



of manners, armes and arts” at Penshurst Place; Andrew Marvell reflected on Appleton House—“that dear and happy isle”; and the idea of the gentleman, with “a full appetite of fame by just and generous actions [but] an equal contempt of it by any servile expedients” reflected the domestic values enjoyed by the early seventeenth century circle which gathered regularly at Great Tew to think about them. It is the locus of happiness, thy fortress and thy ease. As Lionel Trilling writes, “The hope that animates this is the almost shockingly elementary one [which] has to do with good harvests and full barns and qualities of affluent decorum.”²⁹

This was not just an upper class conceit; William Cobbett’s recipe for happiness for the labouring classes of his day was focused on sound economic management of the household, and H.J. Massingham writes of an English village at the start of the twentieth century,

For both yeoman and master-craftsman, the holding of property was the guarantee of economic freedom and a dutiful right. Home, as the centre alike of the family and of industry and the nucleus of neighbourliness, was the ruling concept for them both.³⁰

For the *market economy, however, the household, and the home it becomes if you feel you belong there, is not all that important. Its virtues fade into insignificance in comparison with the personal fulfilment that lies ahead on the journey to work and equality targets outside the home. The unpaid, *informal work done at home contributes nothing measurable to Gross Domestic Product and makes it invisible to a society with eyes only for *money. Individualism and *ideology have abandoned the home as obsolete. The post-war story has been a long goodbye, leaving home to those whose *competitive aspirations have come to little.

Many households are still in good heart; some are less so (see “Not Coping” sidebar); overall, this sector of the economy is in a state of decay. Its declining—or, in some cases, extinguished—ability to provide any of the services noted above deprives the rest of the state of the enabling capability it needs, leaving it with the task of picking up the pieces as households break down. But that’s now. When there is no longer an office to travel to, when the brief interlude of full

NOT COPING

The social worker’s tale

Violence, drugs, chaos: that’s what I deal with every day. I can’t take children into care for that. There’s not the space for them. There’s so many families like that, I don’t think the public has any idea.

I go into houses and they don’t live like we’d live. There can be dog faeces all over the floor, and beer cans, and so much rubbish that there’s only a narrow path from the front door to the kitchen. There might be a lot of swearing and aggression, and the children are missing school, and no one works. But it’s not my job to make value judgments on how adults live their lives. We’re not allowed to do that.

Our only concern is whether the children are at substantial risk of harm, and that’s the criterion we use to ask them to change. And they’re often a bit sullen, but next time you go there’s a bit less muck on the floor, and the kids are in school half the week, and the health visitor’s been, and you think things are getting better. You hope it is, because the pressure’s on you to keep that family together. Then a couple of months later it’s all gone back again, and the kid might be in a bit of trouble with the police—but it’s hard to tell when that all crosses the line and when you should be thinking, “Hang on, this really isn’t working and the children shouldn’t be here”.

A social worker talks about her clients in South Yorkshire, England.³¹

employment in a confident *growth-fed *civic society no longer—looking back—seems to be a good basis on which to build our understanding of what interpersonal *ethics and fulfilment is all about, some revisions to the evaluation of households and their *community habitat will be needed.

The social order of the future will be built up from its households. As its *small groups, they will be the *holons from which the *Lean Economy is made. They