Theodore Levitt's Marketing Myopia

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ABSTRACT. Theodore Levitt criticizes John Kenneth Galbraith's view of advertising as artificial want creation, contending that its selling focus on the product fails to appreciate the marketing focus on the consumer. But Levitt himself not only ends up endorsing selling; he fails to confront the fact that the marketing to our most pervasive needs that he advocates really represents a sophisticated form of selling. He avoids facing this by the fiction that marketing is concerned only with the material level of existence, and absolves marketing of serious involvement in the level of meaning through the relativization of all meanings as personal preferences. The irony is that this itself reflects a particular view of meaning, a modern commercial one, so that it is this vision of life that Levitt's marketing is really SELLING.

Theodore Levitt's Marketing Myopia[1]

Business academic Theodore Levitt enjoys wide influence as an exponent of the importance of marketing for contemporary business. Among the implications of this focus, none is more central than the insistence on identifying and catering to the needs of the consumer. The impression conveyed by this insistence is an expectation of a basically humanitarian, if not actually altruistic, demeanor on the part of the enlightened business corporation. If such an expectation sounds fanciful, this may be more indicative of enthusiasm in Levitt's promotion of marketing, than of a misreading of his intent. While he does acknowledge that the marketing orientation has to be balanced by other more traditional self-interests of the corporation,[2] when he lauds the virtues of marketing itself, this note of realism is difficult to detect. The irony is that Levitt's enthusiasm for the marketing mode discloses precisely the tactics and influences that are of concern to critics of marketing, and especially of the advertising portion of its activity.[3]

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1. *Levitt's Quarrel with Galbraith*

What Levitt means by marketing emerges clearly in his criticism of economist John Kenneth Galbraith's view of advertising. A central thesis of Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* is that the main function of advertising is to create markets for the products that technology is making available. "The affluent society increases its wants and therewith its consumption *pari passu* with its production."[4] As the productive ability of society has increased through modern technology, advertising has emerged to create the demand for those goods. Thus rather than telling the public what is available, advertising functions to create the demand for what is available. Galbraith calls this artificial creation of wants "the dependence effect."

> There will be frequent occasions to refer to the way wants depend on the process by which they are satisfied. It will be convenient to call it the dependence effect.[5]

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This process assures Galbraith that these wants are not urgent. People are susceptible to the manipulations of advertising because they have passed the stage of having their needs satisfied as members of the affluent society, and do not know what they want themselves. This is the central function of modern advertising – "to bring into being wants that previously did not exist."[6]

The problem with this diagnosis, according to Levitt, is that Galbraith overlooks the difference between selling and marketing. "Selling focuses on the need of the seller, marketing on the needs of the buyer."[7] Galbraith, then regards advertising as the promotion of selling. His outlook is product oriented. The product is the given, and the problem is to move it. What he fails to appreciate, Levitt contends, is that sales and advertising can only continue because customers are satisfied. The smart seller is the marketer who does not simply promote a product but researches and addresses the needs of the potential buyer. "The view that an industry is a customer-satisfying process, not a goods-producing process, is vital for all businessmen to understand."[8]

The distinction between the product orientation of the seller and the purchaser orientation of the marketer cannot be drawn more clearly. However, as Levitt expands on the contrast, its significance begins to blur; selling is not totally banished from the agenda of the enlightened marketer. We find Levitt saying things like: "Management must think of itself not as producing products but as providing customer-creating value satisfactions."[9] It seems the goal of the marketer is not to satisfy customers but to create them. Management's job is not only to produce satisfactions, rather than simply products, but to produce satisfactions that are "customer-creating."

An understanding of advertising that sees its roles as one of creating customers sounds much more like Galbraith's thesis, that advertising creates wants, than like Levitt's own counter-claim, that advertising is meeting wants that are already present in the customer. Levitt explicitly acknowledges the presence of an element of demand "creation" for new products. "Generally, demand has to be 'created' during the product's initial *marketing development stage*."[10] It could hardly be otherwise. The novelty of the products precludes the possibility of their being responses to what people want; market research cannot establish how consumers will react to a product that is completely foreign to them.

> The consumers themselves may not know what they want in products to be produced next year and the year after that. Thus, it is necessary to *project* these wants.[11]

It can be argued that the success of the product when it is marketed will be the test of the adequacy of those projections, so that the wants of the consumer remain sovereign. And yet the effect of the advertising based on those projections can hardly be ignored as a significant factor in fashioning those wants. At this point, it is difficult to see where Levitt's marketing view of advertising differs from Galbraith's selling view. It may not be insignificant that in his acknowledgement that demand for new products has to be created, Levitt puts "created" in quotation marks. It is an intrusion into his official position. For if demand has to be "created," this is all that Galbraith's thesis requires. Advertising then is responsible for creating desire to match the products that modern technology makes possible.

Vindication for this conclusion is forthcoming from no less an authority than Levitt himself. In spite of his vaunted distinction between selling and marketing, Levitt castigated the Hoover Corporation precisely for taking this distinction too seriously. Headquarted in Canton, Ohio, Hoover produced vacuum cleaners in England, and also had a washing machine plant there, with limited sales on the continent. Expansion of sales depended on cracking the continental market. Hoover pursued this prospect by what would seem like a classical Levittine approach; they conducted extensive market research. The results showed that in Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Sweden, there were varied preferences in washing machines, including differences over features like the size of the machine, enamel or stainless steel drum, top or front loading, load capacity, spin speed, with or without water heating capacity, and tumble or agitator washing action. The variety of market preferences would

seem to call for a variety of washing machines to meet these wishes of the consumer. But this obvious conclusion is precisely what Levitt rejects. It would be a poor business decision, he contends, for Hoover to attempt to cater to this diversity of preferences. "The message for Hoover should have been obvious: produce only the simple, high-quality machine preferred by the British and sell that same machine aggressively on the Continent . . ."[12] So much for marketing! How could Galbraith be more vindicated than to have his critic advocate the selling that he has insisted is really going on? Galbraith can feel confident in reasserting his view of advertising – "consumer wants are shaped to the purposes and notably to the financial interests of the firm."[13] Levitt himself concurs in practice, however much this may be at odds with his marketing theory.[14]

2. *Levitt's quarrel with himself*

Despite his official denunciation of selling, and his endorsement of a marketing interest in the wants of the consumer, Levitt himself ends up insisting that advertising should tell people what they want. Galbraith's "dependence effect" understanding of advertising is thus confirmed by this view's staunchest critic. However, the apparent totality of Galbraith's victory cannot dispense with the question as to how a thinker of Levitt's calibre can end up endorsing the position he explicitly denounces. The most promising answer is that Levitt's position is not as contradictory as it would at first appear. The directness of the contradiction depends on ambiguity over the notion of wants. When he challenges Galbraith's contention that advertising creates wants in the consumer, and when he later contends that advertising should tell people what they want in a washing machine, he is addressing different levels of wants. The particular wants regarding features of a washing machine are secondary, and can be safely ignored by advertising. This would apply as well to the wants for new products, which people cannot possibly have in specific form until they come to know the product. Beneath these secondary wants for specific products or features, however, there are more primary wants. These are the wants that advertising must take very seriously, and engage in extensive market research in an attempt to address.

The promotion that Levitt would have Hoover undertake would not deal with the features of their washing machines. It would not try to convince Germans that enamel drums are really preferable to stainless steel, or the whole of the continent that the top loading machine preferred by the British is really superior to the front loading version they are familiar with. The actual features of the machine would be totally ignored, in a direct concentration on the consumer. "The media message should have been that *this* is the machine that 'you,' the homemaker, *deserve* to have, and by means of which your relentlessly repetitive heavy daily household burdens are reduced, so that *you* may spend more constructive time for more elevating attention to your children and more loving attention to your husband."[15] While the specific tone of Levitt's tactic might not prove particularly effective today, the level at which it aims, that of our most basic dreams and desires, remains crucial for contemporary advertising.

Thus both Galbraith and Levitt are vindicated. Galbraith is right; the product is given. Marketing does not involve tailoring the product to the preferences of the consumer. But Levitt is also right; the focus of advertising is a marketing one on the consumer, rather than a selling one on the product. In fact, the marketing focus so concentrates on the consumer that the product all but disappears. "An aggressively low price, made possible by European standardization, combined with heavy promotion to the common global desire for alleviation from menial and repetitive work, and the common desire for enhanced familial and connubial relations, would have overcome all previously expressed preferences as to special equipment features."[16] But this marketing focus that Levitt emphasises is precisely what concerns people about contemporary advertising, that it is really a more sophisticated form of selling. The point of the marketing focus is not to determine what people want, but to determine how people can be persuaded to want the product the agency has to sell. It bypasses

issues concerning any direct connection between consumers and the product in a concentration on attempting to present the product as an answer to the more pervasive human needs of the consumer. Hoover made the mistake of thinking that their product should meet the product preferences of the consumer. "It asked people what they wanted in the way of features alone rather than seeing what they visibly wanted as to life itself."[17] True marketing taps humanity's most pervasive and universal wants.

Recognition of different levels of wants rescues Levitt from suspicion of blatant self-contradiction, but, in doing so, it raises still more worrisome questions about the effect of advertising. The wants that advertising takes seriously are not wants for particular products, or for particular features in products, but the more primary wants that characterize us as human beings. "Marketing does not sell a product – it sells a dream; a dream of beauty, of health, of success, of power,"[18] Ralph Glasser contends, pointing out that lipstick is not presented as colored grease, but as a source of beauty, sexual fulfilment, and happiness, and that alcohol is presented not as a relaxant but as a badge of manhood and assurance of social acceptance. Levitt would agree totally! "What is important," he suggest, "is not so much what Revlon puts inside the compact as the ideas put inside the customer's head by luxurious packaging and imaginative advertising."[19] Sophisticated sellers are marketers, marketing not to our particular needs and wants, but to our deeper and more pervasive needs for security, acceptance, and fulfilment. "In this sense alone," Glasser contends, "is it true to say that 'demand' can be created."[20] The catch, of course, is that this is the most significant sense of all. Marketers are really sophisticated sellers.

Levitt seems to be surprised that all the focus on the consumer in the marketing turn has not resulted in a more positive view of business on the part of the consumer. Indeed, the reverse seems to have been the case, with suspicion of advertising becoming even more pronounced. However, Levitt recognizes the source of this suspicion. He sees it as parallel to the way in which physics has not become more popular through the discovery of atomic fission; both the sophisticated analysis of the consumer in contemporary advertising and the prospects of nuclear power in particle physics represent worrisome sources of power. We fear people who possess knowledge of how to produce nuclear power and those who understand our wishes and weaknesses better than we do ourselves. Levitt even acknowledges that "in the case of business and marketing, the consumer's unease is understandable and perhaps even justifiable."[21] What he does not do, however, is apply this conclusion to his own advocacy of the primacy of marketing. He maintains his official distinction. Selling subordinates the consumer to the product – "selling concerns itself with the tricks and techniques of getting people to exchange their cash for their product."[22] By contrast, marketing sees "the whole business process as consisting of a tightly integrated effort to discover, create, arouse, and satisfy customer needs."[23] In spite of acknowledging the probable justification for concern about marketing, Levitt's enthusiasm for the marketing relationship does not really face the depth of that concern, that this focus on the customer may be far more offensive than direct attempts to sell products, precisely because it may entail far more sophisticated manipulation.

3. *The modesty(?) of Levitt's Marketing Myopia*[24]

The marketing that Levitt advocates deals with the most pervasive human wants and needs. "By asserting that people don't buy things but buy solutions to problems, the marketing imagination makes an inspired leap from the obvious to the meaningful."[25] Although Levitt sees marketing functioning in this realm of meanings, he is not particularly concerned about the potential dangers of this because he sees business operating within a very limited range. The representations of advertising are addressed to mundane concerns with the material order, in contrast, for example, to the far more ambitious aspirations of art.

> While the ad man and the designer seek only to convert the audience to their commercial custom, Michelangelo sought to convert its soul. Which is the greater blasphemy? Who commits the greater

> affront to life – he who dabbles with man's erotic appetites, or he who meddles with man's soul? Which act is the easier to judge and justify?[26]

Levitt invokes the standard expedient of neoclassical economics, the isolationist view of business. The focus of business is purely economic, and the economic is sealed off in hermetic isolation from every other area of life. With this, Levitt has the best of both worlds: he can insist that marketing, particularly in its advertising mode, must be seen to occupy the domain of meaning, but, at the same time, he can absolve marketers of responsibility for the meanings they purvey because their focus is only commercial after all.

The strategy of divide and conquer turns out to be no more feasible for Levitt than for any other advocate of the isolation of the economic. The attempt to have it both ways only results in falling into blatant contradiction. Insistence on the neutrality of marketing leads Levitt to advise that in this area: "We should get away from normative considerations entirely."[27] The normative "should" is used to reject the normative, implying that, at least at some level, normative considerations are inevitable. This implication is confirmed in Levitt himself. His proposal to jettison the normative is a direct reflection of the neoclassical economics' view of the neutrality of business, and its assumption that ethical considerations can be left to someone else outside of business, whoever that may be. When that someone else questions the practices of business, however, and suggests that advertising is engaging in exerting questionable influence, Levitt returns to the normative, turning us all into advertisers. "Everybody is a hidden persuader of sorts. Every statement addresses itself to a customer."[28] Thus, on the one hand, business represents a separate area of life that does not have to take ethical considerations into account; on the other hand, at the same time, business is a pervasive activity that we all engage in whenever we make a statement. This leaves only two possibilities. Either we can all forget about ethical considerations, because we are all involved in business, or else business is not nearly as isolated as the protectionist view would like to pretend.

The isolationist view of business is made possible in part because of a strictly hierarchical view of human life. The view of humanity implied in Levitt's expositions is similar to that articulated by the psychologist, Abraham Maslow. Maslow devised a very influential characterization of human beings in terms of a hierarchy of needs, beginning with primary material needs, and extending on to social and spiritual needs.[29] According to this scheme, we experience five ascending levels of needs. The most basic is the physical level, our requirement for the essentials of life like air, water and food. Second is the level of safety, which includes all that goes to make up a secure and dependable environment. Third is the need for acceptance, to be loved, to belong. Fourth, we need to feel good about ourselves, to have a solid sense of self-esteem. Fifth, we need to reach beyond ourselves for spiritual fulfilment, for what Maslow called self-actualization.

It is the direction, rather than the details, of Maslow's hierarchy that can be seen to be reflected in Levitt's approach. What Levitt shares with Maslow is the sense of hierarchy, the assumption that these needs must be met in this ascending order of significance. For Maslow, this means that only when we have the basic necessities, do we, and can we, become concerned about security. Having achieved a basic sense of security, we then look for more human fulfilment in social relations. From there we move on to a mature sense of self, and are then in a position to move toward the fullest reaches of self-fulfilment. What is reflected in Levitt is the sense that the material can be clearly separated from the cultural and spiritual in such hierarchical terms. Business is seen to be concerned with addressing our material needs; even though it "dabbles" in the realm of meaning, it does not get involved in issues of meaning as such.

Although it enjoys wide influence, Maslow's approach presents problems precisely because of the aspect that is reflected in Levitt, the assumption of the strict irreversibility of the hierarchical order. Physical needs must be met before social or spiritual needs can be addressed. While this is true on a basic level, in that a person whose basic needs for food and shelter are not met can be

expected to be totally preoccupied with meeting these primary needs, in a broader context it carries more problematic implications. A strict demarcation of levels will imply that physical needs are subject to satiation, and that this is why they are essentially distinct from social and spiritual needs. It is because these needs have been met that one can go on to higher level needs. This is the aspect that allows Levitt to see advertising addressing only the material level of existence. Yet Levitt is also constrained not only to acknowledge "the apparent insatiability of human appetites," but to affirm the direct connection between these ever expansive "erotic appetites" and the spiritual dimension: "Each generation everywhere seems to ask for what its predecessors asked only of God."[30] Levitt is not concerned about the possibility of this expansive voracity of human appetites displacing the need for God because these appetites are confined to the material level. How insatiability can be confined to the material level Levitt does not say.

4. *The tyranny of Levitt's Marketing Myopia*

Levitt can see advertising innocently "dabbling" in the realm of meaning because of the hierarchical assumption of distinct domains. Advertising is addressing the primary level of physical needs. In the end, the position he advocates may be the most product oriented of all. He sees advertising reaching beneath the wants for particular products or product features, to tap into the most basic and universal human needs, wants and aspirations. It offers things for which former generations looked to God. However, this is not meant seriously because, of course, it is really material products that are being offered. Because it is material products, advertising can really only be functioning in terms of the most elemental level of human needs. If human needs are not so rigidly hierarchical, however, this confidence in the preliminary focus of advertising will appear naive, or positively disingenuous.

The hierarchical understanding of human needs is challenged by a view which sees much more connection and reciprocal influence among our different kinds of needs. In *The Limits to Satisfaction*, William Leiss makes a case for an organic outlook, which recognizes a mutual interaction among the different levels of human needs. "In industrialized as well as in other societies the ensemble of needs constitutes a uniform sphere of activity, each segment of which mirrors the common characteristics of the whole."[31] Even the most primary physical needs are met differently in different cultures. How we deal with the physical order is permeated with symbolic meanings. This is particularly significant in consumer culture. "The sphere of material exchanges is not transcended, but rather is extended ever more deeply into the 'psychological' domains."[32] Far from moving on to social and spiritual needs, once our physical needs are satisfied, our addressing of physical needs involves social and perhaps even spiritual dimensions, with the result that we attempt to address social and spiritual needs through physical products. It is not sufficient that a jacket should protect us from the cold; it must also carry a socially approved label. Clothing meets not only physical needs for protection from the elements, but also affords social status and so addresses what for Maslow is the more peculiarly human need of belonging.

The idea that physical wants and needs can be treated in isolation can be maintained only through rejection of such an organic understanding of the human condition. However, the organic reading receives confirmation even in Levitt's own position. For in spite of its dualistic divide between material and spiritual levels, his own basic stance can be seen to represent a unified perspective, one which subordinates the spiritual to the material. In this way he represents not so much a parallel to, as an inversion of, Maslow's hierarchy.

Levitt avoids confronting the contradiction at the heart of his own marketing vision through a variation of the childlike confidence that if you close your eyes, what is out there will go away. His advice to marketers is to avoid direct consideration of aesthetic and spiritual matters.

> When you consciously use your product to affect the spiritual, cultural, aesthetic, and home lives of

> your customers, then you are playing God. It is bad enough that you intimately affect our private lives in the random process of doing your job as a businessman. To affect them intentionally and in a clearly manipulative fashion that has nothing to do with the object of selling as such, to do that is a compound evil. There are already too many institutions and individuals tyrannizing us with their own special versions of God's will. We don't need any more.[33]

That business faces the temptation " to affect [us] intentionally and in a clearly manipulative fashion that has nothing to do with the objective of selling as such" would appear to be an obvious red herring, even in Levitt's world of marketing. The more disturbing implication, however, is the contention that the promotion of what we have seen Levitt refer to as the "erotic appetites," (which we also saw him characterize as increasingly bearing expectations of providing intangible fulfilments for which people used to look to God) is harmless as long as advertisers do not directly intend to promote aesthetic or spiritual objectives. Levitt shows no significant concern over the fact that through the promotion of products as sources of meaning and fulfilment, advertising can be presenting its "own special version of God's will" in the most effective form prevailing in contemporary culture.

The disinclination to recognize this possibility would seem to be due to assumptions that are revealed more directly in another critic of John Kenneth Galbraith's view of advertising as want creating. Galbraith's fellow economist, F. A. von Hayek, charged that the dismissal of created wants is tantamount to proposing that literature and art are worthless. "To say that a desire is not important because it is not innate is to say that the whole cultural achievement of man is not important."[34] As Von Hayek sees it, Galbraith's claim that advertising is creating artificial wants is tantamount to dismissing everything that does not cater to our most basic physical needs as artificial. The criticism is devestating for Galbraith, until we notice whence it comes. It rests on the assumption that the only innate needs are physical ones. This is Von Hayek's, not Galbraith's, assumption. This is how Von Hayek can equate the wants that Galbraith says are evoked by advertising with wants that are met by cultural productions. Neither are concerned with the essential physical needs, and so one must be as arbitrary as the other. In effect, Von Hayek equates cultural productions with commercial products. No significant distinction is recognized between Shakespeare and shampoo. The arbitrariness receives direct testimony from Levitt. "Who has the right to say so confidently that spiritual values (whatever they are) are so much worth having?"[35] The world of meaning created by advertising is as legitimate as cultural and spiritual meanings that have endured for centuries.

When the confinement of business, and its marketing arm in particular, to the material sphere, becomes too precarious, and its implication in the realm of meanings has to be acknowledged, the immediate tactic is to proclaim a relativization of all meanings. If advertising's involvement in the realm of meaning has to be taken seriously, this can be accommodated by recognizing that, in principle, any meaning is as good as any other. Once basic survival needs are met, we are in the realm of human preferences. This relativization of meaning has at least two crucial implications. One is that the view that any meaning is as good as any other has the inverse implication that no meaning can be of any significance in itself. All meanings have only the significance we accord them. Beneath the surface neutrality of this pean to human preference there lies a more basic and formative perspective, which represents the second crucial implication of this relativization of meaning. This implication is that the preference view itself is not as neutral as it is taken to be, but, in fact, constitutes a particular sense of meaning itself. That sense of meaning is precisely the one that is represented by the modern commercial agenda. All meanings are equally significant or equally insignificant, awaiting our adjudication, because what is meaningful is finally a matter of price. It is the commercial process that determines the meaning of meaning. The pervasive use of values in common parlance is an important indication of this surreptitious tyranny of the commercial. In the present context, that tyranny is illustrated by the captivating comprehensiveness of commercial advertising.

In its focus on the most basic wants of the consumer, the sophisticated marketing form of advertising involves a total, inclusive activity that seeks to enfold the consumer in a world of its own creation. The renowned literary critic, Northrop Frye likens this subtle working of such advertising to the experience of a twilight train trip.

> As one's eyes are passively pulled along a rapidly moving landscape, it turns darker and one begins to realize that many of the objects that appear to be outside are actually reflections of what is in the carriage. As it becomes entirely dark one enters a narcissistic world, where except for a few lights here and there, we can see only the reflection of where we are. A little study of the working of advertising and propaganda in the modern world, with the magic lantern techniques of projected images, will show us how successful they are in creating a world of pure illusion. The illusion of the world itself is reinforced by the more explicit illusions of movies and television, and the imitation world of sports.[36]

Far from simply hyping particular products, advertising is creating a world for us. It not only tells us that a certain brand of toothpaste will give us whiter teeth; it does this through pictures and settings that imply that it will also give us richer lives. Beer is not only an enjoyable drink; it comes with attractive, jovial friends. Cars are not means of transportation; they are symbols of freedom, status and power. Advertising speaks not to the immediate needs that products might be expected to meet as food, clothing, transportation, etc., but to the wider social and spiritual needs for belonging and meaning.

In these terms, advertising effects the combination of Maslow's hierarchy of needs that William Leiss advocates. However, it also illustrates the weakness in Leiss's organic approach, namely, that without something like Maslow's hierarchy, there is no way to distinguish the merits of different forms of satisfaction. The result may be a total inversion of Maslow's kind of hierarchy, an attempt to satisfy social and spiritual needs through material consumption. The way of consumption may then be promoted to fill the void caused by the loss of religious and moral certainties through secularization.[37] "What we see in our country today is a perfectly good economic process – the mechanisms for producing and consuming goods – made into a religion."[38] The way of consumption does not simply tell us what is good, it takes on the aura of goodness itself. It fills the vacuum, created by the hesitancy of secularization, with visions of security, status and meaning attainable through accumulation and consumption.

> Material goods have become substitutes for faith. It's not that people literally place their cars on the altar; rather, it is the function of these goods in a consumer society.[39]

People do not place their cars on the altar because the cars themselves displace the altar. The consumer vision that underlies marketing defines our perspective and priorities with a finality and authority that used to be reserved for religion.

Far from constituting a neutral mechanism that allows human beings to determine their own preferences, consumer culture reflects and imposes its own visions and priorities. Levitt is frank about his commitment to that vision. The marketing that he advocates recognizes the inevitable sway of the global corporation.

> The one great thing that distinguishes the global from the multinational corporation is that it accepts the reality of modernity, in which the republic of technology drives everything relentlessly toward global convergence, for better or for worse – toward the alleviation of life (sic!) and the expansion of discretionary time and spending power.[40]

Recognition of the distinctiveness of the global corporation entails submission to its supreme role in disseminating technologization globally. "It is a role created not by fate or nature or God, but by the necessity of open commerce itself, a necessity that compels action in which only the fit and the brave prosper and survive."[41] There can be no doubting the prevalence of that vision in contemporary culture. This commercial vision of life rules with the authority of science and the enforcement of global corporations. It may even be that this vision is unfolding with an inexorable inevitability. However, if there is

any room for resistance to its tyrannical sway, this will have to begin with the realization that this is what we are being SOLD in the name of marketing.

Notes

[1] The title is derived from the title of one of Theodore Levitt's articles "Marketing Myopia" (*Harvard Business Review* **38**(4) (Jul./Aug. 1960): 45–56; reprinted in *Harvard Business Review* **53**(5) (Sept./Oct. 1975): 26–28, 33–34, 38–39, 44, 173–174, 176–181; reprinted in *The Marketing Imagination* (New York: The Free Press, 1986): 141–172. In this article, Levitt argues that companies that see themselves as producers of particular products, rather than as more broadly catering to human needs, are in danger of missing opportunities that may mean their own survival. His classic example is the buggy whip industry, which might have survived into the era of the motorcar, if it had seen itself in the transportation business, rather than as a producer of buggy whips. The present article argues that Levitt is subject to his own kind of marketing myopia, in his failure to recognize how the marketing he advocates really involves the selling of consumption as a fundamental source of human meaning.

[2] Theodore Levitt, *Marketing for Business Growth* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. 201–206.

[3] Although advertising is generally understood as a component of marketing, Levitt is not concerned with this distinction. He calls an article "The Morality(?) of Advertising" in one publication (*Harvard Business Review* **48** (Jul.–Aug. 1970): 84–92) and "The Morality(?) of Marketing" in another (*Marketing for Business Growth* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. 246–258.).

[4] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), "Introduction," p. xxvii.

[5] Ibid., p. 131.

[6] Ibid., p. 129.

[7] Theodore Levitt, *The Marketing Imagination* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), p. 153.

[8] Ibid., p. 164.

[9] Ibid., p. 167.

[10] Theodore Levitt, "Exploiting the Product Life Cycle," *Harvard Business Review* (Nov.–Dec. 1965), pp. 81–94.

[11] Maurice I. Mandell, *ADVERTISING*, Fourth Edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), p. 176.

[12] Levitt, *The Marketing Imagination*, p. 36.

[13] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Culture of Contentment* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), p. 134.

[14] An obvious response at this stage, which Levitt himself would almost certainly endorse, is that of course any adequate view will have to recognize both marketing and selling. Although there is merit in this academic expedient, it misses the central point, that one of these approaches will be basic. The claim of this article is that Levitt's own treatment provides vindication of Galbraith's selling priority, in spite of his own insistence on the crucial importance of marketing. Any focus on the consumer is ultimately driven and guided by the interests of business itself.

[15] Levitt, *The Marketing Imagination*, p. 36 (Emphases from the original.).

[16] Ibid., pp. 36–37.

[17] Ibid., p. 37.

[18] Ralph Glasser, *The New High Priesthood: The Social, Ethical, and Political Implications of a Marketing-Oriented Society* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 12.

[19] Levitt, *Marketing for Business Growth*, p. 9.

[20] Ibid., p. 13.

[21] Levitt, *The Marketing Imagination*, p. 216.

[22] Ibid., p. 165.

[23] Ibid.

[24] The form of this section title is a parody on Levitt's article title, "The Morality(?) of Advertising." See note 3 above.

[25] Levitt, *The Marketing Imagination*, pp. 127–128.

[26] Theodore Levitt, "The Morality(?) of Advertising," *Harvard Business Review* (Jul.–Aug., 1970), p. 88.

[27] Theodore Levitt, "Are Advertising and Marketing Corrupting Society? It's Not Your Worry, Levitt Tells Business," *Advertising Age* (October 6, 1958), p. 90.

[28] Ibid., p. 91.

[29] Abrham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* **50** (1943), pp. 370–396; and *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1962).

[30] Levitt, *The Marketing Imagination*, p. 226.

[31] William Leiss, *The Limits to Satisfaction, An Essay on the Problem of Needs and Commodities* (Kingston and Montreal: Queen's University Press, 1988), p. 58.

[32] Ibid., p. 57.

[33] Levitt, "Are Advertising and Marketing Corrupting Society? It's Not Your Worry, Levitt Tells Business," p. 91.

[34] F. A. Von Hayek, "The Non Sequitur of the 'Dependence Effect,'" in Beauchamp, Tom L. and Norman E. Bowie (eds.), *Ethical Theory and Business* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), p. 364.

[35] Levitt, "Are Advertising and Marketing Corrupting Society? It's Not Your Worry, Levitt Tells Business," p. 92.
[36] Northrop Frye, *The Modern Century* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 27f.
[37] Glasser, *The New High Priesthood*, pp. 99f.
[38] Fred W. Graham, "America's Other Religion," *Christian Century*, March 17, 1982, p. 306.
[39] Jim Wallis, *The Call to Conversion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 49.
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[41] Ibid., p. 38.

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