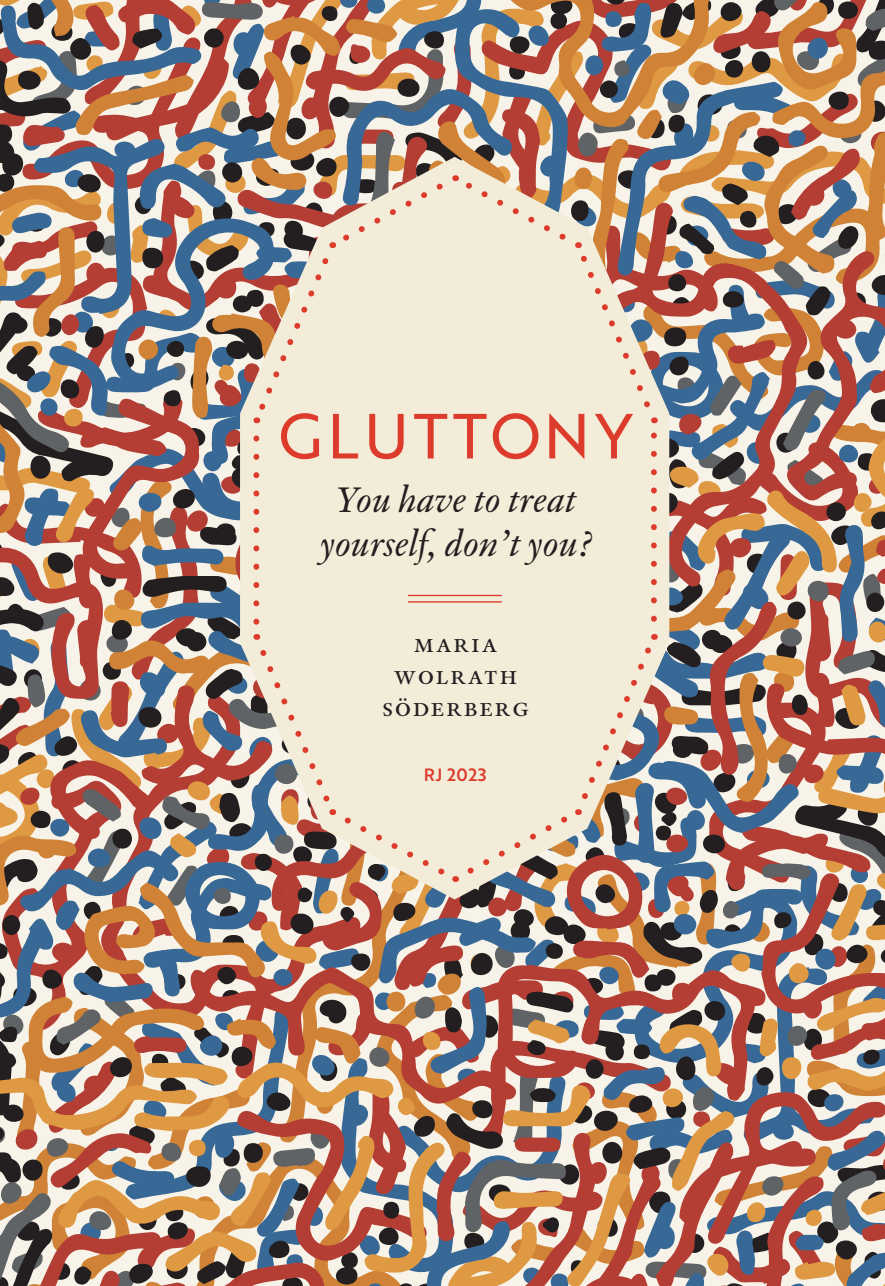
GLUTTONY
You have to treat yourself, don't you?
MARIA WOLRATH SÖDERBERG
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MARIA WOLRATH SÖDERBERG

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Foreword: The deadly sins in our time

Envy, gluttony, greed, pride, lust, sloth and wrath – what is the importance of the seven deadly sins, organised 1,500 years ago by Pope Gregory the Great, in contemporary Sweden? Is devoting seven essays to them really justifiable? After all, we live in one of the most secular societies in the world, a society where hell seems more likely to be the name of a nightclub than a place for sinners. Living out your lusts is not just permitted, it is considered healthy. Letting go, feeling pride, earning money and eating well are also things we value – we treat ourselves, and of course we're worth it!

At the same time, there are indications of a return of morals. The climate crisis and the lifestyle changes that must result from it, increased inequality and people with unimaginable wealth, combined with refugee flows and wars close to Sweden, are contemporary phenomena. They have led to us increasingly talking in terms of morals, at least if we are to judge by the daily press. A simple search of Swedish newspapers shows that the use of the word "morals" has increased tenfold since 2014.

Another sign of the reappearance of morality in public debate is the role played by shame in what is called cancel or call-out culture. There has been an increase in public humiliation, shaming, through the emergence of a new, internet-generated social control. Moreover, online humiliation has become a strategy for various groups to effect change, as a form of modern, shame-driven consumer power. Although most people see dangers in allowing shame to drive public discourse, there are those who argue that it can be a good thing, an effective way of changing people's morals and behaviour.

Good and evil are increasingly referenced in politics, but what some people perceive as good is perceived by others as virtue signalling – and what is that if not pride? Regarding some people as completely shameless can, on the other hand, be seen as part of the same trend. Incidentally, the word shameless was hardly used at all in the early 2000s, but has occurred more frequently since 2014. There are people who argue that we are living in a post-post-political world, a hyper-political era, in which everything is politics and can thus be categorised as good or bad. Involvement is just a click away, but is just as fleeting as love on Tinder. Mass movements die as quickly as they form, and the result is a type of overheated discussion that covers everything but has no depth, which quickly states whether something is right or wrong or good or bad, and where anyone who ends up on the wrong

side of the line can suffer the keelhauling of public opinion.

From this perspective, there is reason to return to the mortal sins and their moral claims. Also, sins and vices are individual; the aim of refraining from sin is personal salvation, not collective change. This emphasis on our own behaviour and our personal morality is symptomatic of the individualism of our time, and the focus on sins thus suits an era that celebrates the ego.

However, the deadly sins have always had an undeniably collective dimension. In 2008, when the Vatican launched seven additional deadly sins, the aim was to adapt them to contemporary global reality and to emphasise the people's social interactions: polluting the environment, morally dubious experiments, bioethical violations, drug abuse, creating poverty, excessive wealth, contributing to social inequality.

It is also worth remembering that the deadly sins are not really about the worst things humans can do, as even in the Middle Ages there were worse things than sloth and lust. Rape and murder were far more serious crimes, but the deadly sins were considered dangerous because they risked enslaving us to our own emotions, destroying our rationality and creating an addiction to the thrill of sin. The deadly sins threatened to consume us. And, like the modern, upgraded deadly sins, the old deadly sins have always referenced the sins and misdeeds that threaten to

tear society apart, and those emotions that threaten to entice us away from the good and the just.

Doesn't this sound urgent? In this essay collection, seven scholars have used their research as a basis on which to tackle a deadly sin, to test the sins' relevance in our time and to discover what they can teach us – about ourselves and about society.

In this essay, rhetoric researcher Maria Wolrath Söderberg writes about gluttony. However, her focus is not unhealthy eating, instead she has turned her gaze on our enormous over-consumption, which is now almost global. Wolrath Söderberg's research examines how we can change to better live in accordance with the resources that are available – how we can break free of dependence and stop the gluttony.

The Editors

Force-fed with toads

Comedian and director Felix Herngren is a guest on the TV programme *Renées brygga* ("Renée's Jetty") and has arrived on some kind of motorised surfboard; it is clear that he likes gadgets. They eat dinner. The musician Uje Brandelius says in, a friendly way, that he likes Felix Herngren but is provoked by his wealth, "No one needs two jet skis." Everyone laughs, and it's almost as if they can't stop. Renée Nyberg is practically rolling under the table. Why is this so funny?

Holidays in the Maldives, walk-in closets, Mercedes SUVs and a second home in the archipelago, surely these are signs of ambition? Besides, isn't treating yourself a human right? But what happens if my gluttony – my consumption – eats up someone else's emissions share?

The Book of Numbers describes how the Israelites, on their journey through the desert, were complaining because they wanted meat. God replied, "You shall have meat – not for one day, not two, but until it comes out of your nostrils." And so huge numbers of quail flew to them and the Israelites feasted until they were punished by a

plague. Gluttony is condemned in several places in the Bible; among other things, it is given as a reason for the fall of Sodom.

When Pope Gregory catalogued the deadly sins, he described gluttony as eating when not hungry, choosing the delicious over the necessary, and increasing your cupidity through good sauces and tempting accompaniments. This sounds like something that quite a few of us do – as a deadly sin, isn't gluttony just a little passé?

What remains is a patronising attitude towards those who gorge themselves on fast food. Gorging yourself and comfort eating are still shameful, but the punishment is self-inflicted – food comas, indigestion, hangovers and obesity. The medieval glutton was also punished by God, as his lard belly would burst and he would be force-fed on toads. God no longer plays this game. Instead, for us, gluttony has become an individual problem – one that indicates a lack of self-restraint. The bad thing about gluttons is not their morals but their characters.

Feasting on someone else's share

Unless resources are unlimited, there is a direct association between gluttony and justice: you take more, I get less. This association has become weaker in our culture, as we believed that we could all have more.

Contemporary gluttony does not, like the gluttony of the Middle Ages, threaten to cast us into eternal torment, but it does threaten creation itself, the Earth. Moreover, consumption is unevenly distributed, and therefore also applies to carbon emissions. The richest one per cent of the world's population is responsible for double the volume of emissions as the poorest fifty per cent. Just think about that.

Comedian Nour El Refai was also a guest on *Renées brygga*. She talked about a childhood of scarcity, one where the fridge was empty and purchases had to be carefully considered. There are still many people in Sweden who live like this, and almost one in ten of the world's population is hungry or malnourished – but many people have become accustomed to an abundance of both food and possessions.

Food accounts for about one-third of global greenhouse

gas emissions. This knowledge justifies the rejuvenation of gluttony as a mortal sin, if starvation does not. But we don't just indulge in meat, endangered fish and avocados, but also in computers, furniture, clothes, cars and travel. After all, there is a limit to how much food a person can eat, but hardly to how much a person can own or consume.

Swedes with a monthly salary of more than SEK 32,400 are among the richest ten percent of the world's population who, combined, account for half of all global emissions. From a global perspective, many average Swedes can thus be regarded as gluttons. Over the last twenty years, a Swede's average economic standard has increased by 60 per cent![1] Still, for those who have become accustomed to a comfortable lifestyle, the thought of not being able to remain in their big house, own two cars or fly off on holiday can be deeply unsettling.

When it comes to income distribution, the relatively well-off have been able to take comfort from the trickle-down theory that says that if we get richer, wealth will trickle down and everyone will be better off. This is not true.[2] Instead, inequalities tend to increase, even in Sweden.[3] However, the downside of our consumption, our emissions, generously trickles onward and upward into our shared atmosphere. Everyone will have to endure the effect of this – and that's the problem.

Scientists now talk about the Anthropocene, the geolog-

ical age in which humans have shaped the Earth's climate and ecosystems, which is usually said to have started with the industrial revolution. Actually, this is unfair to humanity as a whole – only a fraction of us are the guilty parties. Perhaps it should really be called the Phagocene – the age of gluttony.[4]

The gluttonous human

Daniel Pargman, a researcher in human-computer interaction at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, visualised the energy footprint of modern humans in his "Homo colossus" project.[5] He calculated how much energy our lifestyle uses in relation to how much we need to fuel our bodies. If we were to eat all this energy, the average Swede would be equivalent to a twelve-metre-tall dinosaur that weighs thirty tons. You could also talk about *Homo gulosus*, the gluttonous human. We continue to overconsume as if there were no tomorrow.

Why do we find it so difficult to rein ourselves in? Are we simply animals, predestined to gorge ourselves and constantly want more? In one experiment, rats were fed unhealthy treats. The more they ate, the more treats they needed to trigger the brain response to dopamine, the reward substance. This gradually raised the pleasure threshold.[6] Do humans also work like this? With a survival instinct that has brought us a long way, but which has been pushed off course by fossil fuels?

If, for a moment, we assume that gluttony is a funda-

mentally human trait, asking people to abstain is hardly a viable option. The discourse about the climate transition has thus avoided this. One example is the sustainability debater Mattias Goldmann. His book *Klimatsynda!* ("Climate Sinning!"), from 2020, argues that we can contribute to a better climate by indulging our vices, rather than battling them. Treating yourself to the best vegetarian food prepared by the best chefs is a sustainable indulgence, so we don't have to restrain ourselves, he says. This is an extrapolation of the idea behind nudging, which involves making doing the right thing easy and attractive.

One criticism of this is that it is only viable for the rich, but that is fine, because wealthy people have higher emissions. However, there is a more serious problem: switching to more climate-friendly products is not enough. We must also abstain.

The false hope of technological salvation

According to the UN's climate report for 2022, we *must reduce* our consumption if we are to slow global warming.[7] However, we don't hear much about this in politics. Instead, politicians emphasise solutions that increase climate-smart energy production, as well as technological solutions for carbon capture, allowing us to continue with our business as usual.

This conveys false hope. To achieve the climate goals we signed up to, in a way that considers global justice, we should reduce our emissions by more than 20 per cent every year.[8] Over the last decade, we have not done very well at this. Except for during the pandemic, our reduction rate has been just over 1 per cent. We managed 6 per cent in 2019 and peaked at an 11 per cent reduction in 2020. Unfortunately, emissions are increasing again, but the pandemic demonstrated that we can if we must.[9]

Technological solutions are insufficient – mainly because most of what is presented, such as more wind and nuclear power, carbon sequestration in bedrock and electric aircraft, will take decades to develop and deploy at the

necessary scale. We must reduce emissions now.[10] Another reason is that increased energy production, even climate-friendly production, leads to increased use of resources and more waste. Adding to this, we have "Jevon's paradox" – namely that technological developments that increase energy efficiency tend to lead to increased consumption. For example, when the more energy-efficient LED lights were introduced, the use of lighting increased.[11] Technological solutions alone will not be able to save us, we must also change the way we live.

The idea that technology will solve the problem, so we can continue with business as usual interacts with the idea that we are self-serving animals who are incapable of change, perhaps even predestined to greedily grab whatever is available. In turn, this legitimises us not needing to make any effort to refrain from doing so. This is unfortunate – because humans can show restraint. It may not be easy, but it has happened before.

We can make sacrifices for others; the fact is that many people do it every day.

We care for our children and elderly parents, even though this is sometimes difficult. Some people help neighbours, others sacrifice their holidays to put out forest fires, and still others volunteer to work double shifts in healthcare when a virus is running rampant. Entire populations have changed their behaviour when a natural disaster has occurred, or a war or pandemic has broken

out, even without legal enforcement. They mobilised and took care of each other. This is our history. Humans do have this capacity.

In fact, you could ask yourself whether the glutton is the exception.

We can say no

Right now, thousands of people are making changes for the sake of the climate.[12] There are more and more vegetarians, more and more people are buying second-hand,[13] flying is decreasing,[14] people are selling their cars and cycling instead.[15] There are still too few people making these changes, but it's a growing movement, and it's movements like these that change our norms.

The fact is that, to tip a society into new behaviours, not many people are necessary.[16] Experiments suggest that about 25 per cent of a group need to change their behaviour for it to have an impact on the entire group.[17] Probably, a few per cent are all it takes to get something on the agenda and create discussion. This is troubling in one way, as it also applies to behaviours that can be harmful to a society, but in this case it is hopeful. Perhaps we will soon reach a critical mass.

The fact, therefore, is that we can – we can say no. But what makes people take that step?

Working with historian of technology Nina Wormbs, I have investigated how people who have stopped flying

reason about it. We analysed how they justified their decision by looking at 673 survey responses, and the study provided some clues as to what leads to change. The people who abstain from flying for the sake of the climate had long been aware of the climate crisis' severity, but something happened to convert their knowledge into behavioural change. This could have been a tangible experience of climate change, such as the 2018 forest fires or the loss of the well they drew water from. It may also be the birth of a child, providing a longer perspective on the future, or a neighbour who provided inspiration by changing their lifestyle.[18]

This clashes with two ideas that have both had a great impact on the field of the climate transition. One is old, dating back to Plato: knowledge is something you either have or you don't, and having knowledge means that you (automatically) act on it. This suggests that behavioural change can be produced through information.

However, things turn out to be a little less straightforward. Perhaps that's why the opposite assumption has also spread: the idea that knowledge doesn't work, because if it did, we would already have made the transition. This idea has influenced transition work, so that it often focuses on making it easy to do the right thing, without knowledge or even thinking or choosing being necessary.

In our studies, Nina Wormbs and I can see that knowledge does matter, not immediately, but rather as part of a

process in which other things are influential. The type of knowledge also matters. For people who have stopped flying, insights about scale and proportion seem particularly important; they knew they had a big carbon footprint, but not how big it was. They knew that air travel damages the climate, but not that a flight to Thailand is equivalent to far more than a year's worth of emissions for a citizen of the world (assuming we meet climate targets). The latter fact – realising how their own emissions relate to global justice – seems to have been particularly important.

This knowledge thus becomes a moral imperative and more difficult to ignore. This was shocking for many of our respondents. These were people who professed to have a sustainable lifestyle and truly believed they were living sustainable lives, so this knowledge was a painful challenge to their self-image.

Many people who stopped flying were also afraid. The more they took their knowledge seriously, the more clearly they saw the climate threat and the more likely they were to change their lifestyle. This clashes with myths that fear is harmful, or even leads to paralysis. While it is true that powerlessness combined with a lack of options can make a person temporarily passive, in our study (and several others) we see that fear is actually more of a driving force for changing and learning.

The process of transition had also been facilitated by a

social context in which new norms had emerged. Some people had received support for the difficult process of giving up something they loved to do by finding inspiration for other ways of travelling. Many people testified to how stopping flying had been a tough process but, in retrospect, it appeared to be not only necessary for them to live in harmony with themselves, but was also a minor issue – living a good life was possible anyway!

"Because I'm worth it"

Our survey shows that morality and conscience were strong drivers for those who changed their behaviour and said no to air travel. This contrasts with the widespread idea that decisionmakers, transition stakeholders and climate researchers should not moralise on climate issues, and that lecturing people can be counterproductive because it provokes resistance. Underlying this, there is also the idea that people have the right to indulge themselves. Forcing people to refrain from doing so can appear unreasonable – but where exactly is the line between gluttony and indulgence?

Terms such as *flight shame*, *meat shame* and *train bragging* illustrate this strange complexity. In public debate, these terms may appear to have been coined by the climate movement to shame people who fly or eat meat, but when we looked more closely at how the terms emerged, we saw that they were mainly used by those who criticise or reject the demands for a climate transition. You should not need to feel shame, and anyone who demands that you do is behaving badly, so can therefore be dismissed as a moral-

ist or even a hypocrite, because there must be a crack behind this moral claim, a crack where self-interest looms.

Gluttony in an age of finite resources poses moral questions: Should you have more than me? May I consume your allowance? May I waste in your space?

Actually, it is strange that discussing over-consumption as a moral issue is such a sensitive topic, given that we freely discuss other issues in moral terms, such as child rearing or covid vaccines. Someone who prevents someone else from throwing rubbish in the woods would be praised, but when Uje Brandelius points out the absurdity of owning two jet skis, he is just an amusing eccentric.

. . . but others are worse

So why don't we settle for what is necessary or sufficient? Well, perhaps because we don't regard it as gluttony. We perceive our lifestyle as normal.

Comparing ourselves to others is common – this is how we make sense of life, and it helps us adapt socially. When Renée Nyberg asks Uje Brandelius how he deals with his Parkinson's disease, he replies that he uses the "Uje method": think of someone in a worse situation, such as a leper in India, or an ordinary crofter in seventeenth century Sweden.

However, we generally compare ourselves with those who are better off than ourselves. We can call it the "everyone else has more sex" mechanism. Gradually, we move the yardstick for what is reasonable. As we have seen, Uje Brandelius notes that Felix Herngren is filthy rich. "I'm not filthy rich. Last summer I met some billionaires and felt like a pauper," jokes Herngren.

On the whole, we don't usually compare ourselves to billionaires, such as Elon Musk, who has more than two hundred times the emissions of the average Swede.[19] Still,

many Swedes probably dream about the famous Wahlgren family's travelling and their house in Spain. We forget that the average Swede already generates emissions that would require five Earths to live on if everyone was like us.

Comparing yourself to those who are worse is a common way to self-legitimise actions that damage the climate, according to our research on how people justify their climate passivity. Often the comparison is local – we think of neighbours and friends. We also tend to underestimate the climate commitment of our fellow human beings; if we learn that they live more sustainably than we do, it may make us sit up and take notice.[20] A particular bitterness emerges when someone who should have low emissions does things that harm the climate, such as when the climate minister Isabella Lövin flew to climate summits – that allows people to legitimise their holidays in Thailand.[21]

In our study, we could see how comparison with others established a supposedly normal behaviour and made it appear to be a right: if others can fly/eat meat, why shouldn't I?

There are different variants of this rights argument. For example, one could be based on the idea of an "emissions allowance", often shaped more by the lifestyle one is pursuing than by an analysis of what the climate crisis requires. The argument can also be based on a notion of

what you are worth, or you can choose to see a climate-damaging action as compensation for hard work or consolation for feeling down – a little like treating yourself to a pizza after a hard workout at the gym.

Another argument is "I have to be able to treat myself" or "you only live once", where one variant is based on the idea of individual freedom. However, this reasoning seems to have lost an important part of the original liberal idea – that one person's freedom should not impinge on the freedom of others.

Another argument we encountered was the idea that consumers help society to progress, thanks to their consumption. In another study, we even saw people claim that consumption of organic food or climate-smart products gives a plus on their climate account, which they can then withdraw in the form of other consumption. This is known as the negative footprint illusion.[22] However, almost all consumption affects the climate. If you avoid one emission by buying a more environmentally friendly item, it never leads to a plus in your climate account, just a smaller minus. For the climate, making do with the t-shirts you have is always better than buying a few more, even if they are produced with low emissions.

We're just human, after all

It is easy to get upset about how people defend actions that harm the climate, but reasoning like our respondents is deeply human. We like to believe that we gather knowledge, evaluate it, draw conclusions and then act, but even Aristotle recognised that we often tend to look for arguments that justify what we do, arguments that are acceptable in our own specific social context.

This is not a pretty picture of humanity. Still, let's take a more empathetic look – we could see consumption gluttony as a type of addiction. Saint Augustine described gluttony as an insatiable hunger. We need more and more, and eventually we believe we cannot live without what we crave. The need has enslaved us. Perhaps we need a twelve-step programme. This is close to another possible perspective, which is that gluttony is a matter of spiritual emptiness, a sign of detachment, where we have replaced what gives meaning, like relationships, with things. Or that we love things more than people

But we could also see it oppositely: that we love things too little. Everything is replaceable. Things really should

hold more importance for us. I remember how, as a child, I giggled at my parents' loud enthusiasm about our new dishwasher. There was a crisis when the old one broke because we had no buffer for emergency outlays and, once the hard-earned machine had been delivered, mum and dad would sit in front of it on separate chairs and listen to how quietly it washed the dishes. Every day, they were delighted at how clean the dishes were. I understood that they were happy, but I thought they were ridiculous for getting so excited. Now I no longer giggle, I think that I should be happy *every day* about the dishwasher (and the water and the bed and the food and everything else).

Contemporary gluttony can also be seen as a form of infantilisation, in which we have been raised to be giant babies who just want and want. We want policies that protect us from the climate transition, rather than from the climate crisis. This is an inverted perspective on justice. Instead of seeing the unfairness of our extreme share of emissions, we see it as unfair that we should have to refrain from our wants.

Alternatively, gluttony can be analysed from the perspective of identity. This can be seen, for example, in the way people present themselves on dating apps: boats, cars, motorbikes, houses, sunset drinks and gadgets tell us who people are. We consume to be unique, but also to belong. Anthropologist Katarina Graffman and economist Jacob Östberg argue that we are in *hyperconsumption*,

in a selfie world where basic needs are no longer important but identity is everything, requiring expression through consumption.[23] We also go to great lengths to ensure that others look up to us, or perhaps even envy us. It's funny, because if you ask what people want most of all, it's to be loved - and we rarely love those we envy.

Another aspect of consumption is security; owning, collecting and holding on to things can provide some security in a troubled world – but this is not an obvious strategy for dealing with chaos. You could just as well believe that the safest and strongest person is a Snufkin who is used to getting by on very little.

Contentment waits across the gap

People who settle for less have often been regarded as a bit stupid. The philosopher Seneca the Younger pointed this out 2,000 years ago. Contentment, one of the opposites of gluttony, is not a celebrated quality; moderation, another virtue, sounds wretchedly boring. But perhaps a reassessment is underway. Sufficiency is a concept that has been highlighted in research into the climate transition. Based on planetary boundaries and a fair distribution of emissions, researchers focus on how people who over-consume can be made to settle for less and so reduce their carbon footprint.[24] But how can such a necessary change to the norms, or paradigm shift, be encouraged?

One answer can be found in the experiences of people who made changes for the sake of the climate. Things went really well! They said they felt better, were more laid back and discovered new ways of living and being.

But that's not enough, because this is an after-the-fact perspective with little power to convince those suffering the pain of losing something they love (their steak or their holiday on Tenerife). And that feeling of loss is real.

To truly move from gluttony to moderation requires something more, it needs a crack, a gap or a conflict. It is possible to live somewhat harmoniously with moral contradictions – we can go on holiday to Greece while also being aware of climate challenges. This is because we have managed to paper over the cracks using arguments that preserve our peace of mind, using lines of reasoning like thinking of our climate balance sheet, comparing ourself to others who are worse, or emphasising other values that are more important, such as the friendships nurtured by shared travel or the time gained by driving.

When these actions to salvage your conscience break down, something can happen. This could be the sudden realisation that it takes many decades of sorting your rubbish to give it parity with even a short flight, or that you, just an average person, are among the 10 per cent with the highest planetary emissions. The gap between your ideals and your everyday life becomes visible and aggravated. Seeing the conflict between what you do and what you should do is painful, but that pain influences the tendency to behavioural change.[25]

This seems particularly true if your legitimisation strategies have been dismantled within a social context you value and want to be part of. Then you cannot even use the arguments to comfort yourself, because our consciences are shaped by the norms that apply in our "in group". Quite simply, we are social beings.

However, once you have acknowledged the gap and recognised the pain that saying "no" entails and, if you also receive support for your feeling of loss and inspiration from others who have gone before, you can dare to take the step. Then, for many, there is a pleasurable calm: the gap between who you want to be and what you do has closed; something painful has been healed. Perhaps this will not make you happier, but many of our interviewees find a strong sense of purpose in what they do, especially if they have a sense of "togetherness" with others striving for the same thing.

But what about the system?

So far, this text has focused on the changes we can make as individuals; this is important because, according to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, individuals and households control about 60 per cent of the choices that affect emissions.[26]

We have an even greater impact as a group of individuals. It is when we come together, discuss the way we live, and share our changing habits, that norms change. In turn, this prepares the ground for political change.[27]

Public debate can make it sound as if the individual level and the system are at odds. "If the government doesn't take responsibility, they can't expect me to do so as an individual," is a quote from one of our studies. Meanwhile, politicians often place responsibility on the voters – they do not want to restrict people through systemic solutions (at least not when it comes to climate change).

But this is a false dichotomy; both levels are necessary, as is everything in between.

The IPCC, the scientific community and the govern-

ment's own climate policy committee all agree: we must dramatically reduce our energy use and consumption, and politicians have an important role in ensuring this happens quickly and fairly. However, there is one problem – namely that almost no politicians want to admit that our lifestyle has to change. In discussing emissions from our consumption, politicians return to the arguments we saw in our studies: "we're so small that it doesn't matter", "others are worse", "that's someone else's responsibility". Or they argue that the problem simply does not exist, because technological developments like carbon capture and storage or more nuclear power will save us.[28] Transition research calls this response denial: when you have the knowledge but do not act on it.[29]

Why is it so difficult for politicians to talk about restraint? A simple explanation is, naturally, that announcing austerity measures is difficult. However, research shows that politicians tend to underestimate their voters' willingness to change and their propensity to accept systemic solutions. Politicians like to believe that voters are more egotistical than they actually are. When they are told that there is support for a more robust policy, even if it involves lifestyle changes, it turns out that they are more likely to implement this policy.[30]

Many of our respondents want systems that help ordinary people make good, practical choices that incentivise change. A few examples are simpler rail booking systems

and cheaper public transport. Some even say they need help saying no, through prohibitions, such as on certain types of packaging, restrictions such as individual carbon allowances, or high taxes on things like air travel or petrol.[31] However, it is important that citizens perceive regulations and taxes as fair and effective.[32]

Also, anyone who studies historical crises will see that people have an enormous capacity for sacrifice and restraint if they understand that there is a crisis, for example in wartime or natural disasters, when collective efforts are perceived as logical. Research also shows how quickly we get used to restrictions and new rules, even if they require new habits. Again, there are thousands of examples from around the world – switching to right-hand traffic, banning smoking in pubs, water rationing during droughts, banning environmental toxins, rationing petrol during wars, and so on. What we consider reasonable changes over time and in interaction with how we organise society. This is a good thing – in my youth, we emptied the boat's toilet tank into the sea. Nowadays this would feel like the height of irresponsibility and filth.

So there is hope. We are not condemned to be gluttons. We can say no.

If we have enough insight into the crisis, if we see it from the perspective of justice, if we discuss emissions from over-consumption as a moral issue, if we support each other in the painful process of changing habits and,

if we do it together, then we can do it. In the best case, the politicians are with us. If they are, then change can happen faster and be more considered and consistent, but otherwise we have to get together and do it anyway. And, if we do not do this voluntarily and in an organised manner, we are going to have to do it anyway. And then it will be chaotic and painful, because we cannot negotiate with nature.

The return of gluttony as a deadly sin

Labelling consumption that harms the climate as gluttony is a form of re-perspectivation that reveals self-interested drives and injustices. It enables a necessary type of political and cultural critique that is currently strangely absent from the Swedish debate. Internationally, it can no longer be ignored. UN Secretary-General António Guterres is stubbornly and increasingly brutally repeating that the rich must take special responsibility for lowering emissions through policies and reduced consumption. "We have a choice. Collective action or collective suicide."[33]

As I've said, the idea of gluttony as a sin grew from the idea that good things were limited. The link between "when I take more, you get less" disappeared when resources appeared to be infinitely multipliable. Anyone who complained about unfair income, consumption or resources could be accused of snivelling envy (or perhaps Marxism). Gluttony became passé as a deadly sin.

However, the climate crisis has shown that over-consumption leads to emissions that deprive other people of

what they need to live. This is true here in northern Europe and elsewhere on Earth. It affects other people, but also our children and grandchildren. That makes gluttony, once again, a deadly sin. It may no longer be a crime against God, but one against humanity and all other life on Earth.

This essay is based upon research conducted in a project about legitimisation processes for not taking action on climate issues, "Legitimeringsprocesser för att inte handla i klimatfrågan", funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. Notes 18, 22, 28 and 31 include references to publications from the project. If you want support and additional perspectives, listen to the Swedish podcast "Klimatgap", https://shows.acast.com/klimatgap.

Notes

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Riksbankens Jubileumsfond: promotes, inspires and participates

Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ) is an independent foundation with the goal of promoting Swedish research in the humanities and social sciences. The foundation was established through a resolution in the Swedish Riksdag in 1964, when a donation from Riksbanken (the Swedish Central Bank) was approved and the statutes adopted. RJ's establishment was part of the tercentenary celebrations of the world's oldest, still operating, central bank. These celebrations also included the Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel and the bank building on Brunkebergstorg, Stockholm. By establishing a foundation, the Riksdag and the Riksbank hoped to benefit a pressing national cause: scientific research linked to Sweden.

For more than fifty years, the foundation has promoted research in the humanities and social sciences.

In 2022, total funding for research and collaboration amounted to more than SEK 500 million. Hundreds of researchers in these disciplines have received grants for conducting research, building infrastructures and networks, establishing new contacts and participating in conferences and seminars, as well as in public debate.

RJ 2023

The Deadly Sins in Our Time

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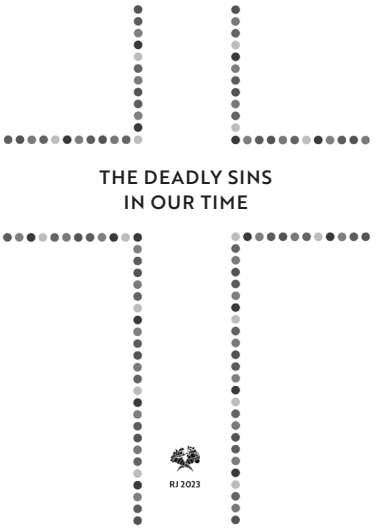

It is not difficult to see our time and our part of the world as gravely afflicted by gluttony. Not only as regards all the food we eat (and throw away), but perhaps particularly the Western world's vast consumerism, where it seems that we cannot have too much stuff. From a global perspective, and considering the climate crisis we have caused, this Western consumption of goods cannot only be considered problematic, but as a deadly sin, one that may finally destroy our ability to survive on Earth. Despite widespread awareness of this situation, breaking old habits is difficult. Most people continue as they always have. Why is this? And who are the people who succeed in changing their behaviour?

In 2023, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond is issuing a collection of essays on *The Deadly Sins in Our Time*. Rhetoric researcher Maria Wolrath Söderberg writes about gluttony as consumption in the shadow of the climate crisis, and examines what motivates the people who make the change, stop flying and consume less.

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