A Theology of Consumption

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But what am I loving when I love you [God]? Not beauty of body nor transient grace, not this fair light which is now so friendly to my eyes, not melodious song in all its lovely harmonies, not the sweet fragrance of flowers or ointments or spices, not manna or honey, not limbs that draw me to carnal embrace: none of these do I love when I love my God. And yet I do love a kind of light, a kind of voice, a certain fragrance, a food and an embrace, when I love my God: a light, voice, fragrance, food and embrace for my inmost self, where something limited to no place shines into my mind, where something not snatched away by passing time sings for me, where something no breath blows away yields to me its scent, where there is savor undiminished by famished eating, and where I am clasped in a union from which no satiety can tear me away. This is what I love, when I love my God.

- Augustine, *Confessions* X.6

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets… For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

- Verses from Zechariah 8

And I think to myself, what a wonderful world.

- Louis Armstrong, "What a Wonderful World"

Abstract

What role do consumer goods play in human flourishing? When considering market consumption and consumer practices, many Christian ethicists and theologians focus far more on injustices and injuries than on flourishing. Nevertheless, a key and complementary tool that Christian ethics currently lacks for healing wounds and cultivating well-being is a comparably detailed account of a theological rationale for market consumption and its connection to human flourishing. This dissertation argues that there is a deeper theological purpose to consumption: it is nothing less than glimpsing God's infinite goodness.

The dissertation holds that human flourishing consists of such glimpses of God, and using the bridge concept of "wonder," it critically connects Platonist Christian theology and ontology, the positive psychology concept of "flow," and the Capabilities Approach to Human Development in order to detail the way *human flourishing - glimpsing God's infinite goodness - consists of cultivating people's capabilities for wondrous activity in community with one another.* The dissertation draws on the work of theologian Robert Adams, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and philosopher Martha Nussbaum. By linking their core insights together, it constructs a more detailed and expansive account of human flourishing than any of the three perspectives is able to offer on its own.

The Christian ethic of consumption that grows from this understanding of flourishing expansively includes things people find wonderful and worthy of pursuit in ordinary life, while also remaining critical of ways in which these good things can be treated as idols to the detriment of neighbors, self, as well as the rest of creation. This theological ethic highlights market objects, services, and activities in which people can: (1) engage in the production process to some extent, (2) participate actively during consumption, whether mentally or physically, and (3) connect with others through consumption. This ethic appreciates the role certain consumer objects, services, and activities can play in offering glimpses of God in the cultivation of wondrous capabilities for flow in community with others.

Having this articulation of a theological purpose to market consumption is important for practical as well as conceptual reasons. On a practical front, it is a call to recognize and embrace the wondrous glimpses of God's goodness to which market consumption can contribute, thereby offering more enticement to ethical consumption than the call of moral duty, virtue, or responsibility alone. On a conceptual level, a positive vision of market consumption duly highlights that this world and life are neither trivial nor simply something to be endured and ultimately escaped, but are part of God's good creation in and for which humans have been made and redeemed.

This dissertation is intended to be of use to Christian theologians, ethicists, college and graduate students in religious studies, and Christians broadly who are seeking a framework for theologically and ethically engaging market consumption. Its argument will also be applicable to interfaith dialogue and engagement around consumer ethics, and the constructive work around the Capabilities Approach to Human Development and the concept of flow will be illuminative to ethicists and consumers who are non-religious as well.

Table of Contents

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Finally, none of this or any of us would be here absent the God who crafted each of us as part of this good creation and came incarnate as Christ to rescue us from the train wreck of our wayward hearts. Lord, may these words spur attention to the wonders of your goodness in creation and beyond. Insofar as these words are true, may they be undergirded by your power and might. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Introduction

Overview

What role do consumer goods play in human flourishing? When considering market consumption and consumer practices, many Christian ethicists and theologians focus far more on injustices and injuries than on flourishing. They often highlight material harms to workers, other species, consumers, or the environment as a whole. They examine relational harms that arise as communal bonds dissolve before private interest and connection to God becomes sinfully distorted toward mammon. They analyze the dispositional harms that consumer practices inflict in habituating people to idolize status, comfort, convenience, and novelty. Christian ethics has rightly catalogued and critiqued unsafe, abusive, or underpaid working conditions, ecologies and other species being devastated by "resource" extraction or pollution, and the grinding lack of nutrition, shelter, medical care, respect, and opportunity so many people face. These criticisms of contemporary market consumption are not only right in themselves, but also necessary to correct such harms and injustices.

Nevertheless, a key and complementary tool that Christian ethics currently lacks for both healing wounds and cultivating well-being is a comparably detailed account of the

theological rationale of market consumption and its connection to human flourishing. Flourishing in and through the marketplace is at times gestured at, but left underdeveloped, as critiques of consumption commonly do not cast a constructive vision of what flourishing in the marketplace would entail. Market consumption tends to be viewed as a means of piquing pleasure or meeting basic needs, whether of the consumer or the producer who enlists his or her pay to go consume as well. Along this line, consumption is understood as beneficial and theologically relevant largely as it instrumentally affords things like food, shelter, medical care, clothing, and a decent degree of comfort. Anything beyond that is taken to be nice, perhaps, but theologically trivial.

Little focus is given to whether there is, or could be, any theological depth or purpose to consumption beyond sheer material health or comfort. Even Christian perspectives that offer full-throated praise of the market system, as well as the enjoyment that market consumption provides, tend to appeal to a thin under-theorized conception of "delight." Creation, as prepared and packaged via the market, is something in which people are supposed to take delight, but it is unclear what that means or entails. What are the contours and boundaries of such delight? What, if anything, links delight in God and delight in creation? Does market-based consumption have anything directly to do with enjoying God? Is there a deeper theological importance to consumption beyond making sure one does not hurt others in the process via deprivation or exploitation? How can consumption of market objects and services nurture, injure, or even partially constitute human flourishing?

This dissertation argues that there is a deeper theological rationale to consumption: it is nothing less than glimpsing God's infinite goodness. The dissertation holds that human flourishing consists of such glimpses of God, and it critically weaves together Platonist Christian theology and ontology, the positive psychology concept of "flow," and the

Capabilities Approach to Human Development in order to detail the way *human flourishing - glimpsing God's infinite goodness - consists of cultivating people's capabilities for wondrous activity in community with one another*. The dissertation develops a positive theological vision of human flourishing that brings together the work of philosopher Robert Adams, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and philosopher Martha Nussbaum into critical and constructive conversation. As will be discussed, this flourishing entails appreciating finite goods, including certain consumer goods and services, as resemblances of God's infinite goodness. The Christian ethic of consumption that grows from this understanding of flourishing is expansive and inclusive of things people find wonderful and worthy of pursuit in ordinary life, while also remaining critical of ways in which these good things can be treated as idols to the detriment of neighbors, self, as well as the rest of creation. Having this positive vision of market consumption is important for practical as well as conceptual reasons. On a practical front, people will be more drawn to consume ethically if it is not simply a duty-bound command, but rather a call to recognize and embrace the wonderful glimpses of God's goodness found therein. On a conceptual level, a positive vision of market consumption highlights and stresses that this world and life are not something to be endured or escaped, but are part of God's good creation in and for which humans have been made and redeemed.

In this account of a positive vision for market consumption, the current market system is not *necessary* for flourishing - in the sense that people need the market system in order to flourish, or even more strongly, that the participation in market system is *the* way God intends humans to flourish. However, it is necessary to engage the current market system critically and constructively given the extent to which our lives are embedded in the production, exchange, and consumption of market goods today. This dissertation builds on the idea that the market system, as one way of using and rearranging elements of creation,

harbors the potential to offer a broadly accessible and diverse array of avenues for people to flourish (i.e. to glimpse God in wondrous activities with one another), while recognizing and stressing that immense critical work remains to be accomplished at national and international levels to address harms to workers, other species, and the environment overall. The positive vision laid out in this dissertation is intended to serve complementarily and in tandem to that work.

The first chapter surveys the prime characteristics of contemporary market consumption in the United States. It describes the key characteristics of contemporary consumption, including its unprecedented growth in the U.S. during the 20th century and the ways it is deeply enmeshed in status-seeking, embrace of luxury, advertising, and day dreaming in ways that powerfully shape people's sense of self. This chapter also puts forward the definition of market consumption as *engaging some aspect of creation that has been produced through the market system*, and highlights dominate patterns of consumption in which goods are consumed that are individually focused, privately owned, alienated from the production process, and require little mental or physical activity.

The second chapter surveys the key themes in Catholic and Protestant ethics regarding market consumption. Christian ethicists and theologians critical of the market system focused primarily on production practices and the impoverished lives of workers during the 19th and early-to-mid 20th centuries. While greed and luxury have been targets of Christian thought and critique for millennia, the extremely productive boom of the mid-20th century to today and the rise of consumption as an ever more pervasive aspect of everyday life, particularly in the United States, led to an increased focus on consumption itself. Concerns over wages and working conditions expanded into critiques of environmental degradation and spiritual malformation wrought by contemporary consumer practices. All of these critiques, however, failed to provide a complementary positive vision of the role

consumer goods should play in flourishing human lives. Even defenders of contemporary market consumption offer very circumscribed understandings of consumer goods as primarily bearers of comfort and sustenance alone. Prominent Christian visions of flourishing in contemporary society similarly tend to focus over and against consumption on either work, morality, or contemplation as the true source of flourishing. The chapter demonstrates that Christian ethics lacks a complementary positive vision of the point of market consumption and its importance for human flourishing, without which Christian ethics lacks a critical lens for offering ethical and theological guidance for living in contemporary consumer society.

The third chapter draws on Robert Adams's work to establish a theological framework that identifies finite goods in creation as resemblances of God's infinite goodness. The driving question for this chapter is, "What is goodness?" Adams maintains that, when we attentively engage finite goods, we experience "something too wonderful to be contained or carried either by our experiences or by the physical or conceptual objects we are perceiving."[1] Adams's account of finite and infinite goods provides an insightful lens for analyzing consumer goods and the importance in particular of non-moral goods, e.g., music, athletics, or literature, to a flourishing human life. While this chapter draws deeply on Adams's articulation of how finite goods image God, it ultimately argues that Adams's criteria for what counts as a resemblance of God are simultaneously too vague and too restrictive. As a result, his comprehensive theory of value remains too obscurely abstract to serve effectively as an ethical and theological guide for perceiving and seeking glimpses of God in creation. The dissertation argues for setting aside these criteria and instead affirming that all of creation, having been made "very good" by God, resembles God in some capacity.

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[1] Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50-51.

This move allows theological and ethical focus to shift from trying to determine what finite goods count as a resemblance of God to seeking ways to fully perceive and appreciate the wondrous finite goods that make up creation. The dissertation enlists the positive psychology concept of flow to provide a more useful, applicable language and process for perceiving God's infinite goodness in finite goods.

The fourth chapter examines Csikszentmihalyi's work on "flow" in order to flesh out the kinds of activities that people self-reportedly find wondrous and worth doing as ends in themselves. Summarizing decades of research, Csikszentmihalyi notes that during flow, people experience "a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like."[2] These are the kinds of moments that Adams alternatively describes as glimpsing God in the wonder of finite goods. As such, the third chapter enlists the concept of flow to provide a more richly textured and detailed picture of what glimpsing God in finite goods entails than Adams provides. The driving question for this chapter is, "How can we recognize glimpses of God in finite goods?" When connected with Adams's theological framework, the kinds of activities and modes of attentiveness that generate flow afford more straightforward and actionable criteria for delineating what developing capabilities for flourishing (i.e., glimpsing wondrous resemblances of God in creation) entails.

Yet both the idea of flow and that of glimpsing God require further ethical development. By itself, flow completely lacks a moral focus or direction, as a person could conceivably enter flow states with indifference or even hostility toward the flourishing of others. For instance, a clothing designer might brilliantly and enthusiastically create excellent lines of clothing, and either not care or be oblivious to the fact that his or her materials

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[2] Mihaly Csikszsentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 3.

come via sweatshop labor. Ultimately, flow by itself is extremely susceptible to idolatry due to the powerful and captivating glimpses of God afforded by flow-generating activities, along with the objects or people they entail. On a different but still very problematic front, Adams's theory of value also needs further development if it is to be applicable in the field of ethics and helpful in navigating consumption amidst everyday contemporary life. Even though in Adams's account, love for God and love for finite good things are not necessarily or properly in competition with each other, love amongst different finite goods (e.g., vocation, family, friends, avocations, strangers, etc.) still is competitive here and now given human finitude. How much of a person's time, energy, and capability should be oriented toward the array of good things and people she loves? What guidance, again, can be offered and enlisted to inhibit fashioning any of these finite goods into an idol?

Given the need for greater ethical clarity and direction, the dissertation turns in the fifth chapter to Martha Nussbaum's work on the Capabilities Approach to Human Development. This chapter carries on the key questions from previous two chapters – "What is goodness?" and "How can we recognize glimpses of God in finite goods?" – but its primary inquiry is, "How can we resist idolizing finite goods?" The ten core human capabilities that she lays out constitute one of the most comprehensive and detailed lists of parameters requisite for human flourishing. Nussbaum's account is rooted in an Aristotelian intuition that flourishing revolves around people's capabilities – what they are able "to do and to be," more so than for instance what they are able to have or own. This list of capabilities provides ethical boundaries and direction for the cultivation and exercise of flow, in that any personal pursuit of flow should be ordered and oriented in a way that not only does not violate other people's capabilities, but also actively helps cultivate other people's capabilities for wondrous activity.

The fifth chapter also argues that the concept of wonder can fill a gap in Nussbaum's own work: namely the lack of robust explanation for why any given capability (e.g., the ones included on her list) is central to human flourishing. Nussbaum holds that the capabilities she lists are central because they are necessary for people to live with human dignity – to live a life worthy of a human being – but she admittedly rests that claim, as well as the belief that human dignity matters, on an intuition. The dissertation argues that a more developed reasoning for why capabilities matter lies in the wonder people find in them. The core capabilities Nussbaum identifies have such central importance to human flourishing because their exercise can afford wondrous moments of glimpsing God.[3]

By bringing Adams, Csikszentmihalyi, and Nussbaum into conversation, a rich vision of human flourishing arises: glimpsing God's infinite goodness in the cultivation of human capabilities for wondrous activity in community with one another. This picture of human flourishing guides the framework for the theological ethics of market consumption developed in the concluding chapter. This last chapter argues for a Christian consumer ethic that is not only attuned to the need to address harms inflicted by contemporary market systems, but also appreciative of the ways in which the goodness of God and of God's creation entail more than morality alone. This chapter is the culmination of the dissertation's argument that consumer goods can play an integral role in human flourishing when directed toward the cultivation and exercise of people's capabilities for flow in community with one another. Drawing upon the framework for consumption constructed through the first four chapters, the theological ethic oriented toward capabilities for flow directs people to consume objects, services, and activities with which they can: (1) engage in the production

[3] The wonder and intrinsic good people find in exercising capacities is also powerfully operative even on a secular level as well in offering reasons why the capabilities are so important (i.e., even if one does not claim those activities resemble and offer glimpses of God's infinite goodness, one can still maintain the wonder they elicit is a significant part of why they are so important).

process to some extent, (2) participate actively during consumption, whether mentally or physically, and (3) connect with others through consumption. This ethic appreciates the role certain consumer objects, services, and activities can play in offering glimpses of God amidst the exercise of capabilities for wondrous activity cultivated in community with others.

This dissertation is intended to be of use to Christian theologians, ethicists, college and graduate students in religious studies, and Christians broadly who are seeking a framework for theologically and ethically engaging market consumption. Its argument will also be applicable to interfaith dialogue and engagement around consumer ethics, and the constructive work around the Capabilities Approach to Human Development and the concept of flow will be illuminative to ethicists and consumers who are non-religious as well.

Wonder as a Bridge Concept

This dissertation links insights from Adams, Csikszentmihalyi, and Nussbaum about human flourishing via the "bridge concept" of wonder. As coined by comparative religious ethicist Aaron Stalnaker, bridge concepts provide "general ideas" that "can be given enough content to be meaningful and guide comparative inquiry yet are still open to greater specification in particular cases." Along this line, Stalnaker holds that a thinker need not explicitly speak in the terms of a given bridge concept, because "bridge concepts may be projected into each thinker or text to be compared as a way to thematize their disparate elements and order their details around these anchoring terms."[4] In the case of Adams, Csikszentmihalyi, and Nussbaum, none of these thinkers deeply engages the concept of wonder, but their work strongly resonates with the concept and experience of wonder. They each tend to reference wonder in passing commentary on a given activity, person, or object.

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[4] Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 1, 17-18.

Wonder is enlisted as a term for things that generate a sense of transcendence (for Adams), flow (for Csikszentmihalyi), and human dignity (for Nussbaum). Building upon Stalnaker's use of bridge concepts, the concept of "wonder" in this dissertation illuminates an otherwise "easily overlooked" key component within Adams, Csikszentmihalyi, and Nussbaum's respective conceptions of human flourishing. By linking their core insights together, it also enables the creation of a more detailed and expansive account of human flourishing than any of the three perspectives can offer on its own.[5]

Notably, wonder itself has not historically received extensive scholarly research or consideration, whether in fields of theology, positive psychology, and philosophy or others. Yet despite that lack of detailed attention, wonder is still often invoked. Socrates famously professed in Plato's *Theatetus* that, "wonder is the only beginning of philosophy,"[6] and building upon Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, Josef Pieper maintained that, "the ability to experience wonder is one of the highest possibilities of human nature." Further describing wonder, Pieper commented, "The inner wealth of wonder is fulfilled in a sense for mystery. The inner orientation of wonder does not aim for the stirring up of doubt, but rather for the recognition that being as being is incomprehensible and full of mystery."[7] Karen Armstrong has held in a similar vein that the purpose of religious practice is "holding us in a

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[5] Ibid.

[6] It is unclear whether wonder for Socrates (and Plato) wonder was a positive thing – the very experience of lovingly admiring and engaging the things that make life worth living – or a dizzying albeit enticing emotion to be calmed as one gained knowledge and wisdom. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 155d. See Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and Opening of Awe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); and Sylvana Chrysakopoulou, "Wonder and the Beginning of Philosophy in Plato" in *Practices of Wonder: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* ed. Sophia Vasalou (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 88-121. See also Aristotle's view regarding the study of animals that "in everything in nature there is something wonder-inspiring…. We should approach the study of each type of animal, not making a sour face, knowing that in every one of them is something natural and wonderful." Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, 645a26-27.

[7] Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* trans. Gerald Malsbary (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1998), 103-105.

state of wonder."[8] Robin Attfield likewise concludes his book, *Wonder, Value and God*, with the following note on the way wonder at creation elicits praise of God: "In humanity… wonder kindles puzzlement and curiosity at the extent of the world's value, and such curiosity can lead to recognition of a creative intelligence underlying all this value, whose purposes the world expresses in one way or another."[9] Even Richard Dawkins, albeit from a very different angle, has stressed:

> The feeling of awed wonder that science can give us is one of the highest experiences of which the human psyche is capable. It is a deep aesthetic passion to rank with the finest that music and poetry can deliver. It is truly one of the things that makes life worth living and it does so, if anything, more effectively if it convinces us that the time we have for living it is finite.[10]

In his book *Sacred Sense*, William Brown sums up the Oxford English Dictionary's entry for "wonder" as follows: "The emotion excited by the perception of something novel and unexpected, or inexplicable; astonishment mingled with perplexity or bewildered curiosity."[11] Although wonder is often associated with grand events or experiences, Brown highlights more ordinary objects of wonder. He writes, "Mundane wonder…is wonder elicited by small, familiar things, such as a baby's smile, an affectionate touch, or a good night's sleep. Things we take for granted or consider ordinary become charged with new meaning; they are experienced differently. Wonder is the familiar becoming new and fresh or downright strange."[12] Pieper similarly associated wonder with "a purely receptive gaze on

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[8] Quoted in Robert Solomon, *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Caroline Press, 2006), vii.

[9] Robin Attfield, *Wonder, Value and God* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 176.

[10] Richard Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion, and the Appetite for Wonder* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), x. Dawkins words simply echo Darwin's regard for the "grandeur" of life on earth, writing, "There is grandeur in this view of life with is several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved." Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species* (New York: H M Caldwell Company, 1900), 474.

[11] William Brown, *Sacred Sense: Discovering the Wonder of God's Word and World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 5.

[12] Ibid., 7.

reality" that "has not become blind to the wondrous – the wonderful fact that something exists." Invoking Socrates, he also held that, "[t]o find the truly unusual and extraordinary… *within* the usual and the ordinary, is the beginning of philosophy."[13]

This dissertation highlights wonder as fundamentally a practice of attentiveness and alertness to the goods in creation, which embody glimpses of infinite goodness.[14] This dissertation maintains that there is no reason why wonder should necessarily dissipate with familiarity, or put differently, why familiarity should dull our capacity to pay attention and routinely fall in love with the incalculable number of good things in creation, which testify in each moment and detail to the goodness of God. Along this line, Robert Solomon contends in his book, *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality*, that wonder enduringly drives "intellectual, moral, and aesthetic growth over the course of the human life span,"[15] and Elaine Scarry captures that sense of attentive growth in regards to beautiful things in particular. Scarry writes in *On Beauty and Being Just*, "It is as though beautiful things have been placed here and there throughout the world to serve as small wake-up calls to perception, spurring lapsed alertness back to its most acute level."[16] Scarry additionally argues that "beauty always takes place in the particular." Beauty is not some abstract generic thing, but is embodied in the intricacies and details of any given beautiful thing. Lack of attentiveness to those particulars generally leads people to miss their beauty. For instance, walking past a tree, perhaps every single day, and perceiving it through a general lens of "a tree," rather than seeing it closely as

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[13] Pieper, *Leisure*, 77, 100, 102.
[14] Wonder is sometimes associated with novelty or simply a curious lack of knowledge, each of which subsides as a person becomes used to something or learns, "Oh, that's why that happens (or happened)." This view mistakenly predicates wonder on unfamiliarity or a mere interest in novelty. See Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 39-56.
[15] Solomon, *Wonder*, 2.
[16] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 81.

this tree, formed in the interplay of a particular location, history, and DNA, and standing or swaying intricately in any given moment with the weather, light, and shadows.[17]

Sophia Vasalou makes a similar point in the introduction to the edited volume *Practices of Wonder: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*. She argues that while wonder can be those rare moments of "spontaneous and effortless reaction to something novel and unexpected," it can also depend on "discipline and learning" in order to be able to "see something *as* extraordinary where we did not do so before." Vasalou continues, "For in the plurality of practices in which wonder is a willfully cultivated response, one's effort is often turned upon the task of enthralling one's attention to the wondrousness, not of what is extraordinary, abnormal, or irregular in our experience, but indeed of what is most ordinary and most regular, in order to see it under its aspect – in its very orderliness – as an extraordinary thing."[18] This attentiveness to particularities in ordinary life could be applied to a cup, a song, a sandwich, a conversation, a bus, a building, a game, a blanket, a book, a movie, a digital image, or any of the host of finite goods in creation (i.e., human artifacts are as much parts of creation as anything else in the universe).

This dissertation uses the term *"wonder"* for people's engaged response to finite goods, be they activities, objects, persons, or some combination thereof, and the glimpses of God they reveal. That engagement can be primarily contemplative or reflective, such as taking in a sunrise, but it can also be more physically active as well as social, such as playing a sport or sharing in a well-cooked meal with friends. Although wonder is often taken to be primarily a mode of contemplation or reflection, this dissertation stretches the term

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[17] Ibid., 18.

[18] Sophia Vasalou, "Introduction" in *Practices of Wonder: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* ed. Sophia Vasalou (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2013), 4.

"wonder" beyond simply that appreciative, focused form of thought.[19] Stretching the concept of wonder is done not only for the technical purposes of having a useful and effective bridge concept, but also as a reflection of the fact that we do frequently describe a host of things as wonderful that entail more activity than reflective mental focus alone, e.g., a meal, a game, a run, a hike, a friendship, a conversation, a trip, a holiday, a class, a worship service, a dance, an adventure, a concert, a project, and so forth.

This dissertation's identification of created goods as glimpses of infinite goodness is intended specifically to highlight these kinds of everyday wondrous things and the way they can simultaneously draw human attentiveness not only toward themselves, but also toward the infinite goodness from which they came. In the words of Adams, experiences with these finite goods reveal "something too wonderful to be contained or carried either by our experience or by the physical or conceptual objects we are perceiving."[20] In the words of Csikszentmnihalyi, they generate that "deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like."[21] And in the words of Nussbaum, they drive people to be "outward-moving, exuberant." She notes, "In wonder I want to leap or run," and highlights in particular that, "the world into which the child arrives is radiant and wonderful, [and it] claims its attention as an object of interest and pleasure in its own right."[22] Nussbaum argues as well that wonder at the dignity of other living beings is key to the development of a "capacity for love and compassion."[23] This dissertation argues

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[19] I selected wonder as the bridge term instead of other possibilities, such as beauty, love, joy, delight, happiness, or flourishing, because wonder not only more nimbly captures the experience of finite goods that image God's goodness, but also encompasses all these other aspects of engaging goodness. As will be argued in this dissertation, love, delight, and happiness derive from the activities, people, and objets that we find wonderful; beautiful things are a subset of finite goods we find wonderful; and flourishing is constituted by engaging the wonderful finite goods that resemble God's infinite goodness.

[20] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 13, 51.

[21] Csikszsentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, 3.

[22] Ibid., 189, 191.

[23] Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 54.

that market consumption can be intentionally folded into this process of wonder at God and the finite goods of creation, most notably in developing and exercising people's capabilities for flow in community with one another.

A Critical Recognition in Undertaking this Project

It is critical to note at the outset of this project a core danger raised in making a claim about human flourishing and the role that consumer goods play in it. The core danger of any such project is that it seeks to universalize an inescapably cultural-bound vision of what human flourishing entails. Doing so risks perpetuating a long history of ignoring and obscuring other people's perspectives, particularly given my cultural position as a white, religious, heterosexual, married with children, employed, highly-schooled, upper middle class, able-bodied (for now), healthy, American male. Given that it would not be surprising if the vision of flourishing for which I argue looks a lot like something a person like myself admires, this project threatens to re-inscribe a long, oppressive history of Caucasians making comprehensive pronouncements about what it is to be human.

As Cornel West lays out in "A Genealogy of Modern Racism," for roughly the last 500 years, those of European descent have largely assumed that full humanity entails having the facial features of a Greek statue, the observational and experimental mindset of a scientist, and the moderate mores and self-control of Greco-Roman ideals and European Christianity.[24] Non-Europeans did not seem to measure up sufficiently to Europe's "normative gaze," and by the time the Enlightenment arrived, Europeans increasingly classified non-Europeans as biologically distinct and inferior races that were intellectually,

[24] Cornel West, *Prophecy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 47-65.

culturally, and morally beneath Europeans. As a result, most Europeans considered it to be perfectly justifiable and reasonable to treat these other "races" as child-like subordinates.[25]

In *Womanist Ethics and The Cultural Production of Evil*, Emilie Townes examines the ways in which evil perspectives such as these are culturally produced. They consist of "the systematic construction of truncated narratives designed to support and perpetuate structural inequities and forms of social oppression." Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony – hegemony being "the set of ideas that dominant groups employ in a society to secure the consent of subordinates to abide by their rule" – Townes points out the way that cultural dominance works through saturation of people's lives, in school, at work, with family, at worship, in the media, in the arts, amidst political affiliations, as well as via the consumer practices that course through them all. Hegemony generates a "false consciousness" and perception that there is "*one* coherent and accurate viewpoint on the world," which is backed up by "social values and moralities."[26] While this dynamic has manifested in a variety of ways across human history, in the United States it has occurred as "[t]he values, belief systems, privileges, histories, experiences of White folks is marked as normal – all else is the exception to it."[27]

Highlighting in particular the lack of interrogation into the color and position of authors regularly looked to as authorities in field of theology, Townes writes:

> In dazzling displays of intellectual hubris, orthodox moral discourse ignores the diversities within their (and our) midst in an ill-timed and increasingly irrelevant search for an objective viewpoint that can lead us toward the [T]ruth. Such inquiries have served (and continue) to preserve a moral and social universe that has mean-spiritedness at one end of its ontological pole and sycophancy at the other. A large

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[25] Ibid. Even though there were certainly Europeans who did not rise to their presumed racial potential and non-Europeans who far exceeded their race's alleged limitations, these people were usually explained away as mere exceptions. For many generations, Europeans cited racial distinctions as justification for their dominating and enjoying the vast majority of social resources and opportunities.

[26] Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 4, 20.

[27] Ibid., 74.

> portion of *noblesse oblige* often acts as filler and buffer for those who seek to maintain or recapture an intellectual and material corpus that reeks of an onerous status quo. This often makes Black women in the academy and in society the invisible visible. We are not alone in this status.[28]

In response to efforts to uncover and make claims to universals regarding people, Townes argues, "Ultimately there is no monolithic human identity. It does not exist and I doubt that it ever will or should."[29]

This dissertation is presented while recognizing the critical need to be continually open, as well as particularly receptive, given my social position, to critique and correction. While I do affirm wholeheartedly the reality of a Truth that is not simply relative to human thoughts, values, and perspectives, I recognize that even in our finest moments of clarity, we see not "face-to-face" but "in a mirror dimly" in this life. The question of whether much can be said universally about being human that does not overlook something critical and or bolster hegemonic oppression lies at the heart of Martha Nussbaum's work on the Capabilities Approach to Human Development. Amartya Sen, who launched this line of inquiry and support for cultivating human capabilities with his Tanner Lecture "Equality of What," very intentionally does not offer a list of core human capabilities in the way that Nussbaum does, wanting to leave the specifics up to respective nations and groups of people. Many agree with Sen, and yet Nussbaum argues that it is precisely leaving a core list of human capabilities unspecified that further enables hegemonic oppression, be it rooted in class, patriarchy, sexism, racism, ageism, or another form of degrading and dismissing other people.

Without a sense of what it is to be human, people can assert certain oppressive practices are simply part of a cultural way of life, practices that even those who are oppressed can come to accept, such as women affirming that they have neither desire nor

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[28] Ibid., 59.
[29] Ibid., 74.

claim to receive an education or political participation equivalent to men. While she draws on the idea that there are human ways of being and doing in the world, Nussbaum maintains that "the core idea is of the human being as a dignified free being who shapes his or her own life in cooperation and reciprocity with others, rather than being passively shaped or pushed around by the world in the manner of a 'flock' or 'herd' animal." She goes on to affirm a vision of "the person as having activity, goals, and projects – as somehow awe-inspiringly above the mechanical workings of nature, and yet in need of support for the fulfillment of many central projects."[30] Nussbaum's list is intended to serve as working criteria for what governments and nations constitutionally owe every citizen as a matter of justice.

Furthermore, efforts to address harms and injustices are not as powerful as they could be when they only entail a sense of what we should not do. If all the guidance we have is do not harm, we lack clarity around what we should additionally be doing to cultivate human thriving. It is parallel to the situation in psychology in which for most of the 20th century the overwhelming focus had been on human pathologies. This focus was essential to addressing many mental afflictions, but at the expense of crowding out consideration of what it looks like and takes to flourish, which presumably means much more than simply not being sick. Martin Seligman, a psychologist who helped initiate the field of positive psychology, notes, "Relieving the states that make life miserable, it seems, has made building the states that make life worth living less of a priority."[31] Despite the importance of "relieving misery and uprooting the disabling conditions of life," there is a need to also help offer insight, clarity, and guidance around human well-being by "exploring what makes life

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[30] Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 72-73.
[31] Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness* (London: Free Press, 2002), ix.

worth living and building the enabling conditions of a life worth living."[32] The danger of not putting forward a positive vision is an inarticulacy and consequently constrained capacity to imagine, collaborate, and enact human flourishing.

This dissertation also comes in the tradition and conviction that human life is at root for the enjoyment of God who has fashioned us as part of a good creation, in which both God and creatures delight. We are not crafted and called to escape this physical creation, but rather to flourish as part of it under God. Twenty-first century life as part of this good creation necessitates engagement with the market system, and therefore we need to not only relieve the aspects of the contemporary market that make life miserable, but also articulate and pursue the ways engagement with the market system can enable human flourishing. The dissertation argues that we need a more detailed, theologically rooted understanding of human well-being that is not limited to: (a) people's access to basic needs, protections, economic or political decision making, and (b) the call of moral obligation to ensure that access for everyone. Without it, we lack a core tool for not only analyzing and identifying the ways consumer practices veer toward a solipsistic escapism, but also providing direction and clarity around how to engage market consumption in ways that conversely generate genuine human flourishing.

The dissertation argues that market consumption aimed at cultivating capabilities for wondrous activity in community with others is essential to human flourishing. It invites readers to critically engage its claim that flow and certain capabilities are universally important to human well-being, and that elements of creation crafted and offered as consumer goods via the market system do genuinely image God's goodness, especially to the extent that they enable wondrous activity in connection to others. It does operate under that assumption that it is possible to have just practices of market production and exchange, in

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[32] Martin Seligman, *Flourishing* (London: Free Press, 2011), 1.

which workers are not exploited nor the environment exhausted. While it affirms the dire need in today's global economy for justice and sustainability, it articulates what well-being extends beyond the absence of injustice and unnecessary suffering. Its "descriptive" analysis of what people find wonderful and worthwhile is admittedly finite, human, and in need of help from others to sharply point out its blind spots.

1. American Market Consumption: Context for Contemporary Life

Introduction

This chapter overviews market consumption in the United States in order to map the terrain of contemporary consumer life that theological ethics of consumption are intended to help people navigate. It situates market consumption in the broader context of consumption as part of life on earth. It then describes the explosive growth over the last century in the array of market goods available for consumption. This growth has blurred lines between needs and luxury, brought the market into nearly every aspect of human life, shaped aspirations around dreams of market consumption and the status, security, and pleasure they promise, and defined people's sense of self. This chapter has three sections. The first explores the definition and patterns of contemporary market consumption. The second surveys the history of the increasing market consumption in the United States over the past century. The third section analyzes key aspects of contemporary market consumption, including the blurred line between needs and luxuries, broad consensus

around consumption-oriented understanding of the "American Dream," emphasis on image before others via consumption, and cultivation of personal identity via consumption.

Market Consumption Defined

The dissertation maintains that wonder plays a central role in human flourishing and should serve as a core aim guiding theological ethics of market consumption. The market system often enables and facilitates wonderful things, activities, relationships, and common projects. As Deirdre McCloskey notes, there is now "more actual food and clothing and housing and education and travel and books for the average human being – even though there were six times more of them." She continues:

> The quality of life you personally lead, dear reader, is better than the lives of your thirty-two great-great-great-great-grandparents. I'll speak for myself. An Irish peasant woman digging parties in her lazy bed in 1805 or a Norwegian farmer of thirty acres of rocky soil in Dimmelsvik in 1800 or the American daughter of poor English people in 1795 Massachusetts had brutish and short lives. Many of them could not read. Their horizons were narrow. Their lives were toilsome and bitter.[1]

While there are clearly ethical issues, highlighted above, such as who has access to this abundance of market consumption, are people idolizing status via consumption, and what are its effects on ecological balance and other species, the point is that in the market system entails a far wider range of opportunity for flourishing engagement with the goodness of creation than anything in human history. Academics, athletics, music, art, literature, film, common vocational projects, shared interests and endeavors among friends, transportation, home and family life, food and cooking, medicine and health care, all of these are deeply

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[1] McCloskey continues, "Humans make their consumption meaningful, as in the meal you share with a friend or the picture frame in which you put the snapshot of your beloved…. People have purposes. A capitalist economy gives them scope to try them out. Go to an American Kennel Club show, or an antique show, or a square-dancing convention, or to a gathering of the many millions of American birdwatchers, and you'll find people of no social pretensions passionately engaged. Yes, some people watch more than four hours of TV a day. Yes, some people engage in corrupting purchases. But they are no worse than their ancestors, and on average better." Deirdre McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16, 24.

embedded in market consumption and made possible by by the market system (at least in their current forms).

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith maintained that, "[c]onsumption is the sole end and purpose of all production," a sentiment echoed by John Maynard Keynes, who held in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* that, "Consumption to repeat the obvious is the sole end and object of all economic activity."[2] Along this line, personal consumption presently accounts for roughly 70% of the U.S. economy.[3] Nevertheless, Anthropologist Richard Wilk has noted that it can be difficult to find a precise definition for what consumption entails. Wilk points out that, "putting a painting on the wall, lying on the beach in the sun, and flushing the toilet, are all acceptable examples of consumption, but it is otherwise impossible to see how they are alike."[4] Wilk has further argued that things like burning gas in a car can feel a lot more like consumption than listening to music in the car because "consumption" enlists a metaphor, consuming, that is literally a process of burning or eating something until it is broken down and gone.[5]

That kind of consumption also of course extends beyond the market system. At a basic level, all living creatures must consume, or absorb, other things in order to continue existing. Water and nutrients are the primary things living beings consume, but consumption is also more broadly using something until it is broken down enough to be no longer

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[2] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (USA: Simon & Brown, 2010), 334. John Maynard Keynes *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: First Harvest/Harcourt Inc, 1964), 104.

[3] See U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis www.bea.gov.

[4] Richard Wilk, "Morals and Metaphors: The Meaning of Consumption" in *Elusive Consumption* ed. Karin Ekstrom and Helene Brembeck (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 16.

[5] In making his argument, Wilk draws upon the cognitive linguistic work of George Lakoff and collaborators who maintain that our language and understanding of the world, our concepts and categories, develop metaphorically around more basic everyday experiences, such as common bodily movements and sensory perceptions. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Consumption as burning or eating (using up) is a prototypical experience through which people understand using market items, and that connection is not surprising considering that the main consumer items in the early roots of consumer society were largely things like spices, perfumes, sugar, coffee, tea, tobacco, and cotton clothing, none of which lasted very long. Wilk, "Morals and Metaphors: The Meaning of Consumption," 12-13.

functional or cohesively existent. Laura Hartman helpfully describes consumption as the "physical throughput of materials and goods in human lives." Hartman draws this concept of "throughput" from industry and ecology. She writes, "In industry, raw materials enter the factory and both waste and products exit; the mass of physical 'stuff' is the throughput. In ecology, the throughput of an organism refers to the materials the organism takes in (water, nutrients, food) and the materials it puts out (waste)."[6] The word "to consume" in English focused largely on the thing that was used up, with its original meaning tied to fire consuming to ashes what it burns.[7] The idea of consuming had this largely destructive connotation until the late 19th century when the focus switched to the human need that was being met in the process of consumption. In the 1920s the meaning grew from simply meeting a human need to being a source of enjoyment and pleasure.[8]

Turn of the 20th century economist Alfred Marshall however highlighted that we do not create and destroy material itself in the economy, but simply certain combinations and arrangements of material things and beings. In his classic *Principles of Economics*, Marshall wrote, "Man cannot create material things…. His efforts and sacrifices result in changing the form or arrangement of matter to adapt it better for the satisfaction of wants…. As his production of material products is really nothing more than a rearrangement of matter which gives it new utilities; so his consumption of them is nothing more than a

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[6] Laura Hartman, *The Christian Consumer: Living Faithfully in a Fragile World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9.

[7] See OED. Richard Wilk notes, "Burning is historically the first English usage of the verb consume, attributed to the Wycliff Bible in 1382, in a biblical passage where a sacrifice 'with fier shall be consumyd' (Lev. 6:23)" Richard Wilk, "Morals and Metaphors: The Meaning of Consumption" in *Elusive Consumption* ed. Karin Ekstrom and Helene Brembeck (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 12.

[8] Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang, *The Unmanageable Consumer: Contemporary Consumption and its Fragmentations* (London: SAGE, 2006), 7. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1983) and Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991).

disarrangement of matter, which diminishes or destroys its utilities."[9] There is a deep theological point here that the market economy is not something humans craft *ex nihilo* but is rather completely dependent upon a broader ecological economy of creation that we simply affect and arrange, in either exhausting or sustainable ways to that broader ecological economy's capacity to replenish and thrive.[10] This insight also stresses that consumer goods are inextricably parts of a good creation, fashioned via human labor and intellect. In this dissertation, *market consumption will be defined as engaging some aspect of creation that has been produced through the market system*. As noted, consumer goods clearly can be, and have been, made and used in ways that undermine workers, consumers, other species, and the environment overall. This dissertation builds on the premise that this is neither a necessary nor inherent aspect of market production and consumption,[11] that consumer goods can be produced and engaged in ways that cultivate people's capacity to flourish, i.e., to glimpse God in wondrous finite goods shared in community with one another.

One final important introductory point on market consumption comes from the work of Fuat Firat and Nikhilesh Dholakia. Firat and Dholakia analyze the following four

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[9] Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics* (London: Macmillan for the Royal Economic Society, 1961), 63-64. Herman Daly argues that nature also has value added to material things, such as a tree, prior to humans manipulating it into something else, such as tables. Daly stresses that the waste from production and consumption of making tables is not the same as having a tree in place, and therefore needs to be accounted for when the economy grows to such a scale that its use of things like trees begins to upset ecological balance. Herman Daly, "Consumption: Value Added, Physical Transformation, and Welfare" in *Ethics of Consumption: The Good Life, Justice, and Global Stewardship* ed. David Crocker and Toby Linden (New York: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 1998), 19-27.

[10] See Wendell Berry, "Two Economies" in *What Matters? Economics for a Renewed Commonwealth* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010), 115-138.

[11] The idea that market consumption does not inherently change the nature of engaging a finite good is not uncontroversial. See for instance, Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012). Furthermore, the idea that market consumption can be undertaken in ways that provide everyone with a living wage and do not exhaust the environment is also not uncontroversial. See for instance, Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) and Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). These points warrant further consideration and analysis growing from arguments made in this dissertation regarding finite goods as glimpses of God's infinite goodness.

key dimensions to contemporary market consumption in their book *Consuming People*: social relationship, availability, participation, and human activity. The social relationship dimension deals with a person's engagement with others as they consume, and it ranges from individual to collective consumption. Individual consumption entails no direct interaction with others in the act of consumption, as one uses an item or service, binge watching a TV series alone for instance. Collective consumption by contrast consists of engaging others around the consumer object or service, binge watching with others or even just talking about the show with friends or colleagues. The availability dimension deals with access to a given consumer item or service and its poles extend from private to public. Private availability meaning a single person owns the consumer good, service, or experience, whereas public means that consumption is more openly accessible. It is the difference between an art collection held in a person's home versus an art collection displayed in a museum one must pay to see.[12]

The participation dimension entails the degree to which a consumer helps select or craft aspects of the consumer item or service. Participatory consumption entails joining in decisions about the creation of the thing or service, such as providing input into plans for the creation of a house. Alienated consumption entails simply receiving an end product without input into its production, such as the vast majority of items and services in the market system. Most of the time people do not have a direct say in the creation of a consumer item or service, but rather have "exit influence," meaning people can affect consumer items and services by what they choose to buy or not buy, even if they do not get to give precise input or direction into how a product is made. Finally, the human activity dimension deals with how much "physical and mental activity" occurs during consumption, and it ranges from active to passive. Using basketball shoes to play basketball is an example

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[12] Fuat Firut and Nikhilesh Dholakia, *Consuming People: From Political Economy to Theaters of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2003), 9-13.

of active consumption, and hanging basketball paraphernalia on one's wall more passive consumption. Firut and Dholakia note the trend over the last few centuries for those with disposable income has been increasingly toward "individual-private-alienated-passive pattern of consumption."[13] The point of this dissertation is to begin fleshing out a vision of an alternative pattern of market consumption that better cultivates and even partially constitutes the wondrous things and activities of human flourishing.

The Rise of American Market Consumption

The 20th century has offered unprecedented economic growth for the United States. Whether one takes a negative or positive view of current consumption, the United States is a country organized and oriented around the creation and consumption of things and services. As economist Charles Lindblom notes, for centuries we have been increasingly fashioning and inhabiting not simply markets, places of exchange, but market systems, the expansive coordination of society around selling and buying. People's connection and relationships are saturated with interested in the creation and exchange of marketable value, i.e., something for which others are willing to pay. In the United States, this coordination occurs through incalculable number of largely self-motivated trades that happen every day.[14]

The origins of this immensely productive market system, as well as society becoming increasingly oriented around consumption, stretch back to 17th century Europe. While markets stretch throughout history, over the last few centuries the items and services made available via market exchange have begun to take a far greater role in driving social interaction as well as people's aspirations and everyday activities. Roberta Sassatelli notes in *Consumer Culture: History, Theory, and Politics*:

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Charles Lindblom, *The Market System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 3.

> Consumer society emerged *gradually* through a progressive, but not linear or uniform, *coming together* of a variety of factors which have varied from time to time in their sometimes profoundly innovative forms. Consumer society or culture has been created both by broad social phenomena (like the growth in social mobility, the evolution of the relationship between the sexes, urbanization, etc.) and more specific economic phenomena (the growth in consumption of luxury goods per capita, the development of standardized production, the reinforcing of a complex commercial system, the spread of consumer credit services, etc.), which in turn have been accompanied and mediated by new economic ethics of production and use and new cultural views of social identity. This has been a transformation of massive importance, which has given way to a form of life characterized by the centrality of the social figure of the 'consumer.'[15]

Over the last few centuries in the west, productivity growth increasingly enabled average people the chance to consume in ways once reserved for nobility. Along these lines, people in 17th century Europe and America harbored insatiable demands for sugar, tea, cocoa, coffee, and tobacco, many of which continue apace to today. Fashionable cotton clothing, porcelain china, perfume, jewelry, paintings, and furniture began to capture people's attention and money in the 18th century, while things like rugs, books, children's toys, kitchenware, and pianos became expected staples of the home front as the 19th century progressed. The turn of the 20th century saw the rise of consumer delights such as bicycles, automobiles, and

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[15] Roberta Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2007), 50. In an article entitled, "Price Competition in 1955," Victor Lebow very directly laid out the consumer way of life: "Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption. The measure of social status, of social acceptance, of prestige, is now to be found in our consumptive patterns. The very meaning and significance of our lives today expressed in consumptive terms. The greater the pressures upon the individual to conform to safe and accepted social standards, the more does he tend to express his aspirations and his individuality in terms of what he wears, drives, eats - his home, his car, his pattern of food serving, his hobbies. These commodities and services must be offered to the consumer with a special urgency. We require not only 'forced draft' consumption, but 'expensive' consumption as well. We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing pace. We need to have people eat, drink, dress, ride, live, with ever more complicated and, therefore, constantly more expensive consumption. The home power tools and the whole 'do-it-yourself' movement are excellent examples of 'expensive' consumption." Victor Lebow, "Price Competition in 1955," *Journal of Retailing* Spring (1955), accessed June 4, 2017, http://www.gcafh.org /edlab/ Lebow.pdf.

motion pictures.[16] By the 21st century, consumer items and services multiplied into innumerable niches, fashions, and types, offering something for sale not only in regards to nearly every aspect of human life, but also to a wide range of people across socio-economic levels.

During these centuries, markets also transitioned from being primarily a way to secure items that one could not make within one's family unit, and that only a relatively few could afford, to being the means by which one secured nearly everything one's family needed and possessed.[17] This shift occurred in tandem with large migrations from the countryside to cities, which had served historically as central meeting points for market exchange, employment, and consumption. Up until the mid-to-late 20th century, most Americans still lived and worked on farms, usually as part of a large family network. In 1790 94.9% of the population lived in rural areas, and over 80% still did at the onset of the Civil War. In the 1920s, half of Americans still remained immersed in rural agricultural life. Most had enough to secure the basics of decent food, shelter, and clothing for themselves and family members. But as agricultural mechanization and technological advancements continued to arise, fewer human hands were needed to grow, harvest, and transport agricultural products, and the percentage of Americans living in rural areas steadily decreased over the 20th century. People emigrated to cities in search of work, and while at the outset of the 20th century only 28% of U.S. population lived in a metropolitan area, by the end of the century that percentage had risen to 80%.[18]

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[16] See Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Center to the Twenty-First* (New York: Harper, 2016); Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1997); Peter Stearns, *Consumerism in World History: The Global Transformation of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 2001); and Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance, 1660-1770* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

[17] James Fulcher, *Capitalism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16.

[18] Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, "Demographic Trends in the 20th Century: Census 2000 Special Reports," U.S. Census Bureau, November 2002, accessed May 17, 2017, https://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf.

Urban living has also coincided with an increase in disposable income and an increase in the number of things people own that has led the United States to become the most affluent country in human history. In 2015 U.S. GDP was valued at over $18 trillion dollars. In real terms, accounting for factors of inflation and deflation, our annual production of economic goods and services is currently 18 times larger than it was during the Great Depression, and roughly 9 times larger than it was during the post World War II boom. Even given the growth in U.S. population that went along with this huge increase in productivity, GDP has doubled in real terms roughly every two decades since 1929.[19]

Highlighting trillions of dollars of GDP can feel very abstract, but the reality of how much wealth is present in the United States becomes more tangible when one considers how the budget of an average household has shifted over the decades, in terms of how money is spent as well as how much a dollar buys. The amounts spent on "necessities," defined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as food, clothing, and housing, have shifted dramatically over the last century.[20] In 1901, for the 76 million Americans living in the United States, the average household unit was roughly five people and the major expenditure was on food, which took up 42.5% of the family income. Housing took up 23% of the budget and clothing 14%. The remaining fifth of the family budget was split amongst healthcare, insurance, entertainment, charity, and miscellaneous expenditures.[21]

By 1950, the population had nearly doubled to over 150 million, while the average household shrank to three people. Although income increases were relatively flat for the first third of the 20th century, by 1950 they had begun to rise so that people had greater

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[19] GDP grew from $1 trillion to $2 trillion from 1929 to 1943, $2 trillion to $4 trillion from 1943 to 1965, $4 trillion to $8 trillion from 1965 to 1987, and $8 trillion to $16 trillion from 1987 and 2014. See Bureau of Economic Analysis (www.bea.gov) and Diane Coyle, *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[20] Elaine Chow and Kathleen Utgoff, "100 Years of U.S. Consumer Spending" U.S. Department of Labor, May 2006, accessed November 4, 2016, http://www.bls.gov/opub/uscs/report991.pdf.

[21] Ibid.

purchasing power to buy more items and services. Food, clothing, and housing remained the largest three expenditures in the 1950s, but the percentages had begun to shift significantly. Food and clothing occupied less of the overall budget, with food down to just 30% and clothing down to 11.5% of the budget. By contrast, housing expenditures rose to 27% of the budget, and due to the prevalence of personal automobiles and growth of the suburbs transportation expenses increased sharply to 13% of the average household budget.[22]

By 1973, the population had risen to over 200 million and purchasing power also continued to rise, while the average household size remained roughly three people. Food and clothing had dropped again as a percentage of the budget to 19% and 8% respectively. Housing largely held steady, rising a bit to 31%, with the costs of housing including not simply shelter, but also a growing array of consumer options for fuel, utilities, cleaning, maintenance, furnishings, and appliances. Transportation rose to 20%, meaning a bit more money was spent on mobility at this point than on eating. Entertainment and healthcare also grew as bigger portions of the budget, 9% and 6% respectively. By the turn of the 21st century, the average household size had dropped to 2.5 people, with roughly a third of households also being just one person. Food and clothing costs continued to decline, with only 13% of the budget dedicated to food and a mere 4% to clothing.[23] Housing grew a bit

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Juliet Schor highlights in particular how clothing has become an indicator of products that used to be more long lasting and durable have become what is called FMCG, "fast-moving consumer goods." For comparison, FMCGs are usually things like food or personal items like toothpaste and shampoo. Convenience stores are replete with FMCGs. Yet given how cheaply available clothing had become, largely driven by low wage global labor, shipping costs, and industry competition, and the accompanying pressure of churning fashions, by 2007 Americans were purchasing on average 67 pieces of clothing annually per person. Schor points out that this trend of swiftly moving through consumer items is echoed in electronics, furniture, and household appliances. Juliet Schor, *True Wealth: How and Why Millions of Americans Are Creating a Time-Rich, Ecologically Light, Small-Scale, High-Satisfaction Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 35.

to 33% and transportation held fairly steady at 19%, with the average household owning two cars.[24]

In regards to the kind of "universal opulence" Adam Smith believed was attainable through increases in productivity through trade and the division of labor, the United States has long since surpassed the mark in terms of productivity.[25] Although poverty in the United States remains extremely pernicious in terms of people's lack of access to education, employment, respect, and connections requisite to develop and seize opportunities, this injustice is distinct from the unjust lack of basic sustenance, shelter, medical care, and clothing undercutting the lives of roughly 1 billion people around the globe today. Poverty in the United States, whether urban or rural, entails greater access to market consumption than the kind of deprivation plaguing other parts of the world (and people generally throughout most of human history).[26] While in 1901 almost the entire the average budget was allocated to necessities of food, clothing, and shelter, by 2003 the percent expended on necessities had dropped so that half of the average household budget was available for consumer items and services aimed largely at comfort, pleasure, and entertainment.

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[24] Ibid. Increases in productivity also contributed to the cost of food and clothing plummeting in particular. Technology largely is responsible for the drop in food prices, given it was far less expensive than enlisting as much human labor as was needed in the past. Clothing prices fell largely as production was outsourced for cheaper corporate costs overseas.

[25] Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 11. Noting that the majority of society consists of "servants, labourers, and workmen," Smith argues that "No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, clothe, and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed, and lodged." Ibid., 46.

[26] Nevertheless, life at lower-income levels also tends to be comparatively more expensive because stores, as well as lenders, tend to charge more for items and services sold to people with low-incomes. Katherine Newman and Victor Tan Chen, *The Missing Class: Portraits of the Near Poor in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 213. Newman and Chen also note, "Stores that service poor neighborhoods have markups that are much higher than those in suburbs, largely because the costs of doing business are higher, given security problems, rents, lack of credit, and lower volume." Ibid., 6, 213-215. See also Linda Alwitt and Thomas Donley, *The Low-Income Consumer: Adjusting the Balance of Exchange* (London: Sage Publications, 1996); and Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

Furthermore, while the budget afforded more goods and services given the increases in productivity (the sheer amount of stuff and services available on the market), the real dollars spent by the average household had also increased 2.4 times.[27] In line with increases in income and purchasing power, economist Clair Brown has noted that over the course of the 20th century, the primary concerns of middle class workers shifted from being focused on meeting physical needs of family to more outwardly focused concerns about "social integration, security, and individual autonomy." While portions of the family budget spent on food and clothing decreased, allocations increased on security via insurance, homeownership, and social security as well as personal autonomy via transportation and recreation.[28]

There has additionally been a gain in discretionary time people have on average to engage in market consumption. Economic historian Robert Fogel highlights in *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100*, "Today ordinary people have time to enjoy those amenities of life only the rich could afford in abundance a century ago. These amenities broaden the mind, enrich the soul, and relieve the monotony of much of earnwork [paid labor]. They include travel, athletics, enjoyment of the performing arts, education, and shared time with the family."[29] In *The Morality of Spending*, Daniel Horowitz notes that the transition of the U.S. to a nation of modern consumers was a "complicated, uneven, and long-term process," but that over time Americans shifted from having a culture oriented around "religious, ethical, and communal values and institutions that restrain individualism and materialism" to one rooted in the "commercial or market economy – and accompanying

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[27] Purchasing power has nearly tripled over the past 100 years due to increased productivity and income. In 2003 the average household spent $40,748 and that money bore the purchasing power of $2000 in 1901 dollars, three-times the $750 average annual household income in 1901. Elaine Chow and Kathleen Utgoff, "100 Years of U.S. Consumer Spending" U.S. Department of Labor, May 2006, http://www.bls.gov/opub/uscs/report991.pdf Accessed November 4, 2016.

[28] Clair Brown, *American Standards of Living* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 16.

[29] Robert Fogel, *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 74.

mentality and acquisitiveness" in which people learned to seek "fulfillment through commercial goods and experiences."[30] With the increasingly widespread opulence in the United States came increased concern about consumption itself. Critique of consumption, in addition to those regarding methods of production, became far more prominent after the 1950s in the United States, as this scale, array, and affordability of consumer goods exploded and pervaded society to an extent they had not before in the U.S. or human history.[31]

As the decades passed, critiques grew regarding the way consumer life deformed people's dispositions, undermining their people's relationships with God, other people, as well as other species. Before we examine those critiques in the second chapter, the next section of this chapter provides further context and background regarding prominent aspects and patterns of contemporary American consumption. The first part focuses on the ways that the line between needs and luxuries has significantly blurred as a consensus in the U.S. has arisen regarding a consumption-oriented understanding of the "American Dream." The second examines the way one's image before others is as central to contemporary market consumption as a given good or service's ostensible function. And the third

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[30] Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), xx-xxii. The roots of consumer oriented society stretch back centuries. As Frank Trentmann explores in *Empire of Things*, "Almost all of the forces driving up consumption were in place by the time Western states embraced sustained growth in the 1950s: the rise in domestic comfort, fashion and novelty; shopping for pleasure; a taste for articles from faraway lands; rising levels of water and energy use; the cult of domestic possessions and hobbies; urban entertainment and pleasure; credit and debit; and the notion of the 'material self,' which recognized that things are an inextricable part of what makes us human." Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, From the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 678.

[31] For mid-century critiques, see John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958); Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963); Donella Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972); Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962); Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society* (London: Sage, 1970).

highlights the way people both understand and seek understand their own personal identities via market consumption.

The Shape of American Market Consumption

A. Needs, Luxuries, and the American Dream

A key aspect about the contemporary market system is the way in which it has become considered increasingly hard, and by some accounts impossible, to draw a clear line between items or services that are necessities and those that are luxuries. Starting around the turn of the century, economists began leaving criteria for any such division up to individual consumers, contending there is no clear way to make such a distinction in economic analysis given the wide range of opinions on the matter. In 1927, economist Vilfredo Pareto pressed economics to focus simply upon "the pure and naked fact of choice."[32] Regardless of the motivation behind a given choice, the prevailing view among economists came to be that the only thing they could lean upon as an indication of what consumers prefer is what they buy, and the reasons for those choices, along with any clear delineation between luxury and need, are indecipherable to social scientific analysis. The idea and socially accepted line between luxury and necessity has also been heavily influenced by advertising and the growing accessibility of consumer goods. Things tend to become considered necessities as more and more people have them, while luxury goods are those items and services that a much smaller number of people can afford. Professor of Marketing Ronald Michman and Professor of Business Administration Edward Mazze note the moving target of luxury in their book, *The Affluent Consumer: Marketing and Selling the Luxury Lifestyle*:

> Goods once perceived as luxury are now commonplace. Consumers purchase more and better products and services as their income increases. Many consumers in the

[32] See Vilfredo Pareto. *Manuel of Political Economy,* trans. Ann Schwier, edited Ann Schwier and Alfred Page (New York: A.M. Kelley, 1971); Paul Samuelson, "A Note on the Pure Theory of Consumer's Preference" *Economica* 5 (1938): 61-71.

> early 1980s viewed the purchases of central air-conditioning systems, dishwashers, and home computers as luxuries. Families today consider these necessities. Crown molding, two and three car garages, fireplaces, outdoor grills, and modern kitchens are common today. Cell phones are now owned by everybody. The term *luxury* has become largely subjective…. The middle-class is a major market for boats, golf clubs, mountain bikes, and other recreational equipment that only the rich were once able to afford. The new status symbols are Black Berry pagers, flat-screen plasma televisions, and designer accessories for pets.[33]

The concept of a "need" is rife with assumptions about particular ends or goals, as well as claims on communal resources. To assert something is a need is connected to a belief about what it is needed *for*. Don Slater writes, "I am saying that I 'need' this thing *in order to* live a certain kind of life, have certain kinds of relations with others (for example have *this* kind of family), be a certain kind of person, carry out certain actions or achieve certain aims." Even a biological need presumes an end of "in order to stay alive." The language of need also entails the idea that one is owed or have a rightly claim to have the need met.[34]

This sense of expanded need has spread deeply into American political discourse and aspirations as well. Despite loudly expressed disagreements amongst political parties in the U.S. today, a widespread (if usually overlooked) consensus has arisen about the goal of life America. The pervading sentiment is that people should have the chance to work and consume as they would like, within the bounds of the law and the array of choices afforded by the market. While people disagree about the role of government in achieving this end, Robert Wuthnow sums up contemporary views of a good American life as having "a comfortable home, opportunities to travel and enjoy ourselves, good medical care, the means to educate our children, and economic security when we retire."[35] This good life is

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[33] Edward Mazze and Ronald Michman, *The Affluent Consumer: Marketing and Selling the Luxury Lifestyle* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 39.
[34] Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 3.
[35] Robert Wuthnow, "A Good Life and a Good Society: The Debate over Materialism" in *Rethinking Materialism* ed. Robert Wuthnow (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 6. See also Ted Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture 1830–1998* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

interwoven with ideas of the American dream, a phrase popularized in the 1930s by writer James Truslow Adams in his widely read and praised book *The Epic of America*. Adams described the American dream as follows:

> [T]hat dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement… It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.[36]

Political philosopher Michael Sandel has argued, despite Adams's claims that the American Dream was far more than things like cars and money, this dream had become increasingly harnessed to consumer goods even by the 1930s. The high-achieving full-stature development and exercise of one's capabilities that James Truslow Adams lauded were oriented precisely toward attaining a certain status and level of consumption. Sandel pointed to progressive era efforts to rally people around shared consumer interests, which could unify people despite differences in work, class, and race. He highlighted the work of progressive reformer and economist Walter Weyl who held, "In America today the unifying economic force, about which a majority, hostile to the plutocracy, is forming, is the common interest of the citizen as consumer." Weyl argued for consumer solidarity, writing, "The producer (who is only the consumer in another role) is highly differentiated… The consumer, on the other hand, is undifferentiated. All men, women, and children who buy shoes (except only the shoe manufacturer) are interested in cheap good shoes."[37]

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[36] James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1933), 214-215. See Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) and Lawrence Samuel, *The American Dream: A Cultural History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012).

[37] Walter Weyl, *New Democracy* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), quoted in Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 223.

Along this line, the good life, the American Dream, gained an increasing focus as well on individual family units, without as much regard for broader communal aspirations. Sandel notes in particular a growing disregard for the need to cultivate a virtuous citizenry capable of self-government. He argues that as politics became increasingly based upon solidarity around consumption, the primary question of politics shifted from "how to elevate or improve or restrain people's preferences" to "how best – most fully, or fairly, or efficiently – to satisfy them."[38] As the 20th century unfolded, conservatives and liberals split on how to best go about seeking consumer welfare, whether by simply increasing gross domestic output as much as possible or enlisting the government to seek distributive fairness and ensure product safety via regulation. Yet unifying and underlying the mainstream political spectrum was an aspiration that people have affordable access, by one avenue or another, to a vast array of consumer items and services.[39]

Historian Brad Gregory argues further that this unity around consumption has arisen as consensus has dissolved regarding critical questions about the purpose of life (e.g., "What should I live for and why?" "What should I believe, and why should I believe it?" "What kind of person should I be?"). Gregory argues that due to an inability to agree about what constitutes the good life, amid clashing pluralistic appeals to reason, science, or religion that stretch back to the Reformation, people have abandoned that search on a societal level and instead embraced in consensus around the "goods life." Gregory writes:

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[38] Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*, 225, 242.

[39] Ibid., 245-249. Lizabeth Cohen has argued that the post World War II period entailed an intentional policy shift particularly at the federal level to encourage market consumption. Cohen tracks how the "strategy that emerged after World War II for reconstructing the nation's economy and reaffirming its democratic values through promoting the expansion of mass consumption… [This shift entailed] a complex shared commitment on the part of policy makers, business and labor leaders, and civic groups to put mass consumption at the center of their plans for a prosperous postwar America." Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 11.

> Amid the hyper pluralism of divergent truth claims, metaphysical beliefs, moral values, and life priorities, ubiquitous practices of consumerism are more than anything else the cultural glue that holds Western societies together. Hegemonic, liberal states protect and promote these practices. Whatever our differences, acquisitiveness unites us (or is supposed to). Judging from people's behaviors reflected in statistics for consumer spending and economic growth, it is correctly assumed by corporate executives, marketing specialists, politicians, and economists that most people in the early twenty-first century will want more and better stuff whatever their beliefs about the Life Questions or their income level.[40]

The following section examines the way this kind of consensus around consumption as a core aspiration has also been shaped through advertising, day dreaming, and cultural assumptions that status can be secured via consumption.

B. Advertising, Dreaming, and Social Image

Another distinguishing characteristic of consumption today is that consumer objects and activities are focused as much, if not more, on image before others and oneself as on function. As it has become technically quite easy to emulate the functionality of a given object or service once it has been around for even a short time, branding has arisen over the past half-century as a dominant characteristic of our market system, and advertising serves as the chief engine of creating and maintaining a brand name and loyal consumer connection to it. Whereas in the early 20th century branding did not need to be as explicit or emphasized because the consumer objects and services of high status and quality were simply only within reach of the affluent, today a plethora of objects and services that often reach quite high levels of quality are produced so inexpensively (at least in terms of market price) that far more people have the chance to purchase them. As such, branding and

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[40] Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 236, 74. The idea of a consumer society or culture – of consumerism – did not arise prominently until after World War II, when people like Galbraith, Packard, Baudrillard and Marcuse unleashed their sharp criticism upon what they saw as "a growing an uncontrolled passion for material things." See Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture*, 2.

outwardly labeling objects and services has become the way to distinguish amongst consumer items that are not that distinguishable in terms of quality and function.

This branding emphasis connects with the development and attachment of one's identity to the kind of things one purchases. People seek, find, and construct a sense of social identity and purpose in the consumer items and services that they not only choose to buy, but more importantly the goods they day dream about purchasing and using, even if they never do so. Envisioning oneself adorned and enjoying consumer goods is not only a way in which people spend their time and become emotionally invested, but also a huge way in which people understand and seek to assert their position and purpose in society. Yet this is not just an individualistic pastime, but rather something oriented toward one's loved ones, as well as the community and institutions of which one is a part. Parents have often quite grandiose consumer dreams for their children in terms of the huge amount of money spent toward education, extracurricular activities, and accompanying accoutrement. New buildings or infrastructure for a community or institution have similar allure. A church renovating its building or making an addition is an intense consumer undertaking steeped in issues of identity well beyond mere functionality of the space.

Postmodern analysts of consumer culture, led by the work of Jean Baudrillard, argue that consumption is primarily aimed not at the functionality of a given good – at least not its ostensible function – but rather at the role it plays in signifying something to the consumer and other people. Consumption is primarily about communicating and symbolizing certain things about oneself.[41] That signification can take a variety of forms. It can be directed outward either in an effort to stand out from others or alternatively to fit in with others. Standing out could take the form of trying to be considered extremely wealthy, or have refined tastes, or be in rejection of those things considered to be popular or refined.

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[41] See Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: Sage, 1970).

Thorstein Veblen's idea of "conspicuous consumption" was aimed originally at newly well-to-do American men during the turn of the 20th century, who were eagerly attempting to show others, particularly their male peers, how wealthy they were and therefore how frivolously and gratuitously they could spend money.[42] Conspicuous consumption identified by Veblen is related to but distinct from the practice of "keeping up with the Joneses," a pressure in which consumers are aiming more heavily at keeping pace with their neighbors and fitting in with them rather than outspending them.[43]

Either way, a large part of consumer culture is seeking to consume in ways that others find appealing. Desiring to purchase and own things that others envy is a distinct drive from a desire to acquire or accumulate possessions themselves. When tied to one's social image, possessions serve largely as a means of seeking, securing, and defending social status in the eyes of others more so than any ostensible function they would presumably be purchased to provide. According to marketing professor Ronald Michman and business administration professor Edward Mazze, contemporary affluent consumers are predominately searching for acceptance, albeit with a hint of impressive, distinct personal taste amidst that conformity. They write, "Affluent consumers are basically conformists and are concerned about social acceptance while trying to look and act a little different from their friends. Fashion serves as an instrument that reflects their concept of good taste, and self-image and that provides them with the opportunity for self-expression."[44] Sociologist George Simmel highlighted this type of consumer dance back in the early 1900s as well, and argued it occurs not only among the rich but across society, as groups with less social status

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[42] See Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979).
[43] See James Duesenberry, *Income, Saving, and the Theory of Consumer Behavior* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949); Juliet Schor, *Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, and the New Consumer* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 8-9.
[44] Ronald Michman and Edward Mazze, *The Affluent Consumer: Marketing and Selling the Luxury Lifestyle* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 29.

and economic resources seek to emulate those with more, and those with more prestige and money seek new fashionable fields to conquer.[45]

Jean-Noel Kapferer notes that "the luxury product corresponds to a dream," and that dream extends far beyond the ostensible functionality of a product.[46] Clothing at its most basic level functions is to protect the body from the elements, and from there meet social norms of decorum. Those norms include covering certain body parts, but also dressing in certain styles for certain occasions. Luxury presses those social expectations and norms further to how a person will be perceived by others and perceive himself when wearing certain clothing. The dreamed-of perception could be to stand out as wealthy, as having classy taste, as rebellious against such taste, as uniquely distinct within it. All those dreams can also be oriented toward caring about what other people think (usually a select group of others whose opinion of oneself one cares about), toward what one thinks of oneself, or some combination thereof.

A large part of daydreaming about luxury entails the "spectacularization of commodities," in which simply going and looking at consumer goods, imagining oneself owning and using them, is a pleasurable experience. This kind of window shopping stretches back as far as the 18th century in places like the malls in Paris. While the experience of enjoying the sheer spectacle of consumer objects has public manifestations, such as going with friends to check out stores and malls, it also private expression, with people browsing

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[45] See George Simmel, "Philosophy of Fashion" in *The Consumption Reader* ed. David Clarke, Marcus Doel, and Kate Housiaux (London: Routledge, 2003); Robert Frank, *Luxury Fever: Money and Happiness in an Era of Excess* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and John Butman, Neil Fiske,, and Michael Silverstein, *Trading Up: Why Consumers Want New Luxury Goods and How Companies Create Them* (New York: Portfolio, 2005). On consumer goods as means of social ranking and status seeking, see Paul Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958); Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
[46] Vincent Bastien and Jean-Noel Kapferer, *Luxury Strategy* (Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2009), 160. See Ronald Michman and and Edward Mazze, *The Affluent Consumer: Marketing and Selling the Luxury Lifestyle* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 105, 148.

eagerly over catalogues as early as the late 19th century and now spending hours on the internet imaginatively trying different consumer dreams out for size.[47] In the mid to late 20th century, as more and more products proliferated both beyond everyday needs, and as they competed with each other for consumer dollars, advertising became far more about associating products with consumer aspirations for things like acceptance, prestige, or a unique sense of personal identity. Advertisers associated goods with particular meanings that transcended the ostensible function of the item or service.[48]

That influence is not necessarily that a person sees an advertisement, whether once or repeatedly, and feels wholly compelled to want the thing advertised. Defenders of the current market system argue that concerns about advertising's power over people are overblown, precisely because corporations and businesses are at the mercy of consumers, and not vice versa. While large quantities of money are poured into advertising, its effectiveness is hard to measure for any given good. In other words, advertising does not hold puppet master-like sway over people. It does however have a significant effect in creating an environment in which consumption serves as the standard way people engage with things they like, because advertising cultivates the perception and practice that the way to exercise one's affinity for something or someone (e.g., a significant other, or a beloved vacation spot or sports team) is through purchasing a product related to it.. It does not *necessarily* affect what we want, e.g., thing x over thing y, so much as the way we relate to the things that we want and care about. For instance, people buy paraphernalia and tickets tied to a sport's team instead of getting some friends together to go outside and play the sport

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[47] Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture*, 27.

[48] See Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: Sage, 1970); Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

themselves, or rest in purchasing pre-made food instead of carving out the time to learn how to make it at home.[49]

There is also a broader effect on society when life is so bombarded with advertisements that people generally want more and more types of things. As economist Victor Lebow noted in 1955:

> [F]rom the larger viewpoint of our economy, the total effect of all the advertising and promotion and selling is to create and maintain the multiplicity and intensity of wants that are the spur to the standard of living in the United States. A specific advertising and promotional campaign, for a particular product at a particular time, has no automatic guarantee of success, yet it may contribute to the general pressure by which wants are stimulated and maintained. Thus its very failure may serve to fertilize this soil, as does so much else that seems to go down the drain.[50]

The ways in which advertising taps into and cultivates people's dreams and aspirations about their place in society and how they are perceived by others also stokes people's concerns about not simply the functionality of a consumer good, but the way it also serves as a status marker. That identifying status is not necessarily simply an expression of wealth and class, such as an expensive and fashionable shirt. Resistance to those kinds of demarcations are increasingly incorporated into the market system, as certain brands of shirts are known for being produced in ways that pay workers a living wage and minimize harms to the environment. Identifying as an ethical consumer can also be part of the attraction to a particular thing or service.[51] Advertising helps cultivate in people a general interest, expectation, and disposition to look to consumer items and services as the primary and necessary means of undertaking daily life. The following section further examines the way in which market consumption pervades contemporary life and people actively seek to form a sense of self in and through market consumption.

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[49] See Vincent Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004).
[50] Victor Lebow, "Price Competition in 1955" *Journal of Retailing* Spring (1955) http://www.gcafh.org/edlab/Lebow.pdf.
[51] Ibid.

C. Consumer Identities

As widely noted by historians, a key aspect of capitalist market system is that people's lives have become increasingly segmented into distinct times and roles for production versus consumption, work versus leisure. These divisions pair with the growing split between public life, where work is primarily done, and private life, where consumption is primarily done.[52] Furthermore, people began to associate and understand themselves as much by what they bought and consumed than the type of work they did.[53] Sociologist Colin Campbell contends that the way people self-identify today is deeply connected to their consumer tastes and preferences. While other aspects of a person's identity may be given, such as family, nationality, age, sex, physical features, and to a large degree social status or class standing, contemporary consumers often take personal consumer preferences as indicative and revealing of someone's identity.[54] Questions that mark one's identity are: What do I like to do? What is my favorite food? Music? Movie? Sports team? Book? How do I like to spend my time? Even though the identity shaped around such questions may grow and shift, there is a conviction in modern consumerism that someone's likes and loves – what that person would choose for him or herself – are essential to who he or she is as a person.[55]

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[52] For most of western history people lived agricultural lives in which the line between production and consumption was not so neatly split, in large part because one's home was where one spent most of one's time, growing enough food to keep oneself and one's family alive and pay whatever portion was demanded by one's land owner or king.

[53] See Kenneth Niell Cameron, *Humanity and Society: A World History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973); Fuat Firat and Nikhilesh Dholakia, *Consuming People: From political economy to theaters of consumption* (New York: Routledge, 1998); and Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800* trans. Miriam Kochan (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

[54] Colin Campbell, "I Shop Therefore I Know That I Am: The Metaphysical Basis of Modern Consumerism," in *Elusive Consumption: Tracking New Research Perspectives*, edited by Karin Ekstrom and Helene Brembeck. Oxford: Berg, 2004, 27-44.

[55] It should be noted that the shift-able and alterable nature of consumer identity, along with the accompanying telos of discovering who one is, does not *by itself* make that consumer identity and telos radically different from those of any other tradition, which can also change over time as those who are experienced within it see fit to argue for alterations or additions to the tradition.

Campbell anecdotally points to "personal ads" as prime examples of people's focus on likes and loves as crucially constitutive of their identity, though one could easily substitute in something like Facebook profiles or Twitter accounts. As people seek out partners, they focus on putting forward their preferences as the way to express who they are to potential partners. Campbell argues, "[T]he person we really consider ourselves to be, the 'real me' if you like, is to be found in our special mix or combination of tastes. This is where we are most likely to feel that our uniqueness as individuals – our individuality – actually resides." As a result, people write personal ads such as: "Bohemian cat-lover, 46 going on 27, totally broke and always working, likes red wine, working out, Pratchett, Tolkein & Red Dwarf"; "Outdoor Girl, 50s, loves long country walks, jive dancing & Tate Modern. Seeks partner to share interests and maybe more"; "Slim, professional, lively, reflective 40 year-old, enjoys Moby, Mozart, the Arts, and watching sports, seeks compatible male."[56]

From this perspective, the marketplace becomes a testing ground for discovering oneself according to one's preferences. People purchase things and services to try them out and see the degree to which they elicit personal pleasure. Similarly people window shop and daydream about the consumer goods and accompanying identities to further discern and revel in what they find most appealing. For modern consumers enraptured with personal tastes, the determining criteria for whether something is real or true is the degree to which it elicits an emotional response in a person. Campbell refers to this view of reality as an "emotional ontology," which he explains as follows:

> The more powerful the response experienced the more 'real' the object or event that produced it is judged to be. At the same time, the more intense our response, the more 'real' – or the more truly ourselves – we feel ourselves to be at that moment. Very simply put we live in a culture in which reality is equated with intensity of

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Ibid., 8-9.

[56] Ibid. See also Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

> experience, and is hence accorded both to the source of intense stimuli and to that aspect of our being which responds to them.[57]

This sense of self is not relegated to people who desire to consume conspicuously, or keep up with everyone else. It is not simply those immersed in the persistent churn of fashion. Given the pervasiveness of consumption, we all have some identity in relation to it according to Campbell.

Along this line, in studying the process through which children learn to become consumers, Professor of Marketing James McNeal argues that it is inaccurate to consider consumer activity as primarily confined to economic activities like buying something at a store. McNeal argues that consumer behavior "pervades virtually all other roles performed by people." He writes, "An act may be called going to school, going to work, sleeping, eating, bathing, driving, playing, but every one of them is mostly CB [consumer behavior]. Moreover, this is true for infants, children, teens, thirty-somethings, and seniors – humans of all ages – in the sense that all people continually think about commercial objects, ask others for commercial objects, select commercial objects, buy commercial objects, and use commercial objects in practically all of their daily activities."[58]

While we might focus on the roles people have at home or work, with family and friends or colleagues and acquaintances, we often overlook the way consumption is part of any place or activity in which they are engaged. In regards to certain activities, we tend to say a person is "sleeping or eating or going to school," but usually fail to note that each of those entails contact with an incalculable number of consumer items and services. McNeal argues that consumer behavior is "a constant in our society" that occurs "all the time, every day and night, in every dimension of our lives." He points out that even a baby asleep in a crib is

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[57] Ibid., 15.

[58] James McNeal, *On Becoming a Consumer: The Development of Consumer Behavior Patterns in Children* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007), 13-15.

"using (consuming) not only the crib but blankets, diapers, mobiles, and utilities while she [sleeps] – and when she woke she consumed more of these items plus food, toys, and other furniture such as her cradle, playpen, and chairs and tables."[59] Simply being a baby in contemporary society is a deeply consumeristic undertaking.

Conclusion

This chapter has described key characteristics of contemporary consumption. Contemporary American life is pervasively shaped and guided by market consumption in the way people personally and socially identify, as well as the type of life they dream about and seek for themselves and their families. This chapter has outlined the rise of market consumption in the United States, the blurred lines around luxury, the use of goods to demonstrate status, the use of goods to explore personal sense of self, and the use of goods for any and all roles we fill in contemporary life, whether in work, family life, friendship, or avocations. Given the power and prevalence of market consumption in contemporary life, having a constructive positive vision for the role of market consumption in human flourishing is critical. Market consumption is not something that can be avoided, but it can be channeled and engaged in ways that cultivate flourishing. This dissertation provides a framework for a positive theological ethics of market consumption oriented toward helping people glimpse God's goodness in the development and exercise of capabilities for wondrous activity in community with one another. It maps how market consumption can serve as constitutive elements of those activities. The next chapter lays further important groundwork and background for this constructive vision. It surveys the prominent arguments in the field of Catholic and Protestant consumer ethics, and highlights how those

[59] Ibid., xv, 10.

critiques of market production and consumption, while crucial, need further development in regards to details of flourishing human life in addition to morality and justice.

2. Western Christian Ethics and Market Consumption

Introduction

This chapter reviews the rise of market consumption as a thematic focus in Catholic and Protestant Christian ethics, which began with critiques of industrial production and work before growing in the mid-to-late 20th century to include greater criticism of market consumption itself. Although criticisms of greed and luxury stretch back millennia, the scale of contemporary market consumption, the ecological costs of production to meet people's pursuit of affluent lifestyles, and the formation and habituation of people as "consumers," led to new critiques of the contemporary market system as the 20th and 21st centuries have progressed. The following survey of Christian consumer ethics is not exhaustive, but rather maps representative works and themes in the field, particularly within the United States.

This chapter breaks into three sections. The first historically situates and overviews the critique of market production for failing to provide people with living wages and safe

working conditions. A core concern here was harm to people's physical health, particularly as they lack the requisite goods to sustain themselves and their families. A related critique of production is the way it pollutes and exhausts the environment, harming humans as well as other species. These concerns with production developed and carried over into critiques of market consumption and consumers, who through some mixture of indifference, ignorance, habit, or financial necessity purchase goods made in ways that exploit workers and the environment. These criticisms focus largely on a consumer culture that equates a good life with owning as many high quality, fashionable consumer goods as possible, and these critiques arose prominently in the second half of the 20th century through today.

The second section of this chapter surveys the primary kinds of Christian arguments made against contemporary market consumption. These critiques again come in addition to and in harmony with the concerns for workers and the environment previously described, and they center around the ways market consumption draws people into: (1) idolatry of wealth and status, (2) dissatisfaction and anxiety, and (3) malformation of dispositions and habits. The final section analyzes the lack of a developed theological articulation in Christian consumer ethics of the role market consumption could or should play in human flourishing. If flourishing were thought of as a path and way of walking with God, the current critiques of market consumption highlight the ways in which people veer off that path, needing to course correction back onto it, but they do not detail what the path or walk of flourishing itself entails - beyond *not* straying harmfully and sinfully away from it. Or to use a different metaphor, there is a difference between an illness and the diligent call and work to correct or heal that illness, and the question of what one should do with a healthy life, beyond simply avoiding illness. The good life under God remains very vague.

Although some Christian theologians and ethicists have offered enticing gestures toward the ultimate aspiration of thriving as part of a good creation, some of which will be

explored in the final section, they repeatedly offer just that, gestures and sketches of what flourishing in and through the contemporary market system entails. Even Christian theologians and ethicists who champion the contemporary market system only offer a very circumscribed role to consumer goods in connection to human flourishing, primarily as means of comfort and sustenance. A clearer articulation of market consumption's place within love of God, neighbor, and the rest of creation is needed in order to provide more effective and constructive guidance for life in consumer society.

The Rise of the Social Question in Western Christian Ethics

Christian considerations of economic activities, such as trade, ownership, use, hospitality, usury, and giving, stretch back to the first century, but in the 19th century they expanded to include consideration of broader societal policies and laws regarding market exchange. Economics itself as a field of study and basis for political decision-making has undergone changes over the past few centuries. At its root, the term economy comes from the Greek *oikonomia*, meaning "household management," and it was historically understood and applied in Western Europe to the stewardship of goods to meet needs of one's household and those living therein. In his *Politics*, Aristotle focused on economics as stewardship of a predominately self-sufficient estate. According the Aristotle the maintenance and operation of the household was a distinct set of concerns from those of the polis, which was an interconnection of households focused on issues of common concern, such as law and governance, religious festival and observance, or defense from foreign attack.[1] Although Aristotle did write of the polis itself as ideally functioning as a self-sufficient unit akin to a household, the idea of political economy, of considering a nation as a household in need of management, did not arise until the early 17th century. Frenchman L.

[1] Aristotle, *The Politics* trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 198), 1252a-1245a16.

de Magerne-Turquet appears to have coined the phrase in a 1611 treatise on government, and in 1615 Siuer de Watteville, a French official, developed it further as a system of policies intended to grow the wealth and power of a nation over and against other countries.[2]

In late 18th century in England, Adam Smith derisively labeled this understanding of political economy "mercantilism," in the sense that it offered too much of a narrowly focused and domestic "merchant" viewpoint, which failed to appreciate the greater benefits of international trade compared to the presumed benefits of high tariffs. Smith's primary point was that it is a mistake to assume that wealth is a zero-sum game in which one nation, or national industry, either has the world's wealth or another does. Instead of assuming the amount of wealth in the world was fixed and had to be fought over, Smith urged governments to see that wealth could be created and there could be mutual national benefit through trade, rather than a system of tariffs intended to protect domestic industry.[3]

Smith did not entirely reject the idea of political economy, of the state as essentially a household in need of responsible stewardship, but he sought to explain the way that political economy should seek to understand and develop policies around the "nature and causes of the wealth of nations," i.e., mutually beneficial trade and division of labor.[4] The past 400 years have demonstrated how trade as well as technological innovation have driven that kind

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[2] Anthony M. C. Waterman, *Political Economy and Christian Theology Since the Enlightenment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 225.

[3] Smith's notion of political economy morphed into the academic, and bureaucratic, field of "economics" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In this shift, the market was increasingly seen as something that could be studied and described scientifically, independent of any political decisions that would or could be made about it. While governmental decisions about markets still were being made and had to be made, academics and many bureaucrats increasingly saw themselves as simply providing objective analysis of economic exchange. Members in the new field of economics came to see it as their task simply to offer descriptions about the economy, with which others could do as they saw fit in terms of decisions about the government's role with the market. Economist Lionel Robbins notes the general definition of economics as a science that came to predominated the field: "Economics is the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternate uses." Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), 16.

[4] See Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 5-6, 218, 344.

of wealth creation, as various elements of creation have been split, combined, cultivated, broken down, built up, and fashioned into an unprecedented array of objects for human use. Smith had in mind a time when core goods of food, shelter, and clothing would be abundant and inexpensive enough that everyone could afford them and a "general plenty [would diffuse] itself through all the different ranks of the society."[5]

As Albert Hirschman analyzes in *The Passions and the Interests*, over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, the desire to make money and attain possessions via production and trade also came to be seen in Europe and European colonies as a civilizing, rationalizing, and industrious interest rather than a socially degrading, sprawling, and impulsive vice, as it had been predominately viewed previously. While the degree to which people took the money-making drive as positive in itself versus simply a productively harnessable passion varied, there was a increasingly widespread conviction that orienting people and countries toward trade checked their impulses toward violence. Montesquieu famously stressed the way *doux commerce* "polishes and softens barbarian ways," as individuals, families, nations, and rulers come to focus their energies on production and trade, instead of fighting, conquest, thieving, or plundering.[6]

Yet the concentration of that wealth in the hands of those who owned capital, such as factories, stocks, and machinery, combined with often unsafe, mind-numbing, poorly paid, socially isolating and degrading working conditions led many people to deeply distrust and resist the particular societal shift toward wealth creation and trade that Smith and others

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[5] Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 11. Noting that the majority of society consists of "servants, labourers, and workmen," Smith argues that "No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, clothe, and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed, and lodged." Ibid., 46.

[6] Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 56-66.

uplifted.[7] While Smith coined the term mercantilism to capture what he took to be a shortsighted strategy for political economy, Karl Marx popularized the term capitalism to convey what he took to be an inherently exploitative system of industrial production and labor. Capitalism was not necessarily more or less oppressive than its immediate predecessor feudalism or past forms of the perpetual "class struggle" between oppressors and oppressed according to Marx. Yet the capitalist "epoch of the bourgeoisie," as Marx and Frederich Engels proclaimed in *The Communist Manifesto*, was radically distinct in regards to how it "simplified the class antagonism" into two competing groups of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, reduced ties between people to "naked self-interest" and "callous 'cash payment,'" and "created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together," at the expense of oppressive, alienating labor practices. Marx and Engels contended that the "icy water of egotistical calculation," the cash nexus, had become the prime basis upon which people engage one another, a dynamic that disintegratingly pervaded even family life as everyone, women, men, and children, had to undertake industrial wage labor simply for their families to survive.[8]

The industrial revolution raised the "social question" of how to address the intense poverty and dehumanizing working conditions of huge numbers of people that were occurring alongside an unprecedented generation of wealth enjoyed by a relative few. Although massive gaps in wealth have always existed, primarily between aristocratic land owners and most everyone else, the industrial revolution widened the gap as technology and markets enabled an enormous production of goods. While the 19th century saw struggles to democratize political decision-making, as well as deal with things like the breakdown of

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[7] Smith recognized this downside of industrialization as well, and spoke about how it will occur as an aspect of the division of labor "unless government takes some pains to prevent it." See Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 393-394.

[8] Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* in *The Marx-Engels Reader: Second Edition* Ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 474-476.

traditional family and communal relationships, the grinding impoverishment of so many people was a core topic of social debate and concern. In addition to these dynamics, there was also a new and growing sense that due to the extremely productive capacities of the market, something *could* be done about poverty in a way that was unimaginable prior to the industrial revolution. This notion that there could be enough material wealth to address poverty was critical for there even being the possibility of the social question.[9]

Factories offered employment that was less varied, more mindless, and often more dangerous than farming, and it was generally compensated with wages that were too low to sufficiently feed, clothe, shelter, and care for workers and their families. Although subsistence farming is grueling and each year bears the possibility of starvation, life in factories and cities also cut people off from the relationships and practices of their traditional communities, while cramming them into unsanitary tenements. Factory work also tended to be overcrowded, dangerous, and abusive, with an impersonal and callous distance between worker and owner. As E.P. Thompson summarizes in *The Making of the English Working Class*, the grievances of the workers in industrializing nations commonly included:

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[9] This sentiment grew predominately in Britain, the German states, France, and the United States, the leading industrial nations by the end of the century. See Gilbert Binyon, *The Christian Socialist Movement in England* (London: SPCK, 1931); Maurice Reckitt, *Maurice to Temple: A Century of the Social Movement in the Church of England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947). In the 19th century, two key factors led toward a greater focus on social well-being. The Enlightenment in science, technology, literacy, and history called into question the more metaphysical Christian affirmations about creation, redemption, the afterlife, and eternity, which led many Christians to place a heavier emphasis and focus on love of neighbor. This shift occurred in tandem with the industrial revolution and the drastic social question it raised around human suffering and needs, while simultaneously generating previously unimaginable resources capable of tending to that suffering. For the first time in history it seemed possible that Jesus's comment to his disciples that the poor will always be with you was not an inescapable aphorism for all time, but something to be overcome with the produce of the market, under the name of Christ and the command to love God and neighbor. Suspicion of classic Christian dogma conjoined with grinding poverty, about which it increasingly seemed something could be done, led many Christians to focus more directly on the church's role in addressing social ills as key to the proclamation and advancement of God's Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven. See Gary Dorrien, *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

> [T]he rise of a master-class without traditional authority or obligations: the growing distance between master and man: the transparency of the exploitation at the source of their new wealth and power: the loss of status and above all of independence for the worker, his reduction to total dependence on the master's instruments of production: the partiality of the law: the disruption of the traditional family economy: the discipline, monotony, hours and conditions of work: loss of leisure and amenities: the reduction of the man to the status of an "instrument."[10]

Criticism of the capitalist market system, articulated foremost by Marx, focused on harms arising from the production process, economic trade, and the disparate ownership of property, especially the ways it prevents people from fully developing as human beings. Most Christian reflection on society and morality of the 19th century followed suit in focusing on people harmed through industrialization and corporate accumulations of power, wealth, and influence. The concern for workers and their families was not simply dehumanizing or difficult work, but that they did not have enough to secure a decent and respectable standard of living. During the 19th century concerns centered largely around laborers stuck doing alienating work for meager wages, without which they were unable to secure for themselves and their families sufficient nutrition, housing, medical care, and education. During the mid 19th century in Britain, Frederick Denison Maurice and other Christian Socialists called for co-operative workshops and associations as truer manifestations of Christian community that would not inflict these kinds of harms on workers and their families.[11]

Pope Leo XIII powerfully launched this concern to the forefront of Catholic thought in *Rerum Novarum* on May 15, 1891. In this encyclical, he addressed the dire situation of so many workers and families, in part to prevent them from drifting toward socialism, which the Catholic Church took to be innately atheistic and therefore a serious danger. In this unprecedented encyclical Leo directly called out the "misery and wretchedness pressing

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[10] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 202-203. See also Jonathan Rees, *Industrializaiton and the Transformation of American Life* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[11] See Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ, or Hints Respecting the Principles, Constitution, and Ordinances of the Catholic Church* (Nashotah: Nashotah House Press, 2013).

so unjustly on the majority of the working class."[12] He maintained that "the first thing of all to secure is to save unfortunate working people from the cruelty of men of greed, who use human beings as mere instruments for money-making… grind them down with excessive labor as to stupefy their minds and wear out their bodies."[13] Leo's encyclical launched extensive Catholic engagement and critique regarding the market system, as will be discussed in the next sections.

In *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, published in 1912, Ernst Troeltsch tracked the historical basis for churches' newfound voice on "modern social problems" that historically unprecedented industrialization and struggles for democratic rule in Europe had generated. Troeltsch described the "vast and complicated" social problem as follows: "It includes the problem of the capitalist economic period and of the industrial proletariat created by it; and of the growth of militaristic and bureaucratic giant states; of the enormous increase in population, which affects colonial and world policy, of the mechanical technique, which produces enormous masses of material and links up and mobilizes the whole world for purposes of trade, but which also treats men and labour like machines." Noting that this situation was "entirely new" and presented "a problem with which Christian-Social work has never been confronted until now," Troeltsch stressed in closing his tome that for churches to successfully apply Christian principles to these issues, "thoughts will be necessary which have not yet been thought, and which will correspond to this new situation as the older forms met the need of the social situation in earlier ages."[14]

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[12] Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, Encyclical on capital and labor, May 15, 1891, sec. 3.
[13] Ibid., sec. 42.
[14] Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* Trans. Olive Wyon (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 1010-1012.

Christian Critiques of Market Production

Writing near-simultaneously to Troeltsch across the Atlantic in the United States, Baptist pastor Walter Rauschenbusch hammered prophetically on the need and opportunity to care for people's well-being on earth. He was adamant that churches not ignore human suffering across society in favor of emphasizing a more individual and personally-oriented piety. Rauschenbusch's experience serving a largely immigrant and impoverished congregation in New York City drove him to a "second conversion to Christ" in which he felt a powerful clarity that the church's mission and call is to address afflictions of industrial society, such as rampant disease, lack of adequate food and shelter, child labor, dehumanizing work, lack of living wage, and huge disparities in wealth.[15] Building upon what was increasingly framed as the Social Gospel, Rauschenbusch proclaimed in the introduction to his 1907 *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, "The essential purpose of Christianity is to transform human society into the Kingdom of God by regenerating all human relations and reconstituting them in accordance with the will of God," and in this text and others, Rauschenbusch dove deeply into specific economic and political analysis along this line.[16] The driving concern though was the relief of human suffering and the effort to resolve the "paradox of modern life," described by Rauschenbusch as the curious situation in which "The instrument [i.e., industrialization] by which all humanity could rise from want and fear of want actually submerged a large part of the people in perpetual want and fear." Rauschenbush noted along this line, "When wealth was multiplying beyond all human

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[15] Gary Dorian, *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 24.
[16] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), xxxvii.

precedent, an immense body of pauperism with all its allied misery was growing up and becoming chronic."[17]

Building upon the teachings of *Rerum Novarum*, Rauschenbusch's Catholic contemporary in the U.S. John Ryan similarly critiqued the instrumentalization of human beings in industrialized society. Although he did not readily proclaim the Kingdom of God as an achievable and duty-bound task for society and the church in society to accomplish, Ryan argued sharply that "[e]very person is an end in himself; none is a mere instrument to the convenience or welfare of any other human being." For Ryan, the truth of "the intrinsic worth, importance, sacredness of the human being" is something God-given as well as self-evident, and from it arises the right to sustenance and a decent life. Ryan argues that this sustenance comes via "useful labor," since "the fruits and potentialities of the earth do not become available to men without exertion." Ryan held that in an industrial context, as opposed to agricultural for instance, that people's right to life entailed being able to earn a living wage that affords a "minimum of goods" sufficient for workers and their families to live "in a manner worthy of a human being." Ryan wrote, "The man who is not provided with requisites of normal health, efficiency, and contentment lives a maimed life, not a reasonable life."[18] Forty years after *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Pius XI also reiterated these sentiments yet again in *Quadragesimo Anno*, decrying that "bodily labor…is being changed into an instrument of perversion; for dead matter come forth from the factory ennobled, while men there are corrupted and degraded."[19]

Catholics and Protestants alike critiqued abuses in the marketplace, though they differed on the degree to which solutions to address it were literal manifestations and

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[17] Ibid., 217.
[18] John Ryan, *Economic Justice: Selections from Distributive Justice and A Living Wage* Ed. Harlan Beckley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 113-115.
[19] Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, Encyclical on reconstruction of the social order, May 15, 1931, sec. 135.

advances of the Kingdom of God. That faith, espoused boldly by Rauschenbusch, was chastened and began to unravel before the horrors of the First and then Second World War, along with the intermediary Great Depression. Reinhold Niebuhr sharply critiqued the Social Gospel as naïvely sentimental in its confidence in moral persuasion, education, and love to alter people's disposition to sin, most especially in their idolatrous, selfish undertakings as social groups and nations to gain power and control over and against one another. According to Niebuhr, confidence that "the kingdom of God is around the corner" and attainable via the "moral resources of men" was woefully misguided.[20] Yet Niebuhr also lamented the abuses in capitalism, and disagreed primarily over the best strategy to address them. He held that due to the pervasiveness of sin prior to the eschaton, the best that could be hoped for here and now was checking the sinful self-interests of individuals and groups against one another in such a way as to limit and mitigate harms inflicted in economic as well as the political arenas.

Niebuhr's realism was deeply incorporated and yet transcended in the work and ministry of Martin Luther King, Jr., who ultimately sought reconciliation and unification as a beloved community, but appreciated the importance of flexing economic and political power to check oppressive abuses by one group against another. Discussing the Poor People's Campaign in 1968, King noted that, while violence and riots are counterproductive because they fuel further violence and can be stopped by force, "The fact is that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor. It must be demanded by the oppressed."[21] King also critiqued the degrading aspects of capitalist production practices and aligned the cause of blacks in America with the longstanding demands of industrial workers. In a 1961 speech to

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[20] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man & Immoral Society* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 82.

[21] Martin Luther King Jr., "The Other America" in *"All Labor Has Dignity"* Ed. Michael Honey (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 160.

an AFL-CIO convention King declared, "Our needs are identical with labor's needs: decent wages, fair working conditions, livable housing, old-age security, health and welfare measures, conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children, and respect in the community."[22]

Liberation theology developed in the 1960s and 1970s built respectively upon Catholic and Protestant affirmations and advocacy for freedom from oppressive working and living conditions – but with far more central emphasis on the voices and activity of the oppressed themselves, rather than simply their suffering. Gustavo Gutierrez highlighted the scripturally rooted call to "put an end to the domination of some countries by others, of some social classes by others, of some persons by others," and to be conscious of and responsive to "the oppressive and alienating circumstances in which the great majority of humankind exists…. and the obstacles these conditions present to the complete fulfillment of all human beings, exploiters and exploited alike."[23] James Cone similarly identified the "essence of the gospel" with active response to the question "What has the gospel to do with the oppressed of the land and their struggle for liberation?"[24]

The common thread of concern that stretches throughout these critiques of market production back into the 19th century is workers and entire families suffer dire poverty while a proportional few have enormous quantities of consumer goods. These critiques took on increasingly global and international dimensions across the mid and late 20th century as businesses in more economically developed countries began to shift production to less

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[22] Ibid., 38.
[23] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* Trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 31, 40.
[24] James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 9.

developed countries.[25] The ethical frame remained around this globalization though has predominately remained one of seeking production practices that justly and sufficiently compensate workers. In *Christian Economic Ethics: History and Implications*, Daniel Finn contends that western Christians from across political, ecumenical, and theological lines and even times generally concur (despite often-fierce disagreements about the path to it) that the goal of economic life is for "ordinary people [to] have the skills and opportunity to support themselves and their families through their daily work."[26] Drawing upon centuries of Christian thought, Finn argues that "[t]he Christian vision of a full and fulfilling human life includes the notion of self-sufficiency…. That is, the poor of the world need assistance in coming to be able to support themselves and their families."[27] In ordinary, daily work people not only meet physical needs, but also reach the "full development of personhood," in deep relationship with other people and with God.[28]

This is a sentiment echoed in texts like Ronald Sider's popularly read *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. Sider believes people's resources should be geared toward helping ensure we structure society so that everyone who can work has access to the developmental resources needed to earn a decent living. Drawing in particular upon Deuteronomy, Leviticus, the prophets, and Paul's letters, Sider argues that Scripture provides "two crucial clues" about economic justice: "First, God wants all people to have the productive resources to be able to earn a decent living and be dignified members of their community…. Second, God wants the rest of us to provide a generous share of the necessities of life to those who

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[25] The primary driving forces toward this intensified globalization of production and trade were relatively low shipping and transportation costs, often drastically lower labor costs in less developed countries, and differences between countries' taxes as well as regulations around things like workers' rights and pollution mitigation.

[26] Daniel Finn, *Christian Economic Ethics: History and Implications* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 13. See Ibid., 219, 262, 268, 283, and 352.

[27] Ibid., 290.

[28] Ibid., 332, 336.

cannot work."[29] Works like Rebecca Todd Peters's *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* maintains a similar emphasis on work. She likewise argues that human flourishing entails not simply having one's basic needs met, but more importantly having the educational and employment opportunities requisite to meet one's own needs, so that people can "experience meaning and value in their work." She maintains that a just society consists of having "adequate education for all members of society, adequate child-care policies and facilities for working families, and job training, retraining, and placement programs that would ensure that citizens were able to become contributing members of society." Peters focuses on "sins of overconsumption, indifference, and greed" that fail, wittingly or not, to recognize that "meaningful work, safe working conditions, and a living wage are all essential requirements for our ability to live the good life." [30]

As the 20th century progressed, an ethical critique of consumers as drivers of oppression increasingly arose, in distinction from and addition to the owners of business and capital for instance. While there are debates around consumer agency versus complicity in this field,[31] there is a continued concern for worker well-being in the critique that consumer demand for inexpensive goods (often inexpensive due in part to low wages) exacerbates and perpetuates harms to workers and by extension their families. David Cloutier contends that although we tend to rail against corporations for harms to workers and the environment, "as long as we are driven toward 'cheap' goods – whether cheap

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[29] Ibid., 86. This sentiment resonates with in Pope John XXIII encyclical *Mater et Magistra* as well. He argues that relief work is important, but that development is just as critical so that everyone needs access to employment to be able to productively share their gifts and earn enough to care for their family. Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, Encyclical on Christianity and Social Progress, May 15, 1961, sec. 163, 151.

[30] Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 28, 177, 204, and 196.

[31] See for instance, Albino Barrera, *Market Complicity and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

luxuries or cheap necessities required to be cheap so that we can buy luxuries – consumer desires must be seen as part of the problem."[32]

Another critical pushback to market production that arose increasingly in the latter half of the 20th century was concern over its ecological impact. While the productivity of the market system has been an unparalleled boon for the generation of wealth for human beings, albeit a boon unevenly enjoyed, much of that productivity has come at the expense of other species and ecological stability. Market consumption and the items and services consumers see is the end product of a generally unknown and hidden production process that requires an enormous amount of animate and inanimate input as well as a huge amount of byproduct waste. Along this line, the authors of the landmark 1972 scientific study *The Limits to Growth* stressed the importance of the "physical economy," which is subject to "physical laws of the planet," in distinction from the "money economy," which humans create but ultimately still depends upon the physical economy. In the market system, the physical economy is successively transformed into different forms of capital. The first is industrial capital, the factories and machines needed to execute the production process. The goods they produce are industrial output that is in turn transformed into the following further forms of capital: service capital (buildings and equipment for service providers like doctors, merchants, teachers, bankers, etc.), agricultural capital (machines and structures for farming), consumer goods, resource-obtaining capital (machines and structures to extract raw materials), and then again more industrial capital (needed to maintain and eventually replace current industrial capital). The production process for all of these outputs generates a significant amount of waste. Although people predominantly think of waste as personal trash, like plastic bags and food wrappers, the vast majority of waste occurs long before a

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[32] David Cloutier, *The Vice of Luxury: Economic Excess in a Consumer Age* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 167.

consumer good is purchased. Authors of *The Limits to Growth* set "a rule of thumb" that "every ton of garbage at the consumer end of the stream has also required the production of 5 tons of waste at the manufacturing stage and 20 tons of waste at the site of initial resource extraction (mining, pumping, logging, farming)."[33]

Critiques about harms to the environment rose to the forefront in the 1960s and 70s. While some focused on this from an anthropocentric lens, in the sense of caring for the environment to ensure a habitable planet for humanity, others raised concern for other species and life on the planet as a whole. Theologians and ethicists Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie McFague, John Cobb, Wendell Berry, Holmes Rolston III, and Leonardo Boff have significantly developed this line of critique of a market system that was excessively harming other creatures and drawing on animate and inanimate "resources" at a rate that threatens the ecological balance that makes life possible. Over the past 50 years, climate change due to human economic behavior has become an additional primary concern given that it encompasses all the old problems of excessive consumption, such as localized pollution, exhaustion of resources, and harm to other species, but also harbors the potential to upset the global ecology in such a drastic and unpredictable fashion as to threaten entire species and life on earth as it presently exists.

In regards to climate change, Willis Jenkins contends that the power humans have gained to affect the climate occurs through such a "dispersed, cumulative, and nonintentional" fashion that it outstrips our traditional moral categories of responsibility. We

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[33] Donella Meadows et al., *Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972), 103. See The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED), *Environmental Data: Compendium 1999* (Paris: OECD, 1999). See William Rees and Mathis Wackernagel, *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1996). In its efforts to achieve a more sustainable economy, the European Union undertakes "material flow analysis" that tracks the material throughput throughout the entire process of producing and consuming an item, including the extraction of raw materials. This is connected to ecological footprint, which only focuses on use of renewable resources and whether they are being consumed within or beyond a rate at which they can be continuously replenished.

cannot point blame for climate change on any discrete act, in the way one for instance could with regard to a physical assault, robbery, or a business owner denying a living wage. Disruptions due to do the consequences of climate change, such as more extreme weather, the spread of disease-carrying insects, and rising sea levels, also disproportionately harm the poor who lack the requisite resources to deal with such issues.[34]

Pope Paul VI raised the call to care of the environment in his 1971 apostolic letter, *Octogesima Adveniens* for the 80th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, declaring the need for everyone to take responsibility for creation because "Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation."[35] Pope Francis powerfully drove this message to the forefront of his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, in which he sought to spark new dialogue and conversation around "sustainable and integral development." According to Francis, the reason environmental damage has continued apace is in part due to a "lack of interest" that "can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions." Drawing explicitly on St. Francis, the pope also contended that at the root of the ecological crisis lies a failure to approach the environment with "awe and wonder," with the "language of fraternity and beauty," as opposed to the perspective of "masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs."[36]

As has been reviewed in this section, concerns with market production's effect on the environment as well as on the poor have deep roots in the theology and ethics of Catholic and Protestant traditions. The critiques that focused on the production process carry over into criticisms of market consumption. In many respects they provide the ever-

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[34] Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 44.
[35] Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, apostolic letter, May 14, 1971, sec. 21.
[36] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, Encyclical on care for our common home, May 24, 2015, sec. 11, 14.

present background problem and worry with contemporary market system: not everyone is able to join in its abundance and that abundance comes at an unsupportably heavy cost to other species and the earth's ecological balance as a whole. If somehow production did not have these effects, if everyone were able to have life-giving access to the market's goods and use of the environment were undertaken at a sustainable and respectful rate (that, for instance, actively appreciated the non-human lives taken so that we might live), the more specific critiques of consumption in the following sections would take on a very different tone, focused largely on the emptiness and lack of fulfillment found in many contemporary consumer practices. That said, currently the problems of production and consumption are closely connected, and the harms of the current production process are in many respects fueled and exacerbated by the prevalent patterns of market consumption today.

The next section surveys prominent themes in Christian critiques of consumption. These concerns have historical precedents and roots, but they rose to prominence in the U.S. largely after World War II through today, in line with the increasing material abundance available to the average American. These critiques again build upon the concerns laid out in the first section for workers and the environment, but they focus more on consumers themselves. These criticisms center around the ways market consumption draws people into: (1) idolatry of wealth and status, (2) dissatisfaction and anxiety, and (3) malformation of dispositions and habits. The works examined below are not exhaustive, but highlight representative themes and concerns in Christian consumer ethics.

Christian Critiques of Market Consumption

John Kavanaugh's *Following Christ in a Consumer Culture*, written in 1981 and republished in 1991 and 2006, criticized consumer activity for undermining people's relationships with one another and God. Kavanaugh argued that the "Commodity Form of

Life," a particular type of idolatry, pervades American society and orients people's worldview and behaviors toward worshipping commodities.[37] People enraptured with the Commodity Form of Life look to production, marketing, and consumption as the ultimate values for themselves personally as well as society as a whole. Consequently, instead of recognizing the worth each person has as a creature made in the image of God, people value one another, as well as themselves, based on the quantity and quality of what one is able to produce as well as the quality and quantity of what one can afford to consume. Kavanaugh lamented that in a consumer society we honor, respect, and seek to be like those who are robust producers and wealthy consumers. In regards to the idolization of consumption, Kavanaugh maintained, "What is 'ours,' what we posses, what we own and consume has become the ultimate criterion against which we measure all other values. As an ultimate, this criterion has become our functional god."[38]

Comparing Marx's idea of fetishizing commodities with the description in Psalm 115 of people crafting idols, Kavanaugh argued that people take on characteristics of what they fetishize and idolize, writing, "Living only to labor and to consume the products of our labor, we become re-created, not in the image of a living personal God, but in the image of dead things which can neither see nor feel nor listen nor speak…. We thus become estranged from our very selves, from each other, and even from the living and true God."[39] The result of growing into the image of a commodity is that people come to consider and treat themselves and others as disposable and valueless absent sufficient quantities of productivity and consumption. Kavanaugh held, "[A]s in every idolatry, we eventually entrap ourselves

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[37] Ronald Sider similarly argues that "The increasingly affluent standard of living is the god of twenty-first century North America, and the adman is its prophet." Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 24.

[38] John Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 33. See as well David Loy, "The Religion of the Market," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* Vol. 65, Iss. 2 (1997): 275-290.

[39] Kavanaugh, *Following Christ*, 35.

after the image and likeness of the idol – the thing we have created and trusted – the commodity: replaceable and obsolete, only quantifiably valuable, and bereft of freedom or qualitative growth."[40]

Kavanaugh saw an "all-encompassing struggle between Christ and idolatry" and he took this struggle to be between "competing total *worldviews* that claim our allegiance…[and] impinge on all of the concrete choices and particular options before us."[41] For Kavanaugh, our lives are either oriented toward God and thereby compassionately committed to the well-being of others, or they are oriented toward idols of prestige and wealth and myopically striving to secure those things for ourselves. That idolatry drives people to expend talent, energy, and time on accumulating as many accolades and things for ourselves as we can, all the while not only envying those who might have more than we do but also seeking to be envied by others. That is how we measure our own value and the value of others, by how much one produces and has to consume, and we are swift to cut off those without the capacity to produce or accumulations of stuff.[42] Those without the capacity to do those three things, whether due to age, illness, or inability, are considered and treated as being of less worth than people who can do them. Furthermore, status at the top of the heap is not only difficult to attain but also to maintain. Once one has gained other people's approving gaze as worthy of envy and praise, one has to keep producing and consuming, in order to keep one's place, as others jockey diligently for it.

In his 1961 encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII maintained that there is a pernicious spirit afoot in society that is not simply concerned with material health, but rather with pleasure. He wrote, "There is, alas, a spirit of hedonism abroad today which beguiles men into thinking that life is nothing more than the quest for pleasure and satisfaction of

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[40] Ibid., 128.
[41] Ibid., 178.
[42] Ibid., 39, 64.

human passions."[43] Past popes had discussed greed and concerns about the wealthy hoarding riches in ways that leave others impoverished, but there is a shift here to criticize a socially pervasive infatuation with consumption. The related idea of proper human development was also prominent in Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, in which he maintains that progress is not simply about "eliminating hunger and reducing poverty," but also about "building human community where men can live truly human lives, free from discrimination on account of race, religion or nationality, free from servitude to other men or to natural forces which they cannot yet control satisfactorily…. [and] where the needy Lazarus can sit down with the rich man at the same banquet table." Pope Paul VI labeled progress a "two-edged sword" that is simultaneously "necessary if man is to grow as a human being, yet it can enslave him, if he comes to regard it as the supreme good and cannot look beyond it."[44]

John Paul II built upon this sentiment in his critique of "consumerism" in *Centesimus Annus*, written in regard to the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. He held that the desire to "live better" is not wrong in itself, but goes wayward when "it is directed towards 'having' rather than 'being,' which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself." John Paul argued that instead of a pursuit of enjoyment alone, which regularly devolves into one-minded pursuit of pleasure via things like intoxicants and pornography, it is critical to seek "life-styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness, and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings, and investments."[45]

Twenty years later, in the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI was still critiquing the harms common consumer behavior on people's relationship with God and one

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[43] John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, sec. 235.
[44] Paul VI, *Popularum Progressio*, Encyclical on the development of peoples, March 26, 1967, sec. 14, 19.
[45] John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, Encyclical on the hundreth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, May 1, 1991, sec. 36.

another. Benedict held that self-centered, and even altruistic, fixations on "mere accumulation[s] of wealth" fail to develop people fully because those efforts do not address people's spiritual drives for a grateful, loving relationships with God as well as merciful, generous, and gracious relationships with one another.[46] Benedict affirmed that humans are "constitutionally oriented towards 'being more'" than simply materially prosperous.[47] Benedict held that a "purely consumerist and utilitarian view of life" also distracts people from the gratuitousness of life because it focuses people's attention on earning and attaining private goods via the market system instead of appreciating the ultimate origin of goodness, existence, and fulfillment in God. Benedict contended that secular efforts to foster human community will always succumb to division because they confuse happiness and salvation with material prosperity and ignore the genuine unifying force of the God "who-is-Love" and the only genuine source of social solidarity.[48]

David Cloutier also notes the way idolatry manifests in the pursuit of luxury, which he defines as securing and enjoying excessive comfort and delight for oneself.[49] Cloutier defines luxury as, "[t]he disposition of using surplus resources for inordinate consumption of private goods and services in search of ease, pleasure, novelty, convenience, or status."[50] This disposition leads people to feel, think, and act as if a given consumer item or service "is essential for happiness and fulfillment." For instance, behaving as though the expansion, renovation, or decoration of one's home are more important than devoting time, attention,

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[46] Ibid., 11, 18.

[47] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, papal encyclical on integral human development in charity and truth, June 29, 2009, sec. 14, 78, 61.

[48] In claiming that truth and love are "gifts," Benedict is not implying that they pop magically into our lives, but simply that God is the source of truth and *caritas* and that therefore humans do not merit or produce truth or *caritas*, but only receive them as gifts. This reception occurs through an instinctive sense that affirms truth and a deep-seated impulse to accept and participate in *caritas*. Ibid., 34, 52.

[49] Cloutier distinguishes luxury from greed, with greed being an obsession with acquisition, particularly of money, and luxury being a broader vice, upon which greed is parasitic.

[50] Cloutier, *The Vice of Luxury*, 180, 133.

and resources to the basic needs of others. While market advocates rightly point out that money spent on one's home creates work for others, the pressing question is whether there are not more effective ways to be in relationship and service to others than buying luxury items. Cloutier argues that idolizing luxury goods though, is part of "worshipping the *self* and making the self the god in whom one believes."[51] The idolatry of loving oneself as the ultimate good simply bears itself out in the ways we consume.

This dynamic is also evident in the way that most people would probably agree if asked that it is important for the goods they purchase to be ethically sourced in terms of just labor compensation and ecological sustainability, but nevertheless still routinely purchase goods produced in exploitative ways. That decision is sometimes driven by the fact that these goods are less expensive, the price depressed because the true labor and ecological costs of such goods are not accounted for in the price. Other times, often when the good is actually expensive, that decision stems from being enraptured with luxury and with "positional goods," the value of which depends largely on where it falls in comparison to what other people have. Cloutier holds that "many people buy cheap goods because we either buy other expensive luxuries or because so much of our income is tied up in maintaining reasonable positional goods."[52] Sociologist Robert Wuthnow makes a further point that market consumption oriented toward one's own status or pleasure also alters people's sense of what is the most effective way to support and care for others: "Materialism draws us into its logic not so much by convincing us that material goods are preferable to helping the poor, but by persuading us that we can help them best by buying luxury goods for ourselves (thereby creating jobs)."[53]

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[51] Ibid., 180.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Robert Wuthnow, "Introduction: A Good Life and a Good Society: The Debate over Materialism" in *Rethinking Materialism: Perspectives on the Spiritual Dimension of Economic Behavior* Ed. Robert Wuthnow (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 15.

Idolatry of status and possession manifest themselves powerfully in consumer society, and Kavanaugh further sees the "Commodity Form of Life" as being primarily a means of avoiding our interior lives, which are filled with anxiety and fear about our vulnerability, limitations, and deficiencies. That fear comes from both personal uneasiness as well as a concern that others will recognize our shortcomings and weaknesses, and presumably reject or exploit us for them. A good bit of time, energy, and resources are poured into shoring up our outward appearances to others, which we do through producing, marketing, and consuming as much as we can to try to give appearance to others that we are not fragile or limited. We seek to provide the image and air that we are attractive and accomplished. This is not a new thing for human beings, but for our cultural moment, production, marketing, and consumption are the ways of expressing this prominence and prowess as a person worthy of respect, affection, and admiration from others.[54]

There is also a strong degree to which both work and consumption each provide an escape, a distraction, from anxiety. That anxiety could come from fear of vulnerability to suffering and inevitably to death, but it can also stem from unease over the ever-unsteady game of seeking social acceptance, praise, and standing. The mercurial pursuit of success in other's eyes and one's own eyes in the market system entails having a prestigious job that pays richly and enables one to purchase the taste and type of market goods that flow with the social class in which one runs or to which one longingly aspires. Consumption of toys, do it yourself kits, cars, vacations, sports equipment or tickets, new shoes and clothing, new homes or additions, not to mention drugs and alcohol, can provide release. Just as endless hours of work can provide escape from thoughts of mortality, weakness, or relationship difficulties with family or friends.[55]

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[54] Kavanaugh, *Following Christ*, 64-72.
[55] Ibid.

In *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*, William Cavanaugh picks up and expands upon consumption as a means of escape. He notes how consumer behavior consists of an ongoing, cyclical form of detachment, which begins with the production process. People know very little about where most consumer items come from because we are detached from the production process and the workers who made the things we acquire and enjoy. We do not know whether they get a living wage or have safe working conditions. We do not know whether producing, as well as disposing of, the consumer good entails exhausting natural resources or destroying habitats. When a given consumer object is out of sight, including when it is hiding in a closet at home, it is generally out of mind.[56]

Cavanaugh contends that a second facet of detached consumerism is that people also easily leave behind consumer objects and services. Our problem is not that we value such goods too much, but that we value them too little. We routinely churn consumer goods through a process of daydreaming about them, acquiring them, growing bored with them, and storing them away before ultimately trashing them. Cavanaugh writes, "Far from obsessively clinging to our stuff, we tend to buy and discard products easily. We don't make them ourselves or have any connections to the people that make them; increasingly, we have no connection to the people that sell them either… Under these conditions, our connections to products become very tenuous and fleeting as well."[57] David McCarthy in *The Good Life* notes that this kind of detachment includes things like clothes, appliances, and technological gadgets (i.e., clutter), but also jobs, homes, neighborhoods, and even to friendships and

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[56] William Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 33-58.

[57] Ibid., 45. On undervaluing material goods, see Charles Mathewes "On Using the World," in *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life* Ed. William Schweiker and Charles Mathewes (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004).

family.[58] The regular market realities, expectations, and aspirations form particularly restless dispositions alongside opportunities, as well as pressures, to act on that restlessness.

Nevertheless, Cavanaugh argues that people are still deeply driven by associations we have between certain products and beliefs about ourselves. People are nurtured and spurred by advertisements to connect hopes and dreams, as well as fears and anxieties, to the advertised products. Amidst this advertisement saturation, people develop a sense of self as well as a sense of others based on the kinds of things people buy and own. Although companies and advertisers do not wield hypnotic power over consumers, and generally view themselves as being in a zero-sum competition with each other and at the mercy of mercurial consumers, the effect of advertisements pervading society is a persistent sense of dissatisfaction and longing that keeps people perpetually grazing through product after product. The danger of advertisements is not that people genuinely believe a given product will bring their fantasy to reality, nor is it a clear connection between advertisement of a given product and its purchase. Rather advertising creates a general sense of "dissatisfaction" and an "anxiety about our lack of fulfillment" that drives consumer desire. That desire is then transferred onto product after product.[59]

People do not become fixated on a particular consumer good or service so much as the feeling of physical pleasure or social acceptance it promises, and at best fleetingly affords. Along this line, consumer products and services are regularly billed as providing far more than they could ever deliver. They are touted as ways to secure and realize pleasure, comfort, health, acceptance, success, prestige, control, dreams, and aspirations, but they fail to deliver. That failure is in part because people get bored once familiar with a given item. The novelty of a consumer good offers a stimulus to self and others that quickly subsides.

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[58] David McCarthy, *The Good Life: Genuine Christianity for the Middle Class* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 27.
[59] Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 59.

To the extent that a product is part of seasonal marketing and production, that failure also stems from shifts in public opinion about what is desirable. As other people stop caring about a given object, and one wants to keep pace in conversation and admiration from others, one has to keep abreast of the latest fashion. If a person falls behind the fashion curve, he risks, as John Kavanaugh noted, other people considering him useless and no longer worth engaging with the same kind of verve as when he had the latest, flashy consumer item.

Cavanaugh argues that at an even more basic level, consumer goods fail to satisfy and deliver on their billing precisely because they are finite. Even the rare consumer item that does hold our interest, such as a beloved book or instrument, is eventually lost to decay, overuse, or misplacement, and furthermore our capacity to engage it also eventually fades away through age, illness, or injury. Cavanaugh writes, "Created things…though essentially good, always fail fully to satisfy because they are not ultimate. They are time-bound, not infinite. Created things fall apart, and we lose interest in them over time. They die. We die. Only God is eternal. Only God stops the decay of time."[60] A core problem with finite goods is that they pass away. One cannot remain perpetually enraptured in a delicious meal, amazing concert, page-turning novel, Sunday morning coffee on the porch, or other consumer delight.

In addition to this lack of fulfillment in consumer goods but treadmill pursuit of them, Charles Mathewes has highlighted as well that the things people can purchase in the marketplace also have a harmful effect on people's dispositional capacity to form and maintain long-term commitments. The speed with which fashion, advertising, social media, and planned obsolescence present new consumer items and services before us and shortens our attention spans and generates faith in the "illusory promise of immediate satisfaction."

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[60] Ibid., 49.

According to Mathewes, "we are pursuing happiness but can never achieve it; we are caught on a treadmill of purely momentary satisfaction, of naturalized dissatisfaction." [61] This weakening of commitment is evident in the way smart phones and computers have deepened people's disposition to repeatedly surf electric devices, looking and scrolling in anticipation of Facebook, email, Google, or Netflix delivering something exciting.

As a result, activities that are not immediately engaging or that entail delayed satisfaction, such as learning a discipline, exercising, or being in a committed relationship with another human being, are increasingly difficult for people in consumer societies to undertake. Our daily routines atrophy our basic capacities to pay attention as well as endure discomfort. Even though commitment to developing skills or forging relationships generate deep fulfillment, more immediate candy-like consumer satisfactions undermine people's ability to form and maintain such commitments. Devoting time to developing an ability to play a sport in community with others can be derailed by the more immediate pleasure of simply watching the sport on TV. The capacity to live a life of devotion to God, through regular prayer as well as generosity to others, is harder when one has an abiding itch to watch one more episode, check out one more link, or daydream about the latest consumer good on one's mind.

Mathewes contends that we misunderstand the kind of creatures that we are when we become disoriented from longer-term commitments to the more instant satisfaction of consumer items and services. He writes, "We have a bad understanding of desire, a bad understanding of our deepest longings, of what and how we want – a misconstrual of love."[62] We believe and act as though we are creatures who can be fulfilled by immediate gratifications that the market offers, particularly as the market expands into more and more

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[61] Charles Mathewes, *The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2010), 128, 116.
[62] Ibid., 116.

aspects of human life. There are more and more goods a person can purchase and enjoy without the slightest capacity to produce them herself and only the slimmest understanding of how they were produced, along with all the human and ecological costs therein. Despite the abundance the market system generates, as Daniel Bell writes in *The Economy of Desire*, "[E]ven if capitalism works and produces a superabundance of material goods, it is still wrong for the ways it deforms human desire and so warps relations with oneself, others, and God."[63]

James K.A. Smith echoes this concern in *Desiring the Kingdom*. Smith holds that our vision of the good life, what we love ultimately, is cultivated by what we see and do on a regular basis. Drawing with Mathewes on Augustinian lines of thought, he maintains that we are at root creatures of worship, and we worship what we envision to be our good. Smith argues that stories, images, and activities – far more so that abstract thought – grip our attention and care with immense power, and they are the primary way our vision of a good life is embedded and nurtured in us.[64] Through stories and images, whether via TV, the mall, a neighbor's house, or online, people's allegiances are regularly shaped by and for the marketplace in ways that shadow the gospel according to Smith. In place of the brokenness of sin is the brokenness one feels in falling short of the ideals put forward in advertisements. Smith notes, "implicit in those visual icons of success, happiness, pleasure, and fulfillment is a stabbing albeit unarticulated recognition that *that's not me*." We not only judge ourselves against market ideals, but also others to see how we compare to them. In this competitive dance we are either "congratulating" ourselves for outpacing someone else, having a more fashionable outfit for instance, or feel demoralized at falling shorter of the advertised ideal

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[63] Daniel Bell, *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 29.
[64] James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 86.

than that other person. The market kingdom though promises redemption, according to Smith. If a person simply buys the right item or service, his brokenness will be mended. Fulfillment is merely a consumption choice away. The fact that the promise is never met does not break the spell, but simply keeps one habitually seeking the next greener pasture to purchase. Smith also notes that consumer kingdom inculcates an ignorance and lack of care about where consumer items and services come from and the kind of harm they inflict on workers and the environment.[65]

Vincent Miller's work adds that it is not simply an issue of what we love being distorted and confused, but rather the very way we love things has been altered by the habits of everyday life in a consumption-focused culture. In *Consuming Religion*, Miller tracks the way that consumer culture trains people to treat and even delight in "narratives, roles, and symbols as disposable commodities: things to be played with, explored, tried on, and, in the end, discarded."[66] That process often entails purchasing whatever consumer goods or services are sold in connection to a given story, role, or symbol. Miller argues that this way of being in the world extends readily to religion, where people profess certain beliefs and then feel that the best way to act upon them is buying the appropriate study bible, trinket, app, or magazine subscription. For instance, for a church fellowship hall renovation or new sanctuary can come to feel absolutely necessary, as though it is clearly the most fitting use of congregational resources to worship and obey God.

In consumer-saturated cultures, the way one learns to "practice" faith is largely by buying stuff. Miller argues, "[B]elievers encounter the elements of tradition in an abstract, fragmented form and are trained to engage them as passive consumers." Consumer culture is a problem because it entails "a particular way of engaging religious beliefs that divorces them

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[65] Ibid., 93-103.

[66] Vincent Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 6.

from practice."[67] Through this kind of habituation, consumer culture is even able to handily "domesticate" critiques of it, as people excitedly buy the protest t-shirt or slap on a bumper sticker. Miller notes:

> Advanced capitalism has shown itself to be strangely immune to ideological criticism. It seems capable of selling anything, including the values of its most committed opponents. It turned the 150th anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto* into a marketing opportunity. In mini-malls throughout the land stacks of glossy paperback editions were placed next to cash registers in major chain bookstores to tempt impulse purchases.[68]

Unlike Kavanaugh, Miller contends that the market does not lead people to intentional or conscious idolatry, so much as de facto idolatry as people have become habituated to "practice" their faith by buying things more than acts of prayer, worship, and study of God alongside compassion, attentiveness, and generosity toward neighbor.

The criticisms of market consumption as well as production that have been overviewed in this chapter so far are critically important and need to be addressed.[69] As has been noted, a key tool to addressing these critiques that is presently lacking is a robust, complementary positive vision of a theological point to market consumption, an understanding of the proper role market goods can and should play in human flourishing. One could imagine a market system in which everyone got a living wage, the environment was utilized at sustainable levels, people were not habitually trained to idolize status, novelty, or possessions via market consumption, and the question would remain with those harms

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[67] Ibid., 9, 12.
[68] Ibid., 18.
[69] These concerns around things like lack of living wages and safe, respectable working conditions for workers, environmental pollution and exhaustion, consumer despair and dissatisfaction on hedonic as well as positional goods treadmills, and consumer dispositional malformation, are broadly shared in consumer ethics in other religious and philosophical traditions. For some representative edited volumes see: *Hooked: Buddhist Writings on Greed, Desire, and the Urge to Consume*, Ed. Stephanie Kaza (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2005); *Mindfulness in the Marketplace: Compassionate Responses to Consumerism*, Ed. Allan Hunt Badiner (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2002); *Ethics of Consumption: The Good Life, Justice, and Global Stewardship*, Ed. David Crocker and Toby Linden (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); *The Ethical Consumer*, Ed. Rob Harrison, Terry Newholm, and Deidre Shaw (London: Sage, 2005).

subdued, what is the point of life together in addition to - or perhaps as the fruit of - treating one another justly. The concluding section of this chapter examines the lack of a positive vision of the theological point to market consumption in Christian ethics. As noted, in the first three sections of this chapter, Christian ethics has largely focused on correcting harms inflicted in the market system, and the field lacks a developed sense of the role market consumption could or should play in human thriving.

Limited Theological Vision Regarding the Point of Market Consumption

While the critiques of market production and consumption catalogued in this chapter are critically important, they are incomplete because they do not offer a full picture of human flourishing in our contemporary market system. Their overarching thrust is that market consumption needs to be undertaken at a scale and in a manner that affords living wages and safe working conditions for everyone and does not exhaust the environment.[70] In line with that point, these critiques stress that people need to recognize the emptiness and habitual malformation that idolatry of wealth and status via market consumption entails, because that idolatry not only exacerbates harms of impoverishment and environmental degradation, but also bears distinct harms to consumers themselves. In other words, the field of Christian consumer ethics focuses importantly, but ultimately too narrowly, on these kinds of moral and spiritual critiques - on the ways in which we are ill and the need to correct them - but without a broader sense of what healthy living in everyday contemporary life looks like beyond refraining from those sins.

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[70] While this dissertation is focused on more micro economic issues of personal market consumption, many of the authors examined in this chapter, as well as others not examined here, make these same points in the context of more macro levels of economic and political policies. They see the need not only for the force of consumer demand alone but also of laws and regulations to demand things like living wages (with perhaps thick social safety nets) and environmental protection for all.

The limits of the current field of Christian consumer ethics are illustrated if one considers a world in which pervasive "political consumerism," as described by Luke Bretherton in *Christianity and Contemporary Politics,* were achieved.[71] The term "political consumerism" arose in the mid-1990s and entails making consumer choices that support the production of goods that are "more just and environmentally responsible," and Bretherton lays out the case for political consumerism as a key Christian practice. Such consumer choices express one's political voice and are intended to shift broader "patterns of consumption."[72] When people undertake this form of market consumption to aid and support the livelihood and well-being of workers and the environment, Bretherton argues, they engage in way of "enabling and mediating concern and care for others and extending the bonds of friendship and pursuing justice." Bretherton highlights buying fair trade products and organic produce as ways of registering "disquiet with how the current economic system and means of production situate us in relation to other humans (in the case of fair trade) or animals and the environment (in relation to organic produce)." Furthermore he sees fair trade as a way to reestablish a relationship between consumer and producer, which is routinely lost amid byzantine divisions of labor and market exchanges

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[71] Of course this political consumerism would need to be done in tandem with legal and regulatory frameworks that protect workers and the environment, but for purposes of this thought experiment, consider these laws and regulations successfully accomplished alongside widespread "political consumerism."

[72] Bretherton distinguishes political consumerism from "consumerized politics" in which standard consumer activities and practices (e.g., purchasing and displaying things like t-shirts, hats, bumperstickers, focusing on Facebook activism, and embracing green-washed advertisements and products) are engaged in to try to make political statements. Consumermized politics is problematic because it lacks the broad-based organizing and clear arguments requisite to effect significant change, according to Bretherton. Those consumerized politics could also be rooted in simply trying to present and mark oneself as a supporter of given cause in a way that is at worst an idolatry of status via consumption, at best a malformation of one's conception of and practice of what is means to act ethically and politically (i.e., primarily by buying and proudly displaying paraphernalia). Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 183-184. See as well Miller, *Consuming Religion*.

that occur before a product reaches the consumer.[73] This type of consumption would likewise be something oriented toward due love of neighbor, over and above idolatry of wealth or status, and as such would presumably be more fulfilling, in that it places its focus not on perfect satisfaction in a consumer good but on the well-being of the people and places that produce one's consumer goods. Depending on the good, this could also entail the formation of patient, compassionate habits and dispositions, as these goods would presumably be less disposable and easily replaced, more appreciated, and one might even have that personal relationship people who produce the good. Nevertheless, as critical as political consumerism is, the question remains of what we are supposed to do when we have fair trade and ecological stability. Is a flourishing life accomplished to the extent that one is either no longer exploiting others or no longer being exploited? The ethics that political consumerism embodies constitutes a core component of human flourishing life from Christian theological perspectives, but are those moral actions, dispositions, and intentions fully encompassing of human flourishing? Does ethical excellence (and presumably the love of God from which that love of neighbor flows) exhaust the good life under God?

At the end of *Following Christ in a Consumer Culture,* Kavanaugh offers a perhaps surprising affirmation of the goodness of consumer items, suggesting more to human well-being than simply ethically caring for others. Kavanaugh writes, "Lovely clothes, a beautiful home, diverse cuisines, stirring art and play are, at their finest, the splendid embodiment and expression of personhood."[74] But he does not develop this claim farther. Ronald Sider similarly does not develop his brief thoughts in *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* about the kinds of market consumption that could be practiced in a society exhibiting economic

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[73]Bretherton *Christianity and Contemporary Politics,* 183-184. Jenkins makes similar points, holding that "[o]ther ways of reorienting consumer capitalism could include fair trade, microlending, farmer's markets, carbon offsets, and community-based ecotourism." Jenkins, *Future of Ethics*, 259.
[74] Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Culture*, 186.

justice and ecological balance. Sider envisions a society in which Christians do not spend money and time on items and services with "heavy resource usage," but rather "spend more of their time and money creating vibrant, active Christian churches [the community, not the building]. Everyone could spend more money on the arts (drama, music, and other creative expressions), thus creating an incentive for more people to engage in these activities instead of in the production of more material goods. People could work fewer hours at their jobs, and in their new leisure they could do volunteer work in their community or spend more time with their families or in constructive hobbies."[75] Sider's sketch is similar to that of David McCarthy's in *The Good Life* when he suggests:

> In an economy directed to the good of human life, our assets are found in the cultivation of the arts, in sacrifice for the sake of beauty and truth, in dance, games of strategy and wit, in housing construction and other constructive labors, and in businesses that make and provide what is good for common life – not only tables and chairs, but also baseball fields, hot dogs, and cold drinks. In view of the grace and wonder of life, we can see that our most valuable assets are things we cannot own… Ironically, modest living (owning and possessing less) opens the way for greater enjoyment of people, places, and things. If we own less, we are free to invest our time and resources in greater things. We are free but less secure and more dependent. We are free for the venture of common life.[76]

McCarthy and Sider's glimpses of good market consumption also resonate with Rauschenbusch's assertion in *Christianizing the Social Order* that:

> The real joy of Life is in its play. Play is anything we do for the joy and love of doing it, apart from any profit, compulsion, or sense of duty. It is the real living of life with the feeling of freedom and self-expression. Play is the business of childhood, and its continuation in later years is the prolongation of youth. Real civilization should increase the margin of time given to play. The advance in science and organization has so increased our power of production that even now it would be possible to supply the average needs of all by four or five hours of daily work by all, and the rest

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[75] Sider, *Rich Christians*, 240.
[76] McCarthy, *The Good Life*, 122.

> of the day might go to athletics, gardening, handicraft, visiting, music, study, or any other form of play.[77]

While Rauschenbusch here uses the language of "play" here and not flourishing, the wide range of activities he identifies and the role he asserts for them as "the joy of Life" indicate they are what Rauschenbusch takes to be simultaneously the point of "civilization," market production, and existence as creatures of God.[78] These images of ideal market consumption are tantalizing, and share similar themes around enjoying creative activities with others (music, arts, sports, reading, etc.). Each description, however, is brief and under-theorized in terms of how these wonderful things connect to things of theological importance like the love of God, the goodness of creation, the intentions of God for human flourishing, or the eschaton. It is unclear what, if anything, is theologically significant to these forms of market consumption, or if they are perhaps largely ways of biding time as we await the eschaton.

In his book *Money Enough*, Doug Hicks does go a step farther toward a more detailed articulation of how market consumption relates to human flourishing. Hicks argues that the Westminster Catechism's affirmation that "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy

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[77] Rauschenbusch continued on to note that the eight to twelve hour work days common in industrial labor leave no such time for play while also sapping people's strength and energy regardless, leaving them prone to "drink and sexual vice…the ready pillows of an exhausted body." He contends, "Unrestrained capitalism would kill out play and put even childhood in the yoke. But the killing of play means taking the life out of Life." Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 248-249.

[78] Rauschenbusch's vision of play interestingly echoes Marx's musing of what living into one's "species being" as a human could look like. While tracing the course of human activity across history in *The German Ideology*, Marx notes that in capitalist societies, as well as all societies to date, people are forced to focus on a specific "exclusive sphere of activity" as one's livelihood, such as hunter, shepherd, or academic. But he contends that "in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic." Marx is making two points here. The first is that it is important for people to be able to pursue activities as they see fit, rather than being coerced into certain activities by necessity or social structures. The second is that these chosen activities are not alienating, but rather fulfill people's potential as human beings. One might quibble, if not contend, though that such a smorgasbord of activity suggests a lack of commitment and discipline – bearing hints of the detached sampler mentality that pervades consumer society – that is requisite to truly develop capacities for any of those activities. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* in *The Marx-Engels Reader: Second Edition*, 160.

him forever" gains a sharper and more precise clarity when paired with the Capabilities Approach to Human Development. He writes, "The capabilities approach allows us to be specific about this fundamental but general theological conviction. Being able to worship God is one such capability. So too are the ones related to economic goods, political participation, education, and so on." Hicks continues later on, "Living faithfully in the global economy begins when we shift our values and our practices from acquiring goods and financial security to developing our own capabilities and the capabilities of our neighbors."[79] For Hicks, possessions and money are simply means to building up and enjoying those capabilities. He writes, "We should shift our focus from promoting happiness to developing human capabilities – our own and those of others." He urges consumers to ask themselves, "*Does this purchase allow me to be better nourished? Will this expenditure allow someone to participate in the life of the community? Does it promote better public health?*"[80] But Hicks does not develop this line of thought farther to explore or explain the connections between enjoying God forever and cultivating human capabilities. What does enjoying God have to do with developing human capabilities? And in what ways can market consumption either enable or undermine that enjoyment of God?

Some Christian thinkers who whole-heartedly support the current market system highlight the way market production and consumption alleviates poverty and allows people the chance to develop their talents via work. Catholic philosopher and theologian Michael Novak maintains, "The intention of the system *qua* system is to raise the material base of the life of every human on earth. It is a system designed to unleash the powers found within every human individual. It instructs nations as well as individuals to seek development of their own wealth. It awakens individuals and nations to their own capacities for imagination,

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[79] Ibid., 29, 33.

[80] Douglas Hicks, *Money Enough: Everyday Practices for Living Faithfully in the Global Economy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 53.

self-improvement, and growth."[81]According to Novak, the main boon to humanity in a market system is not only the expansion of objects and services to make existence more comfortable, convenient, secure, healthy, and pleasant, but the collaborative advancement of human intelligence, creativity, capacity, and skill in the production of consumer goods. Novak even identifies the *imago Dei* with "the vocation to be creative, inventive, and intellectually alert in a practical way."[82] Citing John Locke, he maintains that people are co-creators with God in molding, mixing, and manipulating the elements of this world into objects and opportunities of value for humanity. Disciplined and educated human intelligence is the most critical form of capital according to Novak, who notes:

> Oil lay beneath the sands of Arabia for thousands of years, relatively without value to the human race, until the application of human intelligence found use for it. Countless parts of God's creation lay fallow for millennia until human intelligence saw value in them. Many of the things we today describe as resources were not known to be resources a hundred years ago. Many of those which tomorrow may come to be of value still lie fallow today. The bridge to wealth is constructed chiefly of intelligence. The cause of wealth lies more in the human spirit than in matter.[83]

Along this line, Novak stresses that private property, profit, and markets do not constitute the distinguishing heart of capitalism, as each of those has been around for millennia, but rather creativity that fashions aspects of the world into consumable objects and services for human beings. He writes, "Human beings themselves are the primary cause of the wealth of

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[81] Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 129.
[82] Michael Novak, "The Judeo-Christian Foundation of Human Dignity, Personal Liberty, and the Concept of the Person" in *Three in One: Essays on Democratic Capitalism 1976-2000*, ed. Edward Younkins (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 105.
[83] Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 103, 39.

nations. Human creativity is nature's primary resource."[84] Novak contends, "[t]he skills nourished in a market economy – in industrial crafts, transport, management, clerical staffs, bookkeeping, marketing, research, and the like – call forth talents in the population which traditional societies neglect."[85] Novak's emphasis, though, rests on work and the production rather than the consumption of market objects and services, consumer objects, services, and activities.

Max Stackhouse and Dennis McCann similarly highlight production over consumption in "A Post-Communist Manifesto," maintaining that "creating wealth is the whole point of economic activity."[86] Stackhouse roots this productive power of the current market in the modern corporation, which he notes "has out-employed, out-researched, out-produced, and out-distributed every other known social form of economic organization," and he argues that "inequitable distribution and gluttonous consumerism" are also not unique to "modern Western structures of production." According to Stackhouse, the most effective goal moving forward is to fill and transform modern corporations so that the wealth they create supports material well-being for everyone, enhances human rights, contributes to people's liberation to work that affords a living wage, and democratizes economic and political decision-making.[87] The emphasis here is again on work so that

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[84] Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 237. In considering the particularly effect democratic capitalism has in alleviating poverty compared with other historical alternatives, Novak elaborates, "One must recall that even in Jerusalem in biblical days there were markets, buying and selling, private property, and profits. These do not constitute capitalism but the traditional pre-capitalist order. The distinctive marks of capitalism are an emphasis upon (1) invention, (2) open entry by the poor into markets, (3) ease of incorporation, (4) the availability of credit to the poor, and (5) other such institutions at the bottom of society. The strength of a capitalist order lies in the swift entrance of the poor into a broad middle class. In a proper capitalist order, wealth wells up from the bottom. It does not trickle down." Michael Novak, "Political Economy and Christian Conscience" in *Three in One: Essays on Democratic Capitalism 1976-2000*, ed. Edward Younkins (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 174.

[85] Ibid., 110.

[86] Dennis McCann and Max Stackhouse, "A Post-Communist Manifesto: Public Theology After the Collapse of Socialism" in *The Christian Century* (January 16, 1991): 44-47.

[87] Max Stackhouse, *Public Theology and Political Economy: Christian Stewardship in Modern Society* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991), 113, 120, and 133-135.

people and those who depend on them (e.g., family members) the chance to lead healthy lives. There is no well-articulated analysis of the point of all the productivity, which itself presumably only has value to the extent that it either produces something of value or develops human capabilities that are in themselves valuable, but neither of those lines of thought are rigorously examined.

Additionally, stressing the importance of work over and against consumption often overlooks the fact that work is not as separate from market consumption as it might seem, because market production entails pervasive and routine acts of market consumption as well. "Work" generally stands distinct from "consumption" because it generates something of value whereas consumption uses up something of value. Yet work in our market system demands an incalculable number of goods and services generated via the market system - clothes, shoes, computers, paper, pens, books, phones, machinery, tools, buildings (constructed structure, furnishings, and decor), electricity, water, pretty much anything and everything involved in the work space and activity. As noted, work also has value to the extent that it either results in something worth consuming (or the funds to purchase something worth consuming) or consists of an activity that the worker finds engaging, even wonderful, in itself. In the first case, the value of work depends on its instrumental effectiveness in creating things to consume. In those forms of work people are simply manipulating with hands, minds, or machines one set of market goods and services in order to produce another set of market goods and services for consumption. In the latter case, it is difficult to distinguish the activity of work itself from a "leisure" activity or avocation that a person enjoys doing in itself. In terms of the theological framework that will be developed in the chapters to come, when a person is "working" or "playing" in a way that he finds valuable as an end in itself, he is engaging in a finite good of creation he finds life-giving and fulfilling. Even though in one instance he is receiving financial compensation (e.g., work as a

musician), it is not clear what precisely or categorically distinguishes the activity of playing music when done as work versus as play if the musician sees it as intrinsically valuable practice of making music in either case. The difference comes predominately in a the external dynamic of either receiving income for the activity or not. As such, a richer theological account is still needed for why cultivating human capabilities, whether in work or in leisure, matters and how it connects to God, the goodness of creation, or the eschatological resurrection to come.

John Schneider, Laura Hartman, and David Cloutier respectively offer three of the more detailed projects regarding a positive Christian vision for contemporary market consumption. But yet each still gives an ultimately under-developed articulation of consumer goods and the activities they entail as part of the goodness of creation. For his part, Schneider offers a full-throated, albeit shortsighted, defense of market consumption as an outright good in *The Good of Affluence*. He argues that "there is a way to be affluent that is good" and that "material prosperity (rightly understood) is the condition that God envisions for all human beings." He sees this proper material prosperity, which he calls "delight," coursing throughout scripture, from Genesis, the Promised land, and the prophets in the Old Testament to the feasting Jesus and the new Jerusalem in the New Testament.[88] In strong affirmation of created existence, Schneider holds that "God has in fact designed human beings to enjoy life in the material world," and along this line, that it is "more appropriate [to the imagery of Genesis] to say that, as complete human beings, we *are* bodies," rather than the common expression that we "have bodies."[89]

Drawing on Michael Novak, he finds capitalism to be a fitting model for this kind of delight, because it entails a way of life that creates new wealth, as opposed to historical

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[88] John Schneider, *The Good of Affluence: Seeking God in a Culture of Wealth* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 3.
[89] Ibid., 43, 57.

methods of getting wealth, "war, taxation, or (presuming a difference) outright theft." According to Schneider, the "twin habits of capitalism" that are critical and tied to true embrace of God's good creation are the "acquisition and enjoyment of material affluence," with that acquisition coming via productive activity in the marketplace.[90] While he admits there are people who are thoughtless and idolatrous in their love of wealth, he argues that there are people who recognize the goodness of God and "love being rich both for the freedom it gives them to enjoy life and for the immense power it enables them to offer on behalf of others." He continues, "In the lives of these people affluence is itself a very great good."[91] Schneider on the whole rejects the idea that capitalism is inherently harmful or exploitative. He also limits the scope of those for whom one is responsible (i.e.,, the impoverished for whom one is responsible to aid) to those with whom one is most closely connected, with decreasing circles of responsibility extending outward from family and local community to nationality and special circumstance.

Schneider sees this delight in material goodness arising both in the production of goods as well as their consumption. He offers two extended musings on each. In regards to a job well done, he writes:

> I imagine the makers of Mercedes-Benz automobiles take immense pride in the engineering and craftsmanship of these superb cars. I imagine that the production of these vehicles brings with it feelings of fulfillment and aesthetic pleasure that are not unlike what the great masters of visual art experience when they produce great art…. Furthermore, I know many people who can afford luxury cars like the Lexus or Mercedes, and (aside from the investment advantage that gives them – these cars keep their value), I also know how much pleasure they get from the nearly perfect performance of those vehicles. I think it is very like what other friends of mine get from the pieces of fine art that they own, or from the great books that they read. I see no reason not to make this comparison. Outside of base resentment, I see no reason at all to think that either form of affection is unhealthy materialism. Why not instead wish that everyone could enjoy life at those levels?[92]

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[90] Ibid., 23, 29, 31.
[91] Ibid., 39.
[92] Ibid., 38.

In regards to the goodness of finite goods, he writes:

> The creation story suggests that physical and material delightfulness (superfluity) is needful for healthy human well-being everywhere. It is no doubt why delightful physical actions like getting in good shape, buying a fine new dress or suit, having one's hair done well, shaving and putting on a good aftershave, or getting behind the wheel of a finely tuned care elevate us from various states of depression and discouragement. The same is true of curling up in a pleasurable sitting room in front of a fire in winter, and of grilling steaks on a cedar deck on a warm spring evening…. Human delight is a precious expression of God's glory, of human dignity, and of the goodness of life in this world. In its proper form it is a sacrament to God's dominion over chaos and darkness. And it is the condition of affluence alone that makes full delight possible.[93]

Schneider offers one of the loudest clarion calls to the goodness of market consumption as well as material creation more broadly; however, his description is completely undercut and wholly inadequate as a positive vision of market consumption for two reasons. First, he does not stress, critique, nor seek to redress the harms created by the current market system. Like Novak, he unapologetically embraces the market system as the best humanity can do, given human sin, but he then skirts responsibility for helping address the harms that are present in the market system by contending that a person's moral obligations to others are bound primarily to those relationally and geographically closest to her. With concern for wealthy people having a messianic complex and accompanying despair at the prospect of having to help everyone in need, Schneider argues for the following circles of priority and claim on people's resources and moral attention: "spouses, children, extended family, very close friends" and from there to "immediate Christian congregation, to our local community, state, and nation." Abused workers or environmental destruction outside of one's close moral proximity are not something he thinks people are ethically bound to be concerned with, though he does think that efforts undertaken in an ad hoc, personal fashion

[93] Ibid., 61.

to help those people is praiseworthy, perhaps given the supererogatory nature he ascribes those moral actions.[94]

Second, Schneider makes no distinction between consumption that is "individual-private-alienated-passive" and consumption that is "collective-public-participatory-active." In Benthamite fashion, "delight" for Schneider is whatever piques a person's interest, as long as it does not harm a neighbor physically or relationally close-by. Schneider makes a general claim about the connection between God's glory and creation, proclaiming that "human delight is a precious expression of God's glory," but delight as described here comes too close to being divine glory, dignity, and goodness of life. As opposed to being a response to God, dignity, and goodness, it is those things. In the way Schneider makes his argument (intentionally or not), things are good because we like them, regardless of how passive, private, and individually focused our consumption of them might be. By contrast, this dissertation is arguing that there are certain forms of attention and activity in market consumption that more deeply constitute human flourishing than others, and they constitute human flourishing because they offer glimpses of God's goodness not because we delight in them. Schneider's response would likely be that such views belie an elitist snobbiness, but the repetitive and abiding dissatisfaction found in a life oriented predominately around passive consumption would suggests Schneider is missing something essential in his theological vision of a good life.[95]

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[94] Ibid., 88, 181.

[95] For discussion of such dissatisfaction, see Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy: An Inquiry into Human Satisfaction and Consumer Dissatisfaction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), Robert Lane, *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), Robert Skidelsky and Edward Skidelsky, *How Much is Enough? Money and the Good Life* (New York: Other Press, 2012), and Richard Easterlin, "Does economic growth improve the human lot? Some empirical evidence" in *Nations and Households in Economic Growth* ed. P. Davis and W. Melvin (Paolo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1974), 98-125. This issue will be returned to in later chapters of flow as well.

In *The Christian Consumer: Living Faithfully in a Fragile World*, Laura Hartman notes Schneider's work, but draws upon a wide array of Christian exemplars and scholars to far more ethically explore the question, "What does good Christian consumption look like?" She frames the activities and decisions Christians engage in as they consume to be a form of stewardship ethics. As such, animating inquiries for Christian consumers are: "What is creation, and what are humans to do with it? How are humans to relate well to one another concerning the proper use of the material conditions of life?"[96] These deliberative questions diverge from the prevalent considerations of convenience, taste, and price that generally drive market consumption.

Hartman crafts a framework of four habits of thought and action to help Christians work through the maze of contemporary consumer choices. Depending on the situation, these dispositions at times overlap and at times conflict, but they open a way to make consumer decisions in light of Christ. The four habits are: 1) avoiding personal sins of greed, gluttony, and participation in injustice; 2) embracing creation with celebration as well as responsibility; 3) enacting due love for neighbors as well as oneself; and 4) imagining and living in line with God's coming Kingdom. These focus areas offer a mixture of critiquing the harms in the market system and recognizing consumption as an opportunity for enjoying the goodness of creation. When discussing delight in consumption and affirming that "that our desires are not sinful and that what we desire is abundant," Hartman argues that Christians should follow three guidelines: "we should consume with a sense of gratitude, with savoring, and with sharing."[97] The gratitude is to God for the blessing of delightful aspects of creation to enjoy, in a way that one recognizes one did not earn or merit this goodness, but receives it as a gift. The savoring builds on this gratitude, including both

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[96] Laura Hartman, *The Christian Consumer: Living Faithfully in a Fragile World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15.
[97] Ibid., 61.

contemplative thankfulness to God and an intentional, attentive delight in what is consumed. The sharing arises out of gratitude and savoring, each of which loosens the sense of possession, entitlement, or greediness regarding such goods. Ultimately, Hartman illuminatingly weaves together various perspectives and considerations within Christian traditions regarding consumer desires, decisions, and acts; however, like Schneider, Hartman does not give much more of a theological point to consumption, or articulation of what it theologically entails, beyond a fairly general sense of delight (though Hartman does make a vastly richer ethical argument regarding responsibilities for other people and the environment than Schneider does).

In *The Vice of Luxury*, David Cloutier is a bit more detailed. He seeks to draw a line between a resounding embrace of contemporary consumer life and a renunciation of it. According to Cloutier, "the moral problem denoted by luxury" is not "surplus wealth" or consumption itself, but rather an issue of how that surplus wealth is used.[98] Cloutier dives deeply in the details of contemporary consumer practices, and identifies ways in which focus on material goods for private comfort and convenience not only undermines people's time, energy, resources, and capacity to care for common projects for common benefit, but also inhibits people's chance to develop the ability and desire to seek "the goods of excellence," whether in work or in leisure. Cloutier draws on Alasdair MacIntyre's distinction between internal goods of learning and performing an activity excellently (e.g., playing a musical instrument or providing quality legal counsel) and the external goods that could come via that excellence, such as esteem, popularity, or wealth.[99]

Cloutier argues that a line between necessity and luxury does exist, even if it is left aside as too difficult or presumptuous to delineate in the realms of professional economics

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[98] Cloutier, *Luxury*, 231.
[99] Ibid., 83.

as well as neighborly conversation in the United States. According to Cloutier, this line depends on "the idea that satiability is a characteristic of human flourishing" and that there actually is an "ongoing (though often unacknowledged) distinction of necessity/comfort/luxury within the everyday life of individuals and societies."[100] People make choices routinely about what they consider to be luxurious versus necessary. The primary issue is that dividing line moves over time, and when considering it people tend not only to expand the realm of what they consider necessary but also to orient it toward private consumption.

Cloutier ultimately offers a "fourfold understanding of the proper ordering of surplus," with surplus defined as anything above $50,000 for a family of four.[101] In an almost direct critique of the kind of praise Schneider places on the twin habits of capitalism, Cloutier contends, "The economy of luxury focuses on the acquisition and enjoyment of sensual, status possessions," to which he offers the counterpoint of a "sacramental economy focus[ed] on actively seeking to do good via spending."[102] Cloutier argues that this good comes not only in orienting one's excess wealth toward charitable causes, but also toward consuming shared goods, festival goods, vocational goods, and enrichment goods. In regards to shared goods, Cloutier notes that many consumer goods are "private replacements for shared goods," such as a trading the park for a backyard playset, the library for books from Amazon, and public transportation for a personal car. Shared goods are less convenient to the whim of private desires and regularly demand cooperative interaction and negotiation

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[100] Ibid., 221.

[101] Ibid., 254. See chapter 7 "Luxury and Necessity: What Is Enough?" for Cloutier's analysis reaching this number. He writes, "It is not unreasonable to suggest that a number around $50,000 is today a reasonable proxy for a basic standard of living for a household of four; that estimate runs slightly above the [cost-of-living] calculators and presumes that some small amount of ongoing saving for life events and discretionary spending is reasonable." Cloutier, *Luxury*, 209-252. See also Amy Glasmeier, "Living Wage Calculator," MIT, Accessed May 17, 2017. http://livingwage.mit.edu/.

[102] Cloutier, *Luxury*, 138.

with others, whether strangers, acquaintances, family, or friends. The additional per person cost people pay for private goods is essentially to avoid these aspects of shared goods.[103]

Festival goods entail "special expenditures and excess in service of communal celebration." Cloutier stresses the infrequencies of such expenditures as well as the need for them to be actually connected to something specific and significant to celebrate, rather than just having a party for the sake of a party. The emphasis of festival is also on community events, rather than private affairs. He does also caution the ease with which the sense of festival can be manufactured for profit (proliferation of "holidays" and accompanying paraphernalia), largely as well as a "kind of personal entertainment or amusement" than communal celebration.[104]

Vocational goods and enrichment goods are not as focused on others as shared goods and festival goods, but while they are more "personal" they are still not "private" according to Cloutier. He understands vocation as using one's work for "building up the Kingdom of God through love of others and of God." In this vein, a vocation is not primarily pursuing something that suits one's preferences, as in certain social classes it is taken to be. Though the two are not mutually exclusive, Cloutier contends commitment, not preference satisfaction, is the basis of vocation. Cloutier uplifts using surplus income to purchase consumer goods that can help a person's development in her vocation, but he also recognizes that valid decisions and goods on this front are very murky. Clouiter notes, "The proper use of goods for one's vocation can be challenging," and "negotiating this terrain provides ample opportunity for self-deception."[105]

The line between luxury and legitimate expenditure with vocation only grows more difficult to discern with enrichment goods, which are not only prone to self-deception but

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[103] Ibid., 255-257.
[104] Ibid., 258-260.
[105] Ibid., 261-264.

also "snobbery." Nevertheless, by enrichment goods, Clouiter has in mind consumer goods that actively exercise and develop one's skills, rather than those aimed at physical pleasure or status. He thinks it is particularly important to focus on activities that "involve the contemplation of beauty and the exercise of creativity." Yet, again, the criteria for determining what is legitimate and what is luxury in regards to enrichment goods remains hazy. Overall, Cloutier's fourfold focus for surplus spending provides a helpful framework, but a clear answer to the fundamental question of effective criteria for discerning "how much is enough" remains frustrated. The line demarcating a life of excess is unclear in part because even Cloutier leaves underdeveloped the vision of what human flourishing entails.

This framework for market consumption is also ultimately rooted in Cloutier's call for a "sacramental economy" that is not focused on ways in which market consumption itself might participate in the connection of the supernatural with the natural, "the intertwining of materiality and transcendence," but rather ways that care for the poor via restrained and ethical consumer choices provide that sacramental connection and intertwining. In terms of its focus on the well-being of workers, this sacramental economy is akin to political consumerism. Cloutier argues, "the ancient concern for the poor can and should be manifest in the marketplace, not in the search for goods and services that make 'magic' for you but which shine with the radiance of good production… The economy of luxury focuses on the acquisition and enjoyment of sensual, status possessions. The sacramental economy focuses on actively seeking to do good via spending; the method of making and acquiring our possessions can be genuinely sacramental and genuinely an effective sign of the unity of the human race."[106] While this ethical point should not be overlooked, neither is it all encompassing of what market consumption can and should be.

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[106] Ibid., 120, 123, 137-138.

Conclusion

Catholic and Protestant Christian ethics regarding market production and consumption have focused predominately on injustices and harms done in and through the current market system, including the way it disrupts relationships with God and neighbor and dispositionally shapes people toward idols. If work is a core part of that flourishing life, the constructive production of worthwhile goods, that is predicated on the assumption that there are worthwhile goods to be made for consumption. Some of the meaning of work could be found in the work itself if it is challenging and interesting, but ultimately, that work matters to the extent that it generates something of value, whether instrumental or as an end in itself.

This chapter reviewed representative works and themes in the field of Christian consumer ethics, highlighting the heavy emphasis on critique of physical harms via production processes and dispositional harms via consumer practices. These critiques are essential to address harms and distortions to people's spiritual and ethical formation, but the field lacks a detailed vision of how market consumption can and should support human flourishing. The question remains, what would people do all day if these injuries and injustices were healed? If everyone had a living wage, if the environment and other species were consumed at sustainable rates, if people did not enlist market goods in their idolization of status or possessions, if we were not consuming in ways that debilitate our capacity to pay attention and form lasting commitments, what then? Furthermore, given that all the injurious tendencies of contemporary market consumption are driven by deeply ingrained habits and expectations, what is the compelling vision of flourishing life in contemporary market system around which people could rally to form and cultivate new dispositions? A more richly textured articulation of the theological purpose of market consumption for

human flourishing would afford clearer guidance for decisions regarding consumption and ordinary life in the midst of the market system today.

In his recent book, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*, Miroslav Volf maintains that "world religions both affirm ordinary life and claim that ordinary life comes into its own when aligned with the transcendent order." Volf does not delve into the details of human flourishing in this work, though he flags that this effort will "make up the bulk of my future work" and affirms that "the right kind of love for the right kind of God bathes our world in the light of transcendent glory and turns it into a theater of joy."[107] In the following chapters, that link and orientation between ordinary life and God is fleshed out by bringing the insights of Robert Adams's Platonic Christianity, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow, and Martha Nussbaum's rendering of core human capabilities into critical conversation with one another. The theological ethic that emerges recognizes the potential of certain consumer goods to both enable and even partially constitute glimpses of God's infinite Goodness to the extent that they develop and exercise our capabilities for wondrous activity in community with one another.

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[107] Building upon Nicholas Wolterstorff's claim in *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* that human well-being entails an active component of "life being led well" (e.g., one's efforts, virtue, activities) and a passive component of "life going well" (e.g., external circumstances affecting health, safety, opportunity), Volf lays out a Christian framework for human flourishing as follows: "*Life being led well* (in Jesus's teaching, loving God and neighbor; in Job's case, fearing God and being righteous), *life going well* (in Jesus's practice, healing the sick, feeding the hungry; in Job's case, health, abundant possessions, many children), and life feeling good (in Jesus's teaching, joy; in Job's case, feasting)." Volf also refers to joy as the "crown of the good life" that rests upon life being led well and going well. Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2015), 72, 75, 206. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2008), 145-147. See Miroslav Volf, "The Crown of the Good Life: A Hypothesis" in *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life* Ed. Miroslav Volf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 127-136.

3. Wondrous Goods: Resembling God

Introduction

This chapter provides the theological framework for a positive vision of market consumption and the role that consumer goods play in human flourishing. This framework falls within a broader theological conversation about the connection between the goodness of creation and God's goodness and whether the world itself matters, or is simply trivial at best, sinful temptation at worst, compared to transcendent connection to God. This chapter argues that the world is in fact genuinely valuable, and it explores how humans, as part of creation, should lovingly relate to God and the world in God. This chapter focuses less on sinful distortions of those relationships and more on the link between creation and God and how love of God fitting enfolds love of finite goods.

The driving question for this chapter is, "What is goodness?" This chapter builds critically upon the theistic theory of value that Robert Adams lays out in his books *Finite and Infinite Goods* and *A Theory of Virtue*. In these works Adams deftly explores the Platonic Christian view that intrinsically good things in this world are good because they resemble

God's infinite Goodness, however fragmentarily or fleetingly. Adams defines intrinsic goodness as "that which is worthy to be honored, loved, admired, or (in the extreme case) worshipped, for its own sake," and he labels this kind of goodness "excellence."[1]

Adams's account of finite and infinite goods provides a very useful lens for analyzing consumer goods, as well as the way people value them. Christian ethics is dominated by a focus on morality, broadly understood, and pursued as tending to the basic needs of people, and beyond that the health of other species and ecologies. Yet Adams powerfully and compelling articulates the importance of non-moral goods to a flourishing human life and the ways in which these goods, and our engagement with one another around them, connects us with God. The vast majority of people's lives, spent amidst work, family, friends, and consumption, more frequently has to do with these non-moral goods than they do with morality traditionally understood and taken as somewhat heroically reaching out to sacrifice one's own physical health, enjoyment, or finances to care for others, particularly those in acute need. Although Adams unquestionably upholds morality as a critical activity and orientation in which we glimpse God, he contends that it needs to be placed in concert with the additional ways God's infinite goodness manifests in people's everyday lives as creatures who live enmeshed within a good creation. Consumer goods are simply parts of creation that people, with the significant aid of manmade machines, have manipulated and refashioned for human use.[2]

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[1] Robert Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 24. Adams notes however, "We have no word that in common usage signifies precisely and uniquely this kind of goodness; [as such] I shall refer to it often (though not always happily) as 'excellence.'" Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 14.

[2] As noted in Chapter 1, economist Alfred Marshall highlighted in his classic *Principles of Economics*, "Man cannot create material things…. His efforts and sacrifices result in changing the form or arrangement of matter to adapt it better for the satisfaction of wants…. As his production of material products is really nothing more than a rearrangement of matter which gives it new utilities; so his consumption of them is nothing more than a disarrangement of matter, which diminishes or destroys its utilities." Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics* (London: Macmillan for the Royal Economic Society, 1961), 63-64.

One of the most distinguishing factors of contemporary life is the number of things, the number of consumer objects, with which we navigate and surround our lives. While roots of contemporary consumer habits and of the market goods surfeit stretch back centuries, the average person in the United States today has a immense number of objects in their private possession, not to mention the untellable number goods integrated into work, commerce, entertainment, travel, and public spaces. As noted in the last chapter, Catholic and Protestant Christian traditions have looked upon consumer goods largely with suspicion and critique, either because of the way they were produced, harming workers and environment alike, or because of the way they entice consumers to idolatries of wealth, status, comfort, or pleasure. Adams's theological framework opens an avenue to develop a positive vision for engaging consumer goods that is neither wholly damning nor idolatrously enraptured. Clearly consumer goods that are produced via exploitation are inherently unjust and must be addressed at societal and legal levels, as well as via personal consumer choice; nevertheless, under the assumption that goods can be produced for living wages, under safe working conditions, and in ways that minimize harm to other species and do not exhaust the environment, Adams's framework provides a way to duly appreciate these goods as not merely instrumental but core, even constitutive, parts of human flourishing in the wondrous activities they enable, such as music, literature, sports, the arts, academics, along with the family, friendship, and community formed around those activities.

While this chapter builds upon and is deeply indebted to Adams's framework, it also examines the major criticisms of Adams's framework and argues that Adams's theory of value is unnecessarily hindered, even undermined, by the vague criteria he puts forward for determining what is excellent, and thereby resembles God. Adams sets the following bar for what counts as excellent: "*[B]eing excellent in the way that a finite thing can be consists in resembling God in a way that could serve God as a reason for loving the thing.*" Adams maintains further that the

reason God would have for loving such a finite good is that it shares an "important" property with God in a way that is "faithful" to who God is.[3] These criteria are elusively abstract, and Adams does not offer clear direction for how to enlist them to discern what hits the mark as a resemblance of God and what does not in his account.

This chapter argues that the criteria of importance and faithfulness should be replaced with the affirmation that all of creation resembles God in some capacity, because God made creation "very good." Instead of trying to set apart a distinct set of goods that resemble God in important and faithful ways, this chapter maintains that every part of created existence is wondrous: from the simple to the complex, living beings to physical forces, the accomplishments of human culture to the intricacies of earthly ecologies. The emphasis can then shift from trying to discern what counts as "excellent" to how people can come to appreciatively perceive the goods throughout creation. As a way of laying the groundwork for cultivating that kind of perception, this chapter also argues that identifying *all* finite good as "extrinsically" valuable instead of intrinsically valuable helps keep in view that their value comes from their relationship and resemblance to God.[4]

An Expansive Theistic Ethics of the Good

A. Robert Adams's Project: A Theistic Framework for Ethics

In *Finite and Infinite Goods*, Robert Adams sets out to develop a theory of value. His theory is based on the perspective that finite goods not only come from God (as their creator), but also actually resemble God to varying extents. In this vein, Adams draws

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[3] See Ibid., 28-36.

[4] Appreciating finite goods as having extrinsic value also more precisely captures the "moderate sense" in which Adams seeks to identify finite goods as intrinsic goods. He notes that when he uses the concept of intrinsic value, he does not mean in the "strongest possible sense" that something has value irrespective of its relationship and connection to other things. He also notes regarding the goodness of virtue in particular that he lacks a "perfectly complete and adequate definition of the moderate sense in which I claim that the goodness of virtue is *intrinsic*." Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 24.

creatively upon Platonic views and broadly theistic views to argue that all good things derive ultimately from the supreme Good, God. In discussing goodness, Adams is most interested in the kind of good that is worthy of admiration for its own sake, which he labels "excellence" and identifies as a resemblance of infinite goodness, i.e., God.[5] Although excellence colloquially and commonly refers to high levels of skill, capacity, or quality, Adams uses that term to mean "resembles God." According to Adams, something is "excellent" (in his technical use of that term) only insofar as it resembles or images God, the ultimate Good that both transcends and creates all finite goods.

Adams's driving motivation in writing *Finite and Infinite Goods* was to address a large gap in contemporary theological, as well as philosophical, ethics. Most of 19th and 20th Christian ethics focused on moral concerns regarding people's physical wellbeing and communal relationships, whether at an interpersonal or social justice level. Adams argues this emphasis, while extremely important, tends to lead people to overlook and ignore appreciation for other types of value in addition to morality. Adams notes that in his upbringing and early studies, "It was hard to see room in [Christian ethics] for intense interest in other values, such as aesthetic or intellectual excellence,"[6] and according to Adams, contemporary moral philosophy, at least on the analytic side, kept similar distance from any such engagement with values beyond standard moral boundaries of social justice and altruism. Although the early 20th century saw a strong emphasis on analyzing intrinsic goodness, in the mid to late 20th century, explication of "the right" and justice came to dominate the field, as study and debate around works like *A Theory of Justice* crowded out

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[5] See Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 4. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 24, 65.

[6] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 4. Adams muses on this kind of good in his "Philosophical Autobiography" as follows: "It is hard to date my falling in love with philosophy. It probably began in my undergraduate years, as I found in the clarity and rigor of analytical philosophy's formulations and arguments the same sort of beauty I had learned in high school to see in mathematical proofs." Robert Adams, "A Philosophical Autobiography," in *Metaphysics and the Good: Themes from the Philosophy of Robert Merrihew Adams*, ed. Samuel Newlands and Larry Jorgensen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

examination of "the good," relegating it as primarily relevant to private realms one might choose to embrace (e.g., home, family, religious organizations, vocation, recreation, etc.). Adams intends this theory of value to include both moral values and non-moral values, with morality entailing human relationships with God, one another, other creatures, etc. and non-moral values entailing things like intellectual or aesthetic goods.

Adams is adamant that there is more going on in the goodness of creation than simply personal morality and justice in the law and policy, things of deep importance in themselves, such as music, literature, the arts, sports, and science. These are not merely secondary goods, but are things of deep importance in themselves and worthy of attention, appreciation, and practice as vocations as well as avocations. Adams argues that exclusive focus on morality overlooks an immense array of intrinsically good things, and he writes, "Our view of the values of human life will be distorted if we do not give full weight in our ethical thinking to intrinsic excellences, including those that may be classified as aesthetic or intellectual."[7] Susan Wolf also highlights that in Adams's framework the transcendence of the Good means there will always need to be "an open-endedness about what will turn out to be good. Because goodness, in principle, outstrips our conception of it, it is always possible for the good to surprise us."[8] Certainly morality and justice are intrinsic goods as well, but Adams insists that they are not the only ones, and that due concern for others on individual and societal levels actually *includes* caring about their capacity and opportunity to engage the rich array of goods in creation (i.e., not simply have basic needs and rights met). It entails enjoying these goods in concert with one another. Adams argues that well-being is "primarily to be sought" in "the enjoyment of excellence."[9]

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[7] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 4.
[8] Susan Wolf, "A World of Goods" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64, no. 2 (March 2002): 468.
[9] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 101.

Adams not only thinks that a theistic ethical framework can offer analysis and insights for the broader field of ethics regarding appreciation of such goods; he also thinks religious ethics itself lacks sufficient emphasis on these kinds of goods. He considers that lack surprising given that worshipping God presumably "celebrates an excellence in God that is surely much more than narrowly moral."[10] Adams's claim is that all of these finite good things not only share the same ultimate source in God their creator, but also share to some extent, however fragmentarily, fleetingly, and analogously, in a divine property of God. Adams is arguing that what he terms excellence, i.e., something worthy of praise, is the "property of resembling or faithfully imaging God."[11]

Resemblances of infinite Goodness are manifest in an incalculable number of ways in created existence, whether in human society or more broadly in the rest of creation: e.g., music, arts, science, sports, politics oriented toward the common good, compassion, technological feats, the intricacies of healthy bodies, thriving ecologies, the vastness of space, inhabitable planets, life itself, and so forth. Within each of those broad categories are specific instances, replete with particular details tied to that manifestation of infinite Goodness. In other words, things like wonder at a newborn's fingers wrapping around your thumb, rapt flowing attention to the tuneful beat of a beloved song, awe at telescopic images from the depths of outer space (let alone the technology and social collaboration that made them possible), these are not flattened or lost in some generic idea of "beauty" or "creativity," but rather are beautiful precisely in their particularities. There is certainly an elusiveness to pinning down the criteria for what is good. Yet as Susan Wolf writes appreciatively, "Adams starts with a conviction that we live in a World of Goods [organized around transcendent Good]…. However large are the problems the idea carries with it, the

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Robert Adams, "Precis of *Finite and Infinite Goods*" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64, no. 2 (March 2002): 440.

fact remains that it captures a great deal of ordinary thought and experience of value that no anthropocentric, subjectivist, or naturalist conception of value can."[12] The following section examines Adams's conception of "being for the good."

B. Being for the Good: More than Action and Morality Alone

Adams holds that humans are innately drawn toward God and the glimpses of God experienced in finite goods. To at least some extent, whenever a person loves a finite good she is implicitly loving God, whether she realizes it or not. In Adams's account, that love slips into idolatry when a person comes to love a given "finite object, or realm of objects" to such an exclusive degree that it prevents her "from caring about other instances or types of good." Idolatry occurs when "love for a finite good has ceased to form part of the love for the good or for God and begun to compete with it."[13] That said, given the intimate and inextricable connection between finite goods and God according to Adams, the idea of loving a finite good in place of God does not make as much sense as it does in other theological frameworks in which God stands completely distinct from finite creation. One cannot love a finite good without loving God to some degree (consciously or not), because that finite good is a resemblance of God. Loyalty to finite goods and loyalty to God are not properly rivals, and only become so when a person becomes overly devoted to a finite good in a way that exclusively narrows her focus upon it and leads her to feel that her life would be meaningless without it, that without it she could not continue to be herself or, in extreme

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[12] Wolf, "A World of Goods," 467.

[13] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 200-202. This understanding of idolatry will be discussed in later chapters regarding market consumption and flow, particularly the ways that people can idolize flow experiences.

cases, even go on living.[14] Such idolatry entails an undervaluation of a person's own life and other created goods to the extent that she thinks she needs the idolized good to have a life worth living.

Yet a core element of appreciating the goodness of creation is the recognition in time that as searing as loss of beloved finite goods can be, goodness abides. Although grief can be a due and perfectly fitting response to the loss of a good, Adams maintains that despair is not. Part of loving God in creation is the disposition "to find other particular goods to pursue when the pursuit of one that one loves is definitively blocked." Adams is not advocating a guarded or dispassionate attachment to finite goods – quite the opposite, given the wonder he sees coursing through creation – but rather an affirmation that "it is possible to care passionately about particular goods and projects and still to feel that they do not exhaust the value of one's life. The meaning of one's life is open-ended, one may feel, because one confronts an immeasurable ocean of actual and potential good…. [T]he actual or possible loss, or even the sacrifice, of particular goods that one loves can be faced, not without pain, but with the expectation that while there is life, there will be goods to be loved, and meaning to be found in loving them."[15] The other goods one may go on to love are not replacements for what was lost, but they are opportunities to enjoy in God the wonders of the good creation of which one is a part.

Adams calls this fitting love of good things and goodness itself "being *for* the Good" and being in a "relation of *alliance* with the supreme Good (that is, with God)." When

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[14] Ibid., 206. Adams also holds that it is possible to be actively against the good, in a way that one hates certain resemblances of God (e.g., certain people) and to whatever extent one is able, actively seeks their harm or destruction. That opposition to finite goods can be rooted in idolatrous fixation on a certain good, as one hostilely treats anything one sees as a threat to one's idol. There can also be a more nihilistic form of being against the good, in which one is simply filled with self-destructive dispositions to hatred and violation of good things. Adams holds that the bad is simply privation of the good. Although he argues that privation of the good is distinct from opposition of the good, that opposition can also be easily and readily understood as simply a privation of "being for the good." See Ibid., 102-130.

[15] Ibid., 207.

Adams uses the phrase "being for the good" he intends a wide array of things, including "loving it, liking it, respecting it, wanting it, wishing for it, appreciating it, thinking highly of it, speaking in favor of it and otherwise intentionally standing for it symbolically, acting to promote or protect it, and being disposed to do such things."[16] He holds that the range of things that being for the good entails highlights the difference between an ethics focused on character versus an ethics focused on action. Action and dispositions to act are important and are included under what it means to be for the good, but Adams stresses that his framework for ethics extends beyond that to include emphasis on everyday life and in particular those "whose hands cannot reach the levers of the world." Adams names specifically the ill, aged, those with disabilities, people in whom virtue resides in "attitudes to things that she cannot do much about," but he could just as readily extend that to the average person seeking to care for their family and their work, aware and concerned about suffering that may be raging around the world war, refugee crises, poverty, racism, climate change, among others but that might be largely detached from the reach of the "levers" to which that person has access.[17]

Twentieth century western ethics, philosophical as well as theological, has strongly emphasized the ethical importance of action and consequence, with the major fault lines rising over whether core ethical criteria should rest upon securing the greatest good for the greatest number or respecting an inviolable set of individual rights. A related but distinct divide also raged over whether ethics is primarily about achieving certain outcomes or about following duty, whatever the outcome. G.E.M. Anscombe famously argued that all of these theories rely on the idea of moral obligation and a "law conception of ethics" that is a holdover from Jewish and Christian beliefs in "God as a law-giver" – beliefs that no longer

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[16] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 15.
[17] Ibid., 16.

pervade society in the way they once did.[18] Setting aside the question of whether such divine law exists, Anscombe made the point that the conceptions of obligation it entails are "only harmful" if wielded in a society that is no longer rooted in a religious legal framework. According to Anscombe, those conceptions of obligation make "no reasonable sense" absent divine law and only lead to ethical thinking that, despite being disastrously muddled and grossly injurious (even murderous), is enacted with unwavering conviction as being absolutely necessary and morally justified.[19]

Adams notes that efforts to talk about virtues have still been subsumed in ethics focused on actions and consequences. Virtue is often either understood predominately as a disposition to act rightly or granted value to the extent that it results in well-being, loosely defined but usually taken as physical health. Adams even argues that Anscombe's emphasis on virtue, drawn from Aristotle, remains in an action and outcome-oriented framework. Anscombe held Aristotle's ethics as a potential model for contemporary ethics because Aristotle did not view right and wrong as a stark obedience to divine moral obligations, but rather the more organic fruit of habit and disposition cultivated over time. Yet Adams contends even though duty did not play a central role in Aristotle's ethics, Aristotle still did "think about virtue as a matter of getting it *right* in some sense – hitting the target, choosing

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[18] Anscombe also notes that Stoics "also thought that whatever was involved in conformity to human virtues was required by divine law." G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 5.

[19] One of the driving forces for Anscombe writing the classic essay in which she makes these points, "Modern Moral Philosophy," was the bankruptcy she thought existed in the moral philosophy that could justify dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – incinerating innocent civilians, who had not and were not committing harmful acts of war – under the idea that the action was "necessary" to end the war and "saved more lives than it sacrificed." Anscombe was also strongly opposed to the way such arguments led institutions like Oxford University to award an honorary degree to the man who decided to drop the bombs, U.S. President Harry Truman. She tried to organize an effort amongst fellow faculty at Oxford to deny Truman that honorary degree, arguing that "for men to choose to kill the innocent as a means to their ends is always murder, and murder is one of the worst of human actions." She ultimately gained minimal traction, as her colleagues voted en mass to award Truman the degree. See G.E.M. Anscombe, "Mr. Truman's Degree" Pamphlet (Oxford, 1958) and David Solomon, "Elizabeth Anscombe's 'Modern Moral Philosophy': Fifty Years Later" *Christian Bioethics* 14, no. 2 (2008): 109-122.

the correct action."[20] Virtue remains centrally about formation for right action and more broadly right activity over the course of one's life. Granted that emphasis on right action can still be held in sharp distinction from a focus on outcome (e.g., do not murder no matter what, versus murder if the "beneficial consequences" justify it), the focus remains on the ways virtue generates the right kind of activity.

Adams maintains that ethical concern with action, as well as dispositions to act, are extremely important, but that action alone does not cover the full field of ethics. It ignores in particular "the ethical significance of *what lies behind our actions*," such as morally appropriate motives, beliefs, desires, and emotions. For Adams, these aspects of people have great ethical significance in themselves, independently of any actions or outcomes they may generate.[21] Furthermore, he contends virtuous motives, beliefs, desires, and emotions also do not necessarily have an unwavering connection to beneficial outcomes or right action. Virtue can result in awful consequences. In regards to outcomes, simply because one is acting virtuously does not mean one will be successful in bringing about a good consequence. Along this line, following virtuous dispositions in some circumstances, such as standing in public opposition to an oppressive regime, can even lead directly to suffering or death for oneself or others. And even if such acts can potentially generate later change or affect, sometimes martyrdom (suffering and dying for a cause on principle) is simply martyrdom.[22]

Adams argues that symbolic value is also something that has been unduly ignored in contemporary ethics, particularly in comparison to concern for the value of consequences. Adams maintains, "[S]ymbolic action is a way of being for what one loves and against what

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[20] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 9. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics: Revised Edition,* Trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1106b32.
[21] Ibid., 9.
[22] Likewise, while virtuous dispositions tend to result in right action, Adams notes that things like lack of attention due simply to limits of being a finite human could result in a wrong action, even if a person were completely virtuous. See Adams, *A Theory of Virtue,* 10, 54-60.

one hates." He thinks this is particularly critical way of being for the good because it recognizes, in a way that emphasis on consequences does not, that "helplessness is a large part of life." Adams argues that there is a "gaping hole in most modern ethical theories, and not just utilitarianism," because "they have nothing to say to us in a situation of helplessness."[23] That helplessness can take the form of oppression and persecution. It can also take the more quotidian and inevitable reality of age and illness that takes away people's capacities to act, whether suddenly or steadily over time. That helplessness includes as well the inability to help a friend or loved one who may be ill or injured. Adams writes, "Sending cards and flowers are ways of being for a sick person symbolically. They may also have the good consequences of cheering up the patient, but that will be because he is glad that his friends are for him. The symbolic value of the deed is primary in such a case."[24]

Adams argues that symbolic value has also historically been core to religious ethics, given the limited capacity and failures of people to do good that is often clearly recognized and confessed via religious perspectives and practices. Although symbolic action does not alone constitute love of God, especially when consequential action is also possible, Adams holds that "a genuine love for the good can find in symbolic expression an integration and completion that would otherwise be impossible." The symbolic value and ritual action of worship is primarily not about instrumentally getting things from God, but rather expressing one's gratitude and loving allegiance to God and the good. Adams explains the importance of symbolic value as follows:

> [W]e can hardly deny that our ability to do good, and even to conceive of good and care about it, is limited. Our nonsymbolic activity, perforce, is a little of this and a little of that. Getting ourselves dressed in the morning, driving or riding or walking to work, and then home again to dinner, we try, on the way and in between, to do some good, to love people and be kind to them, to enjoy and perhaps create some beauty. But none of this is very perfect, even when we succeed; and all of it is very

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[23] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 224.
[24] Ibid.

> fragmentary. One who loves the good should be *for* the good wherever it occurs or is at stake. But we do not even know about most of the good and opportunities for the good in the world, and we cannot do very much about most of what we do know. We can care effectively only about fragments that are accessible to us…. Symbolically we can do better. Symbolically I can be for the Good as such, and not just for the bits and pieces of it that I can concretely promote or embody. I can be for the good as such by articulating or accepting some conception of a comprehensive and perfect or transcendent Good and expressing my loyalty to it symbolically…. Theists find this value of symbolism supremely in worship. Limited as the extent of my love and beneficence and political influence must be, I can still *pray* "for all sorts and conditions of" people. Qualitatively limited as I must be in the goodness of my life and even my conception of the good, I can still name and praise a transcendent Good. And fragmented as my concerns are in dealing with various finite goods, I can integrate my love for the good in explicit adoration of the one God.[25]

In pointing out that no one is completely virtuous, Adams argues that a binary focus on right and wrong fails to capture the ambiguous reality of people's everyday ethical lives. People routinely fall short of caring for others, at times through hostility but more often through sheer indifference or preoccupation with other things. Although some hold that genuine virtue never fails, Adams maintains that focusing on these motivational, volitional, and emotional aspects of ethics is much more deeply appreciative and cognizant of the moral failings and oversights in our ordinary lives.[26] Along different lines, Adams also argues that focus on the good rather than the right opens space for recognizing a plurality of goods and ways of being for the Good in life. According to Adams, this perspective contrasts with Aristotle's conviction that while there are many ways of getting something wrong, there is only one way of getting it right – one way of hitting the chief good target. An ethical framework focused on the good is "much more tolerant of ambivalence and diversity," and it gives room for the idea that "there can be quite different alternative ways of being genuinely virtuous."[27]

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[25] Ibid., 227-228.

[26] Adams also argues against the idea that virtue is always consistent in the motivations, desires, or emotions it entails, as well as the actions it tends to generate. He likewise thinks that people can be quite virtuous in one area or capacity, but deficient in others. See Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 115-143.

[27] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 10-11. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b28-31.

Adams also aims to distinguish being for the good from an overemphasis in western ethics of the 20th and 19th centuries on benevolence. Benevolence generally focuses on the physical needs of others, such as food, shelter, clothing, and medicine, and harbors an intense fixation on selflessness. Although Adams does not mention it as such, one could place the pursuit of justice under the ethical orientation that Adams labels "benevolence" as well. Although the word benevolence carries connotations of personal morality of care for others, the motivation and concern with not being sufficiently selfless has been present in ethical pushes for justice on systematic social scales. Along this line, the prevalent contemporary view is that God's love, as well as proper human love, is primarily a selfless benevolence, in which one cares for others' well-being without regard for and often over and against one's own personal good. From this point of view, concern for the well-being of others is also largely focused on physical health. It aims to ensure people have enough food, clothing, shelter, and medical care, that they have protection from harm, as well as justice for harms suffered in which injuries are tended and perpetrators are held to account. Beyond that it focuses on seeking opportunities for quality education and safe, living-wage employment, but each of those is usually geared again to making it so people can now secure physical well-being on their own for themselves and their families.

Physical well-being for individuals, families, neighborhoods, and communities is a central ethical concern and need, but Adams's point is that it is not the only component of well-being, nor should it be one that crowds out everything else. Physical well-being, a healthy functioning body, is itself a form of excellence to be valued as an end in itself. Nevertheless Adams maintains that this view of divine love equating to benevolence is an "overmoralized ideal of love" that does not "allow God to desire, for its own sake, a relationship with creatures, or to love beauty or other impersonal goods." While many people see self-interest and benevolence in conflict, Adams contends that there is room in

divine and human love for interest in both others' good and one's own good. Although benevolence is an unquestionably excellent moral motive, Adams argues that God's love and derivatively the "ideal of love for us humans" entails the enjoyment of admiration for and intrinsic interest in non-moral excellences and relationships as well.

According to Adams, a narrow focus on morality significantly and unduly circumscribes people's conception of goodness. This narrowing occurs both in terms of people equating a "good" action primarily, if not exclusively, to one that benefits other people (especially those lacking basic necessities) but also what a person's motivations and personal outcomes of such benevolent activity might entail.[28] A large focus of western ethics since the Enlightenment has been focused upon asserting a sharp divide between self-interest and benevolence, or altruism. Adams describes self-interest as a "desire for one's own good on the whole, for its own sake" and benevolence as a "desire for the good of others (or even one other person) good, for its own sake."[29] Adams notes that it is common to assume that self-interest and altruism set up "an exhaustive dichotomy" that is mutually exclusive, so one is either concerned with and acting for one's own wellbeing or another's wellbeing. Although both could perhaps be at play, ultimately one is more fundamental. According to Adams, a huge amount of angst and anxiety has been poured upon the sands of whether or not one is acting out of self-interested or altruistic motives as elemental to determining whether one is acting ethically or not. The deciding criteria is often whether one is willing to sacrifice one's own wellbeing for the wellbeing of another.

Adams highlights eros – love in which "the lover desires or prizes, for its own sake, some relationship with the beloved" – as central to both human and divine love of the good,

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[28] Susan Wolf sharply critiques this kind of overbearing, narrow focus on benevolence and morality that ranks all other things of distant secondary importance. See Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints" *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982): 419-439.

[29] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 137.

and notes that eros has many facets. Although value is often elided with desire (so that to value is to desire), Adams places a much heavier emphasis on admiration and wonder as the first moment and root of valuing something. While desire is future oriented and savoring is oriented to the past, admiration is what one does in the presence of value. One may desire to stay in the presence of value, or desire to reunite with it when away from it. One might desire that this value stay safe from harm. But these desires are derivative of moments in which one is admiring the value. That admiration can entail reflective thoughts, like "This is good," but it can also simply be an enraptured focus on the valuable thing. Moments of "flow," as Csikszentmihalyi describes, are moments of admiration. In light of the bridge concept of "wonder" used in this dissertation, it is also key to note that the word admiration derives from the Latin *mirari,* "to wonder."

One's understanding of goodness need not be perfect, however, and is often mistaken, because "we are motivated to pursue ends that we do not claim to understand very fully. We want more than we now understand."[30] Adams holds from his Platonically-inflected theistic perspective that right along with this under-articulated, and to a certain extent un-articulate-able, end that is genuine goodness comes a desire for our motives and actions to be "organized around [this] objective standard of value."[31] In other words, we long for the things we find wonderful, often reaching out in an incoherent myriad of directions, to be coherently orchestrated around, oriented toward, and even disciplined by that ultimate good. Along this line, Adams writes, "[T]he pursuit points in a certain direction, so to speak, and goodness is the property that is uniquely found in that direction, or that reaches the farthest in that direction. Or, perhaps more accurately, excellence [that which is innately worthy of admiration and love] is to be understood in terms of an ideal that lies far beyond the

[30] Ibid., 27.
[31] Ibid.

observable objects we regard as excellent, but in a direction that they combine with our pursuit to point out to us…. The character of our pursuit of excellence, including the character of the things we think are excellent, determines what sort of thing would *satisfy* the pursuit."[32] This pursuit itself is anchored in the admiring wonder that arises when one is swept away by music, literature, sport, caring relationships, the intricate complexities of physics, or the simple grandeur of rolling hills. This wonder generates desire for more of the good with which one is enraptured in the future, as well as savoring reminiscence of one's engagement with it in the past.

Even with accurate perception of what is good, the finite nature of human existence limits which goods a person can love with circumscribing parameters of time, space, personal capacity, personal history, etc. For instance, while a person may acknowledge that a given sport or book is good, he or she may neither be gripped with admiration for it, nor a desire to pursue and experience it. Nonetheless, this person can still recognize that this is a good, which others fittingly admire, desire, and embrace. This kind of recognition is a form of *respect* that one can hold for goods with which one is not personally enamored.[33] Adams holds that this respect is still derivative of a form of love, writing, "One can doubtless regard something as beautiful or good without loving it, and perhaps without really admiring it. But I think that is a secondary sort of recognition of beauty or goodness, parasitic on that which takes place in love and admiration."[34]

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[32] Ibid., 22.

[33] Ibid., 26. Adams also holds that there are certain goods to which a person is particularly called. Adams writes, "My suggestion is that vocation is primarily a matter of *what goods are given to us to love*, and thus of *our part in God's all-embracing and perfect love*." He sees this vocation entailing "ongoing personal commitment" to responsibilities for projects that are "proportioned" to one's capacities. He takes vocation to be an invitation ,rather than a command, from God based around the "goods that are *offered* to us to love." That vocation can be affected by one's circumstances, for instance suffering a debilitating illness or injury, however Adams maintains one's "vocation is to love the good in those ways that remain possible," even if that means simply being for the finite goods, the projects, to which one is called symbolically or in attitude and spirit. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 302-303, 309.

[34] Ibid., 20.

Adams goes on to argue that the pursuit of the Good not only sets a directional frame, however provisional, for understanding what the Good entails, but also is itself partially constitutive of the Good. He writes, "To the extent that anything is good, in the sense of 'excellent,' it is good for us to love it, admire it, and want to be related to it, whether we do in fact or not." For Adams, it is itself excellent to love the excellent almost by the definition and fact of what excellence entails as something innately worthy of love, because any "claim that x is good implies that is intrinsically good to value x," and "the claim that x is excellent implies not only that it is good to value x, but also that this goodness of valuing x is grounded in the excellence of x [as again being something that is innately worthy of admiration and love]."[35]

Adams maintains that when we value things intrinsically, we commonly have an intuition that we are engaging something wonderfully transcendent. From this perspective, the love a person has for finite goods serves as an indication that she is engaging and glimpsing something more than merely those goods in themselves. Although this sense and that kind of valuing can be mistaken (e.g., valuing money as intrinsically good), Adams holds that intrinsic valuing very plausibly indicates that genuinely objective value does exist in the world, that value is not simply something humans project onto the world. Adams stance does not prove such excellence exists, nor that God exists and is the infinite Good from which all finite goods come. Nevertheless, Adams does not set out to prove God's existence as the Good. He is rather running with the intuition that something divine is unveiled when we sense in finite goods "something too wonderful to be contained or carried either by our experience or by the physical or conceptual objects we are perceiving."[36]

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[35] Ibid., 20-22.
[36] Ibid., 51.

Nevertheless, absent some conception of God, that intuition seems to be largely a dead end. An idea that offers a general and vague spiritual conviction that there is something awesome going on in and through existence, but without any specific knowledge or guiding insight into what it could possibly be. If there is to be any actionable and insightful content to the claim that finite goods resemble God, it seems one needs at least a working concept of who God is. Adams pushes back against this suggestion though. He contends that we can know quite a lot about good things without knowing about God with any precision. He equates that situation again to the distinction between people being competent users of the word "water," knowing the roles that it plays, without having the remotest understanding or mere notion that water has the nature H_20. Flowing with this line of thought, Adams claims, "One also does not need any belief, let alone a correct one, about the nature of goodness in order to know much about what is good."[37]

Adams puts a lot of weight on the idea of "general revelation," especially in the realm of ethics. Holding that revelation entails God's intentional action to "lead us to the relevant truths" about goodness, i.e., God's self. While we are often led to these facts about goodness "whether we recognize their theological character or not," Adams argues that despite the wide diversity of religious belief and practice, there is significant overlap in the kinds of things people identify as morally good. Adams claims, "We must have been able, very often, to recognize the good and the right. On my views in the metaphysics of morals it follows that we must have been able, very often, to recognize what are in fact certain relations to God. This is not to say that we must have recognized their theological character. I cannot regard the recognition of moral truths as an exclusive possession of theists, let alone of a particular religious tradition."[38]

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[37] Ibid., 355.
[38] Ibid., 364.

According to Adams, that recognition and general revelation comes through an array of feelings, emotions, inclinations, desires, and beliefs that are learned and shaped via participation in a given family and society. That recognition forms people's perception of what has intrinsic worth.[39] Adams maintains, "[T]here is enough overlap among the different received evaluative beliefs and practices for us to be talking about the same thing, and for us to have received some general revelation in this realm."[40] He considers the broad pervasive, if often overlooked, agreement in principle about the values of life, health, even enjoyment of excellent things, as well as sense of violation and horror at the destruction of good things.

Special revelation that establishes and develops "a particular historic religious tradition," remains important, but Adams tends to think the fragmentary way in which we understand the Good means that there is a due "critical stance" and openness to revision regarding one's own understanding of goodness, even as there remains trust "not only in our own cognitive capacities and skills, but also in those of our society."[41] Adams does not lay out criteria to guide this dynamic of trust and critique, other than the conviction that it

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[39] Adams draws this idea of "doxastic practice" from William Alston's work *Perceiving God*, but stresses the importance of "feelings, emotions, inclinations, and desires" alongside beliefs in the formation of a person's perception of the good. In other words, the formation, exercise, and reformation of perception entail the interplay of far more than just beliefs. Ibid., 357.

[40] Ibid., 364. Adams explicitly argues that this conception of general revelation is distinct from "natural theology" for two reasons. First, the idea of natural theology presupposes a distinction between natural and supernatural that is distinct from how Adams understands the connection between God and creation. Adams writes, "The key point about natural theology is that it is supposed to be *natural*, to be composed of theses that human beings could establish by their unaided natural capacities for knowing and reasoning about the natural environment in which they at all times find themselves. The natural is contrasted with the supernatural, and nature with grace. These contrasts do not have a major structural role in my framework for ethics." Second, Adams does not see any significant ethical content or criteria lying within the concept of "nature" or what is natural, because it is not clear how "any action, or anything that is or could be actual in the natural world, [could] be contrary to nature." The idea of "nature" does not seem to offer leverage to distinguish natural from unnatural, because if something happens or could be reasonably be presumed to be possible in this world, "How then would it be contrary to nature?" Ibid., 365, 307.

[41] Ibid., 361.

stems from the fact that we are finite creatures seeking infinite Goodness that we only glimpse fragmentarily in this life.

The chapter on "Revelation of the Good" and how we form beliefs about the good is the second to last chapter of *Finite and Infinite Goods* because Adams does not think epistemology is well suited to offer us "a few sharply delineated types of evidence or grounds on which all justified evaluative beliefs must be based."[42] Adams thinks a robust set of evaluative beliefs precedes any more systemized epistemological analysis or grounding of them. Furthermore, those evaluative beliefs are rooted in a complex dynamic social and personal interplay of emotions, desires, and beliefs. It does not lend itself to clear epistemological grounding. For Adams, we should always hold any conception of the good with a loose grip in recognition that it is necessarily fragmentary and imperfect and that God transcends any such conception we have. This recognition is not a stance of relativity, as Adams affirms the objective standard that God's Goodness does exist even if perception of it is always open to critique and revision.[43] The pursuit of the good again "reaches out toward an objective standard that is actually glimpsed, though never fully or infallibly."[44] The third section in this chapter lays out in more detail the critiques of Adams's framework, and argues that a more robust and pervasive understanding of all of creation as good and excellent - as resembling God - in some capacity avoids the shortcomings present in Adams's framework, namely there is no clear way, theologically or ethically, to determine what is resembles God.

Adams's work *Finite and Infinite Goods* has received accolades for its precise philosophical reasoning and reviving of genuine plausibility for theory of value rooted in a

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[42] Ibid., 354.
[43] One wonders though whether the perception that Goodness exists objectively and infinitely, and further that the Good is a personal loving God, is also open to critique and revision. Presumably for Adams, the answer is yes. See Ibid., 81-82.
[44] Ibid., 81-82.

broadly Platonic and Augustinian appreciation of transcendent Goodness, i.e., God. Yet it has not been robustly taken up in the field of religious ethics. This lack of widespread conversation and engagement is in part due to the at once enticing yet abstract metaphysical terrain of Adams's work. It is though more likely due to the ways in which Adams sketches what it could mean for finite goods to resemble infinite Goodness, without sufficiently detailed criteria for how to discern whether something resembles God or not. In other words, the application of this framework for ethics to various fields is hindered by the degree to which Adams's claims are intriguing and yet difficult to clearly apply, whether to analyze or offer guidance on difficult ethical issues.

As will be discussed, Adams has been sharply criticized for not offering clear criteria for determining precisely what resembles God and is worthy of appreciation. Yet for Adams, there is a crucial distinction between metaphysics and any kind of applied ethics regarding the Good. It is conceivable that good things resemble God, and yet we remain entirely unable to either easily or usefully define what that means for any given finite thing or situation. Furthermore, Adams holds that the difficulty in understanding the Good and how finite goods relate to it is due not only to the fragmentary and distant ways in which finite goods resemble infinite Good, but also to the fragmentary ways in which humans are able to perceive this relationship, due to our sin-damaged vision as well as our sheer finite, limited capability to perceive goodness.

What Adams is primarily seeking to affirm and explore is not a clear criteria for determining what is good, but rather the claim that goodness is an objective value – something worthy of admiration in itself – that exists outside of whether or not humans value it or not. Goodness transcends us. It exists and would exist as well independently of whether we exist, and it is itself neither merely equivalent nor reducible to joy, pleasure, or desire-satisfaction. Yet while its value does not depend upon our admiration or desire,

admiring and desiring it is precisely what people do when they come to recognize goodness. Along this line for Adams, the intrinsic worth of goodness, i.e., its excellence, is not *determined* by human enjoyment or pursuit, but rather simply *recognized* in the enjoyment and desire it elicits. Emotion and longing play a key role in awareness of what is good, even though they do not constitute what is good, and within the framework Adams lays out, a thing is not good because people admire it, but rather they admire it because it is good.

God's infinite transcendence plays a critical role in this theory of value, and Adams holds that God is transcendent "in the sense that [God] vastly surpasses all other good things, and all our conceptions of the good." Thus, God's transcendence places all human conceptions of God and what is good under the perennial need for and due openness to what Adams calls "the critical stance."[45] Every human perception of excellence, of that which is worthy of admiration for itself, is rightly subject to critical revision given that no one has a complete or clear understanding of God.

In addition to this gap of perception and comprehension is the distance between any finite good and infinite Good. Due to God's transcendence, any finite excellence is "profoundly imperfect in comparison with the Good itself" and only resembles God in "fragmentary" ways. Nevertheless, Adams maintains firmly that these finite good things *do in fact* provide glimpses, however dim and imperfect, of God. Such glimpses of God are experienced as "something too wonderful to be contained or carried either by our experiences or by the physical or conceptual objects we are perceiving."[46] The following section analyzes Adams's conception of excellence as having intrinsic, objective value and resembling God. This chapter will then examine the major critiques of Adams's theory of finite goods imaging divine goodness, and it will lay the critical groundwork for critically

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[45] Ibid., 78, 210-212.
[46] Ibid., 50-51.

building upon Adams's framework in chapters four and five via epistemological insights from positive psychology and the ethical insights of the Capabilities Approach to Human Development.

Goodness as Excellence and as God

A. Value of Goodness is Objective, not Merely Subjective

Adams's theory of value rests heavily on the idea that there are things worthy of admiration in themselves, i.e., that are intrinsically good on his account. As such, it will be clarifying to lay out what he means by "good" as well as "intrinsic value." Adams notes at the outset that he is not examining instrumental goodness, things that are deemed good according to their effectiveness in reaching some other end. He is also not examining merely a "well-being goodness," what is "good for" a given person or living creature, though he will argue that such well-being "is primarily to be sought" in enjoying excellence. Instead, he focuses primarily on a type of goodness he labels "excellence" and defines as that which is worthy of admiration and love in itself.[47] For instance, if a piece of literature is excellent from Adams's perspective, then it is worthy of praise for itself, irrespective of any connection it may have to other finite goods (e.g., book discussion with a friend) or forms of value (e.g., instrumentally generative of fame or fortune). Adams operates under assumption

[47] Ibid., 12-13. The difference between instrumental goodness, well-being goodness, and excellence can be seen in a surgical procedure. The medical tools are instrumentally good for executing the procedure and helping heal the patient, and the effects of the procedure in addressing an illness or injury are good for the patient's well-being. Yet beyond those, the surgeon could also appreciate as an intrinsic goodness to the sheer practice of medicine itself, including the excellence of a well-executed surgery. The practice of medicine could similarly be held as an intrinsic good not only by physicians, but also by anyone in a position to appreciate the craft exercised during surgery. In other words, not only the exercise of medicine, but also witnessing it, can entail appreciating something that is worthy of admiration simply for itself, independently of any beneficial consequences it might also produce. The same dynamic is present as well in finite goods like playing versus listening to music, preparing versus eating food, participating in versus watching sports, writing versus reading literature, and so forth.

that value intrinsic to something good and valuing something as an end are tightly bound together. This value is rooted in what is intrinsic to the good thing loved.

Longstanding debate rages about whether "goodness" of this kind – that which is worthy of admiration – has any grounding beyond human desires or evaluation. Three types of philosophical answers commonly arise in contemporary responses to questions about what makes something good, i.e., what constitutes goodness. The first maintains that pleasure primarily constitutes goodness and determines all that is derivatively and instrumentally valuable to that end. If something elicits pleasure or alleviates pain, it is good. Various versions of hedonism are associated with this perspective. The most common distinction among them is whether there are only differences in quantity of pleasure or also qualitatively inferior versus superior types of pleasure. Jeremy Bentham famously affirmed the former with his quip that "the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry,"[48] while John Stuart Mill maintained the latter with his classic rejoinder, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is only because they only know their own side of the question."[49]

Mill's view provides a clue to the second view of what constitutes the good. This perspective holds that the satisfaction of desires, rather than pleasure per se, is what is good

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[48] Jeremy Bentham, *The Rationale of Reward* (London: R. Heward, 1830).
[49] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* Ed. George Sher (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc, 2001), 10.

and what defines all that is of derivative and instrumental value toward this end.[50] Each of these views locates goodness primarily in subjective experience. One could claim that there are certain pleasures and desires that are universal across humanity, but generally from these perspectives it is left up to persons to deem whether or not they experience pleasure or satisfaction. Each of these understandings of goodness is also focused on sentient beings that can feel pleasure and or have desires satisfied.

The third perspective regarding what constitutes goodness holds that goodness is an objective matter, independent of what any given person feels, thinks, or desires. From this point of view, goodness is located not in personal experience, but in something else. Any given thing's goodness depends upon its capacity to meet objective criteria. In *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit addresses this idea of objective goodness. Although he was focused more specifically in regards to theories of self-interest and what would "be best" for a person and make his or her life go well, rather than goodness itself, his description of "the Objective List Theories" remains apt. He writes, "According to this [Objective List] theory, certain things are good or bad for people, whether or not these people would want to have the good things, or to avoid the bad things. The good things 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. The bad things might include being betrayed,

[50] Advocates of goodness as pleasure would contend that satisfaction of desire is simply a form of pleasure; whereas proponents of goodness as desire-satisfaction would contend that pleasure is simply one type of satisfaction. Yet the difference between the two is highlighted by situations like the following. Imagine a journalist living under a repressive regime is arrested and tortured for writing an article critical of authoritarian rule. In speaking out the journalist may fulfill her desire to spur resistance to the regime, as well as perhaps simply stand against it on principle. Yet while she takes satisfaction in fulfilling this desire, it is hard to imagine she would take pleasure in the arrest and torture that resistance in her context entails. In a less drastic scenario, imagine a parent who sacrifices pleasure (a night out with friends) in order to care for his or her child who has gotten sick. While that might satisfy the desire of the parent to care for the child, it is not normally as pleasure-filled as a night out. All said, desire satisfaction covers a larger realm of actions, circumstances, and consequences than pleasure alone.

manipulated, slandered, deceived, being deprived of liberty or dignity, and enjoying either sadistic pleasure, or aesthetic pleasure in what is in fact ugly."[51]

In *Finite and Infinite Goods,* Adams explores the affirmation that intrinsic goodness (the Good) does have objective reality that precedes and exists independently of human desires and values. For him, while our longings and values regularly do serve as signifiers of goodness, goodness is not reducible to them. In other words, saying "This is good," is not equivalent to saying, "I like this," "I deeply value this," or even "I find this useful." Something is *not* good because people value it, but people value it because it is good, and goodness would exist, again, even if we did not. Along these lines, Adams maintains that good things, rather than being dependent on human value, have value given their transcendent origin in God. Adams writes, "God is the supreme Good, and the goodness of other things consists in a sort of resemblance to God."[52] In *Finite and Infinite Goods*, Adams does not explicitly identify this transcendent Good as the triune God who came incarnate as Christ. He does maintain that God is personal, meaning God has personal attributes, or at

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[51] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1984), 499. Parfit suggests that a combination of Objective List Theories with Hedonistic Theories might offer way to claim what is "most plausible" from the respective theories. He writes, "What is good for someone is neither just what Hedonists claim, nor just what is claimed by Objective List Theorists. We might believe that if we had *either* of these, *without the other*, what we had would have little or no value. We might claim, for example, that what is good or bad for someone is to have knowledge, to be engaged in rational activity, to experience mutual love, and to be aware of beauty, while strongly wanting just these things. On this view, each side in this disagreement saw only half of the truth. Each put forward as sufficient something that was only necessary. Pleasure with many other kinds of object has no value. And, if they are entirely devoid of pleasure, there is no value in knowledge, rational activity, love, or the awareness of beauty. What is of value, or is good for someone, is to have both: to be engaged in these activities, and to be strongly wanting to be so engaged." Ibid., 502.

[52] Ibid., 7.

least analogues thereof, like thoughts, purposes, and loves. Adams stresses in particular God as being a devoted lover of the Good.[53]

B. The Experience of Excellence Points to God

The idea that goodness is objective, and that this objective goodness is rooted in a personal God, contrasts with colloquial use of the word "good," which is commonly taken to mean favorable attitude or judgment toward something. Adams contends, however, that although the word "good" is often used simply to express favor, this fact does not mean the term cannot also be enlisted to refer to objective goodness. In respect to this objectivity, Adams holds that goodness consists of a property that "objects [under] evaluation possess (or lack) independently of whether we now think they do [and of our attitude toward them]," and that "God is the standard of goodness, to which other good things must in some measure conform, but never perfectly conform."[54] Adams acknowledges that goodness being its own distinctly real and objective property rooted in God does not prove that it is so. Yet he undertakes his overall project in order to render further articulacy and intelligibility to the theistic affirmations that: goodness is objective, God is the supreme Good, all else in existence is lovingly created as good by God, and (most specific to Platonic-leaning theology) everything good resembles God in some respect, however distantly and fragmentarily.[55]

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[53] Adams himself is an ordained Presbyterian minister, and has served as a pastor. Robert Adams, *Curriculum Vitae*, January 2010. See also Adams, "A Philosophical Autobiography," in *Metaphysics and the Good: Themes from the Philosophy of Robert Merrihew Adams*, ed. Samuel Newlands and Larry Jorgensen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). This broadly theistic perspective flows with Christian convictions about God, as well as those in both Judaism and Islam. While this dissertation examines Adams framework and its application to market consumption from a Christian lens, it is worth noting that Adams's views resonate across the Abrahamic faiths. More will be examined regarding God, special revelation, and resemblance of God in the following section.

[54] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 17-18, 29.

[55] See Ibid., 18, 28. Adams also notes that he is not offering proof for the existence of God in this framework, but operating from a theistic starting point assuming God's existence. He does note as well though, "In showing advantages of a theistic theory of the nature of ethics, the book does in effect give reasons for accepting theism…" Ibid., 7.

Adams also is building off of the standard conception of intrinsic goodness itself, and holding that the pursuit of intrinsic goodness, i.e., the pursuit of something that people value as an end in itself, "points in a certain direction." Our desire for excellence provides a guide for what could count as excellent. Adams writes, "The character of our pursuit of excellence, including the character of the things we think are excellent, determines what sort of thing would *satisfy* the pursuit." This point does not prove such goodness exists, but helps provide shape to the contours of what goodness could be. Musing Platonically, Adams claims, "[E]xcellence is to be understood in terms of an ideal that lies far beyond the observable objects we regard as excellent, but in a direction that they combine with our pursuit to point out to us."[56]

According to Adams, goodness is a nature that our evaluative language (good, bad, right, wrong, beautiful, excellent, etc.) and our experiences of love and wonder genuinely track. Even if that tracking fails at times due to both finitude and sin, goodness is a distant but perceptible lodestar for Adams. When we seek it, we "reach out toward an objective standard that is actually glimpsed…[even if] never fully or infallibly," and as we perceive and describe good things, we engage in a process, however faltering, of recognizing this objective reality.[57] Adams contends, "I think we cannot always or even usually be totally mistaken about goodness…. [I]f we do not place some trust in our own recognition of the good, we will lose our grip on the concept of the good, and our cognitive contact with the Good itself."[58]

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[56] Ibid., 22.

[57] Ibid., 50, 81-82. "God is the standard of goodness, to which other good things must in some measure conform, but never perfectly conform." Ibid., 29. For instance, in the field of excellence that is morality, Adams contends that although people often disagree vociferously, "[T]here is enough overlap among the different received evaluative beliefs and practices for us to be talking about the same thing." Adams holds that despite our incapacity to fully perceive or comprehend God, "We must have been able, very often, to recognize the good and the right." Ibid., 364.

[58] Ibid., 20.

This inarticulate sense of transcendence also conveys another point about goodness: it is ultimately something we cannot define with sharp precision. Although we can tie it to things like objective reality, intrinsic value, and God, and we can associate finite objects and activities with it, God's nature, the Good, is ultimately something mysterious that lies beyond our capacity to understand and define adequately. As such, the property of goodness to which Adams points as the unifier of finite good things is simply *that they resemble God*. This claim that goodness equates to a resemblance to God in some capacity is frustratingly opaque, abstract, and of seemingly little help in delineating what precisely resembles God, i.e., in determining what finite things are good. Adams notes though that "[m]uch of the intuitive appeal of broadly Platonic theories of value lies in the thought that experienced beauty or excellence points beyond itself to an ideal or transcendent Good of which it is only an imperfect suggestion or imitation." In this vein, Adams encourages exploration of this intuition. He writes, "We may also be tempted to dismiss this feeling as a romantic illusion; but I am inviting the reader to make, in good Platonic company, the experiment of regarding it as veridical."[59]

C. Adams is Seeking the Nature of Goodness (i.e., God)

In considering the nature of goodness and what we can know or say about it, Adams also makes a clarifying distinction between the *meaning* of words and the *nature* of things.[60] He notes, "It is not the meaning of 'good' but the nature of goodness that I mean to analyze," and his core key question is, "What is it, then, that connects the word 'good' with things that are good, or with the property that is goodness."[61] As an example of the

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[59] Ibid., 29, 51.
[60] It is a distinction about "natural kinds" and the connection between nature(s) and meaning(s) that Hilary Putnam articulates in *Mind, Language, and Reality: Philosophical Papers* Vol. 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 196-290.
[61] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 15-16.

distinction, Adams points to the difference between the meaning of the word "water" and the nature of "water." The chemical compound H_2O is the *nature* of "water," a nature that has certain properties, but the *meaning* of the word "water" refers primarily to those properties, not the nature of water. In other words, when people say "water," they do not mean "chemical compound H_2O." Rather, when people say "water," they mean: "that water is a liquid; that some substances dissolve in it; that it is needed for the growth of most, at least, of the plants that interest us; that humans drink it but cannot breathe it; and so forth."[62] The meaning of the word "water" arises from English speakers using it to refer to anything that has a certain set of properties, and that set of properties stems from the *nature* of "water," i.e., the chemical compound H_2O, whether people realize it or not.

Adams goes on to argue that those properties and their effects play a specific "role" (i.e., what water does) that is what is meant when people colloquially use the word "water." When seeking the nature of water, one has to look for the best candidate that fills that role, i.e., the role that people have in mind when they use the word "water." In the case of water, the chemical compound H_2O best fills that role. Adams applies this idea to trying to find the best candidate to fill the role of the "excellent," that which is intrinsically good. Ultimately, Adams seeks to articulate, "What is there in reality corresponding to our talk about good?"[63] The role identified by the term "good" provides the parameters one can use to seek the nature of goodness – that is, what nature or being could fulfill this role. While in its everyday usage, the word "good" refers to the role that "the good" plays in people's lives, Adams is seeking to understand the nature that best performs that "role."

The role played by excellence, as laid out by Adams, deals as much with the person seeking an excellent object as the object itself. In other words, Adams description of the role

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[62] Ibid., 355.
[63] Ibid., 35.

that something excellent plays focuses as heavily on the way excellent things affect a person as on the properties of excellent things themselves, i.e., he tends to highlight that something is excellent if people respond to it in xyz fashion, as much as he highlights something as excellent if it has abc properties. For instance, Adams focuses as much on the way people respond to and value something like an excellent meal, as on what properties constitute an excellent meal.

On a general level, Adams holds that excellence fills the following role. Although Adams does not lay out this role as directly as follows in *Finite and Infinite Goods*, it is clarifying to summarize and consolidate his points here. First, excellent things are objects of pursuit. People strive and want to have and engage them. Second, excellent things are objects of Eros, i.e., prized as intrinsically valuable. Third, this Eros entails not only admiration and desire regarding excellent things, but also recognition of them. In other words, a loved object is seen as familiar in some respect. This familiarity is particularly evident as one encounters more and more excellent things. Adams writes, "Once our admiring Eros has been awakened by some objects, we can recognize others as relevantly similar to them…"[64] This idea of recognition also carries a deeper sense as well of the creature recognizing the creator in excellent things.

Fourth, loving excellent things is itself excellent, i.e., it is intrinsically valuable for us to love excellent things. Loving excellent things is not simply a matter of personal preference, but that love is itself admirable. As an example, Adams highlights the excellence we perceive in someone who is passionately committed to his or her vocation. He also notes that people, parents in particular with regards to their children, regularly want others to fall in love with excellent things, not merely as a means to but as ends in themselves (this point will be discussed further in this chapter). Fifth, we feel motivated, or can appreciate the

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[64] Ibid., 20.

reasons others might feel motivated, to pursue excellent things. For instance, in acknowledging that a type of music is good, even if one is not personally enamored with it, one is recognizing one could come to appreciate and even love it. Furthermore, Adams writes, "[I]n each individual judgment that something is good is a real possibility of being motivated by it, and an openness thereto."[65] Sixth, we do not fully understand goodness, but the desire for it organizes our other motives. Adams holds, "We want more than we now understand. We both postulate and want a true goodness. The desire plays an organizing role in our motivational system…. It is in large part a higher order desire – that is, a desire about our other motives, a desire that they should be organized around an objective standard of value."[66]

Seventh, excellence is very deeply connected to and manifest in personal attributes. Adams points out, "[M]ost of the excellences that are most important to us, and of whose value we are most confident, are excellences of persons or of qualities or actions or works or lives or stories of persons." In other words, we deeply appreciate persons and what they can do and accomplish. Adams holds, "[I]f excellence consists in resembling or imaging a being that is the Good itself [i.e., God], nothing is more important to the role of the Good itself than that persons and their properties should be able to resemble or image it."[67] A high value is placed on personal relationships, which includes intimate ties of friendship and family, collaborative connections between colleagues, as well as a broader moral concern for other people one does not know. Value is also recognized in the fields such as the arts, music, architecture, engineering, medicine, business, sports, hiking, literature, mathematics, science, and philosophy. Presumably this is not a species-specific value either. If and as other species

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[65] Ibid., 27.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 42.

exhibit the capacities of persons, humans would – or at least fittingly could and should – recognize those capacities and the beings that bear them as having intrinsic worth.[68]

According to Adams, if one is engaged in a "quest for a true good" that fills the above role of excellence, i.e., the Good, then the best candidate is God. Adams notes though that while it is a fairly common theistic claim that God is the supreme Good, the more difficult thing to articulate is how good things relate to the supreme Good. Adams recognizes that his theory that this relation is rooted in the resemblance of finite goods to God's infinite goodness is a step beyond saying God best fulfills the role of intrinsic goodness. Adams notes that the precise way he explains this move is something in which he has "rather less confidence" than simply holding that God is the supreme Good.[69]

The next section analyzes Adams's criteria for what determines resemblance of God, namely finite goods that image God in "important" and "faithful" ways, and two major representative critiques of Adams's position on this point. This chapter argues that these criticisms hit genuine weaknesses in Adams's account, but that Adams's conception of goodness as resemblance to God can be powerfully revised if the criteria of importance and faithfulness are dropped in favor of an affirmation that all aspects of creation are good - and resemble God in some respect - because God made creation "very good."

Excellence as Resemblance of God & Criticism of this Position

A. Faithfully Sharing an Important Property: Adams's Criteria for Resembling God

As noted, Adams conceives of goodness as an objective reality that is worthy of love for itself. Adams equates this goodness with God, and holds that finite goods are not only

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[68] Ethical concerns for other species in fact tend to fall along and according to the kinds of things a given life form is able to do, with two prominent capacities being the ability to feel pain as well as the ability to form social and psychological bonds akin to those evident in persons.
[69] Ibid., 28.

made by God, but also to varying extents image God. Adams writes, "[E]xcellences will consist in resembling or imaging God, but in different ways or in different respects."[70] Along this line, he maintains that finite goods, such as those found in sports, music, the arts, morality, friendship, creation itself, among other things, provide "fragmentary glimpses…of a transcendently wonderful object." And when we experience them, "we are dimly aware of something too wonderful to be contained or carried either by our experience or by the physical or conceptual objects we are perceiving."[71] Being captivated and moved by a piece of music, whether playing it oneself or simply listening to it, is a common example of the kind of experience and sense of something transcendent that Adams has in mind. According to Adams, in these moments, our wonder, and the love that develops around such wonder, "reach[] out toward an objective standard [God's Goodness] that is actually glimpsed…[even if] never fully or infallibly."[72] For Adams, our perception and description of good things is a process, however faltering, of literally recognizing God.

In response to concerns that such a stance inaccurately grasps and fails to convey God's distinct otherness from creation, Adams stresses that there is no need for this worry to arise "if the imperfection of [a finite good's] resemblance [to God] is sufficiently stressed." Adams argues that the resemblance between a finite good and the infinite Good, between creation and creator, does not mean the created good thing is a "copy or duplicate" of God, so that God is just a larger more expansive version of the created thing. Adams notes Plato's point that a picture and a reflection do not copy but rather "image" whatever

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[70] Ibid., 41.

[71] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 13, 51.

[72] Ibid., 50, 81-82. "God is the standard of goodness, to which other good things must in some measure conform, but never perfectly conform." Ibid., 29. For instance, in the field of excellence that is morality, Adams contends that although people often disagree vociferously, "[T]here is enough overlap among the different received evaluative beliefs and practices for us to be talking about the same thing." Adams holds that despite our incapacity to fully perceive or comprehend God, "We must have been able, very often, to recognize the good and the right." Ibid., 364.

has been drawn or reflected. While the image shares some visual aspects with whatever it reflecting, it still remains radically distinct from that object. The resemblance or image consists of simply sharing certain, not all, properties, and sharing them in a very distant and fragmentary way. Along this line, Adams holds the properties in finite goods are analogous to, not identical with, those in God. For instance, Adams holds that being honest resembles God not because God "can be literally honest in all the ways we can" but because there is an analogous resemblance "in prizing truth, and caring more about reality than about appearance."[73]

Furthermore, Adams holds that not just any analogous property counts as resembling God, but there is rather a need for: (1) the image to be "faithful" to the Goodness in God, and (2) the image to be "important" in regards to its relevance to Goodness. So something's resemblance to God – and therefore excellence, intrinsic value – depends upon faithfully sharing an important property, or multiple properties, with God. Although he does not explain in detail how one could determine whether an image is faithful, Adams holds that the "faithfulness" of such a shared property occurs to the extent that the shared property fits in due, balanced proportion to other important properties of God. Adams lifts up this kind of balance in contrast to a parody or caricature in which the balance is off as one property is distorted far out of proportion to others. Adams offers the power that Hitler wielded as an example of a shared property that was not faithful resemblance of God's power but rather a caricature of it because it was not balanced alongside properties, presumably like compassion and justice.

Along this line, he maintains that the "importance" of a given shared property rests in there being not only some truth but also some value in that particular resemblance to the Good. In other words, it is not a largely pointless or arbitrary resemblance, such as a person's

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[73] Ibid., 30, 40.

resemblance to a squirrel if they happen to share the same number of hairs on their respective bodies or two people happening to share the fact that neither of them is President of the United States (Adams's examples). Similarly, with regards to God, Adams writes that three-leaf clover has no greater resemblance to God than a four-leaf clover, and a person would not be more like God if he believed he was God, because neither of these things is sufficiently important.[74]

Adams does not provide extensive criteria for determining what constitutes "importance," but he does tie it to a conception of God's favorable perspective and attitude. God's loving attitude and appreciation is invoked not as an explanation or basis for a thing being simultaneously (a) good and (b) an important resemblance of God. With Socrates' abiding question to Euthyphro of whether piety itself or simply the gods' love determines what counts as pious in the background, Adams holds the line that something is intrinsically good not because God loves it, but because its intrinsic goodness provides God with due reason for loving it.[75] Although this consideration of God's love does not seem to advance or clarify how again one might determine what is an important resemblance of God, Adams notes it to highlight the objectivity of intrinsic goodness, as well as the non-arbitrariness of God's choice and appreciation of it, because finite goodness "consists in resembling God in a way that could serve God as a reason for loving the thing."[76]

Adams also does not hold that there is something qualitatively identical in all excellent things, such that there is a quality God has that is shared by all excellent things. With the understanding that God's goodness infinitely exceeds the goodness of anything else, there is "nothing qualitatively identical" to God's goodness in anything else. Rather the thing that binds good things together as good is sharing a resemblance to God. Adams

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[74] Ibid., 32.
[75] Plato, *Euthyphro*, 10a.
[76] Ibid., 36.

writes, "All other good things are good by virtue of their relation to one supremely good thing, the central relation being a sort of resemblance or imaging."[77] The way a given finite good resembles God and ignites recognition of infinite Goodness varies. Adams also argues that the goodness of a finite thing is its resemblance to God. Adams maintains, "[T]hings are good by virtue of a relation to some one supreme Good, but the goodness is not something qualitatively identical in all of them. The supreme Good being vastly better than all the other goods, nothing qualitatively identical to its goodness is present in them; and once we have accepted that, we might as well agree that even the lesser goods differ from each other in the type, and perhaps the degree, of their goodness."[78]

It is critical to stress here that the thing that binds and unifies finite goods together – the shared property – is simply resembling God. Things are worthy of admiration and love *because* they resemble God. That resemblance itself occurs in connection to a variety of different properties of God, each of which might bear resemblance to different degrees. To say, "It's good," (in the technical sense of "excellence" and the "nature" of goodness that Adams lays out) is to say, "It resembles God in some way." Goodness is not its own distinct property of God; Goodness is God. It is the comprehensive inseparably interwoven properties of God: beauty, knowledge, power, justice, creativity, compassion, humility, mercy, kindness, life, peace, grace, care, righteous anger, patience, generosity, truth, wisdom, etc.[79] It is identification of the property of goodness as resemblance to God that simultaneously explains the plurality and the unity of finite goods. Finite goods respectively resemble different aspects of God, but yet remain all bound together in the fact of a resemblance to God. Goodness is resembling God in one fashion or another, to one extent or another.

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[77] Ibid., 40.
[78] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 39.
[79] See for instance, John 1, Genesis 1, Galatians 5, Philippians 2 & 4, 1 John 3:16-18, 1 John 4:1-12, the psalms.

B. How Can These Things Resemble God?

The conception of what unifies things as good, i.e., their respective resemblance to God, leaves a large question as to how one accounts for "differences between excellences, with only one transcendent object (God) to serve as a standard."[80] In other words, there appear to be extremely different kinds of goods, so how do they all resemble God? Although we commonly associate the word "excellence" with highly developed skills or dispositions, Adams has in mind a wider range of finite goods, one that includes not only such heightened capacities, but also a lot from everyday life, like healthily functioning bodies, catching up with a close friend, dawn's rosy fingers, or a delicious meal.[81] These finite intrinsic goods arise in fields as diverse as aesthetics, simple pleasures, morality, academics, athletics, and friendship, among others.

Adams does not try to provide a comprehensive list of excellences, because he thinks that excellences, in imaging infinite goodness, will always outstrip human understanding and attempts at categorization. Some have criticized Adams for vagueness on this point. For example, the philosopher Susan Wolf argues that this conception of goodness offers "little epistemological help in discovering what is good." Wolf writes, "[T]he idea that what is good is good because it resembles or images God is totally baffling if we are to understand the idea of resemblance or imaging literally. In what sense can a good meal, a good basketball game, a good performance of the Brandenburg Concerti, a field of wildflowers, the *Critique of Pure Reason* and my next door neighbor all resemble or image the same thing? How, in any event, can a good meal be said to image God?"[82] As David

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[80] Ibid., 40.

[81] See Robert Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 25. Also see *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 83, 147.

[82] Susan Wolf, "A World of Goods," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 64, No. 2 (March 2002), 472.

Decosimo points out, Wolf's criticism is twofold. First, what commonly binds different goods together as a unitary class of resemblances of God? This point entails skepticism regarding the commensurability of goods. Second, how could certain things, such as a good meal, be said to "resemble" God in any way whatsoever? This is a criticism of the coherence of saying certain things could even resemble God at all.[83]

In a written response to Wolf, Adams readily agrees it is often difficult to see the "kinship" between various forms of excellence, but also highlights that if this kinship is truly rooted in "an excellence so transcendent that it largely escapes our understanding, we should perhaps not be surprised if it is hard to understand that more momentous resemblance."[84] Overall, Adams is not claiming to have pinned down the criteria for discerning and delineating excellent things. He asserts that "the main theoretical 'work' that the conception of God as transcendent Good does in [his] view is not epistemological." He is simply positing their objective and transcendent existence, running with the widespread and intuitive perception that there are things of objective intrinsic worth in the world, i.e., they are not of value simply because we value them. Adams is building upon the common experience that there is something genuinely wonderful to existence and the goods therein, even if we do not know precisely what it is – something that reaches far beyond simply us, our feeling of wonder, and whatever finite thing has elicited our wonder.[85] Adams's response does not provide answers to Wolf's criticisms so much as clarify why, given human finitude, any such answers would be hard to discern and articulate if finite goods do resemble infinite Goodness.

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[83] David Decosimo, "Intrinsic Goodness and Contingency, Resemblance and Particularity: Two Criticisms of Robert Adams's Finite and Infinite Goods." *Studies in Christian Ethics* Vol. 25 Issue 4 (November 2012): 418-441.
[84] Robert Adams, "Responses," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 64, No. 2 (March 2002): 476.
[85] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 13, 51.

David Decosimo offers a different critique. He actually agrees it is "not so implausible" to imagine that finite things, "even…unlikely finite things," resemble God's infinite goodness, noting that some people presume at least some kind of resemblance is possible in the claim that humans are made in God's image. Decosimo, however, sharply criticizes the idea "that *every* instance of genuine excellence is an instance of resemblance to God."[86] Decosimo's resistance to this position is in part due to the way Adams defines resemblance as something that "could serve God as a reason for loving the thing."[87] As noted, Adams provides criteria that a shared property has to be sufficiently important and faithful (i.e., balanced, proportional alongside other properties of God) to count as a resemblance of God. Decosimo argues that this criteria not only lacks sufficient clarity to help determine what has intrinsic worth, but also "fails to account for much of the excellence in the universe and, indeed, much of the excellence that makes life worth living." The excellences Decosimo has in mind are the vast array of things not made by humans, i.e., "most of the planet: from Mont Blanc, coral snakes, wild orchids, and snow leopards to cave bears, California redwoods, and the Amazon river."[88]

Using the example of an "excellent strawberry," Decosimo tests whether the strawberry could count as resembling God and have intrinsic worth on Adams's account. He argues that it is not clear what it could mean for a strawberry to have intrinsic worth, given that whether it is eaten or enlisted in a food fight (Decosimo's examples), its excellence is determined by the end to which a person is putting it, whether taste and nutrition or strawberry splat upon food-fight opponents. Decosimo also notes that the criteria for excellence is different depending on the context and aims of the person with the strawberry. If it is to eat the strawberry, one wants it to be "plump, juicy, sweet, unblemished, bright red,

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[86] David Decosimo, "Intrinsic Goodness": 419.
[87] Adams, *Finite and Infinite*, 36.
[88] Decosimo, "Intrinsic Goodness": 425.

and neither too soft nor too firm." Conversely if one intends to hurl the strawberry at other people in a food fight, "a mushy, moldy strawberry" would be far more excellent to that end.[89]

Decosimo's key argument is that Adams's theory of value cannot account for and appreciate the particularities of finite goods. According to Decosimo, the idea of goodness as resemblance to God necessarily ignores and excludes from consideration the unique aspects of a given good that determine its particular excellence. Citing the example of an excellent strawberry again, Decosimo notes that the particular things that make it excellent as a strawberry, cannot be in any clear sense said to resemble God. Decosimo contends, "I see no way that redness or 'strawberry-shape' can meaningfully be said to resemble God on Adams's theory – which is what would have to be the case if the color or shape were to (be excellent itself or) help make the strawberry resemble God and therefore be excellent." Decosimo presses his critique further, "As it goes with strawberries, so it goes with countless finite goods. Indeed, the scope of this argument extends to virtually any finite good imaginable: a Richard Wilbur poem, the sound of cicada on a summer night, Venezuelan coffee, the tiny hand of a newborn baby, a '67 Ford Mustang, a Frank Ghery building, the smell of rain, bananas, etc…. [T]here is no sense in which any of these, *qua* particular features that they are, could resemble God. And so they cannot count as excellent or as constituting something as excellent."[90]

Decosimo notes that this is seemingly in an effort to keep the idea of resemblance from being silly, but in the process:

> Adams is led to the equally or even more untenable denial of the excellence of the particularities that are so central to making life beautiful. Precisely the features that Adams acknowledges could not possibly resemble God are often essential to some thing's being excellent (or even being the thing it is): the pink of the sunset or the

[89] Ibid., 425-426.
[90] Ibid., 435.

> salmon, the distinctive oakiness of the fire or cigar, the zebra's stripes or the dog's tail.[91]

Decosimo argues that by maintaining that excellence equates to resembling God, Adams evacuates excellent things of the very characteristics that make them excellent, flattening them into vague, uninteresting, and generic categories as Plato did millennia before. Hitting on what he takes to be the egregiousness of this error, Decosimo points out that those who appreciate the excellence of something, e.g., "a sommelier, filmmaker, basketball fan, woodworker, golfer, lover, or parent," are the ones who are acutely, keenly, and lovingly aware of the "rich diversity and individuality of goods that less-skilled lovers are prone to miss or conflate or reduce." He even notes that it would be odd to think of God, the ultimate lover of the Good on Adams's account, would be "like the greenest novice" unable to recognize and revel in such particularity.[92]

Yet in contending that excellence as resemblance to God cannot meaningfully cover many finite goods, Decosimo fails to appreciate that Adams's use of the word "excellence" is quite technical and specific to his framework. Decosimo's argument leans heavily upon defining "excellence" very differently than Adams does. Decosimo operates with the implicit definition of excellence as fitting to a particular end. For Decosimo, something excellent is either: 1) *excellent for* a specific being, in a way that they very same thing may not be excellent for another being; 2) *excellent for* a specific purpose; or 3) *excellent as* a specific type of thing or being. For instance, fertilizer is excellent for a tomato plant's nourishment in a way that it is not (at least not directly) for the nourishment of a human. That fertilizer is excellent for the purpose of growing delicious ripe tomatoes in a way that it is decidedly not excellent for an incalculable number of other human purposes. A specific pile of fertilizer can also be *excellent as* fertilizer, in the sense that it measures up to the standard of enriching nutrients

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[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 436.

characteristic of effective fertilizer (and arguably, made all the more *excellent* to the extent that it measures up *as* organic fertilizer that does not harmfully disrupt, but fits within, the surrounding ecology).

Decosimo thinks that it is not clear what intrinsic worth, "excellence" in Adams's terminology, is absent those purposes and ends. For Decosimo, things are "excellent *for*" certain ends or "excellent *as*" particular types of things or beings, and there is no coherent "excellence" in itself. He argues, "In both cases, my valuing of the strawberry is non-intrinsic in the vital sense that the ends that produce the scales of value that determine the judgments of excellence and determine which features constitute it as excellent are not the strawberry's but my own and depend on my varying purposes and interests."[93] Decosimo continues, "The excellence of the strawberry in either case is relative and context dependent, in such a way that the excellence cannot, on Adams's account, be truly – that is, intrinsically – *excellent*."[94]

Decosimo's criticism is especially important because it highlights a classic Aristotelian critique of Platonic lines of thought, namely that there is no such thing as goodness in itself, only things that are "good *for*" a certain species or objective. Good is relative and specific to a given being, and there is no absolute good that unifies the vast array of things that are "good for" distinct beings. In pointing out the lack of a coherent, and coalescing, idea of goodness, Aristotle notes that what is good for a person is different than what is good for a tree. And what is a good for a person in a certain situation is distinct from, and even not good, in another.[95] Decosimo similarly sees the only viable path forward for Adams's theory (that intrinsic value is resemblance to God) in adopting the idea that there are "life-forms" or species that it is intrinsically good for something to fulfill. According to Decosimo, the "life-form" concept offers an end or purpose (e.g., meeting the

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[93] Ibid., 426.
[94] Ibid., 428.
[95] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I.

standards of a healthy existence according to a being's life-form) that is intrinsic to the being and does not depend completely on human purposes.[96]

Yet this line of thought still leaves the question wide open as to why fulfilling that end of flourishing matters? While this line of thinking duly emphases the diversity of ways goodness manifests in creation, calling for a focus on simply what is "good for" people still presupposes some conception of "good." That "good" is again usually taken to be fulfilling the telos of one's species, yet this Aristotelian idea of excellence as fulfilling one's telos leaves two critical questions unanswered: First, why should anyone care about fulfilling that end? Why is it worthy of value? In a technical Aristotelian sense, a species can have an internally set end toward which it will grow (given the sufficiently nourishing conditions) and objects made by people can have ends or purposes for which they are crafted. These kinds of internally set ends offer a sense of a telos, but not necessarily any sense of why that telos matters in the slightest. Second, how to determine what that telos even is? For living beings, that telos tends to be again understood as "flourishing." Yet the more complex a life-form becomes, the harder it is to figure out what its flourishing entails. Although for an acorn things appear set on a fairly clear course to oak tree, it is not clear what that biologically set telos is for a person. It is much easier to define a healthy functioning end for a tree than a human.

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[96] Richard Kraut has a similar line of argument in *What Is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being*. He holds that any claim that something is "good" is "elliptical," in the sense that it presupposes some further context to explain what is meant by "good." Akin to Decosimo, for Kraut things and beings are either "good as" a certain type or "good for" someone or something else. Kraut argues that it is not "illuminating" to assert either that things are simply good in themselves or even that they are simply good for us. In rejecting the idea that there is any validity to things being good in themselves, he argues that "we can achieve some insight into what is good for us by tracing the development…of a human being over the course of a lifetime." Kraut holds that since "flourishing consists in the growth and development of the capacities of a living thing," it makes sense that this idea could be applied to humans as it readily is to plants and other animals. Richard Kraut, *What Is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 148, 202.

In *A Theory of Virtue,* Adams writes that recent ethical and academic interest in "flourishing," often as a translation for *eudaimonia* from Aristotle's works, bears with it a hope that perhaps there is a way of living and thriving that is as innate and natural to humans as flowering is to a healthy plant. Adams points out, though, that *eudaimonia*, which is notoriously difficult to translate, is at root a term more directly religious than botanical in origin and valence, given that it means "good spirit."[97] Although flourishing does convey the largely Aristotelian idea that every being has an innate biological *telos*, no one has yet been able to pin down a compellingly comprehensive articulation of this *telos* for humans rooted foremost in our physical and psychological makeup. The analogy of thriving people to blossoming plants is enticing, but does not seem to take into account the heightened complexity of people compared to plants.[98] As such, we could envision "flourishing" as being more closely tied to experiencing and enjoying glimpses of God, both now and evermore fully in the resurrection to come, than with reaching an innate biological potential that is circumscribed simply within this finite world. To build on Decosimo's example, from this perspective finite goods can have value that exists completely independently of humanity. Human value does not create the excellence of the strawberry. The goodness of the strawberry derives from God, and people are merely equipped with the capacity to appreciate and enjoy strawberries, as are to varying extents the other creatures that would readily devour them. Strawberries can be excellent for us, but not only us, because we among other creatures can taste and see the excellence that inheres in a strawberry.

Ultimately, Decosimo and Wolf do accurately press the point that Adams's criteria for resembling God are obscure and generally unhelpful in delineating what is excellent. Decosimo is also correct in that limiting intrinsic worth to resembling God by sharing some

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[97] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 49-52.
[98] Ibid.

important property in a faithful way cuts out from consideration a wide array of things people love, because it is not clear how those things could resemble God in important and faithful ways "that could serve God as a reason for loving the thing."[99] As noted above, Adams essentially concurs that this criteria of "importance" and "faithfulness" is vague, and that his theory of value as presented does not necessarily help delineate what counts as a finite resemblance of infinite goodness so much as offer a reason for why we love things, namely because they resemble God and as such are glimpses of infinite goodness. The next section argues from the scriptural affirmation that God made creation "very good" that Adams's criteria for excellence fail to appreciate that every aspect of creation resembles God in some capacity.

C. Extrinsic Finite Goods: All over God's Good Creation

As was examined in the previous section, Adams's criteria that something has to resemble God in "important" and "faithful" ways in order to be excellent are abstract and difficult to apply. While Adams's aim in his theory of the good was to widen the focus of what is worthy of praise and engagement from a theistic perspective (i.e., non-moral goods of everyday life in addition to things like worship of God and ethical care for neighbor),[100] the criteria of resemblance that he lays out place unclear and overly restrictive boundaries for what counts as a resemblance. When Adams names excellent goods, he generally highlights things like mathematics, philosophy, art, cooking, sports, and relationships, and more specifically things like a gourmet meal, a hearty breakfast, a funny movie, a beautiful flower, hawk's scream, hyena's laugh, and sunlight on leaves. Adams writes as well that by excellence he means "the type of goodness exemplified by the beauty of a sunset, a painting, or a

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[99] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 36.
[100] Supra, see pages 114-116.

mathematical proof, or by the greatness of a novel, the nobility of an unselfish deed, or the quality of an athletic or a philosophical performance."[101] In *A Theory of Virtue* Adams additionally warns against failing "to appreciate the excellence of much that is ordinary. " He writes, "Healthy life, human or animal vitality, is a marvel and an excellence. So are simple pleasures. So is sincere love and friendship, however unambitious."[102] Adams even gestures toward the possibility that "an ideal religious consciousness would be able to enjoy God in even the humblest goods," but ultimately claims that "I would not want my argument to rest heavily on that claim."[103]

It is not clear, though, why not. Because is it precisely this point – that all of creation, down to the smallest most apparently insignificant aspect, bears the wondrous glory of the creator if we would but pay attention and appreciate it – that is the most important contribution a theistic account of the Good can articulate for the field of theological ethics, which routinely overlooks and fails to emphasize and incorporate non-moral goods into its ethical and theological analysis. If creation is "good," in fact "very good," and if in this goodness it resembles God's infinite goodness, then that resemblance is far more pervasive and plural than Adams formally gives it credit for being (while the examples he gives of excellence tend to be very plural and far-ranging, he as noted seeks to establish a circumscribed set of goods that count as excellent). Creation, from the cosmic to the sub-atomic and from the societal to the ecological, is wondrous.

Adams's criteria for excellence of "importance" and "faithfulness" cut against the basic affirmation that creation is good, that it is worthy of admiration and love as a finite manifestation of infinite goodness. From this perspective, even if it remains mysterious precisely what the resemblance to God is in a given finite good, the fundamental point is

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[101] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 83. See Ibid., 28, 30, 32, 52, 181, 188, 193, 195.
[102] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 25.
[103] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 195.

that there is *something* infinitely good that is imaged and seen in finite goods - a sense one can get when holding a newborn infant, biting into a ripe sun-warmed tomato fresh off the vine, reading a compelling story, playing a song that courses through one's bones, losing track of the evening amidst conversation with friends.

Along this front, one linguistic alteration in Adams's framework that can help highlight this pervasiveness of goodness throughout creation and the fact that its goodness stems from resemblance to God, is labeling finite goods as having extrinsic value, instead of intrinsic value. Adams's focus in *Finite and Infinite Goods* is on the way people value things as worthy of praise and admiration in themselves, and he holds that the good is an objective value, rooted in the metaphysical realm. The idea of intrinsic goodness is generally understood as meaning something that is good in itself, independently of relationship to other things, such as human value or some ulterior purpose,[104] but Adams does not hold excellence to be "intrinsic in the strongest possible sense, in which an intrinsic property of any thing must be completely independent of any relations to other things" and he admits that he does not have "a perfectly complete and adequate definition of the moderate sense [of intrinsic]."[105] Adams roots the value of finite goods that are intrinsically valuable in their relation to God, as resemblances of God, so even though Adams writes of things as good in themselves, his analysis and exploration of their value hinges on their being good given their relationship of resemblance to God. God is the primary and only intrinsic value.

In his article, "Extrinsic Value," Ben Bradley notes that "[m]any philosophers still consider the division of goods [between intrinsic and instrumental] to be exhaustive." The division is often taken for granted and quickly presented as the range of value: something either has value that is intrinsic, instrumental, or some combination of the two. Along this

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[104] See Shelly Kagan, "Rethinking Intrinsic Value" in *The Journal of Ethics* 2, No. 4 (1998): 278.
[105] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 24.

line, in her article, "Two Distinctions in Goodness," Christine Korsgaard argues that the terms instrumental and intrinsic are used in muddled ways that obscure a key distinction between the source of something's value - i.e., either value is *intrinsic* in itself or value is *extrinsic* from another source - and the way something is valued - i.e., instrumentally or as an end in itself.[106] In their dependence on infinite goodness, finite goods value is extrinsic, and it is more clarifying and accurate (to Adams's framework) to identify finite goods as extrinsic goods. They do not have value in themselves, but only as they relate to God.

Although he does not write of finite goods having extrinsic value, Adams essentially holds this very point when he argues the "God is the supreme Good, and the goodness of other things consists in a sort of resemblance to God."[107] In other words, Adams is placing the value of these goods not in themselves (despite the language he uses of valuing them for their own sakes) but due to their relationship to God, i.e., due to their of sharing some important property with God in a faithfully proportionate with other properties of God. Finite goods are as such extrinsic goods. Given that their value is rooted in God, there is literally nothing in or to the finite good by itself. The finite good would be literally no-thing absent having been created in relationship to God, the Creator. Recognizing and naming finite goods as extrinsically valuable keeps this reality in view. As such, that language of "extrinsic value" can help keep this dynamic more fully in view.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on the work of Adams to examine the question, "What is Goodness." Adams seeks to build a theistic framework for ethics on the idea, and the intuition, that God is goodness and finite goods offer glimpses of God. This framework for

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[106] Ben Bradley, "Extrinsic Value" *Philosophical Studies* 91 (1998): 109; Christine Korsgaard, "Two Distinctions in Goodness" *Philosophical Review* XCII No. 2 (April 1983), 170.
[107] Ibid., 7.

ethics of finite goods as resemblances of infinite goodness powerfully opens the opportunity to appreciate an array of finite goods, beyond morality alone, as theologically significant. This dissertation holds that human flourishing consists of glimpsing God's infinite goodness in those wondrous finite goods. Ultimately though, as has been analyzed, Adams fails to provide a clear and applicable account of what precisely counts as a finite good worthy of love, because the criteria he provides of a finite good needing to resemble God in an "important" and "faithful" way prove simultaneously too restrictive and abstract.

This chapter has argued for replacing those criteria with the affirmation that all of creation is good and as such resembles God in some capacity. This move addresses a problem in Adams's framework (confusion around determining a set of finite goods in creation that count as excellent) while broadening the opportunity conceptually and practically to appreciate the full range of finite goods that make up creation. It also shifts focus from trying to figure out what resembles God and what does not, to how people can come to appreciatively perceive the goods throughout creation, i.e., how to cultivate wonder in God's goodness manifest in the finite goods of creation, which include not simply objects and living beings but activities that engage them as well (e.g., not just a great work of literature in paper or digital copy, but the capability and opportunity to read and discuss it deeply with others). The following chapter examines the way in which Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow can be enlisted to help delineate and analyze what is entailed that perception of wonderful finite goods.

4. Flow: Experiencing Wondrous Goods

Introduction

The first chapter surveyed the patterns and practices of contemporary market consumption in the United States, and the second chapter analyzed how Christian ethics has rightly critiqued the harms to workers, consumers, and the environment in the current market system but to date only offered a limited, under-theorized vision for the role market consumption could or should play in human flourishing. The last chapter critically drew on the work of Robert Adams to begin constructing a theological framework for conceptualizing the connections between God and creation (infinite goodness and finite goods). It argued that human flourishing consists of glimpsing God's infinite goodness in the wondrous finite goods of creation, and as will be analyzed in the chapters to come, this dissertation maintains that market consumption has the theological purpose of facilitating, and in some instances partially constituting, wondrous activities in which people can witness resemblances of God's goodness.

This chapter considers the concept of "flow" as understood by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi[1] and how it can be enlisted to offer a more applicable language and detail regarding the experience of glimpsing God's infinite goodness in finite goods than Adams's account provides. The overarching question for the last chapter was "What is goodness," and the driving question for this chapter is, "How can we recognize glimpses of God in finite goods?" As coined by Csikszentmihalyi, the term "flow" stands for the experience of full absorption a person has when engaged in a mental and or physical activity well-suited but still challenging to her capabilities. Activities commonly conducive to flow include athletics, the arts, reading, music, community initiatives, and challenging work. Summarizing decades of research, Csikszentmihalyi notes that during flow people experience "a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like."[2] He describes this experience as a "state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter." A person frequently loses track of time during flow, as she performs the activity "for the sheer sake of doing it."[3]

As noted in the Introduction, this dissertation enlists the bridge concept of wonder to connect Adams's analysis of finite goods and Csikszentmihalyi's analysis of flow. "Wonder" is defined in this dissertation as *people's engaged response to finite goods, be they activities, objects, persons, or some combination thereof, and the glimpses of God they reveal.* This chapter argues that the concept of flow highlights key aspects involved in the experience wondrous activities, which afford glimpses of God's infinite goodness. This connection between "flow" and engaging finite goods as described in Adams is warranted for three reasons. First, the types of activities on which Csikszentmihalyi focuses overlap with the kinds of finite

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[1] Pronounced "cheeks-sent-me-high."
[2] Mihaly Csikszsentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 3.
[3] Ibid., 4.

goods Adams highlights as imaging God's goodness, for instance, athletics, academics, friendships, the arts, music, cooking, common projects, etc. Csikszentmihalyi writes that flow experiences "could be singing in a choir, programing a computer, dancing, playing bridge, reading a good book. Or if you love your job, as many people do, it could be when you are getting immersed in a complicated surgical operation or a close business deal. Or this complete immersion in the activity may occur in a social interaction, as when good friends talk with each other, or when a mother plays with her baby."[4] As noted in the last chapter, Adams similarly holds that experiencing finite goods includes "the type of goodness exemplified by the beauty of a sunset, a painting, or a mathematical proof, or by the greatness of a novel, the nobility of an unselfish deed, or the quality of an athletic or a philosophical performance." He notes as well that in addition to persons, other fitting objects of love are "particular animals, plants, and other natural objects; species and other natural kinds; arts and sciences (mathematics or philosophy, for example), and particular artistic creations."[5]

Second, for both Adams and Csikszentmihalyi, the finite goods engaged are ones that people find worthwhile and enjoyable to do as ends in themselves. Csikszentmihalyi highlights that people repeatedly state that "the sense of effortless action they feel" in moments of flow "stand out as the best in their lives."[6] Adams holds that engaging finite goods entails experiencing "something too wonderful to be contained or carried either by our experiences or by the physical or conceptual objects we are perceiving."[7] Third, these activities and things in which people become deeply and dispositionally immersed are part of

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[4] Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 29.
[5] Ibid., 83, 147.
[6] "Best" here is left undefined, but presumably in the vein of SWB analysis, best here means people are reporting the highest levels of satisfaction with these kinds of moments.
[7] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 50-51.

everyday ordinary lives, and as such highlight the nonmoral goods that are often overlooked in Christian ethics. Fourth, the work of Adams and Csikszentmihalyi complement one another. Csikszentmihalyi's work details the aspects of being immersed in a wondrous activity, and as such offers a useful tool for fleshing out in Adams's theological framework what it looks like when a person engages a finite good that resembles infinite goodness. Adams's work offers a rich theological explanation of why flow happens in the first place, i.e. humans glimpsing God's wondrous goodness in and through the finite goods of creation. As Adams's analysis focuses primarily on the goods (objects, people, activities, etc.) that people find wonderful, Csikszentmihalyi's analysis focuses primarily on the experience of such goods.

This chapter has three sections. The first section situates the concept of flow in the field of positive psychology and analyzes how the concept of flow affords a middle space between those who maintain happiness is determined by a person's subjective experience (hedonic view) and those who hold that it consists of meeting a set of objective standards (eudaimonic view). The second section examines the core elements to flow and the kinds of activity and personal dispositions that are conducive to flow. This section also draws on Tibor Scitovsky's work, *The Joyless Economy*, to highlight the importance of active consumption that develops people's skills and capabilities. The third section identifies the particular importance of attention and perception to flow and Csikszentmihalyi's claim that it is possible to be trained to find flow no matter the circumstance. When this concept (whether possible or not) is combined with an understanding of creation as good and every aspect of creation resembling God to some extent, it takes on additional importance as a key capability for glimpsing God's goodness in finite goods.

This chapter closes, however, by arguing that flow is very susceptible to idolatry, precisely because they are finite glimpses of infinite goodness. Flow alone is insufficient for

full appreciation of the finite good in relation to God and neighbor, because people can love flow states in a way that prevents them "from caring about other instances or types of good." As Adams notes, idolatry occurs when "love for a finite good has ceased to form part of the love for the good or for God and begun to compete with it."[8] The ethical boundaries and direction that check such idolatry will be engaged in chapter five's analysis of the Capabilities Approach to Human Development.

Happiness and Well-Being in Positive Psychology

According to behavioral psychology, prominent during the early-to-mid 20th century, people act in order to receive rewards that are external to the action they are performing. As he worked on his doctorate in the 1970s, Csikszentmihalyi noticed that this explanation for behavior did not seem to apply to the painters he was engaging in his research. They seemed to give little interest in basking in a finished artwork, desiring to show it to others, or even hoping to sell it. Yet they were simply eager upon finishing one painting to start a new one, and frequently for long stretches of time they would slip into an "almost trancelike state" amidst painting, with little regard for stopping to rest, eat, or even move around.[9] This observation ultimately led Csikszentmihalyi to the broader realization that "there were hundreds of activities that people did simply for the sake of doing the activity, without expecting any external rewards for it."[10]

For much of the 20th century, psychology concentrated upon better understanding and relieving human pathologies, heavily emphasizing the negative aspects of human life rather than studying the kind of joyful absorption Csikszentmihalyi witnessed. Even

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[8] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 200-202.
[9] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play* 25th anniversary edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), xv.
[10] Ibid.

behavioral psychology, which focused on measuring and predicting actions in response to external conditions and stimuli rather than analysis of mental states, was aimed at alleviating common mental illness. Martin Seligman, famous for his study of the connection between depression, poor health, and passivity that stem from a sense of helplessness,[11] holds that while great strides have been made in addressing what makes people miserable, it has come at the expense of extensive research into understanding what makes life "worth living."[12] Seligman notes that a disease-focused therapeutic model of psychology has dominated the field, especially following World War II for a variety of funding and institutional reasons.[13]

In the late 1990s Seligman, alongside Csikszentmihalyi and others, launched new emphasis and support for research into positive psychology that focused upon the emotions, virtues, character traits, institutions, and communities that constitute human flourishing. Although psychologists like Edward Diener and Barbara Frederickson had been working on positive aspects of life for many years, Seligman's push came as part of a broader recognition in the field of psychology that thriving is not simply the absence of illness, and "even if [society] could treat all known cases of mental illness and prevent the onset of any new cases, there is no reason to believe that this would result in more mentally healthy

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[11] Seligman's prime finding was that helplessness can be learned or conditioned and that this sense of helplessness, whether accurate or not, and lack of control to affect outcomes plays a critical role in depression, and can even lead to premature death. However, it can also be unlearned through action that successfully achieves a desired result. See Martin Seligman, *Helplessness: On depression, development, and death* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1975).

[12] Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (New York: Free Press, 2002), ix.

[13] In 1965 Abraham Maslow did call for a similar emphasis, arguing, "[P]sychology ought to become more positive and less negative. It should have higher ceilings, and not be afraid of the loftier possibilities of the human being." However, despite Maslow's work on "peak experiences," broad research on the "loftier possibilities" of humans did not take hold in psychology for decades to come. Abraham Maslow, "A philosophy of psychology: The need for a mature science of human nature," in *Humanistic Viewpoints in Psychology: A Book of Readings*, ed. Frank Severin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 27.

people in the population; it does result in fewer mentally unhealthy people in the population."[14]

Positive psychology has two primary camps with regard to human well-being, which echo divisions in philosophy as far back as the ancient Greeks. In their essay, "On Happiness and Human Potentials," Richard Ryan and Edward Deci classify the two groups as hedonism and eudaimonism. The hedonic perspective locates human well-being in the feeling of happiness or satisfaction, while the eudaimonic view locates human well-being in the fulfillment of human potential. While there is overlap, each places very different emphasis on what matters most: hedonism stresses how you feel, while eudaimonism stresses what you do. Some within the hedonic view have understood human well-being as being primarily about securing physical pleasure and avoiding physical pain, but others have expanded that scope to include the satisfaction of appetites and self-interest, broadly construed. Those holding the hedonic view in psychology tend to have this broader perspective that preference satisfaction is what constitutes human well-being. This state of satisfaction, where there is a relatively small gap between what you desire to happen and what actually happens, has been labeled "Subjective Well-Being" (SWB).[15]

The 1999 volume edited by Daniel Kahneman and others, *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, laid out major themes and research regarding SWB. It includes three aspects: "life satisfaction, the presence of positive mood, and the absence of negative mood, together often summarized as happiness."[16] SWB research leans heavily upon people's self-

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[14] Corey Keyes and Jonathan Haidt, "Introduction: Human Flourishing – The Study of that which Makes Life Worthwhile," in *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived*, ed. Corey Keyes and Jonathan Haidt (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2003), 11. See Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive psychology: an introduction" *The American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 5–14.

[15] Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being" *Annual Review Psychology* 52, no. 1 (2001): 144.

[16] Daniel Kahneman, *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999).

assessment of their own lives, and seeks to avoid a kind of paternalism and elitism that can attend prescribing for people what constitutes their well-being. In the commentary "Subjective Well-Being Is Essential to Well-Being," Edward Diener et al. argue that SWB highlights "people's values, emotions, and evaluations, and does not grant complete hegemony to the external judgments of behavioral experts."[17] Similarly, in her book, *The How of Happiness*, Sonja Lyubomirsky affirms, "happiness is inherently subjective and must be defined from the perspective of the person. No one but you knows or should tell you how happy you truly are."[18] Rooted in university environments deeply committed to the idea and ideal of individual autonomy, the field of psychology heavily emphasizes subjective evaluation to determine conceptions and measurements of well-being.

In this regard, SWB studies resonate strongly with the kind of respect and room for personal decision that also arises in the Capabilities Approach to Human Development, which stresses the need for every person to have the chance to "form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life."[19] The idea that a person should be able to plan her own life goals and activities harmonizes with the idea that she should be the judge as to whether she is happy. Nevertheless, as will be examined in chapter five, Martha Nussbaum created a universal list of core human capabilities (albeit one ever-open to reasoned critique and revision) precisely because a person's evaluation of his own life is susceptible to being distorted by things like cultural assumptions, familial expectations, or a dearth of opportunity to develop certain capabilities. These distortions

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[17] See Ed Diener, Jeffery Sapyta, and Eunkook Suh, "Subjective well-being is essential to well-being" *Psychological Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (1998): 33.
[18] Sonja Lyubomirsky, *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2007), 32.
[19] Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 33-34.

can prevent a person from actually experiencing and appreciating the full range of human capabilities, e.g. learning to read and write, unlocking the flow therein.[20]

Such limitations raise the question of whether we can rely upon self-reports to accurately reflect a person's well-being. Philosophers and religious leaders across time and societies have often argued that people are extraordinarily poor judges of their own well-being. Self-evaluation of personal satisfaction as the key criteria of human flourishing, over and above a person's activities or virtue for instance, has been viewed as a misunderstanding of the good life. This line of thought has arisen within the field of psychology as well. Carol Ryff's call for measurement of psychological well-being and Richard Ryan and Edward Deci's self-determination theory both focus on human functionings and not primarily on self-reported satisfaction of desire. These are examples of more eudaimonic approaches to human flourishing.[21]

One prime mistake against which both hedonic and eudaimonic views of human well-being is the common perception that happiness is equivalent to cheerfulness, or some similar smiling affect. The first problem with this perspective is that there are far more positive emotions at play in a person's life than simply cheerfulness. Barbara Frederickson has identified an array of positive emotions, including joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, and awe. Frederickson's studies have demonstrated how positive emotions "broaden" people's horizons of attention and thought, enabling creativity, and also "build" people's capacity to handle adversity. This "broaden-and-build" aspect to positive emotions comes in contrast to the effect of negative emotions like fear or anger,

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[20] See Robert Biswas-Diener and Ed Diener, "Making the best of a bad situation: Satisfaction in the slums of Calcutta" *Social Indicators Research* 55, no. 3 (2001): 329-352.

[21] See Carol Ryff, "Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57, no. 6 (1989): 1069–81; Carol Ryff and Burton Singer, "Know thyself and become what you are: An eudaemonic approach to psychological well-being" *Journal of Happiness Studies* 9, no. 1 (2008): 13–39; and Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, "Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being" *The American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 68–78.

which tend to narrow a person's focus on the source of fear or anger and generate a comparatively limited set of action responses.[22]

A second problem with viewing happiness as cheerfulness is that it only takes into account a person's subjective state. Issues with this kind of exclusive focus are raised in Robert Nozick's widely cited example of an experience machine that could give anyone hooked up to it whatever kind of happy life he or she requested. Although the machine would be so expertly designed that the person would not be able to tell this happy life is virtual reality once immersed in it, Nozick maintains that most people would not want to hook up to it because something presumably would be missing from this pursuit of a perfectly happy subjective state.[23] To begin, there is an issue of having concern for anyone beyond oneself and their well-being outside your dream state. But there is also the reality that activity is neither an incidental supplement nor mere avenue to experience, but matters itself. Even in the example, people are not simply having a pleasure center in their brain stimulated, but rather engaging in activities, albeit virtually.

Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow emphasizes the intrinsic importance of activity to enjoyment, and serves as a link between hedonic and eudaimonic approaches. While Csikszentmihalyi's research leans heavily upon measurements of self-reported satisfaction, he also stresses that this satisfaction occurs only in the midst of certain activities. On Csikszentmihalyi's account, satisfaction is inseparable from activity that a person undertakes as an end in itself. Satisfaction is also importantly only something that a person feels or expresses when not in a flow state. During the activity, she is not evaluating her subjective well-being in that way. As such, satisfaction comes in times of reflection or self-consciousness either after the activity ends or during momentary breaks in one's focus

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[22] Barbara Frederickson, "The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions" *American Psychologist* 56, no. 3 (2001): 218-226.
[23] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 42–45.

during the activity. As will be examined in the following section, flow plays a critical, robust role in people's conception and experience of well-being. It is not simply a rare thrill, but the root from which people's deepest sense of worth and value grows. The next section examines the elements and common activities involved in experiences of flow.

Elements and Activities of Flow

Csikszentmihalyi's original study from which he coined the term "flow" centered on people performing skilled activities that they intrinsically enjoyed doing, not to receive rewards but simply for the sake of the activity itself. As Csikszentmihalyi explained, participants were "deeply involved in activities which required much time, effort, and skill yet produced little or no financial or status compensation," and the activities thus selected were rock climbing, composing, dancing, chess, and basketball.[24] Csikszentmihalyi was researching: "What exactly makes some action patterns worth pursuing for their own sake, even without any rational compensation? If the reward is in the experience of doing the thing, what is this experience like, and is it the same in rock climbing and chess, in composing music and playing basketball?"[25]

Csikszentmihalyi received feedback from participants through questionnaires, interviews, and importantly the Experience Sampling Method (ESM), which Csikszentmihalyi created in order to get a closer view of people's experience in a given moment rather than simply in reflection. Through ESM he provided each participant with a pager and throughout the day he would page them randomly at some point within every two hour period. When paged the participants would record their status in a booklet, including contextual data of "where she is, what she is doing, what she is thinking about, who she is

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[24] Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play* 25th anniversary edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 179.
[25] Ibid., 181.

with," as well as subjective evaluation on a numerical scale of "how happy she is, how much she is concentrating, how strongly she is motivated, how high her self-esteem, and so on."[26]

Despite the differences between participants' respective activities, Csikszentmihalyi saw four core similarities between them. First, people consistently said that they experienced a "sense of discovery, exploration, problem solution – in other words, a feeling of novelty and challenge." Those challenges were either of discovery or of competition. Every person was "exploring the limits of their abilities and trying to expand them." Csikszentmihalyi noted that this entails a kind of transcendence, "a going beyond the known, a stretching of one's self toward new dimensions of skill and competence."[27] These experiences required active, skilled participation, whether physical, mental, or both. Second, these activities entailed a well-suited match between a person's skills and the difficulty of the activity, in which the activity was hard to do but did not overwhelm a person's skill level. According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow stops when a challenge becomes so difficult that people become anxious about failure or their inadequacy to the task at hand. Conversely, if a person's skills are more advanced than the challenge before him, boredom quickly sets in as he grows disinterested in the activity. The third similarity between activities of flow was that each one offered "coherent, noncontradictory demands for action and…clear, unambiguous feedback to a person's actions." In other words, the activities had clearly established goals and the people undertaking them received regular feedback about how they were faring in regards to those goals (e.g., there was a clear scoreboard).[28] Fourth, when doing the activity, each person had sharp concentration exclusively on the task at hand, and in this attentive focus,

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[26] Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 15.
[27] Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, 30, 33.
[28] In flow state that feedback does not entail or spark critical self-reflection or evaluation, but rather "action and reaction have become so well practiced as to be automatic." The feedback is part of the movement of the activity rather that fodder for thought external to the goals and aims of the activity. Ibid., 46.

"action and awareness merge in a seamless wave of energy."[29] Along this line, when in flow people are not self-consciously reflective about themselves, but rather homed in on carrying out whatever physical or mental movements the activity entails. Csikszentmihalyi describes attention as the capacity to "process information" and "direct action," and in flow attention shifts away from distractions (such as what others are thinking about you, anxiety about failure or underperforming, as well as distractions of other varieties).[30] As Csikszentmihalyi puts it, "A person in flow has no dualistic perspective: he is aware of his actions but not of the awareness itself." On this front, one of the rock climbers in Csikszentmihalyi's study noted, "You are so involved in what you are doing [that] you aren't thinking of yourself as separate from the immediate activity…. You don't see yourself as separate from what you are doing."[31]

In these states, people sometimes also feel as though time slows down as they experience heightened clarity of focus on the activity. In other instances, people lose track of time, beyond any timekeeping requisite within the activity itself. Csikszentmihalyi elected to call this experience "flow" because people in the study regularly used "the analogy of being carried away by an outside force, of moving effortlessly with a current of energy, at the moments of highest enjoyment" to describe their own experience when doing an activity that they deeply enjoy.[32]

In explaining flow, Csikszentmihalyi also draws a sharp contrast between "pleasure" and "enjoyment." He associates pleasure with two drives. The first is the biological drive for

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[29] Csikszentmihalyi points out that human brains can only "process a small bit of information at a given time," meaning people can only pay attention to one thing at a time. Consequently attention moves serially from one focus to another. A flow state entails not being easily distracted, as we tend to be when bored or anxious. When attention momentarily breaks engagement with the challenge at hand in a flow activity, it usually gets back on track quickly, in large part because of the narrowing of one's attention "on a limited stimulus field." Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, 40, 47.

[30] Ibid., 76.

[31] Ibid., 38-40.

[32] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Good Business: Leadership, Flow, and the Making of Meaning* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 39, 36.

things like food, rest, sleep, water, and sex. Pleasure comes as those needs, along with any discomfort in lacking them, are met. The second is "social conditioning" to want certain things, whether material possessions, money, popularity, or prestige.[33] These things are pleasing because they meet social expectations and other people's approving gaze. As the first chapter analyzed, contemporary market consumption is filled with consumer goods and services aimed at passive comforts as well as the passive pleasure of social approval. Some market consumption is simply not geared toward facilitating experiences of flow because it does neither challenges nor develops people's capabilities.

Csikszentmihalyi describes pleasure as primarily a passive and receptive experience. He writes that pleasure is "a conservative force, one that makes us want to satisfy existing needs, to achieve an equilibrium, comfort, and relaxation."[34] Although skill and effort are at times needed to attain pleasing things, pleasure itself does not demand skill or effort. And it is welcomingly experienced if a person does not need to use skill to get the pleasing object or activity. Unlike enjoyment according to Csikszentmihalyi, pleasure can be readily disconnected from skilled activities. Sitting in a hammock, surfing YouTube or Netflix, or receiving a massage are examples of pleasure. Although someone might have to earn a paycheck to afford them absent independent wealth or support, he would and could take pleasure in them without that prior activity. Taking drugs, drinking alcohol, or looking at pornography are also examples of activities aimed at passive pleasure, though these are often undertaken largely as distractions and escapes driven by anxiety or pain, which particularly with drugs grows proportionally as a person's body adapts and begins to depend on the drug for normal bodily functioning.[35]

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[33] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 45.
[34] Csikszentmihalyi, *Good Business*, 37.
[35] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 169-170.

In discussing pleasure, the primary distinction Csikszentmihalyi seeks to make is between simple, unskilled, passive, un-developing experiences that people value as ends versus complex, skilled, challenging, developing experiences that people self-report to value as ends far more. Csikszentmihalyi does not hold that pleasure is something negative or to be avoided, but rather that it is simply distinct from enjoyment, and can crowd out and undercut enjoyment if one spends so much time seeking or resting in pleasure that one does not exercise or develop one's skills. The core difference between enjoyment and pleasure is again that pleasure alone does not allow room for development. Eating a bag of potato chips and resting on a couch has a narrowly fixed range of pleasure that it can provide, both quantitatively in terms of time and qualitatively in terms of pleasure, as one's stomach eventually becomes full and one's legs ready to get up. Furthermore, the minimal abilities needed to eat potato chips and sit up do not grow or develop through eating or sitting more. There is no potential with sitting and munching chips for increasing complexity that challenges and develops a person's skills to new levels of proficiency.[36]

In his classic, *The Joyless Economy*, economist Tibor Scitovsky made similar points regarding the critical difference between skilled versus unskilled consumption. Scitovsky argued that passive consumption, which requires little or no skill, has a low ceiling of enjoyment but as such is widely accessible to a broad array of the consuming public for whom businesses tend to develop goods that require little skill because they can reap

[36] This point is not to make light of comfort food and comfort activities. It is simply to state that they have extremely limited capacity as enjoyable activities in themselves. That said, as will be discussed, a master of flow could conceivably enter a flow state around them using her imagination to create some flow related structure to the activity of sitting or eating, or undertaking meditative appreciative focus on a particular chip but in those cases the primary focus would have shifted from taste and sedentary pleasure to something else.

economies of scale.[37] The distinction that Csikszentmihalyi makes between "pleasure" and "enjoyment" roughly parallels one Scitovsky makes between "comfort" and "pleasure," with comfort being a steady rate of stimulation from passive, unskilled market consumption and pleasure coming from novelty and increases in stimulation from active, skilled market consumption. Scitovsky holds that comfort and pleasure are mutually exclusive, in the way that maintaining a set speed versus accelerating to a new one are exclusive of each other.[38] For ease sake, and given that Scitovsky also occasionally uses enjoyment to describe skilled consumption, this section will map Scitovsky's skilled versus unskilled consumption onto Csikszentmihalyi's distinction between "pleasure" and "enjoyment."

Csikszentmihalyi maintains that "The best moments [in life] usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile."[39] According to Csikszsentmihalyi, in the midst of these activities, "Enjoyment appears at the boundary between boredom and anxiety, when the challenges are most balanced with the person's capacity to act."[40] In research since his original study, Csikszentmihalyi has discovered that this kind of flow is widespread across human activities that "have rules that require the learning of skills…set up goals…provide feedback…make control possible."[41] Physical activity, especially within the goals and rules of an official sport, provides a core field for flow, but Csikszentmihalyi argues further that:

> Even the simplest physical act becomes enjoyable when it is transformed so as to produce flow. The essential steps in this process are: (a) to set an overall goal, and as many subgoals as are realistically feasible; (b) to find ways of measuring progress in

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[37] Scitovsky writes, "To render production cheap, the seller must extend his market; he can best do this by catering to desires everybody shares. These desires - beyond that for the essentials of life - consist in the primitive, unsophisticated desires, or variants of desires, which the most simple-minded segment of the consuming public shares with the rest." Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 9, 234.
[38] Ibid., 72.
[39] Ibid., 3.
[40] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 72, 52.
[41] Ibid., 97

> terms of the goals chosen; (c) to keep concentrating on what one is doing, and to keep making finer and finer distinctions in the challenges involved in the activity; (d) to develop the skills necessary to interact with the opportunities available; and (e) to keep raising the stakes if the activity becomes boring.[42]

Children racing around a playground are frequently in flow amidst impromptu games and goals to chase. Sports provide not only the challenge of performing excellently but also navigating, outpacing, and outthinking opponents. Although winning can become an external goal that unnerves and distracts from flow, competition in which players respect one another amid their jockeying pursuit of excellence can be extremely generative of flow. Running and walking harbor potential for flow, and Csikszentmihalyi holds that yoga and martial arts provide the greatest opportunity and challenge to gain skilled movement of the body.

Playing an instrument, making art, gardening, home renovation and maintenance, and making food likewise open chances to enjoyably develop and exercise skills. Many of these activities are not merely physical, but also deeply intertwined with mental effort and capability. Csikszentmihalyi notes that listening, seeing, and tasting can also all provide chances for flow. At a simple level, these senses provide primarily pleasure, but they each can be trained and formed to appreciate and distinguish differences in what is sensed. With sight, that skill clearly can arise in studying and understanding the intricacies of artwork, architecture, and artifact, in addition to being mesmerized by impressive athletic feats and competitions. Listening to music likewise begins passively with pleasure, but can deepen as a person pays more attention and develops capacities for "analogic" listening, "evoking feelings and images based on the patterns of sound," and "analytic" listening, evaluating the musical structure of a piece and performance of it.[43]

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, 1-34, 140-161.

Science, literature, philosophy, history, and the host of intellectual pursuits are replete with potential for generating flow. Reading is the most commonly reported flow state.[44] While having a fitting match between the complexity of what one is reading and one's skill level matters, the concentration, imagination, and vocabulary generally required for reading are highly conducive to flow, especially when they are being stretched and expanded. The greatest intellectual flow arises though as a person "pass[es] from the status of passive consumer to that of active producer."[45] That production looks different depending on the intellectual field one is tilling, but using the mind to craft words, stories, arguments, documents, experiments, presentations can produce powerful experiences of flow, whether they are done purely as ends in themselves or also as part of broader activities like learning, persuading, teaching, arguing, explaining, or inspiring others.

Scitovsky also stresses the importance of learning "music, pairing, literature, and history" because of the "large reservoir of novelty and years of enjoyment" they provide. He argues, "We must acquire the consumption skills that will give us access to society's accumulated sock of past novelty and so enable us to supplement at will and almost without limit the currently available flow of novelty as a source of stimulation."[46] Highlighting the importance of teaching people how to consume in these skilled ways, Scitovsky argues that

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[44] See Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 116-142.

[45] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 139.

[46] Scitovsky thought this was particularly important for people to do so that when they age and retire, they do not succumb as "unskilled consumers" to the "heartrending spectacle of elderly people trying desperately to keep themselves busy and amused but not knowing how to do so." Scitovsky's point here hits on the acute problem of boredom that comes once a person is no longer mobile, working, able to see friends, and or caring for a family, but has not got that storehouse of learning on which to draw to have interesting things to think about, read, watch, etc. This point resonates with ones that Adams makes about helplessness and being able to be for the good even in midst of illness and disability through, for instance, wondrous activities like reading, worship, prayer, conversation, etc. Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, 235; Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 224-228.

schools should teach not only "work skills with which to earn our living" but also "liberal arts" in order to "make life and people more interesting."[47]

It is worth noting that such learning and skilled tastes, particularly in the critic role of seeing, watching, listening, and tasting, can quickly derail and serve primarily as demarcation of class and status.[48] People's judgments and perceptions become more about setting oneself over and above others than any genuine appreciation. Although the two are not mutually exclusive, skilled consumption as a marker of class is the kind of "social conditioning" that Csikszentmihalyi classified as being more about the pleasure of social acceptance and esteem than enjoyment of the skilled activities for themselves - Scitovsky likewise labeled this the "comfort of belonging."[49] Csikszentmihalyi notes along this line that many parents undermine their children's capacity to enjoy activities, such as playing and listening to music, by aggressively pushing them to high levels of performance, which does not create flow if the child's focus is upon his parents' approval rather than enjoying the challenge of playing music.[50]

Status seeking also undermines the intrinsic value and flow that Csikszentmihalyi argues is present in relationships. With their unending complexity and unpredictability, relationships open a vast field for finding flow in building bonds of friendship as well as

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[47] A different angle on the purpose of liberal arts than the idea that it helps give students critical skills that can be productively employed in the marketplace. Though Scitovksy's aim here is also still more surface level than, for instance, Adams's (or Josef Pieper's) articulation of those wondrous cultural activities as finite glimpses of infinite goodness. Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, 300. See Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* trans. Gerald Malsbary (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1998).

[48] See for instance, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979); and Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[49] Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, 114-120.

[50] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 112. These points run parallel, if less philosophically rich, to those Alasdair MacIntyre makes regarding internal and external goods in *After Virtue*. For examination of that distinction in connection to market consumption, see David Cloutier, *The Vice of Luxury: Economic Excess in a Consumer Age* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 55-104; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

family according to Csikszentmihalyi. He maintains, "People are the most flexible, the most changeable aspect of the environment we have to deal with. The same person can make the mornings wonderful and the evening miserable. Because we depend so much on the affection and approval of others, we are extremely vulnerable to how we are treated by them."[51] The same aspects of enjoyment in other activities bear out in relationships as well. With regard to families, Csikszentmihalyi argues that they generate flow if family members are both "differentiated and integrated" with one another. Differentiation consists of "each person [being] encouraged to develop his or her unique traits, maximize personal skills, set individual goals," and integration entails caring about what happens to one another and offering support. Integration means celebrating joys and mourning losses together, and seeking to help one another. To the extent that friendship, political action, and community engagement are rooted in "common goals and common activities," they likewise afford profound sources of flow.[52]

Scitovsky likewise highlights the "art of conversation" in which people share stimulating exchange of ideas with each other. He argues that "our most enduring enjoyment comes from husbands, wives, children, and friends because their spontaneity, imagination, or knowledge constitute large inventories of novelty we can draw upon for a long time." People are one of the most important sources of enjoyment according Scitovsky because of the "infinite variety, unpredictability, and challenge of human contact" that spans the full range of human activities "discussion, argument, and gossip; making love and playing tennis; cooperation in any work or joint venture; social games and activities."[53] Along a similar line, Adams holds that people especially resemble God's infinite goodness, as do the myriad wondrous activities in which humans can engage with one another. Adams stresses that

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[51] Ibid., 166.
[52] Ibid., 180, 188.
[53] Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, 236, 58, 83.

"most of the excellences that are most important to us, and of whose value we are most confident, are excellences of persons or of qualities or actions or works or lives or stories of persons." Adams also argues that sharing in the enjoyment of finite goods with other people, be it a common project or a concert, in which you and the other person(s) are immersed in that wondrous activity together, is something that significantly amplifies the glimpses of God. It brings good of community into what otherwise would be a private experience. Adams maintains further that, "The good of human persons consists very largely…in enjoying the flourishing of common projects that are rightly valued for their own sake. The flourishing of such projects is related to the good of persons not merely as a means, but as a constituent. Indeed it is a large part of what is excellent in human life."[54]

In a similar vein, Csikszentmihalyi holds that successfully collaborating with coworkers, supervisors, clients, and colleagues also provides substantial opportunity for flow. Csikszentmihalyi broadly identifies work with what people need to do in order to earn enough resources to stay alive, and notes that work in industrial societies is frequently experienced as drudgery. He argues that this perception lies in the separation of work from consumption, and the accompanying view of work as important but boring while leisure as enjoyable but frivolous. From this point of view, leisure is largely a waste of time.[55] In many respects this view paints work with too broad of a brush, as it varies drastically depending on the hours, energy, complexity, challenge, and skill entailed, and whether the work is primarily mental or physical. Yet work is largely seen as productive but painful, while leisure is taken to be unproductive but pleasurable. That productivity is usually aimed at external rewards. In our contemporary economy, that reward is most broadly money, which is then

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[54] Adams has an expansive sense of "common projects" as largely cooperation amongst people to do something they value as an end in itself. These projects span human life, from work to play, to home life and friendships, and "make up an enormous part of the fabric of our lives." Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 42, 144, 192; Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 84-94.

[55] Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, 3.

enlisted to secure housing, food, transportation, clothing, various and sundry consumer objects and services. Those rewards could also be prestige, but often the prestige that comes with doing a lucrative job well enough to accumulate money and expensive possessions. There is a sense of honor in hard work, even if it is not wildly rewarding financially, but it is a quiet honor. Headlines and envy tend to follow well-paying promotions. He also roots this emphasis on money and status as part of a widespread "tacit belief that people are motivated only by external rewards or by the fear of punishment." He sees this assumption at play from childhood education through business management, and maintains that the first core problem with it is that "children and workers will learn, in time, that what they have to do is worthless in itself and that its only justification is the grade or paycheck they get at the end."[56] The second issue is that if people primarily find meaning in external rewards, which in contemporary society are accumulating material goods or status via said accumulation, it places a greater stress on environmental resources than they can endure.[57]

Csikszentmihalyi argues that a more helpful division in everyday life would not actually be between work and play, but between the experience of flow and the experience of boredom or anxiety. He maintains that this split between types of experiences is a more useful division because flow can occur during activities typically labeled work as well as those usually called play. Scitovsky too sees no necessary distinction in "work" versus "play" in terms of people's potential enjoyment or boredom. He writes, "The stimulus satisfaction of work is no different from the satisfaction we get from any other source of stimulation," and he sees physical work as akin to any physical exercise and mental labor as akin to any use of

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[56] Ibid.

[57] In terms of categories of harm noted in the first chapter, Csikszentmihalyi is highlighting concerns with physical harms to environment, and by extension humans, as well as dispositional harms to consumers and workers who are swept into empty feedback loops of indulging in escapist consumer excess to make up for frustration at work drudgery.

mental faculties in leisure.[58] Scitovsky and Csikszentmihalyi agree that boredom and anxiety can occur amid any aspect of life, and both point out the irony that Americans have been particularly ill-equipped at transforming leisure into active flow rather than simply passive pleasure. Csikszentmihalyi writes, "TV watching, the single most often pursued leisure activity in the United States today, leads to the flow condition very rarely. In fact, working people achieve the flow experience – deep concentration, high and balanced challenges and skills, a sense of control and satisfaction – about four times as often on their jobs, proportionally, as they do when they are watching television."[59] Csikszentmihalyi argues as well that by emphasizing the difference between flow and boredom or anxiety, society can more clearly focus on ensuring each person has opportunities to develop the skills requisite to reach her potential for flow.[60]

Along this line, Csikszentmihalyi generally pegs watching TV as a "passive leisure activity" that offers low challenge and demands little skill. In a 1981 study of 104 adult full-time workers in Chicago, Csikszentmihalyi and his colleague Robert Kubey found that respondents reported significantly lower levels of concentration, challenge, and skill alongside higher levels of passiveness, weakness, and drowsiness when watching television. Although respondents had comparable affective states when watching TV or reading, reading carried much higher reports of cognitive engagement as well as activity, strength, and alertness. It is not clear whether TV itself suppresses these capacities or that people generally choose to watch TV when they are already feeling tired and passive. Csikszentmihalyi noted that results of this study "suggest that television, in its present form,

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[58] Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy*, 91-93.
[59] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 83.
[60] Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, 185.

may frequently be chosen for the very reason that it *is* unchanging, relaxing, and relatively uninvolving."[61]

Nevertheless, Csikszentmihalyi and Kubey make a distinction in *Television and the Quality of Life* between to two ways of seeing and processing the world: recognition versus perception.[62] "Recognition" takes things in at a broad scanning glance that overlooks detail to simply slot what is seen into generic categories (e.g., tree, table, car, person, dog, book, hand, etc.). Recognition requires little energy and focus, and although it is useful for navigating daily rhythms of work, maintenance, and rest, "it leaves little or no permanent trace in consciousness, and does not contribute to its complexity." Conversely, "perception" pays attention to details, complexities, and nuances and plants them in a person's memory in ways that generate insights and creativity, as those details frequently spark ideas, connections, emotions, even aspirations.[63] He notes that having a rich memory cultivated through years of attentive perception is indispensable on this front, and like positive emotions analyzed by Barbara Frederickson, perception broadens people's horizons. Csikszentmihalyi and Kubey maintain that "a life spent in constant recognition becomes boring and meaningless," but

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[61] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Robert Kubey, "Television and the Rest of Life: A Systematic Comparison of Subjective Experience" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (1981): 326. In that case, television would simply be something that did not spark or demand deeper engagement. The respondents were full-time workers, so it is possible TV can be more engaging when not coming after a full day's work. Csikszentmihalyi also notes that video games and computer interface with TV afford far more opportunity for active engagement.

[62] Csikszentmihalyi and Kubey draw on the work of John Dewey to make this distinction. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Robert Kubey, *Television and the Quality of Life: How Viewing Shapes Everyday Experience* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc, 1990), 209-210. See John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1915), and John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Putnam, 1934).

[63] Csikszentmihalyi and Kubey, *Television and the Quality of Life*, 209-210.

perception "makes life challenging and enjoyable" and "is a precondition for the growth of consciousness."[64]

Along this line, and in distinction from Scitovsky who saw little promise of skill use of development in TV, Csikszentmihalyi and Kubey contend that even a TV show with poor production, acting, direction, plot, etc. can be examined accordingly, critiqued, and imaginatively reconstructed in ways that exercise and develop skill. They even highlight the importance of encouraging "critical viewing skills" and teaching them in schools so that children can grow up as more active and perceptive viewers. They maintain that everything from the content of programs, such as "elements of plot construction, foreshadowing, character development, and the conventional devices of drama and comedy," to things like production and advertising, alongside the economics and politics of television generally, could all vastly enhance time spent before glowing screens from mere pleasure to the flow of being "savvy media consumers."[65]

Csikszentmihalyi explains that, "Even though [people disposed to perception] have no greater attentional capacity than anyone else, they pay more attention to what happens around them, they notice more, and they are willing to invest more attention in things for their own sake without expecting an immediate return." He also notes that this kind of person, "needs few material possessions and little entertainment, comfort, power, or fame because so much of what he or she does is already rewarding. Because such persons experience flow in work, in family life, when interacting with people, when eating, and even

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[64] Ibid., 211. They describe perceiving a tree as follows: "As we walk down the street a tree suddenly jumps out of its anonymity and we see it as a unique shape covered in a rough bark that now looms in front of our eyes like a continent crisscrossed with an intricate web of valleys, canyons, and ravines. The moving branches encompass convoluted spaces filled with masses of green leaves, each on moving to its own rhythm yet bound to the motion of the rest, each one a distinct shape echoing shape of innumerable other leaves. And this 'tree,' [is] now a complex universe of forms, colors, movements, and sounds…" Ibid., 210.

[65] Csikszentmihalyi and Kubey, *Television and the Quality of Life*, 214-215.

when alone with nothing to do, they are less dependent on the external rewards that keep others motivated to go on with a life composed of dull and meaningless routines."[66]

An important distinction between active versus passive forms of market consumption is also illuminated by this capacity to find flow and the ways that passive consumption quickly can lead to boredom and restless seeking for consumer good after consumer good, whereas active consumption oriented toward flow leads to the need for greater challenges within a set type of market consumption. Csikszentmihalyi notes that even skilled activities become boring as one's capacity to perform them increases. For instance, a beginner book of piano music swiftly becomes uninteresting to play if a person practices diligently. Similarly, professionals whom Csikszentmihalyi has interviewed maintain that "[o]ne will quickly grow tired of any job if its challenges remain the same level."[67] On its face, these points directly contradict the idea that "*any* activity can produce flow" because latent challenges lie even within "mundane tasks."[68]

The idea of getting bored with a flow activity also makes it sound as though flow is susceptible to the "hedonic treadmill," a term and idea coined in 1971 by Philip Brickman and Donald Campbell. The basic idea behind the hedonic treadmill is that there is no long-term way to alter people's life-satisfaction. Because whether a person receives a windfall like winning the lottery or suffers a catastrophe like a severely disabling accident, she will ultimately return to a set level of happiness. The hedonic treadmill idea is based in adaptation level theory, which holds that people quickly adapt to new circumstances, whether they are harmful or beneficial, painful or pleasing. This adaptation occurs in part because people gain new expectations and "contrast" points. For instance, if a person gains a lot more wealth, instead of having in mind his prior poorer circumstance as a reference point

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[66] Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 123, 117.
[67] Csikszentmihalyi, *Good Business*, 64.
[68] Ibid., 46.

for how happy and satisfied he feels, he very swiftly starts to compare himself to other people with as much, or more, money and takes his cues for what is pleasing from other people and the array of things he can now afford. Adaptation also arises because as people tend to lose interest in things with which they have become familiar. As Scitovsky and Csikszentmihalyi both highlight, interest is tightly connected novelty and stimulation that would either be sought in something like a new consumer item in passive consumption (e.g., day dreaming about, shopping for, purchasing, and pretty quickly growing bored with a new piece of clothing) or a new challenge in active consumption (e.g., purchasing and learning a new song book or signing up to play in a band competition or concert).[69]

Yet there is a critical difference between the often overly fatalistic view of the hedonic treadmill (happiness of life satisfaction cannot be altered) and points made by Csikszentmihalyi that people can become bored with a given activity if they become skilled enough at it that it is no longer challenging – if they "adapt" to the challenge in a sense. The difference is twofold. First, activities conducive to flow have no clear, if any, ceiling to the challenges and complexity they can afford. In other words, unlike pleasure activities which have fixed and fairly low ceilings of increasing complexity, there is always another level of proficiency and difficulty in activities conducive to flow. Becoming bored simply means one is ready to move to the next level of complexity or to imagine ways to make the current level more difficult (for instance, trying to improvise harmony or shift key for a piece of beginner level sheet music). The second difference is related but distinct: in flow activities one is and can enlist perception, imagination, and creativity to generate new opportunities and ways of finding flow. In other words, it is a person's disposition that opens up endless avenues of

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[69] See Philip Brickman and Donald Campbell, "Hedonic relativism and planning the good society" in *Adaptation-level Theory: A Symposium* ed. Mortimer Appley (New York: Academic Press, 1971): 287-302; Philip Brickman, Dan Coates, and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, "Lottery Winners and Accident Victims: Is Happiness Relative?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 36, no. 8 (1978): 917-927.

flow. True to its name, the hedonic treadmill is best suited to describing how people adapt to pleasure activities and life circumstances, rather than flow activities.[70]

Many people find themselves upon the treadmill, and Csikszentmihalyi like Scitovsky does not think most people are very adept at using their leisure time in ways that will truly find enjoyable. He maintains that work is a bit easier to intentionally generate flow, if it is not innately of interest to a person, because it often has clear goals, feedback, and some degree of physical, mental, and or relational skill. As such, he thinks time away from work can actually be harder to enjoy and contends, "Having leisure at one's disposal does not improve the quality of life unless one knows how to use it effectively, and it is by no means something one learns automatically." Csikszentmihalyi continues, "[T]he average person is ill-equipped to be idle. Without goals and without others to interact with, most people begin to lose motivation and concentration."[71] According to self-reports, active leisure is far more enjoyable than passive leisure, such as playing basketball versus watching TV or practicing a hobby versus taking a nap. Nevertheless, it usually demands a bit more preparation and "initial investment of attention before it begins to be enjoyable." Passive leisure in contrast requires no such concentration. Csikszentmihalyi is quick to point out that passive leisure is not in itself a bad thing, but rather becomes a problem when it completely or predominantly crowds out active leisure.[72]

The above section has examined the elements that go into flow and the host of human activities in which people can and do find flow. The next section briefly overviews Csikszentmihalyi's argument that a person can be trained to find flow in any situation if his

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[70] For a constructive critique of the hedonic treadmill theory, namely that people's hedonic "set points" are not necessarily fixed but can adapt and change, see Ed Diener, Richard Lucas, and Christie Scollon, "Beyond the Hedonic Treadmill: Revising the Adaptation Theory of Well-Being" *American Psychologist* 61, no. 4 (2006): 305-314.
[71] Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 64-65.
[72] Ibid., 68.

attention and perception are sufficiently developed to do so. This concept of finely honed perception is something that carries over to the idea, at least in potential if not actually given sin here and now, to not only glimpse God in goods like music or art, but also in every single aspect of God's good creation. This idea will be revisited in the final chapter.

Flow No Matter What - Perception

Csikszentmihalyi argues that people who are highly trained in this form of perception can find flow in nearly any circumstances they face. Although these kinds of people readily gravitate toward physical and mental activities that are innately conducive to flow, such as sports, friendships, or academics, Csikszentmihalyi claims that people trained in sharp perception can spark and conjure flow. For instance, Csikszentmihalyi describes a woman who was imprisoned under Stalin but "kept her sanity by figuring out how she would make a bra out of materials at hand, playing chess against herself in her head, holding imaginary conversations in French, doing gymnastics, and memorizing poems she composed." Csikszentmihalyi argues, "When every aspiration is frustrated, a person still must seek a meaningful goal around which to organize the self. Then, even though that person is objectively a slave, subjectively he is free."[73]

Revealing a Stoic streak, albeit one anchored in attentiveness and imagination rather than virtue, Csikszentmihalyi argues that it is possible and important to build up one's capacity to enter flow states. He affirms, "Of all human talents, among the most precious

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[73] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 91-92. Csikszentmihalyi also stresses that flow is not a form of escapism, particularly in comparison to something like intoxicants. Drugs and alcohol in particular are different because they do not grow one's capabilities, but generally numb, crowd out, and stunt them. Depending on the severity of the intoxicant, they constitute an aggressive and harmful form of passive consumption, that undermine the possibility of enfacing in wondrous activities. Csikszentmihalyi describes finding flow in dire circumstances as "escape forward" rather than escapism, because it does develop and exercise one's capacities and allows a person to do things in dignified human ways, despite a context that could dehumanize her. Csikszentmihalyi, *Good Business*, 50.

ones is this ability to discern opportunities around oneself, when others do not. In a given situation, one person will say 'there is nothing to do,' whereas another will find dozens of things to do and enjoy. The individual who is truly engaged with the world – interested, curious, excited – is never at a loss for opportunities to experience flow."[74] According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow "depends on the ability to control what happens in consciousness moment by moment." And he contends, "Only direct control of experience, the ability to derive moment-by-moment enjoyment from everything we do, can overcome the obstacles to fulfillment."[75] After quoting Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, Csikszentmihalyi contends, "Since what we experience *is* reality, as far as we are concerned, we can transform reality to the extent that we influence what happens in consciousness and thus free ourselves from the threats and blandishments of the outside world."[76] According to Csikszentmihalyi, "*any* activity can produce flow, because hidden in even the most seemingly mundane tasks – working on the assembly line, talking to one's child, or washing dishes – are opportunities for using one's skills."[77]

Csikszentmihalyi also maintains that "develop[ing] the ability to find enjoyment and purpose regardless of external circumstances" demands a "drastic change in attitude about what is important and what is not." People tend to find societal rewards of acceptance, respect, power, and fame, which also tend to swirl around the amount of a person's material possessions and largely passive pleasure they afford, but the goal Csikszentmihalyi lays forth is to cultivate the capacity to seek "rewards that are under one's own powers" versus those at the whim of society.[78] Csikszentmihalyi argues that external circumstances are not reliable sources of enjoyment and that joy "does not depend on outside events, but, rather, on how

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[74] Csikszentmihalyi*, Good Business*, 46.
[75] Ibid., 8.
[76] Ibid., 20.
[77] Csikszentmihalyi, *Good Business*, 46.
[78] Ibid., 16, 19.

we interpret them."[79] According to Csikszentmihalyi, "People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives."[80]

Along this line, this perceptive disposition entails a curiosity in the world and activities in it, ranging anywhere from sports and fitness, to family and friends, to science and literature, to hobbies and pastimes, to politics and work. If there is an activity that she does not necessarily have the skills to undertake, she at the very least respects the value of the activity for those who undertake it. For instance, she might not deeply enjoy or seek out jazz, but she can respect those who do and take an interest in it should the opportunity arise. Adams notes a similar dynamic when describing how being for the Good does not necessarily mean one will be drawn to every single finite good, but rather in judging it as good one will recognize "a real possibility of being motivated by it, and an openness thereto." One respects it as a finite good and something that other people find wondrous, even if one is not personally taken in by it. He attributes that lack of appeal to human finitude, noting that "no human being can pursue all values," rather than a conviction that the activity is not good simply because one does not personally like it.[81] When applied to Adams framework, the attentive practices of flow (seeking to develop and challenge one's capabilities) entail an openness to the wide array of finite goods in creation.

Although flow might seem on its face like a gimmick, a self-help trick to distract one from boredom or suffering, the underlying, and at root deeply theological, point that comes to light given the immense wonder people experience in activities where they find flow is that human flourishing consists of developing and exercising those capacities to engage in

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[79] Ibid., 2.

[80] Ibid.

[81] On this front, Adams cites his view of golf, writing, "I have long believed that golf is a good sport for persons of my age and general situation in life, bringing with it the enjoyment of various excellences and other goods; but I have never had any interest in becoming a golfer. I recognize that an interest in golf could be an excellent thing, in view of the values to be realized in the sport, and that there is a justifying reason, for me too, to take up golf. But the game just doesn't appeal to me." Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 26.

wondrous activities - to wonder at the goodness of God as revealed on earth in the wondrous finite goods that image infinite goodness.[82] In many respects, the prospect of being able to find flow no matter the circumstance also connect with Adams's emphasis on the fact that much of our lives are carried out in a largely helpless state in terms of the ethical action or impact we could have on the kinds of social issues that receive most of the attention in Christian ethics, such as poverty or climate change, as well as more localized, everyday life issues, having a debilitating illness. In situations of severely circumscribed influence on the world, Adams stresses the importance of symbolically being for the good in ways that might resonate with the attentive, perceptive, wonder-seeking disposition Csikszentmihalyi commends.[83]

Conclusion

Csikszentmihalyi's research into flow began in the 1970s with rock climbers, chess players, dancers, composers, and basketball players who undertook their respective activities out of enjoyment rather than a desire for external rewards, such as praise, power, or money. Since the time, Csikszentmihalyi and others have compiled and analyzed self-reported data from participants across cultures as well as aspects of life, including work, games,

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[82] It is important to note that Csikszentmihalyi is coming at the concept of flow from a very different religious perspective than the theological views presented in this dissertation. Csikszentmihalyi is operating from a largely agnostic, if not atheist, perspective that the universe "was not designed with the comfort [as well as flow] of human beings in mind." The satisfaction people find in flow is largely an evolutionary fluke, and people's lives are often dominated by forces and circumstances beyond their control. The practices for generating flow for Csikszentmihalyi are a way to wrestle enjoyment out of life, in contrast to the perspective of Adams that engaging finite goods is about glimpsing the infinite goodness from which they came. For Csikszentmihalyi, value is subjectively manufactured by humans, even if it generally follows a fairly set group psychological facts such as people finding deep enjoyment in developing and exercising their capabilities. By contrast, for Adams, value is objectively discovered in creation and originates in God. The somewhat heroic, olympian call to proficiency in finding flow likely stems from this difference in perspective. From Csikszentmihalyi's perspective, there is no God seeking our well-being in wondrous activity, but simply our efforts to find flow amidst a largely hostile world. Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 6-7.

[83] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 224-228.

relationships, daily maintenance, social media, and even situations of extreme deprivation or oppression. Across all these people, activities that include certain key components, most notably the focused exercise and development of a skill or capability in overcoming a challenge, are what people repeatedly report to be the most enjoyable and inherently worthwhile things that they ever do. Although Csikszentmihalyi's analysis relies on subjective, hedonic self-reports about people's satisfaction and state of mind, it illuminates an objective, eudaimonic value that people repeatedly find in the development of their capabilities. As such, the concept of flow offers: 1) a sharp line for delineating between active and passive forms of consumption, dependent upon the extent to which a person's capabilities are being engaged during consumption; 2) the fact that people find active consumption to be vastly more wondrous that passive consumption; 3) emphasis, akin to that in Adams's work, on the array of everyday nonmoral goods that constitute active consumption and human flourishing (not in place of, but complement to, moral goods); and 4) an instructive blueprint for what is critical to spark wonder in a given activity for oneself or others, namely stoking a sense wonder in the activity via setting clear and challenging-but-achievable goals with clear, regular feedback on progress towards them.

During flow a person is sharply focused on an activity that challenges and stretches their capabilities. Such activities are far-ranging, including things like solving a math problem, reading a book, writing a paper, practicing a sport, playing in a game, growing food, running, having a conversation, creating art, listening to music, playing music, cooking a meal, being compassionately present with someone suffering a loss, teaching a class, taking a class, developing a computer program, playing one's roll on a team, designing or constructing a building, among countless others. These activities can be witnessing something wonderful (e.g. listening to music) or undertaking it oneself (e.g. playing an instrument). As such,

"activity" very broadly means exercising and developing one's mental and or physical capabilities.

The driving question behind Csikszentmihalyi's research into flow is to learn and articulate: "What does it actually *mean* to enjoy something?"[84] Csikszentmihalyi is seeking to offer a detailed structural description of why we find certain activities enjoyable. As such, joy is central to flow. Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as "the exhilarating sensation for being fully alive."[85] Flow activities fit in this frame, because they are driven by an abiding perception that an activity is worth doing and there is an importance in acting skillfully to rise to the challenge it brings. Along this line, Csikszentmihalyi maintains there is something unifying in flow that transcends activities. He argues, "The key finding is that the phenomenology of enjoyment is the same across all the different kinds of activity that for some people at some times prove deeply involving. The intense absorption feels the same, whether found in work or play, love or duty."[86]

The primary question for this chapter was "How can we recognize glimpses of God in finite goods?" And this chapter has argued that the elements involved in flow afford a richly detailed and instructive picture of engaging in wondrous activity. Glimpsing God entails absorption in activities that cultivate and challenge one's mental and or physical capabilities. In these moments, a person loses her sense of self beyond engagement in the activity, loses a sense of time outside the activity, is acutely attentive to the particularities of the activity before her, and eagerly undertakes the activity for itself time and again. Furthermore, at root the experience of flow is a form of attentiveness that, when bridged together with the theological framework from chapter three, suggests the ability (at least in

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[84] Csikszentmihalyi, *Good Business*, 38.
[85] Ibid., 37.
[86] Jeanne Nakamura and Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi, "The Construction of Meaning Through Vital Engagement," *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived* Ed. Corey Keyes and Jonathan Haidt (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2003), 91.

potential, if never fully pre-eschaton) to glimpse God's infinite goodness in any and every aspect of creation. The concept of flow also highlights the importance of people's capabilities for mental and physical activity in a way that connects powerfully the emphasis in the Capabilities Approach to Human Development that human flourishing is found in what people are able to do and to be.

Nevertheless, a gaping ethical hole exists with flow. By itself, flow completely lacks any moral focus or direction, as a person could conceivably enter flow states with indifference or even hostility toward the flourishing of others. Csikszentmihalyi even cites how wealthy Athenian citizens might have found enormous flow in philosophical or political activity, but they did so on the labor of slaves who toiled to ensure said citizens had a functioning and supplied household. Csikszentmihalyi similarly notes, "the elegant life-style of the Southern plantations in American [also] rested on the labor of imported slaves."[87] War and crime also offer many opportunities to develop skill, face challenges, and become completely wrapped up in the task at hand, which provides immediate feedback. Alternatively, an activity of flow, be it a career, a family, a hobby, could so absorb a person that he becomes indifferent to the well-being of others.

By itself, flow lacks clear ethical boundaries and direction, and it is very susceptible to idolatry due to the powerful and captivating glimpses of God afforded by flow-generating activities and the objects or people they entail. Consequently, people easily become numb to the broader web of finite goods in creation and God and seek flow in isolating and addictive in ways. People can also find flow in activities that either directly abuse others, such as communal oppression of a minority group, or unleash damaging unintended consequences and externalities, such as scientific research being commandeered to wage war or business operations resulting in ecological harm.

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[87] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 82.

Given the need for greater ethical clarity and direction, the dissertation turns in the fourth chapter to Martha Nussbaum's work on the Capabilities Approach to Human Development. This chapter builds upon the key questions from chapters three and four – "What is goodness?" and "How can we recognize glimpses of God in finite goods?" - and its primary question is, "How can we resist idolizing finite goods?" Nussbaum's insistence that every human being has dignity and that dignity entails the opportunity to develop and exercise core capabilities is necessary to pair with the idea of flow for it to be ethical. As Csikszentmihalyi writes: "The flow experience, like everything else, is not 'good' in an absolute sense. It is good only in that it has the potential to make life more rich, intense, and meaningful; it is good because it increases the strength and complexity of the self. But whether the consequence of any particular instance of flow is good in a larger sense needs to be discussed and evaluated in terms of more inclusive social criteria."[88]

The ten core human capabilities that Nussbaum lays out provide one of the most comprehensive, detailed lists of what is entitled in human flourishing, which will further develop and complement this dissertation's argument that human flourishing consists of cultivating people's capabilities for wondrous activity in community with each other - i.e., their capability to glimpse God's infinite goodness in finite goods. Nussbaum builds upon an Aristotelian intuition that flourishing revolves around people's capabilities, what they are able "to do and to be," more so than for instance what they are able to have or own. This list of capabilities provides clear ethical boundaries and direction for cultivating flow in wondrous activity, along with the market consumption entailed therein.

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[88] Ibid., 70.

5. Wondrous Goods for Everyone: Cultivating Human Capabilities

Introduction

This chapter examines Martha Nussbaum's list of core human capabilities, as well as the reasoning behind its development, in order to provide clear ethical boundaries and direction for the positive vision of human flourishing and market consumption that this dissertation is constructing. As a review, the theological framework for that vision came in chapter three. Building upon Robert Adams's theistic theory of value, chapter three argued that human flourishing consists of glimpsing God's infinite goodness in finite goods, and that this flourishing entails the cultivation of everyone's capabilities for wondrous activity in community with one another. Chapter four built upon Adams's framework with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's positive psychology concept of flow in order not only to gain more useful, instructive detail regarding the experience of those wondrous activities, but also to

begin analyzing the ways *active* market consumption develops people's capabilities, while *passive* market consumption does not.

Bringing the respective work of Adams and Csikszentmihalyi into conversation with Nussbaum's development of the Capabilities Approach to Human Development (CA) in this chapter is necessary for two reasons. First, the concept and practice of flow - even when couched within Adams's theistic framework - lacks a clear ethical direction, because people can engage in the pursuit of activities they enjoy with indifference and or hostility to their neighbors. From the perspective of Adams's theological framework, flow and any given finite goods it entails are very susceptible to being turned into idols because they offer such wonderful glimpses of God's infinite goodness. As such, those idolatrously enamored with a "finite object, or realm of objects" embrace it to such an exclusive degree that it prevents them "from caring about other instances or types of good."[1] Chapter three focused on the question "What is goodness?" and chapter four examined "How can we recognize glimpses of God in finite goods?" This chapter will focus on, "How can we resist idolizing finite goods?" The direction that the CA provides in response to this idolatry is an ethical call for any personal pursuit of wondrous goods in creation to be ordered and oriented in such a way that it not only does not violate other people's capabilities, but also actively helps cultivate other people's capabilities for wondrous activity as well.

This chapter breaks into three sections. The first surveys the origin of the CA as a response to utilitarian metrics for human well-being that focus on things like income, GDP, and preference-satisfaction. This section highlights difficulties in relating human flourishing and market consumption. In ways that overlap with Csikszentmihalyi's work, the CA stresses that flourishing is about people's capabilities. As Ingrid Robeyns notes in her theoretical

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[1] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 200-202. This understanding of idolatry will be discussed in later chapters regarding market consumption and flow, particularly the ways that people can idolize flow experiences.

overview of the CA: "The core characteristic of the capability approach is its focus on what people are effectively able to do and to be; that is, on their capabilities. This contrasts with philosophical approaches that concentrate on people's happiness or desire-fulfillment, or on income, expenditures, or consumption."[2]

The second section overviews the debate around whether it is legitimate to create a universal list of core human capabilities, an issue around which Sen and Nussbaum deeply disagree. Nussbaum maintains that a list is critical to advancing public deliberation and constitutional protections for core human capabilities, even if any such list remains perennially open to revision, which she argues constitute human dignity. According to Nussbaum, "The capabilities are not understood as instrumental to a life with human dignity: they are understood, instead, as ways of realizing a life with human dignity."[3]

The third section examines Nussbaum's list of core human capabilities and connects them via the bridge concept of wonder to Csikszentmihalyi's work on flow and Adams's work on theistic ethics of the good. This section argues that the articulation of human flourishing as wondrous activities can also serve to flesh out Nussbaum's link between human dignity and the capabilities. Presently, Nussbaum's list lacks robust explanation for why any given capability is central to human flourishing, but this section argues that a key reason these capabilities matter and are central to human flourishing is that people find them wonderful.

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[2] Ingrid Robeyns, "The Capability Approach: A Theoretical Survey" *Journal of Human Development* 6, No. 1 (2005): 94.

[3] Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 161.

Measuring Human Well-Being: Origins of the Capabilities Approach

How can we measure human well-being? The origins of the CA lie in Amartya Sen's critique of utilitarian answers to this question that pervaded 20th century economics, politics, and philosophy.[4] Those utilitarian answers centered predominately on either securing pleasurable feelings or satisfying people's preferences, and generally held household income or national productivity as proxies for people's ability to maximize said feelings or preferences. In 1979, as part of the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Stanford University, Sen delivered a seminal CA critique of utilitarian trust in happiness and preference-satisfaction with a lecture entitled "Equality of What?" Sen argued that the problem with utilitarian metrics of well-being is that they offer no basis for absolute guaranteed individual rights. For instance, in utilitarian analysis, a person who is impoverished or oppressed but has a sunny personality, or alternatively has become resigned to a social or physical limitation,[5] could be deemed to have decent, even high utility, and thereby cancel out a societal obligation to aid that person through law or policy. Invoking someone with a physical inability to walk, Sen argued:

> [S]uppose that he is no worse off than others in utility terms despite his physical handicap because of certain other utility features. This could be because he has a jolly disposition. Or because he has a low aspiration level and his heart leaps up whenever he sees a rainbow in the sky. Or because he is religious and feels that he will be rewarded in after-life, or cheerfully accepts what he takes to be just penalty for misdeeds in a past incarnation. The important point is that despite his marginal utility disadvantage, he has no longer a total utility deprivation.[6]

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[4] Sen also critiqued Rawls' theory of equality of primary goods as focusing far too closely on the goods and not what the goods enable people to do. Sen argued that Rawls' position fetishizes the goods at the expense of what they are presumed to enable people to do and be.

[5] See Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 55; and Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 62.

[6] Amartya Sen, "Equality of What?" in *Equal Freedom: Selected Tanner Lectures on Human Values* ed. Stephen Darwall (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

Along this line, Nussbaum has also argued that utilitarian analysis has difficulty taking into account and protecting against people's preferences being stilted by and adapted to oppressive situations in which they live. For instance, a woman who grows up being told that females are intellectually inferior to males and therefore should not be schooled might not express a desire to be educated in school or work in any capacity beyond the home. As Nussbaum writes, "marginalized groups…often internalize their second-class status."[7] This comes from a combination of ignorance of ever having the opportunity to develop and exercise a given capability, such as reading, writing, and intellectual pursuits, compounded by the cultural pressure not to request such opportunities.[8]

Sen has maintained that neither mental states nor preference satisfaction *alone* are sufficient for assessing human well-being. Sen has likewise critiqued policies and conceptions of justice that emphasize making sure people have *access* to a certain level of income and accompanying set of basic goods. Sen contends that a focus on income or specific consumer goods is blind to the fact that different people require different amounts, and even different types, of resources in order to attain similar levels of functioning and opportunity.[9] Sen argues, "[T]here is evidence that the conversion of goods to capabilities varies from person

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[7] Ibid., 50-56.

[8] Nussbaum, "Aristotelian Social Democracy" in *Liberalism and the Good* ed. B. Douglass et al (London: Routledge, 1990), 215. This perspective of course stands in contrast with the strong emphasis on preference satisfaction that is stressed in positive psychology as well as neoclassical economics. For instance, see Robert Biswas-Diener and Ed Diener, "Making the best of a bad situation: satisfaction in the slums of Calcutta," *Social Indicators Research*, 55 (2001): 329-352.

[9] For instance, it requires far more resources from public and non-profit sectors to educate a student living in poverty than a student living in wealth, who is receiving many additional resources and opportunities via private wealth. Simply providing every school with the same amount of funding per student will not result in an equal education for every student. Impoverished students lack the opportunities for market consumption that wealthier students have, such as reliable access to nutritious food, stable housing, routine medical care, transportation, safe neighborhoods, as well as extracurricular and recreational activities and opportunities. Students in poverty are also generally more vulnerable and exposed to additional distractions and stressors that come with lacking the above resources, often combined with additional responsibilities like having to care for older or younger family members, experiencing domestic or neighborhood trauma, needing to earn income for the family, etc.

to person substantially, and the equality of [goods] may still be far from the equality of [what goods do to human beings]."[10] While that conversion depends as well on personal effort and diligence, Sen's point is that it also hinges enormously on the social support one receives and any additional obstacles one might be facing, such as poverty or disability.

Sen's primary criticism, however, was against using things like income, Gross National Product (GNP), and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to measure human well-being and guide economic and public policy. These metrics originated in the 1930s when there was a need and desire in the midst of the Great Depression to have at least some kind of metric to gauge the overall economy's status and measure the effect of government policies toward recovery. At the request of Congress, economist Simon Kuznets led a team of researchers in creating what would become the GNP measure with a 1934 study on the depression's effect on national income from 1929 to 1932.[11] GNP proved handy, in large part because it was something that could be assessed reliably and fairly easily, and nothing comparable existed prior to its creation that could provide a systematic overview of the national economy. These measures of income and productivity served as proxies for determining how well people were doing. As the depression receded, GNP continued to gain prominence as a powerful way to measure economic progress, and became accepted as the staple indicator of economic and national health, only giving way to GDP in the 1990s as global trade and transnational corporations made emphasis on what was produced

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[10] Sen, "Equality of What?", --. Ingrid Robeyns notes the difference and importance for a person being able to translate goods into functioning capabilities as: (1) "*personal conversion factors* (e.g., metabolism, physical condition, sex, reading skills, intelligence)"; (2) "*social conversion factors* (e.g., public policies, social norms, discriminating practices, gender roles, societal hierarchies, power relations)"; and (3) "*environmental conversion factors* (e.g., climate, geographical location)." Robeyns, "The Capability Approach: A Theoretical Survey": 99.

[11] Kuznets originally created two measures, "National Income Produced" and "National Income Paid Out" to help track how much income people were earning, but it ultimately switched over to GNP. Stephen Macekura, "Our Mis-leading Indicators," *Public Books*, September 15, 2014, http://www.publicbooks.org/our-mis-leading-indicators. See Rosemary Marcuss and Richard Kane, "U.S. National Income and Product Statistics: Born of the Great Depression and World War II" *Survey of Current Business* 87, No. 2 (February 2007): 32-46.

domestically a more useful measure of domestic well-being, complementary of other indicators like unemployment.[12]

Although it has been widely recognized, even by its creators, that these kinds of productivity measures do not fully capture human well-being, since the 1930s public policy became increasingly entangled with them as the go-to gauge for national health. And despite their origins as simply a means of getting some kind of sense on how the national economy was faring (i.e., there was not an overbearing ideological edge to its creation), these metrics are rooted in and generative of utilitarian modes of thought. A prime assumption that accompanies paying heavy attention to productivity and income is that more is better than less because more productivity and income enable people to pursue personal goals in and through the market as they see fit. GNP can serve as a proxy for how much a nation enables its citizens to pursue desire satisfaction.

Yet Bobby Kennedy famously called out the insufficiency of GNP as the primary measure of human well-being in a 1968 speech at the University of Kansas as follows:

> Our Gross National Product, now, is over $800 billion dollars a year, but that Gross National Product – if we judge the United States of America by that – that Gross National Product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armored cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman's rifle and Speck's knife, and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children. Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our

[12] See Diane Coyles, *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). Zachary Karabell, *Leading Indicators: A Short History of the Numbers that Rule Our World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), and Lorenzo Pioramonti, *Gross Domestic Problem* (New York: Zed Books, 2013).

> compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.[13]

Along this line, Nussbaum has argued that what is ultimately valuable and can be lost in utilitarian analysis is human dignity, and even though she would agree that humans in general do desire to have their dignity respected, it is dignity first and foremost – not people's desire for it – upon which Nussbaum bases her ethical perspective.[14] Like Kennedy, both Nussbaum and Sen also argue that overemphasizing measures like GDP flattens all aspects of well-being to a financial number. With the CA, they both seek not only a more accurate guidepost for well-being than the size of a nation's marketable product, but also a more fleshed out criteria for determining, as much as possible, what a high quality of life entails.[15]

Csikszentmihalyi's conception of flow has interesting overlap with, and even affirmation of, the aim in the CA to find ways to account for human well-being that focus on what people are able to do and to be. As discussed in chapter four, many psychologists hold the "hedonic view" that human well-being is rooted in (or at least measured as effectively as possible by) people's self-reported preference satisfaction. Csikszentmihalyi's

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[13] Robert Kennedy, "Remarks at the University of Kansas, March 18, 1968," Robert F. Kennedy Speeches. *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum* https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/RFK-Speeches/Remarks-of-Robert-F-Kennedy-at-the-University-of-Kansas-March-18-1968.aspx. Accessed December 28, 2016. Driving force behind the creation of the United Nations' Human Development Index, Mahbub ul Haq likewise maintained, "Any measure that values a gun several hundred times more than a bottle of milk is bound to raise serious questions about its relevance for human progress'.' Mahbub ul Haq, 'The Birth of the Human Development Index', in *Readings in Human Development: Concepts, Measures and Policies for a Development Paradigm*, ed. S. Fukauda–Parr and A. K. Shiva Kumar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 103.

[14] This emphasis on dignity is intended to protect against pitfalls of utilitarianism. For instance, the dignity of those in the minority cannot be justifiably sacrificed for the betterment of the majority, and even if people's desires have been distorted via oppression, due respect for their dignity does not hinge upon them consciously and openly desiring or demanding it.

[15] Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 47-49; Martha Nussbaum, *Nussbaum, Frontiers of Justice of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 70; and Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 60.

research itself leans heavily on such reports of "Subjective Well-Being" in that he is asking a given research participant questions like, "how happy she is, how much she is concentrating, how strongly she is motivated, how high her self-esteem, and so on" during different times and activities throughout the day.[16] Csikszentmihalyi also contends in a jab at those who wholly dismiss SWB that anyone who does not take people at their word regarding their own sense of well-being "suffer[s] from the intellectual arrogance of scholars who believe their interpretations of reality should take precedence over the direct experience of the multitude…. I still think that when a person says he is 'pretty happy,' one has no right to ignore his statement, or interpret it to mean the opposite."[17]

However, Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "flow," and the widely reported satisfaction found therein, arguably still maps out and affirms a more objectively grounded, "eudaimonic" vision of well-being: people find engaging in skilled activities, which cultivate and challenge their capabilities, to be the most valuable things they do in their lives, far more so than engaging in passive pleasures that require little to no effort. In other words, the concept and widespread embrace of "flow" offer further backing and affirmation to the fundamental impulse in the CA to emphasize that human flourishing consists primarily of people being able to develop and exercise their capabilities (i.e., is a question of what people are able "to do and to be"). Consequently, as it did in the last chapter in regards to providing a richly detailed and instructive picture of what it looks like to engage in wondrous activity, flow can serve to provide that useful picture as well in regards to the experience of exercising core human capabilities, which the CA seeks to ensure everyone has the

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[16] Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 15.
[17] Ibid., 20.

opportunity to develop and use.[18] In this dissertation, the language and concept of flow serve in precisely that way, as a lens for more fully describing the wondrous activities that constitute human flourishing.

The next section explores the debate within the CA as to whether it is even legitimate to create (or at least attempt or claim to create) a universal list of those core humans capabilities. This debate and Nussbaum's arguments within it of course relate closely to this dissertation's project of advancing a vision of human flourishing and the role of market consumption within it.

Creating a List of Core Capabilities: Realizing Human Dignity

In his book, *Capabilities and Social Justice*, John Alexander summarized the point of the CA as follows: "design[ing] society's economic and political institutions in such a way that adequate material and social resources are available to everyone in order to possess and exercise a set of basic capabilities that go to make up a decent life."[19] Such a society not only seeks to ensure that people are not constrained by law from developing their capabilities, but also that there is active governmental support for people to do develop those capabilities.

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[18] Csikszentmihalyi also shares the concern with ensuring that everyone has that opportunity. Highlighting the inequalities of opportunity historically and today, Csikszentmihalyi wrote: "A boy of six or seven years, born into a poor family in one of the industrial regions of England two hundred years ago, was likely to wake up around five in the morning, rush to the mill to service the clanking mechanical looms till sunset, six days a week. Often he would die of exhaustion before reaching his teens. A girl of twelve in the silk-making regions of France around the same time would sit next to a tub all day, dipping silkworm cocoons in scalding water to melt t he sticky substance that held the threads together. She was likely to succumb to respiratory diseases as she sat in wet clothes from dawn to dusk, and her fingertips eventually lost all feeling from the hot water. In the meantime, the children of the nobility learned to dance the minuet and to converse in foreign languages. The same difference in life-chances are still with us. What can a child born into an urban slum in Los Angeles, Detroit, Cairo, or Mexico City expect to experience during a lifetime? How is that going to differ from the expectations of a child born into an affluent American suburb, or a well-to-do Swedish or Swiss family?"Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 6-7.

[19] John Alexander, *Capabilities and Social Justice* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008, 2. Nussbaum maintains, "The capabilities are then presented as the source of political principles for a liberal society." Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 70.

Yet a fundamental disagreement between Sen and Nussbaum is whether it is legitimate and important to put forth a list of core capabilities that all societies should follow in order to guide and measure progress toward this form of justice. One camp among CA researchers and advocates contends that such a list of universal human capabilities amounts to a paternalistic, elitist endeavor that inevitably excludes people's voices.[20] Those opposed to the creation of a universal list tend to invest more trust in local communities and nations to generate the capabilities they value themselves through public debate and deliberation. As will be discussed, Nussbaum of course is the most prominent voice from a rival CA perspective arguing for the vital importance of creating a universal list.

In his essay, "Making Capability Lists: Philosophy versus Democracy," Rutger Claassen lays out the basic question as follows: "*Should philosophers make lists of basic capabilities or should they leave this to the democratic process.*"[21] This disagreement is not primarily about the specific capabilities Nussbaum includes on her list, but rather about whether it is appropriate to make a list in the way she does, versus a more democratically engaged process. The pushback to making a universal list is both political and epistemological. There is concern that a list created by Nussbaum or any academic, or more broadly any individual, is oppressive given how it was created and its necessarily limited perspective. Even if a list from a philosopher, or other ivory tower academic, were constructed with the purest of intentions, it would miss critical voices and perspectives about what human well-being entails, and therefore overlook key capabilities. The catch for proponents of a more democratic process, however, is it is not clear what such a "more democratic process" would

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[20] For critique of Nussbaum's pro-list position as paternalistic, see Alison Jaggar, "Reasoning about Well-Being: Nussbaum's Methods of Justifying the Capabilities" *Journal of Political Philosophy* 14, No. 3 (2006): 301-322. See also Ingrid Robeyns, "Selecting Capabilities for Quality of Life Measurement" *Social Indicators Research* 74 (2005): 191-215. Severine Deneulin, *The Capability Approach and the Praxis of Development* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006), 32-44.

[21] Rutger Claassen, "Making Capability Lists: Philosophy Versus Democracy" *Political Studies* 59, No. 3 (2011): 491.

entail. Although the critique is that academics should not be handing down definitions of human flourishing, the guidance for a practical, democratically robust, and effective alternative has to date been left underdeveloped. Rutger Claassen notes that criticisms of Nussbaum's position "call for a constructive view of how the process of public reasoning is to be devised in order to generate capability lists, but in that respect surprisingly little has been done."[22]

In making a list of core capabilities, Nussbaum highlights that this undertaking is normatively intended to afford a basis of constitutional rights and governmental policies that lets people have the freedom to discern and act upon their own notions of the good. In other words, Nussbaum's list is not a scientific effort a priori or a-historically to pin down what it is to be a human being once and for all. Because it is a normative project, she maintains that it is requisitely and welcomingly open to empirical analysis and cross-cultural critique, as well as constructive addition, as people iteratively seek to answer the questions: "[W]hat are the functions without which (meaning without the availability of which) we should regard a life as not fully human?" and "[W]hat do we believe must be there if we are

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[22] Claassen, "Making Capability Lists": 495. For more on this debate see Morten Fibieger Byskov, "Democracy, Philosophy, and the Selection of Capabilities," *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 18, No. 1 (2017): 1-16; Nivedita Menon, "Universalism Without Foundations?" *Economy and Society* 31, No. 1 (2002): 152-169. In her essay "Selecting Capabilities for Quality of Life Measures," Ingrid Robeyns argues, "Nussbaum believes that, by engaging in appropriate cross-cultural dialogue, she is able to understand what is important for people in different contexts, and include all their concerns and interests in her list of capabilities. Most scholars, especially ethnographers, do not believe that it is possible for one person to truly understand the lives of all people around the world. Feminist epistemology in particular has stressed the limits of what one can know. One person will almost always have a partial perspective and thus partial epistemological access, given the impact of one's situatedness. If we accept that it is very hard, and indeed often impossible, to truly understand people who lives [sic] in a very different situation, then the epistemological limits of a well-defined list of capabilities become obvious. Instead, we need a process of genuine listening and deliberation until a list, which will necessarily be collective, can be constructed." Ingrid Robeyns, "Selecting Capabilities for Quality of Life Measurement" *Social Indicators Research* 74 (2005): 198-199.

going to acknowledge that a given life is human?"[23] Nussbaum also stresses that this list is not intended to be exhaustive of what human flourishing entails, but simply to highlight core capabilities that society should be seeking to ensure for everyone.

Nussbaum's argument for a universal list is rooted in her Aristotelian conviction that there genuinely are "features of humanness that lie beneath all local traditions and are there to be seen whether or not they are in fact recognized in local traditions."[24] She ultimately bases her list on a deep respect for human *dignity*, which she believes demands each person be treated as an end in him or herself. Nussbaum holds that when people lack the requisite support and opportunity to develop and exercise their human capacities, their dignity as humans is violated.[25] For Nussbaum, dignity is a crucial guiding concept for treating others ethically, and she maintains that every single human being has equal dignity and therefore deserves a life worthy of that dignity. According to Nussbaum, people need legally protected and provided opportunities to act and choose in line with their dignity, and Nussbaum argues that this provision of the conditions necessary for people to enjoy dignity is what

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[23] Martha Nussbaum, "The Good as Discipline, as Freedom" in *Ethics of Consumption: The Good Life, Justice, and Good Stewardship* ed. David Crocker and Toby Linden (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 317-318

[24] Nussbaum makes this point in response to the virtues that Aristotle argued correspond with shared and important experiences, such as fear of harm and death, bodily drives and pleasures, distribution of limited resources, managements of personal property, attitudes to slights and harms, social association, planning one's conduct and goals, and intellectual life. See "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach" in *The Quality of Life* ed. Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 243. Nussbaum maintains that the list is not based simply on biology or an effort to objectively identify "human nature," from which one then makes normative claims about what humans should do based on what they can do. In contrast, Nussbaum is very cautious about basing ethics upon claims regarding human nature, in large part because she does not think claims to human nature clearly or justifiably convey any normative content, but only "tells us what resources and possibilities we have [as humans] and what our difficulties may be." In other words, for her examining human nature does not rightly tell us what to value, but rather only provides us with an idea of the range of human limitations and possibilities in their efforts to explore and seek what is truly valuable. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 28.

[25] Her emphasis on dignity is in part in response to utilitarian emphases on more mercurial mental states or desire-satisfaction, as well as the stance that individuals and minorities can justifiably be harmed or left out in the interest of greatest good for the greatest number.

social justice entails. For her, then, justice is respecting in word and deed, as individuals and societies, each person's right to live a life "worthy of human dignity."[26]

Yet key questions still remain: what exactly constitutes the ground and content of that dignity? Why do humans have dignity? And what does respecting it entail? The kind of life human dignity entails and demands is not clear, and Nussbaum acknowledges that articulation and examination of dignity remain in need of persistent re-examination, critique, and assessment. As she seeks to reflect upon and identify what dignity entails, Nussbaum argues that dignity is "closely related" to the idea of a "basic capability, [i.e.,] something inherent in the person that exerts a claim that it should be developed." Humans have certain potentials that innately press out for development, like a plant pressing upward toward the sun, even if it has to grow through cracks in the pavement.[27] Stifling that human potential results in lives that are not worthy of the dignity they deserve.[28] Nussbaum describes the development of capabilities as "the unfolding of powers that human beings bring into the

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[26] Ibid., 36, 73.

[27] The resounding interest people place on cultivating and exercising their capabilities, as found in Csikszentmihalyi's research, affirms this perspective. Particularly the way people express more satisfaction in the exercise of their capabilities than in passive pleasures and comforts.

[28] It is critical to note, however, that when Nussbaum frames something as less human or not human, it is not a dismissive judgment that a given thing or activity is of no value. Nussbaum's entire CA project is focused on laying out a basis for political principles to respect and support human dignity. Consequently, labeling an activity or condition is not worthy of human dignity is a way of sharply indicating it falls short of what is a person is rightfully due. For instance, it would not befit human dignity to have society set up in such a way that some people can slip into to such poverty that they have to resort to digging ravenously through trashcans to survive on food thrown out from wealthier people's meals. Eating in that condition and manner might befit the dignity of a squirrel, opossum, or mouse, but not a person. Yet saying that behavior is not worthy of human dignity is not to say that people in such a state are of no value, or are somehow less deserving of treatment as humans, but rather that, by not supporting people reduced to this condition, society has robbed them of their due opportunity to eat like a person. Nussbaum is aiming to mark the threshold of support and opportunities that each person is owed, not to mark the threshold at which a person begins to be owed support and opportunities. Nussbaum argues, "[S]ome living conditions deliver to people a life that is worthy of the human dignity that they possess, and others do not. In the latter circumstance, they retain dignity, but it is like a promissory note whose claims have not been met." Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 30. According to Nussbaum, the dignity of any being is tied up with its core capabilities. See Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 325-407.

world," and maintains that there is an "intuitive idea of waste and starvation" in societies that undermine that unfolding for any of their members.[29]

For Nussbaum, the core of treating a person with the dignity she deserves is again treating her as an end in herself. Nussbaum heavily stresses that "the principle of each person as an end," with "worth in [his or her] own right," means foremost that everyone should have the opportunity to actively plan and direct his or her own life. Nussbaum highlights that this very opportunity is something that has been denied many women throughout history, who have been at times de facto, at times de jure, presumed incompetent and incapable of directing their own lives. As such they have been primarily restricted to only being reproducers and caregivers for the benefit of other people's goals and plans. Respecting each person as an end means appreciating in law and practice that all people have "their own plans to make and their own lives to live" and are as such "deserving of all necessary support for their equal opportunity to be such agents."[30] This aspect of the principle flows with Nussbaum's insistence and adherence to the political ideal of political liberalism "to provide spaces in which valuably different forms of human activity can flourish" and "to foster a political climate in which they will each be able to pursue the good

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[29] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 23.

[30] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 58. This emphasis also comes in response to utilitarian theories and institutional actions that aim at the aggregate benefit of society. While the aspiration to benefit society is noble on its face, Nussbaum points out that it sets up intellectual and political justification for sacrificing the well-being of some for the betterment of the majority. It also fails to take a direct concern for the least well off in society. While that could be a part of maximizing social benefit, it is not necessarily one, and it is easy to see the ways in which a society could find it far more convenient and arguably beneficial to aim political and institutional support at the majority. For instance, until very recently, it was considered too expensive and neither a social norm nor universal need to make buildings accessible to people with physical disabilities. It was not taken to be of sufficient benefit to the whole to warrant mandated accommodation, but the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act was driven forward in part by the aim to fully incorporate people with physical disabilities into shared spaces – to treat each of them with dignity and support the development and exercise of their participation as full citizens and members of society.

(whether religious or ethical) according to their own lights, so long as they do no harm to others."[31]

For Nussbaum, human dignity – which is a fixed reality, even if hard to articulate perfectly – supplies both the *impetus* to create a list and the *anchor* for what kinds of capabilities make it onto that list. Drawing on Marx, Nussbaum argues, "The core idea is that of the human being as a dignified free being who shapes his or her own life in cooperation and reciprocity with others, rather than being passively shaped or pushed around by the world in the manner of a 'flock; or 'herd' animal. A life that is really human is one that is shaped throughout by these human powers of practical reason and sociability."[32] For instance, factory work during the industrial revolution provided precisely the kind of activity that Marx thought fell below human dignity. He did not think it was possible to undertake that wage labor in human ways because operating essentially as a cog in a machine neither requires nor enables a person to exercise distinctly human capabilities. Nussbaum echoes this view writing, "[Work] must involve being able to behave as a thinking being, not just a cog in a machine; and it must be capable of being done with and toward others in a way that involves mutual recognition of humanity."[33] According to Nussbaum, appreciating another person's humanity in the workplace and beyond means "see[ing] the person as having activity, goals, and projects – as somehow awe-inspiringly above the mechanical workings of nature, and yet in need of support for the fulfillment of many central projects."[34]

In *Creating Capabilities*, Nussbaum sums up the following "key moral elements" of the CA as: "the idea of equal human dignity, the idea that practical reason is a very important

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[31] Ibid., 59. Nussbaum holds, "There is something about a person's inviobility that requires liberty." Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 333.
[32] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 72.
[33] Ibid., 83. Nussbaum, *Capabilities Approach*, 78.
[34] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 73.

capability, the idea that people should not have the right to remove the fundamental entitlements of others."[35] The liberty "to form and choose a plan of life that is their own" is important and worthy of political protection according to Nussbaum because "there is something about a person, and a person's inviolability, that requires [this kind of] liberty."[36] Nussbaum maintains that an emphasis and value on what people are able to do and to be is prevalent across cultures and religions, writing, "Ideas of activity and ability are everywhere, and there is no culture in which people do not ask themselves what they are able to do, what opportunities they have for functioning."[37] Although Nussbaum's CA project does not entail comparative cultural analysis, and it claims to universality lean heavily upon intuitions about human dignity, Nussbaum maintains that "[t]he intuitive idea behind the approach is twofold: first, that certain functions are particularly central in human life, in the sense that their presence or absence is typically understood to be a mark of the presence or absence of human life; and second – this is what Marx found in Aristotle – that there is something that it is to do these functionings in a truly human way, not a merely animal way."[38] According to Nussbaum, while this notion of human dignity in pursuit of projects tied to one's capabilities is hard to pin down metaphysically, it is recognized broadly enough to warrant enlisting it as an anchor to secure political principles and constitutional protections. Nussbaum has held that the core capabilities she lists are not tied to any specific metaphysical viewpoint or fully detailed conception of human good, flourishing, or purpose, but are intended to be compatible with a broad array of such perspectives. She argues that it

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[35] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 83.
[36] Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 333.
[37] Ibid., 100.
[38] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 72. For Marx on the idea of humanity having a "species-being," with particular sensory and mental powers and activities, see Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in *The Marx-Engels Reader: Second Edition* ed. Robert Turner (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 75-78, 87-90. See also Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 78, and Nussbaum, "Aristotelian Social Democracy," 224, 225.

is "freestanding moral idea" that every person has "certain human abilities exert a moral claim that they should be developed."[39] The next section examines Nussbaum's list of core capabilities and bridges it to the vision of flourishing (from chapters three and four) as engaging in wondrous activities in community with one another.

The Core Capabilities & Wonder

With the aim of treating every person as an end, empowered to flourish in the development and exercise of his capabilities as a human being, Nussbaum created the following list of core human capabilities. She argues every society should constitutionally protect and support each of its citizen's capabilities. The list is rooted in cross-cultural conversations Nussbaum has had particularly with women in India, alongside extensive philosophical and literary research Nussbaum has undertaken throughout her career.[40] Yet it is not presented as a descriptive analysis as much as a prescriptive one for the formation of constitutional protections and entitlements, as well as a starting framework and goad for citizens, public servants, students, and researchers to engage in critical conversation and constructive action regarding what constitutes human well-being.

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[39] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 83.

[40] Some argue that Nussbaum's view on there truly being a core set of human capabilities innate to human dignity has shifted over time. They contend that Nussbaum used to make a much stronger claim in her works – over and against the specter of relativism and seeming inability in contemporary philosophy and politics to ground any claims about what it is to be human and live a good human life – but that she softened that stance in later works. For earlier views see, Martha Nussbaum, "Nature, Function and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* Supplementary Volume (1988): 145-184; Martha Nussbaum, "Aristotelian Social Democracy" in *Liberalism and the Good* ed. B. Douglass et al (London: Routledge, 1990), 203-252; Martha Nussbaum, "Human functioning and social justice: in defense of Aristotelian essentialism" *Political Theory* 20 (1992): 202-246; and Martha Nussbaum, "Non-relative virtues: an Aristotelian approach" in *The Quality of Life* ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 242-269. For later version on a core list of capabilities see, Nussbaum, *Women in Human Development*, and Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*. See also Alison Jaggar, "Reasoning about Well-Being: Nussbaum's Methods on Justifying the Capabilities" *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 14, No. 3 (2006): 303.

The list for which Nussbaum advocates has undergone development and some alterations over the years, but it presently includes and emphasizes the following capabilities:

> *1. Life*. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before ones life is so reduced as to not be worth living.
>
> *2. Bodily health*. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
>
> *3. Bodily integrity*. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violent; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
>
> *4. Senses, imagination, and thought*. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain.
>
> *5. Emotions*. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development).
>
> *6. Practical reason*. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance).
>
> *7. Affiliation*. *(A)* Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech). *(B)* Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provision of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.
>
> *8. Other species*. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
>
> *9. Play*. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

> *10. Control over one's environment. (A) Political.* Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. *(B) Material.* Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition.[41]

Nussbaum's list of core capabilities breaks into roughly three sections. The first three capabilities (life, bodily health, and bodily integrity) deal with physical well-being. The fourth through six capabilities (the senses, imagination, thought, emotions, and practical reason) deal with mental well-being. The last four capabilities (affiliation, other species, play, and control over one's environment) deal with relational well-being. Collectively they constitute the basis of human flourishing according to Nussbaum, and a person needs them all in order to be living a full, thriving human life. Along this line, Nussbaum also holds that the different core capabilities neither fungible nor commensurable. One cannot exchange one for the other, giving more opportunity for political control in exchange for less secured bodily integrity for instance. They are deeply interconnected but qualitatively distinct values. Just as the heart is connected necessarily and intimately with the lungs but not interchangeable so that one could flourish with two hearts and no lungs. One cannot, for

[41] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 33-34.

example, have a double dose of bodily health that makes up for or equates to a loss of affiliation with other people.[42]

Nussbaum highlights two capabilities, practical reason and affiliation, as playing a particularly important "architectonic" and unifying role in being human and doing things in a human manner. These are the two capabilities that are distinctly human and that transform other capabilities and functionings on the list into truly human endeavors. According to Nussbaum, practical reason and affiliation "both organize and suffuse all the others, making their pursuit truly human."[43] Humans have a distinct way for being and doing things via practical reason and affiliation. For instance, eating has unique forms of preparation like cooking, presentation, pairing, and variety, and it also is highly socialized when organized around conversation, appreciation of taste, sharing, gratitude, and communally set times of day.[44] While people do at times eat alone, and they do at times simply scrounge for whatever is available, those forms of eating are a less human activity, more akin to the eating of other animals. Likewise, if one uses one's capacity to see and hear the world without enlisting "thought and planning," Nussbaum holds that one has used one's ability to see and hear in

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[42] Ibid., 35. Along this line, Nussbaum further argues that it is not even possible to create one clear metric of happiness, whether based on income, productivity, preference satisfaction, or pleasure, because the goods that we value are not all measurable on the same scale. Trying to fit everything on one scale fails to appreciate that goods in our lives are incommensurable. For instance, one cannot simultaneously enjoy time with one's family while working at one's job or profession. Nussbaum stresses that work and family are distinct goods, and although deep familial relationships and professional accomplishments are not entirely mutually exclusive, the more time, attention, and energy a person orients toward family the less he has to orient toward work, and vice versa. The plurality of goods is a clear point of disagreement between Nussbaum and Adams. For Nussbaum, the goods of this life are plural and diverse, and the trade offs we have to make between them are often tragic. For Adams, everything ultimately coheres in God's Goodness, even if in this life for any given individual trade offs need to be made, the goods themselves all not only come from God but also image God. The experience of any given good connects one to infinite Goodness, and in eternity such trade offs need not bear the tragic weight they carry in this life. Through respect, acknowledgment, and even symbolic actions toward other goods and the Good, Adams holds that a person can also "be for the good" in a way that she cannot on Nussbaum's account. See Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 166.

[43] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 82.

[44] See Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 88-89.

an "incompletely human manner." If a person uses practical reason to plan but does not engage in "complex forms of discourse, concern, and reciprocity with other human beings" – i.e., does not connect with others – he is acting in an "incompletely human way."[45] If a grown person has sufficient amounts of nourishing food, but is not able to "exercise practical reason and planning with regard to their health and nutrition," he is not living a life "fully commensurate with human dignity," because he is being treated like an infant.[46]

Practical reason is the personal deliberation regarding one's own good as well as *the* good, in whatever comprehensive, religious, or metaphysical sense one may take personal good and the good to entail. As previously noted, respect and protection for the opportunity to exercise practical reason is the core component of treating a person as an end. A person's capacity and freedom to plan and decided what is best for his or her own life is a critical and central aspect of living a life worthy of human dignity.[47] Nussbaum argues that affiliation, or the opportunity to engage in all the capabilities in relationship with others, is likewise critical, given that humans are social beings. As noted in the last section, Nussbaum also stresses the importance of actually being free to act and to choose for oneself what one finds valuable in the world. Nussbaum believes that human dignity is tightly bound up with having this freedom.[48] Nussbaum maintains that human dignity is respected and recognized only when a person has the freedom to develop and exercise her human capabilities. Capabilities are "ways of realizing a life with human dignity, in the different areas of life with which human beings typically engage." Dignity is not something separable or statically distinct from functioning capabilities, but rather "intertwined" with them, so that the operative concern

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[45] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 82.
[46] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 39.
[47] Individuals with limited mental capacities or youth clearly do not exercise this capacity fully. In the case of youth, that is because this capacity is still being developed. In the case of those with a mental disability that limits this capacity, they are duly offered aid and assistance to exercise this capacity to whatever extent is possible.
[48] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 25, 39, 107.

for Nussbaum is not securing an abstract idea of human dignity, but seeking for all to have "a life with, or worthy of, human dignity, where that life is constituted, at least in part, by having the capabilities on the list."[49]

Nussbaum in particular sharply distinguishes helping people develop those capacities versus making them exercise those capacities. She writes, "My approach uses the idea of a threshold level of each capability, beneath which it is held that truly human functioning is not available to citizens; the social goal should be understood in terms of getting citizens above this capability threshold."[50] Her heavy stress on the importance and value of practical reason is evident in her argument that people should be allowed to exercise "a lot of substandard functioning."[51] People should have the opportunity to craft their own conception of what a good life is, and to have the chance to pursue it of their own accord and determination, or fail to do so as well – though that failure should not be the result of institutional barriers that prevent either the development or the exercise of a core capability.

Nussbaum argues that the space provided for people to plan and organize their own lives is not hands-off relativism, but rather respect. She writes, "Mutual respect does not imply uncertainty or skepticism about the good: it implies, instead, a certain higher-order good, a vision of the citizen as an active searcher for what has worth, whose sincere engagement in that search should be allowed to unfold in freedom, even if it should lead to what seems to be error – unless it inflicts manifest harms on others."[52] According to Nussbaum, "Where adult citizens are concerned, *capability, not functioning, is the appropriate political goal*…. It is perfectly true that functionings, not simply capabilities, are what render a life fully human…. Nonetheless, for political purposes it is appropriate that we shoot for

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[49] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 162.
[50] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 71.
[51] See Ibid., 86-96.
[52] Nussbaum, "The Good As Discipline, As Freedom," 336.

capabilities, and those alone. Citizens must be left free to determine their own course after that. The person with plenty of food may always choose to fast, but there is a great difference between fasting and starving, and it is the difference that I wish to capture [in focusing on capabilities rather than functionings]."[53]

There is at root here, however, an underlying affirmation that capabilities - given that they constitute *the* "ways of realizing a life with human dignity" - are things of value in themselves no matter what.[54] Nussbaum's list heavily endorses the idea that people's ability and opportunity to reason through, explore, and act on what they take to be good is itself a necessary and fundamental good.[55] While Nussbaum seeks to leave the discernment and pursuit of a good life up to people to figure out for themselves, her CA framework and the capabilities she lists, as well as the conviction each person should receive the support requisite to develop and exercise them, are not relativistically compatible with just any metaphysical or ethical perspective. For instance, white supremacist notions that people are distinctly capable based on a racial classification and therefore due different political entitlements would not fit with the CA. Nor would the affirmation that women are less intelligent than men, or divinely ordained to serve exclusively as nurturing helpmate to the aspirations and goals of fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons. In this vein, Nussbaum does highlight her emphasis on each person being treated as an end in himself so that he can plan and pursue his own life goals is a basic tenet of political liberalism, classical as well as contemporary. Nussbaum notes that her conviction on this front is not value neutral, but

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[53] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 87.

[54] Nussbaum*, Frontiers of Justice*, 162.

[55] Nussbaum's list is far more detailed than Sen's open-ended version of the CA, and Severine Deneulin contends that, despite its Rawlsian framing of everyone being able to seek good as they see fit, Nussbaum's position remains "a perfectionist capability approach in disguise," because, "If each human being, whatever her conception of the good life, can endorse these central human capabilities as essential to her life, as Nussbaum claims, is there then not a fundamental set of capabilities inherent in any good human life rather than a set that is only instrumental to any conception of the good?" Severine Deneulin, *The Capability Approach and the Praxis of Development* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006), 32-44.

rather places heavy respect and value on a person's capacity and freedom to choose and pursue what he or she deems to be good and valuable for his or her own life.[56]

Nussbaum does not give a reason for why human dignity expressed in the exercise of these human capabilities ultimately matters itself. As analyzed in the last section, she intuitively holds the conviction that dignity matters and entails primarily developing human capabilities for people to exercise practical reason and affiliation. In her book on the emotions, *Upheavals of Thought*, Nussbaum stresses that human values, namely those around which a person forms emotional attachments, depend upon the extent to which a person believes something (e.g., another person, an activity, an object, a place, etc.) affects his own personal well-being, or flourishing.[57] She defines emotions as "appraisals or value judgments, which ascribe to things and persons outside the person's own control great importance for that person's own flourishing," and she maintains that "Emotions, in short, are acknowledgments of our goals and their status."[58]

However, Nussbaum does not explicitly investigate or theorize a source or basis of the value around which emotions form. She does not seek to explain why people care about anything in the first place. In some respects, Nussbaum quite intentionally seeks to leave that

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[56] Respect for that freedom is not unlimited, but it is granted enormous room to range, with the primary boundaries simply being that you cannot prevent others from engaging – and via political institutions need, to help enable others to be able to engage – in that same freedom of choice. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 59-60.

[57] Yet she argues that this is not a selfishness (though it certainly can take that character), but rather a localization of concern. Nussbaum writes, "The emotions are in this sense localized: they take their stand in my own life, and focus on the transition between light and darkness there, rather than on the general distribution of light and darkness in the universe as a whole." She further explains, "Even when they are concerned with events that take place at a distance, or events in the past, that is, I think, because the person has managed to invest those events with a certain importance in her own scheme of ends and goals." That evaluation is also focused on personal well-being, which can entail delight in the well-being of others, and compassionate pain at their harm in a way that makes their well-being intimately bound up with the life goals and plans one considers essential to one's own well-being. Ibid., 31.

[58] Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4, 22, 135. For Nussbaum, the *eudaimonia* of personal flourishing entails everything that a person believes has value in itself. Ibid., 32.

valuation, along with the freedom to make choices around it as one sees fit, open to individuals. But that still leaves a question as to why the freedom to exercise one's core capabilities in establishing, planning, and pursuing one's own life goals matters.[59] A hole lies in the center of Nussbaum's CA framework: why do the core capabilities she lists, particularly the architectonic ones of practical reason and affiliation, matter? What does flourishing entail beyond the opportunity to try to figure out what flourishing entails? This question is similar to lacuna addressed in this dissertation for the near-exclusive focus in Christian consumer ethics on addressing the harms of market production and market consumption but without a developed vision of the ultimate goal for flourishing human life beyond healing and preventing harms to people and the environment. On that front the question is similarly, what does flourishing entail beyond ensuring everyone has a chance to flourish?

A fuller explanation of capabilities matter is needed, and when Nussbaum's emphasis on human dignity is placed within context with the theistic framework and the concept of flow, the reason that capabilities are good is evident. These capabilities constitute glimpses of God's infinite goodness. They allow people to engage in the wondrous common projects of relationship, friendship, family, art, music, athletics, literature, story-telling, gardening, farming, cooking, political collaboration, as well as morality geared toward ensuring everyone has the opportunity to engage in those wondrous activities.[60] These are capabilities that generate "a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in

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[59] An alternate life could be, for instance, not having an opportunity to develop and exercise one's capabilities do things like read, write, debate, converse, plan, and act in regards to what one takes to be good and worth doing and pursuing - the far more socially and materially circumscribed life that so many humans have lived throughout history.

[60] These are projects that can be undertaken for pay or absent compensation. The more important line for considering the activities that people find worthwhile is not work versus leisure in the sense of financial compensation, but in the sense of whether the activity enlists, challenges, and develops a person's mental and or physical capabilities.

memory for what life should be like," in the words of Csikszentmihalyi.[61] In this vein, the capabilities on Nussbaum's list are central in large part because we find them and the activities we can engage through them to be wonderful.

Nussbaum even hints at this line of thought in her work. She often describes the people, things, and activities that people love as "radiant," and notes - in a way that strongly echoes the kind of very attentive focus present during flow - that when a person experiences wonder, instead of focusing on the importance of a given object, activity, or person to one's own flourishing, one is "maximally aware of the value of the object, and only minimally aware, if at all, of its relationship to her own plans."[62] In considering the value of other species and dignity tied the functioning of their respective capabilities, Nussbaum writes, "[I]f we feel wonder looking at a complex organism, that wonder at least suggest the idea that it is good for that being to persist and flourish as the kind of thing it is. This idea is at least closely related to an ethical judgment that it is wrong when the flourishing of a creature is blocked by the harmful agency of another. *That more complex idea lies at the heart of the capabilities approach* [emphasis added]."[63] Nussbaum is making the point here (similar to ones noted in this dissertation regarding the relationship between goodness and love)[64] that while wonder is not the *basis* of dignity, i.e., something has dignity because we find it wonderful, wonder is *indicative* of a living being's dignity.

Along this line, Nussbaum writes that perceiving other people "in noninstrumental and even non-eudaimonistic ways, as objects of wonder in their own right," is critical to recognizing and appreciating their value in themselves.[65] Nussbaum even ties wonder directly

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[61] Mihaly Csikszsentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 3.
[62] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 54.
[63] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 348-349.
[64] See page 143, supra.
[65] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 237.

to the emotion of compassion, in which one sees another suffering as worthy of one's concern and aid. Having a sense of wonder at another person's sheer life and existence is requisite to feeling compassion for his or her suffering. It is this wonder at another human being and his or her capacities as such that is crucial to seeing him as a bearer of dignity befitting a human. It is furthermore one reason why Nussbaum believes that the project of creating a universal list of human capabilities is not only cross-culturally legitimate, but also possible. This point is expressed in the following extended quote from *Women and Human Development*, in which Nussbaum roots the idea of universal human dignity in the fact that there is a broadly shared cross-cultural conception of both human tragedy and wonder at resilience in the face of tragedy:

> This idea of human dignity has broad cross-cultural resonance and intuitive power. We can think of it as the idea that lies at the heart of tragic artworks, in whatever culture. Think of a tragic character, assailed by fortune. We react to the spectacle of humanity so assailed in a way very different from the way we react to a storm blowing grains of sand in the wind. For we see a human being as having worth as an end, a kind of awe-inspiring something that makes it horrible to see this person beaten down by the currents of chance – and wonderful, at the same time, to witness the way in which chance has not completely eclipsed the humanity of the person. As Aristotle puts it, 'the noble shines through.' Such responses provide us with strong incentives for protecting that in persons that fills us with awe. We see the person as having activity, goals, and projects – as somehow awe-inspiringly above the mechanical workings of nature, and yet in need of support for the fulfillment of many central projects. This idea has many forms, some religious and some secular. Insofar as we are able to respond to tragic tales from other cultures, we show that this idea of human worth and agency crosses cultural boundaries.[66]

In this passage, Nussbaum also references "awe," which she connects closely with wonder. They both entail engaging the value of an object that outpaces and even overwhelms attention to one's own plans or goals, in the sense that a person recognizes "the surpassing value of the object, not just from the person's point of view but quite generally." One is not invested in the object from a standpoint of calculating or considering how it affects one's own well-being, but simply because it is captivatingly radiant. Nussbaum

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[66] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 72-73.

distinguishes awe from wonder by the desires and actions that usually grow from each emotion. She writes, "[W]onder is outward-moving, exuberant, whereas awe is linked with bending, or making oneself small. In wonder I want to leap or run, in awe to kneel." In line with the views above, Nussbaum names wonder as "an important part" in the development of the "capacity for love and compassion."[67] In *Upheavals of Thought*, Nussbaum also highlights how *wonder* plays a key role in the formation of our attachments from infancy on. Nussbaum writes, "[T]he world into which the child arrives is radiant and wonderful, [and it] claims its attention as an object of interest and pleasure in its own right."[68] It is these wonderful radiant things that we find valuable, and as such it is these things around which our attachments, emotions, plans, and goals form.

Ultimately, Nussbaum's list of core capabilities is intended to serve as a check to ensure everyone has an opportunity to realize and enjoy their human dignity in exercising and developing these wonderful capabilities. This point and ethical orientation is crucial for the vision of flourishing developed in this dissertation so far. Because absent the push to ensure everyone has access to cultivate their capabilities, wondrous activities could create a bubble around those engaged in them, and the more deeply immersed in the flow of challenging and developing one's capabilities in that activity one got, the thicket that bubble would become. Other people, other activities, other good objects could all fall out of focus and concern. Flow alone simply highlights and stresses the intrinsic value of developing one's capabilities, but does not offer in itself and ethical imperative to work toward the realization of human dignity for others in the cultivation of their capabilities. For instance, in the context of contemporary market consumption, the guidance flows offers is to engage in active consumption by slowly but steadily learning new skills in it. Learn to cook, garden, do

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[67] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 54.
[68] Ibid., 189, 191.

home improvement, landscaping, woodworking, read books, write, speak a new language, play a sport, organize community events, play an instrument, make art, care for friends with a listening ear, raise children, have a strong marital relationship, homebrew, knit sweaters, visit national parks, etc. As noted, this call to challenge oneself carries over into activities for compensation as well (any of the above or others, like develop a new product, run a business, fulfill one's role in the company, etc.).

One could even engage each of those goods in ways that avoided some of the consumer pitfalls laid out in Christian critique of market consumption. For instance, one could genuinely enjoy engaging in an activity and not simply use it or consumer goods associated with it to seek praise from others, status, or wealth. One could undertake them in ways that entailed simple and restrained amounts of waste (i.e., avoiding luxury), and with a focused, committed, and disciplined manner that resists the insatiably restless consumption of things like comfort or novelty that usually undermine people's ability to make commitments and pay attention. If operating within the theistic framework of finite goods imagining infinite goodness, one could even regularly offer prayerful thanks to God.[69] One could even undertake all of that as part of a family and community in which people sincerely care about and for one another and share generously in wondrous activities together.

And amidst all that flow, one could be completely sinfully oblivious to people and other species outside one's bubble who are not flourishing, who lack the opportunity to live into the full dignity of cultivating and exercising their capabilities. One could similarly be hostile and aggressive to those people or other species one deems a threat to one's bubble of flow. In such cases, one would have made an idol out of those wondrous activities. That

[69] One could affirm in line with this dissertation, "These are the kinds of nonmoral goods in which we were created wonder. We were not made to simply treat each other ethically, but rather treating one another ethically is part of a broader flourishing existence of joining together in wondrous activities. Being ethical, while centrally important, is far from the only wondrous activity for which God created us; it is necessary and innate to human flourishing but not all-encompassing of it, so it is ok to be immersed in this wondrous activity."

idolatry of flow with finite goods can manifest again anywhere from the scale of a single individual upwards to a family, neighborhood, class, nation, or the whole human species over and above other living beings. The ethical injunction the CA to protect and enable everyone's opportunity to exercise their dignity, i.e. their capabilities, is what sets the key boundaries and direction for the vision of human flourishing developed in this dissertation.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the list of core human capabilities and the arguments for it laid out by Martha Nussbaum in order to further develop this dissertation's positive vision of human flourishing and market consumption. Bringing the respective work of Adams and Csikszentmihalyi into conversation with that of Nussbaum was necessary because the concept and practice of flow - even when couched within Adams's theistic framework - lacks a clear ethical direction, and is easily susceptible to a form of idolatry in which a person becomes overly immersed in a certain activity (e.g., a sport, a career, a project) that he becomes indifferent to anything else and even hostile to anyone or thing he perceives to be a threat to the activity in which he finds flow. The direction that the CA provides in response to this idolatry is an ethical call for any personal pursuit of wondrous goods in creation to be ordered and oriented in such a way that it not only does not violate other people's capabilities, but also actively helps cultivate other people's capabilities for wondrous activity as well. This chapter also used the bridge concept of wonder to deepen connections between Nussbaum's list of core human capabilities, Csikszentmihalyi's work on flow, and Adams's work on theistic ethics of the good. It argued that the articulation of human flourishing as wondrous activities more robustly explains why any given capability is central to human flourishing.

By bringing Adams, Csikszentmihalyi, and Nussbaum into conversation, a rich vision of human flourishing arises: glimpsing God's infinite goodness in the cultivation of everyone's capabilities for wondrous activity. This picture of human flourishing guides the framework for the theological ethics of market consumption developed in the concluding chapter. The concluding chapter argues for a Christian consumer ethic that is not only attuned to the need to address harms inflicted by contemporary market systems, but also appreciative of the ways in which market consumption can be oriented toward engaging the goodness of God and of God's creation.

Conclusion: Toward a Theological Ethic of Market Consumption

Introduction

This dissertation has been building the argument that human flourishing consists of glimpsing God's infinite goodness, that those glimpses occur in the cultivation of people's capabilities for wondrous activity in community with one another, and that market consumption can and should play a constitutive role in that flourishing. The argument is that there is properly a deep theological rationale and purpose for market consumption, which itself is a form of human interaction with the goodness of creation, and that purpose is nothing less than glimpsing God's infinite goodness. Some of those glimpses come in the moral goods heavily emphasized in Christian consumer ethics of ensuring that everyone has a living wage, safe working conditions, and respect, that the ecologies of which we are part and other species are not exploited and exhausted, and that consumers do not become wrapped up in idolatries of status and wealth. However, drawing on the work of Adams, this dissertation is arguing that of equal importance are the nonmoral goods that God's infinite

goodness entails (in addition to morality). From this perspective, being moral is a core part of - but not the entirety of - human flourishing in the goodness of creation and the goodness of God,[1] and a key purpose of morality is to engage in laws, policies, personal practices, and relationships that afford everyone the opportunity and support needed to enjoy nonmoral goods together. Although morality is not purely instrumental to that end, since it is itself one of the most poignant finite goods that images infinite goodness, the point is that nonmoral goods are also critically central to human flourishing.[2]

As such, this concluding chapter sketches a theological consumer ethic rooted in the role market consumption plays in cultivation of people's capabilities for wondrous activity. It argues that certain types of consumer items and services are not simply instrumental but constitutive to developing and exercising these core capabilities - i.e., that some forms of market consumption are constitutive of what people are able to do and to be. Market consumption in which people are actively engaged, actively participating, and communally connected is intrinsically interwoven with wondrous activities in which people can glimpse God's infinite goodness, in contrast to consumption that is passive and individually focused on things like status, security, or comfort.

This last chapter has three sections. The first examines the relationships between consumer goods and human capabilities, noting that although some consumer goods are merely instrumental to the development and exercise of capabilities, others are intrinsically part of those abilities and the activities they generate. The second section puts forward the guidelines for a theological ethic of consumption as glimpsing God's goodness in the cultivation of wondrous activities in community with one another. It highlights market

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[1] See Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 138.

[2] Ethics perhaps takes such a prominent place in on our minds due to human sin, because while ethics is in part about maintaining people's access to flourishing (e.g., in that respect ethics is akin to preventative medicine and behavior), it is often focused on addressing injustices (e.g., in that respect ethics is akin to treating illnesses).

objects, services, and activities in which people can: (1) engage in the production process to some extent, (2) participate actively during consumption, whether mentally or physically, and (3) connect with others through consumption.

The final section of this chapter concludes the dissertation by delving further into the theological connections between loving God and loving the creation, as well as between the goodness of God and the goodness of creation, in order to begin sketching connections between human flourishing now and in the eschaton. The position being developed here is that the theological ethic of market consumption in this dissertation provides the way to begin articulating how and why finite goods of flourishing in this life connect quite directly with eschatological goodness of the Kingdom Come. In short, to articulate why this world matters and how we can flourish within it now with an eye toward eternity.

Consumer Goods and Human Capabilities

In his discussion of children's innate orientation toward flow, Csikszentmihalyi highlights the "felt conviction" of importance and meaning in activity. Children easily become deeply immersed in activities, finding them wonderful and fun as ends in themselves. Csikszentmihalyi writes:

> Anyone who stops to watch children at play will see how intrinsically rewarding action can be…. What children do most of the time is interact with the environment on a level at which their skills match opportunities. Left to themselves, children seek out flow with the inevitability of a natural law. They act without interruption if they can use their bodies, their hands, or their brain to produce feedback which proves that they can control the environment. They stop only when the challenges are exhausted, or when their skills are.[3]

Csikszentmihalyi argues that this deep involvement in activities is routinely drained out of kids though through stress on external results and rewards (i.e. a particular enculturation to tie importance primarily to easily quantifiable external goods), such as grades, status,

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[3] Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, 199.

popularity, or perfection in performance. Csikszentmihalyi contends that in this training away from flow, "Efforts that bring no concrete results are branded a waste of time, and the child is encouraged to work only at tasks which will bring extrinsic rewards."[4]

Those external rewards tend to be focused on either physical or social pleasures, whether money, possessions, prestige, or popularity. These kinds of pleasures are again distinguished from flow in that they do not entail development and exercise of capabilities but veer more toward "satisfy[ing] existing needs, to achiev[ing] an equilibrium, comfort, and relaxation" on the physical side and receiving accolades on the social side.[5] Each of these pleasures is in theory detachable from any given activity that might lead to them, in the sense that if an opportunity arose to receive the pleasure absent the activity (e.g. cheating or receiving it ready-made), someone driven by external reward would take the shortcut. These types of pleasures are also extremely susceptible to hedonic adaptation, as the novelty of a pleasure wears off and the amount needed to sate a person grows indefinitely. Akin to eating, the more one consumes these pleasures, the more one's appetite for them grows. Similarly, akin to intoxicants, the more one takes, the more one's body adapts to the drug and in need of ever growing quantities of it to receive pleasure (in addition to simply staving off the pain of withdrawal as one's body becomes dependent upon it for basic functioning).

As noted in Chapter 4, instead of increasing in quality or complexity, these kinds of pleasures can only increase in quantity, and as such pleasure in market consumption requires regular turnover to more consumer items, more money, and more approving social gaze. Because pleasure also offers a limited enjoyment in comparison to flow, with no room for

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[4] Ibid., 200. Along this line, Csikszentmihalyi argues that making school more enjoyable also not about making it easy or pleasant, but rather closely pairing skills to challenge so that child can enter flow and learn how to do so, rather than anxiety or boredom or dependence on external things to generate pleasure. Ibid., 205.

[5] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Good Business: Leadership, Flow, and the Making of Meaning* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 37.

growth, the way to keep up pleasure is to get new or different goods. This dynamic is also amplified in societies where the social pleasures are distributed according to what one consumes. As noted, conspicuous consumption drives people, particularly the wealthy, to try to outpace and outdo one another in consumption, while the dynamic of "keeping up the Joneses" compels neighbors to simply try to keep pace with one another.

Along this line, Robert Frank's *Luxury Fever* highlights the way people pour money and time into accumulating fashionable goods that do not provide lasting subjective well-being. The pleasure rapidly fades. Things like spending more time in flowing relationships with family and friends, or getting a shorter commute by moving closer to more densely populated urban centers even if it means living in a smaller home, result in higher self-reported satisfaction.[6] Yet people regularly gravitate to the pleasures afforded by the market system. Because those pleasures demand fairly little from the consumer, they are more heavily dependent on the consumer item or service being novel or exciting. In other words, the consumer object or service has to make up for the fact that the consumer is not putting much, if any, effort or concentration into consumption. An example of this dynamic would be using a jet ski versus a surfboard. The jet ski demands little consumer skill, albeit vastly more environmental resources. Conversely, the surfboard demands increasing levels of skill, and also draws far less from environmental resources. In his research, Csikszentmihalyi found that "when people were pursuing leisure activities that were expensive in terms of the outside resources required – activities that demanded expensive equipment, or electricity, or other forms of energy measured in BTUs, such as power boating, driving, or watching television – they were significantly *less* happy than when involved in inexpensive leisure." By contrast, when people undertook hobbies or simply joined in conversation, when they engaged in "activities that require few material resources, but…a relatively high investment

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[6] Robert Frank, *Luxury Fever* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), -.

of psychic energy," they reported much higher levels of satisfaction. Csikszentmihalyi has additionally argued that, "Leisure that uses up external resources…often requires less attention, and as a consequence it generally provides less memorable rewards."[7]

In their article, "To do or to have? That is the question," Leaf van Boven and Tom Gilovich note studies that indicate those who spent their money on an activity or experience rated themselves as more satisfied than those who spent money on material objects. Van Boven and Gilovich attribute this to the greater social interaction and connection made through the activities, which are usually undertaken and shared with other people.[8] Yet the more passive a person is, the more entertaining and extensive consumption also has to be to be pleasing, even if it is activity versus material possession focused. For instance, if the activity were going to watch a professional basketball game, that would be more worthwhile than buying an expensive jersey, but both watching the game and owning the jersey would generally generate less self-reported value than actually playing basketball. It is worth noting that playing basketball would also intrinsically entail and require market consumption as well, e.g., shoes, clothing, a basketball, and a court (if an indoor court, there would be large number of other consumer items with the building). The key difference is these would be consumer items enveloped in the exercise and development of capabilities, including joining and affiliating with others in the game. A key problem, though, as noted in chapter four and raised by economist Tibor Scitovsky in *The Joyless Economy*, is that people are neither necessarily competent nor adept at consuming in ways that are fulfilling. People tend to go

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[7] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 99.

[8] Leaf van Boven and Tom Gilovich, "To do or to have? That is the question" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85: 1193-1202.

for the jersey or watching the game over playing it.[9] Along this line, Csikszentmihalyi notes that a prime downside of the market system is that "it will supply any product for which there is sufficient demand, regardless of real benefits."[10]

Money also only opens doors to the possibility for flow, by providing opportunities, items, or services with which to cultivate and exercise one's capabilities. Flow itself cannot be purchased, but rather arises through intention and effort, and the problem with market consumption is that it lends itself toward convenience and shortcuts to external rewards absent the work to create them. People are robbed of flow in consumption when that consumption is passive, and as discussed, the passive pleasure that comes with consuming a produced good – which if self-produced would be tasting the fruit of one's own achievement but is more passively received if produced by another (whether a person or machine) – does not compare to the enjoyment of flow. In the conclusion to *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, Csikszentmihalyi summarizes this position and what he takes to be the negative consequences of passive consumption as follows:

> Enjoyment is not synonymous with pleasure. The satisfaction of basic needs may be a prerequisite for experiencing enjoyment, but by itself it is not enough to give a sense of fulfillment. One needs to grow, to develop new skills, to take on new challenges to maintain a self-concept as a fully functioning human being. When skills are stunted or when opportunities for action are reduced, people will turn to pleasure as the only meaningful experience available. Or they will work harder for extrinsic

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[9] As noted in the fourth chapter, the distinction Csikszentmihalyi draws between enjoyment (skilled and active) and pleasure (unskilled and passive) parallels the distinction Scitovsky makes between "novelty" and "comfort." Scitovsky argues that adaptation in conjunction with socially motivated consumption, aimed at keeping up with or outshining the Joneses, are two key reasons increased income will not generate increased wellbeing. He distinguishes between comfort activities and novelty activities. Comfort activities require minimal, if any, skill to enjoy and are primarily oriented at the removal of a discomfort, which range from bodily discomforts, such as hunger, cold, or thirst, to social discomfort, such as not being accepted, praised, respected, or even envied. Comfort activities are also highly susceptible to a never-ending demand for more given that they are highly sensitive to adaptation and social comparison. In other words, like a stomach, their satisfaction is an ever-moving target, because the more you fill it, the more it requires to feel sated. According to Scitovsky, novelty activities are distinct in that they require skills. They also generally lead people to interact with others. Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy: The Psychology of Human Satisfaction* Revised Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 59-79, 227.

[10] Csikszentmihalyi, *Good Business*, 28.

> rewards, to accumulate some tangible feedback for their existence. Status, power, and money are signs that one is competent, that one is acquiring control. But these are secondary rewards that matter only when the primary enjoyment that could be had from action itself is not available. In this society, where the opportunity to satisfy pleasure and to obtain material comforts is unprecedented, the statistics on crime, mental diseased, alcoholism, venereal disease, gambling, dissatisfaction with work, drug abuse, and general discontent keep steadily worsening. The rates of these indices of alienation are increasing more sharply in the affluent suburbs…The lack of intrinsic rewards is like an undiscovered virus we carry in our bodies; it maims slowly but surely.[11]

Yet how tightly tied and necessary is a given consumer good to the cultivation and exercise of a capability for flow in an activity? One view is that market consumption serves an exclusively instrumental role to human capabilities. In his essay, "Consumption, Well-Being, and Capability," David Crocker applies the capabilities approach to market consumption, and he argues, "As we – often in the company of family, friends, or colleagues – meet human needs, realize our best potentials, press against limits, and cope with bad fortune in humanly excellent ways, commodities can play an important instrumental role."[12] Similarly, drawing on Adam Smith's point that any "creditable day-labourer" of 18th century Europe would need a linen shirt to be able to be in public without embarrassment, Jerome Segal argues in his essay, "Living at a High Economic Standard: A Functionings Analysis," that income and consumer goods are "tools" that can be enlisted to "promote or facilitate central, and possibly universally valued, functionings, such as 'appearing in public without shame.'"[13] Segal further contends that through housing, a person can "host with pride in a dwelling a reasonable distance from work and in a safe neighborhood." He holds that transportation facilitates a person "get[ting] around relatively quickly among the central loci

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[11] Csikszentmihayli, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, 199.

[12] David Crocker, "Consumption, Well-Being, and Capability," in *Ethics of Consumption: The Good Life, Justice, and Good Stewardship* ed. David Crocker and Toby Linden (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 370.

[13] Segal focuses on functionings because he contends that Nussbaum's list of core capabilities offers too comprehensive a vision of the good life, despite Nussbaum's argument and intention for it to be a mere base through which a variety of understandings of the good life could be pursued. Jerome Segal, "Living at a High Economic Standard: A Functionings Analysis" in *Ethics of Consumption*, 354-360, 362.

of everyday life (home, work, friends, schools, shops)," while food allows her to "eat meals that are healthful, appetizing, and leisured." With health and education expenditures, people can gain "effective preventive and remediable health care" and be "schooled effectively and safely."[14]

Ultimately both Segal and Crocker understand consumer goods and services as having purely instrumental value. They present a position that views activities people undertake to have value as ends in themselves, while market items and services are simply useful means to those activities. This is a view akin to the one Aristotle famously put forward regarding money and material possessions. Aristotle maintained that material goods were simply a means of reaching things of intrinsic value like friendship, knowledge, arts, virtue, and ultimately contemplation of the Good. From Aristotle's perspective, obsession with those material goods and their accumulation reveals a failure to understand the difference between goods worthy of value as ends in themselves and goods worthy of value merely as means to those higher ends.[15] In regards to money, it is fairly clear why it only has value as an instrument, because aside from any aesthetic appeal coins or cash might have, money itself has no use beyond serving as a means of exchange. However, consumer items and services are not so clearly limited to having only instrumental value, and the instrumental value of

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[14] Ibid., 356. Segal also adds on aspects of being part of the labor market, i.e., being productive in the economic system, that similarly tied to core functionings. In regards to the labor market he highlights key concerns people have as laborers, as opposed to primary expenditures they make as consumers. These concerns are for security, beauty, leisure, and work, and the core functioning connected to each are as follows. Security concerns are about living "free from anxiety over the decline or loss of income." Beauty concerns consists of living "in an aesthetically rich human and natural environment." Leisure concerns deal with "devot[ing] ample time to enjoyment of friends and amusements." Finally, work concerns focus on "deriv[ing] social esteem and personal self-expression through employment." Ibid., 358

[15] Aristotle criticized the desire for ever-more material goods as *pleonexia*. Someone gripped by *pleonexia* seeks to attain more money, possessions, and even honor no matter the cost, and even if it comes at the expense of others. See Aristotle *Politics* I.8, VII.1, *Rhetoric* II.15-17; John Alexander, *Capabilities and Social Justice*; Nussbaum, "Aristotelian Social Democracy," 211, 229; and Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, 339-40.

certain consumer goods does not fully capture the extent to which they are intrinsically and constitutively part of human flourishing.

Consider having a cup of coffee at a cafe and the connection between the consumer goods and capabilities that could tie in with that activity. Granted, if the coffee comes in a paper cup, that cup seems a prime example of a temporary, instrumental vessel that serves the purpose of holding the coffee until it has been drunk but ultimately and swiftly ends up in a trash can[16] - one could, however, bring one's reusable cup. But what about the coffee itself, along with any other ingredients stirred into it? While drinking the coffee could be tied to exercising capabilities of bodily health as well as the sensation of taste, it is often also a key part of other activities, such as work, reading, or meeting people to talk and build relationship or plan for communal activities, be they recreational, political, religious, etc. In these respects coffee is interwoven with far more than consumption of a beverage. The coffee, along with the incalculable array of market items and services that go into creating the kind of coffeehouse atmosphere that a person can find constructive for working, reading, or conversing and allows her to develop and exercise a range of capacities, including affiliation, imagination, thought, emotion, and practical reason. The importance of the space and the coffee become evident if one imagines trying to exercise and develop the same capabilities and activities on a street corner or a parking lot.

Furthermore, even after a person finishes the coffee and leaves, that coffee and anything else imbibed or eaten literally shapes and nourishes the cells of her body to some extent, and that coffee shop experience develops her capacities, depending on what she may have read or whom she might have interacted with during it. Each of those effects is

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[16] The most fleeting type of consumer goods are termed "Fast Moving Consumer Goods" (FMCG) and these are the packaged items that sell quickly at fairly low cost. FMCG include household items like toilet paper and cleaning supplies, personal care products like deodorant, toothpaste, and over-the-counter drugs, as well as a broad array of food and beverages like fruits and vegetables, processed snacks, and bottled drinks. Gas stations, drugstores, big box stores, and grocery stores are generally teeming with FMCG.

reinforced heavily if this consumer practice is a regular routine in her life. From a capabilities approach, market consumption is a constitutive element of the intrinsically worthwhile, flowing activities of reading, writing, conversing, and being nourished. These are activities that grow and enact capacities of imagination, thought, sensation, bodily health, affiliation, play, and practical reason, none of which would unfolded as such absent that market consumption. If the coffee house is one committed to living wages, fair trade, and environmental sustainability, openly sharing and highlighting information about its employment practices and the source and growers of the ingredients transformed there into cafe fare - i.e., if it is a place in which one can thereby effectively exercise political consumerism as described by Luke Bretherton[17] - it is even more intimately connected to the cultivation of one's capabilities for affiliation, practical reason, control over one's environment, and living in care for other species.

Along a similar line, consider a guitar player. His guitar is a consumer item through which he can develop and exercise capabilities of play, emotion, imagination, sensation, affiliation, as well as practical reason. That guitar and its use would likely also come with accoutrement (pegs, strings, metronome, sheet music, stand, chair, carrying case, attire, shoes, etc.) as well as lessons, practice space, performance space, air conditioning, electricity, and so forth. If the guitarist is part of a band, these consumer items and services would be multiplied many times over, as other instrument specific items and services are added into the mix. It would be inaccurate to label all of these consumer goods as having *merely* instrumental value to playing music, considering that without them, there is no guitar playing or practice, no band, no concert. The consumer goods in cases like this one are necessary.

[17] Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 183-184.

They are constitutive building blocks, and if taken away, the capability to play the guitar would crumble.[18]

As another example, it is not clear what the game of soccer and the capability to engage in that form of play would consist of absent a soccer ball and some form of goal posts. One could quibble over the how requisite it is for a given soccer game to have formal goals, a manicured field, uniforms, shoes, shin guards, attired referees, and so forth, but the ball itself and some demarcation of goals are absolutely necessary, and not simply in an instrumental sense. The ball and goals are not means to the game; these things are part of the game, put at play amid the running, kicking, blocking, scoring, cheering, shouting, strategizing, sensing, picking, and bonding people gathered together in that activity. And if that soccer ball is made in a factory or crafted makeshift from the wrapped up remnants of socks, plastic bags, or rags, it has intrinsic value. Just as pen and ink, computer and electrical grid, paper and printing press are intrinsically important to reading or writing. The things secured in the marketplace are not mere means to capabilities and flow, but rather are critical, intricately interwoven aspects of them.

Given this relationship between consumer items and capabilities, these consumer objects are also intricately connected to the wonder that attends the development and exercise of capabilities. The value of a capability is not instrumentally reductive to the emotion of wonder, as that wonder is not the basis of a capability's intrinsic value, but rather both indicative of and responsive to its value. It is because a capability is worth developing

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[18] There is an important line of thought that needs to be explored and developed further as to whether or not it matters or makes a difference if the guitar, for instance, is bought as a consumer good, received as a gift, or crafted from scratch by the musician himself. What role does attaining a guitar via the market affect its role as either being partially constitutive of human flourishing? It seems from a micro perspective, if the guitar was produced in a just manner (e.g. workers earn living wages, its production is not exhausting the environment or unnecessarily harming other species, etc.) for which the musician checked, and it is used in a way that generates flowing glimpses of infinite goodness for the musician and communities around him, it is not clear it matters whether it was received as a gift, self-made, or bought. But this dynamic demands further study than is possible in the space of this dissertation at present.

and exercising in its own right that we find it wondrous. Similarly, the consumer items are not instrumental or reducible in value to either the capability or the emotion with which they connect. The next section lays out guidelines for a theological ethic of market consumption rooted in this the vision of human flourishing as glimpsing God's goodness in the cultivation of wondrous activities in community with one another.

A Theological Ethic of Market Consumption in Outline

The following theological ethic for market consumption draws upon a modified version of the framework for consumption laid out by Fuat Firat and Nikhilesh Dholakia earlier in the first chapter. Consumption oriented toward glimpsing God would entail focusing on objects and services with which people can: (1) engage in the production process to some extent, (2) participate actively during consumption, whether mentally or physically, and (3) connect with others through consumption. These are three key dimensions to contemporary market consumption, and any given act of consumption falls along a spectrum within each dimension from either private to communal or active to passive.[19] For simplicity's sake, the following explanation of these dimensions will focus on consumer items, though each pattern applies to consumer services as well.

The first dimension is *participation* in the production process and whether a person is active or passive in it. Active participation entails joining in decisions about the item's features or aspects. Customizing an item would be active participation, as would, to a much greater degree, helping craft the item in some respect. Active participation enlists the consumer's time, energy, and skill, and the less she puts in, the more passive her participation. Selecting something off the shelf that is ready to open and start using is an

[19] This description of key dimensions is adapted from the one laid forth in Fuat Firat and Nikhilesh Dholakia in *Consuming People*. See Fuat Firat and Nikhilesh Dholakia, *Consuming People: From political economy to theaters of consumption* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 8-11.

example of passive participation. Given the mystery that tends to shroud the origins of most consumer items today, particularly those that are ready-made off the shelf, investigating the origins of a product and making judgments about what to buy based on that is also a form of participation in the production process, in that one is intentionally exerting exit influence over the production of that product via one's purchase.[20] Clearly exit influence occurs whether one intends it or not, but actively seeking out certain goods to purchase based on the way they were produced still serves as a degree of active participation in its creation, in the vein again of political consumerism. Given enough consumer demand, this kind of active participation can drastically shift how items are produced. Changes underway in the food industry toward more local and certified organic sources of food evidence this power.

As noted in the second chapter, Christian consumer ethics has largely focused on mitigating or eliminating harms in the market system to workers, the impoverished, other species, and the environment fits directly in this category of active participation, in which consumer decisions are based on how a product was made. Such concerns focus on things like safe working conditions and living wages for producers and minimal environmental impact or harm to other species. Protecting the core capabilities that Nussbaum lays out is a means of ensuring that people are not harmed in the production process. Active participation in market consumption entails boycotting products that violate any of the core

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[20] Some consider this exit influence to be a meager form of participation. Elizabeth Anderson criticizes the fact that most of the time people only get to express their voice at the tail end of the economic process by voting via their purchase (or refrain thereof). They only have "exit" influence over the production and marketing of a given item or service. Market testing groups aside, the vast majority of people have no "voice," or direct input, into its creation or advertising. Yet this view does not give due credit to the affect consumer demand has on production. While it is difficult to organize (as difficult as organizing political will) deep engagement in understanding the origins of one's consumer items and services and making consumer choices based on that information is a form of active participation in the production process. While the default exit influence one has over production (i.e. consumer choices and demand affect production whether people are intending to or not) is passive, intentionally choosing what one consumes based around how it was produced is extremely active. See Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 143-144.

human capabilities, including avoiding products if one cannot determine their origin since tracking the origin of consumer items and services can be an extremely difficult process given the lack of information and globally interwoven economy. It furthermore includes seeking products that not only do not stifle people's capabilities, but also cultivate them as much as possible. For instance buying from businesses in which working conditions are set up in such a way to develop people's capabilities and opportunities for flow.[21] This could include profit and governance sharing, in which employees own the company thereby having opportunities to exercise control, practical reason, and affiliation in the workplace even if the work itself might be less conducive or needing of skilled movements of imagination, thought, or the body.

The second dimension, *engagement*, deals with how active or passive a person is in the use of the consumer item. This dimension connects most directly with flow. The more a consumer item involves a person physically and or mentally, the more active he or she is in its use. A puzzle or book, for instance, would entail lots of mental activity, as could a challenging video game. The use of running shoes or sports equipment would entail a high level of physical engagement, as well as mental depending on the skilled actions, dispositions, and decisions involved in a given game. A more passive engagement comes with things like watching television, though a lot depends upon what is being watched and the level of attention and prior knowledge it demands of its viewer. For instance, watching something in a foreign language to learn or practice it entails far more active engagement than watching the same program in one's native tongue. Watching a detailed documentary or story with intriguing plot and complex characters likewise demands more mental engagement and enrichment than a show that piques interest via commercial-break cliffhangers or flashy violence amidst a predictable, weekly 30-minute arc. Consumer items

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[21] See Csikszentmihalyi, *Good Business*.

and services that challenge and develop people's skills and capacities are simply more important and valued (upon examination, if not in widespread practice) in people's lives according to Csikszentmihalyi's research. Certain types of consumption only provide pleasure, with no room – absent a masterful and intentional exercise of perception that can find flow anywhere – for flow or the development of a person's capabilities.

The third dimension, *connection*, has to do with the degree to which consumption is a private affair or something done in relationship and connection to other people – for instance, eating alone versus sharing a meal with others, or driving to work alone versus carpooling or riding public transit. Because of the flow ever-latent within human interaction and relationships, sharing in consumption with others can amplify enjoyment. This point is not to say private consumption is negative nor to romanticize consumption with others, but rather to argue that private consumption – even when aimed at flowing activities versus mere pleasure – has a lower ceiling of enjoyment that consumption in relationship and connection to others breaks through because those relationships themselves afford opportunities for additional and amplified forms of wondrous activity.

This focus on connection also addresses the kinds of consumption that could come at the expense of others. For instance, consumption aimed primarily at demonstrating and demarcating social status clearly has a social aspect to it, but it is aimed at the passive pleasure of being praised and even envied by other people. Simply consuming in order to fit in with others is also focused on the passive pleasure of being accepted. These are not the kind of affiliations of respect and compassion that Nussbaum lays out as part of this capability of affiliation, nor the type of affiliation that generates flow. However, consumption aimed at mutual enjoyment of flowing activities can greatly deepen affiliation and the friendships therein, e.g., playing and hearing music, reading and discussing literature

or media, playing and watching sports, growing, preparing, and or sharing food, maintaining or improving homes.

Nussbaum, Csikszentmihalyi, and Adams all stress the importance of this kind of connection to others. For Nussbaum, "affiliation" serves as an architectonic capability that allows people to do things in and through "complex forms of discourse, concern, and reciprocity with other human beings," without which a person is can only act in an "incompletely human way."[22] Csikszentmihalyi highlights the way "people in general report much lower moods when alone than when they are with others. They feel less happy, less cheerful, less strong, and more bored, more passive, more lonely." Alongside work, good relationships have the greatest effect on people's quality of life according to Csikszentmihalyi's research.[23] Striking a resonate note, Adams stresses, "the extent to which the activities in which we find so much of our good are shared or *common* projects…. [H]uman good is found very largely in activities whose point and value depend on the participation of other people in a common project." By common projects, Adams means all the kinds of wondrous activities that have been noted throughout this dissertation: friendship, family, conversation, concerts, sports, games, rituals, politics, science, philosophy, etc. Adams maintains that "it is in the enjoyment of excellence that a person's good is primarily to be sought," and "good common projects, and caring about them for their own sakes, play a huge part in the constitution of human well-being."[24]

The consumer ethic that arises out of combining the aspiration and practices of flow with the capabilities approach to human development focuses consumption on the items and services that enable flow for oneself and others. In this form of consumption people actively participate in the production of goods. They are also actively engaged during

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[22] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 82.
[23] Csikszentmihalyi also notes importance and increases in self-reported concentration when a person is alone (the only "dimension of experience that tends to be higher [when a person is] alone"), though sharing in wondrous activities, in "common projects" would entail heightened levels of concentration and focus on the tasks at hand. Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 90. See also, Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 164-191.
[24] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 86-88; Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 101, 131-149.

consumption, and connect with others through consumption. They are concerned with cultivating and exercising flowing capabilities not only for themselves but also for everyone, from producers to fellow consumers. That consumer ethic gains an even deeper theological logic undergirding and directing it when the wondrous activities one is engaging via market consumption offer glimpses of God's infinite goodness. The final section of this dissertation concludes by delving further into the theological connections between loving God and loving the creation, as well as between the goodness of God and the goodness of creation, in order to further develop points made in this dissertation to begin exploring connections as well between human flourishing now and in the eschaton. The position being sketched here is that the theological ethic of market consumption in this dissertation provides the way to begin articulating how and why finite goods of flourishing in this life connect quite directly with eschatological goodness of the Kingdom Come. In short, to articulate why this world matters and how we can flourish within it now with an eye toward eternity.[25]

Loving Finite Goods in God: Abidingly Earthy

As noted in the first chapter, economist Alfred Marshall helpfully highlighted in his 1890 *Principles of Economics* that economic activity neither creates nor destroys material existence, but simply a rearranges, combines, cultivates, or breaks down animate and inanimate parts of creation. Marshall wrote, "Man cannot create material things…. His efforts and sacrifices result in changing the form or arrangement of matter to adapt it better for the satisfaction of wants…. As his production of material products is really nothing more than a rearrangement of matter which gives it new utilities; so his consumption of

[25] Given our context of living deeply embedded within the contemporary market system, the answers to those questions for us must wrestle with what it is to flourish amidst contemporary market production and consumption. Again, the question of the dissertation, what role does market consumption play in human flourishing? In what ways does it injure, nurture, or even partially constitute human flourishing? under God?

them is nothing more than a disarrangement of matter, which diminishes or destroys its utilities."[26] Though it can often feel set apart or distinct from what we think of as "creation," the market economy is part of broader ecological economy of creation that we simply affect and arrange (albeit in either exhausting or sustainable ways to that broader ecological economy's capacity to replenish and in ways that justly cultivate benefit for all people or for only a select few). Consumer goods are inextricably parts of a good creation fashioned via human labor and intellect.

The previous section examined the ways in which these goods can be not merely instrumental to but partially constitutive of human capabilities, despite the view from some that consumer goods are never anything more than "tools" to other ends. A related dynamic and difficulty arises with identifying finite goods, including certain market goods, as glimpses of infinite goodness (and with generally drawing on Platonic views of goodness). Finite goods can seem like dispensable, instrumental ladders to infinite goodness. In classic Platonic thought, finite goods are at best precursors through which one ascends to ever-higher perception and appreciation of the "form" of beauty itself. Plato laid this position out in his *Symposium,* in which he has Socrates recount the stages of ascent in loving beauty. A person begins loving physical things, like bodies, garments, gold, etc. Some people get trapped at this stage, while others come to realize not only the form of beauty shared among these things is what one loves and desires, but also that the "beauty of the mind is more honorable than the beauty of the outward form." Ultimately, in seeking beauty in knowledge and wisdom, one comes to "perceive a nature of wondrous beauty… absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things." From this

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[26] Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics* (London: Macmillan for the Royal Economic Society, 1961), 63-64.

perspective, the beautiful things on earth are for "using as steps only" as one "mounts upwards for the sake of that other beauty."[27]

Over five centuries later, ancient Platonist philosopher Plotinus honed this idea of ascent in his treatise "On Beauty." Equating Beauty itself with the Good itself, Plotinus noted that beauty entails not simply beautiful sights but all types of sense-perception. It also extends beyond that to the beauty of certain actions, knowledge, and virtue. Plotinus held that while it is fortunate to have beautiful physical things, "We must ascend, therefore, once more to the Good, which every soul desired." Without direct contemplation of the Good, even a person with enormous wealth and power still be lacking that "for the sake of which it were well to let go the possession and kingship and rule of the whole earth and of the sea, aye, and of the heaven itself." Plotinus argues for the importance of "leaving behind all these and looking beyond them" in order to be converted to beholding Beauty itself. Stressing the way in which all else is a "ladder" to this contemplative vision, Plotinus goes on to ask, "[W]hat other beauty would [a person] have need?" if he were able to remain in contemplation of Beauty itself and "taste of Its bliss," to the ultimate extent of losing one's distinct self and being "assumed" into Goodness itself.[28]

The common concern with Platonist points of view is that they seem to downgrade and utterly instrumentalize finite goods, in a similar vein to the way some view market goods as at best instrumental means to something of intrinsic value. Yet as noted in Chapter 3, Adams seeks to distinguish his theory of value from this kind of supersessionist vision of loving the Good. He pushes against this idea "because it does not allow for anything that really deserves the name of *love* of one's neighbor, or of any other finite thing…. [I]f I do not care about my neighbor's well-being, or any relationships with him, except because I

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[27] Plato, *Symposium*, 210a-211d.
[28] Plotinus, "On Beauty," *Enneads* 1.6.VII.

believe it will help me to enjoy God as I desire, I do not love my neighbor. Nor do I love art or philosophy or any other finite good if I do not love it for its own sake."[29] Adams claims it is "outrageous" for Plato to have held that our love of finite goods, especially our love of individual people, should ultimately become "incidental to love of Beauty." Adams argues, "It's not only obvious that we really do love individual human beings, for example, but overwhelmingly plausible that we should really love them."[30] Although he says "it's not easy to say where Plato's argument goes wrong," Adams contends that the validity of loving particulars seems to be evidenced in, for instance, the fact that God loves each of us, in our particularity and individuality. That love is in part because in imaging infinite goodness, "there is something wonderful" in us; nevertheless, God's love for us is clearly not proportioned to our goodness so much as graciously exhibits a lovingkindness that is deeply committed to us, despite, for instance, our sins and the way we mar resemblances of God that might otherwise radiate forth from us. Either way, however, Adams leans on God's love for finite goods like us as exemplary of the legitimacy and rightness of loving particulars.[31]

By contrast, Adams labels the view that finite goods are ladders to the Good "teleological subordination" and describes it as an effort "to integrate motives and values by treating all other goods as mere *means* or *ways* to one supreme Good."[32] In striving to ward such subordination off, Adams argues that finite goods are worthy of admiration and love in themselves. Adams flatly maintains, "particular things must be loved for their own sake if they are to be loved at all,"[33] and argues that a teleological subordination, which goes against this love of particulars, occurs in two possible ways. First, a finite good is loved as a mere means to another good, and therefore is dispensable as that ulterior good is reached. Second,

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[29] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 186-187.
[30] Ibid., 152.
[31] Ibid., 152-176.
[32] Ibid., 187.
[33] Ibid., 152.

a finite good is loved as a mere instance of a quality, and therefore it could be as easily if not more fully enjoyed in another finite good that manifests that quality as well or in a superior way. Plato and Plotinus subordinate finite goods to the Good in both these ways. In regards to treating a person as a means, it is fairly clear that one does not actually appreciate another person if one is simply being kind in order to advance one's career, to gain access to possessions, prestige, or popularity, or if one is willing to leave that person behind in the pursuit of contemplating the Good. The lack of love for another person is evident in these kinds of situations as one abandons the relationship when one attains the ulterior end, or that person no longer seems like an effective conduit to it.

Yet the reasons for Adams's rejection of the idea that we love particular finite goods simply because they are instances of a more general quality, which ultimately ascends up to God or the Good, are more complicated. This idea harbors a sense that any given finite good is replaceable by an equivalent good and dispensable for one that more fully instantiates the good quality – for instance, a friend with whom one has engaging, roving philosophical debates could be readily exchanged for someone of equal or better yet greater capacities for such dialogue. Adams's response to this position is that it inaccurately accounts for how people value finite goods. According to Adams, we begin with love of particulars and only later gain an appreciation for certain qualities more generally. Furthermore, he maintains that this kind of general appreciation for certain qualities, though, is also perpetually rooted in love of specific goods, i.e. we never actually love "beauty" but only beautiful things.

Whereas Plato and Plotinus counsel detaching from particular finite goods to contemplative appreciation for an abstract general quality therein, Adams argues that in reality we simply do not do this kind of thing. People do not in practice value general qualities fully abstracted from particular finite goods, nor we should not strive to do so

according to Adams. He holds, "[T]he immediate and primary object of our valuing is something individual and particular. We see something beautiful, and we react to it, valuing that particular thing." And he further affirms the priority of particularity over generality by arguing, "[W]e might say that one's liking the more general thing is simply a generalization over one's liking particular things, or perhaps a disposition to like particular things."[34] Drawing upon Adams's account, instead of a Platonic ascent to love the Good shorn of finite resemblances, there is an abidingly earthy and grounded appreciation for beloved aspects of creation, in all of their wonderful particularity.

To return to Adams, from this perspective the finite is not a disposable ladder to the infinite as it is in many Platonic lines of thought, but rather an enduring image of it. Adams discusses an example of sunlight beautifully falling through leaves. He argues, "It is our love, our liking, our admiration and enjoyment of the light on the leaves that suggest to us the greater good [of God]. If we did not care for the light on the leaves, for its own sake, the divine glory will not be visible to us in this experience. So if this is an experience of loving God in the mode of admiring (or adoring) and enjoying God, it would seem to be a case in which love for a finite good is an integral part of love for God."[35] According to Adams, the love for a finite good and the more reflective appreciation of it as a glimpse of infinite goodness are distinct but tightly connected moments. They can even happen simultaneously, in the sense that one is taken by the beauty of the sunlight on leaves and feels, thinks, even professes, "Praise God." We can "enjoy God *in* enjoying finite things."[36] Along this line, one can view the sunlight on leaves as part of a good creation that is entirely detached from God, as a painting is to its painter, or as part of a good creation that is continuously

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[34] Ibid., 166.
[35] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 194.
[36] Ibid., 193.

dependent God, more analogous to the way a dance is to its dancer.[37] It is the difference between seeing creation as a past act of God, akin to a deistic view of God as cosmic clockmaker who simply set the universe in motion, versus seeing creation as the ongoing activity of God.

According to Adams, however, one need not have God consciously on one's lips, heart, and mind every second, nor in every instance of enjoying a finite good, in order to enjoy God in enjoying finite goods. Adams notes that perhaps the failure to consciously recognize and appreciate God in every finite good is more a result of people's "blindness" to God than anything else, and that one who was deeply perceptive in being for the Good would witness God in every finite good. Yet he maintains that he "would not want [his] argument to rest heavily on that claim," and attributes this lack of consciously praising God in every finite good more to people's finitude. Adams writes, "Given our limited capacity for attention, we may need sometimes to focus on a creature we love, without consciously attending to anything else – not even to God; and perhaps that applies to some moments of enjoyment." The key for Adams, however, is that even if recognizing finite goods' origin and resemblance to God does not arise every time one engages a finite good, it does arise sometimes, for instance during times of worship or personal prayer.[38] One could further argue that those set times of giving thanks to God in precise reference to the finite goods in one's life and the lives of others would cultivate one's capacity to perceive God in those goods in the course of everyday life and not only during worship and prayer.[39] This capacity

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[37] Adams also notes regarding these examples, "[I]n a theistic as distinct from a pantheistic view, the Creator is more distinct from the creatures than the dancer from the dance; but they are not as separable from God as the paintings are from the painter. God is neither as wholly immanent in the world as the dancer in the dance, nor as purely transcendent over it as the painter over the paintings. On a theistic view, however, I think there is enough immanence to support speaking of enjoying God in enjoying created goods." Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 195.

[39] See James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

to perceive and appreciate finite goods in God is key aspect of appreciating infinite goodness glimpsed in the kinds of wondrous activities that market consumption can enable.

In a very similar vein, the wonder and flow a person can experience in response to a finite good need not occur every moment or even ever time a person engages with that good. That wonder often serves as a "background emotion," as described in Nussbaum's *Upheavals of Thought*, such that the wonder and the love that grows from it "persist in the fabric of one's life, and are crucial to the explanation of one's actions, though it might take a specific circumstance to call them into awareness."[40] Furthermore, although a person might not experience wonder in ever encounter with a given good, the past perceptions – the history of such perceptions – that forms one's dispostitional orientation toward it as something wonderful are what create the bonds of love. Clearly if sufficient time passes without that wonder, the object, other person, or activity will fade as something of personal importance; however, a person does not need to be in a constant state of wonder to see, acknowledge, judge, and recognize wondrous finite goods, just as she need not be constantly thinking about God to be able to lovingly glimpse God in those finite goods.[41]

This perspective not only articulates why goods in this world matter theologically, but also generates a very different hope and take on eternity, and opens room for a greater appreciation and focus on the importance and intelligibility of bodily resurrection. This view is in contrast to not only the popular idea of person's soul floating off after death to be in heaven with God forever, but also the deeply classical and traditional theological view of eternal bliss as an everlasting contemplative beatific vision of God. Drawing on Aquinas, as well as so many church mothers and fathers before him, Josef Pieper holds that there are glimpses of the beatific vision in contemplation of earthly things. He writes, "earthly

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[40] Ibid., 71.
[41] See Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 195.

contemplation means above all: that back of immediate phenomena, and within them, the Face of the incarnate Divine Logos is visible," and that even "[t]he most trivial of stimuli can bring one to this peak."[42] Pieper proclaims:

> How splendid is water, a rose, a tree, an apple, a human face – such exclamations can scarcely be spoken without also giving tongue to an assent and affirmation which extends beyond the object praised and touches upon the origin of the universe. Who among us has not suddenly looked into a child's face, in the midst of toils and troubles of everyday life, and at that moment 'seen' that everything which is good, is loved and lovable, loved by God! Such certainties all mean, at bottom, one and the same thing: that the world is plumb and sound; that everything comes to its appointed goal; that in spite of all appearances, underlying all things is – peace, salvation, *Gloria*; that nothing and no one is lost…. That, in the precise sense, is contemplation. And we should have the courage to admit its identity.[43]

But in regards to eternal life, this line of theological thought maintains that worshipful contemplation of God directly will be the full and perfect happiness, for which created goods and contemplation of them are merely a "foretaste."[44]

It is not clear though, given the importance of the resurrection and the imagery of raised bodies in the new Jerusalem, why that kind of perception of God could not occur through other forms of wondrous activity in addition to contemplation. Why could finite goods not simply shine and express the goodness of God all the more brilliantly and clearly in the eschaton, whether due to people having clearer, sinless vision, or finite goods resembling God's goodness even more greatly as part of new creation? If one grants that contemplation is not the only form of wondrous activity (of glimpsing God) and that God could be encountered and admired not merely in a glimpse but far more deeply and lastingly in finite goods in the eschaton, then the view that created goodness resembles and offers glimpses of God's infinite goodness opens space to view and hope in a day of resurrection in which *bodies* – flesh coming back upon bone, raised and breathed back to life for eternity –

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[42] Josef Pieper, *Happiness & Contemplation* trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1998), 80, 82.
[43] Ibid., 84-85.
[44] Ibid., 83.

love and experience God all the more powerfully and directly in the wonders of creation, as people exercise capabilities and activities therein in the midst of God's Kingdom Come. People would enjoy embodied love and experience of God and creation in God, freed forever from the distortions and blindness of sin that cut against God and the goodness of God's creation, perhaps to till, keep, and enjoy abundant gardens as envisioned in Genesis, or live in fruitful and worshipful prosperity as in the prophetic visions of cities and God's people finally living in streets restored with justice and peace.[45]

One could imagine in the eschaton, in resurrected bodily existence amidst the new Jerusalem, people having something like contemplative "inner sight" of God with eyes wide open and flowingly attuned to the myriad goods that make up the new creation and not only point instrumentally to God but actually in themselves image, express, manifest, and glorify God's infinite goodness. Created material existence then would be *a*, if not *the*, way through which we creatures, formed from the earth, know and love God, according to God's design and intention in making a "very good" physical creation in the first place.

At stake in a theological view like this is also whether this world, this creation of God, at root matters, and whether this life and the goodness of creation now have any significant, intrinsic connection to the life to come, or whether we are simply biding our time, in which case creation and its purported "goodness" offer at best a comparatively dull waiting room[46] and at worst a sinking ship, each of which we are hoping to escape. The position being sketched here is that this "very good" world of which we are a part matters intimately to God's plans and purposes for creation precisely as a manifestation of God's goodness. This view shares and builds in part upon the kind of conviction and recognition

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[45] See Genesis 2:15; Isaiah 11:1-9, 58:1-12, 65:17-25; Zechariah 8:1-13; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104; Revelation 22:1-5; and 1 Corinthians 15.

[46] Albeit perhaps one still filled with dangerous, distracting temptations for those undisciplined in patience.

noted by Elaine Scarry that "Beauty brings copies of itself into being. It makes us draw it, take photographs of it, or describer it to other people,"[47] with a strong affirmation that this creative activity does not somehow simply result in cheap knockoffs to be discarded when a better version comes along, but rather is both in itself and its creations the wondrous God-given activity for which we were created. It is the flourishing in which we see God's goodness, in glimpses here and now but evermore brilliantly in the eschatological resurrection to come.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the question, "What role do consumer goods play in human flourishing?" When considering market consumption and consumer practices, many Protestant and Catholic ethicists and theologians have focused far more on injustices and injuries than on flourishing. However, a key and complementary tool that Christian ethics has been lacking for healing wounds and cultivating well-being is a comparably detailed account of the theological rationale of market consumption and its connection to human flourishing. This dissertation maintains that there is a deeper theological purpose to consumption: it is nothing less than glimpsing God's infinite goodness. Using the bridge concept of "wonder," the dissertation argued that human flourishing consists of such glimpses of God, and it critically connected Platonist Christian theology and ontology, the positive psychology concept of "flow," and the Capabilities Approach to Human Development in order to detail the way *human flourishing - glimpsing God's infinite goodness - consists of cultivating people's capabilities for wondrous activity in community with one another.*

The first chapter examined the context for current market consumption in the United States in the first chapter, and the state of the field of Catholic and Protestant

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[47] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3-4.

consumer ethics in the second chapter. The dissertation then drew on the work of theologian Robert Adams, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and philosopher Martha Nussbaum to link their core insights together to construct a more detailed and expansive account of human flourishing than any of the three perspectives is able offer on its own.

The third chapter built upon Robert Adams's theological framework that identifies finite goods in creation as resemblances of God's infinite goodness and emphasizes the importance of nonmoral goods, in addition to moral goods, for human well-being. It ultimately argued that Adams's criteria for what counts as a resemblance of God are simultaneously too vague and too restrictive. As a result, his comprehensive theory of value remains too obscurely abstract to serve effectively as an ethical and theological guide for perceiving and seeking glimpses of God in creation. The dissertation argues for setting aside these criteria and instead affirming that all of creation, having been made "very good" by God, resembles God in some capacity. This move allows theological and ethical focus to shift from trying to determine what finite goods count as a resemblance of God to seeking ways to fully perceive and appreciate the wondrous finite goods that make up creation.

In the fourth chapter, the dissertation enlisted the positive psychology concept of flow articulated by Csikszentmihalyi to provide a more useful, applicable language and process for perceiving God's infinite goodness in finite goods. In considering the experience of wonderful finite goods, particularly consumer goods, the concept of flow provided: 1) a sharp line for delineating between active and passive forms of consumption, dependent upon the extent to which a person's capabilities are being engaged during consumption; 2) the fact that people find active consumption to be vastly more wondrous that passive consumption; 3) emphasis, akin to that in Adams's work, on the array of everyday nonmoral goods that constitute active consumption and human flourishing (not in place of, but complement to, moral goods); and 4) an instructive blueprint for what is critical to spark

wonder in a given activity for oneself or others, namely stoking a sense wonder in the activity via setting clear and challenging-but-achievable goals with clear, regular feedback on progress towards them.

However, given that the concept and practice of flow lack ethical direction and are easily susceptible to idolization, the dissertation turned in the fifth chapter to the work of Nussbaum on the Capabilities Approach to Human Development. The ten core human capabilities that she lays out builds upon the intuition that flourishing revolves around people's capabilities – what they are able "to do and to be." This list of capabilities provides ethical boundaries and direction for the cultivation and exercise of flow, in that any personal pursuit of flow should be ordered and oriented in a way that not only does not violate other people's capabilities, but also actively helps cultivate other people's capabilities for wondrous activity. The fifth chapter also argued that the concept of wonder can fill a gap in Nussbaum's own work: namely the lack of robust explanation for why any given capability (e.g., the ones included on her list) is central to human flourishing. Nussbaum holds that the capabilities she lists are central because they are necessary for people to live with human dignity – to live a life worthy of a human being – but she admittedly rests that claim, as well as the belief that human dignity matters, on an intuition. The dissertation argued that the core capabilities Nussbaum identified have such central importance to human flourishing because their exercise can afford wondrous moments of glimpsing God.

By bringing Adams, Csikszentmihalyi, and Nussbaum into conversation, a rich vision of human flourishing arose: glimpsing God's infinite goodness in the cultivation of human capabilities for wondrous activity in community with one another. The concluding chapter laid out the theological ethic of market consumption that grows from this understanding of flourishing. It expansively includes things people find wonderful and worthy of pursuit in ordinary life, while also remaining critical of ways in which these good things can be treated

as idols to the detriment of neighbors, self, as well as the rest of creation. This theological ethic highlights market objects, services, and activities in which people can: (1) engage in the production process to some extent, (2) participate actively during consumption, whether mentally or physically, and (3) connect with others through consumption. This ethic appreciates the role certain consumer objects, services, and activities can play in offering glimpses of God in the cultivation of wondrous capabilities for flow in community with others.

Having a theological rationale for market consumption is important for practical as well as conceptual reasons. Consumption is an integral and essential to human existence as part of this good creation. In contemporary society, that consumption is primarily enabled and accessed via market goods and services, but there is no developed vision of what everyday market consumption can or should be from a Christian perspective. We do not have a clear articulation of the point of market consumption. That matters for three reasons. First, absent that articulation, we easily miss the opportunity to appreciate good creation of which we are a part in all aspects of our everyday lives. When we consume in ways that harm neighbors, overtax other species and our ecology, and or envelope us in the anxious idolatries of wealth or status, we are unquestionably missing the mark of living in a ethically and theologically warranted manner. But those abuses are not the only way to relate to goods created in and through the market system, in which flourishing human activities and capabilities can be cultivated.

Second, while from a Christian perspective, an accurate articulation of that point to consumption is clearly not sufficient in itself to check or uproot people's sinful dispositions, that knowledge and the perceptions it can help cultivate are certainly part of the healing process. Absent some guiding light, even if out of full reach this side of the eschaton, is simply blindness to the right direction to move. As important and central as moral goods are,

focusing on them alone ignores and fails to joyfully perceive the full, life-giving, wonderful sweep of the goodness of creation, of and for which God crafted humanity a part.

Third, without that appreciation, it also becomes all the harder to move along the healing process, if all we see is rather stark medicine of moral restraint and dutiful prayer, versus a love for God and neighbor that bears out in the cultivation of capabilities for flow in community with one another. Neither morality nor prayer disappear on this picture, but rather they are enriched and enabled far more pervasive connection to our everyday lives. Caring for neighbor is about sharing in the wonder of creation together, which includes things like music, art, literature, science, architecture, sports, crafts, meals, gardening, comfortable sleep, learning, conversations with friends about movies or TV shows, games with family, holidays, modes of transportation, homes, and so forth, all of which come in addition to, and in "finite good" concert with, the wonders of things like beautiful sunsets, starry skies, and the Grand Canyon.

"Flow" comes in attention and activities that challenge and develop one's capabilities to engage these wonderful things. Ethical flow comes when we seek to share that cultivation and exercise of capabilities with everyone, ensuring that the wondrous activities we engage in do not come at the expense of others lacking fair wages and safe working conditions, or the exhaustion or gratuitous harm to other species. Theological flow comes when the above is combined with a recognition of finite wonderful goods afford glimpses of God's infinite goodness. In line with Adams's perspective, that recognition need to occur every moment of one's life or experience of flow, but in times of worship, thanksgiving, and prayer and the flow they themselves frequently afford. Granted an accurate articulation of that point to consumption is not itself sufficient to check or uproot people's sinful dispositions, that knowledge and the perceptions it can help cultivate are certainly part of the healing process. Absent some guiding light, even if out of full reach this side of the eschaton, is simply

blindness to the right direction to move. This dissertation has sought to make that direction clearer.

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