

# Notes

## 1 Introduction

1. The assumption that these phenomena are distinct and unrelated is further reflected by the fact that they are handled in unconnected disciplinary debates, with hardly any connections drawn between them. Important exceptions are Mary Douglas and Daniel Miller who suggested that anthropological theories of rituals developed originally to explain taboos and sacrifices in 'primitive' societies can be applied to modern consumption. These works opened the way to see the parallels between a tribal dietary taboo and the modern customs guiding what is appropriate to consume at a cocktail party (Douglas, 1972), or between a ritual sacrifice and grocery shopping in today's North London (Miller, 1999). Alan Hunt's (1996b) study on sumptuary laws, although along different lines, also emphasized this commonality, by arguing that sumptuary laws are earlier varieties of moral regulation that today takes the form of consumption regulation by the government and social movements.
2. There is no consensual definition of the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' in social sciences. Some authors use the term 'ethics' to refer to questions of what constitutes a good life and the term 'moral' for questions of justice (Barnett et al., 2005; Habermas, 1993), which draws largely on Hegel's (1949) distinction between *Sittlichkeit* (ethics) and *Moralität* (morality); but the opposite use is also present (Habermas, 1987). (Habermas even changed his own use from the latter to the former). Applying another distinction, some authors use 'moral' to denote actions guided by abstract rules, whereas 'ethical' is reserved for practical, context-specific and flexible normative evaluation (Sayer, 2005); yet others use the terms in the very opposite sense (Bauman, 1993). Finally, 'ethical' is sometimes used to refer to the concern for distant others, and 'moral' for close ones (Miller, 2001a); but this again is not a consistent use. I will use the two terms interchangeably to refer to normative stances as opposed to mere liking, akin to Taylor's concept of 'strong evaluations' (Taylor, 1989, p. 20), to be explained in the next chapter.
3. This argument is indebted to Slater's (1997a, 1997b) discussion on needs. He suggests that 'needs' is a normative concept; classifying something as a need – as opposed to a desire – always relies on a specific assumption as to what constitutes a meaningful, normal or at least human existence:

When I say that 'I need something', I am making at least two profoundly social statements: Firstly, 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. Statements of need are by their very nature profoundly bound up with assumptions about how people would, could or should live in their society: needs are not only social but also political in that they involve statements about social interests and

projects. ... Secondly, to say that 'I (or we – my social group, my community, my class) need something' is to make a claim on social resources, to claim an entitlement. (Slater, 1997a, pp. 2–3)

I consider 'needs' as one version of consumption norms and Slater's point on them has been instructive in developing an understanding of the stakes of consumption norms more generally.

4. These accounts tend to ignore the longer history of consumer movements in particular and that of the connections between moral concerns and the economy more generally (Trentmann, 2006b). Historical research, in turn, suggests that the current rise of ethical consumer movements is the contemporary version of a phenomenon that has a much longer genealogy.
5. Economics conceptualizes all drives behind consumption under the term 'preferences' (Kopányi, 1999). Economic theory does not deal with the substantive nature of these preferences but treats given, or revealed, preferences as the starting point (Stigler and Becker, 1977). Often, however, economics deviates from this principle, and implicitly puts forward a substantive theory of preferences as well, assuming not only utility-maximizing *means* but particular 'economically rational' substantive *aims* as well, which are egoistic and materialistic. Consider the following argument by which Lazear (following Becker) explains the lower fertility rates in high-income households:

Children produce a stream of services over time, much like an automobile, so one could talk about population growth in terms of consumption and demand curves. ... Since child services (the commodity produced with children) is a time intensive commodity, high wage women face a higher price of children than do low wage women. (Lazear, 2000, p. 11)

Here the discussion of 'rational means' is based on the assumption of a specific end, which is the maximization of *money* as opposed to, say, independence, or achievement of other (artistic, charitable, scientific, religious) aims. In this context the argument seems to become that the *real* aims behind apparently ethical actions are in fact egoistic and calculative. As Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood (1996) suggest, to fill the vacuum left by standard economic theory on the explanation of preferences, 'implicit ideas on human needs creep into economic analysis' (p. 4). These, according to Collin Campbell (1987), are based on the assumption of the insatiable, greedy individual. In this case, economic theory shifts from ignoring consumption norms to denying them. In this sense, consumer behavior can be interpreted as a strand that is in debate with the assumptions of standard economic theory, although, as we shall see, it could not fully depart from it.

6. For a critical discussion of lifestyle studies in marketing and sociology see Holt (1997).

## 2 Understanding Consumption Norms

1. The research was carried out in Budapest in 2005–06 and covered eight families of two or three generations (20 households) from different class

backgrounds. The oldest generation of the families grew up during presocialist times; the middle generation was born under socialism; whereas those in the youngest generation started their adult life under capitalism. The methods included individual and joint family interviews as well as observations of everyday consumption practices and family discussions of purchasing decisions.

2. The long-standing tendency in sociology of associating consumption with capricious purchases and the consumer with the allegedly irrational female consumer, discussed in the previous chapter, exhibits the same bias. It is telling that goods and their users that did not fit the irrational image of the consumer have been discussed under different headings, most notably that of 'technology'. This tendency has been subject to substantial criticism in recent decades, resulting in studies looking at the way men consume and the extension of the concept of consumption from private, luxury goods to material culture more broadly. Once we include, as Elisabeth Shove (Shove and Chappells, 2001) suggests, roof insulation, cars and highways in the notion of 'consumption', it no longer appears to be an activity done mainly by (irrational) women in the realm of the household. This book is written in the spirit of this critical approach. This is why it intentionally includes roughly the same amount of examples taken from men and women, and approaches consumption as a process of engagement with material culture as opposed to limiting it to the act of shopping for particular, extravagant goods.
3. For another classification identifying four modes of provision – market, state, household and communal – see Warde (1990).
4. For further discussion of the term 'consumption' see Harvey et al. (2001), Lury (1996), Miller (2001b) and Trentmann (2006a).
5. Fine et al., for instance, define food norms 'by the ranking of foods by absolute frequency of purchase for the sample as a whole, together with the divergences in rankings for various socioeconomic partitions of the sample' (Fine et al., 1996, p. 171). Similarly, Winterhalder suggests that 'social consumption norm will take the form of a line intermediate between minimum and maximum non-foraging expenditure rates' (Winterhalder, 1987, p. 328).
6. Most of these findings come largely from studies on women – housewives and mothers – and when they do not, as in Chin's (2001) research, they apply mainly to female participants. Does this mean that the relational nature of ethical visions only applies to women? Hardly. Studies on consumption by men suggest that social relationships are central also to the construction of their ethical visions of who to be. Some of these practices are related to the household, such as the purchase of a home and repair related to it, which is understood in terms of one's duties as a father, as well as in terms of achievement and respectability, understood in relation to the larger community (Osella and Osella, 2006). Other practices, such as the purchase of a new motorbike, which from the household's point of view appear as individualistic (Nyman, 1999), on closer scrutiny also turn out to be directed at a relational conception of identity, albeit defined through peer relations (see e.g. Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). This difference highlights

a further, crucial aspect of the ethical visions informing consumption norms: different norms apply to men and to women, and more generally to different people and contexts; an issue that I will return to shortly.

7. These assumptions were reflected in Ancient legislation that – diametrically opposing contemporary efforts – aimed at enhancing imports and limiting exports (Engen, 2004).
8. Their critique was formulated against contemporaneous mercantilist views that aimed to limit imports and encourage exports in order to maximize the domestic accumulation of money, denominated in gold and silver at the time. Although the commercial policy implication of this view of limiting exports was the opposite of the Ancient one, it nevertheless shared its key underlying assumption of trade being a zero-sum game. The difference in policy implications stems from the fact that whereas the Ancient view saw the key aim of commerce in the maximization of goods, mercantilists saw it in the maximization of money.
9. Athenian society consisted of four social strata: free men, free women, metics (foreigners and freed slaves) and slaves. Only free men above the age of 18 were citizens, which meant that they had the right to take part in politics and to own land. Free women were not allowed to take part in politics or to have property; their realm was the household (*oikos*). Metics could not acquire land or take part in public life either; they worked as laborers, tradesmen, craftsmen or money-lenders. Freemen only took up these professions if they could not get hold of land that was in short supply in Athens (Herman, 2006). This division of labor corresponds to the moral evaluation of different activities that ranked the participation in politics and revenue realized from land ownership as the highest (Finley, 1999).
10. Miller's work from this point of view can be divided into two phases. In the first phase he looked at values internal to specific practices. For example, in *The Theory of Shopping* (1999) he argues that consumer practices are best treated as disaggregated, building on 'quite contradictory sources of value and desire. What an individual consumer creates through clothing may be quite inconsistent with their expressive desire of the car' (Miller, 1995, p. 53). In his later books (2008, 2009b), by contrast, he emphasizes the connection across practices that pertain to particular cosmologies.
11. In the interview extracts italics are Hungarian words, simple brackets ( ) include explanations, while squared brackets [ ] are my additions to the text. Also note that in Hungarian there is no linguistic distinction between 'he' and 'she'.
12. The 'gentleman' strata consisted of aristocrats, land-owners as well as high cadres of the army, the state and the Church; the 'lower classes' included lower-level clerical workers, small entrepreneurs, the emerging working class and peasants.
13. For a description of a similar phenomenon see Clarke (2002) and McCracken (2001).
14. As Fodor argues, 'while on the surface genderless, the ideal communist subject had distinctly masculine features' and parallels can be drawn to its 'counterpart, the rational individual under liberal capitalism' (Fodor, 2002, p. 241).
15. Flat consisting of one room and a kitchen.

### 3 Explaining Consumption Norms

1. Note that my discussion focuses on the engagement of norms, not actual consumption practices. A norm can be engaged even if the possibilities of putting it into practice are limited. For example, an impoverished aristocrat may still hold the consumption norms of his previous position, even if he is unable to act on them.
2. The struggle over meaning is also present in Mary Douglas's thesis (discussed previously) on consumption as a means of fixing public meanings. She suggests that those who have greater access to goods and to the consumption rituals that are used to fix meanings also have more power over the formation of the shared cultural universe. People therefore want goods in order to be able to influence and fix public meanings. The 'main point of consumption', as she puts it, is 'the effort to get some agreement from your fellow consumers to define some events in some kind of agreed way' (Douglas, 2001, p. 246) and to 'control ... information about the changing cultural scene ... if possible' (p. 269). Yet unlike Bourdieu, who suggests that the stake of the struggle is relative esteem, Douglas emphasizes the control of information.
3. This is probably why theories end up being so broad that the theoretical interpretation of a case is rather a matter of choice than an insight gained from the empirical material. For example, the norm of decency applied to clothing can equally be interpreted as stemming from the core values that hold society together, or as a translation of the binary opposition between culture and nature (decent=civilized; non-decent=uncivilized), or as an exclusionary device against the lower classes.
4. See also Landsman's (2005) study on East Germany between 1948 and 1961, illustrating how the state's ideological position on consumption was an outcome of the influences of world politics and internal power struggles, including the Party, the consumption lobby and trade organizations.
5. This question is often ignored by the general theories discussed above, because they assume that the norms following from overarching aims will apply to society as a whole, relying on the implicit assumption that people will automatically adopt the general norms that these theories describe.
6. Sometimes Bourdieu's own writing seems to be sensitive to this double nature of ethics and distinction, in particular his later work. For example, in the *Lecture on the Lecture* (Bourdieu, 1990) and in the *Pascalian Meditations* (Bourdieu, 2000) he suggests that a meaningful life and distinction are inseparably connected; although in this case the argument is not made with reference to consumption. Yet in *Distinction*, which focuses on consumption, he fails to draw the conclusion that ethics and distinction are interconnected, but suggests a competitive aspect behind all tastes. (For a more thorough discussion on the relation between ethics and interest in Bourdieu's work, see Evans [1999], Pellandini-Simányi [forthcoming] and Sayer [2001, 2005].)
7. Similar conclusions can be drawn from other ethnographic accounts; see for example, Patico (2008) and Vom Bruck (2005).
8. Lamont (1992) specifies two sets of factors that affect the likelihood of people engaging in particular cultural resources. First, 'remote environmental conditions' (p. 144) include the level of state intervention, social stratification, geographical mobility and ethnic diversity. For example, the stratification system

influences how competitive people become and therefore how open they are to adopt cultural resources favoring competition. Second, ‘proximate factors’ (p. 147) include the nature of the work and workplace culture, personal social mobility, as well as gender, age, ethnicity, and religion. For example, people doing for-profit jobs are more open to cultural resources emphasizing economic rationality than people doing non-profit jobs. In my interpretation, some of these factors (such as the level of state intervention, social stratification and the nature of the workplace) exert an effect on the adoption of new cultural resources through what I here call compatibility with existing cultural resources. They describe existing cultural resources – mindsets or habituses – and their developments that are more compatible with specific cultural resources than with others. Other factors (such as gender or age) affect the engagement of particular cultural resources because they denote the channels by which they can be accessed. In some cases, the same factor affects both access and compatibility.

#### 4 Consumption Norms as Practical Ethics

1. There are three main uses of the term ‘practice’ in social sciences (Warde, 2004). The first use refers to the fact that something is not purely at an abstract thought level but also involves actual bodies, objects and deeds. The second, developed more recently in practice theory, applies the term to denote recurring activities combining specific objects and subjectivities; for example, cooking (Warde, 2005). The third use associates practices with unreflected action and sees them as the opposite of conscious reasoned choices (Thévenot, 2001). Unless indicated otherwise, I use the term in the first sense.
2. Sociological studies on the everyday engagement of ethics (Barnett et al., 2005; Foucault, 1997; Lambek, 2000; Sayer, 2005) and ethical choices related to consumption (Barnett et al., 2005; Lakoff and Collier, 2004) propose a similar distinction between abstract, universal ideals on the one hand, and practical, negotiable and context-specific concerns on the other. Many of these authors link the distinction to theories in moral philosophy, suggesting that abstract ideals belong to the realm of ‘morality’ and to deontological theories specifying general moral rules, whereas everyday, context-specific ideals belong to the realm of ‘ethics’ and to virtue theories focused on the questions of good life (for a discussion of these two sets of theories see Chapter 7). Despite the undoubtable parallels between empirical data on everyday ethics and virtue theory, I think we have to be cautious with using philosophical theories to describe how people actually engage ethics.

First, philosophical theories, including virtue theory, are primarily concerned with defining the good and the right, not with describing how people actually make these normative decisions. As such they are most useful in clarifying critical positions (see Chapter 7) rather than as models of actual action. Second, virtue theory carries a theoretical baggage that is often ignored by direct applications. It originates in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, where being a good person meant being a good citizen, and the ‘good life’ was inseparable from the good of the polis. The polis was defined in opposition to the *oikos* (the household and the economy), and Aristotle restricted the

pursuit of good life to the former (Carrier and Miller, 1999; MacIntyre, 1981). In fact, the application of virtue theory to the oikos and mundane concerns of everyday life is the direct opposite of its original use. Finally, even when insights from virtue theory can be adopted to models of actual behavior, these models remain partial: although some normative decisions are concerned with good life and are closely connected to practice, others are concerned with what is right to do and justice (a question that belongs to deontological theories) and may take the form of abstract deliberation. This is why the concept of practical ethics that I propose here is not a general model, but only one of the models (see discussion of the conditions under which it applies later in the chapter).

3. For Hegel, these objectifications encompass a broad range of forms from law to language and objects, yet the theory has been adopted to describe specifically material forms.
4. Dialectical theory suggests a sequence of externalization and sublation which made it subject to ANT's scholars criticism for retaining the idea of a distinct subject and object. However, comparing the actual application of dialectical theories and ANT, the difference seems insignificant. Miller's theory of objectification, for instance, is a dialectical theory, yet it also emphasizes the simultaneous shaping of subjects and objects:

the critical point about dialectical theory such as objectification is that this is *not* a theory of the mutual constitution of prior forms, such as subjects and objects. It is entirely distinct from representation. .... What is prior is the process of objectification that gives form and that produces in its wake what appears to us as both autonomous subjects and autonomous objects .... (Miller, 2005, pp. 9–11, emphasis in the original)

5. Others take a more radical position, and argue that the very material properties of objects may foster certain ethics that are independent of human intentions. Winner's (1999) example is that nuclear power plants require a central, relatively authoritarian management, whereas privately owned solar panels work best with a dispersed power structure. This way, the latter promotes a democratic organization model, whereas the former fosters a more authoritarian one.
6. Shove uses the term 'co-evolution' to refer to three dimensions: (a) the 'symbolic and material qualities' of objects; (b) the 'habits, practices and expectations of users'; and (c) the 'sociotechnical systems' (2003, p. 48). Here I use the term in a limited sense to refer to the connection between (a) and (b), and assume that socio-technical systems affect norms indirectly, through the influence they exert on objects.
7. The theory defines 'practices' this way, yet in order to distinguish it from my use of the term that simply refers to practical engagement I will call this understanding 'social practices'.
8. As Buchli (2002, p. 4) points out, the study of 'material culture' originally started as a means of 'reading' social progress and social organization from the objects used in non-European cultures. Although the technique of reading artifacts as primary texts was later abandoned in favor of participant observation, the idea that practices – in particular, the circulation and exchange of

objects – are central to understanding kinship, social organization and culture remained of central importance (see also Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986; Mauss, 1990).

9. Füstös and Szokolczai calls these turning points ‘axial moments’ (Füstös and Szokolczai, 1998, p. 211).

## 5 How Consumption Norms Change

1. For a useful review of the literature and consumer socialization theories that incorporate social relations as well see Ville and Tartas (2010).
2. The consumer socialization theory has been subject to critique from other angles as well. The new sociology of childhood perspective takes issue with the developmental approach as a whole for its inability to acknowledge children’s perspectives in their own right. According to this argument, adult-centered approaches that use concepts like maturation and development are akin to colonizers who labeled indigenous cultures as savage and underdeveloped, and were able to do so due to unequal power relations. The alternative view, proposed by this perspective, suggests that children should not be seen as imperfect adults but, just like other cultures, should be understood in their own terms (Jenks, 2005). For further critiques see Buckingham (2011) and Cook (2010).
3. Although, as Zelizer suggests, this separation of activities does not fully apply even today (Zelizer, 2002).
4. In sociology, the term ‘life-course’ is used to indicate the social and cultural factors that shape its stages (Giddens, 2009).
5. Exceptions include Campbell (1987), Røpke (1999) and Shove (2003).
6. This incorporation may happen consciously, as economics’ model of rational choice suggests, or in an unreflected way through the habitus, as Bourdieu (1977) asserts. Yet in either case, as discussed in Chapter 2, economic possibilities are subject to interpretation.
7. The same idea is captured by the objective beauty regime described in Chapter 2. See also Perrotta’s (2004) historical analysis of the idea of consumption as investment.
8. This is not merely about finding a justification for higher and new forms of spending that are allowed by economic possibilities. For example, in many cases, the adoption of the very idea that higher consumption is the hallmark of progress was the prerequisite – rather than the result – of new economic policies favoring higher living standards as opposed to industrial development.
9. This explanation of new consumption norms often overlaps with economic explanations due to the fact that different sections of society tend to benefit to a varying extent from economic prosperity. It is possible to devise a hypothetical case in which purely economic factors are at play. For example, if everyone earns 10 per cent more than in the previous year, social differences remain the same. Yet in reality this is hardly ever the case. In fact, most ‘consumer revolutions’ triggered by increasing incomes have been limited to particular sections of society – such as the bourgeoisie, the middle class, the socialist cadres and so on – and could well be interpreted as the ‘rise’ of



specific social groups in relation to others. Purely social factors cannot be isolated, not even in theory, as the relative power of social groups is always defined to some extent by their income: the 'rise' of one group is always understood at least partly as a rise in relative economic power. By mobility-based social explanations of changes in consumption norm, I will therefore mean accounts that contain economic factors, yet go beyond them and focus on relative social position and a new hierarchy.

10. Colin Campbell (1987) provides a different account that suggests that a new type of hedonism developed at the time as a consequence of the rise of Romanticism. Romanticism promoted romantic love, listening to one's emotions and an inward-looking search for one's true self. This focus on one's inner feelings was the predecessor of modern hedonism: it gave rise to the idea that people should discover and act on their inner emotions and desires (pp. 202–27). Romanticism was not born out of thin air as a justification of consumption. It built on existing religious sources; in fact, on the very same sources that gave rise to the 'spirit of capitalism'. As Campbell argues, Calvinism and Pietism were the two main branches of Protestantism. Whereas Calvinism gave rise to the rational ethic described by Weber, Pietism provided the basis of Romanticism.

The strength of Campbell's explanation compared to McKendrick's is that it links changes in consumption norms to changes in cosmology. Yet similarly to McKendrick, he also suggests the development of a *general* stance to consumption, in the form of hedonistic, pleasure-seeking, individualistic ethics. What makes Smith's explanation superior is that he shows that the demand for goods did not stem from an undifferentiated desire – be it emulative or hedonistic – to consume; rather from the desire to participate in specific practices through which new ethical contents were developed. Hedonism and romanticism can be seen as one of these contents, developed through the practices related to romantic novels, among other goods, yet not as general ideal underlying consumption as such.

11. For a description of a similar process, through which the emergence of the ethical ideal of domesticity brought about a number of related practices that led to increases in consumption in India, see Donner (2008), and in Sweden see Löfgren (1994).
12. This basic insight is behind contemporary marketing's key principle of market-driven or consumer-orientated approach (Kotler, 2003). According to this approach, product development should start by mapping the different practices and related purposes that the given object can be part of, assessing the customer base that could be attracted by focusing on one purpose over another and evaluating the prospective profitability of each segment. This is often the case with already existing products as well, which – thanks to their multiple useful qualities – can serve different purposes. Slater's (2002) study on the strategy development of Johnson and Johnson Baby Oil, for example, shows that the oil could be used as a baby oil, as bath additive, as make-up remover, or as a multi-purpose product; and the choice of which of these should be the product's key image was decided by assessing which purpose would attract the most profitable consumer segment.
13. A similar argument has been proposed by scholars working on cross-cultural consumption with reference to the global proliferation of goods (Howes,

- 1996; Miller, 1997b; Watson, 1997; Wilk, 1997). The argument here is that imported products – such as Coca-Cola or McDonald’s – do not impose their original cultural content on the receiving cultures but either get appropriated and filled with local contents or get combined with local meanings, resulting in hybrid assemblages.
14. For a detailed discussion on how inconspicuous practices related to cleanliness, comfort and convenience have escalated and co-evolved with technologies, see Shove (2003).
  15. Similar conclusions can be drawn from Miller’s (1988) study on the way tenants appropriate council estates in the UK.
  16. See for example, Lears’s (1983) study on American, Mazzarella (2003) on Indian and Vargha (2005) on Hungarian ad producers.
  17. If these failures are less frequent today it is largely because this insight is increasingly taken into consideration when producing ads. Today’s ad production often starts with research that seeks to understand the target consumers, which involves data from life-style research and value-profiling that show for each consumer group the kind of products they like, the values they hold and the messages that they are receptive to, complete with demographic (age, income, gender, employment status and income) and media profiles indicating the most efficient media to reach them. Advertisements are often created around a key message that is arrived at through the evaluation of the target consumer segment’s values, interests and opinions. Before the ad is launched, pilot screenings are conducted to test decoding strategies and effectiveness.
  18. He locates the changes to somewhat later, during the 1920s, as opposed to Lears, who traces it back to 1880–1930.
  19. Yet even with these caveats it is easy to overstate marketing’s role in changing norms. When evaluating its effects, we have to keep in mind that marketing only covers a limited range of goods; and goods of a particular kind. If you take a moment to think through the goods that you used today or that currently surround you, you are very likely to find that you have never encountered an advertisement for most of them. The windows, the insulation in the wall or the electricity, the bus that we take to work or the pavement that we walk on take up most of our consumption, yet seem to be out of the realm of marketing. These examples illustrate how advertisement-based explanations are limited in their scope to private, freely chosen goods (see previous section) that lend themselves to symbolic differentiation.

## 6 Ethical Consumerism and Everyday Ethics

1. Buycotts are the opposite of boycotts, and refer to purchases made with the intention of supporting a particular cause, company or country. The difference between value-based shopping and buycotts is that the former is regular, whereas the latter has a limited timeframe (Gulyás, 2008).
2. Barnett et al. (2005) also highlight the ‘merging of the self-interested and altruistic aspects of morality’ (p. 17) in ethical consumption.
3. In this respect, the movements’ vision of how the ideal Chinese nation should be like was closer to the Japanese movement to reform everyday life which equally sought to advance nationalistic goals, and defined the good life to be

attained in terms of progress and modernity (Garon, 1997; Maclachlan and Trentmann, 2004; Trentmann, 2012). Other national products movements – for example, Gandhi’s *swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) movement – are closer to voluntary simplicity’s vision of traditional, local handcraft production and reconnection with spirituality through material simplicity.

4. Oxfam was set up by Quakers, academics and activists in 1942. The organization raised funds to help Nazi-occupied Greece that was under naval blockade by the Allies, causing famine and shortage of medical supplies even among civilians. This was in line with Oxfam’s original aim to ease suffering caused by the war – regardless of where it occurred –, which only in the 1970s got extended into more general poverty relief objectives (Nicholls and Opal, 2005).
5. The environmental ethical consumer movement, among others, has been subject to a similar critique. According to the critique, the movement’s aims reflect the modern Enlightenment view that posits nature and culture as dualistic, and sees nature as a means of achieving human aims. In this understanding nature is to be protected from harms by humans, largely in order to keep yielding benefits for future generations. This conception has been criticized from many angles, including ecologism, eco-feminism, and Actor-Network Theory (e.g. Latour, 1993). More recently, Weller (2006) argued that this view is opposed to the traditional Chinese worldview that sees humans and nature as mutually interdependent and appreciates nature for its own sake.
6. Note that these surveys operate with a narrower definition of ‘ethical’ products than used previously in this chapter, in that they usually include the purchase of organic, fair trade and eco-friendly goods, yet do not cover purchases motivated by patriotic, spiritual or religious aims.
7. The separation between the two is not clear-cut. First, the line between what counts as side effect and what as genuine engagement is debatable. For example, Shaw and Newholm (2002) suggest that downshifting pursued out of the somewhat selfish desire to get away from the overworked and stressed lifestyle is to be distinguished from genuine ethical simplicity that is pursued out of ethical aims. For others, dissatisfaction with the hurried lifestyle indicates genuine identification with the ethical aims (e.g. Soper, 2007). Similarly, ethical consumption is often pursued as a community activity, giving participants a sense of belonging (Cherrier, 2005a, 2005b); which again poses the question of whether belonging itself or the ethical consumerist aims are the primary motives for their pursuit.

Second, a practice may at one point be a side effect and become invested with concerns of ethical consumption later on. For example, recycling in India was a once common practice of thrift but started to fade due to higher incomes, the entry of women – who used to do much of the sorting – into the labor market, the decreasing of importance of thrift and the spatial segregation between middle-class gated communities and scrap dealers. Today, members of the new middle class and NGOs revive these old practices as part of the new waste-management and recycling schemes that are promoted as the key means to become green. As Anantharaman points out, ‘old practices can be repackaged and re-envisioned using new labels, and this repackaging can help validate and legitimize these activities again (e.g. recycling going from a thrifty practice to a green practice)’ (Anantharaman, 2012, p. 17).

8. Health concerns have been reported as the primary reason underlying the choice of organic food in studies carried out in, among other places, the UK (Miller, 2001a), Greece (Sandalidou et al., 2002), Denmark (Andersen, 2011), Sweden (Magnusson et al., 2001) and Taiwan (Chen, 2009).
9. Williams and Paddock's (2003) study in Leicester, England, in contrast, suggests that these practices are only framed as ethical consumption by the middle and upper class. Whereas for the upper class alternative consumption practices, such as buying second-hand, are a matter of 'choice for reasons to do with fun, sociality, distinction and being seen to buy the right things' (p. 311), for the poor 'participation is due to a lack of choice ... it is seen to signify their exclusion from the mainstream and a sign of their inability to be like everybody else' (p. 318).
10. Hungarian unit of currency.
11. Some authors who use the governmentality framework to analyze ethical consumption, discussed above, highlight that this rearticulation of ordinary ethical concerns as ethical consumerist aims does not happen by itself but is an outcome of the efforts of policymakers, marketers and movements directed at rearticulating 'the ethical dispositions already implicit in routine consumption' as ethical consumption (Barnett et al., 2005, p. 29). They emphasize that through the process people do not simply express existing ethics in a new way but develop novel notions of the self and ethics (see also Agrawal, 2005a, 2005b).
12. The smooth rearticulation of ordinary concerns as ethical consumerist ones is not the only way engagement of ethical consumerism takes place. Radical forms of engagement are often experienced as a rupture, a complete brake with previous ethical outlooks. These changes are often preceded by disruptive life events or crossroads that trigger what Zigon (2007) calls a 'moral breakdown', resulting in heightened reflexivity and reevaluation of self and identity (Cherrier, 2005a, 2005b; Eräranta et al., 2009). The ethical consumers studied by Cherrier, for instance, recalled that their engagement of ethical consumerism was prompted by 'destabilizing events' (Cherrier, 2005b, p. 131), including rape, divorce and children leaving home. These events brought about a feeling of 'collapse of security and the process of existential questioning', 'emptiness and disorientation' and a perception of 'old realities as an illusion' (Cherrier, 2005a, p. 602). These events allowed people to radically question previous priorities and replace them with new ones related to a higher, transcendent morality. The extent to which these new ethical outlooks are actually new or are rearticulated versions of existing concerns needs further research.
13. For a critique of this view see Katz-Gerro (2009) on Israel and Dombos (2008) on Hungary.

## 7 Private Virtues, Public Vices

1. Jamieson suggests a move from the existing consequentialist approach that focuses on outcomes of individual action to virtue ethics centered on particular human qualities, such as humility and moderation (Jamieson, 2010). I am skeptical of this solution, as it requires changes in substantive visions of good

life; a position that I disagree with for reasons to be explained in the next part of the chapter.

2. This strategy goes against what Charles Taylor (1989) sees as one of the key strong evaluations, or 'hypergoods' of modernity: 'the affirmation of ordinary life' (1989, p. 101). He uses the term to refer to *everyday* strong evaluations related to the way people define their identity and see their life as fulfilled by pursuing aims related to family and work (ordinary life): 'The householder's sense of value of what I have been calling ordinary life is woven through the emotions and concerns of his everyday existence' (p. 44). He links the emergence of this hypergood to modernity, and suggests that it has been formulated against the Aristotelian thought that prioritized public life over the private realm as a sphere where visions of good life can be realized. The modern 'affirmation of ordinary life', in contrast, locates the 'higher' precisely in the terrain of everyday life.
3. It would be a mistake to equate ethical consumerist aims with *moral* concerns of justice, whereas everyday ethical aims with *ethical* concerns of good life because, as previous chapters showed, both ethical consumer movements and everyday norms provide substantive visions of good life as well as particular principles of justice.
4. First, theories differ on how valued goods should be distributed, with solutions including strict egalitarianism, the application of the Rawlsian difference principle, distribution based on desert, and the utilitarian view that favors distribution resulting in the highest overall utility (Lamont and Favor, 2008). Second, they disagree on what exactly is the valued good that needs distribution, ranging from money to respect and well-being, present and future pollution rights as well as benefits. A related question refers to the assessment of the value of the goods that need to be distributed; which becomes particularly stringent when it comes to assessing natural beauty, health or reproduction rights as occurred in environmental justice debates. Third, they differ over whom valued goods are to be distributed among (Lamont and Favor, 2008). Here the inclusion of future generations, the extension of justice from the national to the global level, and the incorporation of all living beings beyond humans have been recent key questions (Bell, 2006; Martinez-Alier, 1995). The way these principles are to be arrived at is again subject to debate. Some suggest a theoretical deduction from certain moral norms, such as integrity, dignity or from the 'original situation'. Others, such as Habermas and proponents of a deliberative democracy, stress that the procedural rules of free debate in an open speech situation can be seen as the sole guarantee of arriving at principles regulating justice in a fair way (Bell, 2004, 2006; Caney, 2010; Gardiner, 2010; Lamont and Favor, 2008).
5. Also note that the solution proposed here is not an imposition of external values but values that have been agreed upon and can therefore be shared by all.
6. Bell suggests that private environmental choices may send signals to the government and serve as an implicit means of furthering just arrangements. This is often true, as illustrated by examples where consumer activist agendas were successfully channeled into changes at a policy level (Micheletti, 2003). However, the two types of strategies' underlying conception of political action and moral selfhood are substantially different, and – as I argued earlier in this chapter – work against one another if consistently pursued.

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# Index

- access to consumption norms, 73–6  
Actor-Network-Theory, 86–7, 184  
advertising, *see* marketing  
affirmation of ordinary life, 190  
affordances of objects and subjects, 87  
age and consumption norms, 103–10, *see also* life-course  
agency, 12–13, 96–101  
air-conditioning, 127–8  
Alexander, Jeffrey C., 64  
alienation, 10–11, 14–15, 85–6  
alternative consumption, *see* ethical consumption  
alternative hedonism, 143  
Ancient Greece, 26–7, 30  
Ancient Rome, 30  
anthropology of consumption, 14–15, *see also* Douglas, Mary  
anti-consumerism, *see* ethical consumption  
appropriation, 14–15, 99–101, 126–8  
Ariès, Philippe, 104  
aristocratic consumption norms, 118–20  
attitude-behavior gap, 156  
autonomous choice, 13, 23, 96–9, *see also* agency
- Barnett, Clive, 143–4, 149, 155, 164  
bathing, 123–4, *see also* cleanliness  
Bauman, Zygmunt, 10–11, 89–90  
behavior-impact gap, 156  
Belk, Russell W., 14  
Bell, Derek R., 176  
Boltanski, Luc, 16, 95–6, 170–1  
Bourdieu, Pierre, 11, 61–3, 65, 69–73, 76–7, 79–80, 89, 94  
boycotts, *see* ethical consumption  
Brazil, 25, 72, 156, 160  
Buchli, Victor, 126–7  
boycotts, *see* ethical consumption
- Campbell, Colin, 20, 186  
capacity to appropriate consumption norms, 76–8  
capitalism  
  the study of consumption as part of the critique of capitalism, 9–11, *see also* alienation  
  in China, 147  
  in Western Europe, 112, 186  
capitals, 63, 69–73, 79–80  
care  
  the everyday consumption norm of care, 15, 24–5, 40–1  
  taking care of objects, 40  
  for distant vs close others, 144  
cars, 24, 72, 92, 128  
changes of consumption norms over the life-course, 102–10  
  over generations, 110–34  
channels of access to consumption norms, 73–6, 182–3  
childhood, *see* children  
children, 24, 25, 60–1, 103–7, 185  
China, 146–7, 159–60  
citizenship and consumption, *see* consumer, as political identity  
civilized behavior, consumption norm of, 71, 121  
class, *see* social position and consumption norms  
cleanliness, 95, 121, 123–5  
climate change, 167–9, 174–6  
clothing, 30, 36–9, 45–6, 104–5  
Coca-Cola, 130  
co-evolution of subject and objects, 87, 125, 128, 184, *see also* objectification *and* subject-object relations  
coffeehouses, 88, 120–1  
comfort, 119–20  
Community Supported Agriculture programs, 148, 154

- compensation, consumption as  
   for the loss of freedom, 8,  
     *see also* capitalism  
   for unrealized lifestyles,  
     *see* inconspicuous consumption  
   for unethical purchases, 161  
 conscious vs unreflected engagement  
   of consumption norms, 69–70,  
   93–100  
 consumer, as political identity (vs  
   worker or citizen), 7–8, 149–51,  
   154–5, *see also* consumer  
   movements  
 consumer behaviour, 13–14, 107, 179  
 consumer movements, 7–8, 23,  
   142–55  
 consumer revolutions, 110–21, *see*  
   *also* changes of consumption  
   norms  
 consumer socialization, 103, 185  
 consumption, definition of, 19–20  
 consumption norms,  
   definition of, 19–21  
   explanations of, 51–82  
   varieties of, 2–5  
   study of consumption norms, 9–16  
 convenience ethics, 161  
 Cook, Daniel Thomas, 24, 104–5  
 Co-operative movement, 154–5  
 cosmologies, 19, 35–50, 76–8, 89,  
   92–4, 101, 103, 134–9  
 cross-cultural consumption, 125, 186  
 cultural categories, 14, 28–32, 49–50,  
   56–8, 89  
 cultural order, 56–8  
 cultural resources  
   consumption norms as, 52–3  
   production of, 64–8  
   adoption of, 69–81  
 cultural studies, 12  
  
 decoding, 130–1, 187  
 Delphy, Christine, 60–1  
 demand side of consumption norms,  
   69–80  
 deontological moral philosophy, 173,  
   183–4  
 developmental psychology, 103–4,  
   106  
  
 dialectical theory, 85–6, 184  
 differential consumption norms,  
   28–35, 60–2, *see also* age  
   and consumption norms *and*  
   gender and consumption norms  
 diffusion  
   of goods, *see* cross-cultural  
   consumption  
   of fair trade ideas, 148–52  
 dignity, 38–9, 95  
 Distinction: A Social Critique of the  
   Judgment of Taste, 62–3, 69–72  
 distributive justice, 174, 190  
 domesticity, 120–1  
 double standards in consumption  
   norms, *see* differential  
   consumption norms  
 Douglas, Mary, 14, 32, 57, 59,  
   100, 182  
 durability as a consumption norm,  
   *see* longevity  
 Durkheim, Émile, 58–9  
  
 economic conditions, as explanations  
   of consumption norms, 26, 27,  
   54–6, 60–1, 70–1, 111–16, 134,  
   153–4, *see also* pragmatic beliefs  
   *and* social position and  
   consumption norms  
 economics  
   conceptualization of humans,  
     13, 24  
   notion of preferences in economics,  
     *see* preferences  
 economy, historically changing views  
   of the, 26–7  
 egalitarian consumption norm, 15,  
   22–3, 31, 45–6, 59–60, 117–18,  
   154–5, 161, 189  
 emic approach, 19  
 emotions, 93  
 emotivism, 93  
 England, 3, 23, 24–5, 88, 112–13, 157,  
   160–1  
 entitlement, 6, 39–40, 46–7, 61, 93,  
   118–21  
 environmental activism, 153, 158,  
   159–60, 162, 169, *see also* climate  
   change

- Estonia, 73–4
- ethical consumerism, *see* ethical consumption
- ethical consumption, 7–8, 140–77
- ethics
- definition of, 178
  - and consumption norms, 6, 22–5, *see also* practical ethics
  - vs morality, 97, 143–4, 172–3, 178, 183, 190
  - see also* virtue ethics
- etic approach, 19, 51
- eudemist moral philosophy, *see* virtue ethics
- everyday vs public consumption norms, 1–2, 4
- expectations, 26–7
- explanations of consumption norms, 51–82
- fair trade movement, 147–53
- family, 24–5, 30–1, 35–6, 41, 60–1, 77–8, 107–10, 114, 126–7, 157
- field theory, 65–8, 78–80
- food, 2–3, 31, 32, 40, 54–6, 58, 60–1, 70, 152, 159, 189
- France, 60–1, 123–4, *see also* Bourdieu, Pierre
- free time vs consumption, 112–13, 168
- frugality, *see* thrift
- furniture, *see* home decoration
- Gandhi, 59–60, 114–15
- gender and consumption norms, 3, 9, 26, 29–30, 31, 34–5, 60–1, 76, 105, 120–1, 180–1
- generational changes of consumption norms, 110–33
- generational order, 107
- gentility, 118–21
- gentlemen
- in Hungary, 36–42, 78
  - in England, 118–21
- Germany, 117–18, 150–1, 155
- Giddens, Anthony, 90
- global and local consumption, *see* cross-cultural consumption
- green goods, *see* ethical consumption
- Habermas, Jürgen, 172–5, 212
- habitus, 69, 76–8, 94
- Harris, Marvin, 54–5
- hedonism, 9, 212, 186
- Hegel, 85, 184
- hierarchy and consumption norms, 29–31, 35, 38–9, 46–7, 60–3, 71–2, 93, 106–7, 118–21, *see also* social position and consumption and entitlement
- Hindu religion, 108
- Hispanic Americans, 130
- home decoration, 36–48, 91, 120–1, 126–7
- homo economicus, 24
- households, 107–8
- houses, 77–8, 89, 109–10
- housewives, 24–5, 84, 93, 120–1
- Hungary, 22, 36–49, 66–9, 74–8, 151–2, 163–4
- Hupke constant, 128
- hypergoods, 190
- identity, 10–11, 24–5, 89–90, 93, 101, 132–3, 173
- income
- the effect of income on consumption norms, 26–8, 111–12, *see also* economic conditions
  - source of income determining consumption norms, 33–5
- inconspicuous consumption
- as consumption of non-conspicuous goods, 187
  - as a way of projecting unrealized lifestyles, 161–2
- India, 108–10, 114–16, 123, 130, 135, 160, 188
- individual vs collective moral actions, 154, 155, 168–70
- inscription of practical ethics in objects, 99
- institutional explanations of consumption norms, 129–34, *see also* producers of cultural resources
- intellectual ascetism, 66
- intellectual sophistication, 11, 23, 44, 71–2, 79

- internal goods, 33, 171–2
- internalization of consumption  
 norms, 31, 58, 61, *see also* habitus  
*and* taste
- investment, consumption as, 40–1,  
 113–14, 158
- Islam, 55
- Izhavas, 108–10
- Japan, 23, 123
- Judaism, 54–5, 57
- justice  
 mediated by consumption norms,  
 6, 30–1, 39–40, 46–7, 61, 93,  
 118–21  
 vs ethics, 172–4, *see also* ethics vs  
 morality
- Khrushchev, 68, 126–7
- kulturnost, 23, 44, 78
- Lamont, Michèle, 52, 64–5, 71, 80–1,  
 182–3
- Latour, Bruno, 87, 91–2
- legal regulation of consumption, 3–5,  
*see also* sumptuary laws
- Leninist consumption norms,  
 66, 126
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 56
- liberal environmental citizens, 176
- liberalism  
 early liberal concept of the human  
 subject, 13, 23  
 political liberalism, 175–6, *see also*  
 qualified liberal approach
- life-course, 102–10
- life-cycle, *see* life-course
- lifestyle, 14, 89–90
- longevity, 36–8, 40–1, 48, 109–10
- love, *see* care
- luxury, 3–4
- marketing, 84, 89–90, 129–34, 187
- Marx, Karl, 10, 12, 85–6
- masculinity, 30, 35, 87–8, 108–9, *see*  
*also* gender and consumption  
 norms
- material culture studies, 14–15,  
*see also* Miller, Daniel
- materialism, 9, 114, 133, 144, 153
- materialist explanations of  
 consumption norms, 54–5, 70
- McKendrick, Neil, 117, 186
- mental accounting, 27–8, 33–5
- milieu-ethnocentrism, 117–18
- Miller, Daniel, 5–6, 8, 14–15, 24–5,  
 36, 41, 85–6, 100, 143–4, 153,  
 157, 168, 181, 184
- moral breakdowns, 95, 189
- moral philosophy, *see* deontological  
 moral philosophy *and* virtue  
 ethics
- moral vs ethical, *see* ethics  
 vs morality
- Narkomfin House, Moscow, 126–7
- National Product Movement, 146–7
- nationalism, *see* patriotic  
 consumption norms
- necessities, *see* needs
- needs, 10, 66, 95, 105, 178–9
- new sociology of childhood, 185
- non-consumption, *see* ethical  
 consumption
- Norway, 31, 117
- nouveaux riches, 6, 61
- objectification, 86, 100, 184
- objective beauty regime, 37–8
- objects  
 as causes of changes in  
 consumption norms, 122–9  
 as reinforcing ethics, 90–2,  
 99–101, 122–9  
*see also* subject-object relations
- orders of justification, 52, 170–1
- organic consumption movement,  
*see* ethical consumption
- Oxfam, 149, 188
- patriotic consumption norms, 23,  
 59–60, 115–16, 130, 144–7, 155,  
 187–8
- Piaget, Jean, 103–4, 106
- Pietism, 186
- political anesthesia, 169
- political consumption, *see* ethical  
 consumption

- political liberalism, 175–6, *see also* qualified liberal approach
- practical cultural repertoires, 88–90, 92–3
- practical ethics, 83–101
- practices, 32, 88–9, 183
- pragmatic beliefs, 25–8, 29, 38, 49, 116, 128–9, 134–5, 175
- preferences vs values, 13, 21, 14, 93, 179
- pretentious consumption, 31, 93, 118, *see also* entitlement
- privatization of risk, 166
- privileges, consumption norms  
securing, 60–3
- procedural moral theories, 173–4, 190
- production of consumption norms, 64–9, 78–81, 129–34
- Protestantism, 186
- qualified liberal approach, 172–7
- Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred, 58
- rationality  
and masculinity, 9, 30, 87–8, 164, 180, 181  
and economic theory, 23, 179  
in socialist consumption norms, 22, 45, 126, 181  
in Swedish design, 91
- regimes of living, 88, 95
- relational self, 24–5, 39, 180
- relationships, 14–15, 24–5, 29, 61, 106–10
- religious consumption norms, 2–4, 15, 54–5, 57, 59, 108–9, 149, 186
- resistance vs conformism, 12, 96–9
- respectability, 38–40, 109–10, 118–21
- Romanticism, 186
- Russia, 61
- sacred  
goods treated as sacred, 14, 58  
values of consumption as  
transcendent, 14–15  
*see also* religious consumption norms
- sacrifice, shopping as, 5–6, 15
- Sassatelli, Roberta, 23, 145, 152, 161–2
- Saussure, Ferdinand de, 56
- saving  
consumption as a form of  
saving, *see* investment,  
consumption as  
as a consumption norm, 108, 112–13, 113, *see also* thrift
- Schulze, Gerhard, 117–18
- self-colonization, 152
- settled vs unsettled periods, 96
- Shopping, A Theory of, 15
- Shove, Elisabeth, 4, 87, 100, 101, 125, 127, 136, 168–9, 184
- Slater, Don, 98, 178–9, 186
- slow food movement, 152
- Smith, Woodruff, 87–8, 118–21, 138, 186
- social explanations of changes in consumption norms, 116–21
- social order, 14–15, 58–60
- social position and consumption norms, 30, 31, 38–9, 46–9, 69–78, 107, 116–21, 153–4, 164–5, *see also* hierarchy *and* Bourdieu, Pierre
- socialist consumption norms, 22–3, 42–9, 66–8, 77–8, 126–7
- Scotland, 113
- Soper, Kate, 143
- Soviet Union, 126–7
- status competition, 9–10, 62–3, 71–2, 117–18
- status, *see* social position and consumption norms
- strong evaluations, 21, 99
- strong program of cultural sociology, 64
- structural linguistics, 56
- subject-object relations, 10, 14, 83–8, 184, *see also* objectification
- sumptuary laws, 1, 3–5, 30, 55, 57–9, 61, 68, 96,
- Sweden, 60, 91
- symbolic coupling of goods with meaning, 10, 84, 90
- symbolic power, 62–3, 71, 79–80
- Szasz, Andrew, 169
- taboos, 2–3, 5, 54–60
- tamed hedonism, 23



- taste
  - emergence of taste as a
    - consumption norm, 119–20
  - Bourdieu's theory of taste, 11, 61–3, 69–72,
- Taylor, Charles, 21, 178, 190
- tea, 121
- technology, as an explanation of
  - changes in consumption norms, 122–9
- therapeutic ethos, 132–3
- Thévenot, Laurent, 16, 95–6, 170–1
- thrift, 24, 45, 113–14, 157–61
- transience vs permanence as
  - consumption norms, 109,
  - see also* longevity
- Trentmann, Frank, 150, 154,
- United Kingdom, 149–50, 156, 160,
  - see also* England *and* Scotland
- United States, 10, 14, 31, 34–6, 104–5, 113, 131, 148, 153
- usefulness, 36–7, 122–4
- values, 13, 21, 14, 93, 179,
  - see also* ethics *and* strong evaluations
- Veblen, Thorstein, 9, 113
- virtue ethics, 173, 183–4, 189
- voluntary simplicity, 146
- Weber, Max, 112, 186
- willingness to appropriate
  - consumption norms, 76–8
- women, *see* gender and consumption norms
- Zahavi's Law, 128
- Zelizer, Viviana, 34–5
- Zigon, Jarrett, 95, 97