TEN

Advertising: Creating Desire or Informing the Public?

In the factory, we make cosmetics, in the store we sell hope.

Charles Revson, quoted by Theodore Levitt
in "The Morality (?) of Advertising"

We buy all the right stuff and yet have no more friends, lovers, excitement, or respect than before.

John Waide, "The Making of Self and World in Advertising"

INTRODUCTION

Advertising is all around us. Experts estimate that by the age of twenty-one, the average American has been exposed to an estimated 1 to 2 million advertising messages.[1] Some of the most effective campaigns grab our attention, elicit laughter, and even become a part of our culture. So powerful are some ads that young children can often be heard singing commercial jingles along with nursery rhymes. And, as if billboards and electronic media ads weren't enough, we are now inundated with commercials while we sit in movie theaters. After slides that promote everything from local businesses to popcorn at the concessionaire are projected onto the screen before the lights dim, previews of two or three upcoming attractions are shown. Once the movie itself finally starts, we are insidiously bombarded with more promotions as companies regularly pay for their products to be used by the actors in the film itself.

The advertising industry is big business. Companies pay advertisers large sums of money with a singular goal in mind: to get you to buy a product or service that you might otherwise neglect. This is the clear aim despite the creativity and unquestionable entertainment value of many ads. By 1988, advertisers were already spending well

[1]Craig N. Smith and John A. Quelch, *Ethics in Marketing* (Boston: Irwin, 1993), 607.

over a total of $100 billion on all forms of advertising. This amounts to around $5,000 for every person in the country.[2]

With this type of presence, advertising as an industry receives an inordinate amount of criticism, which comes in two main forms. First, in terms of the big picture, advertising as a total enterprise is criticized for its alleged detrimental effects on society. Second, the specific contents of one form of advertising, persuasive, are regularly criticized for misleading and manipulating consumers into product purchases.

With respect to the first criticism, many argue that as a total enterprise, advertising spurs the conspicuous consumption of many unnecessary goods. In doing so, it leads people into an endless cycle of consumerism that keeps them economically and spiritually impoverished.[3] To some, this is not merely shallow but also grossly immoral in view of the standard-of-living inequities in the wealthy West in contrast to other parts of the globe. Viewed in this light, advertising is often attacked as the engine of a system of greed, waste, and materialism. In fact, some pundits argue that the predominance of persuasive commercial communications on airwaves has undermined conditions for a healthy democracy. For example, some legal scholars argue that modern advertising has not only ceased to provide information, it is now also manipulative and actually replaces a "citizenship democracy" with a "consumer democracy."[4]

Economist John Kenneth Galbraith echoes this notion by suggesting in his book *The New Industrial State* that because private enterprise has the ability and the resources to advertise and persuade consumers, far too many of society's financial resources fall into the pursuit of private goods. In turn, since public goods such as public transportation, parks, and schools do not reinforce consumer choices through advertising, they are left neglected and strapped for resources.[5]

While the morality of advertising as a total enterprise is debatable, the specific contents of advertising also comes under regular controversy. Companies are regularly challenged by consumer groups and/or the Federal Trade Commission for engaging in "false and misleading" advertising campaigns that are accused of duping even "reasonable" consumers. For example, case 10.3 discusses computer manufacturers who have been recent targets of a Merced County, California, district attorney's lawsuit for regularly overstating the size of monitors to consumers. The suit alleges that companies overinflate the size of monitors by about 13 to 19 percent on average because vendors count the entire glass area rather than just the size of the image in their ads. The suit also claims that some monitors were up to 33.7 percent smaller than advertised. The State of California may soon bring similar charges.[6] Airlines also find themselves amid controversy for advertis-

[2] Paul Farhi, "Madison Avenue Adrift in Advertising Doldrums," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 May 1989, C5; cited in William Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1992), 491.

A. Value
B. [illegible]

[3] Richard V. Pierard, "Where America Missed the Way," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* (29 March 1979): 19; cited in Craig M. Gay, *With Liberty and Justice for Whom?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 37.

[4] Ronald K. Collins and David M. Skover, "Commerce and Communication," *Texas Law Review* (March 1993): 697–746.

[5] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State*, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971).

Private vs Public

[6] Karen Kaplan, "Suit Charges PC Firms Cheat on Monitor Sizes," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 March 1995, D4.

ing low fares, making such fantastic claims as "50% off" rates. These ads allegedly fool reasonable consumers into believing that the percentage deducted was from the latest price of a fare. Instead, the real prices are often a percentage off of the full fare, so consumers don't save what they believe they will.

Many advertisers are also regularly criticized for gross exaggeration in the use of less misleading but highly ambiguous product claims such as the "best," "finest," "most," "original," and other immeasurable superlatives in their campaigns. Advertising executives respond to these charges by noting that most ads are mere instances of "puffery" or embellishment and not deception because most reasonable consumers do not expect objective information in ads. In fact, as Theodore Levitt argues in his classic article "The Morality (?) of Advertising," consumers want excitement to enliven their otherwise mundane lives. Quoting T. S. Eliot, he notes that "human kind cannot bear very much reality." As such, consumers are after much more that the pure functional utility of particular products and services. A car, for example, is not just a car to a consumer but a symbol of sexuality. And, as he states it, cosmetics "are not cosmetics, but the satisfactions of allurements they promise." Thus, he argues, advertisers are not engaged in duplicity at all, they are merely responding to true consumer wants, which are often latent, but nonetheless real.

In addition to making misleading claims, advertisers fall under constant scrutiny for manipulating consumers through messages that appeal to the subconscious levels of the human psyche. This is perhaps the most serious criticism of advertising. If true, advertising would go beyond the legitimate fulfillment of a need and cross over into the process of "needs creation" and the undermining of consumer autonomy. In Adam Smith's vision of capitalism, the marketplace is filled with "rational" consumers who make free choices to purchase products or services based solely on their needs, the price, and the perceived quality. Thus the legitimate meeting of a healthy need is not morally questionable. Rather than informing buyers in order to equip them to make informed rational choices, however, persuasive advertising is accused of manipulation through the creation of a need where none previously existed. One way advertising is accused of accomplishing this is through the use of sexual persuasion. For example, sex is often used to place a product in the subconscious mind of consumers through association of the product with sexual power and pleasure. This can be readily seen in the number of companies whose products have very little to do with sex, yet employ these themes with regularity. Beer commercials regularly utilize scantily clad women to promote products. Often, mention of the product itself is made only

in the last few seconds of the spot. Virginia Slims and other cigarette brands often (ironically) portray their products in the context of healthy social lifestyles.

Consumer persuasion can also be accomplished successfully through psychological appeals to common human insecurities. For example, it appears that the whole fashion industry is based on the exploitation of the common human desire to "fit in." Changing fashions rarely outlast the true life of garments. Every season many useful clothes are tossed away (though not by some of your professors) in the name of keeping up with the latest.

Defenders of advertising disagree that it has the power to undermine human choice as its critics maintain. They argue that most consumers recognize the exaggerated claims made in ads for what they are. Moreover, they argue that persuasive ads do not have the power to overcome free will as critics have suggested. Consumers can and do say no regularly to most ads. Robert Arrington comes to this conclusion in his article "Advertising and Behavior Control" in which he examines the condition of human freedom and the limits of advertising to subvert it.

Breaking the boundaries of the traditional debate over the morality of advertising, John Waide offers an insightful article that disagrees with both Levitt and Arrington. Although he does not take issue with Arrington's assertions about the limits of the power of advertising to coerce, Waide offers a strong critique of "associative" advertising through the lens of the development of character in human life using a virtue-based approach to ethics. Waide refreshingly notes that he is not so much concerned with autonomy and behavior control as he is with what kind of people and the type of world that are made through the creation and proliferation of associative advertising.

READINGS

The Morality (?) of Advertising

Theodore Levitt

Harvard Business Review (July-August 1970): 84–92. Copyright © 1970.

In curbing the excesses of advertising, both business and government must distinguish between embellishment and mendacity.

The present controversy over the regulation of advertising may well result in restrictive legislation of some kind, but it is by no means clear how this should be set up. This article presents a philosophical treatment of the human values of advertising as compared with the values of other "imaginative" disciplines. It is designed to provoke thought about the issues at stake. . . .

This year Americans will consume about $20 billion of advertising, and very little of it because we want it. Wherever we turn, advertising will be forcibly thrust on us in an intrusive orgy of abrasive sound and sight, all to induce us to do something we might not ordinarily do, or to induce us to do it differently. This massive and persistent effort crams increasingly more commercial noise into the same, few strained 24 hours of the day. It has provoked a reaction as predictable as it was inevitable: a lot of people want the noise stopped, or at least alleviated.

And they want it cleaned up and corrected. As more and more products have entered the battle for the consumer's fleeting dollar, advertising has increased in boldness and volume. Last year, industry offered the nation's supermarkets about 100 new products a week, equal, on an annualized basis, to the total number already on their shelves. Where so much must be sold so hard, it is not surprising that advertisers have pressed the limits of our credulity and generated complaints about their exaggerations and deceptions.

Only classified ads, the work of rank amateurs, do we presume to contain solid, unembellished fact. We suspect all the rest of systematic and egregious distortion, if not often of outright mendacity.

The attack on advertising comes from all sectors. Indeed, recent studies show that the people most agitated by advertising are precisely those in the higher income brackets whose affluence is generated by the industries that create the ads.[1] While these studies show that only a modest group of people are preoccupied with advertising's constant presence in our lives, they also show that distortion and deception are what bother people most.

This discontent has encouraged Senator Philip Hart and Senator William Proxmire to sponsor consumer-protection and truth-in-advertising legislation. People, they say, want less fluff and more fact about the things they buy. They want description, not distortion, and they want some relief from the constant, grating, vulgar noise.

Legislation seems appropriate because the natural action of competition does not seem to work, or, at least not very well. Competition may ultimately flush out and destroy falsehood and shoddiness, but "ultimately" is too long for the deceived—not just the deceived who are poor, ignorant, and dispossessed, but also all the rest of us who work hard for our money and can seldom judge expertly the truth of conflicting claims about products and services.

The consumer is an amateur, after all; the producer is an expert. In the commercial arena, the consumer is an impotent midget. He is certainly

not king. The producer is a powerful giant. It is an uneven match. In this setting, the purifying power of competition helps the consumer very little—especially in the short run, when his money is spent and gone, from the weak hands into the strong hands. Nor does competition among the sellers solve the "noise" problem. The more they compete, the worse the din of advertising.

A Broad Viewpoint Required

Most people spend their money carefully. Understandably, they look out for larcenous attempts to separate them from it. Few men in business will deny the right, perhaps even the wisdom, of people today asking for some restraint on advertising, or at least for more accurate information on the things they buy and for more consumer protection.

Yet, if we speak in the same breath about consumer protection and about advertising's distortions, exaggerations, and deceptions it is easy to confuse two quite separate things—the legitimate purpose of advertising and the abuses to which it may be put. Rather than deny that distortion and exaggeration exist in advertising, in this article I shall argue that embellishment and distortion are among advertising's legitimate and socially desirable purposes; and that illegitimacy in advertising consists only of falsification with larcenous intent. And while it is difficult, as a practical matter, to draw the line between legitimate distortion and essential falsehood, I want to take a long look at the distinction that exists between the two. This I shall say in advance—the distinction is not as simple, obvious, or great as one might think.

The issue of truth versus falsehood, in advertising or in anything else, is complex and fugitive. It must be pursued in a philosophic mood that might seem foreign to the businessman. Yet the issue at base *is* more philosophic than it is pragmatic. Anyone seriously concerned with the moral problems of a commercial society cannot avoid this fact. I hope the reader will bear with me—I believe he will find it helpful, and perhaps even refreshing.

What Is Reality?

What, indeed? Consider poetry. Like advertising, poetry's purpose is to influence an audience; to affect its perceptions and sensibilities; perhaps even to change its mind. Like rhetoric, poetry's intent is to convince and seduce. In the service of that intent, it employs without guilt or fear of criticism all the arcane tools of distortion that the literary mind can devise. Keats does not offer a truthful engineering description of his Grecian urn. He offers, instead, with exquisite attention to the effects of meter, rhyme, allusion, illusion, metaphor, and sound, a lyrical, exaggerated, distorted, and palpably false description. And he is thoroughly applauded for it, as are all other artists, in whatever medium, who do precisely this same thing successfully.

Commerce, it can be said without apology, takes essentially the same liberties with reality and literality as the artist, except that commerce calls its creations advertising, or industrial design, or packaging. As with art, the purpose is to influence the audience by creating illusions, symbols, and implications that promise more than pure functionality. Once, when asked what his company did, Charles Revson of Revlon, Inc. suggested a profound distinction: "In the factory we make cosmetics; in the store we sell hope." He obviously has no illusions. It is not cosmetic chemicals women want, but the seductive charm promised by the alluring symbols with which these chemicals have been surrounded—hence the rich and exotic packages in which they are sold, and the suggestive advertising with which they are promoted.

Commerce usually embellishes its products thrice: first, it designs the product to be pleasing to the eye, to suggest reliability, and so forth; second, it packages the product as attractively as it feasibly can; and then it advertises this attractive package with inviting pictures, slogans, descriptions, songs, and so on. The package and design are as important as the advertising.

The Grecian vessel, for example, was used to carry liquids, but that function does not explain why the potter decorated it with graceful lines and elegant drawings in black and red. A woman's compact carries refined talc, but this does not explain why manufacturers try to make these boxes into works of decorative art.

Neither the poet nor the ad man celebrates the literal functionality of what he produces. Instead,

each celebrates a deep and complex emotion which he symbolizes by creative embellishment—a content which cannot be captured by literal description alone. Communication, through advertising or through poetry or any other medium, is a creative conceptualization that implies a vicarious experience through a language of symbolic substitutes. Communication can never be the real thing it talks about. Therefore, all communication is in some inevitable fashion a departure from reality.

Everything Is Changed . . .

Poets, novelists, playwrights, composers, and fashion designers have one thing more in common. They all deal in symbolic communication. None is satisfied with nature in the raw, as it was on the day of creation. None is satisfied to tell it exactly "like it is" to the naked eye, as do the classified ads. It is the purpose of all art to alter nature's surface reality, to reshape, to embellish, and to augment what nature has so crudely fashioned, and then to present it to the same applauding humanity that so eagerly buys Revson's exotically advertised cosmetics.

Few, if any, of us accept the natural state in which God created us. We scrupulously select our clothes to suit a multiplicity of simultaneous purposes, not only for warmth, but manifestly for such other purposes as propriety, status, and seduction. Women modify, embellish, and amplify themselves with colored paste for the lips and powders and lotions for the face; men as well as women use devices to take hair off the face and others to put it on the head. Like the inhabitants of isolated African regions, where not a single whiff of advertising has ever intruded, we all encrust ourselves with rings, pendants, bracelets, neckties, clips, chains, and snaps.

Man lives neither in sackcloth nor in sod huts—although these are not notably inferior to tight clothes and overheated dwellings in congested and polluted cities. Everywhere man rejects nature's uneven blessings. He molds and repackages to his own civilizing specifications an otherwise, crude, drab, and generally oppressive reality. He does it so that life may be made for the moment more tolerable than God evidently designed it to be. As T. S. Eliot once remarked, "Human kind cannot bear very much reality."

. . . Into Something Rich and Strange

No line of life is exempt. All the popes of history have countenanced the costly architecture of St. Peter's Basilica and its extravagant interior decoration. All around the globe, nothing typifies man's materialism so much as the temples in which he preaches asceticism. Men of the cloth have not been persuaded that the poetic self-denial of Christ or Buddha—both men of sackcloth and sandals—is enough to inspire, elevate, and hold their flocks together. To amplify the temple in men's eyes, they have, very realistically, systematically sanctioned the embellishment of the houses of the gods with the same kind of luxurious design and expensive decoration that Detroit puts into a Cadillac.

One does not need a doctorate in social anthropology to see that the purposeful transmutation of nature's primeval state occupies all people in all cultures and all societies at all stages of development. Everybody everywhere wants to modify, transform, embellish, enrich, and reconstruct the world around him—to introduce into an otherwise harsh or bland existence some sort of purposeful and distorting alleviation. Civilization is man's attempt to transcend his ancient animality; and this includes both art and advertising.

. . . And More Than "Real"

But civilized man will undoubtedly deny that either the innovative artist or the *grande dame* with *chic* "distorts reality." Instead, he will say that artist and woman merely embellish, enhance, and illuminate. To be sure, he will mean something quite different by these three terms when he applies them to fine art, on the one hand, and to more secular efforts, on the other.

But this distinction is little more than an affectation. As man has civilized himself and developed his sensibilities, he has invented a great variety of subtle distinctions between things that are objectively indistinct. Let us take a closer look at the difference between man's "sacred" distortions and his "secular" ones.

The man of sensibility will probably canonize the artist's deeds as superior creations by ascribing to them an almost cosmic virtue and significance. As a cultivated individual, he will almost certainly refuse to recognize any constructive, cosmic virtues in the productions of the advertisers, and he is likely to admit the charge that advertising uniformly deceives us by analogous techniques. But how "sensible" is he?

And by Similar Means . . .

Let us assume for the moment that there is no objective, operational difference between the embellishments and distortions of the artist and those of the ad man—that both men are more concerned with creating images and feelings than with rendering objective, representational, and informational descriptions. The greater virtue of the artist's work must then derive from some subjective element. What is it?

It will be said that art has a higher value for man because it has a higher purpose. True, the artist is interested in philosophic truth or wisdom, and the ad man in selling his goods and services. Michelangelo, when he designed the Sistine chapel ceiling, had some concern with the inspirational elevation of man's spirit, whereas Edward Levy, who designs cosmetics packages, is interested primarily in creating images to help separate the unwary consumer from his loose change.

But this explanation of the differences between the value of art and the value of advertising is not helpful at all. For is the presence of a "higher" purpose all that redeeming?

Perhaps not; perhaps the reverse is closer to the truth. While the ad man and designer seek only to convert the audience to their commercial custom, Michelangelo sought to convert its soul. Which is the greater blasphemy? Who commits the greater affront to life—he who dabbles with man's erotic appetites, or he who meddles with man's soul? Which act is the easier to judge and justify?

. . . For Different Ends

How much sense does it really make to distinguish between similar means on the grounds that the ends to which they are directed are different—"good" for art and "not so good" for advertising? The distinction produces zero progress in the argument at hand. How willing are we to employ the involuted ethics whereby the ends justify the means?

Apparently, on this subject, lots of people are very willing indeed. The business executive seems to share with the minister, the painter, and the poet the doctrine that the ends justify the means. The difference is that the businessman is justifying the very commercial ends that his critics oppose. While his critics justify the embellishments of art and literature for what these do for man's spirit, the businessman justifies the embellishment of industrial design and advertising for what they do for man's purse.

Taxing the imagination to the limit, the businessman spins casuistic webs of elaborate transparency to the self-righteous effect that promotion and advertising are socially benign because they expand the economy, create jobs, and raise living standards. Technically, he will always be free to argue, and he *will* argue, that his ends become the means to the ends of the musician, poet, painter, and minister. The argument which justifies means in terms of ends is obviously not without its subtleties and intricacies.

The executive and the artist are equally tempted to identify and articulate a higher rationale for their work than their work itself. But only in the improved human consequences of their efforts do they find vindication. The aesthete's ringing declaration of "art for art's sake," with all its self-conscious affirmation of selflessness, sound shallow in the end, even to himself; for, finally, every communication addresses itself to an audience. Thus art is very understandably in constant need of justification by the evidence of its beneficial and divinely approved effect on its audience.

The Audience's Demands

This compulsion to rationalize even art is a highly instructive fact. It tells one a great deal about art's purposes and the purposes of all other communication. As I have said, the poet and the artist each seek in some special way to produce an emotion or assert a truth not otherwise apparent. But it is only in communion with their audiences

that the effectiveness of their efforts can be tested and truth revealed. It may be academic whether a tree falling in the forest makes a noise. It is *not* academic whether a sonnet or a painting has merit. Only an audience can decide that.

The creative person can justify his work only in terms of another person's response to it. Ezra Pound, to be sure, thought that "... in the [greatest] works the live part is the part which the artist has put there to please himself, and the dead part is the part he has put there ... because he thinks he *ought* to—i.e., either to get or keep an audience." This is certainly consistent with our notions of Pound as perhaps the purest of twentieth-century advocates of art for art's sake.

But if we review the record of his life, we find that Pound spent the greater part of his energies seeking suitable places for deserving poets to publish. Why? Because art has little merit standing alone in unseen and unheard isolation. Merit is not inherent in art. It is conferred by an audience.

The same is true of advertising: if it fails to persuade the audience that the product will fulfill the function the audience expects, the advertising has no merit.

Where have we arrived? Only at some common characteristics of art and advertising. Both are rhetorical, and both literally false; both expound an emotional reality deeper than the "real"; both pretend to "higher" purposes, although different ones; and the excellence of each is judged by its effect on its audience—its persuasiveness, in short. I do not mean to imply that the two are fundamentally the same, but rather that they both represent a pervasive, and I believe *universal*, characteristic of human nature—the human audience *demands* symbolic interpretation in everything it sees and knows. If it doesn't get it, it will return a verdict of "no interest."

To get a clearer idea of the relation between the symbols of advertising and the products they glorify, something more must be said about the fiat the consumer gives to industry to "distort" its messages.

Symbol and Substance

As we have seen, man seeks to transcend nature in the raw everywhere. Everywhere, and at all times, he has been attracted by the poetic imagery of some sort of art, literature, music, and mysticism. He obviously wants and needs the promises, the imagery, and the symbols of the poet and the priest. He refuses to live a life of primitive barbarism or sterile functionalism.

Consider a sardine can filled with scented powder. Even if the U.S. Bureau of Standards were to certify that the contents of this package are identical with the product sold in a beautiful paisley-printed container, it would not sell. The Boston matron, for example, who has built herself a deserved reputation for pinching every penny until it hurts, would unhesitatingly turn it down. While she may deny it, in self-assured and neatly cadenced accents, she obviously desires and needs the promises, imagery, and symbols produced by hyperbolic advertisements, elaborate packages, and fetching fashions.

The need for embellishment is not confined to personal appearance. A few years ago, an electronics laboratory offered a $700 testing device for sale. The company ordered two different front panels to be designed, one by the engineers who developed the equipment and one by professional industrial designers. When the two models were shown to a sample of laboratory directors with Ph.D.'s, the professional design attracted twice the purchase intentions that the engineer's design did. Obviously, the laboratory director who has been baptized into science at M.I.T. is quite as responsive to the blandishments of packaging as the Boston matron.

And, obviously, both these customers define the products they buy in much more sophisticated terms than the engineer in the factory. For a woman, dusting powder in a sardine can is not the same product as the identical dusting powder in an exotic paisley package. For the laboratory director, the test equipment behind an engineer-designed panel just isn't as "good" as the identical equipment in a box designed with finesse.

Form Follows the Ideal Function

The consumer refuses to settle for pure operating functionality. "Form follows function" is a resoundingly vacuous cliché, which like all clichés,

depends for its memorability more on its alliteration and brevity than on its wisdom. If it has any truth, it is only in the elastic sense that function extends beyond strict mechanical use into the domain of imagination. We do not choose to buy a particular product; we choose to buy the functional expectations that we attach to it, and we buy these expectations as "tools" to help us solve a problem of life.

Under normal circumstances, furthermore, we must judge a product's "nonmechanical" utilities before we actually buy it. It is rare that we choose an object after we have experienced it; nearly always we must make the choice before the fact. We choose on the basis of promises, not experiences.

Whatever symbols convey and *sustain* these promises in our minds are therefore truly functional. The promises and images which imaginative ads and sculptured packages induce in us are as much the product as the physical materials themselves. To put this another way, these ads and packagings describe the product's fullness for us: in our minds, the product becomes a complex abstraction which is, as Immanuel Kant might have said, the conception of a perfection which has not yet been experienced.

But all promises and images, almost by their very nature, exceed their capacity to live up to themselves. As every eager lover has ever known, the consummation seldom equals the promises which produced the chase. To forestall and suppress the visceral expectation of disappointment that life has taught us must inevitably come, we use art, architecture, literature, and the rest, and advertising as well, to shield ourselves, in advance of experience, from the stark and plain reality in which we are fated to live. I agree that we wish for unobtainable unrealities, "dream castles." But why promise ourselves reality, which we already possess? What we want is what we do *not* possess!

Everyone in the world is trying in his special personal fashion to solve a primal problem of life—the problem of rising above his own negligibility, of escaping from nature's confining, hostile, and unpredictable reality, of finding significance, security, and comfort in the things he must do to survive. Many of the so-called distortions of advertising, product design, and packaging may be viewed as a paradigm of the many responses that man makes to the conditions of survival in the environment. Without distortion, embellishment, and elaboration, life would be drab, dull, anguished, and at its existential worst.

Symbolism Useful and Necessary

Without symbolism, furthermore, life would be even more confusing and anxiety-ridden than it is *with* it. The foot soldier must be able to recognize the general, good or bad, because the general is clothed with power. A general without his stars and suite of aides-de-camp to set him apart from the privates would suffer authority and credibility as much as perfume packaged by Dracula or a computer designed by Rube Goldberg. Any ordinary soldier or civilian who has ever had the uncommon experience of beginning in the same shower with a general can testify from the visible unease of the latter how much clothes "make the man."

Similarly, verbal symbols help to make the product—they help us deal with the uncertainties of daily life. "You can be sure . . . if it's Westinghouse" is a decision rule as useful to the man buying a turbine generator as to the man buying an electric shaver. To label all the devices and embellishments companies employ to reassure the prospective customer about a product's quality with the pejorative term "gimmick," as critics tend to do, is simply silly. Worse, it denies, against massive evidence, man's honest needs and values. If religion must be architectured, packaged, lyricized, and musicized to attract and hold its audience, and if sex must be perfumed, powdered, sprayed, and shaped in order to command attention, it is ridiculous to deny the legitimacy of more modest, and similar, embellishments to the world of commerce.

But still, the critics may say, commercial communications tend to be aggressively deceptive. Perhaps, and perhaps not. The issue at stake here is more complex than the outraged critic believes. Man wants and needs the elevation of the spirit produced by attractive surroundings, by handsome packages, and by imaginative promises. He needs the assurances projected by well-known brand

ames, and the reliability suggested by salesmen who have been taught to dress by Oleg Cassini and to speak by Dale Carnegie. Of course, there are blatant, tasteless, and willfully deceiving salesmen and advertisers, just as there are blatant, tasteless, and willfully deceiving artists, preachers, and even professors. But, before talking blithely about deception, it is helpful to make a distinction between things and descriptions of things.

The Question of Deceit

Poetic descriptions of things make no pretense of being the things themselves. Nor do advertisements, even by the most elastic standards. Advertisements are the symbols of man's aspirations. They are not the real things, nor are they intended to be, nor are they accepted as such by the public. A study some years ago by the Center for Research in Marketing, Inc. concluded that deep down inside the consumer understands this perfectly well and has the attitude that an advertisement is an ad, not a factual news story.

Even Professor Galbraith grants the point when he says that "... because modern man is exposed to a large volume of information of varying degrees of unreliability ... he establishes a system of discounts which he applies to various sources almost without thought.... The discount becomes nearly total for all forms of advertising. The merest child watching television dismisses the health and status-giving claims of a breakfast cereal as 'a commercial.'"[2]

This is not to say, of course, that Galbraith also discounts advertising's effectiveness. Quite the opposite: "Failure to win belief does not impair the effectiveness of the management of demand for consumer products. Management involves the creation of a compelling image of the product in the mind of the consumer. To this he responds more or less automatically under circumstances where the purchase does not merit a great deal of thought. For building this image, palpable fantasy may be more valuable than circumstantial evidence."[3]

Linguists and other communications specialists will agree with the conclusion of the Center for Research in Marketing that "advertising is a symbol system existing in a world of symbols. Its reality depends upon the fact that it is a symbol ... the content of an ad can never be real, it can only say something about reality, or create a relationship between itself and an individual which has an effect on the reality life of an individual."

Consumer, Know Thyself!

Consumption is man's most constant activity. It is well that he understands himself as a consumer.

The object of consumption is to solve a problem. Even consumption that is viewed as the creation of an opportunity—like going to medical school or taking a singles-only Caribbean tour—has as its purpose the solving of a problem. At a minimum, the medical student seeks to solve the problem of how to lead a relevant and comfortable life, and the lady on the tour seeks to solve the problem of spinsterhood.

The "purpose" of the product is not what the engineer explicitly says it is, but what the consumer implicitly demands that it shall be. Thus the consumer consumes not things, but expected benefits—not cosmetics, but the satisfactions of the allurements they promise; not quarter-inch drills, but quarter-inch holes; not stock in companies, but capital gains; not numerically controlled milling machines, but trouble-free and accurately smooth metal parts; not low-cal whipped cream, but self-rewarding indulgence combined with sophisticated convenience.

The significance of these distinctions is anything but trivial. Nobody knows this better, for example, than the creators of automobile ads. It is not the generic virtues that they tout, but more likely the car's capacity to enhance its user's status and his access to female prey.

Whether we are aware of it or not, we in effect expect and demand that advertising create these symbols for us to show us what life *might* be, to bring the possibilities that we cannot see before our eyes and screen out the stark reality in which we must live. We insist, as Gilbert put it, that there be added a "touch of artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative."

Understanding the Difference

In a world where so many things are either commonplace or standardized, it makes no sense to

refer to the rest as false, fraudulent, frivolous, or immaterial. The world works according to the aspirations and needs of its actors, not according to the arcane or moralizing logic of detached critics who pine for another age—an age which, in any case, seems different from today's largely because its observers are no longer children shielded by protective parents from life's implacable harshness.

To understand this is not to condone much of the vulgarity, purposeful duplicity, and scheming half-truths we see in advertising, promotion, packaging, and product design. But before we condemn, it is well to understand the difference between embellishment and duplicity and how extraordinarily uncommon the latter is in our times. The noisy visibility of promotion in our intensely communicating times need not be thoughtlessly equated with malevolence.

Thus the issue is not the prevention of distortion. It is, in the end, to know what kinds of distortions we actually want so that each of our lives, is, without apology, duplicity, or rancor, made bearable. This does not mean we must accept out of hand all the commercial propaganda to which we are each day so constantly exposed, or that we must accept out of hand the equation that effluence is the price of affluence, or the simple notion that business cannot and government should not try to alter and improve the position of the consumer vis-à-vis the producer. It takes a special kind of perversity to continue any longer our shameful failure to mount vigorous, meaningful programs to protect the consumer, to standardize product grades, labels, and packages, to improve the consumer's information-getting process, and to mitigate the vulgarity and oppressiveness that is in so much of our advertising.

But the consumer suffers from an old dilemma. He wants "truth," but he also wants and needs the alleviating imagery and tantalizing promises of the advertiser and designer.

Business is caught in the middle. There is hardly a company that would not go down in ruin if it refused to provide fluff, because nobody will buy pure functionality. Yet, if it uses too much fluff and little else, business invites possibly ruinous legislation. The problem therefore is to find a middle way. and in this search, business can do a great deal more than it has been either accustomed or willing to do:

- It can exert pressure to make sure that no single industry "finds reasons" why it should be exempt from legislative restrictions that are reasonable and popular.
- It can work constructively with government to develop reasonable standards and effective sanctions that will assure a more amenable commercial environment.
- It can support legislation to provide the consumer with the information he needs to make easy comparison between products, packages, and prices.
- It can support and help draft improved legislation on quality stabilization.
- It can support legislation that gives consumers easy access to strong legal remedies where justified. It can support programs to make local legal aid easily available, especially to the poor and undereducated who know so little about their rights and how to assert them.
- Finally, it can support efforts to moderate and clean up the advertising noise that dulls our senses and assaults our sensibilities.

It will not be the end of the world or of capitalism for business to sacrifice a few commercial freedoms so that we may more easily enjoy our own humanity. Business can and should, for its own good, work energetically to achieve this end. But it is also well to remember the limits of what is possible. Paradise was not a free-goods society. The forbidden fruit was gotten at a price.

Notes

[1]See Raymond A. Bauer and Stephen A. Greyser, *Advertising in America: The Consumer View* (Boston, Division of Research, Harvard Business School, 1968), see also Gary A. Steiner, *The People Look at Television* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1963).

[2]John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), 325–26.

[3]Ibid., 326.

The Making of Self and World in Advertising

John Waide

Journal of Business Ethics 6 (1987), 73–79. Copyright © 1987 D. Reidel Publishing Co.

In this paper I will criticize a common practice I call associative advertising. The fault in associative advertising is not that it is deceptive or that it violates the autonomy of its audience—on this point I find Arrington's arguments persuasive.[1] Instead, I will argue against associative advertising by examining the virtues and vices at stake. In so doing, I will offer an alternative to Arrington's exclusive concern with autonomy and behavior control.

Associative advertising is a technique that involves all of the following:

1. The advertiser wants people[2] to buy (or buy more of) a product. This objective is largely independent of any sincere desire to improve or enrich the lives of the people in the target market.
2. In order to increase sales, the advertiser identifies some (usually) deep-seated non-market good for which the people in the target market feel a strong desire. By "non-market good" I mean something which cannot, strictly speaking, be bought or sold in a marketplace. Typical non-market goods are friendship, acceptance and esteem of others. In a more extended sense we may regard excitement (usually sexual) and power as non-market goods since advertising in the U.S.A. usually uses versions of these that cannot be bought and sold. For example, "sex appeal" as the theme of an advertising campaign is not the market-good of prostitution, but the non-market good of sexual attractiveness and acceptability.
3. In most cases, the marketed product bears only the most tenuous (if any) relation to the non-market good with which it is associated in the advertising campaign. For example, soft drinks cannot give one friends, sex, or excitement.
4. Through advertising, the marketed product is associated with the non-market desire it cannot possibly satisfy. If possible, the desire for the non-market good is intensified by calling into question one's acceptability. For example, mouthwash, toothpaste, deodorant, and feminine hygiene ads are concocted to make us worry that we stink.

5. Most of us have enough insight to see both (a) that no particular toothpaste can make us sexy and (b) that wanting to be considered sexy is at least part of our motive for buying that toothpaste. Since we can (though, admittedly, we often do not bother to) see clearly what the appeal of the ad is, we are usually not lacking in relevant information or deceived in any usual sense.
6. In some cases, the product actually gives at least partial satisfaction to the non-market desire—but only because of advertising.[3] For example, mouthwash has little prolonged effect on stinking breath, but it helps to reduce the intense anxieties reinforced by mouthwash commercials on television because we at least feel that we are doing the proper thing. In the most effective cases of associative advertising, people begin to talk like ad copy. We begin to sneer at those who own the wrong things. We all become enforcers for the advertisers. In general, if the advertising images are effective enough and reach enough people, even preposterous marketing claims can become at least partially self-fulfilling.

Most of us are easily able to recognize associative advertising as morally problematic when the consequences are clear, extreme, and our own desires and purchasing habits are not at stake. For example, the marketing methods Nestlé used in Africa involved associative advertising. Briefly, Nestlé identified a large market for its infant formula—without concern for the well-being of the prospective consumers. In order to induce poor women to buy formula rather than breastfeed, Nestlé selected non-market goods on which to base its campaigns—love for one's child and a desire to be acceptable by being modern. These appeals were effective (much as they are in advertising for children's clothing, toys, and computers in the U.S.A.). Through billboards and radio advertising, Nestlé identified parental love with formula feeding and suggested that formula is the modern way to feed a baby. Reports indicate that in some cases mothers of dead babies placed cans of formula on their graves to show that the parents cared enough to do the very best they could for their children, even though we know the formula may have been a contributing cause of death.[4]

One might be tempted to believe that associative advertising is an objectionable technique only when used on the very poorest, most powerless and ignorant people and that it is the poverty, powerlessness, and ignorance which are at fault. An extreme example like the Nestlé case, one might protest, surely doesn't tell us much about more ordinary associative advertising in the industrialized western nations. The issues will become clearer if we look at the conceptions of virtue and vice at stake.

Dewey says "the thing actually at stake in any serious deliberation is not a difference of quantity [as utilitarianism would have us believe], but what kind of person one is to become, what sort of self is in the making, what kind of a world is making."[5] Similarly, I would like to ask who we become as we use or are used by associative advertising. This will not be a decisive argument. I have not found clear, compelling, objective principles—only considerations I find persuasive and which I expect many others to find similarly persuasive. I will briefly examine how associative advertising affects (a) the people who plan and execute marketing strategies and (b) the people who are exposed to the campaign.

(a) Many advertisers[6] come to think clearly and skillfully about how to sell a marketable item by associating it with a non-market good which people in the target market desire. An important ingredient in this process is lack of concern for the well-being of the people who will be influenced by the campaign. Lloyd Slater, a consultant who discussed the infant formula controversy with people in both the research and development and marketing divisions of Nestlé, says that the R & D people had made sure that the formula was nutritionally sound but were troubled or even disgusted by what the marketing department was doing. In contrast, Slater reports that the marketing people simply did not care and that "those guys aren't even human" in their reactions.[7] This evidence is only anecdotal and it concerns an admittedly extreme case. Still, I believe that the

effects of associative advertising[8] would most likely be the same but less pronounced in more ordinary cases. Furthermore, it is quite common for advertisers in the U.S.A. to concentrate their attention on selling something that is harmful to many people, e.g., candy that rots our teeth, and cigarettes. In general, influencing people without concern for their well-being is likely to reduce one's sensitivity to the moral motive of concern for the well-being of others. Compassion, concern, and sympathy for others, it seems to me, are clearly central to moral virtue.[9] Associative advertising must surely undermine this sensitivity in much of the advertising industry. It is, therefore, *prima facie* morally objectionable.

Associative advertising tends to desensitize its practitioners to the compassion, concern, and sympathy for others that are central to moral virtue and it encourages its audience to neglect the cultivation of non-market virtues.

(b) Targets of associative advertising (which include people in the advertising industry) are also made worse by exposure to effective advertising of this kind. The harm done is of two kinds:

(1) We often find that we are buying more but enjoying it less. It isn't only that products fail to live up to specific claims about service-life or effectiveness. More often, the motives ("reasons" would perhaps not be the right word here) for our purchases consistently lead to disappointment. We buy all the right stuff and yet have no more friends, lovers, excitement or respect than before. Instead, we have full closets and empty pocket books. Associative advertising, though not the sole cause, contributes to these results.

(2) Associate advertising may be less effective as an advertising technique to sell particular products than it is as an ideology[10] in our culture. Within the advertising which washes over us daily we can see a number of common themes, but the most important may be "You are what you own."[11] The quibbles over which beer, soft drink, or auto to buy are less important than the over-all message. Each product contributes its few minutes each day, but we are bombarded for hours with the message that friends, lovers, acceptance, excitement, and power are to be gained by purchases in the market, not by developing personal relationships, virtues, and skills. Our energy is channeled into careers so that we will have enough money to *be* someone by buying the right stuff in a market. The not very surprising result is that we neglect non-market methods of satisfying our non-market desires. Those non-market methods call for wisdom, compassion, skill, and a variety of virtues which cannot be bought. It seems, therefore, that insofar as associative advertising encourages us to neglect the non-market cultivation of our virtues and to substitute market goods instead, we become worse and, quite likely, less happy persons.

To sum up the argument so far, associative advertising tends to desensitize its practitioners to the compassion, concern, and sympathy for others that are central to moral virtue and it encourages its audience to neglect the cultivation of non-market virtues. There are at least five important objections that might be offered against my thesis that associative advertising is morally objectionable.

First, one could argue that since each of us is (or can easily be if we want to be) aware of what is going on in associative advertising, we must want to participate and find it objectionable. Accordingly, the argument goes, associative advertising is not a violation of individual autonomy. In order to reply to this objection I must separate issues.

(a) Autonomy is not the main, and certainly not the only, issue here. It may be that I can, through diligent self-examination neutralize much of the power of associative advertising. Since I can resist, one might argue that I am responsible for the results—*caveat emptor* with a new twist.[12] If one's methodology in ethics is concerned about people and not merely their autonomy, then the fact that most people are theoretically capable of resistance will be less important than the fact that most are presently unable to resist.

(b) What is more, the ideology of acquisitiveness which is cultivated by associative advertising

probably undermines the intellectual and emotional virtues of reflectiveness and self-awareness which would better enable us to neutralize the harmful effects of associative advertising. I do not know of specific evidence to cite in support of this claim, but it seems to me to be confirmed in the ordinary experience of those who, despite associative advertising, manage to reflect on what they are exposed to.

(c) Finally, sneer group pressure often makes other people into enforcers so that there are penalties for not going along with the popular currents induced by advertising. We are often compelled even by our associates to be enthusiastic participants in the consumer culture. Arrington omits consideration of sneer group pressure as a form of compulsion which can be (though it is not always) induced by associative advertising.

So far my answer to the first objection is incomplete. I still owe some account of why more people do not complain about associative advertising. This will become clearer as I consider a second objection.

Second, one could insist that even if the non-market desires are not satisfied completely, they must be satisfied for the most part or we would stop falling for associative advertising. This objection seems to me to make three main errors:

(a) Although we have a kind of immediate access to our own motives and are generally able to see what motives an advertising campaign uses, most of us lack even the simple framework provided by my analysis of associative advertising. Even one who sees that a particular ad campaign is aimed at a particular non-market desire may not see how all the ads put together constitute a cultural bombardment with an ideology of acquisitiveness—you are what you own. Without some framework such as this, one has nothing to blame. It is not easy to gain self-reflective insight, much less cultural insight.

(b) Our attempts to gain insight are opposed by associative advertising which always has an answer for our dissatisfactions—buy more or newer or different things. If I find myself feeling let down after a purchase, many voices will tell me that the solution is to buy other things too (or that I have just bought the wrong thing). With all of this advertising proposing one kind of answer for our dissatisfactions, it is scarcely surprising that we do not usually become aware of alternatives.

(c) Finally, constant exposure to associate advertising changes[13] us so that we come to feel acceptable as persons when and only when we own the acceptable, fashionable things. By this point, our characters and conceptions of virtue already largely reflect the result of advertising and we are unlikely to complain or rebel.

Third, and perhaps most pungent of the objections, one might claim that by associating mundane marketable items with deeply rooted non-market desires, our everyday lives are invested with new and greater meaning. Charles Revson of Revlon once said that "In the factory we make cosmetics: in the store we sell hope."[14] Theodore Levitt, in his passionate defense of associative advertising, contends that[15]

> Everyone in the world is trying in his [or her] special personal fashion to solve a primal problem of life—the problem of rising above his [or her] own negligibility, of escaping from nature's confining, hostile, and unpredictable reality, of finding significance, security, and comfort in the things he [or she] must do to survive.

Levitt adds, "Without distortion, embellishment, and elaboration, life would be drab, dull, anguished, and at its existential worst."[16] This objection is based on two assumptions so shocking that his conclusion almost seems sensible.

(a) Without associative advertising would our lives lack significance? Would we be miserable in our drab, dull, anguished lives? Of course not. People have always had ideals, fantasies, heroes, and dreams. We have always told stories that captured our aspirations and fears. The very suggestion that we require advertising to bring a magical aura to our shabby, humdrum lives is not only insulting but false.

(b) Associative advertising is crafted not in order to enrich our daily lives but in order to enrich the clients and does not have the interests of its audience at heart. Still, this issue of intent,

though troubling, is only part of the problem. Neither is the main problem that associative advertising images somehow distort reality. Any work of art also is, in an important sense, a dissembling or distortion. The central question instead is whether the specific appeals and images, techniques and products, enhance people's lives.[17]

A theory of what enhances a life must be at least implicit in any discussion of the morality of associative advertising. Levitt appears to assume that in a satisfying life one has many satisfied desires—*which* desires is not important.[18] To propose and defend an alternative to his view is beyond the scope of this paper. My claim is more modest—that it is not enough to ask whether desires are satisfied. We should also ask what kinds of lives are sustained, made possible, or fostered by having the newly synthesized desires. What kind of self and world are in the making, Dewey would have us ask. This self and world are always in the making. I am not arguing that there is some natural, good self which advertising changes and contaminates. It may be that not only advertising, but also art, religion, and education in general, always synthesize new desires.[19] In each case, we should look at the lives. How to judge the value of these lives and the various conceptions of virtue they will embody is another question. It will be enough for now to see that it is an important question.

There is another legitimate concern besides that of autonomy and behavior control—whether the advertising will tend to influence us to become worse persons.

Now it may be possible to see why I began by saying that I would suggest an alternative to the usual focus on autonomy and behavior control.[20] Arrington's defense of advertising (including, as near as I can tell, what I call associative advertising) seems to assume that we have no standard to which we can appeal to judge whether a desire enhances a life and, consequently, that our only legitimate concerns are whether an advertisement violates the autonomy of its audience by deceiving them or controlling their behavior. I want to suggest that there is another legitimate concern—whether the advertising will tend to influence us to become worse persons.[21]

Fourth, even one who is sympathetic with much of the above might object that associative advertising is necessary to an industrial society such as ours. Economists since Galbraith[22] have argued about whether, without modern advertising of the sort I have described, there would be enough demand to sustain our present levels of production. I have no answer to this question. It seems unlikely that associative advertising will end suddenly, so I am confident that we will have the time and the imagination to adapt our economy to do without it.

Fifth, and last, one might ask what I am proposing. Here I am afraid I must draw up short of my mark. I have no practical political proposal. It seems obvious to me that no broad legislative prohibition would improve matters. Still, it may be possible to make small improvements like some that we have already seen. In the international arena, Nestlé was censured and boycotted, the World Health Organization drafted infant formula marketing guidelines, and finally Nestlé agreed to change its practices. In the U.S.A., legislation prohibits cigarette advertising on television.[23] These are tiny steps, but an important journey may begin with them.

Even my personal solution is rather modest. *First*, if one accepts my thesis that associative advertising is harmful to its audience, then one ought to avoid doing it to others, especially if doing so would require that one dull one's compassion, concern, and sympathy for others. Such initiatives are not entirely without precedent. Soon after the surgeon general's report on cigarettes and cancer in 1964, David Ogilvy and William Bernbach announced that their agencies would no longer accept cigarette accounts and *New Yorker* magazine banned cigarette ads.[24] *Second*, if I am even partly right about the effect of associative advertising on our desires, then one ought to expose oneself as little as possible. The most practical and effective way to do this is probably to banish commercial television and radio from one's life. This measure,

though rewarding,[25] is only moderately effective. Beyond these, I do not yet have any answers.

In conclusion, I have argued against the advertising practice I call associative advertising. My main criticism is two-fold: (a) Advertisers must surely desensitize themselves to the compassion, concern, and sympathy for others that are central emotions in a virtuous person, and (b) associative advertising influences its audience to neglect the non-market cultivation of our virtues and to substitute market goods instead, with the result that we become worse and, quite likely, less happy persons.

Notes

[1]Robert L. Arrington, "Advertising and Behavior Control," *Journal of Business Ethics*, 3–12.

[2]I prefer not to use the term "consumers" since it identifies us with our role in a market, already conceding part of what I want to deny.

[3]Arrington, 8.

[4]James B. McGinnis. *Bread and Justice* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 224. McGinnis cites as his source INFACT Newsletter, September 1977, 3. Formula is often harmful because poor families do not have the sanitary facilities to prepare the formula using clean water and utensils, do not have the money to be able to keep up formula feeding without diluting the formula to the point of starving the child, and formula does not contain the antibodies which a nursing mother can pass to her child to help immunize the child against common local bacteria. Good accounts of this problem are widely available.

[5]John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Random House, 1930), 202.

[6]This can be a diverse group including (depending upon the product) marketing specialists, sales representatives, or people in advertising agencies. Not everyone in one of these positions, however, is necessarily guilty of engaging in associative advertising.

[7]This story was told by Lloyd E. Slater at a National Science Foundation Chatauqua entitled "Meeting World Food Needs" in 1980–1981. It should not be taken as a condemnation of marketing professionals in other firms.

[8]One could argue that the deficiency in compassion, concern, and sympathy on the part of advertisers might be a result of self-selection rather than of associative advertising. Perhaps people in whom these moral sentiments are strong do not commonly go into positions using associative advertising. I doubt, however, that such self-selection can account for all the disregard of the audience's best interests.

[9]See Lawrence A. Blum, *Friendship, Altruism and Morality* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980) for a defense of moral emotions against Kantian claims that emotions are unsuitable as a basis for moral judgment and that only a purely rational good will offers an adequate foundation for morality.

[10]I use "ideology" here in a descriptive rather than a pejorative sense. To be more specific, associative advertising commonly advocates only a part of a more comprehensive ideology. See Raymond Guess, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 5–6.

[11]For an interesting discussion, see John Lachs, "To Have and To Be," *Personalist* 45 (Winter 1964), 5–14; reprinted in John Lachs and Charles Scott, *The Human Search* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 247–55.

[12]This is, in fact, the thrust of Arrington's arguments in "Advertising and Behavior Control."

[13]I do not mean to suggest that only associative advertising can have such ill effects. Neither am I assuming the existence of some natural, pristine self which is perverted by advertising.

[14]Quoted without source in Theodore Levitt, "The Morality (?) of Advertising," *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 1970; reprinted in Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1979), 256.

[15]Levitt (in Barry), 252.

[16]Levitt (in Barry), 256.

[17]"Satisfying a desire would be valuable then if it sustained or made possible a valuable kind of life. To say this is to reflect the argument that in creating the wants he [or she] can satisfy, the advertiser (or the manipulator of mass emotion in politics or religion) is necessarily acting in the best interests of his [or her] public." Stanley Benn, "Freedom and Persuasion," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 45 (1969); reprinted in Beauchamp and Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, second edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 374.

[18]Levitt's view is not new. "Continual success in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desires—that is to say, continual prospering—is what men call felicity." Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 61.

[19]This, in fact, is the principal criticism von Hayek offered of Galbraith's argument against the "dependence effect." F. A. von Hayek, "The Non Sequitur of the 'Dependence Effect,'" *Southern Economic Journal*, April 1961; reprinted in Tom L. Beauchamp and Norman F. Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, second edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 363–66.

[20]Taylor R. Durham, "Information, Persuasion, and Control in Moral Appraisal of Advertising," *The Journal of Business*

Ethics 3, 179. Durham also argues that an exclusive concern with issues of deception and control leads us into errors.

[21]One might object that this requires a normative theory of human nature, but it seems to me that we can go fairly far by reflecting on our experience. If my approach is to be vindicated, however, I must eventually provide an account of how, in general, we are to make judgments about what is and is not good (or life-enhancing) for a human being. Clearly, there is a large theoretical gulf between me and Arrington, but I hope that my analysis of associative advertising shows that my approach is plausible enough to deserve further investigation.

[22]The central text for this problem is *The Affluent Society* (Houghton Mifflin, 1958). The crucial passages are reprinted in many anthologies, e.g., John Kenneth Galbraith. "The Dependence Effect," in W. Michael Hoffman and Jennifer Mills Moore, *Business Ethics Readings and Cases in Corporate Morality* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 328–33.

[23]"In March 1970 Congress removed cigarette ads from TV and radio as of the following January. (The cigarette companies transferred their billings to print and outdoor advertising. Cigarette sales reached new records.)" Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1984), 305.

[24]Stephen Fox, 303–4.

[25]See, for example, Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1977).

Advertising and Behavior Control

Robert L. Arrington

Journal of Business Ethics 1 (1982): 3–12. Copyright © 1982 D. Reidel Publishing Co.

Consider the following advertisements:

(1) "A woman in *Distinction Foundations* is so beautiful that all other women want to kill her."

(2) Pongo Peach color from Revlon comes "from east of the sun . . . west of the moon where each tomorrow dawns." It is "succulent on your lips" and "sizzling on your finger tips (and on your toes, goodness knows)." Let it be your "adventure in paradise."

(3) "Musk by English Leather—The Civilized Way to Roar."

. . .

These are instances of what is called puffery—the practice by a seller of making exaggerated, highly fanciful or suggestive claims about a product or service. Puffery, within ill-defined limits, is legal. It is considered a legitimate, necessary, and very successful tool of the advertising industry. Puffery is not just bragging; it is bragging carefully designed to achieve a very definite effect. Using the techniques of so-called motivational research, advertising firms first identify our often hidden needs (for security, conformity, oral stimulation) and our desires (for power, sexual dominance and dalliance, adventure) and then they design ads which respond to these needs and desires. By associating a product, for which we may have little or no direct need or desire, with symbols reflecting the fulfillment of the other, often subterranean interests, the advertisement can quickly generate large numbers of consumers eager to purchase the product advertised. What woman in the sexual race of life could resist a fountain which would turn other women envious to the point of homicide? Who can turn down an adventure in paradise, east of the sun where tomorrow dawns?

Who doesn't want to be civilized and thoroughly libidinous at the same time? . . . It doesn't take very much motivational research to see the point of these sales pitches. Others are perhaps a little less obvious. The need to feel secure in one's home at night can be used to sell window air conditioners, which drown out small noises and provide a friendly, dependable companion. The fact that baking a cake is symbolic of giving birth to a baby used to prompt advertisements for cake mixes which glamorized the "creative" housewife. And other strategies, for example involving cigar symbolism, are a bit too crude to mention, but are nevertheless very effective.

Don't such uses of puffery amount to manipulation, exploitation, or downright control? In his very popular book *The Hidden Persuaders*, Vance Packard points out that a number of people in the advertising world have frankly admitted as much:

> As early as 1941 Dr. Dichter (an influential advertising consultant) was exhorting ad agencies to recognize themselves for what they actually were—"one of the most advanced laboratories in psychology." He said the successful ad agency "manipulates human motivations and desires and develops a need for goods with which the public has at one time been unfamiliar—perhaps even undesirous of purchasing." The following year *Advertising Agency* carried an ad man's statement that psychology not only holds promise for understanding people but "ultimately for controlling their behavior."[1]

Such statements lead Packard to remark: "With all this interest in manipulating the customer's subconscious, the old slogan "let the buyer beware" began taking on a new and more profound meaning."[2]

B. F. Skinner, the high priest of behaviorism, has expressed a similar assessment of advertising and related marketing techniques. Why, he asks, do we buy a certain kind of car?

> Perhaps our favorite TV program is sponsored by the manufacturer of that car. Perhaps we have seen pictures of many beautiful or prestigeful persons driving it—in pleasant or glamorous places. Perhaps the car has been designed with respect to our motivational patterns: the device on the hood is a phallic symbol; or the horsepower has been stepped up to please our competitive spirit in enabling us to pass other cars swiftly (or, as the advertisements say, "safely"). The concept of freedom that has emerged as part of the cultural practice of our group makes little or no provision for recognizing or dealing with these kinds of control.[3]

In purchasing a car we may think we are free, Skinner is claiming, when in fact our act is completely controlled by factors in our environment and in our history of reinforcement. Advertising is one such factor.

A look at some other advertising techniques may reinforce the suspicion that Madison Avenue controls us like so many puppets. TV watchers surely have noticed that some of the more repugnant ads are shown over and over again, *ad nauseam*. My favorite, or most hated, is the one about A-1 Steak Sauce which goes something like this: Now, ladies and gentlemen, what *is* hamburger? It has succeeded in destroying my taste for hamburger, but it has surely drilled the name of A-1 Sauce into my head. And that is the point of it. Its very repetitiousness has generated what ad theorists call *information*. In this case it is indirect information, information derived not from the content of what is said but from the fact that it is said so often and so vividly that it sticks in one's mind—i.e., the information yield has increased. And not only do I always remember A-1 Sauce when I go to the grocers, I tend to assume that any product advertised so often has to be good—and so I usually buy a bottle of the stuff.

Still another technique: On a recent show of the television program "Hard Choices" it was demonstrated how subliminal suggestion can be used to control customers. In a New Orleans department store, messages to the effect that shoplifting is wrong, illegal, and subject to punishment were blended into the Muzak background music and masked so as not to be

consciously audible. The store reported a dramatic drop in shoplifting. The program host conjectured whether a logical extension of this technique would be to broadcast subliminal advertising messages to the effect that the store's $15.99 sweater special is the "bargain of a lifetime." Actually, this application of subliminal suggestion to advertising has already taken place. Years ago in New Jersey a cinema was reported to have flashed subthreshold ice cream ads onto the screen during regular showings of the film—and, yes, the concession stand did a landslide business.[4]

Puffery, indirect information transfer, subliminal advertising—does the success of these techniques show that many of us have forfeited our autonomy and become a herd of packaged souls?

Puffery, indirect information transfer, subliminal advertising—are these techniques of manipulation and control whose success shows that many of us have forfeited our autonomy and become a community, or herd, of packaged souls?[5] The business world and the advertising industry certainly reject this interpretation of their efforts. *Business Week*, for example, dismissed the charge that the science of behavior, as utilized by advertising, is engaged in human engineering and manipulation. It editorialized to the effect that "it is hard to find anything very sinister about a science whose principle conclusion is that you get along with people by giving them what they want."[6] The theme is familiar: businesses just give the consumer what he/she wants; if they didn't they wouldn't stay in business very long. Proof that the consumer wants the products advertised is given by the fact that he buys them, and indeed often returns to buy them again and again.

The techniques of advertising we are discussing have had their more intellectual defenders as well. For example, Theodore Levitt, Professor of Business Administration at the Harvard Business School, has defended the practice of puffery and the use of techniques depending on motivational research.[7] What would be the consequences, he asks us, of deleting all exaggerated claims and fanciful associations from advertisements? We would be left with literal descriptions of the empirical characteristics of products and their functions. Cosmetics would be presented as facial and bodily lotions and powders which produce certain odor and color changes; they would no longer offer hope or adventure. In addition to the fact that these products would not then sell as well, they would not, according to Levitt, please us as much either. For it is hope and adventure we want when we buy them.... He maintains that "everybody everywhere wants to modify, transform, embellish, enrich and reconstruct the world around him." Commerce takes the same liberty with reality as the artist and the priest—in all three instances the purpose is "to influence the audience by creating illusions, symbols, and implications that promise more than pure functionality." For example, "to amplify the temple in men's eyes, (men of cloth) have, very realistically, systematically sanctioned the embellishment of the houses of the gods with the same kind of luxurious design and expensive decoration that Detroit puts into Cadillac." A poem, a temple, a Cadillac—they all elevate our spirits, offering imaginative promises and symbolic interpretations of our mundane activities. Seen in this light, Levitt claims, "Embellishment and distortion are among advertising's legitimate and socially desirable purposes." To reject these techniques of advertising would be "to deny man's honest needs and values."

Philip Nelson, a Professor of Economics at SUNY-Binghamton, has developed an interesting defense of indirect information advertising.[8] He argues that even when the message (the direct information) is not credible, the fact that the brand is advertised, and advertised frequently, is valuable indirect information for the consumer. The reason for this is that the brands advertised most are more likely to be better buys—losers won't be advertised a lot, for it simply wouldn't pay to do so. Thus even if the advertising claims made for a widely advertised produce are empty, the consumer reaps the benefit of the indirect information which shows the product to be a

good buy. Nelson goes so far as to say that advertising, seen as information and especially as indirect information, does not require an intelligent human response. If the indirect information has been received and has had its impact, the consumer will purchase the better buy even if his explicit reason for doing so is silly, e.g., he naively believes an endorsement of the product by a celebrity. Even though his behavior is overtly irrational, by acting on the indirect information he is nevertheless doing what he ought to do, i.e., getting his money's worth. "'Irrationality' is rational," Nelson writes, "if it is cost-free." . . .

The defense of advertising which suggests that advertising simply is information which allows us to purchase what we want, has in turn been challenged. Does business, largely through its advertising efforts, really make available to the consumer what he/she desires and demands? John Kenneth Galbraith has denied that the matter is as straightforward as this.[9] In his opinion the desires to which business is supposed to respond, far from being original to the consumer, are often themselves created by business. The producers make both the product and the desire for it, and the "central function" of advertising is "to create desires." Galbraith coins the term "The Dependence Effect" to designate the way wants depend on the same process by which they are satisfied.

David Braybrooke has argued in similar and related ways.[10] Even though the consumer is, in a sense, the final authority concerning what he wants, he may come to see; according to Braybrooke, that he was mistaken in wanting what he did. The statement "I want *x*," he tells us, is not incorrigible but is "ripe for revision." If the consumer had more objective information than he is provided by product puffing, if his values had not been mixed up by motivational research strategies (e.g., the confusion of sexual and automotive values), and if he had an expanded set of choices instead of the limited set offered by profit-hungry corporations, then he might want something quite different from what he presently wants. This shows, Braybrooke thinks, the extent to which the consumer's wants are a function of advertising and not necessarily representative of his real or true wants.

The central issue which emerges between the above critics and defenders of advertising is this: do the advertising techniques we have discussed involve a violation of human autonomy and a manipulation and control of consumer behavior, *or* do they simply provide an efficient and cost-effective means of giving the consumer information on the basis of which he or she makes a free choice. Is advertising information, or creation of desire?

To answer this question we need a better conceptual grasp of what is involved in the notion of autonomy. This is a complex, multifaceted concept, and we need to approach it through the more determinate notions of (a) autonomous desire, (b) rational desire and choice, (c) free choice, and (d) control or manipulation. In what follows I shall offer some tentative and very incomplete analyses of these concepts and apply the results to the case of advertising.

(a) Autonomous desire. Imagine that I am watching T.V. and see an ad for Grecian Formula 16. The thought occurs to me that if I purchase some and apply it to my beard, I will soon look younger—in fact I might even be myself again. Suddenly I want to be myself! I want to be young again! So I rush out and buy a bottle. This is our question: was the desire to be younger manufactured by the commercial, or was it "original to me" and truly mine? Was it autonomous or not?

F. A. von Hayek has argued plausibly that we should not equate nonautonomous desires, desires which are not original to me or truly mine, with those which are culturally induced.[11] If we did equate the two, he points out, then the desires for music, art, and knowledge could not properly be attributed to a person as original to him, for these are surely induced culturally. The only desires a person would really have as his own in this case would be the purely physical ones for food, shelter, sex, etc. But if we reject the equation of the nonautonomous and the culturally induced, as von Hayek would have us do, then the mere fact that my desire to be young again is caused by the T.V. commercial—surely an instrument of popular culture transmission—does not in and of itself show that this is not my own, autonomous desire. Moreover, even if I never before felt the need to

look young, it doesn't follow that this new desire is any less mine. I haven't always liked 1969 Aloxe Corton Burgundy or the music of Satie, but when the desires for these things first hit me, they were truly mine.

This shows that there is something wrong in setting up the issue over advertising and behavior control as a question whether our desires are truly ours *or* are created in us by advertisements. Induced and autonomous desires do not separate into two mutually exclusive classes. To obtain a better understanding of autonomous and nonautonomous desires, let us consider some cases of a desire which a person does not *acknowledge* to be his own even though he *feels* it. The kleptomaniac has a desire to steal which in many instances he repudiates, seeking by treatment to rid himself of it. And if I were suddenly overtaken by a desire to attend an REO concert, I would immediately disown this desire, claiming possession or momentary madness. These are examples of desires which one might have but with which one could not identify. They are experienced as foreign to one's character or personality. Often a person will have what Harry Frankfurt calls a second-order desire, that is to say, a desire *not* to have another desire.[12] In such cases, the first-order desire is thought of as being nonautonomous, imposed on one. When on the contrary a person has a second-order desire to maintain and fulfill a first-order desire, then the first-order desire is truly his own, autonomous, original to him. So there is in fact a distinction between desires which are the agent's own and those which are not, but this is not the same as the distinction between desires which are innate to the agent and those which are externally induced.

If we apply the autonomous/nonautonomous distinction derived from Frankfurt to the desires brought about by advertising, does this show that advertising is responsible for creating desires which are not truly the agent's own? Not necessarily, and indeed not often. There may be some desires I feel which I have picked up from advertising and which I disown—for instance, my desire for A-1 Steak Sauce. If I act on these desire it can be said that I have been led by advertising to act in a way foreign to my nature. In these cases my autonomy has been violated. But most of the desires induced by advertising I fully accept, and hence most of these desires are autonomous. The most vivid demonstration of this is that I often return to purchase the same product over and over again, without regret or remorse. And when I don't it is more likely that the desire has just faded than that I have repudiated it. Hence, while advertising may violate my autonomy by leading me to act on desires which are not truly mine, this seems to be the exceptional case.

Note that this conclusion applies equally well to the case of subliminal advertising. This may generate subconscious desires which lead to purchases, and the act of purchasing these goods may be inconsistent with other conscious desires I have, in which case I might repudiate my behavior and by implication the subconscious cause of it. But my subconscious desires may not be inconsistent in this way with my conscious ones; my id may be cooperative and benign rather than hostile and malign.[13] Here again, then, advertising may or may not produce desires which are "not truly mine."

What are we to say in response to Braybrooke's argument that insofar as we might choose differently if advertisers gave us better information and more options, it follows that the desires we have are to be attributed more to advertising than to our own real inclinations? This claim seems empty. It amounts to saying that if the world we lived in, and we ourselves, were different, then we would want different things. This is surely true, but it is equally true of our desire for shelter as of our desire for Grecian Formula 16. If we lived in a tropical paradise we would not need or desire shelter. If we were immortal, we would not desire youth. What is true of all desires can hardly be used as a basis for criticizing some desires by claiming that they are nonautonomous.

(b) Rational desire and choice. Braybrooke might be interpreted as claiming that the desires induced by advertising are often irrational ones in the sense that they are not expressed by an agent who is in full possession of the facts about the products advertised or about the alternative products which might be offered him. Following this

line of thought, a possible criticism of advertising is that it leads us to act on irrational desires or to make irrational choices. It might be said that our autonomy has been violated by the fact that we are prevented from following our rational wills or that we have been denied the "positive freedom" to develop our true, rational selves. It might be claimed that the desires induced in us by advertising are false desires in that they do not reflect our essential, i.e., rational, essence.

The problem faced by this line of criticism is that of determining what is to count as rational desire or rational choice. If we require that the desire or choice be the product of an awareness of *all* the facts about the product, then surely every one of us is always moved by irrational desires and makes nothing but irrational choices. How could we know all the facts about a product? If it be required only that we possess all of the *available* knowledge about the product advertised, then we still have to face the problem that not all available knowledge is *relevant* to a rational choice. If I am purchasing a car, certain engineering features will be, and others won't be, relevant, *given what I want in a car*. My prior desires determine the relevance of information. Normally a rational desire or choice is thought to be one based upon relevant information, and information is relevant if it shows how other, prior desires may be satisfied. It can plausibly be claimed that it is such prior desires that advertising agencies acknowledge, and that the agencies often provide the type of information that is relevant in light of these desires. To the extent that this is true, advertising does not inhibit our rational wills or our autonomy as rational creatures.

It may be urged that much of the puffery engaged in by advertising does not provide relevant information at all but rather makes claims which are not factually true. If someone buys Pongo Peach in anticipation of an adventure in paradise, or Old Charter in expectation of increasing the value of his holdings, then he/she is expecting purely imaginary benefits. In no literal sense will the one product provide adventure and the other increased capital. A purchasing decision based on anticipation of imaginary benefits is not, it might be said, a rational decision, and a desire for imaginary benefits is not a rational desire.

In rejoinder it needs to be pointed out that we often wish to purchase subjective effects which in being subjective are nevertheless real enough. The feeling of adventure or of enhanced social prestige and value are examples of subjective effects promised by advertising. Surely many (most?) advertisements directly promise subjective effects which their patrons actually desire (and obtain when they purchase the product), and thus the ads provide relevant information for rational choice. Moreover, advertisements often provide accurate indirect information on the basis of which a person who wants a certain subjective effect rationally chooses a product. The mechanism involved here is as follows.

To the extent that a consumer takes an advertised product to offer a subjective effect and the product does not, it is unlikely that it will be purchased again. If this happens in a number of cases, the product will be taken off the market. So here the market regulates itself, providing the mechanism whereby misleading advertisements are withdrawn and misled customers are no longer misled. At the same time, a successful bit of puffery, being one which leads to large and repeated sales, produces satisfied customers and more advertising of the product. The indirect information provided by such large-scale advertising efforts provides a measure of verification to the consumer who is looking for certain kinds of subjective effect. For example, if I want to feel well dressed and in fashion, and I consider buying an Izod Alligator shirt which is advertised in all of the magazines and newspapers, then the fact that other people buy it and that this leads to repeated advertisements shows me that the desired subjective effect is real enough and that I indeed will be well dressed and in fashion if I purchase the shirt. The indirect information may lead to a rational decision to purchase a product because the information testifies to the subjective effect that the product brings about.[14]

Some philosophers will be unhappy with the conclusion of this section, largely because they have a concept of true, rational, or ideal desire

which is not the same as the one used here. A Marxist, for instance, may urge that any desire felt by alienated man in a capitalistic society is foreign to his true nature. Or an existentialist may claim that the desires of inauthentic men are themselves inauthentic. Such concepts are based upon general theories of human nature which are unsubstantiated and perhaps incapable of substantiation. Moreover, each of these theories is committed to a concept of an ideal desire which is normatively debatable and which is distinct from the ordinary concept of a rational desire as one based upon relevant information. But it is in the terms of the ordinary concept that we express our concern that advertising may limit our autonomy in the sense of leading us to act on irrational desires, and if we operate with this concept we are driven again to the conclusion that advertising may lead, but probably most often does not lead, to an infringement of autonomy.

How do we distinguish between an impulse we* do *not resist and one we* could *not resist, between freely giving in to a desire and succumbing to one?

(c) Free choice. It might be said that some desires are so strong or so covert that a person cannot resist them, and that when he acts on such desires he is not acting freely or voluntarily but is rather the victim of irresistible impulse or an unconscious drive. Perhaps those who condemn advertising feel that it produces this kind of desire in us and consequently reduces our autonomy.

This raises a very difficult issue. How do we distinguish between an impulse we *do* not resist and one we *could* not resist, between freely giving in to a desire and succumbing to one? I have argued elsewhere that the way to get at this issue is in terms of the notion of acting for a reason.[15] A person acts or chooses freely if he does so for a reason, that is, if he can adduce considerations which justify in his mind the act in question. Many of our actions are in fact free because this condition frequently holds. Often, however, a person will act from habit, or whim, or impulse, and on these occasions he does not have a reason in mind. Nevertheless he often acts voluntarily in these instances, i.e., he could have acted otherwise. And this is because if there *had been* a reason for acting otherwise of which he was aware, he would in fact have done so. Thus acting from habit or impulse is not necessarily to act in an involuntary manner. If, however, a person is aware of a good reason to do x and still follows his impulse to do y, then he can be said to be impelled by irresistible impulse and hence to act involuntarily. Many kleptomaniacs can be said to act involuntarily, for in spite of their knowledge that they likely will be caught and their awareness that the goods they steal have little utilitarian value to them, they nevertheless steal. Here their "out of character" desires have the upper hand, and we have a case of compulsive behavior.

Applying these notions of voluntary and compulsive behavior to the case of behavior prompted by advertising, can we say that consumers influenced by advertising act compulsively? The unexciting answer is: sometimes they do, sometimes not. I may have an overwhelming, T.V. induced urge to own a Mazda Rx-7 and all the while realize that I can't afford one without severely reducing my family's caloric intake to a dangerous level. If, aware of this good reason not to purchase the car, I nevertheless do so, this shows that I have been the victim of T.V. compulsion. But if I have the urge, as I assure you I do, and don't act on it, or if in some other possible world I could afford an Rx-7, then I have not been the subject of undue influence by Mazda advertising. Some Mazda Rx-7 purchasers act compulsively; others do not. The Mazda advertising effort *in general* cannot be condemned, then, for impairing its customers' autonomy in the sense of limiting free or voluntary choice. Of course the question remains what should be done about the fact that advertising may and does *occasionally* limit free choice. We shall return to this question later.

In the case of subliminal advertising we may find an individual whose subconscious desires are activated by advertising into doing something his calculating, reasoning ego does not approve. This

would be a case of compulsion. But most of us have a benevolent subconsciousness which does not overwhelm our ego and its reasons for action. And therefore most of us can respond to subliminal advertising without thereby risking our autonomy. To be sure, if some advertising firm developed a subliminal technique which drove all of us to purchase Lear jets, thereby reducing our caloric intake to the zero point, then we would have a case of advertising which could properly be censured for infringing our right to autonomy. We should acknowledge that this is possible, but at the same time we should recognize that it is not an inherent result of subliminal advertising.

(d) Control or manipulation. Briefly let us consider the matter of control and manipulation. Under what conditions do these activities occur? In a recent paper on "Forms and Limits of Control" I suggested the following criteria:[16]

A person C controls the behavior of another person *P if*

(1) C intends *P* to act in a certain way *A*;
(2) C's intention is causally effective in bringing about *A*; and
(3) C intends to ensure that all of the necessary conditions of *A* are satisfied.

These criteria may be elaborated as follows. To control another person it is not enough that one's actions produce certain behavior on the part of that person; additionally one must intend that this happen. Hence control is the intentional production of behavior. Moreover, it is not enough just to have the intention; the intention must give rise to the conditions which bring about the intended effect. Finally, the controller must intend to establish by his actions any otherwise unsatisfied necessary conditions for the production of the intended effect. The controller is not just influencing the outcome, not just having input; he is as it were guaranteeing that the sufficient conditions for the intended effect are satisfied.

Let us apply those criteria of control to the case of advertising and see what happens. Conditions (1) and (3) are crucial. Does the Mazda manufacturing company or its advertising agency intend that I buy an Rx-7? Do they intend that a certain number of people buy the car? *Prima facie* it seems more appropriate to say that they *hope* a certain number of people will buy it, and hoping and intending are not the same. But the difficult term here is "intend." Some philosophers have argued that to intend *A* it is necessary only to desire that *A* happen and to believe that it will. If this is correct, and if marketing analysis gives the Mazda agency a reasonable belief that a certain segment of the population will buy its product, then, assuming on its part the desire that this happen, we have the conditions necessary for saying that the agency intends that a certain segment purchase the car. If I am a member of this segment of the population, would it then follow that the agency intends that I purchase an Rx-7? Or is control referentially opaque? Obviously we have some questions here which need further exploration.

Let us turn to the third condition of control, the requirement that the controller intends to activate or bring about any otherwise unsatisfied necessary conditions for the production of the intended effect. It is in terms of this condition that we are able to distinguish brainwashing from liberal education. The brainwasher arranges all of the necessary conditions for belief. On the other hand, teachers (at least those of liberal persuasion) seek only to influence their students—to provide them with information and enlightenment which they may absorb *if they wish*. We do not normally think of teachers as controlling their students, for the students' performances depend as well on their own interests and inclinations.

Now the advertiser—does he control, or merely influence, his audience? Does he intend to ensure that all of the necessary conditions for purchasing behavior are met, or does he offer information and symbols which are intended to have an effect only *if* the potential purchaser has certain desires? Undeniably advertising induces some desires, and it does this intentionally, but more often than not it intends to induce a desire for a particular object, *given* that the purchaser already has other desires. Given a desire for youth, or power, or adventure, or ravishing beauty, we are led to desire Grecian Formula 16, Mazda Rx-7's, Pongo Peach, and Distinctive Foundations. In this light, the advertiser is influencing us by appealing

to independent desires we already have. He is not creating those basic desires. Hence it seems appropriate to deny that he intends to produce all of the necessary conditions for our purchases, and appropriate to deny that he controls us.[17]

Let me summarize my argument. The critics of advertising see it as having a pernicious effect on the autonomy of consumers, as controlling their lives and manufacturing their very souls. The defense claims that advertising only offers information and in effect allows industry to provide consumers with what they want. After developing some of the philosophical dimensions of this dispute, I have come down tentatively in favor of the advertisers. Advertising may, but certainly does not always or even frequently, control behavior, produce compulsive behavior, or create wants which are not rational or are not truly those of the consumer. Admittedly, it may in individual cases do all of these things, but it is innocent of the charge of intrinsically or necessarily doing them or even, I think, of often doing so. This limited potentiality, to be sure, leads to the question whether advertising should be abolished or severely curtailed or regulated because of its potential to harm a few poor souls in the above ways. This is a very difficult question, and I do not pretend to have the answer. I only hope that the above discussion, in showing some of the kinds of harm that can be done by advertising and by indicating the likely limits of this harm, will put us in a better position to grapple with the question.

Notes

[1]Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (Pocket Books, New York, 1958), 20–21.

[2]*Ibid.*, 21.

[3]B. F. Skinner, "Some Issues Concerning the Control of Human Behavior: A Symposium" in Karlins and Andrews (eds.), *Man Controlled* (The Free Press, New York, 1972).

[4]For provocative discussions of subliminal advertising, see W. B. Key, *Subliminal Seduction* (The New American Library, New York, 1973), and W. B. Key, *Media Sexploitation* (Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1976).

[5]I would like to emphasize that in what follows, I am discussing these techniques of advertising from the standpoint of the issue of control and not from that of deception. For a good and recent discussion of the many dimensions of possible deception in advertising, see Alex C. Michalos, "Advertising: Its Logic, Ethics, and Economics" in J. A. Blair and R. H. Johnson (eds.), *Informal Logic: The First International Symposium* (Edgepress, Pt. Reyes, Calif., 1980).

[6]Quoted by Packard, *op. Cit.*, 220.

[7]Theodore Levitt, "The Morality (?) of Advertising," *Harvard Business Review* 48 (1970), 84–92.

[8]Philip Nelson, "Advertising and Ethics," in Richard T. De George and Joseph A. Pichler (eds.), *Ethics, Free Enterprise, and Public Policy* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1978), 187–98.

[9]John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*; reprinted in Tom L. Beauchamp and Normal E. Bowie (eds.), *Ethical Theory and Business* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1979), 496–501.

[10]David Braybrooke, "Skepticism of Wants, and Certain Subversive Effects of Corporations on American Values," in Sidney Hook (ed.), *Human Values and Economic Policy* (New York University Press, New York, 1967); reprinted in Beauchamp and Bowie (eds.), *op. Cit.* 502–08.

[11]F. A. von Hayek, "The *Non Sequitur* of the 'Dependence Effect,'" *Southern Economic Journal* (1961); reprinted in Beauchamp and Bowie (eds.), *op. Cit.*, 598–612.

[12]Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* LXVIII (1971), 5–20.

[13]For a discussion of the difference between a malign and a benign subconscious mind, see P. H. Nowell-Smith, "Psychoanalysis and Moral Language," *The Rationalist Annual* (1954); reprinted in P. Edwards and A. Pap (eds.), *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, Revised Edition (The Free Press, New York, 1965), 86–93.

[14]Michalos argues that in emphasizing a brand name—such as Bayer Aspirin—advertisers are illogically attempting to distinguish the indistinguishable by casting a trivial feature of a product as a significant one which separates it from other brands of the same product. The brand name is said to be trivial or unimportant "from the point of view of the effectiveness of the product or that for the sake of which the product is purchased" (*op. Cit.*, 107). This claim ignores the role of indirect information in advertising. For example, consumers want an aspirin *they can trust* (trustworthiness being part of "that for the sake of which the product is purchased"), and the indirect information conveyed by the widespread advertising effort for Bayer Aspirin shows that this product is judged trustworthy by many

other purchasers. Hence the emphasis on the name is not at all irrelevant but rather is a significant feature of the product from the consumer's standpoint, and attending to the name is not at all an illogical or irrational response on the part of the consumer.

[15]Robert L. Arrington, "Practical Reason, Responsibility and the Psychopath," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 9 (1979), 71–89.

[16]Robert L. Arrington, "Forms and Limits of Control," delivered at the annual meeting of the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, Birmingham, Alabama, 1980.

[17]Michalos distinguishes between appealing to people's tastes and molding those tastes (*op. Cit.*, 104), and he seems to agree with my claim that it is morally permissible for advertisers to persuade us to consume some article *if* it suits our tastes (105). However, he also implies that advertisers mold tastes as well as appeal to them. It is unclear what evidence is given for this claim, and it is unclear what is meant by *tastes*. If the latter are thought of as basic desires and wants, then I would agree that advertisers are controlling their customers to the extent that they intentionally mold tastes. But if by molding tastes is meant generating a desire for the particular object they promote, advertisers in doing so may well be appealing to more basic desires, in which case they should not be thought of as controlling the consumer.

CASES

Case 10.1: Diamonds Are Forever

One popular advertisement for engagement rings sponsored by the DeBeers Diamond company poses the following question to men planning proposal: "Is two months' salary too much to spend?" Many suitors take "two months' salary" as an unwritten rule of etiquette and as a measuring stick of how well they've fared in the jewelry aspect of courtship. However, "two months" is not written in any well-known traditional books on wedding etiquette. It seems to be simply an extremely effective creation of the DeBeers company, which controls 80 percent of the world market in diamonds.

While wedding rings were traditionally regarded as symbols of vows to lifelong commitment, today they symbolize wealth and, to some, how much the suitor loves his bride-to-be. Givers and receivers of the glimmering objects can be regularly comparing the caret weight, cost, etc., of their "symbols" with friends and family members. This seems like a clear situation in which the diamond business has violated consumer autonomy by "creating" a new need through exploiting basic human needs to fit in and impress others. For some potential suitors, simply saying no in the face of social pressures to value his bride-to-be in this manner is difficult. Advertisers would probably respond by saying that they are simply "fulfilling" latent human desires rather than creating them. Indeed, it appears that the "need" or desire to impress peers and the bride-to-be is already in existence.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Is the prevalence of the belief of the "two months' salary" rule proof of the power of advertisers to create needs by exploiting human insecurity? Why or why not?
2. If so, does this unjustly violate the autonomy of consumers?

Case 10.2: Sex in Advertising

In a popular television commercial, several attractive young women are in a giggly conversation in a fashionable living room. Soon one of them announces, "He's back!" The young women then rush

over to a telescope to spy on a well-built man in a building across the way as he removes his clothes and steps into the shower. As he steps out of the shower, he finally puts on his jeans, which, though barely shown (no pun intended), are the subject of this commercial. Another television advertisement for a popular soft drink has several women staring out of an office building window at a shirtless construction worker as he drinks his Diet Coke. In the spirit of camaraderie and bonding, the women agree to be back at the same time tomorrow for more. While controversial, these ads are effective because they engage in a role-reversal of what advertisers have used to appeal to male members of the audience for years, that is, raw appeals to sexual power and libido.

Consider commercials for one popular beer in which the opening of one bottle of this company's brew usually paves the way for men to party with beautiful women in bikinis at bars or in some tropical location. In other beer company ads, some members of the audience may wonder if it is swimsuits that are being promoted, since the real product doesn't even appear until the last few seconds of the spot. Perhaps most flagrant, though, are ads for fashion and perfumes. Promotions for Calvin Klein's Obsession perfume barely show the actual product. Instead, photos of nude and semi-dressed models in provocative poses are used to draw attention to the ad and create a sexual association with the product. Ads for Guess jeans and Wilke-Rodriguez fashions have also used overtly sexual themes in order to be effective.

In addition to decrying the sexual contents of these ads, critics claim that they are manipulative and may undermine autonomy through appeals to subconscious drives. Advertisers respond that they are merely reflecting society's norms and appealing to desires that people already have. Perfume would not sell if advertised for its chemical content and few people would buy certain fashions in the absence of the adventure associated with it.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you think that these ads are immoral ? Why or why not?
2. Can these ads truly undermine consumer autonomy through unconscious associations with pleasure and sexual power? Or are most consumers stronger than to allow this to happen?
3. Do you find anything morally objectionable to appealing to the "least common denominator" of a male audience in order to sell items such as beer?

Case 10.3: Undersized Computer Monitors

When is 13 inches not 13 inches? This is not a tricky math question. Rather, it is the subject of a recent lawsuit filed on behalf of consumers by Merced County District Attorney Gordon Spencer. The suit alleges that computer manufacturers such as IBM, Compaq, Apple, and ten others regularly overstate the size of their computer monitors in their advertisements. Spencer accuses the companies of inflating the size of the monitors by an average of 13 to 19 percent, with some monitors being as much as 33.7 percent smaller than advertised. The suit claims that the overstating occurs because manufacturers measure the total glass area of the screen rather than just the image size. "They should only measure the viewable areas of a computer screen, but sometimes they were measuring the stuff that's behind the plastic housing," Spencer said. "If I buy a pound of hamburger, I expect a pound of hamburger—and I don't expect the wrapping to go into it [the weight]," he further stated.

In contrast to the advertised sizes of screens on television sets, computer screens are not strictly regulated. Since the products are similar, it is alleged that most reasonable consumers would expect the same standards of measurement from computers. The suit started in 1993, when a resident of Merced County complained that his monitor was much smaller than the advertisement declared it to be. The State of California's attorney general's office has launched its own investigation and may file similar charges in the near future.[7]

[7]See Karen Kaplan, "Suit Charges PC Firms Cheat on Monitor Sizes," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 March 1995, D4.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do these practices constitute outright deception of even reasonable consumers? Are these ads blatantly false and misleading?
2. Do consumers have any responsibility to be informed by making their own measurements?

Is it a false assumption on the part of consumers, and thus their own fault for being misled, that computer monitors and television screens are measured and advertised in the same fashion?

COMMENTARY

Questions over the morality of advertising have been the subject of public debate for decades. The proliferation of another highly anticipated source of more commercial communication, worldwide networking through computer technology, will only make this debate more intensive in the years ahead. Since its inception, advertising as an industry has received a tremendous amount of criticism from groups with various agendas along the political and moral spectrum. It has been accused of everything from perpetuating conspicuous consumption and materialism to leading young women to develop self-esteem disorders through an irresponsible portrayal of a "beauty myth" that is both unrealistic and unhealthy.

While these are significant causes for concern, a question that is more foundational to these criticisms is whether or not the contents of many campaigns can actually undermine consumer autonomy and free choice through deception and manipulation. If they can, this goes against Adam Smith's vision of capitalism in which autonomous actors engage in voluntary and rational exchange. In his vision of the market, he theorized that supply would be guided by demand and producers of goods and services would profit only through meeting the needs of consumers. This is in sharp contrast to how some believe the current system works. It is alleged that today's economy is one that is dominated by advertising in which producers allegedly stimulate artificial demand by "creating" needs where none previously existed. If in fact advertising can truly undermine the autonomy and rationality of consumers through deception and manipulation, using it for this purpose would make it an immoral enterprise that would mandate more stringent regulations in order to protect consumer interests.

Upon a deeper investigation, many of these specific claims of advertising's power to subvert autonomy seem largely exaggerated. However, there are other significant moral concerns about some of the practices of Madison Avenue. Before we get to these concerns, we will first resolve two critical questions: First, is advertising inherently deception, since very little information is ever presented about the products and services promoted? Second, does advertising really have the power to manipulate and undermine the autonomy of rational consumers through the creation of artificial needs as some of its critics allege?

Many critics have claimed that by only emphasizing the positive aspects of products and services, almost all advertising misleads consumers. Referring to the "bluffing" example discussed in chapter 1, deception does not take place in very specific contexts in which lesser standards of veracity are expected. Thus we must ask if most con-

sumers are really deceived by advertising. The answer seems dubious in light of the fact that most of us were admonished since preschool days by our parents to be skeptical of the claims made by advertisers. Thus we do not expect advertising to be "truthful" in the sense of offering both sides of the story. The great majority of adult consumers are more sophisticated than the pundits allege. Most can "read" through ads and see them for what they are. No reasonable consumer believes that by wearing a specific brand of athletic shoe, he will be able to play basketball like Shaquille O'Neal or Michael Jordan. In fact, some advertisements even offer tongue-in-cheek parodies of themselves. A recent jingle for Sprite claims that by drinking the product, "you will make friends, beautiful women will surround you . . . violins will play to you . . ., etc." It is doubtful that such a benign poke at the industry would work if consumers were not sophisticated enough to laugh along with the ad.

Undoubtedly, some consumers will be misled and will have their autonomy undermined by some campaigns, but consumers must take some responsibility to become educated and aware of the marketplace. As such, current legislation rightfully protects only "reasonable" consumers from deceiving and misleading claims. Policies that protect irresponsible consumers are too paternalistic and circumvent responsible citizenship. However, in cases where even reasonable consumers are readily deceived, current laws must be rigorously enforced because in those cases consumer autonomy is truly being subverted. For example, the 1994 Fair Labeling and Packaging Act was signed into law because many grocery store items offered nutritional information on packages that would mislead even sophisticated consumers. Prior to the act, there were no standard measurements for terms such as "low-fat" "fat-free" and "low-sodium." Some product packages, which is another form of advertising, made claims such as "98% fat free." Most health-conscious consumers assumed that this meant that only 2 percent of the calories came from fat, the standard dietary interpretation of this claim. Some products were deceptive because the 2 percent of fat referred to was measured in terms of volume or weight. In some cases, up to 40 percent or 50 percent of the actual calories came from fat. While the act has helped to make nutritional information much easier to understand, consumers still must be careful. Some wily producers state very low quantities of sodium and fat, but in the context of unrealistic serving sizes. While some of the loopholes of the new law still need to be closed, this is a clear case of the law reasonably stepping in to protect consumer interests. However, it seems certain that in the majority of cases, no reasonable consumer is being truly deceived by advertising.

Let's move to the second question: Does advertising truly have the power to undermine autonomy? John Kenneth Galbraith and a host of other critics of advertising have argued that the industry as a whole can "create" needs in order to sell their products and services to unwitting consumers. The allegation is made that many campaigns undermine autonomy by exploiting deep human insecurities and needs and associating products with answers for those needs. Are these critics right? Can ads manipulate and undermine freedom? It seems obvious that some ads do indeed exploit the darker aspects of human nature. However, experiments suggest that despite the fact that we are inundated with ads, we readily dismiss them. Each of us on average is exposed to 1,600 advertisements a day, notices about 1,200 of them, and responds to only about 12. We also seem to pay more attention to ads for products we already own, possibly to soothe post-purchase dissonance.[8]

[8]Roger Draper, "The Faithless Shepherd," *New York Review of Books* (26 June 1986): 16; cited in William Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, 5th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1992), 500.

Equally lost in the barrage of criticisms is the fact that many, perhaps even most, advertisements are nonmanipulative in nature and are for products that meet genuine needs in the marketplace. For example, advertisements for overnight mail services, telecommunications companies, and computer firms meet the need that individuals and businesses have always had; that is, the need to communicate more efficiently and effectively. While the ads may create the desire for a product or service, the need to communicate was there long before the ad ever appeared.

Furthermore, as Theodore Levitt asserts, advertisements for products such as cosmetics appeal to often latent, but nonetheless real, desires of consumers. As such, he exonerates the industry as a whole by arguing that it does not create needs at all. Rather, advertising merely offers products that are directed to needs that already exist within consumers. He asserts that there would be dire consequences if all forms of "puffery" and association were removed from advertisements. For example, cosmetics would be promoted as chemicals rather than the hope or adventure that they offer. Quoting T. S. Eliot's famous claim that "human kind cannot bear very much reality," Levitt states that advertising is merely reflective of the human journey to transcend "an otherwise harsh or bland existence." Consumers indeed want much more than the utility or intended purpose of a product. Rather, they want "not cosmetics, but expectations of the allurements they promise . . . not low-cal whip cream but self-rewarding indulgence."

Robert Arrington takes a similar position with respect to advertising's alleged powers to control human behavior. Arrington argues that if the hope offered by such advertisements for products are not corollary with rational consumer desires, many products would not be repeatedly purchased by the same consumers. Furthermore, he

asserts that ads may create demand for a specific product such as Grecian Formula 16, but only if the purchaser already has the desire to look or feel youthful. Thus the advertiser does not create this need, he is merely "influencing us by appealing to independent desires we already have."

The "Diamonds Are Forever" case in this chapter further illustrates Arrington's point, and at the same time introduces our most serious concerns about the content of some forms of associative advertising. To summarize the case, the often heard "two-months' salary" rule for engagement rings has taken on the credibility of a long-held social norm. However, as far as we can tell, it is the successful creation of advertisers for the DeBeers company, which controls approximately 80 percent of the world's diamond market. On the surface, the prevalence of the belief in the two-months rule would seem to indicate that the campaign has in fact created a need that did not previously exist. Without commercial influence, rings are symbols of vows of commitment. In most parts of the world, diamond engagement and wedding rings are far from the norm. As such, it appears that at least in the United States, advertisers have successfully created an artificial demand for their product. However, upon a deeper examination, the real "need" was there all along. Men have always "needed" to impress their future spouses and their peers. Diamonds merely provide another means for this desire to be fulfilled. The same can be said for almost every product and service that exists in the marketplace.

However, just because advertising is limited in its power to create needs and thereby undermine autonomy, this does not mean that advertising does not alter some forms of behavior. While ads may not subvert freedom and autonomy, they do successfully influence behavior through the power of persuasion and association. Indeed, advertising works successfully to get consumers to buy products that they may otherwise choose to avoid. If it did not, companies would not pay Madison Avenue the exorbitant sums that they do to promote their products. Advertising may not subvert choice, but it can surely limit it. John Waide points out that society becomes the best enforcers of the claims of ads through peer and social pressure. The diamond example is a case in point. Many men have their choices artificially limited because some members of society measure their success by how close they come to meeting the two-months rule. While many men can and do simply say no to that rule, an even clearer example with respect to the power of advertising to limit choices is in the fashion industry. Certainly consumers can say no, but at what cost? In many instances, it is difficult to even procure a job in the absence of conforming to socially acceptable fashion trends.

While advertisers accomplish their goals of persuasion through appeals to human needs, desires, and insecurities that already exist, there are still serious criticisms that can be levied at advertising. John Waide brings to light a most serious concern by insightfully pointing out that Levitt takes as a given that a satisfactory life is one in which many desires are satisfied, but falsely assumes that "*which* desires is not important." Indeed, it seems critical to ask if appeals to *any* emotion, insecurity, or need is as morally neutral as Levitt and Arrington implicitly assume in their discussions.

Most of us would agree that appeals to healthy needs that can be met with good products serve an important function in a robust and growing economy. For example, commercials for long-distance telephone-communication carriers in which keeping in touch with friends and family is emphasized is a legitimate social function that these companies can meet. Furthermore, many public-service advertisements appeal to fear in portraying the consequences of drug and alcohol abuse. There is no debate over whether or not the prevention of substance abuse is a "product" worth selling through appeals to healthy amounts of human fear.

Some advertisements, however, clearly traverse the bounds of healthy persuasion into the realm of appealing to what one of our former students has labeled "the least common denominator" in the target audience. For example, appeals to sexual power feed on the most base elements of the human psyche. Advertisements for Guess clothes and Calvin Klein perfumes are among the most blatant examples of campaigns that use sexual arousal rather than the product itself in order to promote brand awareness. In many of these ads, the product itself is never even shown. Instead, barely dressed, and in some cases nude, models are placed in provocative situations in order to grab attention. Advertisements for some beer companies also make similar appeals. Many of their television spots use scantily clad women in sketches in which the product is barely mentioned. Undoubtedly, these types of ads attempt to lead the consumer to "associate" the product with sexual power and promiscuity or to correlate the product with perhaps unconscious pleasurable feelings of sex. While these ads are "smart business" from a marketing perspective, appeals to such base appetites are morally deficient.

The most disturbing aspects of many of these examples is that appeals to these parts of the psyche seem so unnecessary. There are countless examples of ad campaigns that rely on entertainment value and creativity rather than on sexual appeals. Even within the alcoholic beverage industry itself are examples of ads that seem to capture the audience without appeals to sex. Most sports fans can recall television

commercials in which beer brands rely on cleverness rather than sex to place their product in the minds of consumers. Furthermore, the wine industry offers a sharp contrast to irresponsible appeals among beer advertisers. Wine makers have voluntarily agreed to responsible advertising of their product in the form of a self-imposed code of conduct. To avoid portraying wine as a means to drunkenness, their code states that it will only be advertised in the context of food. This code is consistently adhered to, as wine is rarely, if ever, advertised outside of this context.

Undoubtedly some advertisers would defend their use of sexual appeals by stating that they are only mirroring society's values, rather than creating them. Thus in reality they are simply giving society what it wants. But should advertisers simply give society what it wants? Are they free from any moral responsibilities to take the higher ground and appeal to healthier parts of the psyche? In one sense the answer to this difficult question gets back to the age-old question that asks whether it is moral for someone to provide a product or service just because there is a market for it. Certainly we can all think of some things that are so grossly immoral that no one ought to supply the demand. Legal products such as pornography, hard alcohol, and tobacco are of such dubious social value that we would all readily state to manufacturers of these products that their gains are "ill-gotten." A corollary argument can be advanced with respect to advertisers. Just because an insecurity, fear, or desire can be successfully appealed to, this does not make it morally right to do so. And just because advertisers do not create immoral societal values, they can and do powerfully and readily reinforce them.

Furthermore, the claim that advertising merely reflects reality is untruthful. No one we know has ever been anywhere where everyone was as physically fit or beautiful as portrayed in some ads. Computer technology in mass media can also create "unreality." Print ads regularly use graphic techniques such as airbrushing to cover blemishes and other less than "ideal" physical features of models. Newer technologies even allow for the changing of eye color, the thickening of hair, and the augmentation of the shape and size of various body parts. Thus the models appearing in magazines really don't exist as we see them. To some extent then, advertising can in fact create a world of unreality, as most reasonable consumers are not aware of some of these enhancement techniques.

John Waide correctly inquires about the type of world we are making through associative advertising. He asks if advertising "will tend to influence us to become worse persons." Instead of the cultivation of virtues, he asserts that advertising contributes to a culture in

which people seek security in material goods that promise nonmarket goods such as friendship, joy, etc. It is obvious that there is no way for market goods to fulfill these deep needs of human beings.

Waide's criticisms are particularly true where we live in Southern California. In many parts of the greater Los Angeles area, the emphasis is on what you own and what you look like rather than who you are. It is not uncommon to come across people who seem to invest all of their resources in looks and material possessions rather than on the cultivation of character. While advertising cannot be blamed for creating such shallow values, it undoubtedly perpetuates an ethos of shallow materialism.

It is obvious, then, that advertisers have great responsibilities with respect to being accountable in the appeals they are making in order to persuade consumers. There is a high road and a low road in business. Companies and advertisers that seek to be ethical must respect human well-being and the "world" they are making; they must be cautious about the types of appeals they are making to their target audience.

While the content of some ads must be cleaned up in order to better society, it is unrealistic to expect voluntary compliance on the part of advertisers. However, further governmental regulation outside of the blatantly false and misleading runs into all sorts of thorny questions about the freedom of speech protected by the First Amendment. Thus the only practical solution for Christians and other members of society who object to such advertising is to influence societal norms or to make their positions known in such a way that morally objectionable ads become unprofitable to use. Other groups have clearly shown that this has already been effective. Various ads have been pulled or changed by major corporations amidst public protest for too much violent or sexual content.

A case can be made, however, for further legislation to protect one group that cannot be deemed reasonable consumers in the marketplace—young children. Children under a certain age are constant targets of ads for products such as cereals, toys, and perhaps even cigarettes. They do not and cannot be expected to bear the responsibilities accorded to a rational consumer in the marketplace. Thus, some further legislative measures, especially for products like cigarettes, can be justified in order to protect their interests.

With all of the criticism that advertising receives, it comes as no surprise that many Christians believe that advertising is one arena that believers are better off staying away from. Undoubtedly, there are some ad campaigns that Christians should not participate in creating. As John Waide states, creating ads that "influence people without concern for their well-being is likely to reduce one's sensitivity to the

moral motive of concern for the well-being of others." Yet, once again we must emphasize that many ads and the products and services they promote are not manipulative and/or destructive for society in general. Commercial communications serve a critical role in a robust economy. Furthermore, Christians once took similar strategies of withdrawal from the realm of radio and television. These mass communication media were left almost exclusively to secular minds and perspectives, and the result is that many Christians are today crying for change. In our opinion, one of the best ways to minimize the amount of morally objectionable advertising is if people who have higher morals and convictions get into the business and create campaigns that can appeal to higher parts of the human psyche and, in the process, serve to help "make a better world."