

# Report from the Institute for

ISSN  
1067-2478

Volume 15

Number 4

# PHILOSOPHY & PUBLIC POLICY

Special Issue

Fall

1995

School of Public Affairs • University of Maryland  
College Park, Maryland 20742 • 301-405-4753

## THE ETHICS OF CONSUMPTION

In the fall of 1994, the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy hosted an interdisciplinary conference on "Consumption, Global Stewardship, and the Good Life." The conference, organized with the support of the Global Stewardship Initiative of the Pew Charitable Trusts, brought together philosophers and theologians, economists and environmentalists, sociologists, historians, political scientists, policy analysts, and social activists interested in understanding and assessing levels and patterns of consumption throughout the world. Participants addressed such questions as, Why do people consume the goods and services they do? How is consumption influenced by social contexts and public policy? What is the relation between lavish consumption by some people and the impoverishment of others? Are current consumption levels and patterns environmentally sustainable? Does our consumer society enable people to lead satisfying or virtuous lives?

The essays in this special *Report*, adapted from conference presentations as well as working papers by Institute research scholars, approach these questions from a variety of perspectives. For all their diversity, however, the various writers share at least one characteristic: they respond, in self-aware and often detailed ways, to a tradition of reflection and debate on political economy and social justice, the human relation to the natural world, and the role of commodities in promoting (or subverting) individual and communal well-being.

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