come to mock. But, as a contemporary newspaper review was to put it, shortly into the production “most profound silence argued the deepest attention, and the sincerest pleasure imaginable—This increased gradually, as the plot advanced, and new circumstances of guilt and distress aggravated the concern of the spectators . . . and I believe there was hardly a spectator there that did not witness his approbation by tears.”

The first night success was symptomatic of the play’s later popularity. The play was frequently performed at Drury Lane over the next few months, became the subject of a royal command performance, was staged at fairs around London, and until the mid-1770s was one of the five most popular non-Shakespearean tragedies produced in the capital. Details for provincial performances are less easy to come by, but it was clearly a drama that enjoyed widespread popularity, and it is noteworthy that the great actress Sarah Siddons acted in a production in Liverpool in 1776. The play was revived in London in the late-eighteenth century, and there is every indication that it remained popular in both the capital...
and the provinces well into the nineteenth. There were recurrent rumors, apparently unsubstantiated, that it owed part of its success to financial support from, as a contemporary put it, “eminent merchants and citizens who approved of its moral tendency,” but it rapidly acquired a lasting reputation for having been very widely attended by apprentices, many of whom were encouraged to see the play by their masters, who hoped that the important moral messages it attempted to convey would be internalized. It was regularly produced at the time of the Christmas and Easter holidays, being “judged a proper entertainment for apprentices, &c, as being a more instructive, moral and cautionary drama, than many pieces that had usually been given on those days.” It was also given the seal of approval of the capital’s mercantile elite by being regularly performed in London on Lord Mayor’s day in the November of each year, replacing a less edifying work entitled *The London Cuckolds.*

Certainly Lillo wrote the play with a didactic intent. The published version of the work was prefaced by a dedicatory letter from Lillo to Sir John Eyles, member of Parliament for and alderman of the City of London, and subgovernor of the South-Sea Company. In the letter, Lillo wrote of “the end of tragedy, the exciting of the passions, in order to the correcting of such of them as are criminal, either in their nature, or through their excess.” Meeting the criticism that *The London Merchant* had debased tragedy by dealing with relatively lowly people and had met with considerable popularity, Lillo commented:

> What I wou’d infer is this, I think, evident truth; that tragedy is so far from losing its dignity, by being accommodated to the circumstances of the generality of mankind, that it is more truly August in proportion to the extent of its influence, and the numbers that are properly affected by it. As it is more truly great to be the instrument of good to many, who stand in need of our assistance, than to a very small part of that number. . . . Plays, founded on moral tales in private life, may be of admirable use, by carrying conviction to the mind, with such irresistible force, as to engage all the faculties and powers of the soul in the cause of virtue, by stifling vice in its first principles.

Lillo, a Christian writing from a clear moral perspective, was convinced of “the usefulness of tragedy in general” in helping to curb vice. In other words, he saw his play, of course among many other things, as a vehicle for social control.

We do not, of course, have any insights into what the generations of apprentices who went to see *The London Merchant* made of the experience, but they were certainly presented with a strong and explicit lesson on the wages of sin. George Barnwell, a youth of eighteen with a promising future before him, was described thus by his friend and fellow apprentice, Trueman: “Never had a youth a higher sense of virtue—Justly he thought, and as he thought he practised; never
was a life more regular than his; as understanding uncommon at his years; an open, generous manliness of temper; his manners easy, unaffected and engaging.”

As well as being admired by Trueman, Barnwell was liked and trusted by his master, while unknown to him, Maria, Thorowgood’s daughter whom Barnwell secretly loved, harbored an undisclosed passion for him.

His downfall was occasioned by Millwood, a woman who, noticing his receiving and paying considerable sums of money in the city, decided to pretend to be in love with this clearly inexperienced young man and persuade him to rob his master and bring money to her. Barnwell does so, his actions providing him with opportunities to wrestle with his conscience on stage. Eventually, Millwood persuades him to murder and rob his wealthy uncle. Barnwell does so, and after another passage in which the turmoil of his conscience is displayed, goes to Millwood and tells her that he has done the deed. By this stage, understandably, he is in a rather disturbed state, and in the best traditions of the period, declares that although no human witnessed the murder, “what can we hide from heaven’s all-seeing eye?” Taking a more robust attitude, Millwood replies, “No more of this stuff—what advantage did you make of his death . . . what gold, what jewels, or what else of value have you brought me?” Barnwell’s response, that he was too conscience-stricken after the murder to take anything, sends Millwood into a passion. Realizing that “in his madness he will discover all, and involve me in his ruin,” she sends for a servant and tells him “fetch me an officer and seize this villain, he has confessed himself a murderer, shou’d I let him escape, I justly might be thought as bad as he.”

But Millwood’s attempts at self-preservation are doomed. Her servant, Lucy, concerned about being implicated in the murder of Barnwell’s uncle, had already revealed all to Thorowgood, who gets a constable and goes with him and a number of assistants to arrest Millwood. She and Barnwell meet after their arrests, and Barnwell has his first opportunity to start moralizing about his downfall:

Be war’d ye youths, who see my sad despair,  
Avoid lewd women, false as they are fair;  
By reason guided, honest joys pursue;  
To fair, to honour and to virtue true,  
Just to her self, will ne’er be false to you.  
By my example learn to shun my fate,  
(How wretched is the man who’s wise too late).  

A scene or two later, Millwood is given her own chance to moralize, and returning to a theme she has touched on earlier in the play, declares that women are men’s “universal prey” and that every fallen woman could attribute her position to the male sex. “Another and another spoiler came,” she declares, and “all my gain was poverty and reproach . . . I found it necessary to be rich; and to that
end, I summon’d all my arts. You call ’em wicked, be it so, they were such as my conversation with your sex has furnished me withal.”

The play quickly returns, however, to more mainstream morality. Barnwell is reported to have behaved well in court, weeping and expressing sorrow, and accepting the inevitability of the sentence of death placed upon him (Millwood, of course, shows none of these qualities). Thorowgood sends a clergyman to help prepare Barnwell for death, and this minister, as is so often the case in the execution pamphlets of the period, does his job well. Barnwell is visited in prison by Thorowgood and tells him of how receptive he had been to the minister’s spiritual guidance: “The word of truth, which he recommended for my constant companion in this my sad retirement, has at length remov’d the doubts I labour’d under. From thence I’ve learnt the infinite extent of his mercy; that my oﬀences, tho’ great, are not unpardonable; and that ’tis not my interest only, but my duty to believe and to rejoice in that hope—so shall heaven receive the glory, and future penitents the profit of my example.”

As well as Thorowgood, Barnwell is visited in prison by Trueman and Maria, which provides more opportunities for the development of moralizing themes, and for animadversions on Barnwell’s sad condition.

The play ends with the execution of Barnwell and Millwood, who go to their deaths together. As they walk to the gallows, as Millwood’s maid, Lucy, puts it, “how humble and composed young Barnwell seems! But Millwood looks wild, ruffled with passion, confounded and amazed.” On the gallows Barnwell, by now fully prepared spiritually for death, tries to bring Millwood to a similar state of mind, advising her “add not to your vast account despair: a sin more injurious to heaven, than all you’ve yet committed.” He prays for her, expresses the hope that “she may find mercy where she least expects it, and this be all her hell” and dies hoping that by his and Millwood’s example “may all be taught to ﬂy the ﬁrst approach of vice.” The ﬁnal words go to Barnwell’s friend, the good apprentice Trueman:

With bleeding hearts, and weeping eyes we show
A human gen’rous sense of others’ woe;
Unless we mark what drew their ruin on,
And by avoiding that—prevent our own.

The tone of these concluding scenes is essentially that of the execution pamphlets. Barnwell had been led to an acceptance of his fate by a clergyman, the fact that he is able to warn Millwood of the danger of despair on the point of death demonstrates that he has internalized the basic theological thrust that lay behind the input of clergymen on these occasions, he dies hoping that his example would serve as a warning for others, and this last point is reinforced, in verse, by another character at the very end of the play. Taken at
its face value, *The London Merchant* is a powerful warning against youthful misdeeds, and more particularly, against delinquency by apprentices. This warning was made all the more powerful by the fact that the play’s tone and plot would have been very familiar to anybody in the period who read the pamphlets describing the “last dying speeches” of criminals, which were so vital in creating one of the standard images of public execution and the conventional wisdom about what lay behind that phenomenon, in eighteenth-century England.

Yet there was more to *The London Merchant* than that. In the very first scene, where Thorowgood and Trueman are shown conducting business together, Thorowgood presents a brief eulogy of the merchant class, declaring how “honest merchants, as such, may sometimes contribute to the safety of the country, as they do to its happiness,” warning Trueman that “if hereafter you should be tempted to any action that has the appearance of vice or meanness in it, upon reflecting on the dignity of our profession, you may with honest scorn reject whatever is unworthy of it.” At a later point in the play, Thorowgood returns to this theme. He is again addressing Trueman, and advises him that “the method of merchandize” should not be regarded “merely as a means of getting wealth,” but should also be studied as a science, because it is “founded in reason, and the nature of things,” and “promotes humanity, as it has opened and yet keeps up intercourse between nations, far remote from one another in situation, customs and religion; promoting arts, industry, peace and plenty; by mutual benefits diffusing love from Pole to Pole.” Trueman, in response, develops the theme, commenting that “I have observ’d those countries, where trade is promoted and encouraged, do not make discoveries to destroy, but to improve mankind.” Thorowgood agrees, opining that “on every climate, and on every country, heaven has bestowed some good peculiar to it self—It is the industrious merchant’s business to collect the various blessings of each soil and climate, and with the product of the whole, to enrich his native country.” Turning to Trueman’s accounts (ironically, he will turn to Barnwell’s next), Thorowgood informs the younger man that “Method in business is the surest guide. He, who neglects it, frequently stumbles, and always wanders, perplex’d, uncertain, and in danger.”

On its most obvious level, then, *The London Merchant* is, like the speeches given or allegedly given by condemned felons on the gallows, like the images created a few years after the play’s first performance in Hogarth’s *Industry and Idleness* series, and like the numerous accounts of the lives of notorious criminals that were so much in vogue by 1731, a warning to apprentices of the dangers and folly of disobedience, delinquency, and the allures of lewd women. As such it clearly had a strong social control message, and one which was in line with a number of others widely available in the culture of the period.

But it also offered something else. Although set in Armada year, 1588, the play clearly related to many of the values that were current at the time of its first performance. By that date, England was coming to the end of the first phase of
what has been described as a commercial revolution, the period when England, for the first time in its history, assumed the role of state of the first order of economic importance. In *The London Merchant* we find not simply a reassertion of one of its period’s more prominent social control themes, a warning to potentially idle apprentices. Here also is an assertion of the dominant values of what was, in many ways, a newly emergent social order in which the values of mercantile capitalism were, if not actually becoming dominant, at least becoming sufficiently strong to make it essential that they, and the social groups they represented, were accommodated within both the ideological and concrete power structures of the period. Thorowgood’s encomium on the importance of trade reminded apprentices in the audience of the importance of the activity that they, and their masters, were involved in. It also reminded them that if “method in business” was neglected, they might stumble, and wander “perplex’d, uncertain, and in danger.” We return to George Barnwell standing on the gallows with that great impediment to method in business, Millwood the prostitute.

**Conclusion**

Thus Lillo’s *The London Merchant* reminds us of the importance of the household as an arena of social control, both in its role in socialization and also, crucial to apprenticeship, as a workplace. The historian of England is faced by the phenomenon of the Industrial Revolution, one of whose themes was the disciplining of a labor force of semi-independent artisans and cottage-based workers, used to working according to their own rhythms, into a docile and time-conscious body of factory workers. The supposedly massive changes that the coming of the factories brought have tended, apart from some work on apprenticeship, to obscure labor discipline before the industrial revolution as a subject for historical investigation. But, surely, here is an aspect of the past experience where social control must have been of prime importance, whether that control manifested itself through a system of labor discipline based on fines and penalties, or through those habits of deference that are thought to have been so strong in rural contexts. And lying behind this, of course, is the need for a continued testing of what the very notion of “work” meant, socially and culturally, in the preindustrial period.

As such considerations remind us, any society, early modern England as much as any other, requires the recognition that social life involves a knowledge of, and willingness to observe, sets of rules, norms, and conventions. Arguably, achieving this type of internalization is one of the major objectives of social control, broadly defined. This leads us back to a set of problems hinted at when touching on the social control aspects of religion: the need to take account of how social control was an element in, and something that affected, the human
psyche. Social control was one element in the social construction of the self, and thus, more broadly, of what society held to be a decent (that is, well socialized and fully acculturated) human being.

Finding much by way of evidence on how the more intimate, personal, or familial processes of social control operated remains problematic, although it is possible that close reading of the personal memoirs of the period, as well as a broader and more imaginative trawl through various categories of court record, might prove helpful. Until such investigations have been completed, we must depend largely upon printed sources. It should be stressed that there was a large body of moralistic and normative literature in existence in early modern England, much of it, of course, based firmly on Christian teaching. One such example of this genre was Richard Allestree’s *The Whole Duty of Man*. Allestree (1619–1681), was a divine and a scholar who survived the disadvantages inherent in taking a royalist position in the Civil Wars and was to enjoy a successful career in the Restoration period, which encompassed being Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford. His *The Whole Duty of Man* was an entirely conventional tract: its views on apprenticeship and domestic service, for example, demonstrated the essentially patriarchal notions of the period, stressing the responsibilities of masters in providing apprentices with instruction in their trade and also moral and religious instruction, and the virtues of diligence and obedience among apprentices. The work was divided into eighteen chapters, each designed to be read on a Sunday, with the intent that the whole book should thus be read on a rolling basis three times a year. Its objective was to create a balanced, godly, and socialized Christian, sincere in his faith, temperate in his personal habits, and honest in his dealings with his neighbors. The first Sunday’s reading, indeed, set out the “three great branches of man’s duty: to God, our selves, our neighbours,” while the point noted on the work’s title page, that the book was “necessary to all families,” returns us to that most important of the primary institutions of social control.40

We must, of course, be skeptical of the actual impact of this or any other normative text, yet the work’s printing history is remarkable. The British Library catalogue lists over fifty editions between the book’s first appearance in 1659 and 1842, it was translated into a number of languages other than English, and it encouraged a number of spin-offs, notably *The New Whole Duty of Man*, which had reached its twenty-ninth edition by 1792 and continued to be published well into the nineteenth century. Such works must have had at least some importance in acculturating individuals into the ways of the Christian commonwealth. And of course, it is interesting that this work should analyze basic social relationships in terms of “duties” and that it should nod at Russian notions of social control in reminding its readers that the Scriptures contained commands, promises of punishments, and promises of rewards.

Commands, punishments, rewards: three of the vital elements of social con-
trol as it was defined by Edward Ross in 1901. The problematic, I would contend, lies in the need to embrace the notion of “social control” in a broader sense than that offered by discussions of law enforcement and punishment and to understand social control as an entity that pervades many, if not most, areas of human activity. We must, therefore, accept the necessity of taking a broad view of how social control might be studied. I would contend that we must study a large number of institutions: the family, the community, the workplace, schools and universities, the Church, law enforcement, and, as I hope I have demonstrated, even such popular works of entertainment as George Lillo’s *The London Merchant*. These institutions did not operate independently, and the historian must try to ascertain how their operations as agencies of social control meshed. We also need to clarify our ideas on what social control was for; and here, I would reiterate, we need to look at not only the social, but how social control helped create socialized individuals, or how, to put it slightly differently, it helped both the social construction of the individual and the ways in which individuals reproduced the societies in which they lived.

Notes

2. e.g., Spufford, “Puritanism and Social Control,” 41–57.
10. Willis Bund, ed., *Calendar of the Quarter Sessions Records*, 726A.
15. e.g., Gouge, *Domestical Duties*.
17. Quoted in Laslett, *World We Have Lost*, 3.
19. e.g., Richardson, *The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum*.
22. Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*. 
24. Sharpe, “‘Last Dying Speeches.’”
32. Ibid., Act IV, sc. XVIII, ii, 53, 10–16.
34. Ibid., Act V, sc. XI, ii, 6–8.
35. Ibid., Act V, sc. XI, ii, 31–32.
37. Ibid., Act I, sc. I, ii, 12–16.
40. Allestree, Whole Duty of Man.