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Author(s): Thomas Raymen

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The Enigma of Social Harm and the Barrier of Liberalism: Why Zemiology needs a theory of the Good

Thomas Raymen¹

Abstract

Social harm is one of the most potentially potent and transformative concepts currently available to the social sciences. However, scholars have struggled to 'define' social harm, puzzled by enigmatic questions and tensions around the issue of how to establish clear conceptual parameters which take advantage of social harm's broader critical focus, whilst preventing the concept from becoming so nebulous that it loses all utility. This article suggests that the enigma of social harm is not simply a problem of having yet to find an adequate definition and set of conceptual parameters. Rather, the uncertainty that surrounds social harm and the proliferation of harms we are witnessing in late-capitalism are both positioned as symptomatic of far deeper social problems generated by a combination of liberalism's flawed conception of the autonomous individual subject and postmodernism's cynical individualism and dismantling of belief in any transcendent authority or ethics that can constitute what philosopher Slavoj Žižek describes as the 'Big Other'. However, such discoveries provide us with a roadmap out of zemiology's conceptual crisis. This article argues that by revisiting the moral philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre and Slavoj Žižek's ontology of the subject, we can shake off liberal-postmodernism's ethical 'culture of emotivism', abandon liberalism's a priori ethical maxims, and begin to reinstate the 'Big Other' by developing a transformative theory of the Good and human flourishing from which we can derive a clear understanding of social harm.

Key words: Social Harm; Liberalism; Postmodernism; Ultra-Realism; Slavoj Žižek; Alasdair MacIntyre

¹ Thomas Raymen is a lecturer in criminology at the University of Plymouth, UK. He is co-founder of the Deviant Leisure Research Network and his research to date has been focused at the intersections of liberal capitalism, commodified leisure and social harm. His current research is dedicated to developing a theory of social harm rooted in a post-liberal ethics.

The Enigma of Social Harm

Some of the most significant problems facing contemporary society not only lie beyond the present scope of legal prohibition but are thoroughly normalized and integral to the functioning of liberal-capitalist political economy. Climate change (Wainwright and Mann, 2018); the rise of far-right nationalist groups (Winlow et al, 2017); crises in housing and employment (Lloyd, 2013; Madden and Marcuse, 2016); resource wars (Parenti, 2011); a libertarian financial elite generating widening gaps of inequality (MacLean, 2017); and a socially corrosive consumer culture generating harsh interpersonal competition, indebtedness and significant mental health issues (Cederström and Spicer, 2015; Raymen and Smith, 2017) are just a few examples of the issues facing contemporary society that could be broadly grouped under the term social harm. Consequently, social harm is one of the most potentially potent and transformative concepts currently available to the social sciences.

But despite these grave problems, there is a paucity of coherence or consensus around the conceptualisation of social harm and its parameters. Theoretical principles of social harm have been devised which hold a more or less coherent internal logic (Lasslett, 2010; Yar, 2012). However, these *a priori* definitions are often vague on how this is operationalised in the field of social practices (Yar, 2012), or limit us in only applying this term to the most severe (and basically criminal) forms of social harm (Lasslett, 2010), thereby robbing the concept of its broader critical focus or applied potential. There is a palpable diffidence when it comes to deciding which social practices should be considered genuinely harmful or only ‘mildly injurious’ outcomes that are to be tolerated as the ‘price of freedom’ (Hall and Winlow, 2018). The fundamental question rests on the ontological and ethical basis that underpins these decisions. As it stands, all we have is the intuitive claim that we know harm when we see it. As Yar (2012: 59) points out, social harm as a concept ‘is sustained by its intuitive moral-political appeal and ‘common-sense’ purchase, but no more’. In publications discussing theories of social harm it is common for scholars to express concern around how broadly we should conceptualise social harm (Hillyard and Tombs, 2004; 2017; Lasslett, 2010; Pemberton, 2015). We live in a society which lacks a common conception of the human and social good, a clear and rational basis for determining what that common good might be, or a grounded understanding of ethics that extends beyond negativistic rights-based ethics in order to determine what can be genuinely conceived of as social harm (MacIntyre, 2011). In the absence of these crucial elements, current theories of social harm exist in a state of partial paralysis, fearful of being derided as producing ‘catch-all’ concepts or committing

liberalism's cardinal sin of piously curtailing the sovereign individual's right to freely express her desires and preferences. The crucial question often uttered but never comprehensively answered is this one: How can we establish clear conceptual parameters which take advantage of social harm's broader critical focus yet avoid the concept from becoming so nebulous that it loses all utility and leaves itself open to accusations of relativism and moral subjectivism?

Ambiguity surrounding social harm could simply be a case of having yet to arrive at a consensus on an adequate definition. Given the scale of the task and the diverse nature of contemporary social practices, this ambiguity is to be expected. With a little more research, democratic debate, and tinkering with regards to our technical application of this concept, such a definitional consensus could be seen to be within reach. However, the central premise of this article suggests differently. It argues that the faltering uncertainty around what constitutes social harm is symptomatic of a far deeper social malaise; a political and ethical paralysis that is generated by the moral philosophical, political-economic and cultural core of liberal-capitalist societies. Namely, the marriage between postmodernism and the political and moral philosophy of liberal individualism which the likes of Slavoj Žižek (2000; 2008) and Alain Badiou (2001) suggest have become the dominant basis of politics and ethics in advanced capitalist societies. Liberalism has located both liberty and moral authority within the sovereign individual, leaving her free to pursue her privately defined and pluralistic notions of the Good life. Meanwhile, postmodernist scepticism has suspended belief in any set of authoritative customs or codes capable of transcending the liberal subject's pluralistic notions of the Good and providing an objective reference point for ethics to arbitrate moral and zemiological disagreements. Consequently, the problem is not just that a consensus around social harm is hard to come by, but that the cynical individualism of liberal-postmodernism *fundamentally precludes any such consensus being reached*. Furthermore, the fusion of postmodernism's scepticism with liberalism's individualism has enabled liberalism—and more specifically, liberal capitalism—to *become more fully itself* and, consequently, more destructive (Deneen, 2018).

As this cynical individualism undermines belief in the legitimacy of any cultural authority to curtail the freedoms of the sovereign individual, there is no guide to tell the individual that his consumer behaviour, financial practice or politico-cultural prejudices is illegitimate. The individual must rely on her own rational decisions guided by conscience and policed at the outer boundary by the crude categories of law. We are witnessing the effects of this in our contemporary context, as subjects transcend the old protections of negative liberty and filter through the numerous loopholes of conscience and law to achieve neoliberalism's asocial libertarian fantasy of total or 'special

liberty' (Hall, 2012a; MacLean, 2017). Therefore, in addition to the preclusion of a consensus around social harm, the cynical individualism of liberal-postmodernism also cultivates cynical and potentially harmful subjects who feel justified in questioning or ignoring any authority that attempts to curtail their pursuit of self-interest.

This article suggests that if the concept of social harm is to arrive at a point of meaningful coherence, zemiologists and criminologists must interrogate their ontological and ethical underpinnings by investigating the subjectivisation processes that operate in a deeper register than liberal idealism's simplistic existential or discursive theories of subjectivity. It is suggested that the moral philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre, combined with the transcendental materialist philosophy of Slavoj Žižek, can provide social harm scholars with a roadmap out of their current definitional crisis. Specifically, Žižek's radically alternative model of ontology and how subjectivity comes into being can help us grasp the problems faced by a society plagued by liberal-postmodernism's cynical individualism. Žižek offers a unique understanding of the corroded relationship that exists between the subject and the shared social space of culture, politics and ethics, and what is required to repair it (Johnston, 2008; Žižek, 1989; 2000). Therefore, a useful starting point for this article is to outline Žižek's model of ontology. From here, we can work backwards and subsequently display how liberal-postmodernism not only precludes any consensus on what constitutes social harm but works in concert with capitalist political economy to cultivate harmful subjectivities rooted in anxiety and intense competitive individualism (Hall et al., 2008) and hardened by their continuous experiences in a competitive yet disintegrating global economy (Crank and Jacoby 2014). Finally, the article will consider what this means for existing social harm perspectives, specifically those rooted in theories of human need, and how we can begin to imagine the Good for society by returning to the field of social practices.

Žižek's Ontology²

Liberalism likes to convince us that we enter the world to develop quite quickly into fully-constituted, autonomous individuals who contractually choose to enter society. However, for Žižek (2000), what lies at the core of subjectivity is a *void* or the 'Lacanian Real'. From birth we exist in a state without culture, besieged by raw internal drives and external stimuli of which we cannot make

² The terminology surrounding Žižek's ontology is informed by the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan. While this article has attempted to make this terminology clear, the reader should consult the glossary in Winlow and Hall's (2013) *Rethinking Social Exclusion*, for more detailed definitions.

sense without the guidance of a Symbolic Order. This is the social world of symbols, customs, rules and values that provide a frame of reference with which we can identify, orient ourselves and make coherent sense of our lives. In the ‘Lacanian Real’, meaningful subjectivity cannot exist as such. Desperate to escape the terror of the Real, the subject must *actively solicit* a pre-existing Symbolic Order to establish any sense of coherence or ontological security (Hall, 2012b). For Žižek (2000), contrary to Hobbes’ ‘natural man’, identifying with such an order of symbols is not something to which the autonomous individual can contractually agree. *It is a fundamentally necessary part of the formation of identity and subjectivity.* The subject must submit to the rule of the Big Other which, in Žižek’s philosophy, constitutes the quasi-anthropomorphic and therefore comprehensible politico-cultural embodiment of the Symbolic Order. As Winlow and Hall (2013) describe it, the Big Other is the broad network of social institutions, customs, ethical codes and laws into which the individual is socialised. It is only in this transition from the Real to the Symbolic Order that subjectivity can begin to constitute itself. The Symbolic Order provides the cultural substance that can ‘fill up’ the void of subjectivity. We are encouraged to seek and find meaning in politics, religion, tradition, government, communities and the purposeful social roles and functions they demand, all of which are imbued with symbolic meaning, values and ethics.

However, for Žižek, the Symbolic Order and the Big Other are not ‘real’ in any objective or material sense. Rather, they are a form of collective fiction and shared ideological illusion generated by a particular set of social and ethical principles and values which reflect our vision of the Good life for individuals and society. As such, the Symbolic Order and Big Other can only exist and perform their function of ordering social life for as long as we act *as if they exist*. Therefore, the meaningful substance of the Symbolic Order is always an artifice. Collective agreement and commitment to these shared fictions is imperative if we are to maintain a well-ordered, comprehensible and liveable social space. This is what Žižek terms *symbolic efficiency*. Living under this framework, the subject is always a subject of ideology. Žižek rejects the common understanding of ideology as a ‘false consciousness’ which distorts reality and prevents us from grasping it as such. This is a common mistake perpetrated by social scientists and social harm scholars who view ideology as fundamentally oppressive and backwards, and view utopia as non-ideological (Copson, 2016). Rather, it is the collective belief and submission to the ideology of the Symbolic Order and the Big Other—be it utopian or regressive—that allows us to structure reality. Without the shared ideological illusion of the Symbolic Order—embodied by the Big Other’s network of institutions—we are left without any meaningful substance through which to

construct reality and confront the trauma of the void that exists at the core of the subject.

This is precisely why we are witnessing in our mass-mediated culture the constant and fervent reproduction of commitment to a liberal-capitalist system which is increasingly failing the majority, actively harming many others, and persisting far past its sell-by date. It is not that we are unaware of these realities. On the contrary, we are acutely aware of them every day. However, without a viable alternative Symbolic Order with which the subject can identify, the subject is faced with a choice: To continue on and act as if they do not know of the unsustainable nature of contemporary capitalism, or risk returning to the Lacanian Real—a plunge into the void, a totally unexplained experiential and perceptual encounter with reality, an option which is persistently, albeit unconsciously, avoided (Žižek, 2008). This is one of the major lessons we learn from Žižek's model of ontology. For the subject, *any* Symbolic Order is better than no Symbolic Order at all (Hall, 2012b).

Therefore, to those scholars on the left who have dreamed of a post-ideological society in which the individual is, one day, to be liberated from the oppression of the Symbolic Order, Žižek would reply that they have fundamentally misconstrued freedom. To attempt to realise such a wish would be to consign the subject to an existence of crushing anxiety, uncertainty, and disorienting ontological insecurity as they scramble around in search of a set of fragile symbols and meanings that can structure and order their lives. Indeed, as many scholars of post-industrial consumer capitalism have suggested, this is precisely the world we currently occupy (Hall et al., 2008; Lasch, 1979; 1985; Raymen and Smith, 2016; 2017; Smith, 2014). The political responses to such widespread anxiety can be ugly and precisely what liberalism promised permanently to supersede (Deneen, 2018). Therefore, we must now turn to an evaluation of liberal individualist moral philosophy, postmodernism and their destructive marriage with neoliberal consumer capitalism. Doing so enables us to see how postmodernist liberal individualism fundamentally precludes the establishment of a coherent Symbolic Order and, therefore, any consensus on what constitutes social harm.

Liberal-Postmodernism Killed the Big Other

Milbank and Pabst (2016) argue that the past fifty years of contemporary capitalism have been the story of an unspoken collusion of two liberalisms. At a basic philosophical level, the economic liberalism of the neoliberal-right and the socio-cultural liberalism of the liberal-left are essentially mirror images of each other. The classical liberals and contemporary neoliberals of the right

have espoused principles of liberty in their efforts to curtail the scope of government's intervention in private property rights or imposition of regulations upon business.³ Simultaneously, the socio-cultural liberalism of the left has advocated individual rights and freedom of self-expression in fields such as identity, consumer culture, and sexuality⁴, and permitted government intervention insofar as it protects those basic liberties and ensures the avoidance of any mistreatment of the individual. This is the fundamental principle behind 'negative liberty' or John Stuart Mill's 'harm principle'. Of course, while they have been depicted as bitter enemies, these two liberalisms have long been in a tacit alliance; one that has served the interests of a post-industrial consumer capitalism grounded in notions of 'freedom' and 'choice' (Cremin, 2011; Lasch, 1985). The result has been the establishment of 'a new, scarcely questionable consensus masquerading as a pragmatic centrism that concealed its ideological commitment to limitless liberations and mindless modernization' (Milbank and Pabst, 2016: 13).

This is neither a caricature of liberalism, or a denial of the significant differences between these wings of liberal thought. Rather, this is an attempt to penetrate the core *domain assumptions* and common characteristics shared by positions across the broad liberal spectrum, which have developed as the foundational basis of modern moral philosophy, politics and perspectives on social harm. Firstly, they concentrate liberty and moral authority within an individual that achieved sovereignty by rebelling against traditional collective institutions of moral, theological or political authority. They reject the classical notion of human beings as possessing some natural teleological purpose and conceive of the human subject as a fully-constituted and autonomous individual who freely chooses to contractually enter into a society constituted only by floating, contractual and constantly renegotiated social relationships. For liberalism in all its various guises, freedom is the right to autonomously pursue one's privately defined notion of the Good life unimpeded by intrusive moral or political authorities (MacIntyre, 2011). Immanuel Kant spells out the motto of modern liberal individualism and its rejection of belief in a transcendent moral or political authority when he writes, 'Have courage to use your own reason!'; deriding the laziness of deferring to "a book which understands for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a physician who decides my diet, and so forth" (Kant, 1990: 83). There

³ Although, as the likes of Davies (2017), Mitchell and Fazi (2017) and Slobodian (2018) have pointed out, neoliberalism has been a primarily *state-driven* process that distinguishes it from *laissez-faire* classical liberalism. Neoliberalism has advocated and endorsed a strong authoritarian state to facilitate the extension of the market logic of competition to a variety of non-market institutions and actors.

⁴ However, as we have seen in recent years with Donald Trump, Brexit and the rise of far-right, left-liberals have been just as quick as their economic liberal 'opponents' to abandon their own principles and 'no-platform' far-right speakers.

is no rightful moral authority to which we should defer or that transcends the self-reasoning and moral sovereignty of the individual.

This critical approach to liberalism facilitates a more systemic and wide-ranging critique that can show how both the liberal-right and liberal-left impede the formation of a consensus around what constitutes social harm. Furthermore, it enables us to see the problematic subjectivities that emerge when liberalism's individual sovereignty combines with capitalism's intense competitive individualism and postmodernism's decimation of belief in *any* adjudicating authority. Hall (2012a) argues that such a cocktail has paved the way for subjectivities which attempt to burst through the flimsy protections of negative liberty to enact a destructive *special liberty* in which they transcend any remaining socio-ethical norms in the name of individual freedom.

However, early liberal thinkers could not foresee that the result of their ambitions would be the unstable context in which we exist today. Liberalism's pluralistic individualism has slowly corroded and undermined the authority and scope of the Symbolic Order and the Big Other; particularly when combined with capitalism's profit motive and the embedding of competitive individualism into all features of life (Davies, 2017). Indeed, Alasdair MacIntyre (2011) offered a seminal critique of modern liberal individualist moral philosophy, suggesting that liberalism's enthusiastic abandonment of any transcendent moral authority was modern moral philosophy's original mistake. This precipitated the rise of what he describes as the 'culture of emotivism', in which the use of moral and evaluative judgements reflects nothing more than the expressions of individuals' myriad arbitrary interests and preferences. Emotivism's theory of meaning suggests that the *meaning* underneath an allegedly objective judgment such as "this is good", is actually a subjective statement of 'I approve of this, do so as well'. True emotivists or relativists would therefore accept that evaluative moral arguments are always subjective and arbitrary. MacIntyre's (2011) argument, however, is that this theory of *meaning* has been abandoned in favour of a 'cogent theory of *use*', in that people *use* moral language only to express already-held arbitrary preferences. Since liberal individualism has rejected the *telos* of human life, or any final adjudicating authority that can transcend the sovereignty of the respective individuals in disagreement, we are faced with the situation we often find ourselves in: interminable moral disagreements or dilemmas which are fundamentally incommensurable and have no rational basis of resolving themselves. Therefore, as MacIntyre (2011) points out, for the criterionless, emotivist self, moral disagreement descends into a manipulative clash of wills, in which there is nothing to do but for 'one will to align the attitudes, feelings, preference and choices of another with its own' (Macintyre, 2011: 28). The Other is reduced to a means to moral victory. Since there is no *shared*

conception of the Good and only manipulatively won battles of private interests and preferences, there can be no meaningful consensus on morality, ethics or, in our case, social harm.

What we are left with is *negative liberty*, a minimalistic series of rights and protections from abuse and mistreatment which act as a vague boundary for the milieu of free wills in permanent competition. These rights attempt to provide some *a priori* rules and laws that can stem the corrosive influence of liberal individualism's underlying logic and deter sovereign individuals from exerting their desires too forcefully and with too much extremity upon vulnerable others. The prevention of powerful majorities from exercising their prejudices has certainly provided some protections for historically and systemically marginalised populations. However, this same logic has been used in a more perverted sense by libertarian financial elites to justify their own *special liberty* (Hall, 2012a) and neoliberal policies of relaxed economic regulation and corporate taxation. The encroachment of the state into such private economic affairs is seen as the illegitimate manipulation and coercion of a wealthy and successful minority by a tyrannical and inferior majority. Indeed, this is the precise argument of James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock (1962) in *The Calculus of Consent*, two economists who were at the forefront of the growing neoliberal movement in the United States in the mid-20th century (MacLean, 2017). Therefore, we cannot view the special liberty enacted by financial elites and violent low-level criminal actors as a gross transgression or perversion of liberalism's underlying logic, but instead see it as a predictable outcome entirely in keeping with liberalism's moral philosophical underpinnings. Therefore, as Badiou (2001) argues, the essential function of such negative liberties has always really been the preservation of capitalism's status quo. Liberalism's conception of the sovereign and autonomous individual is preserved and there is thus no need to engage in a shared deliberation of the common Good, since from a liberal standpoint such issues cannot be settled. These minimalistic negative liberties constitute the basic measures which attempt to keep a watered-down version of the Žižekian Big Other on life-support.

If liberalism's advocacy of autonomous individualism has undermined the health of the Big Other, then postmodernism's pan-scepticism has served as the force which could intensify liberalism's individualistic drive to turn off the Big Other's life-support altogether. As outlined earlier, a properly functioning Symbolic Order and Big Other only exists as long as we *act as if it exists*. However, for postmodernism, the Symbolic Order and the Big Other are just two amongst a constellation of circulating truth claims trying to pass themselves off as more legitimate or 'objective' than others, yet in reality are merely an assortment of socially constructed and renegotiable rules and

conventions (Žižek, 2000). Therefore, postmodernism's inexhaustible reflexivity has punctured this collective fiction and revealed the truth at the core of the Big Other—that its allegedly transcendent authority is not *real* in any objective or material sense that precedes active human maintenance. Under a healthy Symbolic Order, we might have gone along with and believed in the collective lie of community ties, ethical customs and taboos, unspoken rules and social obligations. However, postmodernism, particularly in its liberal guises, has suspended belief in the Symbolic Order, viewing its customs and meanings as ridiculous and often oppressive artificial conventions and unfounded beliefs. Every attempt at ideology is just a ploy to advance and protect the interests of those who devised it at the expense of others. This might seem to be a thoroughly positive development, abandoning the myths and parochial prejudices of modernity's Symbolic Order. However, in denying belief in the Big Other, liberal-postmodernism has thrown the baby out with the bathwater. It has corroded belief in *any* set of shared ethics, customs, values or rules that form the social content which fills up the void that lies at the subjective core of our being. As such, there can be no coherent basis for social harm or consistent guidance on how to govern our social conduct.⁵ For Žižek, postmodernism signals the triumph of liberal-individualism, creating cynical and sceptical subjects who trust only in themselves, what they see before them, and who are constantly furnished with the tools to question the authority of the Big Other, or indeed any authority that attempts to curtail their own passions or desires.

Winlow and Hall (2013) use the example of the doctor's medical prognosis. Previously, submitting to the rule of a functioning Big Other, we would have accepted the doctor's medical advice. Her degrees from universities, medical schools and her years of training indicate that she is a medical expert deserving of respect and we should defer to her informed judgment. However, in the contemporary context if we are told that we do not need to be admitted to hospital or given a medical prescription, we are more likely to sceptically assume that this is just a ploy by the NHS to free-up hospital beds or save money on expensive pharmaceuticals. Consequently, as Hall and Antonopoulous (2016) have observed, we are witnessing a rise in consumers' purchasing of counterfeit pharmaceuticals after trusting their own individual

⁵ One might respond to this by observing that we live in a world full of rules and bureaucracies. These are the series of 'little others' which attempt to occupy the same space as the deceased Big Other and resolve the many situation-specific issues in our lives. However, as Winlow and Hall (2012; 2013) observe, these 'little others' cannot be elevated to the status of the Big Other. They are just a tyranny of committees who do not have a fixed, objective or transcendent source. Therefore, the postmodern subject can undermine belief in these little others in precisely the same way. For a more in-depth discussion, see Winlow and Hall (2012) on ethics committees.

judgment and self-diagnosis. Similarly, we could apply these ideas to examples of social harm explored by researchers in the field of ‘deviant leisure’ (Smith and Raymen, 2016), such as the ethical questions surrounding tourism and drinking holidays and the harms generated both to the environment and local populations (Briggs, 2013; Briggs and Ellis, 2016). Liberal-postmodernism’s cynical individualist is armed with an array of counter-arguments capable of downplaying the harms generated and questioning the authority of those who would position such practices as harmful. Who gave them authority to pass judgment? Why should I be discouraged from going on three luxury holidays a year, drinking to the extent that I vomit in the street and playing my music loudly in my private villa? Climate change is just an overblown moral panic that scientists have used to get research funding, and my frequent tourism provides plenty of jobs in communities where there is little else. Public morality is just a parochial social construct, the petty old-fashioned narrow-mindedness of others trying to intrude upon my fun and inhibit my ability to express myself and my sexuality (Jayne et al., 2006). As Winlow and Hall (2013: 156-157) write, ‘In this sense, postmodernism reanimates asocial libertarianism and fits neatly within the doctrine of neoliberalism: nothing exists beyond the immediate freedoms of the subject and no legitimate authority exists that can justifiably curtail those freedoms’.

It is precisely within these environs of commodified leisure and consumer capitalism that social harm is most uncertain of itself. It is within leisure that we are culturally, economically and even politically represented as existing in a state of voluntarism. Seen to be rightfully enacting our individual freedom and leisure choices, leisure has not just been elevated to a social good but a *moral right* (Raymen, 2018). Within a society which places a primacy upon the liberty of the individual, Rojek (2010: 1) has written that ‘one may hardly dare speak of leisure in anything other than celebratory or triumphalist tones’. However, in an era of post-industrial consumer capitalism in which leisure markets are increasingly cultivated and deregulated due to their demand-side value to the global economy, it is within these arenas of commodified leisure that some of the most normalised harms are being played out (see Smith and Raymen, 2016; Hayward and Smith, 2017). Indeed, postmodernism’s systematic suspension of belief in any alternative mode of existence allows liberal-capitalism and individualistic consumerism to fully realise its core drive of intense competitive individualism. It has denied the possibility of a fully-functioning Big Other to contradict the late-modern consumer subject and whisper in her ear that a particular desire or leisure practice is harmful or illegitimate. Winlow and Hall (2013: 157) sum it up nicely: ‘if nothing is sacred there is nothing that cannot be enjoyed, and nothing that cannot be sold on commercial markets’.

Liberal-postmodernism's cynical disbelief ultimately results in the preservation of our existing political-economic and cultural arrangements. Global capitalism's competitive drives and consumer culture's individualism are depicted as the political-economic and cultural systems that appear closest to our nature as autonomous individuals (McGowan, 2016). We are told that any attempt to rejuvenate society on a radically new political, economic and ethical footing will inevitably lead to totalitarian disaster. This is the ultimate embodiment of liberal-postmodernism, resulting in what Žižek (2008) describes as post-political bio-politics. This term describes the current state of affairs in which society has renounced grand ideological causes or transformative visions of society based upon a new politics, economics or ethics, instead setting about the task of efficiently administering life as it currently exists. This applies neatly to much of the current zemiological landscape. Under this framework, the question of social harm is not an ethical issue or a departure point from which we can imagine a more desirable collective social existence, but more of a technical issue which attempts to engage in piecemeal 'harm-minimisation'. Rather than being recognised as symptoms of deep but ultimately solvable social problems which are then interrogated and challenged, social harms become transformed into risks to be managed; and the task of academics, politicians and policy makers becomes the devising of ingenious ways to mitigate the worst excesses of these harms without transgressing the ontological assumptions of liberalism or the economic needs of capital.

What does this mean for existing perspectives on social harm?

*If Evil exists, we must conceive it from the starting point of the Good
(Badiou, 2001: 60)*

This foray into the ontological, moral and political philosophical underpinnings of late-capitalism leaves us with the question of what this means for existing perspectives on social harm. While there have been a variety of suggested approaches to social harm (see Lasslett, 2010; Yar, 2012; for two examples), I specifically focus upon Pemberton's (2015) approach rooted in theories of human need, advocated by others in the field (Copson, 2011; Hillyard and Tombs, 2017). I do not focus upon this approach to social harm because it is any more deficient than other perspectives. On the contrary, while there are some fundamental flaws that stem from its underpinning intellectual influences, it is focused upon here because of its *potential*. Pemberton's (2015) use of the notion of *human flourishing* opens up possibilities to re-establish what is missing from social harm perspectives—a natural human *telos* of

human flourishing around which an alternative Symbolic Order can be organised and can then serve as a guiding reference point for social harm to transcend the culture of emotivism.

A quick glance across the zemiological literature would suggest that the barrier of liberalism is not a problem for many critical social harm perspectives. Hillyard and Tombs (2017: 300) have spoken about the need to push beyond *negative liberty* organized around a 'freedom from' and link social harm to a more ambitious positive liberty. Pemberton (2015) has similarly advocated this positive liberty, whilst also adding the rather Aristotelian language of social harm as the systemic compromising of 'human flourishing' and suggesting that a Rawlsian human needs approach is the best way to provide the guiding parameters of social harm (Doyal and Gough, 1984; 1991). Additionally, Copson (2011) has also advocated a human needs approach and bemoaned criminology's reliance on the 'liberal individualism' of contemporary jurisprudence; while Yar (2012) has adopted a promising ontological position by using Honneth's (1996) theory of social recognition as the basis on which human flourishing can be cultivated.

However, a closer look at the intellectual underpinnings of contemporary approaches to social harm, particularly those with foundations in Doyal and Gough's (1984; 1991) theory of human needs, reveals a persisting and unacknowledged influence of liberal individualist moral philosophy. Doyal and Gough's position is largely predicated upon the liberal philosopher John Rawls (1972) and his theory of redistributive justice, which attempts to develop an objective and rational test to determine the fair distribution of social goods in society. Rawls encourages the reader to imagine himself about to enter society standing behind a 'veil of ignorance'. The reader does not know what position she would occupy in society, what social class she would belong to, what race or gender she might be, what talents she would possess, or what kind of society she is about to inhabit. Any rational individual, Rawls argues, would therefore agree that each person would have an equal right and access to an extensive set of basic liberties and human needs, and that goods in society are distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of these goods would benefit the least favoured in society. Rawls is essentially attempting to manage and resolve the core tension at the heart of liberalism's political philosophy and the debate between the libertarians and classical liberals who view any taxation and redistribution of goods as theft, and those social liberals who see that a balance must be struck between individual liberty and the needs of the majority. Of course, since the collective majority (traditionally represented by the left) fragmented into innumerable minority interest groups, the minority group of the financial elite have used their political-economic clout to win this

battle repeatedly over the past forty years, as the left has endured defeat after defeat (Dean, 2016).

However, the most problematic aspect about Rawls' (1972) theory of justice is that, as MacIntyre (2011) observes, it *separates morality from desire*. This is antithetical to the teleological ethic of Aristotle, who saw morality not as a given but as an achievement; not as distinct from personal happiness, human flourishing and social advancement but as a fundamental and necessary spur to those pursuits (*Nic. Ethics*, 1095a7-28). Modern liberal individualists, however, often treat morality as an impediment acting *against* natural inclinations or individual desires. We see it in Kant's (1990) categorical imperative, which views morality as acting out of a sense of duty to universalizable moral norms, denying ourselves particular desires and interests if for no other reason than to avoid them being inflicted upon ourselves. We see it in Rawls (1972) who can only imagine people acting in an ethical and equitable manner when they are standing behind a 'veil of ignorance'. We also see it in Mill, who wrote that the readiness to serve the happiness of others through the sacrifice of his own happiness or desire is "the highest virtue that can be found in man". Therefore, instead of trying to develop a society which cultivates subjectivities which reconnect morality and desire, moral and pro-social behaviour is reduced to the act of mere rule-following. As MacIntyre writes:

[W]hat sort of person am I to become? This is in a way an inescapable question in that an answer to it is given *in practice* in each human life. But for characteristically modern moralities it is a question to be approached only by indirection. The primary question from their standpoint has concerned rules: what rules *ought* we to follow? And why ought we obey them? [...] The central doctrine of modern liberalism is the thesis that questions about the *good life for man* or the ends of human life are to be regarded from the public standpoint as systematically unsettleable. On these, individuals are free to agree or to disagree. The rules of morality and law hence are not to be derived from or justified in terms of some more fundamental conception of the good for man (MacIntyre, 2011: 138).

We can see within the above quote the questions that liberal-postmodernism's cynical individualist can quickly pose when morality is separated from desire and reduced to an act of mere rule-following. A good example of the problems generated by this approach can be found when we consider one of the most pressing types of social harm — climate change. Environmental issues tend to be framed as being at odds with personal

desires. We are encouraged to change our consumption habits, buy re-usable coffee cups, and find ways of reducing or negating our carbon footprint when we travel. Appeals are made to alleviate the suffering experienced by animals, or to fulfil our duty to live sustainably in order to ensure a future for our children and grandchildren. The underlying message from those trying to stimulate change is that we must act *against* our self-interest or desires. While it is inconvenient to painstakingly check labels and recycle, to carry a reusable coffee cup wherever you go, or to walk or cycle when it would be much quicker and convenient to drive a car, such measures must be taken no matter how painful.

However, such approaches which separate morality from desire and equate morality to rule-following quickly fall apart. As Shaw and Bonnett (2016) have argued, we are increasingly witnessing the perpetuation of environmental harm through a form of nihilistic grief and loss. Overwhelmed by the daunting scale of change required to avert environmental catastrophe and convinced that things seem to have gone too far, there is no incentive to act against one's sovereign desires. This defeatism prompts depressive forms of consumption that can be witnessed in practices such as extinction tourism, in which companies arrange trips to see certain places, populations or species that are on the borderline of extinction. Here, these consumers and companies flagrantly perpetuate the same environmental harms that have driven these places and populations to near-extinction in the name of 'seeing it before it has gone'. Moreover, in contemporary society there has been a reorientation of the cultural super-ego toward a *cultural injunction to enjoy* (Žižek, 2002). Rather than feel guilt or shame for spending money on new clothes or going on a 'big night out'; the contemporary reoriented super-ego is now more likely to feel guilty for *not* doing so, driven by the sense that others are living more exciting, fulfilling and enjoyable lives. This is most effectively captured by the social media hashtag 'FOMO' (fear of missing out) and bucket-list tourism which provides an itinerary of travel and tourism experiences that one simply has to experience before they die (Thurnell-Read, 2017).

Despite these flawed intellectual underpinnings, Pemberton's (2015) approach to social harm as the compromising of *human flourishing* offers the possibility for resolving this issue around the separation of desire from morality. Whether intentional or not, this is a very Aristotelian term that implicitly suggests that human beings possess a particular goal, purpose or perfected state of being which the individual is constantly striving towards. This is what Aristotle would call the *telos* of human life (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a1-22). It is not something which is left up to the individual to decide privately for themselves, nor can it be achieved individually. Rather, the *telos* (or human flourishing) is developed through a shared deliberation about the

common human good and the kinds of subjectivities, virtues and institutional values that are required for its achievement. It can only be achieved through a properly ethical and political participation within the communities to which we belong. To marry this with Žižek's language, this notion of human flourishing and what it demands would become enshrined within the shared meanings, values, customs and institutions of the Symbolic Order and the Big Other. As the likes of MacIntyre (2011) and Lutz (2012) argue, this *telos* could provide the objective reference point that can not only resolve moral or zemiological disagreements, but also offer guidance as to how to live the Good life. We can see how this notion of human flourishing differs from the idea of the 'Good life' in the liberal-individualist culture of late-capitalism, often a private pursuit of consumer pleasures and personal success which can be achieved in spite of, and is often contingent upon, the suffering or degradation of others (Hall et al, 2008). However, Pemberton (2015) fails to offer much guidance on what actually constitutes human flourishing. Instead, he limits his analysis to the conditions necessary for 'human flourishing' without considering the ends they are geared towards. Given the scale of such a task, this absence is entirely understandable. However, what was required was an acknowledgment that the potentially substantive yet currently diaphanous content of human flourishing is the vital component that can reconnect morality and desire to provide the basis from which we can derive an understanding of what we consider to be social harm.

In the absence of this acknowledgment, two interrelated problems arise, both of which prohibit zemiology from realising its self-proclaimed desire to push beyond negative liberty and conceptualise social harm as the systemic compromising of human flourishing. Firstly, to place human flourishing as the objective reference point for social harm and ethics is a positive first step; but without an acknowledgment of the need for a shared conception of the Good life and a human *telos*, 'human flourishing' provides nothing more than an empty signifier. It remains at the discretion of each sovereign individual to privately decide what constitutes the Good life *for her*, inevitably resulting in vastly divergent conceptions which will clash with others' privately defined ideas of human flourishing. The central tenet of liberal individualism remains intact, perpetuating the 'culture of emotivism' as described by MacIntyre above, and zemiology remains trapped within the confines of liberalism's ideological understanding of 'freedom'. This, Deneen (2018) and MacIntyre (2011) argue, was liberalism's great historical achievement. In the pre-liberal world, liberty was understood as the conquest of base desires and the development of practical moral reasoning to know how to act, what is best and right to choose and desire in order to pursue a shared conception of the Good. However, liberalism has located liberty within the sovereign individual

as the right to pursue pluralistic, personal and privately defined notions of the Good free from religious, cultural or moral intervention.

This perversion of the notion of liberty creates the second interrelated problem. It has enabled liberal individualism to hijack notions of 'positive liberty' and create an essentially false distinction between positive and negative forms of liberty (Hall, 2012a). While theories of human need claim to espouse a notion of *positive* liberty (Doyal and Gough, 1984; 1991; Pemberton, 2015), what this really amounts to is a slightly more ambitious, welfare-oriented and socialistic brand of negative liberty with a different name. It extends the traditional negative liberties of the right to life; freedom from torture; freedom of expression and so on to include equal access to physical and mental health services; education and personal development; and employment, among others. However, this does not constitute a radical departure from the moral philosophy of liberal individualism and its primacy upon individual sovereignty, but merely a more comfortable ledge for the majority to rest upon as they pursue their personal dreams. With no ethical or teleological substance to guide a common understanding of the Good life for human persons, the sovereign individual is simply provided with more services and tools to enable them to pursue their own personal wants and desires. Under this framework, positive liberty is defined as the provider of basic material needs and services for individuals to enact their freedom to behave according to their sovereign view of the good life. Positive and negative liberty thus collapse into one another. We can see this quite clearly when we examine Doyal and Gough's work on theorizing human needs. In a passage that reads as remarkably similar to Žižek's (2008) post-political biopolitics described above, the scope of liberty is limited to a choice between a society of unshackled capitalist production or a state which ensures equal access to high standards of health, education and abundant employment and so on in order to expand the individual's choices so that they can freely decide their own destinies:

As we have hinted in the introduction, conceptions of liberation as a generalisable goal have traditionally been interpreted either as unlimited material production or the expansion of individual choice...For our purposes, the first formulation is problematic because it is now clear that for a variety of social, economic and ecological reasons the dream of unrestrained production has for many turned into a nightmare of Taylorism, unemployment, pollution, corporate imperialism, the fear of nuclear destruction and the exhaustion of global resources. This has in turn focused attention on the 'quality of life', again highlighting the importance of the distinction between wants and needs. Thus, the second approach to

theorising liberational needs - optimising the satisfaction of basic individual needs in principle and in practice - seems more promising if it can be shown to be conceptually and strategically coherent. (Doyal and Gough, 1984: 23)

Alain Badiou has suggested that in a contemporary society oriented towards a negative rights-based ethos, '[e]vil is that from which the Good is derived, not the other way around' (Badiou, 2001: 9). Badiou argues this precludes any genuine transformation of society. What we require in our effort to clearly identify, recognise and provide parameters for social harm is a fundamental reversal of Badiou's (2001) diagnosis of our current predicament. What we are striving for in defining harm is an idea of the *Good* from which social harm is derived. Simon Pemberton has expressed this precise sentiment when he writes that 'we gain an understanding of harm exactly because it represents the converse reality of an imagined desirable state' (Pemberton, 2015: 32).

Therefore, it is suggested that we should take up the mantle from Pemberton (2015) and drive forward to flesh out a fully-fledged theory of what constitutes *human flourishing*. Lasslett (2010) has suggested that we should do the exact opposite and move away from grounding harm in an 'ethical conception of man' and return to more objective and robust ontological theories of harm. However, if we return to Žižek's ontology of the subject, we can see that this separation of ontology from ethics is misguided and ultimately fruitless. At the ontological core of the subject lies a void, and identifying with a Symbolic Order of shared meanings, values and customs is a fundamentally necessary part of identity formation, the development of subjectivity and the constitution of a social world. Such a Symbolic Order of meanings, customs and institutions is unavoidably shaped by politics, political philosophy and, ultimately ethics. Therefore, contrary to Lasslett, we cannot avoid the question of ethics, as the formation of a Symbolic Order and an associated ethics is a fundamental part of the organic and inorganic reproduction of man, without which subjectivity, identity, relationships and other fundamental human needs cannot exist. Social harm, therefore, is not an ontological *or* an ethical issue. Rather, it is an ethical issue *by way of the subject's ontology*. If social harm is to transcend liberalism's scarcely challengeable hegemony and its associated culture of emotivism, it must take heed of this fundamental ontological insight and observe the subject's need for the formation of a strong and coherent Symbolic Order, with a clear and collective notion of *human flourishing* at its core. Despite the apparent pessimism of the preceding pages, this brings us to the more optimistic kernel of the argument that concludes this article. Social harm is not merely a concept that identifies what is socially, environmentally and politically-economically

corrosive in our society. On the contrary, 'defining' social harm is fundamentally bound up with constructing an imagination for the type of lives we want to lead, the society we want to live in, and the subjectivities we want to cultivate.

Therefore, the final section of this article offers some initial reflections on how we might approach a conceptualization of the Good and, by extension, social harm, by returning to social fields, social practices, and social roles as the objective reference point for ethics. The scale of the task of imagining the Good for society is truly enormous, and is really the subject of a series of lengthy monographs rather than a small section in a single article. Therefore, this will be only a brief discussion. However, it is suggested that the first stage of Alasdair MacIntyre's three-part theory of virtue offers a useful rudimentary starting point,⁶ and this section will apply this approach to the social practices of housing and leisure for examples.

The Good: Social Practices as the Objective Reference Point for Ethics

The final contention of this article is that an effort to 'define' social harm, 'define' the Good, or 'define' human flourishing as an *a priori* concept is a fool's errand. It is futile to search for an all-seeing, all-solving theory of human flourishing or social harm that is generated in the abstract, detached from the reality of social practices, social roles and their institutions. Such an approach only leads to the further development of ethical maxims such as the likes of Kant, Mill and Rawls; 'needs-based' approaches like that of Doyal and Gough (1984); or the contemporary fetishization of 'human rights' or 'natural rights' that we have already dismissed. As we have already established, such maxims equate morality with obedient rule-following, disconnect morality from desire, and eventually endorse a perverted negative liberty masquerading as 'positive liberty'. As Badiou (2001) and MacIntyre (2011) observe, the question of ethics and the teleological question of the Good life for human persons is always both asked and answered on *social fields* and within *social practices*. Am I a good father? Am I a good student? Am I a good neighbour or friend? As such, the question of ethics is always bound up with the more practical question of what our *goals* are when thinking about our social practices and institutions and the goals of life for individuals and societies.

⁶ It should be noted here that the other two stages of MacIntyre's theory of virtue are imperative to any fully-fledged development of the Good. The second stage to MacIntyre's theory of virtue is the narrative order of a whole human life, and the third stage is a consideration of moral traditions. However, for our purposes in this article, it is useful to remain focused on the first stage of social practices.

The starting point for MacIntyre is the Aristotelian notion that human beings possess a particular end or purpose to fulfil their *telos* or ‘good’ of *eudaimonia*—translated variously as ‘happiness’, ‘human flourishing’, or ‘human excellence’. Due to the restrictions of space, I will avoid any long descent into a meaningful philosophical discussion of the specific content of the *telos* of human flourishing. This is because Aristotle himself actually left the content of human flourishing relatively open, but also because MacIntyre suggests that social practices have their own objective *telos*, end or purpose. That is, they possess goods that are both *internal* and *external* to their practice. It is by exploring these goods and thinking about what we *want* from social roles and practices and what we are trying to achieve in practicing them that we can begin to think about what the overall Good for human persons might be, both individually and collectively. In turn, we can begin to contrast the goods *internal* to social practices against the goods that are currently pursued under liberal capitalism; and we can begin to think of the kind of virtues we require in order to achieve these internal goods and the virtues cultivated and encouraged by liberal capitalism and consumer culture.

MacIntyre is very specific in what he means by social practices. He claims that social practices are distinct from simple tasks or actions in that we require the virtues to excel in social practices. For example, we do not need the virtues to simply kick a football, write an academic paper, or even run for political office. We do require the virtues in order to excel at the game of football, rigorously engage in academic scholarship and contribute to academic debate, or govern communities wisely (Lutz, 2012: 118). This is because social practices as a complex form of cooperative human activity have objective goods and standards *internal* to them. Consequently, according to MacIntyre, these latter practices, unlike the former acts or tasks, possess an integral moral aspect. One can become a competent football player only by learning the skills required and practicing them repeatedly with diligence and commitment. One can only *genuinely* progress academic thought by closely reading the literature, engaging in hard thinking and having the courage to disagree with and build upon prevailing opinion; and one can only govern communities by wisely by having a clear understanding of the needs of the entire community and a constancy in one’s commitment to their interests.

Of course, there are also goods external to social practices, such as wealth, fame, prestige or power. At this juncture, one might say that such external goods provide a motivating incentive for an individual to dedicate herself to the goods internal to a social practice. However, as MacIntyre points out, to place primacy upon the goods external to practices can often have a corroding effect on the pursuit of their internal goods or their *telos*. The athlete might be inclined to cheat or take performance-enhancing drugs. The academic

might refrain from questioning certain ideas in fear of reprisal from more senior colleagues. This could act as a potential barrier to the external goods of promotion or their status as a ‘rising star’ in the field; compromising the internal goods of academic scholarship such as debate and dialectical progress, and radically new understandings of social and scientific problems. The candidate for political office might lie to voters or endorse policies that will hurt the community they intend to govern in order to secure future election and satisfy the desires of powerful financial backers bankrolling their election campaign. MacIntyre (2011: 228) has written that “in any society which recognized only external goods, competitiveness would be the dominant and even exclusive feature”. In such a society, “[w]e should therefore expect that, if...the pursuit of external goods was to become dominant, the concept of the virtues might suffer first attrition and then perhaps something near total effacement, although simulacrum⁷ [of the virtues] might abound” (*ibid*: 228).

This is precisely what has happened in liberal capitalist society. The entire logic of capitalism as an economic system is geared toward the pursuit of goods external to practices. As capitalism seeks to expand existing markets and create new ones for the purpose of wealth accumulation and infinite growth, it has steadily sought to place primacy upon external goods in almost all spheres of life. Consider housing, which has occupied much attention from social harm scholars in the past decade with regards to issues surrounding the global financial crash (GFC), gentrification and spatial cleansing (Smith, 1996), and the recent Grenfell Tower tragedy (Cooper and Whyte, 2018). Housing in late-capitalism has become a largely speculative affair, in which it is predominantly used and understood for its exchange value (its external good) as opposed to its use value (its internal good) (see Madden and Marcuse, 2016). Such a situation has led to those in charge of the organization and regulation of housing to sell off large amounts of social housing, resulting in the gentrification and exclusion of local working-class populations in both urban and rural locales, skyrocketing property prices and rental rates, and large numbers of properties in ‘prime’ real estate areas remaining vacant as they are accumulated as private financial assets (Atkinson, forthcoming). Naturally, this has precipitated a crisis in affordable housing and homelessness in many metropolises both large and small across the globe, with associated problems of indebtedness and mental health issues. The emphasis upon the

⁷ A good example of this might be the corporate trend toward ‘greenwashing’. Corporations, never letting a good crisis go to waste (Mirowski, 2014), have engaged in sophisticated public relations campaigns which talk up their ‘green’ credentials without making any meaningful alterations to their business practice at the level of production, distribution, or disposal; thereby allowing a simulacrum of environmentalism in which the self-identifying environmentalist consumer can invest.

external goods of the social practice of housing has been pursued to such an extreme point that scholars such as Madden and Marcuse (2016) have seen it suitable to make distinction between 'real estate' and 'housing', in which the former attacks the latter. As they have written, "[t]he commodification of housing means that a structure's function as real estate takes precedence over its usefulness as a place to live. When this happens, housing's role as an investment outweighs all other claims upon it, whether they are based upon right, need, tradition, legal precedent, cultural habit, *or the ethical and affective significance of the home*" (Madden and Marcuse, 2016: 17; emphasis added).

The last line of the above quote is significant. Madden and Marcuse (2016) echo MacIntyre's broader sentiment that housing as a social practice has an integral moral component, with goods internal to its practice. In this regard, if we were to imagine the social practice of organizing and regulating housing geared toward its internal goods, the picture of housing in contemporary society would look quite different. Emphasis would be placed upon all housing being affordable and well-maintained. Rather than cultivating the lifeless *non-spaces* (Augé, 1995) of gated communities and vacant neighbourhoods of 'prime real estate' in an effort to boost value, focus and funding would be geared toward the cultivation of genuine neighbourhoods and spaces for collective and intimate forms of public and private social life. These are the kinds of locales imagined by Jacobs (1961) in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, fundamentally ethical spaces which emphasise affective and emotional place-making through real human ties.

Leisure is another useful example when we start to imagine what 'pro-social' forms of leisure might look like when the goods *internal* to their practice are pursued. Thorstein Veblen (1965) observed long ago the primacy of external goods within leisure when he introduced the term 'conspicuous consumption': those excessive and wasteful leisure practices of the 'leisure class' which were a signifier of their exemption from work, and thus their status and social prestige which could inspire envy, admiration, and even reverence in others. To provide just one example, travelling and tourism has become much more than an opportunity to relax, recharge the batteries, experience other cultures and spend quality time in the company of friends and family. In an age of 'communicative capitalism', going on holiday is also bound up with the external goods of *displaying* one's tourism by 'checking-in' to the airport, sharing pictures of sun-tanned legs by the poolside or videos of scuba-diving and bungee jumping. What Majid Yar (2012) has termed the 'will-to-represent' shapes our holiday destinations and the activities we choose to engage with while which often have highly detrimental impacts to the local environment, eco-systems and the living conditions of local populations.

Luxury consumers pursue the most exclusive locations, while there are numerous travel and tourism experiences which have become 'bucket list' items that the 18-30-year-old simply *must* experience before succumbing to the virtual death of adulthood (Thurnell-Read, 2017). One hears of travellers talking about having to 'do' Ibiza, go scuba diving in Thailand, or see the Northern Lights. This 'bucket list' approach to tourism is significant because it is the external good of the bucket list itself that has achieved primacy. By attaching one's externally recognised identity as a well-travelled and cultured global citizen to one's travel patterns and 'bucket list', travel and tourism becomes more about ticking items off the 'bucket list'—*and being seen to tick them off*—than it does about the goods internal to tourism itself. Consequently, the achievement of this external good of the bucket list can be interminably put-off and placed out of the subject's reach by the creation of new 'must-have' experiences which then amplify the environmental harms associated with a burgeoning travel and tourism industry.

But it is useful to think about what leisure and leisure *spaces* would look like if they were decommoditised and primacy was placed upon the shared goods that are intrinsic to particular leisure practices. One useful example is the most popular leisure past-time of pubs and drinking within the night-time economy. Patrons and landlords would orient their drinking spaces around cultivating a sense of community and belonging. The pub would become a hub for combatting issues of loneliness among the elderly, organising shared community events and activities, discussing politics or other issues central to local civic life, and cultivating forms of friendship that transcend the facile and instrumental nature of friendship that pervades the contemporary night-time economy (Smith, 2014; Winlow and Hall, 2009). We can actually see examples of this within the recent increase of community-owned pubs that have attempted to prevent the closure of their local watering holes due to high rents and drinks prices. However, the vast majority of the night-time economy is geared toward creating drinking spaces of individualistic hedonism, distinction or exclusivity. The craft-ale bar or microbrewery affords people the opportunity to display their identity as a connoisseur with a more sophisticated taste than the 'masses' (Smith, 2014). The night-club experience is as much geared around getting ready for a night-out as it is about the drinking itself. Individuals use the sexually-charged environs of the night-time economy to show off one's latest fashion choices and display their sexual desirability or the benefits of their new exercise regime to cultivate admiration and envy through numerous social media posts (Winlow and Hall, 2009). Friendships within these spheres mimic the 'pure relationships' identified by Giddens (1991) which are distilled down to their use-value. Here, the company of others is instrumentally employed to enable the subject to pursue their

individual interests and desires (Raymen and Smith, 2017). Consequently, contemporary night-time drinking spaces become spaces which pursue the individualised goods external to this social practice.

Traversing the teleological ethics of MacIntyre—and it must be said his full three-part theory of virtue is a great deal more complex than is initially outlined here—may seem unfamiliar ground for the criminologist or zemiologist. Likewise, to speak of ‘morality’, and social roles and practices as the objective reference point for ethics is often met with a sense of unease and discomfort. The social sciences have often invoked the term ‘moral’ with only negative connotations; speaking critically of ‘moral panics’ or condemning ‘moralisers’ or ‘moral crusaders’. As the earlier stages of this article pointed out, this reticence toward the language of morality reflects the influence of postmodernism’s pan-scepticism toward the notion of *any* moral authority, and liberalism’s safeguarding of the autonomous individual’s sovereign right to privately decide what the good life is *for them* and to devise their own moral code which has no transcendent authority other than their own micro-sovereignty. However, while at first glance this might be an uneasy relationship, a closer look at writings in the field of social harm suggests otherwise. Within such writings, there is a broad tendency to develop *typologies* of harmful outcomes; be it physical harms, emotional harms, workplace harms, financial harms, environmental harms and so on (see for example, Hillyard and Tombs, 2004; Pemberton, 2015; Smith and Raymen, 2016; South, 1998). As the name suggests, the obvious purpose of these typologies is to document the various types of harm scholars are interested in. However, I would suggest that there is something more significant taking place here. What all of these typologies are doing is locating and organising harms as they take place within specific spaces, places and *social fields*. I would like to surmise that, perhaps subconsciously and without necessarily realising the full philosophical implications of doing so, what they all implicitly suggest is that the question of ethics and what constitutes social harm is to be found through the exploration of social practices. They suggest that something has gone *wrong* with this social practice, which, by extension, suggests that there exists some Good or internal *telos* of these practices from which they have diverged. Indeed, Hillyard and Tombs (2004: 20) have come closest to this sentiment when they write that social harm is defined, in part, by its operationalization and how it is deployed in practice upon social fields.

Conclusion

In drawing this article to a close, we can return full-circle to Žižek's ontology and the barrier of liberalism. In order to pursue the overall good by first of all pursuing the *shared* goods that are internal to social practices, we will require a strong Symbolic Order of shared meanings, values and customs in order to reconnect morality and desire, and a high degree of *symbolic efficiency* what these goods are. We will require institutions to enshrine those values, and the virtues to ensure that those engaged in the practice of managing and running those institutions do not succumb to the natural tendency of institutions to pursue external goods that are corrosive to the internal *telos* of social practices. In short, we will need a new, healthy and fully functioning Big Other. Of course, none of this is possible as long as we remain attached to the political and moral philosophy of liberal individualism, or a political economy predicated upon the principles of capital accumulation and infinite growth. Capitalism is a system naturally oriented toward the pursuit of private and external goods; and is continuously re-energised by liberalism's seductive-yet-asocial ideals of individual freedom and the moral sovereignty of the autonomous individual to pursue their privately define notion of the Good. Within liberal capitalism, there is no rightful authority that exists beyond the sovereign individual to say that we should pursue the objective and collective goods internal to social practices, and de-prioritise those privately defined and external goods of wealth accumulation, status, celebrity or power for the sake of power. Indeed, this is precisely the strength of viewing the Good as being defined on the field of social practices and the pursuit of their internal goods or *telos*. It quickly reveals that it is the fundamental logic of the marriage between liberalism and capitalism that precludes our imagination and pursuit of the Good, and by extension precludes the establishment of any clear consensus around social harm.

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