

# Morality, money and motor cars by reading norman bowie

Sociology



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The external cost of having businesses not caring for the environment and meddling with the political arena is pollution while the external benefit is having a safe and healthy surroundings. Here is the most important point: while many people would recognize that caring for the environment is indeed a comfortable idea, strict implementation to businesses of environmental legislation would cause inconveniences such as higher prices for consumers and lower production and profitability of producers. Hence, we are faced with the dilemma of which side to choose.

Bowie comes to the conclusion that business does not have a special obligation to the environment but will serve itself by taking responsibility for not intervening in political legislation and educating consumers. I will not argue regarding the merits of this statement because I think it is more appropriate to note that the moral in Bowie's composition is that if we are to analyze and fully comprehend any economic transaction and come up with a definite answer, we must also consider externalities. We must not limit our analysis to the immediate parties involved but also to the overall picture. Bowie's analysis was concerned with people acting as consumers and will be affected by environmental considerations. However, Sagoff argues that the individual is not only a consumer but is also a citizen. Oftentimes, these identities are in conflict with one another. Sagoff was telling us that we want to save the environment and thus act like a concerned citizen but we do worry about an increase in price and decrease in the availability of products thus acting as a consumer. I find these ideas of Sagoff completely relevant in our Bowie reading.

There is one quite unsettling about Bowie's analysis and that is the fact that

he treats people as acting more like consumers rather than considering the innate desire of people in promoting what is righteous. He also considers it inherent in businesses not to act like 'citizens' and help the environment. Nonetheless, we can see that Bowie and Sagoff do have similarities in their idea particularly regarding the conflict that we experience in choosing what is preferable. There is always the desire to promote the ideal only to find ourselves oftentimes reaching a compromise as the consideration of externalities would hinder us from completely siding with the ideal.