Pervasive Social Influences, Part II

Economic and Political Systems

In this chapter, we continue our examination of pervasive contexts by considering the direct and indirect impacts of political and economic systems on motivations and need satisfactions. First, we discuss political systems, and in particular the issue of *political rights and freedoms*. Countries of the world have increasingly moved toward more democratic political systems. Although democratic systems allow for greater political freedom and even personal choice, they are dependent on the willing participation and compliance of their citizens. To foster internalization that anchors such behaviors, democracies must foster perceptions of legitimacy, fairness, and choice. Perceptions of control or corruption conversely lead to lower citizen trust, lower participation, and higher apathy. In authoritarian systems, there is greater reliance on external control and introjection to motivate citizens and thus less effective internalization of governmental authority. Moreover, because conditions for autonomous internalization are undermined, authoritarian systems must develop ever more pervasive controls and sense of external threat to remain stable. Moving to economic systems as pervasive influences, we discuss *wealth distribution and economic inequalities.* Capitalism is now globally influential, even in nations with considerable central planning. A first question is how levels of economic welfare influence capabilities for and attainment of basic need satisfactions. A second is how wealth disparities impact wellness. We also consider factors such as how the focus on extrinsic aspirations and competitive values can be prompted by economic systems and have negative consequences on people through both behavioral demands and altering psychological priorities.

In the previous chapter, we discussed *culture* as a pervasive influence on behavior and experience, suggesting that cultures comprise norms, values, and practices that are more or less well internalized by the members of the culture. These internalizations not only regulate the actions of the members, they also frame the very possibilities and meanings people can envision and pursue, shaping their goals, aspirations, and identities. Further, as SDT highlights, internalized cultural mores and practices can be more or less conducive to basic psychological need satisfaction across a society and, thus, the flourishing or ill-being of its constituents.

In this chapter, we focus on two more pervasive influences on motivation and wellness, namely *political* and *economic* systems. Much like the cultural contexts we discussed in the previous chapter, people are embedded within political and economic contexts that structure how they view the world, what they value, what they worry about, and how they conceptualize their own power and place within their communities. We use the term *political–economic cultures* here to convey the idea that individuals are socialized to invest in activities and aspirations that are congruent with their political–economic systems. The resulting internalizations are sometimes explicit and at other times invisible to those adopting them. Wilson (1992) referred to them as *compliance ideologies*, or the systems of beliefs and perceptions that explain and justify behavior within any given system, thus supporting adherence.

As pervasive contexts, political–economic cultures are typically experienced by the individuals within them as givens and the behaviors those cultures elicit as normative. They may, therefore, have little awareness of alternatives or of the subtle costs of those contexts. For example, in authoritarian regimes people may come to monitor self-expression so chronically that they don't sense its everyday depletion effects. In a capitalist consumer culture, people can lack awareness of how their spending desires are catalyzed or of the psychological and environmental costs of the overconsumption they consider normal. Political–economic cultures are pervasive in just this sense: They penetrate proximal belief structures and everyday forms of human interaction. Political–economic cultures, being the waters in which we swim, are often not comprehended as shaping our aspirations, self-concepts, and ways of being, except on the rare occasions when one comes up for air.

It is especially because of this way in which pervasive political and economic environments frame human experiences and motivations that bringing SDT's functional perspective to bear in the analysis of them is important. We emphasize two types of analyses that can be fruitfully applied to any aspect of political–economic cultures. The first concerns *internalization* and how systems lead people to adhere to (or fail to comply with) their values, regulations, and laws. That is, SDT is concerned with the processes through which political and economic forms become anchored within the selves of the individuals who live in them, in accordance with organismic integration theory (OIT; Chapter 8). Second, SDT is focused on the impact of economic and political systems on *basic psychological need satisfactions* and thus on people's well-being and full functioning, in accordance with basic psychological needs theory (BPNT; Chapter 10). We submit that political regimes and economic systems differentially facilitate or obstruct the basic psychological need satisfactions of individuals, primarily through a variety of mediating variables, with resulting effects on their prosperity and wellness.

SDT's analyses of internalization and need satisfaction can be applied to features of political and economic systems, both large and small. We can ask these questions of specific policies or laws or of broader beliefs and practices. Among the myriad attributes, policies, mechanisms, and methods of pervasive political–economic cultures to which we could thus apply these perspectives, we focus herein on two broad dimensions along which political–economic cultures clearly differ—namely, (1) the presence of *political rights and freedoms,* and (2) patterns of *wealth distribution and economic equality.*

Regarding rights and freedoms, we discuss how governments that are more oriented toward individual rights and democratic processes (vs. governments more oriented toward centralized power and constrained freedoms) can differentially affect people's capacity to exercise autonomy and attain basic need satisfactions. We also discuss how both authoritarian and democratic political climates can be reflected in and supported

by differing proximal social contexts reflected in styles of parenting, education, employment, and religious engagement. For example, SDT expects that proximal climates that are controlling can lead to less active, less questioning, and less informed citizens, a situation essential to authoritarian regimes, whereas autonomy-supportive parenting and education can foster more critical thinking and active civic engagement, attributes needed within healthy democracies. In fact, civic engagement can itself enhance wellness through need satisfactions (e.g., Wray-Lake, DeHaan, Shubert, Ryan, & Curren, 2015).

Concerning economic inequality, we consider how differences in political–economic cultures with regard to opportunity and wealth distribution affect both individual and collective need satisfaction and wellness. Especially in the context of the global expansion of market economies, differential access to resources not only affects individuals' capabilities to pursue what they find worthwhile but also shapes their sense of empowerment, fairness, and connectedness to others. Additionally, just as political climates are reflected in more proximal social contexts, so, too, are economic ones—for example, consider the everyday frustrations, depletion effects, and experiences of diminishment and disempowerment associated with poverty (Green, 2012). We also discuss how the value systems that tend to pervade highly wealth-discrepant systems focus people toward more extrinsic life goals, social comparisons, self-enhancement biases, and consumerism, whereas those associated with greater economic equality are associated more with intrinsic goals and values (Kasser, Kanner, Cohn, & Ryan, 2007).

Again, our choice of these two broad topics (i.e., political freedoms and economic inequality) is hardly comprehensive. SDT perspectives on both processes of internalization and need satisfaction can be applied to any and all of the practices, laws, and norms making up a political–economic culture, both micro and macro, and they are probably most effectively applied the more specific the practices and norms under analysis are. Nonetheless, we are focusing on these more sweeping themes of freedoms and economic inequalities because they clearly bear on people's everyday basic psychological need satisfactions in ways that warrant reflection and further analysis.

Political Freedom versus Control

Aristotle, whose philosophy was centrally concerned with fostering eudaimonia, saw political structures as essential to a healthy societal life. In his view, a political system exists ideally to advance the wellness of all its citizens—that is, the system should work for the enhancement of the common good (Curren, 2000). May (2010) further argued that Aristotle saw the effective state as supplying a *legal ecology,* which, although external to the individual, is essential in promoting his or her flourishing. In May's analysis, this legal ecology includes support for the individual's freedom and competence to pursue multiple possible selves, conducing to autonomy and self-concordance.

Aristotle also viewed the role of citizens as being active rather than passive. In this conception, humans are *zoa politika,* or political animals, and ideally they are engaged participants in their society's system of laws, justice, and the general maintenance of the social order. That is, optimally, citizens are not just subjected to governments, but rather they identify with and autonomously participate in them. For its reciprocal part, governments would aim both to enhance the common good and to govern through consent rather than force (Curren, 2013).

Unfortunately, both past history and present-day realities highlight that actual governments have not often embraced these ideals. In fact, throughout most of human history,

people have been ruled by dictators and tyrants, and, in many areas of the world, the idea of broad participation in governance has only recently become salient. Contemporary political systems thus still vary widely in whether people are treated as participants in, or objects of, state power. Nations also vary in whether their policies and practices enhance the common good or, instead, serve the narrower interests of a few, as in a plutocracy. In fact, differences in beneficence toward citizens are observable not only between nations but also within them, as rights and privileges can be equitably or inequitably distributed. Even in Aristotle's Athenian democracy, the affordance of freedoms was quite unevenly spread across Greek men, Greek women, and the members of the city-state's slave classes.

As pervasive influences, political systems influence individuals' behavioral regulation and psychological wellness both directly and indirectly. Governments create and enforce laws and policies that directly attempt to regulate, constrain, and/or channel human behaviors through external regulations (e.g., speed limits, jail terms, fines, tax incentives). Governments also indirectly regulate behaviors through normative messaging, information dissemination, policy justifications, media control, and other means of influence.

Both direct and indirect strategies of guidance and regulation may inspire more or less autonomous compliance. That is, the ways in which governments design, promote, and enforce mandates and regulations can all affect how well the laws are internalized and thus why people obey them (Tyler, 1990). For example, laws can be designed with principles of justice clearly met (Rawls, 2009). Processes for creating laws can be inclusive or exclusive; they can also be transparent or secretive. Finally, strategies and procedures of enforcing laws can be minimally coercive and respectful of individual rights or draconian and fear-inducing, as in many fascist regimes. Some governments, that is, maintain themselves through persuasion and attempts to cultivate autonomous public support, whereas others do so through power, prisons, and police, fostering controlled motives for compliance. These regulatory approaches obviously affect basic need satisfactions, as people experience more voice versus self-silencing and more empowerment versus fear (Deci & Ryan, 2012). As expressed by Zagajewski, a Polish poet in the Soviet era: ". . . even when I'm unable to define the essence of freedom, I know exactly what it is to be unfree" (cf. Ash, 2004, p. 240).

Corresponding to these differences in how governments obtain compliance, SDT asks: Are people motivated to accept and obey the government and its laws, and if so, why? Is compliance with policies or laws autonomous or controlled? Based on SDT, one would expect the quality of behavioral adherence and satisfaction with laws to be positively associated with a sense of voice, choice, inclusiveness, and fairness in decision making and enforcement.

An experimental study by DeCaro, Janssen, and Lee (2015) illustrates this principle. They specifically examined how participatory voting and enforcement in a task involving the harvesting of resources from a common resource pool influenced people's subsequent voluntary cooperation. Individuals were assigned to one of four conditions: (1) a *vote-and-enforce* condition, in which participants first voted on conservation rules and then were able to apply economic sanctions to enforce them; (2) an *imposed-and-enforce* condition, in which participants could neither vote nor enforce rules; (3) a *vote-and-no-enforcement* condition, in which participants could vote but had no power to sanction rule breakers; or (4) an *imposed* condition, in which there was enforcement but no vote. DeCaro et al. found that cooperation around harvesting resources was highest in the vote-and-enforce condition. Here there was participatory involvement, which would enhance a sense of legitimacy along with structure that would support a sense of fairness

or justice. Moreover, the vote-and-enforce participants continued to cooperate *voluntarily,* even after enforcement was removed later in the experiment. Autonomous internalization had clearly occurred. In contrast, in the imposed-and-enforce condition, which would appear from an SDT point of view to be the most controlling, cooperation was the lowest. In this condition, when enforcement ceased, cooperation further decreased. Thus enforcement improved voluntary cooperation only when individuals had a voice or vote. In fact, DeCaro et al.'s further analyses showed that perceptions of procedural justice (legitimacy) and self-determination were highest in the vote-and-enforce circumstance, suggesting that factors of voice, legitimacy, and justice increased voluntary cooperation by promoting greater internalized motivation. Interestingly, those in groups that both voted and had enforcement capabilities also showed the highest relatedness—they felt closer to one another. Neither voting nor enforcement alone produced such effects. They suggested that simply having enforcement without a vote contributed to lower volitional reasons for cooperation.

SDT also expects some reciprocal processes to be at work. Specifically, the more totalitarian or fascist a government is—by definition, highly centralized power structures that use controlling methods to suppress opposition—the less common is autonomous internalization in the populace, and thus the more important are force, fear, and threat to regime maintenance. Among the tactics that totalitarian governments rely heavily upon to mobilize compliance in the masses are the suppression of free expression, controlling followers with privileges and rewards, and conjuring threats by external enemies. Conversely, the more democratic the society is, the more governmental stability and functioning must rely on autonomous internalization and active, informed participation. Thus it becomes more important within a democratic government to enhance more integrated forms of internalization and autonomous participation, because democracy functions best when an informed public freely exercises its rights and privileges and thus more fully follows the regulations and mandates of the system.

Laws, Internalization, and Perceived Legitimacy

Insofar as laws represent attempts by governmental authorities to regulate behavior, we must first briefly reprise the more extensive discussions from Chapters 3, 8, and 10 concerning the general relations between autonomy, internalization, and external authority. You may recall our argument that the concept of autonomy does not require that the source or impetus of an action originate from within the person. Instead, one can be fully autonomous even when fulfilling someone else's requests or following demands—providing, of course, that one concurs with the directives or with the authority's right to demand them. This issue of being able to assent to or concur with the content of a law or the legitimacy of the regulator is therefore critical to an SDT analysis of government regulations and their internalization.

What, then, is the relation between political regulation of behavior and autonomy? According to SDT, people will be more likely to autonomously comply with government regulations to the extent that there is a *perceived legitimacy* to those regulations (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Insofar as individual citizens accept the legitimacy of a government or its policies, they are internalizing and integrating its laws and then acting more volitionally in carrying them out. Legitimacy is a *psychological* rather than merely a legal concept. Indeed, what is *legal* may not be perceived as legitimate.

Accepting the legitimacy of a government involves identifying with and integrating the government's values, mores, and legality, just as wholly accepting the legitimacy of

leadership within narrower collectives, such as families or school classrooms, involves the willing acceptance of the rules and values therein transmitted. When laws or regulations are backed only by external regulation, compliance will instead be dependent on external enforcement and thus be either poor or very costly (see, e.g., Mankad & Greenhill, 2014). It is therefore consistent with SDT that the stability and effectiveness of democratic governments is enhanced by the voluntary cooperation of its citizens (Tyler, 2006), which in turn reflects more autonomous internalization (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

SDT, in line with its focus on both internalization and need satisfactions, further highlights two major pathways to greater perceived legitimacy and thus more autonomous adherence to political leadership. The first pathway concerns the *process* of enacting laws, policies, and government services—specifically, whether there was fairness, inclusion, and transparency in the decision making, application, and enforcement of those guidelines and procedures. Second, legitimacy also concerns the *content* of the laws and policies and the perceived benefits, harms, and fairness of their impacts. Contents that threaten people's basic needs and their communities should be expected to inherently engender internal conflicts and thus to be associated with a lesser sense of legitimacy. To the extent that either of these pathways to legitimacy—namely, need support either in the process of governance or in the contents and consequences of laws or policies—is problematic, governments will need to exert greater efforts to ensure compliance through external control.

Governmental Regulation and Internalization

The first of these two elements, namely the focus on the process of governing, can be stated formally as follows:

> When citizens perceive empowerment, transparency, and voice in governance, they are more likely to see governmental regulations and laws as legitimate and thus more willingly assent and adhere to them. When they feel controlled, excluded, or without voice, internalizations are less likely to be autonomous and integrated, and they are more likely to be motivated through controlled motivations, passive compliance, or active defiance.

Our claim is that perceptions of fairness, transparency, and participatory power all influence perceived legitimacy, which, in turn, we expect to be positively associated with autonomous internalization of governmentally initiated regulations.

Supporting this idea, substantial psychological research discussed throughout this book has confirmed that the experience of perceived choice has a multitude of positive consequences in more proximal social contexts. Studies have, for example, shown that allowing people to make meaningful decisions facilitates their experience of choice and enhances their intrinsic motivation (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008), an effect presumably mediated by enhancing a sense of autonomy. Autonomy support and provision of choice have also been shown to facilitate internalization of extrinsic motivation (e.g., Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Related to the experience of choice and voice is the concept of transparency. To the extent that the forces behind and processes of government regulations are open and visible, people will have less sense of being controlled and more opportunities to feel that they can react and participate.

DeCaro and Stokes (2008) reviewed the literature on conservation initiatives. Based on their review, they suggested that regulatory initiatives promoted through primarily non-autonomy-supportive tactics (such as to avoid economic fines or to secure economic rewards) are less motivating than those endorsed for autonomous reasons. They further posited that successful programs promote autonomous endorsement of conservation through an autonomy-supportive and fair administrative framework. These methods included providing for democratic participation in management, inclusiveness in decision making with local stakeholders, and respectful, noncoercive messaging (see also DeCaro & Stokes 2013; Osbaldiston & Sheldon, 2003).

Although data on the relations between autonomy support and leadership legitimacy are not extensive, a study in Portugal illustrates this general thesis. Graca, Calheiros, and Barata (2013) studied adolescents' respect for teachers' authority, using a measure that assessed the degree to which a student felt she or he should defer to such authority figures, voluntarily accept their decisions, and follow their rules. They found that the more students perceived teachers to be autonomy-supportive, the more they specifically recognized the legitimacy of the teacher's authority in the classroom. Although not a governmental context, the idea is that leaders who are seen as understanding and concerned with the people who will be impacted by the laws or rules are also seen as more legitimate authorities and are more autonomously followed.

Democracy, as a political system, bases its legitimacy on the principle that individuals have equal input into decision making, primarily by voting for political representatives or sometimes by voting directly on proposed laws. Elections are framed as opportunities for choice and empowerment and ideally confer upon decision makers greater legitimacy (Lanning, 2008). Still, structural democracy (having a vote) as a system is not sufficient to ensure autonomous participation or internalization. In many democracies, a lack of trust, voice, and transparency is apparent and is often accompanied by a related apathy or disengagement of citizens in government (Gonzalez & Tyler, 2008). In some modern democracies, only a minority of eligible citizens are motivated to vote. As Lane (2000) pointed out, there can be a gap between objective freedom to participate in government and the self-determination that people experience when they do. For example, if people do not think voting makes a difference, then they might not be autonomously motivated to become informed voters (Green, 2012).

Motivation for Democratic Political Engagement

SDT suggests that the most active, engaged citizens in democratic regimes would be those who are autonomously motivated. They would have more fully internalized the responsibilities of being citizens and therefore would want to exercise their rights.

These claims were tested in an interesting chain of studies by Koestner, Losier, and colleagues (see Koestner, Losier, Vallerand, & Carducci, 1996; Losier & Koestner, 1999). They surveyed potential Canadian voters several weeks before elections, assessing their motives for following politics using a measure based on the SDT taxonomy of regulations. They also assessed variables such as political information seeking, knowledge of political events, and emotional reactions to the issues of the day. After the elections, participants were recontacted to find out if they had actually voted and how they perceived the election outcomes.

In line with SDT, the major hypotheses were that more autonomous motivation for political engagement would be associated with more active, committed, and effective

participation than more controlled motives based in introjection or external regulation. Results generally confirmed this hypothesis across the studies. First, both intrinsic and identified motivations were associated with more actively reading newspapers, watching debates, and seeking political information. Interestingly, intrinsic motivation for politics was associated with forming an accurate base of knowledge about current issues, but not necessarily with actually voting, whereas identification was related to both developing differentiated opinions about which political parties to support and actually turning out to cast a vote. Introjection was unrelated to voting behavior but was associated with vulnerability to persuasion, passively relying on authorities such as parents to make voting decisions, and to feeling more conflicted about political outcomes. Similar to introjection, those expressing amotivation for politics reported relying on important others in making decisions, denying the personal relevance of voting, and less actively seeking information about current issues. Amotivation was uncorrelated with actual voting behavior.

Such findings clearly suggest that people's motivation for engaging in politics matters. Those who participate autonomously—especially those finding value and importance in participating—are also likely to be the most informed and committed citizens. Again, this is important if the endeavor is democracy; as we discuss, the story is different if the endeavor is maintaining a dictatorship. However, to date there has not been sufficient work on the antecedents of autonomous versus controlled motivation and amotivation in relation to political engagement within democracies. That said, it seems evident from a wide variety of literatures that to the degree that governments are perceived as not transparent, fair, or trustworthy, people more easily become helpless, apathetic, or disengaged (e.g., see Lane, 2000; Lanning, 2008). As the studies above suggest, the consequences of a less autonomously engaged citizenry include more vulnerability to passivity and persuasion, with less appetite to stay informed.

Internalization of political forms is in many ways connected to the proximal environments of families and schools that underpin a political culture. Democratic societies are, for example, not just forms of government but ways of living. In a true democracy, each individual develops both a sense of his or her individual rights and responsibilities and a sentiment that his or her fellow citizens also command rights and respect as human beings. This sensibility often begins in the home, where parents model democracy and autonomy support, and in schools, where, ideally, democratic ideals would be modeled and employed (Curren, 2009). In other words, democratic societies depend on the institutions and citizens within them to be autonomously engaged and to respect others' rights, which accompanies an active rather than passive internalization.

Interestingly, two recent studies by Chua and Philippe (2015) examined relations between paternal autonomy support and children's support for, rather than resistance to, the government. Researching both Malaysians and Canadians, they found that more autonomy-supportive fathers had adult children who were more favorable toward their governments and less prone toward protesting government policies. Chua and Philippe suggested that autonomy support within family authority leads to more trust in external authorities to be benign (a belief that might or might not be adaptive!) It is also likely that more autonomy-supportive fathers better facilitate their children's internalization of ambient political norms and the rule of law.

It further seems the case that being able to participate in voting does have some direct beneficial effect, perhaps by virtue of the feelings of empowerment that voting engenders. For example, Frey and Stutzer (2005) showed that foreigners, relative to natives, living in Switzerland experienced less positive effects of living in this democratic context—perhaps because, being non-citizens, they did not experience a sense of participation and choice.

Internalization within Authoritarian Regimes

Although we have thus far focused on democracies, authoritarian political systems (governments that use centralized power and force to regulate citizens) are common. A regime is more authoritarian to the extent that its predominant style of ensuring compliance relies on external control and force. In most totalitarian systems, there is an ever-present mix of controlling and amotivating forces, some salient and direct, and others often more insidiously enforced. Irrespective of the content of policy decisions, the mere salience of controls is likely to make full internalization more difficult, thereby ensuring a need for more force and fear to maintain the social order. Insofar as citizens do internalize or identify with these external controls, their compliance will often depend upon the fragile mechanisms of compartmentalization within the individuals, as well as information restriction, surveillance, and coercive enforcement from the government. In short, SDT suggests that controlling political systems are often precariously anchored in their subjects' psyches and rarely integrated. This does not mean, however, that these systems are necessarily ineffective, or that some subjects may not become "true believers" (Hoffer, 1989), but rather that the nature of external controls in authoritarian contexts will more generally foster a lower level of internalization.

Moghaddam (2013) suggested that, within dictatorships and totalitarian governments, it is the *masses* who are largely kept compliant through external regulation. In contrast, the psychology of internalization among the *elite* is different. Whereas members of the masses need only comply, members of the political elites must at least appear to maintain an ideological adherence to the ruling powers. Moreover, because membership in the elite is often highly contingent and uncertain, self-presentation of ideological adherence becomes a pervasive personal concern, requiring self-monitoring and concealment of any contrary sentiments. Thus, motivated by fear, compliance often extends even into intimate communications, lest one be revealed as dissident. In this respect, SDT expects that elite groups that justify and crusade for the status quo are often regulated through introjects and compartmentalized identifications, allowing them to appear agentic and internally motivated. At the same time, the need for self-monitoring, concealment or suppression of dissonance, and compliance can have a variety of negative effects on them.

Because of their reliance on controlling strategies, SDT expects more shallow internalization of citizens within authoritarian regimes. Research supporting this was provided by an international study of religious freedoms (Stavrova & Siegers, 2013). These researchers analyzed data from more than 70 countries concerning whether religious practices were or were not externally regulated, socially pressured, or even government enforced. They found that, in those nations in which there was less social pressure and less control from governmental regulations to follow a religion, religious individuals were more likely to evidence *deeper* forms of religious internalization. Specifically, less external social regulation was associated with religious people showing a more intrinsic, relative to extrinsic, religious orientation; being more charitable; and finding lying in one's own interest or engaging in fraudulent behaviors to be less acceptable. Thus it appears that the positive effects of religiosity weaken substantially when there is more governmental and/or social enforcement of religious practices. In short, Stavrova and Siegers's (2013) data are consistent with SDT in showing that the way in which regulations are transmitted matters, with less choice and support for autonomy being associated with less internalization (Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993).

Whereas in democracies the cultivation of more autonomous forms of internalization matters, within totalitarian regimes autonomy and more integrated internalization is not

a necessary goal. This difference is also reflected in the proximal environments typically found within nations of each type. The external regulation of totalitarian governments, if pervasive and potent enough, can foster compliance, especially if supported by an elite that articulates and enforces ideology without open deviance. At the same time, without engendering more autonomous forms of internalization, leaders of authoritarian regimes necessarily become more and more dependent on external means of regulation such as surveillance, force, and coercion. This dynamic parallels that of classroom authorities in Chapter 14, in which we saw how the more teachers used controlling strategies, the more they engendered external regulation in students, and thus the more they needed to continue control to ensure compliance.

Nevertheless, a dictator's job is made easier when people are already prone to be responsive to external controls and to submit to, rather than question, authority. Again, family, religious, and school environments can reinforce and model this style of living by relying themselves on external regulation and control. In this way, people are "accustomed" to comply, especially when economic stress and lack of self-direction weighs in as a compounding factor (Oates, Schooler, & Mulatu, 2004; Schooler, Mulatu, & Oates, 2004). For example, Staub (1992, 2011), in the context of his analyses of conditions underlying genocide and cultural violence, argued that in more authoritarian societies, child rearing techniques often involve adults who set rules without explanations and who simply punish deviations. These techniques, which in SDT would be understood as autonomy-thwarting, often extend to educational and religious institutions in such societies. As another example, Chirkov and Ryan (2001) showed significant differences between both parental and teacher autonomy support in Russians versus Americans, with Russian adults on average being seen as more controlling by students. Although the negative effects of control on internalization were evident in both countries, there were mean-level differences in a direction consistent with the societies' respective political climates. Duriez, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, and De Witte (2007) found that parents who promoted the attainment of extrinsic goals (e.g., financial success and social status) over intrinsic goals (e.g., self-development, community contribution, and affiliation) had children who were more prone to socially dominant attitudes and, to a lesser extent, to rigid adherence to social norms. Parents who modeled and transmitted conservative goals similarly had teenagers more rigidly adhering to societal norms, more critical of norm transgressors, and more prone to insulate themselves from information incompatible with their core beliefs.

Our point here is that the forms of regulation evident at a political–cultural level are intertwined with, and often reflective of, more proximal forms of social control and social values expressed and modeled in families, schools, and religious institutions. These everyday social lessons concerning voice and empowerment can support the defensive psychological processes required to comply with regimes.

Nonetheless, the dynamics of how people acquire democratic versus social dominance ideals are not as straightforward as once assumed, for example, by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950). Instead, they more likely represent interactions between parental- and societally transmitted values and the methods of regulation used to foster compliance and allegiance. Here, we concur with Darling and Steinberg's (1993) suggestion that, in order to model parental influences, one must consider both parental styles of socialization (e.g., their controlling vs. autonomy supportive practices) and the type and content of goals and values they seek to promote (Duriez, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste (2007).

Through both direct and indirect cultural processes, a reciprocally supportive relation exists between pervasive political climates and the proximal values people ultimately

embrace. For instance, Basabe and Valencia (2007), using data from a large-scale survey of world values, examined the relations between freedoms and values for autonomy. Specifically, they looked at the associations between a government's score on liberal development (which combines ratings on human rights, freedoms, and equality with economic development) and the personal values held by its citizens. As we would expect, they found that the less a nation affords rights and freedoms, the less individuals within it embrace values for autonomy, egalitarianism, and tolerance or respect for diversity (see also Welzel, 2013).

Basic Need Satisfaction and Internalization

As we previously suggested, at the level of both individuals and populations, SDT is concerned with how the laws, policies, and methods of a given political system impact people's wellness and capabilities. In other words, we consider how well specific policies or regimes support and nourish their constituents or, alternatively, thwart and hinder their flourishing. SDT suggests more specifically that policies and laws that support basic psychological need satisfactions will be more readily accepted and more fully internalized. The less policies, laws, and codes are congruent with needs, the less well they are likely to be internalized, and thus the more force and coercion will be necessary to maintain control. Stated formally:

> To the degree that the contents of governmental rules and regulations have the functional significance of supporting versus thwarting psychological needs, they will be more readily accepted and internalized, resulting in more willing adherence. In contrast, regulations that conflict with or frustrate basic needs will more likely form the basis of controlled motivations that are likely to require greater external monitoring, control, and coercion to ensure compliance.

Even in contexts in which decision making is transparent and inclusive, the content of laws that are passed will be more or less supportive versus thwarting of people's basic psychological needs. As the functional significance of this satisfying or frustrating effect of laws on needs becomes clear, individuals will be more or less willing to adhere. For example, if a majority were to pass a law that thwarted the basic needs of minorities or subgroups, SDT expects that, to the extent that the laws are "need violating," they will not be readily internalized by the violated individuals.

This principle can help explain the nature of historical change, as tensions mount when psychological needs are thwarted en masse. Examples from prohibition to women's rights show that factors perceived to impinge upon autonomy, competence, and relatedness will be resisted. Further, the less need-satisfying the policy is, the more governments must exercise direct external control to maintain power and promote compliance. For example, Fulbrook (1995) described how the East German (GDR) government was deeply unpopular and clearly fostered a society less conducive to flourishing than its West German neighbor. This unpopularity engendered the necessity of ever-tighter internal security and more controlling methods of regulating citizens' behavior, regulations which eventually broke down.

Similarly, we personally witnessed this pattern in the People's Republic of Bulgaria (PRB) under the 35-year dictatorship of Todor Zhivkov. In that regime, control over all aspects of society was maintained through a network of informers, a feared Committee for State Security, and an opaque set of contingencies for party privileges and social

punishments that helped reward and enforce compliance. The costs of this control in terms of the suppression of the Bulgarian people's ideas, talents, and social energies are inestimable.

Promoting autonomy and competence means supporting individuals to effectively form and pursue their aspirations (Deci & Ryan, 1985b; Doyal & Gough, 1993; Sen, 2000). As such, to evaluate a policy or practice of governance based on whether it promotes autonomy or competence is not to endorse how people live their lives; it is merely to endorse a process within which individuals have the freedom and capability to make decisions for themselves, within the constraints of well-reasoned legal structures, about how to live. Although, historically, many forces have suppressed or restricted inclusive human autonomy and empowerment, SDT suggests that to the extent these are made possible within any regime, this will objectively lead to greater optimization of human outcomes and greater mobilization of human capital.

Promoting societal relatedness requires supporting the cohesion and fairness upon which a civil society depends. As we shall discuss, there cannot be strong relatedness within any society or group when supports for autonomy and competence apply only for some, or where internal competitiveness reigns. Freedoms are also constrained by issues of justice, fairness, and concern for the welfare of all, thus separating free democratic systems from libertarianism. Inequities in rights and privileges lead to lower societal trust, less empathy, and greater intrasocietal violence, all indicative of lower relatedness. In contrast, opportunities to form and participate in voluntary organizations enhance democratic attitudes (Sullivan & Transue, 1999). Political policies thus bear on all basic need satisfactions, sometimes directly, and at other times by structurally thwarting the autonomy, along with the opportunities for competence or relatedness, that people would pursue when provided autonomy support.

Insofar as human nature includes a proactive, integrative propensity, we should expect that it would be difficult to reconcile compartmentalization, repression, or oppression with that integrative tendency. Indeed, given how fundamental the human needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are, they inevitably will have their expression in political life. In this sense, SDT expects human nature to exert a *bottom-up* pressure on controlling political and cultural systems, even as human behavior is channeled and controlled by them.

Basic psychological needs present not only constraints on what can be internalized but also an active bottom-up pressure for voice, freedom of expression and identity, and care for human needs. These pressures are slow to boil up in cultural histories, and never in any smooth progression. Yet, especially over the past seven decades, increasing segments of humanity have been moving away from enslavement and toward liberation, and away from arbitrary tyrannical controls toward wider empowerments, individual rights, and participation. This process is readily evident within modern democratic societies, which have been characterized by increasing civil rights for minority racial and religious groups, women, lesbian–gay–bisexual–transgender (LGBT) individuals, and other historically oppressed or stigmatized groups.

More globally, consider the increases in democratic relative to authoritarian regimes: In 1989, of 167 countries only 69 (41%) were electoral democracies; but in 2016, that number was 125 of 195 (64%) (Freedom House, 2016). Clearly, democracies (though not always ideal in process) have been on the rise, indexing one expression of freedoms and rights.

Again, such progress is fitful and unsteady. There has, for example, been a slight decline in democracies since 2006, and even a rise of authoritarianism in some nations.

Yet, as Diamond (2015) suggests, this has in no way reduced the global desire for freedoms and democracy; instead, the recent decline has widened the gap between people's political aspirations and realities (see also Green, 2012). Clearly, this trajectory toward increased rights and freedoms is far from finished, as many remain oppressed and voiceless, some even enslaved. Yet we have seen an increasing spread of rights and freedoms, and where it has not yet occurred, there are nascent aspirations for change.

Although human propensities toward agency and autonomy might not entirely explain the tides of history, they represent a strong undercurrent with a directional influence. Evidence recently reviewed by Welzel (2013) provides considerable empirical support for this idea. Based on his *utility ladder of freedoms,* he argued that, because both natural selection and cultural adaptations favor higher levels of personal control and autonomy, there is an ever-present pressure upward (from individuals) for more freedoms whenever these are perceived to have utility. In times when the focus is on survival, expanding freedoms will be less salient and less useful, but as they become potentially useful, people will want to appropriate and exercise them. In SDT terms, people have a basic need for autonomy, which is especially expressed under favorable or nurturing conditions. As part of the nature of their self-organization, people will attempt to advance their freedoms, rights, and abilities to pursue what they value.

With increasing rights and freedoms come a number of human and societal benefits and responsibilities. Overall, increased freedoms and rights for individuals have been associated with such outcomes as increases in productivity and human capital (e.g., Woo, 1984; Sen, 2000), decreases in violence (see, e.g., Pinker, 2011), and increases in happiness (e.g., Downie, Koestner, & Chua, 2007). Fischer and Boer (2011) examined the influence of both wealth and "individualism" on a number of wellness indicators in samples drawn from 63 nations, numbering over 400,000 participants. They defined individualism in their studies as the affordance of autonomy and choice to individuals in their life decisions. Rather than any evidence that freedom is problematic, they found robust associations between more freedom and greater well-being. Indeed, these positive effects of greater freedoms and choice were more robust than indicators of wealth in predicting wellness and, when considered together, they often wiped out any positive effects of wealth on outcomes.

Greater rights and freedoms, again within bounds of concerns of relatedness and justice, can allow people the opportunities and choices to pursue the goals that matter to them (Deci & Ryan, 2012) and thus to experience more need satisfaction and fulfillment. Although there are claims that "too much" freedom leads to burdens of choice and loss of identity (e.g., Schwartz, 2000, 2010) the evidence largely points to a more-is-better position on the most prominent outcomes. That is, as SDT would predict, societies that allow for, and especially that support, the autonomy and empowerment of their citizens will develop more motivated, self-regulating, and prosocial citizens (see also Welzel, 2013). With systemic freedoms and basic securities comes greater opportunity for individuals to regulate their lives in self-determined ways, which, contrary to many worldviews, leads them to be *more* motivated, efficacious, creative, and concerned for others.

Group versus Individual Autonomy and the Support of Diversity

Individuals exist within groups, and group norms and value structures provide scaffolding for human development and a sense of belonging and purpose. Yet groups are of two kinds: those that are *elective* and those that people "fall into" by birth, nationality, or cultural assignment. It seems clear from our discussions of social, cultural, and political

entities that human groups, particularly the most powerful of the nonelective varieties, often attempt to constrain human choice, diversity, and autonomy in the service of ensuring continuing group identification and cohesion (Appiah, 2005) or in the service of maintaining the status quo relations of power. Indeed, many of those who most strongly object to individual autonomy do so because they see individual autonomy as representing a threat to traditional cultural, ethnic, and religious groups and to compliance with their practices. Yet recent trends include an increased global demand for recognizing the rights and freedoms for previously oppressed or stigmatized groups of people and calls for acceptance and greater expression of human diversity (Franck, 2001; Solomon, 2012).

In considering the relations between group and individual autonomy, SDT takes interest in how diversities and identifications are regulated both within groups and within the nations housing them. There is invariantly a tension between the very natural diversification propensities inherent in human genetic and cultural evolutions and the inherent tendencies of existing groups and institutions to maintain continuity and cohesion. Groups and institutions can address this tension either by accommodating and supporting diversity or by suppressing variations and mandating conformity. When a group marginalizes or suppresses quite natural variations of humanity, basic psychological needs are likely to be thwarted.

As salient examples, consider cultural, religious, or political groups that cannot *tolerate* homosexuality. This rejection of gay and lesbians and insistence on heteronormativity may produce more cohesion for its non-homosexual members, but it will also produce fractures in the psyches of those who are divergent and do not naturally follow the group's pathway. These individuals will suffer, along with all those with whom they are connected.

Similarly, consider the contemporary cultures, often backed by their governments' legal systems, in which women can be economically and physically controlled by husbands or other male kin. Many people vocally laud this practice as a "cultural tradition." Yet women who might better thrive if afforded their natural human inclinations to be active, volitional, and engaged with the world will *inherently* suffer. So, too, do their cultures and economies, which are deprived of the enormous "human capital" that women could be offering (Sen, 2000).

Where the boundaries of natural versus merely constructed values and propensities of humanity lie has, of course, often been considered a philosophical question. But in SDT we posit that it is more clearly an *empirical* question. It will not optimally be answered simply by dueling ideologies or belief systems, but by the actual analysis of functional outcomes of basic human needs, including SDT's basic psychological needs, that are met or unmet by particular cultural practices and the consequences that follow from them.

Accordingly, if there is a foundational, nonempirical value in SDT, it lies in its central concern and focus on the well-being of *individuals* and the priority SDT puts on that concern. SDT will therefore be critical of cultural institutions and groups that are functionally harmful to the basic need satisfactions of individuals within them, including the harms done to the often hidden and silenced voices of persons for whom the constraints of a culture are most ill fitting. That is, respect for pluralisms of cultures cannot, in the end, trump concerns for the pluralisms of persons within cultures whose welfare is the ultimate aim of psychological theory.

Throughout history, pressure toward specific roles and norms has meant that individuals have often had to turn away from compelling interests, attributes, or concerns that appeared incompatible with dominating religious or cultural authorities. SDT holds that, as people are given room to find fitting identities, and as they perceive tolerance

(both pervasive and proximal) for expressing them, they will move toward more congruent identities and heighted wellness (e.g., see Legate, DeHaan, Weinstein, & Ryan, 2103). This is again an empirical question, but our psychological view of social conditions suggests that humans flourish with support for diversity more than they do when they are constrained to ignore or suppress authentic aspects of their natures. Movements toward rights and freedoms at the political level are thus assumed to enhance opportunities for autonomy competence and relatedness satisfactions at a personal level.

Of course, it is one thing to have the *right* to pursue what one values, but it is quite another to have the capability and resources to do so. This brings us to another pervasive influence on basic psychological need satisfactions and frustrations, namely economic contexts.

On Economic Structures: Wealth, Inequality, and Human Needs

Around the world, the aims of economic activity are the same: the production of goods and services, their distribution to those who have a demand for them, and the allocation of the fruits of production among the populace according to certain metrics or rules. From time immemorial, this has been the logic of the form of organization to which all individuals must submit. To some degree, all economies are "planned economies," although they vary both in the amount of central planning and in who controls and benefits from the plans. Put differently, there is no such thing as a "natural" economy in the sense that human-built power structures and policies exist in all economies and that these heavily determine the rules for production, distribution, and allocation of resources. In turn, the distribution and regulation of wealth bear both directly and indirectly on psychological need satisfactions of constituents and therefore on their functioning and capacities to flourish. Economic systems and policies shape how individual wealth is acquired and how common resources are collected and allocated, in turn influencing people's experiences of control, efficacy, freedom, and community and thus ultimately their basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

In undertaking this topic, we must first clarify our belief that examining economic systems and policies, both macro and micro, in terms of their capacities to support or undermine the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, although controversial, is fully appropriate to social science. Such analyses bear on psychological health and human capital—on both the wellness and productivity of all those comprising the workforce. Yet such analyses are surprisingly rare in the field of psychology. Indeed, Kasser et al. (2007) argued that analyses of the effects of capitalism on human wellness have largely been "taboo" within the journals of psychology, presumably out of the scholarly impulse to avoid appearing value-laden or ideological. Nonetheless, as behavioral scientists, it is hard to deny the multiple ways in which pervasive economic systems shape people's goals, allocations of behavior (e.g., labor, leisure), comfort, and wellness. Thus all economic systems can, and we think should, be evaluated for their capacities to motivate and catalyze human capital and to facilitate basic human need satisfactions and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). All too often, analyses have focused only on the concrete outputs of human capital without consideration of human wellness. An advantage of SDT in this respect is the clarity of its criteria for such critiques—namely, its bedrock concern with the satisfaction versus frustration of basic psychological needs, which have been unequivocally linked to long-term well-being and productive engagement of both collectives and their members.

Any comprehensive review of the interface between SDT and economic systems would require a volume of its own, so we instead focus illustratively on a few global characteristics of such systems that lend themselves to SDT analyses. As we suggested in Chapter 21, as a psychological theory, SDT is focused on both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and resources and thus entails considerations that have been largely outside the scope of classical economic theories of behavior and value. Specifically, SDT identifies values and goods not classically conceptualized within standard economic theories, including intrinsic and extrinsic preferences and identities that are not easily "cashed out" or redeemable. Additionally, as will be seen across examples, whereas in standard economic theories the route to "better" is "more," SDT suggests that the path to wellness and flourishing, at both individual and collective levels of analysis, need not entail accumulation and excess. Wellness can, in fact, be crowded out by extrinsic appetites and acquisitions (e.g. Frey, 1997; Kasser, 2002a; Kasser & Ryan, 1996), which so frequently have negative consequences that are both direct and collateral. Instead, SDT focuses on basic need satisfactions as underlying wellness, and these are intertwined with whether individuals can acquire capabilities to pursue what they deem worthwhile and how economies support or thwart their intrinsic human aspirations.

Autonomy, Basic Need Satisfaction, and Human Capital

Individuals, whether they are moving from one country to another, starting off in the workforce, or changing jobs, confront an existing organizational–social form or structure in which they have to function. This structure will manifest as essentially a top-down entity, which has to be negotiated as people, with the aim of achieving adaptation and success, express their agency. In turn, these strivings and needs of individuals result in bottom-up influences, and they make room for themselves within existing structures and processes.

A central tenet of SDT (again, as applied to organizations in Chapter 21) is the following: the more autonomy, competence, and relatedness satisfactions individuals feel when participating in economic activities, the more productive, innovative, and persistent those people will be. Autonomy in particular, as a quality indicative of integrated engagement in activities, produces "human capital," including its role in generating greater efficiencies, expertise, and innovations. We reviewed a healthy stock of evidence for this claim in Chapter 21.

There can be no doubt, in this respect, that as a pervasive context, capitalism, broadly defined, has in some general sense catalyzed more agency—indeed, more human productive energy—than any other economic macro-system in history. It is therefore also responsible for tremendous wealth generation, and it even contains the potential to greatly diminish or eliminate world poverty (Hart, 2007). In part, this catalyzation of human energies has everything to do with structural supports for autonomy entailed in capitalism, relative to previous economic cultures. For example, individuals living within a market capitalist system typically have, on the surface, a wide array of choices about what work they can pursue and how they can engage in their personal lives. The options available to many have stimulated substantial entrepreneurial activity, and, to the extent that educational opportunities are available, the system of incentives and self-matching of careers can generate initiative and achievement. That is, some forms capitalism can support and enhance autonomy and diversity, allowing individuals to gravitate toward skill sets, talents, and interests, facilitating engagement and need-satisfying productivity.

Although this portrait of capitalism's promise is a reality for some, as we stressed in Chapter 21, more typically it is obtainable for only a privileged minority. For many individuals, the options afforded are severely narrowed by factors not within their control. People without adequate resources or supports for basic health, education, and training, or for cultivating the interests and skills required for entrepreneurship, have considerably delimited options and capacities to exercise their "freedoms" in the marketplace (Green, 2012).

As just a simple example of this, Schüz and colleagues (2016) studied older adults in various regions of Germany. They reasoned that older adults face many everyday challenges and limitations, many of which can compromise their experience of autonomy and competence. Yet results showed that, in regions of Germany where more resources were made available to elderly persons, their self-perceived autonomy was greater. Clearly, adequacy (rather than excess) of resources matters to need satisfaction.

Additionally, just as the political world can lack fairness, transparency, and participatory involvement, economic worlds can lack these same elements of legitimacy. Segments of people can be excluded from navigating the cultures of power and commerce on the basis of social class, gender, race, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. Players with bigger money and "legacy values" have advantages and leverage other agents cannot possibly possess (see Picketty, 2014). Such barriers to fair access and opportunity can thwart basic needs for autonomy and competence and/or lead to many compensatory adaptations that are costly to societies (Phelps, 2012).

Given that our central focus in this chapter is on elements of pervasive contexts that undermine or support human thriving, we will not reiterate many of the points discussed in Chapter 21 on agency and autonomous engagement at the proximate level of work and organizations. Instead, to exemplify SDT considerations, we turn here to some structural elements associated with macro-economics and wealth distribution that affect need satisfaction within and across nations.

Socioeconomic Status

It is well known that socioeconomic factors are significantly associated with both mental and physical health outcomes (e.g., Marmot, 2004, 2015). Every step down a socioeconomic status (SES) hierarchy is, in fact, predictive of worse outcomes. Myriad mediators have been posited concerning this relation, from general psychological factors such as stress to health-related behaviors such as smoking, poor diet, and sedentary lifestyles. Lower occupational status, poorer education, and other indicators of low status in the economic hierarchy have all been associated with a lower sense of control, greater demand, and less choice in many areas of life. Moreover, excessive income inequality also negatively affects wellness for all members of society, at all levels of SES, as it enhances feelings of difference and separateness, social comparison, feelings of threat, and a decreased sense of belonging and community (e.g., see Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Using international databases, DeNeve and Powdthavee (2016) showed that as inequality rises, happiness goes down at the country level, primarily due to increased negative experiences of citizens (rather than frequency of positive experiences).

Research by Cheung and Lucas (2016) with a sample of well over 1 million participants showed that, controlling for people's own household incomes, the income of the county within which the people lived was negatively associated with their life satisfaction, a finding consistent with prior research by Luttmer (2005) and others. Oishi, Kesebir, and Diener (2011) then replicated that finding at the societal level and showed that

this relation was mediated by perceived unfairness and lack of trust, both variables that are likely to go hand-in-hand with thwarting of basic psychological need satisfaction. Cheung and Lucas (2016) further showed that income inequality moderated the negative relation between relative income and life satisfaction, such that those people who lived in wealthy counties had less life satisfaction than those in poorer counties. Finally, they reported that people whose personal incomes were lower had a stronger negative relation between county income and their own life satisfaction. These and related phenomena lead to the general expectation within SDT that both SES and wealth inequalities would negatively affect human wellness and flourishing by negatively affecting people's opportunities to satisfy basic needs.

Indeed, research suggests that SDT's central construct of satisfaction versus frustration of basic psychological needs could be among the most important mediators in the relations between socioeconomic conditions and both physical and mental health outcomes. For instance, González, Swanson, Lynch, and Williams (2016) examined a sample of U.S. employees to test whether basic need satisfactions mediated the relations between SES, rated on the basis of occupational indicators, and both physical and mental health while controlling for variables known to affect health, such as age, exercise levels, and smoking status. Results indicated that a substantial portion of the variance in health-related outcomes was accounted for by SDT's three basic need satisfactions. This speaks to how powerfully economic factors affect our basic psychological needs. People with lower SES have fewer intrinsic job satisfactions, higher work stress, more emotional exhaustion, and lower vitality, all reflective of low basic need satisfaction on a daily basis. In addition, and consistent with Inglehart (1997), the lower people's SES is, the more positively incremental gains in either wealth or the capabilities associated with it affect basic need satisfactions. Those living in conditions of poverty and scarcity not only often lack autonomy and control over outcomes, as we discuss, but they also face obstacles to relatedness. That said, evidence also suggests that, once above poverty levels, the relations between more wealth and more well-being become substantially weaker (Kasser, 2002a). In SDT's view, the reason is that, once basic obstacles to living are overcome, greater material wealth is not likely to directly enhance the basic needs that most robustly fuel wellness.

Di Domenico and Fournier (2014) similarly examined the relations between socioeconomic indicators and well-being and the extent to which these were connected through the pathway of SDT's basic psychological needs. They examined not only perceived SES but also household income and the degree of socioeconomic inequality in people's surroundings as predictors of self-reported health and wellness. They found all three were important—the higher people's perceived SES was, the greater their income was; and the lower the level of income inequality in their region was, the greater was their self-reported health and wellness. More importantly from an SDT perspective, basic need satisfactions mediated these relations. The positive impacts of these variables is largely accounted for by their enhancements of personal autonomy, relatedness to others, and experiences of control and competence.

Social status in these studies was both objectively and subjectively assessed. Yet evidence suggests it is particularly when people see themselves as low status and also internalize it as their own fault that it can be particularly destructive. For example, Jackson, Richman, LaBelle, Lempereur, and Twenge (2015) argued and showed experimentally that the thwarting of psychological needs was amplified when the individuals had internalized their lower social status or viewed it as reflective of their selves. Factors in society such as stigma and stereotypes play such an amplifying role.

Among the many implications of such research is that the factors that reduce people's status, limit choices about work conditions, or add to daily pressures and hassles all affect their wellness outcomes through frustrating their psychological needs. Such results support the general findings and reasoning of thinkers such as Marmot (2004) and Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) who have focused on how income disparities negatively affect well-being. Accordingly, we turn from this general formulation to just a few of the specific societal factors that affect these dynamics.

Social Safety Nets and Individuals' Need Satisfactions

Safety nets represent a core issue in societies regarding basic need satisfactions and their associations with economic supports. Most wage earners in market economies are at least in part, if not primarily, motivated for work by a form of external regulation, namely contingent monetary incentives. Persons understand their jobs as instrumental to a paycheck, either being paid for time or for productivity. Presuming external incentives are equal, people exercise autonomy by seeking work they find engaging, meaningful, interesting, fitting, or affording of opportunities. That is, to the extent that workers have choice, pay-and-benefit contingencies are not fully determinative of what work will be selected or how much effort and energy will be invested in it. Most people would prefer work that is psychologically fulfilling, and research testifies to the fact that although many people will trade off autonomy and relatedness at work for higher pay, many others work at jobs that are less lucrative so that they can pursue work they can endorse and value (e.g., Sheldon & Krieger, 2014a).

Unfortunately, for many employees, work is not a deep source of need satisfaction. Recall Ryan, Bernstein, and Brown's (2010) findings, in a heterogeneous sample of American workers, that well-being was lower on working days, primarily because of low autonomy and relatedness need satisfactions on the job. Market economies allow for many types of pay structures, work environments, and incentives; nevertheless, finding a need-supportive and wellness-fostering workplace can be a struggle for many individuals. For some, choice is simply not available. Given that work can be such a source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, a sense of choice and options with respect to employment is therefore critical for employment's facilitation of autonomy satisfaction.

It is regarding this sense of choice that the size of the *economic safety net* has particular salience. Economic safety nets serve to protect the bottom rungs of the economic ladder from further falling. A *safety net* thus refers to both income and health benefits below which no citizen would be allowed to dip.

There are some clear ways in which safety nets affect psychological needs. Insofar as there are sufficiently large safety nets, people have more objective choice regarding work. People can resign from jobs with bad working conditions or that are need-thwarting and seek more solid or satisfying ones. If they have health care access, they can afford to take risks to shift careers. Thus, to the degree that a safety net allows people to leave their jobs without undue harm, selecting a job will likely facilitate their feeling more autonomously engaged. Employers in the context of larger safety nets will reciprocally be more motivated to make workplace conditions attractive and need-satisfying so as to retain workers, whereas, in the absence of safety nets, employers are "freer" to engage in maltreatment of workers, who would lack options to leave such negative conditions. Obviously, the potential impact on need satisfaction is significant.

To function as an effective support within capitalism, however, a safety net must be set at an optimal level—not so high as to discourage people from undertaking productive

tasks that they might otherwise not be motivated to do, yet not so low as to prevent them from retreating from unfavorable circumstances so as to reengage in ways they perceive as betterment. An optimal range would have the safety net set high enough to functionally support a life, but not so high that it crowds out meaningful incentives and personal initiative for entry-level labor. It also suggests that a safety net would rise in keeping with the overall income of the society, lest it lose its function as an ever-present alternative to poor or exploitive working conditions. For example, in some nations, unemployment payments have historically been quite high relative to wages for low-paying jobs, so unemployed people may be motivated not to find employment, and those who have low-paying and unsatisfying jobs will be motivated to relinquish them (Vansteenkiste, Lens, De Witte, De Witte, & Deci, 2004).

Income Distribution and Inequality

In addition to safety nets, there is the issue of *income distribution,* which also impacts psychological need satisfactions at a population level. In a capitalist system, there will always be variability in income and wealth, so income equality would not be expected for a large portion of the workers, although that equality has been a value in socialist economies. Some level of uneven distribution is, of course, appropriate within capitalist systems, because different workers make contributions (e.g., skills, education, responsibilities) that vary considerably. However, what we are referring to as inequality shows up in two ways within capitalist systems: (1) when, in general, workers are not compensated in a way that is appropriate given their inputs to the organization; and (2) when huge disparities occur in which the difference between the lowest paid employees in a company and the highest paid ones are egregiously large, with the lowest paid living in near poverty and the highest paid amassing enormous wealth that is unreasonable and incommensurate with what they have contributed.

Considerable evidence, much of it compellingly assembled by Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), shows how the relative inequality in the distribution of income within a society strongly impacts the quality of life for all people within it. The greater the income inequality, the weaker the social glue that keeps a society cohesive. As Wilkinson and Pickett summarized: "We have seen how inequality affects trust, community life, and violence, and how—through the quality of life—it predisposes people to be more or less affiliative, empathic or aggressive" (p. 236).

In previous sections, we have detailed some of the mechanisms underlying this trend, as understood within SDT. Individuals living in relative poverty are less likely to provide autonomy-supportive and relatedness-supportive contexts. Poverty has, for example, been associated with less support for self-direction (e.g., Kohn & Slomczynski, 1990), which other research has shown is associated with both less trust in relationships and more investment in extrinsic values as a way of attempting to experience worth (e.g., see Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995). That is, especially within well-developed capitalist contexts such as the United States, the more impoverished and need-thwarting the parent is, the less nurtured the offspring is, and the less growth-, community- and relationship-oriented these offspring are likely to become.

More unequal wealth distribution also brings out competitive, aggressive aspects of humans stemming from both comparative threat and deprivation threat. Considerable research has shown that when people are more focused on competition and attaining money, they are likely to be less autonomously motivated (e.g., Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Reeve & Deci, 1996) and more likely to display a variety of negative social

behaviors and a lower relatedness to their community. Lower relatedness is thus a cost of highly unequal, and especially *inequitably* unequal, economic distribution systems.

Policies that lead to more equitable distributions of wealth within a society typically have a positive influence on individuals who are recipients of their largesse, and cultures in general benefit from having a larger percentage of their members living with adequate food, shelter, and health care. Indeed, substantial research suggests that, in cultures where wealth is more unevenly distributed, overall cultural wellness is diminished, even controlling for overall wealth (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Thus social-welfare policies, when combined with capitalism, can attenuate some of capitalism's more negative effects (Kasser et al., 2007). Still, many people criticize social welfare policies, often on the motivational thesis that they take away incentives for hard work and reward indolence.

Capitalist countries differ in the degree to which they value social welfare or caring for their citizens. For example, several Scandinavian countries are sometimes referred to as social-democratic states, for they have a more elaborate welfare program, with a heavier tax burden, as a result of which there are fewer people who have fallen out of the system into poverty and neglect. In fact, virtually all democratic countries, even with the more laissez-faire versions of capitalism that we find in the United States, do tend to have at least modest social welfare policies, suggesting that when people are free, at least a majority of them experience a tendency to care for those who have been ineffective in caring for themselves.

This was made obvious in a study of U.S. citizens (Norton & Ariely, 2011) in which participants were asked both about income distributions they thought were ideal and those they thought were current in the American economy. The results showed that the vast majority of Americans said they would prefer a distribution of income that approximated that of social democracies such as Sweden. Even more amazing is that most believed that the United States was much more equitable in wealth distribution than it actually is. In other words, many people do not really know what is going on macro-economically within their country, thus living within a system that is not what they say they would prefer.

In this sense, our economies "befall" us. Although we don't design them, economies redesign us in their image. In adapting to the rules of their ambient economic game, people learn how resources are earned, what is valued in human labor and attributes, what to consume, and how these things affect status. And for most people, their adaptation to the economy that befalls them will end up as a primary determinant of how they spend time, money, and their life's energy.

Internalizing Inequality: Extrinsic Aspirations and Consumerism

In discussing totalitarian political regimes, we suggested that, as pervasive environments, they are both anchored in and supported by specific beliefs, attitudes, and practices of individuals, each of which is variously internalized. Similarly, cultures of economic inequality, in which excessive wealth and dire poverty are accepted as companions, are supported by particular values internalized by individuals within proximal environments.

Specifically, the more unequal the culture, the more the people are likely to be insecure and untrusting and thus less empathic toward others. That is, inequality in wealth distribution is consistent with extrinsic orientations that focus on social comparisons and aspirations concerning image, wealth, and recognition. Associated evidence shows that income inequality predicts tendencies toward biased self-enhancement, or the tendency for people to see themselves as better than others (e.g., see Loughnan et al., 2011). Indeed,

income inequality within nations (as indexed by the Gini coefficient) better predicted such self-enhancement biases than did indicators of individualism versus collectivism. Inequality is also less conducive to intrinsic goals of community care, relationships, and personal growth (Kasser et al., 2007).

Investments in extrinsic values in turn drive consumerism and a more self-interested focus in living, which dovetail with an ideology of individualism focused on achievement. The values and belief systems most explicitly associated with income inequality within a society happen to be those that are, empirically speaking, opposed to and potentially undermining of people's attempts to work for the welfare of others in the broader community and to develop a sense of connection and closeness to others (Kasser et al., 2007). For instance, insofar as income inequality is associated with increased consumerism and materialism, as Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) argued, it may also lead to less prosocial attitudes (McHoskey, 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995; Sheldon & McGregor, 2000) and to the general lowering of psychological wellness associated with an emphasis on materialism (Dittmar, 2005; Kasser, 2002a). Again, those higher in materialism and the related extrinsic goals of image and fame, all of which are associated with resource inequalities, have lower wellness due to the lower need satisfaction such lifestyles and value orientations yield over time (Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009). Piff, Stancato, Cote, Mendoza-Denton, and Keltner (2012) showed, for example, that those advantaged by class differences—that is, those benefiting from inequality—may also tend toward less humanity. In seven studies using a variety of methods, they demonstrated that upper-class individuals were actually less generous and less ethical than their lower-class counterparts. This tendency was, in part, explained by the greater tendencies toward greed and materialism in these individuals, or what we would call their extrinsic value systems (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996).

Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan (2003) studied the internalization of ambient cultural beliefs from samples of U.S., South Korean, Russian, and Turkish individuals. Embedded in the findings was that people were likely to report having more controlled (i.e., less autonomous) reasons for believing that it is important "to work in situations involving competition with others" or to endorse that "without competition, it is impossible to have a good society." Such attitudes associated with ideologies of inequality are thus associated with less autonomy, which has been repeatedly shown to be conducive to diminished wellness.

In sum, there is good reason to believe that societies in which inequalities in wealth are more exaggerated are conducive to the internalization of behavioral regulations and attitudes that thwart basic psychological need satisfactions and thus yield lower wellness. This suggests again that macro-economic structures influence wellness through psychological pathways, often in ways that the people who constitute these systems are unaware.

Capabilities, Freedoms, and Wellness: Toward Eudaimonic Societies

As we have seen, social contexts, both proximal and pervasive, can be analyzed in terms of their supports for basic psychological needs of the individuals who constitute them. Societies that provide political freedoms, some basic economic and health care safety nets, and a distribution of wealth that is not highly inequitable and unjust (Rawls, 2009) appear to be more supportive of a population's basic needs and therefore to better support the flourishing of their members. Yet, from an SDT standpoint, these are empirical

questions, as every structure, policy, and social benefit merits differentiated scrutiny in these regards.

It is also clear that SDT differs from economic views that focus on *happiness,* considered as a hedonic concept (e.g., Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999). Indeed, we have long argued that hedonic outcomes such as the mere presence of positive affect and absence of negative affect are not reliable indicators of wellness (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008) or of flourishing (Ryan & Deci, 2001), which has led us to also embrace eudaimonic perspectives (Ryan, Curren, & Deci, 2013). Here we specifically focus on the idea that the affordance of opportunities for autonomy, competence, and relatedness satisfactions are the conditions that foster a good life—a life capable of true flourishing—defined in terms of a person being fully functioning. We look for the indicators of flourishing across multiple indicators, which include not only affective outcomes but also an array of the positive variables that reflect human excellences, virtues, and meanings, as well as the absence of the hindrances to wellness reflected in psychopathology and ill health.

It is also important to note that, with regard to the issues of inequity, our analysis did not suggest that a good society guarantees an equality of *outcomes* but rather equality of access to opportunities to pursue what people deem worthwhile. Indeed, the very centrality of the concern for autonomy within SDT acknowledges that there are a diversity of aims within the human community, a diversity within which individuals have both rights and reasons to take different life routes. Attempts to make everyone productive or achieving along similar or narrow metrics (e.g., all students must be mathematically skilled at a college-ready level) inevitably crush the human spirit and disrespect the variety and diversity of talents and interests natural to our species.

Several prominent economists and philosophers have also, in recent years, contributed to the discussion of wellness promotion using the concept of eudaimonia. The thrust of their work has been to highlight what social conditions and resources provide sufficient room for the exercise of human capacities that can support people living a full and good life. The major works of this type are often said to make up the *capabilities approach,* credited primarily to Sen (e.g., 1985, 2000) and Nussbaum (e.g., 2000).

Sen has argued that for happiness to be attained, persons must have *capabilities*, the latter conceptualized as a reflection of the freedom to achieve valued *functionings*. That is, he argued that societies focused on the flourishing of their citizens ought to provide individuals with the affordances and opportunities that would allow them to freely and effectively pursue that which they have reason to value. This criterion, instead of the mere accumulation of wealth or the growth of the gross national product, is, in his view, a truer indicator of economic development and, indeed, the well-being of societies.

Also pursuing the issue of capabilities, Nussbaum (2000) adopted a more direct approach. She specifically defined 10 capabilities that she deemed essential for human flourishing. The affordance of these capabilities is understood as the foundation upon which a good life can be established. These include the following: (1) a reasonable life expectancy; (2) bodily health; (3) bodily integrity, including freedom of movement and freedom from fear of violence; (4) ability to use one's senses, imagination, and thought; (5) ability and freedom to experience and express emotions, including love; (6) practical reason; (7) affiliation, including the freedom to live with others, and respect for relational choices; (8) appreciation and accessibility of other species; (9) opportunities for play; and (10) control over the environment, both political and material. Nussbaum's view is that people possessing these general capabilities have a greater likelihood of flourishing, whereas the absence of these affordances compromises development and flourishing.

These 10 capabilities are essentially derived from Nussbaum's philosophical analysis and thus could be criticized as arbitrary or elitist insofar as her analysis presumes to articulate what constitutes a good life for everyone (e.g., see Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008). Yet some attempts have been made to operationalize these capabilities and to empirically connect them with traditional subjective measures of happiness or wellness. Anand, Hunter, Carter, Dowding, Guala, and Van Hees (2009), for example, developed a survey-based assessment of Nussbaum's list of capabilities, which they administered to a nationally representative sample of U.K. residents. Their results showed that these capabilities were, as a group, predictive of subjective well-being as measured by the widely used approach of Diener and colleagues (Diener, 1994; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985).

DeHaan, Hirai, and Ryan (2015) also examined how this assessment of Nussbaum's capabilities predicted well-being, as well as the potential mediating role of basic psychological needs in the relations between capabilities and well-being. Surveys from two samples, one from the United States and one from India, produced results consistent with their proposed hypotheses. First, Nussbaum's 10 capabilities were clearly conducive to wellness, as indicated not only by affective happiness but also by vitality, meaning in life, absence of stress, and life satisfaction. The capabilities were also strongly associated with SDT's basic psychological needs. Most relevant here, basic psychological needs largely mediated the relations of capabilities to wellness outcomes, suggesting that capabilities have their impact on wellness by facilitating need satisfactions—that is, experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness—and by preventing the frustration of these needs. This small demonstration merely illustrates that at the center of a flourishing life are conditions that afford the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs that are central to all human beings.

Concluding Comments

The relations between the psychology of individuals and the characteristics of the pervasive environments within which they exist are complex and include asymmetries between the individual and the more encompassing political–economic systems. In no case is one level of analysis simply reducible to the other. That is, we cannot explain a system such as democracy or capitalism on the basis of individual needs and motives, nor can we explain individual needs and motives entirely from these pervasive contextual influences. Nonetheless, we take interest in the idea that there are not only downward influences of pervasive environments on individuals but also influences of the actions and attitudes of those individuals on pervasive structures. The bottom-up influences in societies often result, we speculate, from the tensions created by cultural, political, or economic factors that cannot be readily internalized and that represent barriers to basic need satisfactions, resulting in their being perceived as illegitimate or oppressive. In this regard, we particularly noted the stumbling but nonetheless forward progress toward increasing democracy and human rights around the globe, as people actively pursue their freedoms and capabilities.

Regarding political systems, we suggested that democracies rely on self-motivated, autonomous citizens. It is those individuals who have identified with politics and its value who are most informed, engaged, and active. In contrast, more authoritarian governments do not inspire or require such internalization but, instead, rely on controlled motivations. This also makes the legitimacy of these regimes generally less well-anchored in their constituents' psyches, as they are regulated not through integrated principles but

rather by external contingencies and power structures. We also argued that all governmental regulations and programs can be evaluated with respect to their effectiveness at supporting basic psychological need satisfactions, and thus the flourishing of their constituents.

Regarding economic systems, we discussed the fact that greater economic resources at both national and individual levels contribute to basic psychological need satisfactions, especially for individuals at lower levels of the economic spectrum. At the same time excessive individual wealth contributes little incremental value to need satisfactions, and wealth discrepancies interfere with basic need satisfactions at all levels of income. We discuss the value of economic features like economic safety nets in supporting autonomy and other basic needs through enhancement of choice.

Although the criterion of basic need satisfaction provides a universal basis for evaluating the features of political and economic systems, such analyses are inherently critical and comparative. Herein, however, we did not strive to compare specific nations or policies but rather to focus on broader issues of political freedoms and economic inequality as examples of the kinds of issues that can affect basic need satisfactions. Freedoms, access to resources and capabilities, and human rights all appear to conspire to foster wellness and, as SDT suggests, these relationships are substantially mediated by the satisfaction of people's basic psychological needs.