



Conscious Simplicity, by Duane Elgin

Here are three major ways that I see the idea of simplicity presented in today's popular media:

1) **CRUDE OR REGRESSIVE SIMPLICITY:** The mainstream media often shows simplicity as a path of regress instead of progress. Simplicity is frequently presented as anti-technology and anti-innovation, a backward-looking way of life that seeks a romantic return to a bygone era. A regressive simplicity is often portrayed as a utopian, back-to-nature movement with families leaving the stresses of an urban life in favor of living in the woods, or on a farm, or in a recreational vehicle, or on a boat. This is a stereotypical view of a crudely simple lifestyle -- a throwback to an earlier time and more primitive condition -- with no indoor toilet, no phone, no computer, no television, and no car. No thanks! Seen in this way, simplicity is a cartoon lifestyle that seems naive, disconnected, and irrelevant -- an approach to living that can be easily dismissed as impractical and unworkable. Regarding simplicity as regressive and primitive makes it easier to embrace a "business as usual" approach to living in the world.

2) **COSMETIC OR SUPERFICIAL SIMPLICITY:** In recent years, a different view of simplicity has begun to appear -- a cosmetic simplicity that attempts to cover over deep defects in our modern ways of living by giving the appearance of meaningful change. Shallow simplicity assumes that green technologies -- such as fuel-efficient cars, fluorescent light bulbs, and recycling -- will fix our problems, give us breathing room, and allow us to continue pretty much as we have in the past without requiring that we make fundamental changes in how we live and work. Cosmetic simplicity puts green lipstick on our unsustainable lives to give them the outward appearance of health and happiness. A superficial simplicity gives a false sense of security by implying that small measures will solve great difficulties and allow us to continue along our current path of growth for decades or more.

3) **DEEP OR CONSCIOUS SIMPLICITY:** Occasionally presented in the mass media and poorly understood by the general public is a conscious simplicity that represents a deep, graceful, and sophisticated transformation in our ways of living -- the work we do, the transportation we use, the homes and neighborhoods in which we live, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and much more. A

sophisticated and graceful simplicity seeks to heal our relationship with the Earth, with one another, and with the sacred universe. Conscious simplicity is not simple. This is a life way that is growing and flowering with a garden of expressions. Deep simplicity fits aesthetically and sustainably into the real world of the twenty-first century.

Today's world requires far more than crude or cosmetic changes in our manner of living. If we are to maintain the integrity of the Earth as a living system, we require deep and creative changes in our overall levels and patterns of living and consuming. Simplicity is not an alternative lifestyle for a marginal few, but rather a creative choice for the mainstream majority. What does a life of conscious simplicity look like? There is no cookbook we can turn to with easy recipes for the simple life. The world is moving into new territory and we are all inventing as we go.

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