

# Money vs. Principles

by Bill Herbst

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*[Preface: Last Saturday, the impeachment trial in the U.S. Senate concluded with acquittal for former President Donald Trump, insured by the votes of 43 Republican miscreants. All I want to say is: **I told you so.** Is anyone surprised by the outcome? I doubt it. I sure as hell wasn't. But no matter. Politics is and has always been cynical. Anyway, on to this week's post...]*

One of the truly vexing problems we face in changing the American Way of Life and rescuing civilization from ruin and disaster is the divide between money and principles.

Put in the simplest terms, this boils down to a question that each of us must ask ourselves: Which is more important to us, money or principles? (My use of the word "principles" here and in the title means doing whatever we feel is best for the greater common good of all).

Many people (I daresay most) don't ask themselves that question for various reasons. Some people don't care about the greater good. They're in it for themselves. For others, the answer is too obvious even to ask, much less answer. Some percentage may not want to pose the question because the answer is too painful to face head-on.

For any mature, educated, and self-aware person, the correct answer should be "doing the right thing." In the regular world of real life and actual circumstances, however, the answer most of us choose again and again is "money." I might invoke the crude but common phrase, "*Money talks and bullshit walks.*" The word bullshit in that reference is the sad and somewhat dismissive stand-in for doing the right thing.

Do some people choose to do the right thing regardless of money? Sure. That probably includes many of us, but only in certain situations that are particularly meaningful to us personally. In any situation, however, the bell curve applies. Most people in most situations will choose money. Doing the right thing then gets thrown under the bus. And one way or another, we'll try to convince ourselves that it's OK.

Consider the example in the 1980s and 1990s of the Wal-Mart invasion of rural America. Wal-Mart Supercenters sprouted like weeds in a garden throughout the less densely populated territory of modern America. Basically, Wal-Mart killed small-town Main Street by out-competing (i.e., underpricing) Mom and Pop retailers, thus forcing them out of business. Over the brief period of a mere two decades, rural Americans became almost completely dependent on (and addicted to) Wal-Mart.

How many of us knew that this invasion and takeover by a massive corporate chain was the wrong thing for America? I don't know, but it wasn't a secret. Some people are obviously clueless, but I tend to think that if people didn't know, it's because they didn't want to know. Shopping for consumer products was simply cheaper and more convenient at Wal-Mart, so Americans were happy to do so. I fear this may be a cheap shot, but in the 1980s and 90s too many Americans were listening to (and believing) the Death Culture propaganda of Reagan's "Morning in America" neoliberalism, Rush Limbaugh's Feminazi BS, Alex Jones' conspiracy theories, and Christian Evangelicals' Prosperity Gospel to care much about the common good. Too many still are, despite their having been relentlessly fleeced.

OK, that was then. Now substitute "Amazon" for "Wal-Mart" and "online shopping with quick delivery" for "small-town Main Street America," and you've arrived at our current predicament. Extreme and worsening wealth inequality is one of the most serious indicators of Death Culture, and everything we buy on Amazon contributes to it. Amazon has become the 800-lb. gorilla in the marketplace, dwarfing every other retailer, most of whom are scrambling to look and act more like Amazon.

This is true despite some of Amazon's more obvious failings, such as fake reviews. America's new pastime seems to be researching vacuum cleaners on Amazon, reading thousands of "user reviews" about the hundreds of different versions of vacuum cleaners — full-size, stick, handheld, corded or cordless, etc. — all for sale on Amazon. Jeez, even Home Depot can't compete with that, and your specialty Mom and Pop brick-and-mortar vacuum cleaner store from the 1960s might as well throw in the towel if it hasn't already. Unfortunately, some of those reviews on Amazon are not real, written by people who never bought or used that particular item but were paid a tiny sum to post a review either praising or damning the product.

Beyond reviews that may be fakes are the reviews that are just plain stupid. I'm talking about 5-star reviews that say only "Great product! I love it!" or 1-star reviews by someone who obviously didn't read the user manual. Word of mouth is dead. We let people we don't know influence what we buy. *[This is, by the way, one of the shadow aspects of the Age of Aquarius — the personal and the impersonal can get very confused, with one being easily mistaken for the other.]*

*The rise of social media is the first tidal wave of the Aquarian Age or, quite possibly, the Kali Yuga, for that matter.]*

Amazon has an ad campaign currently underway showcased by commercials that present the company as a responsible corporate citizen and show happy workers dedicated to saving the planet. I have no doubt that such people do indeed work at Amazon. Overall, however, Amazon functions as the new American and global sweatshop, especially at its warehouses. Feudalism is making a grand return.

Amazon's warehouse workers are pushed toward ever higher productivity and efficiency, but they don't share in Jeff Bezos' \$200-billion net worth. Full-time warehouse workers at Amazon average \$31,000 per year. Hell, double that pay and Bezos would probably still be the richest person in the world. But don't be fooled by the ads: Amazon is working overtime, in every way it can, to prevent its warehouse workers from unionizing. As is the case with so much of the corporate world, sloganeering about "we care" is just crass public relations.

And yet, damn near everyone shops online at Amazon. Lots of "good consumers" are thrilled about that and say so. Why? Because money — even a little money — beats the hell out of doing the right thing.

I am no exception. Since the pandemic began, I've increasingly surrendered into relying on Amazon for way too much — not just consumer goods, but even some food. I buy Chana Dal and Masoor Dal from India on Amazon. Four pound packages of those lentils are cheaper and shipped faster than the same brands purchased from eBay or online specialty retailers. I've been effectively seduced by Amazon Prime and no-questions-asked Returns (even though I never return anything, since doing so is way too much trouble). The convenience and saving a buck or two has me by the balls.

Am I happy about this? No. I don't like participating in Death Culture. But I'm old, in declining health, and don't have much fight left in me (except for my writing, such as in these weekly posts).

My intention here is not to rag on anyone. It's just that we're in Deep Shit, and I despair of our finding a way out. None of the "solutions" I see discussed in progressive media — the Green New Deal, infrastructure renewal, military de-escalation, ending racism, etc. — strike me as sufficient to save us from ourselves. Doing whatever we can is certainly worthwhile, but I fear it's all too little, too late. And as long as money consistently trumps doing the right thing, we'll lose.

Once again, I'll close by repeating my apologetic refrain: *I hope I'm wrong.*