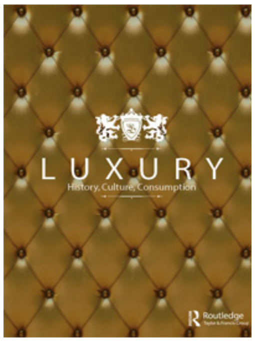

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The Idea of Luxury: Revisited

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ABSTRACT My book *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* was published in 1994 (still in print). While what follows is bound to be self-referential and also presumptuous in that it is premised on there being some interest in these reflections on the book a quarter of a century plus later. The partial defense is that the book has been extensively cited and widely acknowledged as an important and influential contribution. In the period since its publication I have written (often by invitation) some papers that take, sometimes tangential, aspects of the book's discussion as their cue but have not revisited the book as whole. This paper aims to take an, albeit still selective, overview of the book and reply to some of the criticisms to which it has been subject. I divide the paper into three sections. In Sections 1 and 2, I consider separately the two elements in the book's sub-title before in Section 3 making some general remarks on the book's implications for aspects of the contemporary study of luxury.

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1. Conceptual

I first very briefly outline the salient aspects of my argument before looking at some questions and criticisms that it has raised (Berry 1999, 2005, 2016, 2022a, 2022b).

1.1. Synopsis (selected)

At the end of Chapter One I offer a definition: luxuries are those goods that admit of easy or painless substitution because the desire for them lacks fervency (Berry 1994, 41 – hereafter references to this book will be inserted in the text by page number).

I reach that definition through a lengthy analysis. The key building block is a conceptual/epistemic distinction between need and desire. Needs are states of the world, desires are states of the mind. Regardless of your beliefs, humans need vitamin C but whether you like soccer and dislike opera is down to you. I identify 4 categories of need – food/clothing/shelter/leisure, which as such are universal; everyone has them (5–6). However, because these are categories they are generic and abstract, that is, you don't eat food but, rather, you actually eat sourdough or gluten free bread/fillet steak or nut roast/pork dumplings or tofu and so on. These are concrete specifications or qualitative refinements (as I call them [11]) that are, as such, always capable of further refinement (the same applies to the other three categories). These refinements are expressions of desire with different degrees of stringency – whether you desire strawberry or chocolate ice-cream is less stringent than the choice between kosher food or bacon. Luxuries are non-stringent desires which are positively pleasing (rather than the negative removal of pain). Or, as put in the definition, they lack fervency. I identify them as treats.

Three other aspects, or components of, the conceptual analysis

I. I establish a 5-fold taxonomy (38ff) of goods, they are:
   {a} deemed socially necessary (eg household sanitation)
   {b} functional or instrumental (need X for Y to Z) eg toothbrush for teeth cleaning to maintain dental health
   {c} fervently desired ie subjectively necessary (a 'must have' for you)
   {d} cherished ie not substitutable, have sentimental value for you
   {e} luxuries
II. deemed socially necessary (e.g. household sanitation)
III. functional or instrumental (need X for Y to Z), e.g. toothbrush for teeth cleaning to maintain dental health
IV. fervently desired, i.e. subjectively necessary (a "must have" for you)
V. cherished, i.e. not substitutable, have sentimental value for you
VI. luxuries

There are two corollaries.

i. The taxonomy is not static but dynamic. The components are not mutually exclusive; {a} is a particular sub-set of {b} (19) and I give the example of a Rolls-Royce car which can meet any of b-e (40). Plus, importantly, a good can be re-categorized from {e} to the others which is why a luxury is an indefinite qualitative refinement and inherently transient; I stress how in this way one-time luxuries can become socially recognized "needs" (with associated claims on the public purse and an attribution of a "right" to their satisfaction).
ii. While not meeting needs is by definition harmful, and not realizing fervent desires can be distressing, there is no harm or distress consequent on non-possession/enjoyment of a treat-a conclusion I utilize in Part 4 of the book when discussing, for example, the principles of taxation.
iii. I establish a running hypothesis that different evaluations of desire and different identifications of need result in different conceptions of political order (38). This is developed in Part 4 in various ways. In the course of that development I invoke the notion of social grammar. Similar to the way that all languages possess a grammar and a vocabulary, while differing in both those respects, so every society distinguishes between goods that are deemed socially necessary and those not, such as luxuries, despite different customs, institutions and norms. The particular way that distinction is made gives to that society a particular identity, just as the vocabulary and grammatical structures give a language its identity (Chinese rather than English, say). To give an example from the book (241): in early-modern Venice public officials, paid by the "state," enforced sumptuary laws that mandated who could wear what (the desire for luxury was deemed dangerous) but later that came to be judged an unwarranted intrusion on private liberty (the desire for luxury was benign); what was once deemed a socio-political necessity became a legitimate expression of private desire. That shift represents a re-configuration in social identity from Venice in 1421 to Venice in 2021. Against that broad backcloth, also in Part 4, I revisit the issue of the moral cases for needs and desire and discuss meanings of poverty which I illustrate via legal and fiscal etc. policies. An example of the latter is the recent U.K. case that up-held the decision that Botox injections (like all non-therapeutic cosmetic surgery) are to be VAT-rated (I broached this example theoretically in Part 1 [23]).
iv. In the elaboration of the argument I sustain a series of distinctions; luxury is not to be conflated with rarity, ostentation, expensiveness and redundant superfluity. But I will in passing say a brief word about the last two of these in my final Section.

1.2. Criticisms & responses

Of course some of my examples are dated, some of the evidence has been superseded and inevitably developments like social media as well as the extensive contemporary literature are not addressed. But here I comment on three more substantive contested areas

1.2.1. Needs/wants

The first of these disputes my needs/wants architecture. More particularly re "need" it charges that the epistemic difference undersells moral difference. According to "the principle of precedence" that I co-opt (199ff), needs trump desires and a fortiori trump luxuries. I don't think there is a problem here; my co-option does not contradict the analysis. My category of socially necessary goods recognizes that societies prioritize, usually through legal and fiscal measures, certain types of activity/expenditure. For example some societies (e.g. US) tax books others don't (e.g. U.K.) (38) but these are not fixed and always negotiable and my running hypothesis deals with this.

I do, however, argue – and I'm not exceptional in this – that the principle is not absolute; trade-offs can be warranted. Hence, on the one hand, fulfilling desires can also have moral weight because the realization of my desires, my priorities, express my identity and validate my freedom but since your priorities may well be different then, given mutual respect, in this way a basic social pluralism is validated. On the other hand, needs themselves are never brute but open to deliberation both individually and socially. Thus at the individual level, re food for example it can mean following a culturally prescribed diet or going on hunger-strike (cf. 203). At the social level it can express itself in the form of legal requirements of "health and safety" (compare the first of my five goods in the taxonomy).

However, the underlying criticism here is the argument that luxury has morally damaging effects. Though I have subsequently dealt with aspects of this in my discussion (2016) of Re-moralization, which I'll reference later, the fact that my book says relatively little about this issue does perhaps in hindsight signal a deficiency. For example, Roberts (2019) in a sensitively balanced account outlines what she calls the "dark side" of luxury; it is divisive and stimulates degenerate, unethical, and criminal activities and, in the current period of growing economic inequality, this dark side is increasingly overshadowing any positive moral impact of luxury.

Yet it seems more plausible to see luxury expenditure as a *symptom* rather than a *cause* of economic inequality or the iniquity of capitalism (cf. McNeil and Riello 2016, 6). This does not cancel a policy whereby socially-judged "luxuries" can be subjected to an added level of taxation (though the track record of luxury taxes is not encouraging, as "Veblen goods" they can stimulate luxury expenditure) but the point is, perhaps, rather is to send a societal signal rather than raise revenue (cf. 208, 211). In the book I do discuss the relation between luxury and inequality and argue that they should not be confused (222). Beyond that, if the issue is that the production and consumption of luxury goods represents a damaging misallocation of resources – greed before need as the slogan has it – then two observations seem apt. First, though this is a matter of degree, liberal capitalist societies are scarcely the worst offenders and this misallocation rather characterizes kleptocracies. Second, the production of luxury goods is not alone in the capitalist exploitation of labor. If anything cheap mass-produced goods are worse and high end luxury good producers like to invoke the inherent time-intensive craftsmanship of their products. As Axel Dumas CEO of Hermes commented his "concept" for the company is for it "to remain a craft shop" (*Financial Times* 30/3/19). Not mentioned by Dumas but behind this, as expressed by Johann Rupert (chair of Richemont), is a residual fear of the rise of robots.

Another critique on somewhat similar lines, is that I fail to distinguish between true and false needs, that is, the argument that goods and services are constructed by the economic system to maintain itself and which thereby serve to convince folk that they "must have" that item of luxury. Reflecting that broad stance Armitage and Roberts (Roberts and Armitage 2015; Armitage and Roberts 2015) (they cite Marcuse (1964) and I too refer to him [224]) use deterministic language so talk of the "painful infliction" of dependency (indeed "narcotization") on a created desire for goods and services (2015, 127–8). On that basis they object to the "painless substitution" in my definition. My response here is two-fold. First, the notion of "need" is more problematic than they assume when they make claims about "true needs," which on my account is at least as contestable as "desire." Of course, this also has a political dimension. Complementing my earlier comment linking desires with pluralism, for the political authorities to determine what "people truly need" has historically led to uniformity (cf my remarks 228). Alexandra Shulman when she gave up the editorship of the British *Vogue* said (here perhaps supporting Armitage & Roberts) the magazine was "trying to create desire" but went on to claim that it promoted a world where "many many people get an immense amount of pleasure and satisfaction" (q *The Times* 4/7/17). To gainsay such satisfactions is to my mind both morally and politically problematic, which of course is not to claim that regulation of "pleasure" cannot in principle be defended (think of bear-baiting or sugar taxes), a principle that indeed my running "political" hypothesis accommodates. The history of sumptuary legislation, as my earlier example of Venice illustrates and is the leitmotif of my running hypothesis [p.3 supra], is a story of differing social judgements of need and desire.

I do, however, confess that I leave the notion of "desire" or "want" relatively unproblematized. Illouz (2009), for example, as part of her argument to stress the role of emotions, identifies various competing notions of desire and while she utilizes my book she doesn't highlight that aspect. In the book I simply declare further enquiry not vital (12) but that declaration is, I now judge, too pre-emptory, although I still think an extended analysis would be too intrusive. I do, in fact, consider Aristotle's view alongside Hobbes' in Chapter 5 and in a number of respects they still represent salient differing conceptualizations.

Finally, in this sub-section, an approach that is not concerned with moral questions but which implicitly questions by needs/want framework is the reference to "dreams." Kapferer (2015) is the most explicit when he declares the "the notion of luxury is tied to the selling of dreams not wants or desires" (2015, 17; cf. Kapferer and Bastien 2009, 314). Among many others to invoke the link between luxury and dreams or dreamability are Lipovetsky (2003, 23, 73) and Turunen (2018, 3) while Karl Lagerfeld is quoted by Thomas (2008, 168) as saying re handbags that they "make your life more pleasant, make you dream." It is not obvious to me that invoking dreams adds much. It can link to aspirational motivation thus underlying a commercial selling strategy but, as Dubois and Claire Paternault (1994, 69) influentially put it, in articulating what they call "the dream formula," there is a paradox here; an awareness of luxury "feeds the dream but purchase makes dream come true and therefore contributes to destroy it" (without using this particular vocabulary in my book I refer, in effect, to this paradox ([4, 27]).

1.2.2. The categories

The second area of contestation queries my four categories (food, shelter, apparel, leisure). I do admit in the book that I have stretched them (e.g. perfume in the category of clothing (5).

Historically the first three as categories of need are unexceptional, from Plato onwards (46), but it is the inclusion of "leisure" that might be judged more problematic and *it* has been criticized on those grounds by, for example, Robertson (2001). In an early chapter, he acknowledges and draws upon (rather more than is overtly announced) my account of needs and wants. Later, however, he queries whether leisure is a basic human need or is it, rather, a "modern sort of desire." He goes on to hold that my claims that needs are never brute and that desires are more or less necessary means my argument "tends to drift away from the four strands anchoring desires to needs and thus from "real bodies" which supposedly experience these needs" (2001, 141–2). This last phrase alludes to his own argument about what he calls "feelingful meaning" and his critique of mind/body dualism (2001, Introd). As a result I think he is putting his own gloss forward for the purposes of his own argument. I do not see my conceptual argument as resurrecting a mind/body dualism that he wants to challenge but there may here be a reasonable difference of opinion.

I am indeed defensive but I do offer examples to support the case that (comprehensively) interpreted leisure has a universal cultural expression (7). I also observe that it is currently recognized in contemporary analyses of human need (7). Doubtless "leisure" in my scheme of things could withstand further analysis. In retrospect it perhaps seems odd that I didn't refer to Veblen (1970) in this context. And I now think it would have been helpful, after Aristotle (1944, 1333a, 1339b), to distinguish more clearly between leisure as activity undertaken for its own sake (*skole*) from leisure as an instrumental recuperation from activity (*anapausis*); a distinction which could have been developed alongside my argument that luxuries are positively pleasing and not a desire to be free of pain.

I'll mention just one other critique of my categories. Roux (2003, 114), as well as judging that my taxonomy is unable to account for change also alleges that it throws no clarity on current usage. While her judgement is to my mind mis-placed, her allegation does chime with an under-considered aspect of my analysis in so far as it is seemingly out of kilter with common usage. I will address this explicitly in Section 3.

One final remark in this Section: while no-one to my knowledge as followed my book's hubristic ambition, on the conceptual front *Idea of Luxury* has, of course, not monopolized discussion. Earlier works like Sekora (1977) and especially Werner Sombart (1913), both of which I acknowledge, continue to be referenced. Of later work, Appadurai's (1986) account, in particular, especially his widely cited notion of a luxury register, makes no reference to *Idea of Luxury*, although being published only two years later it is probable given publishing time-lags he was unaware of my book. But I will here refer to three different approaches, different both from each other and from mine, though they each reference it.

1.2.3. Other approaches

The first stems from Georges Bataille who is invoked by Calefato (2014, 28), though she is not alone in referencing him – see, for example, Featherstone (2016), Remaury (2005) and Armitage (2022a, 2022b) while name-checked by others such as McNeil and Riello). Bataille (1993, 1985) has an overarching notion of "excess" (or "expenditure") derived from some notion of organic cosmic energy (or "life") which I read as more a Nietzschean *Wille zur Macht* than any Darwinian processes (and Bataille wrote a book on Nietzsche and he engages with him in several of his shorter pieces). "Luxury" figures as an outlet alongside eroticism, work and war (cf. 1993, I, 187; 1985, 118). The profundity that Calefato (2014, 28) claims to see here, I confess, defeats me and that is excluding his late post World War II writing with his remarks that the USSR can change the world and prevail over the U.S.A. (1993, I, 153) and an encomium of Stalin (1993, II, 323). While Armitage's (2023) creative exploitation of Bataille's ideas to characterize the pursuit of luxury as transgressive, is far-removed from my analysis which understandably he does not cite.[1]

My second example is Mortelmans (2005) who offers a complicated and sophisticated semiotic account. While he says I illuminate the philosophical discussions (2005, 498) he proceeds to adapt critically Jean Baudrillard's notion of sign value (1981, cf Xenos (1989) who I cite [32] for another related reference to Baudrillard in the context of luxury). While allowing for horizontal differentiation, his focus is on vertical differentiation whereby "luxury sign-values originate in vertical communication processes between already hierarchically ordered individuals" (2005, 513). The inherent claim is that without a postulated hierarchy there can be no luxury because the "lower" appear to "need to be informed about the codes being used in the interaction" (2005, 512). Thus informed they are able to recognize a product as a mark of distinction and that recognition turns it into a luxury product. While Mortelmans refers to this as a negotiation, it would seem the "higher" must already know what will send the signal that this product will be recognized as a luxury, else why (to use Mortelmans' own example) buy a Ferrari rather (my example) a second-hand jalopy. I detect a circularity in his analysis in that it seems to presuppose what it aims to establish. As I remarked in my book (37), à propos Baudrillard, signposts refer to signposts and not to destinations. More generally, I invoke what I call "naturalism" (33ff) to explain why food and my other categories of need can be "objects" of luxury. This anchors the desires whereas the semiotic approach is too free-floating. Moreover, I believe my analysis brings out the inherent transience of luxury, which accounts for why "luxury" and "necessity" exist on a continuum not as polar opposites.

The final example is provided by Wissing (2019) (cf. Wissing 2018) who puts forward an explicitly phenomenological account. He judges that my book consists of "isolated suggestions" and claims in the book's Foreword that his is the "first monograph specifically focused on luxury in either German or English." Prejudices aside, Wissing's underlying account seems to me to privilege a particular philosophical stance. It belongs in a standard German tradition that links freedom with autonomy, that, post-Kant, judges that what it is to be human is to transcend interest and instrumental reasoning. Hence in iterated versions, Wissing claims luxury is a form of "aesthetic self-awareness" (2019, 7) that characterizes human freedom (2019, 10) so (it is supposed to follow) a luxury has not to be "purposeful" but, rather, "is associated with an exaggerated, extravagant, irrational and superfluous effort" (2018, 81). In Wissing's stipulated sense of the term, the "subject" can feel that in "possessing" a luxury they have put themselves "above rational utilitarian demands" (2019, 87).

Stripped of its particular philosophical baggage, I think my notion of luxury-qua-treat accommodates Wissing's claim that luxury is not phenomenologically purposeful.

It is, of course, for others to judge whether any or all of these approaches have holed my account below the waterline. Not surprisingly I think I'm still afloat.

2. Historical

My treatment of the history of thinking about Luxury was deliberately and explicitly episodic – I made no attempt to provide an exhaustive, comprehensive history. I divide the episodes into two sets of three, constituting Parts II & III of the book. The first set I call the Classical Paradigm. The first of its three chapters is a detailed textual examination of Plato's *Republic* which I use to bring out the socio-political significance of the contrast between need and desires. The second chapter surveys the role of luxury in Roman thought and includes a lengthy comparative discussion of sumptuary law, which is the chapter in this Part that has called forth most comment (e.g. Holleran 2012; Arena 2011). The third chapter deals with that I label The Christian Contribution .This focuses on Augustine and I use it to account for why "luxury" took on the meaning of "lust" and thence its appearance as one of the "seven deadly sins." This meaning persisted into the early-modern period of European history.

The second set of three episodes, under the heading The Transition to Modernity, deals with the replacement of the Classical/Christian paradigm. I coin the term Demoralization to capture this replacement; a term that has been widely adopted. The first of the chapters in this set focuses on seventeenth century discussions of trade and its rehabilitation as a worthwhile activity in contrast to the opprobrium with which it was treated in Classical thought. The next chapter provides a lengthy treatment of the eighteenth century debates in which the pursuit of, and desire for, luxury establishes itself as a realistic depiction of how humans actually behave and which also highlights the positive effects of consumption for social and individual well-being. My discussion is widely cited with my subsection on Hume (142–52) generating especial attention (see, e.g. Susato 2015, Cunningham 2005) but on which subsequently I have done considerable work, especially on David Hume and Adam Smith (some now collected in Berry 2020). Although Clery (2004, 180 n4) judges that my historical account of eighteenth century ideas is "rather less incisive" than provided by Sekora (1977) (both Clery and Sekora are predominantly literature scholars).

The last chapter changes tack and deals with what I call the Historicity of Needs. It considers the argument of Adam Smith (who was also a prominent presence in the previous chapter), to set-up a discussion of Hegel and Marx, who provide grounds for challenging the positive account of luxury established in the eighteenth century.

The episodes are of course primarily concerned with ideas or concepts. I'm offering in these two Parts a sort of intellectual history so when Smith (2002, 64), for example, says I am "not wholly successful at getting beyond the boundaries of the intellectual debate" then that doesn't address my purpose. Smith like Peter McNeil and Giorgio Riello's recent book is concerned with what they call "a very materialistic approach to luxury" (2016, 2) by which they mean not Marx's but "objects"(another recent edited volume identifies its approach as a "biography of objects" [Grewe and Hofmeester 2016, 308]). This of course is a perfectly reasonable approach and marks a difference from the more analytical intellectual history I pursue (the same applies to Maxine Berg's (2005) work, with her notion of "semi-luxury").

I think my episodic discussions still stand up. My chronology has been criticized so, for example, Peck (2005, 8) while accepting my term "de-moralization," and using me as a source for quotation, argues the process started in Jacobean England. But by my calling them episodes I was not committing myself to any strict time-line. And I never committed myself to denying that "moralized" vocabulary disappeared (and have openly acknowledged that in post *The Idea of Luxury* writings [e.g. Berry 1999]).

I would of course in retrospect have done some things differently and even given my episodic approach there are "gaps." In retrospect some do suggest themselves. I'll mention four.

1. Given – I think justifiable- space devoted to the Stoics I ought to have noted their main rivals the Epicureans. I didn't do this originally because in the context, Epicurus' concept of *ataraxia* conveys effectively the same message as the Stoic *apatheia* with regard to the worthlessness of luxury and an advocacy of the "simple life." However, it is the case historically that the Epicurean legacy, especially as promulgated by Lucretius, and together with a less strict meaning of pleasure (for Epicurus it was synonymous with absence of pain), Epicureanism came in Christian thought to be a "by-word for moral degeneracy" (cf Jones 1989, 114). And partly against that backdrop, Epicureanism played a role within early-modern "demoralization" debates. Aside from my deliberate choice of an episodic approach, my excuse for not discussing that role is that it was not directly apt to my chosen focus on the seventeenth century debates on trade and commerce, though I could, indeed, have been more forthcoming on why those debates were my focus (cf 104). Furthermore given I do invoke Hobbes it would have been appropriate there to recognize why contemporaries judged him negatively as an Epicurean.
2. As noted, one of my episodes is the Christian Contribution and David Cloutier (2015, 49n)] in his explicitly Christian re-moralized critique of luxury makes ample and generous use of my book generally though upbraids my book for being "slim on

Christian resources." That is fair comment in as much as I don't discuss Aquinas or Scholasticism more generally but, as explained, I did devote attention to Augustine, along with more briefly Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, to identify a key source of the link between luxury, lust and misogyny.

3. Alison Scott (2015, 2) (albeit she kindly calls my book "seminal") says I move swiftly over the Renaissance. While Kovesi (2018, 4 n4.) reproves me because I omit discussion of the early-modern period by which she means the Renaissance. Indeed I think the Renaissance could well have been an episode. Its inclusion would have enabled me to say more about ideas of magnificence and their relation to luxury, which I only touch upon on in my discussion of ostentation in the opening conceptual chapter. Kovesi herself, reiterating an earlier expression (2018, 10; cf 2015, 33) argues that the neologism *lusso* was coined by Leonardo Dati in 1441 to identify a new phenomenon of consumption and what, in a closely related discussion, Howard (2018) calls the "utility of wealth" (2018, 54). The argument is that this term was distinct from the Roman usage, where *magnificentiam* was linked to public display (in my book I quote Cicero precisely to that effect [84]) as well as from its medieval expression where it had become a synonym for lust (something I discuss at some length in my chapter on the Christian Contribution). Luxury, Kovesi proposes, became placed alongside magnificence (2018, 13). However, as she acknowledges, the Roman negative usage resurrected itself so this era may indeed be "episodic."
4. Given the territory covered are there misplaced emphases? Two candidates come to mind. Though I make some defensive/apologetic remarks at the beginning of the chapter on Plato, Aristotle could perhaps have been given more space since his historical legacy is crucial. But I chose Plato because he most clearly exemplifies my "hypothesis" about needs, wants and political order but Aristotle could also have played that role albeit less crisply. The second case is Rousseau, who along with Aristotle I openly admit in the opening paragraph of my Preface could have been given more attention. While Rousseau's *First Discourse (on the Sciences and Arts)* is perhaps undersold, Smith is arguably oversold in the eighteenth century chapter given the role he plays in later chapters.

I now address some wider consequential issues.

3. After *the idea of luxury* & implications for the study of luxury

In a subsequent article to my book I coined the term "Re-moralization" (2016). I will not here repeat that discussion in detail. In summary, in that article I identify three streams – Ethical, Social and

Green – each of which disputes what I called in the book (3, 195) the "innocence" of luxury and deals with, to re-appropriate Joanne Roberts, its "dark side." The Ethical critique focuses on how luxury foments selfishness and creates dis-satisfaction rather than contentment. The Social critique focuses on how the pursuit of luxury distorts social values and undermines social trust and solidarity. The Green or ecological critique focuses on the wastefulness of luxury consumption and the damage to the environment created by the imperative to want more.

What I want to pursue now though is the question that why, despite Re-moralization, "luxury" is resilient (indeed seemingly booming) and how that bears on my argument in my book and, in so doing, honor the promise I made earlier (attached to my comments on Roux). According to my definition luxury is an indulgence, permitting painless substitution. Though I take my cue from the assumptions in contemporary advertising yet when seen against both unreflective and commercial usage as well as much academic commentary, my conceptual analysis might seem to sit oddly. That dissonance (or ambivalence) between my understanding/definition of "luxury" and its typical usage hinges on what I can call the instrumental stringency of luxury.

To deal with this particular issue, and glossing the literature, I identify four reasons that can be identified to account for why luxury goods are desired.

i. To project power as exemplified by the magnificence of the court and apparel of Henry VIII as portrayed by Holbein or have at one's disposal a fleet of private jets/yachts scattered over the globe.
ii. To establish status as exemplified by ownership of a Birkin bag or private island.
iii. To demonstrate group membership as exemplified by brand recognition, use of logos etc.
iv. To feel good about oneself as exemplified by self-gift giving.

However, these desires can be fervent; I <u>must</u> exhibit respectively (i) my power; (ii) my "being ahead of the game" or my connoisseurship; (iii) my tribal membership; (iv) my sense of self-worth. Thus understood the reason for having/wanting these stereotypical "luxury" goods is stringent. In line with my conceptual analysis, here any substitution would ex hypothesi be painful (insinuating respectively (i) relative impotence; (ii) loss of prestige; (iii) being an outsider; (iv) quasi-pathological lack of self-esteem). However, if these goods are <u>luxuries</u> then on my account they, by definition, can be easily substituted; stringency is a matter of degree, since, like all desires, those for "luxury" are amendable (cf. 202). If no substitution is acceptable (as when a collector "needs" the missing piece regardless of its relative rarity or relative expense) then talk of "luxury" is inapplicable. This underlines that there is nothing fixed about what makes a good "a luxury" – it is, to repeat, a qualitative refinement. So a Prada handbag (say) can ambivalently be fervently desired or be an indulgence but only in the latter sense is it on my analysis "strictly" a luxury good. From this it follows that what constitutes a luxury is not conterminous with commercially branded "luxury goods"; having a tasty pizza (not dining at The Fat Duck), buying a pleasing trinket (not a Cartier ring), purchasing a "in the moment" dress from Primark (not a bespoke gown from Dior), staying in comfortable hostel (not at the Dorchester) or to use an example from the book (40) hiring a baby-sitter to go to the cinema (not a jet to Mustique) are all equally eligible "luxuries" (cf. Berry 2022a). This conceptual argument is in line with the empirical findings of field work interviews by Mansvelt, Breheny, and Hay (2016). They refer to several times to *The Idea of Luxury* as they depict what they call "life's little luxuries."

From which it might be reasonable to conclude the irrelevance of my analysis to the voluminous literature that investigates the lived-world of luxury consumption. But I can contest that conclusion on two grounds. First, my analysis by rooting desires in four universal needs accounts for the range of commercially identified luxury goods that possess a high level of qualitative refinement. Incidentally this explanation of the range of goods is missing from the alternative accounts of Bataille, Mortelmans and Wissing mentioned earlier. Second, my analysis underpins the truth in the cliché "one person's luxury is another's necessity" (cf 33). But I do now think I should have made those two aspects more explicit and salient.

This leads me into a clarification of my 5-fold taxonomy. Luxuries {e} to repeat are not {a} socially necessary {c} fervently desired {d} cherished but I should have been clearer on the relation to {b} the functional/instrumental tooth-brush category. To pick up an earlier example, while a Rolls-Royce could be a luxury it is, as a car, still an instrumental means of transport or, as just said, a meal at a Michelin restaurant is still a meal. As I argue (23ff), though "luxury" as a qualitative refinement is a painless forgo-able superfluity this does not mean it is redundant. To adapt a scenario from the book (10): if in order get an outcome you desire you need to sign a document and, given the way the world is, then a stick of celery would be useless for that task; you need a writing implement and a Mont-Blanc Meisterstück Solitaire pen could do the job but qua luxury it could painlessly be substituted for any number of alternatives. In that scenario, the Mont-Blanc is not purchased or possessed because it is indispensable or hyper-efficient; simply as an instrumental necessity a ball-point pen could do the job. But purchased as an indulgence, the Mont-Blanc is <u>in that sense</u> something distinct from a ball-point; it falls into a separate category – i.e. {e} on my earlier list. But even as an indulgence, a luxury, like in this case the Mont-Blanc pen, is not useless, just as it is not here an object of fervent desire or a cherished heirloom, let alone a legal requirement. The fact that the Mont-Blanc pen is more expensive than a dime-store purchased pen consolidates my claim, supported by Mansvelt's research, that expensiveness is not a necessary condition for "something" to be a luxury.

My final observations pick up (very briefly) three features of the contemporary literature in marketing, business, advertising and consumer behavior; this is not gratuitous because this literature dutifully, though often perfunctorily, cites my book which nonetheless is some evidence that my discussion continues to resonate.

First: one prominent strain in these discussion is to depict luxury more as an "(hedonic) experience" ("selling emotions" as January 2020 Bain Report terms it) than possession of goods (e.g. among many others Batat 2019; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Yeoman 2011) and increasingly so. I don't think this emphasis discomforts my analysis; my category of "leisure" is elastic enough to accommodate the experiential and hence it can easily fit the positively pleasing "experience" of (say) whale watching in Alaska, which can be a treat rather than a fervent desire but qua the former it can be painlessly substituted for a cruise round the Hebrides. It is, perhaps, worth remarking that any difference between possessing and experiencing is not straightforward (I have an unpublished discussion paper on what might distinguish a "luxury experience").

This leads to my second observation, which concerns the phrase (indeed cliché) that "time" is the greatest luxury. However, it seems to me that this is expression misleading. All it can mean is relatively unconstrained opportunity of choice but that, of course, says nothing about what is chosen or their constraints. And suitably read it can conform to my notion of a luxury as a treat or indulgence – being free (i.e. having "the time") to enjoy a non-commoditized experience like going for a walk to watch a spectacular sunset instead of yet another Zoom meeting. Of course, here and typical of this usage, "luxury" is employed as an abstract metonym. Moreover incidentally, this example can be used to illustrate once more my claim that rarity as well as expensiveness is not a necessary condition for "something" to be a luxury.

The final observation concerns the frequent reference to the "democratization of luxury" (to which, for example Mansvelt et al. among many others refer). I myself (32) use this term unreflectively in glossing Williams (1982) but on subsequent reflection these references, it seems to me, are rather loose and typically confused (I have published these reflections in a recent article (Berry 2022a)).

4. Conclusion

The academic and commercial discussion of luxury shows no signs of decreasing. Indeed the former interest has generated two dedicated journals [*Luxury: History, Culture and Consumption*, *Luxury Studies*] and the commercial commentary as expressed itself in websites and blogs [e.g. Luxury Institute, Luxury Society, Pam Danziger] as well as dedicated annual surveys and analyses by companies such as Bain. Since the *Idea of Luxury* continues on one index (non-exhaustive) to generate about 200 citations annually then the ever-increasing "interest" in luxury suggest the book's analysis still has a role to play.[2] On the presumption that that suggestion has some merit than this paper has been an attempt to contribute to the literature through a statement, re-statement and clarification of my argument.*

NOTES

1. This is one of several pieces by Armitage as he analyses 'luxury' from the perspectives of continental philosophy in contrast to my (effectively Humean) approach (see Armitage 2022a, 2022b).
2. The very first sentence in an article published in 2023 cites *Idea of Luxury* (Böhnert, Blaschke, and Biewendt 2023).

* Earlier abbreviated versions of this paper were delivered at the University of Southampton at Winchester and at the "In pursuit of Luxury" virtual conference. I am grateful to John Armitage and Joanne Roberts for an invitation to the former and Veronica Manlow for the latter.

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