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The Ethics and Politics of Consumption

Marco Grix

*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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Abstract

In this project, I critically assess Western consumerism by focussing on five main ethical and political issues: consumption activity frequently injures the consumer, it injures third parties (especially those involved in the production of commodities), it is very inefficient, it alienates consumers from the objects of their consumption, and it is subject to considerable inequality. Linking social and individual practice theory with human and individual need theory, I argue that both communities and their members need well-developed practice portfolios – otherwise we cannot consume well. I also argue that justice requires the satisfaction of basic needs, defined in terms of agency and citizenship requirements, to be given the greatest priority. Politically, a community has a responsibility to manage its social practice portfolio such that its members are able to flourish as human beings without non-consensually compromising the ability of people in other communities to do the same. As citizens, all of its members have a responsibility to participate in an ongoing critical dialogue about how such *flourishing* is to be construed and in which ways the needs that arise from it can legitimately be satisfied. Ethically, the individual consumer has a responsibility to manage her individual practice portfolio, for example, by performing regular portfolio and practice audits. To address her need for objective connectedness, she has a responsibility to dealiate herself from the objects of her consumption. And with regard to TV media and museums, to use two particular examples of service consumption, she has reason to participate in the relevant practices rather differently than Westerners typically do.

To my mum and my grandma.

For everything.

With love.

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Glossary

DIY	Do it yourself
DMV	Driving motor vehicles (as a practice)
FMCG	Fast-moving consumer good
GDP	Gross domestic product
GRP	Global resource pool
HDCs	Highly developed countries
INUS	<u>I</u> nsufficient but <u>n</u> ecessary part of a conditions that is itself <u>u</u> necessary but <u>s</u> ufficient
LDCs	Least developed countries
NPISHs	Non-profit institutions serving households
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PCPP	Practice as collective performance pattern
PIPP	Practice as individual performance pattern
THDB	Travelling on horse-drawn buggies (as a practice)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WWF	World Wildlife Fund (also World Wide Fund for Nature)

Introduction

[T]he economics of the Socratics is not a technology of an age of growth and development. Rather it is the product of an age of anxiety, part of an attempt to work towards establishment of a social order that might ensure a reasonable quality of life for individuals, despite a political environment threatening chaos. Economic analysis in the hands of the philosophers is not a tool to be developed for use in the pursuit of transitory national strength such as the Athenian proved to be. Instead, it is an intellectual activity required for an understanding of the nature of a just society and the application of that understanding to the preservation of a certain quality of life.

*Barry Gordon*¹

In sharp contrast to contemporary consumerist ideology, Socratic philosophy sharply opposed the unconstrained pursuit of our wants. The appreciation of true needs and a disdain for mere desires is evident throughout their writings. For example, Xenophon's Socrates argues that *enkrateia*, self-mastery with regard to bodily pleasures, is the condition of wealth and prosperity. Those who fail to succeed in mastering their desires, especially for bodily pleasures, tend to be poor because their riches fail to match their boundless wants. Addressing Critobulus, Socrates says that "I don't think you would have enough to keep up the style you are living in and to support your reputation, even if your fortune were three times what it is"². By contrast, and somewhat paradoxically, Socrates, who has much less than Critobulus, is actually rich – because his resources suffice to afford the little he desires. Socrates understands what he needs to flourish, and his desires are trained accordingly.³ In a similar vein, Plato notes that "poverty consists not in a lessening of one's property but in an increase of one's avarice"⁴. This makes the reality of scarcity much less terrifying: as long as we understand that a rather small amount of material resources is enough to live a good human life, we can flourish even when our access to them diminishes.

That scarcity is precisely what the Socratic philosophers witnessed when the political, military, and economic strength of Periclean Athens disintegrated. Socrates himself twice fought in the Athenian army and endured the reign of the Thirty Tyrants after Sparta's victory. His disciple Plato experienced the Spartan triumph, the continued withering away of Athens' former empire, and the growing Macedonian threat. And Plato's pupil Aristotle watched the final acts as first Philip II of Macedonia, and then his son Alexander completed the destruction of the old order. Small wonder that Gordon considers the economic thinking of these philosophers 'the product of an age of anxiety'. As the Athenian city-state came crashing down about their ears and social chaos threatened, it made perfect sense to explore whether and how (reasonably) good lives could be led despite a waning resource access.

As it happens, we presently find ourselves in a very similar position: many worry about the imminent disintegration of current Western civilisation (among others). Primarily driven by Western consumerism, humanity's global ecological footprint has been surpassing our planet's biocapacity for decades, badly damaging the

¹ Gordon (1975: 22-23).

² Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (1997: II.4).

³ Ibid; see also Dorion (2006).

⁴ Plato (1980: 736e).

global ecosystem in the process. Throughout the past decade, we have witnessed an astonishing series of record-breaking storms, floods, heat waves, droughts, forest fires, and coral bleaching events around the world – with ‘merely’ 1.0 °C of global warming. The effects of 1.5 °C, let alone increases greater than that, will be far worse, so much so that the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a dire warning in 2018 and urged immediate, unprecedented social and economic changes. While the IPCC’s alert implies that there is still hope, various scholars have begun to communicate a rather different message. For instance, Bendell interprets the scientific information on current climate change as “indicating inevitable collapse, probable catastrophe and possible extinction”⁵ of the human species.

If that is even possible, these problems are further exacerbated by an unabated global population growth that continues to increase the pressure on terrestrial resources. In 2009, the Chief Scientific Adviser to Her Majesty’s Government predicted that “by 2030 the world will need to produce 50 per cent more food and energy, together with 30 per cent more available fresh water, whilst mitigating and adapting to climate change”⁶. The combination of these challenges represents a ‘perfect storm’, and it is difficult to not feel anxious about the future prospects for human well-being. It represents a fitting context for returning to the philosophical concepts and questions that occupied the Socratics some 2.5 millennia ago and considering Western consumption, the activity that lies at the very heart of said storm, from their perspective.

For that reason, the question of *What does it mean to flourish as a human being?* and the concept of *need* play important roles in this thesis. The latter lends itself straightforwardly for an exploration of the former, and if we can determine what human beings need to live well *qua* human, we may be able to scale down the rampant consumerism we find in highly developed countries (HDCs) by limiting ourselves to consuming only those things that are actually required for flourishing. That is what parents do, and probably should do much more frequently, with regard to their children too when they are out shopping after all: “Put that box back on the shelf, you don’t *need* another toy”. The message is clear: the toy is not a necessary condition for the child’s well-being. Thus, there is no good (enough) reason for buying it. Yet, as intuitive and straightforward as that criterion initially seems, its application faces various problems. For example, how can the purchase of *any* commodity ever be justified on the basis of need? For instance, no particular type of food is ever strictly necessary for our well-being: apples are not a necessary condition for health, because we could have oranges instead. Secondly, well-being comes in degrees, so it seems that needs must be correspondingly variable too. For example, what people need for a merely physically tolerable existence (free from major calamity like prolonged and intense hunger and pain) differs from what they need for an existence that deserves the label *human*. These issues are discussed in chapter 3.

Prior to that, I will consider a different subject matter that is highly relevant to consumption. Normative ethical and political theory usually revolves around the idea that our activity is the result of antecedent deliberation and choice. However, by far the most things we do are actually performed in a more or less mechanised fashion, and that applies to consumption too. For example, our shopping routines are highly automatic, our media devices (eg, TV sets) often operate without anyone paying much attention to them, and we frequently eat or drink whilst being entirely absorbed in some other activity (eg, checking social media messages). As a result, it seems that the proper unit of normative consideration is not so much the individual action tokens but rather the individual practices of which they are mere enactments. In fact, given that individual practices are almost always the result of social practices (especially since exposure to the latter is how we usually come to acquire the former), the concept

⁵ Bendell (2018: np).

⁶ Beddington (2009: 1).

of *practice* as such is of great importance to ethics and politics. Connecting chapters 2 and 3, we will see that well-composed individual practice portfolios are centrally among the things that human beings need to flourish.

However, given that the individual can be reasonably expected to acquire only those practices that are part of her political community's portfolio, that community (of which the individual is a part, of course) has a responsibility to ensure that its portfolio too is well-developed – which is one of the subjects discussed in chapter 4. After that, I introduce the anthropological concept of *liminality* and demonstrate its usefulness with regard to the practice portfolio management of political communities. Prior to both of these issues though, I address a different question that crucially concerns human consumption in a world of scarcity: as a matter of justice, what resources can individuals claim and how should these claims be prioritised? Staying within my prior conceptual framework, the answer makes reference to various degrees of human need-satisfaction.

In the final part, we turn toward the individual perspective and therefore to the ethics of consumption. While chapter four focussed upon the community's responsibility for the development and composition of the communal practice portfolio, we now turn our attention to the individual's responsibility for the development and composition of her individual practice portfolio. I argue that my normative approach is better able to account for consumer responsibility than others, in particular the action-centred one put forward in a recent publication on global consumer ethics. In the second section, I discuss what some might consider a curious phenomenon, namely the problem of object alienation. Given that objective connectedness is one of the human needs identified in chapter three, I consider how we can improve our attachment to the objects in our lives and why that helps us flourish. In the final section, I critically assess two practices in particular, namely *television media consumption* and *museum consumption*. I use them to demonstrate how my need- and practice-centred approach can be applied to the analysis of activities that we do, or should, perform on a frequent basis.

Before we engage in any of these considerations, however, we need to perform some groundwork in chapter 1 first. It is there that I outline what consumerism is and why it is problematic. It is there that I conceptualise what *consumption* actually means, and how it differs from another important phenomenon, *production*. And it is there also that we consider the characteristics of our social ecology more generally, because human production and consumption have been having various, quite dramatic effects on the environment(s) in which we operate.

One further matter. Throughout this work, I refer to practices of the Amish, a small seventeenth century offshoot of the Mennonites (another persecuted Anabaptist sect that grew out of the Protestant Reformation struggles in sixteenth century Europe). First arriving on North America's shores in 1737, the Protestant group lived quietly and invisibly as part of the rural population. In 1937, that inconspicuousness ended when the eastern Lancaster County Amish publicly protested the conversion of their one-room/one-teacher community schools into a consolidated public elementary school, the school-year extension from eight months to nine, and the raising of mandatory schooling years from eight to nine. Hiding their children at home, the Amish, in an unprecedented move, engaged lawyers to fight school conversion and the new education legislation all the way to the US Court of Appeals.⁷ Since then, other conflicts with the state have generated national visibility, though the Anabaptists are now largely noted for their dissent from the national mantra of economic growth, technological progress, and unconstrained consumerism. In fact, my reason for favouring the Amish as a research subject is their enduring success in precisely that regard: no other countercultural community has been able to exist in the very midst of American consumer culture, to resist its allure, and to greatly flourish nevertheless for nearly as long. I would have preferred to write about a non-religious community, or one in which religion plays a much less central role, because

⁷ For details, see Meyers (2003).

the approach I develop is secular (in the sense that it revolves entirely around human flourishing as the ultimate end⁸). However, there simply is no other counter-consumerist group with an equally enduring and impressive success story. Not a few, academics included, expected the Amish to disappear in the second half of the twentieth century.⁹ Instead, between 1951 and 2016 their ranks grew organically from roughly 28,000 to 308,000 (3.8% compound annual growth rate, more than triple that of the total US population) and the number of their church districts from 202 to 2,259.¹⁰ Since their original arrival on the *Charming Nancy* in Philadelphia, the Amish have spread to 31 US states and three Canadian provinces. They represent a vibrant collective and a viable non-consumerist cultural option, and I will demonstrate their significance for my project soon enough.

Without further ado, let us get started.

⁸ As opposed to what we might call 'biblical flourishing' (where the ultimate end is indexed to divinity).

⁹ Kraybill et al (2013).

¹⁰ Ibid; Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies (bit.ly/2Y0BvpB, accessed 08.07.2016).

1. Consumption and Consumerism

In the fluorescent glare of the inner light an endless column of tin-bright insects and gleaming reptiles marched up diagonally, from left to right, out of some hidden source of nightmare towards an unknown and monstrous consummation. *Gongylus gongyloides* by millions and, in the midst of them, innumerable bloodsuckers. Eating and being eaten – for ever.

*Aldous Huxley*¹¹

The beauty of Huxley's quote lies in the sense of horror conveyed through the combination of multiple elements that are also characteristic of modern Western consumerism: legions of beautifully dressed yet menacing creatures, the collective drive toward some hideous culmination (consummation, from *consummāre*, one of the Latin roots of *consumption*), and one of the most basic forms of repeatedly performed life-preserving destruction, feeding, which always entails something, or someone, else being fed upon. Consumption cannot occur without destruction, and mass consumption cannot occur without mass destruction. Yet, as we will see in section 1.2, it does not occur for the sake of ruin as such. By definition, consumption has a constructive element, otherwise the activity would have to be labelled 'waste' instead.

Before we engage in that conceptual work though, I will characterise and assess contemporary consumerism as we currently find it in highly developed countries (HDCs) first. I will discuss various ways in which our consumption fails to benefit or, worse, positively harms us, frequently along with many third parties who participate in the processes that either precede or succeed the utilisation of commodities (1.1). In addition, toward the end of the chapter I will argue that our post-industrial consumer society can be characterised in terms of conditions that represent accelerating teeming turbulence, and possibly even vortical environments (1.3). These features play important roles in subsequent chapters.

1.1. Characterising Consumerism

The consumption behaviours and structures found in the Western world after the Industrial Revolution – often called *modern consumerism* or *mass consumption* – have been critically assessed by various scholars and for some time. Many of these works have achieved considerable popularity even outside of academic circles, for example, Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, and Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*.¹² Naturally, I cannot comprehensively review that, by now, extensive literature here. Instead, I focus on a number of key issues that can be addressed from the perspective of the ethical approach that I develop in this thesis.

¹¹ Huxley (1962: 274).

¹² Veblen (2007), Weber (1930), Riesman (1950), Galbraith (1984), and Marcuse (1991).

1.1.1. Western Consumerism

Historically, the particular economic frameworks geared towards, and the individual sensibilities directed at, the mass-acquisition and -enjoyment of market commodities originated and developed in a reasonably identifiable set of countries, notably in Central Europe – particularly the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and France – and its main colonies, especially the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. It is with these HDCs that contemporary Western mass-consumption is primarily associated, and it is they, different though they are, on which I will broadly focus.

The reasons for which I pay special attention to what started off as American mass-consumer culture may be almost too obvious to state:

- *Product Innovation and Volume*: After World War 2, the US produced nearly as many goods as the rest of the globe altogether, creating the impression of a land of milk and honey.¹³ Granted, America's ideological competitor, the Soviet Union, was the first nation to put men in space. Yet, when it came to kitchen debates¹⁴, the Russians fought a losing battle. American consumer products set the standards for decades, both qualitatively and quantitatively.
- *Cultural Hegemony*: As part of America's advancing cultural post-war imperialism¹⁵, the message of the pursuit of happiness through consumption quickly took hold throughout the Western world, starting with the US-occupied parts of the Old Continent. Unsurprisingly, American wealth and abundance were highly alluring for the war-worn Europeans, especially young people. Millions of GIs – young, well-fed and healthy, nonchalant, sex- and fun-hungry, with plentiful supplies of cigarettes, nylons, chocolate, and other attractive goods – effectively played the role of first-hour consumption ambassadors.¹⁶
- *Communicative Dominance*: Being the world leader at developing and producing communication technology for decades after the war, the US was “the most visible and audible land of the world”¹⁷, which made spreading the gospel of consumption all the more effective. Even when the hardware became increasingly Japanese- and European-made, the cultural ‘software’ predominantly remained American, or at least heavily Americanised. Even today, the world's most structurally powerful media entities are US-based transnational media corporations.¹⁸ As a global super-industry, they provide most of the world's imaginary content in a cartel-like fashion.¹⁹
- *Global Brands*: Like America's media corporations, US consumer goods companies became transnational players and introduced American brands (physically through products, ideally²⁰ through advertising) to markets around the world. For example, of the ten largest fast-moving

¹³ Wagnleitner (1999: 476).

¹⁴ At the 1959 American National Exhibition at Sokolniki Park in Moscow, an entire ‘typical American house’ filled with labour-saving and recreational devices was exhibited to demonstrate the benefits of the capitalist consumer market. At the famous impromptu meeting between Nixon and Khrushchev in the kitchen section of the house, the former proposed that it would “be better to compete in the relative merit of washing machines than in the strength of rockets” (Safire, 2009: A25).

¹⁵ It may have been resented and resisted in some places, but was ‘an empire by invitation’ in many others (Wagnleitner, 1999).

¹⁶ Wagnleitner (1999). Of course, the relationships with their hosts were fraught with frictions (for Germany, see Höhn, 2002).

¹⁷ Wagnleitner (1999: 476).

¹⁸ Including Walt Disney, Comcast-NBC-Universal, News Corporation, Time Warner, Viacom, CBS Corporation, and Liberty Media. For details, see Mirrlees (2013).

¹⁹ Miller (2002).

²⁰ Meaning *representing or embodying an idea or conception, not regarded as perfect or supremely excellent in its kind*.

consumer good (FMCG) conglomerates in 2015²¹, six are US companies²² and one is the result of mergers of international groups from the US, Belgium, and Brazil²³.

Although the citizens of countries like Luxembourg, Norway, Switzerland, and Germany do not trail far behind²⁴, Americans are still the planet's most profligate consumers in general. According to 2014 data, the average monthly consumption expenditures for goods and services in the US have reached the staggering amount of US\$8,150 per household, or US\$3,150 per capita.²⁵

Another quick terminological remark. 'Consumerism' has various meanings. Originally, the term denoted the advocacy of consumer interests and entitlements.²⁶ These rights, for which Kennedy's 1962 Consumer Bill of Rights was the landmark legislation (which served as the basis for the 1985 United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection²⁷ in turn), are now legally codified in many countries. However, more recently the term acquired a rather different set of meanings.²⁸ It now refers to

- *Ethical Doctrine*: commodity consumption represents the essence of the good life (which is the antithesis to the Puritan ethic of self-denial);
- *Social Ideology*: the utilisation of goods and services – rather than the individual's religion, work, or political orientation – is the proper source of social and status distinctions (conspicuous consumption);
- *Economic Ideology*: the proper objective of economic development is the realisation of ever-higher material standards of living;
- *Political Ideology*: parties and the state represent demand-focussed providers of political commodities that are marketed and 'sold' like the goods and services in economic marketplaces.²⁹

My use of the term reflects that recent cluster of related meanings, especially the first three. If I refer to the original signification of *consumerism*, I will use a phrase like 'consumer rights movement' instead.

1.1.2. Issues of Contemporary Consumerism

I shall now provide a brief, and necessarily broad-stroke, characterisation of contemporary Western consumption. While I focus primarily on Anglo-American consumer society, the trends outlined below can be found to similar extents in many other Western countries too (for the reasons outlined above). To focus my discussion, I distinguish between five ethical and political issues (that I will ultimately address in chapters 4 and 5 in particular).

²¹ According to OC&C's annual Global 50 FMCG Index (www.occstrategy.com).

²² Procter & Gamble, Pepsico, Coca Cola Company, Tyson Foods, Mondalez, and Archer Daniels Midland.

²³ Anheuser-Busch InBev.

²⁴ Eurostat and OECD databases (actual individual consumption per capita 2011, 2011 PPP).

²⁵ Based on economic data from the US Bureau of Economic Analysis (www.bea.gov).

²⁶ The OED traces this use to the year 1915.

²⁷ See Harland (1987). In 1999, the promotion of sustainable consumption was added to the original seven rights (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2003). It essentially extends consumer rights to future generations.

²⁸ If Wikipedia is an indicator of terminological popularity, this set has crowded out the original signification.

²⁹ See Gabriel & Lang (2015). Geographically, the tone of the term varies significantly. While it is associated with abundance and prosperity in the US, its connotations in Europe are self-interest and vulgar materialism (Bennett et al, 2005).

1.1.2.1. Consumer Injury

As my definition of the concept below bears out, a key aspect of *consumption* is its constructive element. When agents consume, they tend to operate on the basic belief (or at least hope) that they benefit themselves. For instance, food is eaten because it nourishes, clothes worn because they protect, and music listened to because it entertains. Yet, many of the activities contemporarily accounted for under *consumption* actually harm their performers in various ways. Looking ahead to the concepts that I employ in subsequent chapters, I define *harm* or *injury* in terms of human flourishing and needs: an individual suffers harm or injury in a certain respect (eg, regarding a particular human need or set of needs) and during time interval T if and only if there occurs an event such that she would have flourished more in said respect during T had that event not occurred. The characterisation enables us to consider the event's effects with regard to particular time frames and specific aspects (rather than merely human flourishing overall). It allows for harmful actions as well as non-action events, so we can easily account for injuries for which no individual causal actor can be identified.³⁰

Consider eating behaviour in the US. In the early postcolonial period in the States, energy intake was generally sufficient to perform the roughly ten daily hours of heavy labouring (usually on farms). Compared to that amount, contemporary Americans ingest 32% more calories. Between 1980 and 2000 alone, caloric intake grew by 22% – more than one percent annually on average.

Illustration 1: Estimated Average Daily Caloric Intake in the US³¹



At the same time, not only have working weeks become considerably shorter (eg, US manufacturing workers laboured between 65.5-69.0 hours weekly in 1850³² and 41.3 hours in 2000³³ on average), but the work of Westerners has also become considerably less physically laborious on average. For example, in 1841 22% of British workers were employed in agriculture and fishing, 36% in manufacturing, and 33% in services. By 2011, these numbers had changed to one percent, nine percent, and 81% respectively.³⁴ Roughly the same occurred in the US, although it was initially much less industrialised, of course.³⁵

³⁰ For various problems associated with counterfactual comparison accounts of harm, see Hanser (2013).

³¹ Data from Floud et al (2011: 314, Table 6.6). After 1840, a considerable decline in diet occurred due to wheat, rye, pork, and beef shortages when domestic food production could not keep up with rapid population growth (also due to immigration). Average caloric intakes recovered only after the Civil War.

³² US Department of Interior's Census Office (1883) and US Senate (1893).

³³ US Census Bureau (2007).

³⁴ UK Office for National Statistics (2013).

³⁵ See Gallman & Weiss (1969).

In effect, caloric requirements have long been declining while caloric intake has been steadily increasing, although even the early postcolonial diet would now be far too rich for most people. The estimated caloric needs for a middle-aged (36-40 years old) sedentary, moderately active, or active male are 2,400, 2,600, and 2,800 calories daily respectively; a female requires 1,800, 2,000, and 2,200 calories respectively. The actual caloric intake differential explains why excessive body fat has become a major health concern in the US. Among adults aged 20 years or older, 35.1% are now classified as obese (BMI over 30) and another 33.9% as overweight (BMI between 25-30)³⁶, resulting in substantially raised risks of morbidity from type-2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, a variety of cancers, and other conditions.³⁷ In other words, when a typical middle-aged moderately active American woman consumes food containing the average estimated daily 3,900 calories, almost half of her feast counts as overconsumption that is not merely unnecessary but actually injurious. In December 2016, the National Center for Health Statistics reported that for the first time in over two decades the average American life expectancy at birth had declined³⁸, with obesity widely cited as leading cause in the US media.

Part of the explanation for America's excessive energy intake can be found in the growth of ultra-processed edible products, the rates of production and consumption of which began to accelerate in the 1980s.³⁹ Ultra-processed food products "are made from processed substances extracted or refined *from* whole foods – eg, oils, hydrogenated oils and fats, flours and starches, variants of sugar, and cheap parts or remnants of animal foods"⁴⁰ (ie, industrial ingredients and additives⁴¹) but contain little or nothing by way of *actual* whole foods (which they are often designed to resemble in look, smell, feel and taste).⁴² They are typically energy-dense; high in glycaemic load and unhealthy types of dietary fat, free sugars, and sodium; and low in dietary fibre, micronutrients, and phytochemicals.⁴³ As Illustration 2 shows, since 1938 the share of ultra-processed food products in the average Canadian household food basket has been steadily and significantly increasing. It now represents more than half of the diet of Canadians.

³⁶ Ogden et al (2014).

³⁷ National Institutes of Health (1998).

³⁸ Xu et al (2016).

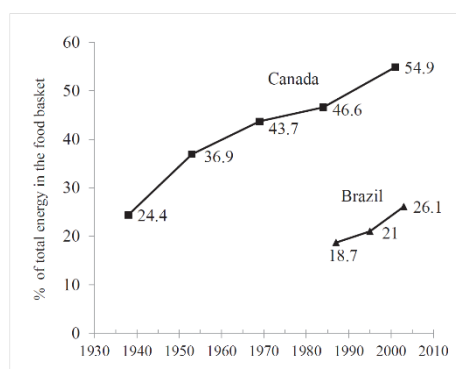
³⁹ Monteiro et al (2012).

⁴⁰ Moodie et al (2013; italics added).

⁴¹ "Numerically, the great majority of the ingredients of ultra-processed products are additives of a variety of types, which include preservatives; stabilisers, emulsifiers, solvents, binders, bulkers; sweeteners, sensory enhancers, flavours, and colours" (Monteiro et al, 2012: 550).

⁴² I follow the classification in Monteiro et al (2012), which distinguishes between three groups, namely foods, culinary ingredients, and food products, and within the third between processed food products, alcoholic drinks, and ultra-processed products.

⁴³ Moodie et al (2013).

Illustration 2: Share of Ultra-Processed Products in the Average Household Food Basket⁴⁴

Considering the example of a developing country that has recently been emerging as an economic world power, Brazil's dietary change is currently trailing behind Canada's by about half a century, but the trend is clear: "As societies become more urbanized, as available income grows and as the proportion of women employed outside the home increases, ready-to-eat and ready-to-heat food products become convenient and attractive choices"⁴⁵. Profit-seeking corporate entities happily promote and address that demand by formulating convenient, highly durable, and hyper-palatable products that subsequently replace unprocessed and minimally processed foods.⁴⁶

Ultra-processed food products are becoming dominant in the global food system as a whole.⁴⁷ Corporations, often the previously mentioned transnational FMCG conglomerates, manufacture these products on massive scales and aggressively market them globally, especially targeting children and young people to mould their food consumption habits early in life.⁴⁸

I will address the phenomenon of ultra-processed products further below because they represent merely one example of objects that, apart from the purchase act, require virtually no pre-consumption activity of their consumers.

1.1.2.2. Consumer Inefficiency

With regard to the utilisation of various resources other than food, the claim that consumption harms the performer is less plausible. However, the weaker claim that it is inefficient is not. Let us conceptualise *efficiency* in terms of resource input *vs* well-being output, such that inefficient consumption represents the utilisation of a resource that could be employed for the sake of gaining a greater amount of well-being otherwise or elsewhere.

Consider accommodation in the US. Helping to alleviate the immense post-war housing shortage, providing an investment outlet for war-time savings, and fuelling not only America's building and construction industries but also, indirectly, the manufacturing of home equipment⁴⁹, the famous GI Bill's low-cost loan guaranty programme was successful in many ways. By 1956, 42% of WW2 veterans had become homeowners⁵⁰, contributing

⁴⁴ Monteiro et al (2013: 24).

⁴⁵ Ibid: 14.

⁴⁶ Monteiro et al (2012).

⁴⁷ Monteiro et al (2013).

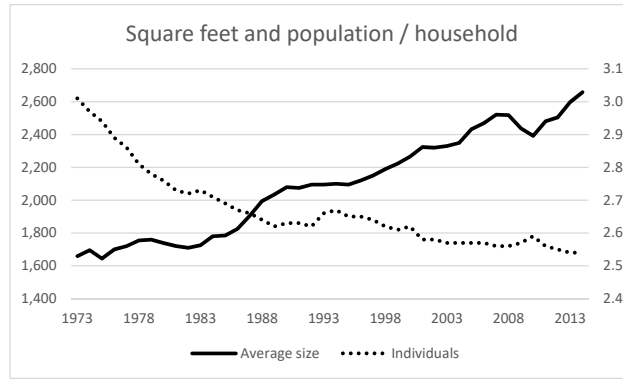
⁴⁸ Monteiro et al (2012).

⁴⁹ In addition to driving demand for such equipment, home ownership also ensured solvency because it could be used to secure further consumer credit. What is more, some US states offered veterans additional loans to assist in purchasing household furnishings and appliances (L. Cohen, 2003).

⁵⁰ L. Cohen (2003).

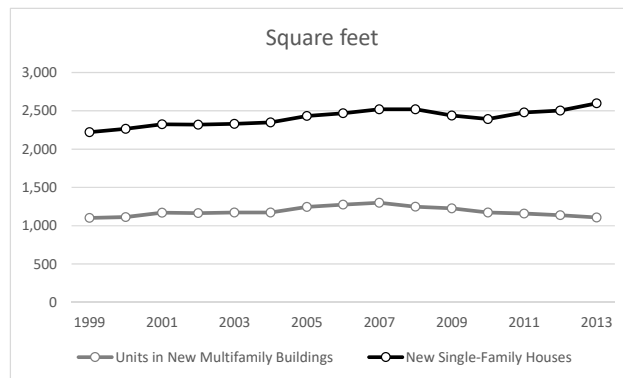
to quickly rising homeownership rates. America’s suburbanisation, the mass-move from urban apartment dwelling to single-family housing outside the inner city had begun. During the 1950s, inner-city populations in the twenty largest metropolitan areas increased by merely 0.1%, suburban ones by 45%.⁵¹ The trend continued throughout the century. While only 15.3% of the US population lived in the suburbs of metropolitan areas in 1940, by 2000 that percentage had skyrocketed to 50.0.⁵²

Illustration 3: Floor Area in New Single-Family Houses and Household Size, US⁵³



Alongside the shift in location, the average US dwelling has been swelling in size rapidly due to the prodigious growth of the footprints of single-family houses. In 1950, the average floor size of new single-family houses had been roughly 1,000 square feet.⁵⁴ By 2014, it had grown to 2,657 square feet – a 165% increase. Once we take into account that, at the same time, the average US household size has been shrinking continuously (from 3.4 persons in 1950 to 2.5 in 2014⁵⁵), dwelling size growth rates become more impressive yet: average square footage per inhabitant in new single-family houses grew from roughly 300 in 1950 to 1,046 in 2014, representing a 250% increase.

Illustration 4: Floor Area in New Single-Family Houses and Units in New Multi-Family Buildings, US⁵⁶



⁵¹ The single-family houses’ share of New Jersey’s housing stock bourgeoned from seven percent in 1950 to 64% a decade later (ibid).
⁵² Hobbs et al (2002).
⁵³ Square footage data from US Department of Commerce (2014); household size data from US Census Bureau (2015).
⁵⁴ Wilson & Boehland (2005).
⁵⁵ Data from US Census Bureau (2015).
⁵⁶ Data from US Department of Commerce (2014).

By contrast, the average size of units in new multi-family buildings, the kind of houses typically found in inner cities, has been changing little. Between 1999 and 2007, average square footage in these units grew from 1,104 to 1,300 (17.8%), but by 2013 it had dropped right back to 1,107. During the same period, new single-family house size grew by 375 square feet on average, a full third the size of a 1999/2013 unit in new multi-family buildings.

The average size across *all* dwelling types in the 28 member states of the European Union (aka EU-28) is 1,101 square feet (102.3 square metres), a number close to the averages of Italy, France, Spain, Finland, and Germany (98.7, 101.8, 102.8, 104.0, and 106.8 square metres respectively). In all of these countries roughly 90% of the population are satisfied or very satisfied with their dwellings⁵⁷, indicating that high degrees of human well-being require dwellings no larger than the average American apartment.⁵⁸

Compared to the central need satisfied by housing, namely *shelter*, typical American single-family dwellings are vastly less resource-efficient than their multi-family correspondents. Not only do they require a considerably greater amount of scarce building materials to begin with, but the increased accommodation size has a direct follow-on effect upon the utilisation of other goods and services too. An empty abode is not a home, after all. A dwelling becomes accommodating only through furnishings, including furniture, rugs and carpets, curtains, and wall-decoration; what is more, empty furniture invites content in turn. The larger the dwelling, the correspondingly greater the follow-on consumption (along with whatever services are required to maintain the objects). Thus, it is not surprising that researchers have found strong links between housing type and consumption volume of said items. According to Norwegian research, for example, households living in single-family houses spend twice as much on consumption related to indoor and outdoor maintenance, household equipment, furniture, and equipment for recreational purposes as households living in multi-family dwellings.⁵⁹ At the same time, there is no empirical evidence that such increased spending level has the people in the former households live better lives.

Mass-suburbanisation and growing dwelling size at least partially explain the volume of usable and appreciable⁶⁰ currently found in America's homes. Although the estimated number of 300,000 objects owned by the average US household reported 2014 in the *Los Angeles Times*⁶¹ seems inflated, the following testimony from an ethno-archaeological study conducted in suburban Los Angeles family homes a few years prior certainly does not:

The first household assemblage we analysed, of Family 27, resulted in a tally of 2,260 visible possessions in the first three rooms coded (two bedrooms and the living room) [...] Family 27 has these thousands of possessions in only a portion of their modest-sized (980 square feet) house's rooms, and they are not at all unique in our study. Small wonder that quite a few of the sampled L.A. houses, which average 1,750 square feet of living space, feel overstuffed and cluttered.⁶²

As the researchers' tallies do not include "untold numbers of items tucked into dresser drawers, boxes, and cabinets or items positioned behind other items"⁶³, their counts are very conservative compared to what families actually own. Like many others before them, the investigators found a pervasive display of hyper-consumerism: homes full of possessions that do not only organise and define but positively engulf their inhabitants.

⁵⁷ 2012 data (Eurostat, 2014b).

⁵⁸ In 2014, EU-28's average household size was 2.3 persons (Eurostat, 2014a).

⁵⁹ Høyer & Holden (2001).

⁶⁰ Use objects and objects that exist purely to be appreciated (see section 1.2 for details).

⁶¹ MacVean (2014).

⁶² Arnold et al (2012: 25).

⁶³ Ibid.

In fact, the researchers highlighted that the living spaces of most Americans do not actually suffice to contain the mass of their belongings any longer:

Cars have been banished from 75 percent of garages to make way for rejected furniture and cascading bins and boxes of mostly forgotten household goods. Our analysis suggests that close to 90 percent of garage square footage in middle-class L.A. neighborhoods may now be used for storage rather than automobiles.⁶⁴

Once US garages had been filled with the collateral objects of consumerist conquest, families had to find home-external space, and the self-storage industry happily responded: one in ten US households now rents a self-storage unit, enabling families to accumulate even more objects. What had once been a service for managing short-term logistical problems (eg, during household moves) increasingly became a long-term solution for managing the effects of over-accumulation. By 2007, “[f]ifty percent of renters were now simply storing what wouldn’t fit in their homes”⁶⁵. In fact, 15% of self-storage customers volunteered they were storing items that they no longer needed or wanted, a number projected to have been grown to one in four renters in 2008. As these stored objects are literally useless and do not promote well-being at all, we can hardly speak of consumption anymore. Rather, the resources in question are completely wasted – with regard to both storage facilities and what sits inside them.

Children are as much subject to growing accumulation of possessions as adults. For instance, in their 1972/73 North Carolina sample, researchers counted an average of 91 toys and furnishings (in 13 classes⁶⁶) in the rooms of 6-year old children.⁶⁷ By 2010, the number of toys owned by an average ten-year-old in the UK (also in 13 classes) had reportedly grown to 238.⁶⁸ Given that US children make up only 3.1% of the global child population but Americans buy over forty percent of the toys consumed world-wide⁶⁹, the number is likely much higher in North-America. In the aforementioned LA households investigated by ethno-archaeologists, the possessions of parents were crowded out to a degree such that even home offices and studies were crammed with toys and other belongings of their progeny. Research data suggest that “each new child in a household leads to a 30 percent increase in a family’s inventory of possessions during the preschool years alone”⁷⁰.

Compare these numbers with the standard household inventories of Americans who lived just one or two hundred years ago. 18th-/19th-century probate records tell us what early-industrial individuals owned at their time of death. For example, take the estate of widow Elizabeth Davis who died in 1825 in Brookhaven, Long Island:

One axe; one pair of andirons and dogs; a crane, a shovel and tongs set, one frying pan, one tea kettle, and two pots; a water pail, a small stove, and two pots to go on it; two bedsteads, two featherbeds, two tables, three chairs, four trunks, some bowls, plates and tableware; one half barrel of wheat flour, twenty pounds of salt beef, and four rods of firewood.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Ibid: 44.

⁶⁵ Mooallem (2009).

⁶⁶ Eg, toy vehicles, dolls, stuffed animals, and sports equipment.

⁶⁷ Rheingold & Cook (1975).

⁶⁸ See Plasket (2014).

⁶⁹ Arnold et al (2012).

⁷⁰ Ibid: 36.

⁷¹ Cowan (1983); for an analysis of 17th-/18th-century English probate inventories, see Weatherill (1996).

Granted, Davis was not well-off, but her neighbour Ruth Mulford did rather well, and she owned relatively few durable things in addition:

A piggin (a milk pail), sieves, stone jugs, and a churn; a large keg with soap grease in it; cards, a spinning wheel, a reel, and some woollen rolls; a bake pan and four large wooden bowls; a coffee mill; twenty-three sheets, eleven tablecloths, twenty-four pillowcases, twelve towels, and six bed quilts.⁷²

Even if the number of items representing the contents of an average 18th-/19th-century household runs into low three-digit territory, the contrast with contemporary household inventories is stunning.

We find an equally impressive difference if we consider refuse. Until just over a century ago, “post-consumer waste had been mostly organic: ashes, food wastes, animal carcasses, and shit”, plus a few “other forms of solid waste: cracked ceramics, glass shards, tattered clothes, broken furniture, metal bits”⁷³. The former was mostly used to supplement soil; the latter was exceedingly rare because rather than being discarded, “most such objects were repaired (collars and coats turned, shoes resoled, tin pots patched) or put to inventive reuse (a broken bowl becomes a scoop, tattered trousers a mop) in an array of marvellous and banal practices”⁷⁴. By contrast, the average per capita generation of municipal solid waste in the US in 2015 was 4.5 lbs daily, up from 2.7 lbs in 1960.⁷⁵

While object stewardship and bricolage (that I discuss in chapter 5) were central characteristics of the human relationship with material objects till the 19th century, the onset of product disposability offered “deliverance from the obligation to care for things”⁷⁶. Contemporary obsolescence figures indicate that, in addition to consuming and using ever more items, these goods pass through the lives of Western consumers at an ever-increasing pace too. For example, consider the changes in first-user service life durations for large household appliances in Germany during the eight years following 2004:

Illustration 5: Average First-User Service Life Durations (Years), Large Household Appliances⁷⁷

Appliance type	2004	2012/13	Change
Washing machines	12.7	11.9	-6.3%
Clothes dryers	13.6	11.9	-12.5%
Dish washers	12.1	12.4	2.5%
Fridges	15.6	14.4	-7.7%
Freezers	18.2	15.5	-14.8%
Fridge/freezer combinations	14.1	12.6	-10.6%
Electric stoves	15.2	13.8	-9.2%
Total	14.1	13.0	-7.8%

Within a mere decade, these appliances exit the household that originally bought them more than a year sooner on average, attesting to increasing rates of material through-put (*ceteris paribus*). In categories such as *consumer electronics*, usables get replaced both far more quickly and at greater rates of acceleration yet. For example, 42% of German smart phone users replace their handsets at least every two years now, 58% at least every three

⁷² The inventory suggests that Mulford “had either purchased linen or cotton fabric for finishing or made these articles at some time in the past (when, presumably, she had owned the appropriate tools) and was holding them for sale in the future” (ibid: 35).

⁷³ Goldstein (2012: 329).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Of that, 26% are paper and paperboard, 13% plastics, and nine percent metals. The numbers do not include industrial, hazardous, and construction/demolition waste (US Environmental Protection Agency, 2018).

⁷⁶ Strasser (1999: 270).

⁷⁷ Prakash et al (2016).

years. Only 19% of users do so because of an actual technical defect or due to weak batteries. The vast majority, 68%, simply want a new model or upgrade because their network provider offers (and encourages) it.⁷⁸

When it comes to clothing, obsolescence is even more prominent. While apparel mongers sold their garments on the basis of four annual seasons (summer, autumn, winter, spring) until just a few years ago, recently so called *fast fashion retailers*⁷⁹ such as Zara, H&M, and Topshop have been shortening their annual fashion cycles to periods of a mere 4-6 weeks, in extreme cases pushing 20 seasons per year.⁸⁰ The vendors explain and justify these accelerations by asserting market demand. Obsessed with the latest trends in popular culture, they argue, consumers want to buy things worn on the catwalk or by celebrities. Yet, their fickle moods have them abandon these wardrobes just as quickly – a characterisation reminiscent of Campbell’s type-3 neophiliac: fashion fanatics who, bored with the familiar and craving for stylistic novelty, are subject to “a rapidly changing and continuous sequence of new wants”⁸¹. Unsurprisingly, the average per-capita generation of textile municipal solid waste in the US was about 1 lbs in every four days in 2013, up from 1 lbs in about 20 days in 1960.⁸²

Yet, the causal explanation of accelerating obsolescence, be it psychological or technological, is not as simple as fashion retailers would have us believe. For example, type-3 neophiliacs do not represent individuals whose pre-existing, dormant psychology just happens to actualise itself now, revealing the fashion addicts we truly are. Neither do they represent a group of people whose psychology somehow transformed itself autonomously, leaving manufacturers and retailers no option but to adapt. Considering the investigative principle *cui bono*, commodity suppliers clearly do not only have a motive to promote a personal identity that revolves around the discretionary features of one’s chosen wardrobe and other possessions. They also have a motive to manipulate the aesthetic judgements that have become the basis for ascertaining individual and group difference, thereby participating in what Bourdieu calls *taste terrorism*, the ridiculing, shaming, and silencing of those “who simply fall short, in the eyes of their judges, of the right way of being and doing”⁸³. In fact, ample documentation exists that the induction of appearance-based feelings of shame and pride has been a frequently and widely pursued corporate sales tactic aimed to provoke consumers into making commodity purchases.⁸⁴ In this context, a discussion of positional consumption – ie, the consumption of positional goods (items the utility of which depends at least partially on social scarcity⁸⁵) – is also pertinent. However, due to space restrictions I must leave this topic for another occasion.

From an aggregate perspective, the inefficiency of modern Western consumption, compared to both how Westerners used to consume merely a few decades ago and how most people in non-HDCs consume to date, is illustrated by the empirical data that bear out the Preston curve.

⁷⁸ Stiftung Warentest (2013).

⁷⁹ The term *fast fashion* actually derives from the phenomenon of supply chain time compression (rather than the fact that consumers replace their wardrobe with increasing speed now). For details, see Hines & Bruce (2007).

⁸⁰ Christopher, Lowson, & Peck (2004) and Hines (2007). As Joy et al put it, “[f]ashion, more than any other industry in the world, embraces obsolescence as a primary goal; fast fashion simply raises the stakes” (2012: 276).

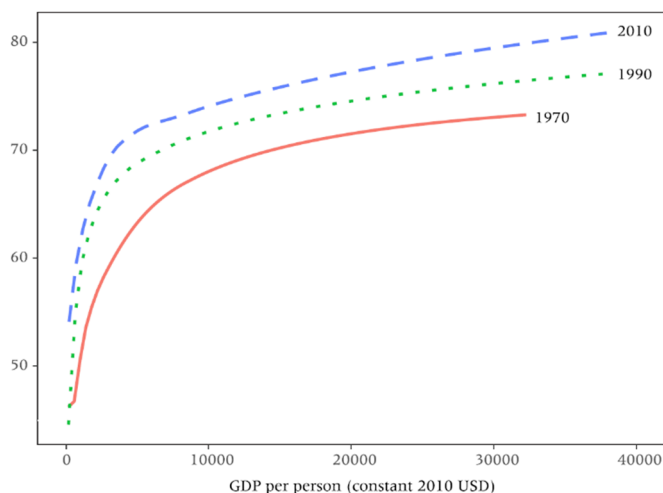
⁸¹ Campbell (1992: 56).

⁸² US Environmental Protection Agency (2018).

⁸³ Bourdieu (1984: 511).

⁸⁴ Eg, Slade (2006).

⁸⁵ Hirsch (2005). For instance, social rank is scarce in that sense because the relatively higher one individual’s social rank is, the relatively lower the rank of others must be. If the perceived luxuriousness or fashionability of clothes socially elevates their wearer, then these clothes are positional goods. See also Lichtenberg (2014), especially chapter 6.

Illustration 6: Relationship Between Real GDP per Person and Life Expectancy at Birth⁸⁶

The curve visualises associations between income and life expectancy. For the illustration above, data from 174 countries (both developed and developing) for the years 1970, 1990, and 2010 were used. Beyond a certain national GDP (presumed to reflect a particular level of average individual consumption), increased income is associated with barely significant life expectancy changes.⁸⁷ That the curve moves upward over time is due to factors other than income, especially medical progress.⁸⁸ If we assume that the causality runs from income to health⁸⁹, however indirectly, and that life expectancy reflects individual well-being with some degree of accuracy, then any further increases in consumption beyond USD 20,000 GDP per capita (indexed to 2010) are highly inefficient because they make the consumer little better off. In fact, we may even go as low as USD 10,000. GDP per capita in the US (in constant 2010 USD) had already surpassed 20,000 in 1965, and it exceeded twice that amount in 1997.⁹⁰ In other words, the marginal returns of greater average consumption have been vanishingly small in the US (and plausibly all other HDCs) for more than half a century. That we have been ruining Earth's biosphere and climate for such little return is all the more tragic.

1.1.2.3. Object Alienation

Human beings have the ability to form a variety of bonds of various strengths. Not only can we develop relationships with other people and with non-human animals, but we can also become attached to physical objects. For example, consider the child who refuses to leave home for the holidays without that old, worn-out teddy bear for which, in the eyes of her parents, she has already become much too old; or the adult who refuses to go climbing without her old, repeatedly mended mountaineering backpack, even though she was given a new one quite some

⁸⁶ Lutz & Kebede (2018).

⁸⁷ We find a rather similar curve if we plot national income or GDP per capita against self-reported happiness (Layard, 2011; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). However, for the moment I will steer clear of subjective happiness measures because they are notoriously unreliable. Subjective happiness is affected by personal expectations, and human beings seem to be able to adjust their expectations to great degrees both up- and downwards (Graham, 2009).

⁸⁸ See Lutz & Kebede (2018).

⁸⁹ According to Pritchett & Summers (1996), country differences in income-per-capita growth rates from 1960-90 explain roughly 40% of the worldwide cross-country differences in mortality improvements, which indicates a positive causal relationship between income and health.

⁹⁰ Data from World Bank (data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD?locations=US, accessed 30.01.2019).

time ago. Whether we claim that such bonds represent “at bottom a kind of love”⁹¹ or consider them in terms of a less conceptually laden *object/objective relationship*, the ability to become attached to objects – just like the capacity to connect with living creatures – is relevant to human flourishing because it affects individual well-being.

Sometimes object attachment is almost automatically associated with what we might call the *materialist attitude* or *materialist value orientation*. Materialism in that sense can be characterised in terms of *acquisition centrality* (meaning that the person’s plans and goals revolve around high levels of material consumption), *happiness as acquisition* (possessions are considered essential to life satisfaction and well-being), and *success as accumulation* (achievements of self and others are judged in terms of quantity and quality of accumulated possessions).⁹² However, there is no necessary link between materialism of that kind and an object attachment that affords benefits like continuity and stability:

Surrounded by our things, we are rooted in and visually continuous with our pasts. Surrounded by our things, we are sheltered from the many forces that would deflect us into new concepts, practices, and experiences. These forces include our own acts of imagination, the constructions of others, the shock of personal tragedy, and simple forgetfulness. As Arendt has suggested, things are our ballast. They stabilize us by reminding us of our past, by making this past a virtual, substantial part of our present.⁹³

By helping us contextualise particular performances (ours and those of others) and other events within the narratives that represent, or that we believe to represent, life stories, objects play an important role with regard to creating a meaningful existence. For example, the aforementioned climbing pack that has been worn out over the course of countless mountaineering trips helps the agent associate her current expedition with a climbing career that may span decades.

Belongings scaffold the sense of who a person was and is, and possibly also who she aspires to become, even if her identity is diametrically opposed to materialism as defined above. For example, when Francis of Assisi underwent his spiritual conversion, he fashioned himself a cross-shaped tunic “of the roughest stuff that therein he may crucify the flesh with [its] vices and sins”, “most poor and mean, and such as by no means to excite the world’s covetousness”⁹⁴. The qualities of his intentionally simple, unattractive, and uncomfortable garment impressed upon him and others the centrality of the idea around which the entire Franciscan movement would revolve, namely the deliberate poverty of Christ – which is precisely why Francis, in contrast to ordinary, involuntary paupers, could not simply wear charitable garment donations (originally designed to send rather different signals⁹⁵).

As indicated above, Western consumerism can be characterised in terms of both the immense number of commodities that surround the individual at home and the increasingly smaller periods during which these objects remain in the possession of their owners. Both make it impossible for agents to develop high-quality relationships with the objects that constitute the set of her possessions. In fact, one might argue that consumerism must necessarily oppose intense objective bonding:

To be a good consumer, you have to desire to get lots of things, but you must not love any of them too much once you have them. [...] When consumerism succeeds, our attachments are shallow, easily broken, so we can move on to the next thing we’re supposed to get. Being a good consumer means desiring new things, not cherishing old ones.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Cary (2009: 119).

⁹² Richins & Dawson (1992).

⁹³ McCracken (1988: 124).

⁹⁴ Thomas of Celano (1908: 22-23)

⁹⁵ Note what we previously discussed with regard to positional consumption.

⁹⁶ Cary (2009).

Plausibly, such a view presupposes that a) consumerism is driven by corporate profit-seeking and b) corporate profits can be maximised only by selling new products that replace old ones (rather than by offering repair and maintenance services). We can probably grant the former, but the latter is less plausible. Profit-seeking as such is neutral with regard to how profits are made. It is no secret that the so-called aftermarket offers considerable sales potential with regard to many commodity types, and that the provision of after-sales services is significantly more profitable for many companies than the supply of newly manufactured items, even for corporations like General Motors⁹⁷. Thus, a rather different logic presents itself: “The longer the life of the asset, the more [sales] opportunities companies will find down the line”⁹⁸, especially if the object plays an important role in the life and activities of the consumer. In that regard, consumerism need not be antithetical to objective attachment. (Unfortunately, the empiricism of contemporary consumer possessions overall does not bear out such an anti-disposability logic.)

However, even if disposability was overcome, the capital profit-drive behind consumerism requires that individuals utilise highly commoditised objects and services, that is, tangible and intangible entities that are maximally processed by corporate providers. Commoditisation erodes objective attachment too. The more value a producer offers its customers, the more payment it can demand for its commodities – but the less consumers engage in objective bonding activity (*ceteris paribus*).

Given that capital must seek productive employment, privately owned corporations tend to add benefit by assuming tasks that have previously been carried out by consumers themselves (assuming a sufficient return on investment).⁹⁹ During the past two centuries, we have seen the delegation of vast portions of pre- and post-consumption activity to corporate providers in virtually all practical life domains. For instance, take vehicle maintenance and the disappearance of the once-popular image of *a man working on his car*:

The increased computerization of the machinery means that to maintain a car or make repairs one needs sophisticated technology that is unavailable even in basic gas stations, let alone home garages. Calls to the radio show *Car Talk* generate very few questions about *how* to fix something; rather, most callers simply want to get an idea of what their problem is before approaching a mechanic so that they feel less likely to be taken for the proverbial ride.¹⁰⁰

According to Clarke, the computerisation of vehicular machinery prevents home car repairs in two ways. It makes the necessary tools inaccessible to consumers, and, she also seems to intimate, it prevents them from understanding how said machinery actually works. Effectively, either of these suffices to block do-it-yourself activity, thereby foreclosing ways of interacting with the object that allow for rich experience. An individual who spends hours, possibly days and weeks, taking apart her vehicle, cleaning, repairing, and replacing components, and putting everything back together again, thereby learning about its inner workings and particular quirks through immediate practical experience (occasionally making mistakes, fixing them, and in so doing further increasing her practical and theoretical understanding), engages with the automobile far more multifariously than a mere driver. Over time, the more varied interactional experience of the former engenders a far thicker history between consumer and object embodied in a much stronger objective attachment.

⁹⁷ In 2001, GM earned relatively more profits from its after-sales revenues than it did from car sales (M. A. Cohen et al, 2006).

⁹⁸ Ibid: 130.

⁹⁹ In fact, Reid makes the consumer’s tendency to outsource tasks central to her very conceptualisation of *household production* (aka homemaking): “those unpaid activities which are carried on, by and for the [household] members, which [...] might be replaced by market goods, or paid services, if circumstances such as income, market conditions, and personal inclinations permit the service being delegated to someone outside the household group” (1934: 11).

¹⁰⁰ Clarke (2007: 193; original italics).

We find the same recession of DIY with regard to many other consumption goods or domains. For example, consider foods. Until the mid-19th century the majority of US households were classified as farming families¹⁰¹ that produced large portions of their own vegetable produce and livestock¹⁰². Even most non-farmer families grew and raised some of their food until after WW2.¹⁰³ By contrast, the typical 21st-century Western consumer gathers virtually all of his food by visiting brick and mortar stores, or, especially after the Internet retailer Amazon entered into the grocery business, by ordering supplies online – with home deliveries distancing him further from the production sphere of his consumables yet.

Not only have consumers ceased to perform agrarian activity, but their participation in the actual fabrication of victuals has been circumscribed dramatically too. Previously, families “dry-cured pork loin and shoulder and belly and back fat, poached and cooled duck in its own fat in a way that would preserve it for years, and preserved fruit to eat throughout the winter”¹⁰⁴. Now, such activity has been almost universally commercialised. In 1972, 44% of the food payments made by US consumers still went to farmers. By 1997, that number had decreased to 23%¹⁰⁵, indicating the greatly increased amount of value contributed by the processing and trading corporations that stand between growers and consumers. It is no accident that the modern American supermarket stocks 40-50,000 individual items and measures up to 90,000 square feet (about the size of a typical, 120x70m rugby field).¹⁰⁶ While consumers used to purchase a relatively small number of unprocessed goods which they subsequently combined and transformed into a wide variety of edibles at home, that spectrum of fully-processed goods is now hosted in-store.

Tellingly, time use studies have shown that between 1965 and 1995 alone the average US American woman’s time spent performing meal-related activities in the home decreased radically:

Illustration 7: Mean Time Spent on Meal-Related Activity (Minutes/Day)¹⁰⁷

Group of adults	Meal preparation			Meal preparation & cleanup		
	1965	1995	Change	1965	1995	Change
Single male	13.6	15.5	1.9	18.1	17.3	-0.8
Married male, nonworking spouse	6.5	13.2	6.7	9.4	14.4	5.0
Married male, working spouse	8.1	13.2	5.1	11.9	14.4	2.5
All				11.2	15.4	4.2
Single female	38.1	28.9	-9.2	60.1	33.1	-27.0
Married female, working	58.3	35.7	-22.6	84.8	41.4	-43.4
Married female, not working	94.2	57.7	-36.5	137.7	68.8	-68.9
All				105.0	43.9	-61.1
Total				60.6	30.9	-29.7

Within thirty years, the total average American’s meal-related pre- and post-consumption activity was cut in half. If the average person prepares three meals daily, by 1995 he/she spent a mere ten minutes total on each occasion. Judging from the figures for married women (who represent by far the largest share of females in the sets

¹⁰¹ Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variables/FARM, accessed 12.06.2017).

¹⁰² According to Vanek (1974), rural families produced about 70% of their own food in 1924.

¹⁰³ Ruhlman (2017).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid: 15.

¹⁰⁵ Cutler et al (2003).

¹⁰⁶ Ruhlman (2017).

¹⁰⁷ Data from Cutler et al (2003) and Egerton et al (2005).

and who still spend by far the most time performing the tasks in question¹⁰⁸), about half of the overall reduction applies to actual meal preparation (rather than dish-washing and the likes).

Given that both the growing/raising and the subsequent fabrication processes represent key means for the development of objective bonds, the attachment between modern consumers and their edibles – and what the latter mean to the former – has suffered accordingly: “with work comes a heightened appreciation of that work’s result, so when we bring home prepared food and heat it in the microwave or on the stovetop, there’s no one to thank or be grateful for, there’s no deeper appreciation of the food other than whether it tastes okay”¹⁰⁹.

In effect, contemporary consumers are surrounded by objects with which they bond little. Saying that our average object attachments are weak is another way of saying that we are alienated or estranged from our possessions. Just as the people to whom we have no ties are strangers, objects to which we have no attachments are alien to us. If the issue were merely quantitative (in the sense that we have strong attachments to a small set of select objects and weak if any bonds with the vast remainder), it would simply represent a problem of waste that could be solved by having radically fewer possessions. However, the issue is qualitative too. Given the, often radical, ways in which our consumption behaviour has been changing, objective bonds that used to be strong(er) have become weak(er). To repeat part of Cary’s quote, “our attachments are shallow, easily broken, so we can move on to the next thing”¹¹⁰, which is why the various benefits of objective relationships fail to obtain and consumerism deprives us of meaning.

1.1.2.4. Third-Party Injury

Quite beside the effects upon consumers, modern consumerism is associated with a variety of injuries inflicted upon third parties. Often the injured individuals are subjects who participate in and/or are affected by either pre-consumption activity (in the course of which raw materials that originate in various parts of the globe turn into the commodities that are utilised in the households of Western consumers) or post-consumption processes (in the course of which discarded commodities disintegrate or are dismantled). Convenience requires a label for this kind of activity/process sequences, and given that change is essential to all of its components, I will refer to it as *commodity transmutation chain*.¹¹¹

The injuries associated with both parts of the chain (up- and downstream of the consumer) occur in various ways and take various forms. A convenient way to categorise them, though not always cleanly, is this tripartite classification: animal mistreatment, environmental degradation, and human ill-being.¹¹²

First, the *mistreatment of animals* for the sake of human consumption has long been a concern for ethicists. For example, from the perspective of classic utilitarianism¹¹³, it is frequently wrong to farm and slaughter animals because the sum total of their pain and suffering outweighs the pleasure that humankind derives from consuming animal products.¹¹⁴ That applies particularly in the context of factory farming, where animals are frequently subject

¹⁰⁸ Between 1930-1965, the weekly food preparation time spent by female homemakers (women without full-time jobs outside the household) had already dropped by more than 60% (Vanek, 1974).

¹⁰⁹ Ruhlman (2017: 251).

¹¹⁰ Cary (2009).

¹¹¹ Technically, this term is not ideal because not all commodities are objects. Services are too, but they are not subject to transmutation (in the relevant sense).

¹¹² See also Grix (2015).

¹¹³ Popularly applied by Singer (eg, 1975) in particular.

¹¹⁴ The mistreatment of animals for the sake of human entertainment (eg, in circuses and theme/amusement parks) is another example.

to systematic and sustained cruelty. For example, consider the five billion laying hens globally, most of which are kept in wire cages so small that the animals are unable to stretch their wings or even turn around:

Because of the stress, boredom, fear, and close quarters, hens will peck at each other, so most are routinely debeaked, a process that involves a hot blade cutting off the tip of the beak through a thick layer of highly sensitive tissue. Debeaking causes lasting pain and impairs the hen's ability to eat, drink, wipe her beak, and preen normally.¹¹⁵

Little argument is needed to support the claim that the lives of these animals are miserable. Aside from nutrition, few of the birds' needs are met, with most of them not experiencing a natural habitat or any sunlight even once before they expire.

Second, a large variety of issues have been discussed under the broad label of *environmental degradation*. The list includes air, water and soil pollution; deforestation; ocean acidification; and biodiversity loss. Recently, the most prominent has undoubtedly been *climate change*, called a 'consumption tragedy' because it is ultimately driven by an ever-increasing consumption in HDCs.¹¹⁶ However, my focus in this second category is distinctly non-anthropocentric (in contrast to that of climate change, which is frequently concerned with human well-being, especially in the future). Insofar as non-human living entities, perhaps even species and entire biotic communities¹¹⁷, have interests (which, given that they may flourish to lesser and greater degree, is plausible), it is the injuries to them that this category pertains to.

The third category, *human ill-being*, incorporates issues like sweatshop, forced, bonded, and child labour. All of these are frequently discussed in the context of business ethics. However, if they occur in the course of producing consumer goods, they are relevant to my project too. Consumers have at least some *prima facie* responsibility with regard to the relevant injuries, because without their acquisition of commodities we would find a corresponding lack of production activity and associated harms after all.¹¹⁸ The supermarket purchase of fish or chocolate exemplifies how HDC consumers may incur such responsibilities:

- *Debt bondage*, the condition where people pledge their labour (or that of others under their control) without the fair value of that labour being reasonably applied to reducing the debt (and thus the period of bondage), is pervasive throughout commodity transmutation chains worldwide. A recent study found that over three quarters of the migrant workers in Thailand's fishing industry between 2011-17 had been held in debt bondage.¹¹⁹ Thailand supplies numerous US and European retailers with cheap seafood.
- *Child labour*, the performance of hazardous labour (eg, carrying heavy loads and the use of sharp tools) and/or work that exceeds the maximum allowable weekly working hours (depending on age), too is globally ubiquitous. Of the estimated 708,000 children aged 10-17 years who worked in cocoa agriculture in Ghana's medium and high cocoa producing areas between 08/2016 and 08/2017, over 94% performed child labour.¹²⁰ Almost all Ghanaian cocoa is sold internationally.

¹¹⁵ Gruen (2011: 83)

¹¹⁶ Gardiner (2011).

¹¹⁷ Leopold (1949) is widely considered the father of, or at least inspiration for, ecocentrism.

¹¹⁸ This is not to say that the workers would be better off. For instance, sweatshop labour has long been defended by economists on the grounds that it is the most effective measure to lift populations in developing nations out of abject poverty. While the conditions in sweatshops are undoubtedly awful, the defence goes, bad jobs at bad wages are preferable to no jobs and no wages at all (Krugman, 1997).

¹¹⁹ Walk Free Foundation (2018).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

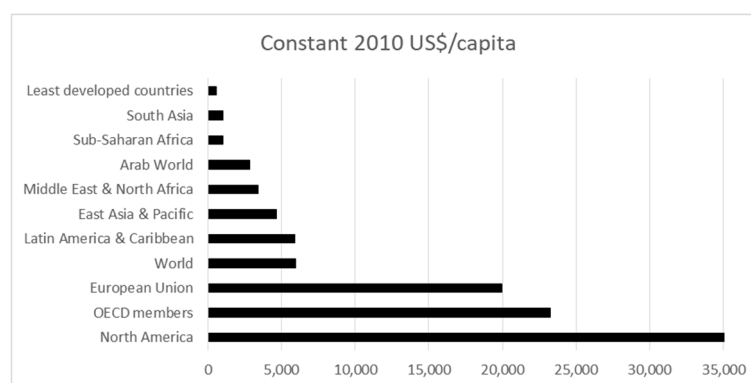
We could easily consider examples for injuries that occur in the downstream part of the commodity transmutation chain too. However, for the sake of brevity I will leave that discussion for another occasion.

1.1.2.5. Consumption Inequality

Finally, consider the stunning inequality with regard to the quantities of consumed commodities worldwide. In 1998, the UNDP's Human Development Report assessed the state of global human development from the perspective of consumption. It compared the global 20% of people living in the highest-income countries and the global 20% living in the poorest: 45% of all meat and fish was consumed by the former, five percent by the latter; for energy (in all forms), the numbers were 58% and four percent; for paper, 85% *vs* one percent respectively. Overall, the former accounted for 86% of total global private consumption expenditures, the latter for just over one percent.¹²¹

Let our focus remain on consumption expenditure figures for the moment: roughly twenty years down the line, little has changed. In the world's least developed countries in 2016, the average annual consumption expenditures by private households and non-profit institutions that serve them (NPISHs) amounted to USD 596¹²² per capita. In North America they were USD 35,639, sixty times higher.

Illustration 8: Households and NPISHs Final Consumption Expenditure 2016¹²³



If an argument could be made that a life that deserves the label *human* is not possible without consuming goods and services at North American levels of expenditure, then it would be difficult to criticise the global inequalities indicated above. No person ought to be prevented from having a human existence after all. Yet, such reasoning is hardly plausible. Firstly, average annual consumption expenditures in many of the most developed European countries are less than half of those in North America (eg, Spain: USD 17,339). Yet, the average European most certainly lives a human life. Secondly, the same applies to people who consume radically less yet. For example, Cuba has long been considered a third-world, or possibly second-world, country with first-world indicators. When it comes to literacy and access to education, healthcare quality and coverage, and life expectancy, it keeps pace with many of the world's most developed nations.¹²⁴ Yet, with USD 3,631 the annual consumption expenditures of the average Cuban are lower than the global average, and almost exactly one tenth of that in the US.

¹²¹ United Nations Development Programme (1998).

¹²² Constant 2010 USD.

¹²³ Data from World Bank (data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.CON.PRVT.PC.KD; accessed 30.01.2019).

¹²⁴ That said, Cuba's citizens plausibly suffer from lacking citizenship. More on this in chapter 3.

On the other hand, many people, possibly most, in the world's least developed countries are not at all able to live with dignity, and their lack of access to consumer goods and services is at least partially responsible. Although an argument to the effect that HDCs have an obligation to transfer the majority of their current resources to least developed countries (LDCs) may be difficult, an argument to the effect that HDCs have an obligation to radically lower their consumption is rather easy. Let what I call our *global resource pool* (GRP) be the sum of all matter and energy in its various forms (eg, plants and non-human animals) at any one time that can be utilised by our planet's population to meet needs and preferences at that time; and let our *sustainable global resource share* be that portion of the GRP which can be used without irreversibly diminishing the total quality and quantity of all useful matter and energy in its various forms in the medium to long term.¹²⁵ Given that our world's population is projected to keep growing at a significant rate (from its current 7.7 billion to 9.8 in 2050 and 11.2 in 2100¹²⁶), the protection of our GRP by limiting our global resource use to the sustainable global resource share is highly prudent. Yet, we have been failing to do so for many decades. Our global human ecological footprint has been exceeding our planet's biocapacity every year since the initial overshoot occurred in the 1970s/80s.¹²⁷ This exceedance has been irreversibly eroding our global resource pool, for example, in the form of biodiversity loss. Although biologists cannot say precisely how many species our world contains, or exactly how many have gone extinct in any time interval, the sizes of monitored wildlife populations have sharply declined recently. According to WWF's Living Planet Index, the overall reduction in the past 45 years was 60%, with South and Central America suffering a particularly dramatic decline (minus 89% since 1970) and global freshwater populations almost equally badly off (83% loss since 1970).¹²⁸ In a recent publication, scientists working with the University of Queensland and the Wildlife Conservation Society argue that over 1,200 species of terrestrial birds, mammals, and amphibians globally, almost one-quarter of those assessed by them, "almost certainly face extinction without [immediate] conservation intervention to remove threats"¹²⁹. The phylogenetic diversity from the recent loss of mammal species alone is projected to take millions of years to recover through a new evolutionary history.¹³⁰

If we wish to prevent further irreversible erosions of our global resource pool, HDCs have to radically reduce their consumption. In 2007, the total ecological footprint of Earth's population exceeded our planet's biocapacity by 50%, so consumption overall needs to be scaled by at least a third. However, that cannot entail that *everyone's* consumption is reduced by a third, because vast portions of the global population are consuming far too little to begin with. People in HDC will have to reduce their consumption far more, because only then is the rest able to increase their utilisation of goods and services to levels necessary for dignified human lives. If the average available biocapacity per individual on Earth is 1.8 global hectares (gha), and the average individual ecological footprint of consumption is 8.0 in the US¹³¹, then the reduction in North America will actually have to be close to

¹²⁵ It is the protection of the global resource pool GRP that the Brundtland Commission urged: our goal is to operate in ways allowing us to meet "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: ch 2).

¹²⁶ United Nations (2017).

¹²⁷ *Ecological footprint* measures the amount of biologically productive land and water area required to produce all the resources an individual, population, or activity consumes, and to absorb the waste they generate (given prevailing technology and resource management practices). *Biocapacity* represents the amount of productive area that is available to generate these resources and to absorb the waste (Global Footprint Network, 2010).

¹²⁸ World Wide Fund for Nature (2018).

¹²⁹ Allan (2019: 1).

¹³⁰ Davis et al (2018).

¹³¹ Global Footprint Network (2010).

80%. Otherwise, people living in non-HDCs will not be able to increase their resource utilisation to a level that corresponds to the average available biocapacity per global individual – at least not without further damaging our world’s resource pool.¹³²

★

A suitable ethical/political theory, or – less ambitiously – set of normative principles, should be able to address the various issues outlined in this sub-section (among others). I will return to them in the last two chapters of this work and attempt to do just that. For now though, I will proceed to the conceptualisation of *consumption* and build a foundation for subsequent philosophical analyses and arguments.

1.2. Conceptualising *Consumption*

The definition of consumption terminology is disconcertingly often neglected in the ethics and political philosophy literature.¹³³ Given that the rough, common-sense understanding of *consumption* that most people have does little justice to the intricacies that concern me in this thesis, I will spend some time with conceptual analysis and with assessing links to other important ideas.

1.2.1. Approaching Consumption

Drawing on philosophical work that reaches back to ancient Greece and Rome, Arendt distinguishes between consumption and use – a differentiation that is related to the distinction between labour and work.¹³⁴ Consumption, Arendt argues, is a natural process. It ensures the survival and health of the organism and is closely tied to the notion of biological needs, or ‘the necessity of subsisting’ as Locke¹³⁵ calls it. Individuals consume to sustain their biological life processes. The things needed for sustaining them are “the least durable of tangible things”¹³⁶, such that “if they are not consumed by use, will decay and perish of themselves”¹³⁷. Fresh food is a classic example. Its consumption must occur almost immediately after the act of its production, so as to both replenish the labour expenditure of the individual and prevent nature’s reclaiming these goods through decomposition (which too is a process of consumption, pursued by micro-organisms).

[I]n their man-made shape, through which they acquired their ephemeral place in the world of manmade things, [consumables] disappear more quickly than any other part of the world [...] they are the least worldly and at the same time the most natural of all things. Although they are man-made, they come and go, are produced and consumed, in accordance with the ever-recurrent cyclical movement of nature.¹³⁸

While it is part of the essence of consumables, as I shall call them, that they disappear when individuals avail themselves to them according to their purpose, use objects (ie, usables) endure, at least when handled properly

¹³² Incidentally, the average individual ecological footprint of consumption in Cuba is 1.85 (Global Footprint Network, 2010).

¹³³ For example, Schwartz (2010) never addresses it.

¹³⁴ Arendt (1998). See also Locke’s explicit distinction between ‘the labour of man’s body, and ‘the work of his hands’ in *Second Treatise of Government*, §27 (1980: 19). The distinction is embodied in a number of languages, including French (*travailler* and *ouvrier*) and German (*arbeiten* and *werken*).

¹³⁵ Locke (1980: §46).

¹³⁶ Arendt (1998: 96).

¹³⁷ Locke (1980: §46).

¹³⁸ Arendt (1998: 96).

(or kept from use entirely). The latter make up what Arendt calls *the human artifice*, the artificial world of things that stands in opposition to our natural surroundings. Usables “give the human artifice the stability and solidity without which it could not be relied upon to house the unstable and mortal creature which is man”.¹³⁹ In fact, their durability is an expression of the skill of the craftsman and the quality of his work.

However, due to the natural laws that govern our world, use cannot occur without some degree of using up. Thus, it too contains an element of consumption.¹⁴⁰ The key difference is that while use is merely incidentally destructive (with regard to the item in question), consumption is essentially so. Nature (re)claims use objects too if they are not protected and maintained: “[i]f left to itself or discarded from the human world, the chair will again become wood, and the wood will decay and return to the soil from which the tree sprang”¹⁴¹. A use object’s durability depends at least partially on the nature and purpose of the item, of course, because object function determines material options.

Arendt mentions a third kind of object that, like usables, is the product of work (as opposed to labour), namely pieces of art. They too constitute the world of things, the human artifice. In fact, they do so even more than usables, because works of art are carefully removed from ordinary use and thus from using-up: we do not urinate in Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917). Artworks are literally useless. They exist for appreciation alone, so I will call them ‘appreciables’. We preserve them through placement in air- and light-conditioned museums and galleries, which renders them outstandingly permanent and thus “the most intensely worldly of all tangible things”¹⁴².

By now, we can clearly see that what we often just refer to as *consumption* consists of different kinds of activities. In the narrow sense, people are not simply consumers, because they do not simply consume. Rather, they are utilisers, because they utilise things by consuming, using, and appreciating them. That said, in keeping with ordinary language I shall continue to refer to *consumption* in the broad sense as the generic activity that encompasses all three of these, and to *consumer* as the individual who engages in it.

1.2.2. Destruction and Construction

Frequently, consumption has been considered a pernicious, evil, or antisocial activity – in some circles and during some periods more so than others. It is no coincidence that one meaning of *consumption* refers to tuberculosis, the disease that, as it progresses, causes drastic weight loss and therefore ‘eats up’ the individual.¹⁴³ Like a wasting illness, consumption tends to be associated with *destructiveness*. By contrast, production tends to be perceived as the very opposite, a *constructive* process that involves the transformation of raw materials into functional commodities. Marxism famously supports that discrimination: while production is closely associated with creativity (eg, in the arts and crafts) and value generation, consumption is represented as the using-up of resources and as value elimination from the world.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Arendt (1998: 136).

¹⁴⁰ The consumptive aspect becomes especially pronounced in the context of planned obsolescence, the stimulation of replacement purchases through uneconomically shortening the usable life of a good (Bulow, 1986). Physical obsolescence activity includes the limiting of functional life design (‘death-dating’) and designing for limited repair. Technological obsolescence (which is voluntary in the sense that consumers could in principle continue to use their existing goods) includes designing for fashion and designing for functional enhancement through adding or upgrading product features (Guiltinan, 2009).

¹⁴¹ Arendt (1998: 137).

¹⁴² Ibid: 167.

¹⁴³ Porter (1993).

¹⁴⁴ Miller (2006).

However, etymology tells a different story. According to the OED, ‘consume’ has not one but two Latin roots.¹⁴⁵ *Consumere* (*con* + *sūmere*¹⁴⁶) – to wear down, use up, exhaust – accounts for consumption’s strong connotations of destruction and waste. However, *consummāre* (*con* + *summa*) – to accomplish, complete, consummate (eg, a marriage) – connotes construction and perfection.¹⁴⁷ While some modern languages preserve both of these origins in the form of separate consumption terms¹⁴⁸, English does not.

The notions that originate in *consumere* express the physical reality described by Arendt: much consumption activity involves material resources which end up being destroyed (essentially or accidentally). Yet, the notions that originate in *consummāre* express a reality too, because they point toward the activity’s purpose: individuals consume to achieve certain ends. We generally do not destroy resources merely for the sake of destruction or without a reason entirely, or at least we do not call such activity ‘consumption’. We use verbs like ‘to squander’ and ‘to waste’ instead. When agents consume, they intend to achieve things, either internally (eg, we eat to increase strength or read to gain understanding), externally (eg, we drive a car to get from A to B), or relationally (eg, we share a meal to strengthen social relationships).

Accordingly, what is often regarded a bitter phenomenon is actually bitter-sweet instead. *Destruction* is the price we pay for *construction*. Without ingesting food and breaking it down into metabolisable nutrients, our organism cannot continue to function; without wearing (and wearing out) clothes, our bodies cannot be protected from the environment. Human existence, let alone human flourishing, cannot be secured without material destruction, dissipation, and conversion.

Importantly, though, consumption is not actually special in that regard. The same applies to production, much heralded as it has been. Despite its creative connotations, production connotes processes that are just as matter-devouring as consumption. In fact, the two are virtually indistinguishable in that regard. For example,

If a man shovels coal into the boiler of a locomotive and thereby creates steam utilized in transportation, we speak of it as an act of production. If a man shovels coal into his own furnace in order to produce the heat which he enjoys in his apartment, we call it an act of consumption.¹⁴⁹

The decisive difference here, it seems, is that when the agent performs the former activity the corresponding processes devour, convert, and utilise matter and energy for the purpose of enabling *others* to achieve certain ends (eg, to get from A to B); when he performs the latter activity, it is his *own* ends (eg, physical health) which are to be achieved instead. I will return to this difference below.

Accordingly, a useful conceptualisation of *consumption* needs to incorporate two components, namely resource utilisation (which in itself does not differentiate it from production, but which distinguishes both consumption and production from other, non-resource utilising activities) as well as the purpose, effects, or ends for which the performance occurs.

¹⁴⁵ Simpson & Weiner (1989); see also Williams (1982) and Williams (1983).

¹⁴⁶ Notice the link to ‘sumption’ and ‘sumptuary’ (Partridge, 1966). Sumptuary legislation is law originally designed to restrict excessive personal expenditures in the interest of preventing extravagance and luxury. In medieval and Renaissance Europe, it became an instrument for the preservation of class-based hierarchies (*la distinction des rangs*). The connection to positional consumption is obvious. For a brief overview of sumptuary law, see Hunt (2003); for a fuller account, see Hunt (1996).

¹⁴⁷ According to *John 19:30*, Christ’s last words as he was dying on the Cross were “consummatum est”: it is finished.

¹⁴⁸ For instance, the French distinguish between the verbs *consumer* (properly reserved for specific negative acts or processes of destruction, say, those involving fire and corrosion) and *consommer* (used for activities such as eating and drinking). Connected to the latter, a *consommé* is a rich broth representing the distilled essence of bouillon (R. H. Williams, 1982).

¹⁴⁹ Seligman (1927: 165).

1.2.3. Consumption Conceptualised

Insofar as they do not leave the terminology altogether un- or underdefined, various academic disciplines characterise consumption in very different ways. For example, economists tend to concern themselves with final market consumption, measured as the goods and services acquired by private households (as distinct from, for example, firms and governments) through the marketplace. The key advantage of this approach is the ability to quantify and compare, which is very useful but not my central concern. Among the key disadvantages is the lack of reference to both of the aforementioned components (resource utilisation and purpose), which leaves the nature of consumption activity entirely opaque. The mere acquisition of a good can obviously not be equated with its consumption. Agents frequently purchase objects which they utilise either hardly or at all (recall my comments on the use of storage facilities in the US), so consumption is actually the very thing that *fails* to occur. What is more, for my purposes the limitation of consumption objects to commercially traded commodities is implausible. A gardener who eats her home-grown produce bypasses the commodity market, but she consumes nevertheless. In fact, she consumes better (see chapter 5).

The environmentalist approach emphasises the material implications of consumption, especially with regard to natural resources. Here, consumption may be defined as “the disarrangement of matter, the using up of value added [by both human agents of labour and capital as well as nature] that inevitably occurs when we use goods”; it is “the transformation of natural capital into manmade capital and then ultimately into waste”, “depleting and polluting, faster than nature can absorb the pollutants and regenerate the resources”¹⁵⁰. As such, it tends to exclusively focus on one of the two main components, namely utilisation and destructiveness. By neglecting the constructive aspect entirely, it ignores the very element needed to distinguish between consumption and production.

Unsurprisingly, anthropologists seek to define consumption in a way that ensures applicability not only to industrial civilisation but also to tribal societies that have barely seen organised markets, still less capitalist ones: “a use of material possessions that is beyond commerce and free within the law”, not just “for subsistence plus competitive display”, but also “for making visible and stable the categories of culture”¹⁵¹. To its credit, the definition incorporates references to both major components, resource utilisation and purpose. The latter in particular is rather detailed. The purpose of consumption extends beyond both basic need and social positional struggle. Goods are adjuncts in consumption rituals “whose primary function is to make sense of the inchoate flux of events”¹⁵² that represents social life. For individuals to be able to make sense of their social world, meaning has to be fixed and communicated – and consumption objects do just that. The drawback of detailing the ends of consumption to such a degree is the risk of incompleteness. Plausibly, human consumption activity serves a variety of other purposes that the definition fails to mention. What is more, none of the examples represent injurious effects. For example, the action of a suicidal agent who ingests a poisonous substance to end her life has purpose, but such an instance of consumption – the effect(s) of which can easily be construed to be detrimental – is left out by the definition. Additionally, it is not clear why legal boundaries matter. Does the taking of illegal drugs not represent consumption activity too? It is equally unclear why the reference to commerce is necessary to characterise consumption. After all,

¹⁵⁰ Daly (1998: 26-27).

¹⁵¹ Douglas & Isherwood (1996: 37-38).

¹⁵² Ibid: 43.

household production (eg, the home-growing of produce) too ‘is beyond commerce’, but we would not define such activity as consumption.¹⁵³

Conspicuous consumption, the demonstration of superiority in a system of social status through publicly displaying the utilisation of goods, is perhaps still the principal mechanism that scholars outside the discipline associate with sociology’s understanding of consumption.¹⁵⁴ More accurately, though, contemporary sociology emphasises the multiplicity of the functions of consumption activity: “a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion”¹⁵⁵. Not only does the definition refer to resource utilisation and purpose(s), but it also indicates the multiplicity of resources and extends their scope beyond commercially traded goods, all of which are details that a plausible characterisation of consumption must accommodate. Unfortunately, though, the definition does not actually discriminate between consumption and production. For instance, an agent who works in her garden and cultivates vegetables is clearly engaged in production, but the sociological definition misclassifies her activity as consumption.

Keeping everything we just discussed in mind, I preliminarily define *consumption*, broadly understood, as follows:

CONS: An individual consumes during period T if, and to the extent that, she employs resources during T and thereby benefits, averts detriment to, or (in some cases) injures herself during T or shortly thereafter.

Given that I am concerned with activity for which agents can be held responsible, one might argue that we should narrow the scope of this definition to intentional consumption activity right away (by replacing ‘benefits’ with ‘intends to benefit’ *et cetera*). However, if by ‘intentional consumption’ we mean that the agent has an intention to perform the action in question at the time¹⁵⁶, our definition would be far too exclusive. As we will see in the chapter 2, vast portions of our activity occur in modes of various degrees of automaticity, with intentions playing no role at the time of behaviour. Yet, even though I may, for example, eat chocolate without even realising it (perhaps because I am fully absorbed in my novel), it would be rather implausible to claim that I therefore do not consume said chocolate in a way for which I can be held responsible.

As the previous distinction between consuming (narrowly understood), using, and appreciating indicates, I am using *employment* (and alternatively *utilisation*) in an inclusive sense. *Resource*, which I will further discuss below, is to be understood broadly as well. Resources need not originate from human activity, and they are not limited to market-traded commodities.

The notions of *benefit*, *detriment*, and *injury* speak to what we could broadly call *the agent’s interests*, or what is generically good or bad for the agent. At this point of the analysis, it would be inappropriate to pre-determine how *interests* is to be defined and what exactly constitutes them. Whether it is pleasure, desire-satisfaction, or something else entirely will be discussed in chapter 3. After that, we can refine the definition.

¹⁵³ I will not criticise that Douglas & Isherwood restrict their definition to material goods, because that simply represents a limitation of their research project.

¹⁵⁴ Warde (2002).

¹⁵⁵ Warde (2005: 137).

¹⁵⁶ Adams (1986) calls it the ‘simple view’.

Central to CONS is the notion that the agent's resource-employment affects her current or short-term interests.¹⁵⁷ Insofar as her activity is directed toward addressing an interest of hers in the mid- to long-term future, she engages in production instead.

As I have already indicated when briefly describing that activities like maintaining our own vehicle and growing our own produce affect how we relate to the things we consume, consumption cannot be analysed in separation from production, at least not in this work. Thus, we need to properly conceptualise the latter as well.

1.2.4. Production Conceptualised

Historically, studies of consumption and production have often been conducted in separation from each other, in philosophy as much as in sociology, anthropology, and other disciplines.¹⁵⁸ For a number of reasons, this is surprising. Firstly, as shown above, the two are very similar in that both incorporate constructive and destructive aspects. Secondly, how we produce affects how we consume (and *vice versa*). Thirdly, as Arendt argues, consumption in the narrow sense is the correlative of labour and production while use is the correlative of work and fabrication.¹⁵⁹ Human consumption (narrowly construed), which Arendt understands as the natural process that arises from, and satisfies, our biological needs and ensures the survival of the organism, is mirrored in the activity of human production in the course of which man labours to provide the objects that nourish him.

Whatever labor produces is meant to be fed into the human life process almost immediately, and this consumption, regenerating the life process, produces – or rather, reproduces – new “labor power,” needed for the further sustenance of the body.¹⁶⁰

Food is the most obvious example. Just as consumption must recur to sustain the biological life process, labouring must recur to provide the corresponding consumables. The two are co-dependent, or at least they used to be (prior to the widespread automatisations in agriculture and manufacturing).

Unlike labour, work, generally performed by craftsmen, fabricates the human artifice¹⁶¹ which represents permanence and durability, and which thereby stands against “the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time”¹⁶². Usables like buildings and appreciables like pieces of art are meant to endure. While labouring is an endlessly recurring process, work comes to an end when its object is finished. That said, all work gives rise to further labouring, partially because durable objects too get used up in the process of their employment and partially because they tend to decay naturally. The second function of labour is “its constant, unending fight against the processes of growth and decay through which nature forever invades the human artifice, threatening the durability of the world and its fitness for human use”.¹⁶³ Without the “daily fight in which the human body is engaged to keep the world clean and prevent its decay [...] to repair every day anew the waste of yesterday”¹⁶⁴, the usables and appreciables that constitute our artifice would quickly disintegrate and be reclaimed by nature. These are some of the reasons why resource-intensive consumption continues to beget further resource-claiming activity: for instance,

¹⁵⁷ For simplicity, I largely disregard the much rarer cases of injury to self.

¹⁵⁸ For example, the discipline-spanning study of materialism/material culture has seen “two decades which under the influence of Marxism emphasized the study of production followed by two decades that concentrated upon consumption”. What “is most needed today are approaches that emphasize the relationship between these two” (Daniel Miller, 2006: 350).

¹⁵⁹ Arendt (1998).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid: 99.

¹⁶¹ The artificial world of durable objects (as opposed to our natural surroundings), for example, buildings.

¹⁶² Arendt (1998: 8).

¹⁶³ Ibid: 100. Labour is unending for this reason too.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid: 101.

expansive mansions and fleets of vehicles have to be maintained even if they are greatly underutilised. As the correspondingly required labour needs to be replenished too, work and fabrication are indirectly connected to consumption (narrowly understood).

Given its lesser role in this work, I will not discuss alternative definitions of *production* as they originate in different academic disciplines. Instead, I put forward my own account right away. Naturally, it closely mirrors the elements of my previous *consumption* account:

PROD: An individual produces during period T if, and to the extent that, she employs resources during T and thereby i) prepares to benefit, avert detriment to, or (in some cases) injure herself in the mid- to long-term future or ii) benefits, averts detriment to, or (in some cases) injures others.

Again, *resources* and *employment* are to be broadly understood. As the definition implies, production is not at all limited to commercial or workplace performances. For example, many activities outside of our professional lives are directed toward advancing the interests of others (often by enabling their consumption), which makes them instances of production. For instance, insofar as parents utilise resources to further the interests of their children (say, by feeding, dressing, or bathing them), they produce.

Crucially, production as defined above may be directed toward the interests of future self (clause i), the interests of others (ii), or both. The productive activity within employment typically addresses both elements. For example, an employee manufactures or provides goods or services that are typically meant to benefit their ultimate consumers, and at the same time her activity will be contractually remunerated which enables said employee to further her own interests in turn in the future. Other activity may be directed exclusively toward advancing the future interests of self. For example, consider an agent who grows her own produce, hunts her own game, makes her own preserves, or tailors her own garments – all firmly established practices among the Amish.

What is more, an activity may instantiate both consumption and production at the same time. Again, employment-related performances are a good example. For instance, to the degree that I enjoy my work and infuse my life with meaning through it, the performance during T benefits me during T (consumption); to the degree that my work benefits others, the activity represents production.

1.2.5. Utilisation and Its Objects

As my definition bears out, *consumption* revolves around resource employment or utilisation. Given that we utilise a variety of things that are rather different in nature, it is actually quite difficult to determine and categorise said resources with precision. Corporeal objects are least problematic in that respect, which is one reason why I differentiate between tangible and intangible resources.¹⁶⁵

1.2.5.1. Tangible Resources

Harking back to an earlier section, Arendt's primary focus is upon tangibles, all of which I define as outlined below.

¹⁶⁵ That said, the distinction is not entirely unambiguous. For example, energy exists in a variety of forms. Coal and oil are material substances that contain chemical energy (tangible). Through combustion, it is transformed into other forms, including thermal, kinetic, and electric (intangible). Thus, whether energy is counted as tangible (ie, capable of being touched) depends on which form it is in at the time.

Illustration 9: Tangible Items for Utilisation¹⁶⁶

<i>Type</i>	<i>Corporeal entities that, at the time of employment T, benefit, avert detriment to, or (in some cases) injure the consumer during T or shortly thereafter; the entities are employed...</i>
Consumables:	... through physical utilisation and cannot be repeatedly utilised because they do not survive their employment (eg, food, drink, sweets, cosmetics, fossil fuels, water, air, drugs).
Usables:	... through physical utilisation and can be repeatedly utilised, though they wear out or down over time (eg, clothes, dishes, books, furniture, TV sets, computers, toys, vehicles, power tools, dwellings, parks and natural reserves).
Appreciables:	... primarily through non-physical utilisation, and they tend to be carefully preserved by us (eg, monuments, historic buildings, natural wonders, décor and decorations, photos, paintings, indoor plants, flowers, front lawns).

In contrast to Arendt’s, my distinction between consumables and usables does not refer to destruction through decay (during non-employment), because it does not conform closely enough to the notion of destruction through using-up (during employment). Firstly, some consumables are actually rather long-lived. For example, fossil fuels are already the end products of (incomplete) biological and geological processes. Thus, they are subject to limited further natural decomposition.¹⁶⁷ Secondly, humans have been developing technology to impede natural decay for a long time, especially with regard to nutriment. For example, the ancient Egyptians began to practice salting to preserve foods somewhere around 3,000 BC¹⁶⁸, and the Chinese used fermentation to produce beverages from rice, honey, and fruit as early as the seventh millennium BC¹⁶⁹.

1.2.5.2. Intangible Resources

Intangible resources are harder to specify than tangibles. Not only do they fit less neatly into sensible and mutually exclusive categories, but it is also somewhat unclear how inclusive the list of resource ought to be. With regard to the latter, I embrace comprehensiveness. Here is an outline of my definitional proposal.

Illustration 10: Intangible Items for Utilisation

<i>Type</i>	<i>Incorporeal entities that, at the time of employment T, benefit, avert detriment to, or (in some cases) injure the consumer during T or shortly thereafter; the entities represent...</i>
Services and machine processes:	... human performances (eg, hairdressings, tattooings, dental treatments, massages, tool repairs, theatre performances, poem recitals, lecture readings) as well as natural and machine processes (eg, movie screenings, automated car washings, sunsets, rainbows, natural sounds).
Information:	... man-made or -manipulated bundles of pure information (eg, digital goods such as online media content, ebooks, and computer software).
Natural signals:	... natural bundles of sensible signals (eg, sounds and images).
Others:	... incorporeal forms of energy (both agent-external and -internal), space, and time.

As I define them, information packages are the result of human performance while bundles of signals are not, but they can be equally useful. For example, a movie clip showing a sunset may elicit the same sensations as

¹⁶⁶ I include air in *consumables* here even though it is not strictly touchable.

¹⁶⁷ That said, crude oil and coal too will spoil if extracted from the ground and stored improperly.

¹⁶⁸ Kurlansky (2002).

¹⁶⁹ McGovern et al (2004).

the vista of an actual sunset. Like services and machine processes, both rather obviously represent consumption objects.

The fourth category incorporates items that may require some explanation, and possibly argumentation. Agent-internal energy includes both labour and mental energy, and although they or their precursors are stored within the agent's corpus (similar to energy being stored in fossil fuel), I consider them intangible. Clearly, individuals expend labour and mental energy for purposes of production. Yet, it is equally clear that agents regularly expend them to address their own current or short-term interests, which makes such utilisation instances of consumption.

Time has been called 'the consumable good *par excellence*' because it disappears without remainder.¹⁷⁰ In that, it is rather like food – both can be used to benefit or injure the agent, both can be wasted. What is more, each of us has a limited amount of time available (daily, annually, throughout one's life), which is precisely what makes it so valuable. Accordingly, it is not surprising that time has long been the subject matter of discussions about thrift, the virtue concerned with the prudent use of resources in both production and consumption. For example, Leon Battista Alberti, a 15th century Renaissance Man like Leonardo da Vinci, argued that 'true and careful thrift' applies to things that "had better be really our own", by which he means anything that "cannot be taken from you in any way"¹⁷¹. Among these things we find time, "a most precious thing" which nature gave "to you the day you saw the light, with the freedom to use [...] well or badly just as it pleased and suited you"¹⁷²:

If a man uses it to wash off the dirt and mud – the ignorance and low desires and vile appetites – that cling to our mind and impure understanding, and if he makes use of time to learn, to think, and to do admirable deeds, he makes time his own. But a man who lets one hour after the other glide by in idleness, never engaging in any worthwhile occupation, certainly loses time. Thus time spent unused is lost, and time well used belongs to him who knows how to use it.¹⁷³

The implication is quite clear: the person who wishes to thrive (a term to which the concept of *thrift* has a close etymological relationship) must use her time well. Without time-thrift and time-discipline, it has been argued, neither industrial capitalism nor the creation of the modern state would have been possible¹⁷⁴, and the Western cultural expectation not to waste time (both at work and at home) has perhaps never been greater than now. However, despite modern man's temporal thriftiness, time-famine or -poverty is now actually considered a central social problem.¹⁷⁵ For example, during the period 1973-2004, the annual work hours of the average US employee rose from 1,679 to 1,864, an increase of 11%. Put differently, during the 31-year period in question, the annual work schedule of the average American employee increased by more than a month (assuming 40-hour work weeks). This point will become relevant again in chapter 5.

All of the items discussed above are resources frequently employed in the course of production too, of course. Once again, it indicates how closely connected consumption and production are.

¹⁷⁰ Brewer (2015).

¹⁷¹ Alberti (1969: 164).

¹⁷² Ibid: 165.

¹⁷³ Ibid: 166.

¹⁷⁴ Thompson (1967). That said, we must resist the conflation of speed and punctuality. The former is a requirement for greater efficiency, the latter for the effective synchronisation of modern society, I believe.

¹⁷⁵ Eg, Garhammer (1998) and de Graaf (2003).

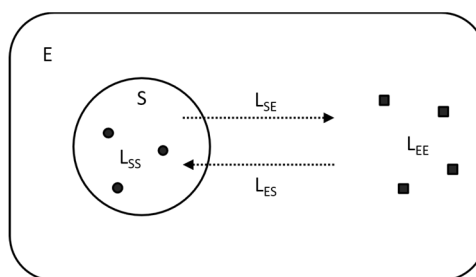
1.3. (Pre-)Vortical Post-Industrial Consumer Society

Contemporary human consumption and its effects cannot be evaluated without a more general analysis of Western societies and the environment that confronts them. For that, I will consider social science research that was carried out in the second half of the 20th century. I will argue that Western societies find themselves in environments that I will call *teeming turbulence*, bordering on, and possibly having already partially been transformed into, vortices.

1.3.1. Social Ecologies

As I will discuss in the next chapter, the flourishing of an agent requires her to properly respond to the texture of her environment. Schematically, the total unit of analysis and the connections between its elements can be represented as in the following simplified model:

Illustration 11: Total Unit of Analysis¹⁷⁶



The circle represents social system S , the dots its constituents. S may be an individual, though it more usually represents a family, a corporate organisation, or a group of practice members. Its elements are bound together by patterns of culture (expressed through language, religion, *et cetera*). The system's relevant environment is represented through the remainder of elements in rectangle E (represented as squares). These are partially beneficial for, partially detrimental to S (goals and opportunities *vs* noxiants and threats).¹⁷⁷ Some of S 's environmental elements may be man-made social systems and forces, others natural resources and forces (though they may interact in various ways¹⁷⁸).

Set $\langle L_{SS}, L_{SE}, L_{ES}, L_{EE} \rangle$ represents potentially lawful connections.¹⁷⁹ L_{SS} signifies the processes within the system itself (internal interdependencies). L_{SE} and L_{ES} signify exchanges between system and environment, namely interpenetration of the system into the environment (outer-directed planning and overt actions, eg, for purposes of resource appropriation and threat avoidance) and *vice versa* (inner-directed information flow as well as actions and processes originating outside of S).¹⁸⁰ L_{EE} signifies the causal texture of the environment: "the ways in which the parts of, and the processes in the environment causally determine each other independently of [L_{SE}], processes independent of what individual systems or sets of systems try to intentionally impose on the environment"¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁶ Based on Babüroglu (1988).

¹⁷⁷ Which elements are beneficial and which are detrimental differs from system to system (and system type to system type).

¹⁷⁸ For example, consider climate change.

¹⁷⁹ Emery & Trist (1965).

¹⁸⁰ Emery (1977), Emery & Trist (1965, 1973).

¹⁸¹ Emery (1977: 3-4).

In order to flourish, a system may have to interact with its environment. For example, living entities may have to appropriate various consumables to secure their nourishment. Which of the four connections a system ought to focus on in its attempts to secure its well-being (ie, adapting¹⁸²) depends on the kind of environment in which the systems finds itself:

Illustration 12: Adaptive Focus¹⁸³

<i>Environment</i>	<i>Focus of adaptation</i>
Type 1: placid random	L _{SS}
Type 2: placid clustered	L _{SS} , L _{SE}
Type 3: disturbed reactive	L _{SS} , L _{SE} , L _{ES}
Type 4a: turbulent	L _{SS} , L _{SE} , L _{ES} , L _{EE}
Type 5: vortical	–

Ranging from type-1 to type-4 environments that represent increasingly complex conditions, the focus of adaptation becomes increasingly broader. Turbulent environments are the most complexly textured surroundings in which adaptive behaviour is possible. The great amount of variance faced by a system arises not only from interaction with other systems, but from the dynamic properties of the extra-social environment itself. Significantly, dynamic field processes emerge as unplanned consequences of the actions of constituent systems (as they attempt to deal with type-3 environments). Crashing animal populations and climate change are merely two – exceedingly catastrophic, complex, and global – examples. The dynamicity of the environment requires continued adaptation of the actor, with new adjustments being required even before earlier ones can be completed, resulting in an existence *beyond the stable state*¹⁸⁴. Challengingly, the environment is “so complex, so richly textured, that it is difficult to see how individual systems can, by their own efforts, successfully adapt to them”¹⁸⁵. Individual strategy, operational planning, and tactics are not nearly effective enough to flourish. Instead, coordination with other systems is required.

Vortical environments result from system maladaptation to (ie, system-induced transformation of) type-4 environments. Due to enormously complex environmental conditions, vortices leave no room for adaptation. Unable to cope, the systems that constitute each other’s environment have rigidified to a degree that results in their violently opposing each other and the social field as a whole. Just as Poe’s fisherman in *A Descent into the Maelström*¹⁸⁶ is reduced to clinging to the inanimate object of a barrel and hoping for the best, a system in a vortical environment is reduced to immediate short-term tactics at most, rather like in type-1 environments.¹⁸⁷

1.3.2. An Alternative Type-4 Ecology

While the mentioned list of ecology types is very useful, in my eyes it is not complete. The increasing environmental complexity faced by systems as discussed by Emery & Trist is largely grounded in *qualitative* ecological changes. However, another obvious, and for me highly relevant, ground for growing environmental

¹⁸² Adaptation is an individual’s or system’s modification of “itself or its environment, when either has changed to the individual’s or system’s disadvantage, so as to regain at least some of its lost efficiency” (Ackoff & Emery, 1972: 124).

¹⁸³ Based on Emery (1977).

¹⁸⁴ Schön (1971).

¹⁸⁵ Emery & Trist (1973: 53).

¹⁸⁶ Poe (1902: 64-82).

¹⁸⁷ McCann & Selsky (1984) discuss hyperturbulence as a midrange condition between turbulence and vortex, but I will incorporate their insights into my considerations of the main environmental types.

complexity is *quantitative* textural change. Let me use an analogy: to the degree that it is not the nature of the game that changes and becomes more difficult, but rather its scale, a player is faced with increasing environmental complexity too.

Emery & Trist are concerned with the kind of complexity as it arises out of my playing a game that starts out as tic-tac-toe, evolves into Nine Men's Morris, advances to Halma (Chinese Checkers), and ends up turning into chess. Chess is far more demanding than tic-tac-toe because it incorporates (*inter alia*) far more types of pieces with very different abilities. Thus, determining what my opponent may do to beat me, and what I need to do to beat her, becomes a far more complicated and cognitively demanding activity. In fact, it may be so complex that I am overwhelmed and therefore unable to operate.

By contrast, imagine a quantitative change: instead of playing one game of chess during period T, I now must play two games concurrently, then three, then five, and then ten.¹⁸⁸ Again, the complexity may simply overwhelm me, though this time it is not due to the more complicated characteristics of chess as such, but rather the fact that my condition is affected by the actions of so many more players. Not only do I have to make ten times as many decisions, but I also have to constantly switch between ten scenarios, which vastly increases cognitive load. While I may be perfectly able to play the game of chess in principle, and perhaps even face two or three opponents at once, I may not at all be able to deal with the demands of facing ten of them.

Increasing environmental complexity is disadvantageous for a system only if it impedes the functioning of that system. Such impediment will occur if the system lacks the capacities necessary to deal with greater informational demands, including perceptual capabilities and information processing capacities. All systems have perceptual and information processing limits, and once those limits have been reached, a system is no longer able to take in and process additional information relevant to its ability to act and react well in its environment. Increases in quantitative complexity push systems toward those limits.

Accordingly, I am adding a second type-4 environment to Emery & Trist's original list: Type 4b, *teeming environments*. They represent ecologies that are qualitatively similar to either disturbed reactive or turbulent environments, but in which the number of environmental components relevant to the system's flourishing (including other systems, extra-social elements, and the interactions between them) has grown to such an extent that S's perceptual and cognitive¹⁸⁹ capacities (including the ability to form plans and act on them) are exceeded. While S can no longer deal with and respond to the full environmental information load, it still operates well enough to flourish to an adequate degree. To use Toffler's terminology the system can only just deal with *future shock*¹⁹⁰. However, any further complexity increases (resulting, once again, in a vortical environment), be they qualitative or quantitative textual changes in S's relevant environment, will result in an operational inability to cope such that the system begins to languish to increasing degrees.

1.3.3. Accelerating Change

There is one other important factor that Emery & Trist do not take into account, but that we must. Importantly, not only may environmental complexity increase qualitatively and quantitatively as such, but these increases themselves may be subject to acceleration. In fact, an excellent case can be made that such temporal

¹⁸⁸ Or perhaps one game of chess against two, three, five, and ultimately ten opponents (all of whom have their pieces on the same board at the same time).

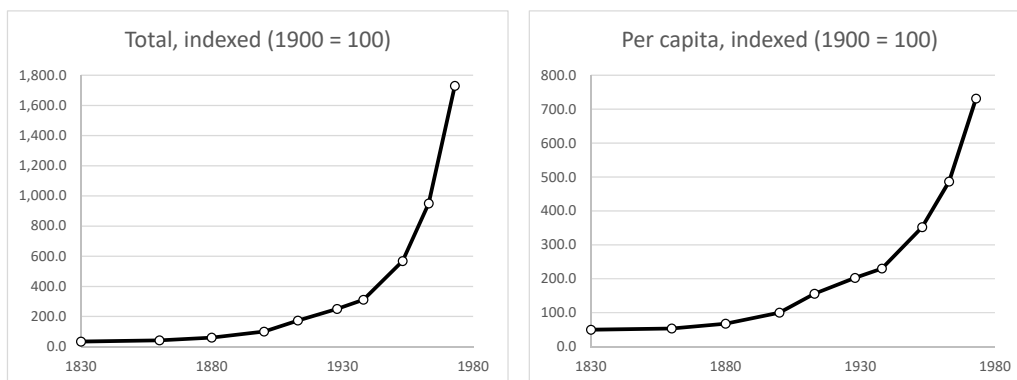
¹⁸⁹ As applied to social systems here, the term should be understood in analogy to human cognition.

¹⁹⁰ Toffler (1970).

compression is precisely what we have been observing in many areas throughout the past two centuries. Consider the following two related examples.

1) *Manufacturing Output*: Following the Industrial Revolution and its technological developments, halfway through the 19th century the production of manufacturing industries in what are now HDCs increased steeply. The growth of production per capita is no less impressive.

Illustration 13: Production of World Manufacturing Industries¹⁹¹



Using the output of the year 1900 as base index, the production of worldwide manufacturing industries, both total and per global capita, have been following exponential growth curves. In effect, between 1830 and 1973 alone total worldwide manufacturing production grew by a factor of 51 and average per-capita manufacturing output by a factor of 15. However, given that the developed world’s share of global manufacturing production grew from 39.5% to 90.1% during the same period¹⁹², both curves would be vastly steeper with regard to Western countries and their members alone yet.

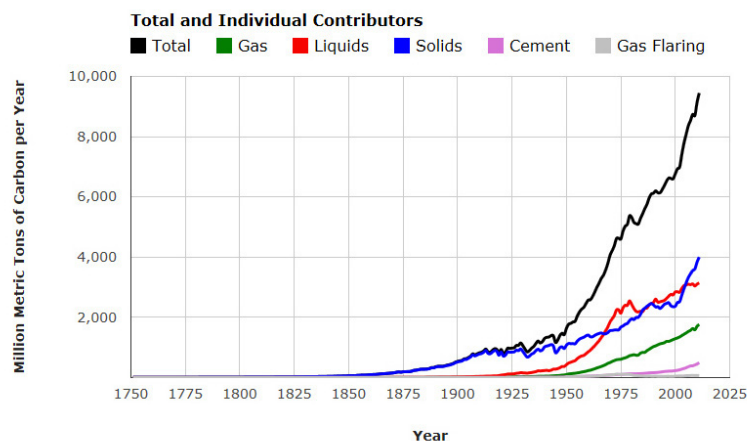
Assuming that all manufacturing contributes to the human artifice, it must be the case that either the Western artifice has been growing at an accelerated rate or that it has been repeatedly transformed at an increasing speed. As the figures of individual consumption growth and commodity obsolescence discussed in the previous section indicated, the truth involves a combination of both.

2) *Greenhouse Gas Emissions*: Until about 1800, estimated global fossil-fuel CO₂ emissions never exceeded 10 million metric tons of carbon per year. By 1850, global emissions had increased to 50 million metric tons annually, by 1900 to 530 million metric tons, and a hundred years later to 6,770 million metric tons.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Data from Bairoch (1982).

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Boden, Marland, & Andres (2013).

Illustration 14: Annual Global Fossil-Fuel Carbon Emission Estimates¹⁹⁴

If we assume that the exponential growth of greenhouse gas emissions goes hand in hand with accelerated climate change and all of its associated effects (eg, weather instabilities and species extinction, the latter giving rise to conflict from human competition for increasingly scarce resources), we have another link between environmental change and the accelerating increase of complexity.

Pulling all these threads together, not only are systems subject to greater environmental textural complexity, but in many areas that increase is itself accelerating. For that reason, I conceptualise type-4 environments as *accelerating teeming turbulence*, with type-5 ecologies largely resulting from the attempts of systems to adapt to these. To the degree that a system is simply unable to (further) respond to an increased environmental complexity, its environment will represent itself as a vortex “where there can be no question of the constituent members adapting and evolving but only a possibility of sheer survival”¹⁹⁵. Remember that this is what scholars like the Chief Scientific Adviser to Her Majesty’s Government are concerned about and academics like Bendell consider unavoidable (“inevitable collapse, probable catastrophe and possible extinction”¹⁹⁶).

1.3.4. Accelerating Teeming Turbulence and Vortex

For two reasons, systems experience accelerating teeming turbulence unevenly. Firstly, different systems have different capacities as well as different resources and skills to meet the increasing demands imposed by changing environmental conditions.¹⁹⁷ Secondly, given that *Homo sapiens*, more than any other animal, takes an active role in the manipulation of her environment, not all domains of a system’s life are subject to the same environment. Culture especially is used by us to create man-made environmental conditions of tolerable complexity. However, with postindustrialism we see

the emergence of a degree of social organizational complexity and a rate of coalescence of previously segregated populations that defy our current efforts at symbolic reductionism. Larger and larger parts of the lives of more and more people are being lived in conditions of environmental [teeming] turbulence.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Emery & Trist (1973: 64-65).

¹⁹⁶ See my Introduction.

¹⁹⁷ McCann & Selsky (1984).

¹⁹⁸ Emery & Trist (1973: 55-56).

These dynamic environmental field forces have emerged as a result of multiple trends that are at least partially the result of systems' attempts to succeed in type-3 environments: i) the sheer *growth of organisations and linked sets of organisations*, especially manufacturers, to the point that they are so large that "their actions are persistent enough and strong enough to induce autochthonous processes in the environment"¹⁹⁹ and ii) a *deepening interdependence between an ever-growing economic sector and other facets of society*, resulting in far-reaching and unpredictable effects from corporate action²⁰⁰ (the collapse of investment bank Lehman Brothers in September 2008 which developed into a full-blown international banking crisis, followed by a global economic downturn, being merely one example).

Emery & Trist list another trend, iii) a *radically increased communication speed and volume* that results in an escalating information burden and a radically reduced response time (unaffected by distance). As the digital revolution, the change from mechanical and analogue to digital electronic technology, unfolded in the late 20th century, that information burden soared further. For example, electronic mail, the exchange of digital messages through digital devices, delivers information virtually instantaneously. Email operates across computer networks, which today is primarily the Internet. While a mere 2.8 million people used the Internet in 1990, as of June 2018 that number has increased to 4.2 billion. Penetration rates (in terms of population share with access) are 85.2% in Europe and 95.0% in North America, with corresponding portions of the population having large-scale access to digital information.²⁰¹

Related to Emery & Trist's third point is a more general trend, namely iv) *radically increased technological change*. Technology is a major force behind acceleration in particular, because it is self-feeding. Its circle – creation of feasible idea, practical application, diffusion through society – permanently renews itself because the diffusion of technology tends to help generate new creative ideas, and it does so with increasing speed. For example,

[i]n 1836 a machine was invented that mowed, threshed, tied straw into sheaves and poured grain into sacks. This machine was itself based on technology at least twenty years old at the time. Yet it was not until a century later, in the 1930's, that such a combine was actually marketed.²⁰²

About 150 years went by between patenting the first typewriter in England and marketing typewriters commercially; between the discovery of food canning and actual industrial application lay a whole century.²⁰³ Such delays between idea, application, and diffusion are now unthinkable in HDCs. Therefore, not only do new techniques and products become more quickly available to the public, but they also stimulate new, creative ideas much sooner, accelerating object throughput in the households of Western consumers.

I propose to add to these four the following two trends, which makes the claim that accelerating teeming turbulence is a permanent and salient feature of post-industrial society even more plausible: v) *intensifying extra-social environmental dynamics* caused by the environmental havoc wreaked throughout the 20th and 21st centuries; vi) *economic and cultural globalisation*, which have greatly enlarged the game board on which Earth's societies and their members play and thereby vastly increased the number of players who participate in the game. *Globalisation* can be defined as follows:

¹⁹⁹ Emery & Trist (1973: 53).

²⁰⁰ Emery & Trist (1973).

²⁰¹ Data from www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm, accessed 25.02.2019.

²⁰² Toffler (1970).

²⁰³ Ibid.

A social process in which the constraints of geography on economic, political, social and cultural arrangements recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding and in which people act accordingly.²⁰⁴

If you imagine globalisation in the context of playing a game like chess, it represents the reduction and elimination of game boundaries, leaving players with horizons that extend further and further: the board keeps growing in size, both the types and tokens of pieces keep increasing, and the number of players continues to swell. As a driver of teeming turbulence, globalisation reinforces a crucial feature of complex games like chess, namely their demandingness: by opening up the game and, so to speak, compressing the world and its events through building and intensifying worldwide social, economic, moral, and political relations that link distant localities and times²⁰⁵, individual players and collectives face an environment of increasingly complex texture, both qualitatively and quantitatively. In the absence of resources and skills required to meet the demands arising from that texture (or walling themselves off from it), the growing complexity will overwhelm them.

These are precisely the conditions in which consumption in a globalised market economy occurs: the consumer becomes linked to ever greater numbers of producers who are increasingly geographically, culturally, and temporally distant to her. For example, her commodities are made on the other side of the globe, by people whose culture is radically different to hers (in terms of language use, religious rituals, and a host of other practices), sometimes months in advance. Both parts of the commodity transmutation chain, up- and downstream, incorporate ever greater numbers of production participants that form increasingly convoluted networks of divided labour and task specialisation – and to which the consumer is linked *qua* utilisation of numerous commodities, but in a greatly detached fashion. Call this phenomenon ‘detached complex consumerism’.

In summary, the environment that marks post-industrial consumer society is highly complex. It has been becoming increasingly inclusive in the sense that growing numbers of agents from previously uninvolved geographical and political territories have become co-performers who play important roles as the providers of resources that enable and define the activities of Western consumer; it has been becoming increasingly rich due to the amount of commodities that figure in the daily activities of the agent (or that simply surround her); and it has been increasingly impermanent because the Western artifice has been subject to growing rates of transformation. The features of these conditions have considerable implications for our ability to consume well, and we will return to them at various points throughout this work.

1.4. Final Comments

In this chapter I have outlined a variety of problems associated with contemporary consumerism. In particular, I have focussed on five challenges, namely injury to consumers, inefficient consumption, alienation from consumption objects, injury to third parties, and global consumption inequality. It is the alleviation of these issues that I will address below.

The consumption of an individual has been defined in terms of what we might consider the addressing of her current or short-term interests. In chapter 3 we will return to this preliminary conceptualisation and make

²⁰⁴ Waters (2001: 5). Many aspects of globalisation are intentional and reflexive (eg, in the realm of corporate action). However, many globalising forces fall outside that characterisation, because they are impersonal and beyond the control and intentions of any individual or group (ibid).

²⁰⁵ As per Giddens’ (1990: 64) and Robertson’s (1992: 8) definitions of *globalisation*.

the idea of 'interest' more concrete, namely by expressing it in terms of needs (that are tied to the end of human flourishing in turn).

Finally, we used existing social science research and social ecology models to explore the nature of post-industrialist environments as we contemporarily find them not only in Western countries but worldwide. I developed the existing type-4 ecology by incorporating quantitative ecological changes and arguing that environmental complexity is further driven by an acceleration of change. As a result, we find ourselves confronted with what I call 'accelerating teeming turbulence' (the precursor to vortical environments), and we can expect that these conditions affect our ability to consume well.

2. Praxeology

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”

*David Foster Wallace*²⁰⁶

Everything is copy.

*Nora Ephron*²⁰⁷

Due to being surrounded by individuals who perform a rich variety of behaviours that are more or less constantly reproduced with varying degrees of similarity, any person who does not literally live as a solitary castaway on the proverbial desert island is permanently immersed in a metaphorical sea of what is often called ‘social practices’: enduring activity patterns that represent distinct conjunctions of different performative elements, often involving the utilisation of objects. For example, people who belong to the same cultural sodality (say, contemporary middle-class Aucklanders) engage in noticeably similar ways when they visit coffeehouses, shop at supermarkets, and travel in city buses. Every time they do so, their individual performances reinforce larger, social activity patterns and contribute to the maintenance of both individual and collective practice portfolios. In that sense, which is not actually how Ephron uses the phrase, *everything is copy*.²⁰⁸ Importantly, as any agent is used to being immersed in patterns, she notices neither their presence nor their effects (on herself and others), cumulatively prodigious as they are. In a way, individuals understand the world that is familiar to them *too* well, much like Wallace’s fish ‘understand’ the water they inhabit: constant presence and intimate familiarity have rendered it invisible. The ‘water’ we float in loses its indiscernibility only when it is lacking, much like we notice the air we breathe (and the fact *that* we breathe at all) only when it is withheld from us.

If we actually make an effort and recognise the many waters we are immersed in, the view that almost all conduct is nothing but enactments of variously routinised activity patterns existing both at the individual and the collective level, that are interconnected in the form of complex networks, and that keep the social structures around us (eg, family, professions, all kinds of organisations) in existence becomes highly plausible. Practice theory, a family of fundamentally ontological projects that populate the world with practices as their focal units of analysis, subscribes to these views. Thus, it represents a fitting approach for the study of human conduct and social order, including human consumption. Almost every time we consume or engage in consumption-related activity (be it during breakfast in the morning, when we drive vehicles to and from work, or as we supermarket-shop in the

²⁰⁶ Wallace (2009: 3-4).

²⁰⁷ Ephron (2014: 301).

²⁰⁸ For Ephron, the slogan expresses that everything you see, hear, or experience otherwise represents legitimate raw material for the work of a writer (Dance, 2015).

evening), everything I just outlined applies. As recent publications reveal²⁰⁹, consumption scholars in various disciplines have contributed to a revival of practice theory (what some have called the *practice turn in contemporary theory*²¹⁰). My work joins this effort and represents a consumption-centred contribution from the perspective of ethics and political philosophy in particular. In section 2.2, I will conceptualise *practice* and discuss its connections to something we already came across in the previous chapter, namely complexity. Prior to that though, we need to turn our attention to another important phenomenon that plays a key role in human consumption first, habitualised activity (2.1).

2.1. Habitualised Activity

As with many ideas in the humanities, historically the interest in habitualisation has been waxing and waning periodically, with different wave patterns occurring in different disciplines and fields. For example, habit played a key role in moral philosophy in Ancient Greece. Virtue, a central concept in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, is characterised as *hexis*, which is rendered as *habitus* in Latin, and then usually as *habit* in English translations: “a [moral] virtue is a habitual disposition connected with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, a mean which is determined by reason, by which the person of practical wisdom would determine it”²¹¹. However, *habit* has been a lot less popular in modern moral philosophy, at least until the recent renewed interest in virtue ethics.

By contrast, habitualised behaviour features extensively in the works of various modern theorists in sociology. For example, Weber characterises ‘traditional behaviour’ as that which is “determined by ingrained habituation”²¹² and largely performed with little or no reflection: “The great bulk of all everyday action to which people have become habitually accustomed approaches [an] almost automatic reaction to habitual stimuli which guide behavior in a course which has been repeatedly followed”²¹³. Recently, the thoughtlessness with which human agents both acquire behavioural dispositions and through their conduct reproduce social activity patterns has been playing a central role in the writings of Bourdieu in particular. His interest in consumption²¹⁴ explains why the current sociology-informed scholarship that specifically focuses on consumer behaviour emphasises the importance of habitualised conduct.²¹⁵

2.1.1. Habitualisation and Human Nature

To help us locate habitualised performance within human activity, let us first distinguish general basic activity types.

²⁰⁹ Eg, Røpke (2009), Warde & Southerton (2012), and Warde (2016).

²¹⁰ Schatzki et al (2001).

²¹¹ Hughes' (2001: 54) translation of *EN 1106b36-1107a2*.

²¹² Weber (1978: 25).

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Eg, Bourdieu (1984).

²¹⁵ Eg, Gronow & Warde (2001).

2.1.1.1. Basic Activity Concepts

Analytically, human activity – the term that I will use to refer to the totality of what may, however tenuously, be regarded as human performance driven by forces that originate within the individual²¹⁶ – can be distinguished into action and non-action.

In its ideal form, action represents what the agent *does* because she chooses to engage in some temporally and spatially located performance in a particular way (as opposed to the alternatives that she also considered but rejected), willingly initiates the activity sequence (or allows it to commence²¹⁷), and attends to each of its subsequent parts. The agent has control over the entire sequence in the sense that she could do otherwise, especially because it issues from, and is accompanied by, what we refer to as a *conscious or premeditated* process: mental acts of which, according to Bargh & Chartrand, the agent is aware, that she intends (ie, that she starts by an act of will), that require effort, and that she controls (by being able to stop and mentally do something else instead)²¹⁸. Obviously, this kind of activity lends itself to being considered conduct that agents can be held responsible for.

However, the conceptualisation just outlined is difficult to apply to purely mental action. If, for mental activity PHI1 to qualify as a genuine mental doing, it needs to be initiated and accompanied by a certain kind of conscious/premeditated process PHI2, then it seems only consequent to hold that the latter requires there to be a further conscious/premeditated process PHI3 in turn, and so on *ad infinitum*. To avoid an infinite regress, we must recognise that “*all* action – including in particular paradigmatic premeditated intentional action – has *and must have* unpremeditated [mental] action at its source and core”²¹⁹. Activities like deliberation and decision-making are built up from, and at every step involve, “the operation of countless non-deliberative processes that are – and must be – quite unlike choice”²²⁰, processes which themselves are neither self-aware nor reflective. Thus, while genuine action should indeed make reference to concepts like *intention*, *consciousness*, and *control*, it cannot be required to be the result of, and accompanied by, separate mental activities that meet the requirements of genuine action themselves.

In contrast to action, non-action is what *happens to* an agent because, at least in the most extreme (and therefore clearest) cases, it lacks the qualities mentioned above entirely. For instance, the human startle response consists of a characteristic sequence of muscular responses elicited by a sudden, intense stimulus (eg, acoustic stimulation).²²¹ Neither is its onset under the actor’s control, nor does conscious wilful direction play any role in its progression: once triggered, the activity sequence plays out fully automatically.

Non-action occurs in the realm of the purely mental too. For example, consider stereotyping. The more a person perceives a social set of individuals as a coherent unit (‘perceived entitativity’), the more likely she is to make trait inferences on the basis of a group member’s attributes and transfer the inferred feature(s) to the group as a whole and to each member, without intention and awareness. Once the stereotypical belief set exists and relevant set members are perceived, various kinds of evaluations (eg, he is black → he is dangerous) ensue automatically.²²²

²¹⁶ To use a somewhat silly contrast: if I have been implanted with a mechanism that can lift my arm by remote control, then the remote-controlled movements of my arm are not my activity because they do not originate within me. Rather, they are the movements of the person operating the remote control (because the latter’s mental states determine what happens to my arm).

²¹⁷ See Campbell (1996: 60).

²¹⁸ See Bargh & Chartrand (1999).

²¹⁹ Railton (2009: 102).

²²⁰ Ibid: 103.

²²¹ For details, see Davis (1984).

²²² The two stages are called ‘stereotype formation’ and ‘stereotype activation’ (Hamilton et al, 2009).

Under the heading of *dual-process theory/models*, social researchers and neuro scientists have been studying how our activity is the outcome of the – sometimes sequential, sometimes simultaneous – operation of both deliberative/conscious/controlled and non-deliberative/non-conscious/autonomous processes, that is, action and non-action.²²³ For example, Kahneman distinguishes between two cognitive systems. *System 1* operates “typically fast, automatic, effortless, associative, implicit (not available to introspection)” and is “governed by habit and [...] therefore difficult to control or modify”; *system 2* operates “slower, serial, effortful”, is “more likely to be consciously monitored and deliberately controlled”, and is “also relatively flexible and potentially rule governed”²²⁴.

Haidt employs the same distinction, though he uses different terms: *intuitive system* and *reasoning system*. The former accounts for why people often have a hard time explaining their doings, including moral activity (ordinarily upheld as a prime example of genuine human action). “[M]oral reasoning is rarely the direct cause of moral judgment”²²⁵, for example, with regard to someone else’s actions or character. Rather, it mostly occurs without intention, effort, or awareness of process, frequently “applying stereotypes that often include morally evaluated traits”²²⁶.

Two ways in which learned behavioural system 1 responses become reliably connected to recurring features of contexts (perceived on the basis of stimuli) are *direct context cuing* and *motivated context cuing*. Regarding the former, direct – ie, reflection-bypassing – context-response associations develop from repeated coactivation of context and response. For example, if the mental representation of a context (eg, getting into my car) is consistently followed by the representation of a behavioural response (eg, buckling the seatbelt), direct associative links that are manifested through corresponding neural changes gradually form between the two. As a result, the latter now occurs directly as a consequence of the former. Regarding motivated context cuing, the reward value of response outcomes is conditioned onto the context cues that have historically accompanied the receipt of those rewards. For example, if TV-watching is consistently accompanied by the positive affect that results from consuming chocolate, the reward value (pleasure) becomes conditioned onto the cues. Thus, the latter themselves now motivate the eating activity directly. In that sense, motivated context cuing represents a motivationally enhanced (or energised) version of direct context cuing.²²⁷

While the theoretical distinction between genuine action and prototypical non-action seems clear enough, many instances of human activity fall in between these idealised notions. For example, they may represent more or less complex sequences that consist of multiple elements located at different places along the spectrum: an agent may deliberate about visiting the supermarket, decide in favour, and consciously initiate a corresponding somatic sequence (eg, by leaving her car and walking toward the entrance), only for it to turn into a routine activity that involves hardly any focal attention at all. What is more, most familiar, minimally complex activities consists of sub-elements that are performed more or less automatically. For example, even when car drivers pay attention to where they are going, most constitutive tasks of their performance (eg, gear-shifting, signalling, accelerating, breaking) are carried out without having to consciously attend to them. In these senses, many of our performances represent mixed composites.

²²³ The details of dual-process theories/models can vary significantly. For an overview pertaining to social psychology in particular, see Gawronski et al (2014).

²²⁴ Kahneman (2003: 698).

²²⁵ Haidt (2001: 815).

²²⁶ Ibid: 820.

²²⁷ Wood & Neal (2007).

In addition, each of the aforementioned elements in an activity sequence, or sub-elements of a performance, may actually be performed in a different fashion (along the action/non-action spectrum) at different times. The ‘devolution’ process that represents habitualisation as a performance ‘decay’²²⁸ from action toward non-action over time (as action markers like consciousness disappear with increased repetition) clearly implies as much.

2.1.1.2. Automaticity

Action is frequently contrasted with activity that is somehow automatic. For example, Leonard defines *reflex* as “a highly automated motor response resulting from a specific sensory input”²²⁹, and Wood & Neal characterise *habit* as “a form of slowly accrued automaticity that involves the direct association between a context and a response”²³⁰. Given that automaticity appears to be a key component of the kind of activity that greatly interests me here, it must be properly conceptualised.

Classically, automaticity was conceived of as a dual-mode, all-or-nothing property. Processes that represent human activity were either automatic or not. However, as empirical findings began to establish that processes may possess merely some of the attributes we will consider in a moment²³¹, and that, when processes become automatic (ie, ‘decay’ from action toward non-action), these features develop both gradually and often along different timelines²³², a more nuanced position began to take hold: not only may processes be automatic to various degrees, but they may also possess different assortments of automaticity attributes.

Several approaches to characterising automaticity have been developed, including feature-based and mechanism-based accounts. The former have been especially popular because they provide lists of clearly identifiable qualities that (ideally) can be measured. Considering the most popular features, automatic processes are frequently characterised as unintentional, uncontrolled or uncontrollable, autonomous, unconscious or unaware, efficient, and/or fast.²³³ Let us consider these attributes in detail.

Under the causal account, an action is *intentional* under a particular description (eg, in terms of abstraction level) if it is caused in the right way²³⁴ by proper intention(s), ie, by a state, or set of states, the content of which represents the action under said description. Intentions are ordinarily related to a variety of states that represent goals (eg, the objective[s] of performing the action). For my purposes, they are the direct outcomes of minimally deliberative activities and minimally conscious decision-making of the individual in question.²³⁵ PHI is unintentional if it is not caused by a suitable intention, that is, either if there is no fitting mental state or if there is no proper causal connection between intention and action.

Relatedly, an action PHI is *controlled* by an individual if, and to the extent that, whether, when, and how its various phases – ie, commencement or suppression, progression (including the prevention or inducement of alterations), and termination – are carried out is determined on the basis of proper causal relationships between the

²²⁸ Campbell (1996: 57).

²²⁹ Leonard (1998: 33).

²³⁰ Wood & Neal (2007: 856).

²³¹ Eg, Bargh (1992).

²³² Eg, Logan (1985).

²³³ This list and the following discussion partially follows Moors & De Houwer (2007).

²³⁴ For details about this qualification (‘in the right way’), see Davidson (1980).

²³⁵ We might consider this a rather strong or demanding conceptualisation. Weaker views (according to which intentions may be entirely unconscious and non-conceptual) are rejected here because they diminish our ability to distinguish between automatic and non-automatic activity.

states that represent the PHI-relevant intention and goals on the one hand and PHI on the other; the action is *controllable* if it is possible for it to be determined in that way. Lack of control/controllability may be due to the absence of proper goal(s) and intention(s), absence of proper effect(s), or absence of the right connection(s) between the two. The main difference between the characterisation of intentionality and that of control is that the reference to goals, understood as desired future states of affairs (represented by corresponding attitudinal states), is essential to the latter but not the former.²³⁶

Autonomy can be straightforwardly characterised as the absence of control: an activity PHI is autonomous to the degree that the set of conditions that suffice for PHI to occur does not include the proper intention(s) and goal(s) as necessary parts, and the formulation of action-relevant goals (eg, to commence or suppress, to prevent or induce alterations to, or to terminate PHI) has no corresponding effect upon the process. To the degree that either of these conditions is violated, the activity is non-autonomous.²³⁷

Consciousness can be distinguished into different types, including phenomenal, access, and monitoring consciousness, aka A-, P-, and M-consciousness. However, Giddens' distinction between discursive and practical consciousness is more relevant here. The former refers to a process in which the agent holds propositions in her mind, reflects on their content and practical implications, and makes choices based on these cogitations (such that, if asked, she could readily give an articulate account of the reasons for her conduct). Thus, it is closely related to A-consciousness and has strong links with what we consider true action. A key characteristic of highly automated activity is that no or few of these cognitive processes occur. Yet, almost all of our habitualised activity is at least in some sense under our control. For example, even though we rarely think about the ways in which we walk at any given moment, we are highly competent at avoiding obstacles, keeping pace with others, adjusting our movements to slopes, *et cetera*. As part of our practical consciousness, we reflexively monitor our routine activity without being aware of doing so. It involves our various senses (eg, vision and hearing), the impressions of which are matched against expected data in a rolling fashion. In cases of mismatch, greater cognitive capacity (if available) is dedicated to the activity in question, to the point that our discursive consciousness takes over if required (eg, if conditions obtain with which the respective dispositions are unable to cope).²³⁸ Thus, monitoring consciousness involves an individual's sometimes focally, often barely peripherally conscious observation of her environment and her performance, such that the latter can be adjusted if/when necessary.

Generally, *efficiency* is characterised in terms of input/output ratios of processes; the higher the ratio, the fewer resources are required to achieve a given result (and the lower the corresponding waste). In the context of human activity and automaticity, the crucial input object is cognitive processing capacity, especially in terms of attentional resources, and – more specifically yet – in terms of focal, bright spot, or spotlight (rather than peripheral) attention. The “‘bright spot’ cast by a spotlight on the stage of a dark theater that represents the integration of multiple sensory inputs into a single conscious experience”²³⁹ represents a classical metaphor for that kind of consciousness. Efficient processes demand little or no bright spot attention (irrespective of whether it is directed toward process-evoking stimuli, process outputs, or the process itself). Thus, their operation tends to remain unaffected when cognitive resources are scarce (eg, due to high cognitive load), a crucial assumption being that all concurrent processes draw on a shared resource pool.

²³⁶ However, intentions cannot plausibly be characterised without reference to goals in turn.

²³⁷ Non-autonomy of PHI does not automatically imply a corresponding control by the individual whose activity it appears to be. Rather, that control may be altogether external to the person (eg, in the way in which a pace-maker controls her heartbeat).

²³⁸ Giddens (1984).

²³⁹ Baars (1998: 58).

Finally, *speed* straightforwardly refers to the length of time between process commencement and termination. Insofar as time represents another type of resource (see chapter 1), faster processes are simply temporally more efficient.

While features like intentionality, control/controllability, and consciousness are primary or essential (though not jointly necessary) features of automaticity, efficiency and speed are secondary qualities that represent mere symptoms and thus explain little or nothing about the nature of automatic activity themselves (though they indicate why automaticity may be an evolutionarily advantageous feature favoured by natural selection). To properly understand *why* automaticity is correlated with efficiency and speed, we would have to turn to the actual mechanisms of cognitive activity, and thus to mechanism-based accounts of automaticity. The two most popular approaches in this category are *memory retrieval* and *algorithm strengthening*.²⁴⁰ Unfortunately, due to scope I cannot discuss them here.

Some scholars argue that intention, control/controllability, and consciousness have strong conceptual ties to each other, to the point where the presence of one feature implies the presence of others. In effect, they equate intentional, controlled, and/or conscious action. I do not follow that view. Individuals may be conscious of some activity-related aspect (eg, the output of a process) without being conscious of others (eg, process-evoking stimuli and the process itself). Similarly, individuals may control some aspect of a process (eg, its alteration or interruption) without controlling others (eg, its commencement). And given that the aspects of consciousness and control do not correspond, there can be no such thing as an X-conscious activity that is necessarily also X-controlled.

Importantly, there is also no such thing as a clean contrast between conscious or controlled (let alone consciously controlled) *vs* unconscious or uncontrolled activity *simpliciter*. Both notions are gradual in the sense that individuals may be more or less conscious of some phenomenon (eg, focally *vs* peripherally) or more or less in control of some aspect (eg, able to prevent alterations to a process as long as they remain within narrower or wider boundaries). Given that intentions are the outcome of minimally conscious cognitive activity, though, should we not at least grant a necessary link between intentionality and consciousness of an activity? We should not, for various reasons. Firstly, there is no necessary link between consciousness of a process and consciousness of whatever state initiated it. Secondly, whatever deliberation and decision-making is required for intention-formation, its actual implementation in the form of action – or some of its implementations (eg, consider the intention to go running every Saturday morning, which has neither a predetermined number of implementations nor an expiration date) – may occur long afterwards, by which time the intention may long have ceased to be a conscious state. According to James, “consciousness deserts all processes where it can no longer be of use”²⁴¹, and it is hard to imagine that this parsimony principle does not apply to mental states too.

In effect, an action may be intentional and/or controlled to some degree and in some or all respects and/or conscious to some degree and in some or all respects, with a corresponding degree of efficiency and speed. Thus, it will make sense to refer to activities as more or less (and differently) automatic, rather than as automatic or not – which at the same time indicates to which degree and why they qualify as action or non-action.

Now that we better understand automaticity, we can turn toward an important kind of activity to which an understanding of that concept is crucial, namely habitualised activity.

²⁴⁰ For a brief overview, see Moors & De Houwer (2007).

²⁴¹ James (1910b: 496).

2.1.1.3. Habitualisation and Typification

While the term ‘habit’ is commonly used to refer to well-worn modes of action of variable complexity (eg, nail-biting), I use the concept to refer to dispositions that represent necessary but not sufficient conditions for *non-complex* activity. Relatedly, habituation is the formation process of these dispositions through repetitive performance.

By contrast, habitualisation is the process through which sets of habits productive of *complex* activity are formed. For example, expert motorists can drive their regular vehicle along familiar routes (in typical traffic conditions) without having to either think about, nor direct their focal attention toward, performing tasks like gear-shifting, accelerating, and braking (as well as carrying them out in perfect synchronicity at that) because numerous previous performances have created an interrelated, finely tuned set of habits that issues in habitualised activity.

Habituation and habitualisation are processes by which individual action that is more or less frequently repeated becomes cast into behavioural patterns, is frequently apprehended (intuitively) by its performer *as* patterns, and can be reproduced with an economy of effort.²⁴² For example, while there is a plethora of breakfast foods (and even more combinations) that I could deliberate about and choose from in the morning, habituation and habitualisation make such activity unnecessary: practically, the set of relevant alternatives is radically narrower, just coffee and bircher muesli. What is more, rather than having to direct much cognitive effort toward the actual preparation of breakfast (filling the kettle, assembling the French press, *etc*), the background of habitualised activity opens up a foreground for attention and deliberation regarding entirely different matters, eg, composing today’s Things To Do list. (Or, alternatively, I may let my mind ‘rest’.)

Much of our activity occurs in the presence of other people – for demonstrative purposes (eg, to explicitly teach), because goals can often be better achieved in teams, or simply because social creatures like us operate within sight of each other much of the time. Thus, habitualisation tends to be accompanied by typification, the recognition of behavioural patterns enacted by others and the association of certain patterns with particular types of performers and/or occasions. Emphasising what he calls *prestigious imitation*, Mauss argues that an individual typically “imitates actions which have succeeded and which he has seen successfully performed by people in whom he has confidence and who have authority over him”²⁴³ (so the transmission of activity patterns bridges voluntarism and coercion). Often, such imitation occurs unintentionally. For example, small children acquire much of their basic behavioural repertoire by simply mirroring the activity performed by their carers, sometimes in circumstances designed by the latter to represent training scenarios. In all of these cases, the learner acquires activity patterns through immersion in a set of agents whose behavioural repertoire already incorporates the habitualised performances in question.

The flip side of the social-acquisition coin is that habitualisation is the means by which social schemes like customs and traditions reproduce²⁴⁴ (rather like genes being the means by which biological bodies reproduce). As social observation frequently occurs in both directions, typification is often reciprocal. In fact, prolonged interaction frequently casts the various parties into related patterns of conduct that give expression to particular roles played *vis-à-vis* each other (eg, gender-related roles within the family). In these various ways, personal and social activity patterns are interrelated.

Habitualisation is pervasive throughout human conduct because it has many advantages for the performer(s), resource efficiency and speed being two that we already touched upon. In addition, typification makes

²⁴² Berger & Luckmann (1966).

²⁴³ Mauss (1973: 73).

²⁴⁴ Bourdieu & Passeron (1977).

the behaviour of others predictable and allows the setting of expectations, which has various psychological and operational benefits. For example, it addresses our need for ontological security because it sustains trust in the continuity of past, present, and future:

The predictability of the (apparently) minor routines of day-to-day life is deeply involved with a sense of psychological security. When such routines are shattered – for whatever reason – anxieties come flooding in, and even very firmly founded aspects of the personality of the individual may become stripped away and altered.²⁴⁵

Not only do shared lives in the form of interwoven taken-for-granted routines represent a stable background from, and against, which it is possible to recognise and evaluate anything novel and unfamiliar, but it also facilitates the division of labour. The latter results in resource efficiency too, though here the economy in question is distinctly collective. Benefits like these also confer evolutionary advantages, though not necessarily at the individual level (and in all kinds of circumstances).

Habitualisation is not without its down-sides. To begin with, the learning mechanisms that result in beneficial activity patterns support the formation of detrimental behaviours as well. Human lives are often littered with bad habits, many of which belong to the domain of consumption (eg, over-eating). At least sometimes, such patterns persist because highly automatised habitualisation has an inbuilt rigidity. The more firmly a highly automatic behaviour pattern is ingrained, the more it resists change, even though alternative routines may be far more beneficial. For example, empirical research has shown that the median time required for newly adopted daily healthy eating, drinking, or exercise behaviours to become automatic is 66 days²⁴⁶, a considerable period on any account. Yet, that number takes into consideration only those who actually adopt the new activity pattern. It ignores the large portion of individuals who fail to perform the changed activity consistently enough to achieve re-habitualisation at all – in the case of the empirical study just mentioned about fifty percent of participants²⁴⁷. Keeping in mind that individuals ordinarily lack the various kinds of support provided to such research participants (eg, being made aware of individual patterns and their harmful effects, introduced to superior patterns, and repeatedly encouraged to adopt them), it is not surprising that bad habits can be very persistent.

2.1.1.4. Habitus

Habitualisation is often associated with unthinking automatism. However, as even the briefest consideration of *habitus*, an important member of the *habit* concept family, reveals, characterising habitualised activity as mindless routine fails to capture it adequately.

Bourdieu in fact uses the concept of *habitus* to explicitly contrast it with the common conception of habit as dispositions for basic, atomic routine behaviours not unlike the conditioned response of the lab rat. *Habitus* refers to a much broader structure of enduring dispositions that affect how an agent perceives her surroundings and practically interprets what is happening in them, what kinds of attitudes she forms and their contents, and which behavioural regularities – many of which represent complex activity patterns or constituents thereof – she engages in.²⁴⁸ Thus, not only does Bourdieu recognise the difference between habituation and habitualisation, but he also emphasises the (partial) patterning of mental activity.

²⁴⁵ Giddens (1990: 98).

²⁴⁶ Measured as time for individual automaticity scores to reach 95% of their asymptote. Individual results ranged from 18 to 254 days (Lally et al, 2010).

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Bourdieu (1990b).

Habits are often associated with overt behaviour or the purely overt components of activity. However, purely cognitive activity like deliberation (which we tend to regard as the purest instance of true action) too relies on the exercise of more basic, elementary skills, at least when it is performed well. The hallmark of expertise is fluency, which cannot be achieved without the non-deliberative employment of basic mental skills.²⁴⁹ Language use is an obvious example. While the novice learner of a second tongue speaks painfully slowly and with obvious effort because she has to reflect about which words to use, how to sequence them grammatically and pronounce them properly, *et cetera*, the expert is fluent because she does not need to deliberate about any of these things. She carries out basic mental tasks in a fully automated fashion²⁵⁰ – which does of course not imply that expert speech represents unthinking routine. Rather, the expert can focus her attention and efforts upon the actual content of her message, the optimisation of its delivery (eg, concerning tone of voice), and the interpretation of the audience’s body language and facial expressions (eg, in terms of comprehension, agreement, or amusement), such that she can make adjustments to her speech if/when required.

To acquire a habitus is to acquire means of knowing and dealing with the world, especially, as the terminology implies, one’s *habitat* (the environment in which the subject typically operates). *Techniques of the body*, as Mauss calls the somatic constituents of the habitus, are modes of activity that may or may not involve extraneous instruments (eg, consider speaking, which usually does not require tools, *vs* writing, which usually does). They afford their possessor a practical understanding of some aspect of her world that manifests itself in her fluent mastery over it.²⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty emphasises that such habitualisation implies a convergence of actor and environment, and thus “a rearrangement and renewal of the corporeal schema”²⁵². Bodily comprehension occurs through transplanting ourselves into parts of the exterior and/or incorporating them into ourselves. For example, whilst driving, a motorist does not perceive her intimately familiar vehicle as a separate entity. Thus, she can navigate narrow passages and immediately see that she “can ‘get through’ without comparing the width of the opening with that of the wings, just as I go through a doorway without checking the width of the doorway against that of my body”²⁵³. The distinction between agent and artifice dissolves, and in some cases our language explicitly represents that convergence. For instance, *habit* refers to both behaviour and dress, the latter composing an essential part of what William James calls the *material me*.²⁵⁴

As previously noted, agents acquire much of their habitus socially. However, rational computation and intentional self-adjustment shape individual behavioural regularities too, especially when agents diagnose an ongoing mismatch between habitualised performance and context, for example, due to major social/political upheaval.²⁵⁵ For Bourdieu, such crises are rare, which is why our habitus is correspondingly stable. If such crises are the exception indeed, Bourdieu’s view strikes me as plausible because contextual stability invites a high degree of automaticity. The more automated an agent’s activity, the less focal consciousness it involves and the correspondingly smaller the likelihood that the individual picks up on mismatches between performance and context – or, to put it differently, the more disruptive (ie, crisis-like) such mismatch will have to be.

²⁴⁹ Railton (2009).

²⁵⁰ For a more detailed account, see Noë (2009: ch 5).

²⁵¹ Mauss (1973).

²⁵² Merleau-Ponty (1962: 164).

²⁵³ *Ibid*: 165.

²⁵⁴ “The old saying that the human person is composed of three parts – soul, body and clothes – is more than a joke” (James, 1910a: 292).

²⁵⁵ Bourdieu (1990a).

2.1.2. Habitualisation Types/Modes

As automaticity is the key feature around which habitualisation revolves, it makes sense to use it to conceptualise different habitualisation types that help us distinguish and evaluate human activity.

2.1.2.1. Categorising Practical Habitualisation

A three-fold distinction of habitualisation positions with regard to a given activity strikes me as most useful. I will refer to them as *non-automaticity*, *mechanisation* (which is fully or highly automatic), and *acumination* (which incorporates various degrees of automaticity).

Non-Automaticity

The first position is easily characterised because, assuming that wholly non-automatic activity is even possible, it typically represents something like the non-habitualised performance of complete novices. Neophytes (attempt to) direct their focal attention toward all aspects of the activity in question, including the evaluation and commencement of each sub-task and the focal monitoring of its subsequent progression. For example, novice motorists try to absorb and analyse every detail of what is happening in- and outside the vehicle because they do not yet possess the highly automatised mental processes that separate the attention-worthy from the irrelevant. Rookie drivers keep running through a host of traffic rules in their minds and simultaneously try to remember to perform a multitude of practical driving tasks, which can easily result in an activity break-down due to cognitive overload (expressing itself through feeling overwhelmed²⁵⁶). Despite a neophyte's desperate attempts to do well, the instructor usually has to repeatedly make her aware of (potential) dangers and frequently remind her to perform sub-tasks like switching gears, checking mirrors, and activating indicators.

Let us return to the features of automaticity: incompetent as the agent in question may be, her activity is unquestionably intentional, controlled, and non-autonomous (assuming, of course, that the overall system or process does not 'get away' from her²⁵⁷). It involves the various types of consciousness, including Giddens' discursive and monitoring consciousness, and it qualifies as neither fast nor efficient.

Mechanisation

Fully mechanised habitualisation represents the fully automatic counter-position to non-automaticity. Regardless of the performance aspect (commencement, maintenance, or termination), the individual lacks the ability to direct and interfere with what is happening in terms of overall activity and the tasks that constitute it. Among the clearest examples of acquired mechanisation of that type (as opposed to genetically programmed reflexes) are the activities performed by individuals who suffer from sleep-disorders, including sleep-walkers and sleep-piano players. These parasomniacs carry out a variety of tasks without the intention to do so (eg, without formulating relevant plans of the right kind before falling asleep). The complete inability to remember the performance upon awakening strongly indicates that their activities fail to be subject to Giddens' monitoring consciousness.

Relatedly, though slightly less fully mechanised, individuals frequently also perform activities like walking and piano play 'in their sleep' in a metaphorical sense. For instance, a mentally fatigued person can walk perfectly competently along familiar routes and on regular terrain, reaching her destination (say, home) without having to

²⁵⁶ The previously mentioned image of Poe's boat helplessly descending into the maelström seems rather apt here.

²⁵⁷ By itself, controlling an activity (as we use the notion) does not at all imply that the individual is in (full) control of a larger activity or system. For example, a novice motorist is less in control of her vehicle than an expert driver even though the latter performs the activity in a much more automatic fashion.

pay the slightest focal attention to her ambulatory performance; a stupefied pianist may competently perform an entire musical number, only to ‘come to’ at some point and realise that she failed to pay any attention throughout, such that she cannot remember any details of her execution.

Both sleep and quasi-sleep performances are only possible with regard to activities and tasks that have been practiced *ad nauseam* in the past, that are not overly complex, and that occur in environments with little or no dynamicity.²⁵⁸

Acumination

Acumination (my own terminology, from the Latin *acūminātus*²⁵⁹, related to *acumen*²⁶⁰) indicates any state of habitualisation in which the option of fittingly (not) performing, maintaining, or terminating somatic tasks depending on the circumstances in which the individual finds herself at time *t* reliably occurs to her at *t* such that she can decide whether or not to implement any one, or some combination, of them (and corporeally act on that choice).

Due to the ‘reliably occurs’ requirement, a host of pre-deliberative mental tasks must be fully mechanised. For example, the interpretation of sensual input data (like visual patterns that represent relevant chess configurations on a board) and the pre-selection of situationally appropriate activity options (based on successful responses in the past) occur automatically, such that the agent can then perform an overall appraisal and match the features of her current – and often also her expected future – circumstances to the most appropriate somatic performance in her repertoire.

Given that automaticity occurs in degrees, acumination does too. For one, the option of fitting performance may reliably occur to the actor with regard to some tasks that constitute the activity, but not regarding others. For instance, the motorist who has moved past (complete) novicehood may reliably remember that she must indicate before turning at intersections; however, that she must regularly check her mirrors too may not reliably occur to her at all yet.

Alternatively, options may reliably occur to the actor with regard to some aspects of an activity and its various subtasks (eg, maintenance or termination), but not regarding others (eg, performance initiation). In fact, neuroscientists found that even though their research subjects reported having formed intentions to perform certain bodily movements, the corresponding conscious states frequently occurred too late to actually play a causal role in the genesis of the respective movements. Thus, the researchers argued, both the individual feeling of intending to perform and the actual performance itself are actually both the result of unconscious processing.²⁶¹ If these findings and their interpretations are correct, the initiation of many performances that we believe to be the result of our conscious choices and intentions actually occurs automatically, and whatever control we have over them is correspondingly limited to the aspects of activity maintenance, modification, and termination at most.

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Apart from conceptual links, the three types are developmentally related, of course. Non-automaticity applies to unfamiliar practical activities, for instance, pursuits that are novel or carried out very infrequently. With

²⁵⁸ Brogaard (2012).

²⁵⁹ Pointed, sharpened; tapering to a point.

²⁶⁰ Keen insight; shrewdness.

²⁶¹ Matsushashi & Hallett (2008).

increased familiarity, habitualisation occurs.²⁶² Put differently, increased familiarity involves a progression from non-automaticity to mechanisation. Acumination represents a middle-ground between the two, reserved for activities that are in some sense and to some degree unfamiliar.

With regard to any particular practical activity (considered from a sufficiently high level of aggregation), the agent's performance may incorporate elements from all three categories. For instance, the partially proficient driver's performance may be acuminated with regard to shifting gears: when the engine runs high, the thought that a gear-change ought to be carried out simply occurs to her – which, absent good reasons against (eg, because she needs peak engine torque and power to overtake another vehicle), she performs. It may be fully mechanised with regard to clutch-operation: she does not even notice whether, when, and how smoothly she works the pedal. And it may be non-automatic with regard to indicator use: the instructor still has to constantly remind her to signal changes of direction or position on the road.

2.1.2.2. Complexity and Habitualisation

Mechanisation has benefits, for example, efficiency and speed. However, it also has cost. To the degree that an activity is performed without mental engagement, it cannot be mentally stimulating. Thus, even if the nature of the activity and the circumstances in which it occurs allows for such stimulation in principle, the opportunity is missed because a necessary condition fails to obtain. Just as importantly, as previously indicated, low-grade consciousness implies an increased likelihood that information indicating a mismatch between performance and context is missed by the agent. Such mismatch may be disadvantageous to the agent, but it may be detrimental to others too – and both of these issues are of course ethically relevant. I will return to these points in chapter 5 in particular.

The obvious question then is this: how *should* an activity be habitualised? Or, put differently, when is an activity well-habitualised? The main factor that determines which mode of habitualisation suits an activity best is the complexity of the relevant system SYS, where the latter incorporates the agent's activity and the relevant parts of the context in which it occurs, including elements of the external environment (eg, animate entities like other human beings and inanimate objects like the human artifice).

Complexity can be characterised on the basis of information: according to the algorithmic information content approach, the complexity of SYS corresponds to the size of the shortest computer programme that could generate a complete description of that system (given a specified level of grain or detail).²⁶³ The main complexity drivers of the systems that interest me are *differentiation*, which represents the number of varied elements, and *interdependence* or *connectivity*, which represents the degree of interrelatedness between them.²⁶⁴ In my eyes, complexity is best indexed to periods of (rather than points in) time because not all kinds of elements and connections may be present at all points throughout such a period. For example, an environment that incorporates relatively few elements at any particular moment may still be highly complex because their features, along with the characteristics of the connections between them, change frequently. The higher that dynamicity and the less orderly that change (eg, in turbulent conditions as discussed in chapter 1), the greater the complexity of such a system will be, with chaotic variation representing a limiting extreme (the description of which requires very large computer programmes).

²⁶² In fact, habitualisation may even be part of the concept of *familiarity*, something that I cannot explore here.

²⁶³ See Mitchell (2009).

²⁶⁴ Following Baccharini (1996).

Again, complexity occurs with regard to both activity and context. *Complex activities* incorporate a multitude of dissimilar, possibly greatly hierarchical, sub-tasks, the performances of which (partially concurrent, partially consecutive) have to be well coordinated. *Complex contexts* expose the individual to a multitude of varied situational demands. Often, complexity of activity and complexity of context are interdependent. For example, surroundings that are complex due to being dynamic require the adaptive agent to have a greater repertoire of responses than static environments. If these responses are all part of the same activity, then that activity is necessarily more complex than one that suits static surroundings. Considering the reverse case, since a complex activity can be performed in a greater variety of ways than a simple one, and since the effects of one individual's performance are often part of the contextual conditions of others, complex activities often yield complex contexts.²⁶⁵ Games exemplify both interdependencies. For example, the performance of a chess expert is much more complex than that of an expert at Nine Men's Morris because the former game's structure (as part of the player's context) is far more complex: greater number of pieces, more types of pieces, and a larger board²⁶⁶. At the same time, due to the greater complexity of the game, a chess opponent performs far more varied and harder-to-predict moves than a Nine Men's Morris opponent – which is an expression of non-orderly variation.

A well-habitualised activity is one in which tasks and sub-tasks are mechanically habitualised to the extent that the relevant system complexity is low. Lack of complexity permits automatic performance, such that little mental energy has to be invested and maximum speed and efficiency benefits can be reaped. To the extent that relevant system complexity is high (without being overwhelming), tasks and sub-tasks need to be acuminatedly habitualised and somatic performance correspondingly non-automatic. In theory, well-acuminated habitualisation may coincide with full somatic non-automaticity if complexity is at a manageable maximum or with full mechanisation if it is entirely absent; in practice, such situations are probably rare (although vortical environments are especially worrisome for us, of course).

Importantly, just as any one activity may be complex in some aspects and simple in others, the same applies to any given context. Correspondingly, the well-endowed agent performs the most suitable activity based on dispositions that may represent partially mechanised and partially non-automatic habitualisation. Piano play as part of an classical orchestra performance is a good example: a pianist's play must be closely aligned with the performances of the other members of the orchestra, including the directions of the conductor. In the context of jazz improvisation, the pianist probably needs an even greater ability to flexibly adapt to what the other instruments do.

However, an aspect of her circumstances that is non-complex concerns her instrument. An expert pianist can fully and lastingly integrate its physical user interface – especially keyboard and pedals – into her corporeal schema because it never changes, allowing the (sub-)tasks that represent her basic foot, arm-, and finger-movements to become correspondingly mechanised.²⁶⁷ Unlike novices, the expert player does not have to search for the right keys – she simply reaches for them and hits her mark every time; she does not have to think about how hard to strike in order to achieve certain effects – she simply knows. In fact, she may perform entire patterns without having to think about appropriate stylistic choices (eg, pianissimo or fortissimo, andante or presto) and how best to

²⁶⁵ What is more, the effects of my past and current performances are often part of my contextual conditions in the future.

²⁶⁶ 32 pieces *versus* 18, six types *versus* one, and 64 squares *versus* 24 respectively.

²⁶⁷ By contrast, imagine a keyboard layout that is frequently reconfigured, such that the number of keys, their locations, and the notes they produce randomly vary and have to be relearned again and again. No real corporeal integration would be possible and bodily movements could hardly be mechanised at all.

implement them at all because training and experience make them directly available to her in terms of both post-deliberative assessment and motor skill. She knows why such patterns are performed in particular ways, but where she had to consciously and deliberately reflect about respective reasons in the past (as a learner), her thoughts have now ‘effaced themselves’²⁶⁸: they linger in the background and could be articulated if required, but they are not ordinarily held in the player’s A-consciousness anymore. Thus, the master pianist’s focal consciousness and deliberate processing can be directed toward monitoring her environment and integrating the execution of sub-tasks and -patterns such that the product of her activity as a whole represents not just a set of well-related tones but rather a melody that properly combines with the performances of the other musicians.

Single Activities and Habitualisation

As noted, proper habitualisation regarding an activity requires the right match between system complexity and performance automaticity. Such matching may occur in different ways. Often, we have no choice but to accept the existing complexities of activities and/or their contexts, such that only our mode of habitualisation can be adjusted. Yet, sometimes the complexity of a system is not an unalterable given. To use a simple example, almost all Western agents have a choice with regard to the complexity of their grocery shopping activity. By limiting such activity to, in extreme cases, one store, context complexity is radically minimised – at least to the degree that the in-store layout is not changed by store operators. Agents who invariably frequent one and the same venue can collect regular shopping list items ‘in their sleep’; only when they reach the checkout do they have to ‘wake up’ from their mindless routine. By contrast, agents who frequent many different stores have to be mentally engaged throughout their in-store activity because item availabilities and locations vary radically. Not only do they have to actively search for the various goods, but they may even have to write down, and consult, detailed shopping lists because unfamiliar in-store layouts and product brands cannot serve as non-consciously perceived stimuli that prompt shoppers to automatically and reliably collect everything they need.

Thus, with regard to activities like the one just described we have a choice: minimise complexity and profit from mechanisation benefits like resource efficiency and speed, or increase complexity and prevent mechanisation drawbacks like boredom (and perhaps even yield positive advantages, eg, stimulation from excitement).

Overall Habitualisation of the Agent

Just as the extent and degree of a particular activity’s automaticity must correspond to the complexity of the relevant system, a similar connection exists between the extent and degree of automaticity of an individual’s activity portfolio as a whole and the complexity of the larger system that incorporates the activities and the relevant parts of the contexts in which they occur: the portfolio of a well-habitualised individual incorporates activities, and these incorporate sub-task performances in turn, that are mechanically habitualised to the extent that relevant system complexity is low; to the extent that system complexity is high, activities and sub-task performances are acuminately habitualised (and correspondingly non-automatic).

I already noted that agents are not simply takers of system complexity: with regard to some activities, and to varying degrees, its extent is a matter of choice. A slightly different point applies to an activity portfolio as a whole: agents frequently have a choice with regard to which activity types they pursue to begin with, and thus which complexities they subject themselves to. For example, I may pursue the opportunity to play chess or the piano and

²⁶⁸ Annas (2011). The notions of effacement and self-effacement considered here are entirely unrelated to a separate philosophical discussion of the problem of self-effacing ethical theories, which commenced with Stocker (1976).

thereby expose myself to very high complexities (of both activity and context), or I may pursue fishing instead – a pastime that involves prolonged periods of almost complete inactivity (both mental and somatic); I may opt into the complexities of family life and raise children, or I may pursue a solitary life instead; I may subject myself to the requirements of maintaining a large dwelling, or I may choose the relative simplicity of a micro-abode instead.

Accordingly, agents usually have at least some degree of freedom regarding the total complexity to which they expose themselves. Limited cognitive resources (including stamina and skills) put a cap on the total amount an individual is able to handle during a given period of time (eg, each day). Thus, the less mechanised her activities are, the fewer of them she can pursue (*ceteris paribus*). If total demand upon the resources of a previously well-habitualised individual exceeds the limits of her resource pool (eg, due to sharply rising complexity regarding one particular activity in her portfolio), her response can only be some kind of reduction: either curtail select pursuits quantitatively (by practicing them less often or withdrawing from them entirely) or lower the quality of her mental engagement (by moving toward a more mechanised mode of habitualisation).

However, the latter must of course be accompanied by a decrease in complexity – otherwise, complexity and habitualisation fail to correspond. Most plausibly, that decrease can be achieved through context modification, especially with regard to the individual's environment. I see three options. (1) The agent minimises exposure to complex conditions by changing her individual location in the larger environment (somewhat like moving from suburb A to suburb B). That way, she does not change the larger environment and its complexity as such, but rather her immediate surroundings. (2) She minimises exposure to complex conditions by partially walling herself, and possibly select others, off from them (somewhat like protecting oneself from the larger climatic elements by building a shelter). That way, she creates a lower-complexity micro-milieu within the larger environment. (3) She actually changes the larger environment and lowers its complexity, thereby producing effects not just for herself and select others, but for all who are exposed to the same surroundings. Unfortunately, the last is rarely an option that the individual is able to achieve by herself. It tends to require coordination and cooperation with (many) others, which introduces an entirely different set of challenges.

These options – change of location, retreat to micro-milieu, and change of environment – may also be available to achieve a complexity *increase*, of course. Which of them is most suitable depends on various facts about the individual and the environment (including other individuals). We will return to these considerations in due course.

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As creatures who may not just analyse the contexts of their activities but engage with them creatively and constructively so as to effect dramatic changes (in particular when it comes to their surroundings), human agents have the ability to drastically modulate the complexity to which they are subject – in either direction.

As we saw, degrees of complexity, and thus also complexity changes, determine which habitualisation mode suits an activity best. Lower complexity allows for greater automaticity (*ceteris paribus*), which tends to yield various benefits for the actor, like the ability to engage in otherwise incompatible parallel performances. However, complexity reduction does not always suit an actor's interests best. Firstly, practices like chess-play require the activities of their participants to remain exacting, which can be achieved only by repeatedly increasing system complexity (eg, by playing more skilled opponents). Without the latter, various goods (and therefore also advanced degrees or kinds of well-being) become or remain unavailable. Secondly, if complexity adjustments occur in the form of measures through which actors become walled off from parts of the environment, the micro-milieus in which they subsequently operate fail to represent the richness of their wider surroundings – a point that is especially

pertinent to complexity-lowering milieus. If the resources on which their actions and behaviour patterns rely (eg, goods and services) are a product and/or cause of that richness, the overall decision-making or actors is bound to neglect elements to which they are connected by links of ethical/political responsibility, especially the interests of living entities (people, non-human animals, ecosystems, *etc*). I will return to this problem in chapter 5.

2.2. Practices

I now shift the focus of our considerations from agent-internal activity properties (because habitualised performance is an expression of various, largely mental, dispositions after all) to entities of which habitualised performance is a key element, but that cannot be reduced to it.

‘Practice’ has various meanings. On the one hand, the term is used as a mass noun that contrasts with ‘theory’ and refers to the practical application or use of ideas, beliefs, or methods.²⁶⁹ On the other hand, it is used as a count noun that indicates more or less narrowly specified repeatable performances or performance clusters of habitualised activities (eg, drive on the left side of the road) or social customs (eg, the keeping of slaves). These notions are far too generic to be analytically useful though, so we need to consider and develop *practice* concepts that are more specific and precise.

2.2.1. Approaching *Practice* Narrowly

In contemporary philosophy, the term ‘practice’ is probably most often associated with Alasdair MacIntyre’s work. His approach relies on the second meaning mentioned above, but he uses the term in a very technical and narrow way. MacIntyre defines *practice* as

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.²⁷⁰

Accordingly, to qualify as a practice, an activity, understood as a set of behaviours that we might also call an *enterprise*, has to satisfy multiple necessary conditions. As I interpret these features, it

- i+ii) incorporates various interconnected elements (*complex*) that are consistent and hang well together (*coherent*),
- iii) is widely practised or at least widely accepted in the collective, has a history, and is part of a tradition (*socially established*),
- iv) involves working with others toward some common end (*cooperative*),
- v) features goods that cannot be derived other than by performing the activity (*goods internal to that form of activity*), and
- vi) features practice-specific quality criteria (*standards of excellence*) that apply to human performances and the products they spawn.

²⁶⁹ See Aristotle’s distinction between *theoria* (contemplation) and *praxis* (everyday actions).

²⁷⁰ MacIntyre (2007: 187).

In later work, MacIntyre explicitly mentions the link between practice and habituation: “If all goes well, we develop in each area [eg, household, school, and workplace] those habits, those dispositions, without which we cannot exercise the moral virtues”²⁷¹. Given that, for MacIntyre, the virtues are centrally located among the aforementioned practice-specific standards of excellence, we can conclude that his *practice* incorporates habituated activity. Thus, I add *habituation* to the list of necessary conditions (vii).

The list’s plausibility cannot be adequately judged outside the context of MacIntyre’s original project. Broadly, he argues that modern liberalism conceptualises the individual in separation of community and tradition, thereby taking away the grounds for agreement upon the substance of ends and ultimate goods. All we are left with is an agreement upon instrumental goods (that an individual may use in whichever way she sees fit), which has various negative implications and consequences. Firstly, we frequently fail to perceive them *as* mere means, thus inevitably pursuing activities with inappropriate ends in mind. Secondly, we subject ourselves to the win/lose antagonism that is inherent to the pursuit of instrumental goods; more on that below. Thirdly, politics tends to decay toward a practice dominated by institutions that promote the maximisation of wealth, power, and status goods through increased effectiveness. MacIntyre’s proposed remedy is the return to an ethics of virtue, with *virtue* characterised by reference to *practice*²⁷².

If we conceptualise the virtues (eg, in terms of their point and function) through *practice*, necessity claims regarding criteria five and six (*internal goods* and *standards of excellence*) are plausible. After all, the Greek term *areté* literally means ‘excellence or goodness of any kind’²⁷³, and the pursuit of such excellence is partially constitutive of the good life. As MacIntyre might put it, the pursuit of excellence is a means internal to achieving the end of human flourishing.²⁷⁴

The complexity criterion is presumably based on MacIntyre’s wanting to distinguish between practices in the sense of more or less any elementary habit (eg, the automatic shifting of gears) and enterprises through the participation in which individuals give meaning to their lives and flourish in characteristically human ways (eg, playing chess, raising children, creating works of art). Without the complexity criterion, even activities like walking might qualify as a practice – but that is not what he has in mind. Even though MacIntyre never explicitly says exactly what does, and does not, qualify as a practice, his examples are indicative: the pursuit of sports (eg, football); certain games (eg, chess); arts (eg, painting and music); crafts, trades, and agriculture (eg, architecture and farming); research and enquiry (eg, physics, chemistry, biology, and history); and politics. All of these represent highly complex endeavours because they incorporate the performance of many different kinds of constitutive, interlinked activities. Agents tend to dedicate significant portions of their lives to these enterprises, through their participation in which (unlike performing elementary activities like walking) they create an individually chosen and often rather unique life narrative.

If we interpret MacIntyre’s second criterion as *intra-practice coherence*²⁷⁵, its necessity seems rather self-evident. An ensemble of activities that hangs together loosely, ill-fittingly, and possibly mutually impedingly cannot qualify as a practice – somewhat similarly to the way in which a set of ill-fitting, possibly mutually contradictory beliefs cannot qualify as a body of knowledge.

²⁷¹ MacIntyre (2016: 49).

²⁷² He refers to two other concepts, the *narrative order* of the individual’s life and *moral tradition* (MacIntyre, 2007).

²⁷³ *Areté* is an abstract noun related to *aristos*, meaning ‘excellent’ (Urmson, 1990).

²⁷⁴ By contrast, the pursuit of practice-external goods is (at best) a means external to achieving said end.

²⁷⁵ Rather than *inter-practice coherence*, to which I will return below.

Criterion three (*socially established*) makes sense if we consider that all practices have histories of their own and are embedded in the histories of their practitioners in turn. What is more, the question of which practice types (eg, sports and games, religion) and which practice tokens (eg, cricket or rugby, Christianity or Islam) a particular community ought to embrace and promote, and which ones it should not, can only be considered through inclusive public debate, for the following reasons. Over the past millennia, countless practices (that give access to different goods) have evolved, a great many of which are still available to practitioners today. No group can pursue all of these practices, so any community (in the classic, geopolitical sense) must choose a particular set it will adopt or retain.²⁷⁶ Without participation in such important decision-making, individuals could not count as politically engaged agents and responsible members of their community in the full sense. Thus, they could not be considered to flourish fully, which – as I will argue in chapter 3 – is the final end of a human life. Furthermore, without widespread interpersonal assessment and social criticism not only are practices doomed to stagnation but their features are also vulnerable to distortion that originates in the biases of individuals and factions. In particular, the corrupting influence of institutions (formal structures that are dedicated to the sustenance of the practice and that have the unfortunate tendency to pursue external goods like wealth, power, and status²⁷⁷) is much less likely to be detected and opposed.

It might appear that the third criterion is vulnerable to counter-examples, say the crafts of spies and burglars (which represent largely non-social, even positively anti-social activities), but it need not be. If we interpret MacIntyre's second criterion as *inter-practice* coherence, then said crafts obviously fail to qualify. The activities of spies and burglars, especially if pursued with great excellence, create distrust within and individual withdrawal from the community. They destroy the very foundations for honesty and cooperation, without which the practices of a community, and thus the community as such, cannot thrive. (Alternatively, we might argue that MacIntyre's *practice* represents an ideal-world concept that is fully coherent and applicable only insofar as it is accepted and acted upon by all. In such a world, something like spy craft would not actually be needed to counter the evil activities of enemies, so it would never be sanctioned by a collective.)

With regard to the fourth criterion (*cooperative*), we should not be misled by examples like that of the solitary castaway on the proverbial desert island, because such an individual does not live in characteristically human circumstances. Firstly, it is difficult to think of *any* type of human activity at all that we do not learn cooperatively, even the most basic and physical ones. For example, children receive massive amounts of parental time and support when they learn to walk, and they characteristically render similar assistance to their own offspring later in turn. Regarding performance that is more cognitive in nature – say, language-use activity like talking, reading, and writing – that fact is even more obvious. In the absence of social learning, we are not talking about solitary individuals like Robinson Crusoe (who did not grow up as a castaway, of course) but rather about members of what Linnaeus classifies as *Homo ferus* (feral man/child): creatures who run about on all fours “having gained the habits, bodily strength and sharp senses of an animal, but lost [or rather, never developed] the human faculties of speech and reason”²⁷⁸. In other words, we are no longer talking about agents at all. If even basic activity is passed on through learner/teacher cooperation, then the activity patterns of complex projects obviously are too. Novices submit to the teachings of experts, and it requires a lot of joint activity between the two (which over time becomes ever less focussed upon transferring skills and ever more directed upon applying them toward the creation of excellent

²⁷⁶ Not only once, of course. Communal practice portfolios are dynamic.

²⁷⁷ MacIntyre (2007).

²⁷⁸ Maclean (1977: 1).

products) before a practitioner can stand and perform on her own. What is more, practitioners who have achieved a high degree of mastery generally transform into teachers in turn, lest the practice will vanish. Thus, throughout a human life the cooperative nature of practice activity does not cease; it merely changes direction.

Secondly, none of the complex projects that represent practices (eg, sports and games, religion, arts, crafts, trades, politics) can be carried out and sustained by single individuals. Not only does the ongoing execution of such projects require communities of practitioners (who often take on various distinct roles within a practice), but so does their further development. While individual performances contribute to the perfection of a practice as such, it is important to remember that they both enable and induce further improvements by other practitioners too. For example, it is no accident that the ongoing process in the course of which writers and thinkers in the arts/humanities reference, build on, and refine the work of their predecessors throughout millennia is called *The Great Conversation*²⁷⁹.

The necessity of habitualisation (criterion vii) arises partially on conceptual grounds: given that individual excellences (including virtues in the narrow sense) represent acquired or refined dispositions of the agent, and given that such dispositions simply *are* the result of agent habitualisation, activity that is performed excellently (as per the standards of the practice) must be habitualised in various ways. Precisely how it should be habitualised depends on the complexity of the relevant system (as previously discussed).

2.2.2. Approaching *Practice* Broadly

Given MacIntyre's particular objectives, his conceptualisation of *practice* is unsurprisingly specific. However, that particularity has a price. His meaning of 'practice' is much narrower than our ordinary understanding of the term. Put differently, MacIntyre's practices represent just a small subset of human practices more broadly conceived, which is why we need a more inclusive account. Broader theories of practice – expounded by Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Charles Taylor (*inter alia*)²⁸⁰ – are rather heterogeneous, and no authoritative or synthetic version has established itself yet. Accordingly, I will focus on a number of central themes and distil an account that I shall subsequently employ.

MacIntyre's characterisation also glosses over an important distinction, namely that between intra- and inter-individual activity patterns. With regard to the latter, Schatzki notes that a practice is a

temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of [bodily] doings and sayings. Examples are cooking practices, voting practices, industrial practices, recreational practices, and correctional practices. To say that the doings and sayings forming a practice constitute a nexus is to say that they are linked in certain ways. Three major avenues of linkage are involved: (1) through understandings, for example, of what to say and do; (2) through explicit rules, principles, precepts, and instructions; and (3) through what I will call "teleoaffective" structures embracing ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions, and moods.²⁸¹

Practices in that sense are coordinated and coordinating entities. They incorporate bodily activities, including the manners in which they are carried out (eg, fully automatic salutation body movements); they also incorporate utterances, including the tones of voice with which they are said (eg, acknowledgements like "Cheers, mate"). Schatzki uses the word 'nexus' here, I believe, because she earlier described 'the social' by using the German word *Zusammenhang*, which, in turn, she renders into English by reference to 'nexus' and 'context'. By 'the social'

²⁷⁹ See Hutchins (1952).

²⁸⁰ See Schatzki (1996).

²⁸¹ Ibid: 89.

she means “a hanging-together of entities that forms a context for each. Human coexistence is a hanging-together of human lives that forms a context in which each proceeds individually”²⁸². Accordingly, practices are doings and sayings (of numerous people, in numerous places, at numerous times) that hang together and form a context for each other. Given what I said earlier about habitualisation and typification, regarding a practice as a ‘temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus’ is quite plausible.

With regard to intra-individual activity patterns, Schatzki notes that practice is the “performing [of] an action or carrying out [of] a practice of the [previous] sort. This notion denotes the do-ing, the actual activity or energization, at the heart of action”²⁸³. Human existence is a happening in the form of ceaseless performance. Without it, practices in the second sense would no longer be actualised and sustained, and thereby cease to exist (outside of history books). Such elimination is a regular occurrence, sometimes regrettably (eg, think of critically endangered crafts like paper marbling and extinct crafts like sieve-and-riddle-making²⁸⁴), often commendably (eg, consider bloodletting, foot binding, and pacifying children with ‘soothing syrups’²⁸⁵).

In the following, I will use these remarks to develop my own conceptualisations of *practice* in the two senses just discussed.

2.2.2.1. Practice as Individual Performance Patterns

Let us begin with a definition and discuss the details afterwards. I understand practice as individual performance pattern as follows:

PIPP: A series of habitualised individual activities that are dispersed across time, that incorporate a particular combination of the three interconnected elements *doings*, *beings*, and *havings*, that are subject to norms, and that are properly causally related.

A practice in this sense represents a habitualised activity as discussed in the previous section, but we now focus on identifiable activity types performed by the individual (or a small group). The key to identifying a type are what I call ‘doings’, ‘beings’, and ‘havings’, notions that are inspired by the work of German-born polymath Erich Fromm.²⁸⁶ I employ the typology to exhaustively incorporate and systematically distinguish between what I consider the main components of a person’s habitualised behaviour pattern. Any such activity forms a module that is characterised through the specific combination of mental and bodily performances (including speech acts), relevant physical and mental attributes²⁸⁷, and whatever resources the individual utilises throughout (including time).

For example, consider the weekend practice of *breakfasting as a family*, and imagine that four of its carriers are Len, his wife, and his two children. Performed virtually every Saturday and Sunday, and in each consecutive home’s dining room throughout the years, it characteristically involves four people and the following elements:

- *Doings*: similar token actions and action-sequences like saying grace, wielding cutlery, pouring coffee, passing foods and drinks, eating various consumables (properly, without slurping noises

²⁸² Ibid: 14.

²⁸³ Ibid: 90.

²⁸⁴ For a list of endangered crafts in the UK, see Bertram (2017).

²⁸⁵ For example, the two primary ingredients in the, now infamous, *Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup* were morphine and alcohol; see Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology (www.woodlibrarymuseum.org).

²⁸⁶ Fromm uses them to conceptualise different modes of existence, that is, “kinds of character structure the respective predominance of which determines the totality of a person’s thinking, feeling, and acting” (1976: 21). He actually only distinguishes between *being* and *having*, and his disciples later add the third mode of existence, *doing*. Either way, I use the terminology for a different purpose.

²⁸⁷ I include person-internal resources such as physical energy (labour) and mental energy under *beings*.

- and the likes), sharing work/school stories, and commenting on current events (politely, without interrupting and snapping at each other);
- *Havings*: similar assortments of consumables (eg, homemade pancakes, bread rolls, cut fruit, freshly made coffee and cocoa), usables (eg, chairs, table and white table cloth, special dishes and cutlery reserved for formal meals), appreciables (eg, table flowers from the garden), services and machine processes (eg, classic music in the background), and others (eg, space and time); and
 - *Beings*: a variety of – usually stable and enduring – physical and mental states, including knowledge-that (eg, that food is to be eaten with cutlery, not one's fingers), knowledge-how (eg, how the act of saying grace is properly carried out), as well as moods and motivations (eg, a keenness to spend time together and share stories).

The composite is subject to various norms that, in the eyes of its performers and the context of the particular practice, govern what counts as *normal*. For example, eating candy or potato crisps, listening to iPod music through earphones, and being in a foul/aggressive mood all violate the norms to which a practice like *breakfasting as a family* is subject – the first in terms of having (non-breakfast food), the second in terms of doing (unsociable performance), and the third in terms of being (anti-social mood).

Crucially, said norms incorporate temporal criteria too. No matter which practice we consider, our time-related attitudes are culturally conditioned, often from early childhood on:

Part of this conditioning consists of building up within the child a series of expectations about the duration of events, processes or relationships. Indeed, one of the most important forms of knowledge that we impart to a child is a knowledge of how long things last. This knowledge is taught, in subtle, informal and often unconscious ways. Yet without a rich set of socially appropriate durational expectancies, no individual could function successfully.²⁸⁸

For example, we have expectations about how long a morning shower and a family breakfast take, about the duration of our trip to work and the journey from supermarket entrance to checkout, and about the lifetimes of consumer products (eg, phones and clothes). When our sense of what is normal is violated by events or activities (eg, the commute home) taking too long, we become impatient and frustrated.

A series of habitualised individual activities qualifies as PIPP only if its enactments over time (eg, this weekend, the next one, the one after that, *etc*) are properly causally related. I cannot flesh out here the precise characteristics of these relationships (and how we avoid deviant causal chains), but the dispositions that result from habitualisation represent key features in such an account.

Importantly, practices are rarely static. While activity modules like *breakfasting as a family* are not frequently subject to radical and abrupt change, they certainly tend to gradually transform over time. For example, as food availability and dietary guidelines change over the years, so does breakfast behaviour.

2.2.2.2. Practice as Collective Performance Patterns

Here we focus on patterns that exist *across* sets of individuals, many of which incorporate millions of members. I define practice as collective performance pattern as follows:

PCPP: A class of habitualised activities that are dispersed across time, space, and individuals, that incorporate similar combinations of the three interconnected elements *doings*, *beings*, and *havings*, that are subject to norms, and that are properly causally related.

²⁸⁸ Toffler (1970: 47-48).

We are now concerned with entities that are ontologically very different to PIPPs. According to practice theory, a social practice exists outside of the individual performer in a very real sense, and its defining types of doings, beings, and havings are attributes of the nexus. Writes Reckwitz, the “conventionalized ‘mental’ activities of understanding, knowing how and desiring are necessary elements and qualities of a practice in which the single individual *participates*, not qualities of the individual”²⁸⁹. And further on,

a social practice consists of certain bodily and certain mental activities. If somebody ‘carries’ (and ‘carries out’) a practice, he or she must take over both the bodily and the mental patterns that constitute the practice. These mental patterns are not the ‘possession’ of an individual ‘deep inside’, but part of the social practice.²⁹⁰

All this is very vague, and I cannot pursue metaphysical theory development here, so let me simply use an analogy from biology to illustrate the contrast between PIPP and PCPP. Any given biotic entity B (ie, a token plant or animal) is a member of a particular species S. B possesses a great many qualities *because* it belongs to S, and by determining the properties of B we can usually determine the particular species of which it is a member. Unlike B, S is not the kind of thing that we can touch and locate in time/space, but many philosophers and scientists consider species non-fictional entities nevertheless.²⁹¹ Similarly, any particular practice as individual performance pattern (PIPP) is a member of a practice as collective performance pattern (PCPP). The former possesses various qualities (in terms of doings, beings, and havings) *because* it belongs to the latter, and by considering the former’s characteristics we can usually determine the relevant nexus. (For example, we recognise whether a group of people performs *breakfasting as a family* or *playing Trivial Pursuit*.) Like species, nexūs²⁹² are not the kind of entity that can be concretely located in time/space either, but that does not render them fictional.²⁹³

Biological species and practice nexūs share three other important characteristics. Firstly, the former disappears when the last of its members disappears (extinction), and the same applies to practices: without a practitioner who performs the relevant habitualised activity, a nexus cannot remain in existence. We may still read about it in books and see it performed in movies (just as we read about extinct biological species or see their members in old documentaries), but the nexus is no longer part of our world’s set of practices.

Secondly, just as deviations in the features of any one member of a biological species do not affect how we characterise the latter, deviations in the attributes of any one habitualised performance (or the performances of any one practitioner) do not change the characteristics of the nexus. Performance change entails nexus change only if the former is pervasive enough (analogical to genetic variations spreading widely enough through the gene pool), so it needs to reach critical mass.²⁹⁴

Thirdly, just as biological species (and thereby the characteristics of their members) can be intentionally manipulated, so can practice species (and thereby the features of habitualised performances). The former occurs in various forms, especially selective breeding (aka artificial selection) and, more recently, genetic engineering/modification. The latter occurs in various forms too, one of the most prevalent of which today is practice manipulation through marketing communication in the form of advertising. By its very essence, marketing communication aims to produce lasting behavioural change such that members of the target group engage in

²⁸⁹ Reckwitz (2002: 250, my italics).

²⁹⁰ Ibid: 252.

²⁹¹ For a brief overview of approaches to the ontological status of species, see Ereshefsky (2017).

²⁹² Plural of ‘nexus’.

²⁹³ By using the term ‘class’ in the definition, I do not wish to commit myself to any particular ontological view. That said, homeostatic property cluster theory seems promising (for a brief introduction, see Ereshefsky, 2017).

²⁹⁴ I will not attempt here to specify the conditions for such critical mass.

whatever activity involves the particular *havings* made and sold by the communicator (usually a profit-maximising corporation). For example, Kellogg's commercials unfailingly portray *breakfasting* as an activity that involves branded 'cereals' like Coco Pops and Crunchy Nut. Its advertising aims to change the breakfasting – and thereby necessarily also the shopping – practices of people like Len and his family, such that said products become an integral element of their habitualised activity. In fact, ideally (for a company like Kellogg's) consumers will not even think about the cereals they purchase and consume anymore. They simply do so in a fully mechanised mode (aka product loyalty).

Most of the elements used in my definition of PCPP have already been discussed. However, let me say a bit more about norms. What MacIntyre calls 'standards of excellence' are definitive of a practice because they determine what is, and is not, appropriate: "To enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them"²⁹⁵. This does not mean that said standards are immutable, because that would render them immune to criticism. While a novice "cannot be initiated into a practice without accepting the authority of the best standards realized so far"²⁹⁶, he should not accept these standards uncritically. He simply has to fully understand and become proficient in the practice first, so she needs to regard them as authoritative for the time being.

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To emphasise the breadth of the practice-as-nexus concept, Schatzki distinguishes between dispersed and integrative practices. The former are widely diffused throughout different sectors of social life, for instance, "the practices of describing, ordering, following rules, explaining, questioning, reporting, examining, and imagining"²⁹⁷. The latter are found in, and constitutive of, particular domains of social life, for instance, farming, business, voting, teaching, celebration, cooking, recreational, industrial, religious, and banking practices.²⁹⁸

While the distinction is interesting, Schatzki does not analyse the possible reasons for which we find these differences among practices. Plausibly, one key reason why a practice tends to be domain-specific is its high complexity; correspondingly, low complexity goes hand in hand with domain-unspecificity. However, the explanation behind higher/lower complexity that I am after here is a purely logical one: assuming that thing T has multiple constituents C_{1-n} , then any one C is necessarily less complex than T. Returning to MacIntyre's narrow conceptualisation of practice, let us use chess play as an example: necessarily, any habitualised activity that represents a constituent of chess play is less complex than the MacIntyrean practice of which it is a constituent. For example, 'ordering, examining, and imagining' are three key constituents of chess play, which is why each of them must necessarily be less complex than the practice as a whole.

Its role of being a building block of a MacIntyrean practice makes the activity in question much more likely to represent a dispersed practice. From an efficiency perspective alone it makes sense for an agent to employ the same activity patterns in as many practices in which she participates as possible. In my work, I will use the term 'practice' to refer to activity patterns (individual and collective) that represent complex and domain-specific – possibly even domain-constitutive – practices as well as the activity patterns that constitute them.

²⁹⁵ MacIntyre (2007: 190).

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Schatzki (1996: 91).

²⁹⁸ Schatzki (1996).

I will occasionally use the term ‘praxis’ (plural *praxes*) to refer to the elementary activity patterns that are the building blocks of complex activity patterns as just characterised. In other words, *praxes* represent what Schatzki calls ‘dispersed practices’, which constitute integrative practices in turn. To use an analogy from biology: *praxes* and integrative practices are to praxeology what cells and organisms are to biology. I will not argue for using two levels of praxeological composition here, and I will also not pretend to have specific criteria for where we can draw the line between them in a plausible and consistent way. Any such issue will have to await discussion in future projects.

2.2.3. Practice and Complexity

Given the relevance of complexity for habitualised activity, and given that such activity lies at the heart of my conceptualisations of *practice*, we have to discuss it in more detail. After I address the issue with regard to individual enactments of practices in the first sub-section, I attend to complexity in the context of practices as activity patterns in the second one.

2.2.3.1. Individual Practice Enactments and Complexity

As previously argued, the mode of habitualisation most suitable for an activity is a function of the complexity of system *SYS*, where the latter incorporates the agent’s activity and the relevant parts of the context in which it occurs (including elements of the agent’s environment). One characteristic that greatly affects the complexity of a practice is what, following Carse, we might call its ‘degree of (in)finiteness’²⁹⁹.

Finite practices are pursued for the purpose of winning or achieving a high ranking, so they are quintessentially competitive. Accordingly, any one of their enactments (eg, a particular game of chess, played by two specific individuals during a specific period of time) must have clear temporal, spatial, and numerical boundaries –otherwise we could never determine whether and when a victory has occurred. Put differently, finite practice enactments occur throughout finite periods, within a marked area (be it a chessboard or a literal battlefield), and with a specified set of practitioners. The logic of winning requires that finite practice enactments are governed by stable rules that limit what players can do to and with each other. Failure to observe these norms directly threatens the purpose and outcome of the enactment, which is why such rules represent contractual terms among the practitioners on the basis of which the winner is determined and a practice enactment is terminated. In the course of a particular performance, rules may not change, because that would amount to performing a different enactment instead.³⁰⁰ In that sense, finite practice norms are external to any particular performance.

By contrast, infinite practices are played for the purpose of keeping the players perform without end. To prevent a finite outcome (victory/defeat and thus termination) and to allow as many persons to join as possible, Carse claims, the rules of an infinite practice must be allowed to evolve throughout the course of an enactment. In that sense, infinite practice rules are internal to the performance and represent contractual terms by which the practitioners agree to continue (instead of end) their engagement. The logic of infinity requires that whatever threatens the continuation of activity is taken *into* the performance, especially boundaries. Therefore, temporal, spatial, and numerical limitations do not apply: where finite practitioners play/act within boundaries, infinite practitioners play/act *with* them. For Carse, ultimately the world as a whole represents the infinite field of practice, and no question of eligibility arises since anyone who wishes may participate.

²⁹⁹ Carse (1986).

³⁰⁰ Plausibly, individuals may disagree about whether the practice in which they participate is finite/closed or infinite/open, with a corresponding (un)willingness to change the rules of the activity tracking that difference.

Carse presents us with a false dichotomy here, because any contrast between finite and truly infinite practices as defined above leaves out the, likely rather large, set of practices that are performed for the sake of keeping the engagement going for as long as possible (yet not into infinity) and those that are open to the in-performance evolution of *some* rules (but not all of them). For that reason, it seems more accurate to distinguish between finite and non-finite practices, with infinite ones representing a subset of the latter.

The important elements here in terms of complexity are as follows. Firstly, the more inclusive a practice is (eg, in terms of spatial and numerical boundaries), the greater its complexity will likely be. That much follows from my previous definition of *complexity*. (The weaker language of ‘likely’ is required for various reasons. For instance, the inclusiveness of practices can vary along different dimensions without such variance necessarily affecting overall practice complexity to the same degree in each case.) Therefore, secondly, the less the practice resembles a finite practice, the greater its complexity plausibly tends to be. Conceptually, non-finite practices are open to becoming increasingly inclusive throughout the course of any particular enactment. It seems fair to assume that openness to the transcendence of boundaries invites change, and the latter drives complexity in two ways: not only does the number of elements that constitute the system (along with the connections between them) increase, but the change itself – ie, the system’s non-orderly dynamicity – drives complexity too.

I introduce (in)finiteness here primarily because it further illuminates something I said in chapter 1: the globalisation of manufacturing and consumption revolves *precisely* around the reduction and elimination of boundaries as described by Carse. It subjects players to temporal, geographical, and numerical horizons that continue to extend. As the practices in question become more and more inclusive, the players – and my focus is on consumers in particular – face an environment of increasingly complex textures, to which their mode of habitualisation needs to correspond. Infinite practices require acuminated habitualisation, but that is not actually what we find with regard to consumer behaviour in HDCs. (More on that in chapter 5.)

None of what I just discussed entails that a finite performance too cannot be highly complex (chess play being an obvious example), or that finite practices are not also open to change *in between* enactments. However, the latter point is not relevant here. This sub-section is purely about individual practice enactments, so variations in between the latter (eg, adjustments to rules of a game like chess) are outside our current scope. They concern the kind of change that I address below.

2.2.3.2. Activity Patterns and Complexity

As previously noted, various sociologists consider habits and routines the means by which social schemes like customs and traditions (both of which represent practice nexūs) reproduce, thereby perpetuating social order.³⁰¹ Conceptually, any such reproduction and perpetuation necessarily implies at least some degree of invariability of practice: customs and traditions are patterns transmitted from one generation to another, which would be impossible without at least a partial intertemporal overlap in pattern characteristics.

That said, the invariability of activity patterns comes in degrees, and how changeable a practice is, or at least ought to be, over time is once again a function of complexity. Once more, it is the complexity of the entire system that matters, but here the system is defined somewhat differently: it includes the various individuals on whose performances the pattern in question supervenes, the havings to which this set of practitioners has access (which is partially determined by the availability of technology in turn), and various forces that represent the

³⁰¹ Eg, Bourdieu & Passeron (1977).

relevant environment in which the pattern persists. An example of the latter are the climatic conditions prevailing in the area where the practice is performed.

We must be careful with regard to the appearance of (in)variability: even though two activities may not *look* very similar from the outside (ie, to spectators who can usually only observe the somatic elements of performances), they may nevertheless be expressions of the same practice. Remember, whether an activity should be habitualised in a mechanised or an acuminated mode is itself a function of complexity (eg, static *vs* dynamic environmental conditions), and that point directly applies to practices too. If acumination is the proper habitualisation mode for the activity patterns representing the practice in question, then what is (or at least ought to be) replicated across different individuals are dispositions that express themselves as non-mechanised activity patterns – say, dispositions for *inquiring*, *analysing*, and *questioning*. For example, the across-individual enactments of an academic practice like *philosophising* may look very dissimilar from the outside, but they represents enactments of one and the same practice nevertheless.

As previously mentioned, the complexity of the system can be usefully characterised in terms of the size of the shortest computer programme necessary for a complete description (given a specified level of grain or detail). Its main determinants are *differentiation* (ie, the number of varied elements) and *interdependence* or *connectivity* (ie, the degree of interrelatedness between them). Indexed to period T, change to these elements and their relations is a key driver of complexity, especially when dynamicity is non-orderly/chaotic (because it requires a much larger programme to exhaustively describe the system at all time points that are part of T).

2.3. Final Comments

Ethical theories can be partly understood in terms of what Kagan calls ‘evaluative focal points’³⁰² and what others have named ‘evaluands’³⁰³. None of these philosophers provide definitions, but rather illustrate the concept by way of giving examples.³⁰⁴ For instance, rule consequentialism makes rules its primary evaluative focal point, assessing these as right/wrong/optional directly in terms of the value they yield. Other evaluands, particularly individual acts, are also evaluated by reference to value, but only indirectly: whether they qualify as right depends on how they are related to the aforementioned rules.

Given the importance of habitualised activity, and the role of practices that represent patterns of such activity (both individual and social) in our lives, it seems quite clear to me that practices represent an important primary evaluative focal point. Interestingly though, I have not seen them being discussed that way. The proposal is this: to assess whether a particular action qualifies as right/wrong/optional, we must assess whether it represents the enactment of a suitable practice – and whether a practice is suitable depends on whether it enables the individual to live well in the long term in the conditions that she finds herself in. In other words, when it comes to the consideration of things that are subject to normative evaluation, practices most certainly have to be taken into account.

For the value yield that we are after to obtain (namely well-being), any given human individual must cultivate a portfolio with suitable individual practices. Whether an individual practice is suitable depends at least partially on its habitualisation mode: depending on the complexity of the relevant system, the practice ought to be

³⁰² Kagan (1998, 2000).

³⁰³ Eg, Pettit & Smith (2000).

³⁰⁴ Eg, Kagan (1998, 2000).

habitualised in a mechanised and/or acuminated fashion. In other words, an individual MacIntyrean practice like *mountaineering* or *political participation* ought to be constituted by praxes that are properly habitualised. Without such practices, and without the right mode of habitualisation, individuals cannot live well. A different way of saying the same is this: individuals *need* proper personal practice portfolios.

That said, individuals will not be able to cultivate appropriate personal portfolios if their community as a whole fails to cultivate a suitable collective practice portfolio. Remember, vast portions of human behaviour patterns are transmitted through social learning (eg, imitation) after all. In the absence of suitable collective practices, the individual cannot be immersed in corresponding behaviour patterns. Thus, she is radically less likely to come to act in ways that promote her thriving. For example, children who grow up without immersion in a human collective will simply not develop into practitioners of a human language. In fact, they may not even develop bipedal locomotion.³⁰⁵ A different way of saying this is: individuals also *need* proper communal practice portfolios.

By now, I have used the term ‘need’ twice already, and not accidentally. It represents the perfect segue to the next chapter.

³⁰⁵ When they were initially captured, Maclean’s (1977) wolf children moved on all fours and could neither speak nor understand human language. Having grown up among animals, they seemed to communicate like them instead, though only partially. While the children appeared to express a variety of animal noises, their linguistic repertoire was severely limited otherwise because human beings lack key pieces of linguistic animal equipment. We have “neither tails, nor caudal glands, nor ruffs, nor hairy cheeks, nor mobile pointed ears” (ibid: 167) after all.

3. Needs and Human Flourishing

There is nothing in the desert. No man needs nothing.

*David Lean*³⁰⁶

In the 1962 Academy Award-winning film *Lawrence of Arabia*, these are the words used by King Faisal to point out the foolishness of the ‘desert-loving English’, who romanticise life in Arabia because they fail to comprehend either how little the desert provides or what a human being requires to fare well. The implicit position, it seems, is that humans cannot flourish in the desert (and/or that whatever prospers in the desert can correspondingly not be human). While such a view has some initial intuitive plausibility, we should be careful with oversimplifications or -generalisations. Considering how crowded, noisy, and cluttered many people’s lives are, the nothingness of the desert actually offers what can be found in few other places, as the Desert Fathers and Mothers already recognised almost two millennia ago. Opting for sometimes hermitic, sometimes cenobitic lives, the Egyptian desert provided various things sought by these Christian ascetics above all else, especially solitude and austerity. Withdrawal, detachment, vulnerability, and a profound lack of distractions not just allowed but positively forced a confrontation with the only thing that remained, the self, and that encounter facilitated a psychological and spiritual growth difficult or impossible to achieve otherwise. If such growth is considered important, and if it can be achieved only in conditions like those found in the desert, then in a sense it is not actually true that no man needs nothing.

The foregoing invites a larger question: what do human beings need? Given my interest in the link between consumption and need, the answer is especially important to this project. The concept of *needs* can be employed to conceptualise the generic notions of human interests and individual interests (along with their advancement) that I used in chapter 1. And given that whatever is needed is never just required by itself but rather to secure some end, needs lend themselves to the exploration of that end. What I have in mind here is roughly what according to Hellenistic philosophical thinking represents the *telos* of all human action, *eudaimonia*, generally translated as doing or faring well, flourishing, prospering, or thriving. It is this concept family that we will explore in this chapter.

The discussion is structured as follows. First, I will discuss the concept of *needs*. I will argue that it lends itself to exploring the idea of human well-being and demonstrate how concrete individual actions derive their normative justification from abstract human needs (3.1). Next I turn to the end for which human needs are required and discuss alternative accounts of human well-being (3.2). Having rejected all but one of these, in the third section I discuss the survivor in detail (3.3). Next, I provide a substantive outline of the things that all human beings need to flourish *qua* human (3.4) and then briefly address what an individual who is specifically located (eg, with regard to space, time, talents, and past choices) requires.

³⁰⁶ Lean (1962).

3.1. Introducing Needs

Historically, the concept of *need* has been used in many different ways, but only some of those are relevant to a discussion of *human* needs. In the following, I will outline the conceptualisation employed in this work.

3.1.1. Basic Distinctions

A claim to the effect that *X needs Y* can apply to many kinds of entities. X may be an artefact (eg, “this chain needs oil”), a non-human organism (eg, “this tree needs water”), or a human being (eg, “this boy needs a blood transfusion”). However, X may also be a different kind of entity, such as a collective. For example, not only does a claim like “New Zealand needs a fairer distribution of wealth” make sense, but such a purported need of kiwi society can also not be reduced to the needs of its members.

Limiting our focus to individual human beings for now, it is important to distinguish between needs as inner states and relational/conditional needs, and between instrumental and constitutive needs. Abraham Maslow, the American psychologist whose theory of human motivation is associated with the notion of *hierarchy of needs*, uses *basic needs* to refer to inner motivating states, especially the fundamental drives and urges that determine many of our daily activities.³⁰⁷ For example, hunger pangs that drive an individual to seek food are an expression of her need for nourishment. Maslow’s basic needs include physiological needs, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualisation. His *needs* conceptualisation incorporates both descriptive and explanatory elements. It is therefore rather unlike what I require for my project.

Needs as inner states can be contrasted with *relational*, or *conditional*, needs. Relational need-statements generally conform to the following structure or formula:

NF: If/when PRO finds herself in C, she needs N for E to obtain.³⁰⁸

PRO refers to a human being (our protagonist); E the effect, end, or *telos* that is to be secured; N the requirement(s) in question; and C the relevant circumstances. The latter may be characterised temporally (as point in time *t* or period of time *T*), spatially, and by reference to many other features. N being required by PRO for E is a matter of fact: it depends on what the world and the things it contains (including PRO, of course) in the circumstances in question are like. This idea can also be expressed as a conditional: if E is to be brought about or secured, then N is required by PRO in C.

One way of conceptualising relational/conditional need is instrumentally. That *PRO needs N in order to E* may be true because N is the means for bringing about the conceptually separate end. We could also say that N is an E-external means. For instance, the ingestion of nutrients may be a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for the separate, and subsequent, effect of being able to perform certain strenuous activities. A second way of conceptualising relational/conditional needs is constitutively. That *PRO needs N to secure E* may be true because N is simply part of E. In other words, the two are conceptually inseparable. We could also say that N is an E-internal means. For example, if spending time with one’s children is necessary for an agent to play the role of parent well, then the former is part of what *good parenting* means. Both types play crucial roles in discussions of human needs, although constitutive needs are particularly important when we consider the substantive claims made by theories of well-being below.

³⁰⁷ Maslow (1954).

³⁰⁸ Cf Barry (1965), Braybrooke (1987), and Doyal & Gough (1991).

3.1.2. Needs and Normativity

Needs, along with the claims that typically accompany them, are generally regarded to have considerable force. They even have normative priority over other (moral) claims. According to Frankfurt, for example, people are “widely disposed to accept the proposition that a need for something preempts a [mere] desire for that thing”, which he calls the *Principle of Precedence*. Thus, “[w]hen there is a competition between a desire and a need for the same thing, the need starts with a certain moral edge”.³⁰⁹ Said priority is partially reflected in the use of terms such as *very basic needs*, *basic needs*, and *fundamental needs*.

However, the mere fact that N represents a particular instrumental or constitutive need tells us little about its normative significance. For example, while it may be instrumentally true that Alex needs to dedicate himself to his craft if he wishes to truly master it, he probably ought not to devote himself to its pursuit if said craft is *methamphetamine manufacturing* or *cat burglary*. For a need to have normative weight, the end in question has to have normative significance, because needs and ends are inextricably related. If E is worthless, then N, the things instrumentally or constitutively required to bring about that end, have no normative force and give us no, or at least no need-grounded, reasons to engage in E-promoting activity (eg, help PRO secure any necessary resources).³¹⁰ If, on the other hand, the end is valuable, then whatever is needed has normative significance and grounds weighty reasons for performing various kinds of activity (eg, procuring or supplying needed goods). Thus, the normative force of needs is inseparable from the properties of the respective end(s), and we will discuss how human end(s) should be conceptualised below in detail.

Something may be a need and a non-ultimate end at the same time. In fact, many things are. For example, not only is passing a certain oral examination necessary to pass a certain course, but exam preparation is also necessary to pass said oral. In that case, *passing the oral* (W) is instrumentally needed for the end *passing the course* (X) to obtain, and *exam preparation* (V) is instrumentally needed for the (subordinate) end *passing the oral* to be brought about. The more thoroughly (and thus longer) we construe such a chain (... – V – W – X – ...), the greater the detail regarding how the ultimate end is brought about becomes. Put differently, longer chains imply less abstract and correspondingly thicker needs.

In political philosophy in particular, *need* is usually meant to refer to things that are required by any given human creature to function as a characteristically human being. In that sense, needs are universal. Being the kind of entity she is, a human being cannot help but have them, at least at certain stages of her existence.³¹¹ Some refer to such needs as *inescapable*,³¹² I refer to them as *human*. Said universality implies unvarying applicability across space and time, which presupposes a standard that is relatively unchanging: human needs represent what is required to live a characteristically human life, given creatures with a particular set of typical properties.

As I previously pointed out, the concept of *needs* applies to other types of entities too, including collectives. Insofar as these collectives consist of members of *Homo sapiens*, we can legitimately refer to their needs as *human* too. To avoid confusion though, I will use the terminology ‘human collective needs’ in those instances.

³⁰⁹ Frankfurt (1984: 3).

³¹⁰ Something may represent a requirement for multiple ends, and only some of these may have worth (while others do not). For my own project, I assume that there is only one ultimate end E in principle (though it comes in degrees).

³¹¹ There may be some exceptions. For example, a (severely) mentally handicapped human being may not have the same need for agency as those who are not handicapped. And we may think that a human being that will die as an infant – to give another example – will never have the need for human agency at all.

³¹² Eg, Thomson (1987).

As in the case of individuals, the notion of universality applies: the human needs of a collective (that represents an entity with a particular set of typical properties³¹³) represent what is required for it to have the existence of a characteristically human collective.

Given that *human need* accounts for what members of *Homo sapiens* universally require, the concept has nothing to say with regard to the numerous claims that seemingly indicate very different needs for different people. For example, the requirements of a chess player are much unlike those of a pianist: “I need a chess board and pieces, an opponent, and a quiet place to think and play” *versus* “I need a piano and a place where no one is bothered by loud music”. *Human needs* cannot help us here because their universality requires the characterisation of their substance to remain highly abstract. In fact, due to this very abstractness, any set of human needs would be of little use in thinking about particular moral and political obligations (eg, in terms of just resource distributions).³¹⁴ For that, we need to focus on the needs of members of a specific community, or the even more particular needs of concrete individuals.

Thus, let me introduce the concept that I call *individual needs*. Unlike human needs, they represent what a particular member of *Homo sapiens* requires in order to meet her human needs. Put differently, individual needs are instantiations of human needs at the level of a particular human being, and nothing but. Something qualifies as individual need iff it yields the same end E that conditions human needs. For example, assume that Alex wishes to kill his wealthy aunt to inherit a fair sum of money; his motive is pure greed. To bring about the noted outcome, he needs a murder weapon. On my conceptualisation, Alex’s requirement would not qualify as an individual need because it is difficult to imagine to which human need the requirement (murder weapon) would give expression. As I will note below, the end that conditions human needs is human flourishing, and there is no plausible argument in support of the view that greed-motivated murder for personal gain yields a flourishing individual life.³¹⁵

There are multiple reasons why not all individual human beings have the same individual needs, and I will only mention three. First, while human beings have the same types of capacities (that ought to be developed and expressed), their individual potential can vary considerably. For example, while some people learn quickly and easily, others have great difficulties in that regard. Thus, the two groups have different needs with regard to educational support. Second, any abstract human need can be instantiated (and satisfied) at the individual level in a great variety of equally legitimate ways. For instance, there are many ways in which the abstract non-ultimate end of *physical fitness* can be secured at the level of individual persons – some people practice *swimming*, others perform *running*. Each of these practices entails very different individual needs (eg, access to a body of water *vs* running shoes). Yet, the requirements in question are equally legitimate because they represent things needed for the respective individuals to become and remain physically fit. Third, individuals who belong to different communities may be subject to different, and equally legitimate, interpretations of the human end. For example, while the practice of *priesthood* is a recognised way of giving one’s life purpose and meaning in a community that interprets human well-being in a religious fashion, it is plausibly not available to members of a non-religious community. Depending on the worldview of the group, such an occupation is considered either admirable or pointless. Below I will argue that communal deliberation and choice (ie, political world-building) plays a key role with regard to

³¹³ Due to the scope of this work, I cannot go into detail with regard to what these properties are. But it seems fairly obvious that the properties of a collective of wolves differs from those of a human collective. What is more, their circumstances differ too, so their needs are likely to be correspondingly dissimilar for that reason as well.

³¹⁴ See also Walzer (1983: 8).

³¹⁵ It is difficult to imagine that it could be the enactment of a proper practice (ie, a practice that enables individuals to flourish).

determining what does, and does not, represent an individual need (as well as legitimate need-satisfiers, a concept that I will discuss below as well).

Once again, we have to briefly discuss collective entities. Just as individual needs represent the requirements of a particular human being (that must obtain for her to flourish), what I will call ‘individual collective needs’ represent the requirements of a particular human collective (that must obtain for it to flourish). For example, any human collective beyond the size of a small tribe plausibly requires some form of government, because lack of decision-making on behalf of the group and lack of coordination of the actions of its members would compromise its functioning. However, what form of government is, and is not, suitable for a particular collective depends on its properties (eg, population size and density) and those of its environment.

3.1.3. Needs as INUS Conditions

Obviously, *need* implies *necessary condition* of some kind, which is conceptually related to *sufficient condition* in turn. If it is true that *A is a necessary condition for B*, then whenever B obtains A is guaranteed to also obtain. If it is true that *B is a sufficient condition for A*, the same holds. Thus, if *A is a necessary condition for B*, then *B is a sufficient condition for A*.³¹⁶

Imagine a typical Westerner PRO who makes a purchase based on the claim “I need a bicycle to get to work”. Literally, representing the bicycle as a necessary condition for securing transportation to one’s workplace is almost always false because virtually everyone can get around in a variety of other ways instead (eg, by driving a car, riding a motorcycle, taking a bus, or simply walking). For the same reason, claims like “I need a bicycle helmet to get to work” and “I need to become fit to get to work” seem equally mistaken. If PRO simply drove a car to work (which, let us assume, she could do), she would require neither. Rather, she would need a driver licence and petrol instead – and funnily enough I just used the term ‘need’ to oppose its previous application, which rather renders the (potential) argument against its employment absurd.

Properly construed though, *needs* talk as I just portrayed it makes a great deal of sense. Each factor – bicycle, helmet, and physical fitness – is needed in the sense of being a *conditional* necessity: it represents an *insufficient* but *necessary* part of a conditions that is itself *unnecessary* but *sufficient* to secure the occurrence of the effect (namely getting to work). To use Mackie’s terminology, each requirement represents part of an *INUS condition*.³¹⁷ Each set – say S1 ⟨bicycle, helmet, physical fitness, ...⟩ and S2 ⟨car, driver licence, petrol, ...⟩ – separately suffices to ensure that PRO gets to work, but if just a single component (eg, petrol) is missing, the set in question (eg, S2) no longer yields the effect. In the context of concrete commodities required by individual consumers (eg, bicycles, helmets, and petrol), these needs are usually instrumental in nature.

Due to the way in which human needs must be satisfied by the individual human being, individual needs frequently represent sets of INUS conditions. For instance, remember the previously mentioned human end of *physical fitness*. There are many, equally legitimate individual-level activities that represent fitness-enhancing and fitness-preserving practices (eg, swimming, running, and cycling). Individuals are perfectly free to practice any one of them, because they are equally suitable to achieve the outcome in principle. Thus, the performance of each of these practices represents an unnecessary but sufficient condition for the individual’s physical fitness, and the things required to carry it out (eg, running shoes, swimming goggles, bicycles) represent parts of INUS conditions in turn.

³¹⁶ Gomes (2009).

³¹⁷ Mackie (1980).

By contrast, the abstract needs that constitute human well-being are different. As noted above, these needs represent whatever is required by a member of *Homo sapiens* regardless of specific location in time/space and irrespective of communal membership. If any one of them remains unmet, an individual cannot live well as a human being (though this entails neither the claim that all human needs must be highly satisfied, nor that they must be equally satisfied). Thus, these abstract requirements represent necessary conditions in the most unambiguous sense.

3.1.4. Human Needs and Their End

Without indexing the end, the question “What kinds of things do human beings actually need?” cannot be answered because the substance of a need directly depends upon the outcome or *telos* that is to be secured. Plausibly, the things that human beings universally need are whatever is required to bring about what, in Aristotelian terminology, would be called the *chief* or *ultimate human end*: living a good human life (or, if we are less ambitious, at least avoiding a bad one). Generically, let us call said end *human well-being* or *flourishing*. In the philosophical literature on needs, however, E has rarely been associated with well-being as such. Some thinkers have associated it with survival. For example, for Aristotle “‘Necessary’ means: That without which, as a concomitant condition, life is impossible; e.g. respiration and food are necessary for an animal, because it cannot exist without them”³¹⁸. Relatedly, Braybrooke suggests that “[b]eing essential to living [...] may be taken as a criterion of being a basic need”³¹⁹.

Contemporary philosophers, on the other hand, have more commonly focused on the notion of harm avoidance. *Human needs*, *intrinsic needs*, *non-volitional* and *constrained volitional needs*, *fundamental needs*, *absolute needs*, and *basic needs* have all been characterised in terms of what is required to prevent (severe) harm.³²⁰

The popularity of understanding the ultimate end as survival or harm avoidance can be explained by the context in which the respective need accounts were developed. Critics had been questioning if needs could have any normative force at all, so need theorists focused their arguments for normativity on identifying requirements which, if they were unsatisfied, would yield a recognisable normative concern – hence the connection to survival and harm. In other words, it was widely thought that the case for needs having normative force would have to rely on the prevention of calamity, like serious harm and death.

However, the claim that survival and harm-avoidance are really the (only) universal, and universally valuable, ends for human beings is implausible. For example, the common starting point of ancient Greek discussions of ethics was the view that the greatest human good is flourishing as such. Mere survival and harm avoidance are far too rudimentary concepts to do it justice, which may be why Anscombe conceptualises the needs of living things in the following way: to say that an organism needs N is to say “that it won’t flourish unless it has it”.³²¹ Reader & Brock too list *flourishing* as a candidate end for construing what they call *non-contingent needs*, but without discussing it further.³²² If we accept that something like well-being or flourishing is the end or purpose of human beings (and their existence), then we can also ask the following question: “What is needed for such a life?”

³¹⁸ *Metaphysics*, V, 1015a20.

³¹⁹ Braybrooke (1987: 31).

³²⁰ Feinberg (1973), Miller (1976), Frankfurt (1984), Thomson (1987), Wiggins (1991), and Doyal & Gough (1991) respectively.

³²¹ Anscombe (1958: 7). Notice that she does not write that the organism will die or languish unless it has it.

³²² Reader & Brock (2004). Griffin refers to *well-being* terminology as well. For example, he notes that “[w]ell-being [...] is the level to which basic needs are met” (1986: 42). However, in the context of his discussion of needs he has a very narrow understanding of *well-being*, so that the end in relation to which he conceptualises (basic) needs is not unlike the previously mentioned rudimentary ends (like harm avoidance).

Furthermore, what exactly do we mean by *harm*? The concept, it seems, is itself best characterised by reference to something like well-being. For example, Wiggins writes that “the suggested elucidation in terms of harm exposes a certain parameter that is always there to be discovered within claims of absolute needing. This is the idea [...] of well-being or flourishing, by reference to which we make judgments of harm”³²³. Thomson also notes that “[t]o say that something harms a person is to say something about the effects of that thing on the person or his life and well-being”³²⁴; “a person is harmed whenever [her] level of well-being is below a certain level or norm”³²⁵.

Accordingly, in the next sub-section I will associate degrees of well-being with different human needs or need-satisfaction. Those things that have been referred to as ‘basic’ and ‘fundamental’ needs can be understood as basic or fundamental *degrees* of human need-satisfaction – and thus, well-being. The question then becomes, what normative significance do these needs have?

Before I address this matter though, let me briefly shift focus from individual human beings to human collectives. Here, similar points apply: the answer to the question “What kinds of things do human collectives need?” directly depends upon the relevant outcome or *telos*. And just as it makes sense to speak of well-being or a flourishing life as the normatively relevant ultimate end with regard to individual human beings, we can speak of the existence of a flourishing collective as the normatively relevant ultimate end with regard to the second kind of entity previously introduced. The end is truly ultimate in that the value represented by the flourishing of a collective is not (fully) reducible to what is good for individual human beings (ie, its members). Granted, high degrees of individual flourishing without collective flourishing are impossible, but it would be implausible to assume that the latter is purely instrumentally valuable.

In the case of collectives too, we might consider basic needs as whatever is required to avoid (severe) harm to them. In fact, we will shortly see that the basic needs of individual human beings and the basic needs of collectives are interrelated.

3.1.5. Degrees of Well-Being as Ultimate End(s)

Uncontroversially, people can fare well to lesser or greater degrees – and given that ends condition needs, it follows that the set of things needed for degree of well-being D1 may not be identical to the set of things needed for degree D2.³²⁶ It is an open question whether said non-identity implies that the ends condition different degrees of satisfaction of the same needs, or whether they condition different needs (or a mix thereof). The answer will depend on a variety of factors, eg, how exactly said needs are conceptualised³²⁷ and which degrees of well-being are being discussed. Three important degrees that suggest themselves are:

- D_B: biological survival (defined as continued existence of the organism),
- D_A: existence as an agent, and
- D_C: existence as a citizen.

Correspondingly, the sets that represent what is necessary to secure these degrees of well-being are S_B, S_A, and S_C respectively.

³²³ Wiggins (1991: 11).

³²⁴ Thomson (1987: 90-91).

³²⁵ Ibid: 93.

³²⁶ With D1 ≠ D2.

³²⁷ I put forward my own conceptualisation below.

D_A and D_C are of particular importance to me. While mere biological survival implies the existence of life (in the same minimal sense in which deep-coma patients are organically alive), it does not actually denote a characteristically *human* existence, at least not in the case of mature human beings. Human agency, understood as autonomy, is the minimal criterion that any adult existence has to meet in order to qualify as human. Following Kant, for us to be able to say that an individual is a person (rather than an automaton directed by others), she must be able to act and be responsible for what she does, which implies mental competence to deliberate and choose.³²⁸ Autonomy thus understood represents the core of agency, which we might define as follows:

*to have the ability to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it. This entails being able to formulate aims, and beliefs about how to achieve them, along with the ability to evaluate the success of these beliefs in the light of empirical evidence.*³²⁹

Notice that such an ability implies a considerable amount of knowledge. For example, to understand how some given aim may be achieved, the individual has to comprehend both her initial starting point and the point of goal-completion, the processes that get her from the former to the latter, as well as the circumstances in which they occur. Crucially, part of that knowledge is self-understanding. For instance, someone who fails to comprehend her own talents and weaknesses, her virtues and vices, as well as her ambitions and fears, cannot possibly make good choices about what to do with her life (eg, which professional career to pursue, whether to live as a single or in a partnership, *etc*) and how to live authentically.

Agency in this minimal sense of autonomy – being able to think critically and select from among the available choices, however limited they may be – must be distinguished from *citizenship* in the stronger sense of autonomy that Raz calls *significant autonomy* and that Doyal & Gough label *critical autonomy*. In order for a person to be able to shape her life and determine its course in the fuller sense that her “personal integrity and sense of dignity and self-respect are made concrete”³³⁰, she must have “the opportunity to question and to participate in *agreeing or changing* the rules of a culture”³³¹. For example, as a woman she ought not to be limited to a choice between readily available career options like becoming a nurse or a primary school teacher, but rather be able to campaign for cultural change such that hitherto purely male professions (say, corporate or religious leadership) become accessible to her too.

That said, autonomy in either sense should actually be conceptualised differently in one important respect. Both ‘the ability to make informed choices...’ (1) and ‘the opportunity to question and to participate...’ (2) are mere preconditions for actual human agency and citizenship respectively. An individual does not qualify as having autonomy if she does not *live* autonomously – and for the latter to obtain, abilities and opportunities must be exercised (instead of simply had or possessed). The critically autonomous person, or citizen, is not just able to, but does in fact engage in political participation (ie, the governing of the *polis*). She contributes to her community’s discourse about which kinds of projects and activities do, and do not, qualify as collectively endorsed modes of flourishing and change the rules of her social environment. To put it in MacIntyrean language, she is not merely able to participate in the practice of *politics* – she is an actual practitioner.

Previously, I noted that the basic needs of a collective too represent that which is required to avoid (severe) harm to it. Plausibly, political collectives constituted by individuals who fail to qualify as citizens cannot represent flourishing *human* collectives either. A community that is governed in the absence of vigorous, permanent public

³²⁸ See Doyal & Gough (1991).

³²⁹ Ibid: 53; original italics.

³³⁰ Raz (1986: 154).

³³¹ Doyal & Gough (1991: 67; original italics).

debate is prone to impoverished decision-making and lack of innovative perspectives on the various political issues that arise. What is more, it is subject to a lack of widespread commitment to whatever political choices are being made at best, and the ill-will of oppressed members of its population at worst. Such a community is either sluggish or volatile. It could not be considered to flourish *qua* human, a problem likely exacerbated in the presence of other collectives that are actively and inclusively governed by its citizenry. In that way, the basic needs of the human individual and the human collective are very much interconnected.

If we compare D_B , D_A , and D_C , the view that different degrees of well-being condition different needs is rather obvious. For example, civic needs are clearly more demanding than agency needs, because

to deliberate well about the common good requires more than the capacity to choose one's ends and to respect others' rights to do the same. It requires a knowledge of public affairs and also a sense of belonging, a concern for the whole, a moral bond with the community whose fate is at stake.³³²

Thus, civic flourishing requires greater education, greater social integration and interaction, and – at least in the large collectives that represent modern nation states – the existence of fair political institutions and structures that characterise the republican liberal society (*inter alia*).³³³ By contrast, mere biological survival requires neither education nor social integration and interaction at all.

In principle, the normative priority associated with satisfying human needs depends on the degree of well-being for which that need-satisfaction is required. For example, satisfying the needs of an individual such that her well-being remains at D_B has greater priority than satisfying needs that preserve D_C because the former entails someone's biological survival (and thus existence in *any* sense at all) being at acute risk. If we assume that death of the organism is a, and for most people plausibly the, supreme bad (especially because it is irreversible), then its avoidance normally takes precedence over all other requirements.³³⁴

A different point applies to degrees of flourishing above D_B : the lower the well-being in question, the less the existence qualifies as being worthy of a human being, with normative priority varying correspondingly. First, consider well-being below D_A . Characteristically, developed human beings “*make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it*”³³⁵ because they are quintessentially reasoning creatures. Without agency, that activity does not occur, so the existence in question cannot qualify as human (because key human capacities remain undeveloped/unemployed). Without reasoning, an individual's activity resembles that of a creature without human cognition, so her life resembles the existence of such an animal.

Second, consider well-being above D_A but below D_C . Without political participation and self-determination, the agent's ability to actually shape her community and thereby determine how (well) her life goes is severely restricted. Put differently, she is unable to give expression to various of her ‘informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it’. The politically disenfranchised/oppressed exist in a moral/political world entirely shaped by others (the inability of women to take higher office in religious organisations like the Roman Catholic Church and Islamic states being an apt example). Thus, the existence of individuals whose degree of flourishing falls between D_A and D_C is unworthy of a human being too, though less so than an existence with a degree of flourishing below D_A .

³³² Sandel (1996).

³³³ That said, even D_A requires such institutions and structures to some degree, because otherwise the availability of resource access necessary to secure the satisfaction of relevant needs cannot be guaranteed.

³³⁴ Exceptions may have various reasons. For example, death may prevent/terminate an even greater evil (say, the presence of intense, prolonged, and incurable pain), or it may be the easily foreseeable result of greatly irresponsible choices made by the individual at risk. I will return to these issues in chapter 4.

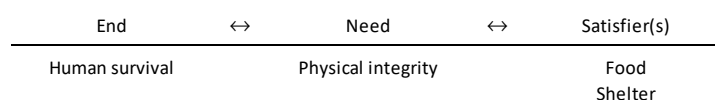
³³⁵ Doyal & Gough (1991: 53; original italics).

Well-being, then, seems to be a plausible candidate for the end that conditions need-satisfaction. Just as ill-being can be considered to be located around the bottom level(s) of well-being, basic needs can be understood to represent what is required to bring about a basic degree of human well-being (eg, one that secures citizenship). This suggestion is compatible with the notion that basic needs have overriding normative force. It also allows us to commit to the claim that human beings need certain things to live lives of more than basic qualities, without requiring to assert that those needs have as much normative force as basic needs.

3.1.6. Need Satisfiers and Frustrators

So far, my discussion has been mostly limited to two elements, ends and needs. However, the latter are actually the centre piece in two parallel chains of three elements. On the positive side, that chain takes the form of E-N-SA: end E conditions need N, which, in turn, conditions satisfier(s) SA. The latter represent things that facilitate or contribute positively to the satisfaction of human/individual needs and thus human/individual flourishing.³³⁶ For example, to secure her survival, a human being needs physical integrity, which is secured through the utilisation of things like food and shelter.

Illustration 15: E-N-SA Chain



Food is a type of satisfier, of which fruits and vegetables are satisfier sub-types, of which carrots and broccoli are sub-types in turn, and of which a particular carrot is a satisfier-token.³³⁷ Often, a given need has numerous satisfiers (different types of vegetables being an obvious example). If we compare any two of them (assuming they bind similar qualities/quantities of resources), one may satisfy a given need to a greater degree, satisfy it for a longer period, satisfy more needs simultaneously, satisfy some needs without simultaneously frustrating any others, issue in greater need-satisfaction overall, *et cetera*. I will consider all of these properties different dimensions of efficiency: the more a satisfier contributes to human need-satisfaction and thus flourishing (in the long term), the more efficient it is. I will refer to this propensity or effect in terms of superiority/inferiority.

On the negative side, said chain takes the form of E-N-FR: end E conditions need N, which, in turn, conditions frustrator(s) FR. The latter represent things that prevent or erode human need-satisfaction and thus flourishing. For example, so-called antinutrients represent natural or synthetic compounds that interfere with the absorption of nutrients in human organisms. Phytic acid (a form of phosphorus found in many plant tissues), for instance, forms insoluble complexes with zinc, iron, and copper, thereby making these metals unavailable for human intestinal absorption.³³⁸ Need-frustrators too can be compared in terms of how destructive they are. I will do so by using ‘effectiveness’ or ‘direness’ terminology: the more it prevents or erodes human need-satisfaction, the more effective and dire a frustrator it is.

³³⁶ To my knowledge, Max-Neef (1991) was the first to use this concept.

³³⁷ Like *food*, the activity of *eating* is a satisfier-type for physical integrity too, and my particular act of eating a particular morsel of food is a satisfier-token.

³³⁸ Cammack et al (2006).

Aside from satisfiers and frustrators, what we might call ‘neutrals’ have no effect on need-satisfaction, positive or negative, at all. Plausibly, it is here that we find impostors and what Max-Neef considers *pseudo-satisfiers*.³³⁹: anything that an individual perceives to be a satisfier, but that actually fails to facilitate or contribute positively to the satisfaction of human/individual needs. Plausibly, *prostitution* may be considered a pseudo-satisfier (falsely perceived by a john to contribute to his need for *affection*).

Regularly, something that represents a satisfier for need N1 may positively frustrate other needs, which gives agents reason against its pursuit or application. Alternatively, something that ordinarily satisfies N1 may turn into a N1-frustrator if it is used for the purpose of addressing N2 instead, which gives agents reasons against the latter. For example, food represents a satisfier for our physical requirements. However, if it is used to satisfy our emotional needs, its consumption may end up seriously jeopardising physical well-being (due to causing varying degrees of obesity).

Conceptually, a key difference between needs and satisfiers/frustrators is that while the former represent necessary conditions for obtaining end E, the latter represent sufficient conditions for the satisfaction/frustration of the need or needs in question, and thus for the obtaining of E. We already came across this notion when I discussed parts of an *INUS condition*: an insufficient but necessary part of a condition that is itself unnecessary but *sufficient* for the effect to occur. Accordingly, need-satisfiers will frequently be INUS conditions.

Given the lack of necessary connection between satisfiers and needs (and thus ends), satisfiers are not automatically blessed with the same end-derived normative significance as needs. Whenever it is possible to address a need through alternative satisfiers, the question “Why *this* one?” cannot be answered by responding “Because without it you cannot flourish”. Instead, we have to rely on other criteria, satisfier efficiency and availability being obvious candidates: if SA1 is a more efficient satisfier available to us than SA2, we have stronger practical reason to opt for the former (*ceteris paribus*³⁴⁰).

- *Efficiency* is an obvious criterion. If the objective is to promote end E, and if our resources are not only limited but scarce (as is usually the case), then an agent has very strong reason to opt for whatever satisfier does so in terms of highest resource-input-to-effect-output ratio.
- *Availability* recommends itself at least partially on the basis that *ought implies can*. Consider the following. Like human needs, human satisfiers and frustrators are universal in principle. For example, *attending school* was a satisfier for the human need of *understanding* (which is grounded in our cognitive capacities) long before any such institutions came into existence. However, an agent has *practical* reason for attending school only if that option is actually practically available to her.

The latter of the two relates to an issue that I have already touched upon: which practices do, and do not, represent legitimate need-satisfiers for an individual depends on the prior political deliberation and choices of her community. The critical public sphere is the place where a community reasons about its culturally specific modes

³³⁹ According to Max-Neef (1991), pseudo-satisfiers may on occasion actually annul the possibility of satisfying the relevant need in the medium to long term. In that case, they are frustrators.

³⁴⁰ Other criteria may be relevant too. For example, consider that alternative satisfiers could be sourced from different (reluctant) providers whose ability to assist varies. How do we weigh the fact that A’s ability to assist is greater than that of B (eg, because she is wealthier or more closely located) against the fact that the satisfier that A may provide is less effective than that of B? I will neglect such issues here because they do not represent a pressing issue. In chapter 4 I will argue for a principle of justice that gives all agents reasonably equal access to need-satisfying basic resources, which enables individuals to generally live without the kind of third-party assistance on which the example above relies.

of flourishing and establishes a corresponding communal interpretation. This ties in nicely with Rawls' view that citizens have the following moral power:

It is the capacity to have, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of the good. Such a conception is an ordered family of final ends and aims which specifies a person's conception of what is of value in human life or, alternatively, of what is regarded as a fully worthwhile life. The elements of such a conception are normally set within, and interpreted by, certain comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrines in the light of which the various ends and aims are ordered and understood.³⁴¹

All citizens have this power, and the communal debate that is a precondition for the formulation of this conception and the result of it at the same time (because they cannot be separated from each other) results in an inter-personal position on what the community as a whole does, and does not, consider 'a fully worthwhile life'. In fact, the community's *need* for that public debate (because it is a necessary condition for a collective's flourishing) represents proper justification for the claim that what does, and does not, represent individually available modes of flourishing, individual needs, and individual need-satisfiers is determined by the community.³⁴²

Consequently, a community like that of the Amish has a different collectively-agreed upon understanding of what *good human life* means than 'mainstream' America, and what does (not) represent legitimate needs of community members, and what things do (not) qualify as legitimate satisfiers for them – especially practices – varies accordingly. For instance, while the Amish and mainstream America agree that *school education* is a legitimate abstract satisfier for the human need that we might call *learning* or *understanding*, the former do not consider *mainstream public schools* a legitimate specific satisfier for said need (see Introduction). That is why the Amish operate their own, one-room schools (that children of their community must attend).

Without determining which practices represent legitimate ways of flourishing and which ones do not, communities have no way of distinguishing between things that represent acceptable need-satisfiers and things that do not, which would make proper arbitration between conflicting resource claims impossible. This is how we can explain why to an Amish child the practice of attending public school is not practically available as a satisfier for her *learning/understanding* needs: the *Ordnung*, the Amish code of conduct for all spheres of life (private, public, and ceremonial) that results from ongoing civic deliberation and decision-making, proscribes it.³⁴³

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Having developed a reasonable understanding of *needs* and related concepts, we can now adjust our definitions of *consumption* and *production* accordingly:

CONS*: An individual consumes during period T if, and to the extent that, she employs resources during T and thereby contributes to her own need-satisfaction during T or shortly thereafter.

PROD*: An individual produces during period T if, and to the extent that, she employs resources during T and thereby i) prepares to contribute to her own need-satisfaction in the mid- to long-term future or ii) contributes to the need-satisfaction of others.

The obvious next question now is: what do human beings actually need? As I noted, needs are conditioned by the end for which they are required. Thus, before we can work out a response to our question, we have to conceptualise the human end first.

³⁴¹ Rawls (2001: 19).

³⁴² In other words, substantive claims about what communities need to flourish help us justify conceptual claims about how the substance of individual needs and satisfiers is established.

³⁴³ Kraybill (2001).

3.2. Flourishing as Human End

Approaches to human well-being or, to use the alternative term, flourishing – that is, accounts of what is good for human beings – have been classified in multiple ways. Two of these categorisation attempts have been especially popular. The first contrasts subjective with objective accounts. Subjective approaches make “well-being depend upon an individual’s own desires”³⁴⁴ while objective ones do not. More precisely, the former consider my having a favourable attitude toward Y a necessary condition of Y being beneficial for me, while the latter deny that.³⁴⁵

The second popular classification attempts gives us a three-fold distinction between hedonistic theories, desire-fulfilment/preference-satisfaction theories, and objective-list theories.³⁴⁶ In the following, I will focus on these three accounts and refer back to the notions of subjectivity and objectivity in due course.

Before we go into detail about the accounts, let me make some structural comments. Conceptually, theories of human well-being can be distinguished by their substantive and their formal claims.³⁴⁷ The former address this question: what constitutes well-being? According to hedonism, for example, it is the greatest amount of pleasure over pain. By contrast, formal claims answer a different question: what makes whatever the theory considers good things good (and bad things bad)? The hedonist’s response would be something like this: the pleasantness of pleasure and the painfulness of pain.³⁴⁸

3.2.1. Hedonism

According to hedonist theory, the polarity of welfare is mapped onto the polarity of pleasure and pain. While well-being is constituted by pleasant experiences, ill-being is constituted by painful ones.³⁴⁹ Pleasure alone makes a human life good, pain alone makes it bad. To make the theory more plausible, attitudinal pleasures (to which I will refer as *enjoyment*, *joy*, or *delight*) and attitudinal pain (*despair*, *grief*, and *sorrow*) should be included in the account to complement sensational experiences.

Proposing that pleasantness is the only good-for-maker of things, hedonism is a formally monist theory of well-being.³⁵⁰ Although it comes in both pleasure-monist and pleasure-pluralist forms,³⁵¹ the theory is substantively monist in the sense that, ultimately, the only thing constitutively required for well-being is pleasure (and the only thing constitutively required for ill-being is pain).

Hedonism is an implausible theory of well-being, for multiple reasons. Firstly, if the notion of *good for* is to be applied across the board to all living things and not just arbitrarily limited to sentient animals, hedonism cannot possibly be correct. There are clearly things that are good for plants, but hedonism cannot account for them. Vegetation lacks nervous systems and mentality, which is why it neither experiences sensations nor has attitudes.

Secondly, hedonism arbitrarily and implausibly disregards the objects of pleasure: to the extent that sensory and attitudinal pleasure constitutes well-being, an individual does well regardless of what she is pleased

³⁴⁴ Griffin (1986: 32).

³⁴⁵ The former may or may not consider my having a favourable attitude a sufficient condition, the latter deny it (Sumner, 1996).

³⁴⁶ For example, Crisp (2008), Kagan (1998), and Parfit (1984).

³⁴⁷ As we will see, not all theories make both sorts of claims, though.

³⁴⁸ Crisp (2008).

³⁴⁹ Sumner (1996).

³⁵⁰ Crisp (2008).

³⁵¹ For example, remember the distinction between sensational and attitudinal pleasure.

about. For instance, assume that I have a festering wound that will result in permanent incapacitation of some kind. For whatever reasons, that condition feels pleasant to me and I am also pleased about it. (If necessary, also assume that in the absence of said wound my life would contain less sensory and attitudinal pleasure.) According to hedonism, my life goes well, which is why the theory's supreme non-concern about the fit between sensation and attitude on the one hand and their objects on the other is so disconcerting. It seems absurd that the wounded I is doing well or flourishing. Plausibly, we ought to find some things pleasant, but not others; similarly, we ought to be delighted about some things, but not others. Hedonism makes no such distinction.

Thirdly, pleasure-monist hedonism is reduced to purely quantitative considerations of welfare. For that type of hedonism, pleasure comes in different amounts, not in different kinds. However, it is rather implausible that the pleasure from eating amounts to the same thing as, for example, being pleased by one's PhD progress. Yet, even pleasure-pluralist hedonism suffers from that problem. If, following Mill³⁵², we wanted to distinguish between higher and lower pleasures (and, contra Bentham³⁵³, say that the pleasure derived from poetry might be superior to that from playing push-pin), the question that presents itself is this: what makes B a higher pleasure than A? Hedonism has no answer. Any plausible response would have to point towards an explanation that is extrinsic to pleasure itself,³⁵⁴ which entails that pleasure is not the only thing that determines well-being.

For these various reasons, the hedonist's theory of well-being must be rejected.

3.2.2. Conative Accounts

Next, consider desire-fulfilment/preference-satisfaction approaches or, as Kraut³⁵⁵ calls them, conative theories of well-being. Originating in the *prima facie* attractive idea that there is a link between X being good for us and X being what we want, a theory that sidesteps various obvious criticisms from the start could be formulated as follows: well-being is constituted by the satisfaction of an individual's properly informed and rational desires or preferences.

Conative accounts are purely formal theories of well-being. The only good-for-making property is the fulfilment of the desires or preferences that the individual in question has. Whatever people happen to desire, the substance itself is left indeterminate by conativism.³⁵⁶ Granted, it may turn out that people universally desire or prefer similar things. However, that would be purely a matter of accident, and conative theory has nothing to say about it.

The first two criticisms of the conative approach correspond to those of hedonism. Firstly, the theory is silent about the welfare of living things that lack mentality. Worse, it can also not account for the well-being of mentally immature human beings. Infants may have something like instinctual preferences (eg, for foods with a certain kind of taste), but they lack content-bearing attitudes like desires and plans. Thus, unless we want to reduce their well-being to the satisfaction of preferences for things like tasty foods, the conative theory is unable to account for what makes an infant's life go well or badly. For example, the theory cannot support the view that infants do well to the degree that they are in the process of properly developing the mental capacities required to form

³⁵² Mill (2003).

³⁵³ Bentham: "Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure, it is more valuable than either" (1825: 206).

³⁵⁴ See previous footnote. Bentham's claim that "the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry" is not supported from within hedonism.

³⁵⁵ Kraut (2007).

³⁵⁶ Grix & McKibbin (2015).

characteristically human attitudes – because that itself is not a matter of an infant’s present desire-fulfilment/preference-satisfaction.

Secondly, regardless of the content of her mental attitudes, to the extent that an individual’s desires and preferences are satisfied, she fares well. For example, if Hitler’s desire to kill millions of Jews qualifies as properly informed and rational, then he does well under the conative theory. An obvious counter here would be that the rationality requirement makes it impossible for such content (that millions of Jews be killed) to be part of a qualifying desire. But that depends on which standard of rationality we apply. If it is minimal, it requires no more than consistency within one’s overall set of desires, so the response would fail. If it is more stringent, it may allow for “substantive criticism of aims” and an assessment of whether an aim is “worth adopting and pursuing”.³⁵⁷ In that case though, the theory will have to refer to a standard of worth that has nothing to do with the nature of mental states, and it will rather be the worth of one’s aim or project that accounts for whether a life goes well (instead of the fact that one’s desire is satisfied). In other words, the theory would have to expand beyond conativism, thereby undermining itself.

Thirdly, and relatedly, why would an individual count as faring well on the grounds that her desire with the content ‘that P’ is satisfied? Would she not count as faring well due to it *being the case* that P instead? For example, assume that I desire for a part of my thesis to be published as a book chapter. If that actually transpires at some point, then my doing well would be accounted for by said chapter being published, not by my desire being satisfied.

Need-theories like the approach that I pursue demonstrate why substantively silent theories of well-being like conativism are so inadequate: if an individual made need-claims on the basis of what she desires and the human end is defined purely formally in terms of desire-satisfaction, it would be difficult to evaluate and prioritise such needs. For example, if one person desires food because she is starving and another one desires food because she wishes to alleviate her boredom, both have an equally strong claim toward food because that is what each needs to satisfy their desire after all (*ceteris paribus*). In fact, if the latter’s desire is stronger than the former’s (for whatever reason), we might even have to say that she needs the food more.³⁵⁸ Accordingly, we need a theory of well-being that makes substantive claims.

3.2.3. Objective List Theory

Due to their implausibility, hedonism and the conative account are weak theories of well-being. Under the previously mentioned three-fold distinction, that leaves objective-list theory. This approach is silent with regard to formal claims. In other words, it does not address this question: what makes what the theory considers good things good (and bad things bad)? Typically listing multiple items meant to constitute human well-being, objective list theories are substantively pluralist. Here are three proposals about which things are good for human beings:

- Finnis: The basic aspects of human well-being are life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, sociability (friendship), practical reasonableness, and ‘religion’.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ Scanlon (1998: 119).

³⁵⁸ This is entirely incompatible with how we ordinarily think about the nature of urgent/basic needs.

³⁵⁹ By ‘religion’, Finnis means to refer to our relations to the cosmos and the divine (1980).

- Fletcher: Well-being is enhanced by achievement, friendship, happiness, pleasure, self-respect, and virtue.³⁶⁰
- Parfit: The things that are good for people might include moral goodness, rational activity, the development of one's abilities, having children and being a good parent, knowledge, and the awareness of true beauty.³⁶¹

With regard to what is bad for human beings, objective list theories have to make a separate proposal. Here is an example:

- Parfit: The things that are bad for people might include being betrayed, manipulated, slandered, deceived, being deprived of liberty or dignity, and enjoying either sadistic pleasure, or aesthetic pleasure in what is in fact ugly.³⁶²

Notice how natural it would be to consider most items from the first three lists as human needs, and the elements from Parfit's second list as things that humans need to avoid (call them 'anti-needs'). However, the insufficiencies of objective list theory are easy to spot. To begin with, like the two previous accounts the theory has nothing to say about the well-being (or ill-being) of non-human creatures. If we are after a general or universal account of *good for* (and *bad for*), then objective list theory is unhelpful. And if we assume that such an account exists, the theory must be incorrect.

Secondly, objective list theories are arbitrary and explanatorily impotent. Given that it is unclear what the items on each list have in common, it is difficult to explain why the different substantive elements are, in fact, listed.³⁶³ Any formally silent theory faces this objection. What is more, it would directly pass on this burden to a theory of needs that makes reference to well-being such construed. A robust theory of needs should be able to say why human beings require the things that it presents as needs, and objective list theory is no help in that regard.

3.2.4. Well-Being of a Fourth Kind

So far, we have considered theories that were formally monist/substantively monist (hedonism), formally monist/substantively silent (conative theory), and formally silent/substantively pluralist (objective list theory). That leaves a number of possible combinations,³⁶⁴ which is why the aforementioned three-fold classification of well-being theories is rather arbitrary. That said, many of the remaining combinations are not plausible (or useful). What we are really after is a theory of well-being that is formally monist and substantively pluralist – and perfectionism is a fitting candidate.

According to perfectionism, the answer to the formal question (what makes good things good and bad things bad?) is this: the fact that they perfect the nature of the entity in question. With regard to human perfectionism as developed by Hurka³⁶⁵, the answer is more specific: the fact that they perfect human nature. The response to the substantive question (what constitutes human well-being?) is this: the development of our physical

³⁶⁰ Fletcher (2013).

³⁶¹ Parfit (1984: 499).

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Fletcher (2015).

³⁶⁴ Eight in total (formally silent/monist/pluralist by substantively silent/monist/pluralist makes nine, but the combination of formally silent and substantively silent makes no sense).

³⁶⁵ Hurka (1993).

nature, practical rationality, and theoretical rationality. A good life requires the advancement of these three characteristics to high degrees, and the ideal human life (insofar as it is within the realm of practical possibility) combines the bodily development of an athlete like Usain Bolt, the practical rationality of a politician like Cicero, and the theoretical understanding of a scientist like Albert Einstein.³⁶⁶

Hurka himself does not put forward his approach as a theory of well-being. Fortunately, Kraut³⁶⁷ proposes a developmentalist alternative that has more than a few similarities with perfectionism and that is expressly construed as a theory of well-being. Formally, it claims that flourishing is a good thing. Not just that, flourishing is good *for* the entity that flourishes. Regardless of whether they are plants, animals, or human beings, entities that flourish do well. They do so by “developing properly and fully, that is, by growing, maturing, making full use of the potentialities, capacities, and faculties that (under favorable conditions) they naturally have at an early stage of their existence”³⁶⁸. In addition to *growing*, *maturing*, and *making full use*, I will include *maintaining* and *restoring*, because it is good for an entity both that its potentialities, capacities, and faculties do not deteriorate, and that, upon having deteriorated (eg, due to accident or illness), they be reconditioned.

Correspondingly, developmentalist well-being’s formal claim is not that it is good for a creature to flourish as a member of a kind (regardless of the kind), but rather that it is good for a creature to flourish as a member of its species. Thus, what is good for human beings is to flourish *as* human beings.

Substantively, the account proposes that human flourishing consists in the maturation, maintenance, restoration, and exercise of certain cognitive, social, affective, physical, and sensory capacities. As Kraut sensibly notes, this list of human powers accords with common sense, and common sense is subject to correction and change. Refinements through the arts and sciences are both welcome and likely. In addition, the human potential itself is subject to alteration, which is why the components of human flourishing may similarly vary. For example, lack of numeracy is a defect now, but it was not before we began to think with numbers. Similarly, certain abilities may become crucial elements of human flourishing in the (far) future, but our current lack of these does not count as a defect now.

At this point, we can already see how Kraut’s account avoids some of the criticisms wielded against the other three approaches. Unlike objective list theory, it is not formally silent. It is explicit about what makes good things good and bad things bad. In fact (and in contrast to hedonism and conative theory), it answers that question with regard to *any* entity for which we can say that something, say X, is good or bad for it. Its explanatory scope is not limited to entities with a mental life. Unlike conative theory, developmentalist well-being is not substantively silent. Thus, we are not left in the dark about what constitutes human welfare.

Before we move on to developing a substantive need-account (and as a natural segue to that topic), let us consider human flourishing and languishing in a bit more detail. Given the multiplicity and complexity of our capacities, human beings can do well/badly in many ways. These details will be important with regard to my need account.

³⁶⁶ Grix & McKibbin (2015).

³⁶⁷ Kraut (2007).

³⁶⁸ Ibid: 131.

3.3. Human Flourishing and Languishing

As stated, human flourishing consists in the maturation, maintenance, restoration, and exercise of our cognitive, social, affective, physical, and sensory capacities, and Kraut's developmentalism allows us to consider both well-being and ill-being concerning all of these elements in detail. In each case, human goodness-for and badness-for can be characterised in terms of "closeness to or distance from living the kind of life available to a flourishing member of [the human] species".³⁶⁹

3.3.1. The Physical

Given the universality of the category of physical capacities among living organisms and given that symptoms of corporeal illness tend to be visible, we can often assess human flourishing by simply looking at someone. As we recognise when a plant looks lush or wilted, when its growth is vigorous or stunted, and when it possesses all of its typical parts or has been maimed in some way, agents can make similar judgements with regard to fellow human beings. What is more, through personal experience we are familiar with a human practice that revolves around the treatment of physical ill-being since childhood, namely the medical profession.

Mentioned universality allows us to assess the physical flourishing of organisms of varying complexity in similar terms. According to Hursthouse, "[a]n individual plant is a good (or bad/poor) specimen of its species (or sub-species), a good rose or nettle, according as (i) its parts and (ii) its operations (including reactions under this heading where relevant) are good or not"³⁷⁰. Similarly, the physical flourishing of a person is assessed with regard to the health of body parts (eg, arms and legs, hand and feet, eyes and ears) and bodily functions (eg, blood circulation, digestion, urination and defecation, as well as sight and hearing).

The ends by reference to which Hursthouse's two aspects are assessed with regard to humans are only partially similar to those applied to vegetation, though. The parts and operations of a plant are judged in light of their contributing, "in the way characteristic of such a member of such a species, to (1) individual survival through the characteristic life span of such a member of such a species and (2) continuance of the species"³⁷¹. When it comes to members of *Homo sapiens*, the ends are more numerous. We add (3) characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic pleasure or enjoyment (inclusively understood) and (4) good functioning of the social group (in the ways characteristic of our species).³⁷² Thus, physical well-being cannot be fully separated from the other dimensions of human flourishing.

3.3.2. The Sensory

Regarding the sensory aspect of human life, it is good for us when our powers of perception, natural curiosity about our environment, and receptivity to beauty grow. We flourish as users of our senses and as observers, because that is how we become conscious of the world around us. We enjoy the beauty of both nature and crafted artefacts. We appreciate tastes and smells, and we experiment with them. We take pleasure in listening to natural sounds and man-made compositions. All these activities are grounded in our basic sensory modalities, and their use

³⁶⁹ Kraut (2007: 152).

³⁷⁰ Hursthouse (1999: 198).

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

can be refined in numerous ways such that our powers of discernment grow (eg, consider the practice of *blind wine tasting*).

Correspondingly, the absence or loss of a sensory power is bad for us, be it sight, hearing, or taste. It diminishes the richness of our experience and stimulation, and it reduces the scope of our environmental awareness. Thus, it closes avenues for learning. None of this is to claim that, say, an individual who is born blind or deaf may not be able to live a flourishing life. Assuming that enough of her other sensory capacities are intact, she will have a sufficiently large spectrum of stimulatory options and enough avenues of discovering her environment. She may even compensate by developing some of her other capacities to extraordinary degrees, excelling there in ways that few others do. That said, we still feel that a person's sensory deficit is regrettable. That view is rather clearly born out by the fact that few parents³⁷³ would wish their offspring to be born blind or deaf, for instance. It is also born out by the fact that, if possible, we protect our sensory organs against injury and degradation (eg, by wearing protective goggles or ear plugs).

The sensory dimension of flourishing lends itself for emphasising that badness-for is not always exhausted by the absence or loss of goodness-for. Badness-for also incorporates the various ways in which the powers of our sensory organs are being used to ill effect, resulting in unpleasantness and distress. For example, when we are exposed to loud noise, harsh light, fetid smell, foul taste, or extreme temperatures, the corresponding experience is bad for us – as are any of the typically ensuing bodily reactions (eg, pain, nausea, dizziness). Some of our automatic behaviours respond to just such a kind of stimulus (remember my earlier comments about the human startle response).

Given their biological functions, to the extent that they alert us to conditions that need our immediate attention (eg, injury) and thus help avoid potentially disastrous and long-term harm, bodily reactions like pain are actually good for us. What is more, sometimes bodily reactions like pain are even welcomed and enjoyed. For example, it is part of the practice of *mountaineering* that participants test their mettle using the grist of pain and discomfort. The ability to proceed in spite of hardships makes the successful completion of an ascent all the more significant and rewarding. Similarly, some women experience labour pain in a positive way. For them, pain is an indicator of progress toward a desired goal and a non-threatening natural life-experience that is to be mastered instead of avoided.³⁷⁴ There is a “striking qualitative difference between pain in the context of helplessness, suffering, and loss, and pain in the context of coping resources, comfort, and a sense of accomplishment”.³⁷⁵ Plausibly, that contrast corresponds at least partially to the difference between willingly subjecting ourselves to experiences that involve pain, and being subjected to them without – or, worse, despite – our wishes.

3.3.3. The Affective

Human beings have the capacity for a large variety of affective states which might be classified as:

³⁷³ That is especially the case for parents who do not have these defects themselves. Many deaf parents actually wish for their children to be born deaf because it prevents that their offspring end up belonging to Hearing culture while they themselves belong to Deaf culture. Given what I said about how children acquire their habits and practices, that wish makes perfect sense: hearing children born to deaf parents would be immersed in the wrong practices in their home, because these practices are adaptive for deaf human beings, but not for hearing ones. Deaf parents will find it difficult to train their hearing children well. For details on Deaf culture, see Dolnick (1993).

³⁷⁴ Lowe (2002).

³⁷⁵ Caton et al (2002: S4).

- *Core Affects*: primitive non-reflective feelings, including pleasure and displeasure, tension and relaxation, energy and tiredness;
- *Emotions*: states that have specific objects (typically individuals, events, or physical objects), for example, anger, fear, jealousy, pride, and love; and
- *Moods*: states that are diffuse and global (in that they are about nothing specific or about everything, the world in general³⁷⁶) and typically last longer than emotions, including anxiety and depression.³⁷⁷

Like sensations, these states have a feel which gives them their positive or negative valence. Due to their deflationary feel, states with negative valence are bad for us in principle. Nevertheless, our experiencing such states may be both contextually fitting (eg, grief as a response to loss) and psychologically healthy (eg, cathartic discharge and distancing³⁷⁸), in which case it is good for us *that* we (are able to) feel them. Affectlessness is a defect for human beings: “better to react to situations with the feelings that are appropriate to them”³⁷⁹. It is not bad for me to feel grief over the loss of a loved person – rather, it is the loss that is bad for me. Similarly, despite their buoyant, inflationary feel, it is not good for me to feel states with positive valence in the wrong circumstances (eg, enjoy the sight of someone being bullied).

As in the case of sensations and our respective bodily reactions, some states with negative affective valence can actually be enjoyed. For example, for mountaineers mild to moderate feelings of hunger, cold, and exposure to dangerous heights can be thrilling because they represent challenges that make the game more demanding; what is more, they make the next meal more gratifying, the subsequent warmth of a fireplace more rewarding, and the safety of basecamp more satisfying (respectively). Such contrasts between positive and negative valences intensify an outdoor experience, multiply the worth of a climbing trip, and make an adventure much more memorable.

Relatedly, certain forms and degrees of adversity – challenges and obstacles that must be overcome – are good for us:

We want some of our desires not to be too easily satisfied. A game that is too easy to play is no fun. A task that presents no difficulty is unchallenging. We are not disturbed by impediments to the satisfaction of our desires in these situations; we welcome them. Without them, we would lose all interest. Our anxiety over the possibility that we may fail is not a negative but a positive feature of these situations; it is a precondition of excitement.³⁸⁰

There are times when it is good for us to effortlessly achieve what we want (eg, when we are tired and weary), when we need tranquillity and relaxation. But the best moments in life, moments of Csikszentmihalyi’s *flow* and *optimal experience*, “usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile”³⁸¹, which is a key characteristic of what I have conceptualised as *acuminated activity*, of course.

³⁷⁶ Frijda (2009).

³⁷⁷ Ekkekakis (2012).

³⁷⁸ Scheff (1979) defines catharsis on the basis of two elements. While somatic-emotional catharsis is the motoric discharge of emotion (eg, through expressive sounds), distancing is the experience of being both participant in and observer of one’s own distress.

³⁷⁹ Kraut (2007: 155).

³⁸⁰ Ibid: 160.

³⁸¹ Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 3).

3.3.4. The Social

The nature of social languishing is rather comprehensively indicated by the criteria of what is generally referred to as *sociopathy/psychopathy*. For example, a diagnosis with antisocial personality disorder (APD) fits an individual who shows a pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the interests of others, as indicated by multiple of the following:

- failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviours (as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest);
- deceitfulness (as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure);
- irritability and aggressiveness (as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults);
- reckless disregard for the safety of others;
- consistent irresponsibility (as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behaviour or honour financial obligations); and
- lack of remorse (as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalising having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another).³⁸²

The items on Hare’s Psychopathy Checklist (PCL-R) and the factors on which they load in statistical data analysis/modelling indicate the same. Relating poorly to others, psychopathic individuals have grandiose self-worth and are glib, superficial, and manipulative. Lacking central affective mental states required for good social relations and a perspective of the interests of others, they are remorseless, callous, and without empathy.³⁸³

The inability to form the full spectrum of human relationships represents a significant deprivation because by being unable to relate comprehensively to elements of her social world the individual fails to fully experience all features of her environment. Correspondingly, she will also fail to gain satisfaction, pleasure, and meaning through participation in the projects that constitute the cooperative activity performed within human practices. What is more, she will be less likely to cope well with adversity. Resilience is defined as the capacity to maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure through “successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances”³⁸⁴. Primary relationships within the family and the wider network of extra-familial relationships represent two of its key sources.³⁸⁵ These tend to be available less, or not at all, to individuals who lack social capacities.

None of this is to deny the benefits of seclusion. As noted in the opening comments to this chapter, the Desert Fathers and Mothers withdrew to the Egyptian desert because it provided suitable conditions for spiritual growth. In fact, temporary solitude may even instil a greater appreciation of company.³⁸⁶ However, the fact that an intentionally chosen (temporary) social distance may yield certain compensating gains has no bearing on the fact that the *inability* to relate to others represents a deprivation.

³⁸² American Psychiatric Association (1994).

³⁸³ Hare (2003), Hare & Neumann (2003).

³⁸⁴ Wolff (1995: 566).

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Thoreau (2004).

3.3.5. The Cognitive

One of the earliest arguments for the view that our reasoning faculties, or rather our use of them, represent the key to conceptualising *good human life* was put forward by Aristotle. Roughly, his reasoning in the *Nicomachean Ethics* can be summarised as follows:

1. The characteristic activity of a thing is that which is distinctive of it.
2. The use of rational faculties is distinctive of human beings.³⁸⁷
3. Thus, the characteristic human activity is the use of rational faculties.
4. Something is a good X only if it performs its characteristic activity well.
5. Thus, an individual is a good human being only if she uses the rational faculties well.

In effect, the claim is that whatever makes us good creatures of our kind (ie, good human beings) is good *for us*. Thus, using rational faculties well is good for us.

Like all species, humans have a characteristic way of going about their lives, but in contrast to plants and other animals ours is much less narrow and specific. For example, we do not universally live in homogenous habitats, because our faculties enable us to exist in a large variety of environments, not least because we have the ability to transform (or create suitable micro-habitats within) them. Rather, our single characteristic way of going on and about is what Hursthouse calls *the rational way*: the performance of actions of any type (eg, feeding, dressing, and driving) “in any ways we can rightly see as something we have [good] reason to do”³⁸⁸. I think that Hursthouse overestimates the role of reasoning in our lives here though. As outlined in chapter 2, human beings actually perform the majority of their activities in more or less mechanised modes, which is greatly adaptive in many circumstances. However, I do not at all deny that we have the *ability* to use reason in the ways described by her, of course. In fact, when it comes to our consumption activity, we should use that ability far more often (see chapter 5).

Whether we agree with Aristotle’s argument or not, the burden of proof is surely on those who wish to deny that cognitive flourishing is a key constituent of human thriving. Once again, the reference to parents and their children is instructive: “Inquisitiveness about the world is one of the necessary elements in any infant’s kit of cognitive and affective tools”³⁸⁹. Children almost incessantly ask why their parents (or others) do the things they see them do, as well as why they are supposed to do the things their parents tell them. In other words, they try to make sense of human conduct by understanding the reasons that motivate it, thereby developing their own understanding of what are, and are not, good reasons. Without that inquisitiveness, a child would not flourish as a cognitive creature, and thus also not as a human being.

★

When it comes to the assessment of the flourishing of plants, we can give a reasonably short and uncomplicated account. With regard to assessments of human flourishing, we do not have that option. Returning to Hursthouse’s approach, not only is human flourishing assessed across more aspects, but it is also appraised with regard to more ends.

In one way, this is a drawback, because it introduces a lot of complexity and indeterminacy. The more dimensions there are to our flourishing, the harder it becomes to say exactly how, when, and to what overall degree

³⁸⁷ Because sense perception and feelings of pleasure and pain we have in common with other animals, and self-nourishment and reproduction with both plants and other animals.

³⁸⁸ Hursthouse (1999: 228).

³⁸⁹ Kraut (2007: 165).

we are doing well. It also makes it very difficult to compare the lives (both actual and potential) of different individuals, not least because it seems clear that an individual does not have to excel along *all* dimensions of human well-being to qualify as a flourishing person. In fact, an individual may even do quite poorly in some respect, which brings me to my second point.

Said complexity offers a wonderful spectrum of possibilities for well-being. Given that human individuals can flourish in a large variety of ways, they are correspondingly able to live great – or at least good, and most certainly satisfactory – lives in a wide variety of circumstances. For example, if scarce material resources or unavailable physical capacities prevent us from flourishing in some ways, we may still have the option of thriving in others. Stephen Hawking – theoretical physicist and cosmologist, sufferer from an early-onset, slow-progressing form of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) – is just one example.

3.4. What Human Beings Need

This brings us to the substantive question: what do human beings (universally) need in order to flourish *qua* human? When it comes to characterising human needs, we should heed Sen’s warning and avoid particular metaphysical commitments. Otherwise, the theory will not allow universal application to, and use by (ideally) all, cultural communities.³⁹⁰ For the same reason, constitutive needs must not be over-specified.³⁹¹ They should not incorporate anything like, for instance, specifically Western views about what human beings require to fully participate in contemporary societies the culture of which is greatly affected by American consumerism.

To minimise the risk of gaps in our list of needs, I will combine a number of different perspectives on human flourishing, by which I mean alternative ways of conceptualising and theorising. Each perspective aims to characterise what we require to flourish, but it does so in a unique fashion. Each perspective generates its own theoretical plane, the combination of which provides us with a multi-dimensional view upon human needs (similar to the combination of three spatial and one temporal dimensional providing us with the four-dimensional Minkowski continuum called *space-time*).

3.4.1. Perspective One: Developmentalist/Perfectionist Needs

Given that we (ultimately) approached the characterisation of well-being from the perspective of Kraut’s developmentalism to begin with, his classification of human powers represents one of the theoretical planes that spans my multi-dimensional approach to human flourishing.

According to Kraut, “a flourishing human being is one who possesses, develops, and enjoys the exercise of cognitive, affective, sensory, and social powers (no less than physical powers)”.³⁹² Following this formula, the possession, development, and joyful exercise of the five powers are presented as sufficient conditions for human flourishing. However, they actually represent necessary conditions instead, because without the possession, development, and joyful exercise of all these powers (to at least some degree) human flourishing is impossible. Considering them necessary conditions is of course precisely what our needs-approach requires.

³⁹⁰ Sen (1992, 2000). For example, our needs should be applicable to both religious communities and atheist/agnostic groups.

³⁹¹ Sen argues that Nussbaum’s Aristotelian “view of human nature (with a unique list of functionings for a good human life) may be tremendously overspecified” and thus does not permit “other routes to be taken which also have some plausibility” (1993: 47).

³⁹² Kraut (2007: 137).

Thus, the following is a more apt formula: The possession, development, and joyfully exercise of the five human powers (along with their maintenance and restoration) are constitutively required for human flourishing. Accordingly, human needs can be categorised in terms of these sub-dimensions:

- a) Physical;
- b) sensory;
- c) affective;
- d) cognitive; and
- e) social.

While the five categories enable us to address the whole spectrum of human powers and capacities, they tell us relatively little about the particular ways in which human beings flourish, about what actual individuals have to do to live good lives on an annual, monthly, weekly, and daily basis. In other words, they have limited practical value and are not very user-friendly.³⁹³ Thus, we need what I will call a *day-to-day* or *quotidian* perspective on flourishing and human needs. Following that, I will discuss a third perspective, existential needs.

3.4.2. Perspective Two: Quotidian Needs

When it comes to the kind of categories that structure our projects and activities (especially our practices) on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, the following represent suitable classes:

- 1) Subsistence;
- 2) maintenance;
- 3) learning;
- 4) connectedness;
- 5) service; and
- 6) idleness.

Let me discuss and justify these six categories in a bit of detail.

3.4.2.1. Subsistence

The first category – which could also be called *physical integrity and physiological functioning* – largely corresponds to bodily health. It incorporates the requirements that we have as a biological life form (biological needs). Here are some examples of activities, objects and facilities, and individual qualities (respectively) that represent satisfiers for our *subsistence* need. They represent what I have already referred to as *doings*, *havings*, and *beings* respectively:

- To feed and drink; rest and sleep; excrete; and exercise
- Nutritious food and clean water; adequate shelter; functional clothing; effective medicine; sanitation facilities
- Healthy parts (eg, limbs) and operations (eg, circulation and digestion); functional senses (eg, taste, smell, sight); temperance, adaptability, and appreciation

³⁹³ As Alkire notes, “theories that are not user-friendly do not spread” (2002: 183), which would defeat the practical purpose of this project.

Some might argue that *subsistence* is merely instrumentally valuable, because it is just a precondition for things that *really* constitute human flourishing (say, intellectual work), but that is incorrect. Firstly, almost any activity directed toward meeting our biological needs involves multiple human powers and capacities (as per developmentalist/perfectionist needs), all of which may, and ideally do, contribute to flourishing. For example, we do not nourish ourselves by directly transferring nutrients into our blood streams. Instead, we eat and drink foods in the context of consumption rituals during which we engage ophthamoception (sight), olfacoception (smell), and gustaoception (taste). The joyful consumption of sensorially pleasing meals greatly contributes to a good life, while the indifferent ingestion of insipid repasts does not.

Secondly (and as previously noted), compared to how non-human animals go about their activities, our cognitive capacity transforms much of our activity into human conduct – including those doings that satisfy our *subsistence* need. Insofar as they are performed by the agent ‘in ways she can rightly see as something she has (good) reason to do’, her activity contributes to, or represents a component of, her flourishing.

Thirdly, as far as applicable, the outlined quotidian needs apply to flourishing during all stages of human life. During early infancy, subsistence is hardly instrumental to other components of flourishing. Rather, it is *the* central constituent.

Finally, remember the various degrees of well-being. With regard to the most basic one, biological survival (D_B), subsistence plays an overwhelmingly central role. Arguably, it is the *only* relevant need.

3.4.2.2. Maintenance

The second category could perhaps also be called *householding*. It represents everything that is involved in securing the functioning of one’s domestic life (broadly conceptualised) and in laying the foundations for meeting needs in the other quotidian categories. In the absence of meeting householding requirements, a human existence would quickly devolve into disorder and decay, and thereby prevent the achievement of numerous other goods. What is more, and as I will argue in chapter 5, these (largely productive) performances can greatly affect our consumption activity.

Exemplary satisfiers are:

- To plan one’s day; acquire food and cook meals; sow, clean, and mend clothes; plant vegetables, weed the garden, harvest and preserve fruits; clean and maintain one’s dwelling; repair tools
- Various tools (eg, for gardening, household repair, and kitchen use); water; cleansing agents; power (electricity); transportation options
- Various skills; physical and mental energy plus endurance; absorption, determination, and discipline; mobility and agility

A large variety of never-ending maintenance activities embed us in the natural circumstances that represent the human condition. Remember, the things that we require to meet our biological needs (food, clothes, dwellings, tools, and other artefacts) are subject to natural forces like wear, decay, and invasion. Accordingly, they must be continuously repaired, replaced, thrown out, and cleaned – all activities that fall into the domain of labouring, which is one of the three elements that constitute Arendt’s *vita activa*³⁹⁴.

Some may resist the view that the maintenance category is constitutively necessary for human flourishing. While a, and perhaps even a large, part of a human life is taken up by householding, many will consider such activity

³⁹⁴ Arendt (1998).

a mere necessary evil, something that has to be dealt with so that we can get on with the things that matter non-instrumentally. Marx seems to indicate as much:

The realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper [...] The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond [the realm of necessity], though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis.³⁹⁵

By implication, labouring does not seem to qualify as *the development of human powers as an end in itself*. This would clearly be bad news for the millions of people who spend much of their days as homemakers, so let us consider reasons why the labouring involved in *householding* might be non-instrumentally valuable after all.

Firstly, chores like maintaining, weeding, and cleaning are satisfactory in a way that activities outside the labouring category are not:

The “blessing or the joy” of labor is the human way to experience the sheer bliss of being alive which we share with all living creatures, and it is even the only way men, too, can remain and swing contentedly in nature’s prescribed cycle, toiling and resting, labouring and consuming, with the same happy and purposeless regularity with which day and night and life and death follow each other.³⁹⁶

Labouring brings us close to our animal nature not because it addresses our mostly biological needs (eg, nourishment) but because it represents bodily performance that, if performed well, results in the most basic – but thereby no less valuable – joy. In an increasingly automated world (where machines and gadgets have been taking over more and more tasks that used to require our physical energy), many people have few opportunities to engage in such activity – which is the reason why *going to the gym* has become such a widespread practice in HDCs. We forget all too easily that householding activities represent much more sensible labour-intense practices (a statement that the Amish would immediately agree to³⁹⁷).

Secondly, to the extent that we household, we retain connections to our natural circumstances; to the extent that we do not (eg, by outsourcing such activities to others or to machines), we alienate ourselves from them, such that our lives become increasingly unnatural and devoid of vitality:

the perfect elimination of the pain and effort of labor would not only rob biological life of its most natural pleasures but deprive the specifically human life of its very liveliness [...] The human condition is such that pain and effort are not just symptoms which can be removed without changing life itself; they are rather the modes in which life itself, together with the necessity to which it is bound, makes itself felt. For mortals, the “easy life of the gods” would be a lifeless life.³⁹⁸

To the degree that we are animals, our life and activities ought to resemble theirs: if they build their dwellings, hunt their food, and clean their coats, so should we. By not doing so, “the life of the rich loses in vitality, in closeness to the ‘good things’ of nature, what it gains in refinement, in sensitivity to the beautiful things in the world”³⁹⁹. Existences of outsourced labour (in which, for instance, our gardens are maintained by professional caretakers, our dwellings are cleaned by maids, our pets are exercised by dog walkers, and our babies are carried and delivered by surrogates) are lifeless indeed because the elements they incorporate (eg, dwellings and gardens) are not the results of our own constructive efforts. Much like the lives of zoo animals, such a human existence is inauthentic.

³⁹⁵ Marx (1981: 958-959).

³⁹⁶ Arendt (1998: 106).

³⁹⁷ Rejecting the use of many technologies, the Amish frequently perform physically vigorous activities like tossing straw bales, chopping and sawing wood, shovelling and digging, as well as grooming and brushing animals. Thus, the idea that these Anabaptists would visit and intentionally seek physical exhaustion at a gym is preposterous.

³⁹⁸ Arendt (1998: 120).

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

Thirdly, the ability to household well is also a measure of self-sufficiency. Even in Homer's world, royalty like "Paris and Odysseus help in the building of their houses", and "Nausicaä herself washes the linen of her brothers" because it preserves independence and autonomy.⁴⁰⁰ If a person is actually able to maintain herself because she practices a multitude of basic household tasks on a regular basis, the order of her life does not depend on others, which is not just a legitimate source of pride⁴⁰¹ but also makes her existence considerably more resilient – especially in a world that is subject to the turbulence described in section 1.3.

Finally, labouring enriches the grasp of our nature and human affairs in ways that cannot be achieved without active participation in the practical realities of life. As Kropotkin writes,

how much the poet would gain in his feeling of the beauties of nature, how much better would he know the human heart, if he met the rising sun amidst the tillers of the soil, himself a tiller; if he fought against the storm with the sailors on board ship; if he knew the poetry of labour and rest, sorrow and joy, struggle and conquest!⁴⁰²

The same is true with regard to householding. To the degree that an individual fails to participate in the practice that we might call *domesticity*, she fails to understand how the vast majority of people (most likely including her own parents and grandparents) lived in the past, and how many people in non-HDCs live to this day. In the absence of habitualisation (which cannot properly occur without practical immersion), an individual can at most have a superficial, theoretical understanding of what the lives of her ancestors and people in other parts of the world is or was like. It entails social alienation (and thus connects to both the *social* need of the perfectionist perspective and the *social connectedness* need that I will discuss further below).

3.4.2.3. Learning

The third dimension is both developmentalist and essentialist in that it is directed toward the acquisition of both instrumental and non-instrumental knowledge of both practical and theoretical kinds. It represents human education and training activity in its many forms and incorporates a diverse set of activities, both formal (eg, attending school) and informal (eg, staying up-to-date on worldly affairs through media):

- To study, investigate, analyse, question, discuss, and practise
- Information records; educators; pedagogical method and educational policies; time to study, think, and digest
- Receptivity and curiosity; healthy senses; critical conscience and practical judgment; perseverance, astonishment, love of truth, open-mindedness, and assertiveness

Both learning *from* and the teaching *of* others are part of this need. The former is especially important during the early stages of the human life-cycle (childhood and adolescence) and during apprenticeship in just about any practice; the latter gains dominance during adulthood (eg, when individuals take on parental roles) and once the practitioner has achieved mastery.

Presumably, the claim that learning is a key constituent of human flourishing needs little argument. Still, let me make a few comments. Firstly, any scheme of needs must incorporate developmental aspects because an agent never simply arrives at a given state of need-satisfaction (and thus flourishing), especially when that state requires

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid: 83.

⁴⁰¹ It is this pride that shines through Corin's famous lines: "I am a true labourer; I earn that I eat, get that I wear; owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness, glad of other men's good, content with my harm" (Shakespeare, *As You Like It*: act III, scene II).

⁴⁰² Kropotkin (1901: 211).

skilled activity. Rather, she slowly progresses from stages of lesser to stages of greater skill through ongoing improvement. For example, part of what every child needs are opportunities to develop the excellences and the knowledge necessary to participate in the practice of *politics* (ie, act as a citizen) upon reaching adulthood. To the extent that the capacities for many activities that represent satisfiers for all six quotidian dimensions (including learning itself) must be acquired through learning, instrumental learning – roughly what Aristotle means with regard to *techné* and *phronesis* – runs perpendicular to (and in that sense is a component of) the other five needs as well. At the same time though, the satisfaction and joy inherent to the mastery of any (sufficiently complex) skill seems to be distinctive enough to justify representing that activity in the context of a distinct dimension of human flourishing, especially since it is required for the representation of non-instrumental learning in any case.

When it comes to non-instrumental learning (roughly what Aristotle has in mind concerning *episteme* and the activity of the theoretical intellect), we must be careful with regard the activity's object. According to Ross, knowledge (among other things⁴⁰³) is good *sans phrase*, that is, in and of itself. His argument from intuition is:

[Suppose] two states of the universe equal in respect of virtue and of pleasure and of the allocation of pleasure to the virtuous, but such that the persons in the one had a far greater understanding of the nature and laws of the universe than those in the other. Can any one doubt that the first would be a better state of the universe?⁴⁰⁴

Yet, that intuition very much depends on how we interpret the phrase 'nature and laws of the universe'. Not just *any* fact about the natural world will convince us that knowledge of it is valuable. For example, if I know the number of leaves on the lime tree in my back yard in world W1, and I fail to have that knowledge (which certainly has no practical relevance to my or anyone else's life) in W2, why should we consider W1 a better world than W2? Ross' subsequent argument that "it seems clear that [...] right opinion is in itself a better state of mind to be in than wrong"⁴⁰⁵ does not help. The fact that A is superior to B in some sense, perhaps even better, does not show that it is good *for* us (where the meaning of those terms is conceptually tied to human flourishing).⁴⁰⁶

To count toward human flourishing, the acquisition of the knowledge or skill in question must be properly related to human well-being. For example, we might argue that it is a precondition for (better) meeting certain other needs, that it develops our cognitive faculties (and thereby turns us into 'good human beings' as Aristotle would have it, see 3.3.5), or that it is enjoyable (in the way that solving a challenging puzzle is accompanied by delight). Or we could argue that the mental beholding of the workings of the universe (eg, its scientific laws) is good for us because it addresses some quasi-aesthetic sensibilities of ours. Clearly, much more needs to be said on this matter, but here is not the place to do so.

3.4.2.4. Connectedness

Next, we have the category that represents our embeddedness in relational networks. It accounts for human connectedness, attachment, and belonging. The fourth category is intimately related to personal identity, which is why it has many links to the social sciences. For example, over a century ago William James, sometimes labelled the *Father of American psychology*, recognised how difficult it is to distinguish between *me* and *mine*: "a man's Self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and

⁴⁰³ Namely, virtue, pleasure, and justice (as the proper apportionment of pleasure to the virtuous and pain to the vicious); see Ross (2002: 134-141).

⁴⁰⁴ Ross (2002: 139).

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Stratton-Lake (2002).

his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account”⁴⁰⁷. That is why “[w]e feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves. Our fame, our children, the work of our hands, may be as dear to us as our bodies are, and arouse the same feelings and the same acts of reprisal if attacked”.⁴⁰⁸ We can see how nicely James’ claims fit with what we said earlier about human habituation and embodiment, the fact that our ‘habitat’ are precisely the surroundings that we identify with the most, and that some objects are even called ‘habit’ (namely clothing). The spectrum of entities listed by James (especially individuals and objects) already indicates that connectedness has multiple dimensions.

How closely something is associated with a person’s self may depend on her degree of perceived control over it. While a person’s free will *essentially* represents the self, the following are increasingly removed: one’s body and conscience; one’s objective belongings; one’s friends; strangers, the physical universe.⁴⁰⁹ Contemporary social scientists discuss this phenomenon under headings like *attachment theory*⁴¹⁰ and *extended self*⁴¹¹.

In the following, I distinguish between four different types of relational networks and connectedness:

- 4.1) Subjective,
- 4.2) local,
- 4.3) spiritual,
- 4.4) objective.

Subjective connectedness (4.1), or relatedness to other subjects, accounts for our embeddedness within networks of people, including those who are close to us (kith and kin), those who are remote (eg, political community), and everyone in between (eg, fellow bowling club members).

Characteristically, connections matter most to us when they concern people we love (partners, parents, offspring, and friends). We experience these relationships as unique and irreplaceable, and for many people they embody most crucially the meaning of their lives. Characteristically, failure to find such relationships makes lives seem empty and their loss causes intense grief.⁴¹²

Unique social relationships begin to form very early in a human life (at around six months), and the critical importance that the connection to primary caretakers has for infant well-being has been well-documented.⁴¹³ Anxiety of separation from them cannot be overcome by care from others, and the ability to form loving adult bonds grows out of well-developed early attachments.⁴¹⁴

That human relationships develop into differentiated hierarchies is no accident. Love and, especially, loving care depend on selective loyalties. While we can try to behave lovingly toward everyone, we can give our attention, care, and support to only a few because various key resources (eg, time and mental energy) are scarce. Without a hierarchy of priorities, people would have no basis for choosing between competing claims of

⁴⁰⁷ James (1910a: 291).

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ McClelland (1951).

⁴¹⁰ It originated as social attachment theory in the work of Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) and later expanded to, for example, place attachment theory (eg, Altman & Low, 1992; Giuliani, 2003; Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014).

⁴¹¹ With regard to possessions and the extended self, see especially Belk (1988, 1989, 1992).

⁴¹² Marris (1982).

⁴¹³ For example, Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) and Ainsworth (1982).

⁴¹⁴ Marris (1982).

relationships, leaving us bewildered and indecisive.⁴¹⁵ That is not to say that we owe those closest to us everything and those more remote nothing, of course.

Subjective connections also include our attachments to non-human creatures.⁴¹⁶ For example, pets are often regarded as family members.⁴¹⁷ They are named, fed, groomed, photographed, talked to, protected, slept and played with, given birthday parties, and mourned for extended periods of time. Often, their lives are symbolically extended (eg, through keeping mementos, looking at photos, telling stories, and visiting pet cemeteries).⁴¹⁸

While it is true that relationships to people and animals tend to matter most to us, we often invest particular places “with the same loving qualities”⁴¹⁹. Local connectedness (4.2) accounts for our attachment to and identification with such places. It is hard to imagine a person who does not have affective bonds (sometimes positive, sometimes negative) with certain locations, be it actual childhood places from the past (eg, the village where we spent our school holidays with grandparents), potential future living places (eg, that picturesque alpine town in the South Island of New Zealand), or one’s current residential neighbourhood.

The human rootedness in places can hardly be overstated. Historically, it is indicated by the evolution of toponymic (ie, locative) last names. For example, more than half of all contemporary English surnames originate in the names of places where people once lived. Contemporary national ID cards and passports of many countries (eg, in Europe) list not only the bearer’s current residence but also her birthplace. To this day, among the first questions that we ask strangers is “Where did you grow up?” and “Where are you from?”, and upon being uprooted from our home we experience “that nagging feeling of dislocation, that feeling of loss”⁴²⁰ that the 17th century Swiss so aptly named *Heimweh* (homesickness)⁴²¹.

Note that, despite its name, local connectedness is defined in terms of links to *place*, which is not essentially a geographical concept. A place is a centre of action, intention, attitudes, and purpose – “a focus where we experience the meaningful events of our existence”⁴²². Places gain much of their character and significance through actions, events, and experiences (which gain their character and significance from places in turn).⁴²³ These actions, events, and experiences may or may not have a geographical dimension. For example, when adults fondly (or less fondly) reminisce about school, they often do not think geographically.⁴²⁴

Empirical research has shown that spirituality is widely considered an important component of well-being too (although it is not always clear what exactly respondents mean when they use respective terminology).⁴²⁵ Definitions of *spirituality* are as numerous as they are contested, and they incorporate a host of themes. However,

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ As opposed to, say, connections to some indistinct fauna, which falls more into the spiritual connection type (4.4).

⁴¹⁷ Eg, Cain (1985), Friedmann & Thomas (1985), and Rochberg-Halton (1985).

⁴¹⁸ Hickrod & Schmitt (1982). In addition to the fact that for many people animals play an important role in terms of both attachment and self-identity, empirical evidence indicates that pet ownership is significantly correlated with greater human health (Headey & Grabka, 2011). The presence of pets or animal companions is associated with reductions in chronic levels of physiological stress indicators and reductions in stress response in both adults and children (Friedmann et al, 2011) – effects which are increasingly exploited in animal-assisted intervention like animal-assisted psychotherapy (Johnson, 2011).

⁴¹⁹ Marris (1982: 185).

⁴²⁰ Weiner (2008: 59).

⁴²¹ Schmid (2008).

⁴²² Norberg-Schulz (1971).

⁴²³ Relph (1976);

⁴²⁴ Similarly, when religious individuals think of *Heaven* and *Paradise*, they necessarily do not think geographically. That said, until the eighteenth century the location of the Garden of Eden used to appear on maps in what is now, somewhat ironically, Iraq (Weiner, 2008).

⁴²⁵ Eg, Brock & McKibbin (2011).

the vast majority of them makes reference to the notions of *connections* and *relationships* (to the natural world, the cosmos, and/or a Transcendent Other of some form).⁴²⁶ In fact, relationships with entities like God, or the gods, often represent the central aspect of spirituality⁴²⁷, signifying the conceptual closeness to the notion of *religiousness*, or perhaps illustrating that spirituality is often contextualised within a religious tradition (ie, a specific system of belief and ritualistic conduct). *Spiritual connectedness* (4.3) as I use the term signifies exactly that kind of experienced cosmic relationship with something greater than the self and the human collective, something significant, sacred, and (literally) awesome, be it our natural environment (as a whole), the universe, an ultimate reality, or a supernatural entity of some sort. As construed here, the notion is inclusive in that it allows for theistic and nontheistic concepts. Regardless of the metaphysical reality of the connections in question, for many people they play an important role with regard to the desire that life and the universe have some kind of larger direction and purpose.⁴²⁸

Finally, objective connectedness (4.4) accounts for our links to artefacts and other objects. I have already touched upon the meaning and importance of that concept in section 1.1.2.3, and I will return to object relationships once again in my discussion of consumption ethics (chapter 5).

3.4.2.5. Service

The fifth category is to be understood in the sense of *servicing a greater purpose*. It represents the numerous and diverse ways in which we tend to give our lives meaning through participation in practices that we usually consider professions, ranging across the entire occupational spectrum from A (like acting) to Z (like zookeeping).

We should not attempt to characterise the nature of this category in an overly precise fashion. Many professions explicitly dedicate themselves to the public good broadly construed, but others do not. For example, while artists, scientists, and mountaineers are certainly part of a community of practitioners, their activity may neither be motivated by, nor actually contribute to, benefits for the larger political community. That said, it certainly contributes to the maintenance of the practical community in question (and the activity patterns that define it).

Some people wish to make a difference through having a clearly identifiable, positive effect on the lives of others (eg, kindergarten and school teachers, social workers). Others give their lives meaning by discovering and exploring patterns of various kinds (eg, scientists, philosophers, chess players). Both represent meaningful occupation types, and the primary question, I believe, is not so much *Which type allows for greater human flourishing per se*, but rather *Which type is more suitable for people with certain natural talents and predispositions (and access to certain external resources)*.

3.4.2.6. Idleness

Finally, in a way the sixth category (that we could also call *leisure, play, and recreation*) represents a residual conceptual domain into which much of our left-over time – and thus also a lot of consumption activity – ought to, but too rarely does, fall. It is very much related to *play*, Nussbaum's ninth central human capability: "Being able to

⁴²⁶ McCarroll et al (2005) find that theme in 22 of the 27 definitions they review.

⁴²⁷ Also in 22 of the 27 reviewed definitions (ibid).

⁴²⁸ These represent a theme in 23 of the 27 reviewed definitions (ibid).

laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities”⁴²⁹. Max-Neef’s list too incorporates idleness, but he never actually provides a characterisation.⁴³⁰

Construing *work* in terms of strenuous and dull labouring that represents a necessary evil we have to undertake to satisfy our subsistence requirements, Russell⁴³¹ argues that idleness is the key to a happy and creative life. In his eyes, ideal leisure represents an active recreational process during which we engage in playful lightheartedness, though I would also add the kind of acuminated performance that I have already mentioned in connection with Csikszentmihalyi’s *flow*⁴³². Free from the pressures of having to secure a livelihood, it represents activity that has a distinctive contemplative component and is not directed at problem-solving for the sake of increased efficiency (as the objective that tends to govern our work performance), but through which we joyfully pursue discovery and skill development for their own sake – whether it occurs in the form of philosophical inquiry, poetic expression, aesthetic creation, or introspective self-exploration.

It seems fair to say that the modern work-ethic, itself rooted in the Protestant work ethic, is still largely opposed to idleness as I just characterised it – partially because it misunderstands what it entails. As Weber describes the Protestant position, “on earth man must, to be certain of his state of grace, ‘do the works of him who sent him, as long as it is yet day’. Not leisure and enjoyment, but only activity serves to increase the glory of God”, by which he means the same kind of labouring as Russell, of course. Unsurprisingly, “[w]aste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins”; “[l]oss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health, six to at most eight hours, is worthy of absolute moral condemnation”⁴³³.

This (‘sociability, idle talk, luxury, and sleep’) is not actually how Russell characterises leisure either, but any activity that is not demonstrably productive is suspect to proponents of the work ethic. To oppose that position, idleness is a worthwhile inclusion in our list of human needs. It is not an element that plays a role with regard to very basic degrees of flourishing, of course, but it becomes increasingly more important once we move beyond mere agency and citizenship.

★

There is another category that some may feel tempted to mention, namely *travel* or *mobility*. Many Westerners do, after all, spend a lot of their time, effort, and resources on getting around, often on a daily basis – not because they want to, but because their various life commitments require it. However, given that we almost always need to get to places for purely instrumental reasons (eg, to meet friends, to work, to engage in recreation), mobility itself is not a terminal constituent of human flourishing. Rather, transportation can easily be accounted for within the other quotidian needs (1 to 6).

3.4.3. Perspective Three: Existential Needs

It is not actually the five perfectionist powers themselves that constitute flourishing, but rather their development and joyful exercise (along with, as I added, their maintenance and restoration). The mere possession of powers is a passive state, which, though necessary, is not sufficient to constitute a good human life. For example,

⁴²⁹ Nussbaum (2006: 77).

⁴³⁰ Max-Neef (1991: 32).

⁴³¹ Russell (2004).

⁴³² Csikszentmihalyi (1990).

⁴³³ Weber (1930: 104).

coma patients can possess the entire spectrum of Kraut's capacities, but as these powers never become actualised, the individual in question can hardly be considered thriving. If we want to evaluate the goodness of an existence, we need information about what the agent actually does with said capacities, which is just what *development*, *exercise*, *maintenance*, and *restoration* express.

It is not surprising that an Aristotelian philosopher like Kraut should construe flourishing in such a fashion. After all, Aristotle himself argued that while the flourishing individual needs the virtues (excellent states of character and mind), the mere "possession of excellence seems actually compatible with being asleep, or with lifelong inactivity"⁴³⁴. Saying that the sleeper and the inactive flourish is obviously absurd. Thus, the human good must be "activity of soul in conformity with excellence"⁴³⁵ – in other words, virtuous activity.

However, something else is required for flourishing. A good life "needs the external goods as well; for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment". Some of Aristotle's virtuous deeds require at least some amount of political power or wealth.⁴³⁶ For example, it is difficult to see how an individual could generously help others by supplying the resource they need if she does not actually possess any herself. What is more, the activities through which we participate in almost any practice (and achieve standards of excellence, including the virtues) require the utilisation of objects, be they consumables, usable, or appreciable. Thus, flourishing in the Aristotelian sense requires three conceptual components: the *having* of resources, the *being* of a certain character, and the *doing* of good deeds – which brings us right back to the tripartite typology that I already used in the previous chapter.

Max-Neef⁴³⁷ too incorporates these three notions into what he calls the *existential perspective* on the good life: *being* registers attributes of individuals and collectives (eg, self-esteem, curiosity); *having* registers both physical objects (eg, food, dress, shelter) and conceptual entities (eg, institutions, norms);⁴³⁸ and *doing* registers individual and collective actions (eg, feed, rest, work).⁴³⁹ In addition, Max-Neef mentions a fourth class, *interacting*. Ostensibly, it incorporates "*locations and milieus* (as times and spaces)"⁴⁴⁰, for instance, schools, universities, and academies with regard to cognitive needs as well as privacy and intimacy with regard to affective needs. In my eyes, the former can easily be accounted for under *having*. The latter, I would argue, denote attributes of a relationship or a place, and such qualities are also accounted for under *having*. It makes no sense to conceive of the things that we require as attribute-free entities, which is why I will disregard Max-Neef's fourth type.

Accordingly, the existential perspective to flourishing incorporates three categories:

- i) Doing;
- ii) being; and
- iii) having.

⁴³⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN), book I, chapter 5.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁶ EN, book I, chapter 8.

⁴³⁷ Max-Neef (1991).

⁴³⁸ Fromm uses the terminology *existential having* for this meaning of *having* (in contrast to the aforementioned *characterological having*). It incorporates the things we "have, keep, take care of, and use [...] in order to survive", for instance, "our bodies, [...] food, shelter, clothing, and [...] tools" (1976: 70).

⁴³⁹ Max-Neef (1991).

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 33; original italics.

Referring back to Kraut's characterisation of human flourishing, class (i) incorporates both activities that develop, employ and maintain, and restore faculties. For example, we develop, maintain, or restore physical faculties by eating, training, and resting, and we employ them by, for example, working and exercising.

As I use them, class (ii) incorporates individual – and, in contrast to Max-Neef's work, not collective – attributes, especially our physical and psychological characteristics. They include virtues of character (eg, temperance and courage) states of mind (eg, knowledge⁴⁴¹), and other dispositions. *Beings* are prerequisites for our actions, because human actions always occur within the bounds and as expressions of our physical and mental traits. Sometimes these attributes are also referred to as *human capital* (although it is occasionally unclear whether the concept refers to individual or collective attributes).⁴⁴²

Class (iii) incorporates tangible and intangible objects like consumables, usable, appreciable, and information as well as social, economic, and political norms, systems, and institutions. They are either prerequisites for or constituents of our actions. Often, they are also the products of our performance, especially when it comes to production activity. In fact, as I will discuss in chapter 5, consumption objects (in the broad sense) being the product of agent PRO's previous activity tends to have a significant effect upon her subsequent employment and utilisation of them.

It is no accident that I defined *individual* and *social practice* by reference to *doings*, *beings*, and *havings* in chapter 2: all of these elements are required to exhaustively characterise human behaviour patterns (that we require to flourish *qua* human). It reminds us of something that is all too often forgotten when we render assistance, for example, in the context of developmental aid: merely supplying commodities to a deprived people (*having*) may help address immediate basic needs, but if the collective is not actually able to provide for itself (*doing*), perhaps because it lacks various skills (*being*), then such a measure will fail to alleviate the group's languishing in the medium to long run.

3.4.4. Multidimensional Integration

Given my proposal regarding the combination of multiple perspectives on human flourishing, we are left with a three-dimensional picture of human needs (literally, if we want to portray the construal graphically). Given the physical limitations of print media, the following table represents the three perspectives in a two-dimensional matrix.

⁴⁴¹ Thus, I do not consider knowledge as something we *have*, but as something we *are* (or are in). It is no different from insisting that hunger and thirst are not things that we have (even though, for example, Germans express it in just that way: *Ich habe Hunger und Durst*, literally: *I have hunger and thirst*) but states that we are in.

⁴⁴² For example, the OECD defines human capital as the “knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being” (2001: 18).

Illustration 16: Matrix of Human Needs

Quotidian	Developmentalist/Perfectionist					Existential
	Physical (DP1)	Sensory (DP2)	Affective (DP3)	Social (DP4)	Cognitive (DP5)	
(Q1) Subsistence						Doing (E1) Being (E2) Having (E3)
(Q2) Maintenance						Doing Being Having
(Q3) Learning						Doing Being Having
(Q4) Connectedness <small>(4.1 subjective, 4.2 local, 4.3 spiritual, 4.4 objective)</small>						Doing Being Having
(Q5) Service						Doing Being Having
(Q6) Idleness						Doing Being Having

The centre cells provide the necessary room for working out the lists of satisfiers that are to be pursued (or frustrators that are to be avoided). Given the universality (and thus timelessness) of human needs, each cell has a fixed content in principle. Once we move to the needs of members of particular communities (with their unique interpretations of *human flourishing*) though, that changes. Either way, the actual fleshing out requires the efforts of actual people, all of whom have cognitive limitations and various biases. For example, any group’s awareness of, and access to, satisfiers (and frustrators) very much depends on factors like its local resource wealth (eg, natural assets), technological development, exposure to outside knowledge, and exchange relationships with other collectives. Thus, no list of satisfiers (human or communal) ever represents a final proposal.

Collective attempts to fill in the lists of satisfiers and frustrators are valuable because they actively involve all members of relevant communities in the project and thereby generate a sense of shared ownership of and commitment to outcomes. What is more, they provide learning opportunities because even intra-collectively different individuals tend to have a variety of perspectives regarding what should, and should not, count as a satisfier, for which need(s), and for which reason(s). This activity lies at the heart of political participation, and I have already indicated the importance of citizenship at various points.

Visually, the matrix illustrates the many ways in which overall flourishing can be negatively affected by localised deficiencies. For basic flourishing to obtain, a human being’s needs must be satisfied with regard to each of the three dimensions and in terms of each category within them. As previously noted, a human being can flourish greatly without each need being satisfied (equally) greatly. Normativity implies possibility, and even an agent who is flush with external resources is subject to the scarcities of time, physical bodily energy, and mental energy after all. A perfectionist ideal like the combination of Usain Bolt’s physicality, Cicero’s practical rationality, and Albert Einstein’s theoretical understanding is practically unattainable because the achievement of supreme excellence tends to require specialisation. At the same time, supreme flourishing cannot obtain if the satisfaction of one or more needs is overly compromised. For example, even though we may agree that Stephen Hawking was thriving, the fact that almost no one (Hawking included, presumably) would wish to be in his place indicates that his life was seriously

lacking. With regard to physical needs in particular (cell cluster DP1), Hawking’s life was drastically wanting, so I think we cannot use the attribute *eudaimon* to characterise his existence.⁴⁴³ As an analytical tool, the matrix enables us to identify where a particular group or individual may experience inadequacy or poverty, such that remedial efforts can be focussed in that regard.

To indicate how the matrix may be filled in, the following illustration contains a rudimentary example of satisfiers for the particular quotidian need of *objective connectedness* (in combination with all five developmentalist/perfectionist and the three existential needs) as represented by cell cluster Q4.4.

Illustration 17: Example of Human Satisfiers

<u>Quotidian</u>	<u>Developmentalist/Perfectionist</u>					<u>Existential</u>
	Physical (DP1)	Sensory (DP2)	Affective (DP3)	Social (DP4)	Cognitive (DP5)	
(Q4.4) Objective connectedness	Build, maintain, repair, use	Observe, touch, smell	Recall, reminisce	Share, gift, inherit	Experiment, teach	Doing (E1)
	Talent, skill	Ophthalmo-, olfacoception	Memory, imagination	Kindness, generosity	Patience, curiosity	Being (E2)
	Material, tools, venues	Usables, appreciables	Usables, appreciables	Fellow practitioners	Teacher, master, pupil	Having (E3)

The need for connectedness with regard to objects may be satisfied in a variety of ways. For example, the agent may engage with an object through construction, maintenance, repair, or regular utilisation activity (eg, consider the home-making of climbing gear and its employment during mountaineering trips). To be performed well, such activity requires various natural or acquired honed skills (eg, construction savvy and climbing expertise). The object’s making also requires essential raw materials and appropriate construction equipment, just as its use requires access to the right kinds of environmental settings. For instance, while the home-production of pitons and climbing nuts requires appropriate metals plus access to tools and possibly machinery, the actual use of such equipment presupposes that the agent has access to suitable rock-climbing venues, whether natural (eg, crags or cliffs) or artificial (eg, man-made indoor climbing walls).

Referring back to the previous chapter, we can see now how habitualised performance and practices fit into the matrix: in order to flourish *qua* human, a human being needs to be a good practitioner. Put differently, being a good practitioner constitutes human flourishing. An individual qualifies as good practitioner only if her *being, having, and doing* needs are satisfied: she possesses the right physical and mental attributes (that constitute behavioural dispositions), has access to the right objects (eg, consumables, usables, and appreciables), and performs the right activities in the right habitualisation modes depending on the circumstances in which she finds herself. For example, an individual who has chosen to give her life meaning and purpose through participation in the practice of *mountaineering* (because that is one of the practices communally available to her) qualifies as a good practitioner only if she has honed her attributes (eg, developed her muscular strength and endurance, her dexterity, and her confidence), has access to both climbing equipment (eg, shoes and ropes) and climbing opportunities (ie, mountains), and carries out the activities that are part of the practice (eg, rock scrambling, ice climbing, and abseiling) in their properly habitualised modes. If any of these elements is lacking, the individual does not practice well.

⁴⁴³ Etymologically, *eudaimon* is rooted in the Greek *eu* (good) and *daimon* (divinity, spirit). It represents the life of a lucky person, someone blessed with a guardian angel. It seems rather uncontroversial that Hawking’s motor neurone disease was not a stroke of good luck.

3.5. What Individuals Need

So far, my discussion has revolved primarily around human flourishing and human needs, that is, an abstract conceptualisation of what any typical human individual requires to live well as a human being. However, to determine what a concrete individual requires to flourish as someone who is specifically located in multiple ways (eg, space, time, talents, and past choices), we must leave the impersonal and decontextualised perspective of human flourishing/needs and shift our focus to individual flourishing/needs.

An individual cannot flourish in an abstract fashion. Instead, each person thrives in particular ways, some of which are completely optional (eg, whether to play soccer, chess, or a musical instrument), some of which are entirely unchosen (eg, whether and how to battle a severe physical illness, deal with past psychological trauma, or care for an ailing parent), and many of which fall in between the extreme points of being *fully open to choice* or *fully nondiscretionary* (because their adoption is subject to *some* constraints and pressures). Regardless of the degree of choice, what I previously characterised as our participation in practices (eg, carrying out a profession, raising children, becoming a chess player, running for political office, or pursuing a matrimonial relationship) is crucial to a person's flourishing because they give an individual life its particular shape and meaning. Put differently, the individual needs a well-cultivated portfolio of suitable individual practices through which she participates in social practices. The constitution of that portfolio determines what the individual needs (in the sense of INUS conditions). For example, Aristotle pursued philosophy, Jana Novotná sports (tennis), and Marie Curie science (physics and chemistry), and to excel in their chosen ventures, each of them required rather different things.

The normative weight of individual needs can be determined in two equivalent ways. Firstly, to the degree that an individual end E_I represents a legitimate expression or instantiation of the abstract human end E_A (characterised as human flourishing), the respective individual needs N_I arising from it have normative weight. Secondly, to the degree that an individual need N_I represents a legitimate expression or instantiation of an abstract human need N_A (as characterised above), the former has normative weight.

A key problem associated with the shift from generic human flourishing and abstract human needs to particular thriving and the requirements of specific agents lies in the legitimacy of individual satisfiers that rely on limited supplies of collective resources. With regard to some of these (eg, land, water, and minerals), almost any given group faces scarcity. Given that some satisfiers lay claim to greater amounts of these resources (to which, let us preliminarily assume, all members of a community have a roughly equal usage claim in principle⁴⁴⁴) than others, how is a collective to determine their allocation?

As previously indicated, that determination is the responsibility of the respective political community as a whole. By jointly establishing and committing to a particular interpretation of human flourishing, members of the community automatically establish and commit to particular interpretations of human needs. The two are intimately connected because the latter constitute the former after all. In other words, deliberations about flourishing are always deliberations about constitutive needs at the same time. Thus, the community also limits which things do, and do not, qualify as need-satisfiers for its members.

On that basis, an Amish community can justifiably respond to a member's claim like "I need to buy a car" by saying "No, you do not". The practice of *driving motor vehicles* does not represent a communally accepted need-satisfier (for any need) among the Amish, so any resource claims in that regard can be rejected.⁴⁴⁵ Frequently

⁴⁴⁴ More on this issue in chapter 4.

⁴⁴⁵ Rare exceptions are possible. For example, even though the Amish reject the use of electricity from public utility lines in principle, a household may be given permission to connect to the grid if the operation of medical machinery (eg, a medical ventilator) requires it.

affirmed by the whole community, the *Ordnung* represents a charter that outlines which practices are mandatory, which are prohibited, and which are optional. Thus, it represents a binding guide on the basis of which claims concerning INUS conditions can be assessed (by members of the community and possible also those on the outside⁴⁴⁶).

3.6. Final Comments

Human needs deserve a much more detailed treatment, of course, but this is not the place for it. Still, let me address at least a few points, primarily to prevent misunderstandings and address potential objections.

Firstly, my list of needs – and especially the quotidian perspective – is neither final nor authoritative. We could easily group needs and satisfiers in different, and arguably no less plausible, ways. My own list is inspired by Max-Neef's, but I chose different groups because his typology strikes me as wanting. For example, his needs called *affection* and *participation* are contained within my *connectedness* (and especially *subjective connectedness*) because they appear to revolve around our being parts in social networks. Similarly, all ten categories of Nussbaum's central human capabilities are part of my quotidian needs. Her typology too strikes me as unsuitable. For example, she lists *senses, imagination, and thought* (capacity 4) as well as *emotions* (5)⁴⁴⁷, but those are already part of my developmentalist/perfectionist perspective. Ultimately, I hope that my list (and the reasoning behind it) contribute to future discussions.

Secondly, and relatedly, my choice of perspectives (developmentalist/perfectionist, quotidian, and existential) is neither final nor authoritative either: additional dimensions could plausibly be added. One such dimension may represent universal human roles and incorporate human needs like being a *citizen, friend, partner, caregiver, and professional*. Another one might incorporate needs like *freedom*⁴⁴⁸ and *joy*. Clearly, a life without joy cannot be a good life. For flourishing individuals, enjoyment is part of properly habitualised activity (because it is instantiated whenever activity represents Csikszentmihalyi's flow). Yet, I cannot explicitly locate joy in my current need structure, so it would have to be part of an additional dimension.

Thirdly, the sets of needs and satisfiers outlined above primarily apply to adult human beings who possess the species-typical range of human characteristics. That qualifier is needed for at least two reasons. Firstly, as I already briefly noted, human needs are not homogenous throughout all of our life stages. Especially toward the bookends of life, our needs are more reduced, as are the corresponding satisfiers. For example, infants do not have a *service* need (because they are far too underdeveloped), and the elderly person who suffers from severe dementia does not have a learning need (because she no longer possesses the respective cognitive capacities). Secondly (and relatedly), the human needs and satisfiers of other individuals whose attributes do not conform to characteristic human nature are different from the details in my matrix too. For example, the cognitive needs and satisfiers of severely mentally handicapped individuals may correspond to those of small children. If that is so, we need a different characterisation of basic needs and basic flourishing for such individuals (because agency and citizenship are not degrees of flourishing available to them).

⁴⁴⁶ That said, the Amish are committed to separation from the world (as prescribed by the Bible, eg, in Romans 12:2, "Be not conformed to this world"). Thus, access to their community for outsiders tends to be limited.

⁴⁴⁷ Nussbaum (2006: 76).

⁴⁴⁸ It is part of Max-Neef's (1991) list.

Finally, since I have referred to Nussbaum's work a few times already, some comments on her notion of capabilities. Fundamentally, the human needs approach and the human capabilities approach, as she conceptualises it, are quite similar. In fact, Nussbaum herself uses terminology like 'human needs', 'basic needs', and 'needs for care' throughout her work.⁴⁴⁹ This is not surprising, because – in my eyes, and without wanting to be presumptuous – the capabilities approach can be absorbed into the needs approach. Human capabilities are among the things that human beings need to flourish. However, they are not the *only* things they need. The capabilities approach is about enabling people to do certain things, eg, “[b]eing able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a ‘truly human’ way”⁴⁵⁰. For a political normative approach, that is perfectly plausible, because politics is about enabling people to do certain things. However, for an ethical doctrine it does not go far enough because human flourishing is not just about *being able* to do things – it is, crucially, about actually *doing* them (see my earlier reference to Aristotle).

⁴⁴⁹ Eg, Nussbaum (2006).

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid: 76.

4. The Politics of Consumption

The neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status.

*Victor Turner*⁴⁵¹

As far as I am aware, the anthropological concept of *liminality* has seen very little use either in Philosophy or with regard to human consumption. This is surprising because once we take into account the role of habituation in human activity, its potential reveals itself quite quickly. For example, reliable and long-lasting behavioural change with regard to deeply ingrained behaviours requires rehabituation. With regard to her previous activity patterns, it entails that the individual must become a ‘*tabula rasa*, a blank slate’ upon which the practitioners among whom she has immersed herself, the liminal community, ‘inscribes’ superior – that is, more adaptive – habits on her. I will argue that liminal communities have enormous innovative potential to develop new and superior practices, including consumption practices. In my view, that is precisely what we need now. In the face of “inevitable collapse, probable catastrophe and possible extinction”⁴⁵² of the human species, communities – and here I mean cities, districts, states, countries, and supra-national collectives alike – ought to prepare themselves by developing as diverse a set of communal practice portfolios as possible, because they can help us both prevent the worst future scenarios from occurring (especially by ensuring that we quickly slow down and stop climate change) and deal with the unprecedented environmental conditions that we will have to face either way. Liminal communities are precisely the entities in which those diverse practices evolve and persist.

Before we explore *liminality* in section 4.3 though, I will first turn to the concept of *justice* and discuss what resource claims an individual can make and how such claims ought to be prioritised (4.1). Following that, I consider what responsibilities the community and its members have with regard to the establishment of a well-developed communal practice portfolio (4.2).

4.1. Resource Access: Matters of Justice

Without external resources of the kinds previously outlined (eg, matter, energy, and space), a human being cannot flourish to any degree. However, many of these resources are subject to scarcity: a greater use by one individual or group necessarily affects how many tokens the rest can utilise (*ceteris paribus*). If the total population’s aggregated resource claims exceed the size of the total available resource pool⁴⁵³, the claims of different individuals or groups necessarily conflict with each other. Resource appropriation under scarcity is one, and perhaps the most prevalent, reason why human beings who aim to bring about their individual ends, as legitimate representations of the human end as they may be, unavoidably restrict each other’s freedom.

⁴⁵¹ Turner (1969: 103).

⁴⁵² Bendell (2018: np).

⁴⁵³ Historically, such excess may originate either on the demand side (due to population growth, growing individual resource use, or both) or on the supply side (due to resource pool deterioration).

The question then is: how should conflicting resource claims be arbitrated? I already discussed that claims within a community can be justified only if they appeal to legitimate need-satisfiers. However, that tells us nothing about how we arbitrate between different claims if they all meet that condition. By itself, the concept of *need* is able to do at least some of that work, and it has been used for that purpose for quite some time. For example, take Locke’s well-known labour-mixing approach – the account that outlines how human beings obtain ownership of previously unowned external objects in the world. Locke’s genealogy begins with a description of a state of nature in which resources (especially land) belong to nobody in particular. It then argues that it is sensible for an individual to appropriate resources for her personal use because she has needs and finds herself surrounded by objects that can help her satisfy them. She is aware that others have similar needs and therefore a similar claim to nature’s resources though. The individual may tediously try to get everyone together and reach consent to a resource allocation agreement (call it a ‘social contract’), but that would take time and she might starve in the process, “notwithstanding the plenty God had given [her]”⁴⁵⁴. So instead, she can go ahead and appropriate a portion of the natural resource stock by mixing her labour with it, as long as she leaves “enough, and as good”⁴⁵⁵ for the rest – where ‘enough’ clearly refers to the needs of others and ‘as good’ to the potential of resources to satisfy them.

In the following, let us see how much philosophical mileage needs can provide in the context of developing a principle of justice that suits my project.

4.1.1. The Currency of Justice

Given that we are here concerned with the distribution of access to resources (and possibly other things), we are concerned with distributive justice. A fundamental question that we must address now is this: what exactly is the ultimate *currency* of distributive justice? In other words, what is the thing the distribution of which is ultimately used to assess whether or not resource access allocations across a set of people qualifies as ‘just’? The most obvious candidate is resource access itself. For example, if we are resource egalitarians, we assess distributive justice on the basis of whether each relevant party has access to the same amount of resources as the rest. However, our choice of *human flourishing* as the end that conditions our needs rules out that option for us. After all, resources are among the very things that we need to flourish, they are mere instruments. Thus, resource claims derive their normative weight entirely from the normative significance of the relevant end.

For that reason, the proper currency of distributive justice is *human flourishing* – or rather, since political philosophy is about enabling individuals to live well (but not actually forcing them to do so, because respecting individual agency entails giving them a choice with regard to the degree of flourishing that they wish to realise), *opportunities for human flourishing*.⁴⁵⁶

4.1.2. The Criterion of Justice

According to Locke, *need* is a sufficient criterion for arbitrating claims toward unowned resources. However, as need is not a binary criterion, it actually makes more sense to use *neediness* instead: the greater the need of a party (especially because her degree of flourishing is lower and thus more compromised), the more weight her

⁴⁵⁴ Locke (1980: bk II, §28).

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid: bk II, §27.

⁴⁵⁶ That said, the principle of justice I propose incorporates an element that revolves around equal resource access (once basic flourishing has been secured for all).

claim toward a resource that is, or ought to be, unowned has (*ceteris paribus*).⁴⁵⁷ As the *ceteris paribus* indicates, the criterion requires further qualification, and I will discuss three important elements here.

Firstly, the *reasons why* an individual is needy matter, especially in terms of individual responsibility. For example, if we compare two parties whose flourishing is equally compromised, but one of them is needy due to failure to act responsibly while the other is not guilty of such neglect, then it would be unfair to consider both claims equally weighty. Part of being an agent is to think through the possible outcomes of one's choices and actions, and to then live with the reasonably foreseeable consequences (both good and bad) in a way that does not make others unreasonably worse off. If I decide to free solo climb a rock face, then fall off and injure myself, and therefore require scarce medical resources, my claims cannot have the same priority as those of other people whose equally bad injuries are the results of unforeseeable events.

Secondly, the *direct efficiency* of the utilisation of scarce resources with regard to the claimant matters too. For example, if we again compare two parties whose flourishing is equally compromised, but with regard to one of them the utilisation of these resources would make hardly any difference while the other person's condition would improve considerably, it would once again seem unfair to consider both claims equally weighty. If the ultimate aim of resource use is human flourishing, differences in resultant flourishing cannot be irrelevant to the arbitration of conflicting resource claims. This criterion is frequently discussed under the heading of *triage* in medical ethics: when the number of patients and/or the severity of their injuries exceed available capacities to render care (ie, resources are scarce), patients with the greatest chance of survival with the least expenditure of time, equipment, supplies, and personnel are treated first.⁴⁵⁸

Thirdly, the *indirect efficiency* of resource utilisation too may have to be taken into account. While direct efficiency narrowly concerns the flourishing of the claimant who is in immediate need, indirect efficiency has a broader scope: it concerns the effects that the individual's resource utilisation has upon the flourishing of the larger community (including future generations). The reason why we discuss the allocation of resources is that they can be used to address neediness. However, why should we arbitrarily limit our concern to the neediness of just one particular individual at a time? Neediness is a basic condition of *all* human beings, and greater flourishing is valuable regardless of the individual who ends up living better. Thus, indirect (or broad) efficiency should be part of our set of relevant criteria. In fact, medical ethics, especially with regard to military medicine, takes the same view: the minimally wounded

may sometimes be the most important patients, depending on the tactical situation. These are the soldiers who can return to the fight with minimal effort. This would be more important than medical reasons for triage if, for example, an enemy force is imminently threatening to overtake friendly forces. Under those conditions, these soldiers must be treated first, to return to duty and continue the mission, regardless of the injury priority and even with likely adverse outcomes for other patients.⁴⁵⁹

Sometimes, broad concern for the well-being of third parties (possibly society as a whole) trumps narrow concern for the well-being of select individuals.

Accordingly, the arbitration principle I propose is this: the greater the need of a party, with her responsibility for the neediness and the likely effects of resource utilisation upon her own long-term flourishing as well as that of third parties properly taken into account, the more weight her claim toward a resource that is, or ought to be, unowned has (*ceteris paribus*).

⁴⁵⁷ This is what the idea of prioritising the satisfaction of basic needs is based on.

⁴⁵⁸ Repine et al (2005).

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid: 506.

We now see why I previously said that the concept of *need* can do *some* work with regard to arbitrating conflicting resource claims: other concepts too are relevant to matters of allocation, so their neglect would diminish the plausibility of a need-based principle. To make the principle properly decision-guiding, we need to work out how exactly responsibility and both efficiencies affect resource eligibility. Not only do they come in degrees, but they are also uncorrelated. Thus, we can easily end up in situations where, for example, two equally needy parties differ in that one of them (but not the other) has acted irresponsibly while the other will profit to a considerably greater degree. In the next sub-section, I will consider this issue in a bit more detail.

Before I do that though, notice my reference to ‘resource that is, *or ought to be*, unowned’. At this point in history, many scarce resources are fully subject to ownership in the sense that for any given resource token, some legal entity (eg, an individual human being, a private corporation, or a public collective entity) has a title that legally prevents others from utilising it. For example, nearly every piece of land on Earth is owned by someone or something with legal standing. Yet, vast numbers of needy human beings own no or barely any of these resources. Given that they can claim only unowned resources, yet virtually no such resources exist, it seems that our discussion is pointless.

However, that is where the notion of ‘*ought to be* unowned’ becomes relevant because the Lockean proviso is violated: if there are now individuals who cannot appropriate unowned resources, the original appropriators must have failed to leave ‘enough, and as good’ for the rest.⁴⁶⁰ The only fitting responses to that violation are for current owners to either give up some of their titles or compensate needy individuals in other (no less effective) ways.

4.1.3. A Principle of Justice

As previously discussed, degrees of flourishing D_A and D_C are especially important for us. Thus, a plausible principle of justice – ie, a principle that addresses the distribution of benefits, burdens, an opportunities across a group of people – has to make reference to both of these.

Securing Agency

Individuals who fail to qualify as agents, now or (in the case of children) in the future, cannot be considered to live fully human lives. The rational activity of the minimally autonomous (eg, in the form of means-end reasoning, imagining alternative possible futures, and choosing some life plans instead of others) is among the central features that differentiate us from other animals, so its absence reduces the existence of a human being to that of a non-human creature. Being denied the opportunity to live a minimally autonomous life (and thus forced into a non-human existence) is an indignity that human beings ought never be subjected to. Thus, all of them have an equal claim toward the resources necessary to secure their agency. In fact, the importance of agency entails that whatever resources are required to secure it must be used to do so before any resource claims that are made to secure higher degrees of human flourishing (eg, citizenship) are given consideration. The reasons are two-fold. Firstly, lack of agency is a greater indignity than lack of citizenship (and lack of higher degrees of well-being is no indignity at all, at least not in the same sense). Secondly, the lower an individual’s degree of flourishing is and the longer that deprivation lasts, the greater the likelihood that her ability to flourish in the long term becomes irreversibly compromised. For instance, research findings strongly indicate that severe deprivations during early childhood have negative long-term effects on cognitive, motor, and behavioural development, nutrition (along with other need-satisfiers like psychosocial stimulation) being critically important during the first 2-3 years of life in particular. The

⁴⁶⁰ See Nozick (1974: 175ff).

precise mechanisms are still not well understood, but one hypothesis is that prolonged and severe undernutrition directly affects the development of children's central nervous systems.⁴⁶¹ Once an individual's cognitive and behavioural developments become compromised or disrupted, the probability that agency and citizenship will subsequently be achieved by her decrease accordingly.

To become and remain agents, individuals require many things, for example, food, shelter, education, and relationships of various qualities and quantities. For various reasons (eg, environmental conditions and congenital developmental capacities), some people require more of these resources than others, and with regard to the most basic degree of flourishing these differences in need are frequently blameless. After all, blame presupposes responsibility, yet responsibility presupposes agency – for which the resources we are discussing here are often required to begin with. For example, dyslexic adolescents ordinarily bear no responsibility for requiring greater therapeutic and educational support than those without the cognitive disorder, so they ought not to be disadvantaged for having to claim more to secure their agency.

Given that the achievement (and later the maintenance) of D_A must be available to all individuals (insofar as their capacities allow it), efficiency considerations likely play a small role. For example, imagine two individuals, A and B. To secure agency, the former needs 10 units of resource R1, the latter 12. As it happens, the first three units of resource R1 are most efficiently used if allocated to individual A. Due to diminishing marginal utility, units 4-5 would be most efficiently used by individual B instead. And so on, forth and back. Ultimately, these considerations do not matter because both must receive the full complement anyway – otherwise their agency could not be secured.⁴⁶²

Securing Citizenship

Citizenship too must be secured universally because a lack of opportunity to live a critically autonomous life too is an indignity for a human being, though a lesser one than lack of opportunity to lead a minimally autonomous existence. Without being a valued member of the civic community and an active participant in the critical public sphere, the individual is unable to engage in shared self-government.⁴⁶³ Thus, she is subject to the political world-building of others, which necessarily reduces her options (eg, in terms of professional career and other important life choices) to the range that these individuals make available to her.

In fact, citizenship must be available to the members of a political community due to the conceptual methodology on the basis of which communally justified need-satisfiers are determined. Whether something like commodity X represents a legitimate need-satisfier for agent PRO depends on the prior political choices of the members of her community. Without it, proper arbitration between conflicting resource claims is impossible. For example, given that *driving motor vehicles* is a practice that Amish communities explicitly reject (for reasons to be discussed further below), *car ownership* does not represent a legitimate need-satisfier for an Amish man or woman. However, that rejection is a communal choice in the first place, and without attaining citizenship no such choices can be made (not least because the determination of what does, and does not, count as valuable in the community – ie, what are, and are not, legitimate conceptions of the good, to use a Rawlsian term⁴⁶⁴ – cannot be made either).

⁴⁶¹ Grantham-McGregor et al (1999).

⁴⁶² I am bracketing from my considerations here individuals whose resource requirements are relatively greater to such a degree that their satisfaction would endanger the flourishing of the other members of the community in question. This point applies to the next subsection too.

⁴⁶³ Sandel (1996).

⁴⁶⁴ Eg, Rawls (2001).

Once again, given that the achievement of D_C must be available to all individuals (insofar as their capacities allow it), efficiency considerations plausibly play a minor role. Responsibility, on the other hand, could be relevant (because the individuals will generally qualify as agents after all).

Greater Degrees of Flourishing

With regard to degrees of flourishing above D_C , considerations of responsibility become much more relevant. The scarcer our resource access, the more important it is that these means to human flourishing be used with foresight – and individuals who qualify as both agent and citizen ought to be keenly aware of that. While the promise of significant reward may make the taking of significant risk worthwhile, the latter entails that increased need-satisfaction may not in fact occur, quite the opposite. Being an agent entails being prepared to live with the consequences of one's risk-taking.

When it comes to securing agency and citizenship, in principle no one ought to be disadvantaged or punished for blamelessly having greater resource requirements than others. However, with regard to higher degrees of flourishing, that view becomes less plausible. The further we move beyond D_C , a different intuition gains dominance: no one ought to be disadvantaged or punished for blamelessly having *smaller* resource requirements than others. Given the nature of the ultimate human good (and the fact that goodness comes with an inherent maximisation imperative, if you will⁴⁶⁵), we want to see a great degree of human flourishing in the world, so resource efficiency has to count for something. Here is a related example, imagine two researchers. If the former is given access to resource package X, he himself will flourish (eg, in terms of *service*) and the technology he will develop also increases his collective's ability to satisfy their needs in the long term by a significant amount. If the latter is given access to X, she will develop a technology that increases the collective's ability to live well in the long term too, but by a greater amount yet. The latter's use of X is more efficient (greater input-to-output ratio), so by giving the former access to the package instead we would effectively punish the community, which is objectionable.

Pulling all these threads together, the following principle of justice suggests itself:

PJ: Fairness requires that individuals meet their obligations with regard to the resource claims of other people. Claims made on the basis of securing agency have absolute priority; no other claims toward scarce resources that are required to obtain D_A are being considered until all of the former have been addressed.⁴⁶⁶ Claims made on the basis of securing citizenship have the next highest priority; no other claims toward scarce resources that are required to obtain D_C are being considered until all of the former have been addressed. Beyond that, an individual may claim that share of the remaining resource pool that permits a degree (and kind) of flourishing no lower than (and radically different from) that which could have been secured with an initially equal share of that remaining resource pool.

Although I do not use the concept of *rights* here, we could easily interpret PJ as representing a charter of abstract consumer rights, though in a sense that is different from the one outlined in chapter 1. It does not so much protect consumers from product-related hazards to their health and safety (*inter alia*)⁴⁶⁷, but rather secures the universal ability to satisfy basic needs.

⁴⁶⁵ If we compare two possible worlds and the only respect in which they differ is the amount of value V in them, the world with more V is the better world purely based on the meaning of 'value' – and it is that world which ought to be brought about.

⁴⁶⁶ This allows that some people may not make any claims because they do not wish to flourish. More qualifications would have to be incorporated here to ensure that any such decision is based on a properly informed choice.

⁴⁶⁷ See Harland (1987).

The last part of PJ allows us to pursue greater flourishing (as in the example above) without compromising fairness.⁴⁶⁸ It is based on the intuition that access to unowned resources (and whatever the community jointly owns) should be distributed equally in principle. Yet, for reasons similar to those that moved Rawls⁴⁶⁹ when he designed his second principle of justice (especially the Difference Principle), equality considerations ought not to crowd out efficiency considerations. Insofar as some individuals can be made better off without making anyone else worse off (pareto-efficiency), total human flourishing is promoted without infringing upon anyone's fair ability to meet needs. To use a familiar metaphor, if there is a way of enlarging the pie (representing the accumulated flourishing of all individuals) and thus giving more to some without anyone getting less – and a radically different kind of⁴⁷⁰ – pastry compared to what they would have received from the smaller original pie, it would be wasteful to prevent that from occurring.

I shall refer to the resources that an individual may claim according to PJ as her *fair resource allocation*. Following Steiner, I hold that in a fully, or almost fully, appropriated world (like ours) each person's resource claims largely entitle her to a share in value (rather than literal resources).⁴⁷¹ In a system of market economies, it may be most conveniently provided as monetary compensation. That point also helps with regard to international wealth transfer, which brings me to our next topic.

4.1.4. Intercollective justice

Notably, PJ does not incorporate any language that limits its application to members of the same political community (eg, a nation state). In that, my approach agrees with article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services"⁴⁷². So if an individual claims certain resources, it may not just affect the resource access of other members of her own political community, but of members of altogether different political communities too. To assess whether such a reach beyond community boundaries is plausible, we need to consider the concept of luck. Resources are necessary to meet needs, and one important reason why it is justifiable to grant two individuals access to different qualities/quantities of resources to achieve the same degree of flourishing up to D_C is that their (un)lucky circumstances (eg, congenital physical illness/health) require it. If, just as one's endowment with talents and disabilities is a matter of luck, the endowment of one's community with external resources – both natural (eg, water and fertile land) and social (eg, education and health infrastructure) – is a matter of luck too, then it seems reasonable to avoid the introduction of communal boundaries in our principle of justice.

A Rawlsian may try to tackle the issue slightly differently and claim that at least with regard to natural resources, communal endowment is not actually decisive for the flourishing of a society and its members. Using Japan as an example, Rawls himself famously argued that the wealth of a society (and the flourishing of its members) is largely determined by its political culture and industriousness, not the natural resources found in its geographical

⁴⁶⁸ It is here that the shift of currency occurs (from opportunities for human flourishing to resource access).

⁴⁶⁹ Rawls (1971).

⁴⁷⁰ This is to ensure that each individual can still flourish in a roughly similar way, not just to the same degree. In Kantian terms, it honours the idea that individual can still choose roughly similar ends.

⁴⁷¹ Steiner (1994).

⁴⁷² See <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html> (accessed 01.01.2019).

boundaries.⁴⁷³ We might agree that national wealth does not depend on whether natural resources are found *within* the borders of a society, but from that it does not at all follow that *access* to such resources does not determine social wealth. Over the past decades, Japan has consistently been the biggest net-resource importer on the world market, ahead of the USA and China – which is “typical for countries with important manufacturing and consumption sectors but with a missing, poor or already exploited resource base within their own territory”⁴⁷⁴. Evidently, human flourishing very much depends upon natural resource access, and how many of these resources a collective possesses purely by virtue of being in the right location is largely a matter of luck for the collective (at least initially).⁴⁷⁵ For any given member of the collective, that view is even more strongly supported.⁴⁷⁶

Clearly, human well-being also depends on access to other, non-natural resources. Among other things, the availability of technology can make a radical difference with regard to a collective’s ability to meet the needs of its members. For instance, simple cycle gas turbines used to produce electricity can achieve energy conversion efficiencies ranging between 20-35%. In other words, 65-80% of input energy is lost in the process (eg, in the form of heat escaping into the environment). By contrast, the most advanced gas turbines achieve efficiencies as high as 60%.⁴⁷⁷ As a result, communities with access to the same quantity and quality of input materials but not the same power generation technology end up with radically different outputs. Compared to a community that possesses only simple cycle gas turbines, a collective with access to the latter technology could generate between two to three times as much electricity.

That leaves the question of whether access to social resources is a matter of luck. Unlike natural resources like ore and coal, technologies do not simply exist and lie fallow, patiently awaiting their utilisation. Rather, they are the product of human activity to begin with, which is why being endowed with them might appear to be a matter of effort, not luck. The same applies to other social resources. However, here we must be mindful of distinguishing between the individual and the communal perspective. Communities and individuals differ in two relevant ways, namely longevity and scope: the former persist over centuries and even millennia, the latter do not; what the former does makes a massive difference, what the latter does usually makes hardly any difference at all. Now, when it comes to matters of endowment and luck, it is the individual perspective that counts. At the time an individual is born into a community that has been existing for some time, the latter’s entire endowment (in terms of both social and natural resources) is purely a matter of luck for her. Even if the individual’s forebears created various social resources (eg, technologies), *her* access to them is as lucky as her access to fresh water and fertile soil. What is more, unless she herself creates a new social resource, the ones that are developed in her community throughout her lifetime (and benefit her in various ways) too are strokes of individual luck. To use myself as an example, I clearly benefit from ongoing advances in computer technology, but they are certainly not the result of my individual research and development efforts. I am simply lucky enough to live in a community that develops (or acquires) and makes them available to me.

Someone might challenge that view in a Rawlsian fashion though: I have been *contributing* to recent technological developments in my community because I have been participating in the same overall social cooperative endeavour (while the members of other communities have not). For Rawls, that is the reason why we come together and agree to a social contract to begin with after all. By doing my part, I enable others to do theirs

⁴⁷³ Rawls (1999); see also Freeman (2007).

⁴⁷⁴ Giljum et al (2010: 11).

⁴⁷⁵ I am assuming here that the collective has a fixed location (rather than conquering new territories, say).

⁴⁷⁶ At least insofar as she does not shift her membership to another group.

⁴⁷⁷ See US Dept of Energy (http://fossil.energy.gov/programs/powersystems/turbines/turbines_howitworks.html, accessed 08.03.2013).

(eg, produce social resources). In that sense, things like recent technologies are not entirely the result of individual luck. However, the decisive question is this: *how much* do I actually contribute? Let us apply the individual difference approach and reason counterfactually: had I not participated in my political community's overall social cooperative endeavour at all, would the social resources in question not have become available? Of course they would have. My individual contribution is miniscule to the point of literal insignificance, so the availability of said resources to me is not the result of my effort. I am simply lucky, and the members of many other communities (eg, LDCs) are not.

For these reasons, my principle of justice applies intercommunally. Due to the current vast differential between communal resource endowments globally, the application of PJ would have significant implications for the way in which we consume. While the members of a few select nations have achieved very high average degrees of well-being, far more people are subject to radically lower qualities of life (often below D_A , let alone D_C). Statistically, the former utilise far more resources than the latter, and, as the Preston curve indicates (chapter 1), they do so very inefficiently. Thus, the application of PJ requires a significant redistribution of resource access, which would directly address the issue of consumer inefficiency discussed in section 1.1.2.2.

Whether that requires a significant redistribution of actual resources is a different question. As the example of Japan shows, highly industrialised Western countries import large amounts of natural resources – and very often these actually originate in the countries that have low standards of life. In fact, the *resource curse thesis* indicates that many LDCs are greatly endowed with natural resources like fossil fuel, and that this very endowment is actually why they are doing so poorly. We have considerable evidence now

that higher levels of petroleum income lead to more durable authoritarian rulers and regimes; that more petroleum income increases the likelihood of certain types of government corruption; and that moderately high levels of petroleum wealth, and possibly other types of resource wealth, tend to trigger or sustain conflict when they are found in regions dominated by marginalized ethnic groups, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.⁴⁷⁸

Thus, PJ plausibly implies that we drastically reduce the transfer of natural resources to HDCs and redistribute *social* resources to least developed countries (at least insofar as it does not compromise the ability of individuals in HDCs to secure their needs to a similarly high degree), because it is those that have the potential to enable the utilisation of their natural resources such that all of their members flourish, not just a select few kleptocrats.

An important question is, how radically will a decrease of resource access affect the well-being in HDCs? The answer matters because flourishing is the ultimate human good that we wish to achieve. As Westerners have become accustomed to their high degrees of material wealth, even moderate decreases in access to natural resources may cause large reductions in well-being, especially due to feelings of unhappiness caused by loss of a consumerist lifestyle. We can easily imagine how a reduction in the comforts and pleasures essential to consumerism would cause discontent. If so, would the reduction in Western resource access end up being rather smaller than indicated above?

I think not. Firstly, subjective well-being is only one component of flourishing. Secondly, we know from the phenomenon of adaptive preferences that any such reductions in subjective well-being are likely temporary. Sen argues that people can become so normalised to their circumstances of material deprivation and social injustice that they consider themselves living a satisfactory life: “Our mental reactions to what we actually get and what we can sensibly expect to get may frequently involve compromises with a harsh reality”; “deprivations are suppressed and

⁴⁷⁸ Ross (2015: 252).

muffled in the scale of utilities (reflected by desire-fulfilment and happiness) by the necessity of endurance in uneventful survival"⁴⁷⁹. If the destitute adjust to radically limited degrees of material wealth, then it seems reasonable to expect that Westerners will adjust to a lower material wealth (that, we must remember, is still adequate) too. What is more, such an adjustment is both desirable and legitimate. If their needs remain to be met to a degree above D_C , then people *ought* to feel satisfied with a life that requires fewer resources – especially when those reductions enable other, previously impoverished individuals achieve degrees of flourishing above D_A and D_C .

★

At this stage, we have addressed some of the issues of contemporary consumerism raised in chapter 1, especially consumption inequality and inefficiency. Based on what human beings need to secure both their agency and their citizenship, PJ entails a radical change of access to the resources that are necessary for human flourishing across the globe.

Now that we know that individuals have a fair resource allocation, and perhaps also understand some of its implications, we can return to the social resource that interests me the most, namely practices. In chapters 2, I argued that practices play a key role in human lives. In chapter 3, I moved on to the stronger claim that human beings need the right kinds of practices in order to flourish (to the degree in question). It implies that individual human agents need access to an appropriate communal portfolio of social practices. The question of what exactly that entails is what I discuss in the next section.

4.2. Communal Practice Portfolios

I previously argued that an individual human being needs to have an appropriate portfolio of individual practices and praxes (as defined in chapter 2). Which elements that portfolio incorporates depends on a variety of factors. Some of these are person-internal, including talents, inclinations, and ambitions. Others are person-external, including community properties and other environmental conditions. A crucial element of these community properties is the communal practice portfolio, for two main reasons. First and most importantly, as we generally acquire our practices through immersion in groups of individuals who are already proficient in them (eg, during childhood and various other stages of apprenticeship), an individual can be reasonably expected to acquire only those practices that are actually part of her community's portfolio (especially that of her political collective). If the portfolio of her current collective is wanting, an agent can acquire practices through immersing herself in different ones, of course, either temporarily or permanently. For example, one reason why individuals emigrate is precisely that other communities offer practices hitherto unavailable to her: if I wish to become a practicing Amish, I have to move to North America and join their collective.

Second, whether the acquisition of one practice is sensible partially depends on others that are part of the collective's portfolio, and how they relate to each other. Here I distinguish between two cases. A) A practice that is communally available to the individual may complement those that are already part of her portfolio. For instance, becoming a science fiction author may be beneficial for someone who already practices physics and astronomy (and possibly *vice versa*).⁴⁸⁰ Alternatively, the practice may be incompatible. B) A practice that is communally available

⁴⁷⁹ Sen (1987: 21-22).

⁴⁸⁰ For a real-life example, see Alastair Reynolds, who was an employee at the European Space Agency and then took up writing. He has been winning numerous sci-fi literature awards and nominations since.

to the individual may complement those that are practiced by other members of her collective (and possibly *vice versa*). Manufacturing and consumption are a good example: to the extent that the activities on both sides correspond (such that quality/quantity of what is manufactured and sold matches quality/quantity of what is purchased and consumed), the practices support each other. Alternatively, they may be incompatible. For instance, many US municipalities have ordinances that prohibit home-based agricultural practices (usually for the purpose of protecting property values). An individual who lives in such a municipality and wishes to cultivate an edible garden in her yard faces the very real danger of having her vegetation destroyed by enforcement officers, being fined, and/or being taken to court.⁴⁸¹

If the flourishing of the individual is determined by the set of practices available in her community, then the constitution of the communal practice portfolio is of crucial importance. In the first sub-section, we will turn to the management of that portfolio.

4.2.1. Communal Portfolio Management

Individuals acquire vast portions of their behavioural repertoire through acculturation, and much of that process occurs unintentionally (see chapter 2). For example, children are surrounded by objects that play various roles in the culture of their community, and they must learn to use them. One of the most efficient ways to do that is by imitation. In fact, from 18 months of age, children routinely engage in what psychologists call *overimitation*: the copying of the actions of adult models “even when a more efficient method of achieving the demonstrated outcome is available and even when copying the adult’s actions results in failure to bring about the demonstrated outcome”⁴⁸². This high-fidelity copying of the behaviour of others becomes increasingly pervasive throughout the preschool period. It represents a mechanism of information transfer that is universal to all human collectives. It is a key element of cultural preservation, of course, since collectives frequently differ not so much with regards to *what* the ends of their activities are but rather in terms of *how* they are brought about: “Knowing *that* a group of people cook meat (an end) provides only limited information about their cultural heritage. Knowing *how* they prepared and cooked that meat (the means) tells far more”⁴⁸³.

That is not to say that people do not also adjust their behaviour patterns, often paired with accompanying changes to the objects they involve (eg, tools). Yet, such adjustments do not occur *ex nihilo*. Processes of behavioural (and possibly object-related) evolution over time incorporate two elements, innovation and imitation. Both must occur in a dialectical process, with one step enabling the next.⁴⁸⁴ Imitative learning puts the individual into a certain initial cognitive space to begin with, and it is only from there that changes can be made and practices develop.

For (over)imitation to occur, the subject must of course be exposed to individuals who are already proficient in the behavioural patterns in question (ie, models). Put differently, the novice must be immersed in a group of practitioners until she has been habituated. Studies have shown how effective immersion – which we can

⁴⁸¹ See Linnekin (2016: ch 4). For a related example, consider organisations like the Hobsonville Point Residents Society (HPRS) the rules of which state that washing lines must not be visible from a street, right of way, or pathway (because laundry looks ‘messy’), which in practice prevents residents from air-drying their washing and forces them to use electric dryers (bit.ly/2MUOeqx and bit.ly/2Wj3al4, accessed 30.09.2019).

⁴⁸² Nielsen & Tomaselli (2010: 729).

⁴⁸³ Ibid: 735; italics added.

⁴⁸⁴ Tomasello (1999) refers to it as *ratchet theory* because a behaviour is learned by individual 1 by imitation, changed by her, then passed on through imitation to individual 2, changed by him again, passed on, etc. Over time, we see the accumulative modifications that represent cultural evolution.

define as “completely surrounding oneself with something in an effort to [...] bring about a powerful personal transformation”⁴⁸⁵ that aims toward acquiring new identities and competencies – is with regard to various practices. For example, elementary school language programmes in which students are fully immersed (in the sense that the second language is not taught as a subject *per se*, but is used as the medium for teaching all, or almost all, other subjects) yield radically better results in terms of mastering listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills than partial immersion (where only a part of the curriculum is taught in the second language), let alone traditional ‘drip-fed’ instruction (where the second language is taught only as one dedicated subject).⁴⁸⁶

The point is this: if you wish to become a skilled user of Māori language, you have to surround yourself with people who proficiently use that language on an ongoing basis (ideally Māori people); if you wish to become a mountain climber, you have to immerse yourself among proficient practitioners of the craft and spend a lot of time with them in the mountains; and if you wish to acquire the practices of the Amish, you have to live among them for a prolonged period.

From this it follows that an individual can acquire a practice – in the sense that she can become a proficient performer – only if she has access to a community of practitioners. It entails that she has a high probability of acquiring only those practices that are part of her political community’s portfolio. For example, during our childhood, my friends and I learned Russian only because the use of that language was part of East Germany’s practice portfolio (due to the GDR’s close political, economic, and cultural relationship with the Soviet Union). By contrast, communication in French was not part of our country’s practice portfolio (because the GDR had no close ties with France), which is why hardly anyone in East Germany acquired competency in that language.

Plausibly, the main purpose of a political community (and the institutions that both represent it and secure its functioning) is to provide those conditions that allow its members to flourish and that cannot – as easily, as efficiently, or at all – be secured by the individual or by small groups of members. For example, Rawls’ contractarian approach theorises that individuals in the Original Position bargain for the purpose of establishing those principles that govern whatever basic social structure is most advantageous for them. Rawls construes that advantage economically because he considers the reason why individuals enter into the social contract to be mutually beneficial economic cooperation. However, a broader perspective is more plausible because, as per our different human needs, human flourishing incorporates far more elements than economic well-being.⁴⁸⁷ Accordingly, the basic structure of a society ought to promote our ability to meet *all* our needs, and social practices represent a crucial element of that structure.

Given the points I just made, a political community satisfies its purpose (and thus functions well) only if its practice portfolio enables its members to flourish as human beings in the long term. To be able to do that, political communities must be good managers of their practice portfolios.

4.2.1.1. Practice Portfolio of the Political Community

Political communities, represented by their institutions, are responsible for their practice portfolios because unlike any of their individual members they have the ability to make changes to those communal portfolios by abandoning existing, adopting new, and reinvigorating old practices. The first can be achieved through changes

⁴⁸⁵ Fortune & Tedick (1999a: 11).

⁴⁸⁶ Eg Campbell et al (1985); for further studies, see Fortune & Tedick (1999b).

⁴⁸⁷ For a fuller criticism, see Nussbaum (2004: ch 1).

in legislation, commodity prohibition being an obvious example. For instance, following the Control of Manufacture Act of 1992, the importation and sale of chewing gum has been prohibited in Singapore for over 25 years.⁴⁸⁸ As a result, respective consumption practices were largely eradicated. The second may be promoted through legislation too, but that can hardly be a sufficient condition. New practices cannot simply be ‘willed’ into existence; activity patterns need to be developed by a community of performers (or imported from another one) instead. I will discuss this issue in detail in the section on liminality below.

When it comes to the revival of practices that have been retreating, the recreation or improvement of the external conditions in which the performance of the activities in question becomes adaptive for community members once again represents a key measure. For example, take bicycle use. During the period between 1990-98 alone, the number of cycling trips in New Zealand reduced by 39%, primarily due to increased automobile use. As transport policies and urban planning became ever more oriented toward motor vehicle operation (just as it did in the US, see chapter 1)⁴⁸⁹, the decreased utilisation of bicycles was hardly surprising: the practice became much less adaptive for the individual. However, recently the New Zealand Ministry of Transport began to acknowledge the many benefits of cycling (eg, access and mobility, health, and environmental sustainability) and recognised that investment in environments and systems that support the mobility practice are necessary for its revival. Thus, it began to

- adopt communal land use, planning, and design that supports cycling (eg, by minimising distances between places where people live, work, shop, go to school, and spend their leisure time);
- provide supportive environments for cycling in existing communities (eg, by building dedicated cycling paths and facilities for secure bicycle parking and storage); and
- improve networks for long-distance cycling (eg, by building national networks of cycle routes, integrated with public transportation networks of carriers like trains and coaches)⁴⁹⁰

Just as the practice of *mountaineering* is adaptive, and therefore sensible, for individuals only if they have access to a fitting natural environment (ie, mountains), practicing *cycling* is adaptive only if individuals have access to a fitting man-made environment.⁴⁹¹ The crucial difference: a community can actually create the latter, which is why it represents an essential part of communal portfolio management.⁴⁹²

If political communities are able to change their practice portfolios, they also able to preserve them, of course. In fact, it is here that most of their activity probably occurs, for example, in the form of maintaining the environments necessary for practices to be carried out. While the larger natural environment often does not represent an element of a community’s external conditions that can be created, it certainly can be preserved and reimproved (to some extent). In fact, the protection of natural environments features very prominently on the agendas of virtually all political communities now, and that priority can be justified at least partially on the basis of practice portfolio responsibility. For example, with the disappearance of marine animal species, professional practices like *fishing* disappear too; with the crashing of insect populations (eg, honey bees), agricultural practices

⁴⁸⁸ Special provisions apply with regard to therapeutic chewing gum.

⁴⁸⁹ Ministry of Transport (2005).

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid (ch 3).

⁴⁹¹ To see how infrastructure changes have helped to reduce barriers to and drive motivations for cycling in Auckland, see TRA (2018: 25).

⁴⁹² This is not to say that communities cannot sometimes also create elements of their natural environment in a rather radical fashion. For example, the Lusatian Lake District (German: Lausitzer Seenland) is a large chain of artificial lakes that has been constructed in Saxony by flooding decommissioned lignite opencast mines. See Hübler (2015).

change radically; and with an increase in ambient temperatures, leisure practices (eg, *skiing* and *ice climbing*) vanish. To the extent that these practices are valuable (because they represent communally recognised need-satisfiers), the community has a responsibility to try to preserve their existence.

Another key element of communal portfolio preservation concerns the thwarting of new practices. Insofar as the collective considers them undesirable (given its particular interpretation of *human flourishing* as well as the characteristics of its members and environment), its institutions are responsible for preventing the spread of such practices. The manufacture and use of highly addictive recreational drugs like methamphetamine is an obvious example. In fact, in the case of highly pernicious practices like these, the community may even have to develop or adopt special (sub)practices that are dedicated to their impediment (eg, *medical treatment of addicts* and *drug-related law enforcement*).

To repeat: for individual members of a political community to be able to flourish, they must have access to a portfolio of practices that allows them to actually do so (given the properties of members and the characteristics of their environment, both social and natural). Accordingly, a political community is responsible for maintaining a practice portfolio that allows its members to flourish in the long term, and it must do so without non-consensually compromising the ability of the members of other political communities to do the same. Universalisability in the sense that the adoption of a principle does not put some in a worse position than others is a hallmark of the ethical/political justifiability of that principle, which is why I refer to ‘not compromising the ability other political communities’. It represents the kind of respect for the capacities of others that we find in Kant’s ethics (“act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means”⁴⁹³). Reference to ‘consent’ is necessary because sacrificing the satisfaction of one group’s members’ needs to some degree can be justified (especially if that enables others to achieve greater well-being, and if they reciprocate), but only if these agents do, or could do⁴⁹⁴, so willingly.⁴⁹⁵ In the case of non-agents (eg, children and non-human animals), it is the consent of guardians that counts.

The obvious question is, how great a degree of flourishing must the portfolio enable the community’s members to achieve? Since communal living represents merely one possible arrangement among others (especially solitary living), and given that it has various costs (eg, in terms of building and maintaining basic social structures), the existence of the community is justified only if it enables its members to flourish no less in the long term than they otherwise could. Thus, the answer to the question is: a degree of long-term flourishing no lower than would be possible for its members under any alternative arrangement. Of course, we can then make finer and more useful distinctions in terms of various types of communities. For example, we would compare urban communities of megacities (eg, Japan) with rural communities of hamlets (eg, the Amish); and we would compare collectives that organise resource access and ownership on the basis of individual property rights (eg, the Amish) with those where all, or nearly all, property is held in common (eg, the Hutterites). Now the question has a more specific answer: a degree of long-term flourishing no lower than would be possible for its members if the community organised itself differently⁴⁹⁶. For example, an urban political community organised along individual property rights is responsible for managing its practice portfolio such that its members can flourish at least as much as they would realistically be

⁴⁹³ Kant (1998: 38).

⁴⁹⁴ I leave open whether potential consent suffices or actual consent is necessary.

⁴⁹⁵ Naturally, the nature of *valid consent* (often characterised as sufficiently capacitated, informed, and voluntary) has to be carefully specified, which I cannot do here. For an overview of issues, see Eyal (2019).

⁴⁹⁶ An assumption is that that community would manage its practice portfolio well.

able to if it was structured and organised differently.⁴⁹⁷ (If a community's current structure and organisation does not meet that requirement, its portfolio management responsibility implies a communal duty to *restructure* and *reorganise*.)

At a minimum, individuals ought to be able to live as citizens, and given that practices represent an important kind of social resource, the communal portfolio must incorporate the social activity patterns that are necessary for the universal achievement of citizenship in the political community in question. An obvious example are education practices. Importantly, the political community must also establish what Arendt calls a 'shared common world': specific public physical spaces where individuals come together as citizens. It is here that they examine issues from different perspectives, modify their views, and enlarge their standpoint to incorporate the views of others.⁴⁹⁸ Thus, it is here that they confront one another with regard to the determination of what *flourishing* means and which practices are required and permissible for it to be secured. The plurality of human opinion implies that citizens likely have very different viewpoints on these issues, and even prolonged public debate may fail to yield a common conviction. Therefore, citizens need something else that serves as their common denominator, something that unites them and toward which they can be committed and loyal: a common set of worldly institutions, including the public space they jointly inhabit as citizens (be it the *agora*, parliament, or revolutionary council) and the formal rules they use to debate and make decisions.⁴⁹⁹

Beyond D_C , matters become slightly more complicated. According to PJ, each individual must have the opportunity to flourish to a degree (and kind) no lower than (and radically different from) that which she could have achieved with an initially equal share of the remaining resource pool. This does not represent a guarantee that everyone who wishes to participate in a particular practice that is part of the community's portfolio will actually end up doing so, either in the same way or at all (which, given the equal access right, might seem implied). For instance, any given community must establish professional practices for the settlement of conflicts (eg, legal practice) and roles within them (eg, that of the judge). However, a well-functioning collective needs only so many judges. What is more, it needs some of the people with relevant talents and skills to take on related yet different, and equally important, roles (eg, that of the lawyer), and it will need others to play more or less similar roles in different practices altogether.

For that reason, PJ should be interpreted to mean that

- every political community member who is suitably talented and skilled has an equal opportunity to take on a desired role (in terms of probability⁵⁰⁰), and
- if she misses out on her first choice, she has the opportunity to take on a role that allows her to flourish in ways that are not radically different (possibly in a different practice).

Notice that PJ has weaker implications than we may initially think, because its demand for "a degree (and kind) of flourishing no lower than (and radically different from) that which could have been secured with an initially equal resource pool share" actually refers to *overall* well-being. Plausibly, an individual can flourish greatly even if with regard to one particular aspect or dimension of human needs the communal portfolio does not enable her to participate in a practice that greatly suits her capacities and circumstances at all. That much is implied by the fact

⁴⁹⁷ 'Realistically' indicates that alternatives are applicable only if they could actually be implemented. I cannot discuss here the criteria that determine what is, and is not, realistic.

⁴⁹⁸ Arendt (1961).

⁴⁹⁹ Canovan (1983).

⁵⁰⁰ For individuals whose relevant talents and skill are exactly the same, this boils down to a lottery.

that we usually do not deny that individuals can flourish highly overall even though they have a disability (say, blind- or deafness) that limits the satisfaction of one particular human need (say, within the *sensory* sub-dimension).

So far, I have largely discussed portfolio management responsibility in the context of the political community. However, that collective actually constitutes what I call a ‘meta-community’ because its members represent the set of individuals who are, or upon adulthood will become, practitioners of what I call the ‘meta-practice’ of politics. Following MacIntyre, politics clearly is a practice because political activity in the ideal sense meets all the requirements listed in his characterisation (see section 2.2.1). Yet, it differs from his other practices in that a significant part of the function of politics is the management of the collective practice portfolio: political activity incorporates the determination of which (other) practices do, and do not, represent communally accepted ways of living well, along with the corresponding management of the portfolio by abandoning existing, adopting new, reinvigorating old practices, and maintaining current practices.

Yet, portfolio management responsibility applies not only in the context of political meta-practice. It is just as relevant in the context of, for want of a better term, ‘ordinary practices’ (ie, those that constitute the portfolio of the political community, other than *politics*).

4.2.1.2. Portfolio of the Ordinary Practice Community

Here the focus of responsibility does not concern the issue of which MacIntyrean practices the members of a community have access to, but rather which characteristics – including roles, activity patterns, and institutions – such practices have. To use the Amish as an example, it is the difference between managing the communal practice portfolio⁵⁰¹ by maintaining practices like *travelling on horse-drawn buggies* and thwarting practices like *driving motor vehicles* on the one hand, and managing the first of these in terms of determining which items and activities qualify as proper and which do not (as per the norms of the practice). For example, battery-operated front lights, turn signals, and flashing rear lights are permitted, but air horns, boom boxes, and CD players are not (at least in most Amish communities). In many church districts, even the use of rubber tyres is prohibited; instead, carriages move on wooden wheels that are wrapped in a steel band (and therefore make the journey uncomfortable).⁵⁰²

In the specific case just discussed, the political community and the community of the practitioners – ie, the set of those who participate in the practice of *travelling on horse-drawn buggies* – is plausibly near identical. Given that all Amish have mobility needs, and given that motorised transportation as well as the use of bicycles is prohibited in almost all church districts, virtually all members of the political community use horse-drawn buggies.⁵⁰³ However, with regard to most other ordinary practices, the set of practitioners represents a mere subset of the political community, and the responsibility for managing a practice’s portfolio of activity patterns, roles, and institutions lies with the latter.

If we need an argument for why that responsibility cannot be squarely located with the individual practitioner, we can refer to the dictum that *ought implies can*. Adapting the concepts of *price taker* and *price maker* from economics, we can say that the individual practitioner is a *practice taker* while the community of practitioners as a whole (as represented by its institutions) is a *practice maker*. A price taker represents a market participant that

⁵⁰¹ Separation from the world – and thus from larger North American society – is a central commitment of the Amish that can be traced back to the 1527 Schleitheim Confession (see Wenger, 1945). Thus, they plausibly represent a distinct political community.

⁵⁰² See Kraybill (2001). As we will see below, these norms are not at all arbitrary. They are maintained for specific (and good) reasons.

⁵⁰³ The same often applies to language use. For example, virtually all New Zealanders are able to communicate in English. Then again, only a small percentage of Aotearoa’s population can communicate in Maori, and fewer are able to use New Zealand Sign Language yet.

has no influence over market price determination (because its share of sales or purchases constitutes only a small proportion of the total); given its limited power, it has to accept prices as given. By contrast, a price maker has the ability to dictate market prices, usually because it has a supply or demand monopoly; it can set the prices that other market participants have to accept.⁵⁰⁴

Similarly, a practice taker represents an entity the activities of which have little to no effect upon the features of the practice in which the entity participates; it takes that practice as given. The individual who represents a standard practitioner (in the sense that she does not play the special role of representing the practice as a whole through the offices of its institutions) is such a practice taker. Of course, her ongoing activity contributes to the continued existence of the social practice, but it does so similarly to the way in which the splat of a single raindrop contributes to the sound of rain. In fact, rain is a good analogy because sets of practitioners can be very large, especially when it comes to the practices that constitute (global) consumerism. Whatever action the individual consumer commits or omits makes little difference to social consumption patterns; variations in her enactments are unlikely to have a significant effect upon the characteristics of consumerism as a whole.

By contrast, the community of practitioners as such, and especially the institutions dedicated to upholding the practice, represent practice makers. Institutions, often represented by individuals who hold institutional offices, have the power to change practices. For example, the Fédération Internationale des Échecs (FIDE) is the only entity that can change the rules of chess. Whenever such a change occurs (by way of adjusting the norms of the practice), the individual player cannot but adjust her conduct accordingly. Similarly, institutions have the power to prevent change. For example, the Académie Française represents the official custodian and protector of the French language, and it is especially dedicated to thwarting the Anglicisation of French. Here too, the individual practitioner adjusts her habitualised communication activity to the rules of language use as maintained by the practice maker (and taught in schools, enforced by the press, *et cetera*).

Plausibly, the portfolio management activities of ordinary MacIntyrean practices are at least partially similar to those outlined in the previous subsection: making changes to the portfolio by abandoning existing, adopting new, and reinvigorating old activity patterns/roles/institutions, as well as preserving the existing portfolio by maintaining environments in which current activity patterns/roles/institutions are adaptive and thwarting those activity patterns/roles/institutions that are not.⁵⁰⁵

Just as the criterion relevant to the political community's determination of what does, and does not, represent a suitable practice portfolio is whether citizens are able to flourish as human beings overall in the long term, the criterion relevant to an ordinary practice community's determination of what do, and do not, represent suitable activity patterns/roles/institutions is whether its members are able to flourish in the long term with regard to the particular needs that the practice is meant to address – through giving access to both practice-internal and -external goods, and without illegitimately compromising the ability of the members of other practices/communities to do the same without their consent. The last (without *illegitimately* compromising...) highlights that some forms of jeopardy are permissible (and thus do not require consent). For example, if practice A attracts the members of practice B because it enables its performers to flourish more, and if B ultimately becomes non-viable due to the size of its practice community dropping below critical mass, we have a case where the ability of the members of the latter is not illegitimately compromised.

⁵⁰⁴ Eg, Rutherford (2002).

⁵⁰⁵ An interesting question concerns the relationship between the responsibilities of the political community and those of communities of ordinary practitioners. Due to scope, I cannot address how the obligations of the two relate to each other.

Systematic pursuit of the objective of enabling all members of the practice to flourish is precisely what distinguishes legitimate from illegitimate practice makers. In order for a community to do so though, its members have to actually determine the needs in question to begin with. Otherwise, portfolio management merely represents unprincipled and blind activism (or passivism). Returning to an earlier example, efficient language use in a globalised, English-speaking world is likely not the primary goal of the Académie Française, otherwise it would not impede the spread of Anglicisms. More plausibly, a main objective is the prevention of cultural homogenisation and thereby the protection of French exceptionalism (whether in the cultural, political, and/or economic sense). It is difficult to not interpret the Academy's activity as a maintenance of language barriers, and such national barriers are generally designed to protect the flourishing of those within against the (potential) need-frustration originating in the activity of those without. That is also the main reason why the Amish maintain the practice of communicating in Pennsylvania Dutch (in a country where virtually no one else is able to use that language): its perceived need for maintaining separation from 'the world'.⁵⁰⁶

Conservatism with regard to the management of a practice's portfolio also ensures that practitioners retain the ability to connect to the history of that practice. One reason why we are unable to associate with the day-to-day lives of people who lived in our country a mere hundred years ago is that both our individual practice portfolios and many of our practices have radically changed throughout that period. As the result of technological developments and the subsequent changes in quality and quantity of consumer goods, the daily activities of contemporary Westerners in the home are radically different from those performed by people in 1920. Consequently, the two groups share little practical understanding. It negatively affects the satisfaction of our quotidian *subjective connectedness* need because we cannot practically comprehend what our ancestors did and how they did it. In that sense, even recent predecessors are very alien to us. The implication: to the degree that subjective connectedness to past people and their traditions is important, practice communities have a responsibility to resist change (and possibly even to roll back changes that have already occurred).

The determination of which needs a practice addresses, and how well it does that, is also required because without that information the political community is unable to manage the overall practice portfolio. For that reason, an ongoing dialogue between ordinary practice communities and the political community is necessary.

4.2.1.3. An Application: Mother's Day and Giving Flowers

Political and ordinary practice communities are not the only kind of practice maker, of course. Industry stakeholders like manufacturers and retailers of goods and services, especially in the form of large-scale corporations, represent another one. I gave various examples in chapter 1 (eg, the producers of ready-to-eat and ready-to-heat foods). Their pursuit of profitability objectives entails the instrumental need to sell commodities on a grand scale, and these sales often entail changes to current practices or the introduction of new ones. For example, when Anna Jarvis, a Methodist layperson from Philadelphia, invented Mother's Day in 1908, the floral industry immediately latched on to it and began to shape it into a floral holiday (with confectioners, department stores, stationers, and jewellers trying to make it theirs instead). While Jarvis attempted to promote Mother's Day through letter-writing campaigns to newspaper editors, politicians, and church leaders, the floral industry's activities had far greater effects. Nationwide trade journals noted the day in its first year of observance, thereby driving florists across the US to commercialise the second Sunday in May from the holiday's very inception. One part of their efforts consisted in consumer advertising designed to emphasise sentiment (with studied evocations of notions like *home*, *childhood*,

⁵⁰⁶ Kraybill et al (2013).

separation, and *love*) whilst at the same time disguising the industry's commercial interests. It thereby addressed members of the political community directly and on a large scale. Another part of their efforts was directed toward the institutions of practice communities, political and otherwise. For example, *Florists' Review* in 1910 reminded its readers to lobby mayors for issuing Mother's Day proclamations, urge ministers to hold special services, and approach local newspapers to write about the history and purpose of Mother's Day (paired with advertising).⁵⁰⁷ These efforts clearly paid off. According to *Fortune* magazine, "Mother's Day is like the Super Bowl for florists" now, with US Americans estimated to have spent \$2.4 billion on floral arrangements for mothers, wives, and girlfriends on the occasion in 2015, outperforming even Valentine's Day and securing ten percent of the industry's annual sales.⁵⁰⁸

Politically and ethically, the Western practice of *giving flowers* is especially problematic due to workers' rights violations, child labour, and environmental destruction. Of the billions of cut flowers sold in the US, roughly 80% are imported. Almost all of these originate in Colombia and Ecuador. Typical workers on South American flower farms rarely earn more than minimum wages, if that. During busy periods (like the run-up to Mother's Day), they are forced to work unreasonably long hours without overtime pay. Being usually hired out by third-party contractors, they are frequently rotated between farms to avoid higher wages for senior workers and benefits. According to UNICEF, six percent of children in Ecuador aged 5-14 are farm labourers, many on flower plantations.⁵⁰⁹ Often, they are involved in fumigation activities that use neurotoxic substances restricted or prohibited in North America and Europe. A health evaluation study of girls, boys, and adolescents from the flower-growing province of Pichincha found that 32% had tremors, 30% headaches, 27% migraines, and 15% had experienced temporary loss of consciousness (syncope).⁵¹⁰ Adult health studies have shown even worse problems. Due to the heavy use of pesticides and fungicides, nearly two-thirds of Colombian flower workers suffer from one or more of the following: headaches, nausea, impaired vision, conjunctivitis, rashes, asthma, congenital malformations, as well as respiratory and neurological problems.⁵¹¹ Yet, chemical toxicity affects not only horticultural workers. In the plains surrounding Bogota, pesticides have contaminated both water table and subsoil throughout the areas where Colombian flower production is concentrated, up to 1,000 feet beneath the earth's surface. In addition, flower production consumes vast amounts of water. To begin with, flower beds require considerable irrigation. For example, the water footprint of a single rose flower stem is estimated to be 7.3-12.8 litres (depending on weight)⁵¹², which represents water that cannot be used for other purposes (eg, subsistence crop farming). Flower production frequently drains natural water reservoirs like Lake Naivasha in Kenya, resulting in water quality deterioration and biodiversity reduction at alarming rates.⁵¹³ The latter is aggravated by pollution from agricultural runoff. What is more, global flower trade entails virtual water trade (aka trade in embedded or embodied water). Since flowers are 90% H₂O, water leaves the countries of origin at a steady rate.

The Western social practice of *giving flowers* is designed to contribute to human flourishing, especially through satisfying *social connectedness* (quotidian dimension) as well as *sensory*, *affective*, and *social* needs

⁵⁰⁷ Upon realising to which degree florists were moulding what she had intended to be a holy day to their commercial ends, Jarvis became increasingly angered and alienated from the industry. By 1920, she denounced it formally and actually began to campaign against the purchase of flowers (as well as other gifts and greeting cards) for the occasion, but to little effect. For a full account, see Schmidt (1991).

⁵⁰⁸ Kell (2015).

⁵⁰⁹ That estimate is likely far too conservative.

⁵¹⁰ Castelnuovo et al (2000).

⁵¹¹ ILRF (2008).

⁵¹² Mekonnen & Hoekstra (2010).

⁵¹³ Ibid.

(developmentalist/perfectionist dimension) of both gifter and giftee. Yet, in its current manifestation, the practice revolves around a product that is harmful to many people (adults and children) as well as other living organisms and systems. Thus, it fails to meet a central requirement presented above: it is not the case that the members of the Western practice are able to flourish in the long term with regard to the particular needs that the practice is meant to address *without illegitimately compromising the ability of the members of other practices/communities to do the same without their consent*. Plausibly, (most) South American horticultural labourers do not validly consent to their working conditions and remuneration. Once we take into account that the majority of female horticultural workers in Ecuador have been victims of some form of sexual harassment or assault,⁵¹⁴ that view becomes more credible yet. Consent occurs, I would argue, only because workers have no viable alternative ways of meeting their subsistence needs. The global application of PJ would go a large way toward addressing that lack. Once the ability to flourish as citizens is guaranteed to all human beings, there is no need (and much less incentive) to subject oneself to the degrading and harmful working conditions as they currently exist.

With regard to children, lack of valid consent is even more obvious. Not only do the health issues described above represent evils in the form of physical languishing, but they are also instrumentally harmful by preventing children from having other needs met, often throughout their entire future lives. For example, neurological problems are responsible for low academic performance and subsequent dropout from the educational system,⁵¹⁵ thereby preventing the achievement of citizenship (and possibly even agency). That school dropouts with multidimensionally compromised childhood development have virtually no chance to live a flourishing adult existence hardly needs an argument. Guardians of non-human living organisms and systems hardly have reason to consent to the environmental destruction that endangers, and often extinguishes, their charges either.

As a result, *giving flowers* in its current form does not represent a justifiable practice. While it is advantageous for industry stakeholders (that have played a significant role in shaping the practice) to maintain our current activity patterns and the commodities they incorporate, their interests are not decisive because they do not qualify as legitimate practice makers. From the perspective of shareholder value maximisation doctrine, it is a mistake if a corporation directly caters to the interests of anyone but its stockholders. In a free capitalist economy, “there is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition”⁵¹⁶. That view is problematic for a variety of reasons. For example, some horticultural companies in Ecuador may well operate within national law. Yet, insofar as that law does not actually protect the ability of Ecuador’s citizens to flourish (as it should), the ‘rules of the game’ are unacceptable. Western companies cannot simply claim innocence on the basis that *they* obey laws (because they themselves do not actually operate in South America after all). Their current business is built on being supplied with commodities that result from non-consensual treatment and activity, which is why that business itself fails to represent justifiable practice.⁵¹⁷ In fact, insofar as Western corporations subscribe to shareholder value doctrine, it fails to do so for another reason: by limiting their direct concern to a very small group of individuals, it deprioritises the flourishing of the larger collective of practitioners. If only shareholder value matters non-instrumentally, we can easily imagine scenarios (or

⁵¹⁴ See Stewart (2007) and ILRF (2008).

⁵¹⁵ Stewart (2007).

⁵¹⁶ Friedman (1962: 133).

⁵¹⁷ Corporate activity is comprised of practices and praxes too after all.

simply look at concrete examples) where the needs of suppliers, workers, customers, and the local community among others are disregarded for the sake of profitability increases.

As corporations and other industry stakeholders (eg, lobbying institutions) do not qualify as legitimate practice makers, they have no authority to assume the management of the portfolios characterised above. By contrast, practice communities as a whole and their institutions, including non-governmental organisations working to enable practice members to flourish⁵¹⁸, do. It is their responsibility to manage practices like *giving flowers* by making radical changes. For example: shift demand from internationally to locally grown commodities; shift gifted objects from purchased to home-cultivated and from out-of-season to seasonal flowers; and shift the gift focus from flowers to entirely different objects (especially self-made ones like poems, letters, drawings, photos, video clips, or simply the gift of time together). Better yet, in the context of occasions like Mothers' Day, move from material gifts given to one's own family members toward donations given to those whose need-satisfaction is radically compromised. The 2015 Mothers' Index gives us clear targets: make Mothers' Day 2019 or 2020 the International Day of Mothers in Somalia, because that is where maternal well-being is globally the lowest.⁵¹⁹ Surely, Westerners could honour their own mothers through largely personal gestures whilst directing expenditures toward mothers who actually need them to achieve a minimum degree of flourishing. In fact, why not show how much we honour the *role* of mothers in general by way of supporting it in places where its performance is particularly difficult and costly for women (especially the hundreds of millions without access to a fair resource share)? If only half of the \$2.4 billion spent on floral arrangements for Mother's Day in the US alone in 2015 found its way to Somalia, the country would effectively double its net official development assistance and official aid received during the entire year of 2016.⁵²⁰ Given the focus of my arguments, those funds should be used to establish practices that enable women to flourish as mothers in the long term. Plausibly, this entails at least a partial focus on female children and adolescents who will not actually become mothers for quite some time. Securing maternal flourishing in sub-Saharan countries in the long run requires substantial changes to practices in which females participate many years prior to motherhood. For example, young women in developing countries are much less likely than men to be literate, let alone have professional or technical education.⁵²¹ It reduces their future opportunities to homebound activity and motherhood, contributes to low levels of health seeking behaviours (especially during pregnancy and childbirth), and diminishes their ability to participate in political life.⁵²² The latter indicates lacking citizenship and thus a lack of campaigning for social practice change by women. For these reasons, changes to practices in the areas of *education* and *training* are crucial for maternal flourishing.

In subsequent years, we can keep working our way up the Mothers' Index: International Day of Mothers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, then the Central African Republic, *etc.* The floral industry (in- and outside the US) could not be relied upon for such changes to the Western practice I have been considering here, because it would not profit from them – quite the contrary. That is precisely why legitimate practice makers have to do so instead.

⁵¹⁸ The consent clause continues to apply, but from here on I will not always mention it.

⁵¹⁹ STC (2015).

⁵²⁰ According to World Bank data, that assistance and aid amounted to \$1.18 billion (<https://bit.ly/2Gfa6Kf>, accessed 25.01.2019).

⁵²¹ In Somalia, children receive only 2.2 years of primary and secondary education on average, so girls likely receive hardly any. By contrast, the average number of years of formal schooling in New Zealand is 19.2 years (STC, 2015).

⁵²² Nussbaum (2000) and STC (2015).

4.2.2. Role of the Individual Community Member

As an individual community member typically is a practice taker, her activity has little effect on the characteristics of the collective practice portfolio. That does not imply, however, that individual practitioners do not play a key role with regard to the decision-making that precedes portfolio management choices. This point applies to both political and ordinary communities.

4.2.2.1. Role of the Political Practitioner

As previously noted, an important part of political activity is the move from substantively thin flourishing and needs *qua* human being to the much thicker flourishing and needs *qua* member of a particular community. In other words, it is the determination of what flourishing in *this* particular community means, what is required to achieve it, and which things (including practices, of course) do, and do not, represent communally acceptable – and therefore legitimate – ways of addressing needs. In that way, concrete values capable of generating ethical norms are as much created as they are discovered.

Citizens easily recognise that some activities cannot possibly qualify as need-satisfiers in *any* community because their execution lowers human need-satisfaction and therefore flourishing (in the long term) regardless of the characteristics of the collective and its external circumstances. For example, take a practice that we might generically call *recreational consumption of hard drugs*: consuming a substance like methamphetamine recreationally is always a communally recognised need-frustrator because users tend to quickly develop an intense addiction that rapidly and drastically erodes physical health, damages social relationships, and compromises other elements of human well-being. Due to diminishing the need-satisfaction with regard to so many aspects of human flourishing, the citizenry of a political collective would straightforwardly label it a need-frustrator, and thus a practice on the basis of which legitimate resource claims cannot possibly be made.

Other activities will not be recognised as need-satisfiers in *some* communities due to special inalterable properties of the latter. My default example is the practice of *mountaineering* in the context of collectives that lack access to mountains (though it would not be considered a need-frustrator).

Then there are the less straightforward cases. Remember this previous example: among the Amish, *driving motor vehicles* (DMV) does not represent a communally recognised need-satisfier, but *travelling on horse-drawn buggies* (THDB) does. While the latter activity is permitted, the former is explicitly prohibited by the *Ordnung*. It is not the case that DMV cannot qualify as need-satisfier due to special *inalterable* properties of the collective. Rather, the Amish citizenry construes *human flourishing* in a particular way and therefore intentionally preserves various traditional communal properties. Following the family, the most important social unit around which Amish life is organised is the church district or congregation (*Gmay*, from the standard German *Gemeinde*: community). Within that unit, most of an Amish family's social and spiritual interaction occurs. Church districts are strictly limited in numerical and geographical size, with congregations typically including some 25-35 families that live in very close proximity.⁵²³ It is the strength of human bonds within that unit that the Amish wish to preserve most of all, because traditional, hamlet-like community life is considered to be most conducive to human well-being as they construe it (informed by the Bible and their own historical records).

Once we understand this, it is easy to comprehend the determination of need-satisfiers/-frustrators by the Amish citizenry. DMV is a need-frustrator because it allows, even encourages, people to socialise far outside the

⁵²³ If districts become too large, congregations divide.

limits of the *Gmay*, thereby weakening the social capital that the Amish value so highly. THDB, on the other hand, is a need-satisfier because it limits interaction to within a small geographical radius. That is precisely why the use of rubber tyres is frequently prohibited too: wooden wheels wrapped in a steel band make for a rough travel experience, the perfect disincentive to long journeys. Given the status of DMV, it does not qualify for consideration with regard to resource allocation. In other words, when it comes to resources needed for mobility/transportation, Amish community members cannot base their claims upon what is needed to drive a car or motorcycle. For example, the cost of car, garage, petrol, and mechanical maintenance are irrelevant. By contrast, the cost of horse and carriage, barn, horse feed, and veterinary services are not.

Would Kantian, or deontological, liberals reject the view that the community as a whole determines what does (not) represent flourishing within and what qualifies as need-satisfier/-frustrator? According to their position, “society, being composed of a plurality of persons, each with his own aims, interests, and conceptions of the good, is best arranged when it is governed by principles that do not *themselves* presuppose any particular conception of the good”⁵²⁴ after all.

If liberals like Rawls were to criticise the idea that the community interprets what does, and does not, represent legitimate forms of flourishing and legitimate need-satisfiers, then I merely need to point out that they themselves require such interpretation. For example, the principles chosen in Rawls’ Original Position are far too abstract to be properly choice- and action-guiding. They require interpretation in terms of which concrete things do, and do not, represent primary goods, otherwise Kantian liberals have no way of allocating resources fairly. Of course, if we found ourselves in circumstances of abundance (eg, in Cockaigne, the land of plenty described in medieval myth⁵²⁵), resource allocation would not be required. Yet, those are not our actual circumstances. A great many resources are becoming increasingly scarce, which is why their fair allocation becomes ever more important.

What is more, my proposal is perfectly democratic in that all adult members of a political community actively participate in the collective determination/interpretation of *flourishing*. Citizens are politically autonomous in the sense that they do not have to take the spectrum of cultural elements as given, but are free to question and participate in agreeing or changing the rules of their culture.⁵²⁶ Universal participation helps to prevent any privileged relation to the socio-cultural means of interpretation and communication (eg, the officially recognised vocabularies in which claims can be pressed, the idioms available for interpreting and communicating needs, and the paradigms of argumentation accepted as authoritative in adjudicating conflicting claims).⁵²⁷

It connects nicely with Arendt’s view that it is not enough for individuals to limit our ‘political’ activity to once-every-four-years voting separately and anonymously according to purely private opinion. Members of a collective must face each other and talk in public, such that their differences and commonalities can emerge and become the subject of democratic debate. Referring to Kant’s concept of *enlarged mentality* (German: *erweiterte Denkungsart*), Arendt writes that

[t]he power of judgment rests on a potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an

⁵²⁴ Sandel (1998: 1; original italics).

⁵²⁵ Equivalent to *Schlaraffenland* in German and *Luilekkerland* in Flemish-Belgian culture (Pleij, 2001).

⁵²⁶ Doyal & Gough (1991).

⁵²⁷ Fraser (1986).

anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement. From this potential agreement judgment derives its specific validity.⁵²⁸

To free itself from natural idiosyncrasies and transcend the limitations of individual reasoning, a person's judgment "needs the presence of others 'in whose place' it must think, whose perspectives it must take into consideration"⁵²⁹. The formulation of opinions that are representative of the collective can occur only when citizens actually confront one another, examine contentious issues from different perspectives, modify their views, and enlarge their standpoint by incorporating the positions of others.⁵³⁰ For this reason, citizenship entails that we cannot simply leave politics to a group of specialists or professionals who engage in political deliberation and choice on behalf of the population (so that the latter can focus on less taxing activities like the pleasures of modern consumerism instead).⁵³¹

Citizenship requires that one person's voice has as much weight in the communal decision-making as that of any other member of the political collective – but no more than that. It cannot entail that she has the power to make cultural determinations in a discrete fashion, because that would represent a form of totalitarianism (which fails to respect the rational capacities and choices of others). The community as a whole (based on the participation of all members) is the only entity warranted to do so.

One further qualification though. To qualify as full agent and citizen, an individual must also be free to leave her political community in favour of joining another one. It is perfectly conceivable that, despite its best efforts, a community is unable to provide a practice portfolio suitable for the particular capacities or attitudes of a given individual. For instance, a small community (call it 'Smallcom') will be hard-pressed to offer the same variety of practices as the portfolio of a large community ('Largecom'). The maintenance of each practice, especially a MacIntyrean one, requires resources after all.⁵³² By allowing her to leave for another political community that offers a more fitting practice portfolio, the person's particular capacities and conception of the good are respected in a fuller sense.

These other communities have a duty to take her in (assuming that she wishes to join for the reasons just indicated), at least on a temporary basis. As I argued above, PJ applies inter-communally and since practices are a social resource, they are subject to sharing with outsiders. Such sharing can occur only through allowing novices to immerse themselves in a community of proficient practitioners, such that they can become properly habitualised (which takes time). In that regard, the Amish can be criticised because their commitment to separation from the world entails a principled opposition toward contact with outsiders, let alone their immersion in the *Gmay*. (Such criticism must also consider that the Amish long-term resistance toward American consumerism may have been possible only because of that very separation though. So we need to develop a general conceptualisation of *communal separation from other collectives* that meets the conditions of PJ and then analyse how the Amish separation from the world fails to meet its requirements.)

⁵²⁸ Arendt (1961: 220).

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Due to the scope of this project, I cannot provide a list of criteria for appropriate communal discourse. However, Habermas (eg, Habermas, 1984; 1987) and his followers provide ample material in that regard, because much of their work revolves around the conceptualisation of proper communal decision-making processes.

⁵³¹ Passerin d'Entrèves (1994).

⁵³² For example, to establish and maintain institutions, but also to oversee and correct the effects of their activity.

4.2.2.2. Role of the Ordinary Practitioner

Just as each member of a political community has responsibilities *qua* membership in the practice of *politics* (as just outlined), membership in other practices entails similar obligations, for analogous reasons. Without participation in the determination of which characteristics – including roles, activity patterns, and institutions – represent legitimate attributes of the practice in question, the individual is passively subject to the choices and determinations of others. In other words, she lacks autonomy and thereby does not live the life of a minimally flourishing human being.

Participation in practices is crucial for the flourishing of human beings, so the properties of these practices determine whether or not particular individuals live well. As previously noted, significant/critical autonomy entails that the individual questions and participates in agreeing to or changing the rules of a culture. At the level of politics, I referred to that role as being a citizen. Yet, citizenship is not limited to the meta-practice of politics. After all, the determination of practice-particular rules of a culture occurs largely within ordinary practices. In other words, citizenship pertains to ordinary practices too. Thus, we can distinguish between political and practice citizenship, which highlights that the achievement of overall citizenship (by flourishing to degree D_C) is even more important than hitherto discussed.

A related point concerns individual identity. For example, what it means to be Amish is very much determined by the practices that are (not) recognised as legitimate need-satisfiers within the Anabaptist collective. I used the examples of *travelling on horse-drawn buggies* (recognised as need-satisfier) contra *driving motor vehicles* (recognised as need-frustrator). Said determinations are central to political citizenship. Yet, what *exactly* it means to properly *travel on horse-drawn buggies* (eg, use of battery-operated front lights: yay, use of CD players: nay) is crucial not just for Amish identity overall but also for the particular identity of everyone who participates in the mobility practice. Identity, which is closely connected to meaning, is important for the flourishing of the individual, and the determination of things that have such importance must not be left to others.

Again, this does not entail that the individual has the ability to individually change the characteristics of the practice. In fact, such unilateral change would lead to practice breakdown. Without inter-individual agreement about the properties of a practice, our ability to recognise it would be undermined. For example, no one would identify someone who operates a pink buggy drawn by a lavishly decorated horse as a participant in the Amish mobility practice of THDB. Since the ability of others to tell which practice a performer belongs to affects how they act around and toward her (eg, in terms of communication), unilateral practice change and the identity function of practices are incompatible.

The ongoing discourse involved in practice citizenship is socially important. By reasoning publicly, once again the individual becomes aware of the perspectives of others, thereby better understanding the practice (and those who participate in it). In fact, she may even change her own position on contentious issues. So with regard to ordinary practices too, the deliberation involved in practice management cannot simply be left to specialists or professionals (who often work within the easily corruptible⁵³³ institutions of the practice).

There is another crucial reason that supports the last point. The agency required for minimal human flourishing clearly incorporates moral agency, and the latter obviously entails that the interests of those who are affected by one's activity are taken into account, both deliberatively and practically. Individual activity patterns almost always connect the practitioner to a multitude of other individuals. In fact, contemporary consumerism links

⁵³³ MacIntyre (2007).

the consuming individual to a (geographically and temporally) vast network of people, both up- and downstream of her need-satisfying activity. Without practice citizenship, she would be wholly unable to understand both who the parties in that network are, what their particular interests are, and how the social practice affects their ability to flourish. Specialists and professionals stand in the way of abolishing the distance that characterises what I previously called ‘detached complex consumerism’ (see 1.3.4).

4.2.3. Communal Portfolios and the Political Meta-Community of Peoples

If a practical community has authority over its interpretation of *human flourishing* (which affects the list of things that qualify as need-satisfiers), what is to stop a collective from opting for a highly consumerist construal of *well-being* that entails much greater resource claims of its members than those of collectives that construe it very differently (mainstream American consumerism and Amish culture being corresponding examples)?

Each political community does indeed have that authority. However, while the recognition of what qualifies as need-satisfier indeed grounds the legitimacy of resource claims within the community, it does not similarly do so without. The main reason is this presumption: regardless of membership in particular political communities, individuals can live equally good human lives through satisfying their human needs in ways that are not radically different in resource-intensity in principle. This can be shown quite easily, not least because collectives are hardly ever *simply* consumerist. Even the most consumerist Western nations incorporate groups of people whose interpretation of *good life* is radically different from, and often diametrically opposed to, the mainstream one(s). These non-consumerist practitioners live good lives nevertheless, so it seems reasonable to assume that the other members of their political community could live equally well if they adopted different practices.

Just as citizens are members of a political meta-community (usually nation states)⁵³⁴, these communities make up another meta-community of their own. In a Rawlsian fashion, we might call it ‘the community of peoples’⁵³⁵. And just as individual members of an ordinary political community must qualify as citizens to live minimally good human lives, the members of the community of peoples must represent what, for lack of a better word, we might call ‘societyship’. The reason is rather similar: without societyship, a collective entity cannot sufficiently flourish as a human collective.

It is here that the concepts of *human collective flourishing* and *human collective needs* become relevant. Due to scope, I could discuss these ideas only very briefly in chapter 3, which is why here too I must limit myself to a rough sketch. Given that, like human individuals, collective entities ought to flourish to at least a minimal degree, they must engage in societyship. A major part of that consists in an ongoing critical dialogue about how their members (ie, their citizens) conceptualise individual human flourishing, and thus which practices represent recognised need-satisfiers. That discourse is important for two reasons. Firstly, different perspectives have the potential for significant learning. Practices recognised as legitimate in one community may be marvellously suitable for the need-satisfaction in others too (even without perfectly matching interpretations of *individual human flourishing*). For example, indigenous communities around the world (say, Aboriginal Canadians and Australians) are cultural resources for Western political communities. Because they have not been (entirely) swamped by the consumerism of the West, they represent repositories of rather different social practices, just as biodiversity hotspots

⁵³⁴ I keep writing as if there were only one political community, usually what we call ‘the state’. However, that is an oversimplification, of course. Ultimately, citizens are most directly members of much more local political communities (eg, cities). These make up larger political communities (eg, districts and states), and those constitute nations in turn. I have been ignoring this point purely because it simplifies my writing.

⁵³⁵ Rawls (1999).

like the Tropical Andes represent a genetic resource pool for the rest of the world. The very people who due to their geographic remoteness or intentional social separation have succumbed least to Western consumerism, and who are most backward in Western eyes, are precisely those that may possess the – from our perspective – most novel cultural resources that can help us flourish in ways that require far fewer materially scarce resources. And although they are not an indigenous community, this point applies to the Amish too.

Secondly, insofar as communally specific practices⁵³⁶ entail different resource claims, they have to be defended. Due to the presumption mentioned above, any one collective that makes greater resource claims (per capita) than others is subject to critical scrutiny by default. Without agreement of the other reasonable members of the community of peoples, greater resource claims have no normative standing. In other words, such claims cannot be expected to result in greater resource allocations. There are various reasons why other reasonable members will often agree to greater allocations, of course. Firstly, with regard to different natural conditions, similar degrees of need-satisfaction may straightforwardly require different amounts of resources. For instance, communities further removed from the equator tend to require clothes and dwellings with better insulation. Secondly, greater allocations may carry the promise of innovation (eg, new technologies) that will benefit other political communities in the form of new future practices in turn. Thirdly, more resource-intense practices in one community may represent just the kind of opportunities for flourishing that are unavailable in another one. Thus, Smallcom may have reason to agree to greater allocations for Largecom if the latter agrees to take in individuals who are unable to flourish in the former.⁵³⁷

The intersocietal deliberations among political communities and the intercivil deliberations within each of them must be connected through suitable feedback mechanisms. That way, the discourses at both levels become much better informed. In itself, it will not result in the transfer of social practices, of course. Practices cannot be transmitted on the basis of theoretical knowledge exchange. For that to occur, we need practical immersion – to which I return in the next section.

4.3. Liminal Communities

In order for the individual acquisition of new practices to occur, various challenges have to be overcome, and immersion plays an important role in that respect. Firstly, such acquisition requires the novice to be in the presence of those who are already proficient in them, because they are her trainers. Secondly, it requires social immersion because consistent messages about how individuals behave in certain circumstances according to the norms of the new practice radically increase the likelihood that new *lasting* habits are formed (and old ones are weakened and ultimately left behind). Thirdly, it may require a change of non-social milieu to avoid that familiar environmental elements cue behaviour that corresponds to old patterns.

Insofar as a novel practice is incompatible with the elements that constitute the individual's current portfolio, its acquisition is much less likely. Many elements of that portfolio are related to each other in an interlocking fashion. For example, Western consumerism represents numerous practices that fit neatly together (eg, dwelling in suburbs, driving cars, and shopping in supermarkets). If a new practice does not fit into this net- or

⁵³⁶ Such communal specificity may be due to merely partially non-identical characteristics. For example, the *use of houses as dwellings* is almost universal to all peoples, but the social practice has radically different properties even across Western nations. For instance, average footprints of dwellings in the US are radically larger than those in Europe (see chapter 1).

⁵³⁷ For example, imagine an Amish adolescent who turns out to have an unprecedented talent for mathematical reasoning. Among the Anabaptists, that individual has no chance to develop her gift and flourish as a mathematical theorist. By contrast, mainstream American society can offer her many opportunities to attend higher education and pursue stimulating professions.

patchwork, it will not be acquired because it will not be frequently performed. The only way to address that problem is to make changes to the entire relevant part of the network – and such a radical change is far more likely if the individual is immersed among practitioners whose entire portfolio consists of an alternative net-/patchwork of practices.

As long as a consumer is exposed to her customary social and geographical milieu, she will find it difficult to break away from her conventional lifestyle and culturally dominant praxes, in the same way in which addicts find it difficult to break with their substance abuse habits if they do not perform the immersion sketched above. I am likening the situation of drug addicts with that of consumers (in the ordinary sense of the term) here indeed. The key advice given by organisations like *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Narcotics Anonymous* to recovering addicts is to avoid places, people, and things associated with one's substance use. The acquisition of practices that are actually adaptive requires “[m]aking sober friends [and] living in a drug-free environment”⁵³⁸. Successful drug therapies provide exactly that. Addicts are taken from their customary milieu and moved into radically different live-in facilities. Although the detox period that deals with physical withdrawal usually lasts only between 5-14 days, treatment at these facilities typically runs 30-90 days because new behavioural routines need time to solidify. After that, patients are frequently moved to halfway houses for several more months, such that their new behavioural routines can congeal further. Once they are ready to re-enter ‘ordinary’ society, recovering addicts are urged to keep following the advice mentioned above: prevent the breakdown of newly acquired practices by avoiding their old milieu (associated with substance abuse).

For an individual transformation with regard to consumerist practices to occur, I put forward a similar proposal: temporarily remove the person from her familiar milieu and immerse her in a communal environment that exposes her to drastically different practices embodied in concrete post-consumerist⁵³⁹ attitudes and activity patterns. That setting, I propose, is provided by what I call *liminal communities*. Before I outline the nature and workings of these proposed communities, I need to briefly discuss the anthropological concept of *liminality* first.

4.3.1. Liminality

The social life of any ordinary community consists of multiple autonomous social groups and spheres of existence. Passage between them requires assistance and mediation, which is the function of ceremonies or rituals. Such passage often takes place in space (eg, by travelling between villages or countries). It also takes place in time – sometimes once (eg, at a certain age or point of development, marriage, or death), sometimes periodically (eg, with the seasons). According to van Gennep, ceremonial patterns that accompany passages have a universal tripartite sequential structure: separation, transition, and incorporation. Each sequence theoretically includes preliminary rites (of separation), liminal rites (of transition), and postliminal rites (of incorporation), though the three are not always equally important or equally elaborated.⁵⁴⁰

4.3.1.1. Liminal Rites

Initiation ceremonies illustrate the sequence nicely. Commonly, they involve an individual leaving her group and experiencing symbolic death (separation), then proceeding through the transitional phase in which she is secluded (perhaps taking on roles otherwise inappropriate for the individual's social position, age, or gender), and

⁵³⁸ Prochaska & Norcross (2010: 257).

⁵³⁹ Or, in the case of the Amish, actually pre-consumerist.

⁵⁴⁰ Van Gennep (1960).

finally re-joining her social world with a new, elevated status (incorporation). Take Turner's account of the installation ceremonies of a Ndembu chief in Northwest Zambia:

The liminal component of such rites begins with the construction of a small shelter of leaves about a mile away from the capital village. This hut is known as *kafu* or *kafwi*, a term Ndembu derive from *ku-fwa*, "to die," for it is here that the chief-elect dies from his commoner state. The chief-elect, clad in nothing but a ragged waist-cloth, and a ritual wife [...] enter the *kafu* shelter just after sundown. The couple are led there as though they were infirm. There they sit crouched in a posture of shame (*nsonyi*) or modesty, while they are washed with medicines mixed with [special] water⁵⁴¹

Following this separation begins the liminal rite *Kumukindyila*, literally 'to speak evil or insulting words against him', the reviling of the chief-elect. During the haranguing, first the Kafwana (the ceremonial authority) calls the initiand a 'mean, selfish, bad-tempered, adulterous fool' (among other things), demands that he see the error of his ways, and, going forward, that he behave as befits a chief. Next, anyone who considers to have been wronged by the chief-elect in the past is entitled to disparage him and express resentment to the fullest. He is prevented from sleeping, jostled roughly, and ordered to perform all kinds of menial tasks: "a chief is just like a slave (*ndung'u*) on the night before he succeeds"⁵⁴². During the subsequent third phase of reaggregation, the initiand returns to the culturally pre-fabricated world and is installed with great pomp and revelry to the enhanced social position of chief.

The crucial central part of the sequence, the liminal phase (from Latin *limen*: threshold) concerns the subject's time spent at the limit and the crossing of the margin. It is here, in the unstructured – actually anti-structured – zone of social limbo, that things are not as they are in the ordinary world: conventional social rules and roles do not apply, the initiand is both literally and symbolically marginalised. Liminal rites exist in complete separation from regular social life. Through symbolic inversion that reduces him to a nobody, the ritual participant is brought under the authority of the community, thereby forcing him to confront the mutual dependence of the different social strata. With all structural relations abandoned, he becomes a *tabula rasa* for the collective's considered beliefs and values, so as to reconstruct him as a respectable head of the group.⁵⁴³

Notice these features in Turner's example:

- **Separation:** the ritual subject is socially detached by moving him geographically and by stripping him of name, rank, and clothes; he is moved from secular/profane space (village) and time (day) to sacred space (*kafu/kafwi*) and time (night).
- **Transition:** liminality is a temporal interface between past condition (left behind) and future condition (yet to obtain); the element of effacement is especially pronounced; the initiand's former self is dying (or, rather, destroyed by the community) before the new one is beginning to grow (or, rather, given birth to); in mid-transition the initiand is pushed as far toward structural invisibility and anonymity as possible.
- **Re-aggregation:** the subject is socially reintegrated by moving him geographically back and by conferring a permanent (elevated) social position on him; he is returned from sacred to secular/profane space and time.

⁵⁴¹ Turner (1969: 100).

⁵⁴² Ibid: 101.

⁵⁴³ Mitchell (1996).

Liminal rituals of tribal society may incorporate subversive elements, but the rituals are not usually designed to subvert the structural status quo of society. The ritual reversal described above “underlines that chaos is the alternative to cosmos, so they had better stick to cosmos, that is, the traditional order of culture”⁵⁴⁴. Hardly anyone would want to exist in a pandemoniacal world of anti-structure after all.

4.3.1.2. The Liminoid

Broadening the application of the basic concept to other phenomena, Turner contrasts the liminal with the liminoid (*-oid*: -like). Unlike the former, the latter occurs within the established social structure, although in neutral spaces or privileged areas. Given its special relationship with play (as opposed to work), following the Industrial Revolution in Western culture⁵⁴⁵ it has largely been located in the domain of leisure.

Leisure-time is associated with both negative and positive freedoms: the freedom from institutional obligations and from the forced, chronologically regulated rhythms of factory and office, as well as the freedom to enter or generate new symbolic worlds (eg, of entertainment, sports, and games) and to play and transcend social structural limitations.⁵⁴⁶ Although the symbolic world in question may be governed by rules and routines even more stringent than those of the work situation (eg, think of sports), it is always optional because chosen voluntarily. Occurring in the sphere of leisure, the liminoid is discretionary – while liminal rituals are not: “One is all play and choice, an entertainment, the other is a matter of deep seriousness, even dread, it is demanding, compulsory”⁵⁴⁷. Carnival is a liminoid phenomenon *par excellence*: as in a liminal ritual, social structures are inverted, full of grotesqueness, eccentricity, hideousness, travesty, and sacrilege; beggars and fools become kings, while kings are reduced to laughing-stock. However, participation is non-obligatory.

What is more, liminoid elevation and degradation are often non-permanent. For instance, at the end of the carnival, (pre-liminoid) beggars and fools return to being (post-liminoid) beggars and fools again, while (pre-liminoid) kings return to being (post-liminoid) kings once more.

In contrast to liminal rituals of tribal society, the liminoid phenomena found in (post-)industrial civilisation are often highly subversive, “lampooning, burlesquing, or [more than] subtly putting down the central values of the basic, work-sphere society, or at least of selected sectors of that society”⁵⁴⁸.

4.3.1.3. Liminality, the Liminoid, and Potential for Change

Liminal and liminoid rituals have immense creative and developmental potential for both the participant and the community. With regard to the former, consider the mental impact of the otherworldly experience of liminality:

ordeals, myths, maskings, mumming, the presentation of sacred icons to novices, secret languages, food and behavioral taboos, create a weird domain in the seclusion camp in which ordinary regularities of kinship, the residential setting, tribal law and custom are set aside. The bizarre becomes the normal, and through the loosening of connections between elements customarily bound together in certain combinations, their scrambling and recombining in monstrous, fantastic, and unnatural shapes, the

⁵⁴⁴ Turner (1974: 72).

⁵⁴⁵ There is no such separation in tribal and agricultural societies (V. W. Turner, 1974).

⁵⁴⁶ Etymologically, *leisure* is derived from Old French *leisir*, which derives from the Latin *licere* (to be permitted).

⁵⁴⁷ V. W. Turner (1974).

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid*: 72.

novices are induced to think (and think hard) about cultural experiences they had hitherto taken for granted.⁵⁴⁹

One can only imagine the phenomenology of such an experience (perhaps by reference to reports of the psychic effects of LSD⁵⁵⁰ during both good and bad trips) and the ways in which it affects the initiand's perspective, perception, and information-processing. The element of mental growth is central to liminality.

Paradoxically (and, in a way, compensatorily), it is often part of liminality that candidates acquire a special power or freedom of the meek, feeble, weak, and humble. Existing outside of conventional social structures means existing outside the authority of those structures too (eg, rights are suspended, as are obligations):⁵⁵¹

The novices are outside society, and society has no power over them, [...] they are actually sacred and holy, and therefore untouchable and dangerous, just as gods would be. Thus, although taboos, as negative rites, erect a barrier between the novices and society, the society is helpless against the novices' undertakings.⁵⁵²

Their alienated god-/ghost-like external situatedness gives novices a very special perspective that is denied to those inside the established social structures. The same applies to participants in liminoid rituals. Stepping out of a framework allows them to see problems – along with novel solutions – that cannot be perceived from within.⁵⁵³ Frequently, distancing from a constellation is necessary before potential alternatives to it can be envisaged:

The normative structure [of the conventional, profane realm] represents the working equilibrium, the anti-structure [of the sacred] represents the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it. We might more correctly call this second system the *proto-structural* system because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. It is the source of new culture.⁵⁵⁴

Therefore, the sacred realm with its anti-structural phenomena could actually be seen as keeping the members of the conventional social system “in a more flexible state with respect to that system, and, therefore, with respect to possible change”⁵⁵⁵. In other words, as a nursery of cultural creativity, a “capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change”⁵⁵⁶, the liminal/liminoid realm has highly adaptive functions. Providing feedback to the conventional social domain, it can supply much-needed goals, aspirations, and structural models – and therefore also, of course, better practices for both current and future circumstances.⁵⁵⁷ Thus, putting the forces of disorder at the service of social order is a key aspect of the rituals I noted.⁵⁵⁸

In fact, it would seem that the anti-structure is a direct (causal) *response to* some disequilibrating circumstances within the social structure. Anti-structure is a reaction to structural crisis, and an attempt to compensate for it.⁵⁵⁹ One might even argue that anti-structure is an auxiliary function of the larger structure,⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid: 73.

⁵⁵⁰ Lysergic acid diethylamide, aka acid, is a hallucinogenic drug.

⁵⁵¹ V. W. Turner (1974).

⁵⁵² Van Gennep (1960: 114).

⁵⁵³ One is tempted to mention here that “[n]o problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it” (Weiner, 2008: 107) or one of the variations thereof, all attributed to Albert Einstein – and, as it turns out, all misquotations (Myers, 2010).

⁵⁵⁴ Sutton-Smith (1977: 25).

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ V. W. Turner (1974).

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ V. W. Turner (1969).

⁵⁵⁹ Returning to the previous example, the Ndembu ritual is a response to the death of the previous chief and the need for new representation and leadership.

⁵⁶⁰ Sutton-Smith (1977).

though we should be careful with such an instrumental interpretation because it marginalises both the significance and the revolutionary potential of anti-structure. I will return to this point below.

As liminal and liminoid rituals have immense creative and developmental potential for the participants, and – through him or her – for the entire community, the sacred is whence the seeds of reform and revolution originate. Yet, we must be weary of an overly romanticised, uncritical view of liminality and its potential for change. Moral ideas and concepts like basic human rights (along with their codifications in the form of, eg, law) too are part of ordinary social structure. Thus, the anti-structural potential of the liminal/liminoid can easily be directed toward undermining components of the social order that are widely considered normatively sound (even among the discontent). The dangers are obvious.

Insofar as an anti-structural phenomenon lies truly outside ordinary social structures (which is the case for the liminal, not the liminoid) and established structures are not re-asserted during the phase of re-aggregation, the moral dangers to both the ritual subjects and those with whom they interact are especially pertinent. One such scenario we find where the short-term liminal of basic military training feeds directly into the protracted liminal of warfare. Another such scenario may be where the liminal of political activity feeds into the lengthy liminal of revolutionary upheaval. Regarding the former, we *know* that the consequences are morally and socially devastating; the atrocities committed during past wars are well-documented. Regarding the latter, we can *imagine* similarly ruinous consequences (because revolutionary change by definition represents radical change directed against established social structures).

4.3.1.4. Communitas

Assuming the ritual in question involves multiple transitional subjects, the liminal fellowship that characterises the relationship between them is called *communitas*. The way in which it differs from the ordinary, stratified social structure of the community corresponds directly to the aforementioned differences between liminal anti-structure and ordinary social structure. As liminal subjects are reduced to social nothingness, the hierarchical differences between them disappear and their relationship becomes characterised by equality. In *communitas*, individuals are not segmented according to roles and status but confront one another as the socially marginalised beings to which they have all been relegated. Recognising that they are “just ordinary people after all, not the anxious prestige-seeking holders of jobs and positions they often seem to be”, their bonds are “undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, spontaneous, concrete, and unmediated”.⁵⁶¹ In principle (or ideally⁵⁶²), the felt bonds of *communitas* extend to humanity as a whole, although it can also be woefully prostituted to produce prejudice against an ‘enemy’.⁵⁶³

The characteristics of *communitas* show it to be beyond strict definition, with almost endless variations. *Communitas* may be best conveyed properly through stories and examples.⁵⁶⁴ One such example is owed to the ritual of basic military training: becoming visibly homogenous, submitting to the authority of the ritual authorities, experiencing the same pains, deprivations, and humiliations, the social hierarchies between recruits disappear and a unit of transitional personae emerges whose shared liminal experience welds them together in comradeship.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶¹ Turner (2012).

⁵⁶² V. W. Turner (1969).

⁵⁶³ Turner (2012). For example, consider the liminality of warfare.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ “Though many men never have a friend, and even the most fortunate of us can have few, comradeship is fortunately within reach of the vast majority. Suffering and danger cannot create friendship, but they make all the difference in comradeship” (Gray, 1959: 89). It transcends even racial differences. For example, in 1884 the Grand Army of the Republic (a fraternal organisation composed of

Comradeship and loss of identity go hand in hand – as does the willingness to sacrifice one’s life for the others (not least because at the height of liminality the maximally marginalised individual has much less left to lose): “In *communitas* there is a loss of ego. One’s pride in oneself becomes irrelevant. In the group, all are in unity, seamless unity”⁵⁶⁶. That comradeship reaches its peak in actual battle⁵⁶⁷ is not surprising, because that is where individual marginalisation is at its greatest and social structures are at their most removed. That comradeship usually fades as soon as the individuals leave the shared liminal realm (ie, military training or service)⁵⁶⁸ is also not surprising, because the nature of human relationships cannot remain the same once established social structures reassert themselves. At that point, “the experience of *communitas* becomes the [mere] memory of *communitas*”⁵⁶⁹.

I will use the concept of *liminal community* a bit more broadly to include not only the initiands but also the proficient masters who instruct them in new practices. (The masters themselves are not transitional subjects, of course, so their experience of the process is entirely different.)

4.3.1.5. Institutionalised Liminality

Sustaining *communitas* is difficult because keeping the unstructured realm and its creative potential alive by prolonging the spontaneous and organising that which is chaos (and therefore inherently opposed to organisation) is both conceptually and practically contradictory. On the one hand, institutionalisation is considerably easier for liminoid phenomena (which exist within neutral spaces or privileged areas within conventional society) than for liminal ones (which exist outside of social structure altogether). On the other hand, liminal rituals are usually not subversive with regard to established social structures while liminoid ones often are, so we might assume that an existing structure is more motivated to sustain the latter – though still with a great amount of precaution: “from the perspectival viewpoint of those concerned with the maintenance of ‘structure,’ all sustained manifestations of [anti-structure] must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions”⁵⁷⁰.

Certain conditions facilitate such sustained manifestation though. If the conventional social structure is itself heterogeneous, with various segments standing in antagonistic relationships toward each other (which, in Western societies⁵⁷¹, is certainly the case), room is left for other subversive elements; or if the structure is conscious of its own defects or weaknesses (eg, its rigidity), it may be motivated to promote social innovation for the sake of becoming stronger and thereby securing the flourishing of its members in the long run.

4.3.2. **Liminal Non-Consumerist Communities and Immersion**

For the purpose of my work, I do not explicitly distinguish between the liminal and the liminoid. Rather, I treat liminality as a concept that admits of degrees. Accordingly, I consider something like military training a liminal phenomenon and the collective of military recruits a liminal community.

veterans who served in the American Civil War for the Northern/Federal forces) was described as “the only association this side of Heaven, where black men and white men mingle on a foot of equality” (Gannon, 2011: 15).

⁵⁶⁶ Turner (2012).

⁵⁶⁷ Gray (1959).

⁵⁶⁸ Gray (1959), Ahlbäck (2014).

⁵⁶⁹ V. W. Turner (1974: 78).

⁵⁷⁰ V. W. Turner (1969: 109).

⁵⁷¹ In contrast to tribal society.

Given my accounts of *liminality* and *communitas*, it may already be clear what my proposals are. Firstly, given the turbulence to which all current political communities are subject (see chapter 1), liminal communities are worth promoting in just about any collective to prepare for the variability of future conditions.

Secondly, HDCs have a special interest in promoting liminal communities because their citizens are subject to radically lower future resource supplies, particularly once fair resource allocations as per PJ are enforced. It requires most of us to radically change our behaviour by adopting practices that are radically different from current ones. However, the members of a political community will be able to do so only if they actually have access to such practices, which becomes much more likely if it previously nurtured a multitude of liminal (sub-) communities that served the function of either practice incubator or practice preserver.

With regard to the former, I already touched upon the innovative potential of liminal communities. For example, freegans represent such a community.⁵⁷² While many of their practices are actually very old (eg, *hitch-hiking*, *train-hopping*, *gleaning*, and *bartering*), at least some of them are rather new (eg, *skipping*, aka dumpstering or dumpster diving, and *guerrilla gardening*). But perhaps more importantly, their combination and adjusted application in a modern urban environment (surrounded by citizens who subscribe to mainstream consumerism) is novel. With regard to the latter, communities like the Amish represent liminal *communitas* too because they exist very much in separation from mainstream North American culture and thereby protect themselves from being transformed or absorbed by it. In fact, they go to some length to distance themselves from American consumerism, which is why old practices like *travelling on horse-drawn buggies*, *home-growing food*, and *home-making clothes* have survived there. Amish culture represents a repository of practices that used to represent widely-performed activity patterns in conditions when communities had access to far fewer resources.⁵⁷³ We may be forced to widely readopt such practices again in the future, which is why their preservation (in the form of promoting the existence of liminal communities) is of great importance.

Thirdly, not only do liminal practice portfolios represent repertoires of rare and valuable activity patterns, but liminal communities themselves represent ideal conditions for individual practice acquisition. I have already argued that behavioural change requires novices to be subject to long-term immersion among the proficient and in settings that prevent cuing of old activity patterns. When it comes to changes of consumption practices, being immersed among practitioners whose entire portfolio consists of an alternative practice net-/patchwork is especially important. Liminal communities like freegans and the Amish represent perfect immersion venues because they meet all these requirements. The characteristics of liminal ceremonies/rituals are ideally suited for behavioural change:

- 1) During the preliminal rite of separation, the subject becomes detached and removed in terms of geographical and social locations. She is stripped of ordinary name, rank, and clothes, because they serve no useful function in her new surroundings.
- 2) During the liminal rite of transition, the initiand's former self is destroyed because her previous understanding (both theoretical and practical) of what *human flourishing* means, what matters in life, and how one ought to act are no longer adaptive either. Communities like freegans and the Amish have very different values, and these are communicated throughout the process of practical retraining because otherwise their activities are unlikely to make much sense. Participating in the daily activities of regular members of such a liminal community throughout several months, the

⁵⁷² For an ethnographic study of freeganism, see Moré (2011).

⁵⁷³ The same may apply to the Gloriavale Christian Community based at Haupiri, New Zealand. The practices of this community have been subject to very limited academic research though.

initiated grows, or is grown, into a very different practitioner. Becoming properly habitualised, she evolves from neophyte to competent performer.

- 3) During postliminal rites of incorporation, the subject returns from the liminal community and reintegrates herself into larger society by acquiring a new permanent social position. However, just as addicts must prevent the breakdown of their newly acquired practices by avoiding the milieu associated with substance abuse, post-consumerist individuals too must avoid places, people, and things associated with their previous consumerist life. Plausibly, it is best for them to build new (quasi-liminal) sub-communities with others like themselves, people who have undergone liminal transformation. That way, they protect themselves against a devolution of their new practice portfolio and reabsorption into mainstream culture, at the same time growing a counterculture that, as its visibility increases correspondingly, has a much greater chance to communicate an alternative interpretation of *human flourishing* and demonstrate its practical viability to society at large. Upon stabilisation, such a community can in fact take in pre-liminal consumers and directly perform the entire liminal cycle itself by immersing them, thereby growing and extending the reach of alternative practices and praxes.⁵⁷⁴ Ordinary society has reason to support such developments, because it represents a fostering of the quasi-liminal.

As previously noted, liminal subjects exist outside the structures of society. Otherwise, the liminal community could not persist and fulfil its creative function. Ordinary community must support such freedom to do things differently, even if it means that liminal subjects are given license to transgress laws. For example, freegan practices are frequently performed in the grey area of quasi-illegality: dumpster-diving, the salvaging of ex-commodities from commercial, residential, industrial, and construction trash bins almost always involves trespassing and, perhaps more importantly, technically qualifies as theft (because disposed items remain the property of the disposer). To allow and encourage freegan practices to flourish, communities must be prepared to resist enforcement of the laws in question – just as the US did when it granted the Amish permission to refuse the use of public schools and pursue their own education practices (see Introduction).

4.4. Final Comments

There is much more that could, and needs, to be said regarding each part of this chapter. For example, the first section revolves around the idea that each individual has access to the resources needed to live a human life by becoming and remaining a citizen. Given our planet's population size and Earth's resource pool, some might caution that that may not actually be possible because the latter is simply not large enough (now or at some point in the future). That view is perfectly understandable, but it can be addressed rather easily – though not uncontroversially. According to PJ, fairness requires that individuals meet their obligations with regard to the resource claims of other people. Part of that obligation, I would argue, entails that individuals not overstay their welcome on this planet. Assume that, for whatever freak reason, my genetic constitution causes me to age at one tenth the rate as everyone else, resulting in a corresponding life expectancy of roughly 820 years. Securing citizenship throughout my life would require about ten times the total resources needed by the 'normal' average Westerner. If

⁵⁷⁴ As such, the obligation of the Amish to take in outsiders for the sake of practical transformation would be limited. We could argue that once a viable non-Amish community (where Amish practices can be reliably acquired) has been established, the Amish have met their obligations under the principle of justice PJ.

resources were critically scarce, my existence as a citizen would prevent at least nine others from living as citizens, which seems rather obviously unfair. Respect for their resource claims entails that I not insist on a lifespan that is longer than that of others, and that point can be generalised: if Earth's resource pool is too small to permit all members of the global population to live as human beings, resource access must be withheld from the most long-lived until the population has shrunk to the required degree. This may sound unduly harsh, but I do not think that it is. Those who already had a long life worth living have an obligation to enable others to do the same.

With regard to the portfolio management of a political community, the approach of the Amish cannot be overemphasised because it is both active and explicit. Firstly, members of the *Gmay* agree to obey the *Ordnung* at the time of their baptism. They clearly understand what is, and is not, recognised by the community as a need-satisfier (especially practices, of course), and that they will be subject to disciplinary measures, possibly even excommunication, if they fail to abide by the norms of their community. Secondly, controversial issues – eg, the use of cell phones, computers, fancy furniture, or immodest dress – frequently receive attention at communal meetings. If the community is unclear about whether a new practice aligns with its interpretation of *human flourishing*, that practice may be provisionally permitted to study its effects. Recognising how variedly and unexpectedly the use of certain technologies and commodities can affect a collective, the default position of the Amish is not blind optimism (as we tend to find it in mainstream Western culture) but rather precaution. For that reason, current and potential future practices are continuously discussed (frequently taking into account information from other Amish communities), sometimes contentiously. Members of each congregation explicitly affirm their district's *Ordnung* twice a year, before spring and fall communion services. In that way, the Amish are actually far more politically active than the average HDC member (even though they strictly limit their political participation to matters internal to the Amish political community).

A potential reason against immersion in a liminal community like that of the Amish, at least for a secular individual, is that their interpretation of *human flourishing* is unacceptably religious. However, that point should not be overemphasised. Firstly, I noted that liminality comes in degrees, so liminal transition comes in degrees also. In the absence of a plausible argument to the opposite, I remain convinced that a community that adopts the Amish practice portfolio (set aside explicitly religious activities like praying and worshipping, of course) need not also adopt a religiously coloured interpretation of *flourishing*. I pointed out that the Amish greatly value social capital in the form of relations within their immediate social network (the *Gmay* or church district). They do so at least partially based on their reading of the Bible, but that second element has no necessary links to the first. We can value the same capital for purely non-religious reasons, and that is enough to make the adoption of Amish practices both possible and reasonable. Secondly, the Amish are merely one liminal community. Non-religious collectives like that of the freegans offer similar opportunities for portfolio transformation – and for city dwellers who wish to stay in an urban environment following their liminal transition, they might actually represent a preferable community for immersion altogether (because Amish practices are much more adaptive in the context of rural life). Let me emphasise the last point: liminal transformation should occur in a structural context that is either not too unlike that of the individual's extra-liminal milieu or that can be recreated by her upon return to the extra-liminal world. Otherwise, the risk of possessing a maladaptive practice portfolio is considerable.

Finally, as noted by one of my doctoral examiners, the concept of *liminality* has some connections to what John Stuart Mill calls 'experiments in living'. In *On Liberty*, he argues that agents should not be prevented from living their lives in whichever ways they see fit, at least if their actions do not harm others (as per his celebrated Harm Principle). One reason is that preventing people from trialling different activities and life models hampers

the human race because it stands in the way of creativity, in two related ways. Firstly, it prevents inventive people from breaking away from social conventions and discovering/developing improved practices: “these few are the salt of the earth; without them, human life would become a stagnant pool”⁵⁷⁵. Secondly, it prevents everyone else from being exposed to different life models and activity patterns, and thus from being given inspiration and other resources to engage in experiments of their own. These thoughts are perfectly compatible with the concept of *liminality*, and an exploration of connections to Mill’s work could be fruitful in various ways. At the very least, Mill’s sympathies could be utilised to promote the ideas I outlined in section 4.3 among contemporary liberals.

⁵⁷⁵ Mill (1864: 115).

5. The Ethics of Consumption

Morality is, at the very least, the effort to guide one's conduct by reason – that is, to do what there are the best reasons for doing – while giving equal weight to the interests of each individual affected by one's decision.

*James & Stuart Rachels*⁵⁷⁶

As the quote indicates, the view that ethics centrally revolves around decision-making is wide-spread among philosophers. For example, Hooker too argues that *decision procedure* (“How should agents make moral choices?”) is a key component of consequentialist ethical theory.⁵⁷⁷ In fact, it is with regard to this element that the two main rivals in that family of moral theories, act- and rule-consequentialism, essentially disagree. The former conveys the impression that on each performative occasion, the agent should decide what to do by calculating which act would produce the most good; the latter claims that normally, agents should decide what to do by applying rules the acceptance of which will produce the best consequences instead. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that both sides ignore the fact that many – and possibly most – of our daily actions are not actually preceded by any decision-making at all, and often for good reason. Automatic performance lets us use various scarce resources more efficiently, and as long as system complexity is low, such activity represents fittingly habitualised performance.

To live well, which is impossible without acting well, the individual needs to have a suitable individual practice portfolio. In other words, she needs to possess a portfolio of activity patterns (representing combinations of the three interconnected elements *doing*, *being*, and *having*) that enables her to flourish *qua* human in the long term to at least as high a degree as a set of communally recognised need-satisfiers that has been properly habitualised relative to the characteristics of the relevant system (including her own qualities and the complexity of the environment). Insofar as system complexity is low, her performance ought to be mechanised; insofar as it is high, it ought to be acuminated.

In this chapter, I focus on the implications of this proposal for our individual consumption. The first part of section 5.1 is dedicated to the management of the individual's practice portfolio. I will look at both the constitution of the portfolio as such and the characteristics of each of its components. Subsequently, I will argue that my practice-centred approach is better able to account for consumer responsibility than others, especially the action-centred one proposed in Schwartz's *Consuming Choices: Ethics in a Global Consumer Age*. In section 5.2, I focus on a particular consumption issue raised in chapter 1, namely object alienation. I use need and practice ethics to assess what changes we can make to alleviate our alienation from the objects that surround us and provide three overall arguments for doing so. In the final section (5.3), I use my conceptual apparatus once more to assess two particular practices, namely TV media and museum consumption. I argue that the former, in its current form, fails to engage consumers as full and excellent practice participants. The latter, on other hand, does not. Museum consumption entails critical interaction with exhibits and, being crucial to the cultural self-understanding of a collective, is tightly integrated with the political activity of the citizenry.

⁵⁷⁶ Rachels & Rachels (2012: 13).

⁵⁷⁷ Hooker (2013, 2015).

5.1. Practice-Centred Ethics

In chapter 4, we already considered individual obligations from a political perspective. There, our focus was on the role of political and practice citizenship with regard to managing the practice portfolio of the political community as well as the characteristics of such practices (including roles, activity patterns, and institutions). In this section, I consider obligations of a different kind because here our focus is upon both the management of the practice portfolio of the individual and the actual enactment of these practices.

5.1.1. Individual Practice Portfolio Management

To flourish, a human individual needs to have an appropriate portfolio of individual practices (and praxes). I should now say more about what that means: an appropriate portfolio consists of individual behaviour patterns that allow its holder to flourish at least as much in the long run as she would be able to (in the relevant context, including her fair resource allocation) if her portfolio were wholly constituted by communally recognised practices. I previously argued that we generally acquire our practices through immersion among practitioners – and given that the practice portfolio of a political community is designed to enable its members to flourish, it is reasonable to expect no more than that the individual adopt a suitable set of behaviour patterns recognised within her current political collective.

This does not entail that her individual portfolio is *restricted* to the patterns that constitute her community's practice portfolio though, because that would stand in the way of increased flourishing. Firstly, individuals frequently belong to multiple political collectives – not necessarily at the same time, but certainly throughout their lives. For instance, we leave home to work in foreign countries or move abroad because that is where we met our partner. Whenever we do so, we take our current individual practice portfolio with us, of course. Now, compare two possible worlds, W1 and W2, and two degrees of flourishing, $D1 > D2$. Both worlds are alike in that some of migrant PRO's activity patterns do not correspond to her new political community's practice portfolio. In W1, PRO retains these patterns and flourishes to degree D1. In W2, she discards these patterns and, where possible, replaces them with recognised alternatives; she flourishes to degree D2. Given that we aim toward promoting individual flourishing as much as possible, requiring full cultural assimilation would be objectionable. (That said, only a political community's recognised need-satisfiers represent legitimate grounds for claiming scarce resources. Thus, the community must grant only whatever quality and quantity of resources are required for such a satisfier.⁵⁷⁸)

Secondly, social progress too requires the liberal formulation. For instance, in the scenario just mentioned, PRO may pass his old practices to those closest to him (eg, his children), and from there they slowly start to spread through the collective because they turn out to be generally adaptive. Clearly, such a possibility should be welcomed.⁵⁷⁹ What is more, recall that the practices of liminal communities too are not culturally recognised by

⁵⁷⁸ At least in the long term. It may be unreasonable to expect that newcomers are sufficiently proficient in the performance of practices they have never encountered before, so the community might have a duty to make temporary allowances with regard to providing the resources claimed by new immigrants.

⁵⁷⁹ If PRO wishes to make claims on the basis of his old practices in the long term, political activity directed toward their communal recognition as legitimate need-satisfiers is required. Such activity too contributes to the spread of practices, especially upon their recognition.

regular political communities (due to how *liminality* is conceptualised). If we wish to use the former as social incubators or preservers, communities must actually allow their practices to find their way into the latter.⁵⁸⁰

With regard to the individual's responsibility for actually managing her portfolio, I will consider two elements. Firstly, her overall portfolio needs to incorporate those practices that enable her to flourish in the right way and to the proper degree, corresponding to her end (as a representation of abstract human flourishing in general and communally legitimate ways of flourishing more specifically). Secondly, each individual practice needs to incorporate suitable doings, havings, and beings, such that the performer's practice enactments contribute to her overall flourishing. I address each of these points in the following subsections.

5.1.1.1. Practice Portfolio of the Individual

As I previously argued, human beings acquire many of their practices without intention. For example, we learn how to behave with regard to many aspects of our existence during childhood, including practices related to both food acquisition and food preparation. Assume that children in group R ('rural') learn how fruit and vegetables are grown in the family garden (and the many activities involved in doing so, including their timelines); they also learn that eggs and meat come from chicken (and what is practically required to look after the animals day after day). Children in group U ('urban') learn how food is purchased at the supermarket. R-children learn how to process freshly harvested garden produce (eg, how to wash, peel, and pickle vegetables), and how to butcher animals (eg, how to kill chicken and drain the blood; scald and pluck the carcass; and remove feet, neck, and inner organs). B-children learn how to open supermarket packages. The practices acquired by these two groups are radically different, and until they qualify as agents (by meeting enough of the criteria or satisfying them to a minimum degree) members of R and U cannot actually be expected to question the makeup of their portfolios.

However, upon meeting agency conditions, that expectation changes. 'Making informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it' (chapter 3) entails performing what I call *portfolio audits*.⁵⁸¹ Many daily activity patterns are so deeply ingrained, and so intricately connected to each other, that the individual never stops to question whether any one of them, or the interconnected whole, ought to be performed by her. That unthinking automaticity can be very beneficial because it promotes efficiency (chapter 2). However, it does of course not guarantee it, which is precisely why an agent has the obligation to occasionally step out of her ordinary practice performance and take a birds-eye view to consider whether, and to what degree, the current set of her practices actually a) promotes her flourishing as interpreted within her political community in general and as more specifically chosen within those constraints by herself, b) corresponds to her capacities (ie, both her gifts and talents as well as the lack thereof), and c) tallies with her external circumstances (including elements of her natural and man-made environments).⁵⁸²

For example, imagine someone who decided six months ago that she should improve her physical fitness and live more frugally. For these reasons, our protagonist took out a gym membership and formed the intention to spend less money. If PRO were to take a portfolio audit today, she would realise that her practices do not actually

⁵⁸⁰ The latter are subject to the same requirements outlined in the previous chapter, of course: activity patterns/roles/institutions are suitable only if members of the practice community are able to flourish in the long term with regard to the particular needs that the practice is meant to address without non-consensually compromising the ability of the members of other practices/communities to do the same.

⁵⁸¹ This terminology is inspired by Smith (2016) who, writing from a distinctly religious perspective, uses 'liturgical audit' instead. The latter represents a macro version of the Daily Examen, a spiritual ritual inherited from Saint Ignatius of Loyola. The Examen is an exercise in prayerful reflection on the events of the day to detect God's presence and discern His directions with regard to tomorrow.

⁵⁸² We reencounter here the elements of the need formula in chapter 3: what the individual requires depends on her circumstances and the relevant end.

reflect her goals because neither does she visit the gym nor have her spending habits changed. The audit should also take into account recent changes in PRO's man-made environment: let us assume that three months ago a newly developed city-wide network of cycling paths opened. Upon reflection, our protagonist ought to realise that the practice of *travelling by bicycle* (which, given the communal creation of the network, appears to represent a culturally legitimate need-satisfier) is suitable to help her meet both of the objectives just mentioned: not only does the practice of *travelling by bicycle* reliably improve physical fitness, but it also allows the cancellation of gym memberships (which contributes to frugality).

Immersion among a collective of cyclists vastly increases the likelihood of PRO's portfolio transformation. Not only does she need competent practitioners to teach her how to cycle to begin with (as well as teach her how to store and maintain the bicycle, use weather forecasts, dress properly, plan grocery runs, *et cetera*), but the invitations and encouragements that result from joining a group of cyclists (along with typical conversations about newly discovered scenic routes, latest developments in cycling gear, and other topics) serve to make *travelling by bicycle* a fixed and frequent component of her activity schedule.

Insofar as immersion is not possible, the adoption of new practices – or rather the elimination of existing practices for the purpose of replacement with new ones – can be made more likely through what I call *Ulyssian blocking*. The concept is inspired by a famous episode from Homer's epic poem, the *Odyssey*. Before skirting the island of the sirens, whose enchanting song causes passing sailors to steer toward the rocks and sink, Odysseus ordered his men to tie him to the mast and not free him until they were out of earshot (lest he would jump overboard and drown himself). When he heard the Siren's honeyed song, Odysseus ordered the sailors (whose ears were plugged with beeswax) to untie him, but they bound him tighter instead.⁵⁸³ Putting himself into a position where the action he would likely perform became impossible for him to carry out represents a Ulyssian blocker.⁵⁸⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, I characterise it a bit more broadly: to put someone (ie, yourself or another) in a position where the action they will likely perform becomes impossible or very costly for them to carry out.

Returning to my previous example, PRO can ascertain the performance of frequent cycling behaviour by making the enactments of her current mobility practice(s) impossible or very costly for herself. For most people, it would imply making one's motor vehicle inaccessible: if PRO habitually drives her car to work, she ought to either sell her vehicle or, less radically, relocate it for several months (until her new practice has taken hold). Additionally, announcing throughout her social network that she is planning to become a cyclist makes deviations from her aspiration socially costly (because failure invites ridicule and thus facilitates shame).⁵⁸⁵ In that sense, immersion in a community or practitioners (eg, liminal community) always incorporates an element of Ulyssian blocking in itself, because protracted failure to adhere to the community's norms and activity patterns results in disapproval of various kinds and severities. For example, an individual's failure to adhere to the *Ordnung* of the Amish begins with personal admonitions, is followed by open reprimands in front of the entire congregation, and ends in shunning (German: *Meidung*; the exclusion of a community member from interaction with others in the hope of bringing her back into the fold).⁵⁸⁶

How often individuals ought to take portfolio audits depends on various factors. The more variable her community's interpretation of human flourishing, the state of her own (in)capacities, and her external

⁵⁸³ Homer (1996: bk 12).

⁵⁸⁴ I prefer the Latin version of 'Odysseus' on purely aesthetic grounds.

⁵⁸⁵ At the same time, it makes success all the more rewarding (due to social acknowledgment).

⁵⁸⁶ If these measures are unsuccessful (and the individual in question made a baptismal pledge), she is excommunicated,

circumstances, the greater the risk that the individual's current portfolio is no longer optimal (*ceteris paribus*). At the very least, such stock-taking ought to occur every couple of months. However, if, as I have argued in chapter 1, our environmental conditions represents accelerating teeming turbulence (and possibly vortex), it should occur more frequently. The process ties rather naturally into the activities that represent citizenship, because public deliberations about communal flourishing and the legitimacy of practices are ideal prompts for private deliberations about one's own flourishing and practices. Therefore, we might even say that political participation creates windows of opportunity for personal change because it facilitates our taking the previously mentioned birds-eye view upon our own individual behaviour patterns.

Similarly, significant changes in individual circumstances (eg, in terms of environment) create windows of opportunity for personal change too. For example, the start of a new job or the move to a different city entail significant changes in context, such that mechanised activity with regard to various practices is no longer possible. In these circumstances, mental faculties have to be dedicated to previously unthinking performances, which provides openings for considering, and subsequently making, changes to one's practice portfolio. Possibly though, this point applies even more to making changes *within* an individual practice, which provides an ideal segue to the next subsection.

5.1.1.2. Individual Practice Characteristics

While portfolio audits are directed toward examining the composition of the individual's practice set, *practice audits* are directed toward examining the constitution of each practice in terms of doings, havings, and beings. For example, the aspiring pianist needs to have access to suitable equipment (which does not entail that she needs to personally own a piano, of course⁵⁸⁷). As the aspiring player intends to develop her skills, she needs to engage in various activities. For instance, she has to practice instrument-play, note-reading, and arguably even song-writing – and the achievement of mastery requires her to perform these activities with the right frequency, length, and intensity. What is more, it requires her to perform these activities in the right habitualisation mode. Whether these conditions are met (and, if not, what adjustments are necessary) are insights gained from practice audits.

With regard to many practices, individuals have a choice of roles. For example, *soccer-play* incorporates the activities of goalkeepers, full-backs, midfielders, forwards, and strikers. It also requires referees. Due to both their natural talents and their interests, participants in the practice are frequently more suitable for some roles than others. However, the achievement of full self-understanding (that is part of attaining agency) often takes time, and the realisation which role fits the practitioner best occurs with corresponding delays. In addition, practitioners fully understand such roles usually only after they have been members of the relevant practice community for quite a while. In all these cases, practice audits represent opportunities for adjustments in practice performance.

As I argued in chapter 2, proper habitualisation regarding an activity entails the right match between system complexity and performance automaticity. For example, pianists who 'sleep-play' through their performance fail to gain access to the goods internal to the practice, partially because they fail to push for greater excellence. So if the individual participates in *piano play* for the purpose of becoming a virtuoso, a practice audit ought to reveal to a mechanical performer that her *modus operandi* stands in the way of her flourishing. If she is actually bored with the practice (or cannot invest sufficient mental energy for other reasons), a practice audit can bring out that it may be time for a portfolio audit.

⁵⁸⁷ For example, the *Street Pianos* initiative has installed more than 1,900 street pianos on streets as well as in public parks, markets and train stations in over 60 cities worldwide, and these instruments are available for everyone to enjoy (www.streetpianos.com).

A key purpose of practice audits, especially in the context of consumption activity as we ordinarily understand that term, is the detection of hidden complexity and the modification of her activity such that it actually corresponds to concealed complexity (instead of merely that which is apparent). As I outlined in chapter 1, much of contemporary Western consumption can be characterised as detached because even though we utilise commodities with extensive pre- and post-consumption histories (that causally and morally link our local flourishing with the well-being of numerous producing parties upstream and many waste-removing, -managing, and -disposing parties downstream), our deliberations prior to acquiring and discarding commodities takes barely any of them into account.

Pre-Consumption History

With regard to upstream events, a key reason for that failure is that the entities with the largest stakes in the perpetuation of consumerism, especially corporate commodity manufacturers and traders, have an interest in shielding consumers from the information mentioned above. Plausibly, they have two main reasons.

Firstly, the rich array of relations between the consumer and numerous up- and downstream entities entails that her consumption activity is actually highly complex, and the globalisation of economic relations increases that complexity further. Many of the aforementioned entities (especially workers and the members of their local communities) are both geographically and culturally remote, which makes the comprehension of their particular modes of individual flourishing, their practices, and the way in which the choices of Western consumers affect their need-satisfaction considerably more difficult. Additionally, many pre- and post-consumption activities are temporally remote from the consumer, which compounds the problem. Yet, complexity makes for non-automatic, and thus less efficient, consumption activity, which is not in the interest of entities that profit from mass-consumption. Consumers who thoughtlessly keep purchasing commodities, only to discard them quickly with equal thoughtlessness, tend to allow for much greater sales volumes.

Secondly, a full understanding of the information mentioned above would entail comprehension of the actual ethical cost of global consumerism, be it in terms of workers' rights violations, environmental degradation, cruelty to animals, or other factors. The reason why many corporations, North American and European alike, have been moving their business activities to developing countries is lower cost due to significantly cheaper labour, lack of environmental regulation, lower taxation, *et cetera*. The international relocation of production facilities is a key precondition for continuously thriving mass consumption in the West because low cost permits low pricing (and correspondingly higher sales volumes). Yet, high-volume sales remain possible only if consumers remain unaware of the ethical cost, or at least unreflective.

Therefore, corporate entities involved in global commodity production and trade frequently fail to support – or worse, even hinder – transparency efforts. Business publications openly admit that “Companies constantly hide the truth to achieve their aims”, and they actually defend that behaviour: “It’s a very constructive thing to do if it means that you’re increasing the value of that organisation”.⁵⁸⁸ What is more, empirical research findings show that voluntary reporting of business practices is unlikely to occur if it affects future corporate earnings and potential cash flows.⁵⁸⁹ Relevantly, though, corporations that have reporting obligations in Western countries actually have an entirely different means to avoid incrimination: by outsourcing the ethically most problematic

⁵⁸⁸ Floyd (2018).

⁵⁸⁹ Eg. Walden & Schwartz (1997).

operations to entities that become independent suppliers, distance is generated (which can be further increased by creating several layers of subcontractors).⁵⁹⁰

In effect, the only elements of upstream commodity transmutation chains to which consumers have direct exposure are the distributors from which they purchase their goods and services, and these interactions are carefully designed and orchestrated. For example, modern supermarkets are clean and safe environments that shield purchasers from virtually all parts of the histories of their commodities – unless they favour the image of a product. The same applies to the virtual environments of online distributors (eg, Amazon.com). Clean shelves with flawless, aesthetically pleasing packages and functionally well-designed commodities is all that consumers see, which makes it possible for them to acquire their need-satisfiers in a context that is minimally complex.

Post-Consumption History

The same applies with regard to downstream events: consumer awareness is typically limited to information about whatever institutionalised waste collecting entity (usually a waste management company) removes the discards of her activity. However, even contact to the latter tends to be strictly distant and formal, lacking both personal interaction and detailed information exchange. As refuse management – insofar as our pre-consumerist ancestors had to manage much refuse, especially non-excrement, to begin with – moved almost entirely from the sphere of individual handling to that of large-scale institutional processing (eg, sanitary sewer operations and sewage treatment, municipal curb-side collection, landfill disposal and incineration), interaction with one's trash became minimal. Despite the continuing push to regard recyclables as a resource, Western culture retains strong associations between waste on the one hand and dirt, impurity, pollution, and danger on the other – the very antithesis of good functioning and positive order.⁵⁹¹ Contemporary perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural patterns reflect these associations: once an article has transitioned to ex-commodity-hood, consumer exposure to it abruptly ends, such that confidence in the order and functioning at all levels of the organisational environment – micro, meso, and macro (eg, individual household, the city, and the nation) – is maintained or restored. For that to be the case, faeces must tracelessly flush down the sanitation facilities after defecation and household garbage must disappear weekly without remainder. Sewer networks must be hidden below the surface of our cities, eliminating any risk of smell or sight. Wastewater treatment facilities, landfills, and incinerators must be located at the very margins of society, out of reach of consumer perception. And the human handlers of that waste must be fittingly invisible labourers, their 'not-there-ness' resulting from both the hidden nature of the infrastructure along which our waste is being removed and processed plus the status imposed by a cultural order that tunes out the existence of waste along with the existence of anything and anyone connected to it.⁵⁹²

The latter, it strikes me, renders waste handlers somewhat like the untouchables found in various caste societies, including the Burakumin of Japan (direct descendants of the Eta-Hinin⁵⁹³) and the Dalits of India, both members of the lowest social stratum whose occupations frequently revolved around death (eg, undertaking and animal slaughter) and the handling of impure materials (eg, meat, leather, and excrement).⁵⁹⁴ Although these untouchables serve functions that are crucial for the good functioning of a collective, their mere physical presence

⁵⁹⁰ See Guers et al (2014) for motivations that drive outsourcing and subcontracting.

⁵⁹¹ Douglas (1966).

⁵⁹² Nagle (2013).

⁵⁹³ *Eta* = abundant defilement, *Hinin* = nonhuman (Shimahara, 1984).

⁵⁹⁴ Shimahara (1984) and Lochtefeld (2001: 720) respectively.

is considered to pollute ‘the pure’.⁵⁹⁵ Thus, exposure to them is socially taboo for members of the higher castes. To avoid contamination, contact is minimal at best – and the same arguably applies to the relationship between Western consumers and the handlers of their waste. Consequently, consumers have virtually no understanding of what happens to what previously represented their commodities, which makes it impossible to take that information into account during their deliberations.

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Early behavioural models represented the decision-making of consumers by analogy with the information-processing activities of computers. Consumers were credited “with the capacity to receive and handle considerable quantities of information and undertake extensive pre-purchase searches and evaluations”⁵⁹⁶, and their purchases were theorised to be determined by such deliberative processes.⁵⁹⁷ However, subsequent empirical research found otherwise. To begin with, much of our regular shopping activity does not entail the level of involvement (generally measured as strength of attitude toward a product, product category, or brand) required for complex procedures of comparative evaluation. “[I]t is painfully obvious”, write Kassarian & Kassarian, that “subjects just do not care much about products; they are unimportant to them. Although issues such as racial equality, wars, and the draft may stir them up, products do not”⁵⁹⁸. Thus, the purchase of most commodities falls into the category of what marketers call *inertia*: consumers collect products or brands they consider satisfactory without any decision-making efforts whatsoever. Insofar as they do make such an effort, the purchase of a low-involvement product is preceded by minimal information processing that simply occurs in the store and on the basis of immediate shelf-comparisons.⁵⁹⁹

Accordingly, by far the most objects are acquired as a matter of routine, and operant conditioning explains such consumer behaviour much more parsimoniously: “Much as whales and dolphins can be trained to jump through hoops of flame, consumers have been trained to smoke cigarettes, cringe in fear of ‘ring around the collar,’ and prefer Budweiser beer to other brands”⁶⁰⁰. Much of that conditioning occurs through incessant and repetitive TV advertising. However, not only are agents very good at blocking out these messages (rendering them into mere background noise), but even if individuals dedicate their attention to TV content, “[t]he learning that results from watching televised commercials is, like the learning of things that are nonsensical or unimportant, *uninvolving*”⁶⁰¹.

The consumption of food represents quite intimate daily happenings, not least because – unlike the objects that remain outside the skin barrier (say, clothes, furniture, and vehicles) – the substances we ingest not only enter into our organisms but literally become the flesh and bones from which we are made: *Der Mensch ist, was er isst*⁶⁰². As such, food acquisition, one might expect, is subject to careful deliberation. Yet, empirical research in the US has shown that “the vast majority of consumers neither use nor comprehend nutrition information [on product

⁵⁹⁵ The stigma of untouchability in the cultures just mentioned continues to exist to date.

⁵⁹⁶ Foxall et al (1998: 28).

⁵⁹⁷ Howard (1983).

⁵⁹⁸ Kassarian & Kassarian (1979: 8).

⁵⁹⁹ Assael (1985), Assael et al (1985).

⁶⁰⁰ Kassarian & Kassarian (1979: 13).

⁶⁰¹ Foxall et al (1998: 30). Uninvolved learning implies failure to recall the relevant facts, which can be compensated for only through increased message repetition, to which TV consumers react with greater disengagement yet.

⁶⁰² Stated by Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach in 1850, German: man is what he eats (1989).

labels] in arriving at food purchase decisions”⁶⁰³ either. If agents fail to engage cognitively even when it comes to satisfying their own nutritional requirements, how can we expect that the cognitive operations typical for acuminated habituation occur with regard to the needs of others (ie, those engaged in upstream production and in downstream waste-related operations)? And indeed, researchers have been reporting that “very few of the consumers we studied had knowledge of the social components of the products they purchased, and our ethnographic work revealed that few were interested in investing in such information”⁶⁰⁴.

Given what we can characterise as manufactured non-complexity, it can hardly surprise that much of our consumption-related activity (eg, supermarket shopping) is performed in highly mechanised modes. In a bubble that shields us from both sides of commodity transmutation chains, unthinking performance is most adaptive for the individual in principle. What is more, the automaticity of this *modus operandi* is self-reinforcing because unthinking activity is inherently unsuitable to becoming aware of the existence of hidden complexity, and then to reveal it. That is precisely why we need the acuminated performance of practice audits. In the context of Western consumption, one of their main purposes is the revelation of the actual complexity of global manufacturing and trade systems on which Western consumerism relies (so that the consumer’s activity, especially in the context of commodity acquisition, ceases to be a series of mechanised performances).

Properly performed practice audits can only come to the conclusion that mechanised consumption and pre-consumption activity (especially commodity acquisition) are entirely inappropriate, given the true complexity indicated above. Realistically though, the typical Western consumer has no chance to understand the details of the activities and processes along commodity transmutation chains (and the parties involved in them) to a degree that comes even remotely close to what is required for properly informed consumer decision-making. Given 1) the lengths of these chains, the number of parties involved in them, and the various barriers to transparency indicated above, and 2) the number of commodities each of us typically consumes, becoming properly informed would be impossible even if we gave up our other life projects (eg, professional careers and family life) and shared information with those who are close to us.

This leaves us with two choices (and combinations thereof): the typical consumer either radically reduces the number of commodities she consumes, or she consumes goods and services that are part of radically less complex commodity transmutation chains. The good news is that the former automatically occurs as soon as members of HDCs reduce their resource claims to their fair allocations. If we assume that the average US American faces an ecological footprint reduction of 80% (see chapter 4), her consumption is likely to drop significantly. However, even that may not reduce the complexity to a manageable degree, which is why the latter is just as important. Consumers can reduce the true complexity to which their activity is subject by switching to different goods and services. Any reduction in distance (geographical, cultural, and temporal) decreases complexity, possibly to the point where mechanised performance becomes appropriate. For example, growing one’s own food reduces distance to an absolute minimum. But even relying on locally made commodities greatly reduces complexity because the consumer understands who the producers (as members of her immediate community) are and what their reputation is. Not only can she visit the production facilities and gain information in the most direct way, but her interactions with them rely on a shared understanding of *human flourishing* and on shared practice norms.

That is precisely what we find among the Amish: insofar as they do not grow and make their own good commodities, they almost exclusively rely on other Amish producers for the goods and services they require to meet

⁶⁰³ Jacoby et al (1977: 126).

⁶⁰⁴ Devinney et al (2010: 45).

their needs (eg, buggies, clothes, and education services). Therefore, they are subject to radically less complexity than the average Western consumer.

Two issues that may already have come to mind are these: 1) If the political community (constituted by citizens) is responsible for determining what does, and does not, count as legitimate ways of flourishing, contemporary Western consumerism could plausibly not be part of a communal practice portfolio, especially given PJ and its fair resource allocation. 2) In the examples above, it seems that consumption practices are very much manipulated by corporate entities that, as per chapter 4, do not qualify as legitimate practice makers. Thus, legitimate activity patterns within consumption practice(s) would not be subject to the issues outlined above.

The first claim is plausible. However, two points in response. Firstly, I am not engaged in purely ideal theory, which is why the ethics elements of my approach do not simply assume that the politics elements are properly implemented and fully operative. Thinking otherwise would be disastrously naïve and lazy. Assuming or demanding that issues like environmental degradation are addressed at the political level, individuals regularly refuse to take ethical responsibility. Yet, spectacular policy failures (both nationally and internationally) occur with alarming frequency, with the result that no responsibility is taken by anyone at all. For example, the international community has been trying to formulate and adopt international environmental agreements that will prevent catastrophic anthropogenic climate change since 1992's Rio Earth Summit. So far, little has been achieved, prompting the authors of the 2018 landmark report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to warn that urgent and unprecedented changes are needed now to keep average global temperature to a maximum of 1.5 °C. If these changes are not secured through political means, they can only result from adjustments in individual behaviour.

Secondly, I already indicated that communal and individual portfolio management are closely linked. For an agent to enact her role as citizen and competently participate in public deliberations about a subject, she actually has to comprehend it first. Without a detailed understanding of her own consumption activity, she can hardly assess whether, how, and to which degree the elements of contemporary consumerism qualify as legitimate need-satisfiers. Thus, she can hardly participate in the communal process required to show that consumerism, or at least part of it, is actually illegitimate.

The second claim is not quite as plausible. To begin with, points similar to the ones I made with regard to the first apply here too. If it is in their interest, illegitimate practice-makers like profit-maximising corporations will always be motivated to manipulate practices. As citizen and practitioner, it is the responsibility of the individual to recognise such efforts and neutralise them – which is, once again, possible only on the basis of sufficient understanding. Secondly, hidden complexity may actually result from the efforts of legitimate practice makers too. As I noted in chapter 2, we are frequently driven to lower environmental complexity because it allows for automatic behaviour. If we thereby do not non-consensually disregard to interests of others, the efficiency gains may justify such efforts. Yet, once our performance has become mechanised, we require occasional practice audits to confirm whether said conditions actually continue to obtain. We cannot merely rely on that being the case by default.

5.1.2. Accounting for Consumer Responsibility

Having addressed responsibility with regard to the management of individual practice portfolios in general, I will now assess how well my practice-centred ethics accounts for consumer responsibility compared to action-centred approaches in particular.

Contemporary Western consumption activity that involves objects with extensive pre- and post-consumption histories create a rich array of relations that link the local flourishing of people like myself with the well-being of numerous parties down- and upstream. The ethical obligations inherent to that array represent what we ordinarily refer to as the subject matter of moral consumer responsibility. Many ethical theories and principles have difficulty accounting for these obligations, and action-centred consequentialism with its inherently causal logic has particular trouble with the following two issues. 1) Much of the harm to individuals whose history overlaps with that of a particular commodity token tends to occur before the latter ever enters into the consumer's life and actions. Without backwards causation, it is difficult to establish that consuming individuals have obligations with regard to such harm. 2) The harm that any individual consumption action causes tends to be both vanishingly small and overdetermined. Thus, the obligations that arise from an action tend to be negligible at best, which leaves us with a picture of consumers as barely having responsibilities for harms associated with child labour, animal cruelty, and environmental destruction at all.

Below I consider how the author of one of the few books on consumptions ethics attempts to address this issue. Following that, I discuss how my own approach fares.

5.1.2.1. Schwartz on Complicity

In *Consuming Choices: Ethics in a Global Consumer Age*, Schwartz tries to overcome the problems I just outlined by conceptualising responsibility in terms of complicity. According to Kutz's Complicity Principle, "I am accountable for what others do when I intentionally participate in the wrong they do or harm they cause", and "I am accountable for the harm or wrong we do together, independently of the actual difference I make".⁶⁰⁵ As long as the individual intentionally participates in a collective endeavour, she is responsible not only for her own performance but for the actions of other people that are part of that endeavour too. For example, even though the causal contribution of each individual crew from among the 1,000+ airplanes that participated in the Allied strategic bombing of Dresden in February 1945 made no difference regarding the catastrophic firestorm that devoured the city, Kutz argues that each crew member is responsible due to willing participation in the raid nonetheless. Degrees of responsibility can be distinguished on the basis of involvement and commitment. While peripheral agents are indirectly involved in the endeavour and lack commitment to achieving its specific end, core agents are both directly involved and committed. Thus, the responsibility of the latter exceeds that of the former.

With regard to consumer responsibility, Schwartz argues that the endeavour in question is *consumer culture*, which differs from collective ventures like the Allied strategic bombing in a crucial way. While the collective that participates in the latter has clear institutional structures (eg, formalised roles and command hierarchy), Western consumer collectives are unstructured: "they come to exist solely because each participant happens to purchase"⁶⁰⁶. This makes it difficult to maintain that consumers are 'both directly involved in and committed to' a collective venture. What is more, Schwartz criticises, "broad appeal to consumer culture would seem to imply that even consumers who attempt to buy ethical products [...] are just as culpable as everyone else simply because they, too, are participants in the consumer culture"⁶⁰⁷.

⁶⁰⁵ Kutz (2000: 122).

⁶⁰⁶ Schwartz (2010: 79).

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid: 79.

Therefore, Schwartz suggests a slightly different approach to complicity. His proposal has three main elements. Firstly, he argues, consumers can be considered core agents because their purchases are essential to the successful collective activity of global manufacturing and trade. Without actual sales, the latter could simply not be maintained. Secondly, people who purchase a product “not only condone wrongdoing but draw direct benefit from it”⁶⁰⁸. Finally, the fact that products and services play important roles with regard to the identity of most Westerners entails that they strongly identify with the *telos*, or end, of consumerism. For these reasons, consumers are responsible for wrongs that the causal approach cannot account for.

Schwartz’s reasoning is not particularly convincing. To begin with, his first point recreates the problems of causal responsibility construed as individual difference. Granted, a system of manufacturing and trade cannot be maintained if *all* buyers stop their purchases, so the activity of the group as a whole makes a difference. However, if any one of them stops, the system survives in perfect shape, so the problem of holding the individual accountable remains. The second point is reminiscent of Miller’s proposal that an individual can be held responsible for remedying a state of affairs on various grounds, for example, whether she has benefitted from it or has the capacity to provide relief.⁶⁰⁹ However, it is not clear how any of these are related to complicity. For example, if I unknowingly and without any intention benefit from a crime, why would I be complicit? Without an argument to the contrary, there seems to be no conceptual link between benefit and complicity (so in the example, I should be held remedially responsible purely on the basis of benefit). The last reason is unconvincing for the following reason: while commodities play important roles with regard to the consumer identity indeed, the way in which they are made and traded does not. In fact, consumers plausibly prefer to remain ignorant of product histories because issues like child labour and animal cruelty would taint a commodity (and thereby make it unsuitable for individual status promotion). It is simply not true that people who purchase a product ‘condone wrongdoing’, because condoning entails intention. Consumerism and the Allied bombing differ in just that way. Bomber crews knew that Dresden would be devoured, and they were committed to producing the harm in question. Consumers, on the other hand, are committed to product use, but not the harms that precede and succeed it (of which they may well be fully unaware). The two are conceptually different, and commitment to one does not entail commitment to the other.

5.1.2.2. Practice-Centred Responsibility

My practice-centred approach fares better than action-centred ethics and Schwartz’s proposal in a number of ways. Below, I address the issues that it is better equipped to handle.

Insignificant harm: As long as the unit under consideration is the individual action token, associated harms will often be negligible, especially with regard to consumption. Yet, if we change our focus to practices, the magnitude of harms like the suffering of slave labourers increases significantly. What matters now is not that PRO buys just one ethically tainted chocolate bar. Instead, what matters is that *every* chocolate bar she buys – whether for herself or others – is likely tainted, because she enacts the same behaviour patterns over and over again. In fact, PRO’s other chocolate-containing groceries (eg, cookies, cakes, pralines, bread spreads, muesli bars, pudding, and chocolate milk) may well be composed of tainted ingredients too – and once we take the accumulated suffering associated with the repeat purchases of all of these items into account, the harms may be anything but trivial. Thus, we may actually be able to use the causal account to consumer responsibility after all.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid: 82.

⁶⁰⁹ Miller (2007).

Upstream location of harm: Practice-centred ethics avoids the issue that the performance of an individual consumer action cannot be causally linked in the right way to harms that occurred in the past (problem of backwards causation). Practices incorporate a clear link between what an agent does now, namely cultivate a portfolio (which causes her to act in foreseeable ways in the future), and any harms that occur prior to future practice enactments. The further we locate the time of analysis toward the early stages of the individual practice's lifecycle, the greater the portion of the enactments of said practices that is located in the future, and the more significant the magnitude of, say, harms that are associated with these enactments becomes. The case for holding the agent responsible as a consumer becomes correspondingly more persuasive. For example, if I begin to cultivate the habit of rewarding myself with Nestlé KitKat bars today, I lay the ground for consuming articles tainted by slave-labour that will be produced throughout years to come, and today I am (at least partially⁶¹⁰) responsible for the misery attributable to the items in question throughout these years. So even if much of the harm associated with human consumption occurs prior to a particular commodity token's consumption, use, or appreciation, the focus on practices locates that harm in the future, which removes another key objection to construing moral responsibility causally.

Vague object of complicity: Consumer culture cannot actually be specified without robustly conceptualising culture. Here too practice theory helps. Following the OED, we can roughly define culture as 'the distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period'⁶¹¹. Thus, a communal practice portfolio represents a rather significant portion of the collective's culture, just as the personal practice portfolio represents a significant portion of the individual's culture – and insofar as these practices meet the criteria of my definition of *consumption* (CONS*), we can speak of *consumer culture*: when agents enact practices and thereby contribute to the satisfaction of their current or short-term needs, they contribute to the maintenance of both their own and their community's consumer culture. In that sense, practice-centred ethics lends itself to an application of the complicity approach too.

Unintentional participation: Perhaps most importantly, the practice-centred approach I pursue spells out how and why individual practitioners are responsible for participating in the management of the practice portfolio of the political community and for managing their own practice portfolio. With regard to both, the individual is responsible for understanding how practices work, how they contribute to the satisfaction of her own needs, and how they affect the need-satisfaction of others. Thus, if a particular practice relies on the infliction of various harms on third parties (eg, workers, animals, and eco-systems), those who participate in it cannot simply claim ignorance. Practice-participation gives access to practice-internal goods (and thus greatly contributes to human flourishing), which it should, only if it is performed well. Yet, good performance in the absence of both proper practice comprehension and practice management is impossible. Thus, instead of grounding consumer responsibility in how the individual actually participates in consumer culture, it must be grounded in how a *good* practitioner participates in it.

Participation in one overall culture: I would also like to address Schwartz's note that a broad appeal to consumer culture implies that individuals who consume differently are just as culpable as everyone else. Firstly, we consume by satisfying different needs in many different ways, so speaking of 'consumption' in an abstract way is really only appropriate if we wish to make very general remarks. In the context of detailed ethical considerations, we can – and should – differentiate on the basis of particular needs and need-satisfier types. Secondly, the same point applies to the practice perspective. Discussions of 'consumer culture' as one overall practice lends itself to

⁶¹⁰ Along with the agents who participate in the actual production practices and others.

⁶¹¹ OED, my emphasis.

general, sweeping remarks. However, when it comes to the specific practices of different communities and individuals, we find an incredible variety of characteristics – and these differences deserve a differentiated analysis and evaluation. For example, as the practices of mainstream Americans differ radically from those of freegans and the Amish, the consumer cultures of the former are radically different from that of the latter. Accordingly, it makes little sense to consider freegans and the Amish culpable for the harms of Western consumerism (just as mainstream Americans cannot be considered responsible for effects of freegan and Amish consumption).

Practice propagation: Finally, practice-centred approaches accommodate another element of responsibility that action-centred approaches cannot. When it comes to the people closest to us, the performances of a practice often serve to transmit behaviour patterns through participative enactment, that is, through directly involving others in the practitioner's ordinary need-satisfying activities.⁶¹² In particular, participative enactment is precisely the mechanism through which children and adolescents acquire much of the practical competence necessary for their progression toward (full) agency and citizenship. From a purely causal perspective, the responsibility for said transmission must at least partially lie with those who do the transmitting (eg, parents); from a moral perspective, the responsibility of those who do the transmitting frequently surpasses that of the receivers, because practical competence implies being privy to information that the practically-not-yet-competent necessarily lack (and practical understanding is plausibly a precondition for being held morally responsible).⁶¹³ In cases where the receiver lacks agency (eg, children), that issue is especially pertinent because she lacks the more general capacity to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it (eg, with regard to participating in the practice enactments of other people).⁶¹⁴

The points I just discussed integrate nicely. Given my unit of analysis, it is not actions but the practices enacted through them that represent the primary object through which moral responsibility is established. Not only does such a shift address various problems encountered by the causal logic of action-centred consequentialism, but it also allows us to speak more intelligently about *consumer culture* and how our participation in it grounds obligations in the context of the complicity account.

5.2. Application: Object Alienation

In chapter 1, I argued that object alienation represents one of the central challenges of contemporary consumerism, and it is this issue that I will address now from the perspective of needs and practices. Alienation in general has to do with our relations to other entities, so the human need that is most straightforwardly relevant to this issue is *connectedness* (see chapter 3). Alienation represents disassociation from something, in our case the things we consume. Strictly speaking, it suggests a process of becoming alien, and thus assumes there to be an initial state of nonalienness. Without the latter, it would be more precise to speak of 'alienness'.⁶¹⁵ At the level of the individual, it is not entirely clear whether contemporary consumers have been becoming more dissociated throughout their lives. However, at the level of communities/collectives (that have much longer lifetimes), that view is very plausible. (Given the number of household possessions now compared to a hundred years ago, average object attachments

⁶¹² By contrast, the explicit teaching of a practice, if it actually involves any practical performance (as opposed to pure description), represents enactments that are usually not meant to satisfy the agent's own needs according to the function of the praxis.

⁶¹³ That said, the receiver is sometimes better informed about her own circumstances.

⁶¹⁴ Plausibly, the general practical competence inherent to agency counteracts a particular practical incompetence regarding a particular practice. That is why agents are in a better position to decide whether and how to cultivate a new activity pattern than non-agents.

⁶¹⁵ See Schacht (1971).

must be radically lower.) What is more, I will argue for dealienation (which implies a process of becoming less alien). Thus, I will set terminological worries aside and retain the language of ‘alienation’.

Compared to the importance of intimate relationships with people, the view that meaningful associations with material objects are important for human flourishing is probably less obvious. Thus, when it comes to answering the question, *What does it even mean to have close, meaningful connections to objects?*, I suggest we start out with the former. Intimate, meaningful interpersonal relationships differ from casual associations in at least seven specific ways:

Illustration 18: Features of Meaningful Human Relationships⁶¹⁶

<i>Knowledge</i>	Intimate partners have extensive personal, often confidential, knowledge about each other. They share information about their histories, preferences, feelings, and desires that they do not reveal to most other people they know.
<i>Interdependence</i>	The lives of intimate partners are intertwined. What each partner does affects what the other partner wants to and can do. The behaviour of one person affects herself and the other.
<i>Caring</i>	Intimate partners feel more affection for one another than they do for most others.
<i>Trust</i>	They expect to be treated fairly and honourably by each other, anticipating that no undue harm will result from the relationship.
<i>Responsiveness</i>	Close partners understand, respect, and appreciate one another, being attentively and effectively responsive to their needs and concerned for their welfare.
<i>Mutuality</i>	Instead of considering themselves two entirely separate individuals, people who are intimate recognise their close connection and think of themselves as ‘us’ instead of ‘me’ and ‘him/her’.
<i>Commitment</i>	The intimately associated expect their partnerships to continue indefinitely. They invest the time, effort, and resources that are needed to realise that goal.

Due to the difference in entity type (human-and-object instead of human-and-human), when we move toward objective relationships we cannot use these attributes without major adjustments. Still, various extrapolations suggest themselves. In fact, we can retain all seven features: a person has a close, meaningful associations with object OBJ if she has detailed knowledge about its history, much of her activity involves its utilisation (in a broad sense), she cares more about OBJ than most other objects, she trusts that OBJ will not cause her undue harm, OBJ represents a need-satisfier (and thus contributes to her flourishing), her bodily comprehension involves a convergence between self and the object (ie, it becomes part of the *material me*)⁶¹⁷, and she expects OBJ to be part of her practice activity in the long run. None of these components is absolutely required for intimate objective associations to occur. However, our closest and most meaningful ones include all seven of these defining characteristics.

The features just outlined are the result of human-object interaction (except for the second, which represents interaction itself). Many of these interactions tend to occur for the purpose of object improvement, which is obviously a central characteristic of production. Examples are the cultivation of edible plants in one’s garden and the repair of one’s motorcycle. The entities in question are enhanced in the sense that their capacity to provide nourishment and transportation (ie, need-satisfaction) in the future is increased or maintained, and this enhancement/maintenance occurs practically through labour infusion. However, the objects of human-performed productive activity are enriched in a less obvious and literal sense too, namely through endowment with meaning. Both kinds of investment are alike in that they require the performance of an agent; they differ in that endowment with meaning fosters object-person relationships in a way that pure labour investment does not.

⁶¹⁶ Miller (2018).

⁶¹⁷ See my earlier comments on Merleau-Ponty’s and William James’ convergence of actor and environment (chapter 2).

Object investments with pure labour leave no permanent trace upon the agent: physical energy is transferred from actor to object, and the only change of the labourer (and a temporary one at that) is a corresponding decrease in energy. The transfer does not establish a connection in principle. After all, my urinating on a patch of soil does not produce any bonds between myself and the soil either (even if it increases its productivity). The investment of meaning through cognitive activity characterised by attention and intentionality of mental states (representing *aboutness*, *directedness*, or *reference* of mind) are unidirectional too. However, that performance results in lasting bonds because the activity leaves traces upon the projecting agent. During the process of exhausting herself psychically, the agent creates memories, develops her practical and theoretical understanding of, increases her trust in and care about the object, *et cetera* – and it is precisely these mental supplements that represent her attachments to it. The more psychic energy the agent expends, the more these connections strengthen (eg, richer memories; greater understanding, trust, and care). In that way, object-person relationships become stronger and the object's meaning for the investor increases. As Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton put it, objects

attain their [personal] significance through *psychic activities* or transactions. [...] Whether through action or contemplation, objects in the domestic environment are meaningful only as part of a communicative sign process and are active ingredients of that process.⁶¹⁸

Investment with labour and meaning are not actually unrelated phenomena, though only one of them depends on the other. Insofar as an activity requires human labour, the agent's mentality in the form of attention and cognitive processing is required to direct and channel her physical energy such that the end of the activity is reliably brought about. Human labour investment without at least a modicum of mental effort (eg, the limited attention of mechanical performance) is impossible.⁶¹⁹ By contrast, activities through which psychic energy is expended do not necessarily require human labour at all. For instance, I may lie on my couch and appreciate a painting on my wall (almost) without moving a muscle.

Symbolic value (that is based on what objects mean) is ordinarily contrasted with physical value (that is based on how objects 'perform'). The former can be further subdivided into what is sometimes called *positional* and *imaginative value*.⁶²⁰ The first of these refers to the meaning that objects have for a *group*, which entails agreement on the attributions among the various members. Positional characteristics allow for both an object and its owner to be positioned within the space of a differentiated social world, fashion attributes being a typical example.⁶²¹ The second refers to the meaning that objects have for an *individual*. While this type of value may make reference to other people (eg, in terms of memories) and often evolves from the individual's original perception of positional value to begin with⁶²², it does not entail inter-individual agreement. Given that I am concerned with individual investments with meaning, the symbolic value I focus on is of the latter type.

In the following, I consider two main ways in which human-object connections are formed. Due to scope, I limit myself to physical objects. After that, I discuss three main arguments for objective dealienation.

⁶¹⁸ Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton (1981: 173; original italics).

⁶¹⁹ Marx might be hinting toward that notion when he writes that the production of our means of subsistence "must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce" (Tucker, 1978: 150).

⁶²⁰ Beckert (2011).

⁶²¹ For sociological/anthropological accounts of positional commodity, see Veblen (2007) and Bourdieu (1984).

⁶²² Before an individual comes to interact with and form private attitudes toward a particular object token, our understanding usually resembles the public attitudes of the practice community.

5.2.1. Objective Connection Formation

Physical objects become invested with meaning in a variety of ways, including these: i) pre-consumption direction of labour toward the ends of activities and ii) direct investment into objects of activities. In the following, I will discuss each of these. For brevity, I limit myself to considering positive object attachment, leaving negative relationships for another occasion.

Pre-Consumption Direction of Labour

When it comes to production activity in particular, the central purpose of the labourer's mental activity is the channelling and directing of human or machine labour toward the *telos* of the performance. Thus, the central object of her mental effort is the item that is created or maintained. To use a different term, producers *ensoul* an object by putting their "effort, focus, energy, carefulness in details, and so forth into the design and production of an artefact"⁶²³, thereby frequently turning it into something loved and precious, something they wish to care for⁶²⁴. The extent of the agent's attachment to the end product is a function of the quantity and quality of her investment with meaning, which explains why self-refurbished furniture and a self-maintained motorcycle tend to have a different kind of, and usually much greater, significance for us than store-bought pieces and shop-serviced vehicles (*ceteris paribus*). Of course, practices through which agents create, recreate, or maintain objects can be powerful means for forming strong person-object relationships only if they are performed in the proper mode: without acuminated habitualisation, investment with meaning, and thus the formation of strong objective connections, cannot occur.

In that way, production practices affect our consumption practices (in terms of both which ones we cultivate and how we carry them out), which indicates how connected our practices are: both the nature of and the benefits from one practice depend on other constituents of the agent's portfolio. For example, the object-person relationships that an agent forms in the course of producing an artefact or consumable directly affect the significance that the consumption of that object has for her. Compare the consumption of home-grown fruits and vegetables with that of store-bought groceries. An agent who has tended her garden for months – by sowing seeds, planting cuttings, and trimming trees; by providing water, fertiliser, and other nutrients; by controlling pests like snails, mites, caterpillars, moths, beetles, and other insects – has a relationship with the fruits of her efforts that is completely lacking with regard to store-procured produce. We tend to utilise meaningful objects like these differently from meaningless ones, usually by treating them with greater attention and care. A gardener well remembers how much time and effort it took her before she could harvest, which has a direct effect upon how she engages with her garden's yield during the consumption phase. For example, she minimises waste by throwing away as little as possible because failure to do so would represent disregard for her own previous efforts (which is a form of self-alienation). When she is finally able to satisfy her nutritional needs, she does so in full awareness of the personal history with her crops, which transforms and enriches her consumption practice in ways similar to how the interaction between two friends is affected by their joint past.

Bricolage (French: do-it-yourself) is a practice that takes the agent's investment even further, especially when it is combined with recycling. The recycling *bricoleur* saves components and materials of old, often defunct artefacts and uses them to construct new objects, thereby re-engaging with her previous investments of meaning, combining them into more complex structures, and through his ongoing performance building on and changing

⁶²³ Blevins & Stolterman (2007: 4).

⁶²⁴ Nelson & Stolterman (2012).

the significance of the item. As Lévi-Strauss puts it, the bricoleur, above all things, engages in a sort of dialogue with his materials. He considers the particular history of each piece and the possibilities “of its features which are already determined by the use for which it was originally intended or the modifications it has undergone for other purposes”⁶²⁵. By creating new from old,

he ‘speaks’ not only with things [...] but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities. The ‘bricoleur’ may not ever complete his purpose but he always puts something of himself into it.⁶²⁶

Few activities preserve more of an agent’s previous psychic investments when items have reached the end of their lifecycle than those belonging to the practice of *bricolage*. They ensure that ‘new’ objects start out with strong object-relationships from the very beginning, preventing that agents have to start with zero personal meaning all over again.

Almost paradoxically, everything I just outlined shows that production activity, performed in the right habitualisation mode, can actually incorporate a key element of consumption (as per CONS*): by investing objects with meaning during our work, we simultaneously build strong objective connections that, at least according to my scheme of human needs, contribute to our flourishing right then and there.

Direct Investment During Consumption

Aside from attachments to consumables being borne from our production efforts, consumption activity itself leads to objective connections too, of course. Many consumption practice enactments incorporate the use of tools, and given that our employment of these devices often requires considerable attention and cognitive processing, they too are subject to psychic investment. For example, an individual may be strongly attached to an old fountain pen because she has been using it since primary school. It is meaningful due to past utilisation and the agent’s memories – recollections of what it feels like to wield the pen, of the messages that were written with it (eg, love letters), and of their role in the narrative that represents the agent’s life story.

Arguably, especially strong attachments are formed with tools that enable agents to express themselves in ways otherwise unavailable to them, for example, with regard to emotions. Davies suggests that

music is naturally expressive because the dynamic character of music is experienced as significantly similar to human behavior expressive of emotions. Movement is heard in music. The relative highness and lowness of notes provides a dimension in aural space within which music moves through time. Thus, if the characteristic behavioral expression of an emotion, *X*, has the dynamic form *Y*, and if a musical work is heard as having the same dynamic form, then *X* is heard in the music.⁶²⁷

For an agent who is unable to directly perform the ‘behaviour expressive of emotions’ that Davies refers to (say, dancing), musical performance may be the only means to express or communicate her sentiments. Executing such performance with skill requires acuminated habitualisation through regular practice involving a musical instrument, and given how intimate a familiarity with that instrument is required to express both the complexity and subtlety of emotions well, it is hard to imagine that a practitioner would not become greatly attached to it. Relatedly, Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton found that “[f]or many people a piano or guitar is the only means through which they can cultivate any kind of creative expression”⁶²⁸. Thus, it is hardly surprising that musical

⁶²⁵ Lévi-Strauss (1966: 18-19). As the French collage artist Louis Pons states, what most people see as “a cluster of junk”, the bricoleur sees as “a cluster of possibilities” where “each object gives a direction, each is a line” (in Agnès Varda’s 2000 documentary *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse*, The Gleaners and I).

⁶²⁶ Ibid: 21.

⁶²⁷ Davies (2003: 132).

⁶²⁸ Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton (1981: 73).

instruments were considered special possessions by 21.6% of the 315 interviewed research subjects in the sample in their empirical study, the sixth highest frequency.

Attachments to tools explain why consumers hang on to objects long after they have stopped using them, even though they may take up room and bind capital (eg, consider a piano). Objects serve as historical reminders and memory prompts, thereby at least temporarily turning from usable into objects of (mere) appreciation. Symbolising one's commitments towards future projects, objects may also be kept to ensure that the agent keeps promises she made to herself or others (eg, to take up *music play* again one day, and to thereby redevelop and reactivate skills).⁶²⁹ Thus, one function of such objects is to induce portfolio audits.

Permanent items like pieces of art or natural objects (eg, conch shells collected during a beach holiday) are objects of appreciation from the start, not tools of somatic utilisation. Activities like protractedly gazing at a painting from various distances, from various angles, with different preconceptions, whilst being in various moods represent the purest and most direct form of investment with meaning. All attention and cognitive processing are directed toward the object and what it represents, solely for the purpose of producing affective and cognitive attitudes in the beholder (which represent strong person-object relationships).

5.2.2. Arguments for Objective Dealienation

Obviously, we become attached to material objects. In fact, some believe, “[m]any of us form stronger attachments to our clothes, cars, or homes than to our neighbors”⁶³⁰. Our relationships with material things play an important role in human flourishing because a lot of meaning is grounded in strong object-person bonds (more on that below). Not all objects that are part of an agent's life need or should become meaningful, of course. Some items lend themselves to far more uses and varied experiences than others (eg, hiking boots *vs* vacuum cleaners); some items serve tasks that can be performed within seconds (eg, paper clips). It is equally silly to expect that we become attached to all objects that merely serve as carriers of information content, including books and videotapes. Insofar as the agent does not require a physical object to serve as sensory memory prompt or the likes, the formation of attachments to a novel (or perhaps to a character it features) does not necessitate an attachment to the material used to manifest language symbols.⁶³¹

However, a large portion of the enormous number of our possessions are neither simple and utilitarian objects nor pure information carriers. What is more, a large share of the brands and commodities that are typically sold in consumer societies are expressly designed and marketed in ways that enable agents to relate to and define their own identity through them more easily, and thus develop personal attachments. In the first half of the twentieth century, companies realised that inanimate objects may “possess a definite psychic content, a ‘soul’ which plays a dynamic emotional role in the daily lives of individuals within the context of their social value system”⁶³². Recognising the profit potential of exploiting the human capacity for relating to objects, marketers began to actively develop and shape product and brand personalities. By producing enduring associations with human traits like sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness,⁶³³ and by matching object personalities with the

⁶²⁹ Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton (1981).

⁶³⁰ Solomon (2003: 23).

⁶³¹ Which is not to say that attachments to content are not generally strengthened through the presence of material information carriers.

⁶³² Dichter (1960: 87).

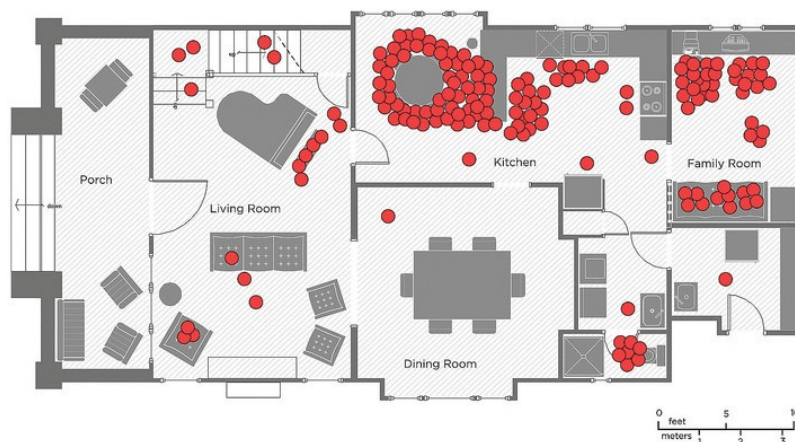
⁶³³ Aaker (1997).

actual or desired self-concepts/-images of target groups, corporations transformed artefacts into items that are meant to be relatable by their very design and promotion methods.⁶³⁴ In these ways, positional and imaginative value are related. Yet, while our lives are littered with these objects, our average connection with them is slight. Put differently, our practice enactments fail to imbue them with significance.

Consumers and commodities entertain a dynamic relationship of constant interaction.⁶³⁵ Put differently, attachments can arise only out of the enactments of practices and praxes in the course of which agents invest mental energy in the right way (ie, activity that represents acuminated habitualisation). Given that the individual supply of that energy is limited, and as the attachment to an object cannot become and remain strong without minimal investments, the number of objects that can have significant meaning for a person is limited. Whether or not the average Western household's number of owned items runs to the 300,000 objects reported for the US (chapter 1), due to both the density of individual possessions at any one point and the speed at which these objects pass through the lives of a consumer ('throughput') the following must be true: either the individual has moderate to strong attachments to a select few possessions and correspondingly none or weak ones to the very large number that represent her remaining belongings, or her object-person relationships are universally weak. Research indicates that Western consumers do indeed form strong attachments with only few artefacts in their lives. For example, the members of Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton's sample considered an average of merely five objects in their household *special*. So from the perspective of meaning through attachment, vast amounts of privately owned objects are wasted upon and by their possessors.

The same applies to the consumption of space. For example, the larger the home of an individual, the less each area within the dwelling is subject to utilisation and therefore to psychic investment on average. Consider the following depiction of residence use.

Illustration 19: Scan-Sampling Observations of Family Member Location⁶³⁶



During the data-collection collection period, the spatial utilisation of the research subjects (indicated by red dots), a Californian family, was almost exclusively limited to kitchen and family room. The remainder of the

⁶³⁴ Of course, object attachments are not meant to negatively affect profitability, which can be prevented by having consumers bond primarily with brands rather than actual commodity tokens.

⁶³⁵ Dichter (1960).

⁶³⁶ Arnold et al (2012: 92). Each dot represents the location of an inhabitant (two parents, two children total) on the ground floor as observed every 10 minutes over the course of multiple days.

ground floor of the dwelling – which, at 2,035 square feet (189 square metre) falls well short of the 2,657 square feet average floor size of new US single-family houses in 2014 – was hardly used at all. If we assume that these findings apply to dwelling utilisation overall⁶³⁷, it is hard to imagine that the dining room, the porch, and the living room mean much or anything to the four inhabitants – which makes these spaces correspondingly wasteful.⁶³⁸

This is not to say that a large home cannot have positional symbolic value, of course. Large residences tend to indicate social standing and class membership among other things. However, this is not the kind of symbolism I am concerned with here because it does not clearly lend itself to ethical assessment. Positional value refers to agreed-upon meaning among groups, so it has to be addressed at the level of the collective.

We might wonder whether modern consumers perhaps form strong attachments to non-private objects instead – public items that are not part of anyone’s household, like the medieval European cathedral.

[T]he process of creating such a building almost certainly generated a renewed and enlarged form (and in certain cases, an entirely new form) of *communitas* among ordinary citizens living in the shadow of the building. A cathedral-building project provided a potentially defining focus, a master narrative, for collective identity among members of the community in which it was built⁶³⁹

Not just the building of medieval cathedrals involved a large variety of practices, but so did their utilisation, of course. What is more, these practices require mental focus. One cannot admire the glory of a house of God, let alone worship inside it, without intense and focussed mental engagement. Yet, there is no evidence that modern consumers are strongly attached to communal objects either, quite the contrary. One of Arendt’s central criticisms of modernity is that while a world that constitutes man’s home is made of durable artefacts that outlast the individual (lest culture has no permanence), consumerism revolves around the very opposite idea, namely that objects have a limited lifespan. That perspective permeates our general attitude toward objects, which is why consumerist individuals lack the dispositions necessary to form attachment to, and care for, an environment of stable and lasting things (which is reflected in a decreased permanence of public artefacts).⁶⁴⁰

In the following, I outline three arguments, or rather themes of arguments, in favour of building meaningful objective connections.

Construal of Life-Narratives

Following the views of philosophers like MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur, a crucial aspect of being in the world as a human individual is our engagement in narrative interpretation of our experiences. By creatively reorganising and reconstructing reality, we ‘grasp together’ events so as to bring together the order and disorder that characterise the things happening to and around us, simultaneously articulating meaningful connections between past events and reconstructing our identities in the present. Without the meaningful continuity created by narrative self-interpretation, we could not make sense of our lives. An individual’s reality would dissolve into a series of disconnected, point-like experiences. It would exclude a sense of who she is and therefore also a sense of responsibility.⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁷ The data from Broege et al (2007) suggest that they do.

⁶³⁸ In Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton’s (1981) research, only three percent of sample members considered the dining room the part of the house in which they feel ‘most at home’. With regard to the kitchen, gender differences were significant: males six percent, females 25%.

⁶³⁹ Scott (2003: 233).

⁶⁴⁰ Arendt (1961).

⁶⁴¹ See Meretoja (2014) for an overview.

The practices we participate in are crucial to our personal identity and self-understanding. The more time I spend mountaineering, the more I enjoy the activities constitutive of the practice, and the more I take on specific roles within it (eg, guide, instructor, lead climber), the more likely it becomes that I answer a question like “Who are you?” and “What do you do?” with “I’m a mountaineer” and “I climb mountains”. Objects are generally instrumental in the enactments of practices; for example, mountaineers require at least a basic set of gear (eg, backpack, sturdy boots, crampons, and ice axe). Not only must these items accompany the practitioner on each trip, but their characteristics are also crucial to both the activities she can perform and the chances of their successful execution. An item like an ice axe is an object of direct investment because frequently such a tool cannot be wielded in a mechanised mode (eg, whilst gingerly ascending a frozen cliff or waterfall). Similarly, crampons can neither be properly put on nor be used without carefully coordinated and monitored bodily movements.

But that is not all. Coming home from a trip, mountaineering equipment requires maintenance, and such activity lends itself to almost meditative opportunities for reflection on one’s outdoor adventures. Meeting with fellow climbers during club events, the performance of various pieces of gear during previous adventures represents a fascinating topic of conversation. In these ways, individuals spend even more time construing vivid narratives around their practice activities whilst handling or talking about practice implements, creating even stronger associations between who they are and what they do as well as the objects essential to both of these.

As a result, instruments become heavily invested with narrative meaning over time. Even just accidentally stumbling over a piece of gear in the house evokes vivid memories of past practice performance, thereby further elevating the overall presence and role of the practice in the individual’s life. Like a diary, it brings back memories of past adventures and reinforces her sense of identity. But *unlike* a diary, it makes the agent’s past physically tangible, thereby providing a very broad spectrum of sensual cues (eg, touch, sounds, and smell). For instance, merely seeing one’s ice axe and its particular blemishes almost automatically brings to mind various stories because the climber knows exactly what caused this and that scratch on shaft or pick; feeling the texture of a tool, its weight and balance, can instantly transport the individual back to a mountain environment, because that is where the instrument is purposively and skilfully wielded; smelling the heavy leather of boots evokes memories of evenings in alpine huts, because that is where the odour is usually encountered when the equipment of a climbing party dries out after a long day in the snow. As multisensorial prompts, objects have an almost magical ability to ‘take us back’ and re-experience past events, even years after they have occurred.

Plausibly, this capacity becomes especially important when two conditions are met. Firstly, the longer the period since an event has occurred, the worse the practitioner’s ability to recollect it accurately purely through cognitive effort becomes, due to fallible human memory. By contrast, durable artefacts retain their features. The marks on an ice axe resulting from a particular adventure are the same a month and five years after the exploit. Secondly, the older a practitioner becomes, the more her cognitive capacity tends to fail. Again, the same is not true with regard to the durable physical features of artefacts and the physical ‘record’ they represent. Thus, in both cases the object enables the individual to (re)construct her historical narrative, and to do so much more accurately. Someone might argue now that ‘accuracy’ is not actually an appropriate criterion for human narratives. All experiences are subject to interpretation anyway, and interpretations are not subject to standards of accuracy (truth-aptness) after all. However, the second sentence actually entails the refutation of such a criticism. Granted, experiences are subject to interpretation. However, the content of pre-interpreted experiences as such is subject to assessment in terms of accuracy.

Finally, object tokens that play long-term roles in practices actually lend themselves to the construal of their very own narratives. An ice axe used throughout a mountaineering career of twenty years could itself be considered a key character in such a historical account. Narratives like those in *The Secret Life of Objects* and *A History of the World in 100 Objects* indicate how rich such stories can be⁶⁴², with practitioners representing secondary protagonists. A dual narrative of that sort represents a fascinating story of human-object interaction throughout the years, with elements of easy success accompanied by events in which the practitioner could achieve triumph (or prevent disaster) only by using both ingenuity and sheer stubbornness in the face of tremendous odds. Just as the strongest friendships result from jointly overcoming (great) adversity, the same applies to human-object associations too – even more so if that adversity results from gear malfunction (assuming that it does not result from shoddy quality). The pick of an ice axe may well break due to accidentally hitting a rock in an unfortunate way. Yet, if the climber survives the subsequent ordeal, faithfully assisted by a damaged yet nevertheless useful tool, her and her instrument's adventure makes for an excellent story that contributes to the overall life narrative. By comparison, the breakdown of a disposable object makes for no story at all, because failure and short-term utilisation are expected to occur by the consumer from the very beginning of use.

Similarly, the utilisation of non-disposable objects that are frequently replaced does not make for good object-related stories either, because it denies opportunities for skill development. Some of the richest attachments to objects are grounded in the wear and tear-related unreliability of the artefact itself, because it creates opportunities for the agent to overcome hardship by applying her skill and ingenuity, which makes the overall activity – whatever practice it belongs to – more rewarding. Artefacts that perform their functions smoothly offer no such opportunities, which is why agents do not bond with them as strongly (*ceteris paribus*). This argument should not be misunderstood as providing justification for the intentional or negligent manufacture or sale of shoddy products. Rather, it provides support for the view that artefacts that used to work well ought not to be replaced merely because they have developed the odd caprice or because they lack some up-to-date product features. For example, drivers who replace their cars with a brand-new vehicle every three years may never experience an object breakdown throughout their practice career because every single vehicular component remains well within its expected lifespan. By contrast, well-used items tend to develop quirks that continuously challenge users to find practical solutions to problems. Drivers who operate their vehicle from cradle to grave are constantly at risk of object breakdown because expected component lifespans vary widely (eg, radiator hoses and thermostats 40-60,000 miles *vs* water and fuel pumps 70-90,000 miles). Each failure represents an opportunity to learn even more about the object and its inner workings, often by interacting with other, more experienced practitioners who are happy to share their expertise with fellow tinkerers.

Tie-in with Consumer Responsibility

As previously argued, morally responsible consumer activity in the absence of a proper understanding of the pre- and post-consumption histories of goods and services cannot occur because it prevents an appropriate match between system complexity and mode of practice performance. Yet, consumers face various barriers in terms of achieving that comprehension. Not only are they geographically, culturally, and temporally remote from those who participate earlier and later in the production/consumption chains that yield contemporary commodities (along their entire lifecycles), but the corporate manufacturers and traders to whom they are geographically, culturally, and temporally close actually shield them from information that would reduce the distance.

⁶⁴² See Raffel (2012) and MacGregor (2010).

By performing pre-consumption labour (in the course of which commodities become infused with meaning) themselves, individuals address these problems head-on. The more involved in pre- and post-consumption processes the consumer becomes, the more her geographical, cultural, and temporal distance shrinks. For example, take the overall practice that I call, for want of a better term, *domestic agriculture*. It consists of activities like *growing fruits and vegetables* and *keeping chicken for eggs and meat*, both of which may be enacted on privately owned real estate or in community gardens. With regard to the consumables in question (fruits, vegetables, eggs, meat), the gardener is fully involved in the pre-consumption activities required to achieve the final agricultural yield. Concerning plant life, it entails: digging and raking; seeding and planting; watering and weeding; picking and washing. Concerning animal produce, it entails: feeding and watering; cleaning chicken coops; clipping wings; collecting and washing eggs; killing, bleeding, scalding, and plucking the animals; processing the carcass. Not only do these performances invest the gardener's produce with personal meaning, but their performance *by* the gardener also exposes her at least partially to the true complexity of food production: "in the garden individuals face considerable ecological dilemmas, ambiguities and opportunities in terms of how they engage with plants, insects and animals"⁶⁴³. In addition, participation in *domestic agriculture* entails a maximum degree of control over how the practitioner's need-satisfaction affects the flourishing of third parties. By insourcing the production of goods, the individual assumes the fullest possible ethical responsibility for her consumption.

The same applies to post-consumption labour. Practicing *bricolage* prevents the consumer from becoming separated from her objects and thus lose the ability to control how her ex-commodities (and the activities involved in their processing) affect the need-satisfaction of third parties, human and non-human alike. Similarly for *domestic agriculture*, as gardeners reintroduce their organic waste directly and locally to various nutrient chains, for example, by feeding food scraps to chicken and composting the rest. Currently, a staggering 40% of food in the US is lost at different stages from farm to fork.⁶⁴⁴ Of that, the vast majority ends up in the landfill, not only representing its single largest constituent but also converting to staggering amounts of methane, a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.⁶⁴⁵ *Domestic agriculture* can mitigate both⁶⁴⁶ of these problems and at the same time increase consumer attachment to consumables. After all, nutrient supply represents a necessary condition for the growth of fresh bio-matter (like vegetables and eggs), and through gardening a consumer can control even this element in the production process.

The recommendation here is not for each consumer to produce *all* of her own groceries (let alone all consumer goods), of course. Not even collectives like the Amish are fully self-sufficient in that way, because it would entail radical inefficiencies due to non-specialisation and thus probably a (radically) decreased ability to flourish. Rather, the recommendation is to produce some of them, because the participation in *domestic agriculture* plausibly yields increased attachment even to those commodities that continue to be acquired through the market. Although an increased general awareness of the numerous processes involved in food production may not automatically result in a greater appreciation of purchased groceries, at the very least it is a precondition.

⁶⁴³ Bhatti & Church (2001: 370).

⁶⁴⁴ Hall et al (2009).

⁶⁴⁵ Gunders (2012).

⁶⁴⁶ Rotting organic waste in landfills undergoes anaerobic decomposition and produces methane. Composting organic waste undergoes aerobic decomposition and produces carbon dioxide instead.

Tie-In with Other Forms of Connectedness

The high degree of separation of production and consumption that we currently find in HDCs entails that those with whom an agent primarily produces are not the individuals with whom she primarily consumes. Thus, the length of occupational hours inevitably affects the length of time a worker can spend with family, friends, and neighbours. Regarding the question of *how* the length of working hours affects family ties, empirical findings have been somewhat mixed. For many parents, involvement in the work force appears to have positive effects. Besides gaining income and health insurance, they benefit from additional social support provided by co-workers. What is more, work can both be an important source of achievement and recognition as well as provide an emotional buffer against family difficulties. Nevertheless, studies have found that a large portion, possibly half, of working parents in the US experiences ‘a lot of stress’ or ‘extreme stress’ in balancing work and family responsibilities. Degrees of role strain are especially high for working mothers, plausibly because they have been retaining primary responsibility for ensuring the functioning of home and family life.⁶⁴⁷ A recent New Zealand study by the Families Commission too found that those who work long hours spend little time with their partners and children, which, in most cases, is felt keenly by all family members. Frequently, one spouse is left carrying the entire domestic workload (which causes partnership tensions) and children cope with their feelings of sadness and anger about parental neglect by disengaging.⁶⁴⁸

Many of the performances that increase object attachment, especially in the form of pre-consumption direction of labour, mitigate these effects by reunifying the spheres of production and consumption. For example, *domestic agriculture* – as the term indicates – occurs at home, and it provides excellent opportunities for engaging in joint family pursuits. The key reason why, to this day, the Amish consider small-scale, low-tech farms the ideal place of occupation is that they lend themselves to being worked by the whole family (and during busy times with the help of neighbours). Parents and children work together to grow fruits and vegetables for their own consumption, for their animals (especially horses, dairy cattle, hogs, poultry, and sheep), and for sale. That way, they develop objective connections and at the same time secure precisely the social capital they value most. And even where Amish husbands are no longer able to secure their livelihood through agriculture, their wives continue to cultivate large vegetable gardens and keep backyard animals, usually with the help of their children.⁶⁴⁹

These effects can be secured outside the Amish community too, of course. *Domestic agriculture* in some form or another is, or at least was until very recently, widely practiced throughout many Western nations. For example, in the UK in 1996 there were 23.7 million private households and 20.2 million private gardens, with 67% of the adult population identifying *gardening* as a hobby. Yet, not only has it become an increasingly irregular pastime, but only 20% of British garden owners grew vegetables that year (compared to 35% only a decade earlier): “The intensification of work and the rise of dual worker households means that the garden has slowly become the ‘outdoor room’ [of mostly passive leisure], where children could play, families sit and relax”⁶⁵⁰. Yet, with *domestic agriculture* still remaining at least a practical memory and the necessary infrastructure remaining in place, that trend could easily be reversed in principle – and from the perspective of both objective and social connectedness, it should. Empirical research confirms that relationships with other people are particularly meaningful elements associated

⁶⁴⁷ Fredriksen-Goldsen et al (2000).

⁶⁴⁸ Families Commission (2009).

⁶⁴⁹ Kraybill (2001).

⁶⁵⁰ Bhatti & Church (2001: 371).

with gardens and gardening for children, adolescents, and those reminiscing about their childhood.⁶⁵¹ Gardening invites joint activity for families and friends, so the very activities that promote object attachment also promote social attachment (and therefore social capital).

In addition, *gardening* is highly suitable to strengthen social connections in other ways. Firstly, since domestic agricultural yields tend to become ripe (and thus need to be harvested) within narrow periods of time, the amounts of periodically available crops frequently surpass the gardener's capacity to process them before spoiling occurs. Bartering with home producers of different goods is not only an excellent way to avoid this problem and secure access to other commodities (which is why freegans too practice it), but it also builds and strengthens social connections with people who are part of the local community. Secondly, domestic agricultural yields represent excellent gifts. Home-made items tend to be far more special and thus relationship-fortifying than store-bought gifts because they are infused with something that belongs, or belonged, to the gifter: the physical and mental energy of the producer. Domestic agricultural yields meet that description, of course – self-grown and -arranged flowers being centrally among them, to relate this subsection back to what I discussed in the previous chapter (Mother's Day and the Western practice of *giving flowers*).

Besides social connectedness, performances that increase attachment to objects of subsequent consumption also tend to contribute to *local* connectedness because, to mention it once more, they are the result of shifting production that occurs far away back into the spatially immediate, domestic sphere. Remember what I previously noted about the lack of psychic investment in un- or underutilised areas inside our dwellings. Quite aside from the fact that smaller private space encourages greater social interaction within communities⁶⁵², building smaller homes and using the freed-up space (along with other scarce resource) to cultivate domestic gardens or other production spaces instead, thereby actively investing them with meaning, results in increased attachment to the home. Part of the attraction of gardens is that they are a site for interacting with nature⁶⁵³ and yet they also represent an extension of the home, so attachment to the former entails attachment to the latter. Representing an element of personal territory, gardens provide a means of expressing personal taste and preference through organisation of layout and choice of cultivated plant/animal life. It is not just the agricultural yield that is the result of labour and mental expenditure – the garden itself is too. For children, the garden is “one of the most accessible and resourceful places where [they] can have unstructured interaction with nature and come to participate in the wonders of natural process”⁶⁵⁴, so the reason for their attachment may be partially different. Either way, empirical studies frequently show that active involvement in gardening work results in considerable place attachment (usually defined as an individual's positive dynamic bonds to a socio-physical setting that provides psychological benefits) among both adults and children.⁶⁵⁵

Similar points apply to other productive activities too, of course. We can expect that motorists who maintain their own vehicles become attached to their garage (which is an extension of the home as well) and people who sew their own clothes become attached to the sewing room, because those are the locations where they spend considerable stretches of time investing labour and mental energy. Previous research indicates as much. Gender

⁶⁵¹ Gross & Lane (2007).

⁶⁵² Cohousing research shows that if residents have less private space, they are more inclined to spend time outside their dwelling unit; if the locality provides them with social spaces for shared activity, the potential for interaction increases further (J. Williams, 2005).

⁶⁵³ In the ordinary, common-sense meaning of ‘non-human life processes’.

⁶⁵⁴ Francis (1995: 188).

⁶⁵⁵ Eg. Francis (1995) and Gross & Lane (2007).

roles being what they are, it is not surprising that 25% of women but only six percent of men consider the kitchen the part of the house they feel ‘most at home’ in. By contrast, percentages are reversed for the study (17% of men, three percent of women).⁶⁵⁶

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A necessary condition for increased average object attachment is a drastically decreased number and throughput of individual possessions and spaces. Many communities and cultures, the Amish being one of them, show us that such a decrease does not stand in the way of living well. Through insourcing some of the production activities that historically used to be performed by the household and attentively engaging with a select few objects in the practices that are central to the individual’s life story, the consumer ends up with meaningful possessions to which she is greatly attached (and few objects that mean nothing to her).

Some might worry that a radical reduction in personal possessions radically reduces the spectrum of opportunities we have, in terms of the kinds of activities that we can perform. Artefacts are necessary conditions for participating in many practices after all, so a lack of access to artefacts entails a lack of opportunities to practice. Such a worry is understandable, but it should not be taken too seriously. Lack of personal possessions does not entail lack of *access* to objects after all. One way to drastically reduce the volume of commodities and spaces at home without compromising our ability to interact with objects and localities is the substitution of personal with communal possession and inhabitation. Just as political communities have communal practice portfolios, they also have communal artefact and space portfolios (although these have become increasingly small and impoverished); and just as other practice communities have portfolios of activity patterns, they too have artefact and space portfolios. Public transportation, libraries, museums, and communal gardens are just the most obvious examples. By shifting our resource investments from personal to communal portfolios, we prevent individual existences that are cluttered with rarely utilised, meaningless possessions and reduce the ecological footprint of HDCs. What is more, these portfolios further promote the development of local social capital. Research has shown that closeness, both functional and physical, is very important in terms of encouraging social interaction – and shared facilities along with jointly owned artefacts within practice communities create both kinds. For example, the public library is precisely the place where the avid reader finds other local bibliophiles with whom she shares interests that are essential to her identity. Similarly, the communal tool shed or workshop⁶⁵⁷ is precisely the facility where do-it-yourselfers meet others like them to work on personal or community projects. In both cases, the potential for local social interaction is obvious. In that way, the reduction of personal possessions may contribute to individual flourishing in multiple important ways without making her significantly worse off in other aspects.

5.3. Application: The Consumption of Goods and Services

Approaching the ethics of consumption from the perspective of needs and practice provides a unique critical perspective upon modern consumption, including what we generally consider the consumption of services.

⁶⁵⁶ Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton (1981).

⁶⁵⁷ For an Auckland example, see the Men’s Shed North Shore (mensshednorthshore.org.nz), a community-based facility where men of all ages and backgrounds meet to work on personal or community projects and socialise with each other. The Shed houses various woodworking and engineering workshop that are fully equipped with tools and machinery that can be used for a variety of small to medium sized projects (eg, boat and furniture repair, wood turning, and toy making).

I have selected two examples, namely television media and museums. In the following I analyse whether and why our consumption of these is problematic by discussing how we participate in the practices that revolve around them.

5.3.1. Television Media Consumption

That contemporary Westerners have become media consumers *par excellence* (non-literally) is common knowledge. In 2015, the average American spent about 9.5 hours daily consuming media by watching television, surfing the web, listening to the radio, and so forth. A year later, that number had grown to 10 hours and 39 minutes. With 5 hours and 4 minutes daily, TV consumption takes the lion share of that activity, almost 50%. According to data from 1999, television viewing occupies 44% of the free time of US Americans during weekdays and almost 37% during weekends.⁶⁵⁸

What we might call *television* is a practice within the larger field of *communication*, and the productive activities carried out within that practice are primarily those of professionals concerned with the particular technological formats and processes of TV content production (eg, camera operators, lighting directors, and production managers). From the perspective of content consumption, it is more plausible to consider individuals as participating in various practices that are merely accidentally linked to *television* because they currently use TV technology among other creative/communicative media (eg, print and radio). Depending on the nature of the subject matter, these content-related practices might be called *news*, *visual art and storytelling*, *comedy*, *science*, and so on – and it is these practices in which consumers participate on a frequent basis by using the instrument that we call ‘TV set’.⁶⁵⁹

Unfortunately, consumer participation in these practices can hardly ever be considered virtuous or excellent. Referring back to the initial paragraph of this sub-section, the average American does not actually spend five hours daily with her mind intently and exclusively focussed upon shows, movies, and news. She does not fully immerse herself in the content, allowing it to affect her feelings and emotions. Consuming television content, especially day-time TV, is not like going to the movies. Rather, for much of the time during which a consumer exposes herself to visual and audible signals, content consumption represents merely one stream of multi-tasking activity that is combined at best with mechanical activity which can be performed with little attention (say, dish-washing or eating) and at worst with activity that requires significant mentality (eg, email messaging or web-surfing). In fact, “apart from all computer activity summed together (email, computer games, homework, etc.), more time [is] devoted to television as the secondary activity than all other secondary media usage”⁶⁶⁰. Just as there are virtually no moments anymore during which agents characterise their activity as *listening to the radio* (instead of *driving the car*, *taking a shower*, or *getting dressed* with the radio running in the background), there are increasingly fewer periods during which our activity can be characterised as *watching TV*. Large amounts of the television sounds and pictures emitted in Anglo-American households register as mere background commotion that provides distraction or comfort. Such secondary TV consumption cannot be construed as acuminately habitualised activity, because it fails to meet the criteria previously outlined. Agents are not at all fully involved, their performance is not guided by internal standards of excellence. For example, the urge to learn is rarely present, as is the drive to aspire. Thus, secondary TV consumption cannot be considered excellent practice participation.

⁶⁵⁸ Robinson & Godbey (1999).

⁶⁵⁹ The only time a consumer ever really participates in *television* is when she buys a TV set, because that is when she might immerse herself in matters of TV technology (before picking and ordering a device).

⁶⁶⁰ Short (2013: 20); Foehr’s findings are similar (2006).

None of that is to deny that secondary TV consumption may have a place in human lives. In some circumstances, multitasking is perfectly adaptive. For example, washing the dishes is an activity that rarely requires an agent's full attention, so she may as well use her unoccupied cognitive capacity to derive other benefits, say, by keeping an eye on the news. Plausibly, though, the taking-in of much contemporary TV content does not actually *require* more mental capacity than the multi-tasking agent can spare. TV content providers are perfectly aware that consumers run their media devices in the background, which is why their broadcasts are designed for partial attention and easy intake to begin with. Mainstream TV programmes do not deal in subtle emotions because they would be lost on multi-tasking consumers. Newscasts do not present intricate premises and complicated arguments, because, unable to follow, the average consumer would quickly tune out and change channels entirely, with correspondingly negative consequences for the station's advertising income: "The most effective telecommunications are the gross, simplified linear messages and programs which conveniently fit the purposes of the medium's commercial controllers"⁶⁶¹. For that reason, the activity of TV content producers cannot qualify as excellent either, in the same way in which the writing of a scientific journal article designed to be digested with the reader's attention partially engaged otherwise could also not qualify as excellent praxis performance. In other words, while secondary TV consumption may have a place in an agent's life, its predominance hurts the practices concerned in terms of both consumer participation and producer performance.

It is not entirely clear how much of our total television time is taken up by exclusive TV watching, but presumably a fair amount.⁶⁶² The question is, what would excellent activity – that is, full participation in contemporary practices that use TV technology – during these periods actually look like? Proper communication practice (that satisfies needs in a profound way) revolves around active performance, but the supply of TV content is not actually designed for such a mode of consumer participation. TV-watching does not foster self-expression, because communication is unidirectional. It does not involve critical interaction, because the medium is almost entirely non-reactive; dissenting, debating, and directing the inquiry are non-options. It does not involve the agent in the gathering of data either. It leaves little room for creativity, because TV content is both visually and aurally explicit. It does not permit consumers to change the speed of engagement, because – compared to reading a book – the tempo of delivery is fully pre-determined. The transmission of content is interrupted to deliver advertising only, and these intermissions are not designed to facilitate quiet reflection at all. Finally, TV consumption hardly encourages the improvement of agent skill in any other sense either, because it requires little sustained effort and no perseverance by the watcher.⁶⁶³ In fact, its undemanding nature is a, perhaps the, major attraction of television to begin with.⁶⁶⁴ All things considered, the communication practices that use TV technology are configured to exclude the vast majority of agents from participation that would enable them to access practice-internal goods.

In order to overcome that exclusion, consumers have to engage in activity that is often neither encouraged nor tolerated by the institutions that maintain TV-related practices. For example, the *Breaking Bad Movie* fan-project represents a rare example of intelligent and highly involved consumer participation in the *visual art and*

⁶⁶¹ Mander (1978: 261).

⁶⁶² German consumption data indicate that the share is almost 70% (Grahm et al, 2003). According to Csikszentmihalyi & Kubey (1981), television occupies the undivided attention of their Chicago sample during only 33% of viewing occasions. Located in between these, Foehr (2006) reports that 55% of the time when TV watching is their primary activity, the members of their sample (American 3rd-12th graders) do 'nothing else'. Said percentage does not take into account the considerable time devoted to television as a secondary activity, though.

⁶⁶³ Eg, see Mander (1978), Valkenburg & van der Voort (1994), and Runco (2014).

⁶⁶⁴ Robinson & Godbey (1999).

storytelling practice. *Breaking Bad*, a highly acclaimed American crime drama series⁶⁶⁵, ran from 2008-2013 and screened 62 episodes with running times of 43-58 minutes each. After two years of work, in early 2017 two French fans of the show released a feature-length film that synthesises the story of the entire series in a two-hour treatment.⁶⁶⁶ A run-time reduction of such radical extent (>95%) does not allow for mere linear compression. Rather, the film represents an experiment that tests if and how the series' concept and storyline can be accommodated in a movie, such that the descending moral trajectory of the drama's main character, Walter White, remains discernible. What makes the project a candidate for acuminatedly habitualised activity (or at least a sustained instance of self-training) are the elements that are hardly ever present in the activities through which consumers ordinarily participate in television-related practices: dedication required to sustain productive efforts throughout two years; intimate familiarity with every aspect of plot, structure, and characters; application of creative and analytical skill in the course of reorganising and reframing the material; and employment of technical competence required to cut and recombine both video and audio content.

Unfortunately (yet predictably), copyright infringement claims almost immediately lead to a removal of the *Breaking Bad Movie* file from sharing platforms like YouTube and Vimeo, thereby blocking opportunities to critically discuss the film and involve fans (especially those who are less technologically savvy or not prepared to use illegal methods of file distribution⁶⁶⁷) on a much broader basis. In that way, consumers are both disincentivised and prevented from full practice participation, and the practice's sovereignty remains wholly retained in the hands of a small group of professionals. Any meaningful change to the status quo will have to be initiated by non-professional participants, especially through a radical reformation of existing institutions and instruments, including copyright protection legislation. Given my previous arguments, the responsibility for these reforms lie with the members of the relevant communication practices as well as with the citizens as members of Western political communities (two sets that more or less perfectly overlap).

Finally, it is not unreasonable to argue that TV consumption, as it is currently practiced by most, erodes the kind of social capital that the Amish value so highly. In 2009, a US household owned 2.9 connected TV sets on average.⁶⁶⁸ That year, the average US household size was 2.6 people. Thus, the average household member was able to watch whatever she prefers, without affecting anyone else's ability in her home to do the same. Research on media consumption bears out such behaviour. In the UK, for example, TV consumption occurs privately much more often than with family members. Whether the category is *live broadcast or recorded TV*, *broadcasters' on-demand and streaming services*, or *subscription on-demand and streaming services*, the primary reason why adults watch is this: for 55%, 50%, and 55% respectively it is alone time ('I can watch anything I want to watch'), and for only 35%, 24%, and 31% respectively it is family time.⁶⁶⁹ It is difficult not to infer from these findings that we practice TV consumption in a way that erodes, or at least fails to promote, social capital at home. That is one of the main reasons why the Amish *Ordnung* proscribes it, and if other political communities value strong families equally highly, TV sets will have to be utilised very differently – or perhaps banned from households entirely.

⁶⁶⁵ Owing to its fifth-season metacore of 99/100 on MetaCritic.com, *Guinness World Records 2014* lists *Breaking Bad* as the highest-ever rated TV series (Glenday, 2013).

⁶⁶⁶ For details, visit <http://bbthemovie.com>. See also Romano (2017).

⁶⁶⁷ As of 2019, the movie file is still circulated in torrent networks and hosted on usenet servers.

⁶⁶⁸ See Nielsen (bit.ly/346QUqG, accessed 01.12.2018).

⁶⁶⁹ Ofcom (2017).

5.3.2. Museum Consumption

For a long while, the history of the museum was a history of the relationship between two different functional processes, curation and education, and for much of that time the latter was considered an adjunct, subservient to the former.⁶⁷⁰ Nevertheless, advancement and improvement of the populace, however biased toward cultural elitism at times, has always been part of the mission statement. Given the meaning of the word *museum*, this seems only fitting: traditionally, the museum is the place consecrated to the Muses, mythical creatures whose name signifies the activity of ‘explaining the mysteries’ to learned men who then bring them to the attention of the vulgar⁶⁷¹. For example, the British Museum Act of 1753 stipulated that the museum collection was to be “preserved and maintained, not only for the Inspection and Entertainment of the Learned and the Curious, but for the General Use and Benefit of the Publick”⁶⁷² (even though the institution did not actually begin to live up to that objective until the following century⁶⁷³).

In fact, though, the foregoing characterisation of the museum is far too anaemic, because it fails to account for the particular potential that lies at the intersection of curation and education. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls the museum ‘a refuge for utopian thought’, a microcosm that brings together past, present, and future in distinctive ways. *Museum* represents an art practice of its own because its rich disjointedness has the capacity to inspire human imagination in various ways. Firstly, its collection represents a permanently growing body of heterogeneous objects and ideas, which are not only encountered from the different perspectives and within the different frameworks of numerous observers but also re-compared and re-combined by them again and again. It was this very encounter between old cosmologies and new ways of perceiving that fuelled the learned and curious discourses of early modern Europe.⁶⁷⁴ Secondly, the space between the objects and ideas is often as inspiring as, if not more inspiring than, the pieces themselves. Any collection is defined by presences as much as by gaps (in the collection, the record, the narrative), not only allowing but positively inviting leaps of intuition, leaps of faith, and poetic leaps. The loosely jointed nature of the incomplete whole makes the collection both a reservoir from which to draw and an active field of infinite combinatorial potential that feeds through coincidence, accident, and incident. In addition, the increasing spectrum of exhibition categories addresses a growing spectrum of human sensibilities. For example, exhibitions (or entire museums) of conscience deal with moral and political issues such as genocide, slavery, apartheid, civil rights, and crimes against humanity, some of which the hosts may be implicated in themselves (eg, the colonial theft of artworks and other relics); metamuseums, on the other hand, reflect on the question of what museums actually do and how they do it (eg, what media they use, what objects they collect and exhibit, who ought to participate in which roles, *et cetera*). In these ways, the museum provokes and sustains reflection, retrospection, prospection, and speculation⁶⁷⁵ – and it is here that some of the particular practice-internal goods of *museum* lie.

The work of expert museum professionals, whether or not they operate at the intersection of curation and education, most certainly qualifies as acuminatedly habitualised activity. More importantly for us, *museum* institutions do not generally exclude or discourage consumers from full practice participation – or at least not

⁶⁷⁰ The nature of that relationship was reflected in the structure of institutions. While curators held permanent senior posts and defined policy, education staff were often seconded from other educational institutions (mainly schools), worked only temporarily, and had minimal input into policy-making (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994).

⁶⁷¹ Findlen (1989).

⁶⁷² No author name given (1805: 12-13).

⁶⁷³ For details, see Leahy (2012).

⁶⁷⁴ Findlen (1989).

⁶⁷⁵ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004).

anymore.⁶⁷⁶ Visitors are generally free to explore objects in their own time and at their own speed. Information tends to be amply supplied through various media, including printed catalogues, guide books, and electronic guides. Exhibitions tend to be carefully narrated, displays generally well-sequenced. Nevertheless, attendees are perfectly free to align explorative emphasis with personal interest, and museums with more fluid and flexible arrangements actively encourage visitors to create their own paths through the installations. Like classic theatre, the museum tells stories in three-dimensional space, the difference being that in the latter it is the show which is stationary and the audience which moves.⁶⁷⁷ Accordingly, consumer participation in museum practice requires spatial and kinetic intelligence, the ability to think and move well with and within a materialised space of a special kind⁶⁷⁸. That intelligence also includes the ability to find ideal viewing places such that objects can be brought into perspective and held in one's static gaze. For example,

[t]he way pictures are hung makes assumptions about what is offered. Hanging editorializes on matters of interpretation and value, and is unconsciously influenced by taste and fashion. Subliminal cues indicate to the audience its department.⁶⁷⁹

Without the ability to pick up these subliminal cues and the understanding of spatial and visual relations between viewer and exhibit, agents lack a competence that is crucial to well-performed appreciation. Yet, as with exhibition routes, so with viewing spots: paths and positions that are not intended by the museum's choreography allow for the kind of visitor disorientation and surprise that further increase the inspirational potential mentioned above – and the intentional fabrication of such effects in oneself may well be the result of a visiting agent's spatial and kinetic intelligence too.

An increasing number of exhibitions intentionally include consumers as co-producers in their projects. For example, the Swedish project *Difficult Matters: Objects and Narratives that Disturb and Affect*⁶⁸⁰ revolved around cultural artefacts where either object, meaning, or both are somehow difficult and troubling, with the critical exploration of what these terms actually mean, and for whom, itself being a key theme. The travelling exhibition involved the display of contributions from 54 Swedish museums, some more obviously disconcerting (eg, a Nazi flag, a lobotomy drill, a caltrop), others ostensibly harmless (eg, a wooden box with water colours⁶⁸¹). The project also involved a seminar series for museum professionals, dedicated to questions concerning the museum's role regarding accidents and major disasters, how to approach people at the margins of society, *et cetera*. More importantly, members of the public were encouraged to contribute personal items that, for whatever reason, touched and upset them – things associated with sadness, discomfort, vulnerability, and intolerability. In that way, visitors were even more actively inspired to reflect on the process through which things acquire their meanings; the relationship between private and shared meanings; the meaning-preserving inseparability of material artefact and immaterial narrative; and the question of which themes and objects a museum should (and should not) explore and exhibit, and why. Visitor reactions and reflections were not only invited but also captured, for example, through the use of guest books and journals.⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁶ For the less than glorious praxes of the early British Museum, see Leahy (2012).

⁶⁷⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2000).

⁶⁷⁸ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004).

⁶⁷⁹ O'Doherty (1999: 24).

⁶⁸⁰ Originally titled *Svåra saker: Ting och berättelser som upprör och berör*, the exhibition opened to the public in 1999.

⁶⁸¹ In an unguarded moment on 23 December 1871, one-year old Elma von Hallwyl put one of the colour tiles from the box in her mouth. She became ill and died from poisoning within hours (Jansson, 2006).

⁶⁸² See Silvén & Björklund (2006).

Projects like *Difficult Matters* allow for a kind of practice participation that television-related practices and their institutions do not. With consumers being urged to go beyond interpretation and evaluation of exhibits by actually contributing to the exhibition corpus, not only does the communication between practice participants represent a critical dialogue but consumers also perform data-gathering and shape the content of the final product as it will subsequently be experienced by other visitors. Dissent and debate regarding a broad range of issues is explicitly asked for, which makes *Difficult Matters* a catalyst – much unlike a bundle of signals that is perceived in the isolation of one’s home and that, more often than not, barely registers. The tempo of delivery in exhibitions is self-chosen, and museum spaces tend to be very suitable for quiet reflection. They also represent environs that lend themselves not nearly as easily to multitasking and other distractions as places in which we watch television – and the relevant norms reflect that. For example, people who talk on the phone in a museum are frequently glared upon or shushed because they behave inappropriately. In addition, museums are able to cater to a broader range of senses than TV media (somatosensation, olfaction, and gustation). For example, television can simply not convey what it is like to stand inside an artefact like *The Gun Sculpture*, 7,000 deactivated weapons from countries around the world welded into a crypt proportioned like a prison cell⁶⁸³; what it is like to experience the stench of gun oil as it highlights the smooth functionality of modern arms; and what it is like to touch the hard edges of rifles, pistols, and landmines as they make the violence of weapons all the more tangible

The issue of the thematic domain of museums as explored by *Difficult Matters* directly addresses a social concern and thus highlights how the practices of *museum* and *politics* are closely intertwined. Museums and the appreciables they house are quintessential representations of Arendt’s human artifice, visible and open to all members of the community. They are political bodies, because as simultaneous preservers and creators of cultural heritage they are crucial to the self-understanding of a collective. How a museum approaches that role – eg, whether it documents conflicts and unequal power relations, whether it explores traumas and disasters, even at the risk of its reputation – is crucial to the authenticity of the political community’s identity. Given that the identity of the individual feeds and builds upon the self-understanding of the collective, each member of that collective, and thus each consumer, not only has an interest in a well-functioning *museum* practice but a responsibility for contributing to its health and vigour through direct participation. It highlights how closely connected *museum* practice is to the achievement and maintenance of citizenship (and how it is integrated with the communal interpretation of *human flourishing* and the determination of legitimate need-satisfiers).

All of that makes the enormous disproportionality between the value of participating in *museum* practice and the frequency with which contemporary consumers actually do so all the more unfortunate. For example, US adults visit museums in-person an average 3.1 times per capita annually and stay an average time of 2.9 hours each time.⁶⁸⁴ Accordingly, Americans spend less time in museums in an entire year than they expose themselves to TV media in the course of two days. Presumably, the fact that it is not at all undemanding does not add to the attraction of *museum*. However, a public discourse among citizens should clarify and acknowledge that museum visits cannot properly satisfy human needs unless they *are* demanding.

Other plausible reasons why museums are so unattractive are the high (and continuously increasing) temporal cost of travelling that result from America’s suburbanisation as well as the monetary cost of museum entry

⁶⁸³ See www.gunsulpture.com and www.sandrabromley.com.

⁶⁸⁴ Griffiths & King (2008).

born from the need to remain financially viable⁶⁸⁵. However, these issues too ought to be subject to public debate and, if possible, practice adjustment. For example, to the extent that museums are required to secure universal citizenship (see comments about cultural heritage above), public funding through resources that represent a quasi-tax is entirely appropriate. The same applies to transportation: since mobility is universally needed to flourish in any given Western political community, and to the degree that private forms of motorised transportation are inferior to public transport systems (eg, in terms of environmental sustainability and speed⁶⁸⁶), public funding to build and operate the latter is perfectly justifiable too. Both museums and public transportation systems represent collectively owned and utilised commodity sets. Given their non-exclusivity, they tend to use scarce resources far more efficiently than privately owned and utilised commodities. Thus, they are likely crucial to securing our ability to flourish even after resource access in HDCs sharply decreases under PJ.

★

In effect, the requirement of flourishing entails that most of us need to consume TV media and museum exhibitions rather differently than the typical Westerner does at present. For example, stronger social capital – or, to stick with my own conceptual tools, the *subjective connectedness* dimension of quotidian needs – plausibly gives us strong reason to consume TV media without withdrawing from the rest of the family. Just as importantly, the achievement of excellence requires that our mode of practice participation changes from passive and mechanised to active and acuminated.

Museums and other public institutions that care for and give us access to the artistically, culturally, historically, and scientifically important objects that are crucial to our communal identity (eg, art galleries) should play a much more prominent role in our lives. Unlike TV media consumption, museum visits are quintessentially non-private activities that address our need for *subjective connectedness* (regarding those who are closest to us as well as the wider citizenry). They invite active exploration and the development of a variety of skills, for example, through participation in the critical interpretation of meaning – which may enable others to discover elements of the narrative that they would never have recognised by themselves. In that way, museum consumption and political participation combine beautifully.

5.4. Final Comments

Much more can, and needs, to be said with regard to all of the issues discussed in this chapter. For example, take objective alienation. The very objects that are now among the most proliferating in our households, consumer electronics, are the artefacts that we become least attached to. As Odom et al report, “for the most part, things ensouled – things with a high strength of attachment – were not digital things and digital things were things unensouled – things with a low strength of attachment”⁶⁸⁷. Conceptually, this makes perfect sense. Functionally, the purpose of consumer electronics is the delivery of digital content (eg, video, audio, and images), and it is this

⁶⁸⁵ American museums are not publicly owned and government support (local, state, and federal) has been eroding significantly. For example, between 1989-2009 the average US museum’s share of funding from government sources dropped from 38% to 24% of its total income (data from American Alliance of Museums, www.aam-us.org, accessed 15.12.2018).

⁶⁸⁶ Public transportation is not speedier than private motorised transport *per se*. However, due to high numbers in private vehicle ownership and use in virtually all countries, traffic congestion has become the bane of the daily commute in urban and suburban areas in particular. In these circumstances, the creation and use of public transportation can result in greatly diminished travel times (for individuals of either group).

⁶⁸⁷ Odom et al (2009: 1056).

content alone that justifiably matters to consumers. Characteristically, the features of good electronic devices are wholly 'transparent' in the sense that consumers should not even notice them when the object is deployed. The less its attributes distract from the characteristics of digital media, the better the device functions (because it is purely a means to access content after all). If acuminately habitualised practice enactments were directed toward media devices instead of the digital content they make accessible, our mental activity would be misdirected. By attending to the content of media, the devices cannot be subject to our attention and thus become meaningful objects. Consequently, consumers cannot be held responsible for not forming attachments to such commodities.

However, justifiable lack of attachment does not automatically give consumers licence to frequently discard or replace consumer electronics. If it affects their ability to form attachments to other objects, we might even argue that it should be avoided. Statistically, electronic devices are among the consumer items that get replaced the most frequently (eg, mobile phones, digital cameras, tablet computers).⁶⁸⁸ Now, the very awareness and expectation that many objects in their lives are discarded or replaced quickly may prevent consumers from developing bonds to objects more globally. After all, we do not let ourselves get attached to people whom we expect to be a part of our lives for brief periods only either – and that may affect our ability to form social bonds more generally (which represents a psychological disorder). If the same holds with regard to objects, then consumers have good reason to avoid frequent replacements even of those commodities that are not subject to connectedness themselves.⁶⁸⁹ Individual insights like these can really only come out of personal portfolio and practice audits because the meta-issue of how we relate to objects in general is not part of our day-to-day activity with regard to any one practice in particular.

One way to lower the throughput of usables is the extension of utilisation periods, which requires resistance to trends of ever-growing comfort and convenience, two of the most potent drivers of shortening product lifecycles in Western consumer society. For example, new cars are promoted as more comfortable because they are now even quieter and roomier on the inside and have even better suspension. The claim that we should pursue increased comfort seems innocuous enough. However, standards of what counts as comfortable, and how much, are culturally determined and in that sense resemble fashion.⁶⁹⁰ These norms are a matter of social construction, and the requirements of capital productivity provide strong incentives for permanent adjustments by illegitimate practice makers motivated by sales and profit growth (ie, corporate manufacturers and traders). Instead of being dictated to them, the members of political and other practice communities have a responsibility to determine these standards themselves – which indicates just one of the many connections between this chapter and the previous.

With regard to the latter, new kitchen appliances are marketed as more convenient because they allow users to complete some specific task more quickly or with less active participation. Convenience addresses the modern phenomena of time poverty, fragmentation of timescapes, and the increased pace of society. Overall, more convenient objects enable us to perform more efficiently. They enable us to fit more activities into the shrinking temporal segments within modern practices (eg, the time slots between meetings) and to perform regardless of our location (eg, at work, on the train).⁶⁹¹ Yet, time famine, temporal fragmentation, and the pace of life keep on intensifying, and it is difficult for the individual to resist those trends even in the home because domestic and non-domestic temporalities are highly interconnected. The temporal demands of an agent's professional practice(s) not

⁶⁸⁸ Odom et al (2009).

⁶⁸⁹ Of course, the negative environmental impact of reduced product lifecycles provides strong reasons against frequent commodity replacement too, but that is a different issue altogether.

⁶⁹⁰ Shove (2012).

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

only condition how she approaches the organisation and performance of activities more generally, but they also affect her domesticity directly. Firstly, the increased mobility of workplace tools (eg, laptops and mobile phones) and geographically/temporally universal access to information (eg, via Internet) generates expectations that agents continue to perform as professionals even after they have left their workplace. Secondly, the amount of time an agent is expected to dedicate to her professional activities straightforwardly determines how much time is left for all other practices. Thirdly, the exhaustion caused by modern workplace temporalities directly affects the agent's ability to function outside of work. None of this implies that the agent has no control over the temporalities of her life at all, of course. In some sense of the term, a person is free to opt out of participating in mainstream consumer and producer culture and possibly join an alternative collective (eg, freegans or the Amish) instead. Yet, such a move is usually very costly, socially and otherwise, because practices tend to be highly interconnected: radical changes with regard to one often entail drastic changes with regard to many others (and not only for one individual, but for others too, eg, family members). So with regard to time poverty, fragmentation of timescapes, and social pace too, it is actually political work at the level of entire practice communities (including *politics*) that needs to be performed.

Conclusion and Outlook

How do we learn to be consumerists? Not because someone comes along and offers an argument for why stuff will make me happy. I don't *think* my way into consumerism. Rather, I'm covertly conscripted into a way of life because I have been *formed* by cultural practices that are nothing less than secular liturgies. My loves have been automated by rituals I didn't even realize were liturgies.

*James K. A. Smith*⁶⁹²

Originally, this project started out as an attempt to analyse human consumption and to build suitable ethical and political principles on the basis of need. What we need, rather than what we merely desire, is an important question, especially when consumption is subject to the problems that I outlined in chapter 1: it frequently injures the consumer, it often involves injury to third parties, it is inefficient, it occurs very unequally, and it objectively alienates us.

At some point, the fact that our consumption activity represents – often mindless – enactments of practices made itself felt: from earliest childhood, every individual is acculturated into activity patterns that are enacted by innumerable members of her political community. We become practically trained to consume like those around us before we can even formulate any clear and coherent thoughts, let alone become aware of ourselves as moral agents. Thus, it is difficult for us to question and change how we consume on a day-to-day basis. It takes an incredible effort of discernment to even recognise the patterns that we reproduce, let alone prevent the occurrence of activity sequences that often play out as automatically as our circadian rhythm.

Fortunately, and plausibly, the two perspectives combine nicely: centrally among the things that human beings need to flourish *qua* human are practices. From the perspective of the individual, each of us needs a well-developed portfolio of practices that represent particular combinations of the three interconnected elements *doings*, *beings*, and *havings* (also reflected in the existential dimension of human needs). For that need to be satisfied, political communities have to ensure that their collective portfolios are well-developed and -diversified in turn.

Needs and practices lends themselves nicely to the analysis of the various consumption issues that I outlined. As long as we define *proper individual practice portfolio* in terms of that set of available practices that enables its possessor to flourish in the long term (given the characteristics of her context), injury will be mostly avoided. Occasional practice enactments may still cause injury to the practitioner, especially if the activity is not acuminatedly habitualised (and thus lacks contextual flexibility in terms of performance). However, on the whole the practice in question would be largely beneficial.

Consumer inefficiency is addressed in various ways. Firstly, the application of PJ entails radical resource access reduction for Western consumers. Given that this move makes it exceedingly difficult for individuals in HDCs to retain the high material standard of life they are accustomed to even if they utilise their resources in the least wasteful fashion, such waste avoidance is very likely to occur. Secondly, the Preston curve demonstrates that a shift of resource access from those who currently overconsume to those who currently underconsume results in enormous gains in total flourishing because any reductions in well-being with regard to the former will be more

⁶⁹² Smith (2016: 45).

than offset by gains in well-being by the latter. Thirdly, a shift of production activity back into households (in the course of objective dealienation) further reduces waste because greater objective connectedness plausibly goes hand in hand with more careful use.

The reduction of object alienation most directly follows from the human need for *connectedness*, especially the objective kind. However, as I argued, other types of connectedness (eg, subjective and local) too give us reason to insource the production of tangible (and plausibly also intangible) consumption objects back into the household. Additionally, the reduction of all types of distance (geographical, cultural, and temporal) increases the individual ability to satisfy the requirements of consumer responsibility.

The issue of third-party injury is primarily addressed at two points. Firstly, by requiring that a political community maintain a practice portfolio that allows for member flourishing without non-consensually compromising the ability of people in other communities to do the same, we avoid many of the third-party harms that I listed. Even though I have focussed on human flourishing, we can easily extend this principle to non-human biotic communities (with the concept of *consent* making reference to human guardians who protect the interests of the creatures, species, or eco-systems in question). Secondly, by requiring that an ordinary practice community too has to take the interests of other practitioners into account, we protect third parties *within* a political community as well.

Finally, consumption inequality is most directly addressed through the principle of justice PJ. It requires that basic need-satisfaction (up to a degree of flourishing that represents human citizenship) is given full priority, both within and across political communities. After that, differential flourishing is acceptable insofar as no one fares worse compared to a scenario in which everyone has access to the same share of the remaining resources (pareto optimality).

Many of the concepts and ideas used and developed in this thesis deserve (and require) far more work – as do many concepts and ideas that I merely touched upon or, due to scope limitations, had to neglect entirely. Let me give two examples. Firstly, the virtue of thrift is especially relevant to human consumption, so the assessment of its role in human practices is a promising topic. Secondly, a comprehensive work on consumption ethics ought to address the proper response to wrong-doing. In the context of consumption, atonement conceptualised in terms of asceticism suggests itself. If we define the latter as “voluntary, sustained, and at least partially systematic program of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensual, or profane gratifications are renounced”⁶⁹³, its potential is quite obvious.

⁶⁹³ Kaelber (2005: 526).

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