

0.1 Chapter 1: capitalism: Good Capitalism

0.2 Good Capitalism

1 Sentimentality in Art and Business

In modern times, one of the criticisms you'll sometimes hear people make about certain works of art is that they are *too sentimental*.



The tendency is to see sentimentality as an unintentionally funny and slightly embarrassing thing about the art of the past. In fact, sentimentality is alive today and its evident not so much in art, as in a place where we might not at first expect it: in business.

We'll get to sentimentality in business in a minute. But first we need to think a bit about sentimentality per se: What is it? And is there anything actually wrong with something being sentimental?



The basic thing that happens in *sentimental* art, is that the negative aspects of life or a situation are repressed; and something is instead presented as wholly nice and lovely.



Youth, for instance, is presented as a time of simple innocence; rural life is imagined as pure and always happy; having little money is suggested to lead to an easy, contented existence.



1.0.0.0.1 Luke Fields *The Village Wedding*

Or, a community is imagined as deeply united and content a representative snapshot of a peaceful, prosperous and contented nation where kindness is normal and everyone is sweet. No one is eaten up with envy or harbours complicated sexual longings.

But whats the problem? Whats so bad about doing this?

Problem One: It leads to disappointment

In an essay, *De Profundis* written in prison Oscar Wilde defines sentimentality as the desire to feed off an emotion without paying for it.



He says: We think we can have our emotions for nothing. We cannot. Even the finest and most self-sacrificing emotions have to be paid for.

To get a handle on what hes saying, imagine that I want you to like me, but dont want to pay the true price of friendship. I want to feel were friends (which is a very nice feeling). But I dont want to back you up when you are in difficulties, I dont want to hear about your problems or give you tricky bits of advice: I dont want to actually have to do the things real friends do.

So I get a warm glow as I invite you to lunch at a non-specific date; or tell you you can count on me, knowing at the back of my mind that I never will live up to the promise... I am thereby being sentimental around friendship.



1.0.0.0.2 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Fidelity*

This young woman is presented as totally devoted and loyal; she will never forget how deeply wonderful and perfect her lover is; she will never get tetchy about how he holds his knife and fork or how loudly he snores at night; she will never wonder if she's wasted her life or think that her partner's conversation is dull, his love-making technique inept, his financial status unsatisfactory or his views about political philosophy seriously misguided.

Sentimentality doesn't want to engage with what Jung calls our shadow sides: our deep tendencies to aggression, negativity, spite, envy and disappointment. These shadows are carefully omitted. It's an attempt to spare ourselves discomfort; but ironically it has a painful consequence:

Sentimental art feeds the tempting delusion that things could be perfect: relationships endlessly charm-

ing, countries without exploitation or violence. Unintentionally, sentimentality increases the burden of disappointment with how things actually are.

Problem Two: Sentimentality breeds cynicism

Wilde also argued:

The sentimentalist is a cynic at heart. Indeed, sentimentality is merely the bank holiday of cynicism. Its initially quite a surprising idea, because surely these attitudes are poles apart.



1.0.0.0.3 Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *Family of Queen Victoria*

In this sentimental portrait, Queen Victoria's family is presented as more polite, quiet and mutually admiring than (one feels) any group of people could actually be. The natural troubles of any family envy, boredom, guilt, spite are kept entirely in the background.

Unconvincing, airbrushed representations of family life encourage an equal and opposite reaction. Exposure to sentimentality leads many people to suppose that a wholly dark view is likely to be true. So, seeing the picture, one is tempted to think that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were probably actually quite malevolent parents, who had no real love of their children. They would, the moment the artist had left the room, become harsh and censorious and cold.

In the middle between sentimentality and cynicism is the mature assessment, which usually means acknowledging that things have good and bad aspects that are unfortunately deeply intertwined. Maturity involves giving up on the attractions of a clearer, simpler (but actually unfair) assessment, whether totally negative or totally positive. Maturity means realising for instance that a single person might be both kindly and generous sometimes and quite greedy at other points. Or that a nation might be really quite admirable in some ways and rather horrific in others.

	Sentimental Attitude	Cynical Attitude
Family	loving, fun, polite	hell
Nation	strong, honourable, harmonious	arrogant, power-hungry, brutal
Youth	simple, innocent, happy	sly, cruel, depressed
Poverty	content, hard-working, unenvious, respectful	lazy, wasteful, talentless
Wealth	kindly, generous, noble	exploitative, greedy

The art of past eras helps us to see sentimentality in action. But, to be honest, our lives are not generally hugely taken up with looking at portraits of 19th century, royal families or depictions of rural life circa 1875. So, even if we think sentimentality is a bit of a worry, we are not going to panic around these kinds of exposure to its potentially harmful effects.

We've raised the issue of sentimentality on art as a lead up to an admittedly unfamiliar but actually more serious issue: sentimentality in business.

Business is at the centre of modern examples of sentimentality.



LOVE IS THE MOST POWERFUL
THING ON THE PLANET.

Love is in a baby's first smile.
In a grandmother's comforting touch.
And in all the wonderful moments in between.

Love rearranges our priorities.
It makes us want to give.
Expecting nothing in return.

Love is the reason you care.

For the tiny and the fragile.
For the wise and irreplaceable.

For all the things in your life
that make life worth living.

Johnson & Johnson
for all you love

This advert is designed to encourage people to buy products like Calming Lavender Baby Shampoo and Hand-and-face take-along-packs from the Johnson and Johnson corporation. It is also, sickeningly, sentimental.

It entirely exaggerates the role of love. It tells us that love is the most powerful thing on the planet as if it is setting out, rather deliberately, to avoid admitting that many other factors are crucial in getting things done; and that the feeling of love though it can be very intense is far from reliable. One does, in fact, sometimes feel utterly weary of those one loves, frustrated, disappointed (and not nearly in receipt of enough admiration and tenderness oneself).

Why would a corporation resort to sentimentality? What is sentimentality for in advertising? Its partly an expression of deep anxiety: the anxiety that the audience is in no position to face reality. Sentimentality is a symptom of the sheer difficulty of ambivalence. Adverts dont trust us enough to share a more complicated view of the world with us. They are wrongly afraid that we might run away completely if we were let in on the secret that their products cant make us entirely happy, that they are good enough but not perfect and that corporations never really love their customers, theyre trying at best to make them a little happier in one or two areas of life.

Businesses are also tempted by sentimentality in their dealings with their own employees. When companies make general statements about how they approach their employees, the shadow side is typically missing.

YAHOO! We Value...

Excellence:

We are committed to winning with integrity. We know leadership is hard won and should never be taken for granted. We aspire to flawless execution and don't take shortcuts on quality. We seek the best talent and promote its development. We are flexible and learn from our mistakes.

Teamwork:

We treat one another with respect and communicate openly. We foster collaboration while maintaining individual accountability. We encourage the best ideas to surface from anywhere within the organization. We appreciate the value of multiple perspectives and diverse expertise.

Innovation:

We thrive on creativity and ingenuity. We seek the innovations and ideas that can change the world. We anticipate market trends and move quickly to embrace them. We are not afraid to take informed, responsible risk.



Community:

We share an infectious sense of mission to make an impact on society and empower consumers in ways never before possible. We are committed to serving both the Internet community and our own communities.

Customer Fixation:

We respect our customers above all else and never forget that they come to us by choice. We share a personal responsibility to maintain our customers' loyalty and trust. We listen and respond to our customers and seek to exceed their expectations.

Fun:

We believe humor is essential to success. We applaud irreverence and don't take ourselves too seriously. We celebrate achievement. We yodel.

And find out what we don't value...

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The mission statement doesn't dare to tell us that teamwork is hard, or that sadly, a lot of work isn't much fun. There's a denial of the reality that the market inevitably creates tensions between the interests of shareholders and the interests of workers (and customers).

There are two causes of sentimentality in business. The first is a fear of the fragility of the audience, a worry that it won't be able to cope with the truth. You think the truth is actually OK. But you fear that other people will get excessively agitated and upset. For businesses the shadow side is this: companies have to make a profit. Businesses have to follow demand. Employees sometimes have to be pushed quite hard or fired to raise profits. They are always means, not ends. Many decisions have to be based on the bottom line. Because these facts aren't fantastic, companies get very nervous about being honest around them.

In fact, we're by nature drawn not to the most delightful things, not to things which suppress the complexity of existence, but those which convey it, and yet still demonstrate a basic confidence and faith.



1.0.0.0.4 Augustus John,* Robin *

Augustus Johns portrait of his son is endearing because unlike a more sentimental picture the child feels real; he could be quite naughty and then very playful; he might maybe make a big fuss about eating broccoli and then pretend to be a lion with a very sore paw; he could be great at climbing trees but also quite mean to his younger sister. The truth is we dont really warm to perfection; we are too quickly conscious of the lie. But this is an insight that tends to fade quickly. When imagining how to get other people to like us or be loyal to our company or interested in something wed like to sell them, we too often feel we have to omit all the weaknesses and rough bits. But its not what we actually warm to ourselves if we reflect on our experience.

The second reason for business sentimentality is darker. People sometimes get very sentimental when

they feel very guilty, when something pretty bad is going on just off-stage. Its a kind of bubble wrap around brutish things.

A company thats mostly spending time desperately trying to extract every cent of profit from its customers will in a kind of reactive excess declare its love for them:

How do we love you? Let us count the ways.

Dallas/Ft. Worth to Houston

Depart	Arrive
7:30 a*	8:18 a
8:45 a*	9:33 a
10:00 a	10:48 a
11:15 a*	12:03 p
12:30 p	1:18 p
1:45 p**	2:33 p
3:00 p	3:48 p
4:15 p**	5:03 p
5:30 p	6:18 p
6:45 p**	7:33 p
8:00 p	8:48 p
9:15 p**	10:03 p

Houston to Dallas/Ft. Worth

Depart	Arrive
7:30 a*	8:18 a
8:45 a	9:33 a
10:00 a*	10:48 a
11:15 a	12:03 p
12:30 p*	1:18 p
1:45 p	2:33 p
3:00 p**	3:48 p
4:15 p	5:03 p
5:30 p**	6:18 p
6:45 p	7:33 p
8:00 p**	8:48 p
9:15 p**	10:03 p

Dallas/Ft. Worth to San Antonio

Depart	Arrive
7:00 a*	7:50 a
9:30 a	10:20 a
12:00 n	12:50 p
2:30 p	3:20 p
5:00 p	5:50 p
7:30 p**	8:20 p

San Antonio to Dallas/Ft. Worth

Depart	Arrive
8:15 a*	9:05 a
10:45 a	11:35 a
1:15 p	2:05 p
3:45 p	4:35 p
6:15 p	7:05 p
8:45 p**	9:35 p

*Except Sunday.
**Except Saturday.



SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

The somebody else up there who loves you.

Societies or businesses with a backdrop of pretty cynical attitudes where theres actually a lot of very brutal employee-employer relations and a lot of disrespect for customers are also often those where theres a lot of overcompensatory moves. When the sugar coating has to be very thick, its often a sign of

something pretty bitter underneath. A company which has traditionally not been very concerned about its impact on the environment might in a sentimental boomerang move feel very drawn to representing itself with dolphins.



The solution to this sort of sentimentality is to relieve the pressure of a bad conscience by changing ones ways.

In the Utopia, there would be less brutality, and therefore less cynicism and less sentimentality. Wed be able to discuss the truth because the truth felt bearable.