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Chapter Author(s): Andrew Szasz

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whom were later excluded from those spaces once they were constructed, for example, Central Park in New York City (Taylor 2009).

Not only is preservation a problematic concept once it is inflected with a scale perspective (because it is highly contingent upon the scale at which it is examined), but Cronon (1995a) suggests that an overemphasis on the preservation of wilderness areas creates dualistic thinking that allows people to be blind to the intensive use of normal landscapes. In other words, preservationist approaches may lead people to view wilderness or nature as separate and apart from humans, rather than all around us in our daily lives. Such dualism may lead people to behave one way in wilderness (e.g., leaving nothing behind except footprints) and another way in their everyday lives.

What the above examples suggest is that preservation is only preservation (nonuse or nonconsumptive use) at the scale of the preserve. When such a preserve is viewed at broader scale frames, we see that this is not really preservation because nonuse/nonconsumptive use in one area is almost always subsidized by use in surrounding areas (or even distant centers of production and consumption). In either instance (conservation or preservation), the distinctions among exploitation, conservation, and preservation begin to become blurred when they are analyzed at multiple scales. Key to understanding this multiscale analysis is attention to how humans divide up space to apply either principle (conservation or preservation) and to socioeconomic and ecological connections that exist between regions and places.

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### Consumption

Andrew Szasz

In discussions of environmental conditions or problems, the concept of consumption appears, typically, in two ways. First, consumption is said to be the *problem*. We are hurting the environment because we consume too much or we consume the wrong kind of things. Second, changing consumption is said to be an important part of the *solution*. If we wish to have a more sustainable relationship with our planet, we must consume less or, at least, smarter and better.

Is consumption the problem? Environmentalist rhetoric asserts that it is. We hear statements such as, “The United States has 4.5 percent of the world’s population but consumes about 25 percent of the world’s resources” and, “If everyone on Earth lived like Americans, that would require four Earths’ worth of natural resources.”

Is changing consumption (at least part of) the solution? Important strains of environmentalist rhetoric say it is. Concerned citizens are exhorted to consume less, to choose the green, natural, organic, sustainable alternative, to reduce their carbon footprint. We will live more sustainably, have fewer adverse impacts, if each consumer “walks lighter on the planet,” uses fewer resources, generates less waste. In the longer term, if enough people make the greener choice, that will send a market signal, motivating manufacturers to bring more such goods to market. (We might think of this as the work of a Green Invisible Hand.)

Sociological analysis does support some version of such claims. Consider the well-known “IPAT” formula:

(Environmental) Impact is a function of a society's Population, its level of Affluence (i.e., the level of its consumption), and its Technology (Commoner 1972; Ehrlich and Holdren 1971). Empirical studies using the IPAT formula confirm that the higher the level of consumption, the higher the environmental impact (York, Rosa, and Dietz 2003). Other, prominent social scientists argue that getting people to consume less or to consume differently can significantly reduce their ecological footprint. O'Rourke (2011) has developed an app for smart phones that helps consumers make ethical choices when they shop. Willis and Schor (2012) argue that green consuming can *politicize* the consumer. Being mindful about one's choices, choosing the greener alternative, and doing all that repeatedly, can change a person's consciousness, they say. It can sensitize one, make one more aware. And that can lead a consumer to increasingly identify himself or herself as someone who "cares about the environment," increasing the likelihood that he or she will then engage in other forms of environmental activism.

Sociological analysis acknowledges some aspects of such claims, but the preponderance of sociological thought has to be seen, overall, as expressing a certain skepticism toward them. Consumption, though certainly not unimportant, is only one, and probably not the main, cause of environmental problems. A sociological understanding of consumption suggests that changing consumption is difficult and may not be the best strategic choice if one is looking for the most effective way to address contemporary society's environmental crisis.

The first point to emphasize is that the relationship between consumption and environmental impacts is more complex than the overconsumption condemned by environmentalists. Sociology has always emphasized the centrality of inequality when analyzing societal

phenomena. Today, inequality is as important as ever. Eighty percent of the world's peoples live in nations in which inequality is rising (Shah 2013). In the United States, income and wealth inequality have been increasing for thirty years and are now up to levels not seen since just before the Great Depression (Saez 2015). Globally, the top 1 percent has 48 percent of all wealth (Oxfam 2015), while three billion people, almost half of humankind, live on \$2.50 a day or less (Shah 2013). For the idea that "consumption is the problem," extreme inequality means that consumption is really two problems: at the top, overconsumption, as the usual critique says; at the bottom, desperate takings of basic materials needed for bare survival, even when that threatens to extinguish species or terminally exhaust local ecosystems.

To focus just on consumption also tends to ignore other drivers of environmental harm, drivers that are certainly linked to consumption in some way, but would not be improved or ameliorated with a politics aimed *only* at changing consumption patterns. First, as the work on IPAT shows, population—sheer human numbers—is an important driver of environmental impact. Every one of the world's seven billion peoples has minimum physiological needs, for water, protein and calories, warmth, and shelter. Feeding all those people, alone, requires vast quantities of land and water—degrading those resources, transforming ecosystems, depriving other species of their use—plus vast outlays of energy, chemicals, etc. Second, consumption is just one phase of a cycle that runs from resource extraction to production, distribution, and marketing to consumption and, finally, to the disposal of things when they are no longer of service. Every phase of this cycle—including the damage associated with mining; waste discharges to air, water, and ground during manufacturing; and the accumulation of postconsumer wastes—is a significant cause of environmental degradation.

I turn now to what sociological analysis suggests about an environmental politics focused on changing consumer behavior. The most important point to make is that a politics that aims at consumer behavior does not address the other causes listed above. Such a politics will have little, if any, impact on the destructive ways resources are extracted, on the toxic methods used in manufacturing goods, on the impacts of transporting goods globally, and on disposal. A politics aimed at changing consumption ignores the question of population and social inequality, hence the environmental consequences of mass poverty.

Furthermore, a politics that aims at changing consumer behavior may not accomplish much even on the terrain on which it aims to operate. When activists talk of “changing consumption,” they are talking about *individual* consumption, when many forms of consumption are *collective* and/or *fixed*. Many cities and suburbs, especially those that grew to their present size in recent years, have a social geography—a spatial organization—that is built around, and hence presumes and requires, the use of the private automobile; these “facts on the ground” are fixed, *given*, largely beyond the influence of the individual consumer. In important ways they limit or *constrain* individual consuming choices. For example, when it comes to buying or renting a home, only a few privileged, wealthy individuals get to design and build their own home, deciding what kind of house, how big, how energy efficient, etc. Most individuals are presented with preexisting choices: homes in an existing, given social geography that are products of many earlier decisions, made by others, about what kind of housing will be built; decisions to put residential neighborhoods here, shopping there, and workplaces someplace else; other decisions to build roads, parking lots, and gas stations rather than light rail; and so forth. The social geography, already there, to be *found*, not within one’s

power to *make*, constrains choices about what home to buy or rent, how much to drive, and many other mundane aspects of everyday life.

For the fraction of consuming that is properly the realm of individual consumer choice, sociology has emphasized the degree to which such choices are far from free or unconstrained. Just over one hundred years ago Thorsten Veblen coined the phrase “conspicuous consumption” to describe how consumption had become a form of status display, way beyond any notion of consumption as necessary to satisfy basic needs (Veblen 1899). Much later, Herbert Marcuse argued in *One-Dimensional Man* (1968) that advanced capitalist societies create new needs, needs that promise to be fulfilled through the consumption of specific commodities. Consuming the right stuff promises to make one “happy.” One consumes to construct, lay claim to, and display a desirable social identity. Consumption is no longer just the satisfaction of basic needs; consumption is driven by powerful societal/cultural motives. Not many persons are so deeply committed to the environment that they are willing to forgo all that and voluntarily choose less attractive green alternatives.

The point is that changing individual consumer behavior can have a material impact only if it is a mass phenomenon, only if millions of consumers make such choices and do so consistently. Sociological analyses of contemporary consumer society imply, however, that there are powerful cultural forces arrayed against such mass shifts in consumer choice; hence green consuming is likely to remain a fringe phenomenon, with limited material impact on environmental conditions. Marketing data appear to support this pessimistic assessment of the promise of targeting consumer behavior as the way to achieve positive environmental change. Hybrid cars continue to account for only a tiny percent of cars sold in the United States. The average home sold in the

United States is many square feet bigger than the typical home sold in past decades. Although some forms of green consuming are thriving, there is scant evidence of a truly mass shift away from conventional consumer items.

Finally, some sociologists are skeptical of the argument that green consuming can politicize people and encourage civic engagement. It is just as plausible, they say, that doing a bit of green shopping may well lead, instead, to feeling less urgency, because “I have done something”; “I have done what I can”; “I have done enough” (Szasz 2007, 2011).

Is consumption part of the problem? Yes, but one has to “unpack” the concept if one is to understand exactly how. Is it—can it be—part of the solution? Possibly, if one avoids the seemingly obvious “let’s persuade consumers to go green.” True, if enough consumers look to buy fruits and vegetables free of pesticide residues, that can foster the growth of organic agriculture. It is more powerful, though, to advocate for policies that can change consumer behavior “from above,” policies that result in design of smarter cities, that incentivize the building of energy-efficient homes, that direct automakers to increase mileage. New, innovative movements, such as the Transition Town Movement, which advocate more holistic, community-based, collective action “to build community resilience in the face of such challenges as peak oil, climate change,” are also promising (Transition 2013). Sociological analysis suggests, however, that a politics that focuses on consumption will not, by itself, be a solution to our environmental crisis unless we also address, at the same time, inequality/poverty, population, the whole cycle of extraction, production, distribution, and waste disposal.

## I4 Cosmos

Laura Dassow Walls

“Cosmos” is one of the most important and most deeply misunderstood words in our vocabulary. In common use, it designates the stars and planets beyond Earth, realms accessible only by telescopes or the most futuristic of technologies. But the complex history of this ancient word suggests that it has much more to teach us—indeed, that we need it now more than ever, for popular usage masks its long history as humanity’s oldest ecological vision of our planet.

In ancient Greece, “*kosmos*” meant not “the universe”—for this the Greeks used “*τὸ πᾶν*,” “the all”—but rather, the universe comprehended as a unified system that was both ordered and beautiful. How, they asked, did this system come into being? Of what did it consist, what was its fate? Their answers elaborated a plethora of possibilities that initiated what we now call “science.” *Kosmoi* were variously imagined as finite or infinite; designed and fated, or bubbling up by chance; single and identical with the universe, or many coexisting in a pluriverse, or perhaps rising, flourishing, and dying in a succession of rebirths—but in all cases, the ancient Greeks imagined their *kosmoi* arising from some prior state of “chaos,” not, as in the Christian thought that supplanted them, *ex nihilo*, from nothing, commanded by a Creator God. Instead, Greek *kosmoi* arose by virtue of some form of ordering principle that was natural, invariant, and consistent over time, hence not subject to interference by the caprice of the gods—and hence, subject to empirical investigation (Gregory 2007, 1–24).