

STYLE AND SCALE: TWO SOURCES OF
INSTITUTIONAL INAPPROPRIATENESS

Michael Thompson

REVISED DRAFT 7 October 1995

This paper has been commissioned by the Trans-National
Institute as part of its research project: "Re-inventing The
Commons".

Write on text, send comments or send both to:

Michael Thompson
The Musgrave Institute
52 Northholme Road
Highbury
London N5 2UX
Tel: (0)171.704.9387
Fax: (0)171.354.5486

STYLE AND SCALE: TWO SOURCES OF
INSTITUTIONAL INAPPROPRIATENESS

Michael Thompson

PROLOGUE

In this paper I present a Cultural Theory approach to the commons: an approach which, whilst certainly institutional, is not fully in agreement with the New Institutionalism of Keohane and Ostrom (1995) (nor, for that matter, with that of March and Olsen (1989), Powell and DiMaggio (1991) or North (1990), though I will not discuss these other versions here). Since most of those who are interested in the commons will not have come across Cultural Theory, I should begin by saying a little about what it is and how its characterisation of institutions differs from that of the New Institutionalists.

Keohane and Ostrom see the commons as flourishing in those places to which the nation state's writ does not fully run. The nation state's authority, they observe, often does not reach effectively to the village level (especially in developing nations) and much the same is true at the opposite end of the scale dimension: in the emergence of the "international regimes" that are increasingly required for the effective management of supra-national things like enclosed coastal seas, ozone holes, whale populations, climates and so on. The nation state, according to Keohane and Ostrom, is hierarchical - that is, centralised and coercive - and the

commons, which are voluntary and co-operative, are able to function only at the two extremes (the very small scale and the very large scale) which mark the limits of the nation state's authority. That, essentially, is the New Institutionalism's characterisation of the commons - local and global. "What", you may ask, "is wrong with that?". "Just about everything!", says Cultural Theory.

Since the objections are fleshed out in some detail in the paper itself, I will restrict myself here to one-line versions, their very brevity serving to pinpoint the fundamental divergences between the New Institutionalism and Cultural Theory.

- Centralisation and coercion are not definitive of hierarchy; formal status distinctions, distribution by rank and station, asymmetry (trust in expert, certified knowledge, for instance) and accountability (the "lowerarchs" right to bring into line those who are not acting in accordance with their proper role within the layered totality) are the sort of features that tell us we are dealing with a hierarchy (Gross and Rayner, 1985).
- Co-operation and voluntariness are not definitive of the commons; market relationships are often (indeed are usually) voluntary, and many commons managing institutions are hierarchical.
- Hierarchical relationships are to be found at all levels (not just within the effective grasp of the nation state)

and commons are to be found at all levels (not just those that are beyond the effective grasp of the nation state). Scale, Cultural Theorists concede, does matter, but it plays no part in defining the commons. Nor does it play any part in defining those other transactional arrangements that are not commons. What, then, does define them?

The answer, I will be arguing, lies not in scale but in style: the different, and contending, arrangements for the promotion of social transactions that are to be found at all scale levels: from the household, through the village, the commune, the canton and the nation state (not forgetting corporations, large and small, and non-governmental organisations, local and far-flung) to the sometimes global interactions of some of these actors. And this means that, if we are to sort out the various kinds of commons, and those various arrangements that are not commons (I'll call them "privates"), then we are going to need a typology of styles. Cultural Theory provides such a typology: a typology that distinguishes those familiar arrangements - markets and hierarchies (the former promoting competition and instituting equality, the latter setting limits on competition and instituting inequality) - and then goes on to distinguish the less familiar arrangements - egalitarianism and fatalism (the former setting limits on competition and instituting equality, the latter enduring unfettered competition and inequality) - that complete the permutational possibilities.

These four styles work themselves through in all sorts of ways: into the patterns of social relationships that both sustain and are themselves sustained by the transactions they carry, into the myths of nature (the convictions as to how the world is) that are shared by those who constitute each of these patterns of social relationships, into the scopes of the knowledges that are shaped by these different arrangements, into the learning styles that they adopt, into the strategies vis-a-vis the environment that each way of knowing gives rise to, and into the ideas of fairness by which each of these strategies is morally justified. It is the distinctive combinations of these key predictions from Cultural Theory that define the various styles and these styles then manifest themselves on all the scale levels, albeit in differing proportions and patterns of interaction. (These key predictions are set out in Figure 4.)

I will be explaining much more about these concomitants of the various styles later in the paper; for now all that really matters is the idea that this typology will allow us to do two vital things. First, it will allow us to say precisely what the definitional ingredients of institutions - alternative arrangements for the promotion of social transactions - are. Second, it will allow us to sort out, at any scale level, the various forms of commons and the various forms of privates. Where the New Institutionalism has a scale axis with hierarchy in the middle and the commons at either extremity, Cultural

Theory gives us a "multi-layered template" in which all four styles are present at every scale level. (Figure 1)

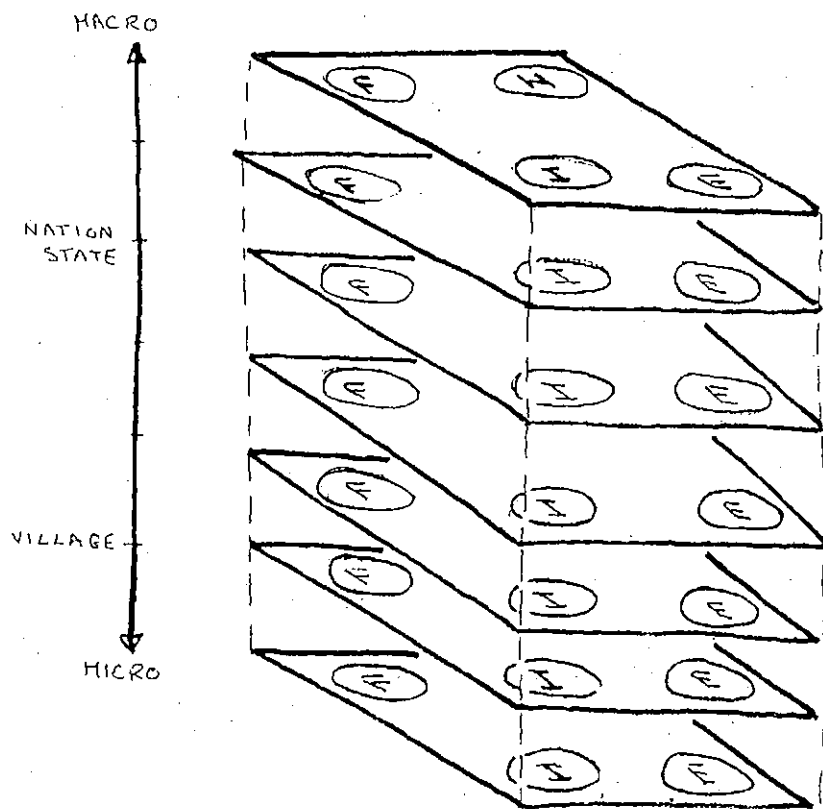


Figure 1 Cultural Theory's Multi-layered Template: 4 styles at every scale level.

Scale and style are thus clearly distinguished, and we can use this template, in a very practical way, to tease out just why it is that things sometimes go right and sometimes go wrong. Institutional arrangements, like Tolstoy's happy and unhappy families, can be appropriate in just one way (right style,

right scale) and inappropriate in three ways (right style, wrong scale; wrong style, right scale; and wrong style, wrong scale). This is a very simple idea, but not one that can be latched onto by way of the New Institutionalism, because the New Institutionalism conflates style and scale into a singular definition of the commons (and of the nation state). It is, moreover, a simple idea that, as I hope to show, gets us quite a long way. But, before I set about demonstrating this simple idea's virtues, I need to explain something that may not be too immediately obvious: the way in which this approach fits with the conceptual framework that is set out in Michael Goldman's paper.

Cultural Theory and the Goldman Framing

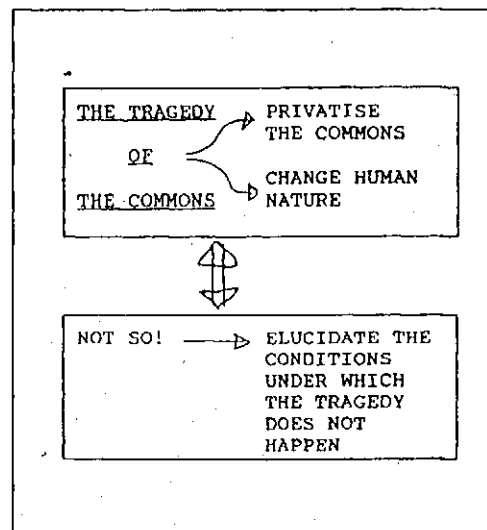
Goldman begins by boldly capturing the past twenty or so years of work on the commons into a dialectic between those who accept the "tragedy of the commons" explanation and those who systematically reject it. Those who accept this explanation are faced with a stark policy choice: either privatise the commons (a solution that is favoured by many development economists and much touted by libertarian think-tanks) or change human nature (a solution that is built into Aldo Leopold's "earth ethic" and into the deep ecologists' insistence that we must develop "a whole new relationship with nature"). "Not so!", cry those who are ranked against them, "the tragedy is not inherent to the commons": an argument that leads them, not to the stark choice, but to the painstaking elucidation of the conditions under which the tragedy of the

commons does not occur (and Goldman lists the various "development tribes", anthropologists amongst them, who have been beavering away at this task).

But Goldman discerns that something else is now beginning to happen. This dialectic, for all the disagreement that it contains, is ultimately contained within a wider area of agreement - that development is inevitable and desirable - that is now becoming the thesis in a new dialectic: a new dialectic in which the two original camps, joined together by their shared and unquestioned assumptions, are pitted against an antithesis that explicitly questions those assumptions. It is within this new questioning of the hitherto unquestioned that Goldman wishes to locate our project, and "reflexivity" - the ability to take up a position from which it is possible to recognise the arguments of those for whom development is the solution and of those for whom it is the problem - is that project's crucial ingredient. (Figure 2)

All this, of course, is pretty airy Hegelian stuff, but it does serve to point us in the right direction and to indicate, in very broad terms, what we should be doing. First, how do we achieve the "requisite reflexivity"; second, how do we make that reflexivity operational - how do we bring it to bear, in a policy-relevant way, on the commons - and third, how do we

DEVELOPMENT ITSELF UNQUESTIONED



THE QUESTIONING OF DEVELOPMENT

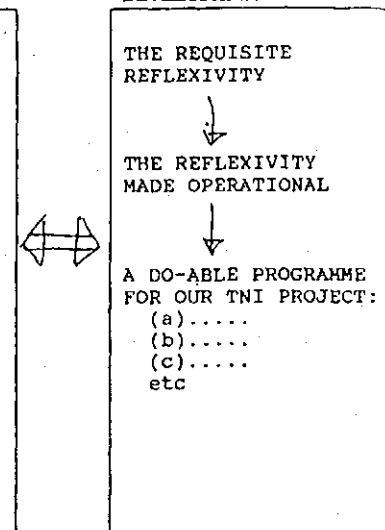


Figure 2 The Goldman Framing

translate that operational reflexivity into a do-able research programme for the Trans National Institute? "By taking the Cultural Theory approach", is my answer!

I am, I confess, an anthropologist, which puts me into the first of Goldman's three "tribes" that oppose the tragedy of the commons hypothesis. And I have done my share of the "painstaking elucidation" that Goldman shows is the hallmark of these three tribes. But, unlike most anthropologists, I am an "anti-particularist". Unwilling to stop at "thick description", I belong to that small band of anthropologists whose prime concern is to fashion some general and universally

valid frame that will tell us just how similar and dissimilar all those "thick descriptions" are. Nor do I see myself as fitting comfortably into the "development community". To do that you have first to buy into what postmodernists call "the project of modernity" (or, even more portentously, "the dark side of the Enlightenment") and British anthropology, to its great credit, never did that! And those who are also anti-particularists, and therefore wish to draw generalisations that will encompass all human social systems, actually advance under the banner: "What's Modern About Now; What's Traditional About Then?".

So try as we may (which, of course, we do not), we cannot fit ourselves into the "development thesis" of Goldman's new dialectic. In other words, the anti-particularistic anthropological approach - that is, the Cultural Theory approach - is simply another way of arriving at the Goldman framing. And its great advantage, I will be claiming, is that its fourfold typology of styles provides us with Goldman's first essential: the requisite reflexivity. Its ideas of fairness, for instance, predict a willingness, among individualists and hierarchists, to go along with the notion of Pareto optimality: an outcome in which the winners can fully compensate the losers, and still be better off than they were, is seen as preferable to the *status quo*. But egalitarians will likely prefer the opposite: a situation in which people are less well off but more equal. Moving from

one Pareto optimum to another, ad infinitum, is development; electing not to do that is something else!

If the policy process is captured by those who, for all their admitted differences, share the development assumption then the egalitarians are going to find themselves excluded. Could this be the reason why the commons have been in such pronounced decline? If so, then there is no chance of our re-inventing the commons, and including the egalitarian position in the policy process (the *sine qua non* for that re-invention), if we do not first place ourselves firmly within the antithesis of Goldman's new dialectic. Conventional approaches - painstaking elucidation, for instance, and the New Institutionalism - are not enough!

WHY INSTITUTIONS HAVE TO BE THE FOCUS

Over the quarter-century or so that has elapsed since Garrett Hardin (1968) published his famous paper "The Tragedy of The Commons" there are a number of lessons that have been (or, at any rate, should have been) learnt. One is that, when commons collapse, it is not because they are commons (any more than that, when privates - that is, markets - fail, it is because they are privates). Both commons and privates collapse because the institutional supports that are required to keep them in place are not up to the task. A related lesson is that, whilst an increase in population undoubtedly places a stress on that population's resource base, there is no direct relationship between population and environmental degradation.

Again, it is the institutions that make all the difference.
(Tiffen *et al.*, 1994)
Hence the possibility of "More People, Less Erosion"/a common
enough phenomenon that makes such nonsense of the frequently
invoked notion of "carrying capacity".

In other words, it is the institutional arrangements that are
interposed between a human population and the resource base on
which it draws that dramatically modify the sorts of limits
that impinge so directly on non-humans. That the limits can
be dramatically extended (and, in some circumstances, cut
back) is the lesson; not that (as some gung-ho neoclassical
economists insist) there are no limits". And if it is the
institutions that make all the difference then it is with the
institutions that we should concern ourselves..

* Meadows, Meadows and Randers (1992, p.123) describe the
various ways in which a population can approach its
limits. At one extreme (where the limits are very close
and incapable of recovering quickly if breached) we get
overshoot and collapse. At the other extreme (where the
limits are far away) we get an "onwards and upwards"
curve. In between (where the limits are not too close
and are capable of recovering, provided the population's
behaviour is not too exuberant) we get an asymptotic
approach to the limit (or a series of steadily
diminishing overshoots and their accompanying fall-
backs). It is the second (the remote limits) of these
ways - a way which Meadows *et al.* are convinced does not
fit our present situation, but which their critics are
convinced does - that is closest to the assumptions that
are built into neo-classical economics. To insist that
there are no limits is to allow the possibility that
eventually umpteen billion of us will be living the life
of Reilly on just one molecule!

THE HIMALAYAN VILLAGE

An analysis of the interactions between Himalayan villagers
and their physical surroundings reveals that their
transactions are parcelled out between four distinct
institutional arrangements, each of which is characterised by
a distinctive management style. Agricultural land, for
instance, is privately owned whilst grazing land and forests
are communally owned. But grazing land and forests do not
suffer the "tragedy of the commons" because transactions in
their products are under the control of a commons managing
institution. Villagers appoint forest guardians, erect a
"social fence" (a declared boundary, not a physical
construction) and institute a system of fines for those who
allow their animals into the forest when access is forbidden,
or take structural timber without first obtaining permission.
If the offender is also a forest guardian the fine is doubled;
if children break the rules their parents are penalised.
Informal though they may seem, and lacking any legal status,
these commons managing arrangements work well in the face-to-
face setting of a village and its physical resources. Drawing
on their "home-made" conceptions of the natural processes that
are at work (their ethnoecology), the forest guardians
regulate the use of these common property resources by
assessing their state of health, year by year or season by
season. In other words, these transactions are regulated

This section is borrowed, with very few changes, from
Price and Thompson (1995). Since, with a few exceptions,
I have not included the references and footnotes here,
readers who wish to go into this example in more detail
should consult the original version.

within a framework that assumes, first, that you can take only so much from the commons and, second, that you can assess where the line between so much and too much should be drawn. The idea of nature inherent to this transactional realm is that nature is bountiful within knowable limits. This, to make a link with the ecological theories of CS Holling (1986), is the myth of Nature Perverse/Tolerant (Figure 3).

With agricultural land, however, decisions are entirely in the hands of individual owners, and fields (unlike communally-owned resources) can quite easily end up belonging to the money-lenders. In recent years, when forests and grazing lands have suffered degradation (for a variety of reasons, not the "tragedy of the commons"), villagers have responded by shifting some of their transactions from one sphere to the other. For instance, they have allowed trees to grow on the banks between their terraced fields (thereby reducing the pressure on the village forest) and they have switched to the stall-feeding of their animals (thereby making more efficient use of the forest and grazing land and receiving copious amounts of manure which they can then carry to their fields). In other words, transactions are parcelled out to the institutional modes that seem appropriate and, if circumstances change, some of those transactions can be switched from one mode to another.

Since they are subsistence farmers, whose aim is to remain viable over generations - rather than to make a "killing" in

any one year - their transactions within their local environment can be characterised as low risk, low reward. However, during those times of the year when there is little farm work to be done, many villagers engage in trading expeditions, or in migrant labour in India (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1975). Trading expeditions are family-based and family-financed, and highly speculative: high risk, high reward (Thompson, 1980). So the individualised transactions, when added together over a full year, constitute a nicely spread risk portfolio. The attitude here (and particularly at the high-risk end of the portfolio) is that "Fortune favours the brave", "Who Dares Wins", "There's plenty more fish in the sea". Opportunities, in other words, are there for the taking. The idea of nature here is optimistic, expansive and non-punitive: Nature Benign (Figure 3).

Social scientists in general, and institutional economists in particular, would see these two spheres as corresponding to their classic distinction between hierarchies and markets, and would have no difficulty in explaining the processes by which some transactions are switched this way or that (Lindblom, 1977; Williamson, 1975). But hierarchies and markets do not exhaust the transactional repertoire of the Himalayan villager. Some collectivised transactions do not involve formal status distinctions (such as those between forest guardians and ordinary villagers) and some individualised transactions are marked by the absence of bidding and

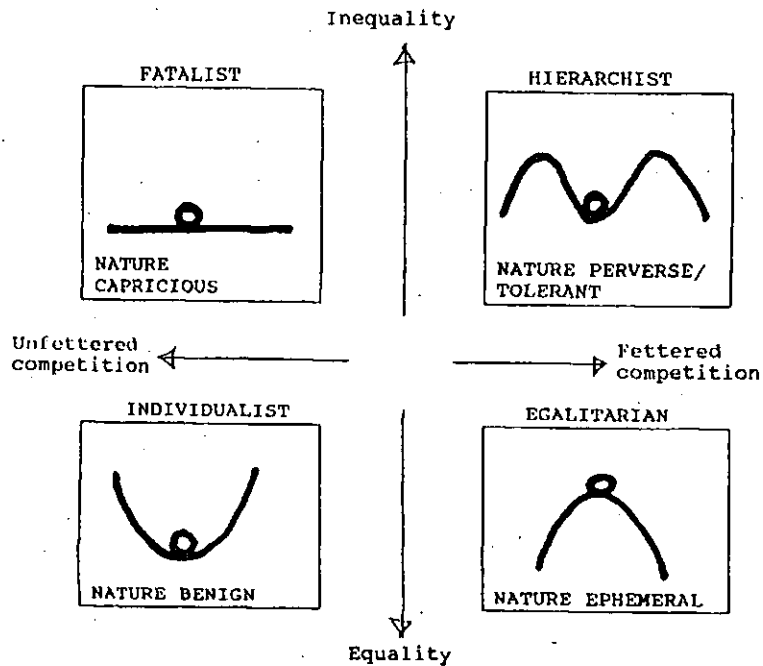


Figure 3. The Myths of Nature and their Transactional Realms.

bargaining (an essential characteristic of the market way of life). The plurality, in other words, is fourfold, not twofold, and it is with this doubling of institutional variety that this paper is concerned.

Non-hierarchical Collectivism

In many parts of the Himalaya (especially the Indian Himalaya), village autonomy is always under threat, because powerful outside actors are also laying claim to the forest resources that are so vital to Himalayan farming systems. One

very effective response to this external threat has been the Chipko Movement. This is a grassroots and highly egalitarian social movement, in which women (who are largely responsible both for fodder gathering and fuel-wood collection) predominate. "Chipko" means "to stick", and the Gandhian strategy is to physically hug the trees, thereby preventing them from being appropriated. Those villagers of a slightly less non-violent disposition actually chase the logging contractors (and the government forestry officers who have been corrupted by the contractors) out of the forest with their kukris (long curved knives). In the Narmada Valley, further to the south, they have now done the same to the representatives of the World Bank.

So far as these threatening external transactions are concerned, it is certainly not a case of "plenty more fish in the sea", nor is there even a "safe limit" within which the commercial extraction of timber would be sustainable. All external predation is seen as catastrophic in its consequences. Hence the spectacularly uncompromising collectivist response of the tree-huggers, whose idea of nature is one in which any perturbation of the present low-key regime is likely to result in irreversible and dramatic collapse: Nature Ephemeral (Figure 3).

Non-market Individualism

Finally, in every village, we may be sure, there will always be some people who sneak produce from the forest when no-one

is looking, or who can never quite get together the capital, the contacts and the oomph to go off on trading expeditions, and manage somehow not to be around when it's all hands to the tree-hugging. These are the fatalists: people whose transactions are somehow dictated by the organisational efforts of those who are not themselves fatalists. Theirs is a life in which the world is always doing things to them - sometimes pleasant, sometimes unpleasant - and in which nothing that they do seems to make much difference. "Why bother?" is the not unreasonable response of the fatalist. If that is how the world is, then learning is not possible and, even if it were, there would be no way of benefitting from it. The idea of nature here is one in which things operate without rhyme or reason: a flatland in which everywhere is the same as everywhere else: Nature Capricious (Figure 3).

Plurality and Flexibility

The Himalayan village, with its transactions parcelled out in these four very different ways, is impressively plural. More than that, as shown by the examples of stall-feeding and trees on private land, it has the ability to switch transactions from one way to another whenever it seems likely that this might be more appropriate. Since the behaviour of the villagers is continuously altering the resource base on which they depend, this is, to put it mildly, a useful in-built mechanism. The jurist, Michael Schapiro (1988), has dubbed this sort of set-up (in which each conviction as to how the world is - each myth of nature - is given some recognition) a

clumsy institution. This is in contrast to those more elegant, and more familiar, arrangements in which just one conviction holds sway. The terminology is deliberately counter-intuitive, clumsy institutions having some remarkable properties that are not shared by their unclumsy alternatives.

To understand just how remarkable this particular clumsy institution is, imagine for a moment that you are some God-like experimenter, able to reach out and change this or that variable in a village's environment, or to move it bodily east or west, north or south, across the Himalayan landscape. As you bring in the logging contractors, or take it a hundred miles eastwards or 1,000 metres higher, the village will shift its transactions this way or that between its four options until it has adapted itself to its changed circumstances. In other words, it will maintain its resilience thanks to the very practical learning system that is part-and-parcel of its fourfold plurality. But, if it did not have this plurality, and was an elegant and unclumsy institution - like, for instance, many national forestry services - it would not be able to do this. Something along these imaginary lines, it turns out, is what has actually happened (and is still happening).

I use the word resilience, rather than sustainability, because sustainability is too stable a notion and implies that human and natural systems can, if they get it "right", settle down into some harmonious, long-term balance.

As we go from one Himalayan village to another, the relative strengths of the four ways of organising vary.

Egalitarianism, for instance, is strongest in those parts of the Himalaya that are most prone to commercial logging. As one moves eastwards, from India (with its powerful centre and its colonial heritage of Reserved Forests) into Nepal and Bhutan, so the Chipko Movement becomes less of a force to be reckoned with. If the inequitable external threat is absent then so too, it appears, is the communitarian response to it. However, the most dramatic of these variations is that between the strongly individualised Buddhist villages and the strongly grouped Hindu villages just a day or two's walk downstream. These are Fürer-Haimendorf's (1975) "adventurous traders" and "cautious cultivators", respectively, and he has shown how the distinctive strategy of each makes viable the other's. In other words, each village, in adjusting to its circumstances (which include the other villages), creates and takes its place in a social and cultural "ecosystem", in which the marked divergence of the parts sustains the whole.

Nor is this a fanciful analogy. Anthropologists and ecologists have shown that the "adventurous trader's" strategy matches that of the omnivorous and opportunistic "r-selected species", the "cautious cultivator's" strategy matches that of the specialised and niche-dependent "k-selected species", the fatalists do for social systems what compost does for natural systems (provides a generalised resource for renewal) and the egalitarians, through their small-scale communal fervour, are

creating enclaves of low-level energy (what Marx called "primitive capital") in places where neither the r-selected nor the k-selected species can make any impression (Holling, 1986; Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky, 1990; Holling, Gunderson and Peterson, 1993).

So the hypothesis I am sketching here is very different from the way people usually think about the interaction of social and natural systems. There is, in my view, no way of ever getting it "right": of bringing the social into long-term harmony with the natural. Instead, each is a fourfold and plurally responsive system, and their time-lagged interactions ensure that there can be no steady-state outcome. The whole thing is in a perpetual unsteady state: changes at each level - the social and the natural - adapting to the other and changing it in the process, thereby setting in motion another set of changes. On and on.

Nor are these changes predictable, as they would be if each level had only two states to be in: hierarchies and markets at the social level and pioneer and climax communities at the natural level. In other words, bumping up the plurality from two to four takes both social and natural systems out of the well-understood realm of "Newtonian science" (in which, once you have identified the key variables and written and solved the equations expressing their cause-and-effect relationships, you can predict the future states of the system) and into a "non-Newtonian" realm that is characterised by complex

systems: systems that are non-linear, highly sensitive to initial conditions, far-from-equilibrium and inherently unpredictable. Order without predictability is what complex systems give us, and my argument is that, when we are talking about institutions, we will be seriously wide of the mark if we assume (as pretty well all of current thinking does assume) that they are simple.

What this means, in practical terms, is that elegant institutions - solutions that begin by defining the problem in terms of just one of the myths of nature and that then try to put all our transactions onto the pattern of social relationships that is supported by that myth of nature - are wholly inappropriate for complex systems. In their place we need much messier arrangements: set-ups in which each myth of nature is granted some legitimacy, and in which transactions are tentatively distributed among the various institutional bases. Policies designed in this way are non-hubristic (because they fully acknowledge the extent of our ignorance), high in consent (because all the "contradictory certitudes" are granted some validity), quick learners (because they do not set off by discarding three-quarters of the experience and wisdom from which they could learn) and highly adaptive (because, by covering all the bases, they allow us to continuously re-assess the appropriateness of our initial distribution of transactions and to switch those that are not working well onto more promising alternatives).

In other words, if you're having to ask who's right you're wrong! Of course we need the commons; of course we need the markets. It is never a matter of one or the other; always a question of what is best handled by which. Nor (and this is the crux of the complex-not-simple realisation) is it ever a straightforward, two-fold allocation: this to the commons, that to the markets. Rather, there is a double bifurcation: the commons come in two very different forms - hierarchy and egalitarianism - and the "privates" come in two very different forms - individualism (the form that is supported by market relations) and fatalism.

IT IS STYLE, NOT SCALE, THAT DISTINGUISHES THE INSTITUTIONS
Cultural Theory (in marked contrast to The New Institutionalism that informs most of the recent work on the commons) focuses on style and ignores scale. The underlying idea in Cultural Theory is that there is no need to make the dichotomy between micro and macro (between the individual and society). Indeed, there is a need not to do this, because to do so would be to slice right through the "meso-level" - the various viable patterns of social relationships - which is Cultural Theory's point of departure. These patterns, Cultural Theory argues, work their way down into the village, into the household and even into the individual (individuality being something that, to a considerable extent, we get from others). And, in the other direction, these patterns manifest themselves in the corporate cultural differences between multinationals (Proctor and Gamble, for instance, and

Unilever, the former opting for global products, the latter for "harmonisation") and in the political cultural differences between nation states (Ireland, for instance, is the most hierarchical country in Europe, France the most fatalist, Germany the highest on both individualism and egalitarianism). The four styles, you could say, are like the letters in a stick of Blackpool rock: no matter where you happen to break it - village or nation state, household or international organisation - there they are! (Figure 1)

With scale backgrounded in this way, we can see that both the village-level commons managing institutions (that the Trans-National Institute is so keen on) and the sort of state interventionism (that the Trans-National Institute is so eager to roll back) are stylistically identical: they are both hierarchical. Both are founded on formal status distinctions, both place their trust in expert, certified knowledge, and both subscribe to a view of the world (Nature Perverse/Tolerant) as a place that is forgiving of many interventions but vulnerable to the occasional knocking of the ball out over the rim. Both also hold to a view of human nature as originated in sin but redeemable by firm, long-lasting and nurturing institutions. Steering a careful path between the egalitarians (who see man as essentially caring and cooperative until corrupted by coercive and unjust institutions) and the individualists (who see man as inherently competitive and self-seeking) hierarchists are committed to wise guidance and far-sighted stewardship.

Everything, therefore, hinges on their discovering just where the limits are and then ensuring (by statutory regulation, in the case of the nation state, and by more homely, face-to-face sanctions, in the case of the Himalayan village) that everyone stays on the right side of them. Whenever we hear talk of "safe limits", "assimilative capabilities", "tolerable risks" ... "carrying capacities" - and we hear such talk in both global and local forums - we are in the presence of hierarchy.

Individualists, however, do not talk like this; they put their trust in those institutional arrangements - markets - that harness man's self-seeking nature to the benefit of all. Adam Smith's "hidden hand", individualists feel, is all the guidance they need, and they note that its track-record in terms of wealth creation and technological innovation has not yet been brought to a halt by any natural limit. Others - the egalitarians - are aghast at this business-as-usual complacency, and will likely point out that the individualist's true predicament is akin to that of the man who, having fallen off the top of a skyscraper, remarks "So far, so good" as he passes each floor. Nor are the egalitarians prepared to stop off at the hierarchists' halfway-house. Nature, they are convinced, allows us no safe limits, and they are deeply distrustful of the sort of "bench science" that is so relied on by the hierarchists. Holism - the insistence that "you can never change just one thing" (which, of course, is what bench science claims to do) - is the bedrock of the egalitarian's science.

A Digression on Fairness

One of the attractions of Cultural Theory is that it gets to grips with the problem of irreducible ignorance. Science, it tells us, will never be able to decide, once and for all, whose science is right. Each, rather, will be valid at times and in places; hence the desirability of not choosing just one and discarding the others. To say, as is so often said, that knowledge is power is to miss the pluralistic point, and to avoid posing the really important questions: "Whose knowledge?" and "Power to do what?". Cultural Theory shows how the different knowledges continually emerge and reconstitute themselves as the different myths of human and physical nature get to work on whatever it is that each new day brings (a considerable proportion of that historical change being, of course, the consequence of earlier actions based on those knowledges). And each knowledge, when acted on, gives those who act on it the power to extend their preferred way of organising - their preferred pattern of social relationships - at the expense of the others*.

In other words, the styles are far from superficial; they cut deep. So deep, in fact, as to define the entire repertoire of

* Just how much power will depend, of course, on the extent to which the world is indeed the way the chosen myth of nature insists it is. And, since our acting in the world often alters the way it is, the equation between knowledge and power can often go into reverse. Surprises, like the poor, are always with us!

institutional arrangements that are available to us*. One very practical consequence of this stylistic depth is a fourfold typology of ideas of fairness. Every policy debate - local and global - is a debate over fairness, yet nearly all policy analysis is couched in the purportedly neutral terms of economic efficiency. Something, for sure, is wrong here, and Cultural Theory can tell us what it is.

A recent book on business ethics (Sternberg 1994) defines as fair a system of distribution in which the rewards are in proportion to the contributions made to the business. In other words, those who put most in should get most out: a state of affairs that would meet with the approval of our Himalayan villager as he sets off on his trading expedition, and that is consistent both with the notion of equality of opportunity and with the criterion of economic efficiency. But this idea of fairness cannot be reconciled with the notion of equality of outcome - in which everyone gets exactly the same regardless of contribution (as, for instance, happens when the tree-hugging successfully repels those who would appropriate the villagers' forest). Nor is it consistent with the notion that distribution should be by rank and station; for instance, that brahmins should receive more water (because they are more easily polluted than those who are lower in the caste hierarchy) or that developed countries should have higher carbon quotas (because their economies are more energy-

* The basic building blocks, that is. Specific institutions can be more complex and varied, but all are put together from these fundamental elements.

intensive than those of less developed countries). Nor is it consistent with the idea that distribution should be by lottery: that people's efforts, be they cooperative or competitive, equalised or stratified, are irrelevant in a haphazard world that is everywhere presided over by Lady Luck. Since it is an easy matter to find people and situations in which one or other of these four ideas of fairness are passionately adhered to and morally justified (in our Himalayan village the people stay the same and only their situations vary) any approach that assumes just one idea of fairness is going to make sense of only a fraction of what is going on. Cultural Theory offers a way round this serious disability.

Distribution in proportion to contribution, we can now see, is supportive of the ego-focused networks that characterise markets, but would quickly destroy the status distinctions that are so vital a part of hierarchy. And such an idea of fairness, by introducing marked inequalities of outcome, would soon undermine the distributive arrangements (strict parity) that keep the members of an egalitarian group equal and united. Conversely, a fatalist who worked out that life's lottery was not in fact random would likely expect to retain the rewards that flowed to him as a result of his intellectual efforts, thereby opening up an achievement gap between himself and his fellow fatalists. And, if he kept that up, then he would inevitably find himself making the transition to market individualism: the pattern of social relationships whose

supporting idea of fairness comports with his new-found transactional reality.

And so it goes, each way of organising - each pattern of social relationships together with its supporting myth of nature - continually competing with the others for adherents, and all the time holding itself together with its particular brand of social glue: its distinctive idea of fairness.

Explanation and Requisite Variety

Sanjeev Prakash (in his paper for this meeting) makes a plea for "weak theory", approvingly quoting Martha Nussbaum to the effect that it is "far better to be vaguely right than to be precisely wrong". The "strong theories" that he is criticising are those (such as the neo-classical framework that gives us the criterion of economic efficiency) that insist on imposing singularity on processes that, were they not plural, would not be there. I could not agree more. What worries me, however, is the Nussbaumian assumption that singularity goes with theoretical strength and plurality with theoretical weakness. It is possible, surely, to be both plural and precisely right, and a theory that carried off that double would not be weak!

That said, I would agree with Prakash that our present probing of common-pool resource (CPR) management systems reveals "a complex, messy picture of plural conceptions of fairness and divergent interests contending within institutions that

use widely varying resolution principles over different places, times and contexts". In other words, it is early days still in the study of clumsy institutions and we should not expect Cultural Theory to sort it all out in a twinkling. What we should aim for, to begin with, is something quite modest: the offering-up of Cultural Theory's plural framework of predictions as a first step towards untangling all the different things that are simultaneously going on in our transactions with one another and with our physical surroundings.

Cultural Theory, I should mention, makes a great many fourfold predictions*, but the ones that are most relevant for present purposes are the ones I have already mentioned. They can be assembled (Figure 4) into a handy exploratory tool: a tool that, if it does nothing else, enables us to achieve the first essential: the avoidance of capture by just one of the positions that it maps.

WHAT IS UNFAMILIAR IN THIS APPROACH?

The fact that the Himalayan villagers' forest and grazing land is communally owned puts these resources firmly on the commons side (the right-hand side) of the Cultural Theory diagram (Figure 3), and the fact that agricultural land is privately owned puts this resource firmly on the privates side (the left-hand side). There is, as I have already pointed out,

* These are assembled, in the form of a chart covering several pages, in Thompson (1992).

	HIERARCHIST	EGALITARIAN	INDIVIDUALIST	FATALIST
PATTERN OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS	Ranked groups	Unranked groups	Ego-focused networks	Margins of organised patterns
MYTH OF NATURE	Perverse/Tolerant	Ephemeral	Benign	Capricious
SCOPE OF KNOWLEDGE	Almost complete and divided up	Incomplete but holistic	Sufficient and timely	Irrelevant
LEARNING STYLE	Anticipation	Trial without error	Trial and error	Luck
STRATEGY w.r.t. THE ENVIRONMENT	Control	Harmony	Exploitation	Happenstance
IDEA OF FAIRNESS	Distribution by rank and station	Equality of outcome	Equality of opportunity	Not on this earth!

Figure 4. Some of Cultural Theory's Key Predictions.

nothing outlandish about this assignment: it corresponds to the conventional markets-and-hierarchies distinction (though at what Oran Young (1995) has called the "nano-level"). But the diagram shows us that this assignment takes account of only two of the four quadrants: the hierarchists' and the individualists', respectively. The other two quadrants - one (the egalitarians') on the commons side, the other (the fatalists') on the privates side - are not covered by this hierarchies-and-markets distinction.

Moreover, some of the Himalayan villagers' resources do not fall clearly on one side or the other: the water that several farmers have to share to irrigate their private fields, for

instance. Is that a commons? Or, since it is going to flow down the hillside anyway, is it privately owned and simply waiting to be divided up in an effective way? Certainly the farmers have to cooperate if each is to get the irrigation he needs, but cooperation, by itself, does not imply a commons. Individualists can cooperate; indeed they are famous cooperators, provided it is in each one's interest to cooperate. If this was all that was involved in the commons (as Keohane and Ostrom, for instance, come perilously close to saying) then there would be little point in re-inventing them! Fortunately, it is not all that is involved.

Every day, during the growing season, thousands of tiny meetings take place across the Nepalese landscape as groups of farmers sort out the sequences and timings by which each will receive his share of the water. Often enough, they also have to determine what will have to be done, and who will do it, by way of maintaining, and perhaps extending, the shared system of channels and flumes by which the water is brought from the stream-bed to their part of the hillside. But only if they were uncooperative would we know, for sure, where they fitted

A Cultural Theoretic reading of the introductory chapter of Keohane and Ostrom (1995) picks up a host of characteristics of institutional arrangements for the management of CPRs that comport with individualism rather than with either of the quadrants on the commons side of the diagram: "productive cooperation", "reciprocity rather than hierarchy", the "positive advantage" of "self-help", "self-monitoring and self-enforcing patterns of human interaction", arrangements that "increase the availability of information and reduce transaction costs" and their "existence in a world without clear hierarchies or centralised enforcement". All these to be found in the first two pages of their book.

on the Cultural Theory diagram. Only fatalists are uncooperative; people, they insist, are not to be trusted and, anyway, what would be the point of going to all that trouble if nothing you did was going to make any difference! In other words, cooperation, by itself, tells you very little: only that you are not dealing with fatalism. What is diagnostic is the moral basis for the cooperation: individualists cooperate only when each judges that he or she will do better by cooperating than by going it alone; hierarchists cooperate in a way that subordinates and, if needs be, sacrifices the individual to the higher claims of the totality (a stratified totality in which the members of each rank are expected to perform their allotted role - noblesse oblige, for instance, for the upper-class officers as they lead their deferential working-class troops "over the top"); and egalitarians cooperate, all on an equal footing, for the benefit of their unstratified collectivity ("All in the same boat", as it were, and all, in the absence of any distinctions of rank and function, "pulling together").

So it is only by careful observation - observation aimed at discovering what metaphors are being used, which ideas of fairness are being appealed to, whether status distinctions

The difference in Nepal being between a high yield from an irrigated field (khet, as it is called) and a lower yield from a rain-fed terrace (bari, as it is called). This potential gain, however, has to be balanced against the risk that the field, if irrigated, might become more prone to landslip. And if it does slip the liability is his and he cannot rely on the community to help make good his loss.

are being upheld or resisted, what myths of nature are being granted credence, and so on - that we can tell, in situations such as the sharing of the Himalayan waters, which institutional style we are dealing with. That there is cooperation tells us only that this is not fatalism. If it is individualistic cooperation then we are not dealing with a commons, if it is hierarchical cooperation then we are dealing with a commons in what is now the conventional sense of the word, and if it is egalitarian cooperation then we are dealing with a commons in a sense that is either not conventionally recognised or uncritically merged with the conventional sense.

The essential point is that you can say nothing about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of a particular situation until you have a sufficiently varied typology of institutional styles, and you do not arrive at such a typology simply by invoking differences of scale (nation state versus village, etc) even though differences of scale (as we will see in a moment) do make a difference. And the important lesson we should draw from the story of the Himalayan village is that the villagers are making these stylistic distinctions all the time: using the appropriate metaphors, myths of nature and ideas of fairness in each of their transactional realms and, wherever a particular allocation appears not to be working too well, reassessing its appropriateness in comparison with the other styles that are available. This is pretty sophisticated stuff (especially when you realise that most of these villagers cannot read or write) and not something that you see

happening every day in ministerial deliberations, say, or being taught in the economics departments of the developed world's finest universities, or being promoted in the policy think-tanks of Washington and London, Berlin and Vienna. Changing all that - getting the North to catch up with the South - it seems to me, would be a worthy goal for the Trans-National Institute, and an excellent reason for re-inventing the commons.

SO HOW DO WE DO IT?

A moment's reflection will confirm that it is not just Himalayan villagers who parcel out their transactions to different institutional arrangements, each with its supporting idea of fairness and myth of nature; we all do it. In Britain, if we want a cup of coffee or a loaf of bread, we get it through the market, but if we need a kidney transplant we rely on a hierarchical arrangement: health authorities, organ donor cards, committees of experts, professional medical judgements as to whether we are suitable cases for treatment, and so on. And, when we want to stop our inner-city street from becoming a rat-run for through traffic, we soon discover that sealing it off by the direct action of all the residents is the most effective recourse.

Of course, the lines get drawn at different places in different countries. Cups of coffee used not to come through the market in centrally-planned places like Bulgaria (with the result that they seldom came) and being an expert (that is,

owning a pen) was not a respected station in Pol Pot's Cambodia. And, even within one country, there is always plenty of disagreement as to just what goods and services should be promoted by which institutional arrangement. The essential point, however, is that these institutional bases are there (they could not not be) and people are concerned not over which one is right, everywhere and always, but with their appropriateness for some transactions and with their inappropriateness for others.

Even Arthur (now Sir Arthur) Seldon - the founding father of the rabidly pro-market Institute of Economic Affairs - is prepared to concede that there is one worthwhile task that Britain's left-wing think-tank (the Institute for Public Policy Research) should address itself to. Privatisation, he says (in a letter to The Independent) has been the great and unqualified success of the Thatcher years, but even he has to acknowledge that eventually, when everything that can successfully be privatised has been privatised, a limit will have been reached. If the new think-tank can determine where that limit lies then that, he concedes, will be something well worth knowing.

This "flat earth" view, in which markets spread and spread until they eventually fall over the edge into failure, is nicely matched by those who seek to promote and expand the institutional arrangements - the commons - whose success is the other side of the markets' failure. The Trans-National

Institute, for instance, takes this success (which marks the limit of Sir Arthur Seldon's world) as the centre of its "flat earth". It seeks, therefore, to re-invent the commons: to push against privatisation until, having communalised everything that can be communalised, it too falls off the edge of its world.

Cultural Theory's fourfold scheme enables us to move beyond this Battle of the Flat Earthers. It allows us to see things in the round: to look down on the flat-earthers - the Knights Seldon and the Susans George - and to see how it is that each of them is struggling to push as many transactions as possible onto their preferred patterns of social relationships. It also reveals that the conventional hierarchies-and-markets view of the round earth (a view that is taken, though not consistently, by Keohane and Ostrom) is seriously deficient, because it ignores two of the four alternative arrangements for the conduct of social transactions: egalitarian groups and excluded margins. All of this suggests that we should discard the either/or way of looking at it and, instead, see the transactional sphere as being covered by four "algal patches", each of which is trying to chew bits off the other three. Each of these patches can expand, if conditions are favourable, to cover nearly all of the available surface, but never all of it, and never for ever!

Once Sir Arthur Seldon's question - "Where are the limits of markets?" - has been rephrased in this way, the answer becomes

clear. And that same answer also holds for those - the hierarchists, the egalitarians and the fatalists - whose "flat earths" lie beyond the edges of his. The limits of each of these transactional realms, Cultural Theory suggests, is defined by the extents of the other three. And the endless movements of these boundaries - the ebbs and flows of the four "algal patches" - are directly linked to the dynamics of consent. As people variously dig in their toes over privatised kidneys, go along with centralisation here, let markets take over there, resort to direct action somewhere else, and decide that nothing can be done about something else, so the "algal patches" rearrange themselves on the surface of the transactional sphere. In addition, these "algal patches" are rather less directly linked to the physical environment: blooming when the world happens to be the way the chosen myth of nature says it is and going sharply into time-lagged reverse when it is not.

Small wonder, then, that policy advice based on just one idea of fairness (economic efficiency, for instance) and just one myth of nature (Perverse/Tolerant, for instance) is so often a disappointment. The simple fact is that the neatness of its single metric is no match for the plurality of the system it seeks to improve. It lacks the requisite variety, and the task, as I see it, of the project we are engaged in is to make good that deficiency.

I mention these two (the first individualist, the second hierarchical) because so much of policy analysis is captured by this particular cultural alliance.

A THREE-DIMENSIONAL TEMPLATE FOR ASSESSING APPROPRIATENESS

There are two distinct sources of institutional inappropriateness: style and scale.

1. Transactions at the village level, or at the level of the nation state (or at any of the intervening levels - canton, county or whatever) may be parcelled out in ways that are stylistically inappropriate.
2. Transactions that are parcelled out to the appropriate institutional style may still be inappropriate, because they are pitched at the wrong point along the local to global scale.
3. Transactions may be inappropriate on both counts: style and scale.

This way of framing the task we face - sorting out the more appropriate from the less appropriate - takes us a long way from the conventional either/or frameworks: markets or hierarchies, privates or commons, local or global, coercive or voluntary, top-down or bottom-up, centralised or decentralised, cooperative or competitive and so on. Instead, we have a "template" with four holes in it (one for each institutional style) only one of which will be appropriate in any instance. On top of that, this template also extends along another dimension - scale - and at each scale level there are four more holes (again, one for each style) (Figure 1). Within this three-dimensional template, only one hole is going to be appropriate and all the rest are going to

be inappropriate. Of one thing we can be sure: we are not going to get it right first time, every time!

By way of a conclusion, let me lay out a few examples, spread out along both the style and scale dimensions, some of which show a happy zeroing-in on appropriateness, others the reverse.

SOME EXAMPLES

Inappropriatenesses of style

- Himalayan villagers letting trees grow on private land, and switching to the stall-feeding of their animals, are nice examples of transactional changes in response to an awareness that things are no longer so appropriate as they once were. Trees on private land work well, not because they replace the commons - the village forest - but because they supplement it: taking some of the pressure off it and thereby enabling it to increase its sustainable yield.

Something similar happens in the case of stall-feeding. The fodder is cut from the commons but the animals have to eat what they are given, rather than eating what they prefer, which is what they do if they are out on the commons. Stall-feeding is more labour-intensive, but this is offset by the animals not having to be watched while on the commons and by their depositing all their manure in one place. And, as with the trees on private

land, what we have here is an intensification of land-use that is achieved by exploiting interdependencies between commons and privates.

What is so instructive about these two examples is that they do not conform to the only solutions that follow from the "tragedy of the commons" hypothesis: privatise the commons or change human nature! What is more, according to the Cultural Theory hypothesis, neither of these extreme positions could constitute a solution; all the possibilities lie in-between.* The Himalayan villagers, it would seem, have worked that out for themselves!

The fourfold allocation of transactions is also found in the Swiss Alps, again with agricultural land being privately owned and grazing land (and sometimes the forest) being communally owned.** But, unlike Himalayan villagers, the Swiss forests are physically sandwiched between the high pastures (communally owned) and the valley floor (privately owned fields and housing). Over the centuries that the Davos valley has been settled, for instance, both the fields and the grazing land have expanded at the expense of the forest, but the trees on

* This, I now realise, is probably the main theme of my early work (Thompson, Warburton and Hatley 1986) on the Himalayas and their commons.

** The Swiss example is set out, in much greater detail, in Price and Thompson (1995).

the steeper slopes have stayed in place, acting both as a source of timber and as a barrier against avalanches.

However, it is difficult to achieve both these functions simultaneously and, in managing the forest for timber production, the Davosers have often set in train changes in the forests' age structure which, decades later, have resulted in exceptional avalanches reaching the valley floor and threatening the destruction of the entire community.

Every time this unpleasant surprise has befallen them the Davosers have responded by switching their forest management onto the all-in-the-same-boat, egalitarian style. Later, it has sometimes shifted to the hierarchist style, often to the individualist style (with farmers owning long thin strips of forest running all the way from valley floor to alpine pasture), and sometimes to the fatalist style (as happened, for instance, when the avalanche danger was clearly perceived yet extraction continued in response to the demands of various mining booms and, in more recent years, the demand for ski-runs).

Surely, you might think, they would have got it right by now. But to think that is to assume that there is one right way, and that is not the case. There is no way of ever getting it right, because managing one way inevitably changes the forest, eventually to the point

where that way of managing is no longer appropriate.

This would happen even if there were no exogenous changes (like the mining and tourist booms) which, of course, there always are (even in seemingly remote places like the Himalayas and the Andes). Viability can only be achieved, therefore, by "covering all the bases": by the villagers ensuring that they have the full repertoire of management styles, and by their being prepared to try a different one whenever the one they are relying on shows signs of no longer being appropriate. The Davosers, like their Himalayan counterparts, have now been in their valley for more than 700 years, without destroying either themselves or their valley in the process: an achievement that would not have been possible if they had opted for just one (or even a mixture of two) institutional styles.

Inappropriatenesses of Scale

- Many of Nepal's forests have, over the past 30 years or so, gone into serious decline. Some have seen this as proof of the "tragedy of the commons" hypothesis: an explanation, however, that cannot cope with the fact that this decline has only happened now while the village forests have existed for centuries. To get around this obstacle we need to ask whether, a few decades ago, there were any major institutional changes in the way these forests were managed. Indeed there were. In the 1950s, following the overthrow of the Rana regime, all the

forests were nationalised and control vested in regionally-based Forestry Officers.

Since a Sherpa in Khumbu (the valley below Mount Everest), to take a specific instance, now had to go on a

administrative centre) for a new roof-post, the house of the fellow-people be the forest. Paphlu could not see being some rather commons managing new one did not work. Hierarchical, it was the appropriate.

controls of the old village began to slide into the nearby forest and not by setting in motion the removal of an entire forest may be far below the rate of change. It is this shift of things to an increasing fatalisation of the village, and not the "tragedy" of the recent decline of the

*But -
is one the rules
come from local users
or other local users
which is the other
rules and admin
apparatus are from
outside*

Nepalese forests.

There is a sophisticated theory of political development which argues that, even so, this drastic centralisation of the forests was desirable. The idea is that it is only appropriate for a state to decentralise its power once it has gathered into itself enough power to make this possible. But, even if that is so, there was surely no need for the state to be so destructive of the village-level institutions. Ultimate title had long been vested in the Nepalese monarch, so the Forestry Service could have based their centralisation on that - there are vast tracts of forest in Nepal that are not village forests - and done nothing more than kept a helpful professional eye on what was happening in the villages.

This, I am pleased to be able to report, is what the Nepalese Forestry Service is now doing: handing the forests back to the villages and helping them to reinvent their commons managing institutions. All in all, it is not dissimilar to what happened with London's Location of Offices Bureau. For many years this hierarchical outfit dutifully carried out its mandate - to encourage offices to move out of the capital - and it went on doing this until, one day, it was realised that there were no longer any jobs for Londoners. The mandate was therefore changed, and the bureau (without even having to change its name) set about its new task: encouraging offices to move into London!

Hierarchies are often rather unloved, but they do have this wonderful ability to execute complete U-turns, without even changing step. The result, in Nepal, is that hierarchical management institutions are now in place at two points along the local-to-global scale - the village and the state - and each it would seem, on present evidence, is performing appropriately.

Forests, of course, are now seen as desirable, not just for the villages and the nations that contain those villages, but for the totality: the global community. Keeping the trees in place and, if possible, increasing their size and quantity is one major part of the solution to the problem of global climate change (not to mention another global commons, biodiversity). So it is worth speculating, for a moment, what institutional arrangements would be most appropriate at this supra-national level.

One essential is that this global institution not destroy those arrangements that are already doing a good job at lower scale levels: the Nepalese village and the Nepalese state, for instance. So there needs to be a sort of subsidiarity principle: anything that is being done (or could be done) at a lower level should not be done at a higher level*. And, since individualism (trees on private land, for instance) is one of those things that is being done at the village level, this

* For a detailed account of the important concept of subsidiarity, and of its career, see Blichner and Sangolt (1994)

principle alerts us to the inappropriatenesses that are built into the present insistence (GATT, for instance) that markets be global. Some markets, yes; but all cannot be right: that would be saying that just one hole in the template - the individualist-style/global-level hole - is appropriate for everything and all the other holes for nothing!

A second essential is clumsiness; if the fourfold plurality is vital for the resilience of the mountain village vis-a-vis its environment then it would be surprising indeed if it were not also vital at the global level. There is not space here to go into precisely what this would involve, but one thing is certain: the requisite plurality will not be achieved if the problem is defined (as the IPCC - The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - has at present defined it) entirely in terms of just one cultural perspective: just one of the four myths of nature*.

Inappropriatenesses of Style and Scale

Throughout the 1950s and 60s the provision of housing in London was almost totally in the hands of the hierarchists - the planners - and one of their main concerns was the renewal of the worn-out fabric of the

* The IPCC scenarios of climate change, it has now been shown (as part of the Battelle-initiated State of the Art Report on Social Science and Global Climate Change) are all hierarchical scenarios. The egalitarians and the individualists have been excluded. The State of the Art Report is not yet published, but much of the evidence concerning the IPCC scenarios (together with suggestions as to how the IPCC process might be made sufficiently clumsy) is contained in van Asselt and Rotmans (1985).

inner-city'. One of their number, Harold P Clunn, put it like this.

London ... is marching on to a destiny which will make it the grandest city in the whole world...

London must be allowed to grow upwards and the stragglng villas and small houses of Highbury, Barnsbury, Stoke Newington, Hackney, Maida Vale and St John's Wood [virtually the entire inner suburbs of London north of the Thames] must give way to new blocks of flats.

Much of London did indeed give way to new blocks of flats and, if the planners had had it all their way, and if enough money had been made available to them, their algorithms for determining just when a section of the built environment had become "optimally demolishable" (their terminology) would have ensured that every urban acre underwent its "comprehensive re-development" (again, their terminology).

Fortunately, a creative and motley assortment of owner-occupiers, who saw these 18th and 19th century houses as sadly neglected heritage not rat-infested slums (the official perception), were able, through their myriad

I have not provided any references for this example. Readers interested in going more deeply into this approach to the built environment are directed to Thompson (1979) and Thompson (1987).

individual and uncoordinated efforts, to derail the planners' singular and unrelenting vision of the New Jerusalem. It was this anarchic and innovative bunch who, in effect, privatised the despised communal burden, re-valued it (just one of those "stragglng villas" could now set you back a million pounds or more) and put it into the healthy and highly liveable state in which we now see it. This re-cycling of the built environment is now something that continues apace in almost every European city, but it would never have happened if control had remained in the hands of the hierarchists.

Again, the lesson is not that the built environment should be entirely privatised. Rather, it is that a vigorous individualistic component is an essential feature of any sustainable city. So too (to anticipate the next example) is the egalitarian component: the recognition that the city, the borough and the neighbourhood belong to those who live there: the insistence that there are some rights (above and beyond those of the individual property owners and the local authorities) that are held in common. These rights may not be easy to define, but we soon know when we have not got them!

The egalitarian commons is not something that is bestowed from on high, nor does it come with the security-fenced housing developments that are so common in America and are now

catching on in Britain. The egalitarian commons is rooted in George Orwell's notion of decency, and is created between people as they go about their daily lives. Often it consists of little more than the occasional taking-in of a delivery for the people next door, or the feeding of their cat while they are away for a couple of days, or the pulling of a fellow-shopper from the path of an on-coming bus. That is why it is so hard to define and quantify, and why it is so easily destroyed. However, the fact that, as has happened in India with the Chipko Movement, it can escalate into a major political force suggests that the egalitarian commons is a vital component in any healthy civic culture.

Michael Jacobs (1995) has provided a nice account of how the egalitarian commons differs from the other commons (and from the privates), and he has gone on to suggest how this particular institutional style should co-exist with those with which we are more familiar.

Geographical communities are important because we cannot avoid living in them. However "creatively individual" we may be, with whatever networks of friendships and "communities of interests", we are dependent on the other people, mostly strangers, with whom we share physical and political space.

Ego-focused networks (individualism, that is), he concedes, have their place in our lives but they are not sufficient.

We are dependent on such strangers to cooperate in a shared moral and legal order; when they don't, this

is called crime, and it affects us all. If the relationship between people in society is insufficiently equal (economically and politically) to allow participation in a shared culture, the result is social disintegration and violent conflict, and it damages everyone.

Destroy egalitarian relationships, Jacobs is arguing, and you open the floodgates of fatalism: neighbours stealing from you instead of looking out for you!

Only with the mutual involvement of neighbouring strangers can individuals take part in democracy, electing and influencing governments. None of these things can be wholly determined by government: they depend on voluntary membership of, and informal association in, society. They depend on the bonds of community.

Fatalists, he rightly observes, do not vote ("It doesn't matter who you vote for", the fatalist rationalizes, "the government always gets in") and government (that is, hierarchy) cannot itself provide that which is essential to its viability: the egalitarian commons: those common goods that, as Jacobs puts it, "we share with others, with strangers". It is precisely these common goods, my next (and final) example suggests, that have been swept away by the public-private partnerships that, in recent decades, have been promoted as the panacea for the ills of the American city.

The argument, as originally propounded by Robin Paul Malloy (1992), is that these public-private partnerships function in a way that does not comport with the classic liberal values. Classic liberalism, according to Malloy, seeks to maximise freedom, individual liberty and human dignity through capitalism and the free market as counterbalanced by a limited state. The public-private partnerships, Malloy points out, transgress this ideal, becoming exercises in "state capitalism" and "urban socialism"; components in an "ever increasing trend towards central planning, communitarianism, and statism". In other words, it is too much hierarchy and not enough individualism that is the trouble. Additionally, hierarchy and individualism are supposed to be pitted against one another, not cuddled up together in the same bed.

Denis Brion (1992), however, points out that Malloy's analysis ignores communalism: "an alternative world view that also has strong roots in American culture". After all, there must be something - neither hierarchy nor individualism - that keeps hierarchy and individualism apart and which, when it is excluded, results in their coming together. Cultural Theory, Brion asserts, and in particular its recognition of egalitarianism as a distinct institutional form, "explains what has in practice happened in The United States". He supports this assertion with a mass of recent law suits - Ollie's

Barbecue in Birmingham, Alabama, Morris's Department Store in Washington DC and so on - which he further strengthens by a lengthy excursion into the theory of place. However, since there is not time to go into all that here, I will simply lay out the bare bones of his argument for not ignoring egalitarianism.

Cultural Theory shows how it is "that a society that values individualism highly nevertheless can readily evolve into one with a substantial element of hierarchy as well". The resulting tacit coalition of individualists and hierarchists (he even pinpoints a particular city club in Indianapolis where the deals get done) leaves the mass of society in a position of "atomized, alienated subordination and systematic exploitation" (ie fatalism). The result is an increasingly contradictory and unstable situation in which a society that in concept values individual liberty highly is, in practice, made up largely of powerless individuals. Though communitarianism is usually seen as being the antithesis of individualism, Cultural Theory reveals how it is that "egalitarian communalism can act as a leaven within society in a way that derivatively serves individualistic values".

In other words, the egalitarian commons are essential to the American way of life, and Brion, having explained in some detail why this is so, then argues that this

leavening power "provides the judiciary with the justification for facilitating, rather than preventing, the emergence of egalitarian communities".

So here - not on the remote and economically marginal Himalayan hillside but at the heart of the once great and now greatly troubled America city - is the most exciting and surprising of all arguments for re-inventing the commons: if we don't, capitalism itself will collapse!

REFERENCES

- BLICHNER, L.C. and SANGOLT, L. (1994) "The concept of subsidiarity and the debate on European co-operation: pitfalls and possibilities". Governance, 7.3. 284-306.
- BRION, D.J. (1992) The meaning of the city: urban redevelopment and the loss of community. Indiana Law Review 25.3. 685-740.
- FÜRER-HAIMENDORF, C. von (1975) Himalayan Traders: Life in Highland Nepal. London: John Murray.
- GROSS, J. and RAYNER, S. (1985) Measuring Culture: A Paradigm for the Analysis of Social Organisation. New York: Columbia University Press.
- HARDIN, G. (1968) The tragedy of the commons. Science 162.1243-48.
- HOLLING, C.S. (1986) The resilience of terrestrial ecosystems: local surprise and global change. In W.C.Clark and R.E. Munn (Eds) Sustainable Development of the Biosphere. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 292-320.
- HOLLING, C.S., GUNDERSON, L. and PETERSON, G. (1993) Comparing Ecological and Social Systems Beijer Discussion Paper Series No. 36. Stockholm: Beijer International Institute of Ecological Economics.
- JACOBS, M. (1995) Inescapable community. Letter to New Statesman and Society. 24 March 1995. 17-18.

KEOHANE, R.O. and OSTROM, E. (1995) Editorial Introduction to Local Commons and Global Interdependence. London: Sage, 1-26.

LINDBLOM, C. (1977) Politics and Markets: The World's Political-Economic System. New York: Basic Books.

MARCH, J.C. and OLSEN, J.P. (1989) Rediscovering Institutions: The Organisational Basis of Politics. London: Macmillan.

MEADOWS, D.H., MEADOWS, D.L. and RANDERS, J. (1992) Beyond The Limits. London: Earthscan.

MULLOY, R.P. (1992) Planning for serfdom: an introduction to a new theory of law and economics. Indiana Law Review 25.3.

NORTH, D.C. (1990) Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

POWELL, W.W. and DIMAGGIO, P.J. (eds), (1991) The New Institutionalism in Organisational Analysis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

PRICE, M.F. and THOMPSON, M. (1995) Complexities of human land uses in mountain ecosystems. Global Ecology (forthcoming).

SCHAPIRO, M. (1988) Judicial selection and the design of clumsy institutions. Southern California Law Review 61: 1555-69.

STERNBERG, E. (1994) Just Business. New York: Little Brown.

THOMPSON, M. (1979) Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

THOMPSON, M. (1980) The aesthetics of risk: culture or context? In R.C. Schwing and W.A. Albers (Eds) Societal Risk Assessment: How Safe Is Safe Enough? New York: Plenum. 273-86.

THOMPSON, M. (1987) Welche Gesellschaftsklassen sind potent genug, anderen ihre Zukunft aufzuoktroyieren? Und wie geht das vor sich? In L. Burchardt (Ed) Design der Zukunft. Köln: DuMont. 58-87.

THOMPSON, M. (1992) The dynamics of cultural theory and their implications for the enterprise culture. In S. Hargreaves Heap and A. Ross (Eds) Understanding the Enterprise Culture. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 182-202.

THOMPSON, M., ELLIS, R. and WILDAVSKY, A. (1990) Cultural Theory. Boulder: West View.

THOMPSON, M., WARBURTON, M. and HATLEY, T. (1986) Uncertainty on a Himalayan Scale. London: Ethnographica.

TIFFEN, M., MORTIMOR, M. and GICHUKI, F.N. (1994) More People, Less Erosion: Environmental Recovery in Kenya. New York: John Wiley.

VAN ASSELT, M. and ROTMANS, J. (1995) Uncertainty in Integrated Assessment Modelling: a Cultural Perspective-Based Approach. Global Dynamics and Sustainable Development Programme, GLOBO Report Series No 9. RIVM (Netherlands Institute of Public

Health and the Environment), Bilthoven, the Netherlands.

WILLIAMSON, O. (1979). Markets and Hierarchies. Analysis and Anti-Trust Implications: A Study in The Economics of Internal Organisation. New York: Free Press.

YOUNG, O. (1995) The problem of scale in human/environment relationships. In R.O. Keohane and E. Ostrom (Eds) Local Commons and Global Interdependence. London: Sage. 27-45.