

IDIOCRACY

Television Is an Evil

by Theodore Dalrymple 

November 03, 2013



photo credit: Shutterstock

Most people read to confirm their prejudices rather than to learn something new or change their minds. Moreover, they recall what confirms their opinions much better than they remember what contradicts them. So aware was Charles Darwin of this

human tendency that, at least according to his *Autobiography*, he wrote down anything he read that contradicted his views, for otherwise (he said) he was sure to forget it.

I must admit that like most of humanity, I am not as honest as Darwin and am reluctant to give up my cherished beliefs even in the face of facts that contradict them. I do on occasion change my mind about something, but slowly and usually without acknowledging that I have done so. I prefer to think that the opinion I now hold is the opinion I have held all my life, rather as Kim Il-sung emerged, according to his hagiographers, as a fully fledged Korean Marxist-Leninist revolutionary by the age of eight. To acknowledge that one has changed one's mind about something is to admit one's fallibility and the possibility that if one was wrong before, one might be wrong again. And in our hearts we know that we are always right.

That is why I was overjoyed recently in Paris to find a well-documented book that confirmed one of my deepest prejudices, namely that television is, if not the root of all evil, at least the root of much evil. That is why I haven't had one for more than forty years. The book was called *TV Lobotomie*, which hardly needs translation.

“There is something about the evil little screen that would sully a saint and sanctify a monster.”

The man who put the first germ of the prejudice against TV in my mind was Malcolm Muggeridge, a now-forgotten British journalist who, bizarrely, emigrated to the Soviet Union in the 1930s in search of a better life. Far from finding the paradise he had expected,

however, he found a kind of hell. During the Ukrainian famine he sent back truthful reports to the *Manchester Guardian* (now the *Guardian*), which published only some of them. He was particularly outraged by the Western intellectuals who took starvation for plenty and tyranny for freedom, and he satirized them mercilessly in his book *Winter in Moscow*.

Later in his life he became a fervent and somewhat unctuous Christian, by no means a popular thing to do in the 1960s. Perhaps he did so because it was his temperament to swim against the tide. Be that as it may, he also denounced television from his pulpit—which was, of course, television.

He denounced it with all the fervor of a temperance preacher denouncing gin or of a modern public health official denouncing tobacco. At first I laughed at him, but then I saw that he was quite right. Television is an evil.

There is so much to be said against it (and its televisual offshoots) that it is difficult to know where to begin. In my opinion, televisual entertainment is by far the most important cause of boredom in the world, and since the attempt to relieve boredom is a much underestimated cause of social pathology of all kinds, television is ultimately responsible for the squalor in the midst of wealth that is so remarkable a feature of our modern existence.

It may seem paradoxical to claim that entertainment is a serious cause of boredom. But as *TV Lobotomie* demonstrates, children who grow up with TV as a large part of their mental diet have difficulty concentrating for the rest of their lives, and since the ability to concentrate is essential to finding anything interesting that is not swift-moving and sensational, and since also a large part of life is necessarily not swift-moving and sensational, those brought up on TV are destined for boredom. Degradation relieves their boredom. Better a life of sordid crises than a life like a flat-line encephalograph.



**GRATUITEMENT
& SANS ENGAGEMENT**
pendant 2 semaines

J'en profite

Most parents believe that television is bad for their children, but they insist that they watch it nonetheless. Indeed, they train them to do so, for contrary to what many might think, television is not immediately attractive to young children, who would rather do

something else than watch it. Having become accustomed to it, however, they need it as an addict needs his drug. The more they watch it, the worse their likely path through life. Before anyone objects that this is because those children who watch the most television come from bad homes, let me point out first that the

relationship between television and scholastic failure (for example) is a causative one, and second that the worst effects of television are seen in the best homes not the worst, precisely because children from the best homes—by best, I mean those with educated parents and high incomes, admittedly a rather reductive definition—have the best cognitive prospects to ruin. As modern European architects have discovered, it is far easier to ruin the good than improve the bad.

To my shame, and against my principles, I have occasionally agreed to appear on television, though even less frequently than I have been asked. I have found those who work for TV broadcasting companies to be the most disagreeable people that I have ever encountered. I far preferred the criminals whom I encountered in my work as a prison doctor, who were more honest and upright than TV people.

In my experience, TV people are as lying, insincere, obsequious, unscrupulous, fickle, exploitative, shallow, cynical, untrustworthy, treacherous, dishonest, mercenary, low, and untruthful a group of people as is to be found on the face of this Earth. They make the average Western politician seem like a moral giant. By comparison with them, Mr. Madoff was a model of probity and Iago was Othello's best friend. I am prepared to admit that there may be—even are—exceptions, as there are exceptions good or bad in every human group, but there is something about the evil little screen that would sully a saint and sanctify a monster.

Turn off, tune out, drop completely.

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195 comments



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**Edward Cefala** • 19 days ago

How right the author is in this work. Seemingly necessary to every job or gym in urban areas are these vivid simulators of reality feeding the unobtainable and outright false fantasies to-order . I wonder if TV has permanently altered the medulla oblongata yet for many's posterity. Similarly I wonder if there is a TV-free zone with actual sanctions against watching or at least one that enforces a general taboo across the board. TV was the third or fourth horseman to be sure.

9 ^ ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Drain52** • 19 days ago

Does TV attract that sort of lowlife, or does it create it?

TV plays a minor role in my life and so is not an addiction, but I'm never giving up Gilligan's Island.

16 ^ ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Spamalot Tolamaps** → Drain52 • 18 days ago*Does TV attract that sort of lowlife, or does it create it?*

“The K**es that rule the Universe, they understand them, those secrets of public opinion. Hidden in the corners, they have all of the wires in their hands. Propaganda, gold, advertising, radio, press, the cinema... Through radio and the cinema! One creates new gods for them! By the same stroke, more new idols are needed every month! ever increasingly more asinine and vapid! ...How, I ask you, do they create the idols which populate the dreams of today's generation? How can the most wretched idiot, the most disgusting freak, the most pathetic slut, be transformed into gods? ...and goddesses? ...received by more souls in a day than Jesus Christ over the course of thousand years?... So at one stroke, the crowd is force-fed, and it just dies for more... And the more unremarkable, the more of a nullity the chosen idol is at the beginning, the greater are her chances to triumph in the hearts of the crowd...

– Louis-Ferdinand Céline, “Trifles for a Massacre,” p. 37

18 ^ ▾ 3 ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**fluffybiskuts** • 19 days ago

Haven't owned a TV for 3 years...best thing I've ever done...

26 ^ ▾ • Reply • Share ›

26 ^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



cedarbend → fluffybiskuts • 19 days ago

We have a TV but watch only movies on it. It's been over 7 years and we have not missed it a bit. Watching it occasionally in a motel confirms that decision. The stupidity is mind-boggling.

26 ^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



gizmo118 → fluffybiskuts • 16 days ago

I gave mine up sometime ago as well, and I've never missed it.

3 ^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



des111168 → gizmo118 • 10 days ago

All I watch is Turner Classic Movies and college football, and I can already see the direction that TCM is headed in, so... lots of reading in my future.

2 ^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



xlibri → fluffybiskuts • 14 days ago

Eight years, and the most productive of my life.

2 ^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



vladdy1 → xlibri • 12 days ago

May I join the crew? It was sometime in the 90's (I remember the Clinton election and the L.A. riots) that I stopped cold. Newspapers were out in the 1980s. When I hear people use the phrase "watched the news," as if it were a monolithic body of facts (or "read the newspaper), it seems as if they live in a different age (and perhaps they do. Hence, Obama)

1 ^ | v | • Reply • Share ›

Avatar

lloydsauvante • 19 days ago

Mr. Dalrymple must be of strong character, for having been born in 1949 he stood against the tide at its most irresistible. I am fortunate to have appeared on earth in 1942. We did not get a TV until I was nine, old enough to think. The shows my younger siblings watched (Howdy Doody among others) were puerile enough to make even a 9-year-old puke. Thus I was inoculated.

The mother of my grown children, a trophy wife at least in terms of relative youth, had been bathed in TV since childhood. Per Gresham's law, we wound up with at TV in our house. The effects were exactly as Dalrymple describes. Two became addicted, and are passive, cantankerous adults. One has learned to shun the medium, and most modern culture, and is actually a delight to talk to. NB: Like Dalrymple, I write under a pseudonym.

My present wife and I have strongly vowed there will never be a TV in our house. Computers are a given, and unfortunately those devices are flexible enough to mimic TVs and even worse. Our children have very small rooms, and there is a firm rule that no electronic devices go into those rooms. Between that and teaching them at home, everything they do should be subject to adult scrutiny. Children, of course, are tricky and they will evade the regime at times, but they will have no doubt where mom and dad stand.

65 ^ | 1 v | • Reply • Share ›

Avatar

Valentine Bloss • 19 days ago

For those who would like to read something that confirms their own suspicions that television, regardless of the "programmed content" is, as a format, a kind of mesmerizing electric noose around the throat of an auto-erotically asphyxiating population...

See Neil Postman's *Amusing or Degrading? Answering Questions to Death*

see [Neil Postman's](#) widely read [Amusing Ourselves to Death](#).

Also, Jerry Mander's [Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#).

Considering either to be "too dated" is a protestation that serves only as a confirmation that you are already drunk from the glass teat.

Finally, from John Taylor Gatto's [Weapons Of Mass Instruction](#):

"Let me confess from the start I'm on the board of advisors of an organization called TV-Free America. As a schoolteacher I found that the kids who drove me crazy were always big TV watchers. Their behavioral profile wasn't pretty. TV addicted kids were irresponsible,

[see more](#)

13 • [Reply](#) • [Share](#) ›

[vern](#) → [Valentine Bloss](#) • 15 days ago
Also check out [Harlan Ellison's The Glass Teat](#).
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[Avatar](#) [Rocquefort](#) • 19 days ago
You should have mentioned computers and the internet as well. Many a day I have watched my friends waste away their lives in front of a PC, spending hours on the internet, playing games, watching movies, everything. One particularly close friend of mine, I estimate, spends about 12 hours every day in front of a computer. And not even doing anything useful, like programming, or doing online courses, or reading, or working. Most of the time he's on social media. These machines, they are evil. They kill the soul, turn you into a zombie. Watching some people raised on TV and computers, I sometimes wonder whether they are even human. They do not exhibit remorse. They lie without shame. They hardly learn from their life experiences. They live by their impulses. They have hardly any face-to-face communication with other people. For all intents and purposes, they have sold their souls to the devil in return for temporary pleasure, and are now paying the price.

18 • [Reply](#) • [Share](#) ›

[vladdy1](#) → [Rocquefort](#) • 12 days ago
Have to agree to disagree on this one. The computer is only a tool, and there is so much of worth there that it is only the human being using it to blame if they waste their time on social media.
2 • [Reply](#) • [Share](#) ›

[des111168](#) → [vladdy1](#) • 10 days ago
The TV is absolutely no different. You can either spend your time watching documenteries, or Honey Boo Boo. Guess which one is more popular. Look, you put most people in a lunchroom filled with junk food, and have just a few plates of vegetables, they're probably going to gorge themselves on the junk food. The Internet is mostly junk food as much as TV is. I'm a sysadmin, and I'm well aware of just how much time is wasted on useless crap while surfing.
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[Avatar](#) [Walt Bernard](#) • 19 days ago
If the medium is the message, then TV teaches that:
1. Appearance is more important than reality.
2. Ideas aren't important at all. You can't even see them.

3. Everything is simple, reducible to a soundbite. Nothing worthwhile is complex.

4. Every problem has a neat and tidy solution, resolved in 1.5 hours at most.

5. It's stupid to be racist, since TV-land is full of J-ws and other non-whites, who are some of the nicest, most intelligent, and most charming people you could ever hope to know.

6. Nothing really important exists outside of what is on TV. If it wasn't on TV, it didn't really happen.

7. Don't worry. Be happy!

99 ^ | 2 v • Reply • Share ›



donpjenn → Walt Bernard • 19 days ago

I think Malcolm Muggeridge would have agreed with your assessment. Well said.

14 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›



TheAntidote → Walt Bernard • 19 days ago

As WB has weighed in once again adding the joosh dimension to the TV question, I feel I should contribute this very timely nugget gleaned from TV:

Charles Krautheimer, the noted neo cohen has published an autobiography in which he writes, "My father wanted us to know everything. We read all the time. We had no TV in the house and were forbidden to watch television. The only exception was once a week we could go to a neighbour's house to see the Ed Sullivan Show...."

34 ^ | 2 v • Reply • Share ›



Antiphon411 → TheAntidote • 19 days ago

Yes, and drug dealers are generally encouraged to stay clean of the stuff they sell, too.

Groucho Marx was famously opposed to TV viewing. This did not stop him, of course, from making millions off of shows for the goyim to watch.

22 ^ | 2 v • Reply • Share ›



zen → Antiphon411 • 18 days ago

You guys good too Jew far.

^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›



Marc Rezkolitso → Antiphon411

• 14 days ago

One can have sympathy for a goy who is not sophisticated enough to figure out the terms of a mortgage or to analyze a stock. But sympathy stops short with those too dumb to push the "off" button. Some people you can't save from themselves.

5 ^ | 2 v • Reply • Share ›



Wortherthorth → TheAntidote • 19 days ago

" neo cohen " Brilliant!

24 ^ | 2 v • Reply • Share ›



Drain52 → TheAntidote • 18 days ago

So little exposure to TV, and yet so great a corruption of mind.

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



hp b → TheAntidote • 14 days ago

My God! what was he reading?!!

Please don't tell me.

^ • Reply • Share ›

CelestiaQuesta → Walt Bernard • 19 days ago

Many commercials have Big Pharma selling their latest meds while suggesting an assortment of general symptoms in case you need help confirming you have the illness, they've got the cure.

Over half our US population have become drug induced brain-numb, walking zombies fixated on day to day conditioning, unable to think for themselves, drugged from the time they wakeup and while they sleep.

And in the hood, barrio and slums, the rage is growing.

Free has a new meaning.

15 ^ • Reply • Share ›

TimMellon → CelestiaQuesta • 18 days ago

And why do you exempt cannabis? Yes, people have become brain numbed from cannabis and it's common in the 'hood.

9 ^ • Reply • Share ›

Anna Dostoyevskaya → CelestiaQuesta

• 17 days ago

There's a UHF channel in my area that shows nothing but movies. While some are the old classics - romances, comedies, westerns, and film noirs from the '30's to the mid-'50's, a lot of them are vapid trash from the mid-'70's to the early '90's. From the commercials, one can gather that the channel's demographic appears to be baby boomers and older Gen-X members: lots of commercials for Medicare supplemental insurance, "hover chairs", back braces, and "mall lawyers" trolling for litigants who may have suffered from asbestos and various prescription drugs (like for "lifestyle" diseases such as Type II diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol).

2 ^ • Reply • Share ›

CelestiaQuesta → Anna Dostoyevskaya

• 9 days ago

I see you've watched a few!

Nice knowing you see the BS.

1 ^ • Reply • Share ›

freedom74 → CelestiaQuesta • 16 days ago

Up until the late 1800's/early 1900's western society was almost always perpetually drunk.

Mainly because of poor drinking water and not enough means to store grains without converting them to alcoholic beverages. Also drugs were fully available over the counter, including most of the schedule one drugs at this time.

Somehow, the destruction of society didn't occur. Oddly enough.

Drugs have nothing to do with it, they are a minor symptom of the actual disease. The real issue is that people can spend 90% of their lives sitting on their butts and still live in what most people would consider a life of total luxury. The lack of any real need to

compete for survival and breeding is the real issue. Everything else is just a downstream bubble popping up.

10 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Marlin B. Newburn → Walt Bernard • 18 days ago

Guns never run out of ammo, and heros never sleep. The heros also have limitless energy while sustaining incredible wounds that would kill from shock alone. Adolescent omnipotence, there, and it is so appealing to adult-children, see also liberal folk.

Only certain biological functions are acceptable such as exchanging bodily fluids during graphic sex, and the latter is always explosively gratifying.

Regarding the aforementioned B-functions that are not allowed: No naked fat people except for shock effect, women farting, and nobody uses the toilet.

14 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



John Bball → Marlin B. Newburn • 18 days ago

And the actors always pull up to a wide open right at the door parking spot in a crowded city at rush hour. ugh!!!!

4 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Joe Hargrave → Walt Bernard • 18 days ago

Not all of television is the USA network.

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



NinoF → Walt Bernard • 14 days ago

It also only works on two of the senses, which makes it easier to push illusions on unwitting viewers. If TV worked the nose, tactile senses, and taste, it could never sell us on a fraction of the garbage they do. Imagine trying to sell junk food if the viewer could actually smell and taste it. Imagine selling sports to viewers if they had to smell the locker room. On and on. Don't even get me started on illusions of all races being the same if we had to smell everyone. But on TV everyone is shiny and palatable to the two senses. But even then, it is not always an easy sell.

5 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



CelestiaQuesta → NinoF • 9 days ago

Right, I can only imagine smelling everyone here! Great to know we're only a few years away from virtually hitting each other.

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›

Avatar

Guest • 19 days ago

I've never owned a TV. One of the main benefits is that I don't have to pay a licence fee levy to auntie Beeb PC. As a kid in the 70s, I don't regret watching a lot of TV. British children's and adult dramas were dark, cynical and extremely thought provoking - they made me into the man I am today.

11 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›

Avatar

erik_ny • 19 days ago

I watched a certain amount of TV as a kid, but I was interested in too many things to sit glued to the thing. So it only partially destroyed my ability to concentrate. Since going online in 1991-2, I haven't watched TV at all unless I'm in an airport. The vomitous CNN is always on. Apart from Turner Classic Movies, television is too boring and dreachv. And for some reason the Weather Channel doesn't

really give you the weather (somehow)... absolutely useless. What's the point? You have to sit thru so much crap to see what you want to see. It's not "swift-moving and sensational" enough. Clearly I'm not the demographic they are trying to reach.

If you are afraid of missing something seriously brilliant, like *Hardcore Pawn*, there's youtube. I can mindlessly watch YT for hours... but that's stuff I really want to see, like Maria Callas, scary Illuminati exposés, Camille Paglia interviews, Putin speeches.... Jersey Shore re-runs. I suspect the point of television is to dazzle and flatter various *submerged populations*, that would have to be the target audience. Maybe it prevents them from rioting (or something), in which case I'm all for television.

16 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›



Bruce Lewis → erik_ny • 19 days ago

I think SOME people need to riot, don't you? It doesn't matter what the "thinking person's" ideology, I think that almost all who think for themselves can agree that television has become an instrument of "mind control." I will never again have one in the house, ever since they invented dvd players (I like movies, but any one that's worth buying is worth watching more than once.)

You may be interested to know, then, that it was a Marxist (or "psuedo Marxist") philosopher, Herbert Marcuse, who insisted, in a book entitled *One Dimensional Man* that America would one day be a totalitarian state, but one in which group-think and "self-censorship" would be enforced by means of the idiot box.

I think we can all agree that it has come to pass, and I really think that everybody, of all political persuasions, but of an existentialist bent, can agree that solutions ("compromises," if you will) must be found, and agreed upon, in an adult fashion, if the malaise we're in is to be ended, and if we are to proceed together, in some kind of disciplined fashion. Otherwise, we're just a bunch of lemmings being led down the primrose path by mercenary hucksters who have no concern that our children's brains are being sucked out of their heads.

16 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›



erik_ny → Bruce Lewis • 19 days ago

Television *was* certainly useful for getting almost everyone on the same page... then Berlin Wall came down, Cold War ended, a few years later millions of people were getting their info from the internet. These great magnets that kept people pointing more or less in the same direction (like metal filings) were removed and everything went flying into a million pieces. It's much harder to control public opinion. And that's a good thing. People at work sometimes mention popular TV shows and most people have (workaholically) never even heard of them..... we're fragmenting into little enclaves that have little or no interaction. Our Overlords clearly need a new strategy. Everyone becoming aware of NSA surveillance should result in more self-censorship. "A nail that sticks up gets hammered down" -- that kind of consciousness is bound to become ubiquitous.

15 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›




NakedJusticeLeague → erik_ny • 19 days ago

Jersey Shore reruns? Really? I expected more from you!


3 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›

 **erik_ny** → NakedJusticeLeague • 19 days ago
I couldn't stop watching it.... maybe for the same reasons people go to the zoo


12 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›

 **NakedJusticeLeague** → erik_ny • 19 days ago
Or watch a train wreck!

5 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›

 **TimMellon** → erik_ny • 19 days ago
I read some where that the Weather channel is one of the most popular channels.
And btw, I don't seem to recall very much on the Net in '91 so what were you doing?

4 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›


 **erik_ny** → TimMellon • 19 days ago
I don't really remember, I got AOL within the first few months of its initial launch. I may have poked around chat rooms and things. I found IRC pretty quickly.... but most certainly did *not* engage in any *illegal activity* such as *file-sharing* like *so many others*.....

(at least not that I recall...)

1 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›

 **Paleoconn** → erik_ny • 19 days ago
Even '92 makes you a very very early adopter. I never heard of the internet til '95 or '96. Btw, i'm too lazy to click to see a larger image of your avatar. Scott Weiland?


^ [v] • Reply • Share ›

 **erik_ny** → Paleoconn • 19 days ago
<http://www.udokier.de/imgs/udo...>


it's a movie still from Dracula by the great reactionary Catholic film director: Paul Morrissey

actor is udo kier

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›

 **Paleoconn** → erik_ny • 19 days ago
Thanks. Sorry for my laziness. Most of the time, I click on it out of impatience to see the larger image and verify my guess. I liked your child Putin; I had to click to get that one.

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›

 **CelestiaQuesta** → erik_ny • 19 days ago
Image is everything, go back to young Putin, it had a intellectual mystic about it.

1 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›

 **TimMellon** → Paleoconn • 19 days ago
I was using a computer in the 80's but it was a terminal and you logged into the mainframe over a modem. Since it was mostly text on a B+W monitor the slow modem wasn't too bad. There was then DOS and then Windows 3.1 which was an improvement. Windows 95 was a big change but it was XP that really worked without too many problems and in fact I still

use it on one PC.
 But even in 2000 only about 1/2 the households had PC's and high speed was only about 5%-10%. I can remember annoying the telephone [co.in](#) my area to get the DSL lines set up and they did in 2000. it was really only in 2000 or so that any online shopping was available and even then not a lot but increased a lot over the next couple of years. I know because I used to order clothes and things from

[see more](#)

6 ^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



vladdy1 → TimMellon • 12 days ago
 I remember being anti-computer at first, saying that the serendipity of learning (browsing in a library and running into unexpected new interests) would be lost. Now I see how one can, as I did today, end up on a page with research about British and American regional dialects when one began in a completely different area. (which I do not now even recall - - something political, I suppose.)

^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



des111168 → Paleoconn • 10 days ago
 Why am I not shocked that someone would mistake a metrosexual vampire for Scotty Weiland? :P

^ | v | • Reply • Share ›

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