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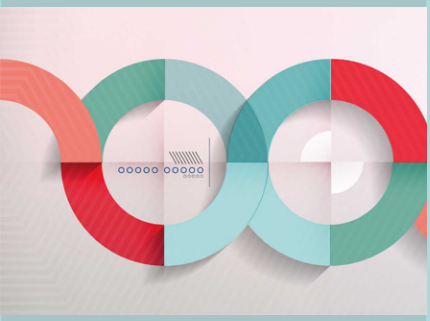

AFTER CONSUMERISM: UTOPIANISM FOR A DYING PLANET*

abstract

This article, written by Gregory Claeys, anticipates some questions that will appear in his book *Utopianism for a Dying Planet* (2022). The text proposes an analysis of the need to think about utopian responses to environmental collapse. The crisis resulting from consumerism, as an unprecedented social disease, requires a radical and immediate response, at the risk of aggravating the problem and making it irremediable.
Keywords: Utopia. Consumerism. Environmental Disaster.

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RESUMO

DEPOIS DO CONSUMISMO: UTOPIANISMO PARA UM PLANETA MORIBUNDO

Este artigo, escrito por Gregory Claeys, antecipa algumas questões que constarão no seu livro *Utopianism for a Dying Planet* (2022). O texto propõe uma análise sobre a necessidade de se pensar respostas utópicas em face do colapso ambiental. A crise decorrente do consumismo, doença social sem precedentes, exige uma resposta radical e imediata, sob risco de agravar o problema e torná-lo irremediável.
Palavras-chave: Utopia. Consumismo. Catástrofe Ambiental.

RESUMEN

DESPUÉS DEL CONSUMISMO: UTOPISMO PARA UN PLANETA MORIBUNDO

Este artículo, escrito por Gregory Claeys, aborda algunas cuestiones que aparecerán en su libro Utopianism for a Dying Planet (2022). El texto propone un análisis de la necesidad de pensar en respuestas utópicas al colapso ambiental. La crisis derivada del consumismo, una enfermedad social sin precedentes, requiere una respuesta radical e inmediata, a riesgo de agravar el problema y hacerlo irremediable.
Palabras clave: Utopía. Consumismo. Catástrofe Ambiental.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most of us have probably reflected that the prospect of rescuing utopia from the all-engulfing vortex of consumer society seemed well-nigh exhausted by the end of the last century. Moreover, if we were not aware then, we certainly are now, that reviving utopia in the face of the spectre of catastrophic environmental breakdown is even more challenging. For humanity finds itself in a unique position unparalleled in its history: its possible extinction as a species now looms, transforming the remote apocalypse of theology and literature into a real-time burgeoning nightmare.

The reasons for this are simple. The so-called climate change or global warming estimates of the past decade are almost daily being revised in terms of both likely temperatures in the near future and their possible consequences. A discourse which for the first decade of this century focussed on a 2°C. ceiling has now been revised. 1.5° is now often touted as a goal. But at the current warming rate of 1.25C. (but 1.48C on land) the Arctic (up to 20m. thick, and shrunken by 40% since 1980) and Antarctic (up to 5km deep) polar icecaps are melting, along with the world's glaciers, and the Siberian permafrost. Sea temperatures are rising, spelling the probable end of coral reefs. As temperatures rise forests burn, and the degradation of agricultural land, species loss and water shortages proceed apace. The more extreme current forecasts - and the worst-case scenarios are the ones to watch - indicate a possible global rise in temperature of around 4°C. by the mid to late 21st-century. This would mean summer temperatures in Europe of some 50-60°C, and sharply rising sea levels which will displace hundreds of millions. This will spell catastrophe to humanity, as Mark Lynas and others have clearly pointed out, and the elimination of most if not all of humanity.[1] This means the key and nearly universal public discourse of attaining 1.5C is wrong, and needs to be set aside in favour of a much lower goal. The earth is not a thermostat which can simply be set at an arbitrary temperature. The planet's degradation is much worse than the goal of 1.5C. implies. Hence a slogan to bear in mind: #onedegreeistoomuch.

How did we reach this apocalyptic state? This dystopian outcome results from the utopia of plenitude or abundance, the land of milk and honey ideal which lies at the heart of the dominant ideology of modernity. Fuelled by ideas of progress based on scientific and technological innovation, the creation of a market or commercial society in the 18th century produced an ideal of unlimited trade, consumption, and production. By the late 20th century this secularised version of paradise dangled the tantalising vision of an American standard of living, with its fast food, fast cars, and unending consumption, before an eager world. After the fall of the USSR the old egalitarian utopias seemed outmoded. In the new egalitarian utopia, everyone gets to eat at McDonalds. The capitalist cornucopia seemed to have surpassed all other competitors. Intoxicated by both consumption and the whirling lights and seductive sounds of its signifiers, we embarked on a colossal feast to end all feasts.

Can we escape the mentality which consumerism has produced? We might today entertain two broad responses to this question. The first is extremely pessimistic. Not only our societies, but our very personalities, have become so commodified and "liquefied" that the wealthiest cannot imagine a world in which constant consumption of the full range of goods from necessities to luxuries and a constantly rising standard of living are not the norm. Self- and collective restraint seem well-nigh unthinkable, and even if they were mooted, they would be quickly negated by our corporate puppet-masters. So we will hurtle recklessly towards the cliff edge of the future, heedless of the consequences, certain of our destiny but incapable of preventing its realisation.

A second possibility is revealed by the utopian tradition, which offers a unique vantage point for conceiving alternatives to late capitalism. It too has flirted with images of the Land of Cockaigne, the peasants' cornucopia, as well as the Baconian emphasis on conquering nature. But utopians have often understood that a balanced approach to using natural resources and to population growth can alone provide sustaina-

ble peace and plenty. Here I introduce a few examples of this kind, and query their contemporary applicability. I will conclude by asking whether there is a cure for the disease now often termed Affluenza, where our vulnerability to emotional distress is increased by "placing a high value on acquiring money and possessions, looking good in the eyes of others and wanting to be famous."[2]

II. SOME UTOPIAN SOLUTIONS

Let's now consider some utopian solutions to these problems. The utopian tradition has generally envisioned more equal as well as more virtuous societies. By the early modern period it was becoming widely evident that such goals could not be attained if the cycle of introducing luxury goods being followed by increased social emulation of the wealthy was not broken. Community could not be attained, in other words, if desire was not mastered, and needs accordingly restrained.[3] The lust for luxury in particular was seen as socially destabilising because of the cycle of emulation, with the middling orders and even the poor (it was supposed) dressing like the rich, causing a great confusion in social ranks, and depriving the wealthy of key status symbols. Sumptuary laws were passed in Europe throughout the medieval and early modern period to suppress this process. For us the danger of emulation, keeping up with the Jones's - or the Kardashians - remains, as we will see, but it is the overall pattern of consumption which is more dangerous. So fashion has always been suspect to utopians, and simplicity of dress and adornment dominates the literary texts and communal experiments alike.

To counter these trends, four models of virtuous restraint dominate 18th and 19th-century debates: the idea of an arcadian state of nature, often without private property, where luxury has not yet been invented; the primitive Christian community, often with a uniformity of dress and consumption, and a virtual prohibition of frivolity and luxury; the classical republican ideal, where property and often trade too are limited; and, in Britain, a Tory or Country Party ideal, where corruption is associated with the growing predominance of a Whiggish commercial interest, by contrast with a virtuous landed interest and patriot-king.[4] These models were concerned to break the cycle of emulation, and to redirect the passions which evidently underpinned it.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the utopian tradition offered a number of proposals for exiting societies which had degenerated owing to corruption through luxury. One of the most influential such attempts was Archbishop Fénelon's *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1699). In *Telemachus* Lycurgan Sparta is a clear precedent, with the Saint/King Louis IX (1214-70), who lived "without ostentation or luxury", being one later model.[5] The plot centres on the lawgiver Mentor's reform of the corrupt state of Salentum, with the aim of "reducing everything to a noble simplicity and frugality". Mentor divides the society into seven classes, giving each an appropriate costume distinguished by colour, and regulating the furniture and ornaments of their houses, the use of gold and silver therein being prohibited, and all furniture being plain and long-lasting. Those engaged in luxury trades are returned to the countryside as cultivators, and an agrarian law restricts property holdings. All "arts subservient to pomp and luxury" are banished. Even the diet of the upper ranks is rendered modest by renouncing "high sauces". Manufacturing and trade are confined to "useful" commodities. Music which is "soft and effeminate … that tended to corrupt the manners of youth" is confined to "festivals in temples, there to celebrate the praises of the gods and heroes". Sculptors and painters are restricted to the same themes, and wine-drinking limited to sacrifices and high festivals. Commerce excludes luxurious or superfluous goods. Wants are thus reduced "to the real exigencies of nature". Self-love is mitigated in part by a devotion to the "pure love of order", the "source of all political virtues". But while the inhabitants of the new order were to be "obedient without being slaves", absolute power would be required to introduce it. The moral is simple: luxury corrupts manners, and by contagious imitation leads even "those in low life" to "affect to pass for people of fashion". Thus "all live above their

rank and income, some from vanity and ostentation, and to display their wealth; others from a false shame, and to hide their poverty." Even "those who are poor will affect to appear wealthy; and spend as if they really were so." But "it is the pride and luxury of certain individuals that involve so many of their fellow-creatures in all the horrors of indigence." Because some were luxurious and idle, others were poor and wretched. Only "by changing the taste, manners, and constitution of a whole nation" could these processes be reversed.[6]

A second extremely important work was the 1771 text Reinhard Koselleck terms the "first futuristic novel". This is Louis-Sébastien Mercier's famous *L'An 2440, rêve s'il en fut jamais* ("The Year 2440: A Dream if ever There was One"; confusingly translated into English as *Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred*).[7] One of the great best-sellers of the epoch, it reached eleven editions by 1793, with translations into English, Dutch and German, and sold at least 63,000 copies by 1814. Here Mercier's principal target was luxury, as destructive of virtue, and he later acknowledged Rousseau as a source of his antagonism to the "insolent luxury" of Versailles.[8] In the Paris of 2440 the "horrid inequality" of "extreme opulence and excessive misery" has disappeared. External commerce has ceased, and its linkage with imperialism acknowledged and extinguished. "Just sumptuary laws have suppressed that barbarous luxury" which blighted the *ancien régime*. Since there are "no monks, nor priests, nor numerous domestics, nor useless valets, nor workmen employed in childish luxuries, a few hours of labour are sufficient for the public wants". Offensive weapons are banned. Women are demure and wear no makeup. Coffee, tea and other "poisons" are prohibited. Everyone dresses in a "simple modest manner", though those who have saved someone's life or performed other acts of public utility wear an embroidered hat. Only "useful and necessary luxury", unmixed with "pride and ostentation", which instead "promotes industry… creates new commodities [and] adds to our conveniences" exists. Cosmopolitanism is the norm: "We regard all men as our friends and brethren. The Indian and the Chinese are our countrymen, when they once set foot on our land." The pleasures of conversation and open sincerity have been restored, and the imprudence and hypocrisy of past interchange are gone. The "most affable people in the world" regard a "happy mediocrity" as the ideal of "sovereign wealth". Since "Foreign traffic was the real father of that destructive luxury, which produced in its turn, that horrid inequality of fortunes, which caused all the wealth of the nation to pass into a few hands", the new regime commences by "destroying those great companies that absorbed all the fortunes of individuals, annihilated the generous boldness of a nation, and gave as deadly a blow to morality as to the state." Thus "We cultivate an interior commerce only, of which we find the good effects; founded principally on agriculture, it distributes the most necessary aliments; it satisfies the wants of man, but not his pride." So

> All that promotes ease and convenience, that directly tends to assist nature, is cultivated with the greatest care. All that belongs to pomp, to ostentation and vanity, to a puerile desire of an exclusive possession of what is merely the work of fancy, is severely prohibited.

Mercier's condemnation of the moderns is savage:

> You thought yourselves highly ingenious in the refinements of luxury, but your pursuits were merely after superfluities, after the shadow of greatness; you were not even voluptuous. Your futile and miserable inventions were confined to a day. You were nothing more than children fond of glaring objects, incapable of satisfying your real wants. Ignorant of the art of happiness, you fatigued yourselves, far from the object of your pursuits, and mistook, at every step, the image for the reality.[9]

The moral of the story is clear: the worst effects of trade and commerce could be reversed, at least in the imagination. Reforming great corporations was the starting-point. Simplicity of manners was the end.

The threat of luxury was also integral to mainstream social and political thinking in this period, with Jean-Ja-

cques Rousseau, sometimes called "the first philosopher of the Greens", emphatically reminding the moderns of the threat to civic and private virtue posed by luxury.[10] Thus the image of the simpler society became central to some socialists, like Robert Owen, Charles Fourier and William Morris; and to the anarchism of William Godwin, Peter Kropotkin, and Mohandas Gandhi. Few liberals took up these themes, though John Stuart Mill, most notably, hinted at the advantages of a "stationary state" in his *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), which declared that the increase of wealth was not boundless, and that stagnation might be "a very considerable improvement on our present condition", since the most disagreeable aspects of competition might be phased out, much inequality could be eliminated, and population growth ended.[11]

In all these instances, both wise legislation and voluntary restraint make an ideal condition possible. The success of such proposals is always contingent, moreover, on the existence of social equality, the quintessential utopian theme from Thomas More onwards. Tacitly, too, the presumption seems evident that the other goods which utopia provides, notably a sense of "community" and personal warmth lacking in the outside competitive society, as well as the provision of "public luxury", directly compensate psychologically for being deprived of private accumulation and consumption and being removed from the cycle of emulation. Human warmth, empathy and solidarity, along with public luxury can replace private consumerism. This compensatory sociability may provide a vital clue to saving ourselves.

It is worth introducing the most important utopian solution to the problem of mass consumerism, that proposed in the greatest such experiment ever attempted, in the USSR. Here a tension existed from the outset between a more ascetic image of the revolutionary and the at least tacit promise that the revolution would bring plenty to all. Certainly at the outset of the revolution there were those who regarded the model proletarian as a "paragon of virtue … a hero of virtue, who did not indulge in the imminent gratification of his needs."[12] Many of the early revolutionaries adopted, in Hans Jonas's terms, "a credo of public morality" which involved "a spirit of frugality, alien to capitalist society", but commensurate with the aim of living "for the whole" and thus involving asceticism and self-denial.[13] Yet the suspicion always existed that such asceticism was always temporary, required until the revolution had been won and plenty achieved, and then dispensable. At the very least its status was ambiguous. And the presence of a cult of technology within Bolshevism, with the promise of electrification and ever-expanding machinery, railways, tractors, tanks and spaceships, belies any belief that growth would in principle be limited under socialism.

The most substantial alteration in these ideals came about in the mid 1930s, when Stalin acknowledged that the surge in demand for consumer goods during the NEP period (1921-8) remained powerful. Soon "the public's interest in material goods was immense".[14] After 1935 Stakhanovites, exceedingly productive "shock workers", were offered luxuries like cars as inducements to labour - they were rarely available otherwise for anything other than official use, and were highly prized, despite the great cost of maintaining them.[15] They were also given costly clothing at workers' congresses; one woman who earned nine times the average wage vowed to spend her surplus entirely on clothing, including ivory-coloured shoes and a crêpe de chine dress.[16] Variation in clothing in particular was widely desired, though the mass production of clothing also accompanied a desire to see ethnic groups like the Uzbeks dress like "cultured" Muscovites, as A. I. Mikoian put it in 1936.[17] When Stalin proclaimed in 1936 that "life has become more joyous", he meant that abundance had been achieved, and Soviet papers proclaimed: "We endorse beauty, smart clothes, chic coiffures, manicures … Girls should be attractive. Perfume and make-up belong to the 'must' of a good Comsomol girl… Clean shaving is mandatory for a Comsomol boy." A magazine named *Fashion* opened, and dancing became all the rage. Then came a backlash against "promiscuity", and arrests of young women for having an "immoral appearance" for flaunting the new fashions.[18] The more

puritanical and the more libertine aspects of the revolution, once again, danced together in a dialectic.

From this time onwards the USSR engaged in a contest with the US to provide a potentially endless array of consumer goods. The retreat from asceticism was largely a post-war and Cold War phenomenon. By the 1950s socialist fashion began to emerge, though a taste for things American (especially cars, music and dance styles) also intensified. (Snack bars were called *amerikanki*, and ice-cream bars were also regarded as "American".)[19] This was notably evident during the 1957 Festival of Youth and Students, when some 30,000 foreigners descended on Moscow. Many must have gone home clothed only in roubles, for a roaring trade developed in their apparel, many of the buyers being Young Communists or *Komsomols*.[20] The resulting gap between promise and reality meant that "the inability to fulfil the needs of consumers would become a major factor in destroying the Soviet regime, perhaps even the chief one."[21] This implies that the Soviet paradigm mirrored that of the West in assuming that mass consumption was an inevitable by-product of industrial society, no less applicable to socialism than to capitalism. A similar process can be traced in the eastern European states incorporated into the Soviet bloc from 1945-89. Though there was here also an evident desire to promote a socialist ideal of restrained needs, the manifest desire to attain a constantly tantalising western standard of living, particularly as viewed through American commodities, made competition with the West in this area inevitable. The possibility of a systematic restraint of needs was therefore virtually ruled out from the outset. Here, as in the case of the USSR, competition with the American utopia made the construction of Soviet utopia well-nigh impossible.

III. OUR DILEMMAS

Let us turn now to consider how far such examples remain relevant today, in a vastly different cultural, social, political and economic context? Several objections are evident. Firstly, the earth's population is now mostly urban: by 2100 70% of humanity will live in cities. This removes the possibility of the rural utopian community as the antidote to commercial urbanism, the option preferred by most pre-Marxian socialists. So we either remake our cities or we relinquish any hopes of utopian progress. Secondly, the religious prerequisites of hostility to luxury consumption are mostly now gone, as Puritanism and Catholic guilt alike are displaced by hedonism. Thirdly, modern individualism inhibits the power of collective restraint on behaviour. More people live alone, fewer are marrying or staying married, more live in the surreal worlds of gaming or YouTube videos. Though powerful countervailing trends towards conformity exist, collective pressure is lessened just as we need it to help limit consumption. Finally, the threat posed to civic virtue by luxury goods is not a recognised issue in public discourse today. Overpowered by neoliberal ideology, we generally feel little obligation to others. Thousands complain even when asked to wear masks to protect others, and themselves, in a pandemic. We demand our rights, without presuming that commensurate duties follow such claims. Indeed in plutocracies the reverse is the case, as the billionaires who control our media and often buy our elections and governments set the standard in excessive personal acquisition of planes and yachts, and generally dictate fashion down the social ladder. Some even offer their own utopia of space colonisation in order to displace any focus on the existing social and economic order.

Yet we have also witnessed some revivals of ideas of personal simplicity. The latest, and perhaps a serviceable model for the 21st century, was the countercultural ethos of 1968. This was rooted in rejecting the commodification of everyday life, the subordination of being to having, and the eternally nagging insistence on instant gratification and conspicuous consumption designed to make our neighbours envious rather than to satisfy true needs. Under the banner of human liberation, a romantic, sensualist, anti-materialistic ideal emerged which stressed communalism, egalitarianism, and oneness with a non-exploited "organic" nature. The counterculture condemned both the soulless, alienating capitalist work-ethic and the elevation of shopping into a religion whose main attraction, as Zygmunt Bauman

has noted, is "the offer of plentiful new starts and resurrections (chances of being 'born again')".[22] This involves a cycle of constantly satisfying needs and creating new needs, and prioritising luxury and brand identity, and packaging over substance. Work under capitalism had become a means to an end, but equally a soul-destroying process which brought little else but what Richard Sennett calls the "corrosion of character".[23]

We may query the idea that the retreat to a "real self" represented anything other than a variant on ever-mutating commodified self, where the point of consumption is constant renewal.[24] But the counterculture did present an ideal of simplified life, of "authentic" and direct personal communication, which gave greater recognition to the value of the emotions and of the erotic. Through writers like Jacques Ellul, Jean Meynaud and Lewis Mumford it challenged the claims of technologically-centred society. To the passive mesmerising experience epitomised in the 1950s image of the suburban family sitting in front of the TV, it posed a creative, active celebration of activity, or at least the alternative mesmerising experience provided by music. Bombarded by TV advertising, which dominated most of their spare time, and thus constantly urged to consume, and to work harder in order to consume more, the moderns had become mere stimulus-response puppets. The engineers of their souls were advertising executives. But to the ideal of a clean, efficient technocracy paid for by subservience to the machine the '67-68 cultural revolution juxtaposed a luddite and humanist cry of resistance to automating mind and body alike. Although it was in turn soon commodified as a style worth buying into, this represents the possibility of a renewed ideal of ecological balance.

IV. TOWARDS A POST-CAPITALIST SOCIETY

Let me turn now to consider whether we can again envision a post-capitalist society where we have broken the cycle of emulation, decommodified our selves, and reined in consumption. The need to abolish capitalism on the basis of its impact on nature now supersedes Marx's emphasis on capitalism's promotion of exploitation as a rationale for constructing a new system. Obviously we must abandon carbon-based energy, move rapidly to 100% renewable energy, and begin the painful process of population restraint and eventually reduction. These are not insoluble problems. More difficult, perhaps, is curing ourselves of two forms of the addiction called Affluenza which chiefly result from consumerism: one focussed on commodities, the other on the people we use consumption to try to surpass or excel.

The first of these two components is easier to disentangle. Since the 19th century Europeans, North Americans and increasingly the rest of the world have become devoted to a lifestyle based on consumerism. The scientific and technological revolutions of this period gave us the steam engine, rapid transport, telegraphy, electricity, refrigeration, radiation, the car, and much more. In the home, by the second half of the 20th century, our domestic burdens were notionally lightened by refrigerators, microwaves, vacuum-cleaners, air conditioning, central heating, and by the entertainment which radio, movies, television and then the internet provided. Where incomes have risen with the pace of technological advancement, we have insisted on newer goods at an increasing rate: cars, phones and so on. Luxuries become conveniences, then necessities. Our primary identity has become that of consumers, with none of the obligations imposed by citizenship or friendship. An addiction to constant stimulation in leisure activities, driven most recently and intensely by smartphones, distracts us from the more nefarious social consequences of the love of technology. These are physical addictions: shopping heightens the intensity of our sensations, while withdrawal from smartphone clicking, swiping and checking generates nervous anxiety. We are creatures, even slaves, of our commodities, unable to stem our relentless desire for novelty, for being "with it" and "up to date", and for affirming ourselves through constant renewal. And so the saying goes, *we* don't have stuff: *stuff has us*.

The second element in Affluenza is that we desire many goods less for their utility and our vanity and narcissism than because of their associated social status. You

proudly acquire a new Porsche and park it in your driveway, so I, your neighbour, buy a Maserati and park it next to your Porsche. You are crestfallen, but determined to work harder to buy a still more prestigious car. This holds for virtually all the commodities branded as luxury goods, and even many mere comforts. Not only do we value and define ourselves by possessing and consuming such goods. We are inescapably trapped in the rat-race, constantly bombarded by increasingly individually-targeted advertising which hints at our lack of worth if we fail to participate. When we are unworthy, others do not like us, and our self-esteem plummets. Yet we all recognise, of course, that few are actually made happy as a result of this system. It stimulates depression, anxiety, and narcissism in all its participants. And the poor are of course increasingly still more miserable than the rest. The greatest of all of the paradoxes of modern progress is that ultimately it produces a miserable populace unless steps are taken to remedy its deficiencies. In the United States, the number of those describing themselves as "very satisfied" peaked in the 1950s, and the far greater range of commodities available today has not increased satisfaction or happiness.[25]

In considering how to solve these problems, one underlying theme in both solutions is equality: more equal societies are not only happier, but also consume less per capita than more unequal societies. Globally the richest 10% generate 50% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and the richest 1%, 80% of that total. This is where utopianism provides excellent guidance in our current position.[26] It does so also, as we have seen, by proposing to end growth as such.

Reducing consumerism requires at least twelve strategies. Firstly, we need to end planned obsolescence, or the deliberate design of goods to have the shortest viable shelf-life. Our attitude must be, to paraphrase Aldous Huxley, that mending is better than ending.[27] Secondly, we need to curtail certain forms of advertising - it has recently been proposed that the use of attractive young men and women to sell anything should be abolished.[28] This will not release us from the tyranny of branding, nor will it end the emulation of social ideal types, but it is a step in the right direction. Thirdly, we need to reduce the impact of fashion on consumption, again perhaps by legislating against advertising, impossible though this sounds. Fourthly, we need to shift towards a concept of public luxury, shared by all in museums, festivals, including free public transport and the like, and away from private luxury, and at the same time shift our values towards "consuming" experience shared with others (or alone, as in some computer games) and away from consuming unsustainable commodities. This will require remodelling cities to give a feeling of neighbourhood and "belongingness", a sense of place with which we can identify, and which is in my view also a central goal of utopianism historically. Fifthly, restraining population growth will suppress demand for commodities. Sixthly, we must reduce our sense of self-identity as a reliance on having a choice of consumer goods. Social solidarity can only grow where an attachment to objects diminishes. Seventhly, we must begin to displace techno-centred personal encounters, like sitting at a café with our friends, all of us staring at our phones, with human encounters in which technology is sidelined if not banned. Eighthly, we can reduce our working hours, particularly as new machines are introduced, once demand for output is reduced. (But we need to avoid simply displacing greater demand to commodity-centred leisure activities.) Ninthly, we require a vibrant feminism which results in equalising gender opportunities across society. Women, who possess considerably more power than men in disposing of household budgets, need full choice over their reproductive capacities, which will reduce family sizes. Tenthly, expanded state action can publicise and sustain these goals. Decentralisation has its place, but small state ideals are not suitable to the complexity of a world-wide solution which must be forged and implemented in a few generations. Eleventh, we must eliminate the expectation that speed of delivery and the volume of the product are the ultimate goals in consumption. This process, sometimes termed the McDonaldization of society,[29] places a premium on quantity over quality, and haste ("fast food") and instant gratification over sociability and delayed satisfaction. It also encourages

indebtedness ("buy now, pay later"), and the downward spiral of shopping-to-compensate for the depression we feel from being indebted as a result of shopping too much. Slower is often better. Twelfth, and perhaps most obviously, we must drastically restrict carbon consumption to reduce $C0_2$ and other emissions. This will entail an immediate move to renewable forms of energy, reforestation, a drastic reduction in the most dangerous forms of consumption, and many other measures.

Turning to the second problem, the psychology of consumption, and interpersonal competition as a driver of consumption, the benefits of a more equal society are obvious.[30] I will feel less anxious if you do not possess substantially more than I do. I will be more prone to measure and evaluate you by your human qualities, your warmth, kindliness and capacity for friendship, than by what you own and how you flaunt it. Where leaders live modestly, this process will be accelerated. Disconnecting our self-identity from commodities and postulating a "sustainable sociability" will not be easy. The self-recognition we gain through consumption is moreover in some respects superior to that accorded us by others, which may be more contingent, fragile, transient and conditional. Goods we can always buy: friends are often not to be had at any price. Equality requires limits on wealth and on income and inheritance. My own view is that a cap should be placed on individual wealth of $10 million per person. Billionaires must cease to exist as a class.

This equality moreover needs to be sustained by a utopian form of sociability in which our human interactions minimise the instrumental and utilitarian and maximise interaction as such. This will involve slowing life down with a great deal more small talk with everyone we encounter. A smile can be a subversive act, a wedge inserted into the system of exploitation and alienation. This process will be eased when the pay differential between classes is reduced substantially, for friendship, as Aristotle recognised, is only possible amongst equals. The more we value people for what they are rather than what they possess, the less they will want to lock themselves into the cycle of consumption. And if it is true that we shop in part to compensate for the loss of earlier forms of association, notably religion and the family, then we need in particular to shore up our sociability rather than accepting this exchange. In sum, we need to exchange psychological satisfactions for material ones, and realise that contact with nature, creative activities, and human relationships are of higher value and greater satisfaction than consuming goods.

V. CONCLUSION

To conclude. A striking feature of much of the environmentalist literature produced between the late 20th century and about five years ago is that it now seems outmoded. Few texts confront the prospect of real catastrophe, and that in the short- and medium-term rather than some distant dystopian future. The two great politico-economic paradigms of the modern epoch, liberalism and Marxism, now appear equally wedded to an ideal of growth and consequently seem useless today. Marxism was never able to attain a fully environmentalist vision, and Marx singularly failed to anticipate that the working classes might succumb to a pattern of fixation upon luxury, conspicuous consumption, and an incessant pattern of the satisfaction of one need being succeeded by the demand to satisfy the next.[31] It is clear, however, that egalitarianism reduces consumption, as does the types of solidarity Marx sought to promote.

Environmental destruction has become the single most important argument for ending capitalism. This is the most fundamental shift in political argument since the early 19th century. It means striking out into the unknown, and producing an entirely new paradigm of how society must be organised, and a great new counter-cultural movement to implement it. We now recognise that overconsumption is a disease, and that the cost of failing to cure it is the complete destruction and the end of humanity. We should be clear that the crisis we face is completely unprecedented. Its magnitude remains unacknowledged. It calls for measures more complex and more radical than those yet in public discourse.

It calls for us to set aside every other issue which divides us. It calls for common dedication and energy of a type never before mustered, beginning with massive civil disobedience to alert the public to the magnitude of the problem. If we act in time the apocalypse can be averted.

NOTAS

1 Mark Lynas. Six Degrees. Our Future on a Hotter Planet (Harper Perennial, 2008).
2 Oliver James. Affluenza. How to Be Successful and Stay Sane (Vermillion, 2007), p. vii. A slightly different definition is offered by another similar title: Affluenza is "a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt anxiety and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more": John de Graaf, David Wann, Thomas H. Naylor. Affluenza. How Overconsumption is Killings Us - and How to Fight Back [2001](3rd edn, BK Currents Books, 2014), p. 1.
3 I draw here on my introduction to Claeys, ed., Modern British Utopias (8 vols, Pickering & Chatto.
4 See Modern British Utopias, c. 1750-1850, vol. 1, pp. xxviii-xxxii, which gives examples of each type.
5 François Fénelon. Letters, ed. John McEwen (Harvill Press, 1964), pp. 140-1.
6 François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon. The Adventures of Telemachus (University of Georgia Press, 1987), pp. 137-55, 266-75.
7 R. Koselleck. The Practice of Conceptual History (Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 85, 88. Just why English-language readers required sixty years more to reach the ideal future is unclear. On the later development of the future-oriented fantasy see I. F. Clarke. The Pattern of Expectation 1644-2001. A modern French edition is Louis Sebastien Mercier. L'An 2440. Reve s'il en fut Jamais, Introduction and notes by Christophe Cave et Christine Marcandier-Colard (La Decouverte, 1999).
8 M. Mercier. De J. J. Rousseau Considéré Comme L'Un des Premier Auteurs de la Révolution (2 vols, Buisson, 1791), vol. 1, pp. 10, 197.
9 [Louis-Sébastien Mercier]. Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, vol. 1, pp. 5, 20, 29, 32, 35, 56, 183, 208; vol. 2, pp. 2, 47, 161, 186-9, 190, 238.
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14 Timo Vihavainen. "The Spirit of Consumerism in Russia and the West", in Timo Vihavainen and Elena Bogdanova, eds. Communism and Consumerism, p. 4.
15 Even as late as 1980, only 15% of Soviet citizens owned cars.
16 Djurdja Bartlett. Fashion East. The Spectre That Haunted Communism (Boston: MIT Press, 2010), p. 68.
17 Amy E. Randall. The Soviet Dream World of Retail Trade and Consumption, pp. 42-3.
18 Nicholas Timasheff. The Great Retreat. The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia (E.P. Dutton, 1946), pp. 317-20.
19 Jukka Gronow. Caviar with Champagne. Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 116.
20 Larissa Zakharova. "How and What to Consume: Patterns of Soviet Clothing Consumption in the 1950s and 1960s", in Timo Vihavainen and Elena Bogdanova, eds. Communism and Consumerism, pp. 104-5.
21 Timo Vihavainen and Elena Bogdanova, eds. Communism and Consumerism, pp. xviii, xi.
22 Zygmunt Bauman. Consuming Life (Polity Press, 2007), p. 49.
23 Richard Sennett. The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism (W.W. Norton, 1998).
24 See Bauman. Consuming Life, p. 113.
25 Kim Humphery. Excess. Anti-Consumerism in the West (Polity, 2010), p. 43.
26 For the most recent statement of this case, see Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. The Inner Level. How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everyone's Well-being (Allen Lane, 2018).
27 Paraphrasing Aldous Huxley. Brave New World (Penguin Books, 1955), p. 49.
28 Oliver James. Affluenza, p. 333.
29 George Ritzer. The McDonaldization of Society (9th edn, Sage Publications, 2019).
30 A starting-point here is Peter K. Lunt and Sonia M. Livingstone. Mass Consumption and Personal Identity (Open University Press, 1992).
31 Edmund Wilson argues that Marx did not in fact want the proletariat to want what the bourgeoisie wanted (quoted in Rosalind H. Williams. Dream Worlds. Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth--Century France, University of California Press, 1982, p. 313). There is little evidence for this assertion

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