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Another Study Shows People With A Low IQ Generally Support The Right-Wing

Okay now, liberals, don’t get all smug and conservatives, don’t get defensive. The studies hit a hot-button trifecta – examining intelligence, racism and ideology – and our ability to remain objective may be strained. But… it is what it is so let’s dive right in.

The first studies of the correlation between intelligence and racism were done in the U.K. and involved children born in 1958 and another group born in 1970. The children’s intelligence was tested at age 10-11 and at age 30-33, their levels of social conservatism were measured. Verbal and nonverbal intelligence at the early ages was gauged using words, symbols and shapes. The later tests used four methods of testing cognitive abilities. The average IQ for comparison was set at 100.

The adults were given statements with which to agree or disagree dealing with social issues such as women working outside the home and what children should be taught in school. They also answered questions as to whether or not they’d work with people of other races. Once the data was crunched, those children who tested low on the IQ tests grew up to be adults who were racist. It also showed that the people with lower cognitive abilities had less social contact with people of other races.

Gordon Hodson of Brock University in St. Catherine’s, Ontario, Canada and his colleague Michael A. Busseri, examined these and other studies. Their findings were published as Bright Minds and Dark Attitudes: Lower Cognitive Ability Predicts Greater Prejudice Through Right-Wing Ideology and Low Intergroup Contact.

“This finding is consistent with recent research demonstrating that inter-group contact is mentally challenging and cognitively draining, and consistent with findings that contact reduces prejudice.”

The point here is that one’s cognitive ability determines how easily one can grasp complexities and that right-wing extremist ideologies (and racism) cater to this handicap. Of course, extremist left-wing ideologies can fall into this trap as well, but few of them are as harmful as right-wing ones. For example, a right-wing view that all foreigners are scary and wish us harm becomes everyone is kind and wishes us well through one left-wing prism. One of these things is not like the other, though.

“Socially conservative ideologies tend to offer structure and order,” Hodson said, explaining why these beliefs might draw those with low intelligence. “Unfortunately, many of these features can also contribute to prejudice.”
Further, these findings may relate to homophobia as well. In another U.S. study, Hodson and Busseri compared 254 people who had the same level of education but possessed different levels of abstract reasoning. They found that people whose abstract reasoning abilities were poor tended to be homophobic. Just like in the U.K. study, these people had also had less contact with gays and were more accepting of authoritarianism.

Dr. Brian Nosek, a University of Virginia psychologist, says that the findings are correlational, hence they can’t conclusively prove that low IQs lead to prejudice. The studies would have to compare identical people, which is not possible. But it does point to the idea that people who lack the cognitive ability to process complexity tend to adhere to strict ideologies:

“Reality is complicated and messy. Ideologies get rid of the messiness and impose a simpler solution. So, it may not be surprising that people with less cognitive capacity will be attracted to simplifying ideologies.” *(source)*

This is not to say that all conservatives are dumb or that all liberals are smart. That’s far too simplistic a conclusion to draw. But the predominance of extremist right-wing ideology amongst those with a low-IQ is too common to ignore.

*Another interesting study* has shown a correlation between American symbols or cues – such as the flag or the word, “patriot” – and increased aggression in judging other people. These cues also increased the subject’s tendency to fall back onto war imagery and language. This occurred regardless of political affiliation or other factors. So when Fox News (or any other network) precedes a story with one of these cues, it tends to increase their viewer’s aggression towards who or whatever the subject of the report may be. Explains a lot, doesn’t it?

What can we conclude from these studies? Strictly speaking, they have their flaws but, overall, I believe that they have been able to draw a connection between low IQ in the form of reasoning and abstract thought and racism and authoritarian ideologies. From here, perhaps we should try to teach children how better to reason and extrapolate as well as to empathize with others. Hopefully, those who have a vested interest in keeping people stupid won’t be able to block these efforts. And if they do, then parents, it’s up to you. Teach your children well.
Anonymous surveys are crucial for filling the gap between reality and government statistics

When it comes to drugs, there are things we know and a (much longer list of) things we don't. We know, for example, that 1 in 5 people in the UK smoke tobacco and adults drink around 20 units of alcohol per week.

But governments rarely collect statistics on other types of drugs - how they make people feel, how much they spend and what, if anything, they do to stay safe.

So, in 2011, Mixmag, a dance music magazine teamed up with Dr Adam Winstock, an addictions psychiatrist, to start a huge anonymised online survey and get some answers to things like:

• What's the perfect marijuana?

• How many people grow their own?

• How would legalisation change the way people talk about drugs?

In 2012, the Guardian partnered with them and the survey responses grew from 2,500 to 15,500. This year, the survey will be available in 10 different languages, via 25 media organisations to seek out a truly global response.

You can respond to the survey anonymously at www.globaldrugsurvey.com/GDS2014. We'll publish the results in March 2014.

The drugs survey has proven its value in the past: ketamine wasn't a word that UK drug agencies were aware of until the survey detected its recreational use by clubbers. Here are some other key findings from past surveys:

22% online

In last year's survey, 22% of drug users said they had bought drugs online. The infamous Silk Road accounted for only a small fraction of those respondents (though 14% had set up an account on the site, only 3% had actually made a purchase).

Instead, drug deals may take place on legitimate sites via thinly veiled adverts posted by the likes of 'Mr Green' or 'Charles White' that can evade the attention of the website administrators.
1 in 5 take mystery powders

A fifth of young drug users admit to taking "mystery white powders" without any idea what they contain. The 2012 survey also showed that 15% of all respondents claimed to have taken a unknown white powder in the last 12 months, a third admitting its was supplied by someone they didn’t trust.

More cannabis than energy drinks

Respondents that admit to having taken cannabis outnumbered those who had smoked tobacco or had high-caffeine, high-sugar energy drinks.

Alcohol consumption the most concerning

19% of those completing the survey last year cited alcohol consumption (either their own or that of a friend) as a concern - compared to 12% worrying about cocaine and cannabis.

Legislation affects choices

The survey also provides some insights into the effects of current government policy - as well as potential changes to it.

1 in 5 respondents said that if possession carried no penalties they might be more likely to try drugs, while 1 in 20 said they would definitely do so.

However the survey also highlighted some unexpected possible consequences of such a change: 27% of survey respondents said they would drink less alcohol if possession of drugs carried no penalty.

Despite the fact that it's anonymous and has been designed by academics and clinicians the survey has plenty of limitations. The mere act of clicking on the link means that respondents will already have something in common that other drug users might not - meaning the survey isn't perfectly representative.

What's more, as with other surveys, respondents might have a tendency to write what they think the researchers want to hear (even if it is subconsciously), or have trouble remembering their drug habits accurately. The survey is nevertheless one of the best tools that exists to simply ask individuals around the world about their experiences with legal and illegal drugs.

You can find out more about the survey's findings so far at www.globaldrugssurvey.com/GDS2014
03. McDonald's Advice To Underpaid Employees: Break Food Into Pieces To Keep You Full

The "advice" was published on the “McResource” website, meant to give tips to fast-food workers.

The latest friendly advice from McDonald’s to their low-wage workers includes tips on how to better handle stress—as well as how to fill yourself up better with dinner.

The fast-food corporation instructs workers that breaking food “into pieces” will keep you full.

The advice was published on the “McResource” website, meant to give tips to fast-food workers.
While you need to be a McDonald’s worker to log-in to the website, details of the advice have been publicized by the group Low Pay Is Not OK, a union-backed group seeking to organize low-wage workers at McDonald’s.

The effort is part of the larger campaign to push for living wages, benefits and the right to organize among low-wage workers across a variety of industries.

A video published by Low Pay Is Not OK shows the website’s advice to workers. One piece of advice given is for workers to take two vacations a year—an impossible task given that many employees work two low-wage jobs. It tells workers to “sing away stress” because it “can lower your blood pressure.” And it tells McDonald’s employees to break “food into pieces,” which “results in eating less and still feeling full.”

McDonald’s had previously come under fire for telling workers to apply for food stamps while being employed by a fast-food corporation raking in billions annually. Many McDonald’s workers make minimum wage. The federal minimum wage rate is $7.25 an hour. The McDonald’s advice comes as more and more corporations undergo scrutiny for paying workers low-wages.

Yesterday, a Wal-Mart store in Cleveland made headlines after a newspaper reported that the store encouraged employees to donate food for other, less fortunate workers at Wal-Mart for Thanksgiving.

Watch the Low Pay Is Not OK video here: or on Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36usDqb0tJU

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04. McDonald’s Advice To Underpaid Employees: Sell Your Christmas Presents For Cash

Tis the season for holiday spirit: Yule logs, egg nog, festive lights and exchanging gifts with loved ones. If you work for McDonald’s, though, be sure to save those receipts.

McDonald’s McResource Line, a dedicated website run by the world’s largest fast-food chain to provide its 1.8 million employees with financial and health-related tips, offers a full page of advice for “Digging Out From Holiday Debt.”

Among their helpful holiday tips: “Selling some of your unwanted possessions on eBay or Craigslist could bring in some quick cash.”

Elsewhere on the site, McDonald’s encourages its employees to break apart food when they eat meals, as “breaking food into pieces often results in eating less and still feeling full.” And if they are struggling to stock their shelves with food in the first place, the company offers assistance for workers applying for food stamps.

McDonald’s corporate officers have a history of offering questionable advice to their low-wage workers. Four months ago, the company partnered with Visa to distribute a sample “budget.” In it, the chain suggested that workers needn’t pay for such frivolous expenses like their heating bills, and factored in a monthly rent of $600. To workers living in New York City (home of 350+ stores) and other expensive metropolises, that number is almost comical.

McDonald’s employees are some of the most underpaid workers in the country. The company’s cashiers and “team members” earn, on average, $7.75 an hour, just 50 cents higher than the federal minimum wage. Responding to rising living costs, many stores have staged walk-outs, strikes and protests, demanding a living wage. In Europe, where the minimum wage for employees is $12, customers pay just pennies more than their American counterparts for the same menu items, while the stores themselves typically bring in higher profit margins than ones in the United States.

Of course, McDonalds has shown little willingness to negotiate higher salaries for their poorest workers even as labor rights groups up the pressure. Instead, their website has another piece of advice for people who are stressed about their meager paychecks: “Quit complaining,” the site suggests. “Stress hormones levels rise by 15% after 10 minutes of complaining.”
The majority of Walmart’s workers make less than $25,000 a year, something that some have gone on strike to protest. But the company could raise all workers’ wages to that level without having to also raise its low prices, according to a new report by the think tank Demos.

Rather than putting the $7.6 billion it spent last year on buying back shares of its own stock to use on something that serves to enrich a small group of investors but doesn’t bring it any other returns, it could use the money to give its low-paid workers a $5.83 raise, “more than enough to ensure that all Walmart workers are paid a wage equivalent to at least $25,000 a year for full-time work,” the report notes.

Share buybacks serve to decrease the number of stock shares and inflate the value of each share without the company increasing its performance. The report notes that “buybacks did nothing to boost Walmart’s productivity or bottom line and had no direct benefit for Walmart’s customers or frontline employees” while typically creating less value for shareholders over time.

But paying workers more would benefit Walmart directly in a few ways. First, it would likely boost employee productivity and reduce turnover. The report notes that almost 500,000 workers leave the company each year, which means extra costs to hire and train replacement employees. Meanwhile, its sales have been suffering from, in part, an inability to keep shelves stocked and poor customer experience, something that could improve with better worker productivity. And if its workers have more money to spend, they may buy more items at Walmart itself, also helping to boost its sales.

It would also help the economy, pumping more money into consumer spending and reducing workers’ need to rely on public benefits.

Instead of considering a raise for its workers, however, the company has fought living wage bills in a number of cities, most recently defeating a bill in Washington, DC by threatening to pull out of plans to open new stores if it passed. And instead of listening to workers’ demands for higher wages, on Monday it was accused by the National Labor Relations Board of illegally firing, disciplining, and threatening workers who went on strike.
06. Boris Johnson's philosophy isn't just elitist – it's sinister

London's mayor opened his mouth and wrote off a whole swath of the populace. Yet he's just spelling out the ideology of the ruling class.

Boris Johnson. 'The Tories increasingly favour genetic explanations for inequality.' Photograph: Dave Thompson/PA

Boris Johnson – or Borisconi, as I call him – has a severe case of premature ejaculation. Obviously I am using ejaculation here to mean saying something too soon and too hastily.

He has said what he really thinks. Will the electorate, the great lumpen mass of obviously stupid people, swallow it? Rich people are rich because they are better, cleverer, more ambitious. We should worship them for paying taxes. Try not to think about the ones that don't. Oh, and let's have Boris Island.

There are no surprises in what he said, other than timing. The Tories increasingly favour genetic explanations for inequality. If whole swaths of us are born poor, dumb and without the drive to get to Eton, never mind a job-centre, it's our own stupid fault. Only lunatics would point to the "cleverness" of the bankers who fabricated formulae that sold off risk in ever smaller bundles, with no consequences for the buyers. Amazing how these intellectual giants produced an unmitigated disaster!

Let's move on, as Borisconi did in his party political broadcast for himself: let the wealthy take London, let a thousand Shards split the sky open so that golden showers rain down on to multibillionaires. Then, he got controversial with an ill-judged and frankly under-researched passage about IQ. Give me back my Mensa membership because any fule know any fule can be tutored up for IQ tests, which is why selective schools prefer this discredited measure of intelligence.

Never mind. A genetically determinist argument – part selfish gene, part antisocial goonishness – is now in favour. This is more than elitism. It is sinister. As a former Tory prime minister bemoans the lack of social mobility, a system of social engineering fuelled by the class and school system operates alongside food banks. What the ruling class rarely spells out is the underlying ideology; Borisconi is unembarrassable, so he does: you are poor because you are stupid.

Those who think money is evil are those who don't have any. As he will know from the classics, Aristophanes talks of demagogues able to fish in still waters by stirring the slime "in the same way it is in troublesome times that you can line your pockets".

These are troublesome times and the links between morality and capitalism, post-crash, could not be clearer. Instead we have this sub-Ayn Rand adolescent fantasy presented as intellectual discourse.
To be fair, there is no one who embodies Rand more than Borisconi, for when Rand tells us that it is intoxicating to only care about yourself, we see Johnson’s egotism, larger than his party, his ambition to be "king of the world", his appetites supposedly appealing. There is no veneer of David Cameron's caring or Nick Clegg's dire procrastination.

Pure self-interest is as economically flawed as it is morally flawed. Roosevelt said it and the banking crisis is again evidence of it. But, strangely, among the almighty va va voom IQs of the cabinet, evidence is not taken seriously. These cornflakes that got shaken to the top of a stale box dismantle health and education and welfare while ignoring expert advice, because I guess they just "know". Greed is not only good, it is a fundamental prop to the fantasy of eternal growth. Again, scientific evidence that links huge wealth to unethical behaviour is glossed over.

As society fragments, a vague Christian morality is also ignored. Durkheim said the arousal of greed stops us finding our foothold. So look around you before you start on the plasma screens of the impoverished. When Romney wrote off half his electorate it did him no good. Who, then, will vote for Borisconi? The super rich and the super stupid?

As he preaches his gospel of self-interest, Borisconi assumes we are all are bad as him. Maybe we are. Maybe we are inured to the banality of obscene inequality that is his "philosophy". Or maybe he has come out with it far too soon. And it is repulsive. In his excitement, he forgot that other people – even the little ones – sometimes think. And sometimes even matter.

• This article was amended on 28 November 2013. The subheading originally misspelled "populace" as "populus". This has now been corrected.
in the form of ground water, arable land, fisheries, a livable climate — to prop up our carbon-intensive lifestyles.

Black Friday has become an orgiastic celebration of hyper-materialism.

We cannot stop catastrophic climate change — in the long term and possibly even the medium-term — without a pretty dramatic change to our overconsumption-based economic system.

We have already **overshot the Earth’s biocapacity** — and the overshoot gets worse every year.

“A quarter of the energy we use is just in our crap,” physicist Saul Griffith explains in his detailed discussion of our carbon footprint. You can watch the MacArthur genius award winner soberly dissect his formerly unsustainable lifestyle [here](#) and [here](#).

Or listen to the MSNBC interview of “Reverend Billy Talen of the Church of Stop Shopping.” Seriously **(sort of)**. Or you can read the Onion’s **black humor**, “Chinese Factory Worker Can’t Believe The Shit He Makes For Americans.”

The tragic irony is that much of this holiday shopping is supposedly for our kids — and yet this overconsumption is a core part of our climate inaction, which, as president Obama has said, is a betrayal of our children!

Now it’s true, as I’ve said, that if we ever get really serious about avoiding catastrophic climate change, we could dramatically cut national and global emissions for decades under the auspices of our basic economic system. You could use a high and rising price for CO2 plus smart regulations to encourage efficiency at a state and national level.

Also, the end to hyper-consumerism is not something amenable to legislation. I’ve argued that it is most likely
to come when we are desperate — when the reality that we are destroying a livable climate is so painful that we give it up voluntarily, albeit reluctantly, like a smoker diagnosed with early-stage emphysema. Bill Clinton didn’t become vegan until after he experienced serious heart trouble — twice.

Climate science is clear that inaction is suicidal (see here). That’s why “virtually all” climatologists “are now convinced that global warming is a clear and present danger to civilization,” as Lonnie Thompson has put it.

A recent must-read New York Times opinion piece by an Iraqi war veteran, “Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene,” explains that a quantum shift in mindset is inevitable:

The human psyche naturally rebels against the idea of its end. Likewise, civilizations have throughout history marched blindly toward disaster, because humans are wired to believe that tomorrow will be much like today — it is unnatural for us to think that this way of life, this present moment, this order of things is not stable and permanent. Across the world today, our actions testify to our belief that we can go on like this forever, burning oil, poisoning the seas, killing off other species, pumping carbon into the air, ignoring the ominous silence of our coal mine canaries in favor of the unending robotic tweets of our new digital imaginarium. Yet the reality of global climate change is going to keep intruding on our fantasies of perpetual growth, permanent innovation and endless energy, just as the reality of mortality shocks our casual faith in permanence.

The biggest problem climate change poses isn’t how the Department of Defense should plan for resource wars, or how we should put up sea walls to protect Alphabet City, or when we should evacuate Hoboken. It won’t be addressed by buying a Prius, signing a treaty, or turning off the air-conditioning. The biggest problem we face is a philosophical one: understanding that this civilization is already dead. The sooner we confront this problem, and the sooner we realize there’s nothing we can do to save ourselves, the sooner we can get down to the hard work of adapting, with mortal humility, to our new reality.

The choice is a clear one. We can continue acting as if tomorrow will be just like yesterday, growing less and less prepared for each new disaster as it comes, and more and more desperately invested in a life we can’t sustain. Or we can learn to see each day as the death of what came before, freeing ourselves to deal with whatever problems the present offers without attachment or fear.

In the words of British poet Matthew Arnold, we are: “Wandering between two worlds, one dead / The other powerless to be born.”

On the subject of our global Ponzi scheme, New York Times columnist Tom Friedman interviewed me for a column back in 2009:

“We created a way of raising standards of living that we can’t possibly pass on to our children,” said Joe Romm, a physicist and climate expert who writes the indispensable blog climateprogress.org. We have been getting rich by depleting all our natural stocks — water, hydrocarbons, forests, rivers, fish and arable land — and not by generating renewable flows.
“You can get this burst of wealth that we have created from this rapacious behavior,” added Romm. “But it has to collapse, unless adults stand up and say, ‘This is a Ponzi scheme. We have not generated real wealth, and we are destroying a livable climate …’ Real wealth is something you can pass on in a way that others can enjoy.”

The adults, in short, are not standing up. Sadly, most haven’t even taken the time to understand that they should.

And so every generation that comes after the Baby Boomers is poised to experience the dramatic changes in lifestyle that inevitably follow the collapse of any Ponzi scheme.

Regular readers are familiar with this metaphor of a global Ponzi scheme. But it bears repeating on Black Friday since it is not just a metaphor, but a central organizing narrative of how to think about the fix we have put ourselves in. As an aside, since some shopping is unavoidable, remember that Black Friday is 50 times more carbon-intensive than Cyber Monday.

What exactly is a Ponzi scheme? Wikipedia (had a good entry:

A Ponzi scheme is a fraudulent investment operation that pays returns to investors from their own money or money paid by subsequent investors rather than from profit. The term “Ponzi scheme” is used primarily in the United States, while other English-speaking countries do not distinguish colloquially between this scheme and pyramid schemes.

The Ponzi scheme usually offers abnormally high short-term returns in order to entice new investors. The perpetuation of the high returns that a Ponzi scheme advertises and pays requires an ever-increasing flow of money from investors in order to keep the scheme going.

In our case, investors (i.e. current generations) are paying themselves (i.e. you and me) by taking the nonrenewable resources and livable climate from future generations. To perpetuate the high returns the rich countries in particular have been achieving in recent decades, we have been taking an ever greater fraction of nonrenewable energy resources (especially hydrocarbons) and natural capital (fresh water, arable land, forests, fisheries), and, the most important nonrenewable natural capital of all — a livable climate.

See also a new study “The Monetary Cost of the Non-Use of Renewable Energies,” which finds that “every day we delay substituting renewables for fossil fuels,” every day “fossil raw materials are consumed as one-time energy creates a future usage loss of between 8.8 and 9.3 billion US Dollars.” Oil and coal are essentially too valuable to burn even ignoring the cost of their climate-destroying emissions.

The system is destined to collapse because the earnings, if any, are less than the payments.


Usually, the scheme is interrupted by legal authorities before it collapses because a Ponzi scheme is suspected or because the promoter is selling unregistered securities.

Yes, well, the authorities (i.e. world leaders, opinion makers, the cognoscenti) haven’t been doing much interrupting over the past two to three decades since, unlike a typical Ponzi scheme, they are heavily invested in the scheme and addicted to the returns!
Knowingly entering a Ponzi scheme, even at the last round of the scheme, can be rational in the economic sense if a government will likely bail out those participating in the Ponzi scheme.

But Friedman quotes Glenn Prickett, senior vice president at Conservation International, explaining, “Mother Nature doesn’t do bailouts.”

We aren’t all Madoffs in the sense of people who have knowingly created a fraudulent Ponzi scheme for humanity. But given all of the warnings from scientists and international governments and independent energy organizations over the past quarter-century (see for instance [IEA’s Bombshell Warning: We’re Headed Toward 11°F Global Warming and “Delaying Action Is a False Economy”]) — it has gotten harder and harder for any of us to pretend that we are innocent victims, that we aren’t just hoping we can maintain our own personal wealth and well-being for a few more decades before the day of reckoning. Après nous le déluge.

In short, humanity has made Madoff look like a penny-ante criminal.

By enriching the authorities, as noted, we encouraged those with the most power to solve the problem to do nothing. Heck, the only way in which the global economy hasn’t become a Ponzi scheme is that everything being done is perfectly legal!

By most enriching those who did the most plundering, we enabled them to fund lobbying and disinformation campaigns to convince substantial fractions of the public and media that there is no Ponzi scheme — that global warming is “too complicated for the public to understand” and nothing to worry about.

And by “paying ourselves” with the wealth from future generations — indeed, from the next 50 generations and next 100 billion people to walk the earth (see [NOAA stunner: Climate change “largely irreversible for 1000 years,” with permanent Dust Bowls in Southwest and around the globe]) — we cleverly took advantage of victims not yet born, those not able to even know they were being robbed.

Madoff is reviled as a monster for targeting charities. We are targeting our own children and grandchildren and on and on. What does that make us?.

[retour à l'index]
Corporate Elites Are Witnessing a Growing Wave of Resistance to the ‘Walmartization’ of Our Economy

The fight for more worker rights and wages is gaining a critical mass.

The struggle of working Americans took center stage as Black Friday protests covered the country. The struggle for wages that do not leave families impoverished is one that affects us all and highlights the unfair economy created by a class war waged by the wealthy for decades.

The ‘Walmartization’ of the US economy has created a downward spiral in wages and destroyed small businesses and communities while heightening the wealth divide that is at the root of so many problems. The war on working people is a war on all but the wealthiest Americans.

The people are fighting back and the elites recognize it. We have seen how aggressive they are in how they responded to Occupy and other protest movements. Thousands of Americans have been arrested exercising their Right to Assembly, more than 7,500 in Occupy alone.

There is fear in the investor class as they see people organizing and mobilizing. Corporations are now investing more time and money in preparation to protect themselves from investor actions and legal challenges. The actions of corporations and governments against the people are a sign of their fear, and a sign of our unrealized strength.

Noam Chomsky writes in his new book, Occupy: Class War, Rebellion and Solidarity, that the “business class” is always engaged in class warfare. They continually act to protect their interests, wealth and power.

The class war manifests itself in every aspect of our lives from the attack on our public institutions and civil liberties to climate change and the global race to the bottom and racially unfair police enforcement and mass incarceration.

It defines our foreign policy including trade agreements rigged for big business and wars for resources, cheap labor and the positioning of American Empire.
Active Fronts of Struggle in the Class War

There are many active fronts of struggle. In last week’s report we emphasized the bold and creative protests against climate change, extreme energy extraction and toxicity in our environment. This week we focus on another critical front, worker rights and wages; and highlight the necessity for persistence, solidarity and transformation.

Henry Giroux recently spoke with Bill Moyers about his book Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism. Giroux said, “The real changes are going to come in creating movements that are longstanding, that are organized, that basically take questions of governance and policy seriously and begin to spread out and become international.”

An area in which this is happening to a great extent is in global trade. The World Trade Organization (WTO) will meet in Bali, Indonesia on December 3. Ever since the Seattle protests in 1999, the WTO has been unable to move forward on their agenda. This week WTO Director General Roberto Azevedo announced they were unable to move forward once again. U.S. Ambassador to the WTO Michael Punke expressed “great sadness,” while we applauded the failure of corporate trade. Activists and small countries being bullied should be wary, this could be a negotiating ploy and they need to continue to fight back.

We are on the cusp of a new era of fair trade instead of rigged corporate trade. Our tasks are to stop the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) which is reaching completion and the new Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TAFTA) from being signed into law and then go on the offense to demand a trade process that is inclusive, democratic and transparent.

Protests were held every day last week in Salt Lake City where the TPP negotiators were meeting and 250 showed up to protest the TPP in Beverly Hills at a high dollar fundraiser featuring President Obama, Majority Leader Reid, and Minority Leader Pelosi. Opposition is growing.

We can keep building momentum on Tuesday, December 3, a day of international protests against toxic trade agreements and for a new era of trade that puts people and the planet before profits. The Flush the TPP campaign signed on to the December 3 day of action called by people in Indonesia and around the world. Protests will be held in cities from Hawaii to New York. And we will deliver a petition to the Office of the US Trade Representative in Washington, DC. telling them to stop their bullying.

The TPP is an example of a phenomenal corporate power grab that will accelerate the global race to the bottom in wages and worker safety as well as in protection of the environment and human rights and public health. It shows how all of our issues are interconnected and we need to act in solidarity. Walmart is one of the corporations that is really pushing the TPP so that it can move its factories into countries like Vietnam where the minimum wage is $0.36 per hour. Stopping the TPP would be a victory against Walmart and all transnational corporations.

We can stop the TPP and are making tremendous progress.

Workers and Communities Unite Against Walmart

Why are the Black Friday mass protests against Walmart important? We can think of no other corporation that has caused as much damage to the working class, communities and the overall economy as Walmart. Poverty wages, destruction of local business and the obscene wealth divide are at the door of the largest retailer in the nation. The six Walton heirs have more wealth than the
The Walton family wealth has come at a tremendous price for the rest of us. They’ve gained this wealth by squashing worker rights, lowering wages and draining our local tax dollars, and they show no signs of changing course. After the disastrous collapse of the factory in Bangladesh which killed over 1,000 workers, many companies signed on to a new accord to prevent it from happening again. Walmart, along with GAP, refuses to sign the accord.

Walmart's low price guarantee has effectively made them into a monopoly that forces their suppliers to fire workers and move overseas to drive down costs. Walmart is such a behemoth that it has no competitor in the world. And despite massive profits, each Walmart employee requires around $2,000.00 per year in public assistance for health care and food stamps. That doesn't include taxpayer investment in infrastructure for Walmart stores and corporate tax breaks. We are all forced to subsidize Walmart's unethical business practices that undermine the economy. This year, Walmart went so far as to request food donations for their own poverty-wage employees' Thanksgiving meals.

In addition, as Walmarts have popped up across the country, they have left a path of destruction to small businesses and have ravaged communities. Local businesses simply can’t compete with Walmart’s prices. And Walmart sucks local dollars out of state to the corporate headquarters in Arkansas. When Walmart comes to town you can expect poverty to increase, local businesses to fail, more public assistance for food stamps and healthcare as well as a constant drain on local taxes.

There is a very high cost to Walmart’s low prices. Local politicians who do not stop Walmart from coming to their city are doing a public disservice.

Over the past few years, Walmart workers have been fighting back through the organization OUR Walmart and their For Respect Campaign. They've staged strikes at stores and warehouses, rallies at the Walmart headquarters and this year they escalated to road blockades and mass arrests. Workers are speaking out and telling their stories. This Black Friday, protests at 1500 stores have been organized and community members are standing in solidarity with the workers. Here are tools that protesters can use to educate and increase the pressure by “rebranding” Walmart with the truth.

Walmart could easily provide a living wage. A recent study by Demos shows it would even be in their best interest to do so because it would stimulate the whole economy. And there are signs that Walmart is feeling the heat. The CEO, Michael Duke, announced this week that he will step down.

And Walmart hired a public relations firm to smear Walmart protesters. Our sense is that this effort will backfire as it shows the desperation of this Goliath that will fall to mobilized Davids. We hope that you will support the Walmart workers and press for real transformation.

Imagine what a better place the world would be if Walmart began to pay workers at a living wage and had to compensate communities for the damage it has done.

In fact, Walmart is not the only corporation that mistreats its workers; it's just the largest one. Here is a list of ten American companies that pay the least. In addition to Walmart employees, other workers are fighting for a living wage. Fast food workers and those who make supplies for the fast food restaurants have also been holding strikes and rallies. Airport workers from Seattle to Minneapolis to New York are organizing for higher pay and winning in the case of Seattle.

The situation in Seattle is particularly noteworthy. Seattle just elected its first socialist at-large council member, Kshama Sawant.
Sawant recently urged local workers to resist Boeing’s “economic terrorism” and threaten to take over the factories rather than make concessions to the company that has been squeezing the workers and the city. Boeing workers voted overwhelmingly to reject a contract that would hurt younger workers even though it puts hard won pay and benefits at risk.

Sawant urged them to go further and take over the factories.

**Persistence and Solidarity are Key Ingredients**

Younger workers are in a tough position and it is great to see solidarity rising up. Graduate students in California showed solidarity this month by pledging to strike alongside campus workers who were planning a strike. And after an eight year campaign that was supported by students, graduate students at New York University won a significant concession: they will vote in December on forming a union. Their goals, like so many impoverished U.S. workers, are better pay and working conditions. Other workers who need our solidarity are postal workers. The Postal Service is under a severe and unnecessary attack, probably because the bi-partisans in Washington want to privatize this public service, and turn it into a profit center for their donors. In this video, Carl Gibson describes an idea that helps the Postal Service at the expense of large financial institutions by sending their pre-paid junk mail back to them.

Persistence and solidarity are key ingredients to social transformation. On December 2, the people of Bhopal will mark the 29th anniversary since the Dow Chemical disaster that has killed 25,000 so far and continues to cause harm. Though their struggle is ongoing, they have had some important victories for clean water, pensions for widows, environmental monitoring and more. They are asking for people to join them by holding actions at Dow Chemical offices.

**Other Highlights From The Week**

The resistance movement continues on many fronts, beyond labor – militarism, spying, coal, climate change and protecting mountains and forests were among those we’ll highlight here.

On the antiwar front, our colleagues at Vets for Peace finished their three week action in Palestine, standing with Palestinians subjected to Israeli ethnic cleansing, with a protest at the US Embassy in Tel Aviv.

Out of fear, they closed the embassy until the vets left. Also, the School of the Americas Watch held its yearly vigil at Fort Benning last weekend, more than one thousand participated. They welcomed newcomers and held a Peoples Movement Assembly for the first time to discuss new strategies and nonviolent direct action tactics. They covered the fence of Fort Benning with crosses signifying the deaths caused by torture and militarism. Next week we will see the SOA’s impact as graduates of the school are now in Honduras enforcing what looks like a corrupt election result.

The Free Marissa Now Campaign just announced a major victory. Marissa Alexander, an abused wife who defended herself by shooting a gun into the air to prevent an attack, was released from jail the night before Thanksgiving pending her next trial in March. And NYPD officer Anthony Bologna, infamous for his brutal treatment of protesters, especially the pepper spraying of woman under arrest, will have to testify before a Civilian Complaint Review Board, as a court ruled against his efforts to avoid testifying. Let’s hope that Bologna is held accountable for his abuse of constitutional rights and the Rule of Law.

Mountain top removal activists are protesting in the West Virginia state capital. They are in Day 3 of “The Coal Dust Vigil,” highlighting how coal dust is killing people and making others ill in their community. And, in Connecticut, there have been spectacular protests against UBS bank for their
financing of mountain top removal -- banner drops, sit-ins, lock-downs and blockades. In Cambridge, Harvard students disrupted a Bank of America recruiting effort over their financial support for coal. Our most inspiring protest of the week is ongoing in California, this amazing 16 year old young woman is in her third week of a tree sit to protect ancient forests.

While the NSA fretted over what else is coming from the Snowden leaks, telling reporters “the worst is yet to come” and there could be two years of stories still ahead, buses in the nation's capital were adorned with large advertisements thanking Edward Snowden and saying “no” to the security state, thanks to the Partnership for Civil Justice. And, in Utah, the massive NSA data center was the subject of a protest, with the Backbone Campaign flying a massive weather balloon sign proclaiming: “Water, Energy, Tax $, NSA Guzzling Billions To Steal Our Liberties.”

A Cultural Transformation

We are in a war that reaches into every aspect of our lives. Giroux describes it as “a war on the mind. The war on what it means to be able to dissent, the war on the possibility of alternative visions.” He goes on to say that we are in “A war on the possibility of an education that enables people to think critically, a war on cultural apparatuses that entertain by simply engaging in this spectacle of violence…”

In addition to building a global movement, Giroux calls for a cultural transformation. We need to find places where people can connect to talk about the world they want to create and then strategize about how to make it a reality. We need to move outside of the constraints inherent in our current economic structure and use our collective wisdom and power to build new systems based on values that lift up communities and heal the planet.

The cultural transformation begins with dispelling myths and facing the truth. We published multiple stories this week on the Thanksgiving Myth. S. Brian Wilson vividly described the truth of the genocide of Native Indians, which he called the “defining and enabling experience of our nation.” Robert Jensen wrote about how we should be atoning for that genocide and reflecting on what it means about us and how it still affects us today, rather than feasting.

But, most important on this are the views of Native Indians. We reported on the annual National Day of Mourning recognized by Indians every year since 1970 on the fourth Thursday of November on a hill overlooking Plymouth Rock.

This year hundreds attended and their message was one that relates to everything we’ve written in this article and much of the work of the resistance movement. They criticized the Plymouth Company’s values of corporatism and profit which brought the Pilgrims here. They said corporations should not have greater rights than people and called on us to “reject the corporate and corrupt values of materialism and competitiveness which were causing harm to fellow human beings and to the earth.”

The Indians urged everyone who attended to go back and work to protect the planet, people and all living things. We see people doing creative resistance that reflects these values on a daily basis and report on much of it at Popular Resistance.

There is so much going on that we cannot cover it all, and we know the potential is even greater.

Connect with people in your community. One person suggested forming a Popular Resistance meet-up and others are joining struggles for workers, the environment, youth, to end war, end police abuse and so much more. There is room for you in this movement. When you get involved, you will find that your frustration at the mis-direction of our country lessens because you will see that you are not alone. Many are working for the transformation we know we need with persistence and in solidarity.
09. From Amazon to kebabs: 10 things you need to know about consumer drones

Amazon wants to use drones for parcel delivery, but UAVs are making their way into our lives in other ways too.

Amazon has announced its ambition to use drones to deliver parcels in the US within five years, as a way to speed up its distribution process and make it "very green".

"You order something and within half an hour you can have a drone land on your front porch, drop off a little box and off it goes," chief executive Jeff Bezos told news show 60 minutes on Sunday night. But Amazon is far from the only company aiming to make unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) a more familiar sight in our towns and cities.

While drones are most associated with military uses, commercial drones (used by companies like Amazon) and consumer drones (used by us) are both growing areas. Here's a primer.
Moving beyond warzones

The use of drones – unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs for short – in military conflicts remains controversial. But drones have consumer uses too, and a growing number of companies are pouring money into making them mainstream in the years ahead. One of those firms, 3D Robotics, raised $30m of funding in September, while the Federal Aviation Administration expects 30,000 drones to be flying over the US alone in 20 years' time.

Parrot's AR.Drone 2.0

Perhaps the best-known consumer drone is Parrot's AR.Drone, which is in its second-generation model. It's a "quadricopter" controlled from your smartphone or tablet, which is capable of zipping around for 36 minutes at a time, recording and streaming video. £279 in the UK, it has an add-on Flight Recorder accessory that uses GPS to navigate a pre-set route, and plot it on a map.

First Person View (FPV)

Besides UAV, another abbreviation you'll often see used when talking about consumer drones is FPV, for First Person View. That refers to drones capable of recording video as they go and streaming it so the owner can steer as if they were sitting in the drone. Some, like the AR.Drone 2.0, offer FPV through their built-in cameras. Others, like the Lehmann LA100, use cameras like the GoPro Hero3+ correct, and there's plenty of sites explaining how keener owners can build their own FPV drones too.

Military inspiration

Having said that consumer drones are moving away from the military world, it's fair to say that a number of them take their design inspiration from the drones being used in warzones. The 4 Channel Predator/Reaper Style UAV Drone RC Plane is a miniature version of the US air force's RQ-1 Predator UAV, for example, encouraging buyers to "fly your own covert missions". For anyone who's followed the debate about military drone-related deaths, the comparison may be distasteful though.

Price: how high can it go?

There's a wide range of consumer drones available. Sub-£100 devices aren't a huge leap from traditional remote-controlled helicopters, with the real action happening between £200 and £400 – although prices are likely to come down over the next year or two. 3D Robotics' 3DR Iris costs $729.99 in the US, but prices go as high as $30,000 for the Aibotix Aibot X6 UAV, which is more focused on commercial use – for example, by filmmakers. Not the kind of thing you'd want to slam into a tree.

There's apps for them

One of the key features of consumer drones is their ability to be controlled by smartphone and tablet apps, although how open they are to developers varies. The AR.Drone led the way in terms of getting apps beyond pure controllers. AR.Race 2 runs on iPhones and iPads, and operates as a racing game for the drone, with players taking turns to complete a course as quickly as possible. Meanwhile,
AR.Rescue 2 is an augmented reality game with virtual aliens that need rescuing. Expect to see more of this as drones get more popular.

7 Commercial uses growing

As more drones get into the hands of individuals, so they'll start using them for work. Germany has a Dönercopter delivering doner kebabs, California has a Burrito Bomber delivering burritos. Sydney firm Flirtey runs a flying book-delivery service. Journalists and activists have also used drones: US journalist Tim Pool customised a drone – the Occucopter – and flew it above the Occupy Wall Street protests to stream footage to the outside world, for example.

8 Drones aren’t just about air

They are swimming and walking too. Portuguese company Azorean raised $127,000 on crowdfunding site Kickstarter to make Ziphius, which it described as “the first app-controlled aquatic drone that plays augmented reality games and shows autonomous behaviours”. It's expected to go on sale in 2014. Meanwhile, the Walkera QR Infra X Smart Drone walks around the house, has sensors to avoid collisions, and can even climb the stairs.

9 Is this legal?

There’s been a lot of debate – more so in the US – about the legality of non-military drones, more in connection with commercial uses and the potential for spying on people. Legal bans on commercial drones left the way clear for consumer models to come out – some of which can be used for commercial purposes. Expect to see some high-profile publicity too if anyone misuses their drone: people buzzing their neighbours' barbecues or spying on spouses or smacking someone in the face with a falling quadricopter could all spark lawsuits.

10 March into the mainstream

Consumer drones are a growing niche. There’s even already a beginner's guide-style e-book: Getting Started with Hobby Quadcopters and Drones, to demystify the area. They also fit into wider trends, from GoPro and other wearable cameras to Lego Mindstorms robotics, that will make them seem less strange in time. That should make 2013 and 2014 a good time for serious discussion about the social implications of the technology.
En Islande, la police tire sur un homme pour la première fois de son histoire

INTERNATIONAL - La police islandaise est confrontée à une criminalité si faible qu'il a fallu attendre ce lundi 2 décembre pour que pour la première fois de son histoire elle tire sur un homme, le blessant mortellement.

L'Islande, pays de 322.000 habitants, connaît l'une des criminalités les plus faibles au monde. Elle ne compte qu'un peu plus de 600 policiers, dont quelques dizaines seulement ont une arme de service. Qu'ils aient dû s'en servir est "sans précédent", a déclaré lors d'une conférence de presse à Reykjavik le directeur national de la police, Haraldur Johannessen.

"La police regrette cet incident"

La victime est un forcené d'un peu moins d'une soixantaine d'années, qui pour une raison inconnue s'est mis à tirer des coups de feu avec un fusil de chasse depuis l'appartement où il vivait seul à Reykjavik. Après avoir évacué l'immeuble, la police a tenté en vain d'établir un contact, puis a lancé des grenades au gaz à travers ses fenêtres afin de neutraliser l'individu.

"Cela n'a pas marché et l'homme a commencé à tirer à travers les fenêtres de son appartement", a rapporté le directeur de la police de la capitale, Stefan Eiriksson.

Une équipe d'intervention spécialisée a pénétré dans l'appartement à l'aube. Elle a été accueillie par de nouveaux tirs qui se sont fichés dans le casque d'un policier et dans le gilet pare-balles d'un autre. Ces policiers ont répliqué et touché l'homme, qui a succombé à ses blessures à l'hôpital dans la matinée. "La police regrette cet incident et présente ses condoléances à la famille", a déclaré Haraldur Johannessen.

Certaines années sans homicides

Une enquête a été ouverte pour déterminer les raisons pour lesquelles le forcené a tiré, et entre autres s'il était sous l'influence de l'alcool ou de stupéfiants. La police a indiqué dans un communiqué que selon ses premières constatations, ses procédures d'intervention avaient été correctement suivies.

"La criminalité est en comparaison plus faible que dans beaucoup de pays développés. C'est en partie dû à un niveau de vie élevé, une population réduite, et des forces de l'ordre diplômées et bien formées", estimait dans son dernier rapport annuel sur la sécurité en Islande l'ambassade américaine à Reykjavik.

Une population rarement exposée à la délinquance

"Il y a toujours des délits qui sont signalés comme de petites agressions, des voitures fracturées, des atteintes contre les biens et d'autres délits de la voie publique en particulier à Reykjavik. La majorité d'entre eux sont attribués à de jeunes délinquants et à des toxicomanes", ajoutait-elle. La police islandaise cherche à sensibiliser à la réalité de la délinquance une population qui y est rarement exposée.

Dans les jours précédant l'incident, elle appelait sur son site internet les résidents de Reykjavik en particulier à ne pas hésiter à signaler les individus suspects qui pourraient préparer un cambriolage, et à garder avec soi dans les bars et restaurants son téléphone portable, de plus en plus fréquemment volé.

11. Male and female brains wired differently, scans reveal

Maps of neural circuitry show women's brains are designed for social skills and memory, men's for perception and co-ordination

Scientists have drawn on nearly 1,000 brain scans to confirm what many had surely concluded long ago: that stark differences exist in the wiring of male and female brains.

Maps of neural circuitry showed that on average women's brains were highly connected across the left and right hemispheres, in contrast to men's brains, where the connections were typically stronger between the front and back regions.

Ragini Verma, a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania, said the greatest surprise was how much the findings supported old stereotypes, with men's brains apparently wired more for perception
and co-ordinated actions, and women's for social skills and memory, making them better equipped for multitasking.

"If you look at functional studies, the left of the brain is more for logical thinking, the right of the brain is for more intuitive thinking.

So if there's a task that involves doing both of those things, it would seem that women are hardwired to do those better," Verma said. "Women are better at intuitive thinking.

Women are better at remembering things. When you talk, women are more emotionally involved – they will listen more."

She added: "I was surprised that it matched a lot of the stereotypes that we think we have in our heads. If I wanted to go to a chef or a hairstylist, they are mainly men."

The findings come from one of the largest studies to look at how brains are wired in healthy males and females.

The maps give scientists a more complete picture of what counts as normal for each sex at various ages.

Armed with the maps, they hope to learn more about whether abnormalities in brain connectivity affect brain disorders such as schizophrenia and depression.

Verma's team used a technique called diffusion tensor imaging to map neural connections in the brains of 428 males and 521 females aged eight to 22.

The neural connections are much like a road system over which the brain's traffic travels.

The scans showed greater connectivity between the left and right sides of the brain in women, while the connections in men were mostly confined to individual hemispheres.

The only region where men had more connections between the left and right sides of the brain was in the cerebellum, which plays a vital role in motor control. "If you want to learn how to ski, it's the cerebellum that has to be strong," Verma said. Details of the study are published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Male and female brains showed few differences in connectivity up to the age of 13, but became more differentiated in 14- to 17-year-olds.

"It's quite striking how complementary the brains of women and men really are," Ruben Gur, a co-author on the study, said in a statement. "Detailed connectome maps of the brain will not only help us better understand the differences between how men and women think, but it will also give us more insight into the roots of neurological disorders, which are often sex-related."
12. So my mushy head is 'hardwired' for girly things, is it? If this is science, I am Richard Dawkins

Why do studies reinforce stereotypes about the male versus female brain, when the truth is that we are not so very different?

If you cut my head in half, out would spill sugar and spice and all things nice, obviously. The part of the brain that does parking would be small, but the part that organises cupcakes and friendship would fizz like sparkling rose. Because I am a girl whose mushy head is "hardwired" for girly things.

As ever, when I see the latest stuff on gender differences in the brain, I feel that I am barely female. Some parts of my brain have gone rogue. But before anyone gets out a soldering iron to rewire me, let's um … think about it.

What we are told is that neuroscience is actually a mass of disciplines: neurology, physiology, psychology, molecular biology and genetics, all of them ramped up by new ways of imaging the brain. Neuroscience has to be social, as we are social animals, and yet it stumbles over "a theory of mind". Are we simply a collection of brain processes that we experience as thoughts and feelings? If we are going to locate these inside the brain, we need some philosophical models too. It is all pretty epiphenomenal for my fluffy little brain. Which is smaller than most men's.

My brain also lives in a female body and clearly there are differences between men and women. But the latest overhyped study, which suggested that – guess what? – men are good at structure and co-ordinated action (map-reading?) and female brains are designed to facilitate communication (everything else?), is about as plausible as the finding reported in one notorious Daily Mail story that women were programmed by evolution to be "bitchy". This was based on showing 46 women in Canada pictures of other women in tight T-shirts. If this is science, I am Richard Dawkins.

Neuroscience is just as useful as evolutionary biology when it comes to reinforcing stereotypes in a pop-psychology manner. Are you right-brained (creative, intuitive) or left-brained (organised, systematic)? Do a quick quiz to see, rather than understand that this dichotomy has been fairly comprehensively debunked. The interaction between the hemispheres is what counts, but this is less
marketable stuff. Such personality tests are sold to anxious parents, used in business recruitment and targeted at schools. All of them confirm what we already know, not what we could know.

The great insights now are around the plasticity of the brain, how new pathways can be formed even after damage, and how they are formed through experience. Yet there is a focus on imagery and which bits of the brain light up, because it is whizzy and fun. Spending a lot of time a while back with neurosurgeons after a close relative suffered a head injury taught me that brain scans are still blunt instruments, that we don't know sometimes if some functions can be taken over by other areas of the brain, if nerves can repair. It taught me that coma is still a mysterious state from which one does not wake up, but rather swims slowly to the surface. All these very clever doctors were more than happy to talk about what they did not know about the brain.

Now, though, neuroscience has achieved a quasi-religious status. There are, of course, drug companies waiting to improve our mental states; the military is also heavily invested in some of the research, as are those who think we will soon be able to predict "criminality" and lock people up before they do anything. Right now, we have politicians basically telling us that intelligence is innate and inequality therefore predetermined. There are, of course, many brilliant scientists who are appalled at this.

Cordelia Fine, for instance, is wonderful at debunking the neuroscience of sex differences, which began in the mid-19th century. These differences were used to argue against giving women the vote. Now they are being used to confirm that women are empathetic, but not power hungry or good at maths. Something as complicated as language does not live in one part of the brain, whether that language is poetry or maths. What Fine dubs "neurosexism" explains female inferiority, lower pay and the lack of women in public life. Is this inferiority located in individual brains or in culture?

Indeed, the latest debate on education shows that we absolutely need a combination of creativity and analytical skills; the binary of left/right brain thinking is inadequate. Of course we can find studies that reinforce gender stereotypes and use a determinist model of the brain. All kinds of self-help books are flogged on the back of this.

How hormones change brain organisation has yet to be fully explained. Many people feel neither male nor female. We see more autism in men, more Alzheimer's in women – and all of this is to be explored. But the idea of plasticity, the ability to change our ways of thinking, gets lost in the new neuro-mythology, which, as authors Hilary Rose and Steven Rose have argued, ignores the ways in which "culture and education shape neuro-cognitive function".

The truth is our brains are much more similar than they are different. That's not a headline you will ever read, is it? "Men and women: much the same!"

Chaque jour, plus de 240 000 tonnes de nourriture finissent à la poubelle en Europe. Pire encore, 50% des aliments sains sont jetés chaque année par les ménages, les supermarchés, les restaurants et l’industrie agro-alimentaire. Un constat pour le moins inacceptable quand on sait que près de 80 millions de personnes vivent sous le seuil de pauvreté et que 16 millions dépendent de l’aide alimentaire offerte par les ONG sur le territoire européen. L’Europe parviendra-t-elle à réduire ce gaspillage alimentaire ?

Le gaspillage alimentaire en chiffres

Un tiers des aliments produits chaque année dans le monde est gaspillé, ce qui équivaut à plus 1,3 milliard de tonnes de nourriture perdue.

Dans l’UE, le gaspillage alimentaire représente plus de 240 000 tonnes par jour, soit 89 millions de tonnes par an. Cela signifie qu’exactement 282 kilos de nourriture part à la poubelle chaque seconde en Europe. Ainsi, un européen gaspille en moyenne 500 grammes de nourriture par jour.

Les ménages sont à l’origine de 42% de ce gaspillage, suivis par l’industrie agroalimentaire qui représente 39% et de la restauration pour 14%. Les consommateurs ont donc une responsabilité importante et le pouvoir de changer les choses. En effet, 60% du gaspillage alimentaire produit par les ménages peut être facilement évité.

En France, nous jetons en moyenne 7 kg par an de produits alimentaires encore emballés…

L’enjeu

L’enjeu est aujourd’hui de savoir répondre à la demande croissante de nourriture qui va avec l’augmentation de la population. Etant donné que la demande est de plus en plus supérieure à l’offre, nous devons définitivement cesser le gaspillage alimentaire. En janvier 2012, le Parlement européen avait demandé des mesures urgentes afin de réduire de moitié les gâchis alimentaires dans l’UE d’ici 2025. Selon une étude publiée par la commission, le gaspillage alimentaire augmenterait de 40% d’ici 2020 si rien n’est fait.
**Quelques solutions**

Nous pouvons d’ores et déjà améliorer l’éducation auprès des enfants pour que les générations futures ne gaspillent pas autant que nous le faisons aujourd’hui. Des cours d’éducation alimentaire pourraient être proposés à l’école, afin de donner des conseils pratiques et d’informer les élèves sur l’importance de la nourriture. Des campagnes de sensibilisation doivent aussi être encouragées pour s’adresser à un public plus large et inciter à changer nos habitudes dès aujourd’hui.

Les produits alimentaires proches de la date de péremption ou endommagés devraient être vendus à moindre coût afin de les rendre accessibles aux personnes en ayant le plus besoin.

Il est aussi nécessaire d’éclairer le consommateur sur la signification des étiquettes. "A consommer de préférence avant le …" se réfère à la qualité du produit alors que "A consommer jusqu’au" est lié à une question de sécurité, chose bien différente.

Le gâchis alimentaire est une des conséquences néfastes qui s’intègre dans notre société de consommation, où les achats impulsifs sont devenus une habitude. Ces achats que nous faisons parfois sans même réfléchir mettent en péril notre planète ainsi que toutes les espèces qui y vivent, y compris la nôtre. Arrêtons donc de céder au marketing agroalimentaire en achetant des produits souvent chers, inutiles et dangereux pour la santé et privilégions les produits dont nous avons réellement besoin.

**retour à l’index**

By Joanna Moorhead

*The Guardian*, Saturday 14 December 2013

14. My daughter died from taking drugs

Martha Fernback was 15 when she died after taking what she thought was ecstasy. Next day, her mother – Anne-Marie Cockburn – began a raw and intimate diary, a unique chronicle of a mother’s grief. By Joanna Moorhead

Anne-Marie Cockburn wrote the following words on 21 July 2013: "My 15-year-old daughter died yesterday. I watched them try to save her. They pumped her chest and drilled something into her leg, but I knew she was already dead on arrival at the hospital. They elevated her arms, but I don't know why: her eyes were half-open and she was way beyond the clouds and stars already."
5742 Days, by Anne-Marie Cockburn

The previous morning, a sunny Saturday, Anne-Marie was the happy mother of a healthy child.

She and Martha were close, perhaps in a way only a single mother and her only daughter can be. It was just the two of them in their cosy flat in Oxford and they did everything together.

Earlier that week they had been to Ikea to buy new stuff for Martha's bedroom; the following weekend, they were off to Bristol. That day, Martha went kayaking with friends on a lake across town and Anne-Marie went shopping.

But by Sunday morning, Martha was dead: Anne-Marie woke up to an entirely changed identity.

"There's no word for what I'd become – maybe it's too terrible a situation to have a word for," she says. "I'm not a widow or an orphan or a divorcee – they all have a word.

"To describe what I am, I need nine words: 'I'm a single mother whose only child is dead.'" Today, nearly six months on, she thinks of herself as a "non-practising" mother; because she'll always be a mother, the woman who bore Martha. She's made up a word to describe herself, too: smothered. "That's 's' for 'single', and then 'mother', and 'ed' is for 'expired daughter',' she explains.

Smothered could also describe the effect of losing her child. It could explain the impact of the magnitude of grief on this slight, 42-year-old woman who says she never really looked for another partner after finding herself alone with a 10-month-old baby because Martha was enough.

Yet the last thing grief has done to Anne-Marie is smother her. In many ways, she says, she feels more alive than ever. It's as though her antennae are twice as sensitive and she's seeing the world in extra-sharp focus because of what she's been through.

She notices every detail, is attuned to every nuance that underlines the gulf between the way she was, and the way she is now. "The other day I looked down at a bag with someone's shopping, and I saw a box that said family tissues," she says. "I thought, I don't need those any more, I can just buy packets for one."

Another time she and a friend went on a train journey that they'd usually have made with Martha. "I was about to get out my family railcard and then I stopped and said, I can't use this any more, can I? And they said, you need a child to travel with you to use that. And I thought, I don't have a child to travel with any more."

Anne-Marie Cockburn: 'If I just close my eyes I can feel the brush of her lips against my cheek.' Photograph: Graeme Robertson for the Guardian

This is red-raw, unadulterated, up-close grief: and what's remarkable about Anne-Marie is that she's chosen to share the immediate grief of the early hours, days, weeks and months – and of now – with the rest of us.

Writing has been her therapy since the day Martha died. "Writing it down felt right," she says. "I've always written a diary and when I started writing this down, it poured out. On the second day my parents
physically took the notebook and pen out of my hands and said, you've got to have a shower. I was just writing, writing."

Now, when she reads what she wrote in those first few days, it's as if she's finding out what she was doing for the first time. "You forget everything in the shock of early grief. Writing it down straight away is the only way of remembering what happened and I need to remember it because I need to make sense of it," she says.

She is publishing her diary because of the way Martha died. What happened on that July day by the lake in Oxford was that Martha took what she thought was MDMA, better known as ecstasy. Shortly before 12.45pm, Anne-Marie texted her daughter to tell her the name of the hotel she'd booked in Bristol for the following weekend. Martha responded simply: "Cute."

"That meant she approved," smiles Anne-Marie. "She was looking forward to going away."

Half an hour later, a number she didn't recognise flashed up on Anne-Marie's phone. She answered and the world as she'd known it for 15 years ended. "It was a woman calling. She said: 'Your daughter is gravely ill and we are trying to save her,'" Anne-Marie remembers. A friend drove her to hospital, but Martha hadn't arrived. "They told me they had no notification of the incident, and it was only when I said that the woman in the park had told me they'd called the air ambulance that they realised how serious it was and showed me to a side-room."

When the ambulance arrived (Martha was brought by road in the end, because she wasn't stable enough to travel by air), Anne-Marie was ushered into the emergency room where the crash team was desperately working on her. "But I knew, the second I saw her, that she was dead," says Anne-Marie. In her book, she describes what happened next: "I was calling to her in the tone I last heard when I gave birth to her." And then: "I couldn't breathe once they announced what I already knew: my fingers and toes were tingling. They put me on a wheeled chair and asked me what I wanted to do. What do I want to do? I don't know what to do – what do you do in a situation like this?"

In many ways that question has become a daily mantra in Anne-Marie's mind. Just as there is no name for her condition, so there is no blueprint, no strategy, no recipe for dealing with a loss like hers. There are no children to carry on for and there's no partner to keep her going.

All that makes sense to Anne-Marie is to document the experience in the hope that others will learn from it. She believes this is happening already among Martha's friends in Oxford. "Some say they'll never touch drugs now – they didn't realise how dangerous something like Ecstasy could be."

"Martha and Anne-Marie.

She hopes parents of teenagers will ask more questions, take the threat of drugs more seriously. "Because it wasn't just Martha – so many teenagers are buying and taking drugs. I honestly believe that if it could happen to us, it could happen to anyone. She couldn't have imagined that this could mean the end of her life, at the age of 15."

Almost half a year on, Anne-Marie is about to go through her first Christmas and New Year in her new, "smothered" state. On what would have been Martha's 16th birthday, on 30 October, a group of her friends joined her in the park where she died, and at 6.41am, the exact time she was born, they lit lanterns by the lake in her memory. Anne-Marie feels a responsibility to be there for Martha's many teenage friends, for whom her death could hardly
have been more shocking. "So many of them have been deeply affected by it – I want to help them find peace and to remember her."

Remembering Martha is never difficult for her mother. "If I just close my eyes I can feel the brush of her lips against my cheek," she says. The girl she recalls was quirky and fun and cheeky and happy – and, in the last few months of her life, amid the tumult of adolescence, a bit rebellious and restless. She loved music, and was hoping to go to her first festival next summer. Two days before her death she went on a school trip to the Natural History Museum; she was keen on science, and might have gone on to do engineering. In the short term, though, her big ambition was to get her mum to say yes to a day shopping in London with her friends.

Anne-Marie has memories, too, of travelling the world with Martha. "I'm so grateful that we saw so many places, went on so many trips," she says. "When I was 15 I'd only been to Germany: but Martha had been to America and Croatia, France and Greece, Ireland and Italy, Spain and Singapore. She rode on a camel in Egypt, went on an elephant in Bali, snorkelled on the Great Barrier Reef. She lived for 5,472 days, seven hours and 36 minutes, and her life was full of adventure – and I'm so happy I shared so many of those adventures with her."

How will Anne-Marie live her life, now that her daughter is gone? "I could have become a crazy cat lady," she says. "I could have had a breakdown. I could have just given up and never gone out again. "But Martha thought life was amazing. And I still think life is amazing. I wish it could be amazing with her still in it, but it can't. It can only be amazing without her. And I'm going to do my best to make it that."

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Book extract: The first 36 hours after my world ended

My eyelids finally stopped fighting the sleep last night and I slept deeply and soundly. I woke up early. My heart is beating, but it pangs with the loss, knowing that I will always miss her. I missed her even when she was only away for a few hours, so this type of "missing" is peculiar, unnatural.

Getting used to her not being here goes against what every cell in my body feels. I am a mother, that is what I do. Mothers care and plan ahead, mothers nurture and nag you to tidy your bedroom. Mothers tell you to shower after you've been swimming in the lake. Martha would make excuses and go to bed with the grit of the day on her.

I'll never get to nag her again, I'll never get to tell her that her room is a mess ... oh how I wish I could nag her again and to hear her excuses ... "I'll do it later, I'll shower after kayaking tomorrow." I'd be both bemused and irritated by this, but that is a luxury now that I'll never get to practice again. I am still a mother, but not a practising one. I have all these mothering skills that I know will always be useful in my life, but their immediate purpose is no longer what they'll be used for.

So I did what I needed to do today, I went online and started looking at coffins: what would she like, what would Martha choose? She was far from traditional, she wouldn't want anything gimmicky either. The answers come to me gently. I know that whatever is chosen, it'll be lovely but really – does it matter that much? The true meaning of life has hit me like a bolt of lightning and the previous version of me now seems trivial – but it's a shame that this had to happen in order for this stoic version of myself to surface.

.../...
President Obama shook Raul Castro’s hand. The right-wing went nuts. American businesses routinely grease communist hands. Capitalists love communism! – The joining of Adam Smith and Karl Marx!

Karl Marx Triumphant! Capitalists love communism!

The Walton siblings and Jaime Diamon might not admit it. But they so love their communism.
Listen to right-wing nuts and you hear a different tale. President Obama raised their ire last week when he shook hands with Raul Castro. Fox News (Motto: “If President Obama Did It, Said It, Dreamed About It, Or Didn’t Do It, It Must Be Bad”) jumped the story like a mugger snatching a purse. One Republican called the handshake “nauseating.” John McCain compared it to Neville Chamberlain shaking hands with Hitler. Right-wingers lapped the stupidity up.

Still, if Obama shook Castro’s hand, he didn’t grease it. Greasing communist hands is a staple of American business today.

**Capitalists love communism!**

Look at recent news. Capitalists love communism! Consider JPMorgan. This pillar of Wall Street is under investigation for hiring sons and daughters of Chinese communist leaders in hopes they will steer business JPMorgan’s way. Internal documents indicate that the company may have given high-paying positions to 30 individuals with close ties to communist officials. This includes the daughter of the deputy minister of propaganda.

Right-wingers often conflate liberalism and communism. What these poor deluded souls fail to notice is the symbiosis of American business and communist interests. China is a perfect model for American big business in 2013. Hate the minimum wage? Charles Koch does. Just set up a few factories in China where workers are paid the minimum or way, way less! According to the Economic Policy Institute the United States lost 2.8 million jobs to China from 2001 to 2010. Why do companies like Apple love doing business there? According to the Huffington Post the average American factory worker earns a little more than $23 per hour. A Chinese factory worker earns $1.36—and averages 12 hours of labor a day.

What else do capitalists love about China? Safety regulations are lax. And don’t all right-wingers know safety regulations strangle business growth! The “good news” is this. Compared to American workers, the Chinese are four times as likely to be killed on the job. In fact, 21 Chinese miners were killed this week. Even Fox News noted that Chinese mines are “the deadliest in the world and suffer frequent explosions, floods and cave-ins.”

**Chinese leaders are a Marxist version of America’s Top 1%.**

How much do capitalists love communism?

Let us count the ways! Environmental regulations in China are weak. Companies foul the air and dump toxic wastes in rivers and no one lifts a finger to stop them. A reporter noted recently that “the smog can be thick enough to render [buildings in Beijing] invisible from only a few blocks away.” There are no real labor unions, either. Workers are mere pawns in the system.

What happens if they protest? The government is happy to arrest them. Meanwhile, Chinese leaders are a Marxist version of America’s Top 1%. As noted in the New York Times, the family of Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao now controls business assets worth $2.7 billion. That’s chump change to the Koch brothers. Still, not bad for leaders of an abusive regime!

Does any of this bother leading capitalists?

No it does not. The American Chamber of Congress has an impressive office in Beijing. A trip to Lowes Home Improvement indicates that General Electric produces most of its light bulbs in China, too. The National Football League imports apparel from China. According to one estimate 80% of Walmart suppliers are based in that communist land. Another report describes Walmart as “the largest foreign-funded supermarket operator in China.” Walmart does deals with communist leaders
every day. Need to open a store in Shanghai? Work with local communist officials. Want to expand your reach in Chinese e-commerce? Buy up a 51% share in Yihoadian, the leading company operating in that communist land.

Who loves communism? Capitalists do. Ford Motors will open two new factories in China soon. A story in the Wall Street Journal in 2012 carried this headline: “Ford Bets $5 Billion on Made in China.” No one at the WSJ seemed to see the irony in that. Citicorp, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs all do good business with communists. Like JPMorgan, they face scrutiny for handing out jobs to children of communist leaders. GlaxoSmithKline has been accused of greasing Chinese doctors’ palms to increase sales. How much grease did they supply? As much as $490 million. IBM has paid bribes. Pfizer has paid bribes. Avon Products has paid bribes. Even Hollywood studios may have paid bribes.

So, what’s the moral of this story? President Obama isn’t a closet communist. Liberals don’t love communism. Strangely enough, many capitalists now do. If a dollar (or yuan) is to be made by greasing a palm, polluting a river, or paying a worker next to nothing, then there are always capitalists willing to do it.

16. Les 18 règles de vie du Dalai-Lama à partager le plus possible

Le Dalai-Lama, grand ambassadeur de l’humanisme dans le monde entier est une figure emblématique pour bon nombre d’entre nous. Ses philosophies sont évocatrices de paix de partage et d’échange. On retrouve bien sur ses valeurs dans le monde du voyage. Je tenais moi aussi, au nom de Voyager Loin, à parler de ces 18 règles de vie. Partagez les sans modération !

1. Prenez en compte que le grand amour et les grandes réussites impliquent de grands risques.

Le risque est impliqué dans chaque grande occasion de la vie. S’il n’y avait pas de risques, alors tout le monde agirait, ce qui rendrait les gens "ordinaires" et non "grands". Démarquez-vous des autres comme celui qui peut non seulement prendre des risques, mais qui
Lorsque vous échouez, n’échouez pas la leçon.

Si vous oubliez ce que vous avez appris à ne pas faire, vous serez condamnés à répéter vos actions. Plus important encore, ne craignez pas l’échec. Car l’échec est le précurseur de la réussite. Rien de grand ne s’est accompli sans échec.

Le but de la vie n’est pas que nous soyons parfaits, mais que nous devenions la meilleure version possible de nous-même. Il est plus important d’être authentique qu’infaillible, et nous gagnons à écouter notre instinct. Les seules vraies erreurs sont celles que nous commettons à répétition. Les autres sont des occasions d’apprentissage.

Suivez les trois R :

Respect de soi – La confiance est la clé de la réussite et si une personne ne se respecte pas, vous ne pouvez pas croire en elle. Ainsi, si vous ne vous respectez pas, vous ne pouvez pas réaliser de grandes choses puisque vous ne pouvez respecter les autres.

Respect des autres – Et vous serez respectés en retour. Si vous ne retournez pas le respect des autres, certains présumeront qu’ils ne valent pas la peine d’être respectés, et de ce fait, ils ne se respecteront pas.

Responsabilité pour toutes vos actions – Vous êtes seul responsable de vos sentiments, de vos actions, de votre réussite, etc. Vous contrôlez totalement votre vie, il ne faut pas essayer de blâmer les autres pour ses erreurs et ses malheurs.

Rappelez-vous que ne pas obtenir ce que vous voulez est parfois un merveilleux coup de chance.

Essayer d’obtenir tout ce que vous désirez ne sera pas nécessairement bon pour vous dans le long terme. Si quelque chose semble ne jamais fonctionner, comme si le destin intervenait, pensez à lâcher prise et revenez y plus tard. L’Univers agit de façon mystérieuse et doit être digne de confiance.

Apprenez les règles pour savoir comment les transgresser correctement.

Les règles sont faites pour être transgressées. La plupart d’entre elles sont mis en place par les anciens établissements corrompus qui ne cherchent qu’à asservir et maintenir leur propre pouvoir. Quand il s’agit de transgresser les règles, faites-le correctement pour éviter les répressions. Mais par-dessus toutes choses, assurez-vous que vous le faites dans les règles. Si l’autorité n’avait jamais été remise en question, nous serions civilisation stagnante.

Ne laissez pas une petite dispute briser une grande amitié.

Évidemment, l’amitié est bien plus importante qu’une petite dispute, mais très peu de gens mettent cette règle en pratique. Vous devez également être en mesure de suivre la règle #7 pour pouvoir suivre la règle #6.
Lorsque vous réalisez que vous avez commis une erreur, prenez immédiatement des mesures pour la corriger.

Et ne laissez pas votre fierté faire obstacle à ces mesures. Pardonnez-vous et prenez-en l’entièreet responsabilité. Cela en dira long sur votre personne. Ce n’est pas le nombre de nos échecs qui déterminent notre réussite finale, mais notre capacité à en extraire de la sagesse, puis à passer à autre chose avec une énergie nouvelle.

Les erreurs sont neutres; nous pouvons en faire ce que nous voulons. Selon notre manière de les percevoir, elles nous accableront ou nous guideront vers le succès.

Passez un peu de temps seul chaque jour.

Peu importe ce que vous faites, passez au moins 30 minutes de votre journée seul dans un endroit calme. Cela vous donnera au moins une demi-heure pour observer ce qui se passe dans votre vie, de prendre conscience de qui vous êtes et de comprendre ce que vous voulez. Que ce soit à travers la prière, la méditation, le yoga ou le golf, ce rituel est un « must».

Ouvrez vos bras au changement, mais ne laissez pas s’envoler vos valeurs.

Le monde est en constante évolution. Si vous n’êtes pas ouvert au changement, alors vous serez malheureux. Vous allez vous-même changer, mais cela ne veut pas dire que vos valeurs doivent changer aussi. Accueillez les nouveaux lieux, les nouveaux visages et les nouveaux amours, mais ne changez jamais ces parties importantes de vous-même, sauf si vous avez de bonnes raisons de penser que vous aviez tort d’y croire.

Rappelez-vous que le silence est parfois la meilleure réponse.

Le silence conduit à la contemplation détendue au cours de laquelle les émotions ont moins d’influence et où logique peut prendre le relais. Par exemple, si vous vous disputez avec un ami, garder le silence au lieu de riposter en vous emportant est plus efficace et mettra fin à la dispute beaucoup plus rapidement.

Vivez votre vie avec honneur.

De ce fait, lorsque vous vieillirez et vous regarderez en arrière, vous serez en mesure d’en profiter une seconde fois. Vous allez devoir vivre avec vos actions pour le reste de votre vie, alors pour vous épargner le regret et l’angoisse, vivez votre vie avec honneur à partir de maintenant. Les bonnes choses viennent et les bonnes personnes aussi. Vous ne serez jamais puni pour avoir agi avec intégrité.

Une atmosphère d’amour dans votre maison est le fondement de votre vie.

C’est la règle où vous avez le moins de contrôle. Comme dans la règle #3, si vous respectez (aimez) votre famille, ils vous respecteront et vous aimerons en retour. Faites entrer l’amour dans votre maison. Faites briller les murs avec de la tendresse. Cela établira une base solide dans la vie de vos enfants.
13 Lorsque vous êtes en désaccord avec les êtres chers, concentrez-vous uniquement sur le présent.

Ne réveillez pas le passé. Le passé est constant, immuable. Réveiller le passé ne peut qu’apporter plus de douleur à la situation. Pardonnez les actions passées et concentrez-vous sur le présent.

14 Partagez vos connaissances.

On apprend tellement dans une vie. Partager vos connaissances avec les gens que vous rencontrez, cela ne peut que les aider. Plus important encore, partager vos échecs et vos expériences pour que les autres ne reproduisent pas les mêmes erreurs.

15 Soyez doux avec la terre.

La terre est l’endroit où nous vivons. Donc, cela devrait être évident. Blesser la terre c’est se blesser soi-même, l’avenir de vos enfants et de vos proches.

16 Une fois par an Aussi souvent que possible, allez quelque part où vous n’êtes jamais allé auparavant.

Découvrez de nouveaux lieux et de nouvelles choses. Vous pourriez vous retrouver avec quelqu’un quelque part qui vous rend plus heureux. La Terre est si vaste avec des endroits uniques et magnifiques, pourquoi ne pas aller explorer un peu ?

17 Rappelez-vous que la meilleure des relations est celle dans laquelle votre amour pour l’autre dépasse vos propres besoins.

L’inverse peut être un indice que votre relation doit se terminer. Si vous avez besoin de quelqu’un plus que vous l’aimez, c’est un signe de dépendance, pas d’affection. Trouvez quelqu’un où l’amour est la force dominante et dans laquelle la relation est beaucoup plus épanouissante.

18 Jugez vos réussites d’après ce que vous avez eu à renoncer pour y arriver.

Décidez ce que vous voulez. Conceivez votre vie idéale et forcez. Ne laissez aucune partie de ce rêve s’échapper, ainsi, vous ne vivrez jamais dans le regret. Tout est bon, car tout est utile – dans la mesure où vous savez saisir les occasions d’apprentissage qui se présentent à vous.
Si vous percevez les expériences difficiles comme de mauvais présages, elles auront un impact négatif. Si vous les voyez comme des occasions de croître, vous saurez les transcender.

ECONOMY
AlterNet / By Lynn Stuart Parramore
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17. Is There Anything You Can’t Buy in America? Should There Be?

Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel investigates what happens to a society where everything is for sale.

Photo Credit: Jean Lee/ Shutterstock.com

If you’ve got the money, there’s hardly anything you can’t buy in America. You can purchase a cushy upgrade to your prison cell, an internship at a famous magazine, or a fast-track through airport security. You can even buy someone’s virginity in an online auction.

Sky’s the limit. Oh, wait, it’s not: You can purchase naming rights to stars, and no doubt we will soon have the David H. Koch Galaxy winking at us from outer space.

What’s the biggie? says the free marketeer. It’s up to the market to “decide” what can be bought and sold, and we’re all free to make up our own minds about participating or not. The market is our liberation, say the advocates, unshackling us from arbitrary restraints and some other guy’s moral hangups.

But hang on a second. Where exactly are we headed with this? Should I really be able to buy an organ? A womb? A sterilization program for crack addicts? What’s the downside of moving toward a society where everything’s for sale?

It’s been quite a while since we’ve had much serious public discussion about what a market-based mentality costs us. One Harvard philosopher thinks it has been far too long.

On Wednesday, the Institute for New Economic Thinking and the Union Theological Seminary hosted a discussion featuring Michael Sandel, a man who likes to dive headlong into a topic many
economists will avoid even dipping a toe: the moral implications of a price tag-driven society. Along with INET president Rob Johnson and Union president Rev. Dr. Serene Jones, Sandel spoke about ideas from his recent book, *What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*.

**Consider the Walrus**

Sandel kicked off the discussion with a case involving our bewhiskered friend, the walrus.

In Canada’s Arctic region, the ancient practice of walrus hunting had so depleted the population that a hunting ban was enacted in 1928. The ban allowed a small exception for the Inuit, an aboriginal group of subsistence hunters, who were given a quota of walruses they could kill each year.

In the 1990s, the Inuit asked the Canadian government to allow them to sell the right to kill some of their walrus quota to big-game hunters. The Inuit would take the hunters by boat to the spots where the walruses loll about and let them shoot away.

The Inuit argued that this practice would create much-needed jobs and bring in thousands of dollars for their people, who would get to keep the meat and blubber, just as they had always done.

What do you think?

Should the Inuit be granted this right or not?

Arguments on both sides of the question poured forth in a lively discussion.

Some said it was not fair for an outsider to decide, in a paternalistic way, what the Inuit should do with their walrus kill-quota.

Others argued that there was something morally repugnant about the practice: the walruses, after all, did not give chase to the hunters, but sat on their ice floes like so many beanbag chairs.

Some wondered if the choice of an economically distressed people to earn money in such a way could really be considered a free choice. Were the Inuit coerced by circumstance? Who should decide? What values were at stake?

Sandel is concerned that the logic of buying and selling no longer applies to just televisions and cars, but increasingly governs our entire lives.

He points out that in a society where everything is for sale, things get much harder for those who have fewer resources, and that markets may “crowd out” values that are worth caring about, like loyalty and duty.

If we set up a society where people act only out of economic self-interest, then our “muscles” for other concerns will tend to atrophy. Sandel pointed to the emptiness of our public discourse as a sign that this is happening.

For a long time, economists have tried to pretend that their field is value-neutral. Baloney, says Sandel, and it’s high time economists reconnected their work to moral and political philosophy.

He reminded us that economics actually started out as a branch of moral philosophy, and that Adam Smith himself would never have advocated focusing on economic questions in the absence of moral considerations.
Unfortunately, somewhere along the way economics became untethered from the humanities, and the result has been monstrous. (Ask a business school student which major she holds in lowest regard: the answer will either be English or philosophy.)

Members of the audience called upon liberals and progressives to stop shying away from questions of values and morality, and that is a good thing. One member accused postmodernists of blighting the public conversation of rights and morals, presumably through their emphasis on relativism.

I hear that a lot. As someone who studied in an English department in the 1990s, I can certainly acknowledge the excesses of postmodernism. But the movement also forced us to consider the multiplicity of viewpoints when considering moral questions, and to be attuned to how the dominant notion of what is good and right can silence the marginalized perspective.

In the case of the Inuit and the walrus, a postmodernist might caution a room full of affluent white humans against making quick judgments about what is right for aboriginal people or large blubbery mammals.

Certainly, we don’t want such considerations to constrain us from having the conversation. We want them to refine our perceptions and to help us avoid the simplistic stances of the Right, which, admittedly, do better in sound-bytes.

The real foe of progressive and liberal morality is not Jacques Derrida but Ayn Rand (and her acolyte Alan Greenspan), whose celebration of self-interest as the desirable motivator of human behavior is among the most repugnant ideas ever to attain widespread acceptance in America, giving Calvinist predestination a run for its money.

The notion of self-interest ubel alles has permitted the growth of societal ills like economic inequality and a two-tiered justice system that is eroding confidence in our democratic institutions.

Instead of liberating us, markets are increasingly dominating us in ways that threaten our health and security. Just ask anyone other than a rich person who has ever had the bad luck to get sick in America.

Michael Sandel is right to help get a debate about morals and markets underway. Americans have increasingly looked to markets to solve our problems and enhance our lives. Now we have to deal with the monsters they have created.