

Chapter One

Introduction: Politicizing Consumption in an Unequal World

1.1 The Moralization of Consumption

In contemporary debates about climate change, human rights, social justice, sustainability and public health, patterns of everyday consumption are commonly identified as both a source of harm and as a potential means of addressing various problems. In turn, consumers are routinely challenged to change their behaviour through the exercise of responsible choice. In this book, we develop a genealogical analysis of the institutional, organizational and social dynamics behind the growth in ethical consumption practices in the United Kingdom. We theorize this phenomenon in terms of the *problematization* of consumption and consumer choice. We argue that the emergence of ethical consumption is best understood as a political phenomenon rather than simply a market response to changes in consumer demand. By this, we mean that it reflects strategies and repertoires shared amongst a diverse range of governmental and non-governmental actors. The emergence and growth of contemporary ethical consumption is, we propose, indicative of distinctive forms of political mobilization and representation, and of new modes of civic involvement and citizenly participation. In developing this argument, we seek to counter the common view that the emergence of ethical consumption activities is a sign of the substitution of privatized acts of consumer choice for properly political forms of collective action. In order to move beyond the terms of this negative evaluation of 'consumerism', we argue that it is necessary to displace 'the consumer' from the centre of analytical, empirical and critical attention.

In this book we develop the argument that the emergence of ethical consumption should be understood as a means through which various actors

seek to 'do' politics in and through distinctively ethical registers. Above all, it is the register of responsibility that is prevalent in the diverse activities that make up the field of ethical consumption. We argue that ethical consumption campaigning is a form of political action which seeks to articulate the responsibilities of family life, local attachment and national citizenship with a range of 'global' concerns – where these global concerns include issues of trade justice, climate change, human rights and labour solidarity. In short, we are interested here in understanding how ethical consumption campaigning seeks to 'globalize responsibility'.

In developing our argument, we take our distance from the two dominant social science traditions of thought about the politics of consumption. In the first, consumption serves as a privileged entry point for thinking about the attenuated moral horizons of modern life. In this paradigm, Marx's account of commodity fetishism is reframed as a hypothesis about the deleterious effects of affluent consumers having no knowledge about the origins of the goods that they consume. On this view, responsible action requires the development of cognitive maps that connect spatially and temporally distanced actions and their consequences through the provision of explanatory knowledge. The moral charge of research on commodity chains and value chains lies in the claim that by reconnecting locations of production, networks of distribution and acts of consumption, the alienating effects of modern capitalism can be exposed. Behind this style of analysis is the assumption that the secret to motivating practical action lies in helping people to recognize their entanglement in complex networks of commodification and accumulation.

In a second tradition of research on the politics of consumption, the emphasis is on asserting the skilled, active and creative role of consumers and consumption activities. Research in sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and human geography has demonstrated that everyday commodity consumption is a realm for the actualization of capacities for autonomous action, reflexive monitoring of conduct and the self-fashioning of relationships between selves and others. Here, consumption is reframed as a field in which ordinary people resist, subvert and creatively appropriate dominant cultural registers of consumerism.

From the perspective of the first of these traditions, the moral issue raised by commodity consumption is the imperative of attending to the consequences of extended networks of production and distribution that people are entangled in by virtue of their actions as consumers (see Wilk 2001). This view is often associated with the assumption that consuming more responsibly is equivalent to consuming less. From the perspective of the second tradition, however, the central moral issue is the acknowledgement of the ways in which consumption offers people opportunities to determine the types of selves and the types of relationships they wish to cultivate. This perspective is much more attuned to appreciating the importance of objects of consumption

to practices of self-making (see Miller 2001c). And these two views are not necessarily opposed of course. The moral force of demonstrating the chains of consequence into which consumers' identities are woven tends to assume that, once informed about these consequences, people have the capacity to take responsibility for changing their consumption activity accordingly, in order to minimize environmental impacts, to boycott unethical companies, or to support fair trade or organic product ranges.

Both of these styles of critical social science stand in a longer tradition of *moralizing* about consumption. Hilton (2004) observes that from the eighteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century, consumption itself tended to be subjected to (largely negative) moral judgement. The rise of modern consumer politics in Europe and North America after 1945 represented a *demoralization* of consumption, in so far as this politics focused on the benefits and risks associated with specific products in a context in which generalized mass consumption was considered a norm. In this respect, Hilton (*ibid.*: 119) suggests that the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century saw 'a discernible trend to remoralize the market through issues of ethical consumerism and globalization'. In this context '[m]oralities of consumption might therefore be re-emerging as globalized critiques of the discrepancies in northern affluence and southern poverty' (*ibid.*: 120).

The dominant motif of the contemporary remoralization of consumption is the revival of a long-standing tradition of opposing the egoistic, hedonistic, self-interested imperatives of the consumer to the civic virtues of the citizen. Schudson (2007: 237) has observed that 'a lot of criticism of consumer culture has been moralistic, judgemental, intolerant, condescending, and, perhaps, muddled'. The muddle involved in the criticism of consumer culture is most evident, he suggests, in this opposition of consumer to citizen. It is a trope that 'offers a narrow and misleading view of consumer behaviour as well as an absurdly romanticized view of civic behaviour' (*ibid.*: 238). The idea that commodity consumption and consumerism are irredeemably individualistic, irresponsible and apolitical is in need of revision, not least in light of the centrality of consumer activism to histories of modern citizenship, civil society and welfare (e.g., Hilton 2003, 2008; Trentmann 2008). As Schudson (2006: 203) suggests, 'in an age of environmentalism, consumer boycotts, and political regulation of the safety of cars and toys and pajamas', the assumption that the world of consumption and the world of politics are guided by diametrically opposed values is 'ripe for reconsideration'. With this in mind, understanding the globalization of responsibility through discourses of 'ethical' consumerism requires us to adopt what Schudson calls a *post-moralistic* approach to understanding the contemporary politicization of consumption. But this requires us to take a detour through some recent moral and political philosophy to better grasp what is at stake in thinking seriously about the concept of responsibility and its relationship to the contemporary politics of consumption.

1.2 Justice, Responsibility and the Politics of Consumption

If a great deal of academic analysis of consumption is implicitly if not explicitly moralistic, then it is also the case that much of this analysis tends to presume that the moral values associated either negatively or positively with consumption are self-evident. Moralizing about consumption depends on simplifying a complex range of practices, processes and relations. Seen from one angle, the active, assertive consumer of cultural studies lore is able to maintain multiple personal relations of care and love through the purchase, exchange and use of commodities. Seen from another angle, they are complicit in the reproduction of systematic inequalities of global wealth, environmental damage and human rights abuses. And it is the latter perspective that has attracted most sustained attention amongst scholars interested in connecting consumption to the concerns of moral and political philosophy (see Crocker and Linden 1998).

Our starting point is that reasoning about issues of responsibility and consumption should not be reduced to a causal calculation of causes and effects. Nor should we necessarily frame these issues in the purely 'ethical' terms of worrying about how affluent consumers in the West should best discharge their obligations to assist those less fortunate than themselves. These two frames – in which responsibility is reduced to a matter of causality and/or a matter of assisting those less fortunate – are the primary registers in which issues of responsibility have been discussed in human geography's so-called 'moral turn' (see Smith 2000 for a review of this field). But we need to keep in view the close proximity between issues of responsibility and questions of justice. The political dimension of justice is hardly absent from this set of debates in human geography, but there is a persistent tendency to think of values such as justice, care or responsibility as externally generated criteria against which the world should be judged and by which action should be guided. In contrast, our concern here is with developing an account of responsibility and justice understood as normative modalities through which practices unfold in the world (see Boltanski and Thévenot 2006).

Debates in political philosophy about *global distributive justice* provide an entry point for framing the relationship between responsibility and consumption. Thomas Pogge (1994, 2001) has argued that rather than reasoning about obligations to those less fortunate than oneself from the perspective of a potential helper, it is more appropriate to acknowledge that affluent citizens of the West stand in the position of supporters and beneficiaries of global institutional systems that contribute to the impoverishment and disenfranchisement of distant others. Pogge's point is that questions of global responsibility are not merely matters of personal morality; they are also issues of *justice*. Or, from a related but distinct position, Onora O'Neill (2000) argues that equal moral status should be afforded to 'distant others'

because, in everyday activities, their status as moral agents is taken for granted. Like Pogge, O'Neill is making an argument not just about moral responsibility, but about equality and justice. Both of these positions are part of a broader field of debates in which the principle of egalitarianism as the core value of justice is framed in terms of particular understandings of responsibility (see Hurley 2003).

The arguments of Pogge and O'Neill are part of a broader philosophical debate about the degree to which the egalitarian theory of justice developed and defended by John Rawls (1972) can be applied to transnational processes and the global scale (see Tasioulas 2005). The pivotal issue in these debates concerns the question of just what range of activities should be evaluated by an egalitarian theory of justice. Rawls (1972: 7–11) originally argued that 'the subject of justice' should first and foremost be thought of as the institutions of society which sustain deep and pervasive inequalities – what he called 'the basic structure of society'. The basic structure included 'the political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements' (ibid.: 7). On this view, then, the primary subject of justice is 'the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation' (ibid.). In making this argument for 'the basic structure of society' as the primary subject of evaluations of justice, Rawls was imposing a restriction on the range of activities that theorizing about 'social justice' should be expected to address:

Many different kinds of things are said to be just and unjust: not only laws, institutions, and social systems, but also particular actions of many kinds, including decisions, judgments, and imputations. We also call the attitudes and dispositions of persons, and persons themselves, just and unjust. (Ibid.)

Rawls did not consider this broader range of activities to be a primary concern of a theory of social justice. For him, these were matters of ethical judgement rather than evaluations of justice (cf. O'Neill 1996).

Philosophical debates about global distributive justice focus on the question of whether it is plausible to think in terms of a 'global basic structure', and therefore whether it is appropriate to extend and revise principles of egalitarian justice to this scale of evaluation (Pogge 1994). Rawls (1999) himself thought that principles of distributive justice could not be extended in this way, and affirmed instead a somewhat paternalist 'duty of assistance' to other peoples. But cutting across positions on this issue of the *scope of justice* there is a debate concerning whether the restriction of questions of justice to the basic structure is actually justifiable. In a radical endorsement of the principle that 'the personal is political', G. A. Cohen (2000, 2008) argues against Rawls that this restriction should be lifted, so that 'non-coercive' structures such as conventions, social ethos and personal choices

also fall under the evaluation of egalitarian principles of justice. For Cohen, principles of justice necessarily make a claim on personal conduct; they require the *site* of justice to be extended beyond 'political' fields all the way into matters of 'ethics'. Against this view, while arguing that the scope of distributive justice principles should be extended globally, Pogge (2000) argues against the idea that egalitarian criteria for assessing institutional structures should also apply to a morality that governs personal conduct as well. In his view, this 'monist' position will actually hinder the development of an overlapping consensus on issues of global distributive justice.

These debates in political philosophy about the *scope* (global or domestic) and *site* ('coercive' institutions of the basic structure and/or 'non-coercive' fields of personal conduct and social ethos) of egalitarian justice are played out in practice in the contemporary politicization of consumption. As we have already suggested, commodity consumption is routinely presented as implicated in wider networks of global inequality and environmental harm. A recurring theme of public debates about what to do about consumption is the problem of where effective agency for changing consumption lies. Is it the responsibility of 'everyone', as consumers, to 'do their bit' and 'play their part' in reducing the unjust, destructive, unsustainable consequences of consumption? Or does attention need to be focused on structural factors, such as the regulation of markets, the monitoring of production and distribution systems, or re-gearing international financial and trade regimes? Arguing the former position might well lead to charges that this lets the real culprits off the hook, as well as imposing unreasonable burdens on socially differentiated groups of consumers. Arguing the latter position might elicit the charge that this passes the buck – that, as citizens, people should be more responsible about exercising consumer choice. In Chapter 5 of this book, we show how both of these sentiments find expression in the ordinary forms of reasoning that are bought to bear by 'consumers' about the responsibilities they are supposed to discharge through their everyday consumption choices. Philosophical tensions concerning the scope and site of justice are, then, very real matters of public debate, campaign strategy and policy design in the contemporary politics of consumption.

The contribution to this set of philosophical debates that most informs our analysis here is that of the feminist political philosopher Iris Marion Young. Young uses the contemporary politicization of consumption as the real-world example with which to work through these questions of the relationship between justice and responsibility. In her work on political responsibility, Young deploys the example of anti-sweatshop campaigns, particularly the movement that developed in the United States from the mid-1990s around this issue, to clarify the types of critical reasoning that might be applied to issues of global injustice. Young's (1990) own retheorization of justice stands in critical relation to the Rawlsian heritage, not least by extending the definition of the basic structure to include a wide range of

non-distributive issues, such as the social division of labour, structures of decision-making power and processes of cultural normalization (see Young 2006). This is a *deepening* of the definition of the basic structure, as distinct from the *extension* of the scope of the Rawlsian principle of the basic structure that Pogge recommends or the *generalization* that Cohen recommends. Against the type of position developed by Cohen, Young reaffirms the Rawlsian principle of two levels of moral evaluation: 'one to do with individual interaction and the other to do with the background conditions within which that action takes place' (2006: 91). She affirms that questions of justice refer primarily to the latter level:

Theorizing justice should focus primarily on the basic structure, because the degree of justice or injustice of the basic structure conditions the way we should evaluate individual interactions or rules and distributions within particular institutions. (Ibid.)

Young therefore refuses to collapse institutional analysis into the analysis of individual interactions. Young's commitment to the idea that the primary subject of justice is the basic structure, suitably extended *and* deepened, helps us to appreciate the task she pursues in her theorization of the modalities of political responsibility disclosed by the anti-sweatshop movement. Her account of political responsibility is a response to the challenge of developing a point of view that can encompass 'the accumulated consequences of the actions of millions of mediated individuals' (ibid.: 96). Young's own response focuses attention on how this challenge is being practically met through innovative forms of transnational mobilization and campaigning.

Political responsibility emerges in Young's analysis as a theme in which questions of justice are articulated with the evaluation of individual-level conduct and interaction in a non-reductive way. Young (2004) develops what she calls a social connection model of political responsibility, in which responsibility is understood to arise from the ways in which different actors are implicated in structural social processes. Her starting point is a concern not to reproduce a discourse of blame and guilt by applying a single standard of justice to both social structures and individual action (Young 2003). Consumer campaigns often invoke the theme of collective responsibility in the effort to motivate individual behaviour change, implicitly falling back on a model in which responsibility is about being held liable for the consequences of one's actions. But staking claims about responsibility on a liability model of responsibility is, Young points out, likely to be counterproductive, and also risks reproducing injustices of its own. In seeking to motivate action, it is not enough to show that someone is connected through their everyday actions as a consumer to wider systems that reproduce harm. Quite the reverse in fact, since on their own, any one individual might not

actually be able to do much about sweatshops on the other side of the world. In many arguments of this sort, an individual consumers' connection to labour exploitation or environmental destruction in distant places seems to depend on a whole chain of mediating causal linkages. These might persuade an individual consumer that their actions contribute, in small ways, to the reproduction of those harms. But they are just as likely to convince the consumer that on their own, as a consumer, there is not much they can do about it (see Allen 2008).

In contrast to this blame-focused understanding of responsibility, Young sets out an understanding of political responsibility that can negotiate between an undifferentiated claim of individual responsibility and an indiscriminating claim about collective responsibility. Young (2007: 179) calls this alternative a model of *shared responsibility*, one in which responsibility is distributed across complex networks of causality and agency (see also Kuper 2005; Barnett, Robinson and Rose 2008). The advantage of the concept of shared responsibility is that it allows a more discriminating analysis of the partial ways in which actors might understand themselves to be responsible, where this in turn is not just a matter of liability or blame but is closely related to an analysis of the capacity to act. Young argues (2007: 181–186) that there are varied 'parameters of reasoning' about responsibility that can be practically applied to link up questions of global justice and personal-political responsibility: responsibility can be understood along vectors of power, privilege, interest and collective ability.

Young's approach to political responsibility enables us to see that responsibility does not, in theory or practice, arise simply from being connected to events, people, places and processes. It is differentiated according to capacities that actors can bring to bear to change things. For example, the question of *power* is one crucial dimension of this sense of shared responsibility – it is important to be able to discern the degree and type of influence that different actors have to change a situation. But responsibility might also be differentiated by the issue of relative *privilege*. So, for example, even actors who cannot reasonably be thought of as causally responsible for sweatshop labour might be plausibly understood to benefit from or derive privileges from these conditions and practices. In short, it might be the case that those who gain privileges from patterns of harm done to others are also those who have most power to act to change these. But it is not necessarily the case. Benefiting from these patterns, causing them, and having the capacity to act to change them do not map easily onto a single location in social space – and an analysis of the politics of responsibility therefore needs to be attentive to how these different dimensions of responsibility are articulated together.

The main lesson we take from Young's work on political responsibility is that theorizing about *global* political responsibility requires more than just telling stories about spatially extensive networks of connection and entanglement.

It also requires avoiding simple assertions of collective responsibility over individual responsibility. Thinking in terms of shared responsibility, as distinct from collective responsibility, leads us to think about the ways in which the power to influence events is widely distributed. In short, responsibility has different forms and is shared among different actors. It is also likely to be motivated by concerns for different moral 'goods'. So, for example, Micheletti and Stolle (2007) re-describe the anti-sweatshop movement from which Young's analysis draws in terms of the articulation of different movement actors who seek to mobilize individuals along four pathways. In this case, the actors include trade unions, anti-sweatshop associations, international humanitarian organizations, and Internet activists; and the individuals are mobilized as supporters of causes, as a critical mass of shoppers, as agents of corporate change and as ontological agents of societal change.

Young's account of the modalities of responsibility disclosed by campaigns for global labour solidarity does more than tell a simple geographical story about the responsibilities that people have by virtue of being connected into wider spatial systems. Her account of political responsibility stresses questions of power and privilege as well as simply connection: some actors bear more responsibility by virtue of having greater capacity to act; some by virtue of being relatively privileged by their position in unequal systems of social relations. In short, taking responsibility is not just an individuated action taken by a single person or by some collective agent. It is theorized in terms of how distributed actions join actors together, feeding into wider networks of cooperation that reach out and influence events elsewhere.

Young's philosophical reconstruction of the modalities of political responsibility assists us in the task of developing a 'post-moralist' approach to understanding the contemporary politicization of consumption through ethical registers. In this book, we seek to develop a complementary analysis, drawing inspiration from Young's framework in order to understand the practical ways in which the politicization of consumption in Western capitalist democracies can be understood as responding to broadly shared concerns about the possibility of living responsibly in a highly unequal world (see also Massey 2006; Jackson *et al.* 2009).

In emphasizing how responsibility is being discursively and practically *globalized* through ethical consumption campaigning, we want to avoid falling into the trap of presuming that consumption has become an ethically charged, politically contentious arena simply in response to secular transformations in the nature of 'modernity'. Our emphasis in this book is on understanding the ways in which the widespread turn to consumer-based forms of mobilization among campaign groups, NGOs, social movements, as well as by policy makers, is the result of the strategic search for effective agents of change in an increasingly complex 'globalized' world economy (Littler 2005). In short, we are interested in understanding how different agents make 'global responsibility' into both a problem and a possibility.

The politicization of consumption in the register of responsibility is not as a substitute for other forms of political action. Rather, this politicization seeks to link practices and social relations of consumption to the transformation of broader systems and social relations of production, distribution and trade (Murray 2004). Kate Soper (2006) argues that if universal criteria of basic needs are to be met on a global scale, then the required changes to patterns of material affluence in Western societies are not likely to be generated through moralistic demands to consume less or consume more responsibly. What is required is the development of alternative political imaginaries which help in redefining understandings of needs, pleasure and enjoyment. The range of practices we examine in this book under the broad topic of 'ethical consumption' deserve, we think, to be considered as practical experiments in developing just these sorts of alternative imaginaries. And they are also experiments in developing the sort of distributed practices of shared responsibility outlined by Young.

We follow Leyshon, Lee and Williams in suggesting that fair trade consumption, organic food networks, sustainable consumption initiatives and other examples of alternative economic activity should be seen as 'practical, day-to-day experiments in performing the economy otherwise' (Leyshon *et al.* 2003: 11). But it might be wise to avoid the idea that experiments of this sort must somehow escape entanglement in a supposedly all-encompassing capitalist monolith to deserve attention as repositories of critical alternatives (see Luetchford and De Neve 2008). To adopt this 'critical' axiom is to lose sight of the political significance of day-to-day performances of values and commitments by deploying a totalizing vision of higher level structural transformation. In insisting on analysing these alternative economic practices as political we are keen to avoid premature celebration just as we are keen to resist the temptations of easy 'critique'. We are concerned in this book with underscoring the extent to which the alternative economic practices involved in the growth of ethical consumption are embedded in organized, strategic campaigns which are focused as much on mobilizing support and making claims of representation as they are on simply getting people to buy this or that brand of coffee or boycott this or that make of training shoe. In short, we start off by recommending Rob Harrison's characterization of what he calls 'ethical consumerism' as a *movement*. Harrison is one of the founding members of the Ethical Consumer Research Association and its magazine *Ethical Consumer* (discussed further in later chapters), and a leading figure in this movement in the UK and internationally. For Harrison, this movement grows out of the widespread adoption of 'market campaigns' by pressure groups and campaign organizations. In market campaigns, 'persuading consumers to act ethically is often just one element of a broader campaign which may involve other activities such as shareholder actions, political lobbying, pickets and non-violent direct action' (Harrison 2005: 55).

1.3 Relocating Agency in Ethical Consumption

Academic and activist discourses of capitalist globalization and rampant neoliberalism have provoked interest in the economic and political potential of various ‘alternative economic spaces’ (Leyshon *et al.* 2003). This includes research on the growth of ethical finance, alternative food networks, the social economy, and alternative trading systems (e.g., Carter and Huby 2005; Amin *et al.* 2002; Hughes 2005; Whatmore and Clark 2008). Ethical consumption is part of this broader flourishing of economic experimentation. In the United Kingdom, the market for ‘ethical’ consumer products has grown steadily since the early 1990s. Consumer expenditure on ‘ethical’ products in the UK almost tripled between 1999 and 2009, growing from £13.5 billion to £36 billion. This includes everything from fair trade and organic food to eco-friendly travel, energy efficient boilers to rechargeable batteries – and therefore reflects a range of ‘global’ issues, from trade justice to climate change.¹ While this growth coincides with a decade of escalating consumer spending, fuelled by credit and rising property prices, organizations involved in promoting this market suggest that the increase is also likely to prove resilient despite the onset of economic recession.²

The growth of academic research on ethical consumption has matched its economic growth (for a thorough review, see Newholm and Shaw 2007). A feature of both academic and popular discussions of the growth of ethical consumption is the widespread assumption that ‘the consumer’ is the key agent of this process. There is a burgeoning literature in economics and management studies on business ethics and corporate social responsibility. This work understands ethical consumption primarily in terms of the role that information plays as the medium through which the ethical preferences of consumers and the ethical records of businesses are signalled in the marketplace (e.g., Bateman; Fraedrich and Iyer 2002). From this perspective, the development of appropriate informational strategies (marketing, advertising, labelling and branding) will assist in overcoming market failure.

Academic research on ethical consumption as a form of political action is also often underwritten by the dual assumptions that providing information to consumers about the conditions of production and distribution of commodities is central to changing consumer behaviour, and that knowledge is the key to putting pressure on corporations and governments. The literature on consumer-oriented activism and policy – such as fair trade campaigns, sustainable consumption and ethical trade audits – often presumes that publicity is the primary means of acting on the conduct of individualized consumers and corporate actors alike. The literature which argues that ethical consumption and political consumerism are distinctively new forms of political practice tends to reproduce the idea that shopping is a key vector

of action in a 'post-political age', narrowing the focus of attention on 'the consumer' (e.g., Cook *et al.* 2006; Hooghe and Micheletti 2005). This sort of framing of ethical consumption reproduces generalizing narratives in which 'traditional' forms of participation – party membership, voting – are supposed to be in terminal decline, and are being replaced by more individualized forms of action, for which buying or boycotting as a 'consumer' has become the paradigm (e.g., Stoker 2006).

This assumption is still at work even in academic literature that sets out to explain the splicing together of consumption practices and various campaign issues in non-reductive ways, and to justify this phenomenon as one worthy of serious academic study. The most important strand of research in this regard is literature that develops the concept of *political consumerism*. We discuss this literature in more detail in Chapter 2. This concept reproduces the assumption that 'the consumer' is a key agent of social change and that shopping is a medium of political action (e.g., Micheletti and Follesdal 2007). The same assumption frames critical analysis of strategies of 'shopping for change', the limitations of which are found to lie in the individualized, consumerized forms of activity through which this sort of action unfolds (e.g., Bryant and Goodman 2004; Guthman 2007; Low and Davenport 2007; Seyfang 2005; Varul 2008; Watson 2007). There remains a deep and intense suspicion that consumerized forms of public mobilization threaten to undermine or substitute for authentic, properly political collective activity.

The academic framing of ethical consumption as irredeemably tainted by its association with the cultural registers of consumerism is reflected in public discourse about the phenomenon, in which the shared assumption is that consumer motivations are the primary driver of this growth. So, for example, *The Economist* magazine has acknowledged the growing importance of the market in green, organic, and fair trade goods and services.³ While paying lip service to the 'noble aims' of this market sector, it expresses suspicion of the idea that markets and consumer choice can or should serve as effective mediums of 'ethical' or 'political' goals – it recommends voting as the preferred means for this.⁴ Likewise, left-liberal criticism of the growth of markets in broadly defined 'ethical' goods and services routinely alights upon the limitations of consumerism as a means of bringing about meaningful political change; expressing doubts that shopping can save the planet routinely slides into the lament that consumerism is replacing citizenship as the primary form of public engagement.⁵

In this book, we contribute to a reconceptualization of ethical consumption which challenges the assumption that 'the consumer' is the primary agent of change in efforts to politicize consumption practices (see Clarke 2008). In one sense, the focus on consumers in research on fair trade, alternative food networks, trade justice and environmental politics has opened out new perspectives on the personal ethical sensibilities that are addressed

in these fields. However, this fixation on the agency of ‘the consumer’ – either positively or negatively evaluated – often fails to credit the role of campaign organizations as prime movers in the politicization of consumption. We suggest that in order to understand both the range of roles and motivations people bring to their engagements with ethical consumption campaigns, or the ways in which campaigns seek to enrol supporters, the concept of ‘the consumer’ might not throw much explanatory light on the set of processes involved in the growth of the variety of alternative economic practices subsumed under the name ‘ethical consumption’.

So, just what is *ethical consumption*? What is known as ethical consumption in the UK bears a close resemblance to what European scholars and activists have called ‘political consumerism’ (Micheletti *et al.* 2004; Stolle *et al.* 2005), and part of the phenomenon that Littler (2008) has called ‘radical consumption’. Ethical consumption is in important respects distinctive from anti-consumerist movements (Littler 2005; Zavestoski 2002) such as the voluntary simplicity movement (Cherrier and Murray 2002; Shaw and Newholm 2002) or ‘No Logo’ forms of anti-globalization campaign (Klein 2000). Rather than rejecting the persona of ‘consumer’, ethical consumption campaigning represents a distinctive strategy for connecting the politics of consumption with the practices of being a discerning, choosy, responsible consumer. It is therefore more aligned with slow food movements (Andrews 2005), although often more populist in its methods and objectives, and more closely aligned to development and green political movements. Ethical consumption campaigning is also distinct from the related and growing area of ethical investment (Carter and Huby 2005). Ethical consumption campaigning seeks to embed altruistic, humanitarian, solidaristic and environmental commitments into the rhythms and routines of everyday life – from drinking coffee, to buying clothes, to making the kids’ packed lunch. But it must also, we suggest, be analysed not simply in terms of the changes to patterns of consumption that it succeeds in generating. Ethical consumption, understood as an organized field of strategic interventions, seeks to use everyday consumption as a surface of mobilization for wider, explicitly political aims and agendas. Thus, it marks an innovation in modes of ‘being political’ (Isin 2002), one in which people are encouraged to recognize themselves as bearing certain types of *global* obligation by virtue of their privileged position as consumers, obligations which in turn they are encouraged to discharge in part by acting as consumers in ‘responsible’ ways. The sense of ‘global’ here is itself open to multiple interpretations in different campaigns – it encompasses not only activities premised on the assumption that consuming certain goods can assist distant actors or help in reshaping international trade, but also activities that seek to reshape highly localized practices in order to minimize ‘impacts’ or ‘footprints’ that contribute to broader environmental processes.

It is worth underscoring just how diverse the activities that fall within the field of 'ethical consumption' actually are. Micheletti (2003) suggests that what she calls 'political consumerism' involves some combination of three forms of action: boycotting; positive buying, or 'buycotting'; and 'discursive' action of various sorts, from culture jamming to publicizing working conditions in distant sweatshops, in which information about consumption is circulated. Even this simple categorization indicates some of the diversity and complexity of ethical consumption. The Ethical Consumer Research Association (ECRA), the leading ethical consumption campaign organization in the UK, works with a similar sort of categorization (Harrison 2008). For them, ethical consumption includes different forms of action: boycotting, positive buying, anti-consumer activity, buying the most ethical product in a particular sector, or relationship purchasing. In turn, different sorts of commodities might be the focus of ethical consumption activity (see Crane 2001): boycotted goods might include environmentally destructive products (e.g., aerosols) or high-profile corporations (e.g., Nestlé, Esso); positive buying, perhaps exemplified by fair trade, might focus on coffee or chocolate; best-in-sector buying depends heavily on labelling schemes, and might extend from food products to energy efficient washing machines; relationship buying might include vegetable box schemes or shopping on the local high street. And in turn, different sorts of economic actors help to facilitate ethical consumption: specialist corporations branded as 'ethical', such as The Body Shop; mainstream retailers, such as Gap, who in 2006 launched, alongside American Express, the *Product (RED)* range, in which global brands were used to raise awareness and money to help finance AIDS programmes in Africa; as well as a range of alternative business models that have emerged in the past two decades. And ethical consumption might be considered as distinct from, but related to, the growth of ethical banking and investment, and distinct from, but again might be articulated with, the development of corporate social responsibility initiatives.

It is also worth underscoring the point that the politics of ethical consumption activities is far from straightforward. It includes anti-consumerist and culture jamming practices that use media campaigning against 'consumerism' (see Littler 2005). It might draw on traditions of downshifting and voluntary simplicity (Shaw and Newholm 2002; Cherrier and Murray 2002). In these cases, it is consumerism and consumption *per se* that are targeted as objects of political action. The use of purchasing to positively support particular causes is distinct from this model of ethical consumption. In this case, all sorts of political campaigns now use consumer goods to raise funds and awareness. Some of these campaigns are explicitly focused on transforming economic practices of which consumption is part. The fair trade movement draws on the long-standing traditions of the cooperative movement. This movement is distinct from the union-based movements that have emerged since the 1990s, often focused on anti-sweatshop campaigns, and

frequently focused on garment and textile sectors (see Hale and Wills 2005). These two organizational fields are, however, increasingly drawn together, not least as fair trade campaigning moves beyond a focus on food to other commodity sectors, such as fair trade cotton (e.g., Egels-Zandén and Hyllman 2006). And at the same time it is possible to detect a 'consumerist turn' in the strategies of anti-sweatshop campaigners (Johns and Vural 2000; Prasad *et al.* 2004; Traub-Werner and Cravey 2002). This is just part of a broader shift to adopt consumer-oriented strategies by a broad range of campaign organizations. In increasing numbers of sectors, labelling and monitoring of product ranges is becoming an established voluntary practice (Guthman 2007; Van den Burg *et al.* 2003). Ethical consumption also extends to recycling and waste campaigns, promoted by national governments and administered by local authorities (Bulkeley and Gregson 2009).

In short, just what counts as ethical consumption is itself open to some debate. On the one hand, ethical consumption might be defined in relation to particular objects of ethical concern. In this sense, consumption research defines a variety of issues as 'ethical', including environmental sustainability, health and safety risks, animal welfare, fair trade, labour conditions and human rights. On the other hand, this focus on consumption as a means of acting in an ethical way toward particular matters of concern extends across various forms of practice, including shopping, investment decisions and personal banking and pensions. The diversity of objects and practices that might constitute ethical consumption is underscored by considering the diversity of organizational forms that might be defined in this category: ethical trading organizations, lobby groups, fair trade campaign organizations, cooperative movements, consumer boycott campaigns, 'No-Logo' anti-globalization campaigns, local food markets and charity shops.

Even this short overview indicates the high degree of overlap between organizations, the diversity of strategies adopted and issues addressed, and the variability of scales at which ethical consumption activities operate. It is this complexity that leads us to adopt a genealogical style of analysis, one which seeks to identify the emergence of a shared set of strategic problematizations which seek to mobilize a diverse range of motivations, incentives and desires in developing large-scale forms of collective action that are able to induce meaningful change in the patterns of conduct of powerful economic and bureaucratic systems.

In adopting this genealogical perspective, we are seeking to avoid the moralism that characterizes much of the critical social science literature on ethical consumption. As we have already noted, some commentators identify new forms of political agency in the growth of ethically motivated exercise of conscious consumer choice. But this can just as easily be taken to confirm a shift away from active citizenship prompted by a broader process of individualization, and as evidence of a process of disengagement from political processes which are still taken to be the norm – deliberative, representative

forms of public action. In a great deal of critical analysis, the benchmark of properly 'ethical' consumption remains the virtuous figure of the anti-consumer – voluntary simplicity and more recently the growth of the slow food movement easily come to serve as reference points for practices which are less compromised with markets and the culture of consumerism. The moralization of consumption therefore persists in analysis of the growth of ethical consumption, and is evident in the degree of suspicion directed towards consumer-based forms of social activity, often interpreted as indices of consumerist individualism or neoliberal hegemony. This suspicion is an index of the strong hold that a particular image of consumption continues to have on the academic imagination: consumption is often thought of as synonymous with conspicuous display and spectacle, if not outright hedonism; and it is routinely reduced to the discrete act of purchasing. This view of consumption is rooted in a theoretical and empirical imagination that runs from Veblen through Horkheimer and Adorno, to Galbraith, on to Baudrillard and through to Bauman. What gets lost from view in this picture is the ordinariness of much of the consumption that people do, and the politics of this ordinariness (Hilton 2007b). Our argument in this book is based on the assumption that it not possible to understand the dynamics of ethical consumption initiatives, whether from the strategic perspectives of campaign organizations or from the perspective of the people they seek to enrol into their projects, without appreciating the mundane and ordinary dimensions of consumption.

Our argument is that appreciating what Hilton (*ibid.*) calls the 'banality of consumption' goes hand in hand with bringing into view the ways in which ethical consumption is related to the changing dynamics of civic participation. In their review of changing patterns of civic engagement in the UK between 1984 and 2000, Pattie *et al.* (2003b: 631) found that 'people's participation in conventional political activities (such as voting, contacting a politician and attending a political meeting) has declined, whereas participation in consumption and contact politics (boycotting goods and contacting the media) has grown significantly'. The question that arises from this finding is whether this reflects a substitution of publicly oriented collective participation by identity-based, individually motivated and privatized forms of concern. The answer to this question depends in part on just how ethical consumption is understood and explained. As we have already suggested, in the burgeoning literature in economics and management studies on business ethics and corporate social responsibility, ethical consumption is understood primarily in terms of the effective consumer demand as the medium through which the ethical preferences of consumers and the ethical records of businesses are signalled in the marketplace. From this perspective, markets are perfectly capable of expressing people's ethical, moral or political preferences, just as long as appropriate informational strategies are developed (e.g., marketing, advertising, labelling and branding). This is also

a background assumption in many policy initiatives on sustainability, in campaigning around the environment, and across the range of 'ethical' trading initiatives, where it often seems to be supposed that the main challenge is to provide people with more information in order to raise awareness of the consequences of their everyday consumption choices – then they will magically change their behaviour.

The information-led understanding of ethical consumption misses out a great deal of what actually shapes people's consumption activities (Hobson 2003; Jackson 2004). And it manages to reproduce a narrowly utilitarian conceptualization of ethical decision-making by consumers, companies and public organizations alike (see Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm 2005). We question whether this prevalent understanding of ethical consumption provides an accurate picture of people's 'ethical' motivations for engaging in such activities, and also question whether the 'political' significance of ethical consumption lies simply in the signalling of aggregated demands in markets for consumer goods. On both of these grounds, the information-based model of ethical consumption as a consumer-driven process interprets this phenomenon far too narrowly.

The main example of ethical consumption we deal with in this book is fair trade consumption. The public presence of the movement advocating fair trade has grown considerably in the UK since the early 1990s (see Anderson 2009). This presence is evident not only in the growth of the market for fair trade products, but also in terms of awareness of the issues at the heart of the fair trade movement. The relationship between growing the market for fair trade goods and public communication is a pivotal aspect of 'market campaigns' such as fair trade. In this respect, the 'mainstreaming' of fair trade, as products such as fair trade tea, coffee and chocolate or fair trade cotton clothing become established in leading high street retail chains such as Sainsbury's, the Co-op and Marks & Spencer, is a process whereby the public reach of fair trade messaging is expanded. For example, in 2009, leading chocolate brands including Cadbury's *Dairy Milk* and Nestlé's *Kit-Kat* also became accredited fair trade products. This represents one of the most significant projections of fair trade into the public realm. *Dairy Milk* is the UK's best-selling chocolate bar, meaning that the distinctive fair trade logo 'will be printed on the 300 million chocolate bars sold a year, and appear in 30,000 shops where the product is sold.'⁶

Fair trade is an international movement for social and environmental justice that develops alternative economic spaces of production, trade, retailing and consumption (Lamb 2008). The goals of the fair trade movement include improving the livelihoods and well-being of small producers; promoting development opportunities for disadvantaged groups of producers, in particular women and indigenous peoples; raising awareness among consumers of the negative effects of patterns of international trade on producers in the global South; campaigning for changes in the regulatory regimes

governing international trade; and the protection and promotion of human rights. The international fair trade movement consists of certification agencies, producer organizations and cooperatives, trading networks and retailers. In this book, we use different aspects of fair trade consumption activity in the UK to elaborate on how ethical consumption campaigning scrambles some settled understandings of the 'who', 'where' and 'how far' of citizenly acts (Barnett, 2010).

Fair trade is not an example of anti-consumerism. It is the exemplary market campaign. Fair trade campaigners do not want people to stop drinking coffee, or to eat less chocolate. They want us to buy coffee or chocolate that is produced and distributed by organizations and networks that ensure the producers receive a fair price to give them a sustainable livelihood. Looked at in purely economic terms, however, the impact of fair trade is still only a pinprick on unequal patterns of world trade. But maybe that is missing the point. As we show in Chapter 6, for people actively involved in fair trade consumption activities, the point to 'doing' fair trade is not wholly about the aggregate market effect of lots of individualized purchases. Although the potential impact on producer communities is a significant factor in people's motivations, engagement with fair trade consumption is often a way of aligning quite abstract commitments with the routines and rhythms of everyday life. In turn, for the organizations behind the growth of fair trade, consumer-based activism is an important way of raising awareness about issues, establishing the legitimacy of their claims and the validity of their own arguments, and generating 'demonstration effects' in support of alternative trading models. In the UK, companies and organizations such as Traidcraft, the Fairtrade Foundation, Oxfam, Christian Aid or the Co-op are all trying to exert influence over governments and corporations. It is very important for them to be able to show that they have broad-based popular support for the sorts of changes that they are promoting. Being able to demonstrate a growth in sales of fairly traded products is, then, one way for these organizations to legitimize their standing in a wider public realm, as well as validating themselves to members and supporters.

In this book we use empirical analysis of fair trade campaigning and other ethical consumption activities to develop an understanding of the ways in which contemporary forms of consumer-oriented activism seek to provide pathways to participation for a wide range of social actors, whether as individuals differently placed in socio-economic or institutional relationships, or public and private organizations embedded in different forms of economic, educational or civic activity. Some of the most successful contemporary campaigns for social justice – around labour, human rights and environment – use consumer-oriented strategies to raise awareness, mobilize support, and exert pressure on powerful actors. The significance of ethical consumption campaigning needs to be assessed not primarily in terms of the aggregate impact of individualized consumer choices on overall

market trends, but rather in terms of the reorientation of the ways in which the mobilization of support, resources and legitimacy for political campaigns is sustained.

From the perspective which we develop in this book, the emergence of ethical consumption is not best explained by people becoming more ethically aware by virtue of learning about the extended consequences of their actions, and nor are changes in behaviour just responses to being provided with information about alternatives. Rather, this trend is the outcome of organized efforts by a variety of collective actors to practically re-articulate the ordinary ethical dispositions of everyday consumption. There are two dimensions to this process of practical re-articulation. First, there is a process of *discursive* engagement with the frames of reference that already shape people's consumer behaviour. Campaigning materials and modes of address that are sensitive to the experiential horizons of ordinary consumers are more likely to succeed than those that suppose that consumers normally lead constricted, self-interested, moral lives. Second, there is the process of using various *devices* to actually enable people to readjust their consumption behaviour. Recycling boxes are an example of this; so is the labelling of food and other products; vegetable box delivery schemes are another; direct-debit donations to charities another. In analyzing both aspects of ethical consumption campaigning in this book, we will see that the 'the consumer' is not so much a locus of sovereignty and agency, as it is a rhetorical figure and point of identification only contingently related to the politicization of consumption.

1.4 Problematizing Consumption

We have already indicated that there is a range of academic approaches to studying ethical consumption. And we have already indicated that this book seeks to reconfigure the way in which this phenomenon is theoretically framed. The most productive theoretical framework, developed primarily by Scandinavian-based political scientists, interprets ethical consumption practices as a set of political practices, under the name political consumerism (Micheletti 2003). We discuss this approach further in Chapter 2. One feature of this approach is its reliance on a tradition of grand sociological theory of globalization and modernity. In literature on political consumerism, informed by theories of the risk society and reflexive modernization, the growth of what we are calling ethical consumption is presented as the expression of a broad societal shift away from 'traditional' forms of political participation. From this perspective, ethical consumption appears to be a distinctively novel innovation in political practice, one that stands out against and represents a rupture with norms of 'traditional' politics of parties, elections and interest-group pluralism. This interpretation is, despite

its own orientation, prone to be co-opted into academic diagnoses of civic apathy and disengagement. Ethical consumption is just as easily incorporated into narratives of ‘neoliberalization’, in which it is framed around an analysis of the veiling and unveiling of commodity fetishism in more or less successful ways (e.g., Guthman 2007; Hartwick 2000; Hudson and Hudson 2003; Tormey 2007).

In this book, we seek to avoid the style of grand theorizing associated with narratives of modernity, postmodernity, neoliberalism and advanced liberalism. We seek instead to put to work an analysis of what Michel Foucault called ‘modes of problematization’. Foucault suggested that ‘the study of problematizations’ was ‘the way to analyze questions of general import in their historically unique form’ (Foucault 1997: 318). Analysing practices in terms of their mode of problematization implies, then, asking ‘how and why certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes) became a *problem*’ (Foucault 2000: 171). The important point about Foucault’s approach from our point of view is that it implies thinking of problematizations not as effects of historical tendencies or conjunctural events, but as indicative of definitive, strategic interventions (ibid.: 172). It is this emphasis that we want to work through in this book, by focusing on the sorts of strategic interventions through which everyday consumption activities have been problematized in specifically ethical registers of global responsibility, and by looking at the practices through which this problematization has been formed and disseminated (cf. Foucault 1986: 11–12).

Our genealogical analysis of the problematizations through which ethical consumption campaigning operates is divided into two parts. Part I, *Theorizing Consumption Differently*, consists of three chapters setting out the theoretical approach, building on Foucault’s notion of modes of problematization, which informs our understanding of consumption. Part II, *Doing Consumption Differently*, consists of three chapters which work through in a more empirical register the analysis of problematizations and practices of everyday consumption. But these two sections are not sharply divided between the theoretical and empirical. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 critically elaborate on theoretical traditions working in a genealogical vein indebted to Foucault, and these elaborations are informed by our empirical analysis of the political rationalities of ethical consumption campaigning, which suggest that ‘strong’ hypotheses about neoliberal subjects and advanced liberal governmentality might be in need of some revision. And the more empirical chapters, Chapters 5, 6 and 7, work through the conceptualization of ethical problematization we develop in these earlier chapters.

Chapter 2 develops an argument with the literature on governmentality to build a genealogical conceptualization of the growth of ethical consumption initiatives in terms of strategic interventions which aim to articulate various political programmes (e.g., environmentalism, trade justice, human rights) with the everyday contexts of care-giving and social reproduction.

This argument is informed by a careful analysis of the strategic deployment of the rhetoric of consumer power in ethical consumption campaigning around a double rhetoric of *global responsibility*: simultaneously problematizing people's consumption habits by reference to their distant consequences, and exhorting their potential agency to contribute to transformative projects by exercising choice more responsibly.

Chapter 3 discusses practice-based conceptualizations of consumption. This discussion is informed by empirical analysis of the ways in which ethical consumption campaigns aim not only to provide information to consumers, but also aims to *problematize* everyday practices of consumption by shaping the terms of public debate and by getting people to talk reflexively about their habits and routines.

And in Chapter 4 we further develop this focus on modes of problematization, arguing that a key objective of ethical consumption campaigning is to discursively problematize everyday consumption. The rhetoric of 'choice' and 'responsibility' is central to this discursive problematization of everyday consumption. Building on this argument, we develop a case for understanding the ways in which ethical consumption initiatives deploy information for two purposes: first, to generate *narratives* in both the public sphere and in everyday life, in order to encourage debate about issues of environment, climate change, sweatshops, or trade justice, etc.; and, second, to establish the legitimacy of organizations as *representatives* of popular concerns on these issues.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 work through in an empirical register the argument about the problematization of consumption through strategic interventions by various actors. Each of these chapters draws on empirical research undertaken in and around the city of Bristol in the south-west of England, involving focus group research investigating the positioning of ordinary people in ethical consumption discourse, interview-based case-study work on local fair trade networks, and ethnographic research on local fair trade campaigning.

In Chapter 5, we analyse talk-data generated in focus groups to gloss ordinary people's understandings of ethical consumption. This chapter shows that people have high levels of awareness of various issues related to the 'ethical' aspects of everyday consumption, and shows too that people bring a range of ethical concerns and competencies to their everyday consumption practices. These range from the relatively personal responsibilities of family life to more public commitments like membership of particular faith communities, political parties, and professional communities. This chapter emphasizes the ways in which people engage critically and sceptically with the demands placed upon them as 'consumers' by campaigns and policies promoting ethical and responsible consumption. Theoretically, this chapter further elaborates on how the discursive problematization of consumption discussed in earlier chapters is negotiated in reasoned forms of

talk-in-interaction, in which people consider the degree to which various ethical maxims could and should hold for them.

Chapter 6 further develops the argument that organizations involved in ethical consumption campaigning seek to engage and extend people's existing commitments. It elaborates on how people adopt ethical consumption practices as a supplement to deeper forms of identification, membership and participation. Being involved with fair trade, as a campaigner, shopper or supporter, emerges from this analysis as just one aspect of more extensive practices of 'ethical selving' (Varul 2009). In this chapter, analysis of research on self-identified 'ethical consumers' who are actively involved in local fair trade networks in and around Bristol shows that involvement in ethical consumption is an adjunct to stronger forms of commitment and participation in specific communities of practice. We find little evidence that people adopt ethical consumption activities as an alternative to other forms of civic involvement or public participation. Rather, being an ethical consumer seems to follow from and sustain participation in existing social networks of associational life; and it is these networks which are effectively enrolled en bloc into broader political campaigns.

Finally, in Chapter 7, we pursue further the displacement of 'the consumer' from the centre of analytical attention, by focusing on the dynamics of ethical consumption campaigning directed at transforming urbanized infrastructures of individual and collective consumption. Through a case study of the year-long campaign to have Bristol accredited as a Fairtrade City, we elaborate on how ethical consumption campaigning is just as likely to involve lobbying, negotiating and advising key actors in local authorities, the public sector and private business to adopt 'ethical' supply and procurement policies as it is to focus on efforts to transform aggregate patterns of individual consumer behaviour. The Fairtrade City campaign in Bristol illustrates that campaign organizations operate at different levels to enlist support and transform consumption practices: sometimes they deploy devices that are presented as extending choices to consumers to raise awareness amongst a broad general public and generate media attention; sometimes they engage at an institutional level to change the ways in which consumption is regulated at the level of whole systems of provisioning.

Across these six chapters, we seek to develop three related arguments about the practices and problematizations of ethical consumption.

First, the problematization of consumption through the rhetoric of consumer choice, consumer power and consumer responsibility is a contingent achievement of strategically guided interventions into the public realm and everyday practices. While the rhetoric of consumer agency is certainly prevalent in ethical consumption campaigning, practical interventions seek to engage 'thicker' aspects of people's personal identification (e.g., as parents, as members of faith communities, as professionals); and to change systems of collective provisioning 'behind the backs' of consumers by transforming

the design and management of infrastructures of consumption. In short, 'the consumer' is not necessarily the primary target or the main vector of agency in ethical consumption initiatives.

Second, consumption is understood by campaign organizations as a surface of mobilization through which to generate public awareness and enrol potential supporters. This form of mobilization does not necessarily substitute idealized models of consumer agency and market power for other modes of civic participation, associational organization, or collective action. It just as often serves as a pathway for enrolling resources in support of these types of activity.

Third, engagements with consumption-oriented campaigns by ordinary people and by committed ethical consumers alike are guided by attempts to align everyday routines with existing moral and political commitments in order to sustain a degree of personal integrity in an unequal world. Rather than thinking of 'ethical consumers' as individualized utility maximizers or disciplined (or even resisting) subjects of hegemonic ideologies, we argue that understanding the emergence of ethical consumption requires us to take seriously the forms of practical reasoning through which vertical positionings of people as bearers of proliferating global responsibilities are mulled over, acknowledged, or subjected to critical scrutiny.

