

Huxley 1962

Armaments, universal debt, and planned obsolescence - those are the three pillars of Western prosperity. If war, waste, and moneylenders were abolished, you'd collapse. And while you people are over-consuming the rest of the world sinks more and more deeply into chronic disaster.

This is in my humble opinion the best of the quotes as it is direct and most clearly describes the problems we face in the current age. We live in a throw away society where lives have a monetary cost. And I care more that we may not have an environment to live in in the future than some loss of spiritual connection. I am not particularly concerned at what morality was abandoned to get to this point but more with what morality is needed to fix it. And this addresses that very problem.

The problem is we do not see the cost of our actions. We are sheltered from them as they are often slow to us like in global warming or we are disconnected from them because the war is over there. The policy solutions to this must be vast. We must pay the price for what we do and not shove it onto the next generation or people from some far off land. Wealth cannot be allowed to sit and gather at the very top. If you want to go to war have fun, don't send someone else to do it for you. Educate everyone and educate them well. Punish those responsible. If your company poisons a well you better drink from it. Metaphorically at least. Encourage responsibility at an early age. Not this american dream everyone is responsible for themselves crap. But actual responsibility to yourself, your fellow human and the world in which you live. We require taxes and laws that prevent all kinds of abuse. It's such a vast thing it's hard to even envision.

I think this is a really interesting quote that gets to the heart of, at least, American consumerism. Especially now, I think that companies have been remarkably successful in two things. First, they have found a way to tap into what we desire most as a society, what we want our lives to be, and convince us that these products they are selling will be the things that help us achieve those things. Additionally, companies are good at manufacturing desires/ideals we never would have had otherwise, and then manufacturing items that are exactly advertised to get us closer to those ideals. As a low-hanging fruit example: beauty magazines airbrush model's skin so that readers feel insecure about their skin being non-airbrushed in real life, and are then compelled to buy the skin products advertised in those magazines. The desire is created by the advertiser to sell products, causing us to endlessly consume in a desperate attempt to achieve an image created by those advertisers to sell products. This is especially bad here in America, with this "American dream". How do you achieve this dream? Well, be sure to buy a house and Farmer's house insurance, white Behr paint to decorate your picket fence, and buy a Samsung refrigerator with a touch screen to optimize organize your shopping list, as your life will be hectic without it! Also, don't forget to buy individually packaged nuts and applesauce snacks to bring to your kid's soccer game, so you can show off the convenience you can afford to the other parents. We all have a life we want to live and people we want to be, so we consume things we feel will help us get closer to that life.

Another quote mentioned war, and I think this applies as well. So much rhetoric surrounding imperialism in America is the idea of "planting the seed of democracy" and remaking countries in "our image". But of course, you need guns, bombs, armour, boats, planes, and many other supplies to make this happen. All things that need to be bought and consumed.

But even in the much-publicized rebellion of the young against the materialism of the affluent society, the consumer mentality is too often still intact: the standards of behavior are still those of kind and quantity, the security sought is still the security of numbers, and the chief motive is still the consumer's anxiety that he is missing out on what is "in". In this state of total consumerism - which is to say a state of helpless dependence on things and services and ideas and motives that we have forgotten how to provide ourselves - all meaningful contact between ourselves and the earth is broken. We do not understand the earth in terms either of what it offers us or of what it requires of us, and I think it is the rule that people inevitably destroy what they do not understand.

**Wendel
Berry
2002**

While I also really agree with the first quote, I think this quote strikes very true to what I observe among my liberal peer group. While most everyone I know believes in climate change and understands how things like plastic pollution and oil spills are bad, it's so hard to keep up thinking about making the environmental choice, when we are inundated with advertisements and when buying what we are used to takes less effort. But the message to just stop buying so much stuff is one I hear much less often than messages about which ethical brands to support. The anxiety of "missing out on what is 'in'" still tracks for the mentality of anti-materialists. Social media has trained us to be constantly waiting for new information, and for other peoples' opinions on that information so we can form our own in reference to them. "A helpless dependence on... ideas" is definitely something I feel myself that I had never thought critically about until now.



This quote is the one that stuck with me, because I think it speaks to my generation directly. Though Berry wrote and published the essay containing the quote above nearly 20 years ago and was not talking about my generation, I think he gets us just about right, meaning that youth culture has not changed a lot in the last 20 years.

When I try to think of policy to address consumerism, I've thought about illegalizing planned obsolescence or giving tax deductions for families who choose a more sustainable lifestyle and other economic policies along those lines, but these just aim at changing behavior through financial incentives. They don't seek to change people's mindsets or bring them into 'meaningful contact with the earth.' To seek to change people's consumer attitudes on a deeper moral level would take policy in the form of public outreach and education. But also I think that addressing other social ills through policy would be helpful for making people receptive to moral appeals. The consumer's "anxiety that he is missing out on what is 'in'" is amplified by extreme wealth inequality, when one might never feel content with what they have because they are constantly comparing their life to those with the ability to buy more than them. In public health we see that inequality is bad for the mind and body- the healthiest countries with the longest life expectancy, once above the level of GDP per capita where most people aren't in abject poverty, aren't the countries that are richest in total, but are the ones that have the smallest degree of wealth inequality between citizens. Or, our public policy strategy just needs to be massive outreach informing about over-consumption even among young anti-materialism people and about the hypocrisy of green capitalism, which just simply might not be a concept that has

Second, I would want to make it mandatory to teach kids from K-12 about their connection to the planet. So, kids would have science class, math class, history class, and how-much-I-depend-on-the-earth class, which would give basic insight into the science of the earth, but more importantly would teach kids how to be responsible members of the Earth's ecosystem. I think it would be important for every child to take a field trip out to a farm, to see where their food comes from. I would also have kids go out to the forests, and then to an area being logged, to see where their wood and paper comes from. I guess, I want to enforce a curriculum that fills in the gaps that exist in today's common knowledge, to remove the ignorance that Wendell speaks about. I think that teaching our children how to be a responsible member of the world, and dispel any notion that we exist separately from the Earth is an important first step in redefining how we view prosperity, progress, and ourselves.



It is effective in that it identifies the problem as a systematic behavior compelled by 'need'. People are incredibly insecure, disillusioned from themselves in their assumption that there is no value in independence if it cannot be conveyed on a T-shirt. Efforts for reform alike are inspired by the emotionality conditioned by this collective anxiety and despite their best and necessary intent can easily misinform others. The quote argues real reform, real divergence from a 'consumerist being' is not accomplished with messages on T-shirts. A value system change instead is the solution. The appropriate change, as suggested, is predicated on a relationship with the earth, nature, our own humanity. 'Reciprocity' is a concept prevalent in psychology and psychoanalytic theory and it reflects a human faculty limited by consumerist society. An attempt at an algebra of it might reflect this which is inevitably more complicated than described:

Temporality/Self(other) → reciprocity

From the quote and this vague model, policy should reflect that nondestructive behaviors are contingent upon psychological constructs. Policy should neuter advertising which weighs heavily on our construal of self, weaponizing it to an extent, making kids and adults inclined to value themselves with objects. Temporality can be addressed by education, hopefully, inclining children to imagine larger perspectives and broader considerations. Textbooks are stupid and typical testing procedures incentive shallow processing, encouraging our brains to mature into T-shirt buying machines that consider little beyond the next meal. Another policy, which you may have said before I'm not sure, is that it should be forbidden to destroy anything that is not completely understood. Of course, once understood, it will not be destroyed.

We seldom consider how much of our lives we must render in return for some object we barely want, seldom need, buy only because it was put before us...And this is understandable given the workings of our system where without a job we perish, where if we don't want a job and are happy to get by we are labeled irresponsible, non-contributing leeches on society. But if we hire a fleet of bulldozers, tear up half the countryside and build some monstrous factory, casino or mall, we are called entrepreneurs, job-creators, stalwarts of the community. Maybe we should all be shut away on some planet for the insane. Then again, maybe that is where we are.

Mante 1993

Short & Sweet Version: Our culture is so deeply entwined with the ideology of progress, economic growth, and consumerism that curbing the populations consumeristic tendencies is impossible. In this political era, the division of political beliefs would cause any policy placed forward to have critics. It purely is insanity. The "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality that many hold is a way to devalue those who cannot work (leeches) or those who wish to live free of the consumer lifestyle (hippies) as less than another, and applies a monetary value to lives. The fact that many cannot afford healthcare unless participating rigorously in the rat race, and the importance of generational wealth in how we are valued as humans is insane. Destroying the planet for purely economic growth and then heralding that as progress is an insight to the form of anthropocentric progress many in this country hold as the only way forward is a clear consequence of our consumerism. Whether it be born out of greed, cultural norms, or the fear of perishing, we all are working towards not being considered 'leeches. It is crucial to acknowledge the role that the absence of managing large companies allows them to economically and socially encourage and require us to participate in the insanity via media, necessities for modern day employment, and health care requirements.

A public policy that I would put into place would be aimed at the large corporations and would include:

- Managing the amount that a company may count towards tax deductible reinvestments and a tax margin that is regulated based off earnings, not gross profit after reinvestments. This would avoid companies like Amazon from paying no taxes.
- Revision to current tax laws that allow companies like United Airlines to escape most taxes, whilst being able to receive such a large bailout.
- Applying price caps (Limit the price increase to 150% of original price) to items that are considered necessities (food, toiletries, medical devices) for functioning, to prevent large hikes in pricing preventing accessibility to individuals
- Better regulation of employee's safety net in emergencies

A public policy that I would put into place to attempt to fix consumeristic behaviors in the working class would be related to health:

- As mentioned in my last policy, price caps on medications on a federal level is crucial for individuals to be able to feel more comfortable in the economy.
- Limiting amounts that may be charged for emergency services, with and without insurance.
- Revisions to current medical company's tax policies especially in the case of the international companies (Pfizer as an example)
- Allocating more spending for clinics for those without insurance. The largest group affected by the COVID-19 virus, is poor individuals, who cannot afford health care.

The virus acts as a large wake up to what is truly considered needed for survival, and consumerism is deeply engrained in survival here in America, and by extension, Western Societies as a whole, it truly is insane.

On the way from the Renaissance to our days we have enriched our experience, but we have lost the concept of a Supreme Complete Entity which used to restrain our passions and our irresponsibility. We have placed too much hope in political and social reforms, only to find out that we were being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life. In the East, it is destroyed by the dealings and machinations of the ruling party. In the West, commercial interests tend to suffocate it. This is the real crisis.

**Aleksandr I.
Solzhenitsyn
Harvard
Commencement
1978**

