

CHAPTER I

Luxury goods

On 31 December 1987 *The Times* carried the following report,

A Lake District Hotel is offering weekend breaks costing nearly £1,000 a day. Guests paying £1,995 each will be served grouse, venison, fillet steak, lobster, caviar, truffles and pâté de foie gras. Miss Carolyn Graves, a director of the hotel, said,

'The big-spending break is for people who work so hard that holidays are a rarity and have to be crammed full of a year's worth of pleasure.' . . .

Those include return helicopter travel from up to 200 miles, a self-drive or chauffeur driven Rolls-Royce, the hotel's luxury suite with its spa bath and sunbathing tower, a case of champagne per person, the pick of the cellar, a personal chef to cook whatever takes the guests' fancy, and two sheepskin coats and personalized crystal decanter and glasses as souvenirs.

The Times called this a 'luxury weekend' and it does indeed represent, even to the possible extent of self-parody, what would appear to be commonly conjured up by the use of the word 'luxury'.

Open any newspaper or magazine, turn to the advertisements placed by commercial retailers, and the word 'luxury' will recur and recur. Since this is a commercial context, we can be reasonably confident that this rhetoric must be thought to be a selling-point. Obviously in the competitive market-place advertisers are not going to proclaim their products deficient, inadequate or even average. It is, therefore, fair to infer that labelling a consumption good ('capital' goods such as steel mills or power stations are not at issue) or a service as a 'luxury' is also to make a claim about its 'desirability'.

At this superficial level there seems to be a definite connexion between a good being a luxury and it being an object of desire. Since it is being publicly proclaimed, the implication is that this connexion is thought to be innocent or innocuous. From a historical perspective the fact that the desire for luxury goods can be assumed to be innocuous is a point of considerable significance. From the Greeks

onwards, luxury had always been associated with desire but, up until the eighteenth century, this association had been deemed pernicious and harmful. While an important evaluative change occurred at that time, a morally censorious attitude toward luxury persisted throughout the nineteenth century, attaining a prominent place in France in the last decade of the century (see, for example, Laveleye, *Luxury*) and echoes can be heard in some aspects of contemporary cultural criticism. I will examine these issues in Parts II and IV. In this chapter I explore contemporary usage to the end of establishing both a general conceptual framework and a *terminus ad quem*. I also introduce or 'signal' many of the themes that will be adopted in fuller detail in later chapters. In that sense this chapter is a preliminary to what follows.

While my exploration will, in the course of establishing the framework, aim to explicate the presence of certain standard assumptions, the bulk of contemporary usage is, of course, generally unreflective. Although this does not absolve me from heeding possible contrary cases, the exploration does not pretend to fit all usages into some conceptual straitjacket. That would be a pointless task because it is inherent in the very use of language that it is fluid; the expression 'play on words' is very apt. Nevertheless it is reasonable to maintain that much of such 'playfulness' relies on existing received meanings: it is those meanings that are being inventively exploited through irony, pun, hyperbole, litotes and so on. Similarly while 'luxury' may well be an ingredient in what is dismissively labelled 'adspeak', along with terms like 'executive' or 'premium', the choice of the term is not purely arbitrary; it rests upon or exploits certain assumed connotations. The following analysis of 'luxury' thus fixes upon the standard (whether direct or oblique) usage and its assumptions.

THE CATEGORIES OF LUXURY GOODS

I open by pursuing an implication of the salience of the label 'luxury' in contemporary advertising. The initial response would seem to be that we are dealing with a paradox. On the one hand retailers want to sell as much of their product as they can while, on the other hand, their very object in proclaiming their product a 'luxury' might seem to imply exclusiveness. It is in line with this exclusivity that luxury goods are seemingly to be associated with expensiveness and rarity. I want to argue, however, firstly and unremarkably, that the image of the 'exclusive' luxury good is a gambit to increase consumption and,

secondly and perhaps less obviously, that neither expense nor rarity are of themselves sufficient conditions for a good to be accounted a 'luxury'.

If we reflect upon the argument that the label 'luxury' is an inducement to consumption, then clearly for that to be effective it must be assumed that the good in question is not only desired but widely desired. The image is that although only a (select) 'few' now enjoy (I will return to the aptness of that verb) the good, many others would also like to enjoy it. Here we can discern one reason why rarity is not a sufficient condition. For example, (though I shall have to come back to this) it is possible to purchase a first edition of Hobbes's *De Cive* for a couple of thousand pounds, but the bookseller, while declaring that the copy was 'scarce' (*Blackwell's Rare Book Catalogue*, January 1989) did not proclaim it a 'luxury'.

This example reveals an important distinction. A desire can be characterised either by its general incidence, the extent of its diffusion, or by the intensity with which it is held. Accordingly while few desire a copy of *De Cive*, a book-collector might crave a first edition. As we will now see it is this factor of extensiveness or general desirability that enables us to identify the range of goods to which, in contemporary society, the term 'luxury' is standardly applied. We can make a start by returning to the package offered by that Lake District hotel. In this package four categories of luxury goods can be discerned.

The first category is *sustenance* or food and drink. The hotel makes much of its menu – caviar, champagne – as well as the provision of a personal chef to cook whatever is the guest's fancy. The second category is *shelter*. The hotel itself is offering accommodation with its spa bath, sunbathing tower and presumably also the other standard features provided by luxury hotels ('luxury' applied to and by hotels about themselves is one of the commonest of current usages). The third category is only vestigially present in this package in the form of the 'gift' of sheepskin coats, that is, the third category is *clothing* or apparel, with their various accessories like jewellery and also – though the link is admittedly more tenuous – perfume. The final category is *leisure*. This package is most ostensibly provided by the hotel as a holiday. Under this category is also to be included various entertainment and sporting goods like videos and polo ponies.

The list of categories of luxury goods is thus sustenance, shelter, clothing and leisure. We shall have more to say later about other

possible categories and the extent to which these four *as categories* are able to subsume other putative candidates. In the meantime I take it as some corroboration of this list that W. Hamish Fraser in his *The Coming of the Mass Market* states that from the mid-nineteenth century, when the British had some surplus to spend it was expended on 'more and better food, on a wider range of clothing, on more elaborate furnishing for their homes and on a greater variety of leisure pursuits' (1981: p. ix). My claim therefore is that the goods that advertisers prefix with the label 'luxury' fall into one or other of these categories. Why should that be?

As a preliminary to the answer to that question it will be fruitful to address another, namely, what other sorts of consumption goods are there? Is anything here being ruled out? It is important that very little is excluded and apparent examples like 'health goods', as we shall see, are inappropriately labelled 'luxuries'. The importance of the inclusivity of the four categories stems from its negative implications. The fact that almost any consumption good can be a 'luxury good' means that luxury goods do not constitute a discrete, separate category super-added to some other category, such as 'necessities'. This latter notion would imply that luxury expenditure is residual, but this implication is resisted on two grounds. First, it gives to 'necessity' some fixed or determinate sense as, for example, in the Stoic notion of a 'natural life' or the idea of 'subsistence' in classical economics (cf. Levine, 1988: pp. 5-6), but such determinacy is unsustainable. Second, it axiomatically yet unwarrantedly prioritises needs over desires. Both of these arguments will be taken up in later chapters.

The relationship between needs and desires is fundamental to this enquiry. This relationship is at the heart of the answer to the initial question: why do advertised 'luxuries' fall into the four identified categories? The vital element in the answer to this question is the extensiveness or generality of the desires for luxury goods. The source of this extensiveness is the fact that the above four categories all relate to satisfactions that are universally experienced. It is the nature of this relationship that is crucial.

We can elicit just why this is so crucial if instead of 'universally experienced satisfactions' we refer to needs. Sustenance, shelter, clothing and leisure are all needs and, for reasons that we shall shortly bring out, because of their 'universality' they can be identified as 'basic needs'. There has been a remarkably consistent agreement that the first three of my quartet are needs of that sort. From Plato and

Seneca in the Classical period to Stuart in the eighteenth century to Kropotkin in the early twentieth century, food, clothing and shelter are time and again cited as basic needs.

The fourth category – leisure – is arguably more problematic. In particular there is the fact that a common understanding of leisure is as a residual rather than a basic category. On this understanding, leisure is that sphere of life remaining after 'the practical necessities of life have been attended to' (*Dictionary of Sociology*, quoted in Parker, 1972: p. 21). But this definition imposes too sharp a division. In many societies work (practical necessity) is not distinguished from leisure. Keith Thomas (1964: p. 51) cites the case of the Dogans of Sudan who use the same word to indicate both cultivation of the ground and ceremonial dancing.

Leisure activities are not, I am claiming, to be understood as residual but as activities that are rooted in the universal requirements of human life – just as eating, being clothed and sheltered are. Of course, these requirements differ from age to age and culture to culture but no more so for leisure than for diet, forms of dress or modes of abode (cf. Herskovits, 1952: pp. 271-5). Accordingly, just as humans have always had to eat, be clothed in some measure and be sheltered so too have they always given expression to 'leisure'. One indication (no more) of this is that holidays and feast days are known throughout all human cultures. More generally the element of 'play' is similarly ubiquitous. There is no need to endorse fully Huizinga's thesis that civilisation itself arose in and as play to recognise its universal dimension (1949: p. 172). Moreover, if it is thought a defect in this fourth category that it lacks a historical pedigree, Huizinga supplies a citation from Plato's *Lysis* (7.830) in support of his notion of *homo ludens*.

Regardless of its historical antecedents, leisure, in my categorical sense, is now generally included in lists of human needs. (I shall take up later the importance of these being 'human needs'.) David Braybrooke, for example, not only has a need for recreation amongst his list of course-of-life needs but also includes needs for periodic rest and exercise (1987: p. 36). Nor is this recognition confined to academic theory. In a 1980s survey many respondents regarded a hobby or leisure activity as a necessity (Mack & Lansley, 1985: p. 126). In our terms these activities are universally experienced satisfactions which can thus establish categorically the basis for a widespread desire for goods to meet those satisfactions.

Before proceeding to analyse the relationship between needs and desires we have to ask the question, given that these four are basic needs, why this four? The assumption behind the question is that there are other basic needs. There is no simple straightforward answer to the question but, as a 'working hypothesis', we can hold that this quartet has in common a reference to physical or bodily satisfactions. The consequence of this is to exclude what can be loosely called 'mental needs' such as 'autonomy' (Plant, 1991), 'creative consciousness' (Doyal & Gough, 1984), 'plans of life' (Miller, 1976) or 'freedom and justice' (Simpson, 1982). This is not an arbitrary exclusion as I shall hope to vindicate as the argument proceeds. However, two observations can be made at this juncture.

First, this restriction to physical needs is warranted by the fact that throughout its history 'luxury' has been closely associated with physical or sensory enjoyment. Originally this association was a ground for complaint but later it became, as contemporary advertising exemplifies, a connexion to be celebrated. Second, the identification of needs is not unproblematic, which is one of the reasons why there is no simple answer to the question. Thinking about needs has a history itself, and one feature of that history is particularly pertinent. Traditionally, 'attributes' such as autonomy were not thought of as needs. One implication of this tradition is a rejection of the initial assumption that there are other basic needs of a 'mental' sort. Indeed the notion of 'mental' needs was invoked deliberately to counter the traditional accounts, which were thought to over-emphasise the physicality of needs. We shall have more to say about needs-theorising in Chapters 7 and 8.

NEEDS AND DESIRES

I now explore the precise nature of this crucial relationship between needs and luxury goods. I shall aim to bring out certain features common to all four categories. But, of course, it follows from this that there is more to say about each category than I will cover here.

Let us start our guided tour in the kitchen. Food is both a need and, as a category of luxury good, an object of desire. *Prima facie* this dual character appears uncontentious for it seems self-evident that we both need and want food. This appearance is, however, deceptive. It was because of this deceptiveness that I earlier deliberately referred to the *relationship* between needs and luxury goods. To uncover the source of

the deception it is necessary to heed the more general, and for us fundamental, relationship between needs and desires or wants (for my purposes I shall take these latter two terms as synonyms). This is an involved and complex question. All I wish to do at this preliminary stage is outline in a non-definitive way certain central arguments and draw attention to some distinctions (later chapters will elaborate the arguments and explore further the distinctions).

One central aspect of the analysis of need is to differentiate it from 'wanting'. This is a conceptual and not merely a semantic differentiation. That is to say there is a conceptual difference even if the common usage does not invariably reflect it. To similar effect, *besoin* and *Bedürfnis* can in context be translated as either 'need' or 'want' but that does not make these terms conceptually continuous. Among the various (inter-related) criteria put forward to differentiate them, two are particularly apposite.

First, wants, unlike needs, are intentional. Wiggins's observations are here typical. He writes,

What I need depends not on thought or the workings of my mind (or not only on these) but on the way the world is. Again, if one wants something because it is F, one believes or suspects that it is F. But if one needs something because it is F, it must really be F, whether or not one believes that it is. (1985: pp. 152-3)

In less technical language, wants are privileged. If I say that I want cherry pie you cannot contradict that by declaring that I want apple pie. Needs, by contrast, are not privileged. Thus, unlike wants, others can know better than you what your needs are. For example, you need vitamin C (that is the way the world is) to avoid scurvy whether or not you believe this and, hence, whether or not you *want* to consume fruit. This now broaches the second criterion. Needs, unlike wants, are objective or universal; they are attributes of us not *qua* individuals but *qua* 'generic men' (Minogue, 1963: p. 112).

These two criteria of non-intentionality and universality are what characterise basic (or, as they are sometimes called, absolute or fundamental) needs. As we have seen, sustenance, shelter, clothing and leisure can be so characterised. What makes these needs 'basic' is that they embody a stringency such that they are necessary rather than contingent features of human life. They are, by virtue of this stringency, not in their entirety reducible to any possible voluntary set of circumstances or purposive goals.

This analysis, however, does not exhaust the contexts within which the language of needs is employed. This language possesses other idioms. A good can, for example, be needed as an instrumental means to an end. This instrumentalist sense is, perhaps, the predominant use of the word 'need'. These usages concern volitional or purely instrumental needs; in contrast to 'basic needs' they are entirely reducible to purposive or intentional goals. For example, I need a pen so that I might fill in my pools coupon; but I want to fill in my pools coupon so that I might win a large sum of money which will enable me to enjoy a life of luxury. It is clear from this example that the need in question (for a pen) is subordinate to the desire. Although subordinate, the pen is still 'needed' in the strict sense that without it my coupon will remain empty. Moreover, regardless of any belief I might entertain, I need a pen for this task and not a stick of celery since, given 'the way the world is', only the former, and not the latter, will enable me to complete the coupon. However, unlike the putatively basic needs, this need is only called forth by virtue of the prior desire or want. Hence, while the possession of basic needs is involuntary or necessary, instrumental needs arise as a consequence of some volition and are thus possessed contingently. I shall, as promised, return to these questions. There is another issue which, again, at this point can merely be noted. Needs are an important element in moralistic discourse and the extent to which a particular need can be judged to be morally compelling will be affected by whether it is judged to be a fundamental or 'merely' an instrumental need.

For the moment I wish to use this analysis to demonstrate why it can be misleading to say we both need and want food. Such a statement conflates two different levels of generality. To identify basic needs is to identify certain abstract universals. The task that these identifications perform is to categorise certain postulated constants in human life and, generally, to impart to them moral significance. What they do not do is differentiate concretely between particular foodstuffs or particular fabrics or particular shelters or particular pursuits. We all possess needs for (to repeat) food, clothing, shelter and leisure; these possessions are states of the world, they are not principles of action (cf. Thomson, 1987: p. 16). By contrast, wants are principles of action as they specify or particularise the need; we have, accordingly, desires for lamb or pork, for a suit or a sports-jacket, for a flat or a detached villa, for soccer or opera.

Although all desires specify in this manner, they are not all of a piece. We have, therefore, to locate the desires for luxury goods more precisely. This will be a lengthy process. We can commence by elaborating further the idea of 'desire'. By means of this elaboration we can identify two characterising formal features: luxury goods are refined and positively pleasing. These characterise luxury, they are not sufficient of themselves to *define* it.

REFINEMENT

The first feature is that the desires for luxury goods are desires for (what I shall term) increasingly 'refined' goods.¹ The specificity definitive of desiring expresses itself in the greater refinement of the goods that serve generically to meet universally experienced satisfactions or needs. This increasing refinement imparts a dynamism to luxuries. One consequence of this dynamism is that it also imparts a basic transience to the status of a luxury good.

The refinements that characterise luxuries are the qualitative or adjectival aspects of goods. The clearest example of this principle is provided by food. The stomach can only hold so much – there is a natural limit to its capacity (an important idea as we shall see in later chapters). Although the Romans did their best to increase these limits quantitatively in as much as it was common for guests to be sick in the middle of a banquet, so that they might continue to gorge themselves, the scope for such increase is severely circumscribed. Accordingly the increase is to be understood qualitatively.

But once the qualitative dimension is broached then limits are evanescent. It is not now a question of need – bread to assuage hunger – but of desire – for fresh bread (the example is Seneca's). The same applies to clothing or housing or leisure: not a goatskin for warmth but a cashmere coat, not a wattle-and-daub dwelling for protection but a Georgian town-house, not a sing-song round the fire for entertainment but a compact-disc player. Since it is in principle never possible to give a complete description – it is always possible to add another adjective or qualify an existing qualification – then the process of refinement is itself in principle infinite (cf. Hampshire,

¹ I have chosen this terminology in order in part to echo two 'classical' discussions – that of Hume, who changed the title of his essay 'Of Luxury' to 'Of Refinement in the Arts' (see Chapter 6), and that of Sombart (1913: p. 72), who makes a historical link between luxury goods and refined goods.

1965: p. 21). Hence bread that is not simply fresh, but wholemeal, or rye, or stone-ground, or made from organically grown grain, or oval-shaped or baked by Dusty Miller and so on and on. And when we recall that 'the need' is but an abstract category then the initial example of bread is exactly that, 'an example'; it is itself a choice (the refinement of desire) from amongst all that which, inexhaustibly, constitutes the edible. The upshot is that, unlike the supposed fixity of needs (the importance of this 'supposition' will be brought out in Part II), the desires for luxury goods are inherently fluid and dynamic.

POSITIVE PLEASURE AND DESIRE

The second formal feature that characterises the specificity of the desires for luxury goods refers to the presence of a belief. For any good to be desired as a luxury, it must be believed that possession of that good is 'pleasing'. (Recall here Miss Graves's statement that her weekend was designed to be crammed full of 'pleasures'.) This necessary connexion between luxury and what is believed to please explains why it is apt to speak of 'enjoying' luxury goods. The pleasures in question will be those that relate to our four categories which, as we have noted, are associated with bodily or sensory satisfactions. When a prisoner was convicted of bribing a prison-officer to serve him smoked salmon and champagne, the judge commented 'If prisoners live in luxury the whole concept of punishment is undermined' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 25/9/88). In our terminology, in this example, food *qua* abstract universal has in the form of the salmon become a specific object of desire – a luxury good. Luxury food is desired because it is thought to be pleasing to the palate (that is not to say that there may not also be extrinsic reasons why such a dish is desired). It would be pathological or deliberately perverse (as in a notorious film starring Divine) to consider eating dog turd as an object of desire. It is because there is a warranted naturalistic assumption that certain goods are not merely necessarily desired as pleasing but are, in fact, widely desired that these goods are liable to be labelled 'luxuries'. I will return to the relationship between that assumption and such labelling.

It is not vital to this enquiry to enter into the various disputes about the appropriate characterisation of 'desire'. But it is worth making one observation. We can distinguish between negative and positive desires. An appropriate illustration is provided by Francis Hutcheson in the eighteenth century. Hutcheson, in his *Observations on the Fable of*

(*the Bees* (p. 60) in the context of a discussion of Mandeville's account of luxury, distinguishes between what is desired 'chiefly in order to remove the pain' and what is desired because of 'a previous opinion of good in the object'. Hutcheson links the former (negative desire) with meeting the bare necessities of life and the latter (positive desire) with pleasures above necessity, as when humans 'desire something more in dress, houses, furniture than mere warmth or necessary use' (ibid.: p. 62). Following this analysis, we can say that desires for luxuries are positive desires for what pleases – or desires for positive pleasures.

A distinction along these lines has prompted some writers to distinguish 'pleasure' and 'comfort'. Scitovsky, for example, links the latter with cessation of pain (Hutcheson's first sense of desire) and contrasts this, as a passive state, with the former as an active state of change (1976: ch. 4). A somewhat similar active/passive distinction is made by Campbell (1987). He links the former with desire and pleasure, the latter with need and satisfaction (ibid.: p. 60). In line with our earlier use of Wiggins, Campbell notes (drawing on Ryle) that while 'satisfactoriness' is a state that is open to others to assess, the experiencing of something as pleasant is inseparable from our paying attention to it (ibid.: p. 62). Like Scitovsky, Campbell links comfort with satisfaction while he looks upon luxuries as 'means to pleasure' (ibid.: p. 59). Scitovsky (1976: pp. 107–10), for his part, goes on to examine the link between satiability, comfort and necessity in contrast to the link between insatiability, pleasure and luxury.

While there is here a conceptual distinction of a Hutchesonian sort (not, as he admits, that it is original to him), it is not evident that the term 'comfort' has to be understood as an ineliminable constituent of one half of this divide. Certainly such a restriction is historically untenable. Like 'luxury', 'comfort' is a word with an instructive past. Literally it means 'strengthen', in the sense of support, as in the King James's version of Psalm 23, 'thy rod and thy staff they comfort me'. Its current sense of 'being comfortable' – of physical well-being – was according to Peter Thornton (1978: p. 10) 'invented by the French in the seventeenth century'.

SHELTER

In general (that is unreflective) usage, 'comfort' is found especially in the context of shelter or accommodation, a sphere that is particularly favoured by advertisers when they employ the label 'luxury'. The

luxury + pleasure

history of housing, both with regard to architectural form and furnished contents, is well-documented. Rybczynski (1988: p. 217) in his book on the idea of 'The Home' declares unequivocally, in language that conforms to my thesis, that 'domestic well-being is a fundamental human need that is deeply rooted in us and must be satisfied'. Moreover, a motif of the book itself is the relation between this well-being and the idea of 'comfort'.²

Rybczynski lays considerable emphasis on what he calls 'the feminization of the home' (ibid.: p. 72, cf. p. 223), by which he means that the initiative and drive to comfort was led by women. He is not alone in making this link. Thornton had linked the 'invention' of comfort to the influence of women, Mme de Rambouillet in particular (ibid.: pp. 9-10), and the general connexion between luxury goods, physical ease or sensuousness and women was also made by Werner Sombart (1913). In his explanation he stresses - indeed he calls it his *Grundgedanke* - the role played in the development of capitalism by the accumulation of wealth derived from trade in luxury goods, where the stimulus for this trade emanated from princely courts at the behest, most especially, of courtesans or mistresses (ibid.: p. 77).

What is interesting about these observations is that, in the classical critique, *luxuria* was almost invariably linked with its supposed 'softness'. This was the object of criticism because, as we shall discuss at some length in Part II, such softness was indicative of effeminacy, the effect of which was to undermine the masculine qualities of *virtus*. Nor has this connexion between the feminine and the luxurious completely disappeared. A spokesman for Dunhill's (a company that openly proclaims itself a purveyor of luxury goods) remarked that the company recognised that 70 per cent of all purchasing power in luxury goods was at the discretion of women (*Sunday Times* 3/4/88).

We can now pursue more systematically this link between comfort and shelter. The basic need for shelter is to offer protection against the elements. Included in this category are all those activities which are thus protected, that is, those activities which are undertaken to meet 'daily needs' (Rybczynski's 'domestic well-being'). This inclusiveness means that the scope for luxury-refinement of shelter is correspondingly extensive. This is supported by the literature. 'Luxurious' dwellings for the Romans related to such items as furniture and draperies as well as room number and size. And in contemporary society a 'luxury

² Cf. Le Corbusier (1975: p. 29) who follows his notorious remark that a house is a 'machine à habiter' by the remark that it is 'une machine diligente et prévenante pour satisfaire aux exigences du corps: confort'.

home' possesses structural features such as double-glazing, central heating and what one company (Commercial Business Installations) advertises as 'drive-in luxury' that is, remotely-controlled garage doors (illustrated with a picture of a Porsche). More compendiously, this home will possess luxury carpets, furnishings and furniture, while no self-respecting 'luxury apartment' is complete without its 'luxury kitchen' and its 'luxury bathroom'. The latter typically refers to refinements such as jacuzzis and saunas, while the chief attribute of the former is its gadgetry and general labour-saving quality. I will have more to say about gadgetry in a moment but first wish to comment briefly upon the bathroom.

It could be argued that the bathroom serves the bodily needs for cleanliness and excretion and that these constitute a separate category. Such an argument is defensible, and to accept it would not damage this analysis in its essentials. However, I wish to resist it. Aside from a desire for organisational economy, and thus a reluctance to multiply categories, my chief reason for this resistance is that any human habitation makes provision to meet these needs. Of course, this provision does not have to be incorporated into the fabric of the shelter (such an incorporation was a refinement that became one of the distinctive hallmarks of luxury) for it to be reasonably included in that category. The needs served by the bathroom are thus to be understood as being accommodated within the inclusiveness of the need for shelter.

This same categorical inclusiveness enables 'shelter' to encompass the gamut of 'household needs'. We can elaborate this by picking up the reference to gadgets. To describe luxury household items as gadgets is to acknowledge their instrumental status. A knife, for example, has the function (meets the need) of cutting and any qualitative refinement of that function/need will bear most directly on its sharpness and its suitability to the particular task at hand and, less directly, on the amount of effort involved. In the light of these two criteria and in line with the above analysis we can now predict that a 'luxury knife' would be electric with interchangeable blades. However, since the knife is an instrument, it means that it can be subsumed within the four basic or generic categories. A knife is something needed for day-to-day living and such living occurs within a 'shelter'. Accordingly one would expect to see listed in the inventory of a luxury dwelling an electric knife with interchangeable blades; it is the presence of the knife that helps to identify the dwelling as 'luxurious'. We must, however, be on our guard. The example of the knife as a

gadget, as an instrumental need, might seem to imply that the process of 'refinement' in the guise of increasing specificity is reducible to the more efficient development of an instrument's function. That this implication is misleading will become apparent later when we discuss the general relationship between luxury, necessity and superfluity. But it will not be out of place at this juncture to examine another popular usage, namely, luxury travel.

LUXURY TRAVEL

The popularity of this usage means that I have a *prima facie* obligation to accommodate it to my framework. At first blush its relationship to the four basic categories might appear problematic. In a manner akin to the relationship between bathrooms and excretory needs it could be argued that, in some circumstances at least, mobility and carriage possess a stringency such that travel may be regarded as a basic need. But it is possible to push back the need to travel to the more basic purpose of obtaining food and materials for accommodation or clothing or 'joy-riding' (apt phrase). A vehicle is thus like a knife — an instrumental good. For this reason, on balance I am not inclined to see travel, any more than kitchen utensils, as a separate category of luxury goods.

More precisely, again like the knife, a case can be made to treat it as a subset of that already elastic category of shelter. This case is also worth developing because it enables us to introduce a further relevant consideration. The case proceeds as follows. When a car, for example, is described as a 'luxury model' what is typically denoted thereby is its possession of such features as central locking, computer-controlled instruments, electronic sun-roof, leather upholstery, ample leg-room and the like. These features make for a pleasant, relaxing, that is, 'comfortable' journey, and it is because these are widely-desired features that cars with these features are typically marketed as 'luxury' vehicles. We can interpolate here that the requirement that the car provide protection from the elements is no longer regarded as a 'luxury' feature. Cars are, in this sense, mobile shelters and some of them are, indeed, called 'mobile homes' (with scope for luxury gadgets). Recalling the earlier remark that it is misleading to reduce 'refinement' of instrumental needs to questions of efficiency, it is noteworthy that these features are not narrowly utilitarian aspects. The function of the car is to transport one from A to B. The luxury

refinement of this is not speed; cars that are designed purely for speed are not designed for comfort.

There is scope for an area of indeterminacy here. Certainly compared to a Rolls-Royce, a Formula One racing car is not a luxury car, while an Italian sports car is perhaps less clearly categorised. Nevertheless the more the sports car emphasises power and speed the less scope there is for the standard luxury fittings. This difference is reflected in the practice of referring to those vehicles that stress speed as 'performance' cars. A more direct piece of evidence that supports that conclusion is provided by the testimony of an owner of a Ferrari F40. The owner stated that this car, which cost £165,000, had 'pullwire on the doors and plastic sliding windows' and 'no carpets, interior light or radio,' but what it did have in abundance was power, so that within seconds of ignition 'the car is into the hundreds' (Peter Inston, 'Me and My Car', *Sunday Times* 21/8/88). We can also observe, in passing, that this particular example illustrates that expensiveness is not a sufficient condition to determine a good's luxury status. Nonetheless it makes sense to call a Rolls-Royce a luxury car because it makes travelling in this vehicle (instrument) a positive pleasure.

Of course it is open to any individual to regard, as Peter Inston clearly does, a car's speed as the source of 'pleasure' and vehicles can be desired for that reason. At the close of this chapter we will consider directly the individual dimension to the identification of luxury but the apparent fact of the matter is that, in popular standard usage as reflected in the language of marketing, the luxury refinement of cars relates to non-functional attributes rather than to issues of increased efficiency. Nonetheless, just as the luxury knife still cuts, so a luxury car is still a means of transport. Thus while on the one hand it is misleading to reduce the knife's 'luxury' to its increased efficiency so, on the other, it is misleading to neglect the fact that all luxuries 'relate' to basic satisfactions. It is important in a consideration of luxury not to identify it with redundancy or uselessness, a point we shall meet again.

THE TRANSCIENCE OF LUXURY

Though we have stressed that desires are by their nature specific, we have also, in the context of luxury goods, understood them as falling into four general categories. As we have seen, the category of shelter

includes an array of subsidiary instrumental needs and a 'luxury dwelling' is one where the most refined goods or gadgets are to be found. These gadgets are positively pleasing because they make domestic life easier. It is quite simply more pleasant to let others, or machines, perform tasks which are, to you, no more than chores. So widely shared is this disposition that it is one of the areas of the greatest convergence in human desires. (Note the implicit naturalism here.) Thanks to this particular convergence, household chores have been one of the areas of most rapid development and greatest refinements. The percentage of households with vacuum cleaners, washing-machines, gas or electric heating is so high that simple possession of these no longer ranks as a luxury. We shall return to this point, but one implication can be taken up immediately.

Implicit here is the transient status of luxury goods. A luxury is not something static, it is dynamic; it is subject to development as the desires, and necessarily attendant beliefs, are met and then fuelled with further qualitative modifications or refinements. Hence, for example, 'simple possession' of a television is not (now) a luxury. We can discern here a 'drag-effect'. As goods come to be widely available and become cemented into daily life, then possession of, or access to, such goods means they can lose their luxury status. But more than that, they can be thought to be socially necessary. One particularly instructive case is sanitation arrangements. It provides perhaps the best example of how a one-time luxury – interior water-closets – has become a legally enforceable requirement. Characteristically this works both ways so that those who live in an unsanitary dwelling may be said to possess the 'right' to have their dwelling conform to the socially necessary standards.³

If we reflect on this case of transience then two important implications can be identified. The first is that a desire appears to have turned into a need. We have to analyse this appearance with some care. In so far as basic needs are at issue, then this can be only an appearance since these needs are categories and not principles of action. There is a conceptual or logical 'gap' here that cannot be bridged. The needs at issue must be some sort of instrumental or volitional need. These needs, as the example of my need for the pen

³ If 'rights' are tied to goods or services that are deemed social necessities and these same goods were one-time luxuries, then this class of 'rights' too must also be understood as fluid, rather than, say, as 'natural' or simply 'human'. One consequence is that there can be no right to a luxury (cf. Raphael, 1967: p. 64).

mentioned above illustrates, do not in principle stand in conceptual opposition to desires. The crucial point in this case is not, therefore, that some transformation of desire into need has occurred but that 'our' society has invested certain instrumental needs with a special status, namely, that of being social necessities. This constitutes the first implication and reinforces the earlier comment that luxuries are not a superadded category. There is, as it were, a continuum in any society from desires which are deemed social necessities to those deemed luxuries. I will return to this.

The second implication concerns this special status. By virtue of their status as social necessities goods can, in context, establish a *prima facie* claim on the public purse. Think here of the argument that pensioners should be exempted from paying the television licence-fee on the grounds that, like their exemption from prescription charges, we are here dealing with a non-luxury item. (The British Labour Party, in Opposition, committed itself to that policy – see *The Times*, 28/8/90). This is not, however, all one way. The effective spread of private ownership of washing-machines has produced the demise of publicly funded washhouses.⁴

POLITICAL MORALITY

This last point broaches an issue of more general significance. If we confine ourselves to contemporary capitalist societies, then this association between the transience of luxury goods and the dynamism of desire can be linked to another. This second, linked association, is that between the commercially assumed innocence of luxury goods and the legitimacy of private desire.

As we have seen, the direction of the luxury 'refinements' in shelter is, in broad terms, toward the increasing 'privatisation' of such goods. This fact goes a long way to explaining why the 'home' is such a focus for advertisers proclaiming their goods as 'luxuries'. The rapid dissemination of televisions, and then videos, is further testament to these pre-eminent 'leisure goods' being valued because they can be enjoyed 'at home'. And while 'eating out' has, if anything, increased, thus providing counter-evidence, the labour-saving aspect of this does have its privatised dimension in the form of the 'carry-out'. This

⁴ Cf. Gershuny (1983) on the growth of 'self-servicing' as a consequence of the spread of consumer durables, a process which he judges as equalising access to services as between the rich and the poor.

privatising or domesticating tendency is in accordance historically with the emergence of 'comfort'. This initially expressed itself within the closets or private rooms of the great houses, where the aptly-named 'easy chairs' or *fauteuils de commodité* were located, before pervading the more formal public rooms (cf. Thornton, 1978: pp. 10, 302).

Looked at in this light we can see that in this process of privatisation some basic questions in political morality are at stake. Indeed, from its inception in Greek thought, 'luxury' was a political concept. In classical, as well as in Christian and early modern thought, 'luxuries' were subject to moral criticism. As we have already noted, they were condemned because they fostered effeminacy and thus undermined virtue and corrupted both the individual and his *patria*. While this line of criticism never completely died out, it lost its edge.

Whereas the pre-modern view, to be canvassed in Part II, saw a threat to liberty in the boundless uncontrollability of human bodily desires, modern thought values the liberty manifest in individuals pursuing their own desires, a task in which every human partakes and for which every human is qualified, and regarding which every human is his or her own best judge. The elitism and sexism of classical thought, whereby only the sage or independent male citizen was free, is transformed. It is, of course, liberalism that best embodies such a transformation with its understanding of what is decisively different about the modern world. It is, therefore, no surprise to find historically that it was liberals, like Adam Smith, who defended luxury or opulence against, among many others, the neo-classical critique of Rousseau or conventional moralising of John Brown's *Estimate* (see Chapter 6). However, it is also no surprise that this liberal picture fails to command universal assent. What we find is that the 'privatisation' associated with, and the innocence of, luxury goods are not immune from criticism from those who wish to dispute the political morality of liberalism. Unlike the classical critique which indicted luxury because it undermined virtue, the modern critique focuses upon the obligation to meet needs.

One of the hallmarks of socialism is that it invokes the morality of meeting needs to indict the immorality of a society that supports the ability to acquire luxuries ahead of the responsibility of ensuring that needs are met. Needs possess, as we noted earlier, a seemingly even more basic universalism than desires. But, as the above-mentioned 'drag-effect' implies, a one-time luxury can become a social necessity, which is to say that there has been a shift in the understanding of what

is required to participate effectively in society. It is indeed this very fluidity that accounts for the developments in theories of needs. The recourse to 'need' has been able to retain its popularity and potency in social criticism because, by being extended to encompass notions of autonomy and the like, it has been made applicable to conditions where more than minimal physical survival is at stake. It is this same fluidity that is fundamental to the debates over the 'relative' as opposed to the 'absolute' character of poverty. We shall deal with this question in Chapter 8.

The crucial premise in this socialist critique is a postulated connexion between the failure to meet needs and the suffering of harm. From this is typically generated a principle such that meeting needs ought to have precedence over satisfying desires (see Chapter 8). Accordingly, from this perspective, it is wrong if some individuals in a society are able to indulge or wallow in luxury while other members are in a needy state. One popular expression of this was an indictment of the conspicuous lifestyle of Porsche-owning 'yuppies' living in luxurious dockland flats alongside the original and socially-deprived denizens of the same area. It should be acknowledged that the general thrust of this critique has not been confined to socialists. For example, the World Bank – an institution not usually thought of as socialist – stated that capital aid would not be forthcoming to African regimes if they financed, *inter alia*, 'luxurious consumption' (*Sub-Saharan Africa*, World Bank Report, quoted in *The Times* 22/11/89).

That issue, along with the role played by needs in definitions of poverty, and social criticism more generally, will be addressed in Part IV. It will, however, at this point be appropriate to take up my earlier remark concerning the relationships between 'health goods' and luxury.

HEALTH GOODS

Medical treatment is generally seen as a need, the sufficient and necessary condition of which is ill-health. This generates a moral argument to the effect that any system in which treatment is a function of ability-to-pay is unacceptable because that ability illicitly replaces need as a sufficient condition. It might now seem that this argument could be extended to 'luxury'; any society in which access to health care is a 'luxury' is to be indicted. Such an argument is misdirected. This is so on two fronts. First, it conflates expensiveness

and luxury – as we saw with the Ferrari F40 sports car this is not a necessary connexion. Second, and more directly, it is quite literally a category mistake – provision of medical treatment falls outside the four categories of luxury goods.

Where luxury does figure in this context is in the guise of ‘plush private rooms with videos, fridges, telephones and special menus’ and so on. (This list is from an article in *The Observer* 1/7/90 entitled ‘Luxury on the NHS’.) These features all fall within my categories of shelter and sustenance. Presumably, it is features such as these that are being invoked when the *Norwich Union* declares in an advertisement that its scheme will make ‘Personal healthcare. No longer an expensive luxury’. I think that this presumption is warranted by the considerations that have been put forward and so this advertisement does not stand as a counter-example to my argument. What is also worthy of note about this advertisement is the locution ‘expensive luxury’, which, at least, suggests that the two terms are not synonymous. Advertising language is, of course, notorious for its disregard of grammatical niceties but this locution is not pleonastic and is perfectly intelligible. One random example comes from Simon Barnes’s column in which, referring to American Football, he writes, ‘It is a good idea to have cover for your top man; but a stable of quarterbacks can be an expensive luxury’ (*The Times* 5/1/91).

That those with more money can more easily buy treatment may be criticised by denying that there should be a ‘market’ in such matters, but such a criticism is not contentious with claiming that mere differential ability-to-pay constitutes a ‘luxury’. To receive medical attention because one suffers from (say) a diseased spleen is truly a ‘need’. In Hutcheson’s terms, the ‘desire’ to have the spleen removed is not a positive ‘pleasure’ but the removal of pain. And while, unlike autonomy, ‘health’ is a basic bodily (widely understood) need, its confinement to the sphere of pain removal or negative desire means it lacks the conceptual capacity to become a genuine ‘luxury’.

In the light of the earlier argument this last point perhaps warrants some clarification. There is a difference between the removal of a diseased spleen and the possession of an automatic washing-machine. It is the difference between restoration and improvement. The former restores the body to a *status quo ante* and the desire is negative because it wants to undo what has transpired (sickness). The latter embodies a positive desire to establish a new condition – a less onerous chore. Hence while the washing-machine diminishes the drudgery, to which

as a matter of natural fact individuals are averse,⁵ the desire to possess that machine is not a negative desire but a positive pleasure because it assists in the execution of a continuing task.

Perhaps the best indicator of the relationship between luxury and health goods is the case of cosmetic surgery. This surgery can be a health need, like treatment for the spleen, when it is performed to ameliorate some psychologically troubling disfigurement. Health can be ‘restored’ to some socially acceptable norm if a nose (say) is surgically altered. Indeed in this case the operation could be financed from public funds (as it is in the British NHS). Cosmetic surgery can also be elective in the sense that an individual positively desires (say) a more attractive nose. *Ex hypothesi*, this surgery is not determined by considerations of health and it can accordingly, without inconsistency, be regarded as a luxury good (in the category of clothing – see later). Moreover this surgery is appropriately paid for from private funds.

This example brings out a further point. As technology develops so the scope for surgery increases. These developments may mean that a previously permanent disfigurement can be removed – a ‘sickness’ can be cured, health restored. But, and this is the important point, in this case we have *not* got an example of a luxury becoming a need. What has happened is that a previously unmet need can now be met. This is so even if the same development could be used to realise a positive pleasure. The conceptual distinction between restoration and improvement remains, and is not affected by the possibility that the technology is employed to realise a luxury good before a health good. It bears repeating that to deny that *medical* treatment/attention is amenable to ‘luxury’ good status is a separate question from whether or not a society should increase public monies to meet health needs by, for example, levying taxes upon ‘luxury goods’. That question will occupy us in Part IV and we shall, later in this chapter, make some observations upon the general relationship between needs and desires as an indication of a society’s conception of political order.

SUPERFLUITY

That health is not a luxury is the conclusion we would expect from the seemingly obvious ‘fact’ that luxuries are not needed. While perhaps ‘obvious’ it nonetheless bears further scrutiny. This we can undertake

⁵ No claim is being made to the effect that the avoidance of labour is ‘natural’, a charge that Marx levelled against Smith. The operative word is ‘drudgery’.

exploring the idea of a luxury good as a superfluous item. It is clear that the ideas of luxury and superfluity are commonly associated. Mandeville, for example, as part of his subversive intent, held that the only tenable definition of luxury was as something that is 'not immediately necessary to make Man subsist as he is a living Creature' (*Fable*: I, 107). Sombart (1913: p. 71) followed suit by defining luxury as expenditure that goes beyond what is necessary (*der über das Notwendige hinausgeht*). On a popular level, this association is evident when those cast away on BBC Radio's 'Desert Island Discs' with their eight records and three books are also allowed a 'luxury'. The seeming definition of this is that it must be of no conceivable use in abetting an 'escape' from the island. On a philosophical level, Garret Thomson (1987: p. 96, cf. p. 108) says luxuries are enjoyable items that are 'by definition' superfluous.

Thomson goes on to say that luxuries are 'neither beneficial nor useful'. This is not, however, a necessary consequence of superfluity. While all luxuries are superfluous, the converse does not hold. The crux is the sense in which 'superfluous' is understood. Two senses can be distinguished. It can mean the redundant or it can mean the easily substitutable. The former meaning accords most clearly with the ideas of quotas or fixed quantities. If it takes six screws to secure a shelf then more than that number are superfluous *qua* redundant: a seventh screw is not a 'refined' luxury good. A luxury good as such is not a redundancy – the Rolls-Royce gets one from A to B. As six screws secure the shelf so six slices of bread fill the stomach, also making any more superfluous *qua* redundant. This last example is chosen to evoke Seneca's argument about 'luxurious excess'. But in that argument, it will be recalled, the issue was not so much the number of slices as the relative freshness of the bread – the crucial issue being that luxury is a question of qualitative refinement rather than quantity. Once this distinction between quantity and quality is heeded then we can begin to see why it is potentially misleading to assimilate the notions of luxury and superfluity without some further specification of the latter.

This same conclusion can be reinforced by noting the connexion between luxury and 'pleasure', since the latter is absent when the superfluous-*qua*-redundant is involved. But it should not be thought that we are dealing with two hermetically distinct notions. The concept of Diminishing Marginal Utility provides an illustration as to why this is the case. Conceivably a doughnut can be a luxury and even two or perhaps three doughnuts can still constitute qualitative

refinements on bread rolls. However, the fourth doughnut can be a redundantly superfluous confection – it is no longer desired as a pleasing pastry.

Nevertheless, luxury and superfluity do intersect conceptually. The superfluousness of a luxury stems from its negative status – it is something we can do without, it is not needed. We need a certain quantum of fluid intake but don't need a glass of Château-Lafite, even if by some bizarre set of circumstances it should transpire that a glass of Lafite is the quantum of liquid that is needed. In line with the earlier argument regarding the abstract nature of needs then any potable fluid, even urine *in extremis*, can serve to satisfy the need to drink. Château-Lafite is at this abstract level on a par with a glass of water and, as a consequence, as long as we have water then the Lafite can be forgone without harm. But the same could be said equally of forgoing water as long as there is a glass of claret.

Where then does the difference between water and Lafite lie such that standardly (i.e. non-bizarrely) only the latter qualifies as a luxury good? To answer that we need to recall that luxury goods represent the increasing development of specific desires within categories established by certain basic generic needs. They constitute qualitative refinements. As refinements they can always be substituted for a less refined product; if the 'four-star' hotel is fully booked, or too expensive, then a three-star will do.

It is, accordingly, the second meaning of superfluous – the easily substitutable – that supplies the appropriate sense in which luxuries are superfluous. The substitutable is not the redundant even though both can be judged non-necessary and thus both be deemed superfluous. However, it is important to tread carefully. Substitutability itself seems most obviously to apply to needs of the basic categorical sort. The explanation for this lies in the very abstractness of these needs. As our discussion of liquid intake bore out, because anything deemed potable will suffice to meet the need then any one drinkable item is substitutable for another. Simmel, implicitly following Kant (*Groundwork*, tr. Paton: p. 102), made this point when he stated that, 'so long as objects are merely useful they are interchangeable and everything can be replaced by anything else that performs the same service' (Simmel, 1990: p. 74). What this analysis fails to bring out is, of course, the element of necessity in needs-satisfaction. King Midas starved to death because a golden apple is no substitute for a Golden Delicious.

To account for the connexion between luxuries and substitutability

we have to heed the earlier distinction between the expansiveness and intensity of desire. We have seen that, in contrast to the abstract universality of basic needs, the language of desire is that of concrete specificity. One aspect of this is that the more specific and concrete a desire is, say for a first edition of *De Cive*, then the less expansive yet more intense that desire is, so that the less a substitute is acceptable. Given this we are now able, in a preliminary fashion, to locate luxuries: it is a hallmark of a luxury that it is something not intensely desired. As we shall explore in more detail later, a luxury is something it would be nice to have, while at the same time not having it would cause no particular pain. Because of this it is very likely that a luxury will be relatively easily substituted; the three-star hotel is perfectly acceptable. This conclusion, at least, accords with an aspect of both received and academic wisdom.

From the point of view of mainstream economists a luxury good is a good or service that enjoys high income elasticity of demand. In their technical language/notation a good is a luxury good when income elasticity is greater than unity ($e > 1$) and a 'necessity' when it is less than unity ($e < 1$) (there are also 'inferior goods' which, after a certain point, are not desired at all ($e < 0$)) (cf. e.g., Lancaster, 1971: p. 68). Economists have also developed their own technical discussion of 'substitutability'. Where, in theory, there exist virtually perfect substitutes, then the very high price elasticity that is definitive of luxuries will be found (Deaton & Muellbauer, 1980: p. 79). Accordingly, should there be, for example, a fall in the price of Château-Latour, then (for the same vintage) one can expect a drop in sales of Lafite as oenophiles (and investors) switch (substitute) chateaux. In a similar fashion, should there be a fall in income then, because luxury goods are substitutable for less refined items (water for Lafite in my earlier – deliberately stark – example), expenditure upon them will decline. This understanding also accords with the apparently common-sense view (as exemplified by Hamish Fraser whom I quoted toward the beginning of this chapter) that expenditure is directed first at what is needed and then, only if there is a surplus, will this be directed toward 'luxuries'. There is also empirical support for this in as much as food retailers have retained their profit margins in a high-interest rate economy like Great Britain in 1989–90 (see, e.g., comments by the deputy chairman of Sainsbury's, *Observer* 19/9/90). Conversely, in 1988 at the time of tax-cuts, there was, in the words of one sub-editor, a 'Boom in luxuries predicted' (see *The Times*, 16/4/88).

Notwithstanding this convergence, it paints too simple a picture.

There is ample evidence that individuals are prepared to sacrifice consumption of supposedly 'basic needs' in order to maintain social status or prosecute a personal 'plan of life'. Even economists recognise the 'demonstration effect' (Duesenberry, 1949: p. 27) and the phenomenon of non-functional demand. In an influential analysis of that phenomenon, Leibenstein (1950) identified three aspects – the 'Bandwagon effect' where demand increases due to the fact that others are consuming the product as, for example, in the case of what is fashionable; the 'Snob effect' where demand decreases due to the fact that others are consuming a particular product, and the 'Veblen effect' where demand increases when the price is higher rather than lower.

If we apply this analysis to our opening paradox, then we can identify as one aim of the rhetoric of luxury in advertising that it is attempting to stimulate a bandwagon effect. Yet the transient quality of the status 'luxury' necessarily means that a particular 'luxury good' will move to the snob effect. This means that self-styled purveyors of luxury goods must always be on their guard to maintain the cachet of 'exclusiveness'.

CLOTHING

The clothing industry provides a good illustration of this and we can perhaps best appreciate this and other related points by means of a more general discussion of the category of clothing as a luxury good. There are, on the one hand, the fashion leaders and practitioners of *haute couture* and, on the other, the mass-market ready-to-wear manufacturers. The latter can advertise a 'luxury' silk blouse to be obtained via mail order, while the former rely on stylistic innovation, inherent quality of raw materials and expertise in cutting and stitching, together with the status of a 'name'.

At one level clothing is seemingly akin to shelter in that it provides protection against the elements. However, since no animal wears clothes this need seems straightforwardly to be a human need. Indeed, despite their reference to physical satisfactions, each of the needs which categorically establish luxuries are *human* needs. While the category of 'leisure' most obviously seems to be a human need the same also applies to food and shelter, as well as to clothing. The identification of these needs as human accommodates the indisputable fact that they exist only as embedded in cultures.

The implications of this embedment have now, if only at this point,

in a preliminary way, to be addressed. Not only do no animals wear clothes but the wearing of apparel is no simple functional act. Indeed there is no universal correlation between cold climate and quantity of clothing, as Charles Darwin observed on the Beagle voyage upon seeing the near-naked inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego (*Voyage of the Beagle*: pp. 212-13). What clothing the Fuegians did possess was some covering of the genital area. Nor is the explanation for that self-evident. The least plausible explanation is sexual modesty. This lacks explanatory weight because the trans-cultural tendency is for clothing to attract rather than distract attention. In Madge Garland's words, 'a history of the way people dress is concerned with man's first and most faithful addiction - his intense preoccupation with his own body' (Garland, 1975: p. 7) and, as another historian of fashion has pointed out, the most frequent tendency in the history of costume has been a striving for an increase in stature (Kybalova, 1968: p. 15). Sexual modesty is not the thought that comes to mind when, for example, the elaborate cod-pieces on Elizabethan male costumes are observed.

If sexual modesty thus looks an unlikely explanation for genital covering, then the practical use of such garments to protect the organs necessary for reproduction is perhaps a better bet. But that too is not the whole answer. The protective function does not explain the universal presence of decoration on clothes as well as on humans themselves. Darwin's Fuegians, even when quite naked were nonetheless 'bedaubed with white paint' (*Voyage*: p. 213) and the elective cosmetic surgery mentioned above can be understood as a further example. Once again it is sexual attraction that seems better placed to account for this ubiquity. This raises an issue that goes deep into the territory of morality. We must be content with making an observation from the perimeter, though in Chapter 9 a brief exploration will be undertaken.

What is quintessential to human societies is that the so-called natural processes, such as, pre-eminently, sex along with birth and death, are overlaid with conventions, with ritual and ceremony which are invested with deep symbolic meaning. The effect of this investment is to render over-simple any explanation of human apparel that assimilates it too directly to the functionalism possessed by the tail-feathers of the peacock. And while it is unwise to look for moncausality in this area, the most promising general explanation of the human need for clothes is this link with their symbolic character. It is this character that best accounts for the apparently non-functional aspect of clothing.

ORNAMENT

The fact that the earliest known examples of human clothing are the skins of the animals that are hunted is not simply a case of *faute de mieux* but is indicative of the symbolic dimension. At its baldest the argument is that there is a mythopoetic connexion between wearing the skins and a successful hunt; it is a form of sympathetic magic. It is this same general principle that accounts for ornamentation, the wearing of which 'identified the wearer with animals, gods, heroes or other men' (Boucher, n.d.: p. 10). For example, it is, from this perspective, significant that in the *Iliad* (iii, p. 64) when Paris, somewhat uncharacteristically, steps forward and offers combat he is described as wearing a panther's skin. Certainly the remains of the earliest civilisations provide evidence of the perceived indispensability of ornaments and jewellery through their presence in tombs.

So ubiquitous is this human concern to decorate that some writers explain it by invoking a distinct human need to that effect. For example, the nineteenth-century historian of luxury, Henri Baudrillart referred to *l'instinct de parure* (*Histoire du Luxe Privé*: i, p. 166) and, from a very different perspective, Ernest Mandel (1968: p. 660) refers to decoration as one of the (six) basic needs. However, this is an unnecessary complication. The human need for clothing is itself inseparable from its symbolic role and it is that which is typically manifest in ornamentation, for the 'truly natural state of the adult human is dressed and decorated' (Hollander, 1988: p. 84). Or, as Carlyle put it, 'the first purpose of Clothes . . . was not warmth or decency but ornament' (*Sartor Resartus*: p. 30).

If ornamentation is coeval with clothing, then it means luxury clothing is not to be understood as ornamentation superadded on to some simple utilitarian function. This conclusion has a wider bearing. The 'luxury knife' referred to earlier would not be luxurious *because* it was gold-plated; gold-plating would be another refinement not different in kind from it being electrically powered. Nor is there any necessary order of priority; clearly in this case gold-plating antedates the refinement of power. Furthermore, to regard gold-plating as the essence of luxury is to confuse, once again, the redundant with the substitutable - a Trabant can substitute for a Rolls-Royce but the latter is still a means of transport.

The fact that clothing has symbolic significance means that the human need for clothing only exists within a concrete cultural setting. Certainly in Western culture the most frequent symbolic use of

clothing has been to maintain social status and social differences. A clear-cut expression of this connexion between clothing and status is the evidence of sumptuary laws. For example, the 1363 Act of Apparel of Edward III spoke in its preamble of the 'contagious and excessive apparel of divers people, against their estate and degree' (in Harte, 1976: p. 138). All such legislation, which we shall examine in some detail in Chapter 3, typically specified in minute detail what each of the various ranks was permitted and (more often) forbidden to wear. It is here that luxury most obviously and pejoratively makes its appearance.

From the perspective of the framers of these laws, 'luxury' represents, in the guise of the desire for sumptuous apparel, the subversion of proper social stratification. But in contemporary society, where luxury is regarded as an essentially innocent desire, it still applies to clothing and the 'meaning' conveyed thereby. Hence modern luxury clothes are distinguished by the exquisite workmanship and quality material found in the Saville Row suit and the Lagerfeld dress worn with jewels from Cartier and perfume from Chanel (and may be also the effects of elective cosmetic surgery). The above-noted association between luxury and privatisation of consumption is encapsulated in *haute couture* and bespoke tailoring (and choice of nose). Ownership of such goods conveys the meaning of exclusivity and its associated qualities of power, wealth and taste. But whereas in Roman and medieval societies 'luxury' was a threat to exclusivity by representing the subversiveness of private desire, in modern societies the 'message' reinforces the legitimacy of such desire.

CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

Once again we must proceed with due care. It is unacceptable to assimilate without remainder – as might here seem to be implied – conspicuous consumption and expenditure on luxuries. Indeed just as ornamentation is not the same as luxury nor is ostentation. Conspicuous consumption is consumption, the satisfaction of which derives from audience reaction (cf. Mason, 1981). In its purest form, as identified by Veblen, conspicuous consumption is consumption of the totally useless. But this is not to say that such consumption is pointless. Indeed we can detect, perhaps paradoxically, an element of 'necessity' here (cf. Kyrk, 1976: p. 241n), an element that precludes the assimilation of these two types of expenditure.

Conspicuous consumption has to be understood in terms of social perception. To consume conspicuously is to consume these goods that non-consumers are presumed to perceive as (*inter alia*) luxuries. However, from the consumer's perspective this consumption is instrumental/necessary to the maintenance of that very (presumed) perception and thence to the maintenance of their social status (cf. Simmel, 1964: p. 338). Pace Dwight Robinson (1961: p. 398), the motivation for luxury is not the pursuit of demonstrable rarity for its own sake; it is for the sake of social perception. Indeed the rationale underlying sumptuary laws was to reserve particular fabrics and ornamentation for certain social orders in order to distinguish them and uphold the social hierarchy. Moreover since any social hierarchy reposes on a configuration of power, and attendant belief, this sumptuary distinctiveness was designed to manifest that configuration. Of Elizabeth I, for example, McKendrick (1983: p. 76) remarks that the extravagance of her wardrobe 'fulfilled a very political need. It was the visible external proof of her divinity; it buttressed her political power; and her courtiers were expected to buttress it further with a spectacular display of satellite finery.'⁶

I shall have more to say about what McKendrick here calls 'political need' in the context of sumptuary legislation in Chapter 3 but the general point is of wider application. The social practice of poilatch and purchases from Asprey's Gift Catalogue can both be understood as instrumental to the maintenance of self-perceived 'position' in society. This self-perception is itself, at least partially, constituted by the presumption that others perceive their consumption as conspicuous in this manner. It also fits this picture that in contemporary societies once the perception changes, that is once the bandwagon rolls so that 'luxury goods' become widely attainable, then they cease to become items to consume conspicuously; they no longer mark out 'distance' (cf. Bourdieu, 1979)⁷ – to be the first in your street to own a video means something, a meaning that is lost when every other household possesses one.

⁶ Cf. Simmel (1964: p. 343) who in his brief essay on 'Adornment' remarks *à propos* of sumptuary law that adornment is the means by which 'social power or dignity is transformed into visible, personal excellence'.

⁷ The crux of Bourdieu's (1979: p. 58) argument is that, 'le pouvoir économique est d'abord un pouvoir de mettre la nécessité économique à distance; c'est pourquoi il s'affirme universellement par la destruction de richesses, le dépense ostentatoire, le gaspillage et toutes les formes de luxe gratuit'. Note the universality here, for its significance see text *infra*.

SOCIAL MEANING

A radical implication can be drawn from these remarks. To appreciate this we can return to the connexion between luxury and rarity. Earlier I said that rarity was not a sufficient condition of a good being a luxury and cited, as an example, the limited appeal of a first edition of *De Cive*. What is required is not that the good in question is of limited supply but that *many* desire it when there are only a few in existence; for example, an internal water-closet could be said to have been a 'luxury good' in the 1900s.

Thus far we have attempted to explain this by reference to the abstract categorical status of 'needs'. An alternative explanation, the 'radical implication', would displace this reference and have recourse solely to the 'social meaning' of a luxury as a rare item. This alternative is part of a more general conceptualisation of consumption as a 'system of meaning' or signs (cf. Baudrillard, 1988: p. 46). According to this account, to possess (consume) rare but widely-desired objects is to enjoy a luxury. Xenos (1989: pp. 94-5) goes as far as saying that 'it is not the scarcity of certain objects that determines their status as luxury items; it is their status as luxury items that renders them scarce objects'. In terminology current in late nineteenth-century France it is, on this understanding, conceptually impossible to 'democratise' luxury (cf. Williams, 1982: pp. 94-104 *et passim*). Luxuries are *by definition* always out of reach of mass consumption.

A variant of this argument is one aspect of Fred Hirsch's notion of 'positional goods'. These goods are socially scarce in such a way that an increase in their availability changes their character so that they yield less satisfaction (Hirsch, 1977: p. 20). Hirsch adopts the economist's definition of 'luxury' (high income elasticity of demand) and then notes that as the general standard of living rises so the demand for luxuries is diffused (*ibid.*: p. 66). But this diffusion, he claims, changes the character of the good. Car ownership is an example. When cars are widely owned not only (as in the video example) is the symbolic cachet lost but also the actual enjoyment of the good is offset by such consequences as traffic jams, parking restrictions and inferior public transport (*ibid.*: p. 167). This analysis does, however, neglect the fact that the good itself has changed as well as its diffusion. In functional terms the cars now mass produced are, on most meaningful criteria - reliability, safety, energy efficiency - far superior to earlier models. The fact that, when first introduced, these

early models were themselves superior to horse-drawn conveyances was central to their appeal. They were not centrally or essentially 'snob goods'. By conceptually tying 'luxury' so tightly to the social meaning of rarity/exclusivity the inherent quality of the good, and the reasons for wanting it, are downplayed.

This is not to say that social meaning is irrelevant and I shall myself exploit one dimension of this account later, when I discuss the relationship between the 'grammar' of societies and the identification of goods as necessities or luxuries. However, as I have already suggested, I do not wish to travel all the way down this road. Two considerations underlie my reluctance.

INDIVIDUAL MEANING

The first consideration stems from any earlier caution against assimilating luxury goods to those consumed conspicuously. There is an element of particularity or individuality which exclusive emphasis upon *social* meaning or perception runs the risk of obscuring. The crux of the matter is the 'relativity' of luxury; one person's luxury can be another's necessity. This can, indeed, as we have seen, provide an explanation of the necessity to consume luxuries conspicuously in order to maintain social esteem. However, it is consistent also with another, more individual, aspect of relativity. I might regard the ownership of a word-processor as a luxury but to the professional writer it can be a necessity. Although this is a difference between individuals it is not without possible social significance. The professional writer, for example, might well be able to claim the cost of the processor against tax, thus indicating a societal recognition of this necessity. More importantly, it is not the case here that my identification of this good as a luxury is dependent on the fact that only a few 'consume' it. That identification stems from its place within *my* schedule of desires. This reinforces the earlier conclusion that there is no necessary connexion between luxury and rarity. The corollary of this is that it is not definitionally true that luxuries cannot be widely consumed. I will return to individual meaning at the end of the chapter.

NEEDS AND NATURALISM

The second, broader, consideration that makes me reluctant to follow in its entirety the approach of Baudrillard and others is based on an

unwillingness to jettison the naturalism that underlies my four categories. The source of my reluctance can be conveyed by looking more closely at the 'movement' of goods from being rare to being commonplace. It is undeniable that this is the context historically of many instances of 'luxury goods'. As an example let me cite the work of Fernand Braudel. He writes,

Sugar, for example, was a luxury before the sixteenth century; pepper was still a luxury in the closing years of the seventeenth; so were alcohol and the first 'aperitifs' at the time of Catherine de Medici, or the swansdown beds and silver cups of the Russian boyars before Peter the Great. The first flat plates, which Francis I ordered from a goldsmith in Antwerp in 1538, were also a luxury. (Braudel, 1981: p. 183)

And throughout the treasure-trove of minutiae with which his writings abound, we find goods (coffee, chocolate, tobacco and table forks are further examples) the consumption of which was initially limited to a few, referred to as luxuries.⁸

What those who wish to jettison any naturalistic talk of needs do not explain is why such goods did not remain confined to a 'few'. Why did cars come to be mass-produced? Why was the owner of the first video in the street joined by others shortly thereafter? The broad outlines of an explanation are discernible in the above discussion. There is a movement from the 'few' to the 'many' in the case of cars and videos (or sugar or forks) because such a movement expresses the general incidence of the desire for these goods. (Of course this is no guarantee of success; think of the respective fates of videos and the Sinclair C5 'motor-vehicle'.)

And this incidence is general *because* these desires 'relate' to 'universal satisfactions'. The causal element should not be overlooked. It is misleadingly oversimple to attribute this diffusion to the 'totalitarian' compass or 'omnipotence' of advertising (Baudrillard, 1988: pp. 19, 10).⁹ The 'naturalism' to which I refer is constituted by the universality of satisfactions. The necessary connexion between luxury and pleasure is similarly significant. The history of fashion counsels against too facile a reading of that connexion; women (especially) have suffered physical discomfort in order to be 'in vogue' and luxury clothing in its guise as 'trend-setter' is no exception.

⁸ There is support for Braudel's list and labelling. Erasmus in 1516 lists as *luxum ac delicias* and whose consumption is confined to the rich, 'cotton, silk, dyed cloth, pepper, spices, ointments, jewels' (*Institutio*: p. 262, tr. p. 192).

⁹ Baudrillard (1988: p. 42) is later critical of Galbraith (1985) for assuming too much passivity on the part of the consumer and now declares that 'we know that advertising is not omnipotent'.

Nonetheless no amount of advertising can make sugar other than sweet, and the very fact that large sums of money are spent on informing consumers of the dangers to health of its overconsumption is itself testament to the force of the 'natural' connexion. Advertising, in other words, has to rely for its potency on certain givens, and central to these givens are the universality of satisfactions enjoyed by humans. Seen in this light it is no surprise to find sexual attractiveness used so often to sell anything from clothing to soft furnishings (shelter) to chocolates (sustenance) to holidays (leisure); as well as 'subsumable' items such as lawn-mowers and car-tyres. The very ubiquity and frequency of this marketing strategy itself overlays the fact that goods of these types are widely desired *because* they 'relate' to these 'naturally' experienced satisfactions.

My recourse to naturalism here should not be misconstrued. Baudrillard (1981: p. 80) explicitly attacks a naturalistic account of needs, where that is understood to refer to a 'vital anthropological minimum'. This minimum, he declares, is a residuum, not a *sine qua non* point of departure. Societies give priority (variously) to the 'divine or sacrificial share, sumptuous discharge, economic profit' and only once these have been determined is the 'survival threshold' identified; it is 'this pre-dedication of luxury that negatively determines the level of survival, and not the reverse' (*ibid.*). But I am not arguing for the 'brute-ness' of these satisfactions (needs). (Indeed in Chapter 9 I shall reinvoke the notion of 'pre-dedication'.) Rather, in line with my understanding of needs as abstract categories, these needs are never experienced other than as elements of social/cultural practice or 'forms of life' in the Wittgensteinian sense. This is why I am not committed to 'brute-ness' or what Baudrillard (1981: p. 71) calls 'naive factuality'.¹⁰

Yet neither does it follow from this that 'needs' are simply reducible

¹⁰ Baudrillard's whole 'problematic' is Marxian. Much of the animus of his writing is directed against the centrality assumed by 'use-value' and 'production' in Marxist theory. Nonetheless, like others (e.g. Prétécille & Terrail, 1985) he is (or was, since his position has changed) concerned to explode the ideological character of needs, where this is understood in terms of their place in individualistic political economy. Rather, needs are to be understood as productive forces required by the economic system, that is, as 'a function induced (in the individual) by the internal logic of the system' (Baudrillard, 1988: p. 82). As an illustrative example Baudrillard imagines the requirement, sanctioned by law, to change cars every two years. Although he is critical of Galbraith for having a simplistic view of needs (cf. Baudrillard, 1988: pp. 38ff.) he is adapting here what Galbraith (1962: ch. 11) called the 'dependence effect'; wants are created by the productive process by which they are satisfied. When considered outside its problematic it is not easy to see what this Baudrillardian theory of consumption amounts to. Certainly its preoccupation with the assumptions and practices of capitalist (and socialist/productivist) economics appears to make it over-specific.

to social constructions. We have distinguished between basic needs that are abstract categories but which nevertheless reflect, in Wiggins's terms, 'the way the world is', and instrumental or volitional needs and, within the latter, have noted that some of them possess the special status of being socially necessary. While the last of these do appear to be socially constructed – a point I shall pick up shortly – it does not mean that this applies to basic needs. It is worth exploring briefly why this is the case.

UNIVERSALISM

Apart from his critique, Baudrillard (1981: pp. 74–6) conceives of consumption in terms of the 'logic of sign-exchange'. It is part of this general 'logic' that needs are social effects and not extra-societal (individual/'natural') causes. In support of his argument, Baudrillard explicitly cites Lévi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology. Just as, according to the latter, the kinship system is not determined 'in the final analysis' by consanguinity and filiation (natural givens) but by 'the arbitrary regulation of classification' so 'the system of consumption is based on a code of signs (objects/signs) and differences, and not on need and pleasure' (Baudrillard, 1988: p. 47). However, Lévi-Strauss's work can be used to show not so much the limitations of Baudrillard's approach as the sense in which my use of needs as abstract categories is 'naturalistic'. The nub issue is universalism. Lévi-Strauss (1968: p. 51) is himself critical of the 'sterile empiricism' of functionalist anthropology with its language of needs (as in Malinowski (1960), for example). Nonetheless there are universal 'forms' that structure each custom and institution; indeed there is 'a single structural scheme existing and operating in different spatial and temporal contexts' (Lévi-Strauss, 1968: p. 21). The earlier discussion of ornament can be usefully re-invoked to clarify the argument.

Different cultures use and value as ornamentation a seemingly infinite array of materials and designs and their 'meaning' is (very often) specific to that culture. It remains possible, however, for those not part of that culture to comprehend that 'meaning' in the sense of appreciating its internal intelligibility. What makes such comprehension possible is the presence of certain 'universals'. Whether these universals are best understood epistemologically or biologically is less important than their presence (cf. Berry: 1986a).

Relatedly, the ubiquity of the phenomenon of ornamentation tells

against the inherently implausible claim that it is present within all cultures because each and every culture just so happened to develop this 'practice'. Lévi-Strauss himself provides evidence to this effect. The womenfolk of north American Plains Indians practise embroidery with porcupine quills. This embroidery is 'purely decorative in inspiration' and has 'symbolic significance' (Lévi-Strauss, 1978: p. 249). Lévi-Strauss interprets this significance in terms of the ornamentation reproducing, via the periodicity of the availability of porcupine quills, the periodicity of the major cosmic cycles – including those of female physiology (ibid.: p. 386). The accuracy or otherwise of this account is not here at issue. My point is that Lévi-Strauss is, within his approach, implicitly having recourse to certain 'natural' constants in order to explain/comprehend a particular cultural practice (cf. also Lévi-Strauss, 1977: p. 25).

The relevance of this is that the radical implication whereby luxury is understood simply in terms of social meaning does not do full justice to the phenomenon. Hence the reason *why* food, clothing, housing and leisure can be objects of 'luxury', and thus also have, in many cases, a 'meaning' as badges of distinction, is not mere accidental convergence in different societies at different times and in different places. In the Baudrillardian approach the signs lead only to other signs. It is as if signposts pointed not to a destination but simply to other signposts. Lévi-Strauss himself indicates that there is, in principle, something beyond signifiers,

each matrix of meanings refers to another matrix, each myth to other myths. And if it is now asked to what final meaning these mutually significative meanings are referring – since in the last resort and in their totality they must refer to something – the only reply to emerge from this study [*The Raw and the Cooked*] is that myths signify the mind that evolves them by making use of the world of which it itself is a part. (In Sperber, 1985: p. 83)

In my account the 'something' is constituted by those universally experienced satisfactions that embody what I have called naturalism. I repeat that this does not require any commitment to an extra-societal conception of needs/luxury.

SOCIAL GRAMMAR

While I cannot accept the full 'deconstructionist' thrust of the Baudrillardian approach, I do wish to develop one particular aspect

of the social meaning of luxury. This development will be discussed more fully in Part IV and here I confine myself to an outline statement. I stated above that one important aspect of the 'drag-effect' that luxury goods possessed was that such goods could become so widespread that they are judged to be socially necessary. This division between goods that are deemed socially necessary and goods that constitute luxuries is part of what we may call the basic grammar of societies. Just as a language's grammar makes communication therein possible, so this division is one way in which a society is made intelligible to its members. The division acts as a marker, an ingredient in an information/communication system (cf. Douglas & Isherwood, 1979) that helps to establish a society's identity.

This intelligibility does not mean consensus but rather a presupposition that enables dispute about what should be in what category to take place. And wherever we have such categorical dispute – or at least the potential for such – then we have entered more explicitly into the realm of the political. For example, in the UK there is a policy to levy no VAT on books but to impose it on cinema tickets (and as a political policy it is open to amendment). We can state the principle that this example aims to illustrate in more general terms. All societies give practical effect, through legal and fiscal measures especially, to the distinction between needs and desires; books are educational and an educated population is a 'socially recognised need'; the cinema is a recreational outlet of which individuals may or may not wish to avail themselves. The underlying principle here can be formulated as a hypothesis: different evaluations of desire and different notions or identifications of need will result in different conceptions of 'good and politic order' as the 1553 Act of Apparel put it. This hypothesis will be examined or 'tested' in later chapters. Placed in this context, the issue of luxury for all its contemporary commonplace commercial usage remains political.

I want to conclude this preliminary survey by exploiting the notion that luxury can be understood as one of the basic categorising components of a society's grammar. I pursue this objective by drawing a conceptual map, or taxonomy, of societal goods as exemplified in contemporary societies.

A TAXONOMY OF SOCIETAL GOODS

1 A good can be deemed necessary. This necessity is the product of a particular society identifying particular goods as especially important.

The criteria of importance will not only reflect cultural norms and standards but also heed the ineluctable requirements of any human existence. It is through heeding these requirements that whatever is deemed socially necessary makes concrete the abstractness of basic needs. Goods that are given the status of 'social necessity' can be treated as possessing the objective (belief-independent) qualities of basic needs. Hence, to re-use the example of sanitation, regardless of an individual's own thoughts about hygiene any newly-constructed dwelling must, to accord with the law, serve to meet his or her needs in that regard.

2 A good can be needed as an instrumental means to an end. As noted above, this instrumentalist sense is, perhaps, the predominant use of the word 'need'. Accordingly this category of goods encompasses the requirements of day-to-day living – the toothbrush, the tin-opener, the shopping bag, the frying-pan, the pen and so on and on. Nevertheless there remains, even while allowing for substitutability (you can clean your teeth with dental floss or an appropriately shaped twig), an element of necessity. We can see how by means of an example. If what I want to do is cross the Atlantic in the shortest time possible, then I, as a civilian, have no alternative but to go by Concorde. But, if that is indeed the case, then flying by Concorde has become an instrumental necessity. It is desired simply as a necessary means to the realisation of a specific end and is not desired for itself or for any intrinsic reason.

3 A good can be coveted or desired fervently; it is the realisation of a specific objective for its own sake or because it is especially valued. If I have a fervent or settled desire (if I 'really want' (cf. Gosling, 1969: pp. 107–9) to fly supersonically and I direct my energies to accumulating the fare by forgoing other expenditures then flying by a 747 is not an option. Fervency of desire is, in this regard, thus assimilable to instrumental necessity. Similarly, if the book-collector intensely wants or covets a first edition of *De Cive* then no other edition is acceptable.

4 A good can be cherished. There is no requirement that such a good be widely cherished; certain goods have a 'sentimental value' that is particular to an individual. That particularity is immune to the perceptions of others. It is also immune to the relative penetration of goods of that type, simply because it is not a good of a *type* but a good the value of which lies precisely in its non-reproducibility, in its specific associations.

5 A good can be a luxury. We can identify such goods negatively by

their not being goods that are deemed socially necessary; nor utilitarian instruments, necessary means to an end; nor objects of fervent desire; nor cherished possessions. What then, positively, is a luxury?

A luxury good is an indulgence. It is a good that is thought desirable or pleasing by an individual. By extension it is a good that is assumed by advertisers and the manufacturers of consumer goods to be desirable or pleasing to the generality of individuals. As we have seen the category or *taxis* of luxury within this taxonomy itself encompasses four (sub)categories. Within these categories of sustenance, shelter, clothing and leisure, a luxury good is a good that it would be nice to have or experience – the special quality of which is precisely that it does not fall into the other taxonomical categories that have just been identified. On an individual level this encompasses how small, relatively inexpensive goods can be thought of as luxuries – for example, hiring a baby-sitter and going to the cinema. This falls into the leisure-class of luxury goods: it is not (1) a social necessity, unlike swimming-pools there are no public funds to meet this leisure activity; not (2) an instrumental necessity, the parents are not incipient baby-bashers for whom a night-out is therapy; not (3) something necessarily planned for, any film would do and its expense is relatively slight; not (4) a cherished habitual pastime; rather, (5) it is a treat, a positively pleasant experience and all of this is consistent with the parents being happy to stay at home.

It should be apparent from this last example that this taxonomy must be understood three-dimensionally – our map is a relief map. The goods referred to in this taxonomy are particulars. And any one particular good can fall into any *taxis* 2–5 depending on the particular desires of a particular agent. Hence a Rolls-Royce can be an instrumental necessity; it is a means of demonstrating municipal dignity or company prosperity or personal status. It can be an object of fervent desire, a vehicle for which one would plan for either by long-term saving or by systematic 'trading-up'. Or again, it can be a prized personal possession. And, of course, it can be a luxury. It is worth pointing out another apparent paradox. All the manufacturer cares about is selling the car, and the advertiser believes calling it a 'luxury automobile' is a selling point. But, on my account, some, perhaps indeed many, of the purchasers are not treating it as a luxury. Those who buy a Rolls as a *luxury* are, it follows from this analysis, perhaps best characterised by the pools-winner or the

equivalent. In my strict sense, therefore, a luxury good, though desired, is not a goal at which 'action' is directed.¹¹ In sum, *luxuries are those goods that admit of easy and painless substitution because the desire for them lacks fervency.*

The fact that a Rolls can in this way fall into any of these four taxonomical categories accords with our initial remark that luxury goods were not a separate category superadded to a fixed determinate set of basic necessities. This fact also explains why it is intelligible that one person's luxury can be another's (instrumental) necessity. I should also add that from a particular individual's point of view any number of social goods can be a matter of complete indifference – hence to someone who is neither a mayor nor a company chairman, who cannot, and will not learn to drive, and has no wish to be driven, a Rolls-Royce would be redundant. However, if my account is right (or, more modestly, is along the right lines) then such an individual would not be puzzled by a Rolls-Royce being described as a 'luxury'.

It is this interpersonal relativity that provoked Mandeville's stringent definition of luxury as something not absolutely necessary, for, as he went on to maintain, once a less stringent criterion is adopted, and since 'the wants of Men are innumerable, then what ought to supply them has no bounds; what is call'd superfluous to some degree of People will be thought requisite to those of higher Quality'. In the light of this, Mandeville further claimed that once a less stringent definition is employed then 'there is no Luxury at all' (*Fable*: I, 137).

However, on my analysis, while I have agreed with Mandeville's comments as to the indefiniteness of luxury (non-stringently identified), I have demurred from his conclusion that 'luxury' is therefore indefinable or unidentifiable. Let me now recapitulate my analysis to explain this.

In abstract terms, the assumption in contemporary commercial usage is that a luxury good is a widely desired (because not yet generally attained) good that is believed to be 'pleasing', and the general desirability of which is explained by it being a specific refinement, or qualitative aspect, of some universal generic need. These refinements, as products of desire, reflect the differences between individuals: I want coffee, you want tea, he wants lemonade,

¹¹ Cf. Gosling (1969: p. 108) 'It may be allowed that the person would be glad if x were to be handed him on a plate, and perhaps even hopes that this will happen, but he will not himself stir a finger to bring it about.'

she wants whisky. These differences nonetheless have a common focus because of their root in common need: we all need a drink. I have identified four chief categories of luxury goods corresponding to four basic needs – sustenance, shelter, clothing and leisure. Thus it is that we typically regard caviar, a palace, a Dior gown and a weekend in a certain Lake District hotel as luxuries.

The 'we' in question here are the members of late twentieth-century industrial societies. Those who lived in earlier, different, societies would have specified the content of these categories differently but the same four categories would have been identifiable. What would have been different is the social values placed on these goods. In Parts II and III I investigate the changes in valuation that have occurred.

PART II

The classical paradigm