

Wants and needs in the context of climate change

**How Gewirth's account of basic human rights and
Nussbaum's list of capabilities specify the threshold of sufficiency.**

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“No one owns the water.
No one owns the land.
No one owns the oceans.
No one owns the sands.
These were given by our mother
The planet provides for free.
Only by the hands of the greedy,
does the earth require a fee.”
- *Poet Christopher*

Abstract. The distinction between wants and needs is significant for the debate about climate change, distinguished theoretically using sufficientarianism, it demonstrates the moral relevance of securing enough of some goods (needs) but not of others (wants). Satisfying more than is needed at the expense of others is unjust, certainly when others fall below the threshold. In the context of climate change this notion has intergenerational implications. The sufficiency threshold as specified by Nussbaum’s list of capabilities, aimed at human development, promotes freedom to choose between different achievements of capabilities, but requires limitations on the manner and degree of achieving capabilities. Gewirth’s account of basic human rights demands rights for all agents. Prioritizing the more necessary goods and rights, conflicts between rights should be resolved with consideration for justice. His account proves to be well suited to specify a sustainable sufficiency threshold in the context of climate change. Needs are essential to the human life, wants are not. A more sustainable way of satisfying both needs to be adopted and the fulfilment of wants may be limited or prohibited for the sake of future generations and intergenerational justice.

Keywords: climate change, needs/wants distinction, sufficientarianism, human rights, intergenerational justice, environmental justice, sustainability, capabilities approach.

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Introduction

In 2007, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was formed, their rapport concluded, roughly, that climate change has significantly harmful effects on human health and welfare and that climate change can be attributed largely to human activity, such as the emission of greenhouse gasses. The convention was aimed at creating legal grounds to prevent further, dangerous, human interference with the environment (UNFCCC, 2007, 3-4). Since then, the Paris Agreement (2017), which builds upon the United Nations Convention, has been formed in an attempt to slow down the Earth's rising temperature along with other effects of climate change and to strengthen the abilities of countries to battle the effects of climate change. Both the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement are important steps forward to combat climate change which is, at the very least, among the biggest, if not the biggest threat to humanity in the 21st century.

The European Commission for Climate Action, like the UNFCC, states that human activity is a leading cause of the increase in concentrations of several greenhouse gases.¹ This increase in emissions is due to several acts. Firstly, as a consequence of the burning of coal, oil and gas which produces carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide. Secondly, deforestation which allows for less trees to absorb CO₂ from the Earth's atmosphere. Thirdly, due to an increase in the farming of livestock. The commission also states that leading climate scientists believe human activities are, almost certainly, the main cause of global warming, a claim also stated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014).

Concerning the consequences of climate change, massive losses are estimated to arise from climate change. Climate change is very likely to have a detrimental impact on agricultural systems leading to worldwide malnutrition and certainly to famine in less developed countries. Moreover, as a result of rising sea levels, people will need to relocate in great numbers, forcing them to leave behind all that they have and start over somewhere else. Globally, as weather will continue to change more drastically, storms in different degrees of intensity will disrupt the lives of many.

Climate change is a complicated problem because it is a global phenomenon that needs global action to solve it and because it affects both current and future generations, which creates difficulties for battling the problem which requires a solution for intergenerationally conflicting rights.

¹ Namely : carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases. CO₂ is responsible for 64% of man-made global warming, methane for 17% and nitrous oxide for 6% (IPCC, 2014).

I will not defend the claim that future people have rights. Rather, given the extensive research already conducted on this subject, I will take it as a given that they do, and hope that readers will accept the claim that future people are legitimate claimholders of basic human rights, that they have an interest in living a good life free from unnecessary harms and dangers. Variations of this claim have been defended by numerous philosophers who have provided arguments in favour of it and have successfully refuted arguments made by those who believe, for varying reasons, that future people's interests should not be taken into account.²

Given the causes and consequences of climate change, I find the idea that people have the right to satisfy their needs but that they may have to give up (some of) their wants, compelling. The satisfaction of wants, insofar as it negatively impacts climate change may be a luxury that falls outside the scope of things people should have a right to (do). This idea has brought me to my research question: *What, in the context of climate change, are needs and wants?* I will take sufficientarianism as the theoretical explanation of the distinction between needs and wants, and propose two approaches to specify the threshold. Namely Alan Gewirth's account of basic human rights and Martha Nussbaum's list of capabilities. As such bringing me to the question: which of the two is better suited for the specification of a threshold of sufficiency in the context of climate change. I will argue that the application of Gewirth's account is the preferable option for my specific purposes, specifying the threshold just high enough to be sustainable and respect needs intergenerationally. I hope my arguments and conclusions will contribute to the debate about climate change mitigation by offering an alternative view on rights and corresponding responsibilities.

To answer my research question I will start, in the first chapter, by setting out the principle of sufficiency. While also addressing the most important criticisms I will make a case for sufficientarianism, not to defend it as a comprehensive ethical theory but as the theoretical explanation of the distinction between wants and needs, specifically in the context of climate change. I shall argue that people's needs and wants are fundamentally and morally different and it is on the basis of this difference and the implications thereof, that I write this thesis. The reason for this is my conviction that by satisfying personal desires, current and past generations frustrate the ability of future people to satisfy their needs.

The next step then, is asserting what it is that people do and do not need. As

² See (amongst others) : Bos (2016), Düwell (2014), Düwell & Bos (2016), Gaillard (2016), Grosserries & Meyers (2012), Meijboom (2016), Meijers (2016), Mulgan (2017), Philips (2015), Riley (2016), Risse (2012), Shue (1996)

aforementioned, I have chosen two moral views, firstly Gewirth's account of basic human rights, and secondly Nussbaum's list of capabilities, based on the capabilities approach formulated by Amartya Sen, to specify the threshold. I will present the views concisely and establish how they may distinguish between wants and needs, using their accounts to specify a sufficiency threshold, doing so in conjunction with other concerns such as global, but especially intergenerational justice (Caney, 2012, 259). Adopting, what Caney (2012) calls, a Method of Integration, treating "climactic responsibilities in light of a general account of global justice." (259). Furthermore, my focus on individual responsibilities, regarding people as opposed to states as having certain moral rights, means I thereby also adopt an individualist position, as opposed to a statist approach (Caney, 2012, 260-261).

The reason for choosing Gewirth as the first proposal for the specification of the sufficiency threshold is that his is one of the most theoretically based, extensively justified accounts of human rights. Throughout his work, he has paid great attention to what it is that humans need and formulated a rational, fundamental principle of equal and universal human rights.

The second proposal for the specification of the sufficiency threshold is the capabilities approach. This approach focusses on human development and takes into account that people have different abilities of converting resources into actions, or capabilities. Since its formulation, the capabilities approach has been influential in human development theories. The two views will provide different perceptions of human needs and wants and will thus specify the threshold of sufficiency, which I will also refer to as the threshold of enough, in different ways. The first part of every chapter will cover the theoretical aspects of each view and discuss some criticisms. The last part of each contains an analysis of how they specify the threshold.

In the fourth and last chapter I will compare the different specifications of the sufficiency threshold. I will conclude that although Nussbaum may, at first, seem the more appropriate choice, Gewirth proves to be better suited to explicate the sufficiency threshold, especially in the context of climate change because of the way he prescribes how conflicting rights should be resolved.

1. Sufficiencyarianism

Introduction

As aforementioned, climate change is a critical issue, the effects of which have severe consequences for the earth's environment and thus for the lives of those who inhabit her currently and in the future. The aim and idea of defining a threshold is that defining what people need to live a good life, all that they need in order to do so, must be safeguarded, for all generations. Those things people do not need (to do), the things they want (to do) that go above the threshold and which impact climate change even further can have significant consequences for the fulfilment of future people's needs. Satisfying wants, acquiring more than is needed insofar as it frustrates other's needs, I will argue, is morally impermissible.

In this chapter I shall explain what the principle of sufficiency, or sufficiencyarianism, holds. As such, explaining the difference between wants and needs, as the sufficiency threshold is where these are distinguished, differentiating between the moral significance of securing enough of some goods but not of others. I will argue for the validity of using this view in the context of climate change, also defending it against some of the main criticisms laid against it in the past. I will then explain the principles and features of this view. I will describe the conflict that arises between generations because of the risk climate change poses to future people, requiring limitations of certain freedoms of current generations.

1.1 Sufficiencyarianism

In 1987, Harry Frankfurt introduced the principle of Sufficiency as an alternative to egalitarianism. Egalitarianism, Frankfurt believed, was based on the idea that economic inequality is, in itself, unacceptable and that people, generally, thought it evident that some people having (a lot) more than others is morally undesirable. Frankfurt had a different idea, namely that inequality in itself is not necessarily bad, but rather, the thing that he, and he supposed many others, thought to be immoral is that in cases where one speaks of economic inequality, the immorality resides not in some having less than others but in some having too little, not enough (Frankfurt, 1987, 32).

Frankfurt, therefore, argued that (economic) equality, morally speaking, is of less importance.³ More important, morally, is that people have enough. He believed, and I agree, that if everyone would have enough to meet their basic needs to live a good life, it would be of no, or I would say less, moral consequence whether some had more or less than others. This alternative to egalitarianism is what he refers to as ‘the doctrine of sufficiency’, which I will also refer to as Sufficiency (Frankfurt, 1987, 32). This is not to say that equality is an undesirable goal. Frankfurt states that the claim that “equality in itself lacks moral importance does not entail that equality is to be avoided.” (Frankfurt, 1987, 22). Certainly, an egalitarian social policy may very well be important to promoting the ability of everyone to live a good life, i.e. being able to enjoy significant goods. In fact, Frankfurt states, it could be true that the best way to achieve sufficiency is through a policy of equality (Frankfurt, 1987, 22).

This difference between having the same or having enough is especially relevant for issues of climate change and duties and rights connected to climate change mitigation. An acceptable and effective strategy for limiting further harm to the environment should, in my opinion, not aim to ensure future generations have, or can enjoy, the same (goods) as current and past generations do and have had, rather, that future generations can secure enough of certain goods to live a good life.

1.2 Moral relevance of equality and sufficiency

What goods and the amount of goods others have, has bearing on how people value their own lives. People may perceive themselves as relatively poor, while they have enough of what they need. This feeling, at least in part, is subsequent to others having more. Morally speaking, this does not bear much meaning. Indeed, Frankfurt states, the comparison is not important, or, I would say, at least not morally relevant. The level of inequality is only important “as it pertains contingently to other interests.” (Frankfurt, 1987, 32). What this means, I believe, is that inequality only matters, morally, when the inequality also has bearing on the enjoyment of other factors in life. People should be free and able to pursue their goals, whether in the form of economic ambitions or otherwise. These goals, and in fact the goods people need to achieve them in order to live their life, come from an intrinsic desire, or a universal need for them. Desires created through external factors (such as others having

³ Note that where I refer to sufficiency or equality of goods, while referring to monetary goods as an easy and coherent example, the sufficiency principle also applies to other goods that people need, such as physical and mental health, general well-being, family and friends, safety, access to food and clean drinking water, education and so on. Any arguments for economic sufficiency, therefore, also apply to other aspects of life needed for people to live a good life.

more), hinder people's ability to appreciate their lives and render them less able or incapable to understand what really matters to them, it interferes with their ability to realise their own needs. "In this way the doctrine of equality contributes to the moral disorientation and shallowness of our time." (Frankfurt, 1987, 23). The point he makes here, and it is a point well-taken, is that people seem to be unable to cherish and value what they have, instead, they have an immeasurable and, I would add, irrational and insatiable craving for goods they do not have and often, do not need but simply, desire. Egalitarianism, it seems then, is not the answer. At least not for the debate concerning climate change.

I tend to agree with Frankfurt, sufficientarianism seems a morally compelling option and certainly relevant in the context of climate change. The moral significance of everyone having enough seems greater than everyone having the same or equal shares (of something). Even if everyone had the same amount of, say, potatoes, but that amount would be insufficient to sustain a healthy diet, than the fact that everyone is, at least, equal, does not make anyone better off. Making sure everyone has enough, even though some may have more than others, makes everyone, at least, 'well-enough-off'. Now, I do admit this may be a simple line of thought, and the example could also have been that everyone has equal amounts of potatoes and that that amount were in fact enough, rendering this example meaningless. However, making sure everyone is (absolutely) equal, meaning everyone has equal shares of what they need, seems unrealistic, to say the least. Because sufficientarianism seems to focus more on what people need, rather than what they, rationally or irrationally, want, I find it can provide an interesting outlook on the issue of climate change and how it might be dealt with. The following section will address some advantages to the theory as opposed to egalitarianism.

1.3 Why Sufficientarianism and why not egalitarianism

In this section I will not only discuss sufficientarianism, but also egalitarianism because Frankfurt presented the doctrine of sufficiency, which holds that what matters morally is that everyone has enough, as an alternative to the egalitarian ideal. Therefore, I feel it is important to consider the arguments against egalitarianism and to pay attention to Frankfurt's reasons for rejecting the theory of egalitarianism. Through this, it will also become clearer why sufficientarianism may be the better alternative in the case of climate change.

A disadvantage to the doctrine of sufficiency is that it is unclear what, specifically, constitutes as needs and wants, a distinction that is much needed. Frankfurt does not provide a clear answer on what people should have enough of. This difficulty does not imply the theory should be abandoned, rather, what is needed as Frankfurt proposes, is a "systematic inquiry

into the analytical and theoretical issues raised by the concept of having enough, the importance of which egalitarianism has masked.”(Frankfurt, 1987, 24).

The arguments for equality, Frankfurt states, have no “attribution to equality of any unequivocally inherent moral value.”(Frankfurt, 1987, 25). These arguments come in a number of ways. Firstly, that maintaining good relations among citizens in a shared society is desirable and that equality is indispensable for the realisation of these relationships. Secondly, an argument for equality could be formed in lines with the idea that economic inequality leads to gaps between social groups and results in a misbalance in political influence or even that it infringes upon people’s ability to realise their capabilities. But, these arguments fail to prove that equality has intrinsic value, rather, what they show is that equality has a derivative value. I feel it is important to stress that equality is, in fact, important. Equality is an essential social good. However, its value is derivative, equality is important “in virtue of its contingent connections to other things” (Frankfurt, 1987, 25).

A better argument for the intrinsic importance of equality “is based upon the principle of diminishing marginal utility.” (Frankfurt, 1987, 25). This argument is used in an attempt to link economic equality to the maximization of aggregate utility. It presupposes that (a) there is a certain threshold where the value of an extra euro or dollar diminishes, and that (b) the utility provided by or derivable from a certain amount of money is the same for everyone. To illustrate *a*; giving a millionaire ten euros has, to the millionaire, very little (additional) value. In contrast, giving a begging child in India ten euros, or the equivalent of ten euros in rupees, is very valuable to that child and possibly his or her entire family. So far, this argument seems convincing. Frankfurt however, begs to differ, he believes both *a* and *b* to be false because people have different capabilities to enjoy different goods, people may have mental or physical health problems and people’s ability to utilise goods vary. This notion is also an important feature of the capabilities approach, which I discuss in chapter 3.

Frankfurt (1987) claims he believes it is a mistake to think that it is always wrong for some people to have more than others in cases where others have less than enough (31). To illustrate this point, consider the following example; say there is only enough food for nine out of ten people to meet their minimally required caloric intake. According to Frankfurt’s claim, it would be wrong to think of those nine people doing something wrong or immoral, to think that this situation, where some have more than others but no more than they need, is immoral. That is not to say it is not wrong for that one person to die of starvation, which indeed, it is. But this is wrong, independent of the other nine people having enough not to die. Frankfurt uses this as an argument against egalitarianism. However, I believe, the claim also

holds in support of Sufficiencyarianism in cases of scarcity, where there is not enough to pull people above a threshold so they have enough. If this claim is true we must, as Frankfurt (1987) does, bite the unpleasant bullet, so to speak, and conclude that, while it is terrible for people to die of hunger, or any other (preventable) cause, it may be worse, if there is no way to improve or was no way to prevent the situation, to starve for a longer period of time rather than a shorter period of time, to not prolong the agony of starvation (31).

So far, I have discussed people having equal shares, having enough and more or less than others. I would now like to move on to the following claim that “no one should have more than enough while anyone has less than enough.” (Frankfurt, 1987, 32). This claim is made on the presumption, which Frankfurt believes to be false, that giving resources to people who do not have enough, who need those resources, makes them better off. The mistake in this claim, I agree with Frankfurt, is that giving people more does not make them significantly better off if they still have too little. Again, what we should strive for is getting people across the threshold because that will make them well-off, not simply less worse off. Once again, this is an important claim in the case of climate change and climate change mitigation, what we need to strive for is not a little less climate change or some degree of climate change mitigation. Future generations should not have to experience slightly less global warming, or some degree of sea-level rise if it still endangers their livelihood, certainly when those dangers are consequences of the satisfaction of people’s wants, rather than their needs.

1.4 What is enough in the doctrine of sufficiency?

In the doctrine of sufficiency, enough means meeting a certain standard, a threshold. Frankfurt mainly argues for economic sufficiency but his claims, and mine, as aforementioned, also apply to welfare, opportunity, respect, health and satisfaction of other needs (Frankfurt, 1987, 22). The sufficiency claim, I believe, applies to the needs people have that are imperative for them to live a good life. If a person has enough safety, the person cannot make claims of dissatisfaction about their life regarding safety. Thus, if a person has, or can objectively be said to have, enough safety, nutrition or health (or indeed some other good), more will (generally) not contribute to a higher quality of life (Frankfurt, 1987, 38).

Additionally, not everyone will make an effort to maximize their quality of life. Frankfurt concludes that it is irrational for anyone to refuse to maximize their quality of life (1987, 40). I agree with Frankfurt, more importantly, I am convinced that people may know what they want but not what they really need and as such are unable to express their needs

and will not attempt to satisfy them as a consequence of lack of knowledge and insight, not because the need is any less urgent, this idea is also expressed by Korolev (2015, 27).

1.5 Shields, criticisms and the prospect for Sufficiency

So far I have argued for Sufficiency as a viable option for achieving (intergenerational) environmental justice. I now wish to elaborate further on different versions of this theory and some important criticisms against sufficiency. That is why I turn to Liam Shields who has aimed to clarify some of the main claims of sufficiency principles and has refuted some of the most important criticisms against sufficientarian principles.

Sufficiency principles have been met with a number of criticisms. Some of the objections to which they are vulnerable are firstly, that they are implausible because they sometimes require benefiting the better-off by small amounts rather than benefiting the worse-off by large amounts. The second reason people object to sufficiency is that they believe this principle to be indifferent to objectionable inequalities. Thirdly, sufficiency principles are said to appeal to a threshold when no such threshold can be specified in a non-arbitrary and unambiguous manner. Shields, however, believes the main criticisms can be avoided. How he arrives at this conclusion and which criticisms he refutes will be the focus of the following section.

Shields states there are two main versions of the sufficiency principle, The Headcount Claim and the Negative Thesis, which I will both discuss.

Firstly, the Headcount Claim, which some sufficiency principles express, holds that “we should maximize the number of people who secure enough.” (Shields, 2012, 103). This claim entails that distribution is assessed “only in terms of the number of people who have secured enough in each distribution.” (Shields, 2012, 103). This means trying to make people, who have not yet reached the threshold, better off without thereby ‘pulling’ them across the threshold, has no significance for the assessment of the distribution. An important criticism against this claim is The Excessive Upward Transfers Objection, which states that “sufficiency principles are implausible because, amongst those below the threshold, they require benefiting the better-off by tiny amounts at the expense of large benefits to the worse-off.” (Shields, 2012, 102). This claim, in other words, is aimed at getting as many people across a certain threshold, which sounds as an admirable moral ideal. However, what this objection is based on is the idea that it is wrong to benefit someone who is close to the threshold, the ‘better-off’, at the expense of others who are in greater need, in order to get a higher ‘head-count’, while others who are further below the threshold are worse-off and thus

in greater need.

Secondly, The Negative Thesis, holds that “once everyone has secured enough, no distributive criteria apply to benefits (though wholly aggregative criteria may apply).” (Shields, 2012, 103). An objection to versions of the Negative Thesis is what Shields terms The Indifference Objection, which states that “sufficiency principles are implausible because they are objectionably indifferent to inequalities once everyone has secured enough.” (Shields, 2012, 104). This objection is based on the assumption that sufficiency principles are indifferent to policies or situations where the worse-off bear greater costs (in the form of taxes or duties for example), than the better-off and the only way to avoid this objection is by setting the threshold extremely high. However, setting the bar, or threshold, higher than necessary, apart from rendering it far more difficult to make sure everyone has enough, also no longer has anything to do with sufficiency, this is an important reason for which Nussbaum’s list of capabilities is not particularly suitable for the specification of the threshold, which I will discuss in sections 3.4 and 4.1.1.

In the following section I will explain why the indifference objection does not hold.

1.6 Sufficiency principles

Shields restates a thesis noted by Paula Casal who defined The Positive Thesis: “it is important that people live above a certain threshold, free from deprivation.” (Shields, 2012, 105). The positive thesis, as opposed to the negative thesis, avoids the vulnerability to the indifference objection mentioned above. Shields stresses that sufficiency principles must make claims about the importance of securing enough for people, if not, sufficiency principles would be meaningless, empty. Therefore, sufficiency principles “must also state that securing ‘enough’ is a non-instrumentally weighty demand. Sufficiency principles are dispensable if securing enough is *only* important as a means to meet the demands of purely aggregative, egalitarian or prioritarions principles.” (Shields, 2012, 106). Formulated this way, sufficiency principles seem significant for securing people’s basic rights, in the sense that, without having sufficient, people would be deprived of that which they need to live their life. The restated Positive Thesis, Shields therefore proposes, is this; “We have weighty non-instrumental reasons to secure at least enough of some good(s).” (Shields, 2012, 106).

Therefore, Shields proposes a weaker version of the negative thesis, termed The Diminution Thesis, which holds that “once people have secured enough our reasons to benefit them further are weaker.” (Shields, 2012, 107). This thesis allows sufficiency principles to avoid the indifference objection because there is still reason to benefit the worst-off or the

worse-off even when they have secured enough. Furthermore, this thesis is in line with claims from prioritarrians, in whose view duties to further benefit people become less important as the beneficiary becomes better-off,. The important difference is that for sufficientarians the motivation is getting people across a threshold, whereas, for prioritarrians, prioritizing the least well-off is the main concern.

Shields rejects this thesis for two reasons, firstly because it is not a necessary claim of sufficiency principles, secondly, the thesis is incompatible with the sufficientarian view in which, once everyone has secured enough, an equal distribution of goods is warranted, whereas for prioritarrians, the priority will always remain those who are least-well of, no matter how well-off they are, regardless, in other words, of whether they have sufficient (Shields, 2012, 108). This shift in importance of duties, or importance of benefitting people once they have crossed the threshold is what distinguishes prioritarianism from sufficientarianism, formally expressed in what Shields terms The Shift Thesis: “once people have secured enough there is a discontinuity in the rate of change of the marginal weight of our reasons to benefit them further.” (Shields, 2012, 108). However, not all sufficientarians agree with the idea that such a shift exists. Some advocate for an egalitarian distribution once everyone has secured enough, others for a continuing diminishment of priority (Shields, 2012, 109).

Concluding, Shields holds that the *positive thesis* and the *shift thesis* “comprise the minimum claims of any distinctive sufficiency principle.” (Shields, 2012, 110). These claims combined can avoid the important criticisms such as the indifference objection, even once everyone has secured enough, there is still reason to benefit people further, rendering the indifference objection less important or even invalid. The excessive upward transfers objection can also be rendered invalid or, at the very least, of less significance because the worse-off below the threshold are prioritised within the positive thesis.

1.7 Features of sufficiency principles

According to Shields, sufficiency principles must contain certain features to be plausible. Moreover, I believe these features also clearly distinguish needs from wants.

Firstly, reasons for supporting the shift thesis (the claim that once people have secured enough, the importance of benefitting them further change or shift), must be non-instrumental, meaning that, that which people ought to have enough of is intrinsically important.

Secondly, it must be possible for the demands that follow from the proposed principles to be completely met. In addition; the principles cannot be met ‘more’. In other words, they

could not be “satisfied to a higher degree.” (Shields, 2012, 113).

Thirdly, the right threshold level must be established. The threshold must not be so low as to leave the sufficiency principle empty; although everyone could be considered above the threshold, they would still not have enough. However, the threshold must also not be too high, even though those above it would certainly live good lives. In both cases, justice is absent, and it is just that, which sufficiency principles aim to secure; justice. Thus, the height of the threshold must be specified in terms of justice.

Fourthly, the reasons for securing enough of some goods but not of others must be significantly weighty, thereby differentiating between the importance of needs and wants (Shields, 2012, 113).

1.8 Conflict between rights

When sufficientarianism is applied intergenerationally its implication is twofold: it imposes a limit to people’s freedoms, especially those of current generations; it limits what they are allowed to do. These limitations follow from the second implication; namely, that future generations must also be able to secure enough and, certainly, their rights to secure enough should not be infringed upon for trivial reasons. Within the principle of sufficiency that could mean that once people have secured enough and unnecessarily securing more would impose further risk upon future generations, disabling them in their need to secure enough, acts to secure more than enough would be immoral.

Climate change is in great part man-made, the emission of greenhouse gasses especially, has played an important part in creating this problem. There is an apparent conflict between the rights of current and past generations to emit and the rights of future generations to live enjoyable lives, free from unnecessary and serious harms. For a viable climate change policy this conflict needs to be resolved in a manner that respects both the lives of current generations and the lives of future generations. Respecting the rights of future people will entail a limitation in freedom for people currently alive, who will have to change their actions and opt for a more sustainable way of living. In some cases these changes can be made quite easily as some goods are substitutable either in a wide sense or in a narrow sense. The first “occurs when one substitutes one kind of good with another quite different kind of good without detriment to that person because their overall share of goods remains just.”(Caney, 2012, 283). The latter applies to substitutes that possess “the same kind of properties” that have the same benefit and can be used “interchangeably to achieve that benefit.” (Caney, 2012, 284). This does not, according to Caney (2012), apply below the threshold because

some goods are so important for human functioning, they cannot be replaced by other goods (285). Greenhouse gasses, however, are substitutable in the narrow sense in three ways; Firstly, energy can be used more efficiently so that the same benefits or opportunities are generated with less energy (less emissions). Secondly, there are alternative energy sources available that are more sustainable such as solar, wind and nuclear energy, which cannot reverse climate change altogether but can play a significant role in mitigating it. Thirdly, changing agricultural practices some of which can be stopped, some altered and some replaced by others without forfeiting the related benefits (Caney, 2012, 288-289).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have taken sufficientarianism as the theory that distinguishes between wants and needs, prescribing the moral importance of a threshold that people must meet. I have described the need to prioritise the satisfaction of needs over the satisfaction of wants, highlighting the immorality of satisfying one's wants, luxuries or desires, at the expense of the needs of others.

When thinking about what is owed to future generations, the goal should not be to ensure they have the same or the same amount of some goods as current and past generations have or have had, rather, the goal should be ensuring they will have enough of what they need. I have tried to argue that making sure future generations can satisfy their needs, safeguarding the possibility to find themselves above the sufficiency threshold is what matters morally, suggesting the frustration of future people's needs for the satisfaction of unnecessary, albeit pleasant, wants, is immoral. What has been set forth in this chapter is what could be an efficient, but also demanding view of rights in the context of climate change, which requires changes to people's day to day lives. This makes the sufficientarian explanation of the distinction between wants and needs effective as it restricts humans in their actions.

The risk, admittedly, is that this will prove to be too great a change for people to accept and, indeed, I must acknowledge that only allowing people to satisfy their needs appears quite strict and will lead to more abstemious lives than people are currently accustomed to. People may need to change a great deal; their diets, their means and intensity of transport use, switching to sustainable energy sources. These changes, although I do believe they would bring about the most justice, intergenerationally, may be perceived, at

least by some, as too demanding and perhaps even as unfeasible, but thereby not any less necessary. Furthermore, as aforementioned some changes are quite easy to make.

What must be asserted now, is how the threshold of enough can be specified. This will be the aim of the second and third chapter in which two ways to specify the threshold will be discussed.

2. First proposal for specifying the threshold of sufficiency

Introduction

Having set out the principle of sufficiency in the last chapter, what must be specified now is what falls below the threshold. In this chapter, I will attempt to show how Gewirth's account of basic human rights can specify the sufficiency threshold, thereby distinguishing between wants and needs. To do this I will first set out Gewirth's claims and arguments so as to clarify the reasons for which he argued that some rights matter more than others. Then, I will fill in the threshold with, what I believe to be the basic rights that all people need, objectively speaking.

Gewirth offers an analytical justification for human rights, which, if correct, encompasses extensive, intersubjective duties to protect and foster human rights. He tried to derive human rights as necessary preconditions of the concept of agency: He claims that, simply by understanding oneself as an agent, one is *logically* required to accept specific rights for oneself and others. Not accepting these rights comes at the costs of inconsistency. The agency of future agents is sufficient to grant them the same set of basic rights that current generations enjoy and sufficient to protect these rights now, and certainly to not allow the frustration of these rights, which I consider needs, for the sake of the satisfaction of wants.

2.1 The basis and content of human rights

Gewirth argued that for human rights to exist there must be valid moral criteria or principles that justify that all humans, by virtue of being human, have these rights and the corresponding duties. He stated "Human rights are rights or entitlements that belong to every person; thus they are universal moral rights." (Gewirth, 1981, 42). His goal has been to find a non-question begging subject matter for morality, which can be found by considering the general concept of morality, the core meaning of which is defined by Gewirth as follows: "a morality is a set of categorically obligatory requirements for action that are addressed at least in part to every actual or prospective agent, and that are intended to further the interests, especially the most important interest, of persons or recipients other than or in addition to the agent or the speaker." (Gewirth, 1981, 45-46). Note that within this definition, a distinction between basic needs and less basic needs is already apparent because of the emphasis on the most important interests. Because interests vary, moralities also vary depending on the interests of persons;

what they regard as important and what it is they want to pursue in life. However, what all moralities have in common is that “they are concerned with actions. For all moral judgments, including right claims, consist directly or indirectly in precepts about how persons ought to act toward one another.” (Gewirth, 1978, 46). The prescription of right or wrong to human action is a feature of all judgements. Morality is concerned with action, claims Gewirth, and the general subject matter of all morality is the context of human actions, prescribing or prohibiting various actions.

But how does the content of human rights follow from this? To answer that question, Gewirth uses a dialectically necessary approach, an approach so named because it “proceeds from what all agents logically must claim or accept, on pain of contradiction.” (Gewirth, 1978, 46). What each rational agent must logically hold or claim, on his own behalf, according to Gewirth is that they have a right to the necessary conditions of human action. As aforementioned, all moral precepts are concerned with action; how people ought to act. Actions, are done by purposive agents; human beings who, for one reason or another, want to achieve certain purposes that they regard as worth pursuing, in some way ‘good’. Thus, those goods or conditions which agents need to achieve their desired purposes, must, rationally, be regarded as necessary goods or conditions of action. Since without these conditions, the agent would not be able to act or be successful in the achievement of their purposes.

Gewirth identifies two basic necessary conditions of action; freedom and wellbeing, that all agents need for (successful) action. For this reason he refers to them as the *generic features* of action. Gewirth defines freedom as consisting “in controlling one’s behavior by one’s unforced choice while having knowledge of relevant circumstances” and wellbeing as consisting “in having the other general abilities and conditions required for agency.” (Gewirth, 1978, 47). Wellbeing is the consequence of abilities and conditions required for agency and comprises three kinds of goods, listed here in order of necessity: basic, non-subtractive and additive. “Basic goods are the essential preconditions of action, such as life, physical integrity and mental equilibrium”, including food, clothing and shelter (Gewirth, 1978, 54). “Non-subtractive goods “are the abilities and conditions required for maintaining undiminished one’s level of purpose-fulfilment and one’s capabilities for particular actions.” (Gewirth, 1978, 55-56). “Additive goods are abilities and conditions required for increasing one’s level of purpose-fulfilment and one’s capabilities for particular actions.”(Gewirth, 1978, 56).

From the above mentioned consideration of freedom and wellbeing as necessary goods of action follows the ascription and content of human rights. The relation between necessary

goods and rights suggests “that rights involve normative necessity.” (Gewirth, 1978, 47). Likewise, an essential component in the ascription of rights is normative necessity, which makes them fundamentally different from mere wants.

Thus, Gewirth concludes the following : if a person, whom I shall call Ursula, has a right to x , Ursula is thus entitled to x . This also entails that all other people ought to at least refrain from interfering with Ursula’s right to have or do x . Furthermore, and more demanding, Gewirth believes it also logically follows that in some circumstances, others may also have a duty to assist Ursula if she is unable to have or do x on her own. Explained as such it becomes apparent that having rights is a two way street, not only do rights entail entitlements for the right holder but they also entail a duty to respect the rights of others and to refrain from hindering the possibility of others to claim their (necessary) rights.

As aforementioned, freedom and wellbeing are necessary goods of action, where necessary goods are understood as “truly grounded requirements of agency” distinguishing “the indispensable conditions that all agents must accept as needed for their actions.” (Gewirth, 1978, 48). However, human rights and duties do not logically follow from necessary goods. To illustrate; from the claim ‘water is a necessary good for Ursula’, it does not logically follow that ‘Ursula has a right to water’. For the ascription of rights, both necessary goods and rights must “figure in judgments made by the agent or right-holder himself in accordance with the dialectically necessary method.” The dialectically necessary method requires that judgments about necessary goods or rights are made by agents themselves from their own “internal, conative standpoint in purposive agency” thus portraying their own affirmation (Gewirth, 1978, 49).

Gewirth argues that what follows from an agent making a claim on necessary goods is a claim against others to refrain from interfering with him having those goods. Apart from the claim to non-interference of others, what also follows, according to Gewirth, is that in some cases others also have a duty to assist (Gewirth, 1978, 50).⁴

⁴ I believe this is quite a controversial step in Gewirth’s argumentation. And there are, understandably, some who disagree that such a conclusion follows, such as Williams (2006), who argued: If my own agency forces me to accept specific rights for myself, the agency of others only forces me to accept that *they* have to claim these right *for themselves*. What I don’t have to accept is that they *actually have* these rights. Differently put – Gewirth claims that the agency of others is a sufficient reason to grant them generic rights, Williams (206) claims that it is only sufficient to ascribe them the same logical reason to claim rights (60).

What this shows, so far, is that every agent must accept that: (1) Freedom and well-being are necessary goods, indispensable for action. Therefore, the agent must also accept: (2) It is necessary for an agent, to have freedom and well-being. Plus: (3) All agents must refrain from interfering with another's freedom and well-being.

However, if someone denies having rights to freedom and wellbeing, they thereby also deny that they have a duty of non-interference and thus must accept that people will interfere with their freedom and wellbeing. Gewirth believes there is a contradiction residing in this denial since he is convinced that any rational prospective agent will accept that he has a right to generic rights: freedom and wellbeing because they are the necessary conditions of action, and therefore denying that right is to deny being a prospective (rational) agent and elimination of those conditions which all agents need for action (Gewirth, 1978, 50-51).

2.1.1 Moral rights

But the rights discussed so far are not yet moral rights, they follow from agents' own desires. To distinguish moral rights, the rights in question must be appropriated to all humans and "each agent must admit that all other humans also have these rights." (Gewirth, 1978, 51). Because the right to generic rights is dependent on the feature of agency, then all who have that feature thereby have these rights; "each agent logically must admit that all other agents have the same rights as he claims for himself, so that in this way the existence of universal and equal moral rights, and hence of human rights, must be accepted within the whole context of action or practice." (Gewirth, 1985, 742-743). Gewirth here uses the *argument from the sufficiency of agency*: If a person's own agency is a sufficient condition to claim generic rights for themselves, the agency of others is also sufficient to grant them the same set of generic rights. Gewirth, thus envisioned generic rights as universal, based on human agency.

I have stated before that I will not defend the claim that future people have rights, but rather, accept that they do given. Nonetheless, I want to point out that I believe that Gewirth's approach is very applicable for taking future people into account because of their prospective agency and the rights that are attributed based on human agency.

These past steps have led to the basis of human (moral) rights, that "require of every agent that he take favorable account of the most important interest of all other prospective agents, namely, the interests grounded in their need for the necessary conditions of agency." (Gewirth, 1978, 52). All human (prospective) agents have these rights. This generalization entails, furthermore, a duty of non-interference and in some cases a duty to assist. Gewirth proposes the following precept, which he calls the *Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC)* :

“Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself.”, so named because “it combines the formal consideration of consistency with the material consideration of the generic features and rights of agency.” (Gewirth, 1978, 52-53).

The PGC is a supreme principle of morality because of the interpersonal requirements that follow from the generic features of action which no rational agent can deny or evade. Why these rights are considered moral is because they are not focusses on any single agent, rather they aim to ensure all agents have “equality of generic rights” (Gewirth, 1978, 53).

In sum, moral rights are grounded in the GPC, a supreme moral principle that all agents must rationally accept. The primary condition for having moral rights is agency. Agents need the necessary goods of action; freedom and wellbeing. Gewirth concludes, the PGC justifies freedom and wellbeing as human rights.

2.1.2 Conflicts between rights

Now, an important question that needs answering concerns the specific content of the right to freedom and wellbeing, which as of now, remains general and somewhat vague. As aforementioned, wellbeing consist in three kinds of goods: basic, nonsubtractive and additive goods. These goods, here presented in order of necessity, when violated constitute different levels of harm; if the right to basic wellbeing is violated this constitutes a basic harm, the violation of a person’s right to nonsubtractive or additive goods constitutes a specific harm. This distinction is important in the case of climate change, certainly because the violation of a person’s right to wellbeing or freedom is morally wrong, according to Gewirth. Moreover, he states that in general “all such morally wrong actions are rationally unjustifiable.” (Gewirth, 1978, 57). Especially in the case of climate change, there are conflicting rights. To illustrate: Wendy’s right to freedom is overridden by Peter’s right to life if Wendy, by making use of her right to freedom, would endanger the life of Peter. Or, in a different scenario; Wendy’s right not to be hindered in her freedom to pursue her additional rights may be overridden if this is what is necessary for the prevention or rectification of infringements on Peter’s basic rights or his nonsubtractive rights.

What these conflicts illustrate is that human rights are not absolute, they are prima facie only, they can, in some cases, be justifiably overridden. This does not deteriorate the legitimacy of the PGC as an obligatory moral principle because they retain the principle’s central criteria, namely “mutual respect for freedom and wellbeing among all prospective purposive agents.” (Gewirth, 1978, 58). Justified violation of rights; “departures from mutual respect for freedom and wellbeing among all prospective purposive agents”, are justified in

three cases, here presented in hierarchical order of most pressing to pressing; firstly when they are required for preventing future or rectify past violations of this mutual respect, secondly when they avoid more severe deviations, thirdly when departing from mutual respect is in accordance with existing social rules that are in line with the PGC (Gewirth, 1978, 58).

I believe Gewirth's claim is essential for the purpose of this thesis as it underwrites my intuition that it is unjust to endanger future generations for the pleasure of unnecessary goals or personal desires and that perhaps people are morally obligated to accept certain inconveniences and restrictions for the sake of justice. The justification for departures from mutual respect is essential in the case of climate change, for which rectifying past violations and preventing future and more severe deviations is required for the sake of justice, specifically; intergenerational justice. It entails that avoiding more severe climate change for the sake of future people, requires a limitation to the rights of current generations.

2.2 Resolving the conflict between rights

I have now shown that sometimes conflicts arise between rights and that in some cases, human rights may be overridden. I will now discuss how Gewirth suggests the conflict between rights should be resolved. There are two criteria for resolving conflicts between rights, both of which are essential when formulating rights and duties in the for the context of an effective and acceptable climate change mitigation.

The first of these two, limits the right to freedom and can mostly be used to solve conflicts between conflicting rights to goods of comparable importance or value, this criterion is termed as "the criterion of the prevention or removal of transactional inconsistency." (Gewirth, 1978, 58). What this criterion entails is a limitation on the right to freedom when that freedom is used to infringe upon the freedom or wellbeing of another person. To illustrate this point, let me assume that Peter and Wendy live on an island together and that, on that island, there is a limited amount of food. If Wendy uses her freedom to consume all the food by herself, or steal it so that Peter cannot eat, Wendy thereby infringes upon Peter's right to sufficient nutrition and this will have consequences for his wellbeing. In this case, Wendy's right to freedom is in conflict with Peter's right to well-being. And in this case, Wendy's freedom would legitimately be limited in order to safeguard Peter's right to wellbeing, doing so would not constitute a serious harm for Wendy whereas not imposing the limitation would constitute serious harm for Peter.

The second criterion for resolving conflicts of rights deals with conflicting rights of different degrees of importance. In order to solve the conflict, the degree of the necessity for

action must be evaluated and precedence will be allocated to the most necessary right (Gewirth, 1978, 59). To illustrate such a conflict, say Peter wants to fly around the world to travel for fun, thereby polluting the air that Wendy needs to breathe, and the soil in which the crops grow that Wendy needs to eat, there is a conflict between Peter's right to freedom and Wendy's right to wellbeing where Wendy's rights are being violated. In this case, where Peter's right is of (much) less importance and Wendy's right is essential, Wendy's right thus takes precedence over Peter's. And Peter's freedom (to fly) may be limited or reconsidered.

Although Gewirth's PGC prohibits, in all other cases, the use of coercion and basic harm, in cases where one person or one group of people violates the rights of another, thereby incurring the transactional inconsistency, coercion and basic harm may be permitted and even required. That said, the manner and degree of the intervention, coercion and harm, depends on the situation (Gewirth, 1978, 58-59). Gewirth's emphasis on necessity is an important advantage to his account for my objective because it provides a rational justification of prioritising the more necessary rights thereby allowing for limitations on freedom in some cases of rights violations, even if these occur intergenerationally.

2.4 Specifying the threshold

Using Gewirth's account to specify the threshold entails that the satisfaction of the basic human rights constitutes meeting the threshold of enough. This applies both to current and future generations as both are, or will be, agents, meaning they have the capacity and propensity for action. Therefore they have, or will have, generic rights, rights to generic conditions of agency, namely freedom and well-being, needed by all agents for the successful pursuit of their purposes.

As aforementioned, Gewirth distinguishes between basic rights, non-subtractive rights and additive rights, ranked in order of importance regarding the negative impact in cases of infringements on those rights. Infringement on basic rights such as the right to life, is more severe than an infringement on additive rights, rights for improving one's quality of life. Gewirth does not specify a threshold in so many words but draws a line by making a claim for necessity of freedom and wellbeing as the generic features of action and the three kinds of goods necessary for wellbeing. I draw the threshold of sufficiency above freedom and wellbeing and the goods and corresponding rights necessary to achieve wellbeing because without these goods and the corresponding rights to them, an agent's life lacks the essential requirements for a good life. To illustrate; suppose I would draw the line above the basic and

nonsubtractive goods only, thereby dismissing the additive goods as unnecessary. This would entail that being free from discrimination is not necessary for a human life or the exertion of agency. History shows, however, that discrimination severely harms people, it is not a luxury but a basic need to live without that harm. Consider another example; enjoying an education nourishes and develops people's cognitive and perhaps even emotional capacities, it provides knowledge that attributes to a more comprehensive view of the world. I believe, strongly, that without education, not only individuals but societies as a whole would suffer quite severely. These are but two examples of what I estimate would supervene to setting the threshold below the additive goods, which ranks lowest of the three necessary goods that Gewirth describes. I believe setting the threshold above the right to freedom and wellbeing would constitute an injustice. To show this more convincingly I shall treat the necessary goods for wellbeing separately in order of importance.

Firstly, basic goods, which are the most important and comprise of life, physical integrity and mental equilibrium. Without basic goods, any kind of life would be (almost) impossible. The right to these basic goods means people have a right not to be killed, attacked, terrorized or, in general, harmed in their physical and mental abilities, this also entails a right not to be deprived of sufficient and adequate nutrition. Every human being needs these basic rights to function, they are adequately coined as they truly are the foundation for living a life.

Secondly, nonsubtractive goods are goods, abilities and conditions people need to maintain an "undiminished [...] level of purpose fulfilment and one's capabilities for particular action." (Gewirth, 1978, 56). These comprise of planning one's life, having knowledge indispensable for action, not being lied to or cheated, and of not being harmed by dangerous conditions. Furthermore, to this category of goods belong also the utilisation of resources to satisfy wants and the right not to be harmed by or subject to situations wherein one is hindered in securing available resources. The use of resources to satisfy wants, leaves a lot unspecified and is subject to interpretation. However, taking into account the provided guidelines for resolving conflicts, this need not be as problematic as it may appear. For instance, in the case of climate change, finite and unsustainable resources are used to satisfy needs and wants that frustrate the possibility of future people securing their basic needs. When it comes to wants, limitations to the use of certain resources are justified and in some cases even demanded for the sake of justice. I believe that where sustainable alternatives are available, these should be used, especially for the satisfaction of wants but also for the satisfaction of needs. Suppose people were allowed to cut down rainforests to use the trees to

warm their houses, crippling the earth's ability to turn CO₂ into oxygen and attributing to soil erosion, while sustainable energy sources such as solar and wind energy are readily available. Surely this is unnecessary and unjust.

Thirdly, although aimed at improving life, additive goods are also necessary for the achievement of wellbeing and thus I will also place these below the threshold. Additive goods are the abilities and conditions that increase an agent's "level of purpose fulfilment and [...] capabilities for particular action." (Gewirth, 1978, 56). Additive goods concern an increase of that which people already have, a further improvement of their life. The right to additive goods can be perceived as an improvement of the more basic needs, one might have assumed that they should be placed above the threshold. However, given the specification of self-development, developing self-esteem, enjoying an education, and the right to freedom from discrimination and racism as additive goods, I believe these are needs and cannot be considered wants given their importance for wellbeing. Certainly, the achievement of wellbeing seems impossible if a person is subject to harm from others in the form of discrimination or by being denied an education or freedom of speech.

Thus, the threshold as specified by Gewirth's account of basic human rights comprises freedom and wellbeing and the three kinds of goods necessary to achieve wellbeing, as aforementioned, these features are necessary for the human life.

Conclusion

Human beings, by virtue of being human beings, rights to freedom and wellbeing. Humans, perceived as rational purposeful agents have an interest in the pursuit of their goals. Being free from infringements upon these basic rights also entails a duty not to infringe upon another agent's right to these basic necessities. Deeming future people as legitimate claimholders to these rights imposes duties on current generations not to unnecessarily infringe upon their basic rights. Consequently, for the sake of justice, current generations must accept limitations on some of their freedoms to avoid infringements. Reducing the emission of greenhouse gasses, cars, airplanes and other means of transportation that are unnecessary for the satisfaction of one's needs, or basic rights, fall within the scope of limitations people need to accept based on the threshold specified by Gewirth's approach. Lastly, opting for green, sustainable energy sources where these are available may be one of the easiest ways to mitigate climate change while still securing enough of the basic, nonsubtractive and additive goods, thus meeting the threshold of sufficiency.

3. Second proposal for specifying the threshold of sufficiency

Introduction

My goal in this chapter is to examine how Nussbaum's list of basic capabilities can define a threshold of sufficiency, as such distinguishing wants from needs. To do this I shall first set out what Sen argued for and what the capabilities approach encompasses. I will then turn to Claassen who has questioned whether a capabilities list should or should not to be developed by philosophers, explaining why Sen did not and why a list of basic capabilities should be formulated. Because Sen himself did not provide an actual list of capabilities which are to be valued or prioritised I will turn to Martha Nussbaum and the list she has proposed. I will also address some critiques laid against the capabilities approach, some of which are my own and some of which are presented by Thomas Pogge who has debated whether the capabilities approach can be justified.

The capabilities approach is a theoretical framework proposed by Amartya Sen (2003), it emphasizes the moral importance of the freedom to achieve capabilities. The capabilities approach is primarily used in development studies (Nussbaum, 2001, 5). It is presented as an alternative to commodity based approaches, because "it is capabilities, not actual functionings, that should be the legislator's goal" (Nussbaum, 1990, 150). People's capabilities, which vary from person to person, show if and how people are able to turn commodities into capabilities. These capabilities, so argues Sen, are an expression of their freedom.

3.1 Sen's capabilities approach

Much like Kant, who argued for the importance of seeing human beings as ends in themselves and not as means to other ends, Sen argues that people and their lives should be the primary focus, with production and prosperity as means to those lives (Sen, 2003, 41). The reason for this claim is that economically prospering countries could still be inhabited by people whose quality of life is low, lacking freedom and wellbeing. Sen highlights two issues; the first of which is that "economic prosperity is no more than one of the means to enriching lives of people." (Sen, 2003, 42). The second is that greater economic prosperity does not (necessarily) result in the achievement of valuable ends. A difficult question arises, namely, what are valuable ends? Sen chooses not to present a list of capabilities, but rather, to leave the selection of capabilities to a process of democratic deliberation so that people, within their

societies can decide for themselves what capabilities they value (Claassen, 2001).

The capabilities approach is rooted in Aristotelian theory, the work of Adam Smith and Karl Marx. This approach, also referred to as the capability approach, “sees human life as a set of “doings and beings”- we may call them “functionings”-and is related the evaluation of the quality of life to the assessment of the capability to function.” (Sen, 2003, 43). Because of this view on life, as a set of “doings and beings” that are valuable, these functionings and the capability to function will need to be assessed to establish the Quality of Life (Sen, 2003, 44). Essential to one’s life then, is the combination of several functionings, some of which are elementary, such as being well nourished, and some are complex functionings, such as being able to take part in a social life (Sen, 2003,44).

Important to this approach is that functionings are perceived as essential, as “constitutive” elements of living. “A functioning is an achievement of a person”, that which someone achieves is part of the state of that person. From this, the capability of a person can be derived, as it is a reflection of multiple combinations of functionings that a person can achieve. A person’s capability reflects their (level of) freedom to choose between different lives. Because of the addition of “doings” and “beings”, “achievements” are included within the capability approach (Sen, 2003, 45). The question that needs answering, then, is which achievements are significant and valuable and should be included to assess functioning and capabilities, this will be the focus of section 3.4 (Sen, 2003, 46).

According to Sen, the advantages of the capabilities approach can be clearly understood when compared to traditional approaches used in welfare economics and moral philosophy because of its alternative view of the human life and the analysis of human freedom as a central feature of living” which “provide a differently grounded foundational route to the evaluative exercise.” (Sen, 2003, 47). Sen’s critique on basic needs literature is grounded in what he refers to as “commodity fetishism.” (Sen, 2003, 47). Commodities, even when perceived as merely instrumentally valuable might not be useful because people have different ways and abilities to transform commodities into capabilities (Sen, 2003, 47). Commodities, primary goods, or basic needs are means to freedom. Contrariwise, capabilities are expressions, empirical proof if you will, of freedom (Sen, 2003, 48).

3.1.1 The importance of freedom

The capabilities approach accepts freedom as both intrinsically and as instrumentally important. When seen as intrinsically important, having multiple options to choose from is

valuable, even if only one option is chosen. By contrast; if freedom is perceived as only instrumentally important then what matters is that the preferred option is available and a person is free to choose that option, the value of that option is that it leads a person to the desired end; reaching a state which is valuable to them (Sen, 2003, 48).

Freedom is a means to achievement and there is no need to decide on either the instrumental or intrinsic view since both are unlikely to be entirely sufficient or satisfactory. In practice, though, focus is primarily placed on the chosen set of functionings. These functionings may sometimes be in need of refinement, to illustrate this point Sen uses an example of a starving person and a person who chooses to fast, in both cases the functioning could be described as lacking adequate and sufficient nutrition, the important difference is the presence or absence of choice namely the choice to not consume food. That choice is present in a fasting situation, but absent in a situation where people do not have access to food or do not have the means to purchase food (Sen, 2003, 50). What is imperative, then, is freedom, as Sen concludes "the bottom line of all this is to recognize that the use of the capability approach [...] may give more role to the value of freedom might have been initially apparent." (Sen, 2003, 51).

The assessment of efficiency and inequality is dependent on the metric and approach one chooses to use for said assessment. According to Sen, the capabilities approach, as opposed to utility based evaluations, proves to be better equipped to examine inequalities, efficiency and quality of life. "The foundational importance of human capabilities provides a firm basis for evaluating living standards and the quality of life, and also points to a general format in terms of which problems of efficiency and equality can both be discussed." (Sen, 2003, 54). Because this approach focuses on multiple capabilities, it is a pluralist approach that recognises differences between people.

3.2 Developing a capabilities list

A dividing point amongst proponents of the capabilities approach is whether or not the approach should include a list of (basic) capabilities. Some believe, as Sen does, that the selection of such a list should be left to people themselves, to a process of democratic deliberation or public reasoning so that every country or society can select those capabilities they value, they would opt for 'the democratic position' (Claassen, 2011, 491). However, what is needed for the capabilities approach to be a viable theory of justice is the selection and justification of a list of capabilities. Claassen argues, and I agree, "that capability theories of justice should include lists of basic capabilities" which can be selected and justified through

philosophical reflection, this is what Claassen refers to as the ‘philosophical position’ (2011, 491-492).

Consider two arguments held by those who adhere the democratic position. Firstly, Sen values the generality and flexibility of the approach which means its application can be diversified almost endlessly. However, I agree with Claassen, I believe there are certain universal capabilities that can be selected objectively, which I would refer to as needs, as capabilities that every human being ought to have the freedom to achieve. In this case, these views are not mutually exclusive, it is possible to develop a list of basic, universal capabilities that can be completed and further developed based on specific context. The objection also holds that when academics create a list, they thereby bypass the people the list is intended for in the first place. The need for and importance public reasoning should not be undermined in this way (Claassen, 2011, 493-494).

A second objection, referred to by Claassen as the epistemological objection, one that Sen supports also, “holds that philosophers cannot possibly know which capabilities are most important to people” (2011, 494). The idea is that for a significant list the public must be heard collectively, it should be a process of public reasoning. Problems arise, however, when it comes to the actual process of public reasoning; without theoretical limits or guidelines, it is entirely possible that the process is carried out unjustly, either as a result of the manner in which the public ‘reasons’ or because it is impossible to include everyone, hear every single person out, a selection of representatives must be made, but on what grounds? I would like to now turn to Nussbaum’s answers to the two objections mentioned above, as presented by Claassen (2011, 495).

Regarding the epistemological objection, it can be said that although the epistemological limits are not insignificant, a theory of justice is incomplete without a definite list of capabilities. Responding to the political objection; some matters are too important to be left to public reasoning in which culture, tradition and varying degrees of knowledge can undermine a just outcome. I find this answer particularly convincing and Korolev (2015) also argues that people, generally, know what they want rather than what they need. Expressing those wants, furthermore, comes easier to most people than expressing their needs, which in turn only become apparent when a (severe) deficiency is reached.

Claassen himself argues that democratic decision making and philosophical theorising are not mutually exclusive. A preliminary list constructed by philosophers leaves the possibility of local specification of a differentiated list of capabilities, open. Done this way, the gap between the democratic and philosophical position is narrowed. An important point

Claassen makes is that there is a problem within the democratic position, namely that if objections can be made to philosophical involvement in the application on theories, such as the application of the capabilities approach, then that objection could also hold for the development of (any) theories. Prescribing that it is capabilities, rather than commodities, people should value, already bypasses the people the theory was developed for (Claassen, 2011, 498). Furthermore, philosophical reasoning has developed concepts of justice and equality on which theories of democracy and the democracies themselves, are based (Claassen, 2011, 499). Importantly, philosophy has and still continues to enrich the public debate (Claassen, 2011, 502).

The strongest argument in favour of the philosophical position is that it does not, contrary to what the democratic position holds, bypass the democratic process. The mistake is based on a misconception of the relation between democracy and philosophy. When philosophers are perceived as *philosopher citizens*, who present their theories merely as input to the democratic process which is ran by others, rather than people in high towers who have a monopoly to the truth, prescribing what people ought to do or developing theories that need not be applied practically, it becomes apparent why the philosophical position does not bypass the democratic process (Claassen, 2011, 501). Nussbaum, whose list of capabilities I will discuss in the following section, most likely holds this position herself, merely recommending her list that she leaves open to additions and alterations. Indeed, a list presented in the manner Nussbaum presents hers leaves the public firstly, with decisions concerning specifications of abstract notions in the theory itself, secondly, with the interpretation of certain elements that can in some cases be guided by recommendations. For other elements the public “has to start from scratch” (Claassen, 2011, 502).

3.2.1 Nussbaum’s list of capabilities

Now let me turn to the important question of which capabilities should be prioritized. As aforementioned, Sen does not provide an actual list of capabilities. Luckily, Nussbaum does present such a list. The list of basic capabilities builds upon what Nussbaum considers essential factors that are part of any human life, such as morality, meaningful relationships, cognitive capacity and practical reason (Nussbaum, 1990, 146-149).⁵ Based on the list of the

⁵ The full list of the shape of the human form of life factors includes: (1) Mortality; all human beings face death and have an aversion to death. (2) The human body, which entails also the following features: hunger and thirst and the (varying) need for food and drink, need for shelter, sexual desire and mobility. (3) Capacity for pleasure and pain. (4) Cognitive capability; perceiving, imagining, thinking. (5) Early infant development, all human

shape of the human form of life, as Nussbaum calls it, is a list that contains some basic functionings that Nussbaum believes should be considered as constitutive of human life. This list establishes, in a way, a threshold above which people in a society need to find themselves for their reigning political order to be considered good or decent since, according to the capabilities approach governments are responsible for securing opportunities and circumstances that allow people to achieve their desired ends. The basic functionings proposed by Nussbaum are these:

1. Being able to live to the end of a complete human life, as far as possible; not dying prematurely or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. Being able to have good health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction, to move about from place to place.
3. Being able to avoid unnecessary and non-useful pain and to have pleasurable experiences.
4. Being able to use the five senses, to imagine, to think, and to reason.
5. Being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, grieve, feel longing and gratitude.
6. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's own life.
7. Being able to live for and to others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of familial and social interaction.
8. Being able to live with concern for, and in relation to, animals, plants, the world of nature.
9. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
10. Being able to live one's own life and nobody else's.

beings being as babies who are helpless end depend upon those that take care of them to whom they feel a certain closeness. (6) Practical reason; all human beings try, to the best of their abilities, to manage and plan their lives. (7) Affiliation with other human beings; all human beings feel some affiliation and have (varying degrees of) concern for other human beings. (8) Relatedness to other species and to nature, human beings are not alone amongst inanimate objects but share the earth with other animals and nature. (9) Humour and play. (10) Separateness; each person is an individual living their own life, walking a different path than others. (11) Strong separateness; each human being lives within their own surrounding an context and knows different objects, visits different places and locations, has their own history and friends (Nussbaum, 1990, 146-149).

10a. Being able to live one's own life in one's very own surroundings and context.
(Nussbaum, 1990, 150-151)⁶

Nussbaum states there may be other capabilities that are essential to the human life, but for now at least these can be considered as vitally important to such a degree that a life lacking in any of these can be said to be lacking in humanness. The list she presents provides a minimal theory of good, emphasizing what is absolutely essential, forming a threshold above which every human being can choose a good functioning. Her goal for this list is that it can provide grounds for formulating responsibilities of governments to promote the good of human beings.

What this list requires then, according to Nussbaum, is comprehensive health care but also clean air and water and “security of life and property”, also, people should be free to make autonomous choices (Nussbaum, 1990, 152-153). Furthermore, what the list requires is sufficient and adequate nutrition, housing, sexual freedom, absence of and protection from unnecessary harms. Moreover, education, social relations, respect for other species and nature, recreational and professional freedom and possibilities need to be promoted and supported. These requirements, to me, sound like claims against climate change and an argument for responsibilities of climate change mitigation. Lastly, Nussbaum’s list requires “the protection of a larger or smaller sphere of non-interference around the person so that, according to the practical reason and in relationship with others, each person can choose, in his or her own context to lead his or her very own life.” (Nussbaum, 1990, 152-153).

With regard to climate change, there is an important point that I would like to make here. Nussbaum states that the conception of her proposed list requires "sufficient nutrition and adequate housing; and these are to be arranged to as to promote the choices of citizens to regulate their nutrition and their shelter by their own practical reason." (Nussbaum, 1990, 152). My issue with this part is "own practical reason", now there are two possible interpretations or meanings here, firstly, the manner in which people of current and past generations have lived their lives and have caused climate change is not considered "practical reason." In that case governments and other institutions have been severely lacking in steering the public toward practical reason and more morale lifestyles or even enforcing this. The

⁶ Nussbaum has modified the last two capabilities on her list, with (10) now being; Control over One’s Environment. A. Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. B. Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), not just formally but in terms of real opportunity; and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure” (Nussbaum, 2000, 80).

second is that living in a way that unnecessarily causes climate change to happen, is in fact, considered practical reason. In both cases, I would argue that perhaps there should not be room for peoples own "practical reason" and more room needs to be created, sooner rather than later, for education to provide people with knowledge so they can in fact have practical reason. I imagine governments could or perhaps should, play a role in this. In any case; leaving people with the freedom to choose as they see fit where those choices have severe consequences, to let them rely on their own "practical reason" without thinking further than their own desires has resulted in a moral or sustainable outcome. I would argue that in this case, where climate change is an incredibly serious problem, there is little room for such liberties. Moreover, I maintain that causing climate change for the sake of satisfying unnecessary wants, is not a freedom people should have. Taking this freedom away from them is, in my opinion, not an infringement on their freedom, rather, they have immorally and unjustly had the freedom to satisfy their wants without any limitations, a freedom that, I believe, they should never have had, morally speaking.

3.3 Critiques on the capabilities approach

Now turning to some criticisms against the capabilities approach. Pogge aimed to assert whether the approach can be justified as superior to resourcist views. Stating that the differences are not as great as Sen or Nussbaum have made out to be, because resourcist views do take interpersonal differences into account. Suggesting the capabilities approach as a preferable alternative to resourcist views requires arguments proving superiority of the first over the latter, which Sen fails to do. Pogge concludes that the capabilities approach, as of yet, cannot "conceivably deliver at least one candidate public criterion of social justice that would be as clear, workable or plausible as the leading resourcist criterion" and that it would not do better in "addressing and highlighting the horrific injustices of the world in which we live." (Pogge, 2002, 217).

Moreover, although Nussbaum has provided a list of capabilities, Sen has not. It seems, to me, rather strange to argue against leading views, presenting an alternative, of which the implementation is supposed to result in a more fair and just world, without producing an outcome of those arguments. Why not take the last step? Let me assume for the moment that the capabilities approach that Sen proposes is, in fact, preferable to commodity based views of social justice. Why not then provide (at least) a preliminary list which may or may not be tailored in different ways by different societies to fit their particular needs. Without this list, Sen leaves the approach open to interpretation by others.

The weighing or prioritising of capabilities is another worry that Pogge (2002) expresses, not only whether there are some capabilities that are more important than others but also how the capabilities of one person compare and relate to (other) capabilities of other people. This brings me to the next point of criticism which is the importance of freedom that Sen highlights, every human being should have certain freedoms to achieve the capabilities they value. However, people live among other people who also have these freedoms, and the freedom of one person can only go so far until it infringes upon the freedom of another. By focussing on people's freedom, I feel Sen fails to sufficiently reflect the fact that people live in communities, societies, among friends, family and strangers that they coexist with. Furthermore, some of the freedoms people have not only affect other people living in a shared time or generation but also those in the future. Future generations, surely Sen would have agreed, should also have freedom to achieve their basic capabilities.

3.4 Specifying the threshold

This section will answer the question which basic capabilities should be placed below the threshold. Nussbaum presents the aforementioned capabilities as basic capabilities. And claims that her approach “uses the idea of a *threshold level of each capability*, beneath which it is held that truly human functioning is not available to citizens; the social goal should be understood in terms of getting people across the threshold.” (Nussbaum, 2001, 6). For Nussbaum, these capabilities together comprise the threshold.

Now, presume all the capabilities are placed below the threshold, then future generations should also be able to achieve those capabilities. In theory, that sounds very just. However, to ensure future generations will be able to do that, current generations would have to accept limitations to their freedoms because Nussbaum's threshold is so high. I do not believe it would be possible to have all generations achieve these capabilities sustainably, in the context of climate change without putting limitations on the way people achieve their capabilities. If justice indeed demands, and I believe it does, that current generations should not frustrate the needs, or capabilities, of future generations by satisfying more than they need. Specifying the threshold by using Nussbaum's list would require putting limits on the way people achieve their capabilities.

Without limitations to the list, it would allow too much freedom to achieve one's capabilities whichever way and to whatever extent people prefer. I contend, limitations should be placed on the extent to and the manner in which capabilities are achieved, rather than taking one (or even several) away altogether. For instance, I appreciate that moving from

place to place is important for human functioning. However, travelling across the world purely for the joy of seeing the world, however pleasurable, is not necessary. Imposing a limit to this would not diminish human functioning, rather, it would transform the original character of the list into a list that distinguishes between needs and wants in light of climate change.

I would say at least two capabilities have parts that merit some degree of limitation. The second capability, being adequately nourished and moving around from place to place, need not be satisfied to any given person's subjective preferences. Adequate nourishment is something that can be determined objectively. And objectively speaking, a human diet containing animal products is both unnecessary and unsustainable. Not only are there millions of people worldwide who have adopted a plant based diet, studies have shown that a plant based diet prolongs the human life span, improves physical and mental health, prevents and sometimes even reverses some diet-related diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease (Beezhold, Radnitz, Rinne & DiMatteo, 2015; Glick-Bauer & Yeh, 2014; Hu, 2003; Tusso, Ismail, Ha & Bartolotto, 2013, 62-63). Giving up animal products has been found to be the biggest positive influence a person can have on the environment (Poore & Nemecek, 2018, 987-990).⁷

Furthermore, while moving around is necessary to some degree, I believe some limitations to flying and driving, are acceptable, certainly where more sustainable alternatives, such as electric cars, bicycles, and some forms of public transportation, are available. Concerning the capability to enjoy recreational activities, I believe limitations are acceptable, not to the *ability* of enjoying the experience but to the actual experiences insofar as these negatively impact climate change, such as driving an old-timer around for fun or celebrating new-year's eve with fireworks.

Thus, the capabilities list needs some limitations to be applicable to a sufficiency threshold. Even with my proposed limitations, the list may include too much and remain an unsustainable list of more than enough rather than a list of needs, that specifies a sustainable threshold of enough.

⁷ "In particular, the impacts of animal products can markedly exceed those of vegetable substitutes, to such a degree that meat, aquaculture, eggs, and dairy use ~83% of the world's farmland and contribute 56 to 58% of food's different emissions, despite providing only 37% of our protein and 18% of our calories. [...] We find that the impacts of the lowest-impact animal products exceed average impacts of substitute vegetable proteins across GHG emissions, eutrophication, acidification (excluding nuts), and frequently land use." (Poore & Nemecek, 2018, 987-990).

Conclusion

For the sake of justice, the consequences of climate change require a limitation of certain freedoms of current generations. Considering the emission of greenhouse gases is the driver of climate change, these emissions need to be limited (Caney, 2012, 255).⁸

Applying Nussbaum's list of capabilities intergenerationally and as a specification of a sufficiency threshold would merit several limitations. That being said, I believe my specific use of the capabilities approach, in some ways, forgoes Sen's initial goal and arguments because it seeks to limit, rather than enhance freedom. Given the importance of freedom within the capabilities approach on the one hand and the importance of limiting certain freedoms for the environment and the safety of future generations on the other hand, the capabilities approach and my application thereof seem to be on opposite ends. But presuming, as I do, that the capabilities approach can be applied intergenerationally, I believe this would entail that infringing upon the freedom of securing one's basic capabilities, or needs, for the sake of non-basic capabilities, or wants, that are not (as) necessary for a good life, would be unjust.

In the following chapter I will compare the applicability of Nussbaum's list of capabilities and Gewirth's account of basic human rights. I will discuss the stronger and weaker points of both for the specific purpose of specifying the sufficiency threshold in the context of climate change.

⁸ These include, but are not limited to flying and driving cars, building and living in houses that are not adequately isolated or do not use sustainable energy sources for cooling or heating, and buying and consuming food products cause the most emissions and require the most land, water, and fertilizers to produce, such as animal products.

4. Comparing the two proposals

In this chapter I will compare the two proposals I have previously presented. Starting with Nussbaum's list of capabilities, I will work my way back to Gewirth and highlight what I have found to be the most important disadvantages and advantages of both approaches used to specify the sufficiency threshold. At the end of this chapter I conclude that Gewirth is better suited to specify the threshold of sufficiency and why I have found this to be so.

4.1 The second proposal: Nussbaum's list of capabilities

4.1.1 Disadvantages

One reason why Nussbaum's list of capabilities is not very suited to specify a threshold of enough is the motivation behind the capabilities approach. Formulated to further human development in underdeveloped countries, the capabilities approach's main focus is freedom, and promoting freedom as the enabler of human development. In contrast, I want to do almost the opposite; I seek to find justification for limiting freedoms. I have attempted to find some middle – moral- ground so that the environment and thus, future generations will not suffer from the satisfaction of people's wants that go beyond what they need, because I wholeheartedly believe that needs merit preference over wants. Thus, my goal and that of Nussbaum are different, which makes my application difficult.⁹ Sen and Nussbaum want to enhance the freedom to achieve capabilities of people who fall below that threshold, generally people in underdeveloped countries, up to their threshold of capabilities. This is not threshold of enough but a threshold of more than enough, which makes sense given the goal of the capabilities approach. Contrariwise, I want to find ways to justifiably diminish unnecessary freedoms of those above the threshold, generally and predominantly in well-developed countries. So our goals are fundamentally different, her threshold is a goal that demands people going up, mine would demand they 'go down'.

Furthermore, the approach is has an individualistic character, which, while useful for its original purpose, makes it less useful for mine because it seems to perceive individuals as living in their own separated piece of land in the world, without explicitly addressing possible consequences of the freedom of one person on another person's life and freedoms. To a certain degree, there is insufficient regard and concern for the shared society, a shared planet with future generations who inherit it and it's climate. As such, the freedoms of one person

⁹ Note that this is not a critique on the capabilities approach nor Nussbaum's list, merely a disadvantage to the applicability to a threshold of needs.

may conflict with the freedom of others. But neither Sen, nor Nussbaum provides ways to resolve such conflicts.

What would make it easier to resolve conflicts would be a hierarchy within the capabilities list. It is likely that Nussbaum had some order in mind while composing this list as she has, because the capabilities seem to be listed in order of importance starting with the capability to live one's life, completely and free from harm, and ending with living in one's surroundings. However, the hierarchy is not explicitly addressed, nor does Nussbaum claim any of the capabilities as more or less important, with some deserving of priority over others. The question of what justice requires in cases of conflict, is left unanswered.

Moreover, I believe Nussbaum's list is too extensive for my purposes. The problem may not be the list itself, but rather a lack of limitations and conditions that restrain excessiveness. Applying her list will make a sustainable outcome very unlikely unless limits are placed on the manner and degree of achieving some capabilities, or by the addition of certain conditions to specify that these capabilities can be achieved insofar and in such a way as they do not hinder the achievement of others, even intergenerationally. It seems unfeasible to have people of both current and future generations meet their basic capabilities without putting limitations in place. If justice requires that future people can achieve all these basic capabilities, I believe current generations cannot achieve them all unlimited, otherwise future generations will face greater threats from the consequences of climate change. It would set the threshold too high, which seems great from an individual's standpoint but would be drastic for climate change and future generations, or; if we prioritise future generations; I am afraid it would render current people's lives abstemious.

Although the list of capabilities has some degree of detail, certainly more than Gewirth provides, it does require further specification concerning what the capabilities entail in the form of rights and duties and concerning the relation between humans in a shared society, nation, continent and planet that is also inhabited by plants and animals. Further specification should encompass a consideration of how people achieve their capabilities, addressing their inclination to choose familiar and convenient unsustainable options and practices.

4.1.2 Advantages

Although, as aforementioned, further specification is required, one advantage to Nussbaum's list of capabilities is that she does describe the capabilities in some detail. Especially in comparison to Gewirth, this makes it easier to deduct what the various capabilities imply.

One particular capability prescribes the need for consideration for other human beings,

“Being able to live for and to others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of familial and social interaction” (Nussbaum, 1990, 115). Although not its original aim, I believe this could attribute to intergenerational justice, if it is applied intergenerationally because it would require people to recognise future people and to show concern for them. I assume this would entail not harming them for unnecessary reasons but such a conclusion is not stipulated by Nussbaum.

Another capability that makes Nussbaum’s list advantageous is the eighth capability; “Being able to live with concern for, and in relation to, animals, plants, the world of nature.” This capability suggest a broader moral scope, including living beings; animals, and living things; plants and nature, certainly the scope of morality is much broader than the one Gewirth proposes which is only concerned with humans.

That being said, these capabilities only require recognising and showing concern for other humans, animals and nature. In the case of showing concern for other human beings I have assumed this would mean people should not harming future generations (unnecessarily), but this is my personal assumption and what exactly these capabilities entail is unclear. Numerous questions are left open, such as; Ought people to merely show concern for others, or ought people to show equal consideration of future people, What level of concern should be shown for the planet, the environment and animals? As of yet, these questions remain unanswered.

4.2 The first proposal: Gewirth’s account of basic human rights

4.2.1 Disadvantages

I believe an important disadvantage to Gewirth’s account of basic human rights is the lack of specification. While he argues for freedom and wellbeing as necessary and gives some general indications of what the three kinds of goods necessary for the achievement of wellbeing entail, he leaves a lot of room for interpretation and specification of the corresponding rights. For instance, the right to utilise resources to satisfy wants, leaves a many things unspecified, such as which resources people have a rights to use, considering their environmental impact, and to what degree these may be used. This problem is somewhat alleviated because of Gewirth’s prescription how conflicts should be resolved. In the case of climate change, where conflicts between generations already conflict, this is an important feature which I will discuss in the next section.

The ascription of the right not to be harmed by or subject to situations wherein one is hindered in securing available resources, may present difficulties, as limits on freedom for the

sake of alleviating climate change and securing the rights of future generations, may be seen as a violation. Certainly, some level of convenience and freedom of choice will be taken away from current generations if, for instance, unsustainable energy sources, though available, are no longer acceptable energy sources people are allowed to use. However, especially in cases where (more) sustainable resources are available, I would argue that this does not constitute an unacceptable harm, or indeed any harm at all, but rather a temporary inconvenience or a restriction in their freedom of choice, because people are accustomed to using certain energy sources. I would argue, furthermore, that such inconveniences do not compare to the injustice and harm future generations will experience if people are allowed to continue their unsustainable ways simply because they prefer to do so or out of convenience.

Lastly, the attribution of rights based on agency can be a disadvantage to Gewirth's account as a specification of the threshold, because it excludes humans who do not have agency such as people in a coma, people with severe disabilities, elderly people with developed Alzheimer's disease, and also nature, plants and animals. A critique on the approach itself could be that agency is not the only important feature on the basis of which rights can be attributed. The ability to experience pleasure or pain, having or developing certain emotional and cognitive capacities or simply the fact that someone or something is alive and has a function in the world could all be worth at least some degree of consideration.

4.2.2 Advantages

The focus on agency, however, is also an advantage, agency as a precondition for the attribution of human rights means that every human being who has agency, must have human rights. Thus, if current generations believe they are legitimate right holders because of their agency, they must also accept that future people, who will have agency, will be legitimate right claimers, and violations of their rights (especially for the satisfaction of wants) is immoral, and rationally unjustifiable. Justice demands that every agent can satisfy their basic, nonsubtractive and additive needs, therefore it also requires the limitation of some rights to secure more basic rights of these violate the rights of others (Gewirth, 1978, 57). I believe Gewirth is especially suited to fill in the threshold of sufficiency because of his emphasis on necessity, and normative necessity, as an essential component in the ascription of rights. Necessary goods are "confined to the truly grounded requirements of agency; hence, it correctly characterizes the indispensable conditions that all agents must accept as needed for their actions"(Gewirth, 1978, 48). The significance of freedom and wellbeing as necessary goods of (successful) action, and importance of these goods as opposed to others, suggests an

inherent dichotomy between wants and needs in his approach.

As aforementioned in paragraph 2.1, basic, nonsubtractive goods and additive goods are necessary preconditions for the achievement of wellbeing. While all three are important, there is also a hierarchy to these three kinds of goods. When translated into rights, these rights vary in degrees of necessity and therefore differ in importance, meaning some can be prioritized over others. I believe this way of classifying different goods and rights has a sufficientarian character. Moreover, it requires the prioritisation of more basic rights or goods in cases of conflict. Rights are *prima facie* only, not absolute. Gewirth explicitly states that in some cases, rights may justifiably be overridden (Gewirth, 1978, 57). Allowing for rights to be overridden is propitious for resolving conflicts between wants and needs, especially in the context of climate change where a just solution must be found for intergenerational conflicts between rights.

Another advantage is the PGC, which furthers the interests of all human beings as individuals and in relation to one another, it highlights the moral significance of and need for equality of generic rights and encompasses that every agent must act in a way that is respectful of the rights of others, at least refraining from interfering with their rights, because they too have the same rights the agent claims for himself. In the case of climate change, Gewirth's claim that people should not merely respect that others have these rights but that they, in some cases, even have a duty to help them satisfy these rights if they are unable to do so on their own, is an important advantage to Gewirth and certainly one of the reasons why I believe his account is better suited than Nussbaum's list of capabilities to specify the threshold. The duty to assist others in securing their rights could be quite demanding but it chiefly highlights, once more, the moral importance of needs and the priority they deserve over wants. It entails that current generations at least have an obligation to not act in such a way as to leave future generations unable to attain freedom and wellbeing and even that they, in some cases, have a duty to assist them in their ability to secure their needs. This last feature may be used to justify the delineation of duties of climate change mitigation.

In the context of climate change, this would require limitations on certain rights and freedoms. While it is within every person's right to secure their basic needs, these should, where possible, be satisfied in a sustainable manner. Furthermore, limitations can justifiably be placed on actions aimed at the satisfaction of wants insofar as these infringe upon, or deprive future people of, their basic rights. Because of this strictness, the application of Gewirth's account to a sufficiency threshold, the implications are highly likely to be effective in battling climate change. The use of unsustainable energy sources for which there are

sustainable alternatives readily available, needs to be limited if not prohibited, so long it allows for the continuation of a sustainable economy. The emission of greenhouse gasses, insofar as these are not emitted as a result of satisfying basic needs, and where sustainable alternatives are available, may need to be prohibited or at least severely reduced, certainly considering the availability of sustainable alternatives. A limitation on people's freedom that would greatly aid the reduction of greenhouse gasses is the exclusion, or great reduction, of animal agriculture, as research has found that giving up the consumption of animal products it is the single biggest positive impact a person can have on the environment, greater even than giving up flying or driving a car (Poore & Nemecek, 2018).

Conclusion

Of the two proposals, I believe Gewirth provides the most coherent distinction between wants and needs. It specifies the threshold of sufficiency just high enough. Although an important disadvantage is lack of specification, his emphasis on human agency, his principle of generic consistency and the importance he attributes to necessary goods clearly distinguishes needs from wants. Moreover, the recognition of the fact that rights conflict and his proposal of how these conflicts need to be resolved, granting priority to that which is more necessary, is valuable for the issue of climate change, attributing to a just outcome for all generations. Specified as such, the threshold is effective and just in the context of climate change because restrictions can justifiably be placed on some freedoms so as to ensure both current and future generations will be able to satisfy their basic needs.

Conclusion

The earth's climate continues to change drastically and quickly, and the effects of climate change have dangerous repercussions for future generations. There is only one earth. There is no planet B to move to when this one is left uninhabitable. In spite of the attention this problem has received, the severity of the issue remains unchanged.

The idea that there is an essentially relevant moral difference between needs and wants has led me to my research question: *What, in the context of climate change, are needs and wants?* A question which I have tried to answer in multiple steps. Firstly, by using sufficientarianism as the theoretical explanation of the distinction between needs and wants. The first chapter has been dedicated to this, separating needs from wants, placing them on opposite ends of the threshold of sufficiency. I have discussed the principle's emphasis on the moral importance of needs, of people having enough and meeting the threshold. Needs are universal and can be determined objectively. In contrast, wants are subjective, personal desires that, although pleasurable, are not necessary and may be overridden for the sake of justice. In the context of climate change, this means that while current generations have the right to satisfy their needs, the needs of future people have priority over current people's wants, especially insofar as the satisfaction of wants aggravate climate change.

This brings me to the next step, answering the question how the threshold can be defined. I have argued that of the two proposed views: Gewirth's account of basic human rights and Nussbaum's capabilities list, the former is better suited to explicate a sufficiency threshold in the context of climate change.

The second chapter answers the question how Gewirth's account of human rights can specify the threshold. I have argued that the generic features of action, and the goods necessary to achieve wellbeing: basic, nonsubtractive and additive goods, are needs, and that they should be placed below the threshold.

The third chapter shows how Nussbaum's list of capabilities could explicate the sufficiency threshold. I have argued that while I have found the list to be quite extensive, the threshold must contain all capabilities. However, the use of a threshold of enough, requires consideration of the human propensity to choose more convenient unsustainable options, for which the proof is climate change itself. Limits to the manner of and degree to which the capabilities are achieved should be put in place, restricting freedom of choice rather than actual freedom. Without these limitations, the threshold would not concern sufficiency but

abundance, allowing for the aggravation of climate change, thereby infringing upon the rights of future generations. In short, it would constitute an intergenerational injustice.

In the fourth chapter I take the last step, concluding my argumentation for Gewirth as the preferable option to specify the threshold. The comparison of the two proposals illustrates that Nussbaum's list is less appropriate because of the focus on freedom, its individualistic character and the lack of explicit hierarchy to the capabilities. Furthermore, no way to resolve conflicts has been proposed, leaving the interpretation of which capabilities merit prioritisation in cases of conflict, open.

I have argued that Gewirth's account, although in need of specification and perhaps a broader scope of moral consideration, is nonetheless better suited, for several reasons. Firstly, the Principle of Generic Consistency is especially relevant in the case of climate change. Applied intergenerationally, it entails that current generations must logically accept future generations as equality legitimate right claimers that require consideration and respect. Requiring, at the very least that current generations do not infringe upon their needs. Thirdly, what is particularly valuable in the case of climate change is the explication of the *prima facie* character of rights, which means that overriding them is justified and even required in some cases. When rights conflict, justice requires that the more necessary right or good is prioritised. The justification for violations of rights is essential in the case of climate change, for which preventing future and more severe violations is required for the sake of justice, specifically; intergenerational justice. Avoiding more severe climate change for the sake of future people, requires a limitation to the rights of current generations. This specification of how conflicts ought to be resolved complements my idea that the needs of future people should not be frustrated, especially not for the sake of wants.

The implications of this specification of the threshold is that people need freedom and wellbeing, correspondingly; they have rights to life, to physical and mental abilities and to sufficient and adequate nutrition. Furthermore, people have the right to knowledge, to be unhindered in planning their life and to not suffer harm from dangerous conditions. Lastly, self-development, education and freedom from discrimination are also needs. What this means, in the case of climate change, is that future people should not suffer from climate change, as it has negative effects on many of their needs. To ensure future people can also satisfy their needs, current generations need to satisfy their needs more sustainably and must forgo the satisfaction of their unsustainable wants. Recreational activities and travelling

should be limited and dietary habits and energy use in general should be adapted, opting for more a sustainable, plant based diet and sustainable energy such as wind and solar power.

In conclusion; I have argued that there is an important difference between wants and needs and that, while people have the right to satisfy their needs, preferably in a sustainable way, the satisfaction of their wants insofar as it affects climate change, is immoral if it needlessly endangers future generations and their ability to satisfy their basic needs. I would say that the restrictions on peoples' freedoms now is not an actual limitation but the end to a loan, of sorts, on certain freedoms people should never have had, or not to the extent or in the manner in which they have exerted them. The freedom to needlessly aggravate climate change at the expense of future people, I have found, is immoral. I believe persisting to aggravate climate change is not merely a failure to protect future people, it constitutes inflicting danger on those who have no way of defending themselves against the harm that is imposed on them. Additionally, the longer people wait, the greater the problem of climate change becomes, adding to the danger to future people and making it more difficult to solve.

I have tried to argue concisely, including as much as needed to answer my research question without lingering on additional aspects. Some limitations to this thesis, I need to indicate are, firstly, choosing two approaches to explain the threshold and not more. Secondly, I submit I could have chosen different approaches which could have been equally suitable, Rawls' theory of justice, or Kant's moral philosophy for instance. Lastly, climate change may be too great a problem to be left to individual agents. More drastic steps, in the form of official legislation perhaps, may be required to mitigate climate change efficiently. It would be interesting to see what the role of governments could be, and how the distinction between needs and wants could be used in public policy. I would say however, that this would not diminish people's individual moral responsibility to refrain from creating an even bigger problem.

With climate change, we are essentially passing on a sinking boat to future generations, to our children and grandchildren, a sinking boat in which we have purposefully and knowingly punctured holes. While we are aware that the boat is sinking, and know what must be done to fix it, everyone on board refuses to stop destroying the boat, taking bits and pieces from it here and there, making it less and less likely that the boat will ever float, let alone sail, again. Every passenger on the boat is more concerned with themselves, taking from the boat what

they can, pointing fingers to others on board, demanding or expecting them to fix the problem. And all the while, the boat keeps sinking.

I believe it is high time to fix the boat.

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