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Double Degree Bachelor in Philosophy of a Specific Discipline

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Capitalism and the Excentric Human Condition

*Analysis of Capitalism's Efficiency in Satisfying Human Self-Realization
through the Perspective of Helmuth Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology.*

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Abstract

With Capitalism being the most prominent economic system in the West, this thesis dives into the quest whether it is also the most efficient in satisfying the human need of self-realization. Applying Helmuth Plessner's perspective on the human condition presented in his book *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, I affirm the claim of Capitalism being the most efficient system, while pointing out its twofold nature. After introducing Plessner's philosophical anthropology and the main concepts of Capitalism, I will delve into the identified ambiguity of Capitalism's effects on humankind. This philosophical reflection is divided into two parts: positive and negative effects of Capitalism. The positive ones I identified include the facilitation of Capitalism in increasing the human degree of artificiality, in following individualistic goals, in pushing technological advancement and innovation, and the support of political diversity and peace. The negative effects identified include Capitalism's utopian promise of self- fulfillment, its promotion of human boundlessness resulting in negative environmental and socioeconomic impacts, and its encouragement in developing dependence-creating technologies. I conclude that the ambiguity of Capitalism is a reflection of the ambiguous excentric creator, humanity.

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Research Question

Is Capitalism the most efficient economic system for individual self-realization? I will approach this question from the perspective of Helmuth Plessner's anthropological philosophy as presented in his work *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (Levels of the Organic and Man).

I will argue that indeed, Capitalism is the most efficient economic framework as I evaluate the ways in which it is reflecting human nature. However, from the perspective of Plessner, I will argue that there are some unfavorable aspects linked to the Capitalism-human relationship. Associated negative social, cultural and economic effects will be investigated in this thesis, which lead me to an ambiguous view on this efficiency and its impact on human nature.

Introduction

This thesis examines why Capitalism is the most efficient economic system to enable individual self-realization, considering the anthropological theory presented in Helmuth Plessner's *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*¹. We try to delve into this relationship by analyzing how Capitalism is reflecting the human's excentric positionality and resulting rootlessness (*Wurzellosigkeit*) (Plessner, 1981, GS IV, p.419)². Although we argue that Capitalism is the most efficient framework, we also see that efficiency comes at a cost. Thus, lastly we will evaluate the ambiguous social, cultural and economic impacts that this efficiency has on the human nature.

Helmuth Plessner introduced the concept of excentric positionality, which will be explained in detail in the following sections, initially in his work *die Stufen*, in 1928. He puts excentricity as the origin of human nature and any other humanly created structure such as society, culture, economics or politics.

Choosing an anthropological theory to analyze an economic framework might not seem self-evident at first, but I chose Plessner's work *die Stufen* to analyze Capitalism's role in human life because it is a theory that convinces with applicability in various contexts. Just as Capitalism affects human life not only in an economic way, but also has social, cultural or environmental impacts for instance. Hence, the analysis of this array of impacts can only be adequately carried out with a theory that considers insights from various domains. Using a dominantly economic theory for a similar analysis would only result in limited insights, similar to looking at the world in a vacuum.

Furthermore, Plessner's coherent anthropological theory convinces with contemporary relevance, because it allows for an analysis of issues in a non-isolated way. Today's world is increasingly

¹ Will be further referred to as *die Stufen*.

² Will be further referred to as (IV, page number)

interconnected through globalization and the rise of the internet. As already mentioned, economic frameworks have not only cross-sectional, but also international implications. Hence, their efficiency in satisfying the human condition can best be examined with a broadly pertinent theory like Plessner's.

The aim of this thesis is not only to explore why Capitalism is the most efficient economic system to satisfy the human needs. The overall interest lies on how Capitalism is linked to human excentricity, how it embraces the human's constantly changing intentions. As already pointed out, I will argue that humanity's striving personality, paired with Capitalism's opportunistic character leads to ambiguous implications for the individual, society, culture, economics and the environment.

The thesis is divided in three parts. The first part will explain Plessner's anthropological theory, focusing on chapter 7 'the Sphere of the Human' of *die Stufen*. Key concepts, such as excentricity and the resulting anthropological laws will be introduced, to set the stage for the philosophical reflection. The second part of the thesis will briefly state the main features and ideas of Capitalism. The philosophical reflection, where Capitalism is confronted with the human condition, will constitute the third and final part of the thesis. The dual nature of how Capitalism reflects human rootlessness and its way of satisfying needs will be analyzed in depth and represents the largest fraction of this third part.

Part 1: Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology

Philosophical Anthropology represents in the first sense an overarching discipline which serves as an umbrella term for various philosophical human-focused paradigms. It emerged as a consequence of the shaking of the Middle Age's order, which was rooted in the dominance of religion and ancient tradition. Hence, philosophical anthropology is originally an emancipative movement from Christian religion and Greek tradition (Apostolopoulou, 1992, p.49). As a discipline, it reflects how the human being becomes central as a reference point in explaining diverse aspects of life, such as history, economics, morality, etc. Beforehand, questions such as how the human shall behave were answered by looking at the Bible. Another example of how this new view of human essentiality influenced new theories is the fundamental concept of the *homo oeconomicus* in the economic discipline.

Philosophical Anthropology as a specific paradigm³ emerged in the first third of the 20th century. It is part of the overarching discipline just as for example Existentialism, another human-focused paradigm. Helmuth Plessner, alongside Arnold Gehlen and Max Scheler, is one of the main representatives of the paradigm. It has risen as a reaction to the challenges of 'modernity'. Humanity was facing dominance of empirical sciences, especially biology, as well as a rapidly evolving societal and political sphere. Hence, the human body was being analyzed in its interconnectedness to its own psyche and body, to culture and sociality ("Helmuth Plessner Gesellschaft", n.d).

Philosophical Anthropology as a paradigm was trying to reposition the human being in the world whilst bridging competing disciplines like biology and sociology. It is no surprise that Plessner, who studied Zoology, Philosophy and Sociology, was a driving force in that challenge. His diverse background is another reason why I chose to use Plessner's theory as a basis for my thesis analysis over his colleagues Scheler and Gehlen.

Inanimate versus animate nature

While reading *the Stufen*, one can recognize Plessner's background in biology in the very first distinction of his anthropological theory: inanimate versus animate nature, also referred to as living and lifeless nature. The animate nature is defined as an entity having a boundary, which it is crossing to execute exchanges with its environment in order to survive and strive. Inanimate nature, for instance a stone, lacks this exchange capacity and need, as it is lifeless. Plessner calls the boundary *Grenze*, which, literally translated, means border. The rather broad term *Grenzverkehr*, or border traffic, gives us a hint that Plessner intends

³ This thesis is referring to the **paradigm** and its implications when talking about Philosophical Anthropology.

to extend his theory beyond its biological roots. He proves the applicability in other fields through works such as 'Political Anthropology', which we will touch upon later on.

Positionality

The next step of Plessner's theory concerns the organization of the animate life. He makes a difference between three organic *Stufen* (levels), namely plants, animals and human beings. This distinction is based on their specific positionality (*Positionalität*), the relationship between the living being and its own boundary (de Mul, 2014, p.15). The positionality determines the way the living being is positioned in its environment.

Plants have the most basic positionality, as it is 'open'. An open positionality means that the plant has no governing center and is limited to being a body. Hence, it is completely unconscious of the environmental stimuli and its reactions to it. In other words, it has no relationship to its positionality, it lacks insight (subject), and outside (object) (de Mul, 2014, p.16).

Animals have a closed, or centric positionality. The center enables the animal to have a relationship with its positionality in two ways. First, the center, physically the nervous system, creates a physical consciousness of its own body. So it goes beyond the state of a plant as it is not only a body, it is also in its body and experiences its living. Second, as the center is mediating the crossing of the boundary, it establishes a psychic awareness of its environment (de Mul, 2014, p.16). The consciousness allows the animal to make a distinction between itself and its environment. However, lacking self-consciousness, it is guided by instincts and cannot reflect about its doing or itself.

Human beings have an excentric positionality. The human organism adds a distinct relationship to its own center which allows for self-consciousness and objectification of the own person. Human beings have a stance outside their body and are as such, excentric (de Mul, 2018, slide 36). Consequently, the human being not only lives (*lebt*) and experiences (*erlebt*), but also experiences the experience (*erlebt sein Erleben*) (IV, p.364). The main condition of the excentric existence is the double aspectivity (*Doppelaspektivität*). It describes a relationship to both sides of the boundary, which enables human beings to grasp the world from an inner and outer perspective (de Mul, 2014, p.16).

In essence, the human existence is characterized by a threefold structure, as put by Plessner: the living being is its body (*Leib*), has its body as a thing located amidst others (*Körper*), and is the outside perspective from which it can see both (Coolen, 2014, p.114; IV, p.365).

Three worlds

The human finds himself in a world shaped by the threefold nature of his position: there are three worlds perceived by the human as their own reality, positioned in their own being (Plessner, 2019, p.293). Plessner describes these worlds as outer world (*Aussenwelt*), inner world (*Innenwelt*) and shared world (*Mitwelt*). The human capacity of double aspectivity makes the human see each of the three worlds from an inner and outer perspective.

The **outer world** is the spatiotemporal extension filled with things (Plessner, 2019, p.293). The human body is comprised in the outer world in two ways. Firstly, as a physical body (*Körper*) which we can perceive as just any other object surrounding us. Secondly as a living body (*Leib*), which constitutes the center with which we perceive and act. As an illustrative example, the way in which we perceive our body, either as a *Körper* or as a *Leib*, becomes distinct when we are in a state of pain. The perceptive intensity of pain makes us switch from seeing our body as a mere object and we realize we are comprised in this body as a perceiving *Leib*. We will be unable to demarcate the body as a purely external object.

The living being at a distance from itself is given to itself as **inner world**, the world inside the *Leib* (Plessner, 2019, p.294). The law of excentricity introduces in a dual aspect the soul (*Seele*), our psychic reality, temperament and character traits, and the lived experience (*Erlebnis*). Psychic dispositions determine and are determined by lived experiences. For example, when considering oneself to be a creative person, only through sitting down and creating art, one can realize whether one disposes some talent in it or not. This lived experience then again opens up possibilities to pursue, or not, depending on our psychic properties. For example, whether we are a person who likes to spend time alone drawing, or not.

The **shared world** can be described as the ‘we-sphere’ of identities that are excentrically positioned. It appears as the spirit or culture (*Geist*) produced by the individuals’ consciousness (*Bewusstsein*). The shared world carries the person while at the same time being carried by and shaped by the person. The excentric positionality generates and ensures the reality of the shared world for the human (Plessner, 2019, p.303). A person is influenced by the culture he grows up in, but at the same time influences the culture with his behavior, which makes the spirit evolve over time. An example is language, which defines a person that speaks it, as it puts him in a concrete cultural context. At the same time, we can see language expressions change over time by how people who use it on an everyday basis.

Concluding, one can say that the human dual aspectivity creates in each world two perspectives, which are mutually shaping each other.

The gap

Excentricity has another, shaping effect on our human nature, namely the fact that we face distance, a gap

between us and the three worlds. As de Mul (2018, slide 41) describes it: ‘we do not coincide with the outer world, our fellow man and not even with ourselves’. Meanwhile Plessner’s description of the human condition sets forth: ‘as an excentric being without equilibrium, standing out of place and time in nothingness (*ortlos, zeitlos im Nichts stehend*), constitutively homeless (*konstitutiv heimatlos*), he must “become something” and create his own equilibrium’ (Plessner, 2019, p.310). Clearly, this gap is steering our doing in every aspect of our life. We want to close the gap to finally reach ‘home’, approach an equilibrium.

Three anthropological laws

The extent of the human excentricity essentiality leads Plessner to formulate three basic anthropological laws, which illustrate the human condition.

First law: Das Gesetz von der natürlichen Künstlichkeit

The first law derives from the antinomy of human existence: the human need to make himself into what he already is (*sich zu dem erst machen zu müssen, was er schon ist...*)- to lead the life he lives (... *das Leben zu führen, welches er lebt*) (Plessner, 2019, p.310). The law is called **natural artificiality**, alluding to the natural human incompleteness and need of self-realization. Since the human is forced by his excentric life form to create what he is - as he is only insofar he performs (*der Mensch lebt nur, indem er ein Leben führt*) – he needs to compensate his ‘nakedness’ (*Nacktheit*) with a non-organic compound. Hence, by his form of existence he is artificial by nature (Plessner, 2019, p.310). The human’s objectifying capability makes him see his own deficiencies, which he tries to fix through tools and technology. In that process, the tools become part of the person, not biologically speaking, but in the cognitive structure (de Mul, 2014, p.19).

In the process of escaping our excentricity with technology, we create culture. The desire to cross the boundaries of our unescapable finite existence in time and space, has driven us to create immemorial tools. For example through language and writing, we escape the finitude of our time. We can pass on our knowledge to future generations, and learn from the ones preceding us. We can nowadays overcome our spatial finitude through the use of information technology such as using webcams to have a peek at the other side of the world, or call when we want to talk to somebody distant from us. Another example of trying to annihilate our deficiencies is the creation of microscopes or telescopes in order to come closer to what is physically unreachable for us. Similarly, we have created planes to overcome our incapability of flying, cars to increase our speed, and so on. Plessner explains that artificiality is the human attempt to find a ‘second home’ (*zweite Vaterland*) and absolute rootedness (*Verwurzelung*) (Plessner, 2019, p.316).

The theme of overcoming ourselves is also represented in other philosophers’ works. For instance Nietzsche (2006, p.119) claims in ‘On the Genealogy of Morality’ that self-overcoming is the essence of life in order to reach self-elevation.

Plessner argues through his anthropological theory that not history initiated culture, but the excentric structure of human life. The lack of balance in the human positionality, the act of overcoming and self-realization, are the origin of culture (Plessner, 2019, p.320).

Second law: das Gesetz von der vermittelten Unmittelbarkeit

The second anthropological law is called mediated immediacy and deals with the relationship between the subject and its environment. The law's name is based on Plessner's definition of a mediated-immediate relationship: a mediated-immediate relation is a connection in which the mediating link is necessary in order to ensure the immediacy of the connection (Plessner, 2019, p.324).

The law depends on the positionality of the organism. For example a plant's open position allows the environment to confront it in an immediate way. The animal's closed position requires a medium for it to perceive the environment, in its case, its senses. However, as the animal's center is 'hidden to itself', its lack of self-consciousness does not allow awareness of the mediation.

The excentricity of the human makes him the mediation between himself and the field, while still being completely absorbed in that field, as he still also "stands in" this mediation (Plessner, 2019, p.327). The excentric position allows him to experience his living body open to the environment, and his physical body that is utilizable as an instrument. The person experiences that he uses his body as a tool in order to mediate his immediate contact with the world (Coolen, 2014, p.119). Given the objectifying capacity, the human knows of the indirectness of his relationship to his surrounding, as it is given to him as mediated (Plessner, 2019, p.325).

Two important ideas in the second anthropological law are immanence (*Immanenz*) and fundamental expressivity (*Expressivität*), which both stem from the excentric positionality. Immanence is the human's imprisonment in his own consciousness. Given he is in his consciousness and has only images of being in nature, psyche, and spirit, the human comprehends the actual world in a way that for him is immediate (Plessner, 2019, p.332).

Expressivity is linked to the urge for artificiality introduced in the first anthropological law. In leading and performing our life, we create and express ourselves. There is an essential connection between the excentric positionality and expressivity as the mode of life of the human (Plessner, 2019, p.323). The human pushes himself to constantly create and find balance through new technology. Plessner points out that, although humans are the creators of their own tools, the latter acquire their own weight: "Equally essential for the technical artifact is its inner weight, its objectivity that discloses the aspect of technology that only can be found or discovered, but never made. Everything that enters the sphere of culture shows its dependence on human creation. But at the same time (and to the same extent) it is independent from

man” (IV, p.397, as cited in de Mul, 2014, p.20). How this aspect of technology can influence our life will be treated more in depth in the third part of the thesis.

Third law: das Gesetz vom utopischen Standort

The third anthropological law is called utopian standpoint. It describes at the same time the grandeur and misère of human life. This ambiguity stems from excentricity and how it shapes the human life. On the one hand, the human being's brokenness (*Gebrochenheit*) is the driving force to create, innovate and find ways to close the distance between himself and the three worlds. On the other hand, he is never able to fully close the gap, reach this 'home' (Heimat) and thus will continue looking until the end of his finite existence. Hence, excentricity is what makes humanity thrive and develop while at the same time it will never allow it to settle in a balanced *definitivum*. Humans find themselves imprisoned in a finite physical body while the wish for eternity and immortality persists. Plessner explains that an answer to this desire is often found in religion which offers an eternal prospect of peace. Nowadays, this utopian role is progressively being taken over from technology (de Mul, 2014, p.20). How this affects the human life will be analyzed more in depth in the third part of the thesis.

Plessner depicts this chase of self-realization as a form of rootlessness, in the sense that as soon as our intention has been fulfilled, we are already in the next intention and the fulfilment of the preceding one leaves us unfulfilled. This rootlessness can also be experienced from the human in himself. Plessner makes the difference between shame (*Scham*) and pride (*Stolz*). This could be described as awareness of the human nullity versus his uniqueness. A human being is aware that there is not a second person like him on earth while also knowing that the individual impact is so small that his disappearance would leave the world unaffected. It pushes the individual into an increased desire of individuality in order to escape replaceability. But the human's actual position in the here and now makes him realize that he could also 'have become another'. Thus the individual's replaceability warrants the certainty of the contingency of his individual existence. This contingency is the reason for his pride and shame (Plessner, 2019, p.341). The contingency confronts the absolute and divine the human desires, but will never be able to reach.

Plessner sees in this an insurmountable contradiction between culture and religion. As stated previously, culture originates from the human striving for self-realization and expression, which leaves culture to be an infinitely evolving concept driven by human brokenness. Religion on the other hand attracts through its stability and promise of a *definitivum* (Plessner, 2019, p.342). However, Plessner does not stop at religion when it comes to societal utopian promises. Living in Germany during the time of the third Reich, he could experience himself (being Jewish he had to flee to the Netherlands), how political ideologies could take over the role of a promised utopia, and how powerful this could be. This again is just another example of how the utopian standpoint is reflected in a world created through human excentricity. Whether religion,

political ideology or technology, those utopia-promising schemes are still relevant today. How they are impacting humanity nowadays will be discussed more in-depth in the third part of the thesis.

Human unfathomability

One last important notion that shall be introduced is a concept presented by Plessner 1931 in his work *Political Anthropology*. He describes the human as a *homo absconditus* (Plessner, 2018, p.8). It can be translated as the concealed human, because the human's intentions are hidden to himself. Plessner refers to it as a 'binding unfathomability', which for him is the 'formula for human life' as it captures the incapability of defining oneself (Plessner, 2018, p.8).

Confronting ourselves excentrically, we are performing our lives without an objective reference. This has as a result that we are a work in progress and our paths are likely to change. Plessner explains that the dual aspectivity enables us to become very diverse human beings. Our excentricity allows us not to be bound by instincts and hence, we are highly variable, historically and culturally.

The human essence is not fixed, and will never settle as it is shaped by the individual environment of the three worlds. Therefore, Plessner is voicing a post-structuralist thought of plurality of meaning: he is arguing for cultural and political diversity. Our boundary forces us to differentiate ourselves from 'the other', from what is foreign (Plessner, 2018, p.9). On a cultural and political level, this differentiation leads to different traditions and frameworks. The implications of this diversity will be treated more in depth in the third part of the thesis.

Part 2: Capitalism

Nowadays, Capitalism illustrates a comprehensive term of an initial economic concept that evolved into several sub forms over the century. Most countries do not practice a pure capitalist system but have integrated the key ideas in a mixed economy. Mixed economies lie on the continuum between pure Capitalism and pure Socialism, ranging in the level of government intervention (Chappelow, 2019). Limiting the focus on the Western countries, a rather pure capitalist system is being practiced in Anglo-Saxon countries such as the UK or the US. Nordic countries are balancing Capitalism with Socialism and most European countries are practicing Welfare Capitalism (Chappelow, 2019).

For this thesis, we will only focus on the key ideas of Capitalism that still form a common ground between the different mixed economy models. Thence, the most relevant aspects will now be discussed so they are clear for the philosophical reflection in part three of the thesis.

Adam Smith is seen as the father of Capitalism, who enlightened the world with a novel economic theory presented in his works *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). Besides Smith, Milton Friedman is seen today as an essential shaping figure of pure Capitalism. Both have established concepts that are still relevant in today's markets. These main capitalistic features will be discussed next.

Freedom

Freedom is the main capitalist maxim. It can be found in various aspects in the economic system's principles and ways of operating. Capitalism is described as a free market economy, which means that the production of goods and services is based on supply and demand, hence a process without government intervention. Moreover, the two foundations of Friedman's 'capitalist ethic' are private property rights paired with the freedom to employ and exchange the resources voluntarily in free markets (Ashford, 2014, p.537). Voluntary trade is the mechanism that drives activity in the capitalist system. Individuals only enter an exchange of private property when the exchange is believed to be beneficial in a psychic or material way.

'Free enterprise' is another right stemming from the freedom principle. Individuals are free to invest, start a business to produce and sell goods and services without coercive governmental constraints (Chappelow, 2019). According to Friedman, the government's role should be limited to protecting the freedom of voluntary exchange (Ashford, 2014, p.537). This contained state behavior is part of the *laissez-faire* principle of market economies. The free markets powers are supposed to regulate economic activity without a government authority providing regulation or supervision (Chappelow, 2019).

Self-interest

The principle of self-interest is another key factor which is defining market activity. It was Smith who initially made self-interest a key component of an economic theory. He introduced the notion 'the invisible hand' as a metaphor to describe the unintended social benefits that result from the individual's pursuing of self-interest. If an individual is seeking his self-interest, the motivation for personal gain is high, which will lead the person to work hard. As a result, society as a whole will benefit from more jobs, more competition and higher quality goods and services (Cooney, 2012). On a corporate level, this self-interest guided behavior is often paraphrased as profit-maximizing strategies.

(Neo)Liberalism

Capitalism is also an important characteristic of Liberalism, which is a political tradition that is based on economic liberty, individual rights and equality before the law (Sennholz, 1985). Liberalism became a distinct popular movement among Western economists and philosophers during the enlightenment era. Monarchic ruling and mercantilist policies got abolished and replaced by the promotion of free markets (Gould, 1999, p.3).

It was the English liberal economists and French physiocrats that erected the economic laissez faire principle of politically unrestrained, self-regulating markets (Sennholz, 1985). In regard of the previous explanations, it becomes clear that Liberalism and Capitalism have been mutually shaping, which resulted in concordant values. Nowadays, Liberalism has become the political ideology for individual freedom to organize social and economic life as pleased. Man shall be able to choose his employment, buy, sell and keep profits of economic pursuits (Sennholz, 1985).

Another key connection of Liberalism and Capitalism is the need and support of democracy for the framework to function. Liberal democracy combined with the capitalist values lead to the erection of democratic Capitalism, an ideology promoting individual freedom and pluralism (Novak, 1982, p.31). This ideology had been especially prominent in the decades after the Second World War in Europe and Japan. Its effects included sustained growth and full employment, which is why this period in history is often

referred to as ‘the golden age of Capitalism’ (Muller, 2013). Hence, democracy is another important factor that enables the efficiency of Capitalism.⁴

As aforementioned, nowadays mostly capitalist mixed economies are in place, but entrepreneurs and capitalists still manage to profitably engage in economic activities, even after taxations and increased regulations (Sennholz, 1985). This is due to the fact that the most fundamental capitalist principles are still steering the liberal markets of Western countries.

Individualism

Individualism as a characterizing trait of the Western world is seen as a discourse contingent to the one of Capitalism. Capitalism moved individualism in the direction of possessive rights of property, while individualism pushed capitalism to embrace a specifically individualistic conception of property rights and economic relations (Turner, 1988, p.57). Hence, the individualistic culture and Capitalism are mutually shaping contingencies.

Globalization

Lastly, an implication of Capitalism shall be addressed which has been very relevant in the last 50 years, namely globalization. We live in a world more internationally interconnected than ever before, in a culturally, economically, socially and politically sense. Globalization is defined as a form of capitalist expansion that entails the integration of local and national economies into a global, unregulated market economy (Guttal, 2007, p.523). Moreover, it is a political movement which increases interaction and integration of companies, institutions and governments around the globe.

⁴ An interesting contemporary development is the one of authoritarian Capitalism. The best example being China, this form of state organization is a mix of autocracy and radical capitalist markets. The common belief that democracy and capitalism go hand in hand, that economic growth both requires and propels political liberalization seems to be proven inadequate by China’s boom over the last decades (Ang, 2018). While democratic Capitalism in the US and Europe starts to show a systemic sickness, the authoritarian form seems to have taken the lead when it comes to efficiency. Is it true that authoritarian ‘stability’ is a more efficient way to guide the economy whereas democracy seems to be a cyclicity of market chaos?

While the individual freedom in China is fairly limited (e.g. freedom of speech), mainly through the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the country undertook crucial political reforms to ‘democratize’ the markets, making the country a ‘highly adaptive capitalist machine’ (Ang, 2018). The former economically inefficient stigma of Communism has been lifted and replaced by a powerful hybrid state form. Superior efficiency is provided for instance when it comes to the increased speed of radical change made feasible through the authoritarian governance of the mono-party CCP. Proposed change does not have to go through the lengthy process common in democratic structures. An example is the ban of fossil fuel vehicles, which was announced in 2017 with the deadline of ‘in the near future’ (“the Guardian”, 2017). Already in 2018 China overtook the US as biggest electric car market.

On an economic level the Chinese hybrid state form has doubtlessly overtaken democratic Capitalism in terms of efficiency. The future development of the country’s governance will show whether it will also gain the upper hand over the west in enabling individual self-realization, from a Plessnerian perspective. Although this quest goes beyond the scope of my thesis, it is nevertheless an interesting train of thought which should fuel another research paper.

Globalization emerged in the 1970s during Reagan's neoliberal reign. The recession which hit the USA made Reagan spark an era of deregulation and return to the free-market ideology (neoliberalism). It did not only entail a reduction in welfare and corporate taxes, but most importantly a removal of regulation on production and trade (Cole, 2019).

The era of neoliberal economics did not just aim at deregulating national economics, but also at facilitating international free trade. A significant legislative step towards globalization also stems from that era, namely the NAFTA free trade agreement. Free trade zones allow companies to produce their goods overseas without paying import or export tariffs on them (Cole, 2019). The launch of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 set another crucial international institution in place. Its aim is to promote neoliberal free trade policies internationally. The WTO plays a significant role in governing and developing global trade as well as in resolving trade disputes between countries (Cole, 2019).

The ubiquity of liberal ideas in the world and the revolution in information technology has fully launched and enabled the process of globalization. The diminishing of national and political boundaries has created a lot of benefits for the world, such as technological progress, economic and corporate growth, or the development of third world countries (Guttal, 2007, p.523). However, it is also accompanied by negative outgrowth and externalities. These, as well as the positive aspects will be addressed more in depth and in relation to Plessner's *die Stufen*, in the subsequent part of the thesis.

Another note has to be made regarding Plessner's view on globalization. For Plessner, globalization is an anthropological phenomenon as old as humankind. For instance, human beings are scattered around the globe. Practically isochronally to the appearance of the first forms of the homo in Africa started the process of globalization, the expansion of our species. Anthropologically speaking, the boom of globalization, since the capitalist reign during the last 50 years, is in line with human nature. Hence, Capitalism really just highlighted a very foundational characteristic of the human lifeform. This is another reason for me to argue that Plessner would agree with Capitalism being the most fitting economic system for humanity.

Indeed, Plessner had a crucial influence in the development of the economic system called "Social Market Economy" promoted originally in West Germany by chancellor Konrad Adenauer in 1949. It is a third way between the laissez-faire economic liberalism and socialist economies in the sense that it combines free market capitalism with policies supporting fair competition and a welfare state (Spicka, 2007, p.2) ("The Economist", n.d.). The originator of the term and co-creator of the Social Market Economy idea (*Soziale Marktwirtschaft*) Alfred Müller-Armack turned to Plessner's anthropological theory to formulate his own position. Because Plessner's theory takes into account the "oneness" of human nature and culture, while at the same time allowing for variability through historicity. Müller-Armack sees this historicity as the possibility of free and responsible action and human duty to act (Nörr, 1998, pp.222-224). He applied this historical investigation to the Social Market Economy. The fact that Plessner and Müller-Armack have

cooperated and ultimately held seminars together, is another indication for Plessner's favorable mindset towards Capitalism (Möller, 1999, p.43)

As we can see from the arguments above, Capitalism is an economic system that shapes and is shaped by the individual's needs and wants. That is what makes it such an interesting framework to be analyzed through Plessner's concept of externality and contingent anthropological laws. We will now progress to the last part of the thesis where we confront the two economic and anthropological theories.

Part 3: Philosophical Reflection

After having explained Plessner's main ideas of die *Stufen* in the first, and the core features of Capitalism in the second part, it is now time to oppose these two in my philosophical reflection.

Although I will argue for Capitalism being the most efficient economic system to satisfy the needs of the excentric human nature, it is important to keep in mind that the dual aspectivity results in a mutually shaping relationship between human excentricity and Capitalism.

As already mentioned in the introduction, capitalistic efficiency is ambiguous which will be shown in this section. This ambiguity will also dictate the structure of the philosophical reflection. The first part will delineate the positive ways in which Capitalism's efficiency interacts with the human positionality. The second part will focus on the detrimental impacts of Capitalism's characteristics on the human nature and related worlds.

Positive Implications of Capitalism's Efficiency

In this part we will argue that Capitalism is the most efficient economic system to satisfy human excentric needs and analyze why.

Capitalism and natural artificiality

First we are going to relate Capitalism's efficiency to the first anthropological law of Plessner: artificiality by nature. The expression of the human nature that corresponds to his essential dividedness and rootlessness, is artificiality. The creation of a second home through artificial means is where Capitalism plays an important role. Although human beings have already created tools before Capitalism was established, this economic system is not only supporting, but also driven by the fulfillment of materialistic desires. The mutual driving relationship holds for both demand and supply.

On the demand side for instance, if individuals are looking for a certain gadget, its availability will be unregulated in a capitalistic market (presuming it has a legal nature of course). Fulfilling ones dreams is only limited by the own funds. Especially now with the rise of the internet, space is not a restraining factor to buy objects of desire. Viewing and ordering goods via the internet makes the process of self-realization we are all bound to, faster and easier.

As mentioned in the first part of the thesis, Plessner describes the chase of self-realization as rootlessness, because the fulfillment of our intentions is temporary. It is therefore no surprise that artificial

remedies to flee homelessness depict the same problem. In order to 'live' a life, we perform and in every performance (*Vollzug*) we express who we are. As 'who we are' is an unstable concept, these performances have to be sustained to pursue the quest for ourselves and flee rootlessness. This infinite circle is what ultimately drives the capitalist markets. Needs will never be permanently satisfied and consequently, will never stop emerging. The only permanence is the need for more, which is sustained by human excentricity.

The capitalist market qualities of speed, large offer and availability root from free market principles. As we have seen in the second part of the thesis, capitalist markets are defined by freedom of business and limited government regulation. On the supply side, these features allow companies to respond adequately to the urge of self-realization, while creating a profit. The demand for more can be addressed by the markets, as there are no restraints from the state. When there is a need, a supplier is free to satisfy it and keep the profits which further incentivize the supplier to continue doing so.

A counter example of a less efficient economic system is Communism. An example of an extreme form of Communism would be North Korea. High government intervention being in place, supply and offer is restrained and controlled. Freedom of purchase and business are not given, which leaves the excentric need of closing the gap through artificial means impeded.

Capitalism and individualism

Another efficient way in which Capitalism corresponds to the human nature, is that both are characterized by individualism. As mentioned previously, Plessner explains that the individual experience of rootlessness results in the realization of pride and shame. Pride refers to the realization of every individual's uniqueness which the human wants to emphasize in order to distance oneself from being replaceable. In turn, individualism represents one of the main capitalist principles.

Individual rights and freedom to choose one's own path professionally and privately are embraced in the market. Capitalist markets are usually found contingent to individualistic cultures. The markets have quickly picked up the trend of personalizing commodities, which is currently common practice in most industries. Again, the market allows companies to seize profitable opportunities while supporting individuals' pride and desire to set themselves apart from the rest.

A note that should be made is that I am mostly talking about individualistic economic freedom. An underlying reason is that I am focusing my analysis on the capitalist situation in the West. Democratic Capitalism in place, political freedom is usually seen as a necessity for capitalist markets.

However, as we have seen in part 2 of the thesis (footnote), there are new forms of authoritarian Capitalism which see no issue in splitting political from economic freedom. For instance in China, raising the voice against the governing Chinese Communist Party will presumably have legal consequences,

whereas the individual economic freedom is still in place. However, limiting liberty in the political sense, authoritarian forms of Capitalism allow less individual self-realization in total than the western democratic form.

Capitalism and technological development

Another implication of the radical dual aspect is that individuals can see what they are not, they can see what lies on the other side of the gap. They are not able to bridge that gap with the means naturally at their disposal, and once again, seek refuge and peace in artificiality.

It is in this situation where the human being proves his grandeur. The desire to overcome the human deficiencies has led to an immense amount of innovation over the centuries. An example given in the first part of the thesis was the invention of the airplane in order to make up for our lack of wings. Tools have been invented to compensate for lack of human skills since the dawn of time. However, the amount of life and world changing inventions has exploded since the industrial revolution. Although many factors have contributed to the industrialization, it is an event that started in Britain, and not without a reason. Britain was the first European country that created a market without trade barriers or tolls, while enforcing private property rights, and essentially practicing free market Capitalism (Landes, 1988, p.46). As Capitalism spread alongside the industrial revolution in Europe, the two events are intimately linked (Scorse, 2006).

Free market economies are best able to sustain periods of economic growth and ergo, industrial capacity. The economic freedom generates a wider range of innovation and grants greater entrepreneurial flexibility and activity (Scorse, 2006). All in all, we can see that Capitalism is at the root of increased innovation and technological progress. Siddiqui (2018) calls innovation a ‘process of creative destruction’ which stars as the essence of capitalism. It is about constantly revolutionizing the economic structure, through destruction of what is in place, and creation of a new version. This process, in the pursuit of profits, is what stimulates industrial and commercial life to invent new products, methods of production and so on (Siddiqui, 2018).

Technological innovation allows humanity to advance, overcome itself and come closer to shut the gap between itself and the three worlds through ameliorated artificial tools. Today we can be artificial to a greater degree than a hundred years ago. For instance, artificial joints or in-lab grown organs can prolong the functionality of our bodies beyond their natural ‘deadline’. Social media platforms allow individuals to extend their physical body into artificial profiles with which they can express themselves. That kind of extension is what makes individuals feel like closing the gap between themselves and the inner and outer world. They feel like becoming who they really are. If the rate of technological progress will be kept up, we could increase the degree of artificiality that we consist of and slowly extend into cyborgs.

Overall, we can see that the combination of infinitely emerging needs of self-realization, combined with freely responding markets makes Capitalism the most efficient market framework to respond to the human's natural artificiality. It constitutes a process, or circle, that sustains itself and drives the economy forward.

Capitalism and the *homo absconditus*

Another important aspect in which Capitalism is an efficient and matching economic system to the human nature is made clear in Plessner's Political Anthropology. As already touched upon in the first part of the thesis, Plessner describes the human as a *homo absconditus*, a concealed human whose intentions are hidden to himself. Intentions are changing constantly, replacing one another and the individual can often not understand why, himself. Plessner describes this pattern as a 'binding unfathomability'. Because the human confronts himself excentrically, he always has to create his identity to settle. This holds at the individual and especially at the cultural level (Plessner, 2018, p.10). Excentricity makes the human independent of his instincts, which makes him highly variable historically and culturally. Plessner calls this phenomenon 'radical historicity'. The unfixed human essence leads to unique paths influenced by the relative spatiotemporal environment. The concealment of ourselves creates a feeling of uncertainty and being lost, which makes us wish to define the boundaries in the three worlds to find a sense of stability. On an individual level, as well as on a cultural level, this means that we have to identify us and differentiate ourselves from what is foreign (Plessner, 2018, p.10).

This boundary establishment need has implications for the individual, but also for nations or cultures as a whole. I argue that Capitalism has a positive mediating effect on both levels.

First, let's have a look at the cultural level. Plessner alerts about the implications of the delimitation of a cultural sphere against a foreign outside. Definition of a culture involves a differentiation against a 'constitutive outside' (Plessner, 2018, p.7). Viewed from a political perspective, each concrete political system fashions itself in how it is not only different but also superior to others. Plessner warns about the struggle for power, the competition of political existence and striving for success (Plessner, 2018, p.10).

Plessner stresses again the spatiotemporal relativity that makes each individual but also every culture and political system contingent to historical and sociocultural factors. Unfathomability will always create diversity which makes Plessner argues for plurality of meaning and renouncement of supremacy. Subsequently, Plessner suggests to replace the infinite struggle for power and supremacy with a playful competition, which allows respect of diversity. Although Plessner does not concretely voice a certain way of doing politics, one could argue that he would agree with a market economy which has competition at its heart. Based on individual freedom, free market power and limited government regulation, liberalist

capitalist countries allow for diversity and creativity. The markets regulate economic activity without supremacy. Simply the better product or business model will prevail.

Moreover, the capitalist movement has resulted in many free market zones and trade agreements between different regions of the world, which help to sustain peace and hinder supremacy of single nations. For example the GATT, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, was created and signed originally in 1947 by 23 nations. This trade agreement's purpose was to promote international trade by reducing trade barriers. Originally an economic agreement, it has been adapted over the years, gathering more than 123 signatures by 1994. Finally, it had led to the creation of the WTO in 1995, an institutional successor which is still under effect today. As one can see, trade agreements create a base for international discussion, respect of diverse cultures and peace, given their foundation is built on mutually beneficial economic grounds.

Another example of an initially economic union that has transformed into a more comprehensive institution, is the European Union. It started off as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952, with originally 6 member states. The primary reason for the union was the peaceful integration of Europe after the Second World War, through tackling economic trade issues rather than focusing on the political issues in the first place. It was an attempt to incentivize sovereign nations to cooperate, leading to a peaceful and stable Europe. Nowadays, the European Union is not just an economic but also political union with 28 member states.⁵ It was capitalist fundamental values like free trade, free choice of business and employment that has set the stage for a peaceful union of countries. A core goal is to maintain the sovereignty of nations and cultures, protect diversity while creating a peaceful economic competition without the struggle for supremacy.

⁵ Albeit the European Union's great advantages, there is the current issue of countries doubting their membership. Brexit being the first case, it could stimulate other countries to follow. The question however is, what are the underlying reasons behind this trend? Is the EU becoming too large? Is there a limit to the size of a body to grasp its boundary? Is it a problem of identification with the EU as a sphere? Plessner agrees with Carl Schmitt's 'friend-enemy' distinction presented in his work 'The Concept of the Political', that votes for the need of state boundaries. Schmitt claims that there is a specific political distinction between friend and enemy. Defining the opposing 'other' is what strengthens state unity. An enemy can be any entity that represents a threat or interest conflict to own interests. The transition from friend to enemy depends on the intensity of dissociation or association feeling (Vinx, 2016). Applied to the current situation in the EU, it could be that the 'other', as in the EU as a whole, has asked too much from the single countries, turning it from friend into the latent enemy. Too many overarching EU regulations that limit the countries' sovereignty. Too much solidarity for other EU members in need (e.g. Greece during the financial crisis). Too much solidarity when it comes to labour movement among the members (e.g. cheap labour from less developed states moves to more advanced members and create local job market imbalances)? When is the limit of solidarity reached? Are we stretching solidarity to a level in the EU, where individuals and states cannot legitimize it, or identify with it, anymore? Whether the current phenomenon is due to a problem of identification with the EU as a sphere, to resource-straining solidarity requests making the Union an enemy, or to another underlying reason, goes beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it would make an interesting paper to analyze the topic with Plessner' or Schmitt's theories.

Based on Plessner's statements in *Political Anthropology*, he should be agreeing on these historic economic conventions and their effect on the power for struggle and wars, which were reigning Europe all the centuries before. These agreements, or unions, built on capitalist values, allow for the nations to create and keep their own identities. They respect radical historicity and the subsequent plurality of meaning. It grants a peaceful coexistence of cultural spheres that can identify themselves apart from others, while an economic competition is in place that steers a peaceful exchange between the boundaries.

Moreover, in the case of the European Union, a new overarching boundary and identity was created, the one of the Union itself. Individuals, but also nations see themselves as part of the larger Union, as it acts as a sphere with a boundary against other spheres. For instance, it governs cross boundary exchange with spheres external to the EU, for example trade with the US. These agreements provide a very powerful example how Capitalism realizes its power in shaping the shared world through following individual as well as cultural consciousness rooted in excentricity.

Capitalism's role in self-realization on an individual level, has already been addressed above. However, it should be added that no other economic system legally allows for individual expression as much as Capitalism. Again, as an extreme counter example, the strictly communist country North Korea does not allow individual deviations from the state-given norms. Identities are pre-fabricated and government-planned, deviations are seen as inefficient to the overall political scheme and goal. It is the diversity of human possibilities however, which stems from the excentric positionality and thus the unfathomability of human life (Plessner, 2018, p.9). Hence, being able to pursue the possibilities legally without the risk of being prosecuted or stopped, proves a strong point for the efficiency of Capitalism. Of course, even nowadays, people deviating from societal norms in creating their identity, face a lot of other problems such as discrimination, violence or exclusion. However, as this thesis focuses mostly on the economic and political side of self-realization in Western countries, liberalist Capitalism does prove its capacity in lessening problems related to those aspects.

Concluding, we can say that on a cultural level, Capitalism proves its capability of keeping cultural spheres and boundaries linked to radical historicity intact. Those are needed for citizens to feel stable and safe, while at the same time, it is still stimulating market competition. On an individual level, its liberalist values allow for a free development of the self, without market or state intervention inhibiting such a process of boundary definition. Moreover, the capitalist market framework is optimal to fulfill the human's need for artificiality.

Negative Implications of Capitalism's Efficiency

Although this thesis argues for the efficiency of Capitalism, it also expounds that efficiency comes at a price. In this section we will dive into the unfavorable particularities of Capitalism's relationship with the excentric human being.

Capitalism and its utopian promise

First, although Capitalism does best enable the human to dive into artificiality, it is also exploiting the third anthropological law presented by Plessner: the utopian standpoint. We saw that human beings have to lead a life in performance (*leben im Vollzug*) without objective reference points, which makes their paths highly variable. This variability is supported by capitalist markets through seemingly endless supply and offer. However, humans do not like the rootlessness of themselves, they are in fact looking for stability, orientation and home. It is this utopian belief of being able to reach this kind of *definitivum*, which keeps the individual going, although he will never be able to reach it.

Plessner explains that this rootlessness could find an answer in religion as it promises an eternal prospect of peace and 'reaching home'. Similarly, these orientation points are sought for in society. In times of political or societal insecurity, individuals are especially prone to fall for charismatic leaders, or ideological dictatorships. Extreme but good examples are the third Reich of Hitler, or Trump's populist way of capturing the trust of voters. Especially today, with weakening societal traditions and decreasing power or belief in religions, individuals seem to be increasingly lost. It appears like the increase of freedom coming from the political opening of countries and lessening cultural norms takes humanity an important part of orientation. They are forced to create every aspect of their lives individually, be all 'out there' in extroversion.

The safe havens, where an individual can be introverted and follow societal norms and traditions, are diminishing. Those have become replaced by capitalist market values. However, as freedom and individualism do not offer much stability, the promise of becoming more fulfilled with more artificial and materialist commodities, seems to do. There is no other economic system that stimulates consumerism on a similar level. So as we can see, capitalism does not just build on the human pride, but also on his shame.

Shame on the one hand, represented as the fear of drowning in the mass and not being able to have made a significance. But shame also as the introvert side of the human who seeks refuge in societal norms in which he can hide himself. The lack of given limits in a capitalist system increases the rootlessness of the already orientation-craving human being. Hence, he flees into consumerism, the capitalist ideology which promises that more will make you feel more yourself and more satisfied. However, albeit commodity

fetishism might be helping to increase the natural artificiality of the human, it certainly does not offer any *definitivum* to his excentric nature. As our intentions change and once fulfilled, are being replaced, our way of leading life cannot grant us any security. Additionally, the lack of a greater goal leaves us even more variable in our path and unsure in daily decisions.

The result is a behavior which Plessner describes as *Maßlosigkeit* (exorbitance). It seems like individuals are stretching the already weak limits of what is acceptable, in an uninhibited fashion. Plessner calls this boundlessness, the ‘sickness of modern society’, which can be witnessed on an individual as well as on an economic and political level (Plessner, 1982, GS VIII). It is abutting on what Plessner calls the misère of humanity: the eternal chase of reaching balance and home. In free market economies this chase translates in embracing excessive consumerism. However, the human is still positioned in a utopian standpoint. Thus, the capitalist promise of self-fulfillment through consumerism will always stay utopian and hence, never offer orientation to humanity.

Moreover, on a larger scale, Liberalism as the current utopian hope has already shown various crises where it could not keep its promise of self-regulating markets. For example the financial crisis in 2008 which occurred partly due to poorly regulated financial institutions. In the end, governments’ interventions saved Capitalism from itself as financial markets failed to self-correct. Unfortunately, the markets privatized their profits and socialized their losses (Rudd, 2018).

Capitalism and *Maßlosigkeit*

The next negative point of Capitalism is linked to the exorbitant behavior it is promoting in our society. More precisely, free market power creates externalities and other negative impacts. An externality is an industrial or commercial repercussion, which is affecting third parties without being reflected in market prices. We illustrate negative capitalist impacts, through environmental and socio-economic examples.

Socioeconomic

First, let us see how negative socioeconomic impacts can be explained by human excentricity linked to a capitalistic market structure. As we have pointed out in the previous part of the thesis, Capitalism was the main driver in eliminating international trade barriers and establishing free trade zones. Those allow companies not only to engage in international trade, but also to relocate and outsource parts of their business into distant geographic locations. These possibilities are legitimized by foundational capitalistic values such as freedom, low regulation and profit maximizing behavior.

A result of this free space are multinational enterprises (MNEs) which were able to grow exponentially through their pursuit of self-interest above and beyond domestic borders and cultural spheres. It follows

that some MNEs have become ‘too big to fail’ as they gained an extensive amount of power during their expansion. The aforementioned relocation of facilities abroad does play its part in this power, as MNEs can escape domestic regulation by relocating into countries where regulation is less stringent.

Additionally, the profit-focused capitalist market structure, reigning global economy at the moment, still lacks decent international regulation to control very large corporations. For example, established antitrust laws do not hold internationally and can be bypassed with smart relocation strategies. This escape from already lackadaisical economic regulations has international negative impacts which cannot only be explained by the capitalistic policies in place, but also by our very human nature. As we have seen in previous paragraphs, the human’s unfathomability creates a lot of diversity, individually and culturally. Also the need of establishing ones identity and boundary towards what is foreign, facilitates the corporate and individual acceptance of diversity in cultural spheres, which include for example labour practices. What constitutes acceptable working conditions in Western Europe might be inconsistent with what acceptable working conditions represent in, for example, developing countries. Considering Plessner’s argument for the inescapability of diversity in the shared world given different contextual influences, and the capitalistic ideology, this is admissible.

But what does this mean in practice? Unfortunately, the distance our excentricity enables us to take between ourselves, and what is other, also facilitates the establishment of inhumanity. Inhumanity, as described by Plessner, involves perceiving other individuals not as human beings anymore, but as tools. It is about a complete objectification (*Versachlichung*) of another person, turning them unhuman. That means one negates their excentric position in this world. Ultimately, one treats them without emotional consideration, just like any other instrument which is supposed to be used. It boils down to a dominance of businesslike reason over empathy.

Putting this now in the context of border-crossing capitalism, inhuman economic strategies involve outsourcing business activities to countries where other humans are merely seen as instruments, working under inhuman conditions. An example would be Apple’s outsourcing of their iPhone and iPad assembly to the supplier Foxconn located in China. The inhuman working conditions that prevail in their factories first became publicly criticized in 2006. However, after an initial scandal, the whole story dissolved again in ignorance, from Apple’s as well as from the consumers’ side. Simultaneously, the working conditions have not been considerably ameliorated.

This is a good example to showcase how our inhumanity allows us to distance ourselves from empathic feelings towards the affected instrumentalized individuals. It legitimizes self-interested behavior at the expense of employee welfare. Of course, the distance between us and the people exploited as tools, facilitates inhumanity, as we do not actually see them physically nor can we imagine being in their position.

Our excentric nature detaches the cultural sphere we identify ourselves with, from another sphere across the globe. Combined with capitalistic market values, it seems to be natural to exploit gaps in international labor standards. After all, how inhuman would it be not to respect human unfathomability and resulting cultural diversity as well as a shared world with different norms and principles? The deplorable truth is that currently many individuals in developing countries are exploited by profit-maximizing MNEs that outsource the labor-intensive work there for the sake of missing regulations.

In general, human traits, such as violence or aggression, are not dangerous. They are natural and can be found in other species as well. What is however dangerous in the human beings according to Plessner, is the *Maßlosigkeit* of these human traits. For instance, if there is violence, humans get so worked up in it that they lose all sense of sufficiency and limit. An example would be the killing of innocent civilians in a war. Although Capitalism is driving and driven by this *Maßlosigkeit*, it constitutes at the same a threat to it. For example, as outlined above, corporate freedom and little regulation allowed MNEs to grow boundlessly, reaching a size and power which do not stimulate Capitalism anymore. Their dimension translates into insurmountable barriers for firms to entry the market and hence inhibit the 'free enterprise' principle. As a result, some MNEs (such as for example Google) became large to an extent that fair competition is hardly possible anymore. Hence this human boundlessness ends up undermining the core features of Capitalism and consequently also the benefits of self-realization it offers.

Environmental

Now let us have a look at how the capitalistic economy creates environmental hazards. The environment is often struck by externalities, as it does not have an active involvement in the economic activity.

Globalization, as we have seen an event deeply connected to Capitalism, plays its fair share in the creation of environmental externalities. Globalization can be set equal to the opening of markets that were once separated. The loss of market regulation comes along with a loss of protection for domestic firms. Competition has expanded beyond domestic borders, which increases the number of players in a market. The result is a fierce competition, leading to domestic firms struggling to survive.

This increased pressure to perform often stimulates companies to take greater risks in their business activities, which can have serious environmental impacts. An example given by Kopf, Carnevale and Chambers (2013, p.42) is the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. Besides killing multiple workers, it represented the largest oil spill in history. Oil spill effects on the environment are not limited to the short-term. The oil spreads from the water surface as far as 1100 meters below sea level, making its effects echo for decades in the ecosystem. Albeit such an incident can be partly written off as an accident, the Presidential Oil Spill Commission accused lack of management oversight and carelessness as

ultimate cause for the blowout (Kopf, Carnevale and Chambers, 2013, p.42). As one can see, increased risk-taking plays, to a degree, a role in environmental externalities, as it leads to less careful consideration, control and execution of business activities.

Furthermore, activities that are harsh on the environment are in general heavily regulated in domestic markets. Globalization however, allows the relocation of domestically restrained activities to regions where regulations are less stringent, in order to gain a competitive advantage. An example would be the relocation of Smithfield Foods, the world's leading pork producer and processor (Kopf et al., 2013, p.43). Having initially located their hog production in the USA in the 1990s, they faced issues with environmental regulations when it came to the discharge of the nitrogen and phosphorus heavy animal waste. As a result, they relocated the majority of their hog operations to Poland, where environmental regulations were less stringent. Smithfield Foods engaged in environmental inequity by exporting environmental damage to a lower income country (Kopf et al., 2013, p.43). The relocation allowed them to gain a considerable competitive advantage in the sense that the weak regulations allowed them to cut costs and increase supply. They caused an oversupply of pig products and local producers had to leave the market (Kopf et al., 2013, p.43). Hence, their relocation had not only an environmental impact, but extended to become an economic disruption. One can see that in a globalized market, efficiency of production decides who can survive in the fierce competition. This merely profit-maximizing survival behavior is made possible as well as caused by the capitalistic market structure.

The previous examples reflect what Plessner criticizes as *Maßlosigkeit* (exorbitance). We have already touched upon how this *Maßlosigkeit* is lived out on an individual level in the paragraphs above. Now in the shared world on an economic level, Plessner criticizes how this exorbitance is represented in, for example, the systematic way that we disrespect and harm the environment or other human beings for a culture of profit-maximization and growth (Plessner, 1982, GS VIII). Plessner sees the roots of this behavior in the loss of orientation through decreasing social and cultural limits in the shared world.

Overall, we can say that negative impacts and externalities of capitalist economic activities can be addressed more easily on a domestic level through government regulation. Globally expanding capitalism creates possibilities for large corporations to escape regulations and competitive pressure leading to the pursuit of inhuman practices. We have seen that the excentric nature of the human, whose act of overcoming himself in self-realization, is originating and shaping culture. If paired with the seemingly indomitability of Capitalism, the human rootlessness is leading the shared world into the sickness of modern society, *Maßlosigkeit*.

Linked to the trait of boundlessness, humanity always had their history of intensification, both in the good and bad ways. Admittedly, the current situation of globalized Capitalism appears to be a pessimistic

spiral of intensification and acceleration. Negative environmental and socioeconomic impacts seem inescapable. Nevertheless, we have to regard the situation from Plessner's perspective, who sees a glimpse of hope in every issue.

Certainly, intensification was also what made humanity overcome crises since the dawn of time. For instance, feeding the growing population of humans, was always one of the biggest challenges. We advanced from hunters and gatherers to agriculture, followed by the industrialization of agriculture to satisfy the growing needs of food. Nowadays, agriculture has reached a level of efficiency that allows us to grow more food in less space (thanks to pesticides, hyper efficient crops, CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations), greenhouses, and so on). Throughout history we see the trait of intensification in the human nature. It is both a vice and a virtue depending on how we choose to employ it. Plessner would see it as a chance to improve the described current capitalist crises.

Capitalism and the magnitude of technology

As pointed out in the beginning of the philosophical reflection, the dual aspectivity results in a mutually shaping relationship between human excentricity and Capitalism. Capitalism is a creation of our self-expression while also being a means of our self-expression. Fundamental expressivity is one of the mediated immediacy key features. As adumbrated in the first part of the thesis, an issue related to this, and enhanced by Capitalism, shall now be addressed.

Rising from excentric positionality, we cannot escape expressing ourselves, as it is the mode of human life (Plessner, 2019, p.323). Expressivity is linked to the urge for artificiality introduced in the first anthropological law.

The issue of expressing oneself through technology, is the inner weight technology gains in the process of being a 'mere tool'. As Plessner puts it: "Everything that enters the sphere of culture shows its dependence on human creation. But at the same time (and to the same extent) it is independent from man" (IV, p. 397 as cited in de Mul, 2014, p.20). This technological independence from man can also be flipped into the dependence of man on their created tools. The detachability of technology from the human entails that the human will never be able to be in full control over his own creation, because he can only invent to the extent that he discovers (Plessner, 2019, p.321).

An interesting contemporary of Plessner, Marshall McLuhan shares this view on media. According to McLuhan all man-made technologies represent forms of media, as they all act as information carriers. They act as an extension of the human senses (Wetzels, 2014). This idea of extension of the human natural capabilities is also prominent in Plessner's natural artificiality law. As a result of this extension, the medium itself has a fundamental influence on the relationship between the individual and the world (Wetzels, 2014).

McLuhan's view of media is summarized in his famous statement 'the medium is the message'. Hence, the created medium is not just a mere tool, it also shapes our living environment. It gains autonomy and influence over the user. Again, this thought is very similar to Plessner's idea of the inner weight gained by technology.

When one puts this technological magnitude in the context of capitalist markets, individuals are faced with a very wide array of possible technologies. Free access and constant innovation is an overwhelming mix. The greater the number of independent technologies, the greater the number of human dependences. Integration of technology in culture has various unintentional side-effects which creates limits on predictability and controllability (de Mul, 2014, p.20).

Let us take the example of social media for instance. Peter Weibel (1992, p.75) describes media as an extension to not only overcome space and time, but necessarily also the fear that is linked to the insufficiency of overcoming them. Although the date (1992) of this definition of media is not very recent, I believe it has contemporary relevance as it captures an essential feature of a "medium", context and time independently. For the case of social media for instance, I argue that its use as a medium to even remotely tame space and time, creates a magnitude of its own that is heavily influencing the user. The ability to check what happens in different parts of the world at all time creates a sort of addiction to stay updated. Even when we decide to disconnect from social media for a while, there is an inner urge to check for news anyways. This phenomena is called 'FOMO', fear of missing out and leads to feelings of stress and negative emotionality (Hobson, 2018). Living offline has become a luxury, if not even a non-option. Enslavement through 'data stress' and internet addiction seem to be unescapable side-effects of social media (Wetzels, 2014).

It is a good example of technology over which we claim to have control of, and which is supposed to facilitate us grasping the magnitude of space and time. In reality, it just makes us experience the vast enormity of space and time and our impotence of overcoming it. Also McLuhan was convinced about the fact that electronic communication media fundamentally and mostly unconsciously changes modern society (Wetzels, 2014).

Capitalism's foundational freedom of business is against setting boundaries for business models, even when they exploit the human weaknesses related to their rootlessness. In contrary, technologies such as social media platforms are further adapted to exploit the human nature. For example live push-messages that give updates in real time on a smart phone even when one does not actively use the platform at that moment. Those settings reinforce the inner weight of the platforms and increase our dependence on them to tackle our own deficiency in overcoming time and space. With greater knowledge about the human psyche, businesses can further target how to make technologies even more appealing to our nature in the self-interested goal of making a profit by exploiting human excentricity.

But Capitalism does not just support the creation of tools, it also is a tool itself. A result of human self-expression, it is a medium that shapes our life as we express ourselves, through that medium. It is a perfect example to exhibit how a tool, once created, gains its own form of dynamic. Just as McLuhan put it: 'first man made the hammer, then the hammer made the man' (Wetzels, 2014). What the 'hammer' did to society could not have been foreseen. It is a creation beyond the creator, a creation arduous to control.

Concluding, we can say that Capitalism has been changing the shared world through weakening cultural and societal norms, which used to give individuals safe havens and orientation. Those have been replaced with individualistic values which exploit the human's utopian standpoint. Moreover, foundational capitalistic values support inhuman practices and *Maßlosigkeit* among individuals and corporations that have negative environmental and socioeconomic consequences. Lastly, Capitalism supports the creation of technologies whose inner weight outweighs the human control over them for profits' sake.

Conclusion

Throughout the thesis, we have seen that the ambiguity of Capitalism essentially reflects the human being's existence as a conflict. His own existence is always breaking apart into bondage and freedom, is and ought. 'Conflict as the center of existence' as the quintessence of life (Plessner, 2019, p.317). Because of the excentricity of his positional form, the individual's acting is driven by what he can never achieve given his limited natural faculties. This conflict is what ultimately defines the shared world we created.

This is also the case for Capitalism, which we made the predominant economic system in the world as it facilitates our conflict-driven desire for self-realization. However, the damage created in this process should not be seen as collateral. Mostly resulting from the human vice of *Maßlosigkeit*, it can also be turned into a virtuous force for change. The natural human capability of intensification can serve as a driver for innovation to overcome current global issues. I believe Plessner would agree that our nature of overcoming ourselves also enables us to overcome issues limiting this need, whether they present themselves in an environmental, socioeconomic or political nature.

In general, I think Helmuth Plessner's anthropological theory is a great contribution in analyzing contemporary issues. It permits the extension to seemingly domain- or industry-specific problems to a larger scale. Examining problems in the perspective of the human nature and history allows for a fundamental understanding of the underlying reasons and hence, can lead to solutions which do not seem apparent in the first place.

To conclude, Capitalism is in my opinion indeed the most efficient economics system. Its ongoing global spread of practice is just one of the proofs. Its ambiguous nature is inevitable, as it is a medium created by ambiguous beings. Subsequently, it will never lose its twofold nature of impacts. Nevertheless, the cost of its efficiency should be tackled by the innovation it inherently enables. This permits humanity to continue benefitting from its efficiency to act out its excentric nature in the future.

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