

Drugs and consumerism

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Peter Bloom: Welcome. My name is Peter Bloom. I'm from the Department of People and Organisations at the Open University Business School, and I'm here with Professor Gerard Hastings from Stirling University as well as the Open University. And we're going to be talking about some of the broader theoretical and empirical issues that are facing around drugs, drug pricing and drug marketing, and what this says a little more broadly about society and the ways in which we think about ourselves as consuming subjects. So I'm very happy to introduce Professor Hastings.

Gerard Hastings: Good morning. Hello. What time of day are we? First of all, it's a pleasure to be here. As Peter said, I work both at Stirling University and at the Open University and I have done for many years now. My interest is in the interface between business and society or, if you will, the interface between consumer and citizen and how those fit together and how society works for the greater good of all concerned. And that takes us into issues such as power. It takes us into issues such as responsibility and accountability and the decisions we make and the implications those have, not just for us and those near to us, but right down the supply chain. So my consumption behaviour in Milton Keynes will have implications for people working in factories in Dhaka, for example, and we need to think through those sorts of issues as well.

So it's really trying to take a broader look at how business and where we are now in a post-consumer, capitalist society, how that impacts on the nature of the world much more broadly. And that can take us from very, very small things like the impact of the pharmaceutical industry when they produced antiretrovirals and were not allowing those into Sub-Saharan countries, for example, at great, great human cost, or the activities of tobacco companies, who are selling a product they know to be highly dangerous and is killing one in two of their customers, so very specific market malfunctions like that, right through to whole systems concerns. And those might include things like obesity – which is a very multifactoral problem but a massive one, not just for Britain, but for the world – right through to issues of

sustainability and what's happening to the planet. And in many ways these are all connected by this fundamental process of consumption.

Peter Bloom: And I think that brings us to the ways in which the process of what we consume is quite multiple and multifactoral and has a lot of different elements. And the issue of drugs is one I think that is very much, if you will, expansive like that in the sense that it can have a very negative connotation in our current climate of prohibition, addiction issues, people taking too many drugs or whether they should be allowed to take drugs. On the other hand, it has a very positive connotation: this drug is going to cure us. This drug is going to help us. This drug is going to remedy us. There's also a lot of discussion about what makes something a drug and how should they be classified. So you brought this up, but in terms of obesity, is something like soda a drug, or is it a drink, a beverage? And how do we make these classifications?

So I thought maybe before getting into again a broader discussion of these issues if you'd be able to just take some of our listeners a little bit through the history of how we began to label things as drugs and how we began to classify things as drugs and as good and bad drugs?

Gerard Hastings: Well you touched on a very important issue. The word drug itself is a very conflicted one. It can mean very good things and it can mean very bad things. And within those definitions there is also good and bad. So if we deal with the illicit drug issue first of all and the whole issue of addiction, and I think most people will start to think at this point about heroin and cocaine and issues like that. But you're quite right. We can also think of addiction in terms of other substances. I mean, nicotine would be an obvious one, alcohol, and then getting onto things that we see perhaps more just as standard consumer products, like sugar, but a lot of people argue that there are addictive tendencies going on there.

And addiction is a really important concept, not just in the literal sense of the drug addicts shaking because they can't get their fix, but in the sense of which this impedes our freedom of choice. And freedom is a word that's used enormously in our world and it's used as a way to defend your patch. If I'm a multinational corporation and somebody says well, we want to stop your advertising of cigarettes, for example, the word freedom will very quickly come in: our commercial freedom to do this. And if you go across the Atlantic to America, then those freedoms are enshrined for companies in a way that's... And I think freedom is a word that, in the same way as drugs, that begs us to say well, hang on, what do you mean by freedom? What does it mean in this context? So it's very important to recognise that.

If we jump to the other meaning of the word drugs, which you characterised as the sort of benign one, which is the pharma company as a finder of cures for terrible diseases and even relieving us of this burden of illness, I think that is an enticing and interesting construction, but

it's very often a long way from what is actually happening. What we've got even in the "benign end" of the pharmaceutical industry we've got big business operating as effectively and efficiently as it can to make profits for shareholders, and that is not the same thing as trying to cure human illness. So the decision that a pharmaceutical company will make about what drugs to produce would not be the same as a government committee set up to say well, what are the problems facing this society and what illnesses should we cure.

And if you look at this on a global level, then that mismatch becomes appallingly clear in a world in which we have multiple treatments for male-pattern baldness and erectile dysfunction and nothing for bilharzia or tropical diseases, simply because, not because these are more important illnesses, but because the people who have male-pattern baldness have money. And that is how capitalism is set up: to chase the profit. And in some ways, you know, if we were discussing this under the banner of the minister of finance, for example, rather than the minister of health, we would see that as a very good thing, you know, economic growth and increasing jobs and resources and industries that feed off the main industry, like the marketing industry, for example. But in other ways, there are massively dysfunctional outcomes in that. And very broadly you can begin to talk about those in terms of externalities.

So the cigarette companies, for example, produces products and sell them and make a profit, in fact, make fantastic profits. And from an investment perspective, tobacco companies, even now at this time in history when we know so much about the harm their products are doing, are still a fantastic buy in terms of stock because people carry on using the product even when times are hard, not least because of the ultimate loyalty scheme of addiction. You can't get a better loyalty card. So they stand to make a great deal of money out of it and that is what drives what's going on, rather than somebody saying well, hang on, maybe it would be better if we didn't have these products and maybe we should set up a system where these products are actively discouraged rather than encouraged.

But the point is there is some intelligent thinking going into the process rather than, to use that word again, simply thinking about the free market. And again, free is a very, very dangerous word because it is not a free market. It's anything but a free market. But there is still this notion out there – a bit like the tooth fairy – that the free market is there and will guide everything and the invisible hand and so on. And that is pure and pristine and uncontaminated and it's bull [bleep].

Peter Bloom: Well, I think you raise a really interesting set of points there, and one of them is about how what is seen as organic or natural oftentimes even in terms of drugs themselves, so this is our organic drug, or obviously these are the main diseases that we need to solve, is itself a social construction and riven with power relations and riven with a set of discourses and understandings that are not necessarily from one set of inspirations that you would think

in terms of drug use. However, I wanted to go back a little bit historically, if we could talk about this interface between consumer and citizen, and I think drugs is a very interesting link between this because we've talked a good bit about the ways in which drugs themselves are something that people consume, and they also help to make us the subjects that we are.

And they also help to define which people are which types of citizens or not. I mean there's been a range of literature, for instance, recently tracing out the genealogy of the War on Drugs in the United States and talking about how it's very much linked to the racialisation of society and very strong about these are citizens that must be punished and have punitive things because they do horrible drugs such as heroin and cocaine. And at the same time you also see, as you said, this massive proliferation of pharmaceutical industry, whose entire job it is in many ways you can use the word addiction, you can use the word incentivise, but to make us into drug-consuming citizens.

So I wanted to know if maybe we could have a little bit of a discussion about how drugs themselves help to define us and how we consume, because it is a very material act of consuming drugs, the limits of what this freedom is and the limits of how we define ourselves as citizens and how this is maybe changing as time goes on.

Gerard Hastings: It's very interesting. I would suggest that the pharmaceutical industry – I'll use that term rather than drugs because it gets us confused with the War on Drugs.

Peter Bloom: Absolutely.

Gerard Hastings: But maybe come back to the War on Drugs in a moment. But the pharmaceutical end of this activity is in many ways a microcosm of how society as a whole works, where disease and illness and health have become matters of consumption. So if you have a headache, you buy a pill to cure that headache. If you have a stomach ache, you get another pill to cure that. And quite often these are problems that (a) may not be problems at all, so you might just feel a little bit headache-y, but if you just took a brisk walk and went out in the fresh air, then it would resolve it. And (b) there's something passive about what is going on, you know, that the problems I face in life are going to be resolved by buying something. You know, in that case fairly trivial illnesses, maybe more serious long-term maladies, so that's how I resolve them and I'm dependent upon a third party. I'm dependent on me earning the money to pay for this and there is a hamster wheel process going on there. Because once you multiply this out and say it's not just my headache I'm going to cure with it, but all the other problems I face in life, therefore I'm going to have to do lots of buying, therefore I'm going to have to do lots of working to earn the money to do the lots of buying.

Peter Bloom: And you see this, I think, as well, like, in terms of how it helps to in many ways give people a psychological coping mechanism to identify their problems. I mean notice this when I go back to the United States, the commercials for, when we have many of them on male-pattern baldness medicine, or even more perhaps for erectile dysfunction, there's this idea that in the midst of a society that's going through a continual recession and massive insecurity in terms of wages and also just general social upheaval, really a lot of the problems that people face if only you weren't bald or if only you were more virile, all of your problems at work, all of your problems at home, everything would be solved. And I do think there is a certain sense in which psychologically it kind of helps – not helps in a good way, but it makes people feel as if, yes.

Gerard Hastings: Yeah, it works. It works. It works. I think that's absolutely right. And our conversation here is being quite critical of how that business model works, but my goodness, it does work. It is immensely effective. And what's happening, not just in the pharmaceutical market, but across all consumption fields is that you're perpetually being offered the solution, and you just have to go and buy it. And there are many, many problems with that. But if we cut to the chase, the biggest problem of all is that you're not going to solve the fundamental issues of being a human being by something you buy. What is your life about? I've a friend who has just had a stroke at a very young age and he's taken a real knock and it's forced him to stop and think, right, OK, this could all come to an end very soon. What's it about? And actually that's the question we all at some point have to consider.

And, you know, when it comes to that question, on your deathbed when you were asked, OK, what was it all about, Peter? What have I done? I would be very surprised if you say well, I had a wonderful iPhone 6, or what a Maserati it was I was driving. The things that will really matter to you then will be much more complex and difficult to define: things like family and friendship and sense of achievement. And I think that third one, that sense of achievement, I think we've got to be very careful around here because there's something incredibly passive about the system that we are now creating where every human need, and we can perhaps drill down on what we mean by need, but every human need is catered for by somebody just going along and giving somebody some money for it and that's that sorted.

Whereas, just supposing, and I don't think this is a big supposition at all, solving those problems for yourself is what really matters, that sense of achievement when you come across an obstacle in life and you overcome it, whatever it is, whether it's climbing a mountain, whether it's getting your relationship back on the rails, whether it's meeting a girl for the first time, this sense of having done something that has required a lot of effort. But we have a system that is built around offering us excellent customer service so that we have these things are given to us very readily and easily on a plate and we develop this rather worrying sense of entitlement.

Peter Bloom: I mean, it's the old classic move from give me freedom or liberty, or give me death, to give me convenience, or give me death. But I think you also touched on a very interesting point about the passive subject and the consuming subject as it revolves around drugs in a sense that it also helps to personalise, I think, and make individual in a very passive way problems that are very collective and social in their character. So I think on the one hand that there's a definite, as you mentioned, kind of replacement of these existential concerns with this consumptive culture. On the other hand, it's also replacement of a democratic culture or civic culture - I think this goes back to some of our original discussions of citizenship -with a kind of individual consumptive culture.

And this might be a good segue into talking a little bit about issues of obesity and how we think about valuing things. But you have an issue such as obesity, which is really about nutrition, which really touches on issues of class, economic inequality, who has access to what resources, and yet it becomes an issue of just personalised consumption. Or very interestingly, the environmental issue in terms of climate change, which is very interesting in the sense that it combines individual existential or maybe a collective existential concern. And there is very much, well, we can solve this just by everyone buying more solar panels or buying, so it becomes this way in which actually having a civic discussion and collective solutions becomes an individual consumption solution.

Gerard Hastings: Yeah. Yeah, I agree with what you're saying. I think the individual and the collective, a balance needs to be found. And there's no doubt that the neoliberal model of modern life puts a great deal of emphasis on the individual making individual decisions and, hand in glove with that, an oversimplification. And going back to something you said a few minutes ago about the War on Drugs, you know, war is - what is it Churchill said? - war is politics by other means. But the reason people end up resorting to war is that they've failed at the politics and politics is just hard work because people are complicated.

So, instead of invading Iraq, the alternative was to sit down with Saddam Hussein, who was a tricky devil if ever there was one, and trying to think through and talk through processes that would have taken generations to bear fruit; whereas, the temptation is to go in with all your daisy cutting bombs and so on and sort it. But we know this doesn't work. And yet because you've oversimplified something that is actually immensely complicated what we're seeing now in the Middle East does speak very articulately to that complexity.

But far from decrying that and moving away from that, we're transporting that same approach, that same rhetoric, into an equally complex problem which is humankind's relationship with mind-altering substances, which has been going on since the dawn of time. It's got to be thought through very carefully and it's about people's agency and sense of empowerment.

And ultimately, you're right: this comes down to whether we want a society made up of consumers or citizens and what the difference between these two is. And I would say that in very simple terms a consumer is somebody who earns money to buy stuff to solve the problems that life throws at them. The citizen is somebody much more actively engaged in the process of running a society.

So yeah they think about their own personal responsibility and their own purchase of solar panels, for example, but they also think about what's going on around them and what's happening to other people, and they question and they challenge. And the French writer Albert Camus is very strong on this and I think he's got a very good point to make. This is about the human need to rebel. And he would argue, I think, and I would certainly argue, that rebellion is perhaps the closest you can come to a definitive human quality. That's really what we have to do in life. Not to accept just to become a passenger. We have to say hang on, I hear what you're saying, but I don't like it for this reason. I can see problems for me. But in the act of rebellion, Camus would argue, we recognise that there's something essential about me, about being a human being, that is being offended here, that is being damaged here and therefore there is some essential human condition that needs to be defended. Therefore, it immediately takes you into the collective as well as the individual.

And the easiest way I think to make this very evocative is to think about children and the impact of marketing on children. And the recognition that if you think of, well, first of all, recognise the fact that until about the age of 12, children really don't get advertising. They have an increasingly sophisticated understanding, but it's only by 12 that they realise the full complexity, (a) that this a partial message given by somebody with a vested interest in persuading you that whatever it is, is the best there is and that therefore you've got to be very, very alert to what is going on and have your critical radar switched on to, and your parents can do a lot in that early period to, you know, they'd say well, hang on, kid. It says it's £3.99 for that doll, but it needs batteries which are £4.99 and they'll only last a week. And will do that critical analysis for them. But of course, increasingly, that is going out the window.

I think there's always a danger it wasn't there, but increasingly it's going out of the window. Partly because media is changing so much and so kids are viewing very many things on their own. There isn't a parental eye over the shoulder. And secondly, I think really quite sinisterly, a great deal of the advertising promotion and marketing that's going on is subliminal. We don't recognise it as marketing. We've just been doing some research just this week in fact with teenagers. And we've been doing research with teenagers for years about various issues to do with marketing and for years if we get a focus group of teens together, one great way of just getting them to relax and break the ice and get them to open up and be prepared to talk in front of strangers and so on is to say well, what's your favourite ad?

Now, bizarrely enough, I was really alarmed to discover that this no longer works. They don't have a favourite ad. And that sounded like a good thing for somebody like me who's quite critical of what advertisers do, but then it's not that they're not seeing advertisements anymore, they're just not recognising them as advertisements. So it's going straight under the radar. But that idea of our young people being contaminated I think is the word I would use by marketing at a very tender age when they don't fully understand what it is has massive repercussions for us. Because what essentially we are doing, if you think about our system, we're jumping to the very macro level and the issues of climate change and global warming, you know, it's pretty obvious that we're getting things wrong – that we are in a big mess with this.

It's becoming almost impolite to talk about it because it is so upsetting. So at a dinner party if you say well, yeah, what about the melting ice caps? You will be frowned upon because you'd ruin the evening. But that itself is an indicator that we are getting things massively wrong. By extension therefore, we need new ideas. We need new thinking. Where is that new thinking going to come from? Frankly, it's not going to come from the likes of you and I. Because we are hopelessly ensnared and involved in the system as it is, we can't see it. Where it could come from is from new generations coming through. But at the moment we are systematically indoctrinating them into our own stupid ways. So that they emerge at the end of childhood as fully functioning consumers, not citizens, consumers that see the solution to all our woes is through going into a shop.

Peter Bloom: And I think it's interesting because you also see, I think, the other side of that, of what it means to be active as a citizen and passive as a consumer. I think, on the other side of that, one of the, you know, putting partisanship aside, most interesting phenomenon is the way in which the younger generation has actively rebelled in a very kind of existential Camus sense against what was I think for many of us of a certain age seen as just simple, if not fundamental truth, then intractable policies. So even if you did not agree with the War on Drugs in the United States, for instance, it would be the height of absurdity to say oh well I think that's going to end in my lifetime. And yet they seem to not seem to take this on passively as consumers, but actively and well, no we don't like this and this is something that we'd like to have changed.

And so I think there is this dynamic, but I also think that you're right that just across the board there's a consumption of information in a way in which in many ways what it means to be individual or subject now is as a passive consumer. You're consuming this information. There's a voyeurism to it. And in many ways, we've come to a time when people have incredible amounts, ironically, of voice without necessarily power. So they can write whatever they want on a website or whatever, but it's really just about consuming and having other people consume information without actually necessarily active forms of organisation or

participation, or even as you said, in a more, I think kind of fundamental way then it was like climbing a mountain.

Gerard Hastings: Yeah. You make a very good point. Because I'm just struck in my own lifetime how consumption has multiplied, how much more we now consume. And I get very nervous at this point because I'm an old man looking back dewy-eyed on a post-war Britain, but I'll do it anyway. And I think about my own mother bringing up three children, both her and my father working teachers so time poor, not particularly wealthy because teachers weren't paid very well then. I'm not sure they are now, but they certainly weren't then. But all family shopping was basically done from a grocer's with greengrocery at the end of the street. My mother and father had a book that they wrote down their needs so that they'd drop that in through the letterbox and a boy on a bike would bring the food along.

And we as children had a very, very simple nutritional life where we knew what meal it was on a Monday and a Tuesday. We had beans on toast on a Monday evening. I knew that Thursday was just bread and butter because the baker did an afternoon bake so there was fresh bread available. We had school lunches, of course, so that was taking care of the major nutritional concerns. But the whole thing was very, very simple; whereas, now feeding a family like that will involve going to a supermarket and loading up a car with an inordinate amount of stuff.

Peter Bloom: And I think it takes a psychological toll. I mean the stress and the anxiety of deciding what do I need to buy, what do I need to have? And I think if you look at just even childcare studies about this, I mean the increasing pressure parents face in terms of helping young kids keep up with the Joneses is incredible. And I think that then takes us maybe to what I think are interesting questions of how we assign value, and pricing and marketing is central to this.

So if we go back for a second to some of our initial conversations about something like obesity or, as you mentioned, how pharmaceutical companies would decide which drugs to produce or not, I think that we're also seeing a way in which a term like value or what is socially valuable has become increasingly perhaps narrowed to consumptive questions of what would be financially valuable. And I'm wondering if maybe you could talk a little bit about the history and some of the causes about how this idea of value and pricing has come in many ways to represent or reflect a lot of the issues of the consuming subject that you've been so articulately talking about?

Gerard Hastings: Pricing is a surprisingly interesting topic of conversation. It sounds incredibly dull, but I think what we're beginning to tease out here is the distinction between value and values. And these are very different issues. And I think value has been hammered

away by marketers. Marketers in many ways look for human vulnerabilities and exploit them. And if there's a vulnerability that is gaping, it is our desire for getting a bargain. It's the power of free. And despite the fact that we all know there is no such thing as a free lunch, but nonetheless we fall for it every time. And that is why when you go into a supermarket, it's just stuffed with price promotions of one sort or another, you know, BOGOFs, buy two get one free, get one half price, deals, deals, deals.

Peter Bloom: And you don't even have to leave your house. I mean, it's from the comfort of your home now.

Gerard Hastings: And if you think about something like a BOGOF. Hopefully, you've gone into the supermarket saying I'm going to buy some potatoes. You've not just gone into the supermarket saying what will I buy? Because that's absolutely lethal. But you've gone in with the intention of buying potatoes. And then you go in and the bag of potatoes you want is actually buy one, get one free, so you buy twice as many potatoes. What happens then? Because you didn't need those. You'd already decided you needed one bag of potatoes. You're now going to buy two because you've been stimulated by this special offer. What happens is that you end up throwing those potatoes away.

And in the UK there was a report by the Institute of Engineers last year shows that a third of the national crop is left in the field because it's not pretty enough, perfectly edible, but it's just not pretty enough. The carrots are twisted or the potatoes are too small or they don't pass the test. And then another third is thrown away because we're buying too much. Two-thirds of the food that we grow we throw away for no good reason because we're getting a bargain. So that idea of price, I think, is toxic. And it stems from the quintessentially marketing idea that pricing should be driven not by the cost of production, but by the willingness of the customer to pay for it. So it's perceived value that matters and my goodness you can mess with that.

So a great example would be the running shoe. You know, the running shoe which costs, you know, maybe £2 to make, but if you put a Nike Swoosh on it and call it an Airmax de da de da de da, then suddenly it's worth £200. And so you've clearly got a massive opportunity to make a great deal of money if you can just manipulate people's desire for that. And that creates enormous moral hazard because we as human beings find it very difficult to resist that bargain. And we're thinking all the time, you know, I can get this product that I want, I can get this mango for half price if I buy two and that's a really good deal for me. And my mind is being deliberately drawn away from the question that maybe I should equally or more importantly be asking: who grew this mango; how well are they being paid for doing what they're doing? You know, it brings you into the issue of farms and how they operate.

And the fact that in the UK now in order to meet these pricing demands the only way to go is industrial agriculture. Do we really want that? Is that really in our best interests? But we've got this very short-term incentive that we get two for the price of one and we don't think about the farmer in Devon or in Guatemala who is having to produce stuff in the most appalling conditions in order to meet the demands of the latter-day National Fruit Company and people suffering terrible privations as a result of it. But we are being bribed and reassured so we get the thing cheap and we get the nice branding and we know every little helps and we are thereby lulled into this very nasty false sense of security.

Peter Bloom: And I think that the issue of marketing in terms of how it plays on values to create value is also very interesting so ostensibly – I pronounced that incorrectly – apparently, we often have very strong values for science. We like research. We like science. We like things to be cutting-edge. And you see this with running shoes and drugs, which is that a shoe that takes £2 to make, they not only put a Swoosh on it, they also put all these parts on it that are fetishized in order to make it seem like this is cutting-edge science. Or I always find it interesting when I see drugs have these very strange names and, you know, that are supposedly representative of the chemical compounds that they're made of and things. But it's really about not letting people know of its pharmacology. But an obtuseness about people recognising that well, when it comes down to it people will think this is extremely scientific and extremely precise and therefore a pill that they've already really paid for because of government subsidies and also subsidising the scientists who've made it. Actually that in the final process, which the only thing the pharmaceutical companies have done is produce it for, what is it, 30p a pill because it's such a cutting-edge pharmaceutical discovery that it can charge £30 a pill or something like that.

So I think there's also a way in which financial value also plays on the fetishization of certain values that we already have and marketing is really at the interface of this, of flouting how we see value and how we see what things are worth.

Gerard Hastings: Yes. Yeah, and it is an extremely difficult sell to convince somebody that the bargain they are getting is not a bargain because somebody in Guatemala is suffering as a result of them buying this. The terrifying example of this in this century in the pharmaceutical industry is antiretrovirals. An estimated 10 million Africans died simply because the companies were defending their copyright. And yet, as you pointed out, 80% of the funding for producing these things came from the public purse. And I think, to take us back to Camus, I think unless we're very careful we're all complicit in this. We are collaborators. This whole system works and in many ways I would argue it's one of the most oppressive systems humankind has ever come up with because it dresses up so well as being anything but oppressive.

It's all about your agency and your right and your entitlement to have the life and the excellent customer service and that sense of black affront if you go into your local supermarket and they don't have the brand of coffee that you normally have. It's an interesting experience to contrast what modern Britain is like with a country like Cuba. I had a couple of weeks in Cuba just three or four years ago and there is far less consumer stuff available. So there is a shop and there is coffee. And coming back to Britain just after a few weeks in Cuba, it was utterly bewildering. The first shop we went into was just a local CTN and they must have had 200 variants on the shelf. And, you know, this is the tyranny.

Peter Bloom: And I think that's an interesting way that we don't think about marketing and pricing as something that's oppressive. In fact, we think of it as empowering, but it's only because, as we've said before, from a very young age, before you even have a full cognisance of what is going on, it becomes so pervasive. I think there's the Richard Linklater movie – I forget it's name now; the second one in the trilogy: *Before Midnight* or *After Sunset* – where Julie Delpy, one of the main characters, says as a child she spent two weeks in Communist Poland and obviously she didn't like all the restrictions on certain freedoms and she found it a much more grey, oppressive society than she was used to in France, that's where her character's from. But what she did find interesting was that after two or three days of no advertising, she just felt free. Her mind felt uncluttered.

There was a way in which she felt extremely open in almost a good type of emptiness. And I can say that I have this experience often even in just going from the UK – you can probably tell, audience, from my voice that I'm an American – to the United States, where it's even more systematic in the United States. And the minute you land in the United States, you just feel, if you're not used to it, almost bombarded with advertisements and, like you said, subliminal. Everything is on sale. Everything is nice and shiny. And so I do think that there's a way in which you're right that there's something almost like a shiny, happy tyranny that's at stake in terms of how we think about marketing and pricing, and I think drugs is very much at the centre of that.

Gerard Hastings: Yes. Well, drugs are just another consumer durable. They're just another product that people buy. And we referred earlier to the hamster wheel, but every time you buy something you're obviously using money to buy it with. But actually that money is time because you have to spend your time earning the money in order to pay that. So you end up, I think, very quickly – and this thinking has been occurring to people for centuries, so there's a medieval writer Étienne de La Boétie writing at the same time as Michel de Montaigne, and he talks about looking at polities throughout history how people fall into voluntary servitude again and again they will support a wealthy elite. And he puts that down to a number of strategies they use, which translate perfectly into modern marketing and capitalism. There is magic. There is bread and circuses. And then finally, there is bribery for the lucky middle

classes who get a little bit of the goodies, so they get quite nice jobs. They don't get the wealth and power of the elite.

And I think we've just industrialised that so people end up. And just looking back at the writing of people like Huxley and Orwell, they were anticipating this. And what is really difficult to get your head around because it becomes bewildering, but what Huxley was talking about in Brave New World has happened. It's happened, but it's happened in such an enticing way that we have voluntarily jumped into bed with it.

Peter Bloom: And I think it's also quite interesting that in many ways the system has outrun the elites of which it supposedly empowers. As someone who studies in part questions of economic structuralism and identity and things, I mean it's not as if in this new economy that stockbrokers, for instance, or "former masters of the universe" are any more happy or less stressed than the rest of us. And I think that goes all the way up. It's not as if people who have the money and resources are any less bombarded with marketing or any less feeling as if they need to buy in order to establish themselves as a self. So I think it is in many ways a brave new world in also just how pervasive it is.

Gerard Hastings: Well, I mean, the notoriety of the bankers bonus and the current outcry about massive corporate payouts for chief executives. And it's easy just to get hot under the collar and say these are greedy so and so and deserve to be strung up from the nearest lamp post, but actually I think your point is well made. These people are behaving in what is for them a terribly dysfunctional way. I do an exercise in the classroom sometimes and I used to have the figures to hand of what the chief executive of Coca Cola got and this is old data, so it'll be a lot more now. And I said, OK, 25 million a year he gets.

So I said \$25 million. That's what you've got. What are you going to spend it on? Now, five minutes. Just think about that one. And they start off and they have a nice villa and a swimming pool. And very quickly they're saying well, I'm struggling a bit now, and it starts to all fall apart a bit. And just as they're getting to the point of about to give up on how you would sensibly, without spending it on stupid things, but sensibly within your current lifestyle spend \$25 million, I then point out remember you've got to do it all again next year. And it's just impossible in any sort of sensible way to spend this sort of money.

As you've been talking, there's a couplet from TS Eliot keeps coming to mind and I think it sums up a lot of going on, again predicting where we are now, and his couplet went something like: where is the wisdom we lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we lost in information? I think that describes perfectly what's going on. So we have a mass of information, we have a mass of advertising, we have a mass of opportunities to buy things, but where's the wisdom in it all?

Peter Bloom: And I think on that note that might be a really nice provocative place in which to close. That was excellent. Thank you very much.

Gerard Hastings: I hope it's useful. It's very interesting to do, yeah.

Peter Bloom: Yes. I thought it was an interesting conversation and I'd like to once again thank you Professor Hastings for your time and for what I think was a very provocative, interesting and wide-ranging conversation.

Gerard Hastings: Brilliant. Thank you.

Peter Bloom: Thank you.