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## Give them What they WANT or Give them What they NEED?

Amare Asgedom

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A discussion on the discrepancy between "needs" and "wants" appears to be naive when examined on the surface. A probe into the philosophical foundations would, however, demonstrate fundamental differences.

Needs are usually useful and most often necessary for human survival. In addition to the "basic needs", there are also other needs, such as, truth, aesthetics, etc., Abraham H. Maslow depicts them in a hierarchical order called "hierarchy of needs". Although the order of importance suggested by Maslow could be controversial, as for instance, an individual or groups could prefer to starve to death in attempting to satisfy a higher need, the provided list enjoys a popular acceptance by the scientific world. Maslow in his book, **The farther Reaches of Human Nature**, also discusses at length the concept of "self-actualization" to refer to a person who has reached a status of satisfaction in terms of reaching a higher stage on the hierarchy of needs. Naturally, one would presume that human beings normally strive to satisfy their needs. Depending on time and space conditions, however, it is possible to predict what individuals need or what society and different social groups need. It also follows that national development programs should aim at satisfying such needs; including those higher-level needs like the pursuance of "truth" as form of aesthetics. Hence, give them what they need.

Aesthesing truth, one could argue, should be the highest form of human civilization; and

a goal for which all civilizations aspire. "Truth" is beautiful and people must find beauty in truth. This ethic is a psychological and cultural process which highly responsible societies should promote and ever struggle (against the forces of its negation - decadence, consumerism, fetishism, etc.) to achieve.

Wants, on the contrary, are individualistic and may not even reflect actual needs. They are things which the individual demands for consumption. They might be harmful, exploitative and even fetal to the consumer. They facilitate the human tendency to decline or to resort to the "low-taste". One of the forms in which the principle of "give them what they want" reveals itself is "consumerism". The word, consumerism, is not used here to indicate public interest movements against producers or advertisers. It is used as a sociological term to demonstrate human inclinations in terms of declining tendencies.

Consumerism is a tendency to over engage one's self in consumption and to reduce every human and social phenomena to a status of consumption. It is the desire to possess everything; the world, all wealth and perhaps all women too (on the part of men). This becomes the only reason for living. You live in order to consume and you consume in order to consume. The following three major attributes summarize consumerist tendencies.



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### 1. Excessive life - styles

People have started living in large depopulated houses with a very small family - size overstuffed with commodities. They feel safer by being closer to objects than to people, friends, extended family, etc. Residence structures are engineered to meet the requirements of consumption including facilitating the exercise of wife-swapping (exchange of wives during get-togethers).

### 2. Rising in number and amount of things to consume

Alcohol, cocaine, tobacco, sex (including perverted one's) entertainment-music, dance, video drams-with cheerful and excited reactions to watching the torture and pain of other human beings in television. Today, we have more symptoms of decadence than there were during the eve of the fall of the "Roman Civilization", a period marked by human barbarism in terms of wanting to be entertained by watching human tortures by wild beasts.

### 3. An emergence of a perspective to view all people as tools of satisfying one's consumerist wants:

In modern society, a woman is viewed as a commodity to satisfy highly inflamed wants of sex, or the same woman aspires to possess the man's wealth and prestige with little interest in the man himself. The relationship is not seen as a "live" interpersonal connections created by reciprocated needs. When the former role is assumed, always, there is the tendency to maximize consumption of it. Even friendships and kinships are reduced to the role of satisfying these consumerist

wants. This is a perspective by which humans start to see each other from the point of view of promoting one's egoistic interests. One could, therefore, argue that the unidimensionality of man is set to operate. If members of a family or friends are perceived as not serving one's purpose, they are easily abandoned.

The forces of need can then be in fierce competition with the forces of want. If the latter triumphs, the world might lead to its final destruction. This becomes inevitable when all humane and friendly ties are exhausted and replaced by a new perception of man where every man is perceived as harmful to the other and when the highest form of human happiness (beauty) is derived from seeing the pain and torture of others--aesthetizing barbarism.

The force of decadence often fight against reason. They take things for the sake of it, and have no reason for what they do. They consume for the sake of consumption. They advocate war for the sake of war. For them, this is an art form from which satisfaction and happiness are derived. Actually Fascists and Nazis were not only war mongers. They aesthetized wars. "It is beautiful to see green meadows covered with debris of human bodies". "It is beautiful to hear the screaming of those in pain," they would often say. Fascists had aesthetized wars, communists attempted to politicize it, but in vain. The world is back to square one again. It is the business of Business to promote consumerism, the finality of which may be found in Fascism.

The school, the family, the mass media, etc. are culture promoters. And What do they give to people? Need or Want? These days people are becoming very much dependent



on the mass media for news, opinion and entertainment. Information technologies have shrunked the world, creating McLuhan's "Global Village". In the light of such communication capabilities, the question; what do you give to people? becomes legitimate. Are the activities of the cultural industry contributory to the forces of development?

or are they working hard to facilitate the process of social decadence? **But what is the mechanism of "giving" when one wants a need another wants a want?** A great sense of responsibility and an aesthetical taste of truth is required in the leadership area of the cultural industry at least to eke-out the time of the inevitable doom of the earthly world.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

### SOME INDICATORS FOR COMPARISON PURPOSE

**GER:** Gross enrolment Ratio (All levels); **PTR:** Public Teacher Ratio; **PDR:** Primary Drop out Ratio; **RPB:** Ratio of population below 15 (0-14); **WLF:** Women in labour force as % of men; **GP:** Growth of production %; **AODA:** Amount of off. Dupt. Assist (per capital).

Country/Region	GER	PTR	PDR	RPB	WLF	GOP	AODA
The World	58.3	22.0	--	32.3	--	3.1	8.7
Developing count	54.0	25.0	44	35.5	--	4.0	7.3
Least Development ct.	--	--	58	--	27.7	--	7.3
Sub-sahara Af.	41.9	34.0	42	46.7	33.1	2.1	27.7
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Ethiopia	18.0	42.0	50	48.0	37.8	2.0	14.2
Industrialized (Developed)	79.1	16.0	--	22.0	--	--	--

**Source:** UNDP & UNESCO (1991). Human Development and World Education Reports. - means data not available.

**IER Comments:** Could you tell how useful the above information would be for interested reserchers?