

# A Capabilities Approach to Late Modernity

– Flexibility, Singularity, and Human Flourishing in the  
Labor Market

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## Abstract

**Keywords:** Capabilities Approach, Late Modernity, Labor Market, Flexibility, Singularity

In my paper, I argue that the underlying social ideals of the late modern labor market, namely flexibility and singularity, undermine human flourishing as conceptualized by Martha C. Nussbaum. It is on these grounds, that we should be critical of late modernity. For an account of late modernity, I rely on the sociological works of Ulrich Beck (1992), Zygmunt Bauman (2000; 2007a), and Andreas Reckwitz (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020). My account of this socio-historical era focusses on the three main components that set it apart from the previous industrial modernity according to the aforementioned sociologists: the revolution in ICT, the creative economy, and the socio-cultural revolution within the new middle class. It becomes clear that these three components contribute to a more liquid, flexible, and singularized setting. On this basis, then, I will introduce the ethical theory of Martha C. Nussbaum: The Capabilities Approach. I will justify the methodological choice of using her theory, and not that the Capabilities approach of Amartya Sen. My focus on human flourishing will be defended against the accusation of being universalist or biased, and the suggestion that preference utilitarianism would be a better fit for my research objective.


The main body of my paper is the ethical analysis and weighing of arguments for and against my thesis, that we ought to object to the social ideals promoted by the late modern labor market because they undermine human flourishing. I will give two main arguments in support of this thesis, each corresponding to one of Nussbaum's central Capabilities. The first one identifies a conflict between the requirements for our emotional Capability and the kind of self-sufficiency needed to achieve the social ideal of flexibility. I show, that flexibility has become a necessary coping strategy for the late modern individual, making the conflict a pressing one to solve. My second argument draws out a lack of respect and dignity granted to those who perform functional labor (mostly in the service sector) in late modernity, because the functional worker can not live up to the social ideal of singularity. The lack of respect for functional workers pushes them below the threshold required for human flourishing. Finally, I will consider the counterargument, that the late modern labor market provides better opportunities for creative expression and self-actualization. Is that not the epitome of human flourishing i.e. the actualization of one's potentialities? However, I refute this counterargument on multiple grounds: firstly, the goal is not human flourishing, but economic profit. Secondly, it promotes a kind of consumerism, that seems to conflict with emotional needs. Lastly, the workers who are enabled creative expression, are and will remain few.

## Acknowledgement

To write a thesis in philosophy on a topic I feel this passionate about has been a great privilege. Even though, the writing process was not always a pure joy, it has been an incredible opportunity for me to look closer at the dynamics in our society and to question my own views on them. For my bachelor thesis I had already researched the lifestyles of late modernity but I did not have the same tools I have now. Acquiring these tools of applied ethics has been a journey for me. It has brought me to Linköping University, it challenged me and it made me grow. Thank you to everyone who has been a part of this. This thesis is a result of this journey.

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## I. Introduction

Sociological analyses of our current place and time are rarely as purely factual as early sociologists had envisioned for their discipline (Turner, 2013, p. 603). But the kind of social criticism provided by social analyses is usually not coherently translated into ethical principles or thoroughly dissected with the help of an ethical theory. A common defense of this state of affairs is to argue that “the intellectual cultures of ethics and sociology are so radically divergent that dialog is virtually impossible.” (p. 603) My thesis will prove that this is not the case. Ethicists are already acknowledging their reliance on the social sciences because “ethical theory has to connect to empirical reality, either through claims about human nature or in other ways” (p. 608). I will show the value which ethics can add to sociology by applying the ethical theory of Martha Nussbaum (2011), her Capabilities approach, to evaluate the ethical implications of sociological findings. This opens up new ways to critically engage with the current state of our society on a deeper level. I will argue that the underlying social ideals of the late modern labor market undermine human flourishing. It is on this basis, that we should be critical of late modernity.

### Ideals

The formulation of my thesis requires me to provide definitions of three key terms, before I continue building my argument: ideals, human flourishing, and late modernity. Firstly, in the context of my thesis, I use “ideals” to denote substantive ideals: “Substantive ideals delineate the features that something or someone must possess in order to be excellent in a specific regard.” (Rosati, 1998, p 3837) These ideals do not have to be necessarily “good” in a moral sense (p. 3839). This “specific regard”, which serves as an evaluative standard in ideals, is socially constructed and a product of its time. This, I indicate in my thesis accordingly, by referring to them as *social* ideals. In contrast, *moral* ideals are the result of ethical deliberation. Ideals in this ethical sense are also aspirational, “offering us not only representations of the world as it is, but as it attractively could be if certain actions were undertaken.” (Anderson, 2017, p. xxi) Martha C. Nussbaum’s Capabilities approach relies on the moral ideal of human flourishing. Each of her ten central Capabilities that will be introduced in section III of my paper, represents a secondary moral ideal.

### Human Flourishing

The concept of “human flourishing” builds on the tradition of Aristotelian ethics and aims to provide a more intuitive translation for the Greek term *eudaimonia*. Eudaimonia ought to be

the goal of all human struggles, Aristotle argues. The term encompasses more than the subjective good of "happiness", neo-Aristotelians suggest (Rasmussen, 1999, p. 2). In contrast to happiness, flourishing is not just an end state; "it is a life that is worthwhile throughout" (p. 5). Flourishing is a set of actions: "These activities are those that both express and produce in a human being an actualization of potentialities that are specific to its natural kind." (p. 3) The actualization of potentialities requires that the individual takes responsibility for their own life: "so as to develop and maintain those virtues for which he alone is responsible and which in most cases will allow him to attain the goods his life requires." (p. 10) This neo-Aristotelian theory assumes that who or what a person is and *can be* depends not just on the real potentialities, but also on the needs and circumstances of the person (p. 8f.). Therefore, flourishing also draws attention to the need for external goods and the importance of needs. Nussbaum, who's theory is the backbone of my ethical analysis generally shares the neo-Aristotelian interpretation and proposes human flourishing as the goal for human development (Nussbaum, 2011, 23). The ten central Capabilities she proposes, will enable the flourishing of any individual in any given society, she argues.

## Late Modernity and my Research Objective

The last term of my thesis statement that I need to introduce very briefly here is "late modernity". This concept attempts to describe and understand the era we are living in. It is roughly said to have started in the 1970s and to have replaced industrial (also organized or heavy) modernity. As an ethicist, I wonder about the ethics, values, and ideals that characterize this time. Sociologists point to underlying social ideals of flexibility (Bauman, 2000; 2003; 2007a; 2007b), singularity (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020), and emancipative values like self-actualization (Welzel & Inglehard, 2010). While these sociologists provide accounts and theories on how these values came to be and inform the structure of our society today, they do not evaluate the morality of these social ideals. To start such an evaluative project is the objective of my thesis. Nonetheless, it is useful to first understand how these social ideals came to be and how they inform our society today.

In contrast to industrial modernity, late modernity is characterized by a revolution in information and communications technologies (ICT) (Bauman, 2000, p.36), a creative economy which thrives on the new social logic that devalues anything standardized in favor of everything "singular" (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 3), and a new middle class aspiring towards self-actualization (Inglehard and Welzel, 2010). The social ideal of *flexibility* is a response to the new affordances of ICT, and the increased speed of change. Social institutions

and social norms have lost their dependability; everything appears to be in flux. The second key value that emerged is, as Reckwitz (Reckwitz & Pakis 2020) emphasize: *singularity*. Things, persons, experiences; everything needs to be unique in order to gain social recognition. As a logical consequence, *self-actualization* becomes a social ideal for assessing one's life: can I show my own unique personality, thoughts and creativity through my lifestyle? The culmination of these changes causes external circumstances to be less predictable for the individual. The social ideals that accompanied the transition into late modernity – flexibility and singularity – encourage the individual to embrace the unpredictability as an opportunity to actualize a life that nobody else could. When I say, that my thesis focusses on the level of “ideals”, it is the relationship between the social ideals of flexibility and singularity and the moral ideal of human flourishing, that is my primary research interest.

## Roadmap

With this clarification of my research interest and the key terms of my thesis, I can now move on to a more detailed introduction to the late modern labor market. For this, I rely on works from Ulrich Beck (1992), Zygmunt Bauman (2000; 2007a), and Andreas Reckwitz (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020). In the second section of my paper, the account of late modernity focusses on the three main socio-historical components that set it apart from the previous industrial modernity: the revolution in ICT, the creative economy, and the socio-cultural revolution within the middle class. It will become clear that these three components contribute to a more liquid, flexible, and singularized setting. In the third section, I will introduce the ethical theory of Martha C. Nussbaum: The Capabilities approach. I will justify the methodological choice of using her theory, and not that the Capabilities approach of Amartya Sen. My methodological choice will further be defended against the accusation of being a universalist theory with a Western bias, and the suggestion that preference utilitarianism would be a better fit to approach human flourishing.

The fourth section is entirely dedicated to the ethical analysis and weighing of arguments for and against my thesis: we ought to object to the social ideals promoted by the late modern labor market because they undermine human flourishing. I will give two main arguments in support of this thesis, each corresponding to one of Nussbaum's central Capabilities. The first one identifies a conflict between the requirements for our emotional Capability and the kind of self-sufficiency needed to achieve the social ideal of flexibility. I show, that flexibility has become a necessary coping strategy for the late modern individual, making the conflict a



pressing one. My second argument draws out a lack of respect and dignity granted to those who perform functional labor<sup>1</sup> in late modernity. This lack of respect pushes them below the threshold required for human flourishing. Finally, I will consider the counterargument, that the late modern labor market provides better opportunities for creative expression. Is that not the epitome of human flourishing i.e. the actualization of one's potentialities? However, I refute this counterargument on multiple grounds by showing that the alignment between late modernity and human flourishing exists only on a surface level.

## II. A Brief Introduction to Late Modernity

As mentioned in the introduction, the concept of "late modernity" is an attempt to describe and understand the era we live in. Around the 1970s it has started to replace industrial (or organized) modernity. Two processes in particular capture the core of the transformation: *liquification* and *singularization*. Zygmunt Bauman uses the metaphor of liquid modernity to contrast the current era with the previous industrial or heavy modernity. Liquefaction captures the characteristic patterns of coordination between social entities in our time: "like all fluids, they do not keep their shape for long." (Bauman, 2000, p. 33) The metaphor illustrates the incredible speed of change. It asks one, as well, to visualize how smaller entities travel much quicker than bigger ones, because they face less resistance. Liquids are much more flexible than solids. The velocity of change favors individuals without attachments, who travel lightly and adapt quickly to new circumstances (Bauman, 2007a, p. 10). *Flexibility* is the emergent social ideal of late modernity which Bauman emphasizes in his work.

The second process characteristic for late modernity, is singularization. It is emphasized in Andreas Reckwitz' distinction between the social logic of the *general* and the social logic of the *singular*. Social logic is "what is socially and culturally expected.... What is increasingly being advanced and demanded and what has become the focus of people's hopes and longings." (Reckwitz, 2020, p. 141) The social logic of the singular is sustained by continuous processes of singularization, which "means more than independence and self-optimization. At its heart is a more complex pursuit of uniqueness and exceptionality" (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 3). *Singularity* is the ideal standard Reckwitz finds most characteristic for society in late modernity. In contrast, *industrial* modernity was characterized by the social ideal of *generality* and sustained by processes of *standardization*. These two sociological theories of

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<sup>1</sup>Often times, the term of "unskilled labor" is used in this context. Any work, though requires skills of some sort. This is why I prefer the term *functional* worker. Functional work in late modernity usually refers to work in the service sector, where the worker is replaceable. (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 77)

liquid modernity and the social logic of singularities including the corresponding social ideals of flexibility and singularity are at the core of my argument. They are key to understanding late modernity. Three socio-historical components of late modernity shall provide the necessary introduction to the topic to prepare my reader for the ethical critique of the social ideals underlying the labor market. I will now account for each of these three aspects in turn: the revolution in ICT, the creative economy, and the socio-cultural revolution of the new middle class (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 73ff.).

## Revolution in ICT

In April 1976, the very first Apple computer hit the market: the Apple I. Early versions of the internet had been around at that point, too, but the use was mostly limited to military officials, academia, and computer enthusiasts. The commercial breakthrough of the internet occurred in the 1990s. These two revolutions in ICT – digitization and the internet – have shaped the period of late modernity decisively. Since my hypothesis emphasizes the ideals perpetuated by the labor market, my analysis will focus on the effect of the ICT revolution on economic production, rather than on consumption, politics or identity formation. The main difference the new ICT brought about is that information can be exchanged much faster. This has heightened the sensitivity of the producer towards changes in market demand. Improved means of information transmittance and means of transportation made the just-in-time or lean production popular in the course of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. No longer was it necessary to keep huge warehouses, causing the powerful image of “the gradual abandonment of large-scale work buildings.” (Beck, 1992, p. 142) The image is a powerful one, because heavy, industrial modernity was “the bulk-obsessed modernity, ‘the larger the better’ kind of modernity, of ‘the size is power, the volume is success’ sort.” (Bauman, 2000b, p. 34) The flexibilization of capital according to market demands, also gave rise to the desire for more flexible working hours. This would enable businesses to respond even better to changes; whilst shifting part of the entrepreneurial risk “onto the employees as flexible underemployment.” (Beck, 1992, p. 146f.) By today, we have certainly moved away from the industrial mode of “a uniform system of lifelong full-time work organized in a single industrial location”, and are left instead with a risk-fraught labor market of underemployment (p. 143f.). And a labor market that favors flexibility, the ability to respond to changes in demand, over anything else.

But the effects of the new ICT go beyond the increased flexibility through lean production. Nor did it just affect employment contracts through more flexible working hours and new

forms of underemployment. It also changed the spatial dimension of labor: “In the software universe of light-speed travel, space may be traversed, literally in ‘no time’; the difference between ‘far away’ and ‘down here’ is cancelled.” (Bauman, 2000, p.36) The same holds true for the majority of work itself in software capitalism: it is “disembodied”. The worker only needs a computer to work, no heavy machinery or physical labor is necessary for production. Cognition (both human and computed) is much more decisive in *creating value* than physical labor. Your own unique thinking and point of view should be reflected in your work because it is not your physical labor that turns resources into goods, anymore. It is your *cognitive* efforts, your *singular identity*, that creates value (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 146). Thus, we see, how flexibility and singularity emerged as values through the new ICT. But we have already bridged into the next component of late modernity: the creative economy.

## Creative Economy

Late modernity and its labor market cannot be understood without paying attention to the continuously growing relevance of the new economic branch of the creative economy.<sup>2</sup> Reckwitz (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020) clearly identifies it as the new driving force: The value creation and number of employees in these fields have been growing since the 1980s – “both in absolute terms and in terms of their share of the overall economy.” (p. 83). The creative economy is usually considered to include “architecture, advertising, the arts, crafts, music, film and video, design, fashion, computer games, software development and computer services, and finally media of all sorts, from print and radio to television and online.” (p. 83) It is difficult to understand the growth of this economic branch without taking into consideration how the social logic of singularities feeds into its popularity, because the creative economy thrives on the new social logic.

The society of late modernity advances and *demand*s singularity. The consuming subject is concerned with *curating* an exceptional life and *performing* their unique personality for themselves and an (imagined) audience – “everything in one’s lifestyle is measured according to the standard of ‘specialness’” (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 3). This emphasizes, that singularity always has a performative side. It also explains, why Reckwitz chooses the term “singularity” over “individuality”: the demand for uniqueness is not just applied to subjects, but also to objects, places, events, and even collectives (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 59). In contrast, during *industrial* modernity the social logic of the general directed efforts of society

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<sup>2</sup> I will remain with Reckwitz’ preferred vocabulary, here: creative economy; though others also refer to it as “knowledge economy” (Drucker, 1969).

towards goods that “were equal, homogenous and justified” (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 7). Justified where those things that were *functional*. For individuals the goal was to *fit in* with the general society: “Even the consuming subject in organized [industrial] modernity was not concerned with begin distinct but rather with demonstrating normality.” (p. 71) The social logic of the general operated through processes of standardization and formalization with the goal of rationalization.

In contrast, *processes of singularization* shape today’s society of singularities. These processes are always an act of *culturalization*. A profane object becomes a cultural good when we recognize its *complexity* and attach *value* to it. If one recognizes an object in all its complexity, it automatically appears to be unique. A successful singularization also requires a strong *emotive effect* on the consumer or the audience (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 59). Obviously, cultural goods are not only a phenomenon of late modernity. But since the 1980s one can recognize an explosion of produced singularities and social appreciation for them (p. 72).<sup>3</sup> This process of singularization is exactly what labor in the creative economy is concerned with: “To work creatively is to work on cultural novelties and singular things, media formats, service relationships, or events.” (p. 136) Therefore, creative labor requires a very different skill set than functional labor. The employee needs to provide new perspectives, knowledge about the field – history of previous trends and a sense of what comes next. Reckwitz explains that creative labor “always has the nature of research in the broad sense”, but the real challenge is to turn the information into attention-grabbing, affective *narratives* (p. 136). *Imagination* is key.

In developing such singular goods, the employee “has become a collaborator whose particular personality is valorized and utilized.” (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 146) But with the utilization of the entire personality and an expectation to always be aware of the developments in one’s field, the boundary between work and non-work becomes more and more blurred (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 165). Thus, creative labor is often perceived to enable meaningful self-actualization, but also holds the risk of self-exploitation because there is not a necessary end to your work once you go home (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 157). Since the goods developed in the creative economy are to be singular goods, they are also often supposed to be new things. But new things remain new only for a short period of time,

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<sup>3</sup>Reckwitz (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020) shows in his *The Society of Singularities* that “This quantitative shift has a qualitative and structurally formational effect on society” (p. 59) that is unique for late modernity.

thus “permanent innovation is its central objective.” (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 136)

Permanent innovation, then, requires employees to be flexible. We can clearly trace the rise of the social ideals of singularity and flexibility in the context of the creative economy.

## The Socio-Cultural Revolution of the New Middle Class

The main group who perpetuates and substantiates these dynamics, shall be the last component I introduce here. Even when sociologists (and myself in this paper, too) often appear to take a critical attitude towards late modernity, one should not forget that the predictability of the previous industrial modernity came at high costs: “These include social inhibition and repression on a large scale and the elimination of genuinely unique characteristics in a radical, systemic and historically. unprecedented way.” (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 30). By the late sixties the middle class, presented with new material and educational opportunities, had accumulated substantial levels of “cultural capital” (p. 73). This correlates with a shift from materialist towards post-materialist or “emancipative” values in the middle class (Inglehard and Welzel, 2010).<sup>4</sup> This means, that values of self-expression gain prominence over values of security and safety. So, the middle class started to protest against the old rigidity in the social order. The protest voiced, is dubbed “artistic critique” by Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello (2005, p. 163). It opposes “standardisation” and “vindicates an ideal of liberation and/or of individual autonomy, singularity, and authenticity” (p. 176). This obviously resonates with the social logic of singularity, as well, providing evidence that the middle class has been the main driver in this shift of social logics.

The shift in values which the middle class supported was evident in the many social emancipatory movements of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But it is also reflected in the values which the labor market caters to. The new middle-class values self-actualization over security, *flexibility* over “lifelong plans” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 169). While the firm of the 60s was characterized by rigorous hierarchy and counted on vertical integration, the company of late modernity is characterized by “featuring an organisation that is very

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<sup>4</sup> The circumstance, that certain material and educational opportunities are necessary for the socio-cultural revolution from materialist to post-materialist values is an indicator for the scope of my research and that of the sociological theories I rely on: They are inherently Western-centric. The implications of late modernity vary greatly across regions. My paper and argument focusses on the impacts late modernity has on the potential for human flourishing in the developed countries, who have experienced decades of stability and material affluence, and who are now entering a phase of liquefaction and flexibilization. It would certainly be an interesting research project for the future to investigate the ethical implications of the manifestations of late modernity across the globe.

flexible; organised by projects; works in a network; features few hierarchical levels; where a logic of transversal flows has replaced a more hierarchical one, etc” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 165). In late modernity, security is “[f]or the mobile and the adaptable” (p. 166). The precarity of forms of underemployment like part-time work is perceived rather as a desirable *liberation* than as an undesirable *risk* (Beck, 1992, p. 143).<sup>5</sup> All these new value assessments are simultaneously inspired by and further feed into the flexibility of liquid modernity and the aestheticizing logic of singularities. The new middle class seeks self-actualization through work, and has found a home in the creative economy. Combined with the shift from a social logic of the general to the social logic of the singular, we end up with a *polarization of the labor market* between professions in the creative economy and functional labor:

Essentially, a dualism now exists between the highly qualified activities of the knowledge and culture economy on the one hand, and the simple or standardized activities of the service sector and others. ... In late modernity, the professions that produce cultural singularity goods can claim legitimacy, status, and resources, whereas functional and “profane” labor cannot. (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 77)

With this, I conclude the sociological introduction to late modernity. This should give my reader sufficient background to follow the ethical analysis of three particular aspects of the late modern labor market: the emergence and broad acceptance of the social ideals of flexibility and singularity, the subsequent polarization between creative and functional labor, and the hope for self-actualization through creative work for the new middle class. Each of these aspects are relevant for the arguments I make in the course of my ethical analysis. Now, it is time to turn attention to my methodological choices and the ethical theory I build my argument on: Martha C. Nussbaum’s Capabilities approach.

### III. Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach

The Capabilities approaches (CA) started as a framework to evaluate human development and were pioneered by the economist and philosopher Amartya Sen (Robeyns, 2003, p. 5).

Nussbaum has developed it further into a partial theory of justice, aimed to provide minimum requirements for people to live a good life (p. 24). Broadly speaking, CA respond to the question of what individuals should be *capable to do and be*. At its core then, they provide an

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<sup>5</sup>“flexible forms of underemployment meet increasing interest among (young) men and women, in fact are virtually demanded by them in order to balance wage labor and family work, work and life, more equitably.” (Beck, 1992, p. 143)

answer to what a good life requires and that the goal for “human development” should be *human flourishing*. Nussbaum (2011) explains:

the approach takes each person as an end, asking not just about the total or average well-being but about the opportunities available to each person. It is focused on choice or freedom, holding that the crucial good societies should be promoting for their people is a set of opportunities, or substantial freedoms, which people then may or may not exercise in action: the choice is theirs. It thus commits itself to respect for people’s powers of self-definition. (p. 18)

This very emphasis on self-definition has determined the terminology of “Capabilities” in this paradigm and ties in with the intention of enabling human flourishing. We remember, that human flourishing is the actualization of individual potentialities.

When Nussbaum refers to “capabilities”, she does not only mean basic biological abilities, nor simply learned, or internal skills. The deficiency of such conceptions of learned capabilities – like reading or logical argumentation– is that one might be deprived of an opportunity to apply them (Nussbaum, 2009, p .67). For example, people might live in a society where they are denied free speech. The fact that they have received an education that has fostered their internal capability to form and present a critical argument, does not mean for them that they are actually able to do their critical thinking. What matters for a theory of justice, then, are “combined capabilities”: “Combined capabilities are internal capabilities plus a social-political environment that makes choice a live possibility.” (Nussbaum, 2019, p. 67) Capabilities – with a capital C – are “the substantial freedoms a person has to choose this or that functioning.” (p. 67) They are “capacities to function.” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 58)

To understand the key concept of *capability*, it is helpful to contrast it with *functioning*. Nussbaum (2011) provides an illustrative example for this: “there is a huge difference between fasting and starving, and it is that difference that we aim to capture.” (p. 67) In this context, a theory of justice that promotes capabilities means providing the individual with nutritional choices, so that ‘not eating’ is a choice. The functioning of this example would be “to be nourished”. A theory of justice, that promoted functioning, then, would focus on making people “be nourished”, although the person might rather be fasting, or eating food that is not properly nutritious. Here, the Rawlsian influence becomes evident: CA scholars generally prefer to give people options and choices to determine what makes a good life for themselves, rather than prescribing anyone to function in a specific way. Guaranteeing a

*Capability* means that we open up the *opportunities* a person has. They no longer have only the option to starve, they have the *choice* between being nourished and fasting.

### Why Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach to Late Modernity?

Even though Sen has pioneered CA, for my thesis it makes more sense to use Nussbaum's particular approach. For Sen, an economist, the main goal is to provide an evaluative framework (Robeyns, 2003, p. 36). Nussbaum, on the other hand, develops a partial theory of justice, and lays out "the political principles that should underlie a constitution." (p. 24) Therefore, she provides a list of such principles: ten central Capabilities. Sen opposes the endorsement of such a list of Capabilities, which has less relevance for an evaluative project of his kind anyways. The list is an ongoing debate among Capability scholars (Robeyns, 2003) and I do not intend to settle this disagreement. For my own project, having Nussbaum's list of Capabilities presents a useful starting point. Though the list is often criticized to be *biased*, in my particular case the list counteracts my own bias. I have approached the topic of late modernity with the intuition that there was something wrong with the social ideals of its labor market in respect to basic requirements for a good life. If I had compiled my own set of Capabilities, they would have been biased and limited to my research interest. Nussbaum provides a list of exactly such requirements for a good life that I needed to test my intuition – a list that is not tailored to my own research question in particular. Furthermore, Robeyns (2003) explains that a bias in the list can be avoided by making the list *explicit*, to discuss and defend the items on the list (p. 41). I do this as I continue in my argument, thereby also strengthening the *legitimacy* of the items on the list.

Another reason for choosing Nussbaum's theory for my project is that it is an *ideal* theory. She advocates for a set of *normative ideals* a society should engrave as fundamental rights in their constitution (Nussbaum, 2019, p. 68). Of course, non-ideal theory may also rely on ideals, but Nussbaum's list of Central Capabilities is also *prescriptive*. She defends her idealism in terms of necessary aspiration: "we need attractive and lofty goals to energize our efforts." (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 303) Her approach asks us, as a society, to make her central Capabilities the ideals that we strive for – to make them our *social logic*, in short. This immediate translatability into Reckwitz' terminology suggests that these theories are already operating on the same level.



## Criticism of CA

Nonetheless, the criticism towards a list of central Capabilities must be taken seriously. One critique argues that such a list has a Western bias, making its universalist aspirations problematic. The universalism it implies is furthermore paternalistic. Who gets to decide that a wide range of opportunities *must* be available, even if people might be happy to live their lives within a close-knit religious community for example? A critic could suggest, that preference utilitarianism is better, than Nussbaum's Capabilities approach. The starting point for such a utilitarianism is the assumption, that "people's essential interest is the satisfaction of their informed preferences" (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 38). Its advantage is, that it does not presuppose an objectivist or Western standard for wellbeing. The rule one can derive then is, that what satisfies one's informed preferences is good, and the good ought to be maximized.

One can reasonably challenge this the supposed superiority of preference utilitarianism, by asking who decides which kind of preferences are *informed*? Is there not a universalist assumption behind that, as well? And instead of providing opportunities, the utilitarian brings about end states, leaving *less* freedom to choose one's own individual path. These particular problem could be avoided if one did not adjust for informed preference. But then, the problem arises, that there are unfair or *illegitimate* preferences. For example, the preference of the racist group to exclude certain people from healthcare is a morally illegitimate desire (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 27). Nussbaum (2011) further refutes any moral theories that aim for preference satisfaction on the ground of adaptive preferences: "when society has put some things out of reach for some people, they typically learn not to want those things. ... thus they may report satisfaction with their state, even though opportunities that they would have enjoyed using are being denied them." (p. 54) If one would now rather go back to adjust for *informed* preferences, the result is a much more biased and paternalistic approach than CA ever were. The goal of CA is not to promote certain end states or bring all people to function in the same way. Capabilities are the *opportunities* that should be available for everyone. People are still free to choose to not use these opportunities and to live, for example, in a tight-knit religious community instead.

Other critics also suggest, that individualism is deeply engrained in CA which is problematic in their eyes (Stewart & Deneuli, 2002, p. 66). The focus of CA on what the individual is able

to do and be, loses track of important social goods, the critic argues.<sup>6</sup> Utilitarianism, in contrast, is attentive to the *greater good*. Robeyns (2003) reasonably holds against this criticism, that CA subscribe to *ethical* individualism, not ontological or methodological individualism (p. 44). Ethical individualism “postulates that individuals, and only individuals are the units of moral concern.” (p. 44) In no way does ethical individualism deny that the opportunities and wellbeing of individuals are influenced by social factors. This is also clear, when one recalls that the goal of CA is *human flourishing*, eudaimonia. The realization of potentialities in this way cannot occur outside a social setting: the social setting turns a capability into a Capability – a capacity to function. Human flourishing is a social good. It is made up of the culmination of the realization of individuals’ potentialities. With this I have defended my methodological choice of Nussbaum’s Capabilities approach against other CA and against alternative ethical theories like preference utilitarianism. But what are the central Capabilities now on Nussbaum’s controversial list? What makes her approach special?

### Which Capabilities?

Nussbaum explains that there are two requirements for Capabilities to make it on her list: Firstly, there are certain functionings so central to human life that “their presence or absence is typically understood to be a mark of the presence or absence of human life.” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 52) Secondly, these functionings are furthermore intimately connected to a sense of human *dignity*. That is, they enable a life in which one is “able to develop and exercise one’s human powers.” (p. 52) Basic social justice, requires that society provides all members equally with at least a certain *threshold level* of these Capabilities, that connect so intimately to human life and human dignity. However complicated and vague the notion of *dignity* might be, there is one generally acknowledged aspect that Nussbaum (2019) includes, too (revealing a strong Kantian influence): “This is the idea that each person is an end, a being with dignity, to be treated with respect, and that none should be used as a mere means to the ends of others.” (p. 76) Human dignity is intimately connected to “being an agent”, then. A dignified person is someone who makes active decisions and has the opportunity to follow through with their decision. Nussbaum suggests that if one takes all her ten Capabilities together, each of them reflects an aspect of dignity. Only if they are all enabled above a minimum threshold to everyone in a given society, is the dignity of these people *respected*.

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<sup>6</sup>“flourishing individuals generally need and depend on functional families, cooperative and high-trust societies, and social contexts which contribute to the development of individuals who choose “valuable” capabilities.” (Stewart & Deneulin, 2002, p. 68)

The ten Central Capabilities, which Nussbaum (2011) advocates for, then, are the following:

1. Life. 2. Bodily health. 3. Bodily integrity 4. Senses, imagination, and thought.
5. Emotions. 6. Practical reason. 7. Affiliation. 8. Other species. 9. Play. 10. Control over one's environment. (A) Political. (B) Material. (pp. 33f.)<sup>7</sup>

Reading this list, it is worth to remind oneself again, that Capabilities are capacities to function. We should be able to *choose* from this list, but we are *not forced* to live our lives using all these capabilities. We ought to be able to decide over our own bodies, and to choose to keep its integrity. Our environment ought to be in such a state, that we could choose a life in harmony with other species for ourselves. This implies that the Capabilities sometimes demand limiting the freedom of one person to interfere with those requirements necessary for another's Capability – a familiar liberal constraint.<sup>8</sup> In the course of my thesis, I will look more closely at the Capabilities 4. Senses, imagination, and thought, 5. Emotions, and 7. Affiliation. The other Capabilities will remain unexplained in my paper, since the space I have for my argument is limited. How the other Capabilities relate to late modernity would be an interesting subject for future research.

#### IV. The Ethical Analysis

With this, we have prepared the grounds for the ethical analysis. As I have said above, the thesis I put forth is that we ought to object to the underlying ideals of the late modern labor market because they conflict with Central Capabilities required for human flourishing. The main thrust of my arguments can be stated as follows:

- The emotional development of individuals (in accordance with the fifth Capability “Emotions”) is undermined by the necessary social ideal of flexibility and self-sufficiency in late modernity.

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<sup>7</sup> I will not provide an explanation of all of these Capabilities in my paper. The first three appear rather straightforward, as well as “control over one's environment”. The 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Capability will be explained in my ethical analysis, since my argument builds on these. Thus, practical reason, affiliation, other species, and play deserve a short explanation.

“6. *Practical reason*. “Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance. ...

8. *Other species*. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. *Play*. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 33f.)

<sup>8</sup>It can be found, for example in John Stuart Mill's (2009) *On Liberty*, originally published in 1859.

- The social logic of singularity undermines the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation for individuals outside the creative economy, therefore pushing functional workers below the threshold of the seventh Capability “Affiliation”.

Finally, I consider the strongest counterargument:

- The creative economy enables work and consumption in a way that opens up opportunities for the application of “Senses, imagination, and thought” as described by the fourth Capability.

The counterargument will be refuted, by appealing to the core purpose of Nussbaum’s approach: human development, not economic growth. Human flourishing requires more than material wealth. My previous arguments provide further grounds to rebut this argument in favor of the late modern labor market. Therefore, I will be able to conclude with strong support for my thesis.

Each argument will be presented in the same manner: Firstly, I account for the relevance of the Capability I claim to be at risk (or promoted) by the social ideals of the late modern labor market. This ought to be the first step, because if the Capability in question was not as decisive for human flourishing, the ethical critique I base on it would lose its relevance proportionally. Secondly, I account for those aspects of the late modern labor market which are *immediately* related to the Capability in question. At times, this means that I refer back to the first chapter, at other times, I will introduce further pieces to the puzzle. Based on this added account of the sociological background, in a third step, I draw out the lines of conflict between the social ideals and the moral ideals which Nussbaum recognizes as crucial for human flourishing.

## Argument 1

*The emotional development of individuals (in accordance with the fifth Capability) is undermined by the necessary ideal of flexibility and self-sufficiency in late modernity.*

The first argument I put forth is connected to the fifth capability on Nussbaum’s (2011) list:

5. Emotions. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one’s emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (p. 33f.)

Relying on Nussbaum's (1995) own account, I will establish that emotions are the acknowledgement that things and people outside of the self matter. We grieve at the absence of someone because we admit that they are important to us. I will argue that emotional development is relevant for human flourishing because emotions are at the core of our perception and entire being, and we simply *do* have needs for external goods. I continue my argument by outlining the dynamics of the late modern labor market. In contrast to emotional development, they demand self-sufficiency to maximize the individual's ability to respond to changes i.e. their flexibility. This prepares the grounds for the final two-step argument: the emotional development of the late modern subject is blighted by the social ideal of flexibility. Adopting this social ideal is not a fully voluntary act, though. Flexibility has become a necessary property for the individual to cope with living in a time of permanent change.

### **Capability 5: Emotions**

As we remember, Nussbaum's goal with the list of the ten central capabilities is to provide an account of what basic functionings must be enabled for a minimum of social justice. What qualifies "emotions" then, to make it on this list? Emotions are at the very core of the human experience. Nussbaum understands emotions not as "irrational pushes and pulls, they are ways of viewing the world. They reside in the core of one's being, the part of it with which one makes sense of the world." (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 376). Happiness, fear, sadness, and anger, are *inseparable* from our immediate experience of life. They influence our choices, our hopes and dreams, our actions. They also determine our wellbeing. The article in the *Stanford Encyclopedia for Philosophy* reads: "No aspect of our mental life is more important to the quality and meaning of our existence than the emotions. They are what makes life worth living and sometimes worth ending." (Scarantino & De Sousa, 2021) The centrality emotions play in our lives, comes with an air of certainty: If emotions are "ways of perceiving" (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 374) how could they ever be blighted? To answer this question, it is necessary to take a closer look at what emotions are and the conditions that turn it into a Capability i.e., a capacity to function.

The understanding of emotions which Nussbaum (1995) endorses, follows the philosophy of Greek and Roman Stoics. The core understanding, is, that "emotions are linked to beliefs ... that ascribe high worth or importance to things and persons outside the self." (p. 377) Nussbaum (1995) provides examples, that explain what this means:

Fear involves the thought that there are important bad things that could happen in the future and that one is not fully capable of preventing them. Grief involves the thought that someone or something extremely important has been taken from one; anger the thought that another has seriously damaged something to which one attaches great worth; pity the thought that another is suffering in a non-trivial way, through no fault of his or her own; hope involves the thought that one's own future good is in important respects not under one's own control. (p. 368)

Thus, emotions are attachments to external things, and as such, they “are acknowledgements, then, of the person's own incompleteness and vulnerability.” (p. 368) There are things and persons *outside* of our self that are of high importance which we cannot control. I am not quite enough; other things and persons *contribute* to my quality of life. These attachments to outside things make us vulnerable. The Stoics conclude from this, that emotions are a weakness and as such need to be overcome. The morally good person should not be vulnerable. They ought to be self-sufficient (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 378).

Nussbaum (1995) reaches a different conclusion. She argues that an account, where emotions are seen as something that needs to be banished, “is not only a very dubious basis for an account of good reasoning, but also an empty universe that cannot sustain an agent's interests long or fulfil her search for meaning. (p. 381) She recognizes the role emotions play in our social life and especially for beneficent action – the core of *any* ethical life. Beneficent action builds on the emotion of “pity”, which simply means that one recognizes and acknowledges the *needs* of another person as *important*. Needs actually are important, because “the social world is inhabited by weak creatures who can survive and flourish only if they come to one another's aid.” (p. 380) Emotions, like pity, are necessary for ethical behavior. A morally good person ought to show such ethical behavior. Therefore, the morally good person ought to accept their self-*insufficiency* to experience emotional development. They have to believe, “one is oneself such a [weak] creature.” (p. 380) This also shows that emotions require attachments to *other* persons: Love, grief, pity, and anger, are always directed towards somebody else. *Relationships* are necessary for emotions.

### **Emergence of Flexibility**

Before I investigate how the social ideal of flexibility *undermines* these conditions – accepting one's own self-insufficiency and having relationships to persons outside the self – I will show how flexibility fits into late modernity. The emergence of flexibility has already

been introduced in section II, especially as it is now enabled by the new ICT. We also learned that the new middle class values flexibility over routinization. But what kind of expectations follow in more detail from this social ideal? Bauman (2007b) explains, that the ideal employee in a liquid setting is supposed to be as mobile as possible, in order to match the digitized capital's readiness to move within an instant (p. 3f.). Bauman (2007a) elaborates:

Employers wish their future employees to swim rather than walk and to surf rather than swim. The ideal employee would be a person with no previous bonds, commitments or emotional attachments, and shunning new ones; a person ready to take on any task that comes by and prepared to instantly readjust and refocus their own inclinations, embracing new priorities and abandoning those previously acquired in short order; a person used to a setting where 'getting used to' as such – to a job, or a skill, or a way of doing things – is unwelcome and so imprudent; last but not least, a person who will leave the company when they are no longer needed, without complaint or litigation. (p. 10)

This quote highlights how the underlying values of heavy modernity – stability, routinization, and long-term planning – have lost their meaning completely in the transition to liquid modernity.

If the individual in late modernity wants to be successful in the labor market, they must always be on their toes. They must be ready to react to changing circumstances, leave a position without complaint as soon as they're not useful anymore, and travel hopefully towards the next opportunity. Give up long-term planning because one cannot predict the future anyway. Security is in mobility. Do not become tied to places, people, or objects. Or else: "One may become, horror of horrors, 'dependent'." (Bauman, 2003, p. 43) *Dependence* is such a horror in the context of late modernity, because liquid life is so unreliable.

Circumstances are certain to change in the near future. The individual is advised to not get attached, in order to keep the unavoidable ending painless and to remain *capable of action*: "Liquid Life is a succession of new beginnings – yet precisely for that reason it is the swift and painless endings, without which new beginnings would be unthinkable, that tend to be its most challenging and most upsetting headaches." (Bauman, 2007b, p. 2) The only *constant* is the liquid self themselves. Thus, self-reliance is the most promising strategy to remain capable of action, to keep agency. Liquid life is moving quickly which is a constant source of anxiety

for individuals in the labor market. Bauman (2003) describes what the entire industry of career counsellors, would have to say to anyone who is at risk of being left behind:

not enough self-assertion, not enough self-care or self-drilling, but most probably insufficient flexibility, too tight an embrace of old routines, places or people, a lack of enthusiasm for change and an unwillingness to change once change had to come. (p. 58)

In this description the emphasis on self-sufficiency is evident: It was their doings and undoings that have caused their failure. The most promising strategy for success then, is to adapt to the permanence of change: prepare for anything at all times. Be flexible and don't count on anyone but yourself. People leave, or you will leave people. Either one is going to happen for sure.

### **The Conflict Between Flexibility and Emotions**

With this, we are well prepared to analyze how this social ideal of flexibility, then, relates to the individual's ability "to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger." (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 33f.) My claim is that flexibility restricts the emotional development of the (socially) ideal individual so much, that they fall below the threshold of Emotions that is necessary for human flourishing. I will substantiate my claim in two steps. Firstly, I show that flexibility undermines emotional functioning because it favors self-sufficiency over strong attachments. Secondly, I argue that an embrace of flexibility is not a choice for the subject of late modernity but a necessary coping strategy. I start my argument on an analytical level, that is close to the surface: Bauman (2007a) identifies as a characteristic of the perfect employee, "embracing new priorities and abandoning those previously acquired in short order." (p. 10) There simply is no *time* to grieve what and whom one has left behind. Liquid modernity is so fast-paced, that endings *must* be swift and painless. Intimate relationships, that are deserving of the word "love" and "longing" take time to build, but are perceived to be a *risk* of slowing the individual down.

My argument on a deeper analytical level, requires us to keep in mind that emotions are "linked to beliefs ... that ascribe high worth or importance to things and persons outside the self." (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 377) If we were all that mattered to us, we would not be *slowed down* by emotions. This is exactly what the late modern labor market demands: Self-sufficiency seems necessary when your "Liquid Life is a succession of new beginnings" (Bauman, 2007b, p. 2). Close relationships become *liabilities*, and dependence must be overcome by "self-assertion, ... self-care or self-drilling" (Bauman, 2003, p. 58). You always need to be ready to be make a good first impression, to be assertive, and enthusiastic for



change; just as your career counsellor would advise. It appears, then, that self-sufficiency is *necessary* to foster the kind of flexibility needed to cope with the fast-paced environment of the late modern labor market. Liquid modernity *encourages* the same response which the Stoics had upon realizing that emotions are a testimony “of the person's own incompleteness and vulnerability.” (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 368) Emotions ought to be overcome.

But is it not a choice to embrace the constant change of the world around us with the value of flexibility? Is it fair to argue then, that late modernity undermines the Capability of emotions? To the critic I respond, that *embracing* flexibility is only to a certain extent voluntary. There is strong social pressure to conform. If your life is *not* in constant flux, Bauman (2003) suggests, that the anxiety will haunt you that you missed “the moment that calls for a change of track before crossing the point of no return.” (p. 2) You haven’t been strong enough to keep up. You couldn’t keep up. Do you want to live with this kind of resentment against yourself? Recent catastrophes outside of the labor market further illustrate that flexibility is a necessary strategy: You might have set up a comfortable life for yourself, but then a pandemic hits, droughts, wild fires, floods, food or oil shortages, an economic crisis, inflation, a housing crisis, a war in Europe. Crises like these are only likely to increase in frequency as the climate crisis escalates and late-stage capitalism spirals further out of control.

Therefore, the pressure to retain or even *increase* one’s flexibility goes beyond the dynamics of the labor market. Long-term planning and the comfort of certainty are unaffordable luxuries in late modernity. You *must* be flexible to keep going under changing circumstances. If you add the social pressure of keeping your life in constant flux, the level of *voluntariness* is further diminished. The individual only appears to have two options: Either, they embrace the ideal of flexibility by becoming self-sufficient and thus live a life of impoverished emotional connections. Or they live in a constant state of anxiety over losing those things or to leave or being left behind by the people one is emotionally attached to. Neither of the options can be deemed satisfying, since neither enables emotional development unblighted by fear and anxiety, as laid out by Nussbaum in the fifth Capability. Thus, we have built the first case against the social ideals of late modernity.

## Argument 2

*The Social Logic of Singularity undermines the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation for functional workers, therefore pushing them below the threshold of the seventh Capability “Affiliation”.*

With my second argument, I draw attention to another aspect of the late modern labor market and a broader shift in values in late modern society. The argument I make in this section builds on the division of the labor market between *creative* and *functional* labor. On the one hand we have the creative economy, where singular goods are invented and developed, on the other hand we have the “unskilled” functional labor that provides services and the background structure for producing and circulating these singular goods. When we consider this division through the lens of a transition from the social logic of the general towards the social logic of the singular, it becomes evident, that there is also a *normative polarization*: “In late modernity, the professions that produce cultural singularity goods can claim legitimacy, status, and resources, whereas functional and “profane” labor cannot.” (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 77) I will argue, based on this observation, that there is a conflict with human flourishing and the seventh Capability of “Affiliation” in particular:

7. Affiliation. (B) Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin. (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 34)

As with the previous argument, I will start by elaborating the importance of this capability. What makes affiliations where we are treated as dignified beings necessary for human flourishing? I will then proceed by accounting for the developments in late modernity, that I find most relevant in this respect. This time, Reckwitz’ (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020) *The Society of Singularities* will be most relevant. The final step will be to draw out the particular fault lines between the *social* ideals of late modernity and the *moral* ideal of the Capabilities.

### **Capability 7B: Affiliation and Human Dignity**

The seventh Capability “affiliation” plays a special role in Nussbaum’s theory, together with the sixth Capability “practical reason”. As Nussbaum (2011) explains: “They pervade the others in the sense that when the others are present in a form commensurate with human dignity, they are woven into them.” (p. 39) Nussbaum argues that respect for human dignity cannot exist if affiliations are not built in such a way that they provide “the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation”. While our human dignity is inalienable, a life *worthy* of dignity has a relational dimension: respect for my dignity is reliant on your attitudes and actions towards me. In adjacent research (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007), affiliation is thus highlighted to be a “fertile function”; meaning that it has a snowball effect, opening up doors

for other Capabilities to move above a certain threshold, as well. Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) find that affiliations play a crucial role in creating disadvantage in access to basic social goods: “by lacking or losing such access their disadvantage may well have been created by others, or, if not, is at least tolerated by them.” (p. 7) Our lives are embedded in a social context. And when this social context keeps all doors closed for *us*, it is much harder to achieve anything. Discriminatory policy and more broadly, any discriminatory affiliation, affects the *options* a person has for creating the life they wish for themselves. The Capabilities approach, we remember, evaluates “social justice” on the basis of what people are actually *able to do and be*. And to be a “dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others” requires that one is *treated* as such.

As a philosopher, one immediately wonders what Nussbaum means by being treated as ‘equally worthy’ as others. Nussbaum represents a relational egalitarianism, meaning that to her, each person is respect worthy no matter their social or inherent features.<sup>9</sup> What matters in terms of equality is *social* equality (rather than distributive equality of economic means) across the dimensions of authority, esteem, and standing (Anderson, 2017, p. 3). Here, Nussbaum’s concept of a *threshold* gains importance: while we don’t have to equalize all living conditions or apply the Rawlsian difference principle in order to achieve basic justice – which in turn means respecting every person’s dignity – we need to enable everyone living conditions above a certain threshold (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 32). Importantly, the Capabilities are not merely material resources, nor can they be provided by material resources alone. Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) affirm this: “Not all goods are material goods. Quite possibly the most important ones are not.” (p. 6) Nussbaum’s project, then, is not primarily focused on the redistribution of resources: “Treating people as equals may not entail equalizing the living conditions of all.” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 31) It is a matter of *relational* equality. My dignity is respected, when *others* respect it as well.

### **The Normative Polarization of the Labor Market**

As with the previous argument, I will return to aspects of this Capability, after I have introduced the change of late modernity that I want to emphasize here: the polarization of the labor market between *valued* creative labor and *profane* functional labor. In the first chapter, I

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<sup>9</sup> “The idea of human dignity is usually taken to involve an idea of equal worth: rich and poor, rural and urban, female and male, all are equally deserving of respect, just in virtue of being human, and this respect should not be abridged on account of a characteristic that is distributed by the whims of fortune.” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 46)

have already discussed the rise of the creative economy. Within the social logic of singularities, the creative economy claims all the status and prestige, leaving functional labor more or less entirely *devalued* (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020 p. 77). But of course, there is no society that can live solely on creativity and knowledge. Functional modes of production have not become obsolete in late modernity. They have just moved into the background (p. 135).<sup>10</sup> The Amazon warehouse is an illustrative example of an industrial mode of production that has not only survived, but became a necessary *background* structure in late modernity. The functional Amazon warehouse *enables* the singularized circulation of an ever-growing number of differentiated cultural goods. Thanks to it, the highly individualized consumerism becomes possible that enables the *material performance* of our singular identities. The coexistence of both functional and creative labor and the social preference of the latter, gives rise to a dramatic normative polarization of the labor market.

The polarization boils down to the recognition of creative workers as *singularities*. The recognition of workers as a singularity makes creative labor attractive, and the lack of this opportunity in functional labor makes it profane and merely necessary. Even though, every human being is a singularity already, this is not always *recognized* by society. While the creative economy is structured so as to *utilize* singularities, the functional worker is not *supposed* to be singular. Reckwitz (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020) explains the main modus operandi of industrial modernity, rationalization, to be inherently opposed to singularization: “The process of rationalization is always concerned with reducing complexity, with confining social entities to just a few parameters and therefore making them predictable and cooperative. Here, the complexity is regarded as disruptive.” (p. 59) If *complexity* is discouraged, though, it means that singularization cannot take place. Only if we recognize the inherent complexity and inner density of something (or someone) do we see what really makes them singular (p. 59).

We must also remember that *singularization* means *valorization* (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 8). If something is valorized that means, that “As bearers of value, they are not a means to an end; in a sense, they are ends in themselves.” (p. 54) But complexity is *reduced* in contexts of functional labor. They *cannot* be recognized as ends in themselves, while others, who move in the same labor market do get that very opportunity. So, even though as a human being you are always a singular entity, if you do functional work in late modernity, your singularity is

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<sup>10</sup> ...and often to the other side of the globe. Unfortunately, I lack the space to investigate the state of global justice in late modernity. It is definitely a promising avenue for future research.

*not* recognized. You are perceived to be replaceable, so you are not valuable in the eyes of society. With this, we are already moving into the ethical argument that the ideological structure of late modernity, which causes this normative polarization, conflicts with “being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 34)

### **The Polarized Labor Market Undermines the Flourishing of the Functional Worker**

My argument is that the social logic of singularity deprives workers outside the creative economy of the social bases in which their equal worth and human dignity are respected. This is what makes late modernity objectionable in light of the Capability of having affiliations of mutual respect. A critic might object, that a) paid labor never respects the individual’s dignity, because wage labor always *uses* the individual as a *means* towards production and economic profits. This raises doubt whether the workers in the creative economy have any advantage at all. A critic might challenge my argument on b) a historical account. Has the functional worker *ever* been treated with respect? Today, it is mostly service workers who do functional work of the kind that I mean here, whereas historically it was mostly work in factories. Objection b) raises doubt that the lack of respectful affiliations the functional worker has, is unique to the value structure of late modernity. I will refute both objections, and substantiate my claim with empirical evidence. Elizabeth Anderson’s (2017) account in *Private Government* shows that the humiliation of functional workers in their work place is common practice in the late modern labor market. Thus, I will provide evidence that they really are deprived of “the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 34).

Objection a) challenged the implication that workers in the creative economy have an advantage compared to functional laborers. When Reckwitz (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020) claims, that being valorized means that one is recognized as an end in themselves (p. 54), does he overlook that it does not apply for persons in the context of wage labor? One could argue even that the position of the worker in the creative economy has worsened because their *entire* personality is utilized as a means to create economic profit (p. 146). Thus, their dignity is not respected in the strict Kantian sense, either. But this is only one aspect of Nussbaum’s definition of dignity. It is also key “to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 34). The social logic of singularities, clearly causes a blatant *inequality* between workers in the creative economy, who are supposed to be singularities versus functional workers in the service sector whose complexity is supposed to be reduced. The functional worker is supposed to be “average”, and behave in a generally

expected way, so that the same quality of service can be guaranteed across different interactions. This means, that the worth we attach to each kind of worker is far from equal: “The flipside of valorizing unique and extraordinary performance is the utter devaluation of that which is merely average.” (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 150) It is the glaring inequality in esteem and status, that gives the creative laborer a considerable advantage: their *worthiness* of respect is recognized, even though they might still be used as means to economic profits.

Challenge b) to my argument raises doubt whether this phenomenon is unique for late modernity by suggesting that the functional worker has *never* been treated with respect. One can find strong support for such a thesis in modern history. The working conditions in factories during Marx’ times had been much less humane. I hold against this that a historical comparison is not a strong argument: Things can be bad in one way now, even if they were bad in a different way before. The way in which they are bad today is *unique* to late modernity. During industrial modernity, the social logic of the general prevailed which meant that society valued the general – that which fit in and did not stand out as a singularity. Even in their consumption choices, individuals wanted to affirm their general normality (p. 71). Being another cob in the machine was not devastating to one’s social status. In late modernity, though, functional workers are worth *less* in the eyes of society: They *failed* to self-actualize through labor. They are replaceable, and as such have not succeeded to *singularize* in the labor market. This is where the disrespect for functional workers today becomes unique for late modernity: Work should not be separate from the private identity; your identity *should* be utilized (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 145). The expectation to self-actualize through your (creative) work went hand in hand with the collapse of the distinction between work and non-work (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 165). If you were disrespected at work in industrial modernity, the disrespect affected only this dimension or functional role. People approached works with an *extrinsic* motivation “as means to an end; income, security, status” (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 146). These motivations still exist, but people are also looking for *intrinsic* motivation; “Something to be identified with” (p. 146). If in this setting, you find only *extrinsic* motivation to show up to your work, you have failed to live up to the social expectations of late modernity.

Finally, I shall substantiate my claims with empirical evidence. For this, I draw on Elizabeth Anderson’s (2017) account in *Private Government* of the terrible working conditions for workers in our current economy. It is noteworthy that the examples she draws on to illustrate the abuse of authority by employers over employees can all be categorized as functional labor.

She draws attention to the “workers in the bottom half, who toil in agriculture, slaughterhouses, janitorial services, restaurant work, warehouses, call centers, retail sales, domestic service, elder care, the garment industry, prisons, yard work, and unskilled construction and manufacturing work” (Anderson, 2017, p. 135). She goes on to provide indication of what workers in these jobs have to stand, which illustrate how their *dignity* is disrespected: sexual harassment (90% of restaurant workers in US), sweatshop-like conditions (93% of garment factories in Southern California), and no adequate bathroom breaks – “Many are forced to wear diapers” (vast majority of workers in the poultry industry) (p.135).

My argument suggests that employers get away with such gross practices of disrespect and humiliation, because functional workers are not singularized individuals due to their type of work. It is not an *accidental* humiliation, but it is *inseparable* from the value structure of our society. Functional workers are not recognized as complex beings *worthy* of respect. This is supported by the invisibility of the problem, which Anderson (2017) points out: “this 80 percent receives almost no recognition in contemporary public and academic discourse.” (p. 62) As a society, we care about *singular* subjects who contribute in a *singular* way to the production of *singular* goods. We don’t care about those who perform general tasks that could be performed by anyone. We don’t care about those who seem *replaceable*. It is due to this lack of valorization, that the gross abuses of managerial authority remain outside the public discourse. Anderson responds to her critic, Tyler Cowen – a very well-off, privileged academic – by tracing the ignorance *he* shows on the horrible working conditions in the Amazon warehouses to his social situation. Her response illustrates how the spotlight of society draws attention consistently *away* from “what work is like for those at the bottom of the workplace hierarchy, who mostly labor out of public view.” (p. 134) During Marx’ time, working conditions had been inhumane for functional workers. But their struggles had been very much *in* public view. The spotlight focused very much on the suffering of the bottom half. This supports my claim: they were not disrespected because they did functional labor.

Nussbaum would certainly agree with Anderson (2017): “A free society of equals cannot be founded on an institutional structure in which the vast majority of workers for most of their productive lives labor under such government.” (p. 133)<sup>11</sup> The polarization we see today,

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<sup>11</sup>“such government” refers to Anderson’s (2017) core concept of “private government”: “You are subject to private government wherever (1) you are subordinate to authorities who can order you around and sanction you for not complying over some domain of your life, and (2) the authorities treat it as none of your business, across a wide range of cases, what orders it issues or why it sanctions

clearly *undermines* the realization of Nussbaum's Capability of affiliation. With this, I have shown that the Capability for affiliations of equal worth and dignity, is undermined for functional workers in late modernity, in a way that puts them below the necessary threshold. While it does not mean, that there had not been disrespect for functional workers before, the disrespect towards their dignity is not paralleled in the creative economy and it is unique for the setting of late modernity. The question that remains now, is whether late modernity is truly all that bad. Is there no progress in late modernity towards human flourishing?

## Counterargument

*The creative economy enables work and consumption in a way that opens opportunities for the application of "Senses, imagination, and thought" in accordance with the fourth Capability.*

Someone familiar with Nussbaum's list of central Capabilities might have noticed one major advantage in late modernity. This can be found in connection to the fourth Capability:

4. Senses, imagination, and thought. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 33)

This is exactly what labor in the creative economy demands: to use one's senses, imagination and thought in connection with producing cultural goods. Does this not mean that late modernity promotes this functioning and as such we ought to embrace late modernity, rather than reject it? Is the ideal of self-actualization that workers in the creative economy experience not the actualization of one's potentialities and therefore the epitome of human flourishing? Like with the previous arguments, I will first shed light on the relevance of this Capability. Then I will elaborate on those aspects of the late modern labor market that are most relevant for this argument. This will show immediately how the creative economy enables the use of senses, thought and imagination in the context of production *and* consumption. Finally, though, I will scrutinize and refute this counterargument.

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you." (p. 44f.) Such private government, Anderson argues in the book, is left to its own devices and is not regulated by the political government in our current social system.



#### **Capability 4: Senses, imagination, and thought**

The fourth Capability introduces to our understanding of Nussbaum's concept of human flourishing the role of the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of human existence. To enjoy the taste of one's food, or to recognize the beauty of an image or a melody is wherein man differs from the animal, according to Marx (1844, p. 46). He emphasizes here the role education and the satisfaction of basic needs play in one's ability to appreciate art and cultural goods. He argues that: "because the meaning of an object for me goes only so far as my sense goes... – for this reason the senses of the social man differ from those of the non-social man." (p. 46) Nussbaum (2001) affirms this view of Marx (p. 45). Culture is part of a "truly human" experience, but the cultural sensibility needs to be cultivated in a social setting. By adding this Capability to her list, Nussbaum emphasizes the importance of using one's senses in a way that goes beyond securing survival. However, the wording leaves the door wide open for objections: what does "truly human" mean? Who decides what it means? What if somebody's senses are restricted by certain circumstances? What does this imply for their dignity or that of other, non-human, beings? To assess the late modern labor market fairly, it is necessary that I seriously engage with these objections to the Capability and answer the question of what makes this functioning relevant and worth enabling to all human beings.

The importance of this Capability should be built on a more secure basis than suggesting it is "truly human". An alternative foundation for the relevance of the fourth Capability can be derived from Nussbaum's request for capability theorists to "become readers of novels, biographies, autobiographies, and psychological case histories— anything that can enhance their grasp of those complicated elements of human experience on which our hope of political achievement and stability depends." (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 184) Senses, imagination, and thought foster "the ability to grasp, with imagination and information, the nature of one's historical and political situation." (p. 98) If one is unaware of "the nature of one's historical and political situation", how could one recognize social injustice? If Capability theorists are to *read* novels and biographies, someone needs to *write* them. Creative production is an act of weaving your individual life into the grand story of humanity; of using your voice. If you cannot use your voice, how can you demand justice for yourself and others? And how can you actualize your potentialities, flourish, if you cannot express yourself through imagination and thought? These mechanisms are, what Nussbaum means, when she says, as quoted above, that "our hope of political achievement and stability" depends on this fourth Capability.

## **The Creative Economy Speaks to our Senses and Imagination**

The fourth Capability is key for human flourishing, not just because it may or may not be integral to human nature, but also because it plays an important role for social justice.

Therefore, I can now account for elements of the creative economy that clearly relate to Capability 4. Senses, imagination, and thought. On first encounter, it appears that they relate to each other in such a way, that people move above the threshold of what basic social justice requires. The creative economy – the ideological heart of the late modern economy – is in its entirety geared towards stimulating our senses due to its focus on *singular* goods. We remember, that goods must be recognized to have “inherent complexity and inner density” in order to qualify as a *cultural*, singular, good. But they also need to cause an affect; they need to grab our attention, in order to be *valorized*, i.e. singularized (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 60). This necessarily includes speaking to the senses of the customer: “the aim here is rather intensive perception in all sensory dimensions and for its own sake.” (p. 62)

Since aesthetics play such a key role in the reception and *consumption* of (singular) goods in late modernity, they are equally important for the *production* of them. The main task for creative workers is to turn researched information into attention-grabbing, affective narratives: “Information is emotionally impoverished and objective; narratives and aesthetic perceptions mobilize affect.” (p. 62) Singular goods, as developed in the creative economy, are designed to speak to our senses and imagination as well as reason and thought. Thus, creative labor is a truly *aesthetic act* which requires thought and reasoning, and the application of one’s senses and imagination. Especially its relation to “senses” deserves emphasis here. After all, one could argue, that industrial labor is about the application of thought and imagination, too – mechanics use it in their work. Self-actualization of this creative kind is not just a by-product of creative labor, but its very *expectation* (p. 146).

The relevance, of the fourth Capability, as has been established above, also lies in its role of enabling us to make sense of our historical and political place in the world. Here, too, the production of singularities aligns perfectly: While industrial production is always tied to solving a problem, seeking answers to questions of ‘how?’; creative production asks ‘why?’ (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 60). While “how” aims to find the most efficient solution; creative labor addresses the creative imagination of the customer and the worker. Why should a customer buy this product? Because it will help them to perform the singular self they want to be. It will allow them to curate the life that will set them apart as a singular individual from others – a major life goal for the individual in a society of singularities (p. 3).

While there have always been people and jobs that had the goal of answering ‘why’ with narratives and addressing the aesthetics and cultural sensibility, late modernity has brought an impactful quantitative shift “that has a qualitative and structurally formational effect on society” (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 59). The demand for “singularized (that is, valorized and affectively operating) objects, subjects, places, events, and collectives” has increased dramatically. If we just think about how curated many of our contemporaries’ lives are, this becomes obvious: People don’t just eat bread anymore. It has to be the home-made sourdough bread. Functional clothing like socks in hiking sandals and zip-off pants (basically the German national costume) is subject to ridicule because it lacks all aesthetic appeal; when worn *unironically*. On the other hand, however, we have seen micro bags trending, and pockets on women’s pants sewn shut. Trend cycles becoming shorter and shorter. We have oat milk that has morphed into a lifestyle brand, where even the list of ingredients on the carton is wrapped up in a fun, ironic, *narrative*. We see our senses and sensibilities being taken into account in every aspect of our consumerist economy. Or don’t we?

### **Rebuttal**

The apparent alignment between the goals of the creative economy and the fourth Capability provides a strong counterargument against my thesis, which is, that the social ideals of late modernity undermine our flourishing. How can that be true if the individual in the creative economy gets to make their living by producing cultural goods? Aren’t we living in the paradise of the fourth Capability? We certainly are living in an era that provides many opportunities to function in accordance with our sensual and imaginative abilities. But we are also living in an era of *consumerism* (Bauman, 2007a, p. 26). The *goal* of consumerism is not human development, but maximum consumption and economic profit. It favors short-lived trends, because its constant obsession with the singular drives it to the next thing before a product becomes average or *old* news (Bauman, 2007a, p. 31). Consumerism drives shorter and shorter consumption cycles, which provide the creative economy with constant work. The functioning of thought, imagination and senses is a means to keep the consumerist machine running, which produces economic growth. In this context, the fourth Capability becomes a means to the end of economic profit; while for Nussbaum, it is a means to human development. Economic profit is not aimed at promoting anyone’s voice, which makes senses and imagination relevant. My first argument against this counterargument, then, is a deontological one. But is economic growth also bad in its *consequences*? Or is just not a good *motive* and *intention*?

Of course, it would be too simple to just condemn economic growth all together. But social justice is about what citizens are actually able to do and to be. Though GNP can correlate with widening opportunities, it fails at motivating nations to attend “to the living standard of their poorer inhabitants, and without addressing issues such as health and education, which typically do not improve with economic growth.” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. ix) Economic growth tells us little about what citizens are *actually* able to do and to be, because it does not reflect distributive inequalities. It says nothing about wellbeing, gender equality, educational or professional opportunities for personal growth. Furthermore, not all Capabilities can be satisfied with financial means as established above.<sup>12</sup> This is why, Nussbaum (2019) refers to CA as “necessary counter-theory” in the context of human development (p. 65): they radically shift the focus away from financial means and towards what people are actually able to do and to be. Therefore, it is not just a deontological problem to set economic growth as the main goal and to utilize Capabilities as means to this end. The singular focus on economic growth fails to advance all Capabilities necessary for human flourishing as a consequence.

Some critics might be unconvinced. After all, we have just seen that consumerism also aligns with the fourth Capability “Senses, imagination, and thought”. Therefore, it does good for the flourishing of the creative class. To those, I present two more rebuttals which tie back to my previous arguments and address both sides of consumption and production. Firstly, we had seen how the specific modes of consumerism open up consumption options in line with the fourth Capability. The goods we purchase and consume are to be aesthetically pleasing, and they are to enable us to curate and perform our singular personality: “subjects make themselves distinct through the uniqueness of their objects.” (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 41) Through this process, your identity becomes something almost outside of yourself that you are performing. In this performance others become both your audience and a benchmark for your own uniqueness. Because singularities cannot exist outside “performances of singularity before a social audience.” (p. 49) The performativity of identity through consumer goods in the late modern setting pushes us in the opposite direction of enabling emotions. Emotions, according to Nussbaum, require the permission – possibly even the affirmation – of one’s own *weakness*. In order to be recognized as a singular entity one’s performance must be perceived

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<sup>12</sup> Wolff and De Shalit (2007) also emphasize, that disadvantage is more than low income, i.e. economic poverty: “disadvantage is multifaceted, and for reasons such as this we will argue later that disadvantage is plural in nature.” (p. 4) They, illustrate with examples how money can solve some immediate problems, but “redistribution of money cannot in itself end oppressive social structures.” (p. 5)

as authentic: “performances suffer if they are one-sided or incoherent.” (Reckwitz & Pakis, 2020, p. 151) The pressure amounts to such, that you cannot allow yourself any weakness, because it would cause you to slip up in your performance, to bring the card house of your authentic façade to a fall. But how are we to have authentic, real connections when we are so set on performing singular entities? When our “authentic” façades are more appealing, more stimulating, than our authentic selves? This is the downside of the consumption that stimulates senses and imagination; the consumption of the singular. It would be interesting to conduct further research in this area.

Secondly, I want to point to the small percentage of people working in the creative industry. Economic growth will *never* be possible without functional labor. The late modern labor market will *never* lift everybody over the threshold and into creative labor. We cannot live off of creativity alone. So, very few people actually get to apply their senses and imagination in their work: it is and *will remain* a privilege. If we just look at the case of Germany, for example: in the year 2018, 1,695,923 individuals worked in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) (BmWi, 2019). That seems like a considerable amount of people. However, it places the percentage of people making their living in the German CCI at only roughly 3.78% (Destatis, 2020).<sup>13</sup> And while it is likely that there are countries where this percentage is higher, it is even more likely that there are many countries who have a much smaller CCI. Though this share might increase in the future, it is doubtful that it will ever be accessible to all. While creative labor is certainly the social *ideal* in late modernity, it can never be the dominant form of employment.

Thus, while a few individuals might be able to work creatively (applying their senses and imagination), the majority of the labor force remains below the threshold of the seventh Capability which is necessary for a life worthy of our dignity. The seventh Capability, is also a fertile function, which enables many more Capabilities. If it is blocked, it has negative ripple effects on the other Capabilities, including the fourth one. Finally, then, one needs to balance the marginal gain of having a small part of the labor market enabled to work according to their functioning of thought, imagination and sense with the conclusions from my first two arguments. The conflict between emotions and flexibility remains, just as the conflict between the polarization of the labor market and relational equality for functional

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<sup>13</sup>the total German workforce added up to almost 44,850,000 people

workers. Some weighing is due, here, which can only result for the disadvantage for the social ideals of the late modern labor market.

## Conclusion

I have begun my paper by introducing the sociological work of Bauman and Reckwitz, who capture the particularity of late modernity with their theories of liquid modernity and the social logic of the singular. Flexibility and singularity were the core concepts and social ideals that I traced through the ICT revolutions, the emergence of the creative economy and new middle class. Nussbaum's theory was introduced and I justified my methodological choice, defending CA against the suggestion that it was too universalist and too individualist. In the course of this defense of methodology, I also argued why I did not choose preference utilitarianism. Of course, I also highlighted the idiosyncrasies of Nussbaum's approach and introduced her list of central Capabilities, as a main analytical tool to reach my research objective: to substantiate the claim that we ought to object the ideal-structure of the late modern labor market, because it conflicts with requirements for human flourishing.

The first argument I presented relies on the Capability of developing and experiencing emotions. I have shown, that this is hindered in late modernity because emotions require that one acknowledges the importance of external circumstances and persons in particular, while the late modern labor market demands self-sufficiency for maximum flexibility. Flexibility is not much of a choice for subjects in late modernity, because the expectation in the labor market appears that one is ready to move quickly and as soon as opportunities open up. Furthermore, the environment is in constant change so that attaching oneself to external things is inseparable from the fear of losing them. The second argument I made, is that the normative polarization of the labor market undermines the Capability of the functional worker to have affiliations of respect and non-humiliation (in- and outside the labor market). The Capability of affiliation is especially relevant, because it emphasizes the importance of relational equality. One's social context can open or close doors for the individual to realize their potentialities. The moral right to equal respect makes it problematic when the social logic of singularity valorizes creative work, but denies functional work any status or respect: there is an unbridgeable gap of relational inequality. Even if they are both instrumentalized as means for production. Historically, functional workers have suffered bad working conditions, as well, but in late modernity one is expected to self-actualize through work. The distinction

between your identity and your work is blurred, making disrespect and humiliation as Anderson documented it, ever more devastating.

In defense of late modernity, the argument has been presented that the creative economy – the ideological heart of the late modern economy – is geared towards stimulating our senses, imagination and thought in such a way, that it immediately contributes to human flourishing. This has been rebutted in multiple ways: firstly, it was pointed out, that the intention of the creative economy is economic gains, and consumerism. The CA is geared towards human development. Economic growth is not necessarily bad, but it cannot provide everything necessary for human flourishing. Secondly, while it is true, that even consumption is aimed at one's senses and imagination, it also hinders emotional development, because consumption is limited to the performance of identity. Such a performance must be constant in order to be perceived as authentic, allowing, one's again no admittance of weakness, which is necessary for emotional development. Thirdly, while it is true, that the creative economy enables a lucky few to work above the threshold of applying senses, these positions are limited, and never will be the only kind of work society needs. With this, I can conclude that I have been able to show, that the social ideals of the late modern labor market – flexibility, singularity and self-actualization – are objectionable on the grounds of Nussbaum's Capabilities approach.

This begs the question, though, whether society could not embrace ideals that are more attainable instead? Are flexibility and singularity really the best we can do? Nussbaum provides proof that we could do better because we already know where to start. She provides us with an entire list of ideals, that would have a more positive outcome and are ethically defensible. The question for future research is, then how do we get our society to adapt such new ideals? What would a labor market look like which's main goal it is to enable human flourishing? These are questions, which insights from sociology can help. The mechanisms of social transformation and value formation are not new to the discipline of sociology. The collaboration between sociology and ethics is therefore a promising one. It is one, that could fruitfully prompt real change, based on a cohesive critique of the principles that shape our society structurally and ideologically.

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