

Consumption Jiu-Jitsu: Using their own Tools against Them

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There are basically two philosophical positions which anti-consumption action can take, one which is moral and idealistic, and another which is pragmatic and goal, rather than process-oriented. Both are necessary, but there is still an enormous gulf between them. I will illustrate this point through a discussion of the moral ideology of 'simple living' as it is practiced in the USA. This is essentially a familiar form of Christian asceticism and traditional critiques of modernity blended with new-age spirituality and environmentalism. In this paper I propose an alternative pragmatic approach which uses the equivalent of the tactics of Jiu-Jitsu, a martial art based not on confronting force with force, but with bending the momentum of an attack in a different direction. The global expansion of consumer culture has tremendous momentum and force. While it important to visualize alternatives, I suggest some pragmatic approaches which use some of the elements which drive consumption to instead reduce the environmental and social costs of consumer culture. In particular I focus on social competition, substitution effects, and emulation.