

**RESPONSES TO ALCOHOL-RELATED PROBLEMS  
IN AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE:  
CHARACTERIZING AND EXPLAINING CULTURAL WETNESS AND DRYNESS**

Robin Room

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It is an old perception, reaffirmed every day by contemporary travelers between northern and southern Europe, that some cultures are "wetter" and some "drier". The terms "wet" and "dry", as applied to the cultural position of alcohol (rather than to such matters as its sugar content!) presumably derive in the first instance from the North American political debates about Prohibition. In this usage, they referred to the policy response to alcohol: should the effort be made to exclude it altogether from the society, or should the effort rather be to control it and perhaps to integrate it into daily life? That there was a continuum between being totally "wet" or totally "dry" was acknowledged, for instance, by Will Rogers' characterization of the Republican Party platform for the 1932 U.S. elections as "damp". The same dimension of distinction was mentioned in the report of the International Study of Alcohol Control Experiences (ISACE), in terms of a continuum between the complete integration of alcohol into daily life "as a consumer commodity like any other", and its marginalization as an especially powerful and dangerous or harmful commodity, "singled out from ordinary commerce for special treatment".<sup>1</sup>

We shall apply the terms "wet" and "dry" more broadly here, to include not only control policies in the society, but also attitudes and norms concerning drinking. We will argue that the "wet" and the "dry" ideal types also include distinctive patterns of consequences of drinking, and different societal responses to drinking. Our aim, in this paper, is to explore patterns in the differentiation of cultures between "wet" and "dry", and to describe and assess possible explanations and mechanisms of cultural change towards the wetter or the drier end of the spectrum. This draft is intended as a working document for discussion, and not as a final statement.

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<sup>1</sup>Klaus Mäkelä et al., Alcohol, Society and the State: 1. A Comparative Study of Alcohol Control, Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation, 1981, p. 95. In Italian: I.S.A.C.E., Alcool, Società e Stato, Torino: Edizione Gruppo Abele, 1984, p. 111.

## NORTH AMERICAN ANALYSES: INTEGRATED VS. AMBIVALENT DRINKING CUSTOMS<sup>2</sup>

Most sustained discussion in recent decades of wet vs. dry patterns has focused on attitudes and norms concerning drinking. Much of this literature was published by North American sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s. In an often-cited paper, Ullman contrasted the "integrated drinking customs" of Italians, Chinese and Orthodox Jews with the "unintegrated drinking customs" of Irish-Americans and of the "United States American of the Northeast quarter of the nation -- Protestant, middle-class, urban, white, from Anglo-Saxon background of three or more generations in this country". On this basis, he proposed that

in any group or society in which the drinking customs, values, and sanctions -- together with the attitudes of all segments of the group or society -- are well established, known to and agreed upon by all, and are consistent with the rest of the culture, the rate of alcoholism will be low.<sup>3</sup>

Ullman's hypothesis was related to and drew upon the "ambivalence" explanation of presumptively high U.S. alcoholism rates. The idea that the U.S. was a society uniquely ambivalent about its drinking, and that alcoholism rates would be reduced by integrating drinking more into everyday life, became the main intellectual underpinning for what became known as the "sociocultural model" of alcohol problems prevention in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Later, Whitehead and colleagues adapted the Ullman hypothesis to reflect the new focus in the literature on level of consumption as a determinant of alcohol problems, synthesizing the two traditions in a restated (and complex) hypothesis.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The material in this section is adapted from "Cross-Cultural Research in Alcohol Studies: Research Traditions and Analytical Issues", pp. 9-40 in: Tom Harford and Lee Towle, eds., Cultural Influences and Drinking Patterns: A Focus on Hispanic and Japanese Population, NIAAA Research Monograph No. 19, Washington, DC: USGPO, 1988.

<sup>3</sup>Albert D. Ullman, "Sociocultural Backgrounds of Alcoholism", Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 315 (Jan. 1958): 48-54.

<sup>4</sup>For a methodological critique of this tradition, see: Klaus Mäkelä, "Consumption Level and Cultural Drinking Patterns as Determinants of Alcohol Problems", Journal of Drug Issues 5 (1975): 344-357. For a conceptual critique of ambivalence theories, see: Robin Room, "Ambivalence as a Sociological Explanation: The Case of Cultural Explanations of Alcohol Problems", American Sociological Review 41 (1976): 1047-1065.

<sup>5</sup>Paul C. Whitehead and Cheryl Harvey, "Explaining Alcoholism: An Empirical Test and Reformulation", Journal of Health and Social Behavior 15:57-65, 1974; B. Gail Frankel and Paul C. Whitehead, Drinking and Damage: Theoretical Advances and Implications for Prevention, New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers Center for Alcohol Studies, Monograph No. 14, 1981. For the contrast between the "sociocultural" and "single-distribution" traditions, see: Thomas Harford et al., Normative Approaches to the Prevention of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, NIAAA Research Monograph No. 3, Washington, DC: USGPO, DHEW Publication (ADM) 79-847, 1980.

In the years after Ullman's paper, a related tradition of sociological literature differentiated between drinking cultures in terms of whether they had "proscriptive", "prescriptive", or "permissive" or "nonscriptive" norms on drinking.<sup>6</sup> While this literature drew its cases and comparisons primarily from North American ethnoreligious groups, Pittman drew on it and on the ambivalence tradition to propose that "it is possible to range all cultures on a continuum in reference to their attitudes about drinking".<sup>7</sup> In this global synthesis, Pittman offered four such "cultural positions": the abstinent culture, the ambivalent culture, the permissive culture and the over-permissive culture -- the last of which, in his view, "is a polar type of cultural attitude which exists only in part, never in entirety". Pittman acknowledges that the general "cultural position" on drinking does not always determine behavior; while the "extensiveness of beverage use correlates with cultural type, it is not a perfect correlation".

Though these discussions frequently drew on international materials for their cross-cultural perspectives, the research questions and formulations tended to be strongly oriented to North America, and for the most part were founded on a rather small base of empirical data. It was commonly assumed that the drinking patterns of American ethnic groups and of their country of origin were identical -- an assumption which became untenable in the wake of Stivers' comparison of Irish and Irish-American patterns.<sup>8</sup>

Researchers have also paid attention to cultural variations in the profile of drinking problems, relating these differences to cultural differences in the social control of drinking. In 1972, the chart above appeared in The Drinking and Drug Practices Surveyor.<sup>9</sup> It drew particularly on comparisons in two cultural frames: between Nordic countries and between regions of the U.S. Comparing Finland and Denmark as the extremes of variation in the Nordic countries, Nils Christie had shown that "visible problems" -- alcohol-related crime statistics -- were higher in Finland, although the per-capita consumption of alcohol was lower and the temperance movement had traditionally been stronger there than in Denmark. Christie saw the

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<sup>6</sup>E. Mizruchi and R. Perrucci, "Norm Qualities and Differential Effects of Deviant Behavior: An Exploratory Analysis", American Sociological Review 27: 391-399, 1962; D. Larsen and B. Abu-Laban, "Norm Qualities and Deviant Drinking Behavior", Social Problems 15:441-450, 1968. See the discussion in: Robin Room, "Normative Perspectives on Alcohol Use and Problems", Journal of Drug Issues 5(1975): 358-368.

<sup>7</sup>David J. Pittman, "International Overview: Social and Cultural Factors in Drinking Patterns, Pathological and Nonpathological", pp. 3-20 in: David J. Pittman, ed., Alcoholism, New York, etc.: Harper & Row, 1967.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Stivers, A Hair of the Dog: Irish Drinking and American Stereotypes, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.

<sup>9</sup>[Robin Room], "Relations between Ethnic and Cross-National Comparisons", Drinking and Drug Practices Surveyor 5 (1972), p. 16.

## COMPARING THE PROBLEMS OF DRYNESS AND THE PROBLEMS OF WETNESS

	Type I ("wet") characterized by:	Type II ("dry") characterized by:
temperance tradition:	weak	strong
proportion of abstainers:	low	high
dominant pattern of heavy drinking:	frequent fairly heavy	infrequent very heavy (binge)
deaths from alcohol poisoning (overdose):	lower	higher
deaths from cirrhosis:	higher	lower
violence and social disruption associated with heavy drinking	lower	higher
moonshining	absent	present

causal arrow as pointing in both directions between social control and social disruption:

the causal chain probably goes like this: A drinking culture with a large degree of highly visible, non-beneficial effects of alcohol consumption leads to a strict system of control which somewhat reduces total consumption, which again influences and most often reduces the visible problems. But also, the system of control influences visible problems -- sometimes probably in the direction of increasing them.<sup>10</sup>

Other discussions had pointed out that cirrhosis mortality was higher in Denmark, on the other hand, so that one might talk in terms of "problems of dryness" as against "problems of wetness".

In the meantime, analyses of regional variations within the U.S., between the "drier" Southern and prairie states and the "wetter" remainder of the country, had shown analogous distinctions between the two areas.<sup>11</sup> For a given amount of drinking, respondents reported experiencing more drinking-related social problems in dryer regions and dryer neighborhoods. This seemed to reflect both more reactions by others to the drinking and a greater prominence of more troublesome drinking styles among the

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<sup>10</sup>Nils Christie, "Scandinavian Experience in Legislation and Control", pp. 101-121 in: National Conference on Legal Issues in Alcoholism and Alcohol Usage, Boston: Boston University Law-Medicine Institute, 1965.

<sup>11</sup>Robin Room, "Drinking in the Rural South: Some Comparisons in a National Sample", pp. 79-108 in: John Ewing and Beatrice Rouse, eds., Law and Drinking Behavior, Chapel Hill: Center for Alcohol Studies, University of North Carolina, 1971; Robin Room, "Interrelations of Alcohol Policies, Consumption, and Problems in the U.S.", Drinking and Drug Practices Surveyor 9:21-31, 1974; Don Cahalan and Robin Room, Problem Drinking among American Men, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Center for Alcohol Studies, Monograph No. 7, 1974.

drinkers in dryer areas. While cirrhosis mortality and other consequences of long-term heavy drinking were higher in the wetter regions, such indicators as public drunkenness arrests and arrests for moonshining, which tapped societal response as well as the underlying behavior, were much higher in the dryer regions, and indicators of disruptive drinking such as the percent of drivers with high blood-alcohol levels, as measured in roadside surveys, were also marginally higher, although the base of those who drink at all is lower in dryer areas.

Versions of the same differences in patterns have been described in other frames of comparison. Comparisons between German-speaking, French-speaking and Italian-speaking regions of Switzerland show a gradation between the Italian-speaking areas at the "wetter" end and the German-speaking areas at the "dryer" end.<sup>12</sup> The pattern of a positive relation of consumption level with cirrhosis and a negative relation with police statistics like drunk driving and public drunkenness arrests shows up also in a comparison of 17 developed countries on 11 indicators of alcohol consumption, spending and alcohol-related problems.<sup>13</sup> Much of the variance in this comparison was among the 12 European countries included; in a broader European framework, it is clear that in the wine cultures of Southern Europe, where drinking is more integrated with meals and other aspects of daily life,<sup>14</sup> health problems of heavy drinking are more prominent, while problems of social disruption are more prominent in the beer and particularly the spirits-drinking countries of Northern and Northeastern Europe.

Lastly, ethnographic, survey and epidemiological research in developing countries has suggested that Northern European countries are not necessarily at the extreme in a global perspective in setting alcoholic beverages apart from everyday life. A pattern of intermittent explosive drinking, and of access to drinking being limited by customary rules on the circumstances of drinking and on the gender, age and social position of the drinker, can be found in a number of developing countries.

It will be noted that some of the comparative studies have been between nation-states, while some have been of regions or cultures within one nation-state. Thus a comparison in a large-scale frame -- say, the whole of Europe -- may lump together considerable variation which would be apparent in a comparison at a more local level -- say of provinces within Italy. Also, the characterizations of "wetter" and "dryer" we are using are defined in relative terms: a cultural group which appears to be on the "wet" end in one set of comparisons may seem to be on the "dry" end in another set of comparisons.

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<sup>12</sup>Peter Wütrich and H. Hausheer, Der schweizerische Alkoholkonsum, Working paper no. 1, Lausanne: ISPA, 1977; Hermann Fahrenkrug, "Swiss Drinking Habits: Results from Surveys in 1975, 1981 and 1987", Contemporary Drug Problems, forthcoming.

<sup>13</sup>[Richard Bunce and Robin Room], "International Statistics on Alcohol Abuse", pp. 20-25 in: Ernest Noble, ed., Third Special Report to Congress on Alcohol and Health, Technical Support Document, DHEW Publication No. (ADM) 79-832, Washington, DC: USGPO, 1979.

<sup>14</sup>Salme Ahlström-Laakso, "European Drinking Habits: A Review of Research and Some Suggestions for Conceptual Integration of Findings", pp. 119-132 in: Michael Everett, Jack Waddell and Dwight Heath, eds., Cross-Cultural Approaches to the Study of Alcohol, The Hague & Paris: Mouton, 1976.

## COMPONENTS OF THE WET/DRY DISTINCTION

In this section we discuss briefly the different alcohol-specific characteristics, for which there are quantitative or comparative measures, which might be regarded as components of the differentiation between wetter and dryer cultures.

### Per-capita recorded sales, expressed in litres of absolute alcohol:

In industrial societies, this is a good indicator of the level of consumption in the society, and thus presumably of the "wetness" of the social environment. Of course, it reflects both the proportion of the population who drink at all and the level of consumption among drinkers; once the abstainers are removed, drinkers in the dryer parts of the United States appear to drink more per capita than drinkers in the wetter parts. As a measure of actual consumption, per-capita sales are distorted by the effects of cross-border imports and exports by individual consumers, of smuggling, of illicit production, and of licit home production. Untaxed home and local production is an important component of consumption in many developing countries.

### Proportion of abstainers:

This seems to be a fairly good surrogate measure of the extent of temperance sentiment in the population. For abstention as reported in surveys, there is some evidence that this is not only because of actual differences in behavior, but because a very infrequent drinker may regard themselves as an abstainer in a dryer environment and as a drinker in a wetter environment.

### Spirits vs. other drinking:

Spirits as a greater proportion of all alcohol consumption seems to be associated with a "dryer" cultural configuration. As with many other features, the causal arrow could go in both directions: for instance, a dryer environment forces alcohol into more transportable and concealable forms; spirits drinking may have been more problematic and the society may have gone dryer in reaction.

### Patterns of drinking:

A "dryer" cultural environment is often associated with the existence of "explosive" patterns of drinking. This term, used by Jellinek and others, seems to refer both to a pattern of occasional consumption of very large amounts by individuals, small groups or subcultures (rather than in community-wide fiestas), and to obnoxious or socially disruptive patterns of behavior while and after drinking. These explosive patterns, however, may characterize only a relatively small proportion of all the drinking occasions in the society.

The archetypal description of "wet" cultures, and in particular wine cultures, is in terms of drinking during meals. Frequently, such descriptions have not been very clear about how much drinking, and by whom, also goes on outside mealtimes.

Middle-class patterns of drinking seem to be especially important in the characterization of the drinking culture of industrial societies. This presumably reflects both the claims to normative hegemony of the middle class, and the fact that most of those writing or describing patterns are themselves middle class.

Characterizations of the wetness and dryness of cultures are often implicitly based on patterns among men rather than women, and more on patterns of drinking in public than in private.

#### Cultural meanings of drinking:

This area merits a book in its own right. The archetypal characterization is that, in a wetter cultural environment, alcohol is integrated in everyday life, and consumption is to a considerable degree banalized. However, despite the banalization of many drinking occasions, alcoholic beverages carry a heavy load of symbols in wet cultures, and perhaps particularly in wine cultures.

The symbolization of alcoholic beverages tends to be quite specific to different types of beverages in wetter cultures, and the idea of lumping them together under a single heading of "alcohol" often seems strange to the lay member of the culture. The focus on "alcohol" (and thus on its psychic, physical and social effects) as the important commonality among the different beverages is in itself rather a "dry" idea.

As the ISACE study noted, there are different ways a dry culture may characterize alcohol in setting it apart from ordinary commodities and the ordinary rounds of daily life. It can be seen as a risk factor for long-term health, like cigarette smoking; this characterization, which is coming into currency nowadays, was not very important historically. It can be seen as endangering physical coordination, as in drinking driving countermeasures; this is also a fairly recent concern from a policy viewpoint, reaching back about 50 years in any country. It can be seen as a disinhibitor, as a substance which makes people act unpredictably and often badly. It can be seen as addictive, as something with the power to enslave people and to distract them from the proper concerns of their daily life. Or it can be seen as a consciousness-expander, as something with the power to project people into an alternative reality. All three of these last characterizations of alcohol seem to be associated with dryness, at least in the sense of strong cultural efforts to control drinking.

There is a substantial social psychological literature these days on alcohol expectancies -- what people expect drinking to do to and for them -- and attributions -- to what extent drinking is regarded as an explanation of behavior. A related topic, less well studied, is the excuse value of alcohol -- how much and how well drinking functions as an excuse for bad behavior. The studies which have been done have primarily been on U.S. college students. It is time to internationalize these study traditions -- and, in particular, to apply them to wetter cultural environments.

Perhaps it would be especially revealing to apply them in wine cultures. It could be argued that wine cultures expend considerable cultural energy on denying the intoxicating effects of alcoholic beverages, on insisting on turning wine into water (to formulate in a dry culture's terms). Thus it is shameful for a French working man to show any effects of alcohol, no matter how much he has been drinking.

#### Cirrhosis mortality and other long-term physical consequences:

Cirrhosis mortality has been the archetypal indicator of long-term physical consequences of drinking, and usually has a strong relationship with level of consumption both cross-sectionally across societies and longitudinally in any given society. But there are some anomalies in the cross-sectional comparisons: why does New Zealand, for instance, have a much lower cirrhosis mortality rate than its consumption level would imply? Very few systematic comparisons have been made for other possible

long-term physical consequence indicators, such as esophageal cancer, which presumably should show similar patterns to cirrhosis.

In wetter cultures, most cases who end up in psychiatric hospitals with alcohol-related doses should also probably be counted in this category (alcohol-related encephalopathies), while in dryer cultures "alcoholic psychosis" is more likely to reflect acute effects or addictive behavior.

#### Overdose and other acute physical effects of drinking:

The classic study showing alcohol poisoning deaths to be part of a dryer cultural pattern is Poikolainen's comparison of Nordic countries.<sup>15</sup> The same pattern can be found in the U.S., in comparisons of places with adequate mortality reporting: deaths from alcohol poisoning are several times more common in the Carolinas and Georgia, for instance, than in wetter parts of the country.<sup>16</sup>

Deaths from contaminants of alcoholic beverages are classically also associated with dryer cultural environments, as a byproduct of illicit production. But, as recent Italian history and the Quebec beer-drinker's heart disease of the 1950s remind us, they can also occur in connection with licit production.

In terms of upper limits on the number of lives lost in industrial societies, deaths from long-term physical consequences of drinking are a far more important public health problem than deaths from overdose or contaminants.

#### The problematization of alcohol: the propensity to define social and health problems as alcohol-related:

The nature and extent of problematization of alcohol is obviously related to the cultural meanings of drinking, discussed above. There is rather little in the way of good controlled comparisons across cultures, but plenty of anecdotal evidence. There are some temporal comparisons in one culture between wetting and drying periods, for cultures which have historically been at the dryer end of the spectrum. At that end, the involvement of drinking in any untoward event or condition is more likely to be noticed and noted, and the event or condition is more likely to be responded to in terms of its drinking component. The alcohol relationship of an event is thus more likely to be recorded, in part because there is more likely to be a place or category in a recording system in which to record it. On the other hand, respondents in surveys are more likely to underreport their amount of drinking when drinking is problematized.

Wet cultures, and perhaps particularly wine cultures, classically respond to problems identified as alcohol-related by dividing alcohol into "good alcohol" and "bad alcohol", and attributing the problems to the bad alcohol. "Bad alcohol" may be identified in terms of a particular beverage type (e.g., spirits or beer), of a foreign rather than domestic origin, of a low quality or price, or of particular constituents

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<sup>15</sup>Kari Poikolainen, Alcohol Poisoning Mortality in Four Nordic Countries, Helsinki: Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies, vol. 28, 1977.

<sup>16</sup>Page Hudson, "The Medical Examiner Looks at Drinking", pp. 71-92 in: John Ewing and Beatrice Rouse, eds., Drinking: Alcohol in American Society -- Issues and Current Research, Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978.



or adulterants (e.g., absinthe, congeners).

#### The discovery of addiction:

The idea of addiction to alcohol as a disease -- of a mysterious affliction which explains repeated harmful behavior -- arises and flourishes in the post-Enlightenment period in wet societies as a part of the process of becoming dryer.<sup>17</sup> In the frame of comparison of European and English-speaking societies, then, alcoholism or addiction concepts have been stronger in dryer societies, particularly in periods of retreat from wetness (see Marginalization below).

As a carrier of the alcoholism conceptualization, Alcoholics Anonymous has been stronger in historically dryer than wetter societies. This may also reflect those societies' greater propensity to popular movements problematizing alcohol issues (see below).

#### Public drunkenness and other alcohol-specific arrests:

Since drinking is less problematized in wetter cultures, alcohol-specific offenses such as public drunkenness may not even exist in them. Even where they do exist (e.g. drunk driving offenses), the police and the legal system are likely to pay less attention to them than in dryer cultures. Whether there is a difference also in the underlying drinking behaviors, besides the difference in societal response to the behaviors, is less clear. Disorderly public drunkenness appears to be more common in dryer societies than at least in European wine cultures. But driving after drinking is not particularly either a "wet" or a "dry" phenomenon.

#### Alcohol-related casualties and crimes:

Like drinking-driving, the patterns have not been particularly clear. Conceptually, we may separate the physiological impairment due to intoxication from the "disinhibited" behavior in which cultural and individual expectancies play a large part. Alcohol's effect on intentions, by which we culturally separate accidents from crimes, is probably mostly part of the realm of disinhibition. Alcohol's role in unintentional casualties -- accidents -- might then be expected to vary directly with wetness, except as the relation is modified by (a) learned tolerance on the part of heavy drinkers; (b) an elevation in riskier drinking behaviors in dryer environments (see "Patterns of drinking" above).

There is now some direct evidence from time-series comparisons of Nordic countries that alcohol is more likely to play a causal role in crime in dryer than in wetter cultures. There is a need for more work harnessing the insights of MacAndrew and Edgerton's Drunken Comportment to the literature on alcohol expectancies and alcohol as an excuse, and to cultural wetness/dryness.

#### Marginalization of the deviant drinker:

The patterns here seem to present some paradoxes. In "wetter" cultural situations, the boundaries of permissible drinking patterns are set very broadly. Accordingly, the image of the "alcoholic" tends to

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<sup>17</sup>Harry Gene Levine, "The Discovery of Addiction: Changing Conceptions of Habitual Drunkenness in American History", Journal of Studies on Alcohol 39:143-174, 1978.

be extreme: of the clochard, the Skid Row habitue, what Finnish researchers sometimes term the "far-gone heavy drinker". In "dryer" cultural situations, the deviant drinker is also quite marginalized, but often differently defined -- it may include anyone who drinks at all. Reflecting cultural realities, the imagery often includes the wealthy wastrel as well as the down-and-out poor drinker. The marginalization may be most likely to break down in periods of cultural change. As a culture is in the first stages of a drying trend, there is a great deal of consciousness-raising about the drinking of people in the cultural mainstream. Thus in the U.S. in the 1830s and again today, the image of the alcoholic, the person who has lost control of their drinking, is less marginalized, and includes "ordinary" people like you and me.

#### Patterns of professional treatment handling:

The wetter the culture, the less likely there is to be an alcohol-specific treatment system, presumably mostly reflecting the lesser problematization of alcohol. In wetter cultures, the dominant image of alcohol problems, in part reflecting reality, is in terms of physical consequences of drinking, and alcohol treatment may be regarded as a branch of internal medicine. In dryer cultures, the medical specialty with custody is psychiatry, reflecting the cultural focus on alcohol's effects on behavior. But in dryer cultures, a much wider range of professions is involved in handling alcohol problems -- notably including social workers and probation officers. The alcohol-specific system for treating or otherwise handling problems becomes quite extensive, particularly in recent decades. It is not clear whether there is a greater caseload in non-alcohol-specific health and social agencies of cases which could objectively be classed as alcohol-related in dryer cultures or in wetter cultures.

#### Popular movements and the politicization of alcohol:

Dryer cultures are more likely to have had a stronger temperance movement during the period prior to the First World War. The temperance movement is more likely to have had a mass popular base in dryer cultures, and to have been limited to a narrow professional base in wetter cultures. In line with the greater problematization of alcohol historically as well as today in dryer cultures, alcohol-specific issues are likely to have played a stronger role in their political history.

#### Alcohol control measures and alcohol policymaking:

The state is more likely to have interfered in the alcohol market in dryer societies to limit the availability of alcohol, often through an alcohol-specific control system. The state's interference in the alcohol market in wetter societies is more likely have been with the primary intention of stabilizing an agricultural market or for product quality assurance (see the discussion of "bad alcohol" above). The idea of having a general alcohol policy tends to make more sense in the context of a dryer than a wetter culture.

#### Alcohol research:

Reflecting patterns of problematization, alcohol research is better funded and tends in most respects to be more developed in dryer than in wetter cultures. Researchers in wetter cultures are thus in a crucial position to add needed dimensions of variation in cross-cultural comparisons.

## GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE: EXPLANATIONS OF WETNESS/DRYNESS AND OF PROCESSES OF CHANGE

The sociological "ambivalence" literature, referred to above, had a half-hidden policy preference: the solution to what was assumed to be an especially high rate of alcoholism in the United States was to move to a cultural pattern of "integrated" drinking norms, as was seen to be characteristic, for instance, of Italian-Americans and Italians. This policy preference found explicit expression in the works of the psychiatrist Morris Chafetz, who was to become the first Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Chafetz outlined a preventive approach which "aims to inculcate societies with responsible drinking behavior and to interlard alcohol use with all ordinary social behavior by teaching young people how to drink with responsibility, without ill effects, and for benefit only".<sup>18</sup> In response to related Chafetz article, Hiltner sounded a note of caution: the essence of the new cultural attitude proposed by Chafetz was

described in positive terms: alcohol is sipped, taken with food, in relaxed situations, with everybody joining in and taking only a little. If such an attitude could be made to prevail in our society, I have no doubt that many desirable consequences would follow. I wish I could share Chafetz's optimism about the relative ease of producing such a change.

With limited exceptions, the types of cultures in which the relaxed-sip-with-food approach is manifested consistently are (to use the categories of Apollonian and Dionysian as developed by Ruth Benedict for anthropological studies) all very much more Apollonian than are most American or Western European societies. . . . What Chafetz seems, in effect, to be proposing is that we try to produce an Apollonian attitude about drinking -- in a culture which is, in most other respects, strongly Dionysian. Can one such factor be shifted without some supporting shift in at least many other factors? The answer may not be an impossibility, but the difficulties are very great.<sup>19</sup>

Despite his leadership position in the early 1970s, it is doubtful that Chafetz's views had much direct effect on the "wetting" process then under way in the United States. But similar widely-held views did have a dramatic effect on Finnish alcohol policy in the 1960s. Convinced "that the 'social liquor question' could be solved by modifying the style of drinking and [that] the tight restrictions, in fact, provoked immoderate patterns", Finnish policymakers adopted a policy in the 1950s and 1960s of favoring wines and beer at the expense of spirits, seeking "to promote integrated drinking even if it

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<sup>18</sup>Morris E. Chafetz, "The Prevention of Alcoholism", International Journal of Psychiatry 9:329-348, 1970.

<sup>19</sup>Seward Hiltner, "Alcoholism Prevention and Reality", Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol 28:348-349, 1967.

implied increased average consumption".<sup>20</sup> The policy culminated in 1968 in a 20-fold increase in the retail outlets selling beer. The results were dramatic but unexpected. Overall alcohol consumption rose steeply. But it quickly became clear that the new drinking patterns were added onto rather than replacing the old ones, and that the prevalence of intoxication episodes was rising rather than falling. At least in the short run, the Finnish experience provided support for Hiltner's skepticism about quick cultural change away from the problems of dryness.<sup>21</sup>

As for the longer run -- well, the longer run is still in process. It is quite possible that a loosening of state controls as in Finland may produce a rise in problems in the short run, but a drop in the long run as a result of informal processes of response and normative change. Behind the controversy between Chafetz and Hiltner, however, lie the questions of how change in the cultural position of alcohol occurs, of what are the mechanisms which hold together the clusters of dry characteristics and of wet characteristics, and of how the historical split between wetter and dryer cultures occurred. Following are the beginnings of an inventory of answers that have been given to these questions, with some comments on each. The answers are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and do not all operate at the same level of explanation.

#### Apollonian vs. Dionysian:

Hiltner's off-the-cuff response to Chafetz tends to imply a static dualism of cultures. Wet and dry cultures are that way because they have always been that way, and it may be impossible to switch from one to another. This response seems difficult to sustain historically: in the long run, there have been very significant shifts in culture's wetness or dryness. Consider, for instance, an English traveler's description of French drinking in the early 17th century, long before the steep rise in French alcohol consumption in the 19th century: "drunkenness is reprocheful among the French, and the greater parte drinke water mingled with wine. . . . Women for the most part, and virgins alwaies . . . drink water".<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, 18th-century North America would fairly be described as a wet culture, before American alcohol

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<sup>20</sup>Klaus Mäkelä, Esa Österberg and Pekka Sulkunen, "Drink in Finland: Increasing Alcohol Availability in a Monopoly State", pp. 31-60 in: Eric Single, Patricia Morgan and Jan de Lint, eds., Alcohol, Society, and the State: 2. The Social History of Alcohol Policy in Seven Countries, Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation, 1981.

<sup>21</sup>For a later review of the evidence on the possibility of "dry" culture shifting to the "wet" column without alcohol problems rates rising, see Robin Room, "The impossible dream? Routes to reducing alcohol problems in a temperance culture", Journal of Substance Use 4:91-106, 1992. (Note added Jan. 2000.)

<sup>22</sup>Gregory Austin, Alcohol in Western Society from Antiquity to 1800: A Chronological History, Santa Barbara CA: ABC-Clio Information Services, 1985, p. 212.

consumption dropped by two-thirds between 1830 and 1845.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, cultural change does happen to and in the context of the existing cultural matrix, and cultures do differ substantially on many dimensions. Particular kinds of cultural pattern, as Hiltner implies, may put a special value on the experience of intoxication. The cultural values expressed in portrayals of intoxication in Finnish films, for instance, is reminiscent of the cultural valuation on vision quests in some American Indian and some Australian aboriginal cultures.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps one reason that temperance took such a firm hold in Finland was that it was an appropriate response to pre-existing socially disruptive forms of drinking. Dionysian cultures, according to such an argument, "needed" a temperance movement, while Apollonian cultures didn't.

#### Catholic vs. Protestant:

Historically, the first 19th century temperance movement, in the United States, emerged as a semi-secular offshoot of Protestant revivalism. With the important exception of Ireland, all countries which experienced strong popular temperance movements before the First World War were Protestant. The test case of the relative influence of linguistic ethnicity and of denomination is Switzerland: the Swiss temperance movement first emerged in the French-speaking rather than the German-speaking population (where it finds its strength these days), but among Protestants rather than Catholics.

In a quantitative comparison of survey data from English-speaking countries, Greeley has recently argued for the continuing vitality of Protestant/Catholic differences in world view, with Protestants tending to emphasize individualist and Catholics communitarian values.<sup>25</sup> Levine has emphasized the growing importance of self-control as a cultural value, expressed in the particular form of self-control of drinking behavior, in the rise of the American temperance movement. Like Levine's analysis, an explanation of cultural dryness as a late manifestation of the Protestant Reformation tends to presume that the natural (or at least pre-existing) state of humankind (or at least of the European branch) is wet.

#### Ambivalence vs. Integration:

From the first, the tradition of argument that portrayed the United States as a culture especially ambivalent about drinking saw hedonic wetness as the natural state of humankind, and saw the ambivalence as resulting from the interplay with the hedonic impulse of the "extraordinary" historic rise

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<sup>23</sup>William J. Rorabaugh, The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

<sup>24</sup>Pasi Falk and Pekka Sulkunen, "Drinking on the Screen: An Analysis of a Mythical Male Fantasy in Finnish Films", Social Science Information 22:387-410, 1983.

<sup>25</sup>Andrew Greeley, "Protestant and Catholic: Is the Analogical Imagination Extinct?", American Sociological Review 54:485-502, 1989.

of asceticism.<sup>26</sup> Ambivalence theorists thus tended to regard what they saw as an especially high rate of alcoholism in the United States as an eventual result of the advent of the temperance movement.

I have critiqued this tradition on conceptual grounds elsewhere.(Room, "Ambivalence . . .", note 4 above.) It can also be argued that the temperance movement was a rational response to extraordinarily high levels of drinking in late 18th century America, which have never since been matched. On the other hand, ambivalence theories would tend to agree with other traditions of explanation in seeing a fundamental cultural shift in the place of alcohol in American culture as associated with the advent of the temperance movement.

#### Wine cultures vs. the rest:

Geography, which was a favorite explanation of human behavior in the 19th century, tends to be out of fashion. Yet there is no doubt that geography makes alcohol differentially available, and in different forms, in different parts of Europe. The most notable distinction of the North American continent for medieval Icelandic explorers, as reflected in their name for it (Vinland), was that wine-grapes grew wild on it. The European countries with the greatest reputation for integrated drinking, and for the least social disruption around drinking, are the wine-drinking countries along the Mediterranean shore.

Until the advent of spirits as a regular item of consumption, most alcohol consumption in Europe north of the Alps was of beer or cider. Reflecting the seasonal cycles of agriculture and since supplies did not keep well, consumption in the countryside tended to be in the form of occasional communal drinking bouts -- a pattern still visible in many third-world village cultures outside the cash economy. It can be argued that this pattern of binge-like drinking was carried forward into urban and industrial environments; but with entry into the cash economy the pattern could now be engaged in on a more regular and more individual basis.

On the other hand, wine could be stored, and was thus available year-round. The patterns of drinking in wine cultures, it can be argued, reflect a very long process of cultural accommodation to and domestication of regular wine-drinking, including a cultural de-emphasis on its intoxicating properties (see above; it would be useful for social psychologists to test this aspect).

Against this, it should be noted that, because of poverty, wine was frequently effectively not available to peasants for daily use before the 19th century. Poor French peasants frequently had available only piquet, the low-alcohol drink made from the fourth pressings of the grapes. In France, at least, consumption rose far above former levels in the course of the 19th century. The pattern of regular heavy consumption we think of as French, thus, is historically recent for those below the middle class, and cultural adaptations to it must therefore have some relatively recent elements. Is this true also for other wine cultures?

Unfortunately for researchers, the line of division between Protestant and Catholic (or Orthodox) Europe also tends to be the line between wine cultures and the rest. But there are some interesting

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<sup>26</sup>Abraham Myerson, "Alcohol: A Study of Social Ambivalence", Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol 1:13-20, 1940.

exceptions, which could be used to study the relative explanatory power of religion and of wine cultivation. Catholic Poland, for instance, seems to have a well-established tradition of "unintegrated" problematic drinking, and some temperance traditions. Examples of interesting spots to study, where cultures, religions and winemaking intersect, would include northern Yugoslavia and Transylvania.

#### The spirits "epidemic":

For several hundred years after distilled beverages came to Europe, they were culturally enclaved as medicines. Apparently they first became banalized and an item of home production and regular consumption in Scotland and Ireland. By the 17th century, industrial production was under way, and spirits had become an important item of trade and empire-building by the 18th century. As an early industrial product, spirits may have played an important role in the accumulation of capital from the pennies of the devotees of "Mother Gin".

Contemporary testimony is vivid about the depredations brought by this concentrated and cheaply produced form of alcohol, which did not spoil and thus could be transported long distances. There is no doubt, for instance, that the "gin epidemic" had a major effect on British life, particularly in London, and eventually persuaded the government to undertake effective countermeasures, even against the interests of its class base.

It seems that the spirits trade made much greater inroads against beer and cider drinking than against wine drinking. If this is really true, then the spirits epidemic is a possible explanation of why the temperance movement became strong particularly in non-wine-drinking areas of Europe. There are problems of timing in viewing the temperance movement as a cultural response to the spirits epidemic: even in North America, where the rise of spirits and the rise of temperance are closest together in time, more than half a century separates them.

#### Industrialization, capitalism, urbanization, "complex society":

The idea that alcoholism or alcohol problems is a disorder particularly of societies like ours is longstanding and has appeared in many forms. In view of how well such ideas tap into the recurrent Arcadian myths of our culture, it is probably wise to maintain some skepticism about them.

Bacon's early classic of the modern alcohol literature, "Alcohol and Complex Society", is still worth rereading.<sup>27</sup> Although this avowedly functional analysis does not take a clear position on whether alcohol problems are more severe in complex than in simpler societies, it claims that the functions have shifted: alcohol's food value, medicinal value, and religious-ecstasy value have diminished, while its use in "social jollification" and in tension reduction has increased. Complexity has also brought more vested interests in alcohol production and a loosening of social controls which limited consumption, on the one hand, and a greater demand for attentiveness and responsibility, on the other.

A common theme in reviews of the anthropological literature is the rarity of alcohol problems in village and tribal societies. I will not repeat here my critique of this view, which is still a matter of

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<sup>27</sup>Selden Bacon, "Alcohol and Complex Society", with discussion, pp. 179-200 in Alcohol, Science and Society, New Haven: Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 1945.

controversy. Presumably the classic Marxist view of alcoholism as a disorder of capitalism would agree that alcohol problems are rare in precapitalist societies.

Where there seems to be some agreement among social scientists (not necessarily among psychiatrists) is that "alcoholism", in the sense that Alcoholics Anonymous or Jellinek in his writings of the 1950s meant it, is primarily a disorder of post-Enlightenment industrial societies. In the wake of Levine's discussion of "the discovery of addiction", it has been argued that alcoholism, in the sense of a deep existential experience of loss of control over one's drinking and one's life, is a "culture-bound syndrome" that is conditioned on the existence of a cultural expectation of self-control for all adult members of the culture. The expectation of individual self-control, it can be argued, is how industrial cultures reconcile the conflict between increased expectations of attentiveness and work precision and the ready availability of cheap alcohol in an economy that depends on mass consumption.<sup>28</sup> Recent social historical work has underlined the importance of employer interests in labor discipline in the history of the temperance movement.<sup>29</sup>

Any of these related lines of argument can obviously only be used to explain change in one direction. Any explanation that involves industrialization must deal somehow with the fact of residual differences between northern and southern Europe in cultural position and understandings of alcohol, although urbanization and industrialization are by now present in all areas of Europe.

#### Populism, Feminism:

De Tocqueville's view of America as a nation of joiners was largely based on his observations of the early temperance movement. Popular movements of social response to alcohol have been notably strong in countries with strong populist political traditions, and frequently, in fact, temperance movements were part of the formation of that tradition. The pattern continues today in the membership distribution of Alcoholics Anonymous, which tends to be notably stronger in populist, non-authoritarian cultures. Presumably, of course, populist traditions or are formed by or at least interplay with other factors mentioned above.

It can be argued that temperance was strongest in precisely those cultures in which the first women's movement, of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was strongest. Certainly the two movements overlapped considerably, and it could be argued that consciousness-raising went in both directions. Given the gender differences in drinking in most societies, women have more to lose than to gain from heavy drinking, and the political success of temperance movements has often depended on the validation and empowerment of women's views.

#### Cyclical theories, theories of generational change:

While most explanations discussed above seek to explain either continuing cultural differences or

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<sup>28</sup>Robin Room, "Drugs, Consciousness and Self-Control: Popular and Medical Conceptions", International Review Journal of Psychiatry 1:63-70, 1989.

<sup>29</sup>John Rumbarger, Power, Profits and Prohibition: Alcohol Reform and the Industrializing of America 1800-1930, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.



one-directional transformations, these analyses offer characterizations and perhaps explanations of patterns of ebb and flow in the place of alcohol in a given culture. Most such work has been done in cultures that have had a strong temperance tradition. As Les Drew noted some years ago, consumption levels in a number of English-speaking countries seem cyclical, with a period of about 70 years. It has also been noted that temperance efforts ebb and flow, with a linked periodicity.<sup>30</sup> In this perspective, temperance movements can be viewed as the process of societal response to increases in alcohol-related problems that accompany increases in consumption levels. As a temperance movement moves into a more coercive phase, restrictions on drinking may eventually become the target of a generational revolt, initiating another cycle.<sup>31</sup>

It has been noted that the dynamics of such "long waves" of alcohol consumption do not seem to be specific to a particular society. "They are surprisingly common across countries, despite differences in the countries' general economic development and in alcohol culture. . . . None of the factors commonly put forward as explanations for drinking or problematic drinking -- such as buying power, the amount of leisure time, social misery, or industrialization and urbanization -- present patterns of variation over time similar to the variations in alcohol consumption".(Mäkelä et al., 1981, p. 7 -- see note 1)

At the material level, it has been suggested that rises in consumption might be linked cross-culturally by improvements in production technology that make alcohol more cheaply available -- for beer, for instance, bulk production and refrigeration in the late 19th century, packaging and preserving technology and intensive advertising techniques in the 1940s and after. At the level of ideas, the diffusion of professional ideologies, legislative approaches, and mass organizing techniques could be the cross-cultural linkage, particularly for societal responses to drinking. Serious study of such factors in a cross-national frame is in its infancy.

## CONCLUSION

The text above is a first attempt to lay out the present state of knowledge and theorizing about the nature and explanation of differences between wet and dry cultures as ideal types, and about processes of cultural movement in a wetter or dryer direction. In the existing literature, many of the characterizations and explanations are offered on an ad-hoc basis, without consideration of how patterns or explanations might fit together or compete with each other. It is hoped that the present compilation and commentary will help to provide a base from which more sustained and synthetic data collection and analysis can proceed in the future.

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<sup>30</sup>Jack Blocker, American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989.

<sup>31</sup>Robin Room, "A 'Reverence for Strong Drink': The Lost Generation and the Elevation of Alcohol in American Culture", Journal of Studies on Alcohol 45:540-546, 1984.