

# Tesla Tantrums: Consumer Choices in the Age of Performative Ethics

By Patrick Keeney

The French have an apt expression for those vexing moments when, having exited a spirited exchange, the perfect rejoinder belatedly arrives. They call it *l'esprit de l'escalier*—"the wit of the staircase."

The phrase captures that all-too-human affliction of eloquence delayed. The sharp retort, the subtle riposte—these come not in the heat of dialogue but only after one has turned his back and descended the stairs. "If only I had said..." It's an experience with which I'm intimately familiar.

Yet every so often, I rise to the occasion. One such instance still affords a small measure of satisfaction. A visitor from England took it upon himself to scold me for driving a German automobile. He declared he could never own one, not after the destruction wrought by the Luftwaffe on England during the war. The implication was unmistakable: my vehicular choice constituted a moral failing. He drove, he proudly informed me, a Toyota Camry. For once, I replied in real time, "Ah, well, I could never own a Japanese car, not after what the Japanese Army did to our Canadian boys in Hong Kong." We changed the subject.

That brief exchange came to mind as I watched the recent paroxysms of hostility directed at [Tesla](#). Dealerships have been torched, vehicles vandalized, and owners accosted in parking lots by sanctimonious citizens, sneering moral condemnation.

Even politicians joined the fray. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz,

the Democratic Party's recent vice-presidential candidate, recently expressed glee at Tesla's declining stock price, [claiming it "gives him a little boost during the day."](#)

This outburst merits reflection. Here we find an American governor exulting in the potential downfall of one of his country's most dynamic and consequential enterprises—a company that, in 2023 alone, produced over 1.8 million vehicles, employs more than 140,000 people, and remains at the vanguard of innovation in energy, automation, and artificial intelligence. That such a public figure should take pleasure in the misfortunes of a firm so central to the nation's technological leadership is not merely a lapse in political judgment; it signals something graver: the corrosive triumph of tribal animus over the sober duties of civic stewardship.

The malaise is even sharper when one recalls that the State of Minnesota, whose investment board Governor Walz chairs, holds over [1.8 million shares in Tesla](#), valued at more than \$360 million and designated for public employees' pensions. That the governor should revel in the company's potential decline, despite his state's substantial financial stake, lays bare the civic and fiduciary cost of ideological enmity.

One need not be a shareholder, a Tesla driver, or an admirer of Elon Musk to find this disquieting. The concern transcends personalities and partisanship. It speaks to a deeper civic pathology—one in which ideological grievance eclipses common purpose, and economic success is no longer welcomed as a national achievement but treated as a litmus test of tribal loyalty.



If Mr. Musk espouses views one finds disagreeable, there are democratic mechanisms to contest them. But to vilify an entire enterprise—its workers, consumers, products—based on its founder’s political eccentricities is intellectual laziness masquerading as moral conviction.

It also prompts a deeper question, leading us to the heart of the matter: which corporations, if any, are so morally unblemished that we can consume their products without public disapproval? In an age increasingly saturated with virtue signalling and performative ethics, should we now consider our consumer choices as moral declarations? If so, the standard quickly becomes untenable.

Consider Henry Ford, whose contributions to American industry were matched only by the virulence of his anti-Semitism. [Ford financed the dissemination of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion](#), a notorious forgery, and his newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent*, published material that later delighted Nazi propagandists. By the logic of ideological purity, must we now abandon our Fords and dismantle every endowment bearing his name?

Or ponder [Apple](#). Lauded for its sleek design and innovation, the company has also drawn fire for its reliance on overseas manufacturing, particularly through [Foxconn](#), where reports of dire labour conditions have prompted global concern. Are we

then to discard our iPhones, torch our MacBooks, and boycott the Apple Store as gestures of resistance?

Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Nike, and [Amazon](#) have all faced their respective reckonings—environmental degradation, exploitative labour, tax evasion, and anti-competitive conduct. Even the so-called “green industries,” ostensibly paragons of sustainability, are entangled in troubling realities: the mining of cobalt and lithium (often involving child labour), the environmental toll of solar and wind technologies, and the geopolitical implications of rare earth extraction.

And what of legacy media organizations, whose selective coverage, ideological slant, and occasional falsehoods have sown confusion and deepened division? If we are to demand moral rectitude from our manufacturers, should we not hold our journalists and media organizations to the same standard?

The list is endless. In a fallen world, condemning every corporation and institution for its moral shortcomings takes little imagination. Yet, this is precisely the point: the moral outrage directed at Tesla is not principled but opportunistic. It is less about ethics and more about tribalism.

This is not to deny ethics a role in commerce, but to warn against the creeping politicization of consumption, where our purchases become tribal totems. The recent wave of anti-Tesla fervour reflects not principled conscience but performative indignation.

Yet true moral seriousness demands more: intellectual consistency, a spirit of humility, and the courage to confront in ourselves the very faults we so eagerly ascribe to others. As Solzhenitsyn wisely observed, the line between good and evil runs “right through every human heart.” In an age of ritualized outrage and ideological pageantry, it is this inward reckoning and humility that distinguishes authentic

moral engagement from the empty theatre of righteousness.

*An earlier version of this article was published in the [Epoch Times](#)*

*Image from [AP](#)*