

# Using Theories of Consumer Behavior in the Search for the Meaning of Life

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper overviews classical traditional theories of consumer behavior and demonstrates their application in an introspective exercise to help students formulate a philosophy of life, with encouragement to adopt a God-centered worldview centering not on shallow personal values (e.g., material goods, pleasure, status, etc.) but rather on Christ's values: loving and serving others, thereby loving and serving God. Students visualize what living life according to each of these theories and values entails. This demonstrates the theories' personal relevance despite their flawed worldviews, and it assists students in becoming more enlightened human beings who live a purpose-driven life, pursuing God rather than shallow values that become idols.

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## INTRODUCTION

The consumer behavior (CB) course applies our knowledge of human behavior, human society, individual relationships, and people's thinking and behavior to effective, insightful marketing management. By drawing on the social (behavioral) sciences, CB is a wonderful course for a Christian to teach, whether in a Christian or secular school. In either case, it gives a Christian professor an opportunity to use a rich array of behavioral theories and perspectives on human activity (cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology, sociology, communications, economics, management science, philosophy, etc.) that can be critically screened through the lens of Scripture and a Christian worldview (or, in a secular school, from such a perspective by professors honestly sharing with students where their philosophy of life originates).

For instance, under the topic of consumer decision-making, applications to spiritual decisions can be discussed. (In secular schools this can even be a springboard for sharing the Gospel in an optional five-minute session with interested students on life's most important decision: accepting Jesus.) The evangelical subculture is ripe for investigation when discussing subcultures. The module on social groups lends itself to a discussion of the importance of human relationships in God's world and how we influence one another. Other

topics ripe for critical Christian worldview analysis include the importance and relevance of brand image to our self-concept (should be based on Christian character); neglect of spiritual needs in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and inward focus on self versus outward emphasis on others; perception and the spiritual realm; and nurture and determinism versus nature, genetics, and free will as determinants of personality and behavior. The following exercise is my most significant Christian application in the course — the meaning of life and the purpose-driven consumer — which suggests what should be important to us and how we should live our lives. As Chuck Colson noted, "For many, if not most, believers, faith isn't something that is limited to Easter or even only on Sundays — it shapes the way they live. That's because we believe that God is at work in our lives" (Colson, 2009). The exercise's background, application questions, and suggested approach are all detailed in Author disguised (2011) and its instructor's manual. Here, I focus on the exercise from a Christian perspective.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES

The exercise works best relatively early in the course as an overview of some theories to come, and it helps illustrate

the interdisciplinary nature of CB. Its general objectives, shared with other exercises found in the textbook, include:

- To allow students to experience deriving and applying CB theories, concepts, and principles to specific situations so as to sharpen their understanding and aid their retention of these ideas.
- To demonstrate the practicality of the material, both professionally (as marketing decision-makers) and personally (as consumers and people).
- To permit students to test their understanding of and think about the material.
- To serve as catalysts encouraging in-class participation, involvement, and exchange of information.
- To stimulate creative thinking.
- To make learning fun, enjoyable, entertaining, and relevant.

The exercise's specific learning objectives are:

- To summarize some of the classic social science theories of human (and, hence, consumer) behavior as adapted by marketers to understand the personal applications of CB theories that will be discussed more thoroughly throughout the course.
- To demonstrate that each theory only partially explains human behavior and to illustrate how each theory best explains for certain products, consumers, and purchase/usage situations.
- *To help students clarify their own philosophy of life that motivates their behavior, including their CB.*

Here, I wish to emphasize the last objective, as it provides faith integration and the most meaningful discussion we have during the semester.

## THE EXERCISE

### Conceptual Background

#### *Application of Social Science Theories*

Students are exposed, through background reading and/or lecture, to four different behavioral models from the social science literature that were summarized and applied to CB by Kotler (1965), who observed that each model represented a radically different conceptualization of how people behave. Each theory<sup>1</sup> only partially answers the burning questions, "What drives human nature?" and "What makes the consumer tick?" These are questions of *motivation*: "relatively enduring, strong, and persistent

internal stimuli that arouse and direct behavior toward certain goals" (Author Disguised, 2011, p. 361) — and of *personal values*: "centrally held cognitive elements which stimulate motivation for behavioral response" (Vincent, Scott, and Lamont, 1977, p. 49). Motives and values generally shape how a person thinks and behaves, both in the marketplace and in life.

Kotler's thesis was that if we asked some of the great behavioral science thinkers, "Why do people buy?" they might translate their grand theories into descriptive motivational models of CB. Kotler created hypothetical CB models for the theories of Alfred Marshall (economics), Ivan Pavlov (behavioral psychology), Sigmund Freud (psychoanalytical psychology), and Thorstein Veblen (sociology).<sup>2</sup> The premise was that the social science theory that a marketer subscribes to heavily influences how that person markets to consumers based on knowledge of what presumably motivates buyers. For example, subscribing to economic theory, believing consumers respond primarily to economic stimuli, a seller will rely heavily on economic incentives such as better quality and/or more quantity for the consumer's money, low prices, and sales promotions. However, if a marketer believes social influence theory is operative, she will probably appeal to social status, conformity, and/or peer pressure.

#### *Overview of the Four Theories*

The first of the four theories was that of English economist Alfred Marshall (1920), who postulated what was, in effect, the first theory of CB — economics' rational choice theory. This model assumes that buyers are motivated by the pursuit of individual usefulness, satisfaction, or happiness, i.e., utility, behaving as rational actors who maximize subjective (expected) utility via the "self-interest standard." Economic buyers make highly informed optimal decisions based on self-interested economic calculations, carefully allocating their scarce household resources among various purchase alternatives in order to maximize their expected utility per dollar spent.<sup>3</sup> That is, they get the best deal or "most bang per buck."

A second theory was that of Russian physiologist and behaviorist Ivan Pavlov (1927), who suggested that much human behavior results from classical conditioning — a passively learned, low-involvement, associative process of automatic responses (habits) produced via repetition plus positive reinforcement of the responses. In Pavlov's experiments, hungry dogs (motivation) were exposed to meat paste (unconditioned or natural stimulus) associated with the ringing of a bell (conditioned or unnatural stimulus). The dogs naturally salivated (unconditioned response)

upon exposure to the meat paste. However, after repetitive pairings of the ringing bell followed by the reinforcement of being fed some meat paste, they drooled at the sound of the bell (conditioned response) The Pavlovian model suggests that much of our learned behavior is automatic, unthinking, knee-jerk reactions to environmental stimuli — a model of people as machinelike, passive automatons.

Third, was Austrian physician Sigmund Freud's (1930) psychoanalytical theory of the emotional, hedonic person. Dr. Freud discussed repressed (hidden), subconscious, and instinctual motivations. Freud believed people are driven primarily by social and psychological needs of a hedonic (typically sexual) and often subconscious nature that they are either unable or unwilling to discuss because of these motives' antisocial nature. The human psyche, believed Freud, is a conflict system, composed of a childish, hedonistic id demanding instant gratification of instincts, a parental superego requiring adherence to social norms, and an adult ego, which tries to balance the conflicting demands of the id for pleasure and of the superego for wanting to do the socially acceptable thing and to avoid guilt or shame. Finally, was the theory of the social consumer proposed by sociologist Thorstein Veblen, who penned the influential tome *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) in which he further developed Aristotle's notion that man is primarily a social animal heavily influenced by people and social groups around him. Veblen coined the term "conspicuous consumption," referring to those consumer goods and leisure activities that are purchased for status, to impress others and to "keep up with the Jones's."

### The Introspective Exercise

#### *The Introspective Question*

The exercise based on these four theories uses a pedagogical technique known as introspection—having students think about, analyze, and recall examples of their own CB and broader human behavior related to a particular topic or concept (Author Disguised, 2011). This demonstrates the relevance of the material to learners personally and can sometimes assist them in becoming savvier consumers or (as in this exercise) more enlightened human beings.

Students are presented with the following questions: "Each of the theories of CB discussed in this exercise relates to a worldview, life view, or philosophy of life — a set of fundamental beliefs about the nature of the world, what is important in life, and what gives us a sense of purpose, direction, and goals to guide our actions. A philosophy of life is a worldview serving as a motivating force in peoples' lives. This worldview underlies one's values,

thinking processes, and decision making.

"For example, Marshall's economic man seems rather materialistic, seeking fortune and wealth. He is selfish, out to maximize his own gain, very cold and calculating, albeit rational, logical, and efficient. Similarly, can you describe the philosophies of life that seem to be subscribed to by the Pavlov, Freud, and Veblen models? Describe the person who believes each of these worldviews.

"What other philosophies of life are there? What is important to people who subscribe to each of these philosophies? What is your philosophy of life? Is one worldview better than the others? Why or why not?"

#### *The Introspective Role Play with the Four Theories*

Following a review of the theories and presentation of the questions, I pretend that each of the four famous theorists is waiting outside of the classroom in the hall to meet the class, inviting each of the invisible guests into the classroom individually. I ask students to describe each person, whether they would like that person as a friend, and why or why not. We discuss whether or not each exhibits a worthwhile philosophy of life. For example, for Marshall questions include: Are many people best described by rational choice theory, making deliberations among alternative courses of action motivated by the pursuit of individual usefulness or happiness? Do you know people who seem to be overly concerned about accumulating a lot of money and spending it wisely to get the most personal fulfillment?

The following are some observations that can be made on each of the types of consumers that might emerge from each theory:

**Marshall:** This is a no-nonsense, rational, unemotional individual. This value-maximizer tries to get the most for his money. Some such individuals are driven by materialism — the desire to acquire and consume more, dubbed "Affluenza" by a film of that name. The "good life" is valued in terms of consumer "goods." It is reminiscent of George Carlin's classic bit, "A Place for My Stuff," in which he riffs on our materialistic need to accumulate. (I play a bit of the video clip, available on YouTube: "That's what your house is, a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get...more stuff!") This individual's motto is, "He who dies with the most toys wins," or, "The difference between men and boys is the price of their toys." This philosophy is played upon by much of the advertising industry, which promises redemption (salvation, deliverance) from our problems through material goods and services. As novelist John Updike observed, the goal of all advertising

efforts is “to persuade us that a certain beer, or candy bar, or insurance company, or oil-based conglomerate is like the crucified Christ, the gateway to the good life” (Colson, 1999, p. 230).

Students often attend college to get that degree, which will get them keys to fancy cars and houses and a big, fat bank account. Seventy-five percent say that they want to go to college so that they can make more money (Deluchhi and Korgen, 2002). However, the law of diminishing marginal utility sets in — the more we have, the more acquisitive we become. Things never satisfy. Call it the Yertle the Turtle syndrome — the more the Dr. Seuss character Yertle got, the more the turtle wildly fantasized about what else he could get, until his kingdom fell into the muck. Ben Franklin observed that “money never made a man happy yet, nor will it. The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of filling a vacuum, it makes one” (quotationsbook.com). King Solomon had wealth overflowing, but it left him cold: “Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

A gross misconception is that having more will make a person happier, more important, and more secure. However, self-worth and net worth are not the same. One’s valuables do not determine her value. In fact, every major item we own wants our attention — our possessions end up possessing us. Money is a good servant but a bad master. In fact, empirical research has found a negative correlation between materialism and subjective well-being as long as basic needs are met (Belk, 1984; Vargas and Yoon, 2006).

So, how can we simultaneously pursue wealth, fame, and success along with happiness? The key is not just to pursue wealth, fame, and success for their own sake — our vision must be placed much higher.

- Try to combine the pursuit of wealth with creativity. Attempt to make something useful, delightful, or beautiful. (I have found this to be true in writing my CB textbook.)
- Do not pursue wealth for the sake of wealth, letting money become your god in the process — practice generosity with it. Christ did not condemn the rich ruler for being wealthy but rather for being greedy and not using his wealth to love his neighbor as himself (Luke 18:18-23).
- Create happiness and satisfaction by creating jobs. There is joy in lifting people out of need, not by donations, but on a permanent basis.
- Happiness should have a moral foundation. If possible, it should be consistent with the needs of oth-

ers, and not just their material needs but also their emotional and spiritual needs.

**Pavlov:** Pavlov’s consumer is passive rather than being personally responsible for his actions as an active moral agent — potentially a mindless pushover for anyone trying to manipulate or control him. He is a product of his social environment, making knee-jerk, automatic, unthinking responses to external stimuli. Such thinking traces back to mid-eighteenth century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1754), who said that in its natural state, human nature is good and that people become evil by being corrupted by society (versus Judeo-Christian teaching that we are by nature born sinful).

Deterministic psychologists such as B.F. Skinner (1957) and J.B. Watson (the founder of behaviorism), philosophers such as John Locke, as well as sociologists like Margaret Mead say that we are born a blank slate on which the environment writes (Pinker, 2002). Comedian Flip Wilson used to do a shtick in which he dressed up like a woman, explaining, “The devil made me do it.” (I play a YouTube excerpt.) Consumerist critics deterministically allege that buyers are passive puppets in the hands of Machiavellian marketers who condition people to do what they wish for them to do. Consumers lack sovereignty and are pushovers for marketing manipulation.

There is no longer an argument of a dominant “nature vs. nurture”; it is clear that both determine who we are as humans (Dobson, 2007). While one cannot deny the important influence of our environment (nurture), if we are strictly creatures of our environment, we lack free will and can make all kinds of excuses for our shortcomings (lousy parents, poor neighborhood, peer pressure, racism, etc.). But, in fact, we are responsible, thinking beings who can, with God’s help, override our external influences and experiences (although, admittedly, this is not always easy, forcing us to depend on God for strength and resolve to overcome). As Shakespeare wrote in *Julius Caesar*, “The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars but in ourselves.” Personal responsibility must be taken by the “ghost in the machine” (our nature: see Koestler, 1990, and Pinker, 2002).

**Freud:** The Freudian individual is a pleasure-seeking, experiencing Epicurean who lives only for the moment, whose ego will always rationalize his hedonistic ways (“Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”). This good-time Charlie lives for the weekend and subscribes to the Playboy philosophy of life: “Let it all hang out,” “If it feels good, do it,” “Girls just wanna have fun,” etc.

Freud reduced humans to complex animals, reciting

explanations of behavior couched in “old-fashioned” theological terms such as “sin,” “soul,” and “conscience.” (He instead substituted terms such as “instincts” and “drives.”) According to Freud, people are animalistic — a bunch of sexual and other sensual instincts that should not be repressed. Such liberationists view tradition or any kind of societal constraints on behavior as unnatural restrictions on happiness and a violation of rights. As Rousseau famously said in *The Social Contract* (1762), “Man is born free but is everywhere in chains,” i.e., people must throw off the constraints of a hypocritical, corrupting society and explore their natural, spontaneous selves. Citizens should be unshackled from the constraints of culture: institutions (family, church, and local community), rules, customs, and traditions.

However, this usually amounts to freedom without responsibility. Pleasure tends to be fleeting and does not ultimately satisfy. It is like a drug: the more you have, the more you want. Plus it can burn you out! (After graduation, students will not party as hearty.) King Solomon had 700 wives and 400 concubines (for most guys one wife is more than enough!), yet he still had a hole in his soul.

**Veblen:** The Veblenian consumer is a showboat, living to impress others. This person’s philosophy is, “If you’ve got it, flaunt it!” She is snobbier than thou, driven by pride (one of the seven “deadly sins”). She also is trendy, wanting to own the “latest and greatest” of everything. Ms. Veblen shallowly judges others on externals — what they have, what they own, what they do. This modern materialist believes that “happiness is having” and “you are what you own” (a message often reinforced, sadly, by brand image advertising). Exorbitant opulence is like waving a steak dinner in front of a homeless person. Such exhibitionists are typically insecure, immature, and have poor self-esteem. They often envy their neighbors. In fact, King Solomon observed that “I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man’s envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

Most students will agree on the common threads underlying all of these worldviews: (1) They are empty, vain, superficial philosophies of life, and (2) none satisfies in the long run.

#### *Brainstorming Other Consumer Values and Personal Values*

I next ask students what other things people live for besides getting good deals, enjoying their comfortable routines, pleasure, and display and whether each of these is what is most important in life. My goal is to get them to consider as their own personal values the two greatest commandments: 1) loving one’s neighbor as oneself and serv-

ing others, and 2) loving God and seeking his purposes.

You can explore with students the following additional philosophies of life:

**Power seekers.** Power is man’s desire to control his own destiny as well as the destiny of others. German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (who had declared that both God and morality were dead) argued that men are driven by an amoral “will to power” (Nietzsche, 1833) and that superior men will sweep aside religiously inspired moral rules (which he deemed as artificial as any other moral rules) to create whatever rules would help them dominate the world. He looked forward to the evolution of a race of superhumans imbued with an ethic of power. (A century later, the Nazis, taking their cue from Nietzsche, tried to create just such a super race.) Niccolo Machiavelli (1532) discussed the use and abuse of power by princes in *The Prince* during Renaissance Italy, recommending that it is better to be feared than loved.

“Money and power” are two strong motivators in the corporate world, driving people up the corporate ladder, and executives will sometimes do unethical things to get them. However, power is like saltwater — the more you drink, the thirstier you get. Plus, as Lord Acton observed, “Absolute power corrupts absolutely” (1949, p. 364).

**Seekers of fame and celebrity.** Some people want to bask in the public limelight — witness the popularity of *American Idol*. Creative people such as Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, and Igor Stravinsky tended to be great self-promoters of their own works. However, fame is fleeting, a fickle friend (“fifteen minutes of fame”) and does not ultimately satisfy. Many Hollywood celebrities are unhappy wretches with miserable personal lives. And, some of the loneliest people in the world are those who have reached the top (“It’s lonely at the top”).

**Popularity and the approval of others.** As social creatures, we tend to value ourselves based on others’ opinions. Nothing seems worse than loneliness or rejection. However, the feeling of importance that peer approval offers is transient and superficial.

**Beauty and appearance.** Unfortunately, good looks fade as one ages. People get tummy tucks, face lifts, and all other kinds of cosmetic surgery in a vain attempt to stay young-looking. When God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint one of Jesse’s sons to be Israel’s future king, Samuel was convinced God was going to tell him to anoint Eliab, Jesse’s eldest son, since he was tall and handsome. However, God rejected Samuel’s choice in favor of David. “Man looks at the outward appearance,” he explained, “but God looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

You can conclude with your students that the values above are based on *externals*. Their emptiness is summed up in 1 John 2:16: “For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh [pleasure], the lust of the eyes [money, materialism, and envy], and the pride of life [fame, power] — is not of the Father but of the world.” They are popular advertising appeals. However, such externals have an intoxicating effect on people, making them feel self-reliant, self-secure, and independent of God. And empirical research shows that they do not lead to increased happiness long term (although short term they might). This is probably because as people gain more of any of these externals, their expectations also rise to fit their new circumstances. That tends to make them only as satisfied as they previously were. One of the characteristics of human nature is an insatiable desire for more — materially, intellectually, and spiritually.

The following are things people seek, based more on intrinsic satisfaction:

**Work and achievement.** A job well done gives a sense of accomplishment, although work for the sake of work is workaholicism and, according to Solomon, vanity (Ecclesiastes 4:4). The workaholic is, in fact, often driven by envy, greed, and a constant desire to stay ahead of everyone else. Too many people also get their external identity from their work. While working hard to serve your customers is admirable, doing so with moderation and taking time for refreshment and renewal are vital.

**Knowledge.** Some people want to be know-it-alls for the intellectual satisfaction it brings, to impress others, or because “knowledge is power.” Faust sold his soul to the devil in exchange for absolute knowledge. Some college professors want to be gurus in their fields. But, the more a person understands, the more inquisitive she becomes — she is never satisfied.

**Wisdom.** This is more than knowledge — it is the skillful application of knowledge to live a useful life. Solomon, the wisest man (other than Christ) who ever lived, had abundant wisdom, yet it was not sufficient for him: “I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:13-14).

**Good health.** Many people spend hours each day working out, eating right, and otherwise caring for their bodies, seeking to feel good and stay sleek. (“You can’t be too rich or too thin.”) This, too, is intrinsically good, but, as the old Brenda Lee tune asks, “Is that all there is?” Also, health consciousness can become selfish if overdone.

**Attractive appearance.** Some folks pursue physical attractiveness. This, too, is an unquenchable thirst that can never be satisfied. There will always be someone who is more beautiful, more perfect. This drive to be good-looking powers multibillion-dollar-a-year industries like cosmetics, clothing, hair care, and cosmetic surgery. Nonetheless, it is trite but true that beauty is only skin deep and that true beauty is what is on the inside.

**Love of family, friends, and others.** A lot of joy can be gained from helping others: “It’s better to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Relationships between people are critical. The second greatest commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

**Pursuit of God.** Orthodox Christians and Jews believe that pursuit of a personal relationship with God comes above all else. The greatest commandment in the Old Testament is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength,” and the second greatest commandment is to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:17). Judeo-Christian teaching suggests that anything we put ahead of God is an idol. In Luke 14:13, Jesus taught: “No servant can serve two masters — You cannot serve God and money.” Some people invest all of their energy in pursuit of money, success, possessions, a career, fame, etc. If these idols are taken away, only an empty shell is left. The only way to protect yourself against such loss is to invest your life in the living God, whom you can never lose. All of these idols can and often do deteriorate — money can be lost in a bad investment, possessions can be lost or destroyed, beauty fades with age, etc. In contrast to such sources of happiness stands joy — the quiet, confident assurance of God’s love and working out his plan for our lives, no matter what our circumstances. Plus, the things we so highly esteem, such as wealth, fame, and earthly success, mean very little to God and do not gain us more favor with him. Real security can only be found in that which can never be taken away from you — your personal relationship with God. This is the “purpose-driven life” — a life guided, controlled, and directed by God’s purposes.

#### *Coming to Closure on a Life Philosophy*

Eventually, King Solomon recognized the truth, concluding, “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’” (Ecclesiastes 12:1). He finishes his book by observing, “Here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes

12:13). Solomon recognized that there is an eternal hole in our heart so big that only God can fill it. We try to fill it with things and people, but none of it satisfies. Only the eternal gratifies.

Fulfilling the two greatest commandments — love of others and love of God — were what happiness and fulfillment traditionally meant. Today, people think more in terms of the other philosophies of life, which concern feeling good and getting what we want rather than having any moral meaning. The old school proposed that happiness is a condition of the soul that comes from self-denial, from constantly giving oneself to others, and from continually doing what is right and good. Happiness is a result of a sense of fulfillment, of personal satisfaction, knowing that we have done something worthwhile, purposeful, and meaningful. Aristotle (fourth century B.C.) spoke about the paradox of hedonism, noting that happiness tends to elude those who directly pursue it. Instead, if you live a virtuous life and passionately do things that are meaningful to you, somehow happiness comes. Former Archbishop of Washington Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, speaking to the 2006 graduating class of Stonehill College, observed that happiness does not come from riches, power, comfort, or security. “It only comes in reaching out to your neighbor, in loving God, and loving the little guy. Think not just of yourself but of other people.”

As Pastor Rick Warren points out in best-selling *The Purpose-Driven Life*, the purpose of life is “far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions” (Warren, 2002, 17). God is the one who gives purpose and meaning to our accomplishments, so if we want to truly succeed and be fulfilled, we must discover his will (purpose) for us and live to please him. This is because without God, we are all random “accidents,” the result of time and astronomical chance, without meaning, purpose, or morals.

People who achieve God’s plan for their lives are usually well poised for success because they serve the people around them and are appreciated for doing so — and is not this what the marketing concept is all about? Business, and especially marketing, is a noble calling — it is all about serving others. (Riddle: How is marketing like a game of tennis? Those who don’t serve well lose.)

Students can be told that their primary goal in college should be to develop a philosophy of life. This is critical because absent a purpose, life is motion without meaning and aimless activity. Students can use their college years to explore and react to their desires, interests, and values. They should be encouraged to think about what is really

important while they are young, before the pressures of career and family distract them.

#### *Outcomes of the Exercise*

In a classroom in a Catholic college where most students are nominally Christian but many seem to be interested in spiritual/Christian issues (based on feedback on student evaluations and casual conversations with colleagues), we get reasonably good discussion. Sometimes a student will mention serving other people as the meaning of life, which I quickly tie into the marketing concept.

Once in a while, a student will bring God into the equation, on which I follow up. If nobody mentions God, I do (I make it clear from day one that I am a Christian and will at times filter course content through a biblical worldview, encouraging them to feel free to disagree with me and express their own worldview).

I suspect that in evangelical schools, the discussion will much more quickly zero in on the two greatest commandments. However, for many students, this might be more in theory than in practice/reality. Probe them to learn what is really important to them, and challenge them to reevaluate what is important.

Students might question why they should study other theories such as those of Freud if they lead to false worldviews. They can be told that these worldviews remind us, as Christians, to avoid traveling down the wrong roads of life, can help us better understand those who are so doing and encourage us to gently correct them, and can dissuade us as marketing practitioners from encouraging in our customers ungodly desires such as greed and vanity, operating as salt and light in the very public side of business known as marketing.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I use the terms *model* and *theory* interchangeably, although technically there is a distinction. A theory is a set of statements or principles devised to explain a group of facts or phenomena, based on repeated empirical observation, whereas a model is a schematic description (visual representation) of a theory.

<sup>2</sup> The fifth theory described by Kotler, the Hobbesian Organizational-Factors Model, is not discussed here since it applies primarily to organizational buyers rather than to consumer customers.

<sup>3</sup> A broader perspective of rational choice theory is held by Simon (1993) and others who have questioned the classical economics assumption of the “self-interest standard,” con-

sidering altruism — caring for one's fellow humans, leading to maximizing others' interests while sacrificing one's own self-interest. Thus, self-interest is not always selfishness if one derives utility from helping others sacrificially (Author Disguised, 2008).

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