

## **THE PARADOX OF AFFLUENCE**

1. The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as "an immense collection of commodities".  
(Marx)
2. Our enormously productive economy... demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and the selling of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction in commodities... We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate.  
(Victor Lebow)
3. Modern society represents the first large-scale attempt to found stability and authority not upon the earlier patterns of inherited privilege or traditional associations, but rather directly on the achievements of economic production and the satisfaction of needs... This is the tendency which the emergence of capitalism during the early modern era set in motion, however, and it may be expressed in the following way: the primary social bond is the identification of the self-interest of the individual, intent upon maximizing the satisfaction of his needs, with the interest of society as a whole, which is to maximize total productive output. In concrete terms, the well-being of every individual is thought to be identical with the steady rise of the Gross National Product... The principle of legitimacy for modern society ..... now consists in a permanently rising level of consumption.  
(William Leiss)
4. Amidst the satisfaction people feel with their material progress, there is a spirit of unhappiness and depression haunting advanced market democracies throughout the world.... The haunting spirit is manifold: a postwar decline in the United States in people who report themselves as happy, a rising tide in all advanced societies of clinical depression and dysphoria (especially among the young), increasing distrust of each other and of political and other institutions, declining belief that the lot of average man is getting better, a tragic erosion of family solidarity and community integration together with an apparent decline in warm, intimate relations among friends ... How to account for this combination of growing unhappiness and depression, interpersonal and institutional distrust, and weakened companionship in advanced market democracies, in which people are, with important exceptions, reasonably well-off?  
(Robert Lane)