So the other day I heard about the Sackler family, which runs Purdue Pharma, gaining immunity to personal lawsuits in the wake of Purdue's bankruptcy. That probably doesn't mean much to most people, and not long ago, I didn't much care either.

I first heard about Purdue and the Sacklers a few years back, from some story about the opioid crisis in America. I have a few minor health issues, but I've never needed regular painkillers. So the story didn't resonate with me at first. Then I started to grasp the sheer scale of the crisis. Just how many people are affected by it, and how addictive oxy really is to them. That's a lot of suffering, both by the addicted and their loved ones, and you know how much I care about suffering. It's kind of my main thing.

Ok, so how should we examine this? Practically? Morally? Legally? Well, that last one is a waste of time. The legal precedent has been set: while Purdue Pharma is legally screwed, the Sacklers are exempt from any meaningful consequence to their actions.

So let's start with practicality. The Sacklers have been pushing the Oxycontin opioid hard, for years now. They've brushed aside complaints about its addictive qualities by advocating, as strongly as possible, that the addiction is the *user's* fault, not the drug's. And by extension, not the Sacklers'. As a result, people are becoming more and more addicted to oxy. Its users mostly start taking it because they don't want to be in constant pain, and end up being unable to stop!

How did this happen? It's pretty simple: pharma companies hire drug reps to push their products to doctors. That's how business works. If you can convince doctors to prescribe your product, then the patients will take it. Then if your product is addictive enough, your patients will have to get more, and more, etc. It's basically drug dealing, but with legal backing and a flimsy pretense at being for the good of the people.

Maybe you've heard of Martin Shkreli. Back in 2015, he was described as 'the most hated man in America', because he jacked up the prices for his company's lifesaving medicine by a factor of over 50. That, while horrible, was done on a specific drug for a specific condition. What the Sacklers did was much more subtle, and much, much more widespread. Shkreli's drug Daraprim is used to treat toxoplasmosis, a relatively rare parasitic infection. Oxycontin 'treats' pain, which is everywhere! Shkreli arbitrarily increased the prices on his drug, while the Sacklers just made theirs more addictive. Same concept, different execution. And different scale.

From a practical standpoint, it's good business. They have a product, they marketed it, they aggressively expanded their message, and they staunchly defended that product in litigation. Now they've dodged all personal responsibility for it.

But what about morality? The Sacklers, regardless of their intentions, did bring up a good point in their defense of their actions. Oxy isn't being forced on anyone. People are free to take it, or not take it, as we see fit. Therefore, they claim, people who overdose and die on oxy are themselves at fault.

Whose fault it is, is a primary question in the law. That's why a lot of states have no-fault driver's insurance (which itself is a huge can of worms, but I can get into that later). Technically, the Sacklers are right. If I drink myself into the grave, could my family blame the company that makes my favorite beer? Or more to the point, the people who own that company?

If the Sacklers aren't to blame, then what about the doctors? They're the ones who start most oxy users on their path towards addiction. They're supposed to be highly trained followers of the Hippocratic Oath. That's... why we trust them in the first place. Isn't it?

Right, doctors need to eat, too. There are some laws preventing the pharma companies from just paying them directly, but a lot of pharmaceutical reps bring other forms of incentives, and the companies spend a *lot* of money making sure their reps are really good at making friends with doctors.

So is it really all our fault? The users' fault? That's what we're told, sure, but I don't buy it. I have no medical training, and the same is true for the vast majority of other Americans. If my doctor says I should take this drug for pain, instead of that one, I'm inclined to take them at their word. Since I have to work for a living, I don't have time to do research on all the options, much less get a full medical degree so I know the whole score. I really have no choice but to trust the doc's recommendation.

Then I start taking oxy, and slowly realize I can't stop. Maybe I'm too proud to admit it, to myself or others, or maybe I think if I just have enough willpower, I can break the addiction. Whatever the reason, I'm in a tough spot.

But remember, this drug isn't meant to just suppress pain. It may have started out that way, but it's been constantly tweaked and refined to be as addictive as possible! That was intentional. Maybe the Sacklers who came up with the drug, marketed it, altered it, defended it, and are now hiding from it didn't *intend* to cause my suffering, but they did want my money. And they were willing to hurt me and millions of others to get it.

Yes, we are responsible for our own choices. The Sacklers chose to do this, and they are responsible as well. Like so many other owners of corporations, they have used the vast wealth they have plundered (and yes, that's the word I'm using. What else would you call taking someone's money and leaving them to die?) to protect themselves legally from the consequences of their actions. They are no different than the previous so-called 'most hated man in America', in their intentions.

Maybe we shouldn't let them get away with it. Nearly 500,000 Americans have died from opioid overdoses in the last two decades. That rivals even Covid at this point! Millions of their loved ones have suffered too, from all those deaths. Maybe we, the many who have suffered, should change the laws so that they, the few who have benefited, will face some actual consequences for their actions.

Or we should admit that we don't actually care about our neighbors, friends, and family members dying in droves. Not enough to actually do anything about it, anyway.

*no angry breathing here- just angry silence*

Sorry, that got pretty dark. It's just hard to be optimistic in the face of the sheer scale of all this.

If there is a takeaway I'd like you to get from this, it's that the Sacklers and Purdue, or pharma companies in general, are just another example of exploitation. Companies are made up things. First in the form of ladders meant to support businesses (which are also made up). Then they became funnels, taking the wealth from a lot of people and pouring it towards the few. And now they've become shields through Citizens United and corporate personhood, protecting the people most at fault and mirroring the message of fault back at us.

It's high time that we shatter these shapeshifting tools of evil into a million metaphorical pieces, and swear collectively to never use anything like them again.