

> Status of chapter: **Good Draft**. To be discussed and refined. Conclusion and a couple of other bits to be written. Some refs to be supplied. Not spell-checked. 14 June 2025.

## Chapter 7. Good, Harmful and Useless Economic Activity

Summary: Economics does not adequately differentiate harmful and useless from good economic activity. We discuss how this may be accomplished by reference to Multi-aspectual Good and Dooyeweerd's aspects.

*Web version, with active links to notes, refs, etc.:  
"http://christianthinking.space/economics/"*

"Economists - we generalize, but not grossly - conscientiously abstain from passing judgement on wants." [S + S, 88]

"Love for money is a root of all kinds of evil." I Timothy 6:10

As outlined in Chapter 2, many recent thinkers are concerned about the shape and practice of economics. Many are motivated by something wrong (inequality, climate change, biodiversity loss, addiction, etc.), while others are concerned by the unproductivity and non-essentiality of much economic activity. Yet, many others turn their blind eye to such harms, pointing to the immense benefits that economic growth has brought.

What Harm does economic activity do? What Good? Why? Is Harm inescapable? What can be done about it? >

[Note: Capitals] And yet, as one RLDG participant pleaded, though economics has indeed done immense harm, it is not all bad and depends on how economics is used. Just as a wind bends reeds one way rather than another, so an 'ill wind' seems to be bending economic activity towards Harm and / or Uselessness. The ill wind is partly current economics theory (whether of capitalist and socialist flavour) but, as we shall see, it comes from other quarters too, especially mindset and attitude, which 'bend' both theory and practice.

The challenge is that, in most economics, Good, Harmful and Useless economic activity are **conflated** together (as in GDP, which treats 'bads' as 'goods'). We need a sound basis for separating them out in both theory and practice, and yet most discussion of them seems is quite **amorphous**.

This chapter discusses how to understand and clearly distinguish Harmful and Useless economic activity from Good, at all levels and in both theory and practice. First (section 7-1), we show the difference between Good, Harmful and Useless economic activity and why that difference is important. Then (section 7-2) we discuss in detail the difference between Good and Harm, both in nature and in causality, then (section 7-3) the difference between Good and Useless economic activity. In (section 7-4) assessment is discussed, including national indices like GDP, in a way that takes Harm into account and in (section 7-5) action to take to reduce Harm and curb Useless and increase Good. Finally, in (section 7-6) some common economic issues are rethought using the approach discussed in this chapter. It is all made possible by viewing through the lens of Dooyeweerd's aspects and especially their diverse normativity.

Because of the sparsity of incisive discussion on this, this chapter needs to say more and so is longer than others.

### 7-1. The Difference Between Good, Harmful and Useless Economic Activity

Summary: Good, Harmful and Useless economic activity mix together in real life but need to be separated out in analysis, assessment, planning and theory - yet are not.

Whereas economic activity should contribute to **Multi-aspectual Overall Good**, that which is **Harmful** destroys the Good and that which we call **Useless** (non-essential or unproductive) dilutes Good. To fulfil its mandate, therefore, economics practice should seek the Good, reject the Harm and curb the Useless, and economic theory should express understanding and encouragement of that. But that is far from where economics is at present.

### 7-1.1 Some Examples

Summary: Economic activity does much Harm as well as Good, at all levels, and much of it is Useless, and yet it is all mixed together.

Economic activity is almost universally treated as an unmitigated Good but much of it is either unproductive or non-essential, and much of it does harm. Several examples were discussed during RLDG discussions, some well-known, some less so.

Example 1. > "I need to earn more money, so I will ..." (a) go fruit-picking for a local farmer, (b) act as tour guide in my local area, (c) become a social media influencer for a cosmetics firm, (d) sell narcotics. All make money, but (a) is probably good, (c) is fairly useless in that it does not matter if it does not happen, (b) and (c) are unnecessary to different degrees and for different reasons (which we include in Useless, below). (d) is harmful. If we extend beyond money to other resources, such as "I will spend my evening time doing ..." (a) to (d) but also (e) volunteering to plant trees or to give respite to carers, (e) help more with housework. Both those are probably good, and necessary. Shows the impact of choices we make.

Example 2. > We purchase clothes yet their manufacture might use slave labour and their shipping generates unnecessary climate change emissions. We enjoy avocados, not realising the huge damage done to biodiversity as forests are cleared in order to grow them and supply us. Shows how even innocent purchases can, invisibly, generate Harm.

Example 3. > **Producers of junk food** that causes **obesity** (Harm), yet can provide jobs, generate money flow that "trickles down" to the poor (discussed later), and yield tax income for governments and also helps fund health systems - but are not those needed to deal with the obesity and other problems they cause? As one of our participants put it, we're just going "round and round and round". There may be some validity in what they say, in that problems can ensue if their warnings go unheeded, but it need not always be taken at face value. Shows how widespread Harmful impact of economic activity can be.

Example 4. > The Californian **Delta Smelt**. These unique fish have been threatened with **extinction** by the demands for water by the farming industry for growing **food**. But if we stand back, we find that the people in California are not starving (and often obese). This suggests that the main motivation for destroying this ecosystem and species is not primarily the good of feeding people, but is actually that of competitiveness between the agricultural corporations (as is actually argued by the farming sector to avoid having to reduce water demand); see On Competition and Competitiveness. And yet are there (small) farmers who are not greedy or competitive in this way but have other issues, such as their very survival? See longer discussion in Chapter 9. Shows hypocrisy. Shows the impact of competition. Shows some are more evil than others.

Example 5. > Guy Standing: Blue Commons [2023]. "The sea provides more than half the oxygen we breathe, food for billions of people and livelihoods for hundreds of millions. But giant corporations are plundering the world's oceans, aided by global finance and complicit states, following the neoliberal maxim of Blue Growth. The situation is dire: rampant exploitation and corruption now drive all aspects of the ocean economy, destroying communities, intensifying inequalities, and driving fish populations and other ocean life towards extinction." A global perspective.

Example 6. >The **tobacco industry** is now almost universally accepted as a Harmful industry but does it not contribute jobs and taxes, persuading governments to water down policy? Shows how harmful sectors protect themselves.

Example 7. >Social media **influencers promote cosmetics**, but how essential are they? And might they promote competitive vanity? And might this destroy erstwhile relationships? Shows non-obvious harm, and questions need.

Example 8. **Rapid delivery** companies that deliver food or other items, within 10 minutes of ordering, offer us convenience (and only occasionally a real need). Not only does rapid delivery massively increase climate change emissions, especially if single items are ordered, not only does it depend on low wages, but its effect is also more subtle. Rapid delivery encourages laziness, and reduces the need to plan. This is harmful in two ways, robbing us of much-needed exercise of body and mind and changing our very aspirations and expectations of life. As [Wallop 2021] puts it, "We are democratising the right to laziness." Rapid delivery is set to be a multi-billion industry. Shows how we are all implicated.

Many other examples may be found, where economic activity, as it is currently theorized and practised, leads to cheating, betrayal, hindering proper development, social problems, misery, and even pandemics and wars. "All kinds of evil."

In these examples, we see problems as both **microeconomic and macroeconomic levels**; for example, in rapid delivery the problem is not just laziness, but making *the right to laziness* a widespread expectation of life (Democratisation: in Adam Smith's day, laziness was a vice of the wealthy). According to our discussion in Chapter 6, it is a **change of culture** and hence deep and long-lasting, difficult to change. Is not "democratisation" an unmitigated Good? Well, no, not if the thing democratised is Harmful.

The challenge is not just the problems themselves but that in each is a **mixture** of Good, Harmful and Useless economic activity, and this is not well understood. Good economic activity can also do Harm. Harmful can also provide some Good (e.g. tobacco industry). Non-essentials can do Harm. And Harm as well as Good can be to individuals but also to attitudes and mindsets. So discussing them becomes fraught with confusion.

Recent thinkers (and some not-so-recent) have begun to recognise that the Harm economic activity can do is a problem.

## 7-1.2 Expressions of Concern

Summary: Much recent discussion does expose the difference between Good and Harmful and Useless economic activity but it does not offer adequate understanding.

The literature of Environmental Economics (see Chapter 9) concerns environmental Harm, and Health Economics, Harm to health, but there are many other kinds of Harm and often several go together.

Kate Raworth [2017, 4-5] summarises the good that economic activity has achieved:

>"There have been extraordinary strides in human well-being over the past 60 years. ... the number of people living in extreme income poverty - on less than \$1 a day - has fallen by more than half. Over two billion people have gained access to safe drinking water and toilets for the first time. all this while the human population has grown by almost 40%."

But then she expresses her concern about how economic activity has been

**Harmful:**

> “That was the good news. The rest of the story, of course, has not turned out so well so far. Many millions of people still live lives of extreme deprivation. Worldwide, one person in nine does not have enough to eat. In 2015 six million children under the age of five died, more than half of those deaths due to easy-to-treat conditions like diarrhoea and malaria. ... To these extremes of human circumstance, add the deepening degradation of our planetary home. Human activity is putting unprecedented stress on Earth’s life-giving systems. .. Around 40% of the world’s agricultural land is now seriously degraded ...over 80% of the world’s fisheries are fully or over-exploited and a refuse truck’s worth of plastic is dumped into the ocean every minute. ...”

Mark Carney [2021] expresses similar concerns. The word “better” in the title of his book, *Value(s): Building a Better World for All* implies that we want Good to replace Harm. In Part II, he discusses **harms** that economic activity has done, increasing inequalities and decreasing trust (credit crisis), threatening health (covid crisis), and undermining our ability to feed ourselves and reducing biodiversity and the climate crisis. Economic activity has been Harmful. He discusses what can be done, and notes a “malignant culture at the heart of financial capitalism.”

Tomas Sedlacek [2011] is one of the very few who has directly addressed the Good versus Evil in economics, and makes many useful points. = = = = = To be written. = = = = =

He makes the important point that Evil is subordinate to Good, not an equal-opposite to Good. Good defines Evil, not the other way round. We adopt this, though we treat Harmful repercussions as equal-opposite to Good repercussions > [Note: Good Versus Harm].

Back in 1979, E.F. Schumacher wrote

> “When you travel up the big motor road from London, you find yourself surrounded by a huge fleet of lorries carrying biscuits from London to Glasgow. And, when you look across to the other motorway, you find an equally huge fleet of lorries carrying biscuits from Glasgow to London.”

Both fleets of lorries are there because of economic functioning. “Now, the chap in London says, I sell locally what I can sell,” explains Schumacher, “but that doesn’t fully load up my capacity. And, in order to get it fully loaded up, the marginal costs are only a small fraction. So I can let my marginal product travel long distances - to Glasgow. Even if the transport costs absorb most of the difference between marginal cost and average cost, as long as there is something left it’s profitable for me to do so. And he’s quite right. Except that the Glasgow chap thinks the same, and he, in order to fill up his capacity, invades the London market. And so, while it is logical from the point of view of the one manufacturer in London and the one manufacturer in Glasgow, if you add it all together it’s a total **absurdity**.” It indicates what we call “Useless” economic activity.

Marianna Mazzucato [2018] contrasts “makers and takers” - one creating value, the other extracting value. Such economic activity is unproductive and generates no value; it is almost Useless. “In 2009 Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman Sachs, claimed that ‘The people of Goldman Sachs are among the most productive in the world.’ Yet, just the year before, Goldman had been a major contributor to the worst financial and economic crisis since the 1930s.” [p.xiii-xiv] There is something wrong in our estimation of what is value.

David Graeber [2018] finds Useless economic activity, not among the wealthy, but among workers throughout Western economies. These are *Bullshit Jobs*, which he defines as jobs “so completely pointless that even the person

who has to perform it every day cannot convince himself there's a good reason for him to be doing it" [p.2-3]. He gives numerous examples, such as " A Spanish civil servant who collected a salary for at least six years without working" who "used his time to become an expert on the writings of the Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza" [p.3]. He starts his book with the example:

>  
In the German military a soldier needs to move to a different office 5 meters down the corridor, including the computer from their desk. Instead of allowing it to be carried, a sub-sub-contractor, Kurt, is called in, who lives 200 km away and must hire a car to drive down to the office, seal up the computer in a box, fill in forms to record this, wait for it to be moved, then unseal and unpack it in the new office, filling in more forms. "So, instead of the soldier carrying his computer for five meters, two people drive for a combined six to ten hours, fill in around fifteen pages of paperwork, and waste a good four hundred euros of taxpayers' money. ... Kurt's job might be considered a paradigmatic example of a bullshit job for one simple reason: if the position were eliminated, it would make no discernible difference in the world. Likely as not, things would improve since German military bases would presumably have to come up with a more reasonable way to move equipment." [p.1-2]

He cites a survey [p.25] that found that office workers spent only 39% of their time doing their primary job duties, and 16% on emails, 11% attending useful meetings, 10% on wasteful meetings, 11% on administrative tasks, 8% on interruptions for nonessential tasks and 5% for other things.

Even Adam Smith differentiated the luxuries of the wealthy from the needs of the ordinary person.

Robert and Edward Skidelsky [2012] argue cogently for **enough**. They show first how economic growth does not correlate with what we truly value, such as happiness, chart the history of capitalism, and how modern Western culture, unlike all other cultures elsewhere or elsewhen, has rejected the idea of 'the good life' and reduced it to money or markets. This, they argue, removes: the difference between needs and wants; that between necessities and luxuries; the idea of 'enoughness'; use-value, replacing it with exchange-value [p.89-91]. Use-value is our key value. See our detailed <"skidelsky.html">review and critique of their book, *How Much is Enough?*.

These examples of concern - and many other - suggest that there is something about **the way economics operates** that generates such absurdities and harm and, what is worse, does not even consider them absurdities. By and large, the expressions of concern we looked at first are about economic activity that does **Harm**, while the later ones are about what might be called **Useless** economic activity.

In the literature on the Good versus Harm dimension, we find some attempts to address the issue in practice, where it is part of reality, but theoretical treatment, and especially philosophical grounding, is inadequate and almost non-existent especially in mainstream economics. >For example, the State of Maryland has developed a **Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI)** of 26 variables, which takes account of inequality, includes non-market benefits, and identifies and deducts costs like environmental degradation. But there is little adequate theory to underpin such attempts.

On the Good versus Useless dimension, we find a meagre discourse in the theoretical literature and some more in the practical, professional and popular literature. In the public media and especially in politics, which seem committed to economic growth at all costs, there is almost zero recognition of Harm and Uselessness. So we attempt discussion of both Harmful and Useless economic activity in this chapter.

To differentiate the kinds of Harm (and Good / value) we employ Dooyeweerd's aspects, as we did in Chapter 5 to understand kinds of value and Chapter 6 to understand kinds of functioning in economic activity, but here we extend both with the inherent normativity of aspects, which distinguishes Good from Evil / Harm and the many distinct kinds of each.

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If economics is to contribute to Multi-aspectual Good, we need to clearly differentiate Good from Harmful and Useless.

There have been a few attempts to recognise this in practice, which have forced the development of specific measures of Harm.

### **7-1.3 A Quick Empirical Calculation of Amount of Harmful and Useless Economic Activity**

Summary: The amount of harmful and useless economic activity in the UK is surprisingly high.

As far as we can discover, few have discussed the amounts of Harmful and Useless economic activity in nations like the UK, and few are interested in even doing research on this. Here we try to calculate these two figures using some data available for the UK - and emerge with a ballpark figure that surprises us. Better calculation is needed, but this very approximate figure does at least show there is a problem that needs addressing, and an urgent need to undertake research.

#### **7-1.3.1 How much useless economic activity in the UK economy?**

Summary: About three quarters of the UK economy is Useless (and may be curbed without much pain).

It is not easy to estimate the amount of useless economic activity for reasons discussed earlier, but the Pandemic offered an opportunity to estimate very roughly the amount of non-essentials in the economy, because then most people reduced their consumption of non-essentials. Figures released [Source to be traced = = =] suggest that at least half the goods and clothing bought in the UK, and half the goods carried by trucks, were non-essential. This might be supported by the fact that, in the affluent UK, while the savings of the more wealthy increased, those of the poorest 20% reduced, suggesting that the wealthiest had previously been spending on non-essentials. If these figures are correct, non-essentials might make up about half the UK real economy.

Graeber [2018] estimates that 40% of jobs in capitalist economies are "bullshit", i.e. unproductive and not worth doing, absorbing human labour yet bringing little or no Good.

The amount of Useless economic activity is the combination of those. Do we just add them together (to get 90% of the economy as Useless)? Of course not! Do we take the maximum of the two figures, i.e. 50%? Probably not, because that would only be valid if all the Bullshit jobs are devoted solely to production of baubles (non-essentials); many of Graeber's examples come from industries and sectors concerned with essentials. If, as is more reasonable, we assume some overlap between them, then we might argue that 40% of jobs in both the production of essentials and the production of non-essentials are Bullshit (i.e. non-essentiality and unproductivity are statistically independent factors). Combining the figures this way >[Note: Combination]means that around **70% of the UK economy may be classed as Useless**. In the USA the figure is probably worse.

That 70% is a huge figure. Imagine that 70% of the workforce being devoted to contributing Good instead!

Is it merely coincidence that this is nearly the amount by how much the UK's ecological footprint needs to shrink to bring it down to 1 Earth? Can we achieve this just by removing Useless economic activity? A tempting idea!

Of course, our figure of 70% Useless economic activity was based on weak and limited empirical evidence, but there is at least reasonable logic behind it: when people are keenly aware of national and global emergencies, they will tend to focus on what is essential.

### 7-1.3.2 How much harmful economic activity in the UK economy?

Summary: Nearly four fifths of the UK economy does Harm (and should be removed).

A few empirical figures are available from which we might calculate the proportion of harmful economic activity in the UK economy. Each comes from a different sector, and a proper calculation must be made.

One is ecological footprint, which, for the UK is 4.2 Global Hectares (over 2.6 Earths) [WPF 2023]. This includes what humanity's demand for raw materials and for food and for absorption of our waste and pollution by the planet would be if all humans had the same impact as those in the UK. Oversimplifying perhaps, we may say that any excess over 1.0 Earths must be treated as harmful activity. This gives us a proportion of  $3.2/4.2 = 76\%$  ecologically harmful economic activity in the UK. That figure might include unpaid economic activity and whether or not that should be included or excluded from calculations depends on their purpose. However, given that our mindset in the UK assumes most of life involves money, unpaid activity may be assumed small.

To this figure should be added other harms to health from air pollution, obesity etc. These are 9-19 and 10 billion UKP respectively, which is about 6% of the economy [DEFRA 2023]. Other kinds of harm might add another 6%. When combined with the 76% harm because of ecological footprint probabilistically, this gives a total of 79% ( $76\% + 12\% - 76\% * 12\%$ ) of the UK economy does harm.

### 7-1.3.3 Combining these

Summary: Taking both Useless and Harmful figures together should make us think carefully and urgently undertake research.

These figures, 70% useless, 79% harmful are astounding. They leave very little of the UK economy that is Useful Good: between 7% (if Useless and Harmful are statistically independent) and 21% (if all Useless is Harmful). Even 21% is a very small proportion of the UK to be pronounced as Good.

That figure will shock many - including we in the RLDG. Even we expect it to be wrong - but what other better figures are there? A more nuanced analysis is needed, but that shock figure should serve as a warning that we should not take lightly.

We need proper estimates - that is, **research** to obtain them, with empirical study guided by the methods outlined above. The challenge in doing this lies not only in its technical difficulties (which human ingenuity will usually be able to overcome, given the will), but in that many thinkers dislike and resist the very notion that so much of our economy is Useless, so their hidden motivation will be to try to find ways to reduce that figure, rather than truly estimate it. We need honest research!

Hopefully more than 7% will turn out to be healthy Good, but it would not be entirely surprising to find the true figure to be around 10%, given the state of the world and the mindset and attitude that pervades affluent cultures today.

Now we discuss how aspects might help in this research, first in assessing in Harm, then in assessing Useless.

#### 7-1.4 Conflation and Confusion

Summary: In most economics theory and practice, especially in finance, Harmful and Useless economic activity are confused and conflated with Good. We need a basis for distinguishing them.

So, there seems to be a shared intuition of the difference between Good economic activity and that which is Harmful or Useless. But most such expressions of concern are rather general, with few offering a basis for differentiating kinds of Harm (or Good) in a way that is needed in practice. For example, Carney [2021] offers a list of a few kinds of value in his final chapter but neither justifies them explicitly nor even discusses them.

Most expressions of concern focus on either Harm or Uselessness and only a few discuss both and even most of these fail to differentiate the two clearly. Schumacher does, but he consigns both to “absurdities”. It is absurd because (a) both journeys consume large amounts of fuel (over 1600 miles for two round trips), generating climate change emissions and health-harming pollution (Harmful), and (b) neither journey is really necessary, in that biscuits made in each city could stay there and it takes up at least two driver shifts, which could be employed in more productive ways (Useless).

In the examples above there is a complicated mix of Good and Harm and - maybe more challenging, though some Harms are obvious and direct (like addiction and obesity) many are indirect and less obvious, such as species extinction, biodiversity loss from felling rainforests to grow feed for cattle and avocados for the affluent, climate change emissions from flying and road-use, and psychological problems from undue work pressure on employees. Much of the cause of these is what Carney calls the “malignant culture” at the heart of financial capitalism, but we find it also in the human heart in Chapter 6.

As a result, harmful industries have found it relatively easy to convince government to water down policies aimed against Harm, by pointing out the small amount of Good they do, often as job- and tax-provision.

Most economic theories and models suffer even more than those expressions of concern do from these confusions and conflations, in both their treatment of value (as discussed in Chapter 5), and their treatment of economic activity (Chapter 6) and, as discussed in Chapter 4, with unquestioning adherence to economic growth - a version of “love for money.” The difference between Harm and Good is hidden, and no adequate conceptual tools have been developed for tackling the difference, so most economics theory offers no way to discourage harm, but lets it expand in the Economy.

For example, in GDP the (quantitative value of the) Good, Harmful and Useless economic activity are all added together, with no differentiation. Since governments work to increase GDP by any means possible, this actively encourages or justifies Harmful and Useless economic activity as well as Good. In companies we see something similar, to increase (profit-making) income by almost any means possible. Later, we suggest that GDP should subtract Harm from Good, not add them.

Much of the problem lies in the **reduction** of all to the economic aspect, which inherently restricts us to only one norm: carefulness versus waste. Calling

economic activity Harmful because it generates climate change, obesity, wars or laziness is not meaningful by reference to the economic aspect but only to **other aspects**. So such repercussions are either ignored or relegated to the anonymous category of “externalities”, discussed in Chapter 5) and Chapter 6. Economic theory and practice need to explicitly address all norms.

How may we resolve such conundrums, especially in a way that cannot be obfuscated by vested interests on either side?

**7-1.5 Our Approach**

Summary: We differentiate Harmful and Useless economic activity from Good on the basis of the normativity and diversity of aspects.

The foundation we offer is twofold:

- ◆ Differentiate Good, Harmful and Useless.
- ◆ Use Dooyeweerd’s aspects to separate out the kinds of Harm and Good and understand how they interact, and understand Uselessness more precisely.

It advocates growth of the Good, degrowth of the Harmful and curbing of the Useless. We seek not just reduction or prevention of Harm, but the positive increase in Multi-aspectual Good. Jackson’s idea of Post-growth is similar. Harmful and Useless activity are problematic in different ways:

- ◆ **Harmful economic activity** destroys and diminishes Good.
- ◆ **Useless economic activity** dilutes and diverts from Good, wasting human effort, time and resources that could / should have been devoted to contributing to Good.

Figure f7-axes depicts this. Along one axis are Good and Harm and, on the other, Good and Useless. These are the opposite ends of two dimensions, with most economic activity falling somewhere in between in both dimensions. Many result in some Harm and some Good; many are partially Useless.

<img src = “pix/f7-ghu.gif” alt = “Two dimensions of Good versus Harmful and versus Useless economic activity. 1360,600” width = 453 height = 200

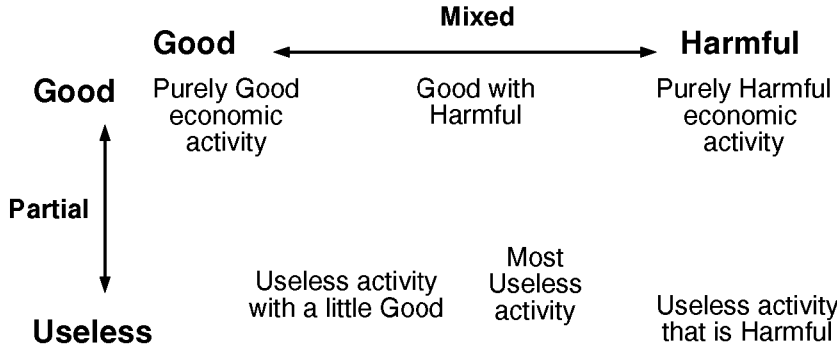


Figure f7-axe. Two dimensions of Good versus Harmful and versus Useless economic activity.

In “Useless” we include both the unproductive and the non-essential. Along these dimensions, we can plot various economic activities and sectors of the economy. **Discuss:** Where might we place: Agriculture, Art, Aviation, Gambling, Healthcare, Information Technology, Pokicing, Tobacco, Tourism?

As soon as we begin such discussions, we open up further challenges (which shows the value of such an exercise). 1. Some Good activities are there

in order to overcome Harm - for example healthcare, policing, cyber-cleaning. So, in fact, our foundation recognises three version of the Good-Harm mix:

- ◆ **Generative** activity, which generates new Good;
- ◆ **Destructive / Depletive** activity, which destroys Good and is thus Harmful;
- ◆ **Restorative** activity, which heals or rectifies Harm.

Just as generative Good and destructive Harm are different in each aspect, so is restorative Good, for example: biotic: bodily healthcare; psychical: overcoming trauma; analytical: overcoming confusion; formative: rebuilding after war or other destruction; lingual: correcting misinformation or lack of information; social: mending relationships; economic: reducing poverty; aesthetic: restoring harmony after fracture; ethical: sacrificial rap-taking in era of selfish, arrogant unconcern. Restorative Good like healthcare can stimulate generative Good, including perhaps in other aspects, because of the example it sets.

Mostly, we will include restorative with generative activity as Good because, in this world here and now, Harm has occurred and keeps on occurring. However, as the context changes, so should our treatment. The less Harm our economic activities do overall, the less we would need restorative Good.

Some Harmful sectors or economic activities (e.g. tobacco, gambling) might can do what some might argue is Good, such as provide jobs, taxes and transient pleasure of thrill. Some of what seems Good can do some Harm (e.g. agricultural food production, when it destroys soil fertility, pollinators and also increases climate change emissions). So we seek **no simple distinction** between Good and Harm, but rather try to understand it aspectually. As explained briefly in Chapter 3, most kinds of Harm arise either as repercussion of a dysfunction in one or more aspects in which humanity functions or as undue elevation of an aspect. Each aspect offers a different kind of each and most activities can be Harmful in some aspects and Good in others.

Likewise there is **no hard boundary** between Good and Useless. Art, leisure and pleasure can be argued either way. We will argue that there is some Good in these because of the aesthetic aspect but that we need to take all **other aspects** into account: is our pleasure at the expense of injustice or environmental damage? The important thing will be surfeit rather than enjoyment itself.

Understanding them aspectually can avoid the usual side-taking and instead open up recordable discussion. It can bring true motivations to the surface, which can provide a basis for differentiating between, for instance, greedy and non-greedy farmers in California. In this way we can offer a systematic way to deal with mixtures of Harm, Good and Useless, in both practice and theory, because our approach makes their various kinds explicit so they can be openly discussed or assessed.

What we discussed in both Chapters 5 and 6, on values and on functioning and repercussions, is brought together to understand both Harmful and Useless economic activity. We will examine each in turn, because their nature, their 'causes' and how to assess them, differ.

To separate Harmful and Useless from Good is not always straightforward. Harm and Uselessness call for different treatment, which we attempt in the next two sections.

## 7-2. Good Versus Harm

Summary: This is how to use the normativity and diversity of aspects to differentiate Harmful from Good economic activity, in both theory and practice?

>[Note: Good Versus Harm

“Love of money” is one root of evil that Paul saw operating around him. It is not money as such, but “love of money” >[Note: Love of Money] that is a root of many kinds of harm, an adherence to money as something to possess and increase, and as the “measure of all things” and their value, so that we ignore and downplay all the multiple kinds of value discussed in Chapter 5.

> Example: Poaching Black Rhino for their horn; the rhinos are tranquilized, their horns are hacked off and the rhino bleeds to death slowly and painfully. Black Rhino horn attracts a high price when sold to China and Vietnam as a medicine or status symbol. Impoverished people find the high prices paid for horn very tempting, especially if they have been led to assume money is the way to obtain things.

> Example: It is this adherence that leads banks and retirement funds to continue to finance fossil fuels, despite knowing of the harm they do.

Most neoclassical / neoliberal / capitalist economics refuses to recognise the difference between Good and Harm, their only norm being that of increasing wealth. Most socialist economics also implicitly recognises a kind of Harm, inequality or injustice, but that is just one and they and ignore other kinds. Many recent thinkers however are motivated by some kind of Harm, whether environmental, health, injustice or whatever; there are many kinds. So **we need** to understand the kinds of harm that are possible.

### 7-2.1 Limitations in Much Current Thinking

Summary: Current recognition of Harm in economics is inadequate.

While some recent discourse recognises kinds of Harm, there are three main problems with it.

1. Often, the recognition of Harm is **only implicit**, and often expressed via a corresponding Good. It relies on our intuition to agree with the thinker that their concern is indeed a kind of Harm, and it seldom provides in-depth understanding of that kind of Harm, how it comes about and what to do about it. We find this implicit recognition in what economic theories or models aim for, such as equilibrium, or avoid, such as waste or poverty, but their force relies on implicit agreement about what is Good or Harmful. Other examples include socialization, innovation, education and longer-term thinking [Mazzucato [2018, 263-267]] or wellbeing [SNA 2021]. One problem with relying on implicitly understood Harm and Good is that it is often too abstract to provide understanding of the details of Harm. Another is that some economists argue that a Harm like inequality is actually Good. **We need** to understand exactly what is harmful and why.

2. Overall, we have a **fragmented view**, with little understanding of the diversity of kinds of Harm and how they interrelate. With a few exceptions (e.g. Raworth >[Note: Raworth diversity]) most focus on one or two kinds of Harm. But it is little use rectifying one kind of Harm and leaving the others to wreak their havoc because all are interconnected. For example, those who are cruel to animals are often cruel to humans too [Sampson 20xx]. For example, poverty and environmental destruction reinforce each other [= = =].

3. Much recent thinking is reactive, to specific areas of concern, and so is **orientated to the past**. Problems / Harm yet to be widely recognised are left out of consideration.

As explained in Chapter 3, using Dooyeweerd’s aspects can make implicit things explicit, bring coherence and can help us imagine future possibilities.

### 7-2.2 Kinds of harm

Summary: Dooyeweerd's aspects can help us understand Good and Harm more clearly and more deeply.

If we are to differentiate Harm from Good, in all their kinds, we need a basis for such differentiation >[Note: Basis of Harm].

The much-maligned but much-misused equilibrium model of conventional economics, interestingly, indicates a little of Harm. Good is equilibrium and Harm is when either supply exceeds demand, which is waste, or demand exceeds supply, which can be the Harm that is poverty. These are two Harms meaningful in the economic aspect. But economics must also take into account all other kinds of Harm and Good.

Dooyeweerd's aspects can provide this, allowing to ask, for each thing we might consider harmful (or good), "Which aspect makes it meaningful to see this as problematic?" For example, inequality of income is problematic, not simply because it is a quantitative difference, but because it is unjust, so it is the juridical aspect that makes it problematic. Applying this to the harms listed in Chapter 2, we might find:

- ◆ Injustice to workers: juridical
- ◆ Injustice to LDNs: juridical
- ◆ Environmental destruction: biotic
- ◆ Depletion of soil fertility: biotic
- ◆ Climate change: physical, biotic
- ◆ Commitment to economic growth: pistic
- ◆ Narrow values: pistic about ethical
- ◆ Inequality in affluent nations: juridical
- ◆ Unconcern for future generations: ethical
- ◆ Disregarding of mundane work: aesthetic, pistic
- ◆ Ignoring unpaid household activity: pistic, ethical, juridical
- ◆ Cruelty to animals: psychical, juridical
- ◆ Health problems: biotic, psychical
- ◆ Addictions: psychical
- ◆ "Feelings of antagonism": psychical, pistic
- ◆ Spiritual poverty: pistic
- ◆ Unproductivity, waste: economic.

(Such a list is only a sample of harms. **Discuss**, to add more. Then see example Good and Harm in each aspect in Table t7-ghfr below.)

Addressing one harm directly does not usually address others and might even make them worse when they are ignored and even sacrificed on the altar of the one given all the attention. (Some early attempts to address environmental issues seemed to make poverty worse; early attempts to address hunger destroyed the environment; examples of both can be found in India.) Aiming for Multi-aspectual Good helps ensure this does not happen.

### 7-2.3 Understanding Harm

Summary: How Harm operates - as repercussions of dysfunction in each aspect.

To properly understand such Harms and harms, how they operate, what future possible harms might occur, and what we might do about them, we need to understand how each kind of harm comes about. To do this, we bring together Chapter 6's discussion of functioning and repercussions and Chapter 5's understanding of value and anti-value, and ask

"Why is it that economic activity generates harms rather than purely good?"

Assuming that few individuals, companies or governments actually intend Harm, Harm often comes about as an unintended consequence of other action - especially of the myriad of myriad of tiny actions of billions of people.

> Example of Harm to lives: An individual just fancies some advertised food, has the money and buys it, unaware it is harmful junk food. A company aims to increase its income or profits and chooses to sell products that are harmful (or non-essential) but "in demand". A government wants money to pay for health services (and other things!) and chooses to allow harmful sectors that pay high tax to remain, wants to stay in power to tries to appeal to voters who "just fancy" junk food. Similarly for all other kinds of Harm.

> Example of Harm to the Economy: Blood imported from the USA into the UK a few decades for transfusions was contaminated and resulted in est. 2900 deaths. Some of the blood was collected from prisoners and drug addicts. These decisions were driven by "commercial greed and state negligence" [Guardian 14 April 2024]. And now, the UK government is having to pay large sums in compensation.

> Example of Harm to planet: Children grow up in UK and move across the ocean to live 3000 miles away in the USA. Parents want to visit children and grandchildren once or more a year, and vice versa. This then 'necessitates' many flights (Harmful to climate), which would not occur if the children stayed in their home country. In many cases, that move is non-essential (see later).

We need to understand both the Harmful "unintended consequences", and also the "other actions" that led indirectly to them. Though some harms come from natural events like volcanoes erupting, here we are trying to understand Harm and harms for which we are responsible, and can maybe do something about, both long-term harms like climate change and short-term ones.

In most aspects the **boundary between Good and Harm** can never be sharply defined. This is because (a) the meaning-kernel of each can never be precisely defined, (b) each aspect contains analogical echoes of all the others. Instead of demanding precise, sharp boundaries, we need humility and willingness to err on the side of caution, even if by doing so we might seem to miss out on the final small percentage of benefit to self. That way lies wisdom, especially in the longer term.

**Real-life economic activity** includes functioning in all aspects, whether well or dysfunctionally. When the functioning is Good, then economic activity can bring Good, such as in the fourth column. When there is dysfunction in any aspect of our economic activity, we will find harm resulting in any spheres of life, as in the final column. (So far, this section has presented a negative view of economic activity, because it has seldom been discussed adequately, but the above equations and table provide a basis for returning to a balanced view, as discussed below.)

**Multi-aspectual Good** comes from functioning well in every aspect, with zero dysfunction in any. Dysfunction in any aspect not only detracts from Multi-aspectual Good but it also introduces a kind of Harm, which often acts like a poison or cancer that spreads. This is because we react to the dysfunction in the same or other aspects.

> Example: Misleading advertisements (lingual dysfunction) lowering trust and increasing cynicism (ethical harm).

> Example: The owner of a football club becomes greedy (ethical dysfunction) and begins taking money out of the club for themselves (juridical dysfunction) rather than investing in players (economic). As a result, the club does poorly in the League (aesthetic dysfunction), the fans get angry (pistic, psychical), begin bad-mouthing the owner (social, lingual dysfunction), the club gets a bad reputation (pistic, social), and its income reduces (economic) as fans stay away. [Note: Football]

This example shows not only how dysfunction in aspects of economic activity, such as advertising or monetary strategy, spreads harm - and also how this returns to harm economic performance, which we will discuss later.

## 7-2.4 A Mathematical Treatment of Good and Harm

Summary: It may be possible in principle to express Good and Harm mathematically, but not very well.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, The repercussions of functioning or dysfunctioning in any aspect may be expressed approximately by the following formulae >[Note: Using Maths]:

WHEN  $F_x$  THEN  $G_x$ .

or conversely,

WHEN  $D_x$  THEN  $H_x$ .

where  $F_x$  is functioning and  $D_x$  is dysfunction in an aspect  $x$ , and  $G_x$  is a repercussion that is good according to that same aspect,  $x$ , and  $H_x$  is the correspondingly harmful repercussion. (The case of cross-aspect repercussions is discussed below, as is restorative activity, like healthcare, which is Good that overcomes previous Harm.)

In each aspect the formulae refer to different kinds of functioning and repercussion. Examples of  $F$ ,  $G$ ,  $D$  and  $H$  are shown in Table t3 of Chapter 3, reproduced here for convenience >[Note: Aspect details].

Table t7-ghfr. Good and harmful functioning and repercussions in each aspect (examples), reproduced from Chapter 3

> (Click on table for full size)

< "pix/t3-ghfr.gif" >

<img src = "pix/t3-ghfr.gif" alt = "Examples of good and harmful functioning and repercussions for each aspect 1328,1800, from fpr:t04-nvy" width = 432 height = 600 > </a

Aspect	Functioning (F <sub>x</sub> )	Dysfunction (D <sub>x</sub> )	Repercussions	
			Good (G <sub>x</sub> )	Harmful (H <sub>x</sub> )
<b>Quantitative</b>	Amount as given		Reliable totals Sequence	
<b>Spatial</b>	Simultaneity Continuity		Continuous extension	
<b>Kinematic</b>	Movement		Dynamism	
<b>Physical</b>	Force, causality		Persistence	
<b>Organic / Biotic</b>	Feeding Reproduction	Starvation Sterility	Vitality Survival	Disease Extinction
<b>Psychic / Sensitive</b>	Interaction	Insensitivity	Alertness Emotional health	Sensory deprivation Addiction
<b>Analytic</b>	Distinction	Conflation	Conceptual clarity	Confusion
<b>Formative</b>	Planning Working, constructing	Laziness, Destroying	Achievement Construction Technology	Lost opportunities Destruction
<b>Lingual</b>	Expressing	Deceiving	Information	Misinformation
<b>Social</b>	Relating, befriending Taking a role	Disdaining, hating Refusing to fit in	Friendship Amplified activity	Working against each other
<b>Economic</b>	Frugality	Squandering	Well-resourced prosperity	Unsustainability Destitution
<b>Aesthetic</b>	Harmonizing Enjoying	Fragmentation	Wholeness Interest, fun, beauty	Fragmentation Boredom
<b>Juridical</b>	Giving due, responsibility	Irresponsibility	Justice Appropriateness	Injustice Inappropriateness
<b>Ethical / Attitudinal</b>	Self-giving love, vulnerability, trust	Selfishness, self-protection	Culture of goodwill	Competitive, harsh culture
<b>Pistic / Faith</b>	Belief, courage, commitment	Idolatry, disloyalty	High morale in society	Loss of meaning, morale

Idolatry: Treating something non-absolute as absolute

However, the equations and table are only indicative and should not be seen as complete. This is because they suggest that Good or Harmful repercussions meaningful in an aspect can arise only from (dys)functioning in that aspect, but in practice dysfunction in one aspect can lead to Harm in others. >For example, it is well-known that hunger can mean that people do not think so well (biotic-analytical 'repercussion'; e.g. children at school without breakfast) - but why?. Not thinking well can lead to unwise decisions that overlook possibilities for real prosperity and make us ignore the basic norm of frugality, and instead commit to harmful or useless economic activity. Lying leads to lack of trust, which undermines the entire economic system. These are all **inter-aspect dependencies**: biotic dysfunction leading to analytical dysfunction, to formative, to lingual, to ethical, and then to economic dysfunction. In the reverse direction, economic dysfunction of waste and destitution makes devastating hunger more likely. Arrogance (pistic dysfunction) can lead to injustice (juridical), thus to conflict (aesthetic, social), to destruction of food resources and hunger (biotic). And so on. >[Note: Inter-aspect Repercussions] Whether and how to modify the above equations is still being pondered and requires **research**. At present, it may suffice to untangle all the complex inter-aspect effects and see how each is a tangle of single-aspect repercussions, which are expressible by the above equations.

## 7-2.5 Mix of Good and Harm

Summary: A challenge is that Harm and Good mix together, but Dooyeweerd's aspects help us untangle them.

Harm and Good mix, and if we are to reduce one and increase or encourage the other, we need to conceptually untangle the various kinds of Harm from kinds of Good found in real-life situations.

Dooyeweerd's aspects help us to reveal the various factors at play for good and ill. Two examples from Confusion and Conflation may be analysed aspectually as follows:

> The threats to the Californian **Delta Smelt** by farming interests may be understood more clearly this way. Growing food (and thus demanding water) seems a biotic Good, while extinction is a biotic Harm. But if we delve deeper we find other aspects at play. That some people in California are not starving but obese is another biotic Harm. The competitive motivation is of the ethical and pistic aspects and, as discussed later, Harmful. The plight of small farmers, when genuine, is meaningful in yet other aspects. See longer discussion in Chapter 9.

> With **rapid delivery** companies and their "democratization", Is not democratisation juridical Good? In this case, we must take the target aspect of that juridical functioning into account. 'Democratization' of education (in John Knox's Scotland and by Comenius) and of hygiene (in Victorian Britain) were good because both are aspectual virtues (lingual, biotic), but 'democratization' of vices is harmful and should not be supported. But democratization of vices like laziness must not be considered a Good. Bodily laziness, which it encourages, is biotic Harm and reducing the need to plan is often formative Harm. Some of these factors are shown in Figure f7-eqns. (Note: Laziness differs from leisure, an aesthetic Good when not out of proportion.) That rapid delivery is set to be a multi-billion industry, dependent on low wages, may be a juridical evil. That analysis was carried out by critics of rapid delivery; those who support it might draw attention to other aspects, then dialogue can begin, instead of just being for or against rapid delivery.

Most resign themselves to such mixes, but doing so is far from ideal because it **robs us of incentive** to address the Harm, boosts cynical attitudes, which themselves are dysfunction that spreads (pistic aspect), and allows perpetrators of Harm to excuse themselves. Dooyeweerd's thesis is that no aspect undermines others and that Harmful activity is not totally inescapable. Seeming conflict between the norms of aspects (such as "Being too ethical jeopardises profits", a supposed conflict between ethical and economic aspects) often betrays a misunderstanding of the aspects concerned. Dooyeweerd's suite of aspects not only helps us separate things out, reveal issues that had been overlooked, especially hidden motives, opens the door to deeper understanding and more open dialogue, but also gives incentive to work out how apparent inter-aspect conflicts may be reduced and Harm removed from the mixture. It also helps us move away from simple for-or-against stances, into more fruitful discourse. See section on Wisdom.

Underlying much Harm is the selfish, unconcerned love of convenience, and presupposing a right thereto, (ethical and pistic dysfunction) - our old friend, **mindset-attitude**, which we discuss later.

## 7-2.6 Harm to the Economy

Summary: Dysfunction in other spheres rebounds as harm to economic activity and they economy.

"Sustainable growth can be undercut by a number of dimensions: ... excess debts ... governments squandering their future ... rapid exhaustion of the carbon budget ... devouring of social capital ..." Carney [2021, 455-6]

Not only does economic activity impact other areas of life, but they impact economic activity, including the economy. Dooyeweerd argued that all aspects cohere and work together, so this two-way impact is expected.

One impact, overlooked until relatively recently, is that of **climate change** and biodiversity loss (biotic dysfunction) on the economies of nations, especially those of the Global South >[Note: Global South Economies]. Others have been known about for longer, ranging from corruption (juridical dysfunction) to worker stress (psychical), and things like high fault rates in equipment (formative), poor technique (formative). Addiction reduces productivity. Also, wrongdoing often requires massive compensation years later, such as the contaminated blood scandal in the 1970s in the UK [House of Lords 2024]. Note that though the climate is a physical activity, the harm from it is meaningful chiefly in the biotic aspect, and the indirectly in the economic and other aspects.

Whether known or not, what is less often discussed is **why they happen** and how to consider them all together.

>

Example: At the time of writing this (December 2022), the UK is facing **strikes** by many different workers: nurses, railway workers, postal workers, and so on - mostly those who were required to work throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, often at risk of their own lives and under very stressful conditions. According to one railway worker, with whom one of the RLDG participants was in conversation, had they been given "a proper thankyou" for working through the pandemic, all this trouble would not have happened. Instead, the UK government cracked down on the railway companies, demanding that they pay back the financial support they had been given during the pandemic. Comment: A clear case of (a) elevation of an isolated economics, (b) ignoring values like thanks or mercy, and of toxic culture, a phrase she used.

**Toxic culture** in any organisation is pistic and ethical dysfunction, often manifested as prioritization of own interests by management, taking advantage of workers, especially their sacrifices during the Pandemic >[Note: Toxic culture]. Hence strikes.

Many such impacts are gradual and unexpected, especially when the mindset among economists, politicians and media is of economics as isolated from other spheres (Chapter 4) and only monetary value is acknowledged and assessed (Chapter 5).

**Research project.** Investigate the impact of dysfunctional management attitudes on economic performance of companies, and compare with that of generous attitude.

Conversely, good functioning in other aspects, such as trust or good information, enhances good economic activity and might even repair the Economy. Especially, a generous culture can do wonders for an economy, both in organisations and in a nation. Sadly, however, this is too often taken for granted and not explicitly taken into account. Dooyeweerd's aspects help us, not only to see them all together, but also how the cumulative impact on the Economy might be larger than focusing on any one of them might suggest.

In real-life economic activity, however, good and harms are mixed together.

## 7-2.7 Harm in Labour and Use

Summary: Labour and use generate Harm or Good via different routes.

The above formulae are not adequate when trying to understand labour and its **indirect contribution** to Multi-aspectual Good or Harm of the production of a good/service. The goods/services only contributes once they are being used;

their contribution is potential yet to be realized, though the activity of producing it contributes directly. The potential is different in each aspect. So the formulae above may be modified for this indirect contribution as follows:

$$\text{WHEN } P ( p (G_x) ) \text{ THEN } G'_x$$

and conversely

$$\text{WHEN } P ( p (H_x) ) \text{ THEN } H'_x$$

where  $P ( )$  indicates “production of”,  $p ( )$  indicates “potential Good or Harmful contribution to Multi-aspectual Good/Harm”,  $G_x$  and  $H_x$  indicate Good and Harm meaningful in aspect  $a$ , and  $G'_x$  and  $H'_x$  indicate Good and Harm in aspect  $a$  indirectly generated by the production.

The two pairs of formulae apply to different parts of Figure f6-luog in Chapter 6, as shown in Figure f7-eqns. The first set applies to the two arrows that feed directly into Multi-aspectual Good, and the second set to the arrow feeding from production to use. The diagram also shows factors in the example of Democratising the Right to Laziness, mentioned earlier.

<img src = “pix/f7-eqns.gif” alt = “Direct and Indirect Contributions to Multi-aspectual Good or Harm from production and use, with examples from rapid delivery. 1952,825” width = 651 height = 275”

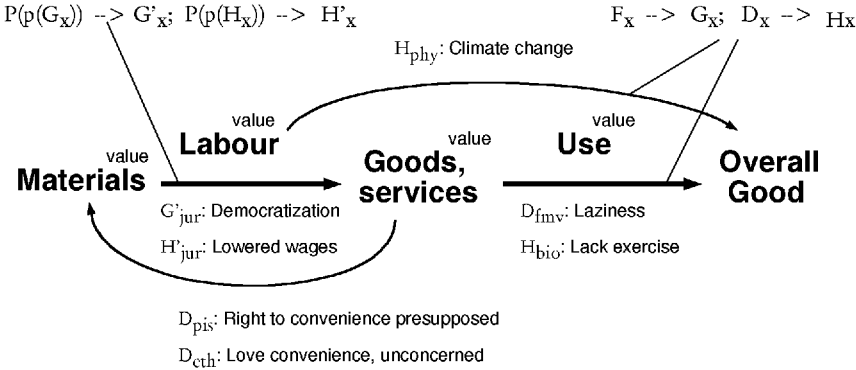


Figure f7-eqns. Direct and Indirect Contributions to Multi-aspectual Good or Harm from production and use, with examples from rapid delivery.

### 7-2.8 The Role of Ethical and Pistic Functioning in Harm

Summary: Ethical and pistic functioning are often the ultimate and deepest root of Harm and route to Good.

“a malignant culture at the heart of financial capitalism” [Mark Carney]

It is not just culture but malignant culture. And not just financial capitalism; in almost all economics in affluent cultures. As also discussed in Chapter 6, our **ethical and pistic functioning** ( attitudes and mindsets; culture) impact all our economic activity retrocipatively and usually in powerful, hidden ways because they are our functioning in the ethical and pistic aspects. Frequently, at the **root of the best and worst economic activity** lies mindsets and attitudes.

> Example 1: In the UK, the Inquiry into the **Grenfell Tower** fire disaster of 2017, when fire spread through flammable external cladding and killed 72 people, found that contractors were to blame because they installed flammable cladding, up which the fire spread rapidly. Root causes include (a) the building designers loved to be “innovative”, (b) warnings about the possibility of fire were ignored by the local authority (Westminster City Council, one of the wealthiest in the UK), (c) the suppliers of the cladding panels had distorted test results in order to get their product past

safety conditions, (d) which happened because UK Government building regulations were deficient and could be exploited by unscrupulous developers. These all involve dysfunctional mindset and attitude.

> Example 2: The attitude and mindset of senior management (the culture) in the UK Post Office led to the **Horizon Scandal**, where sub-postmasters were wrongly accused and convicted of stealing money, because of a faulty computer system; the management refused to consider the possibility that the system might be faulty, and took a vindictive attitude towards those they accused, then hindered investigations, and, when they were forced to pay compensation, did so very reluctantly.

The foundation being developed here does not judge only today's Western economics, but also that of **earlier ages and different cultures**. This is because it does not just acknowledge culture but offers a specific understanding of it (as ethical and pistic functioning) by reference to a suite of aspects that **transcends cultures and ages** and even makes culture possible (see Chapter 3).

> For example, both in mediaeval Europe and in many African countries today, the family has first call on finances and resources, leading to what Western culture calls corruption. The actual Harm of this is often more down-to-earth, as poverty or pressure to do unwise things. In a sub-Saharan African country, a family was given seed so they could grow a crop of maize to sell and get them out of poverty - but they used all the best of the crop for a family wedding and remained in destitution. The 16th century Venetian composer, Giovanni Gabrielli, got into harmful debt in order to pay his sister's huge court costs for divorce - brought about by the attitude and mindset of her and her husband.

To properly understand, reduce, rectify and prevent Harm, we need to address these two hidden aspects, not only the more visible ones. The Grenfell case shows Harm arising from economic activity rooted in an attitude of greed by the contractor firms and unconcern by wealthy local authorities.

Good **functioning in the ethical aspect** increases trust and generosity, which enhances economic activity, and indeed the entire economy. > An example is when Lever Brothers, Josiah Boot and Thomas Cook made soap, medicines and holidays available to the poor, which had previously been available only to the wealthy,. The result was not just healthier and happier people but also a burgeoning economy - Good in several aspects. Notice that this was motivated, not primarily by economic self-interest (nor even by Smithian self-love) but by genuine concern and generous, risky self-giving (ethical functioning).

Contrariwise, **dysfunction in the ethical aspect**, as selfishness, self-centredness, self-protection, distrust, meanness and the like, causes Harm, in that it distorts and corrupts economic activity that could otherwise have been Good.

> Examples: In the Grenfell Tower disaster, we can see selfish unconcern in Westminster City Council's attitude to the poorer parts of their jurisdiction, and can see selfishness and self-protection in the distortion of test results by the suppliers in order to protect their own products, and in the tendency to exploit - rife in the UK construction industry over the past few decades. In the Horizon Scandal we can see selfish unconcern among the management refusing to consider the possibility of system faults and self-protection in their vindictive attitude, and meanness in the reluctance to pay compensation.

The impact of ethical and pistic functioning - Good or Evil - is usually long in being visible and is deeply entrenched. Moreover it is often self-reinforcing in that when anybody points out the results of these dysfunctions the holders of ethical and pistic dysfunctioning try to divert blame to others, often those who carry out the actions that arise from these deep dysfunctions, and even convince themselves of their own acceptability. This is one reason why it is important to nip ethical and pistic dysfunction in the bud; it is of the human heart, reinforced by culture, which issues in harmful decisions and activities. (x To Jews and

Christians, God sees and judges the heart and wants us to allow it to be changed by the Spirit of God. x)

Which ethical functioning we do is often influenced by our pistic functioning. For instance, the above-mentioned philanthropists believed that the poor are of value and committed to their cause in the face of opposition.

Good **pistic functioning** orientates us towards reality, how things 'work well' in other aspects, in our beliefs, expectations, assumptions, aspirations, commitments, etc.

**Pistic dysfunction** manifests itself in several ways: holding the belief that harm in another aspect does not matter, commitment to some thing that causes harm elsewhere (e.g. tobacco, fossil fuels), hidden agendas, vested interests, cowardice, undue elevation of an aspect (such as the economic), giving it too high a place in our estimation, sacrificing other things for it, ignoring aspects that threaten it, and so on.

> Examples: In the Grenfell Tower disaster, we can see pistic dysfunction in over-commitment to innovation by the designers, warnings ignored and in UK government allowing deficient, exploitable regulations. In the Horizon Scandal there was a assumption and among Post Office senior management that postmasters were untrustworthy and it became a reinforced belief, and the refusal to consider other possibilities. The reluctance to pay adequate compensation arose not only from selfishness but a belief that the survival and reputation of the Post Office and its current management was more important than justice. (x Christians will find it a great shame that the CEO of the Post Office at the time was a Christian. x)

The main harm from unduly elevating aspects occurs because other aspects are ignored, not cared about, analysed nor planned for, and often sacrificed on the altar of the elevated aspect. For several of these, we have used the word "idolatry" in Chapter 4 >[Note: Idolatry]. Giving absolute **priority to the economic aspect**, whether money or productivity, can incite things like deceit (lingual dysfunction), corner-cutting (juridical dysfunction), little injustices or illegalities (juridical dysfunction), undermining relationships (social dysfunction), trust-breaking (ethical dysfunction) and so on.

Some economists emphasise how the **structures of society** impact economics and its delivering good or ill [= = = refs], usually emphasising how policies and laws of a society constrain people's economic activity towards certain directions rather than others. As discussed in §6-5, not only do laws and policies do this (juridical structures) but also ethical and pistic structures, i.e. attitude and mindset.

Thus, understanding how dysfunctional ethical and pistic functioning can do Harm indirectly by impact on functioning in other aspects might help us in several ways.

- ◆ It might help shed light on the roots of various evils we face, ranging from climate change through poverty to meaninglessness in life.
- ◆ It might help us more clearly understand what is good and bad about various things in economics, including some of those about which there are set positions. For example, it may be not that capitalism is in itself problematic, but selfish and competitive capitalism. It may be that socialism is not in itself problematic, but ideological socialism. It may be that it was not early environmentalist action that brought poverty to India but unconcerned environmentalism. And so on.
- ◆ It might help us understand individual cases of Harm or Good by revealing motivations and presuppositions.

So, when considering Harmful economic activity, do not overlook the hidden, indirect impact of ethical and pistic functioning. They play an even greater role in Useless economic activity, as discussed below.

## 7-2.9 On Assessing Harm (and Good)

Summary: To assess Harm separately from Good is challenging, but may be facilitated by aspectual analysis followed by qualitative and/or quantitative interpretation thereof.

In individual, company and government economics, we need to assess Good and Harm. This section discusses how this may be done, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

### 7-2.9.1 Preparatory Aspectual Analysis

Summary: Some steps of aspectual analysis prepare for qualitative and quantitative assessment.

Before assessing, we need a clear idea of what it is meaningful to assess. The following are some steps help us do this, based on Winfield's [1995; 2006] Multi-aspectual Knowledge Elicitation (MAKE). They help us build a rich picture of the situation or phenomenon we want to assess, which can then be used in both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

- ◆ Be familiar with the meaningfulness and norms that each aspect offers.
- ◆ Identify a couple of aspects that are the main meaningfulness of the situation > (for example in the case of Grenfell Tower construction, these might be the formative aspect of construction, physical of materials and of course economic). (It is useful to write these down on a large sheet of paper.)
- ◆ Identify economic activities and other factors that are meaningful in these few aspects (and write them down near the names of the chosen aspects). Economic activities are those that involve any kind of resource, not just money. The factors can be anything relevant that comes to mind.
- ◆ If you can, mark whether the issues are positive or negative in these aspects, and whether they are unproductive and/or non-essential.
- ◆ Identify factors meaningful in other aspects > (e.g. social, juridical, aesthetic in the people immediately around the Grenfell Tower constructors), and name those aspects and link the factors to them (drawing these onto the sheet and marking them in a similar way).
- ◆ Identify relationships between these issues (drawn as lines between them), especially those of inter-aspect dependency, in which one issue leads to, or depends on, the other.
- ◆ Keep doing this, adding new issues, relationships and, where necessary, new aspects until no more factors can be thought of > (e.g. kinematic, biotic, lingual, ethical, etc.).
- ◆ Are there any missing aspects? If so, note them, and try to identify issues meaningful therein and link them with other issues > (e.g. kinematic, biotic, lingual, ethical, pistic, etc.).
- ◆ In particular, consider ethical and pistic functioning, of selfisness or self-giving, and of aspirations, expectations, beliefs, assumptions, commitments, and even religion or ideology, etc.
- ◆ Repeat any of the above as necessary.

This gives us a picture the kinds of Good, Harmful and Useless economic activities that characterize the situation we are assessing. The Good and Harm might be in different aspects, but can also be in the same aspect. Remember, things might be meaningful in ways we do not expect; do not overlook them.

**7-2.9.2 Qualitative methods for assessing Harm and Good**

Summary: How to assess Harm versus Good qualitatively.

In **qualitative assessment** of Harm and Good, we must consider **all kinds of good and harm**, both human and and the non-human environment, and how different kinds **interact**? The above steps can prepare us by assembling many meaningful issues to be assessed.

Causal maps can be useful visual aids to thinking about what ‘causes’ what harm and good, and presenting our thinking about them. Figure f7-eqns above is a broad-brush view for rapid delivery. Figure f7-causal below shows a more detailed causal map for what can harm agriculture, redrawn from Figure 1 of Garcia-Andreu [2017] with aspects added that make each issue problematic or at least meaningful.

<img src = "pix/f7-causalmap.gif" alt = "Example causal map showing multiple factors harming the agriculture sector. 1808,2250" width = 603 height = 750

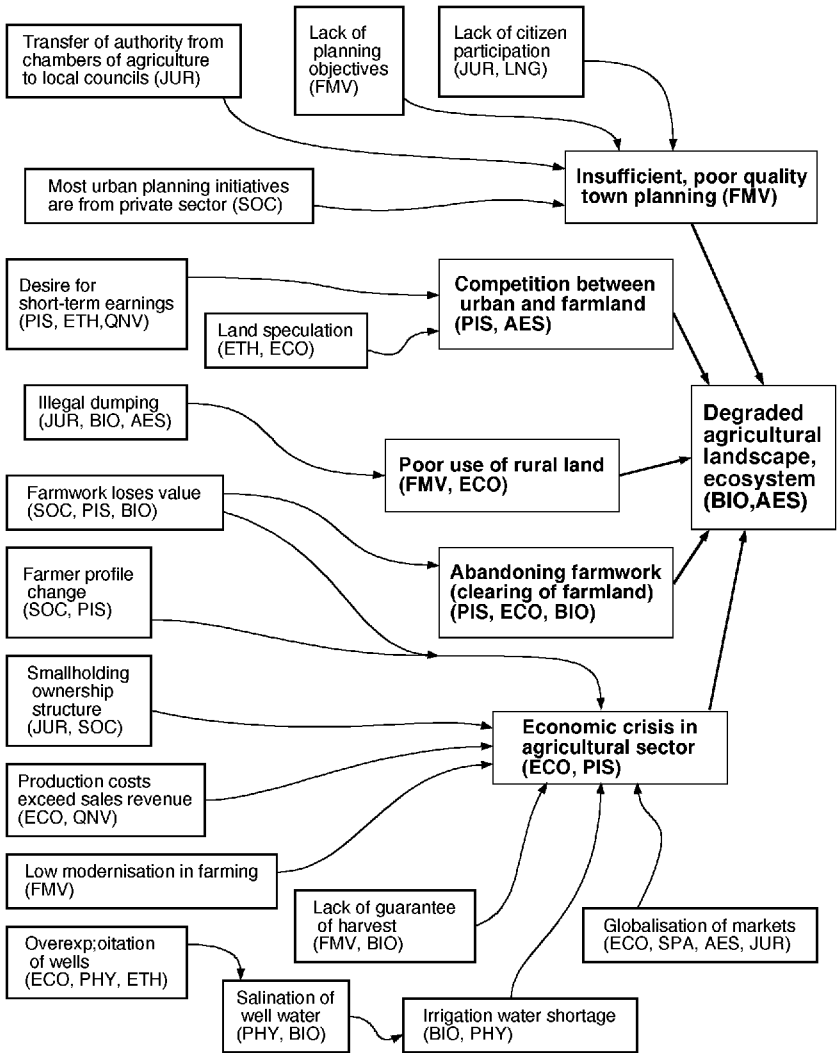


Figure f7-causal. Example causal map showing multiple factors harming the agriculture sector

This diagram shows several things: (a) multi-stage 'causality'; (b) that one factor can 'cause' several things; (c) most factors have several aspects that make them important. Notice also some mistakes to avoid: (a) Some items bespeak harm (e.g. farmwork losing value) while others are merely neutral (e.g. farmer profile). (b) Some penultimate factors are all very general and arguably do not 'cause' the final factor; for example, to say that an economic crisis leads to degraded landscape and ecosystem is not very helpful because nothing can be done about it.

Such a diagram contains 'input' factors that are quite concrete, a number of abstract ones, which are quite general, leading to the final problem. In a full study, for each 'input' factor, do four things :

- ◆ Identify specific (rather than general) Good and/or Harmful repercussions of each. (For example illegal dumping leads to anger among farmers and others and can also lead to pollution of nearby water and a danger to animals. For some of the input factors we already have identified repercussions, such as salination of well water.)
- ◆ Ask to what extent each is necessary rather than being unproductive or non-essential. (In this example, this does not apply to most, except perhaps that modernisation in farming might not be essential.)
- ◆ Identify what each might depend on (i.e. what might 'cause' them?). (For example illegal dumping depends on transport and a negative attitude among many people.)
- ◆ Reflect on what motivates each. For example, what motivates illegal dumping?

It is the concrete (input) factors that are important. The general factors are less so at this point, and, if present, have served to help identify the input factors. This gives us (a) a deep understanding of the Good, Harmful and Useless economic activities; (b) an understanding of the dynamics, and (c) pointers to what action we might take or plan for, both immediate and longer-term (especially about motivations).

### 7-2.9.3 Quantitative Assessment of Good and Harm

Summary: There are various quantitative ways to assess Good and Harm in or by the economy.

**Quantitative assessment** gives an overview, and a bar chart with bars for each aspect is a useful way of showing it visually, as in Figure f7-firtree. In aspectual quantitative assessment we assign quantitative values or amounts to each meaningful factor, functioning or repercussion. This can be by counting instances, by weighting them, or by reference to market prices, etc. as discussed in Chapter 5 on how to quantify value. That which is Harmful may be depicted as a bar to the left, and that which is Good, a bar to the right, giving something that could look like a fir tree. Where we wish to differentiate between generative and restorative Good, the Good bars could be split in two. Where it is not meaningful to assign Harm or Good, a single-sided bar chart would occur.

<img src = "pix/aspect.tree.gif" alt- "'Fir tree' showing 'amount' of Good and Harm in each aspect 736, 871" width = 368 height = 436

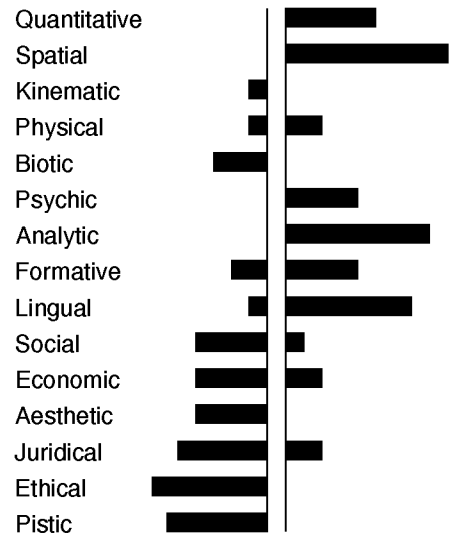


Figure f7-firtree. 'Fir tree' showing 'amount' of Good and Harm in each aspect.

When interpreting such an aspect 'fir tree', look, not at the precise quantitative amounts, but at patterns. In this example, we find Good (benefit) in analytical, lingual and spatial aspects but Harm in later, post-social aspects. Notice that there can be both Harm and Good meaningful in the same aspect simultaneously; for example, building a new coal mine can bring justice to workers but injustice to planet and future generations by contributing to climate change (juridical aspect).

Such pictures can stimulate and guide further investigation, to obtain deeper understanding, for instance with a deep, qualitative analysis as we have just outlined. What is important to understand is the functioning in each aspect and its repercussions, because it is those that contribute to Multi-aspectual Good (or not).

**7-2.10 Concluding Remarks about Harm and Good**

Summary: Harmful economic activity can be differentiated from Good by understanding all aspects thereof.

One of the RLDG participants pointed to the sentence in Paul's letter to the Galatian Christians, 5:19, "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like." Whether or not we agree with Paul that each of these is in some way harmful, most are easy to monetize. How much economic activity is directed towards them and fosters them? How much fosters discord, jealousy, factions, drunkenness? The editor of the UK *Daily Mail* admitted their policy was to give people a "daily hate".

The RLDG participant continued, "Harder to monetise are the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." [Galatians 5:22-23]. Therein lies our challenge. Whether or not we are Christian believers, it may be noted that these are all mindset-attitude, things of the heart rather than being visible actions, and so are deeper-acting, and also that most of humanity would agree deep down that most of them are to be sought rather than avoided. If our hearts foster the opposite of these, whether in individuals or throughout organisations or society, then we must address this if we are to understand and tackle Harmful economic activity. Therefore, instead of going directly for economic solutions, we should first seek to understand in

which aspect(s) the dysfunction is occurring, and address it in conjunction with all others and the mindset-attitude that underlies them. We return to this later.

### 7-3. Good Versus Useless Economic Activity

Summary: Useless economic activity is of two types, unproductivity and non-essentials, and both should be discouraged and curbed.

Keynes is reputed to have predicted in the 1930s that GDP of European and American countries would increase to a certain amount and then become stable, so that many were surprised to find GDP continuing to increase. He assumed that people would satisfy their needs, but instead, we keep on increasing our 'needs', turning wishes into wants and wants into 'needs'. There is a propensity in affluent cultures to keep wanting more and more of what is, in reality, non-essential, and to allow unproductivity to spread.

> During the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK Road Haulage Association reported (8 April 2020) that 46% of the UK truck fleet was parked up because nobody was purchasing "non-essentials" (the word they used, especially when interviewed in the BBC Today Programme)! If so, could the transport sector halve its carbon footprint and all the other externalised damage it does if we no longer demanded non-essentials?

A year later it was found that the clothing sector had reduced by 50% and fuel by 25% (in round figures). Every year 120 bn items of clothing are manufactured, 30% are never sold and another 40% are not used; only 30% are properly used, so the remainder are non-necessary. Could the ecological footprint of the global clothing industry, and other damage it does, be more than halved if we did not demand non-essentials?

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed something of what is essential and what is not - half of our economic activity, if not more (see later). This is part of what we call "**Useless economic activity**".

> **Examples of Useless:** 1. Schumacher's trucks carrying biscuits made in Glasgow to London and biscuits made in London to Glasgow, seems like a waste of two whole driver shifts. 2. Yet another business meeting or conference just because someone expects it is a waste of time. [Note Spree] 3. Much of our defence spending is wasteful [Note: Jim Radford] 4. "Bullshit Jobs", in which "if the position were eliminated, it would make no discernible difference in the world. Likely as not, things would improve" [Graeber 2018, 2] are a waste.

Though examples may be mentioned and deplored, there is too little data on the prevalence of the problem, and no adequate discussion of its nature. So **research** is needed. This section discusses two modes of Useless economic activity:

- ◆ unproductivity, as in Graeber's "bullshit jobs"
- ◆ non-essentials, as in Adam Smith's "baubles and trinkets"

Waste is an example of unproductivity. Surfeit of pleasure is an example of non-essentials. Convenience can be both.

In some ways, unproductivity and non-essentials overlap. The concern about Useless economic activity has a long, though niche, discourse. Veblen [1899] devoted a whole, classic, work to **wasteful consumption** ("conspicuously wasteful expenditure of time and substance" and discussed reasons for this which we pick up later. Zhang [2022] extends Veblen's discussion from consumption to **wasteful production**), which he defines as conspicuous goods (tourism and the private motor vehicle as examples), "conspicuous profession" ("misallocation of talent") and "information overproduction" ("shallow and fragmented information to divert the attention" from the important, deeper issues) and arises from the "selfish propensity for preservation, domination and

coercion". He argues that Smith's ideas lead to this in a free market, and that this waste cannot be explained by market imperfections, government interference or transaction costs, he discusses worldviews that lie at the root (which he also calls "quasi-religion"). [Perrotta 2018] likewise discourses on **unproductive labour** devoted to production of "luxuries". We do not argue whether or not they are ontologically distinct but rather we treat them separately because it is convenient and instructive to do so. We discuss why they are problematic, the challenges they present, and propose a way of understanding them, unproductivity first, then non-essentiality.

### 7-3.1 Why Useless Economic Activity is Problematic

Summary; Useless activity is problematic chiefly because it displaces and dilutes Good activity. And it often also does Harm - even if also some Good.

An economy **bloated** with Useless economic activity is not healthy, neither for the economy itself nor for the other spheres of life. Would the world's affluent economies work better if less bloated - i.e. shrunk rather than grown?

Whereas Harmful economic activity is problematic because it destroys and diminished Multi-aspectual Overall Good, Useless economic activity is problematic because it **dilutes and displaces Good** economic activity, diverting human functioning away from contributing to Multi-aspectual Overall Good. By absorbing human effort, Useless economic activity substitutes for Good activity (opportunity costs), replacing, delaying and sometimes preventing it. And much Useless economic activity also does Harm.

In principle, Useless activity need not cause Harm - though it often does. Whereas Harm is the repercussions of dysfunction in any aspect, Uselessness is dysfunction and repercussion in the economic aspect: **waste** or excess instead of frugality, both people's effort and other resources. Indeed, it goes against both the norm and the logic of economic aspect, and this is why Schumacher, Mazzucato, Graeber and others call it an "absurdity."

> Think: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientist, the hopes of its children." Dwight D Eisenhower, 1953

Governments and organisations are always complaining that they do not have enough money - **budgets stretched** to deal with prison overcrowding, to have enough beds in hospital, to be able to screen the population for cancer, to allow farmers a proper price for what they grow or produce, to encourage more research in universities, to invest in national sport, to invest in national art, to reconfigure the electricity grid for local renewable energy, to support the homeless, and so on. (Notice how we include both generative and restorative Good there.)

Both **unproductivity** and **non-essentials** are problematic in diverting human activity away from Good, but in **different ways**. Unproductivity wastes the human activity of producing; the processes around non-essentials (producing, distributing and using them) waste human activity even if they are highly productive processes. >(I can be very productive in being an influencer for cosmetic firms, but in the end, did I waste my life in doing so?) Bullshit jobs are a waste of the resource of human functioning, which could be directed towards generation of Multi-aspectual Good instead. Bauble production, whether of goods or services, is surfeit, as well as a waste of productive capacity and raw materials, which could (and should instead) be directed towards Multi-aspectual Good. Both can

divert from contributing to real, quality Good. (Below, we nuance that, by allowing a small amount of non-essentials to be Good, if not in excess.)

In fact, **unproductivity and non-essentials are often linked**. Much unproductivity is because an organisation's disposable income is spent on non-essentials and employee time is devoted to non-essential tasks. However, conceptually, they differ in their nature and in what 'causes' them, and they have different provenance within the field, so we discuss each separately.

Non-essentials (and some unproductivity) are problematic in two further ways. One is the **Harm** that the production, distribution and use of many non-essentials does. This is of various kinds (meaningful in different aspects), not least in environmental damage and injustice (such as slave labour) but also in things like obesity and other health problems, and alteration of our expectations and aspirations towards selfish ease, greed and even addiction. Indeed, buying non-essentials also makes and keeps people poor because, as Fello [n.d.] suggests:

"eventually your spending spree will catch up and lead you towards debt ... You see a jaw-dropping blazer and you are tempted to buy it, but is there any wedding around the corner? ... Every rupee spent on non-essential items is a rupee that could have been spent on something else ... When you spend on non-essentials, the people around you might have a conflict in opinion about it ... Lastly, non-essential spending can distract from a focus on health and well-being. ... While non-essential spending can be enjoyable in the short term, [it is] packed with disadvantages!"

One not uncommon example is the father (I have heard of this in India) who borrows a vast amount in order to give a lavish wedding for his daughter and is in debt for the rest of his life. It is not the wedding that is non-essential so much as its lavishness - often rooted in the desire to keep face in the community (social, pistic dysfunction). In the Global North, harmful non-essentials might include the car, rapid delivery (discussed above), surfeit of meat-eating, sugar consumption. The latter is harmful in the UK because sugar beet farmers lobbied the government to allow neo-nicotinoid pest control, which has decimated the population of bees and other pollinators.

The other way is that living with a surfeit of non-essentials is **unsustainable** in the long run, so to base economic strategy on ever-increasing non-essentials as is happening at present is at best unwise, at worst catastrophic. In two ways.

1. The **Ecological Footprint** of most affluent cultures is multiple Earths >[Note: Ecological Footprint] and hence cannot continue forever. What this means is that the Earth cannot cope with an abundance of Useless economic activity that drains its resources for no good purpose. The ferrying of biscuits between two cities drains fossil fuel resources. (It also wastes human time; that is an opportunity cost.)

2. The human spirit intuitively knows that a surfeit of non-essentials is **unsatisfying and unsatisfactory**, and, unless under continual pressure to consume more, will gravitate to reducing their spend on non-essentials. People were quite happy to cease purchase of non-essentials during the Covid-19 Pandemic [see earlier]. Even four years later, KPMG's UK Consumer Pulse survey for the first quarter of 2024, found that "52% of consumers say they have had to cut their non-essential spending" and "Eating out is the most common (72%) discretionary spending cut" [Ellett 2024]. (Of course, governments and most businesses are taking this as a warning and seeking to find ways to boost non-essential consumption so as to grow the economy or bottom line, and so continue the pressure on us.) If the persuasion pressure is lifted, then widespread surplus

accumulation of non-essentials will reduce - and it is likely that most people will be more satisfied.

3. **Spread.** Useless economic activity on a small scale might not be very problematic except for the individuals concerned, but it can often spread to become widespread because of example-setting, fashionability and peer pressure, particularly via social media, and especially artificial intelligence trained on the Internet content produced by affluent cultures. When it does spread, its impact can be vast, both in ecological footprint and in overall health, mental health and attitude / mindset.

For all these reasons, therefore, Useless economic activity should usually be **curbed** - by both individuals and at the societal level.

Should we cut them out altogether, as some in the past have tried to do? >[Note: Puritans?] Such attempts did not work, in that they set up a reaction that, arguably, led to more excess than before. Rather, we urge a reasonable small amount of Uselessness, such as mandated in the idea of Sabbath >[Note: Sabbath & Life].

To curb it we need to assess it but **assessing Useless** economic activity presents different challenges from assessing Harm because, whereas Harm is largely visible, Useless is mainly invisible, referring as it does to the non-existent Good could be there but is not. Non-essentiality refers to what fuller Good could be done with resources expended on something that brings at best only limited Good; unproductivity refers to human effort and life that could bring more Good. It is little good trying to curb Useless activity without replacing it with some better Good. So, to assess Useless depends on having some notion of unfulfilled Good possibility. >Kurt's activity appears as unproductive only because we (think we) know a much better way of moving a computer a few doors a long a corridor.

This implies that we need some way of assessing, a way that transcends mere subjectivity - at both the individual or societal / cultural ("social construction") level. If we were to make our assessment relative to either subjectivity then the assessment would have no authority in other contexts. But objectivity is no answer because it tends to be rigid and reductionist. As explained in Chapter 3, Dooyeweerd's idea of aspects as **given-meaningfulness** transcends such subjectivity (and even cultural mores and norms) without driving us to rigid objectivity. They thus offer a good basis for not only understanding but also assessing and then curbing the Useless.

> **Research** needs to be carried out on all these facets of the problematic nature of Useless economic activity, because little has yet been done. Good quality data needs to be assembled (and if it undermines some of the above, then the above needs to be rethought). And good understanding needs to be developed. Now we examine each of unproductivity and non-essentials in more depth. The research needs to transcend the right-left divide, and uses Dooyeweerd's aspects to do so.

### 7-3.2 The Unproductive

Summary: Unproductive economic activity is a waste of human economic functioning, which could have been devoted to more Good.

David Graeber begins his 2018 book, *Bullshit Jobs*, with Kurt's story above. Throughout the book, with many other examples, he argues that, not only socialist economies but also [p.6], "Contemporary capitalism seems riddled with such jobs", his estimate being 40% of jobs. He lists examples of "bullshit" jobs:

- >
- ◆ "apparently endless growth of administrative responsibilities in British academic departments" [p. xvii];

- ◆ “a YouGov poll found that in the United Kingdom only 50 percent of those who had full-time jobs were completely certain their job made any sort of meaningful contribution to the world” [p.6];
- ◆ Possibly “telemarketing, market research” [p.11] and “lobbyists and financial consultants” [p.12];
- ◆ “customers had to go through three different clerks to buy a loaf of bread” in a Communist country [p.17];
- ◆ “many nurses, for instance, complained to me that as much as 80% of their time is taken up with paperwork, meetings and the like” [p.24];
- ◆ “I worked as a receptionist ... The phone rang maybe once a day so I was given a couple of other tasks ... Keep a candy dish full of mints ... wind a grandfather clock ...” [p.30];
- ◆ “My job, as a cold caller, was to call these people ... emphasising that I was calling on behalf of a broker. ... The reasoning behind this was that the brokers themselves would seem, to the potential client, to be more capable and professional if they were so damn busy making money that they needed an assistant to make this call for them.” [p.30-31]
- ◆ “The only full-time job I ever had ... was there only because the HR specialist was lazy and didn’t want to leave his desk” [p.34];
- ◆ “They bring us adverts for well-known branded products ... and we use visual effects trickery to make it seem like these products actually work” [p.37];
- ◆ and so on.

Such ‘Bullshit’ jobs often have very little meaning, and are against human dignity. Graeber includes in his definition of them, that the employee knows they are meaningless and do little good. Whatever other Harm such jobs do, this robbing of dignity is Harmful - in the pistic and social aspects especially.

And one from another source:

>

- ◆ A university tries to cut costs of its administration by requiring academic staff to fill in their own forms for travel costs, so the university can remove the travel support officer. As a result the thousand academic staff each spend an hour a month (on average) because they do not know what information goes where, not what are reasonable as estimated costs - expertise that the travel support officer had. So the total time spent on travel administration rose from 40 to 250 hours per week, with the latter more highly paid.

Mazzucato has a similar concern [2018, 6]: “Also crucial is whether what it is that is being created is useful: are the products and services being created increasing or decreasing the resilience of the productive system.” (Notice, however: useful to the “productive system” not other spheres of life.)

### 7-3.2.1 What is (Un)productivity?

Summary: There is little agreement on what productivity is, covering many aspects, so we employ a multi-aspectual view, which then offers more precision to understanding unproductivity.

What, however, is productivity? What is it to be productive or unproductive? Mazzucato [2018] uses the idea of the “*production boundary*” between them but gives no adequate definition except that productive work adds value while unproductive work does not and, as we have seen in Chapter 5, there are many kinds of value. However, her reviews of European and North American ideas about productivity from the 1600s onwards, in her chapters 1,2, offer a useful overview that we adopt here, of which the following is a summary, with a few comments added.

The mediaeval Roman Catholic church treated most merchants, who “bought cheap and sold dear” as unproductive. In reaction to that, Merchantilism arose. Merchantilists like Petty and King defined productivity as having income

exceeding expenditure, though they differed on who was productive and unproductive. Soldiers were productive to Petty but unproductive to King (and possibly to Eisenhower above?). The 'great professions' (clergy, lords, lawyers and civil servants) were productive to King but unproductive to Petty, who considered them a mere necessary evil. The difference may be explained by how their backgrounds formed their idea of what is meaningful and good (pistic functioning). Quesnay viewed the economy metaphorically as a metabolic system, in which everything comes from somewhere and goes somewhere, so he saw farmers and miners as productive, in that it is nature that produces new things (plants from seeds, minerals from soil), while all others were unproductive, mere shapers of these. Turgot took a similar perspective, of the fundamental importance of agriculture, but saw as productive anyone who met various needs or kept society afloat, including artisans and judges.

Adam Smith identified productivity, which had increased enormously since the Reformation due to division of labour and trade, mainly with skill (formative power), the making of things, especially helped by machines and by specialised techniques of production, and thus birthed the labour theory of value. Ricardo, noticing that how labour wages is distributed is ignored by Smith even though it regulates the growth and wealth of nations, and that basic wages were tied to the price of food, so linked productivity back to land, and its agricultural quality, and to landlord rent. Consumption, he believed, could sometimes be productive, when used to 'buy labour' and thus reproduce itself, but is unproductive when consumed on luxuries (c.f. non-essentials). Marx, continuing with the labour theory of value, saw only worker labour as productive, whether in agriculture or mining (primary), industry (secondary), services (tertiary) or even some forms of finance, which performs the service of circulating wealth, whereas households and government are unproductive.

Those thinkers sought **objective** views of value and productivity. They differed widely in what constituted productivity. A fundamental weakness of such objective attempts is **reductionism**, with each thinker seeing only one kind of value or meaningful productivity: merchantry, land, human labour, paid labour, and so on. As a result, views swing wildly and much that is of value is overlooked altogether - especially household production and biodiversity.

Recent thinkers adopt **subjective** views of value (and hence productivity), as being in the eye of the beholder. To cope with this, the utility theory of value was born: the value of something is its utility to its consumer, and this could be anything, even how much a new car impresses the neighbours. Though, in theory, this might allow for a wide range of kinds of value to emerge, there are problems. Subjectivity is at the mercy of societal or individual dysfunctional attitudes and mindsets, especially those expressed in fashionability. The single concept of utility is so elegant, and also amenable to mathematical treatment, that it discourages discussion of what kinds of value are possible. Subjectivity makes us blind to value in anything not subjectively valued (as was the case with climate and biodiversity until recently, though even Mazzucato overlooks that).

Utility theory rests on assumptions that are actually seldom true. Mazzucato 2018, 66-69] lists them as that "it is only what fetches a price in the market (legally) that can be termed productive activity", that "Inherent in equilibrium is the idea that everything is in everyone's interest" (and that equilibrium is universally good) and that "markets are the most efficient allocators of resources". This complex historical picture is, perhaps, the reason why Mazzucato attempts no full definition of productivity, except the very simple one that productivity adds value while unproductivity does not.

Mazzucato's main concern is the "takers", those who **extract** "value" from the economy for themselves rather than creating it - and especially those in the financial sector, but also those who invent ways of avoiding tax etc. Almost all their human activity is ultimately Useless, unnecessary while generating much more Harm than Good.

All these ideas tell us something about productivity and there is more to be said. Perrotta [2018] offers a very useful historical overview of the development of the idea of unproductive labour, covering early days, Physiocrats, Smith, Marx, through to capitalists of today who invest abroad. He links productivity and unproductivity with accumulation and ends by stating that "a clear analysis of accumulation remained lacking". This, we hope to be able to address by more deeply understanding Useless and Harmful economic activity here and, in Chapter 8, the nature of money.

How do we bring them all together to obtain a fuller, rich understanding of productivity and then unproductivity? To judge each contribution and understand something of their insightfulnesses and biases, it is worth looking at **what motivated them** (as explained in Chapter 3), especially the presuppositions on which theorizing rests. The Merchantilists reacted against the Roman Catholic view, Quesday's and Turgot's primary motivation was to defend the (French) land-owning aristocracy against Merchantilism, both Smith and Ricardo were horrified at the extravagant, luxurious lifestyles of the aristocracy and rich landlords, especially when addicted to gambling, and thus industrial capitalists were heroes, Marx was motivated by the injustices this led to, and so on. Subjectivists are often motivated by an ideological dislike of objectivism - though some are motivated by dislike of reductionism and a vanilla subjectivism emerged. In principle, subjectivism should allow space for previously overlooked aspects, but in practice, prioritises whatever seems fashionable intellectually. Motivations tells us what each finds most deeply meaningful, and we can locate them within Dooyeweerd's suite of modalities of meaning. Simplifying somewhat, it is the juridical aspect with a bit of ethical aspect that made the Roman Catholic view meaningful, the quantitative for the Merchantilists, the physical and biotic for Quesnay, the formative for Smith, Ricardo and Marx, with the latter bringing back some of the juridical, and the psychical and analytical for the subjectivists and Utility Theory.

If all these thinkers offered some valid insight, then we can see that **productivity has multiple aspects** and cannot be reduced to any one or two of them. This invites us to identify which aspects are missing or under-represented and ask whether and in what way each might be important in understanding productivity and unproductivity. We leave readers to discuss this for the spatial, kinematic, lingual, social, aesthetic, ethical and pistic aspects, drawing perhaps on Chapter 6 on economic activity as aspectual functioning. Some of them are important as 'causes' of unproductivity, as we discuss below.

Insofar as **unproductivity** is the opposite, or lack, of productivity, this multi-aspectual view is not particularly helpful: it cannot be opposite of several aspects (juridical, quantitative, biotic, etc.) all at once, but must be opposite in one main aspect. We must identify the main (core, qualifying) aspect of productivity, to which all these other aspects contribute. From its etymology, producing is primarily meaningful in the **formative aspect** of achieving things. But productivity is a measure of the value of what is produced relative to resources required in the producing, both of which are meaningful in the **economic aspect**. Thus (un)productivity is meaningful primarily in the formative and economic aspects, but the kinds Good produced can be meaningful in any **other aspects**, including those discussed by these thinkers. So unproductivity takes into account the multi-aspectual productivity that *could have* occurred - that is, it is

relative what is possible with the resources available - a waste of those resources, and especially the resource of human effort that is reasonably available. This gives Mazzucato's simple definition, that productivity adds value while unproductivity does not, more precision. This is why unproductivity is a dilution of, or diversion away from contributing to, Multi-aspectual Overall Good and Unproductivity is thus a dysfunction in the economic aspect.

Notice that those who, **reductionistically**, see only through the lens of the economic aspect are likely to come up with ideas that are nonsensical to everyday experience, such as Longfield's idea, cited by Perrotta [2022], that "Human consumption is always unproductive, because it destroys the wealth consumed." This is why we must always keep multiple aspects in mind.

### 7-3.2.2 What 'Causes' Unproductivity

Summary: Both academics and reflective practitioners have identified a multitude of 'causes' of unproductivity - which may be understood by the aspects that make each meaningful. Ethical and pistic dysfunctions are often the root causes, corrupting our behaviour and decisions meaningful in other aspects.

To cope with unproductivity, we need to understand what can bring it about. What is it that dilutes the Good that could arise from human effort? From purely economic theory, one can say that the more disposable income one has, the more one wastes it on things that are unproductive. Management spends it on non-essential goods and time is devoted to non-essential tasks. (In that, we see, of course, a link between unproductivity and non-essentiality.)

But, beyond that, there seems to be little theoretical discussion of this. A Google Scholar request yielded only four articles, one from 1958, and two more recent ones that are over-specific (e.g. relevant to Pakistan). Morris [1958] and Gillman [1958] (one cites the other) argue that "uninvestible monopoly profits" and "unvestible social surplus" are the cause of unproductive spending. But these are enablers rather than what Aristotle calls agentive causes that involve deliberate choice. To understand these, we must fall back on examples from real life. To generalise from them, we can ask, "In which aspects is there functioning that impacts our economic functioning negatively?"

If we look at actual cases mentioned by Graeber [2018] we find several examples with a suggestion about its cause (italicized):

- ◆ "A Spanish civil servant who collected a salary for at least six years without working ... He explained that while he had worked for many years dutifully monitoring the city's water treatment plant, the water board eventually came under control of higher-ups who *loathed his Socialist politics* and refused to assign him any responsibilities." (He actually used his time fruitfully in educating himself about Spinoza) [p.3-4]
- ◆ "assigning minor tasks as an excuse to have them hang around *making you look impressive*. ... Doormen are the most obvious example. ... receptionists and front-desk personnel at places that obviously don't need them." [p.30]
- ◆ "My job, as a cold caller, was to call these people ... emphasising that I was calling on behalf of a broker. ... The reasoning behind this was that the brokers themselves *would seem*, to the potential client, to be more capable and professional if they were so damn busy making money that they needed an assistant to make this call for them." [.30-31]
- ◆ "The only full-time job I ever had ... was there only because the HR specialist was *lazy* and didn't want to leave his desk" [p.34];
- ◆ "They bring us adverts for well-known branded products ... and we use

visual effects trickery to make it *seem like these products actually work*"  
[p.37]

All these reasons are dysfunctions in various aspects - pistic, lingual, lingual, formative, lingual, the lingual dysfunctions being types of deceit - and they all bring about the dysfunction of waste in the economic. Graeber does not mention the cause of Kurt's unproductivity but might it be that a simple office move along the corridor in the German military requires a logistics company from far away [Graeber 2018, 1-2] because the regulations require only security-cleared firms may move military equipment - which is meaningful in the juridical aspect?

Mazzucato's [2018] concern is at the macro level, the economy as a whole, concerned mainly with those who extract rather than create value. Though her discussion is more abstract, she indicates three things the finance sector does that can lead to this type of unproductivity [p.146]: inserting transaction costs between providers and receivers, exercising monopoly power and charging much more than the risks would warrant, especially in fund management. Innovation and entrepreneurship, usually thought good things because they can generate new kinds of Good, is devoted to finding clever ways to do such things and deceive clients and authorities about it. Patents make this worse by offering ways by which such people can protect themselves and monopolise the sector. To understand this aspectually we can see positive formative functioning (innovation) and negative lingual and juridical functioning (deceiving, cheating), motivated by the ethical dysfunction of greed and the pistic dysfunction of idolising money.

It is also instructive to look at guidelines various authors have offered for increasing productivity.

> "Eight reasons why your employees are unproductive" [= = =] might lead us to expect eight faults in the employees, like lack of skill, laziness, drunkenness or hostile intent - and these indeed occur - but the list is actually eight things that are the fault of management: working environment not fit for purpose (aesthetic), digital communications out of control (formative, economic), managers unskilled (juridical: inappropriate management), performance management strategy out of step with how they work (aesthetic), no buy-in to organisational purpose (pistic), management does not recognise or reward their hard work (ethical, social), lacking adequate health / wellbeing support (biotic, psychical), expecting them to work longer than is reasonable (ethical, juridical).

Thus employees can be unproductive for many faults of management and some faults of their own, and both need to take into account, and aspects can help us do this. If we look at ourselves (whether employee or employer), we find likewise.

> Sixteen reasons why I am unproductive [= = =]: not managing my time (economic), not creating to-do lists (analytical), lack of task prioritization (juridical), not blocking off time for work (analytical, juridical), overwhelming / outdated technical tools (formative), too many interruptions (aesthetic), multitasking (analytical), focussing on the uncontrollable (formative), feeling overwhelmed by the future (psychical, pistic), lack of self-confidence (pistic), not googling or using AI enough (lingual), not enough sleep (psychical, biotic), not nutritious food (biotic), not exercising (psychical), not enough time for breaks (aesthetic, psychical), messy work space (aesthetic).

In the above two lists we can find every aspect from the biotic to the pistic as possibly leading to unproductivity. Each reduces productivity in a different way, depending on the inter-aspect impact involved.

Because human activity is multi-aspectual, most of the above dysfunctions do not originate in their aspect alone, but are either 'caused' or at least exacerbated by dysfunction in other aspects, because of the inter-aspect

dependency discussed in Chapter 6. Lack of industry might be pure laziness, but it might also be because of dysfunction in the **ethical and/or pistic aspects**.

These are caused either in the heart (attitude, mindset) of the individual and/or in the culture (pervading attitude, prevailing mindset). Much unproductivity arises from idolising convenience. We discuss this more fully below, but here in an example.

> Example: We may analyse Graeber's German military idiocy, cited earlier, as follows. The idol here seems to be national security, and the sacrifice is the multiple resources of people, time and fuel wasted, and "the way we live" is governed by military regulations, drawn up to appease the idol of military security, and hence has departed from "a more reasonable way". The primary idiocy here is dysfunctions meaningful in the formative aspect (of achieving nothing) and economic aspect (waste). We can see the following kinds of waste: distance driven (kinematic), two people's time (multi-aspectual), paperwork (lingual). This operation incurs the following obvious kinds of harm: climate change emissions (physical-biotic), tiredness from driving (psychical). What is the reason for this idiocy? We may ask why the regulations are in place. One reason is the contracts between the parties involved (juridical, social aspect). Another is the possibility of computers that might contain military secrets being lost or stolen. This again is juridical aspect, but it is motivated by self-protective fear, a dysfunction in the ethical aspect. The presence of this dysfunction may be taken as a warning of hidden harm occurring, which is usually attributed cynically to 'the system' - in this case, the multiple waste that occurred.

Each case is different, and **awareness of Dooyeweerd's aspects** can help us understand more precisely and usefully what is going on. And it could help guide on what to do about uproductivity. Again, to understand this fully calls for **research**.

### 7-3.3 Non-essentials

Summary: Many goods and services, especially in affluent economies, are non-essential and should be discouraged rather than encouraged.

Whereas unproductivity is waste of resources during economic activity, **non-essentials** refers to goods and services produced that contribute little to Multi-aspectual Overall Good when used, such that the effort devoted to producing them could be better employed in other things. A person can be very productive in producing these, yet they are all still Useless because of contributing so little of importance.

Adam Smith decried "baubles and trinkets" and "luxuries" the wealthy demanded, and these are obvious non-essentials - but are we in affluent cultures today not like them? Are not many of the things we take for granted mere baubles and trinkets? Non-essentials include:

- ◆ Over-production of food for the well-fed (in the UK we throw away 30% of our food [= = =]);
- ◆ Sending of unnecessary gifts (at Christmas a large proportion of gifts are not wanted);
- ◆ Hospitality that is just for show;
- ◆ Vacations, business meetings and conferences that are not really necessary;
- ◆ Manufactured products that are replaced rather than repaired or repurposed;
- ◆ Whole kitchens, bathrooms, etc. being replaced just because we got tired of the old ones;
- ◆ Many 'iconic' projects by larger institutions, public or private;
- ◆ Piano lessons for childre;
- ◆ McCaig's Folly (Oban, Scotland), built to give local stone masons employment during hard times;
- ◆ Paving local paths with stone (Todmorden, England) by a philanthropist for a similar reason;

◆ and so on.

There is great variety here, and some seem good and some seem just a waste, so how do we judge which non-essentials are Good, and which are truly Useless and even Harmful so they should be curbed? The production, delivery and consumption of most goods and services causes at least some **Harm**, not least in climate change and biodiversity destruction >[Note: Ecological Footprint], as well as in several hidden ways, discussed later. Therefore the contribution to Multi-aspectual Overall Good from use of these goods and services must be worth it. With essentials, this can be so, but with non-essentials it might not be. Piano lessons for children is an obvious Good - except when so rigidly prioritised that the child hates it and is put off piano for the rest of their lives. Giving employment to workers in hard times is an obvious Good, but could McCaig have employed them in something more beneficial? At least the Todmorden paths were made more usable by many people, especially in bad weather. But the over-production of food does so much Harm that many now recognise it as deeply problematic.

In affluent cultures there is a vast **surfeit of non-essentials**, very few of which contribute enough to Multi-aspectual Overall Good to justify the Harm they do. It is difficult to put a figure on how many because reliable figures are not yet available because economists have not done the research, but our rough estimate (earlier) puts non-essentials at half or more of the UK economy, and probably more for that of the USA. Even if this estimate is wrong, it is enough to call for serious action.

Our rule of thumb is that production and use of non-essentials for the affluent **should be curbed** - reduced. We should curb our use of - and demand for - non-essentials. In the main, most non-essentials could be dispensed with without much hardship.

Ideally it should be curbed by individual choice but, if not, curbing requires structural means (often government legislation). The choice between the two is ours - but sadly democracy ruled by the media seldom improves individual responsibility. Indeed, we in affluent cultures have become so used to pleasures, stimulations, comforts and conveniences that we are unaware most are non-essentials and we have become trapped in them - and neither most individuals nor governments are willing to question their necessity. Most political economists are likely to resist curbing non-essentials; those leaning to the right want freedom for the wealthy to 'enjoy' their wealth and those leaning to the left argue that the non-wealthy should have equal access to the pleasures and conveniences enjoyed by the wealthy.

As with unproductivity we shall look at what the extant literature says about what are non-essentials and what might cause them and, having found each wanting, employ the idea of multi-aspectual functioning that we discussed in Chapter 6.

### 7-3.3.1 What are non-essentials?

Summary: Six challenges to understanding non-essentials.

The academic literature on **non-essentials** ("inessentials") is surprisingly sparse, with the difference between needs and wants being "an underutilized perspective" [Beckman & Smith 2016]. They are often mentioned (as in Smith's "baubles and trinkets") but seldom is their nature explored.

> For example, a car for each member of a family is convenient - but is it always essential? In today's affluent culture, it is considered essential: it avoids the need to negotiate sharing. But is avoiding negotiation really an essential?

Conventionally, within demand theory, non-essentials are treated as goods that may be substituted for others. Beckman & Smith, finding only three major papers on this since 1950, try to enhance demand theory to take the difference between essentials and non-essentials seriously rather than merely reducing it to the idea of substitutes and complements. To do so they resort to Dictator Game theory, that if a monopolist dictator offers a good for a certain price then if the buyer refuses it and it is essential they die while if it is non-essential they can live. They work it out as mathematical equations. The problem with their approach, apart from its reduction to the quantitative aspect, is (a) the difference between essential and non-essential is too binary: live or die; (b) it allows no distinction between kinds of essentiality. Such a view presupposes prior understanding of the difference between essential and non-essential, rather than help us arrive at understanding. That, however, is a largely macroeconomic, mathematical view.

The microeconomic view is often behavioural in nature. Theoretical understanding of it is impoverished, so we must resort to real-life examples, such as practical guidance to firms and planners. Reference is sometimes made to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, with Samuel [2022] for example suggesting that the 'lower' needs are more essential than the 'higher' ones.

Manchester Hive [2024] discusses the use of non-essentials by "the poor" rather than the affluent - things like time-pieces, looking glasses, books, pictures. This gives the lie to the assumption that the impoverished had little inclination or ability to acquire anything other than basic provisions. Such items transformed people's lives. For example looking glasses made shaving easier "creating a sense of comfort". However, in addition to making life easier, some were obtained for pride and prestige, just as with the affluent.

Many divide essentials from non-essentials from the point of view of spending. "Non-essential spending refers to purchases that are not necessary for basic needs or survival" [Fello n.d.]. But what is "necessary"? Hertsavers [2025] suggest that essentials include housing, food, utilities, transportation and healthcare, non-essentials include dining out, entertainment, travel, luxury items, noting that non-essentials offer greater flexibility in budgeting. Valensky [2023], published by a firm that provides technology for retail stores, tries to identify non-essential retail shops as stores that sell non-essentials (including home decor, gift shops, jewellery shops, cosmetic shops, clothing stores, luxury goods stores and department stores) and suggests how they might prosper even in a context of uncertainty.

There are six problems with this approach of trying to draw a line between essential and non-essential. 1. An obvious question is on what grounds to differentiate between essentials and non-essentials (i.e. where to draw any line that we wish to: is transportation essential or not?). 2. Most extant theoretical discussion of non-essentials lumps all the different kinds together, often reducing them to discretionary income. 3. A philosophical problem: it presupposes non-essentials as the opposite of essentials and try to erect a clear boundary between them. 4. A practical problem within today's society: most in affluent cultures would resist curbing many of what others might think of as non-essential. 5. Even if this were not so, people (even in non-affluent cultures) know intuitively that there is more to life than food and housing - such as tools, music, beauty, responsibility, love and faith. 6. A sixth problem exhibited by most who discuss non-essentials is a presupposition of the non-essentials as things to encourage people buy, rather than to curb. Valensky advises non-essential retail stores to "have loyal and engaged customers", "prioritise exceptional customer service and quality, offering free or discounted shipping options, and staying on top of the latest trends".

### 7-3.3.2 Our Approach to Non-essentials

Summary: The challenges of understanding non-essentials might be faced using aspects, with especial reference to the aesthetic aspect.

We take a different approach to each of those.

Answering 1, 2. **Each aspect offers a different essentiality** - a different reason for being essential or not. We allow for multiple differentiations; things might be essential in one aspect but non-essential from the perspective of others - tools are essential in formative functioning but not in biotic. We return to the challenge of how to make this differentiation below.

Answering 3. Non-essentiality is not just the opposite of essentiality, but involves **aspectual functioning**. We use functioning and repercussions as a basis for judging non-essentials.

Answering 5. The “more to life” is affirmed by human life involving every aspect in harmony: being **multi-aspectual**. Since each aspect enables some kind of Good, then its right exercise brings Good that is not to be regretted.

Functioning in the **aesthetic** aspect inherently involves what seems non-essential in all other aspects. This is where non-essentials can be Good. But in affluent cultures we have excess non-essentials beyond that which is required for Good aesthetic functioning. A judicious amount of fun and life-harmony is Good. >(x In Genesis and Exodus, having one day in seven (Sabbath) where we and all animals rest and enjoy life, and one year in seven for plants, is a fundamental law - which seems nonsensical from the economic, formative and other aspects but brings much Good overall. x)

Answering 6. **Most non-essentials generate Harm** by their production, distribution and use. So we have to ensure the Good that comes from them is worth it. Some use of non-essentials can bring Good but in affluent cultures our non-essentials are in excess.

**Excess**, being a dysfunctioning in the economic and aesthetic aspects, reduces the Good, undermining and souring any real pleasure obtained >[Note: Excessive enjoyment] - especially when the reason for it is selfishness and/or pride (dysfunction in the ethical and pistic aspects: “I have a right to live for my own pleasure!” >[Note: Right to happiness?]). The Harm that results can be in any aspects: bloating our ecological footprint, damaging our attitude and culture, and especially making us poor [Fello n.d.], wasting resources, robbing people of their means of livelihood, making us lazy and expecting to be lazy, and so on. It is Harmful also because often our excess is at the expense of justice to others, especially in the Global South. That is why we call for non-essentials to be **curbed**.

Answering 4. Resistance to curbing non-essentials by the affluent is seen, at root, as a problem within the **human heart and the prevailing culture**, namely **ethical and pistic dysfunctions** of selfish greed and beliefs that having non-essentials is of ultimate importance, for example for status and one’s own identity. Thought economic reasons may be assembled for such resistance, to try to understand it only in terms of them without reference to the ethical and pistic dysfunctions would be fruitless. Of those who try to boost non-essentials we would examine their motives and methods via the lens of aspects. For example Valensky’s advice to maintain customer loyalty can be in itself a pistic Good, but the discounts on expensive goods are often deceitful, and to encourage the following of trends is often idolatrous.

In a perfect society, with zero crime, would not police, cyber-cleaning and judiciary be non-essential? In a perfectly healthy society, would not some

hospital services be non-essential? Since we do not live in a perfect society, in which these are **restorative** economic activities that rectify wrongs, we do not consider such things as non-essentials here because society is unlikely to become like that, but treat them as Good. But from time to time we should stand back and question whether we should now do so.

So a useful **rule-of-thumb** is:

In affluent cultures, non-essentials should usually be curbed.

The amount of effort we should put into curbing non-essentials increases as

- » the more Harm they incur,
- » the less Good they contribute,
- » the degree to which they are in excess,
- » the more they are demanded for reasons that go against the aspectual norms of the ethical and pistic aspect (attitude, mindset),
- » the more they are demanded or expected or aspired to.

### 7-3.3.3 What 'causes' non-essentials?

Summary: Multiple reasons have been adduced for why we assemble non-essentials in our lives, each meaningful in a different aspect. Understanding this way draws an holistic picture.

What leads people to buy so many non-essential goods and services? Some examples:

> "I am tired of my kitchen / bathroom and so will get a new one (even though it is working OK." Likewise with phones, cars, company computers, ...

Replacing rather than repairing or re-using or re-purposing.

"Guests coming to dinner and I don't want to appear stingy, so I'll buy a lot of extra stuff just in case."

"You're going to attend a conference, and it brings up some anxiety, so you get some gear to help you feel more prepared." [Babauta n.d.]

There are many reasons in everyday life within affluent cultures why so many non-essentials are bought. How can we understand it?

People have tried to theorize this in several ways. As with unproductivity, one 'cause' of non-essentials acknowledged by economic theory is disposable income. From an economic perspective, some point to over-cheap trading making it possible to demand exotic goods, and some such as Schumacher [1967] point to having surplus production capacity. These *enable* the us to buy surplus non-essentials, which stimulates demand-led production but they seldom generate it - that is, they are not what Aristotle called agentive and final (motivating) causes, which we want to understand. "One of the main psychological factors that influence a person's decision to buy goods is motivation" Agustin [2024].

Babauta [n.d.] reflects on a different agentive cause, a feeling of uncertainty, which results in "buying too much stuff". He discusses the futility of doing so - and how we can "live with little" to counteract that tendency.

Veblen [1899], in his classic *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, discussed some motivations behind the "conspicuous leisure" and "conspicuous consumption" by a new type of wealthy person who were replacing the previous landed class in late 1800s America: the rich industrialist. This involved massive amounts of non-essentials. He argued that "The motive that lies at the root of

ownership is emulation” [p.14] (of the aristocracy) and that “this emulation shapes the methods and selects the objects of expenditure for personal comfort and decent livelihood.” Samuel [2022] makes a similar point more generally: the main motivation behind buying non-essentials is to do with identity, social status, etc. - which is true also of the earlier landed class and of many of the affluent across the world.

Such are worth reading because they tend to be written well but they are usually about one ‘cause’ of buying non-essentials and overlook others. Agustin [2024] tries to give a more holistic picture, discussing briefly several things that influence “buying decisions”:

- ◆ psychological drivers like emotional appeal, perceived status enhancement, social influence;
- ◆ marketing and advertising, including branding, product placement, and targeted promotions;
- ◆ economic factors including discounts and deals and perceived value, and low price;
- ◆ product attributes like quality and durability, innovation and novelty, and customization options; and
- ◆ consumer trends like sustainability preferences, digital influence, personal preferences, hobbies and interests and personal beliefs (e.g. that sustainability or fair trade are important); we might add habit to these.

What we see from these - and others not cited here - is that ‘causes’ of obtaining non-essentials come from **many aspects**. Identity, emulation and pride are functioning in the pistic aspect, often (we believe mistakenly) seeming to require the possession of non-essentials >[Note: Possessing Non-essentials]. The feeling of uncertainty involves the psychical aspect (feeling), aesthetic (disharmony), pistic (aspirations) and ethical (self-protection) aspects. Emotional appeal is functioning in the psychical and aesthetic aspects, perceiving status enhancement, the psychical, social and pistic aspects, branding, the lingual and pistic aspects, product placement, the lingual and aesthetic aspect, targeted promotions, the lingual, social and formative aspects. Most consumer trends are society’s or community’s functioning in the pistic and ethical aspects. Some of those are meaningful mainly in one aspect, some in several. In fact those named aspects are only the main ones; in reality, each one involves all aspects.

Though the agentive ‘cause’ of obtaining non-essentials might be meaningful in various aspects, the actual motivating is primarily a functioning in the pistic aspect that, as we have seen several times, impacts our functioning in earlier aspects. Buying non-essentials “caters to our desire for instant gratification [ethical aspect] and the need for self-expression [pistic]” [Valensky 2023]. So, as with all human economic activity, the **pistic (and ethical) aspects** are of great significance in the buying and using of non-essentials even though often overlooked.

Thus our idea of **multi-aspectual functioning with repercussions** (Chapter 6) can help us understand why non-essentials are obtained. If that is so, then the solution might not be to legislate about or tax non-essentials so much as to seek change of heart and culture. We discuss this below.

Non-essentials can become Harmful for three reasons. 1. When the obtaining of the non-essential involves dysfunction in any aspects, e.g. slave labour (juridical). 2. When the reasons for obtaining them are negative in any aspect. > For example, *identity* would seem a pistic Good, but if it becomes self-idolatry, it is pistic dysfunction. *Emotional appeal* is, in itself, good in the psychical and aesthetic aspects, but hidden behind these might be greed (ethical dysfunction) or society’s idolatry of that particular appeal (pistic dysfunction). 3. When any aspect is unduly elevated.

A very common example in affluent societies is elevation of my aesthetic aspect over the juridical aspect of others, which leads to surfeit of non-essentials - ironic because this is a dysfunction in the aesthetic aspect! This brings with it economic waste in our need to house, insure, protect and maintain our non-essentials. Moreover, having them tends to make us greedy for more of either them or others, and changes our expectations of what a 'good life' is.

If any of these reasons apply, then non-essentials should be curbed. As we found earlier, living with surfeit of non-essentials is unsustainable.

#### **7-3.3.4 Elephants in the room: three things to take into account**

Summary: Three things that need to be considered together, which are, at best, recognised by only one side in the De-growth debate: that many non-essentials do harm, that many livelihoods depend on non-essentials, and that many people actually want to live with less.

It is largely the huge increase in non-essentials that accounts for economic growth within affluent cultures, and the consequent planetary, health, social and ethical Harm this has caused. If we are reduce these Harms we need to reduce non-essentials. However, while we sit round the table to discuss this, there are three 'elephants in the room', three issues that need to be taken into account but often go unseen.

Unseen by those who push for growth and jobs - both right- and left-leaning people >[Note: Right-left Useless] - is non-essentials are fundamentally problematic: their waste, various kinds of Harm and unsustainability. Unseen by those who question growth is that it was the massive demand for and consumption of non-essentials that has kept affluent economies growing and given jobs and a 'nice' life to many. Unseen by most of both is that many people feel trapped in the need to get paid work and wish they did not have to. All three need to be seen clearly and taken seriously.

We have already revealed some of the first elephant, above. It is seen clearly by those who question growth.

The second elephant is seen clearly by pro-growthists, who use it to push the argument for growth, but hardly at all by those who question growth, until recently. The line taken by those who question growth has often been to state the end-goal, such as Schumacher's [1967] "Small is Beautiful" or Trainer's [2022] "Simpler Way" and sing its beauties as a vision of lifestyle, but they have remained the aspiration of only a tiny minority within affluent cultures. They have not 'worked' in reality. While there are many reasons for this, such as reluctance of governments to legislate, and desire of businesses to grow, and that "wicked" top 1% of the population who have xx% of the world's wealth, there is one important reason many do not discuss: most of us affluent people are too much in love with our non-essentials to be willing to give them up - even though many of us know we would be happier and healthier without most of them. This results in us thinking, or rather assuming, taking it for granted, that we need jobs with enough pay to satisfy our desire for not only essentials but non-essentials too. And the more non-essentials we have the more we want. So, if we are to curb non-essentials, we - and the majority of people in affluent cultures - must accept a reduction in our pay and accumulation and use of non-essentials. Notice how this is very centrally a pistic problem: expectations, assumptions, aspirations, etc.

Unlike many, Ted Trainer has at least begun to recognise the need for this and has not only presented his vision of a Simpler Way, but has begun to discuss how it could come about. Elsewhere we critique his ideas, showing how they miss much of the need for action in the pistic and ethical aspects. He relies

largely on the vision being so attractive that people will aspire to it. But it is very doubtful that, in this era of resurgence of self-centring populism, enough people would be attracted by it.

More recently, Kallis et al. [2025] begin to reveal this elephant more clearly. In a major article, nine co-authors review “Post-growth science”. Let their paper summary explain >[bulleting added]:

> “There are increasing concerns that continued economic growth in high-income countries might not be environmentally sustainable, socially beneficial, or economically achievable. In this Review, we explore the rapidly advancing field of post-growth research, which has evolved in response to these concerns. The central idea of post-growth is to replace the goal of increasing GDP with the goal of improving human wellbeing within planetary boundaries. Key advances discussed in this Review include:

- » the development of ecological macroeconomic models that test policies for managing without growth;
- » understanding and reducing the growth dependencies that tie social welfare to increasing GDP in the current economy;
- » and characterising the policies and provisioning systems that would allow resource use to be reduced while improving human wellbeing.

Despite recent advances in post-growth research, important questions remain, such as the politics of transition, and transformations in the relationship between the Global North and the Global South.”

It is an important article and addresses several aspects of the problem, but nowhere in the article does it mention non-essentials. It does refer to “universal access to essential goods and services” as an example of a policy, but does not tackle the problem of surfeit of non-essentials. It focuses on policies but not the responsibility of the individual. So it has revealed less than half of this elephant.

Attempts to solve the problem by action in the psychical and juridical aspects, as Trainer and these authors propose, are unlikely to be successful, because expectations are functioning in the pistic aspect and require **pistic action** to make any significant change and the desire to satisfy self is functioning in the ethical aspect. As we discuss in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6, pistic action involves repentance, and the ethical action required is to turn away from self-centredness.

The third elephant is that, since the Covid-19 Pandemic, there are signs that many ‘ordinary’ people are not so trapped in the aspiration of ever increasing consumption as most economists and politicians assume. This might offer a little hope to those who want to curb non-essentials. Many people’s (pistic) idea of what life should be about is not, deep down, that forced on them by the current economic system, the media and politicians through continual pressure to buy more and more non-essentials. Very little research has been done on this, but [source to be traced = = =] found that x% of people feel trapped in jobs that consume too much of their lives, and [= = =] found that x% of people would be willing to give up some non-essentials. What this means is that strategy planners and courageous media outlets and politicians have something with which to advocate a reduction in non-essentials.

### **7-3.4 General Understanding of Why Useless Economic Activity Occurs, and How to Curb It**

Summary: The ‘causes’ of Useless economic activity (unproductivity and non-essentials considered together) can be understood more generally as meaningful in various aspects, often motivated by ethical and pistic dysfunction. Both individuals and governments have a role in curbing Useless economic activity.

Now that we have examined unproductivity and non-essentials separately, it is time to bring them back together under the idea of Useless economic activity. What should we attend to, to curb problematic Useless economic activity? The following (long) list is of some generalised 'causes' the Useless (unproductivity and non-essentials), approximately in the order of aspects that make them meaningful. The earlier ones tend to enablers, with the later ones involving some deliberate agency. Individuals and governments - and indeed all levels - have a role to play.

- ◆ Size of economy: Plentiful money allows spend on non-essentials and undermines incentives to reduce unproductivity (economic, quantitative aspects). Example actions: Individuals should question every proposed purchase of non-essentials. Governments need not spend all their income; for example Norway put its income from North Sea oil into a Sovereign Wealth fund.
- ◆ Fear: Fear can make us unproductive and purchase more non-essentials 'just in case' (psychical aspect). Example actions: Individuals can both resist and face the fear, especially if they are decision-makers in organisations. So can governments.
- ◆ Trade: Over-cheap transport encourages demand for non-essential goods and services from distant places and non-essential business and leisure travel (kinematic, economic aspect). Example actions: Individuals ... Governments ...
- ◆ Surplus capacity: As Schumacher pointed out, having surplus capacity can enable and motivate unnecessary sales (economic aspect). Example actions: Individuals ... Governments ...
- ◆ Misunderstanding the economic norm as provisioning rather than frugality (as for example in ever-increasing GDP) makes the ever-increasing supply of non-essentials an aspiration (pistic: belief). Example actions: Individuals ... Governments ...
- ◆ Legislation: Legislation and regulations often generate unproductivity (juridical). Example actions: Individuals ... Governments ...
- ◆ Excuses: That some good comes from non-essentials (pleasure) or unproductivity (jobs, taxes) is used to excuse surfeit non-essentials (analytical, lingual, ethical, pistic dysfunction). Such excuses ignore that there might be alternative ways to use funds to bring better Good and also the value of the unpaid. Example actions: Individuals ... Governments ...
- ◆ Undue elevation of aesthetic aspect: Aesthetics (enjoyment, harmony) is a Good part of life and involves some non-essentials, but surfeit thereof palls, no longer satisfies, and does Harm (aesthetic, economic dysfunction). Demanding surfeit of entertainment while the poor and the planet suffer is multiple dysfunction. Example actions: Individuals ... Governments ...
- ◆ Desire for convenience: Convenience is a kind of aesthetic non-essential with formative overtones. As well as exploiting the less-privileged and unnecessarily increasing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions that result from all non-essentials, convenience encourages bodily and mental laziness, dependence and deterioration. While luxuries are visibly non-essential, conveniences are often deemed essential within affluent cultures. It threatens to get worse if Julian Baggini is correct: "We never outrun our wish for convenience." Maybe the good ol' virtue of self-control is called for? Example actions: Individuals ... Governments ...
- ◆ Undue elevation of other aspects: Unduly elevating anything (rules, safety, innovation etc.) and sacrificing the economic norm of frugality leads to unproductivity (pistic). Kurt's useless job arose from over-emphasis on juridical ideas of security and safety, and also rule-keeping. Favouritism (social), conveniences (formative), vanity projects (aesthetic) and brilliant

technology (formative) are other frequent reasons. Example actions:

Individuals ... Governments ...

- ◆ Encouragement of giving: In many cultures (including traditional Christianity) we are exhorted to give away wealth. That can result in more non-essentials being obtained as gifts. The modern, Humanist economy discounts and discourages giving away but that does not reduce non-essentials; instead, it exhorts us to obtain non-essentials for ourselves. The difference is that the non-essentials given away often come with good functioning in the ethical aspect, which benefits society).
- ◆ Selfish expectations: Those who are selfless will often spend more of their disposable income on Good than those who have a self-centred attitude, who often accumulate more non-essentials (ethical aspect). In affluent cultures, we assume a right to accumulate non-essentials and strongly resist those who question the right. Example actions: Individuals ... Governments ...
- ◆ Self-protection: Individuals and organisations often accumulate more than is reasonable to protect themselves against risks (which may be why fund managers can often over-charge clients) (ethical aspect). Example actions: Individuals ... Governments ...
- ◆ Expectation, aspiration: Do not we in affluent cultures demand and assume enjoyment, convenience, entertainment and ease in life, seeing it as a right, something to expect, a habit, and get angry about being asked to lessen our demands for it? (pistic dysfunction) Example actions: Individuals ... Governments ...
- ◆ Pride: Wanting status is a major source of Useless economic activity, as Samuel and Veblen argue (pistic dysfunction) - for example, believing that the having of servants conveys status, which in effect is what Graeber's unproductive doormen and the broker's cold-caller are, and that possession of non-essentials, with displays of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure, conveys honour. Example actions: Individuals ... Governments ...

Most of these motivations are exacerbated by peer pressure (social aspect).

### 7-3.5 Challenges of Identifying the Useless

Summary: It is not easy to clearly distinguish essentials from non-essentials nor productive from unproductive, for several reasons. This is how we may use Dooyeweerd's aspects to do so.

"Scots prioritising essentials - but still finding funds for holidays" >[PwC 2024].  
Are holidays essential or non-essential?

Though productivity seems measurable (e.g. income from products over hours worked), doing that narrows down our view of what productivity is and misses much that is important - and at what number does it become unproductive?

Differentiating non-essential from essential and unproductive from productive is difficult for similar reasons, which we discuss here and we suggest how each might be addressed. Not having found much academic literature about this, we fall back on observations that arose during RLDG discussions. They are here to stimulate discussion, not as some final truth.

1. About **restorative economic activity**. At this early stage in the discourse, we include restorative activity as essential rather than non-essential, because of the Harm that has occurred and continues to happen. When the discourse is more mature, and if ever the amount of Harm reduces, then some restorative

activity might be deemed less essential. In any case, restorative economic activity can be more or less unproductive.

2. There is no sharp **boundary** between Good and Useless, such that something is either one or the other. The difference between the extremes is clear (Smith's "baubles and trinkets" and Graeber's "bullshit jobs" are obviously Useless and contain very little important Good) but with most things it is less clear.

> For example, is having a second yacht essential? Probably not. Is having a boat essential? Almost certainly if you are surveying waterways (though could much be done from their banks?). Is food essential? Yes - though not for those who are fasting. But what kind of food and when? Is exquisite food essential? Probably not - unless on rare occasions to honour someone such as at birthday or Christmas - yet even then it depends on whether our motive for 'honouring' the person is actually self-serving or self-giving. Is having a break productive or unproductive? Does it depend on how long the break is and whether alcohol is consumed during the break?

Thinking about both the boundary between Good and Useless and the context may be helped by asking

"In which aspect(s) does this economic activity or product contribute to Good  
What does it contribute?  
What could it contribute?  
And why?"

And how does this relate to all other aspects?"

Each aspect defines a different kind of Good and therefore a different boundary between Good and Useless. Something is productive and essential only by reference to those aspects that makes it meaningful and Good; in most other aspects it is often non-essential or unproductive. > Food is essential biotically, but it need not be tasty (psychical aspect) nor delicious (aesthetic aspect) to fulfil this function. Company might be essential because it is a Good of the social aspect, but not essential biotically. Skill is essential by the formative aspect, though maybe not biotically. This is why, in multi-aspectual reality, the boundary between Good and Useless is **fuzzy**.

3. It **depends on context**. To most of us, decent food and reasonable pleasures may be treated as essentials while to ascetic monks they are non-essential. A good tool is essential for crafting (formative aspect) but sometimes the craftspeople falsely claim essentiality for expensive tools they never use because they like to show off. Ostentatious pleasure or consumption in a context of poverty is Evil - and currently the excess practised within affluent cultures is in the context of worldwide poverty and environmental destruction. The "and why?" above helps to reveal contextual factors and motivations. The comparison with all other aspects is a kind of 'balancing' though not in the usual zero-sum way it is usually thought of, as we shall see in what follows. In transcending the subjective-objective opposition, Dooyeweerd's aspects open the way to more fruitful discussion of Useless activity, so we do not have to opt for one or the other.

4. Neither context nor boundary-fuzziness should be an **excuse** for Useless economic activity.

> "These people expect me to splash out, so I must spend more than I can afford."  
"I'll get the spare yacht (or car, or phone) in case the other one is in for repair."  
Management under pressure from senior management to maximize output quantity can treat their employees' breaks as unproductive. Is one car per person rather than family actually essential, or a mere convenience to avoid having to negotiate sharing? Is the social pressure to accumulate "baubles" to make us look good to others really essential?

We must question the degree to which we allow context to excuse our non-essentials or unproductivity. Excuse is, at root, a dysfunction in our old friends the **pistic and ethical** aspects (**mindset, attitude - culture**). Decisions on this made by the affluent will most likely justify much more unproductivity and non-essentials, but harmfully so, because of the selfish unconcern and idolatry that pervades their perspectives at a hidden level. Our pistic functioning also influences what we deem important when thinking about essentials and taking responsibility. Gillman's and Morris' "uninvestible" surplus profit or social resource: why not **give it away** rather than spend it on non-essentials or unproductivity? This, maybe, is where some thought from Development Studies or even Marxism or Christianity might help us think.

5. Instead of a sharp boundary, can we assign some **quantitative scale to Uselessness**, as more or less Useless? That might be helpful for introducing the idea, but assigning quantitative numbers misleads evaluation and decision-making, as discussed in Chapter 5. (Non-)Essentiality especially seems to be a qualitative rather than quantitative matter, in that something is essential *because of* some kind of Good it brings.

6. Is essentiality **objective** judgment or a **purely subjective** evaluation? Neither. Supposed objective essentiality arises mostly from reductionism. Even though many people assume, expect and might argue - their subjective beliefs - that what they are buying, producing or doing is in some way essential for them, very often the world cannot afford their so-called essentials; c.f. the ecological footprint of most affluent nations is 3 or more whole earths or more. (Is this one of the weaknesses of *Doughnut Economics*?) Instead, we need some less subjective understanding even though we need not seek complete objectivity.

7. Therefore decision-makers should **take full responsibility** of properly considering all relevant factors involved in what makes something essential and productive or non-essential or unproductive, and not try to shirk it by either hiding behind definitions nor reducing it to numbers.

### 7-3.6 Some Practical Tips on Identifying and Assessing Useless Economic Activity

Summary: Several practical tips on assessing Useless economic activity.

Earlier, we made a quick overview assessment of the amount of Useless economic activity in the UK, using meagre empirical evidence obtained during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. But that is only indicative and we need deeper understanding. Ideally, we would begin by a preparatory analysis as for assessing Harmful economic activity and emerge with some kind of causal or other network as shown in Figure f7-causal. Though it is not easy to discern the Useless in some of its factors, we may winkle it out with the following questions, in three groups, to identify them, to understand deep roots of why they occur and perhaps what to do about them.

1. **Indicators** of Useless economic activity. By asking the following questions about an economic activity, a rich picture may be constructed.

- ◆ What would happen **if this economic activity did not occur**?
- ◆ What **surfeit** of anything (food, material goods, comfort, technology, convenience, pleasures, and the like) is there? Especially when compared with those in non-affluent but stable cultures? Surfeit can indicate non-essentials.
- ◆ Are there people who believe the economic activity is **absurd**, such as

Schumacher's biscuit lorries? If so, in which aspects is it absurd? Consider their views carefully, even if they are from 'the other side'.

- ◆ What **imbalances** in economic activity are there? Imbalances indicate too much directed towards favoured aspects.
- ◆ Look at the aesthetic functioning. In households, how much is spent on luxuries, pleasures, entertainment, etc.? A useful rule of thumb is that one-seventh is healthy but more than that might not be. In firms and governments, how much is spent on 'iconic' projects, buildings, etc.? Are wishes being turned into wants and wants into needs?
- ◆ Does something happen **purely for reputation**, e.g. "iconic" projects? These often waste considerable amounts of resources for little benefit.
- ◆ What activity is driven by ideology? For example, on one hand equality and diversity, on the other, reaction against this; both consume resources unproductively.

2. **Motivations.** What are the **real motivations** for this economic activity?

- ◆ Ask "Why does it occur?" to obtain some first level reasons why Useless activity occurs, which are meaningful in aspects that people already agree on. These are only surface motivations however, so ask
- ◆ Often, a deeper motivation is revealed. Ask, "Why is that reason important?" This reveals deeper motivations, usually functioning in the ethical and pistic aspects. Are they valid?
- ◆ Are these deeper motivations self-centred or self-giving? Are they idolatrous? Are there hidden agendas?

These questions help us assess how important it is to remove Useless economic activity, whether non-essential or unproductive.

## 7-4. Bringing Good, Harmful and Useless Together

Summary: We can now merge the ideas, especially to discuss things like national measures of wellbeing (GDP and its replacements).

Given the importance of replacing Harmful economic activity with Good, and of curbing Useless activity, and also the need for assessments of value, discussed in Chapter 5, we need ways to analyse, assess or measure them. Sometimes overviews are needed, sometimes comparisons must be made, sometimes we need to understand what is going on, sometimes we need to make decisions, make future plans, regarding Good, Harmful and Useless economic activity. Governments and businesses need an estimate of how much economic activity over which they have control is Harmful and Useless. As discussed in Chapter 5, it is difficult to assess and measure value and, as discussed above, it is probably equally challenging to differentiate the Harmful and the Useless from the Good.

Earlier, we made a quick calculation from empirical sources of the amount of Harmful and Useless economic activity in the UK economy, but it was very approximate. Here we discuss assessment of Harm and Uselessness using Dooyeweerd's aspects, then propose how GDP might be reformed, and end with suggestions for economic planning.

### 7-4.1 Replacing GDP? An Initial Multi-aspectual Index of National Wellbeing

Summary: A national index of wellbeing like GDP could in principle be compiled by adding together Good that is meaningful in each aspect and subtracting total Harm. Might this usefully redefine GDP?

Many have pointed out the flaws in GDP as a measure of national wellbeing which governments aspire to increase (see separate page on <"gdp.html"> GDP) and have suggested alternative quantitative indices such as HDI, GHI and GPI. These bring in measures of other kinds of value such as health, education and environment. Given that quantitative indices have some valid uses, we also propose one, but with is based on different principles.

GDP (ideally) adds together the monetary value of all money-based transactions and these other indices add quantised measures of other good things. They all add; we subtract. In the main, all of them add what they believe to be kinds of Good, and we do too, only we recognise a broader ranges of kinds of Good because we employ Dooyeweerd's aspects. But then we subtract Harm - again differentiated according to kinds as defined by aspects. Therefore our suggested index is:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{National Index} \\ &= \text{Sum}( G_x ) - \text{Sum}( H_x ) \\ &= \text{Sum}( G_x - H_x ) \end{aligned}$$

where  $G_x$  and  $H_x$  are the Good and Harm meaningful in each aspect  $x$ , as defined earlier. (This was discussed in <"reith2020/se26.html#s-nmnw"> RLDG Discussion 26. We believe that using such an index would help to discourage Harmful economic activity and especially shrink Harmful sectors more successfully than current policies do.

We may add two refinements. 1. There are two types of Good, generative and restorative. Usually we would include both in  $G_x$  but then there is a danger that Harm would be excused because the more Harm, the more restorative Good (hospitals, police, etc.), and hence the greater the Index. 2. What about Useless economic activity? We might deal with it in three ways. That Useless activity which does Harm should be subtracted as Harm (including biotic Harm from biodiversity loss and climate change, psychological Harm to mental health, attitudinal Harm if selfishness was encouraged, and so on). Useless activity that is a reasonable amount of aesthetic Good (not surfeit) can be counted as (generative) Good.

Other Useless activity that does no Harm but just wastes things (especially resulting in unproductivity) can be deliberately omitted from the calculation. However it may be worth explicitly including because its communicates something of the context, helping us understand more deeply. To include it in a way that is thus recorded but has no arithmeticeffect, include it with a zero multiplier.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{National Index} \\ &= \text{Sum}( G_x ) - \text{Sum}( H_x ) + 0 * \text{Sum}( \text{Useless}_x ) \end{aligned}$$

Would this be **doable**? Or would it be too complicated? At the worst, we have 75 totals to calculate: in each of 15 aspects we might have five totals: generative Good, depletive Harm, restorative Good, unproductivity and non-essentials. Could we obtain a national total of each? Probably Yes. It would seem tractable since all that is required, in principle, is to take the data already used in calculating GDP and split it up (and we have already discussed the challenges in distinguishing these things from one another).

Of course, for such a national measure to work, especially in liberal democracies, there must be **some degree of national agreement** that these how each aspect value is calculated is at least acceptable as what people think are

genuinely good or bad. Presumably, broad agreement can be obtained over broad ideas of aspectual Good and Harm, and initial introduction of the index might restrict itself to these, and introduce more detailed value judgments later. But it might become more challenging in affluent cultures that have come to see Useless activity and products as acceptable and aspirational.

This means that perhaps GDP need not be replaced but rather redefined, and expanded to include all kinds of Good and Harm, as:

GDP

$$= \text{Sum}( G_x ) - \text{Sum}( H_x ) + 0 * \text{Sum}( \text{Useless}_x )$$

**Research needed:** There are two main challenges to bringing this in: (a) How to measure the Good and Harm in each aspect; see Chapter 5; (b) There would be some downsides in the process of bringing this in (in addition to threatening vested interests) and these, and how to ameliorate them, would need to be discussed widely among all kinds of people (without letting vested interests and political commitments dominate the conversation). See ["gdp.html"](#) > discussion of GDP.

## 7-4.2 Fully Understanding the Impact of Juridical, Ethical and Pistic Structures

Summary: We systematize our understanding of societal structures that bend individuals, societies and economies towards the Harmful, the Useless or the Good.

Since the juridical, ethical and pistic aspects constitute societal structures, and functioning in them retrocipatively impacts functioning in all other aspects (including economic activity), as discussed in Section §6.3 </a ,they require special consideration> . The Good, Harmful or Useless economic activity cannot be properly understood or assessed without these. By "agents" we mean at all levels: individual, household, organisation or business, government, etc.

When **assessing the juridical aspect** of economic activity, we must take into account:

- ◆ Acts of justice or injustice, appropriateness or inappropriateness, by agents (individuals, households, firms, governments, etc.);
- ◆ How juridical structures (rules, laws, policies etc.) bend agent functioning towards Good or Harm or Uselessness.
- ◆ How such juridical structures are shaped by ethical and pistic functioning.
- ◆ Do loopholes exist? Is there a danger of the **unscrupulous**, self-interested or arrogant finding aspects in which their Harmful activity does a small bit of Good and they argue for its overriding importance?

When **assessing the ethical aspect** of (attitude that shapes) economic activity, we must take into account:

- ◆ Individual acts by agents, of self-giving or selfishness, generosity or meanness, openness or self-protection, trust or distrust, sacrifice or greed, sharing or competitiveness;
- ◆ How self-giving or selfish attitudes bend other agents towards either Good, Harm or Uselessness in any aspect;
- ◆ How the attitude that pervades society (e.g. competitive self-advantage) shapes policies and laws that are set in place.
- ◆ How attitudes are impacted by pistic functioning, for example in the presupposition of the Self-interested Rational Economic Actor.

When **assessing the pistic aspect** of (mindset underlying) economic activity, we must take into account:

- ◆ Individual acts by agents, of belief or refusal to believe what is reasonable, courage or cowardice, loyalty or betrayal, openness to all aspects versus undue elevation (idolatry) of certain aspects, what agents take to be most important or meaningful, what they assume, presuppose and ignore, in which the 'what' might be understood in terms of which aspects most make it meaningful;
- ◆ How the beliefs, expectations, aspirations, assumptions that prevail in society bend people towards Good, Harm or Useless activity in any aspects;
- ◆ How the prevailing beliefs etc. shape the rules, laws and policies that we set in place, especially in what society presupposes as meaningful and meaningless, the latter sometimes drilling loopholes in laws;
- ◆ How the prevailing beliefs etc. encourage and foster self-giving or selfishness, trust or distrust, sacrifice or self-protection, helpless or competitiveness, etc., for example the assumption that economic activity is (should be) driven by self-interest.

Exactly how these are taken into account, qualitatively or quantitatively, depends on our needs. Much still needs exploring. Academia has seldom done the necessary research, and teaches these very inadequately, if at all, so they remain something of a mystery. **Research project:** Investigate good ways to assess those.

This is why mindset and attitude are so important, and economics needs urgently to take them into account. They are often hidden, indirect and longer-term in their effects. They are less obvious than the juridical, yet pervasive, not only within particular jurisdictions (juridical structures), but across cultures. It can be a long time before they are recognised and taken seriously - if they even recognised at all. Selfish or idolatrous agendas prevent us thinking carefully of many kinds of possibility that do not suit them - until somebody arrives whose attitude and mindset is different. (X. Being such a person might be one of the genuine contributions that Christians or followers of other religions can prophetically and powerfully yet gently offer.)

## **7-5. Action to Reduce Harm, Discourage Useless and Increase Good**

Summary: What changes are needed to bring into economics the distinction between Good, Harmful and Useless economic activity?

If we wish to continue our Useless activity, are we not saying that we are more important than other people on Earth, demanding that they cut their Ecological Footprint in order to allow ours to remain bloated with Harmful and Useless activity? Reducing an Ecological Footprint from 3.0 Earths to less than 1.0 Earth requires a massive reduction in affluent footprints - no mere 20% drop, but a 70% reduction - and more for the USA. That is why we must consider action here.

How should economics theory and practice change to take the difference between Good, Harmful and Useless into account? How can we reduce Harm, discourage Useless economic activity and increase Good, as a proportion of individual, communal, national or global economic activity? **Significant changes are needed.** Some changes are radical, some are incremental. Even though our critique of economics is more radical than most, it does not require the complete reordering of society in the way that some thinkers suggest. To provide practical specificity, we discuss economic planning, then discuss kinds of change

meaningful in each aspect. Some changes are to individual agency, some to societal structures, but most involve both radical and incremental changes.

### 7-5.1 Radical and Incremental Changes

Summary: We need both radical and incremental changes, not one at the expense of the other.

Some argue for incremental changes, some for radical changes, usually of whole structures of society. We argue for an integrated advance on both fronts. On the one hand, incremental changes have so far brought many improvements in human life, such as health, nutrition, life expectancy, the dignity of the disabled, etc. On the other hand, incremental changes have proven to be insufficient. The incremental changes that are being suggested are nowhere near enough to prevent catastrophic climate change and biodiversity loss, for example. Radical change is needed too. (x Jesus said his disciples were salt and light; is salt incremental and light more radical? x)

Note that the incremental-radical duality is not identical to the individual-societal; we need both in both.

Instead of arguing this at an abstract level, we have used Dooyeweerd's aspects to consider actions of both kinds, categorising them by aspect and encouraging the building of a complete picture. We start with action meaningful in the economic aspect and then discuss some others.

All are examples, and not the entire changes needed.

### 7-5.2 Economic Planning Around Harmful and Useless Economic Activity

Summary: Economic planning should aim to increase Good, prevent or rectify Harmful and reduce Useless economical activity.

However much or little of the economy is planned, by governments or companies, at least some strategy decisions are and should be made by those with responsibility to do so. The aim of economic planning must be to **increase Multi-aspectual Overall Good** and decrease Harm and maybe discourage Useless economic activity, while remembering that all people make the actual contributions to these. We discuss government planning but similar principles apply in company economic planning.

Chapter 4 outlines some discussions about economic growth. Many, especially politicians, just assume growth is Good, but, since it is becoming obvious that that assumption is false, a growing number of people are suggesting post-growth [Jackson 2009], degrowth [Demaria et al. 2013] or beyond-growth EU [2023] and these should be planned for. We in affluent cultures should plan seriously to reduce our ecological footprint and it is most likely that we will need to abandon our commitment to economic growth and **shrink our economies**, allowing poorer nations the headroom to grow their economies, both within a sustainable ecological footprint (which we are currently exceeding). As has been said, the Earth cannot cope with an abundance of Useless economic activity that increases the ecological footprint for no good purpose.

We discuss first economic planning without reference to aspects but only to differentiating the Harmful, Useless and Good. Then we bring aspects in.

### 7-5.3 Economic planning without regard to aspects

Summary: Calculating amounts of Harmful or Useless economic activity

against Good, can help planners prioritise actions or policy-makers, their policies.

Current economic planning presupposes the Goodness of all economic activity, but it can be improved by separating out Harmful and Useless activity from Good and treating them differently. Wisdom and the aim of contributing to Multi-aspectual Overall Good would suggest that we should plan to reduce the Harmful and curb the Useless.

At the micro level this can be achieved by people wanting to take responsibility and by saving more because that reduces unnecessary or frivolous spending. At the macro level, the traditional and obvious action is to legislate and manage the tax and subsidy regimes to stop Harmful and discourage Useless economic activities and encourage Good activities.

Generally, most people and governments already know unproductivity is a problem and have been trying to reduce it for decades, so that it is now more difficult to remove it because there is less to remove. But with non-essentials there is far less awareness of the problems they cause and those in affluent cultures have come to accept and expect non-essentials as part of life and, in many cases, a surfeit thereof, and have become inured to (unconcerned about) the Harm their non-essentials do. Therefore they are likely to resist any attempt to do this. Sadly, this is true of most people and politicians in affluent cultures, especially those which have influence in the world. People in the USA for instance have become more and more angry about taxes and legislation in recent decades - and yet most refuse to take individual responsibility to the extent needed. That needs to be taken seriously.

To bring people along with plans to obliterate Harmful economic activity and curb non-essentials, it is useful to separate out four quadrants of the economy, as depicted in Figure f7-ghu.propns, based on Figure f7-axes:

- ◆ Good and essential economic activity;
- ◆ Non-essential but Good economic activity;
- ◆ Harmful and non-essential economic activity;
- ◆ Harmful but essential economic activity.

<img src = "pix/f7-ghu.propns.gif" alt = "Four quadrants of an economy 1200,600" width = 400 height = 200

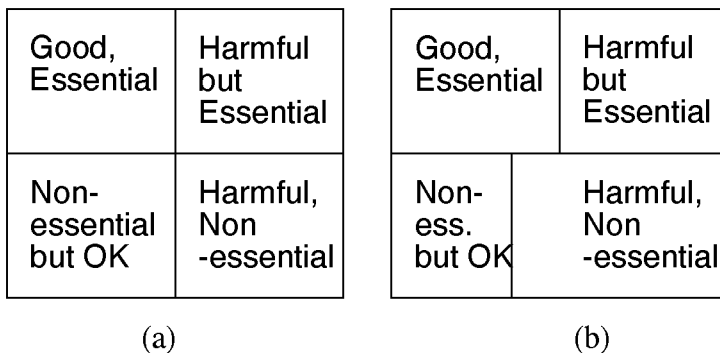


Figure f7-ghu.propns. Four quadrants of an economy. (a) Non-essentials and Harmful independent; (b) Many Non-essentials being Harmful.

The area of each quadrant indicates its proportion of the total economy. Figure f7-ghu.propns(a) shows the theoretical idea, assuming the Good-Non-essential axis is statistically independent of the Good-Harmful but, since much

non-essential activity generates Harm, the proportions are likely to be skewed as depicted in Figure f7-ghu.propns(b).

When there is widespread agreement in principle on the difference between the four quadrants (even if not on their proportions) then people are likely to accept the following priorities of economic planning (in addition to continuing to reduce unproductivity):

- ◆ 1. Obliterate Harmful Non-essentials as a priority. Though some might squeal, most there will be little pain resulting.
- ◆ 2. Grow / expand the Good-essential - especially in impoverished economies of the Global South.
- ◆ 3. Curb Non-Essential-but-OK on the grounds that they divert from Good, especially in bloated affluent economies with large ecological footprint and many affluence-generated health problems.
- ◆ 4. Consider what to do about Harmful-but-essential economic activity (and especially consider carefully why they are essential and whether they truly are.)

With these, the Treasury will no longer take the lazy option of “cuts across the board” nor the inadequate option of allocations based of how well government departments can make their case, but will be on firmer grounds that will stand the test of time.

Of course, calculating the proportion of each depends on what we believe is important, which varies with context. What we believe is important is not the same as what the media scream about ><“n-uksm”> [Note: UK Screaming Media].

As well as such financial and political planning, which is filled with what is meaningful in the juridical aspect (as well as economic and quantitative), planners should recognise the even greater importance of the other two macro aspects of societal structure, the ethical aspect of pervading attitude and the pistic aspect of prevailing mindset. Action here is not mainly by governments, but more by opinion-formers and influencers and by religions. People need to be encouraged into selflessness and away from materialist, self-centred expectations and aspirations. Unfortunately, at present, most social media encourages selfishness and materialism, so we need courageous planners, influencers and opinion-formers who go in the opposite direction, towards Good, and we need to capitalise on the positive role of religion can play - but never in any authoritarian manner.

### 7-5.3.1 National planning by sector

Summary: As an example of the above, we show how Supply and Use Tables, employed in sectoral economic planning, may be enriched to differentiate between Good, Harmful and Useless.

In planning for sectors of the economy, **Supply and Use Tables** show the total economic value in each sector of a nation’s economy, typically divided between domestic and that which is traded with other nations. Table t7-sut(a) shows the UK Supply and Use Tables for 2020.

Table t7-sut. Example of Supply and Use Table (a) original, (b) differentiating Good, Harmful and Useless.

>(Click of picture for full size)

<“pix/t7-sutables.gif”>

<img src = “pix/t7-sutables.gif” alt = “Example of Supply and Use Table showing Good and Harm 1200,1500” width = 400 height = 500

(a)

Products	Domestic output	Imports		
		Goods		Services
		EU	Rest of world	
Agriculture	30847	7384	5927	132
Production	647600	224949	199897	8255
Construction	294940	-	-	4014
Distribution	614742	-	-	19634
Information	215729	1153	1140	22478
Financial	293739	-	-	22696
Real Estate	364718	-	-	5263
Support services	452718	1	1	74900
Government	596569	-	-	2023
Other services	79342	228	1477	7677

(b)

Products	Domestic output		Imports							
			Goods				Services			
			EU		Rest of world		EU		Rest of world	
	Good	Harm	Good	Harm	Good	Harm	Good	Harm	Good	Harm
	Uf	Uf	Uf	Uf	Uf	Uf	Uf	Uf	Uf	Uf
	Useful	Useless	Useful	Useless	Useful	Useless	Useful	Useless	Useful	Useless
Agriculture	13671	6629	885	9662	890	1909	807	2321		
Production										
Construction										
Distribution										
Information										
Financial										
Real Estate										
Support services										
Government										
Other services										

As with GDP, this version conflates Harmful and Useless economic activity with Good. It also ignores high-value unpaid work, such home-making. However, we may split the figures for each sector into four (Good-Useful, Useless-but-Good, Harmful-but-Useful, Harmful-Useless), as depicted in Table t7-sut(b). This enables planners to see immediately which sectors should be actively shrunk and which, encouraged to grow. In Table t7-sut(b), I have split two of the Agriculture figures into these four, as shown along the bottom. In the absence of any suitable analysis, I have used my imagination, guided roughly by the proportions of Harmful and Useless economic activity derived above. For domestic agricultural production I have assumed just less than half the food grown here is Good and necessary, and about half the food grown in this country is Useless on the basis that 30% of food is wasted and much is exotic luxury or is over-feeding - but that much of that comes from abroad. Over half the Useless food is Harmful. Only a small amount of the Harmful food grown in the UK is necessary. Of food imported from the rest of the world, I have estimated that only a third is necessary because much imported food is exotic, and that much of this is Harmful, not least because of the climate change emissions etc. from long distance transport and involves unjust labour conditions.

Such a breakdown can be turned round to group together all the Good\_Useful, Harmful-Useless, etc. which are then split into domestic, EU goods, other goods, services, as shown in Table t7-suba.

Table t7-sut-ghu. Example of Supply and Use Table rearranged to make Good, Harmful and Useless the top consideration.  
> (Click of picture for full size)

< "pix/t7-sut-ghu.gif" >  
 <img src = "pix/t7-sut-ghu.gif" alt = "Supply and Use Table arranged differently 1200,600" width = 400 height = 200

Products	Good-Useful	Useless but Good	Harmful but Useful	Harmful & Useless
	Dm EU'RW'Sv	Dm EU'RW'Sv	Dm EU'RW'Sv	Dm EU',RW'Sv
Agriculture	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
Production	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
Construction	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
Distribution	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
Information	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
Financial	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
Real Estate	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
Support services	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
Government	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
Other services	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .

However, even this is a blunt instrument, because it offers no way to differentiate kind of Harm or Good. To do that, we need aspects.

### 7-5.4 Introducing aspects

Summary: How using aspects can make more specific economic plans and policies.

Derived from extant models like SU tables without reference to aspects, those approaches suffer from disadvantages. One is that different kinds of Harm are mixed together. Since different kinds of Harm call for different kinds of solution, it is not wise to hide the differences among them. Another is that those in a sector might fight to defend it from being shrunk, outsourcing their Harm to others or engaging in special pleading because they "provide jobs" or contributed taxes, or offer some transient individual convenience or pleasure. To address this, we need to understand what kinds of Harm they do and what kinds of Good they plead and what is its true contribution of Multi-aspectual Overall Good.

### 7-5.5 Action in Each Aspect

Summary: Action may be taken in each aspect.

So, we now discuss action that might be taken in each aspect, starting with the economic, then the early aspects, ending with ethical and pistic. Some we discuss; others we just summarise with a few bullets.

#### 7-5.5.1 Economic Aspect Action: Saving, Taxes, Incentives and Subsidies

Summary: Saving, taxes, incentives and subsidies take on a different aura when we consider aspects.

**Saving** helps encourage frugality. What is saved is not spent on **non-essentials**, at least not immediately, and especially not on non-essentials that bring zero or only transitory good. If frugality is the kernel norm of the economic aspect, as Dooyeweerd believed, then saving that encourages it will eventually bring benefit.

**Company accounts** should include an accounting for the value of Harm done by and as a result of their activities, both direct and indirect, and across all aspects. The direct and indirect Harm could also be reported separately (maybe under the existing classification of class I, II, III, though this is not ideal, as discussed elsewhere), and reported per aspect.

**Taxes** that are aimed at discouraging Harm (e.g. Pigouvian taxes) have some effect, but also many failings. Not least is the problem of measurement and determining the right level of tax for some Harm that is non-measurable. Also,

they do not take into account connections with other factors, as our idea of multi-aspectual interwovenness requires. For example, if a widespread Harm is taxed, governments have a strong incentive to encourage that Harmful activity because they obtain income from taxes. Such conundrums make relying on taxes to reduce Harm ineffective. At the individual level, if the Harmful or Non-essentials become expensive, they often become aspired to, and this actually encourages rather than discourages Harm and Uselessness. Much of the success of Pigouvian taxes relies on functioning in aspects other than the economic, such as those of psychology or motivation. Nevertheless, such taxes have a valid role in encouraging Good and discouraging Harm, when they are part of a wider strategy that takes all aspects into account.

**Incentives** and **subsidies** designed to encourage some Good economic activity may also be used, maybe to leverage other finance. However, most subsidy regimes do not have such an aim in mind. Conventionally, subsidies are categorised along two dimensions, one being what economically- meaningful thing is being subsidised (production, consumption, taxes, etc.), the other being whether they are broad or narrow. There seems to be no attempt to categorise them by the kind of Good they might bring about - unless this is tied to certain sectors that the governments favour. One weakness of relying on subsidies is that they can become "perverse", for example when fishery subsidies have led to overfishing. Because perverse subsidies often favour powerful vested interests, they are often not tackled as robustly as they should be.

**Adherence to economic growth** encourages both Harmful and Useless economic activity more than Good, because of our selfishness and idolatry. So some have tried austerity, especially in the framework of a command economy. Austerity might have some useful role, in that it prevents over-expenditure on Harm and Non-essentials [= = = ref: effects of austerity on externalities and non-essentials] but it has other ramifications that are both counter-productive and Harmful. In cultures where most people assume they have a right to their affluent lifestyles, people get angry about what they see as austerity and resist, thus reinforcing selfish attitudes.

What undermines the effectiveness of taxes and subsidies as (dis)incentive is the impact of other aspects. We will briefly consider several, especially the ethical and pistic aspects. For example, governments could find ways to accept lower tax income on large Harmful sectors, but they choose not to because of their heart attitude is self-centred and they idolise income or the protection of certain sectors.

Other economic actions, such as incentives, insurance, or debt, debt cancellation, markets, etc. could also be analysed in such ways. We leave that to readers, and to future research.

### **7-5.5.2 Psychological, Analytical and Formative Aspect Action: Behavioural Methods**

Summary: Behavioural action to reduce Harm and Useslessness.

- ◆ Individuals can increase their awareness of the good feelings that are aroused when we function well in any aspect, and the differences of those feelings - feelings of satisfaction at clearly understanding a situation, especially when one has been confused before, feelings of thrill at achieving something good, feelings good at high quality communication, feelings of friendship, feelings at not wasting, feelings of harmony, feelings of justice, feelings of having done something selfless, and feelings of meaningfulness, to name a few. And conversely.

- ◆ Increased awareness of the difference in feeling between really good functioning and fake functioning, for example of achieving something good rather than of cheating someone.
- ◆ Governments can set up nudge and other units - but must ensure they are aimed at aspectual Good not greed. The 2020 Pandemic was a useful instance of this.

### 7-5.5.3 Lingual Aspect Action: Information, Education and Persuasion

Summary: Some action from information, education and persuasion.

- ◆ Courageous individuals to communicate truth clearly and well, rather than be content with half-truths, equivocation and confusion, and the content of what is communicated to increasingly be about Good rather than Evil or Useless activity. They will be like salt that preserves and flavours.
- ◆ Media and information flow to do similar rather than planning content to addict people.
- ◆ Persuasion (e.g. advertising) to Good rather than self-interest.
- ◆ Education: towards Good. Especially people should be educated about what is Good in each aspect and how to achieve it.
- ◆ Government information to recover high quality towards Good rather than towards vote-getting or propaganda.

### 7-5.5.4 Social Aspect Action:

Summary: Some group and relational actions.

- ◆ Set up groups of people to change the way we do economics, encouraging one another in this. The setting-up must be by the people themselves, but Government etc. should make the setting up of good groups easier rather than more difficult.
- ◆ Enrol friends in moving to multi-aspectual economics.
- ◆ However, do not resort to inappropriate peer pressure; allow people to act voluntarily.

### 7-5.5.5 Aesthetic Aspect Action: Harmony and Enjoyment

Summary: Action meaningful in the aesthetic aspect.

- ◆ Harmony: Ensure that all our actions work together rather than undermine each other.
- ◆ Harmony: Ensure that all our actions work together rather than giving undue priority to one kind.
- ◆ Ensure that Good is enjoyable and fun rather than boring. This is a challenge because Evil presents some immediate intense thrill, which can be addictive.

### 7-5.5.6 Juridical Aspect Action: Policy and Responsibility

Summary: Responsibility is important in planning.

In our juridical functioning, we have juridical actions like policy-making, and a juridical disposition of a sense responsibility.

Governments legislate, forming policies and laws and imposing taxes, which govern economic activity. They should consider the example of **expanding or shrinking sectors of the economy**. The RLDG discussions recognised that differentiating Harm and Useless from Good implies that some sectors of the economy must shrink, and others no longer be encouraged to grow. Is that an elephant in the room of politics and political economy, and also of most conventional economics? Though some contrarian groups >[Note: Contrarian Groups] call for specific sectors to be shrunk, there seems to be no serious discussion

among mainstream legislators and opinion-formers about which sectors must shrink, and how to ensure they do. It is the mainstream that needs to act.

But the people as a whole must want to take responsibility. If they do not, then they will resist government attempts to do so. How to ensure that people want to take responsibility is a matter for changing attitude and mindset (ethical and pistic aspects) - changing culture. See separate discussion of < "culture.html" > Culture.

Responsibility is a disposition more than an action, almost an attitude - both individual and cultural. There needs to be a **sense of responsibility** among us if we are to excise Harmful and reduce Useless economic activity. A "sense of responsibility" is wider than responsibility to a particular party. "Our first duty is to shareholders" will not do. That is what led the East India Company to heinous cruelty and arrogance during famine.

**Economic responsibility** has been defined as "one's self-limiting and self-assumed obligation towards others to be aware of how one's actions have consequences for others - consequences which one is obliged to factor in when deciding upon an action" [Negru & Dolfsma 2022]. Notice the commitment to something that approximates to multi-aspectual Multi-aspectual Good. Responsibility is functioning in the juridical aspect to give full due to all ("others"), where this targets first the economic and ethical functioning of self-limiting, which in turn targets all and every aspect and kind of entity. Narrow responsibility to just one kind of entity (e.g. shareholders) or one aspect (e.g. the economic or even the juridical itself) alone does Harm not Good.

They see economic responsibility as one of four components of **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**, along with environmental, 'ethical' and social responsibility. However, CSR is often narrowed, especially when used by companies as a reputational tick-box exercise. Frequently some aspectual dysfunction is mixed in, and firms seldom seriously look at the Harm done by their products. When CSR is undertaken for selfish reasons (e.g. to boost the reputation or shareholder attractiveness of a firm) it is ethical dysfunction and so contributes indirectly to Overall Harm by reinforcing self-centred attitudes, including cynicism, in society.

However, the incorporation of CSR into the culture of business, even in this limited sense, has been helpful in instilling throughout society a change in mindset-attitude away from "our profits only" to some sense of responsibility. The lingual functioning of media and discourse and the social functioning of peer pressure have played important parts in this welcome shift. But we need to go further, to ensure a fuller, wiser idea of CSR prevails.

However, "Reform must come from within, not from without. You cannot legislate for virtue." [James Cardinal Gibbons] Though responsibility itself is juridical, adopting a sense of responsibility is more ethical and pistic.

#### **7-5.5.7 Ethical and Pistic Aspects Action: Change of Heart and of Culture**

Summary: Action in the ethical and pistic aspects (heart, culture) are even more important in economic planning.

Several people (Trainer, Speth, Landes, etc.) call for a change in culture and, in our separate page on < "culture.html" > Culture we discuss what culture is and how to change it. The most important aspects are the ethical and pistic. They are also the aspects functioning in the human heart - so what is said here applies at both micro and macro levels of economics. Change of heart and culture is the most radical of all changes, not least because it affects all else.

**Changing our pistic functioning** refers to changing aspirations and expectations, assumptions and presuppositions that we take for granted. Especially we must turn away from idolatry or undue elevation of the economic or any other aspect or institution or even our own views, and from our hidden agendas and stubborn refusal to change. It works by inspiring, more than coercion, or offering a new way of seeing things.

But it requires **repentance**, not mere reductions or reparations (incremental). True repentance is radical, as discussed in Chapter 3. It is not just saying "Sorry" or making a few reparations (though reparations will usually occur willingly when someone truly repents), but a deep, "I was and am wrong; Help me change" (pistic functioning). It is contrition of the kind that leads to action that is costly to self (ethical functioning). Perhaps one of the most important areas of repentance required is that the entire field of economics needs to repent of making self-interest and competitiveness its centre, presupposed as good and necessary, along with repenting of its addiction to growth for growth's sake in affluent economies. Again, this is among both individuals and society/culture.

We can see pistic change in individuals (e.g. religious conversion), but it also refers to collective pistic functioning too - change of mindset - the aspirations and expectations of a society or culture. Bringing that into our Rethink, it requires at least that affluent culture should turn away from affluent expectations of what is 'normal' and what people have a right to when these are Harmful and/or Useless, while those in non-affluent cultures should turn away from aspiring to the things they see in affluent culture that are Useless or cause Harm. (x Christians will remember Paul's words, "and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content" and Jesus' warnings to the affluent. x)

**Change in our ethical functioning** involves turning from a selfish, self-centred, self-protective, competitive, unconcerned attitudes towards others, including the non-human world. (x Christians will remember Jesus, when asked who the neighbour is whom we are supposed to love as ourselves, mentioned a member of a despised race and referred to heart of compassion rather than ethical rules.) Any limiting of to whom we take this attitude shows we have not yet this attitude as fully as we should. As with pistic functioning, this applies not only to individuals but to collective, cultural, societal attitudes, which are often constituted as tacit agreement.

Usually pistic and ethical functioning go hand in hand. Thus, in individualistic cultures, our presupposition of the supremacy of the individual makes it easier to allow, agree and encourage selfishness rather than self-giving. This may be why many recent thinkers [e.g. Trainer 2022] call not only for change to economic systems but also a move to a more communal (not communistic) society. Yet the mere call for communality is doomed to fail because it reduces the change needed to the social aspect and ignores mindset and attitude. The link between pistic and ethical is why true repentance almost always leads to willingness to make reparations that are costly to self.

A number of thinkers have discussed the need for this [Carney 2021; = = =] and how it might be achieved [= = =] but the idea of repentance is usually lacking in what they propose, or else deeply hidden.

Whether such change of heart requires radical social nor even political restructuring is open to question, and examples both ways can be found; it is not discussed here because it depends on context.

**Change of culture** (pervading attitude and mindset) cannot be brought about by change of legislation, policies or such structures (juridical change), nor by education, marketing nor better information (lingual change), nor technological

change (formative), nor even economic changes like austerity or prosperity, nor by aesthetic changes like comedy, novels or art, on their own, these aspects precede the ethical and pistic, which is where the problem lies. Take legislation; legislating is not the full answer because (a) some just ignore it and act against it, (b) legislation is often weakened in its content by those whose vested interests would be adversely affected, (c) legislation often expresses current biases, hidden agendas, fashionability, etc. (d) legislation is too often rescinded when it proves a inconvenient, whether among democratic politicians seeking votes or autocratic politicians seeking their own interests. Likewise social norms and economic incentives, whose impact also reduces over time. Education of the young might do a bit better, but education of adults is often resisted as brainwashing. All these occur because of corrupt heart, which cannot be remedied nor prevented by any of these.

To change culture needs **repentance** not just problem-solving. Repentance is a change in the ethical and pistic aspects, which then opens the way for all these pre-ethical changes to take effect too. Ethical change requires a turning from self-centredness, self-protection and a competitive attitude, to self-giving, open and generous attitude. Pistic change requires a shift in what we deem of ultimate importance. To be fully effective, ethical and pistic changes must take place at all levels - individuals, households, companies, nations and even internationally. Such changes set an example that is followed by others, and then others, and yet others too; the mindset and attitude spread. (This may be an insight that Jewish and Christian ideas can contribute, even into secular debate, as discussed in Chapter 3, especially what has been learned from revivals.)

For more, see the discussion of Salvation and Hope and Transforming in Chapter 3, whether or not one adopts a Christian belief. Let those of us who can or wish to do this now. Time is fast running out!

With such changes in culture, all other kinds of change are made more effective; we discuss this next.

### **7-5.6 Integrated Change**

Summary: In economic planning, we need to keep all aspects in mind together.

Beware! There is a tendency to pick and choose actions to suit our perception of limits on resources, guided, usually subliminally by our prejudices and vested interests. That will not work - though it might buy a few votes in democracies or plaudits from senior management. We need to take action in all aspects, and especially the ethical and pistic.

Dooyeweerd maintained that all aspects are equally important and they all aspects cohere, so we need integrated, coordinated, cohesive action in all aspects together. This will integrate incremental change (often meaningful in the earlier aspects) with radical change (often in the final three aspects).

On one hand, none of the changes in pre-ethical aspects will achieve what we need without change in ethical and pistic functioning of attitude and mindset. For example, France legislated some mildly 'green' policies - but the Yellow Vests then rose up against them; the hearts of the people had not yet changed sufficiently. For example, too few affluent countries have admitted "We were wrong!" only "We want to be seen to be doing something."

Once attitude is changed, then the other measures - taxes, subsidies, policy, behavioural methods, education, etc. - can become effective. This is what happened during the Pandemic in most affluent countries: many people believed it

was important and were willing to make what they saw as sacrifices and enjoy it. Such changes may be seen as a 'carrier' for ethical or pistic functioning.

On the other hand, changing attitude of heart without change in all other aspects is mere hypocrisy (important in Christian perspectives). Change in heart must be accompanied by change in action. For example, one of the few issues over which affluent nations have admitted "We were wrong" is slavery - but most are still reluctant to even consider reparations, which would show genuine repentance. (Another, smaller example is repudiation of CFCs in the Montreal Protocol, but that was much easier, requiring very little sacrifice.) For example, should we repent of the presupposition of free Oxygen from Brazilian and Indonesian forests?

Better science or more logical thinking (analytical functioning), better planning or technique or technology (formative), education or marketing (lingual), cooperation or social pressure (social), institutions (social), economic incentives or policy (economic), joined-up thinking (aesthetic) or rules and policies (juridical) are all important, but if soured by dysfunctional attitudes (ethical) or mindsets (pistic), they will ultimately fail. All of those actions are deeply influenced by attitude and mindset. For example, media content and entertainment help shape mindset and attitude, but the existing mindset and attitude of those who own and run media and entertainment companies determines what content they allow, so the media is particularly important in shaping society's mindset.

Only thus may culture be changed in the way that Ted Trainer [2022] and others call for.

### **7-5.7 The Normative Practices Approach**

Summary: The Normative Practice Approach might be a useful tool to guide the actions taken.

The **Normative Practices Approach** [Jochemsen & Glas 1997; Jochemsen 2006; Hoogland = = =] is an attempt to unravel complexity and operationalize the normativity inherent in Dooyeweerd's aspects in engineering projects. Its "practice" refers to professional practice. Developed initially in the complex healthcare context, some of its insights might carry over to (the professional practice of) economics. It enables us to analyse systems in the complex reality of professional practice, to provide new insights for redesign of those systems and offer new concepts [Verkerk et al. 2017]. It gives attention to the "structure", which is the qualitative aspects of a practice, the context, which is the influence of the environment on the practice, and the direction, which is the basic beliefs of those involved. It thus aligns quite well with the approach we have been developing here: complexity, beliefs and normativity. Indeed it has Reformational roots. But, from our point of view, it is concerned only with professional practices and not all of everyday life, so for example could not easily deal with unpaid work, nor with the the "Multi-aspectual Overall" of all that happens because of economics.

However, Verkerk et al. [2017] have developed a version that does recognise what they call "user practices" as well as professional practice, by which they mean the user using the products of that professional practice in everyday life, which takes an important step towards dealing with full everyday experience itself. Verkerk et al. reinterpret structure, context and direction as a Triple-I model: identity and intrinsic values, interests of stakeholders, and ideals and basic beliefs, which can be of those involved in professional practice or user practice. The attention to identity, ideals, values and beliefs aligns with our idea of heart and culture - though they overlook the ethical aspect of selfish versus

self-giving attitude. They make explicit reference to Dooyeweerd's theory of entities, but not of his idea of aspects - though they do name some of them, suggesting that they presuppose the idea of aspects rather than weave the idea of aspects into their model. As a result, though they give some importance to normativity as a generic directional idea, to bridge the traditional Is-Ought divide found in rationalism and utilitarianism, they give no explicit basis for understanding the complex varieties and interplay of good and bad that we find in economics. Nor do they have the idea of Useless activity.

So we can recommend trying to apply the Normative Practices Approach to analyse and redesign in the various economics-oriented professions and maybe also everyday experience, but its use in economics needs to be **researched**.

## 7-6. Some Issues in Economics

Summary: We show how understanding the difference between Good, Harmful and Useless can be applied to various issues in economics.

Several issues common in economics were discussed by the RLDG, applying the perspectives described in Chapter 3 and the ideas developed in these chapters. GDP has been discussed earlier. We discuss several others here, not to offer final commentary but to illustrate how extant issues may be addressed by the ideas in this chapter.

### 7-6.1 Monopoly and Innovation

Summary: = = = = section to be written

Most people believe that monopoly is harmful. But why? What is right and wrong about monopoly? Let us examine various aspects of the functioning of monopoly.

See ze21:

- # review the diverse problems leading to monopoly, incl econ, pis, eth, ling, social, jur aspects.
- # monopoly hinders innovation; buy up patents for good ideas
- # don't like to challenge their market
- # [is it monopoly or bigness?] oligopoly too
- # advantage of large corp, can invest in innovation.
- # [the attitude aspects of monopoly]

### 7-6.2 Competition and Competitiveness

Summary: Competitiveness is a Harm not a Good, and should not be put at the root of the Economy.

By many, **competition** presupposed as good and important yet **competitiveness**, the trying to put oneself above others, is a dysfunction in the ethical aspect of self-giving. Sadly, competitiveness seems to be a primary desideratum in business and economics. Let us lift a cover on competitiveness and competition.

Ironically, Googling "problems of competition" brought up many papers and articles that discuss how to remove hindrances to competition, rather than articles discussing competitiveness as problematic. Competition, it is presumed, guarantees innovativeness and is necessary for economic growth. Threats to competition are seen de-facto as bad and to be prevented almost at all costs. American antitrust legislation is designed to protect and promote competition. Company (or university) management accepts without question being driven by competitiveness against rivals.

But what is the reality? Perhaps surprisingly to many, competition is not so applauded by economists as most assume. It is **harmful** for the environment

[[Porter & van der Linde 1995] and for health [Barros et al. 2015], and other things, because the logic forced upon companies is that they must disregard environmental and other issues in their Spenceristic struggle against their competitors. Competition breeds a culture in which people no longer help each other, e.g. in supporting their advancement. Much management in affluent cultures succumbs to this, despite misgivings among many.

Competition is even often “**suboptimal**” for the Economy itself [Stücke 2013; Deutsch 2006]. Stückle [2013] examines competition from the perspective of Antitrust jurisprudence, designed to prevent barriers to competitiveness, he first reviews some of the supposed virtues of competition, mostly well-known (lowering costs, improving quality, widening choices, stimulating innovation, higher efficiency and productivity, as well as higher-level things like economic growth, and, supposedly, equality, democracy and wellbeing). He then discusses the not-so-known **downsides of competition**. Competitiveness drives firms to exploit weaknesses in customers, escalates bidding and thus increases costs, instils fear of being disadvantaged (e.g. when bidding), leading to illogical, wasteful and harmful decisions. Competitiveness is sub-optimal when individual interests diverge from those of the group or society (and, we add, Multi-aspectual Good), especially in situations of lobbying, encourages lying and misinformation, favouritism, status-seeking and undue risk-taking. It increases the “appeal of materialism” [Fisher 55]. Competitiveness among intermediaries encourages deceit, inflating or distorting assessments of value. As Trainer [2022] puts it,

“The sensible way for humans to go about things is by cooperating. Competition is in general morally undesirable, and in most practical situations it is a wasteful mistake and results in unfair outcomes. A competitive economy is obviously very productive and has powerful incentives for “efficiency” (narrowly defined), and innovation, but it has socially unacceptable consequences, often brutally destructive. The problem with competition is that someone wins...and then takes much more than their fair share. There is clear evidence that in many situations, including education and within organisations, competing is about the worst, most inefficient way to organise things. (Kohn, 1992). When people compete much of their energy goes into thwarting rivals, whereas if they cooperate all their energy can go into finding a mutually beneficial goal. When people compete, one gets the prize and the rest get disappointed and at times jealous and resentful. When competition is the mode, happy, mutually supportive attitudes are not well reinforced. But when people cooperate, goodness multiplies; there is synergism.” [p.137]

Now, Stückle [2013] writes as one who uses economics. Economists themselves, however, are challenged by the **Paradox of Competition**, in which competitiveness eventually undermines itself and even delivers the opposite. Example: A detergent company advertises and increases its sales at the expense of others; they also advertise; in the end, no company benefits, but all reduce their profits because of their expenditure on advertising! Similarly with opening hours, wages, currency devaluations, etc. To a view from the economic aspect alone, this is a paradox, but from a wider, multi-aspectual view, it is no surprise that, ultimately, competition is counterproductive. (Even allowing for economic growth does not ultimately overcome the paradox; not argued here, except to point to the increase in Useless and often Harmful economic activity that occurs.)

The holistic, **multi-aspectual perspective**, with an understanding of repercussions of aspectual (dys)function in various aspects, which this Rethink brings, can help us separate out the benefits and harms of competition. Notice how the lower-level virtues are mostly meaningful in the economic aspect while the problems are meaningful in both economic and other aspects.

It also provides ground for an important distinction often overlooked, between **competition and competitiveness**. Competition is narrowed down in its meaning to being one bulwark against harmful monopolisation, a juridical concern. Competitiveness is an attitude, an ethical dysfunction that retrocipatorily sours and undermines functioning in most other aspects and depends on dysfunction therein.

For example, competitiveness both fosters and depends on deceit (lingual dysfunction), which is sometimes covert rather than overt. What drives competitiveness at the deeper level is often the thrill of achieving (formative aspect) regardless of consequences, and then greed or fear of losing out (both ethical dysfunction), upon which the lower-level virtues are cited merely as justifications. Examining the virtues of competition, we can see that most of them would still accrue with a collaborative or gift economy, where good ethical functioning dominates. The supposed need for competitiveness presupposes the ethical dysfunction of self-interest apparently introduced by Adam Smith, which is ultimately harmful and counterproductive. "To be, is to be in competitiveness" which most presuppose, is "the philosophy of Hell" [Lewis = = , 92].

Even if we allow a narrowly-circumscribed competition to be beneficial as a bulwark against an evil monopolisation, it is not the only bulwark, so it is not essential.

What this implies is that, at the very least, economists and other opinion formers should recognise that a healthy economy *does not* require competition and *should not* encourage competitiveness. Work is underway to devise non-competitive economics, but it is often weakened by not explicitly understanding the ethical and pistic aspects (attitude and mindset). The presupposition of self-interest is false and fruitless, as has already been shown in our discussion of Adam Smith.

**Research project:** However, the above ideas are only initial. They need working out more precisely. Rethink competition and competitiveness via aspectual functioning and its good and harmful presuppositions, especially taking account of the ethical and pistic aspects.

>[Does this topic needs better treatment? How?]

### 7-6.3 Trickle-Down Economics

Summary: Trickle-Down Economics, that money made available to the wealthy ends up helping the poor, is argued for or against. Instead, we try to understand the deeper reasons why it does not currently work well, but might have some validity. This is a worked example of the above thinking.

= = = = this is an early version; it requires rearranging and shortening, and talking about attitude reasons.

What some call Trickle-Down Economics refers to money being made available to wealthy people metaphorically eventually trickling down to the poor. It is "made available" (supply-side) usually by government subsidies or cutting taxes. Supporters of Trickle-Down Economics argue that it encourages investments, which provides more jobs for 'the poor'. The idea is obviously favoured by most wealthy people and by those who dislike government taxes or impositions, to shield themselves from left-wing accusations of injustice to the poor. The word "trickle-down" is pejorative, coined by those who criticise it. We want to get beneath the pejorativity, to understand what is happening, and when it is harmful and when it is valid, and why.

There have been times when Trickle-Down Economics seems to have worked, such as the Reagan era, but most of the time it fails in fact. The main left-wing criticism of Trickle-Down Economics, however, is weak because it rests on the presupposition of money as owned commodity (“I should have as much money as you”), which is discussed in Chapter 8, and is weakened by the fact of money as flow (money flows to the poor), which Trickle-Down Economics recognises. There are **stronger and more fundamental reasons** why it fails: one relating to aspects, one relating to attitude-mindset around it, and one that it instils a negative attitude in society.

Almost all of the arguments among economists over *whether* Trickle-Down Economics works or not, are in terms, concepts and rationalities meaningful in the economic aspect, usually failing to properly consider *why* these effects occur.

The *why* involves multi-aspectual functioning, in which the economic functioning is an expression in that aspect of functioning in other aspects, but those other aspects are not explicitly considered. Consider the following. Supporters refer to the Laffer Curve, which plots the amount of income governments would obtain against the rates of tax they impose, obviously zero for 0% tax, also zero for 100% tax because (they assume) nobody would work, but some in between, with a peak at some tax rate. It has been pointed out [Amadeo 2021a] that Laffer failed to give numbers for this, so it remains a motivating idea more than a useful tool for economic planning. That is all that can be seen via the single lens of the economic aspect. However, in reality, even with 100% tax, some might still work, because we like working (formative and aesthetic aspects) and like benefiting others (ethical aspect). These are reasons that are not visible through the lens of the economic aspect, but only via the lenses of other aspects.

Likewise, opponents argue only in terms of the economic aspect, for example, “Cutting taxes for the wealthy often does not translate to increased rates of employment, consumer spending, and government revenues in the long term” [Amadeo 2021b] and “The actions of a government don’t take place in isolation. There are other factors that impact what companies and wealthy individuals will do with their capital, such as interest rates and the propensity to save” [Cattln 2022]. But *why* does tax-cutting not “translate”, *why* is there a propensity to save, and what determines interest rates? The answers involve factors like trust, fear, herd instinct, assumptions and aspirations, which are meaningful in the social, aesthetic, ethical and pistic aspects. (Actually, opponents do bring in a version of the juridical aspect, as in “The added income for the wealthy, resulting from tax cuts, will simply increase the growing income inequality” [Amadeo 2021b] but it is a thin version [See Inequality.]

Most arguments resting on a one-dimensional understanding from the perspective of the economic aspect are limited, failing to align with practical reality, and misleading policy-making and planning. Instead, seeing economics as “embedded” among other spheres, meaningful in other aspects, allows us to ask “Why?” and “What else?” questions, such as “What else occurs at 100% tax rate?” “Why is it that cutting taxes for the wealthy often does not achieve what is promised?” Answering such questions is necessary for a full understanding. Various components of our Rethink suggests the following reasons why Trickle-Down Economics cannot work.

[ = = = = this para to go before the three flaws?] We **critique Trickle-Down Economics** in terms of its contribution to Multi-aspectual Overall Good, asking what Good, Harmful or Useless economic activity is enabled by < “#s-umny = = = ” > money at each of its steps. Resourcing the poor is usually Good economic activity, i.e. contributing to Multi-aspectual Good (in the biotic aspect

of keeping alive, the juridical aspect of justice, and maybe in the ethical aspect of care). That money eventually trickles down to the poor is thus a Good. Investment might also be a Good (in the formative aspect of innovation and industry) but this depends on what is invested in (i.e. the target aspect of the formative functioning), and this might be Harmful or Useless rather than, or as well as, Good. Moreover, the human functioning most directly enabled by the availability of money might itself be Harmful.

Therefore, Trickle-Down Economics might yield Harm rather than Good (which of course is not recognised in GDP) - and even in economic terms, markets often react to harm. Yielding harm is more likely among the wealthy, because their attitude is often "unconcerned" or "arrogant" [Ezekiel 16:49], dysfunctioning in the ethical and pistic aspects. (A Christian perspective also suggests the wealthy are further from what God intended because camels cannot get through eyes of needles.)

Perhaps for similar reasons, the first step of Trickle-Down Economics (the money made available to the wealthy) often yields Useless economic functioning instead of Good. It is only after several steps that it trickles down to those who will use the money received for more Good functioning, such as keeping alive or helping others. In such cases, the contribution to Multi-aspectual Good is delayed rather than direct.

However, there is an exception, *Effective Altruism*, such as McGaskell's *Giving What We Can*, in which billionaires give their money away in a way that directly does Good. Those who want to battle over *whether* Trickle-Down Economics is goody or baddy can argue the finer points of how much altruism actually goes on, but we will not do so. Our concern would rather be over how to take account of structural issues, such as why there is a need for altruism in the first place, which are concerns about structures and attitudes that pervade society.

Yet again, we must highlight the importance of attitude: the ethical functioning that pervades society as either selfish or self-giving attitude, and the pistic functioning of what society tends to belief, commit to, aspire to, expect and assume - in short, what it worships. If all our attitudes were perfect, then it is likely that Trickle-Down Economics would work well to bring Multi-aspectual Good, but because they are not, it fails to do so. Even more, the emphasis on making money available to those already wealthy does itself give a certain 'message' that exacerbates self-centredness and idolatry.

Instead of taking sides over Trickle-Down Economics, we try to understand it, and find that, in the present era, it usually is more Harmful than Good. It is interesting that some advocate Middle-Out Economics, in which money is made available to middle-earners, which then 'trickles' both up and down. Such people are, arguably, less likely to take so brazenly a self-centred and idolatrous attitude, and also mean that there are fewer steps that delay eventual Good.

## **7-7. Conclusions on Good, Harmful and Useless Economic Activity**

Summary: = = = = section to be written

# Every aspect, and its impact on and from the economic aspect, becomes an indispensable part of economics.

# Aspects help us understand Harmful and Useless economic activity in different ways. Harm: aspects as value of repercussions; Useless: aspects as functioning.

# rrefer back to 7-2.1 Limitations in Much Current Thinking

This chapter concerns itself with two things that prevent or dilute economic activity from contributing to Multi-aspectual Overall Good:

- ◆ Harmful economic activity, which depletes and destroys Good, and in terms of which we differentiate three types of economic activity:
  - » Generative activity that generates new Good;
  - » Destructive activity that generates Harm;
  - » Restorative activity, which is heals and restores after Harm is done.
- ◆ Useless economic activity, which dilutes, displaces and diverts human effort from Multi-aspectual Overall Good, and which tend to bloat economies of affluent cultures, of which we discussed two types:
  - » Unproductivity, which is a waste of human effort in the process of generating or restoring Good;
  - » Non-essentials, which are goods and services that are not really necessary but superfluous.

# Why hadn't we understood the harm that was being done? Because it wasn't meaningful to economists or others.

# We are not used to thinking GHU, so we will have to learn, and learn through experience, including making mistakes. [scrap-221203]

# Here We have been able to distinguish Harm from Good because (a) we have identified aspects that are inherently normative, (b) we see economics as functioning in these aspects rather than as merely concerned with entities like capital.

- » Why our approach might be feasible in principle.
  - challenge: huge effort to evaluate all in each aspect
  - feasible because we as humanity already do that effort for GDP, but it is accepted and distributed among business reporting, tax returns, etc.

The examples in this chapter demonstrate how Dooyeweerd's aspects can help us tease apart the various components of each side of the argument, so we can think more carefully and perhaps more deeply, and lay things bare. They are NOT to be taken as an actual comment on the situation, because I know too little about it, and of course the following probably shows something of my biases, but it is an example of the **process of aspectual analysis**.

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17 July 2023 rearranging. 18 July 2023 Concerns; Conflation. 20 July 2023 first few sects; conflation and GH mix. 21 July 2023 tips; causes of useless. 22 July 2023 causes; more on Useless. 24 July 2023 tips for assessing Useless. 25 July 2023 Planning. 4 August 2023 lots edits --- printed. 7 August 2023 ballpk figures. 8 August 2023 Planning, rid GDP. 10 August 2023 better

on competn. 15 August 2023 edits. 16 August 2023 more. 17 August 2023 aspanal. 21 August 2023 intro, 19 September 2023 Harm rw. 20 September 2023 two Hm2econ merged; completed (K) of 230821. 22 September 2023 competitiveness. 23 September 2023 dealt with some = = = = . 25 September 2023 ed Useless; list Bullshit. 26 September 2023 rw Non-ess challenge; some = = = = . 28 September 2023 summary's. 29 September 2023 headings; ----- uploaded. 14 October 2023 correction. 26 October 2023 Gal 5:19. 26 October 2023 David Hurst Gal 5:19. 27 October 2023 equilb model. 28 October 2023 SUTables explan. 30 October 2023 bits. 16 November 2023 veblen, some rw ness and WhyOccurs. 30 November 2023 MINW section from ze26. 20 December 2023 Goodwin. 30 January 2024 saving as ec soln. 9 February 2024 MAOG. 22 February 2024 p-usia unscrupulous; s + s quote; para on and link to s + s. 21 March 2024 examples beyond Western. 22 March 2024 addiction lowers productivity. 26 March 2024 Carney quote. 15 May 2024 convce rw; company accounts. 16 May 2024 Blood contam greed; bloated slogan. 28 June 2024 rw econ planning o asps. 15 August 2024 resch for GDP. 26 September 2024 expand ineff. of education etc. 31 October 2024 relabel ref. 7 November 2024 Tainted blood scandal. 13 November 2024 bit fr r6. 14 November 2024 budgets stretched by non-essentials. 14 January 2025 rw intro, corrected wee. 24 January 2025 link corrected. 31 January 2025 how und eth, pis can help shed light. 10 February 2025 democr. right to laziness pistic. 12 February 2025 holidays. 21 March 2025 added bits into Competition. 14 April 2025 intro. 15 April 2025 began rw 7-1. 16 April 2025 more §7-1 (a); done ---upl (b). 28 April 2025 intro non-ess. 2 May 2025 Redid 7-3.5 challenges. 3 May 2025 edited new 7-3.5; edits from start. 6 May 2025 bits. 7 May 2025 editing. 9 May 2025 corrected pix; Probs of useless ed. concl summary; causes of unprod. 12 May 2025 ed what is unprod. Began noness. 13 May 2025 non-ess litr. 14 May 2025 noness articles. 16 May 2025 noness better, causes (a),(b),(c). 17 May 2025 edited non-essentials; ed intro; pix corrected; ----- uploaded. 19 May 2025 link n-math; n-gvsh, Sedlacek; elephants. 21 May 2025 moved unsustainability of noness to Useless Problematic. 22 May 2025 Kallis; tidy up noness. 26 May 2025 Mazz on unprod causes; assess. 27 May 2025 sorting out causes Useless. 28 May 2025 some on assessment.

30 May 2025: began to rearrange, so assessments come into Harm and Useless, and the overall UK measure is moved early; philosophical difference btw assessing Useless and Harmful; tips on id useless. 31 May 2025 edited action. 2 June 2025 sorting out where I got to, and edit assess jur,eth,pis (a); filled in aspectual actions (b); ed tips (c). 3 June 2025 index + gdp (a) ----- printed, uploaded (b). 5 June 2025 edits. 6 June 2025 edits. 9 June 2025 footprint; edits. 10 June 2025 NPA; SUTables. 11 June 2025 near-final edits re. planning etc. apart from tidying up; final edits. 12 June 2025 correcting links. 13 June 2025 fontsizes; dealt with most = = = = . 14 June 2025 summaries; some = = = = ; refces to r.html; some = = = refs found; pdf link; headings; ----- printed, pdf, upl.