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Structure, Agency, and Strategy Among Tenants in India

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JEL Keywords: B5, O17, O12, O53

In this paper I have used pseudonyms. The NVIVO dataset can be put in the public domain. Please contact me if you want to see the dataset.

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Abstract

This paper arises from the Global Poverty Research Group (www.gprg.org), under which I have conducted fieldwork in rural south India. My focus is on strategies, choice, and constraints as aspects of tenants' decisions. My aim is to treat tenants (as both households and as individual agents) in their structural contexts (class, caste, religion, gender).

The strategies that people use involve an orientation to current and future events, including possible events which are imagined or which could happen. This orientation creates a context for immediate decision-making as well as a context for reflection and deliberation. The strategies of tenants include being friendly toward landlords but making this conditional upon their proper behaviour; the renegotiation of work; switching from land management to livestock; choosing to rent rainfed land or irrigated land; and so on. Agents negotiate and enforce proper behaviour and thus both create and change the system of norms that exists. In Macintyre's terms (1985), the virtues intrinsic to the socio-economic practices are continually being re-worked. In the paper, I reframe this in dynamic structure-agency terms. Both structural relationships and concrete past incidents act as reference points for decisions made today in a given relationship.

The strategy of a household is an emergent property of the household as an agent, and includes detailed first-order strategies along with more reflective second-order strategies which reconcile goals in the education, migration, and marriage domains with assumptions - and explicit strategies - about domestic and paid labour. The paper is thus interdisciplinary and links together several schools of thought.

MacIntyre, A. (1985 (orig. 1981)). *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. London, Duckworth Publishers.

1 Introduction

> The research question originally set for this field based research was: **RQ1 What are the variations in the mixture of choice and constraint factors that are felt to influence people's decisions** about their work, occupational status, and land management, among the people in rural Andhra Pradesh villages who are renting in land?

This was intended to be a question of agency vs. structure. I later amended the research question, finding among others the following narrow question very interesting and revealing: **Is the creation of norms for proper behaviour something that the tenant can control?** There are indeed examples of tenants being able to shame landlords into behaving better. By phrasing the tenants' work decisions in terms of strategies of agents, I am able to decompose the routine action and see into what lies behind it. Using interviews, we (the research team) caused respondents to articulate their choices – some of which were probably tacit and habitual rather than based on cognitive reflection. However there is some evidence that a struggle over norms is taking place between tenants and landlords, and that this struggle arises in a complex context of personal, spousal, and household strategies about not only labouring but labour-education-family planning-and-migration. The only aim of this paper is to spell out (and illustrate) how an agent's interests can be usefully described *after* the researcher has a clear grasp of the mutuality of household members and their shared strategy, as well as the complex interaction of first- and second-order strategies that they have at a point in time. Compared with most sociology, the topic is highly economic. But compared with some 'sociology of economic life', my approach is innovative as it does not presume either individualism or economic rationality.

The methodology I prefer is a retroductive one in which we iteratively ask 'why do we observe this' 'why do we describe this in that way' and 'why did someone describe what we observed that way?' until deeper knowledge is obtained than that available through the review of literature. The study reported in this paper is a case-study based pilot study in 2006 based upon a random sample of 115 households who were surveyed with questionnaires in 1994. More analysis and writing up is planned during 2007. Future research will be able to look at strategies and the choices within them in more detail using a variety of innovative methods. Ethnography of the longer-term sort will be very useful, and the current research is just a pilot study which indicates the direction that the next piece of field work should take. It is possible to use statistical methods, too, to study strategies; this method will be used in a separate study of housewifisation strategies.

The two ontological tricks used here are to define (a) 'agents' and (b) 'strategies' very carefully. First, a) define an 'agent' in a way that does not isolate each agent away from the others. Perceive that they are mutually interpenetrating. A wife's existence is in part co-extent with the

experiences and body of her husband. Since she may feel this way, and he may feel this way, it is good to recognise it as a reality. Of course the words that describe it do not easily do justice to this interpenetration. A job for philosophers is to put more refined words onto my idea of the co-penetrating person, couple, household, family, village, caste, NGO, government and state.

Because both 'people' and 'larger-scale agents' – e.g. couples - deliberate, muse, consider, feel, discuss, sense, change, and so on, it is not simple to use language in a way that is not liable to be taken as if it were individualist. Try to read my verbs as post-individualistic verbs. "The household **chose** a strategy of renting in some wet land to grow sugar". Of course actually somebody said that was the strategy. They were an individual human body when they said it. But the saying-it moment isn't the decisive moment. The decisive moment came before that, in a mute 'we moment' of decision or change. What 'he' means is "We had sold off our own land and migrated, then came back with money to buy bulls, so this year we *chose a strategy of renting in some wet land to grow sugar* to utilise our new bulls". A close study is planned of what was said during the 39 interviews of the pilot research project. To facilitate this study, careful translation from spoken Telugu to written English is being undertaken.

The Telugu language has a particular focus on the collective agent. In Telugu, special words for 'we' remind the outsider about the importance of collective agents in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The word Meemu means 'we but not you', whereas the commonly used 'manamu' means 'we including you to whom I'm speaking'. In practice, in village Telugu, saying "Meemu…" is almost a preparation for an argument. It hints that the speaker is going to oppose what someone else did. Manamu, on the other hand, has rich connotations of cooperation, co-existence, peace and sharingness. 'We all don't have enough money' 'we all join in the self-help group' (*manamandariki dubbulu leevu, manamandaru SHGloo vunnaamu*). (hypothetical cases are used in this paragraph).

b) Secondly, as an ontological innovation – well known in management studies but less studied in the sociology of economic life – I define a 'strategy'. I specify how strategies link up with social practices, habitus, and social structural causal mechanisms. Finally, drawing upon the ontological work of Elder Vass (2007), I suggest that the change of a strategy arises in the context of specific past events, and these events cause 'interval emergence'. The new strategy itself is also a cause of more emergent events. From the reactions, the agent may decide to revise the strategy; in its nature it is somewhat fluid. But ontologists find that social structures are in general rather durable, and so it is with strategies. Once we get committed to a strategy, and invest resources of time, energy, and ethical co-feeling into it, we become unwilling or unable to easily shift out of that strategy. These commitments grow and fade over time. Sudden events can cause a strategy to disappear; in the poverty literature many observers note that ill health changes everything and shifts households downward to more desperate strategies (Kothari and Hulme, 2005). Death,

of course, galvanizes change in family strategies. But since these sudden events are not wholly unforeseeable, wise people develop robust responsive strategies. Some people are wise and far-seeing. Some have complex ethical stances which enable them to respond gently to sudden events; others have weak or inconsistent ethical stances which make them get rushed, inflamed, fearful or tense at moments of exogenous change.

It is important to develop this ontological work in the context of having empirical data. To compare, Archer conducted research on a similar topic with about 25 respondents in the UK using long unstructured interviews (Archer, 2000). I would not expect all the findings to be the same in two such different contexts. However to a small extent the theoretical framework can have some common elements. These must be justified. I hope the paper will justify the use of the term 'strategy' just as Archer (2003, 2007) justifies her term 'communicative reflexive person' and Bourdieu justified his term 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu, 1999). These terms are the tools with which more detailed contextualised descriptions can be developed.

In a sense that defines ontology – the theory of the existence of these things which comprise our social world. In that sense Archer, Giddens, Bourdieu, Sayer (1992) and Elder Vass are all ontologists.[2] Whether one has a good ontology or not may be a question that can only be settled using empirical data. Elder Vass has gone so far as to suggest that only regional ontologies – those specific to a particular context – can be examined for their worthiness. Yet philosophers do make more abstract comments about ontology in general. A realist ontology, for example, may suffer from excessive essentialism. A strong constructivist ontology has hardly any scope for falsification moments. The ontology generally applied here is that known as scientific realism (Williams, 2005, 2006). In developing this ontology I am especially sensitive to the importance of values, as is Williams.

My main conclusion in the paper is that ontic mutuality is often misunderstood when treated via methodological individualism (by the 'choice' school) and via structures or structural constraint (by the 'constraint' school). This has implications for a number of procedures used by social scientists from day to day, such as interpretation of meanings, the study of causes, and making generalisations.

There is much to recommend in the two theoretical schools that I began with (Olsen, 2006a) – neoclassical economic theory with an ontological realism, e.g. demand/supply leading to price as emergent property; and Marxism, in which structures of power/knowledge are important ontological underpinnings. However I want to explore the notion of the agent that is needed for a reconciliation of these two schools and to move forward in a transdisciplinary way. The paper should be readable by anyone from any school of social science.

[2] For an overview, see Danermark, *et al.*, 2001, or Sayer (2000).

In this sense, then, the methodological innovation is two-fold. Firstly it is to suggest that the iteration from theory to data and back can begin with a contextualised location and time, not with theory. Secondly it is to suggest a specific innovation with regard to the assumptions one makes about Agents and the nature of strategies.

This builds upon an existing theory of practices (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, *et al.*, eds, 2001), upon which I will draw. According to this theory, practices exist socially, have internal values which reflect and describe expertise, are taken up with differing degrees of commitment by participants, and change over time. Some practices bear social status and others are a marker of low social status. The theory of practices aims to ensure that erroneous assumptions of individualism and rational-choice are not inserted into the study of social practices. For instance, when studying sport we wouldn't assume boys just 'choose' sport, but that doing *competitive* sport helps them achieve a strong masculinity; when studying reading we would recognise that some reading practices have a 'highbrow' level of social status (e.g. reading a large newspaper), while others don't; and so on. Practices are socially located, temporally specific, and grounded in a particular region and language. So are strategies. Doing practices sometimes tends to have unanticipated or unintended effects in some circumstances. By introducing agents' *strategies* I will begin to unravel the issue of *intended effects* and *reasoning*.

2 Methods and Data

The research began with a literature review and the analysis of secondary data (National Sample Survey 55th round) on tenants' declared range of work patterns. These labour data may perhaps be inaccurate with regard to land rentals. The overall percentage of adult respondents who were in households that rented in land in 1999 was 5% in Punjab and Gujarat, 6% in Maharashtra, 10% in Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka, and 16% in both Andhra Pradesh and in Orissa. Thus considerable land rental is reported in the NSS 1999, although as a proportion of total arable land these percentages are much lower. (Author's calculations using the NSS primary data.)

Nevertheless where tenancy *is* recorded, it is likely to be associated with valid records of the labour use of real tenants. In causal terms the NSS data are instances, and can instantiate arguments about the causal mechanisms leading to tenants doing paid, informal, domestic or no work. What we are missing is the full range of such cases, since there is very likely to be underreporting. Background reports on land tenancy in rural India have been published elsewhere (Olsen, 2006a, 2007, 2008 submitted paper).

Using realist assumptions the research moved into a qualitative mixed-methods stage, reported here. 35 interviews took place in Telugu and most were digitally recorded. A quota sample of respondents was drawn from an existing village survey in which 1994-95 household income details were recorded. The longitudinal follow-up method gives us a detailed background

from which to work in framing the questions. It also increases rapport and trust, since there had been no negative consequences of being in the 1994-5 survey. Each interview is being painstakingly translated verbatim into English.

The venue is two villages of Ramasamudram Taluk of Chittoor District, southern Andhra Pradesh, India. This place gets only 860 mm of rainfall per year, usually spread over about 8 or 10 days in the monsoon seasons July and October. The two villages were surveyed in 1994-1996, and have 550 households in total, of which 60 each (total 120) were selected for research in 1995 using both interviews and a questionnaire survey (ESRC data archive study number 3927; Olsen, 1997). From these 120 households, there were at that time 35 tenant households. Of these, about half held some land of their own. Many were poor, although not as poor as some landless non-tenant families.

The present choice of about 39 households has placed some stress on getting the tenants of 1995 to reply to questionnaires and interviews. 32 interviews were achieved with people in households that were in the 1994 survey. About 7 additional interviews were taped and transcribed. However many are no longer tenants, and many more people now report being tenants. Being a tenant was not used as a quota sampling criterion. Instead, it was left open whether a sampled household was a tenant or not. But the sampling had to include 4 women from households that own some land (besides the house plot) and who do paid labour; 4 women from households that own some land but who do **not** do paid labour; 4 women from households that are landless, who do paid labour; and 4 women from households that are landless, and who do **not** do paid labour, e.g. shopkeeper households. Furthermore 4 men of each group were interviewed. In practice both members of a couple were often present for the interviews. A wide range of ages 18-50 were included amongst these people. Further interviews took place with informants and interested parties who wanted to tell their stories to the researchers. A questionnaire was used to collect background data and about ten attitudes (on Likert scales) in Telugu from each household's representative. The representative was either the male or female partner of the main married couple of the household. No unmarried female household heads were in the qualitative sub-sample of 35 people.

The quota sampling method creates great contrasts between respondents. Some come from the same household however, and couples could, if they wish, be interviewed together. Most did wish this. A revisit to each household to check on the data and to augment the initial interview was planned, subject to funds (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000); some re-visits have taken place already. Some tenants are not at all poor, and others are very poor, so the study will lead to commentaries on how poverty appears to be affecting people (and whether they mention that poverty affects them). The case study method illustrates the co-incidence of 'causes' and 'reasons' as mechanisms. Furthermore, baseline data gives an idea of the 'liabilities' and 'capabilities' that are enabled by the assets held by each household or

each person. Agarwal would argue that a person's fallback position affects their bargaining position, but this is quite hard to measure and we are not necessarily trying to fit the data into a bargaining model (Agarwal, 1997 and 2002).

After the interviews are translated into English they were typed, with some words being typed in transliterated Telugu (e.g. *meemu cheetu kooruku tiisukonaamu*, we took the land as sharecropping, or *ee uuruloo manamu svantabhoomi kaadu. Bhoomi tiisukoodaniiki kauruku tiisukoovatsee*. In this hamlet, no one has land. To get land you have to sharecrop.) We currently have 10 draft full texts in English and 22 in Telugu. We also have ten other texts finalized in English. The project includes about 700 pages of text (35 x 20 pages) in total, and this is being put into NVIVO as a series of documents. Both individuals and households are being annotated as sets of 'cases' in this data.

Analysing the data will take two procedures iteratively. Firstly, discourse analysis will be conducted to see what patterns of discourse are dominant in this context (and hence, apparently, what are the rules and norms of discourse about the topics in the interview plan). Assumptions made about discourse – as evidence of the underlying social reality - are described by Olsen (2005a). Secondly, the specific and rather Western discourse of choice vs. constraint, found in the three models that were described in the review of literature, is being explored by looking for parallels, analogies, metaphors and similarities in the interview texts. In other words we are studying the hypothesis that a choice discourse is present among the tenants of this part of rural India.

We also are looking for evidence of constraints as described by Marxist writers (e.g. Athreya, 1990; Bhaduri, 1983) or as described by feminists (Folbre, 1995; Swaminathan, 2002). There has been a synergy of findings about complex agency. If agency is complex, and strategies utilize discourse but the strategies are not always *cognitive* or explicit, then discourse analysis will not be a sufficient method for analysing the data. We also have to study the household cases as wholes. For this reason a realist case study method is being used here (Ragin, 1987).

3 Ontologically Rich Agents

The agent to whom we refer in the tenancy literature is usually a household. However in studies of casual employment it is usually a person. Where these two ideal types clash, we are then offered a theory of bargaining (Agarwal 1997) (in which the household is reduced to its units) or the theory of household cooperative conflict (Sen), which allows contradictions to exist. The more highly developed neoclassical theories of the household (NCE, and the new home economics, NHE) are inadequate. There is a gap in the economic literature when we come to agents, and in institutionalism also they are not well treated. Here I can refer to works in the 'new' institutional economics (NIE) with respect to tenancy (e.g. Stiglitz, 1974, 1986 which were seminal works in NIE). Hodgson, 2004, gives an overview

of both 'old' and 'new' institutionalist schools of economic thought in general. When we come to tenancy we mainly find neoclassical economists (NCE), Marxists, and gender & development (GAD) authors (as reviewed in Olsen, 2006a and 2006b). Institutionalists, on the other hand, see social norms as malleable but are not specific enough about who/what can change them as opposed to just creating new ones. An example of a new institutionalist who once commented that land reforms are necessary to improve well-being in countries with high rural inequality, such as Brazil, is Stiglitz (2002). See also Srinivasan and Bell, 1989, and Agrawal, 1999, cited in Olsen (2006b). My aim is to conceive the agent carefully and thus improve on all the four schools of thought.

Let us begin from reflecting on a story about one worker, Yasmeen (see also Appendix 1). She is a Muslim without any land, and farming work is the main activity that she knows about. Her marriage to a Hindu is just one part of the story but it does help to see the semi-freedom that the two adults had in getting married. Furthermore, as a result of their marriage strategy, the Reddy husband was barred from inheriting any property, and Yasmeen was not able to give any dowry. The couple have got two grandsons living with them. These two sons (of the couple's son), aged 15 and 17, are not doing farming work. Instead there is a clear statement that "she wants to see their grandsons in good positions". Both boys are in or above high school and still studying. The family has no bicycle and so these boys have walked to the bus stop 1km away to get to school for many years. The implied preference for office work for the two young boys was re-emphasised when Yasmeen responded that she'd like "very much" for her son to work as a salaried worker. In these villages, it is common for people to think it is prestigious and well-paid to work as a salaried office worker. A new set of social norms, which did not exist among workers in the 1980s, places high value upon educating young village boys and ensuring that they obtain office work rather than doing manual work. Only a few boys from the villages succeed in getting such work. The norms do not necessarily apply to girls, but they do apply to those girls that perform well at school and to those whose parents can easily afford the time to let the girl study.

In the case of Yasmeen, her own offspring do agricultural labour but at the stage of having grandsons she is ready to work very hard to ensure that they continue their education. Yasmeen was very hard to pin down during the months of the interviews, December and January, because of her long working hours. She tends to their two cows every day, walking them around in search of grass, watering them three times a day, and generally ensuring that they are safe. Her husband was unwilling to talk to strangers but was generally helpful during the main interview.

This case illustrates a shift in strategy for the labour market entry of young people between the generation into which Yasmeen (age 45) was born, and her husband's (age 55), versus the one born in the last two decades. In the 1960s nearly all the workers and farmers would have normally expected their sons to become workers or farmers. Larger farmers and landlords were the only families who might aspire to send their children to work in offices.

Yet it is not true to suggest that all workers have this office-work strategy. Instead the strategy is a preference over a medium term, toward which specific household members have decided to work, invoking a number of social practices (such as paying tuition fees, concurring in the strategy, keeping a light on in the hut in the evenings, and encouraging study) and achieving some success for a few years.

Strategies are in general defined as the orientation that an agent has toward future possibilities in which they declare one main aim and realise that several subsidiary events must or may occur, prior to that event, in order to make it come about. Explicitly stating or proposing a strategy requires some knowledge about what causes the outcome to occur, knowledge of what that outcome *is* or *would be* like, and a willingness to engage in actions in the short term which will – we think – lead to that outcome. Thus strategies have a visionary quality to them.

> At the end of the interview, she told us that she wants to see their grandsons in good positions and would not mind to leave the village to join them in a city. *(fieldnotes, WO, 2007)*

Yasmeen's vision includes leaving the village some day. But in general, not everyone can or would be explicit about every strategy that they have: what to eat, where to buy food, how to get to work, and what type of cow to buy. Bourdieu's term habitus touches upon the habitual and socially normed nature of many social practices. They are not only embodied habits of individual humans, but the practices invoke and rest upon social norms which we do not regularly break. We break the norms and diverge from normal institutions only whilst having a sense of bravery or risk because there will be amazement or disapproval when others realise that we have surprised them. In a sense that is what is meant by 'normal' behaviour. My conception of agency needs to allow for both normal and non-normal behaviour. In rough terms we want it to allow for normal, deviant, and innovative behaviours. [The only difference between deviant and innovative, as adjectives here, is in the normative connotation or undertone that they are carrying. Some theories of deviancy may be usefully adapted to the analysis of constructive innovation. In particular it may be useful to consider the relative importance of cognitive and non-cognitive mechanisms in making non-normal behaviour possible or likely.]

If asked to describe them, many people will show that they do have visions and long-term goals as well as medium-term plans, which I'll call strategies. At least they would have visions of a good future outcome if they were asked to be deliberate and explicit about them. In some ways an interview is likely to elicit explicit strategies even if there were no (or little) cognition about the strategies beforehand. In this way strategies, like 'practices' and 'habits', are things about which people can talk when asked, but their talk is not essential to the existence of the social thing. Some 'reactions' also fit inside strategies. I give an example later of how a tenant and his family react to particular challenges. Most try to respond by retaining the tenancy relationship and rescuing the land's productivity. Occasionally, though,

people give up tenancy. Thus the two reactions – sticking and quitting – are important options when challenging situations crop up. Agency in this paper refers to the choice of strategy (first-order choice) and also to the choice of response when facing a challenge to success (second-order choice). There are many second-order responses, and an ethical judgement about changing the strategy could also be considered a second-order strategy in itself. Thus, one can have strategies about strategies, if one is an agent.

Finally having a strategy is like holding an ethical opinion about what should take place. A strategy is not binding but it gives coherence to one's view of events. One's own actions and others' actions can be (and are) judged from the viewpoint of the various strategies that one holds. These orientations are similar to 'preferences' but different from the connotations of the word 'preferences' in that they are subject to revision, are open to change over time, are based on wishes or desires rather than merely a forecast of the future, and finally are a guide to good action.

But not all agents are humans. And for this reason, as well as because of inariculateness and because it is impossible to reflect on all strategies simultaneously, we are not always deliberate and explicit about strategies. Therefore it is important to step back one stage and look at who the agents are. The possibility of tacit knowledge arises in the human body because of the possibility of habitual reactions to stimuli. These may be either subconsciously developed or cognitively known, or both. Thus these reactions may be based on instinctive responses, or on socialised habitus, or on the internalisation of social norms, or a combination of all three. However the 'agent' in the tenancy arrangements – in which Yasmeen also engages – is not a single individual, so it can't be simply a matter of cognitively thinking all this over. Instead the agent is placed in deliberative contexts, where they have to speak and communicate about possible strategies, too.

Therefore it is worth revising our concept of 'the agent' to widen it in five ways, shown in Figure 1. The work of feminists like Kabeer (1994) also supports this approach to the human agent. Kalpagam (1994), too, sees people as embedded in collective agents and also reflecting on their situation. So my proposition that an agent is a complex decision maker, not necessarily human but often composed of some humans and some other elements, is not new or original.

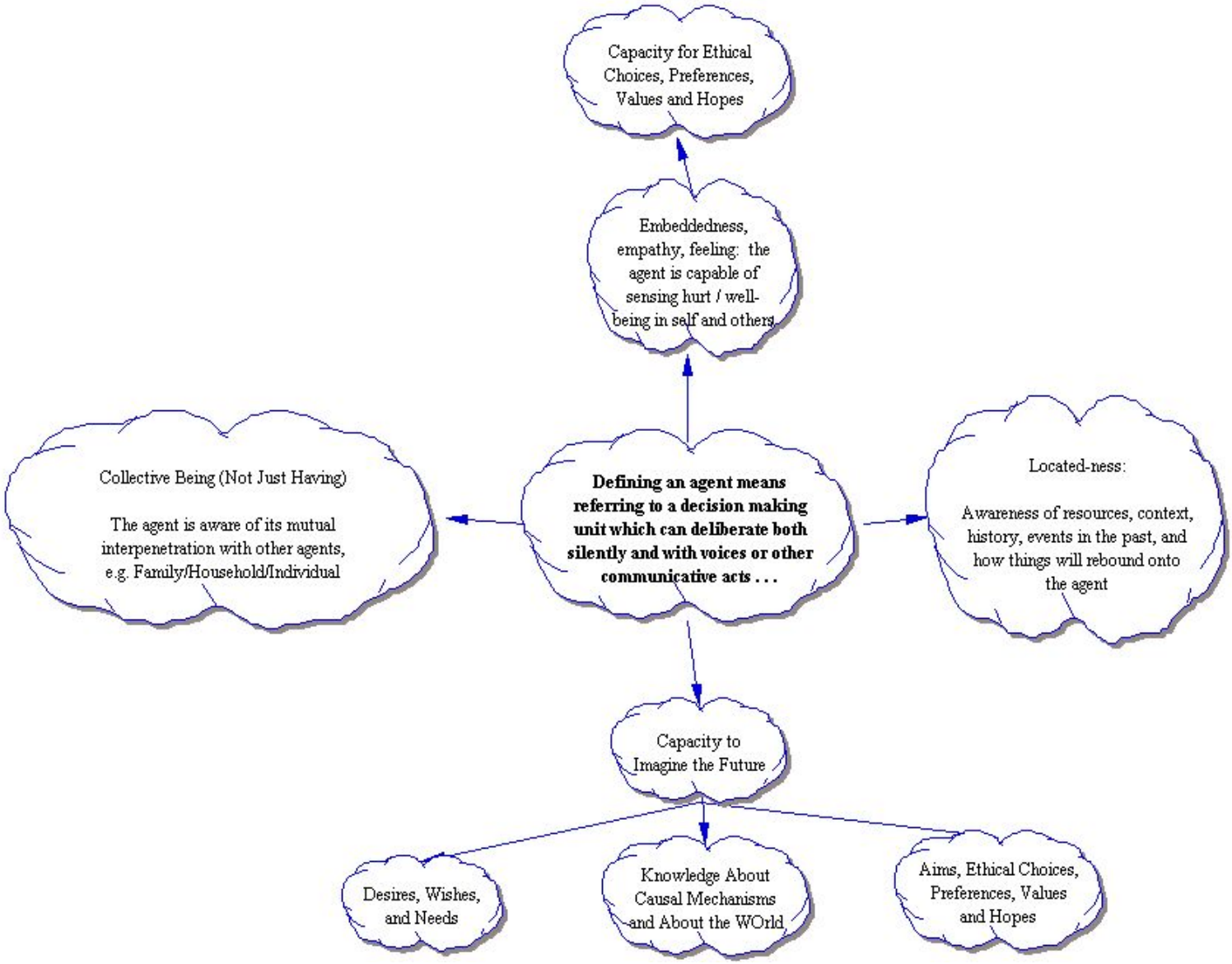

Figure 1: Complex Ontological Aspects of Human Agency

In the case of Yasmeen, her hopes and wishes do not include continuing to be a tenant farmer. She and her sister in law are scathing about the prospects for tenant farming. They feel that they can't make gains from it. They prefer to do agriculture where they own the land (as shown when we asked them about this; their reaction to how well do you like to do tenancy was 'do not like it', whereas for own-land farming 'like it' and for hiring in other workers to do the agricultural operations 'like it' (2, 4 and 4 respectively on 5-point Likert scales). With regard to their children's work, they could only comment on boy children [who are now married and moved

away] not on girl children's work, and Yasmeen stated that they 'strongly dislike' to have their son do agricultural casual labouring.

It appears that this couple are seeing their land instrumentally, and that their main aim in doing tenancy is to get money. This is not their only aim in life, however. They also want to get the two grandsons educated, and get them into good jobs. Whilst this requires money, it also requires many other things. For instance night time study when Yasmeen is very tired, and running a kerosene lamp whenever the electricity stops working (which is daily at odd times). They do not closely supervise the grandson's book work but they encourage and enable it. Their domestic work and caring work practices are all wrapped up into achieving the medium term strategy of boys' education and the long term job strategy.

What are the competing concepts of agency found in the neoclassical literature and in Marxism? These points were discussed in earlier works, where I took the position that a tolerant pluralism across theories was useful (as an *a priori*) for two reasons: 1) mixed methods research can illuminate the ways in which each theory is either consistent with reality or false; and 2) there is a political sphere within which the dynamics of theoretical disputes takes place. The researcher who wants to engage in the power dynamics of theory choice will see themselves as strategically placed to comment both negatively and positively on the competing theories (Olsen, 2006a). One might first of all explore whether they are accurate about causal mechanisms that bring about important outcomes, and the four main theories of Indian tenancy markets certainly succeed on this front: neoclassical theory with its utility maximising actors can be adapted for various situations (using 'exogenous' factors where the theory fails!); new institutionalist theory includes many things, and helps us seek explanations by asking why the observed outcomes occurred; Indian Marxist political economy tells many truths about bonded labour, tenancy, and rural work relationships generally; and finally the fourth school, Gender and Development (GAD), offers an illumination of how gender roles are changed or perpetuated. Thus there are four competing schools, yet none is fully falsified on this first hurdle of having some explanatory power.

Then we turn to the second way to comment negatively or positively about the existing theories. In a new paper I describe how positive connotations may flavour theorists' descriptions of real events, such as employing men with bullocks to do ploughing (Olsen, 2007). In this case a positive 'undertone' arises because the work is high paid and so the household that has bullocks is found to be alleviating their own poverty by earning this wage. It's not an explicit or even logical normative conclusion from the evidence about hiring men to do ploughing with bulls (see Skoufias, 1995, for a description from the new institutionalist viewpoint with positive connotations). But implicitly this positive valuation begins to creep in and be carried across to Skoufias' reader. Meanwhile for employers, the disadvantages of using men-with-bullocks to plough are becoming evident in the village scenes in Chittoor District: men must be managed; men bargain over the wage-rate; bullocks have to be fed; the cost of raising bulls is rising

due to water shortage; fodder costs have risen; the men want higher wages for this. Tractors can sometimes be cheaper. To a neoclassical economist, everyone makes rational choices and the market will find an optimum price and quantity of bullock labour if there is no intervention. This well known story is withdrawn by New Institutionalists for the good reason that the market can only work so well if there is 'perfect information'. However the employer has trouble supervising the worker, the rain may not come at a convenient time, the tractor may be busy on the critical two-day slot, and so on. Now we have weaknesses in both NCE and NIE popping up. They popped up not only because of the complexity of the situation, and the fact that rationality fails to adequately describe agents' behaviour in these situations, but also because the fundamental conflict of interest between employer and worker in the tenancy relationship was never dealt with. The 'theory of strategies' approach that I'm suggesting here would help to resolve this tension a little bit. The tension exists in reality, and the researcher needs to see the positive connotations of both 'using tractors' and 'using bullocks' for all 3 parties concerned. Knowledge of these three positions, with their typical 'located-ness', will help us make an overview statement about (1) why the outcomes that occurred were dominant, and (2) what normative connotations to attach to various aspects of the outcome. Our normative connotations will be explicit, and need not hide any more as implicit nods of approval. But the normative connotations of us *as author* are not the same as those of the agents involved *as actors*. To most sociologists this will come as no surprise but in economics there is very little training in the meta-reasoning that is required.

To summarise this meta-reasoning see Figure 2, below.

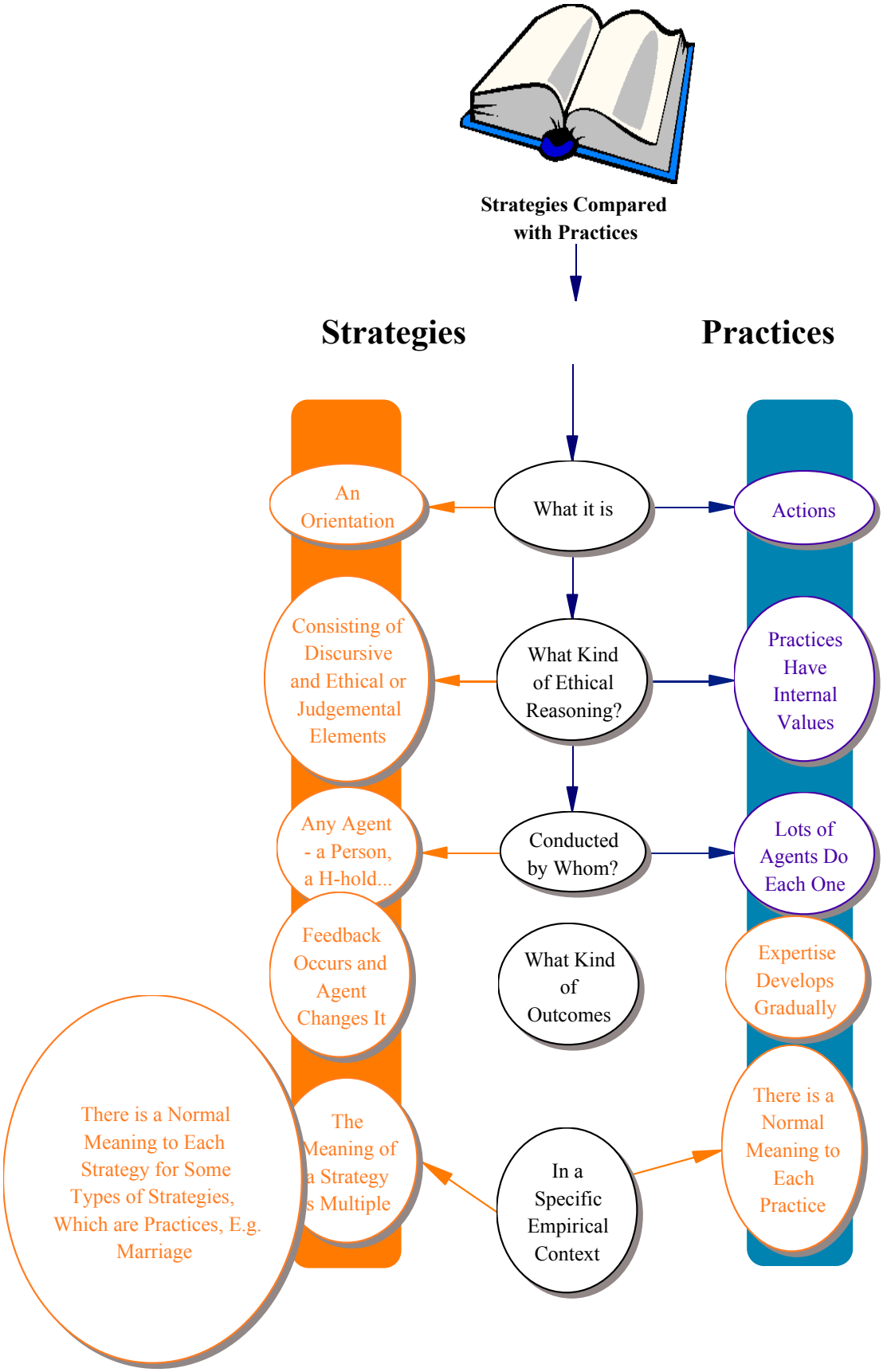

Figure 2: Strategies Compared with Practices

In economics, at best, the market transactions are seen as practices. There are good and bad performances of these practices, but their objective is seen as intrinsic to the nature of the practice. Figure 2 refers to a literature on practices which is in sociology, not economics (Reckwitz, 2002, Warde, 2003, 2005; Macintyre, 1985; Beynon, 1994, etc.), but makes the important point that in the study of practices the human behaviour is seen as patterned, predetermined, and given. In sociology people are seen to participate in the practice as 'normal' for the practice (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu and Nice, 1977). In a theory of strategies, though, we don't equate the person's intent with the outcome, we don't assume that everyone engages with practices for similar purposes or in the same way, and we are going to view divergence from norms very carefully. I say more about this in the next section.

4 Strategies

I suggested earlier that strategies are in general defined as the orientation that an agent has toward future possibilities in which they declare one main aim and realise that several subsidiary events must or may occur, prior to that event, in order to make it come about. By offering a definition, as described in my introduction, I am really just setting up a starting point for a discussion about strategies. That discussion is grounded in our team work in Indian villages. For example one researcher group led by D Venkateswarlu collected 80 case histories from people who lived in villages where most workers had either migrated to Mumbai to work, or considered migrating. These case histories were selectively located within the working, farming and manual employee classes (not the large farmers or salaried office workers). However they show that across a huge geographic area, and all along a huge social spectrum, people have different reasons for migrating. Migration is thus a *strategy that means different things to different people*. It appears, when studying migration, that we can essentialise it into a single thing, put borders around it, say what it is and what is not migration, and even count it. But this is not an adequate account of migration as a strategy. The meaning of a strategy varies depending upon the context. Thus there are a million migration strategies. There are also many meanings for the same action taken with a strategic context. However, it is useful to make a conscious effort to define *strategy* in an agreed, consistent way in this paper. By doing so we make it possible to open up avenues for further research about them. This research will not simply look at actions, but also at thoughts about actions. Furthermore it will not just look at practices, but at the meaning of practices within specific strategic contexts.

In Figure 2, I have de-stressed the futuristic 'vision' component of strategies in order to simply stress that the agent is now seen as both doing and at the same time observing themselves doing the various actions and practices that are involved in a particular strategy. There is no presumption that all agents are reflexive in the cognitive, explicit sense when they use

strategies. Some people are reflexive, some couples have a lot of discussion and are thus 'deliberative', and others are neither (Archer, 2000). A couple of examples will help to illustrate the presence or absence of reflexivity among agents in the working class of the villages in Chittoor District. But when we ask about the decision to adopt or develop a particular strategy, such as renting land in, we are asking someone to reflect on their practices and to take a position toward them. This position or orientation will usually and generally tend to be a positively connotated one: we tried this, we wanted that, we thought this would work. Some people will admit mistakes and at the same time grant themselves approval all over again: when we did X we made a mistake (losing the land to a cheater), but we have recovered by doing Y… My field research in UK, Sri Lanka, Ghana and India has suggested that there is a very widespread practice of self-validation not only by individual persons but also by larger agents such as households, NGOs, and government officials. Every action has a reason; with the reasons stated it is or was rational; mistakes do happen; mature people accept these and learn from them. A healthy mental state will usually produce consistent stories about past strategies.

5 Second-Order Strategies

An agent's second-order strategy is an orientation (which leads to specific actions) that encompasses and deals with several other strategies. In order to make it easier to move to a global level later on, I am going to distinguish 1^{st}-, 2^{nd}- and 3^{rd}-order strategies. 1^{st}-order strategies are relative to an agent's specific location, possibilities, and goals, and the possible actions that lead toward one of their main goals. One will inevitably have several 1^{st}-order strategies at the same time (typically, in the socio-economic sphere in rural India, these would include a strategy for educating each child; one for each person's paid work; one for managing domestic work; one for managing land; a strategy for saving up for a difficult period later on; and so on.) Again at the next level there must be several second-order strategies, e.g.:

- One to reconcile one's action in the education field with one's decisions about child labouring;
- One to reconcile the savings strategy (if any) with the spending on education (if any);
- One to reconcile the decisions about paid work with those about domestic work.

And so on. Thus one might investigate the 'male breadwinner model' of the household as a 2^{nd}-order strategy for reconciling a set of 1^{st}-order work strategies, dealing with the last of the above bullet points. In the classic urban breadwinner model, a single man earns enough money to pay for all household expenses, and his housewife manages domestic work (Narayan, 1991). In India, the breadwinner model often implies, in addition, a 1^{st}-

order strategy of employing a maid to clean the dishes and perhaps do some food cleaning work and sweeping. Thus the 2nd-order strategies have embedded in them some norms about the typical range of social practices that make the strategy feasible.[3]

To think about second-order strategies, an agent requires four characteristics:

1) A certain amount of reflexivity, because one needs to consider how possible future difficulties or opportunities in each 1st-order strategy may have implications for adjusting the 2nd-order strategy. This may not be self-reflexivity, but a capacity to reflect about the situation and possible difficulties.
2) A capacity to consider over a wider scope than that which is dealt with explicitly in each 1st-order strategy. This 'scope' may be either in terms of the number of fields or the wide range of practices whose interactions are considered.
3) A capacity to consider a range of agents, which are likely to be inter-penetrating (e.g. self, partner, couple, children, and household for example). Each agent may be perceived to have a particular interest, and thus conflicts of interest may need to be reconciled through the workings of the 2nd-order strategy. Alternatively, common interests can be identified, and a wider (encompassing) agent can be *appealed to* while we develop and hone the 2nd-order strategy. In other words the *mapping* of interests onto agents is malleable, and discussion of this mapping is part of the deliberations about 2nd-order strategies. A mapping is a relationship which is embedded in discourse and in the habitus of the agents.
4) Recognising interests implies also forecasting foreward some possible injuries or advantages for each concerned party. The ethics of considering harm to self and others will be invoked by most agents. However they may prioritise the harm to 'nearer and dearer' agents over harm or risks to those further away. This sense of nearness is an aspect of *identity* which affects one's *morality* and is linked up to one's *strategic decisions*. Sine none of the italicised factors listed here are necessarily an individual characteristic, nor can interests simply be reduced to the desires or needs of individuals, discussion of the *boundaries of the agent* will go hand in hand with discussion of the *harm and benefit that may result* from the 2nd-order strategy.

Two examples illustrate this complicated layout.

a) Suppose people in a household discuss education costs and the benefits. Their visions are deliberated upon until a household

[3] In 2006, the Indian government made it illegal to employ child labour to do the work of maid or cleaner in government-owned accommodation. Thus right in the heart of a set of physical homes where the breadwinner model is a common 2nd-order strategy, the government placed a restriction on the kind of labour that can be used for the underlying 1st-order strategy. This would increase the cost of the maids by forcing the breadwinner and housewife to employ an adult.

unity is achieved via consensus. The implications for their employment are then traced through, seeking any inconsistencies or difficulties. Some self-sacrifice is arranged and this is willingly agreed to in view of the shared second-order strategy that is being developed. We heard numerous women describing this kind of 2nd-order strategy in which they hoped their kids would achieve much higher formal education than the adults had had.

At a critical moment one person might call upon external loyalties and benefits to outsiders, such as 'Having a good job brings pride to our caste' or 'The country also benefits if we send that boy out to work in the city environment, as he is a good boy and will be productive' or some similar statement. A real example to illustrate this *call to a wider good* occurs when the self-help group members say 'I must repay my self-help group loan reliably, because having a successful repayment benefits all members.' They are thinking that reliability brings pride to the village, whereas defaulting would bring shame to themselves, to the group and to the village. This sense of the wider good may be one aspect of the inter-penetrating-agents scenario that helps explain differences in perceived repayment patterns of 'men vs. women'. Naturally it is subject to change over time.

b) a couple running a plot of rented-in land make their arrangements while taking into account the needs and desires of the landlord. The landlord, in turn, is a household whose children's high educational needs are being attended to. The landlord, too, wants to consider the mutual benefit of their own and their tenant's household so sees it important to be reliable about the rate of crop share due. This share is agreed mutually early in the season. The tenancy pair is now two agents who are sensitive to each other's interests but nevertheless separated by some conflict of interest, too. (For instance, the fact that their expectations for an acceptable level of formal education of their children are very different might be judged by an outsider as unequal or unfair.) The 2nd-order strategies of each household are aimed mainly at reconciling any difficulties (or inconsistencies) with their set of 1st-order strategies. But when they meet to discuss the tenancy (which occurs perhaps monthly during the season), they also develop and implement a shared 2nd-order strategy for the plot. At this point they have become a larger agent [the tenancy pair] who have a great shared interest. Cooperation among all the household members of both households occurs; in the past this included workers doing free unpaid labour at the landlord's house but not vice versa. The parties concerned chose sharecropping, instead of cash cropping, to retain this shared interest in preference to the

cash cropping system. Not all pairs are mutual enough to become a larger agent. But it does happen.[4]

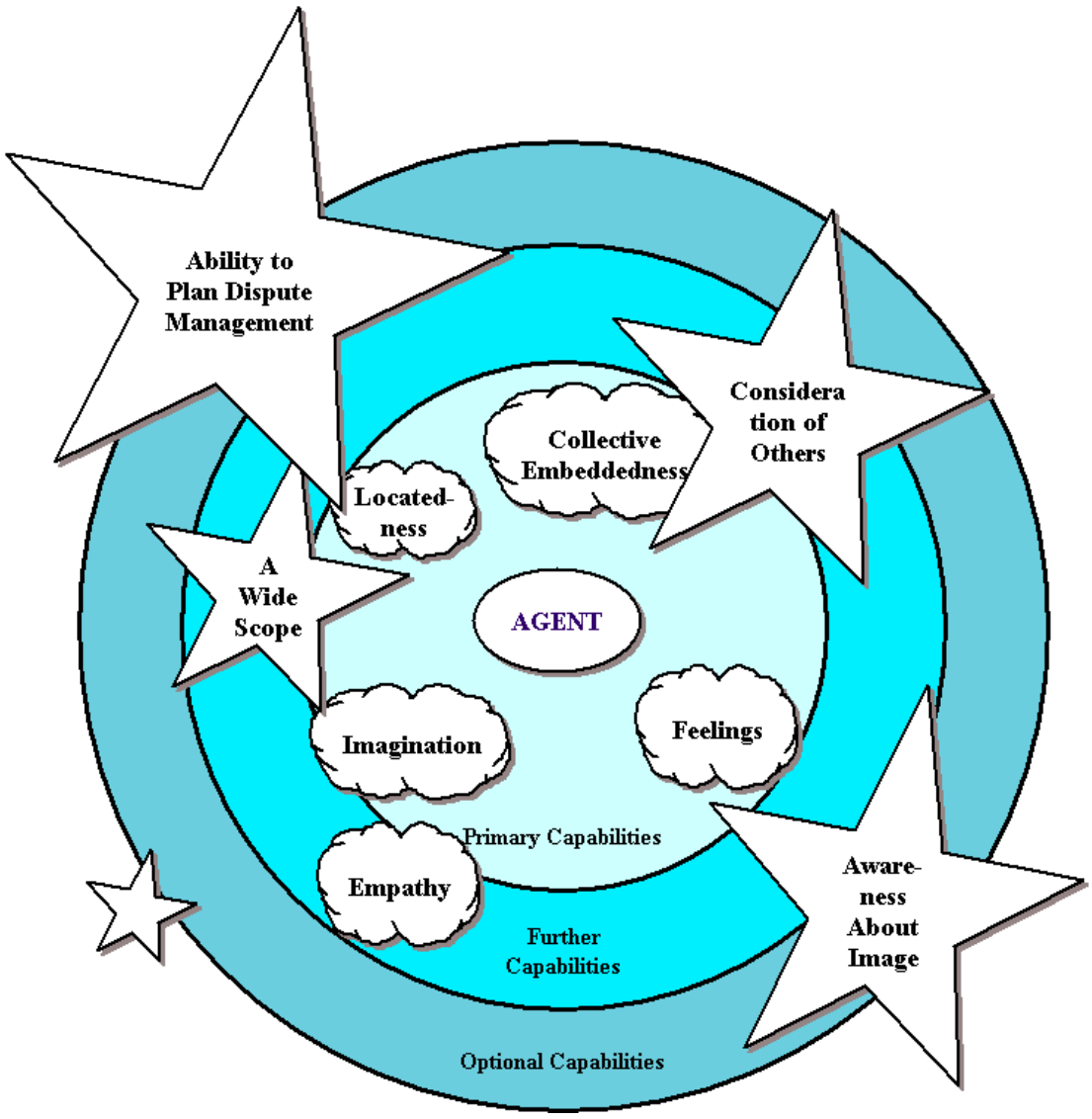

Figure 3: Characteristics of Agents Who Have 1st-order, 2nd-order, and 3rd-order Strategies (Concentric Circles Moving Outward)

In summary, 2nd-order strategies are orientations toward sets of 1st-order strategies of self and others. The 2nd-order strategy that is best is one which is consistent, wide in scope, handles the needs of numerous agents, and is consistent with the ethics of the agent who is making a decision. In

[4] The case of Anna, a rather kind landlord without direct male heirs, illustrates the mutuality situation. It will be described in a separate paper. Anna is focused on having quality relationships here and now, not just on his children's future well-being.

the process of reaching a 2nd-order strategy, sometimes a larger agent is effectively (though not necessarily permanently) formed.

Among the ethical overtones of the 2nd order strategy, a sense of *self-approval* develops. Furthermore an additional undertone of disappointment will also exist, since some options have to be closed off for the moment. These impossible (i.e. not chosen) 1st-order strategies might have been desired by some or all the people who are in/of this 'agent'.

Because 2nd-order strategies involve deliberation across and within agents, they involve complex moral reasoning. Dealing with felt harm or disappointment is part of the mature consideration that takes place.

The kind of reasoning that is involved here has been dealt with explicitly by transformative theorists in the health and human sciences who do damage limitation and who try to increase health of those suffering from guilt, depression, conflict, and other so-called "abnormalities" of daily life.

Research has happened in a number of multidisciplinary contexts about unhealthy mental states. This research includes the transformative approach to human health of Reason and Rowan (1981), the realist approach to human capabilities of Nussbaum (1993, 1999), the interpersonal psychology of John Heron (1998, 2000), some writings of Singer (notably 1981) and the humanist approach to counselling associated with Rogers (1980). At this point I am interested in turning this school around and looking at the future with a view to generating positive mental states and healthy social assessments of mutual wellbeing. Most of this research, notably Heron (2000 and 2001), argues that cathartic moments of self-analysis and revelation, as well as deliberation facilitated by newcomers who are caring toward the agent, are very useful in generating constructive change from scenes of tension or upset. In general, these five schools of psychology will tend to promote what Archer calls morphogenesis, whereas neoclassical economics has tended to promote morphostasis (Archer, 2000). In other words they promote progressive change while some economists have promoted the continuation of unhealthy situations. There is no suggestion here that this morphostatic emphasis is deliberate. Instead, it is inherently likely given that the theory lacks rich concepts of agency and dynamics.

It has also been dealt with to a certain extent by the ethics of development authors. Here we can refer to Gasper in particular who has worked on the linkages between market transactions, market valuations, and ethical decision-making in development contexts (2004). This will be developed separately. It is important to recognise that in this literature no simple solutions are found. Gasper is especially critical of any purely monetary measure of value because it oversimplifies the harms and benefits that really accompany any development decision. Commercial values are also questioned (as a metric for development decision making) by Nussbaum (2000). They have been accused of androcentricity by Nelson (1995). It is

important to recognise, as Nelson points out, that androcentricity is often a special form of methodological individualism (Nelson, 1995, 1998, 2003).

In summary, the great 2nd-order strategies are not just the ones that work, *ex post*. They are also the ones that carry insights, resolve tension, solve problems and seek mutuality amidst potential conflicts of interest. Figure 3 illustrates some of the characteristics that are valuable at each level.

6 Third Order Strategic Thinking

At an even higher level, we reach the point where agents are aware of how their 2nd-order and 1st-order strategies come across to others . They begin to care about how the strategies of other units that comprise, cooperate with, or compete with them interweave with their own strategies. Public presentations of one's 2nd-order strategy take special forms that have rhetoric and posturing added in to ensure not only that one has *self-approval* but also that an agents obtains the *approval of others*. Care for one's appearance and reputation enter in. To develop a 3rd order strategy, apart from all the requirements of 2nd order deliberation, one also needs:

- A capacity to imagine others disapproving of how one has placed oneself.

- An ability to imagine portraying oneself as either honest, or as open but with secret and private parts, or as totally private. According to this portrayal, one decides how much of one's various strategies to reveal. One thinks or discusses also how one wants to *appear to be honest* (or not), and quite a bit of impression management may take place over time.

- A capacity to imagine others helping one to achieve one's various goals. Managing people and other agents becomes part of a 3rd –order strategy.

- Locatedness – as before at the 1st-order and 2nd-order strategic levels.
- Wider scope – even wider than at the lower levels – the interests of each agent in each field must be dealt with either by internalising them or externalising them. Conflicts must be dealt with somehow. Governance at the local and national level obviously has this 3rd-order strategic nature.
- Processual or substantive criteria for well-being are set out.
- Processual or substantive criteria for handling disputes are set out.
- Processual or substantive criteria for the scope of ethical content are set out.

Examples include government policy treatments of various rural issues like child labour, self-help groups, and land assignment to poor people. To take one example, the assignment of land to poor rural people is an initiative

embarked upon with renewed vigour in Andhra Pradesh during 2007. this initiative has the following character:

- A capacity to imagine others disapproving of the land distribution: it is too unequal. Any honest agent will be interested in relieving the landlessness (if they could do so without hurting anybody).

- Government portrays itself as honest and asks poor people to put their names down on a list to receive land. They pretend that no non-poor people can bribe their way onto these lists. Votes will be gained from families of poor people who live in hope of receiving land, and from less poor families who approve of the policy of helping the rural poor. They also invite owners of unused land to report it unused, and they instruct local officials to compile a list of such plots.

- The government officials and lawyers are assumed to be willing and able to help achieve the goal of distributing the waste lands and other unused lands to poor people. The problem of poor land records is being dealt with quietly in the background. *Pacca* deeds or *pattas* are promised to each recipient. (A *pacca* deed, pronounced to rhyme with luck-uh, is a firmly legal, enforceable deed that shows clear ownership of the plot, boundaries of the plot, and the revenue office responsible for the plot.)

- Locatedness – It is known that certain politicians can distribute large quantities of their surplus land under the scheme. Their huge assets generate their feeling of being able to donate land.
- Conflicts among potential recipients must be dealt with somehow. It is not yet clear how.
- Substantive criteria for well-being are set out: a family with land is better off than one without land, even if it is poor quality land that no one else wanted.
- Processual criteria for handling disputes are set out: the government officials and lawyers receive instructions about how to ensure someone qualifies as a poor recipient.
- Substantive criteria for the scope of ethical content are set out: the land redistribution follows a long term policy of redistributing surplus land and ensuring that uncultivated land is taken up by local farming people. Avoidance of waste is the overriding ethical criterion.

In summary up to now we have 1st-, 2nd- and 3rd-order strategic thinking. There is no need to go further because the work of governance and decisionmaking at national and international levels can be fully dealt with and described under the 3rd-order strategy heading. Thus direct linkages can be made between what is assumed about local agents (within large-scale policy strategies) and what reasons people might have for participating in schemes as part of their own 1st or 2nd-order strategies. It is

now possible to link up complex moral reasoning of the 'academic' kind, which tends to be over-arching, comprehensive, based upon counterfactuals and hypothetical futures, and imaginative, with local moral reasoning of the 'lay' kind. Both involve the use of our full capacity for human agency (reflexivity, located-ness, imaginativeness, empathy, and collective embeddedness).

It might be possible to make some general points about good vs. poor quality moral reasoning once an empirical context has been specified. An excellent 3rd-order complex moral reasoning strategy would have a finite number of attributes, but these attributes can only be specified in a given context – not in the abstract.

7 Discussion

In discussing the cases which were used to illustrate a rich ontology of agents' strategies, three main points can be made.

Firstly, there is more research to be done. The framework which links social structures, habitus, practices, and strategies is open to further development and refinement in itself. It also needs to be fleshed out with local details of strategies in the context of specific regional ontologies, e.g. comparing southern Andhra Pradesh with the situation further north where migration to Mumbai is o much more common. In all such comparative analyses we can expect to find a mixture of commonalities along with contrasts. A commonality across western Andhra Pradesh is that migration is used to ease household income constraints by bringing remittances into a household and reducing its consumption requirements for a time. A contrast, however, is whether migration is typically for daily paid labour (casual, seasonal, irregular) or is for a longer period with a maistry (boss) who can lend the workers money and move them around at will. Both bonded and unbonded migrant labouring with a maistry is much less common in western Chittoor District than in the areas of Mahbuubnagar much further north. In Anantapur, a mixture of seasonal, temporary, irregular, maistry-led and bonded labour has been found. Thus a single State within India demonstrates both comparability and contrasts once the blank spaces of the theoretical framework begin to be filled in.

Secondly, the interlinkage of gendered social structures with institutions and strategies was evident throughout the analysis. This was not an *a priori* assumption. Gender entered when roles were mentioned, acted out, or invoked within specific household tenancy strategies. Gendered labouring stereotypes were also evident in the division of labour both in paid and unpaid work. Gendered patterns that are often hidden in the study of economic (commercial) life by neoclassical and Marxist authors were brought into an integrated analysis here. This analysis has a large overlap with the gender and development school. Best illustrating this we had the case of Yasmeen whose grandsons were living and studying at her house in Telugu medium schools. On our visits to Yasmeen's house it was clear that she was responsible for a wide range of work roles – cooking, watching the

cows, field work, and managing the chickens. Although the menfolk of the house help with much of this work, they are not expected to do cooking at all. Thus the whole of household management was left in her care. As also illustrated in a whole series of accounts (in the case studies) of migrant labourers, the able-bodied women in working class families are generally expected to do all the cooking and household cleaning, as well as breast feeding and/or feeding children, washing dishes and washing clothes. They often rise far earlier than men folk to complete these tasks before a long day of paid work.

Thirdly the surprising finding of this report is that people do not simply act out the roles that are socially expected for a given position in society. Instead, given a configuration of resources and other aspects of 'located-ness' (as I called it), people make decisions that are purposive, consistent and coherently aimed at some vision. Thus poor Bangarappa's daughter and her household decided to buy him a cow, making it more difficult for him to do casual farming work for quite a long time. This commitment was not entered into lightly, involved some prior discussion, linked two households, and was consistent with the failure of Bangarappa's land to engage his energies sufficiently or pay him enough income to make an arable-based strategy dominant in 2006/7. However Bangarappa is ready to consider returning to doing arable land agriculture, rather than animal husbandry, if the rains come or water supply is provided to some land that he can operate. His own plot of government donated land would, in a different water situation, have transformed his whole labour strategy. But since it is rocky and has poor quality soil with no regular water source, Bangarappa hardly grows any crops there. Bangarappa is pulled into a modern economic activity – milch cow production – by his extended family who bring his interests into their own strategy. The fact that they call the cow a 'gift' from his daughter helps to rationalise a boundary between her household and his which is permeable yet very strongly established. Thus Bangarappa didn't migrate for paid work, didn't go hungry and get ill, didn't go to live with relatives far away. All these are actions which one might have 'expected' when the loss of his land and reduction in well water have caused him to exit from being a worker-farmer and move firmly into the worker category.

The date of the gift of a cow arriving from the daughter's house to Bangarappa's house appears as an important turning point in his labouring strategy. His focus now on the cow's health and feeding reflects his new circumstances. Instead of a labourer he is a cow owner. It was a big moment and he appeared to be proud when he showed us the cow. The events following on from that date emerge as after-effects of it.[5]

My examples of Yasmeen and Bangarappa have illustrated both class and gender structures. I have used the term 'institutions' in the paper

[5] A Marxist might consider a cow to be a productive asset. Hence those workers who own cows would be owning part of the means of production. Thus Bangarappa moved from assetless worker to asset-holding worker, a notch upward.

occasionally to refer to sets of normatively regulated practices, such as land rental on sharecropping (*kauru*). Throughout I have tried to recognise that across space (4 districts) and time (1994 vs. 2006) there are differences and changes in class, gender, and social institutions. In these diverse and changing contexts a multiverse of strategies emerged. Interesting to note that for most actors most of the time the strategies they develop are seen as reflecting moral goodness and the best possible response to difficult or new circumstances as well as to their local traditions and their history. I found people rather willing to tell about their strategies, but also engaged in third-order strategic representations during the interviews in which I participated. Thus it will be possible (in a separate paper) to comment on the notion of 'communicative reflexivity' that was noted by Archer in *The Internal Conversation* (2003) with regard to UK respondents. In south India communication is important among the people both within and between households, and with officials, but it is felt as much more artificial (than in the UK) to represent one's actions to a foreigner or to an urban outsider. Divisions entrenched in the languages of *prakruti* and *vikruti*[6], third-order strategies of representation, 1st and 2nd order strategies of cooperativeness and suspicion, and many other motives enter in to the shaping of the interview data. I haven't commented very much here on the epistemological aspects of the analysis. That will be the subject of other papers, since it raises important issues of validity, positionality, credibility, and representation. Eventually one may want to comment on the coherence and desirability of micro agents' strategies, of larger organisations' strategies, and of government action in the context of what has been learned [with whatever weaknesses and gaps] from this kind of study.

8 Conclusions

In summary, I have given case evidence that used a mixed methods approach in rural south India to explore the strategies that tenants use. Tenants pick up common strategies from the social practices around them, but also innovate and modify their practices to suit their chosen mix of strategies. Strategies like renting land interact and partially overlap with strategies for domestic labour and paid labour as well as helping 'agents' to achieve social status and to accumulate resources or increase their human capital. By agents I mean both people and households here.

Because strategies are so different from practices but the term 'strategy' is an encompassing word that can include some practices, the paper has carefully defined 'strategies', distinguished them from practices, and set out the characteristics of the agents who use them.

These agents are not isolated people. Instead agents are overlapping potential actors. Each person's mind is aware of some of these overlapping

[6] Telugu has a formal language, the vrikruti, which has much in common with Sanskrit. Then there is the spoken popular language, known as prakruti. This has slang and shortened phrases and has less Sanskrit. In vrikruti there are many words for the same thing, so abstract concepts are usually expressed in vrikruti. That leaves the prakruti appearing rather concrete and simplified to the listener.

identities (and their real agency, i.e. the real capacity for action) beyond their own body. Thus each person is embedded in collectivities. Another phrase describing this is having a corporate identity, but this phrase is too ethereal and suggests something subjective, whereas I have argued in favour of a realism in which the co-existence is real and generates both capabilities and liabilities of the agents. Even if we didn't recognise the situation cognitively, it would still exist.[7] To some extent one suspects that agency also exists among the animal kingdom. Furthermore our relationship with nature can be conceived of, similarly, with the inter-penetration metaphor (or a metaphor like stewardship or co-existence). There is no need to speak of our relations with the world in methodological individualist ways. Feminists who advocate relationality rather than a focus on ownership and separateness will like this framework. To summarise the main elements, I list them below and provide an example from the case material.

CHARACTERISTIC OF AGENCY	EXAMPLE FROM SOUTH INDIA
Located-ness	The land ownership structure
Imaginativeness	Capacity to hope for office work
Empathy	Feeling bad about being cheated
Collective embeddedness	Deciding along with family to buy a cow

Finally for many Indian farmers and workers, considerable effort is put into working out the best thing to do each season. There was lots of evidence of changing strategies over time. People made these decisions after discussion and consultation. Life histories would reveal the resulting changes better than our case data. Ethnography would reveal the role of power-over inside the family during these deliberations. In those particular cases where there was some discussion before a new strategy was embarked upon we have reflexive agents.

Reflexivity (optional)	Thinking the tenancy relationship over

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[7] To describe agents' capabilities, we would probably start by seeing the capabilities and liabilities of a person as a relationally emergent property of the several larger wholes within which the person exists. Yet these wholes do not subsume the person. Instead they are overlapping aspects of a person's identity as an agent. These wholes include the country, region, language group, local class, broad social class, community group, caste, religious group, village, household, and couple.

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Appendix 1: Case background for Yasmeen (Pseudonym)

1. Yasmeen, Muslim w/o Jayanth Reddy, Peddapalli, main village

Yasmeen is a Muslim and Jayanth is Hindu. They are one of the few inter-caste love-marriages. Their house is at the far end of Peddapalli a bit apart from the other houses. When we asked her about the household head she told us that their 17 year old son is the head of the house. It took us a while until she disclosed the name of her husband to us since it is rather obvious that it is a love-marriage – which must have been and to a certain extent still is - a big scandal. The couple lives with their two grandchildren (2 boys). She gets a daily wage of 40 Rs (30-35 Rs last year) and her husband earns 100 Rs / day. They have recently constructed a new house and plan to move in once the final alterations are completed.

The family owns two cows and two hens. Both Yasmeen and Jayanth do *kuulie* (casual) agricultural labour for about 20 days a month and Yasmeen is taking care of the cows, but none of their grandsons is engaged in agricultural labour. Both are still students.

They used to rent-in land from B. Reddy of Peddapalli seven years ago, but stopped that since there is no water. Later she added that they don't like to be tenants on a permanent basis – practically working for a landlord. They used to do sharecropping – the land and water was provided and a tractor. They only used the tractor when they could afford the diesel and the driver. They had to provide all the seeds, fertilizer and pesticides but had to give half their yield. At the end of the interview she told us that she wants to see their grandsons in good positions and would not mind to leave the village to join them in a city.

Notes Olsen (Jan. 07):
Yasmeen's husband is there with his sister (amma) and brother. Her house is a large round, smoky, thatched hut. Her husband brought some kerosene to start fire with. We had tea while we played with two baby goats twins just three days old. Her house is a real farm although they just have one kunta ($1/100^{th}$ of a Hectare) of house land. Around it are fields. Her husband's sister sat there with the two goat babies in her lap. The two boys in the room are Yasmeen's grand children. When the current went out, they lit a kerosene lantern. Her hut has a set of three large pots of seeds, about eight feet high: gaadi –food storage –one is empty –all three are empty. The interview is in Telugu. During the interview the sheep went to sleep. The three men went out. The two children listened and eventually one got bored. He took a big school book and began to do some close work. It seems he is studying in Telugu medium. The interview was done in full fast Telugu. There were just a few interjections in Urdu. Aktawala did the interviews. The two women were scathing about the possibility of growing crops. They used to rent lots of land, 4-6 acres.

Casenotes from 1994 for Yasmeen's household: In 1994, her household had the following members: herself, then 35, her husband then 45, husband's sister 3 years younger than Yasmeen, Yasmeen's mother then aged 75 (now

dead), and the two boys, then aged 8 and 4. The boys are now (in 2007) 21 and 17 according to our records.

Case 2: Bangarappa, a Hindu man living alone, Kurava caste (a "backward" caste, so-called, living in Chinnapalli village.

Bangarappa is 65. his wife has died and his two daughters moved away at the time of marriage. His son unfortunately also died, and this left Bangarappa living alone which is relatively unusual. His mud hut with thatch roof has a small cooking area at the back, and he cooks for himself. There are pots for seed storage, but they are empty. Bangarappa has one milk cow. His ownership of 2 acres of dryland is contested in the context of receiving access to it as 'assigned land' long ago. Bangarappa has worked as a *kuulie* (agricultural labourer) all his life in a variety of situations, including renting land from others. He is very poor with just 4 kg of rice per month on his rice ration card, and no electricity. Electricity would cost Rs. 30 a month but he feels he can't afford it. His neighbours have electricity.