

“The Gift of Strawberries” by Robin Kimmerer Essay

Most of us have grown up watching the market economy work, and we take it for granted. However, this approach makes people value less food, clothing, and other goods, which causes the current tendency and problem of overconsumption. Robin Kimmerer, in “The Gift of Strawberries”, offers the concept of “gift economy” as a different perspective on the processes of receiving and exchanging goods. Although it cannot replace the modern market economy system, it can change the way people perceive consumption. My childhood on a farm allowed me to understand Kimmerer’s position on “gift economy”, since I grew up in an environment similar to the author’s that shaped my worldview.

In “The Gift of Strawberries”, Kimmerer reveals some of her life experiences to explain the principles of the gift economy. First, the author talks about picking wild berries that were meant only to be eaten, as well as a gift to her father in the form of a berry shortcake (Kimmerer 1). In these descriptions, Kimmerer explains the first principles of the gift of the economy, such as everything that people receive is a gift from the land, but a present they can give is their time, attention, and work. These descriptions are close to me, since I grew up on a farm and my family also have a tradition to pick fruits and cook for one’s birthday and the dishes that he or she likes the most. For this reason, I understand the feelings that Kimmerer talks about, namely the value that nature’s gifts carry in the hands of people. I also like the phrase that Kimmerer would probably steal wild strawberries if she saw them in the store (3). I understand that these strawberries have a price to justify the efforts of the person who picked them from the point of market economics. However, just like Kimmerer, I believe that this strawberry is a gift from nature and, therefore, can only be given away for free.

Another principle that is of great importance in the gift economy is that gifts create a feeling of responsibility in the recipient. A simple example of socks knitted by a grandmother, I think, is close to any person who received homemade gifts (Kimmerer 3). While they are free to recipients and probably less expensive than a present from the store to the giver, they are of significantly greater value. This value is created by the intention of a person to express their love or respect. For this reason, people value gifts more than the things they buy because of the sense of special connection. However, I observe that the market economy also causes people to depreciate this connection when people choose “any” gifts or accept them by thinking of their prices. This behavior is a consequence and disadvantage of the market economy, which exacerbates the problem of consumption. Therefore, as someone who has had the good fortune to observe both economies, I can clearly see these differences.

Another principle that strikes me as key in the chapter is that gifts are not free. Kimmerer demonstrates that although presents have no actual economic value to the recipient, they have a significantly higher cost of responsibility (4). The person who receives the gift feels a responsibility to give something in return to the same person or others. This culture exists not only in the market that Kimmerer describes but also in other organized or self-existent

movements. This idea reminded me of such movements as hitchhiking, Couchsurfing, or the Burning Man festival, which are based on the principle of exchange. People who once hitchhiked or stayed in strangers' homes on Couchsurfing often also stop on the road to help a traveler or host guests at their home. Burning Man festival visitors who receive free food and entertainment from other people often return to the festival to offer their services to strangers. This knowledge helped me understand the words of the author and the feelings that she describes.

However, the main point that Kimmerer describes in the gift economy is the internal constraints people feel. The author talks about her experience in the market and notes that since all her purchases were gifts from other people, she did not want to take more (Kimmerer 5). These self-restraints were driven by a sense of responsibility and stopped her from unnecessary purchases. Therefore, the main idea of the gift economy that people can apply in the modern world is that any purchase should be perceived as a gift. In this case, people will feel self-restraint and refuse to buy excessive food they cannot eat. People will reject the "gifts" of production that are unpleasant to them if they see the hard work of a person behind the next unnecessary clothes. In this way, treating all goods as gifts will help reduce overconsumption and hence the use of resources and waste that it causes.

In conclusion, my childhood experience of growing up on a farm is very similar to that of Kimmerer, which helped me understand the author's ideas about the gift of the economy. At the same time, since today I live by the laws of a market economy, I also understand Kimmerer's suggestions about applying some of the principles she described to the modern world. My environment influenced my attitude; thus, I agree entirely with the author's ideas and experienced many of them in my life. For this reason, I find that people's perception of all goods as gifts from nature or people is an excellent solution to reduce the problem of overconsumption.

Work Cited

Kimmerer, Robin. "The Gift of Strawberries. Excerpt from 'Braiding Sweetgrass'". Web.