

Consuming with Mindfulness: Import of Buddhist Philosophy for an Ethic toward Consumerism

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ABSTRACT

This essay grounds itself in the recent debate concerning the imposition of moral obligations on individuals because of their indulgence in over-consumption practices. There is a growing body of literature that argues against imposing moral obligation on individuals because the contribution of individuals' consumption to global warming is insignificant. In this context, by drawing insights from Buddhist philosophy, I posit that the normative ground to impose moral obligation on individuals, however, may not always be the environmental harms, rather, I particularly demonstrate how the individual-centered moral deliberation of Buddhist philosophy regarding consumption can be a sufficient moral ground to make an individual responsible of his or her own consumption. First, I will provide a detailed account of how over-indulgence in consumerism is seen in Buddhist tradition. This will particularly explicate why, according to Buddhist tradition, endless persuasion of the materialistic path to satisfying one's desire, is considered a moral wrong. Through this premise, I also refute the usual belief that consumption actually offers an individual happiness and make her feel contented in life. After unpacking the drivers behind consumption and highlighting the major shortcomings of those, I further borrow from Buddhist thoughts to delineate avenues that can lead us out of the prevailing consumerist lifestyle. I invoke the notion of mindfulness to enhance our power of self-reflection and to critically review our own

consumption. In conclusion, I affirm that mindfulness at both individual as well as collective level could be an appropriate way to move toward a sustainable and just society.

Keywords: Buddhism, climate change, consumerism, gas-guzzler, mindful consumption

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INTRODUCTION

In the past decade or so, especially after climate change discourse have significantly gained prominence, moral and ethical implications of indulging in normatively defined wasteful or “over”-consumption practices, have become an important topic of debate in the discipline of environmental ethics (e.g., Michaelis 2000; Wenz 2001, Yaacob 2004). Scholarly works like Westra and Werhane (1998), and Crocker and Linden (1998) comprehensively discussed various takes on the ethics of modern-day consumption practices and delineate avenues for proceeding toward a regime of sustainable consumption. There is also a growing body of literature (e.g., Baatz 2013, 2014; Baatz & Ott 2017; Bell 2008; Caney 2005, 2006, 2009; Gardiner 2011; Garvey 2008; Jamieson 2007; Page 2008; Shue 1993; Singer 2009, 2010) deliberating on the moral and ethical implications of various consumption practices, based on the argument that those practices are energy intensive and thus can contribute to the rise in anthropogenic emission of Green House Gases (GHGs), in turn causing climate change. Broadly speaking, there are two main concerns around which the debates in this literature seem to be based: whether Emissions Egalitarianism (EE) is a just proposition to make in this highly carbon-unequal world or emissions cut should be implemented at equal proportions throughout the world, and who should bear the responsibility of GHGs emissions, is it individuals or institutions. Scholars such as Caney, Baatz, Ott, Singer, Seidel, Bell

(Baatz 2013 & 2014; Baatz & Ott 2017; Bell 2008; Caney 2005, 2006, & 2009; Singer 2002; Seidel 2013) argued that emissions need to be divided in an egalitarian manner and not by per capita estimate that had gained popularity as endorsed by mainly non-governmental organizations, leading politicians, and academics (Baatz & Ott 2017). Baatz and Ott (2017) also highlighted that “Criticism of EE usually seems to be motivated out of self-interest from high polluters.”

In regard to the second concern, Scholars like Neuteleers, Johnson, Sinnott-Armstrong, Sandberg, Cripps, argue¹ that the moral obligation regarding restricting certain consumption practices due to their contribution to climate change, cannot be rightfully placed on individuals. As Sinnott-Armstrong (2010) remarked “Global warming and climate change occur on such a massive scale that my individual drive makes no difference to the welfare of anyone.” One of the most prominent questions that are referred in this case is whether it is a morally rightful act to ride a “gas-guzzling” car just for amusement and can there be any moral obligation imposed on an individual to restrain his or her from indulging in such acts? The main argument, as already highlighted, that is put forth by the aforementioned scholars is that an individual’s contribution to any global scale phenomenon like climate change is really inconsequential and thus, the moral obligation should be imposed on institutions

¹Cripps 2013; Neuteleers 2010; Johnson 2003; Sandberg 2011; Sinnott-Armstrong 2010; Sandberg 2011

and governments, instead of individuals. And in this context, the example of riding a gas-guzzler is really an apt one considering an individual may not need to use such vehicle to meet the basic need of using a car, that is mobility. Most likely owing to this reason, this example is widely employed in the aforementioned literature. I am also going to keep this practice as a background example throughout this essay. In the conclusion of this essay, I will highlight how the entire deliberation could contribute to this question whether it is morally just to ride such a car in this climate-constrained world.

There are scholars such as Hiller, Nolt, Schwenkenbecher (Hiller, 2011; Nolt, 2011; Schwenkenbecher, 2014) who opposed the above stream of literature and argues that individuals (particularly the ones whose carbon footprints are substantially higher than the rest) should be held responsible for their respective GHGs emissions. On that same vein, Nolt (2011) attempts to estimate what is the harm done by the emissions made by average American citizens. Although he indicates at the outset that the estimates are crude, these do help in situating the argument that EE seems the right path forward as being our collective response to this mammoth crisis that all of humanity is faced within the form of climate change. To summarize, these works addressing the second concern primarily argue whether individuals, especially wealthy or well-to-do ones, should morally be held responsible to curtail their consumption practices and habits for a greater good of the entire of humanity in particular and earth in general.

This essay would be an attempt to contribute to this debate from a completely different as well as a novel perspective. Throughout the essay, I would build the argument to its depth and breadth that an individual ought to be held responsible for his or her consumption practices, not only for the environmental or social impacts of those consumption practices, but also, because any form of over-indulgence in consumption is not a morally rightful act even from the point of view of one's own life. Michaelis (2000) rightly notes, "The association of material consumption with the greater good contradicts the teachings of religions and philosophers over the last three thousand years." There is a body of literature that pays attention to the "ecological turn" in many religious faiths (e.g., Gottlieb, 2006; Kinsley, 1995). Tucker, one of leading religious studies scholars working in this field, states that "religious scholars, such as Tucker, Sullivan, John Grim, Duncan Ryuken Williams, and others note that many of the world's major religious traditions are entering what may be classified as an "ecological phase" in which the people of these traditions are now developing ethics concerning the environment" (Tucker, 2003). Thomas (2011), a comprehensive work in this regard, examined "the extent to which religions can be seen as powerful countercultural resources in the struggle to create new and less damaging conceptions of 'the good life', or whether they are themselves now so deeply implicated in consumerism and historically rooted in the pursuit of material prosperity as to be ineffective in this regard."

In this essay, I am particularly drawing from the Buddhist tradition to justify the aforementioned statement and substantiate my argument that we really do not need to employ the rampant environmental degradation as the necessary normative stance to mark certain consumption practices as morally wrong. Here, it is important to provide the rationale behind why I am choosing to focus particularly on Buddhist tradition over other religious traditions. First, the Buddhist tradition generally focuses on the individuals and strive to put forth an ethic that everyone could uphold in his or her individual life-journey. Loy (1997) noted that perspectives of Buddhist tradition on this matter delineated avenues through which individuals could “unhook” themselves as well as their respective mindsets from the bindings that “consumerism” imposes and, eventually, from the religion of the market. He saw Buddhist teachings could significantly aid individuals to “unhook” themselves from already established assumptions embedded within specific traditional standpoints. Second, I would like to highlight that, may be owing to the earlier point I mentioned, there is already a growing body of literature (I will discuss this as I go along in the essay) that delineates the import of Buddhist philosophy in understanding the consumer culture. In this context, my attempt in this essay is to particularly demonstrate how the individual-centered moral deliberation of Buddhist philosophy, regarding consumption can be sufficient to make an individual morally responsible and mindful about his or her own consumption.

In the following, first of all, I will provide a detailed account of how consumption, especially over-indulgence in consumerism, is seen in Buddhist tradition. This will particularly explicate why, according to the Buddhist tradition, endless persuasion of the materialistic path to satisfying one’s desire, is considered a moral wrong. Following that, I will briefly discuss the Buddhist’s take on why there is such proliferation of consumerism in the modern world. Based on these insights, my attempt would be to develop an ethical principle through which prevailing consumerism in the current society can be moderated toward a conducive atmosphere that can foster and encourage morally responsible consumption patterns.

Consumption and Buddhist Philosophy

Regarding consumption, Buddhist stance is nowhere near to be denoted as negative, or consumption in general is not considered as an outright wrong act (Essen 2010). Indeed, consumption or basic consumption is considered as highly essential means that can help people come out of poverty (Harvey, 2013). Buddhist philosophy minutely differentiates between consumeristic attitude and consumable products. Buddhism denotes that there is nothing inherently wrong associated with any product, indeed the problem lies on one’s intention as Harvey says “... a focus on amassing wealth is problematic, but wealth itself is not evil; the important thing is how it is made and used” (Harvey, 2013). In this regard, it is apt to revisit the insights provided by Buddha to

decide whether any act of generating wealth is immoral or not (e.g., SN.IV.331-337). The first thing that needs to be considered here is the manner in which a particular wealth is produced. Buddhism elaborates that no other being should be harmed in the process of generation of a particular wealth, otherwise, the wealth will be regarded immoral. Second, one has the complete right to enjoy or make life easier with the help of the wealth generated through one's own hard work, provided the use of it, is directed toward *karmically* fruitful action to help oneself as well as other beings (Harvey, 2013). Third, even if a wealth is produced in the appropriate manner and used for benefiting oneself and other beings, it may still become immoral if one approaches that wealth for satisfying his or her greed or longing and in the process gets attached to that wealth (Ibid; Essen 2010). Hence, it is quite clear that Buddhist philosophy decides morally right and wrong act, not by directly judging a wealth or an object, rather, by evaluating the process of production, usage of the product, and the underlying motives behind its consumption. In other words, instead of just deliberating upon a wealth or its process of production, for determining its moral status, Buddhism accentuates the need to understand one's relationship with that wealth by reflecting on the process of accumulation.

Now coming to consumption from wealth generation, Buddhism considers consumption as just a means to achieve happiness. Moreover, it is also considered as an inevitable basis for a life that can foster

spiritual and moral development (Harvey, 2013). Ven Payutto clearly states that consumption must only be seen as “a means to an end, which is the development of human potential” (p. 43) or “well being within the individual, within society and within the environment” (p. 35). Although Buddhism highlights the need of consumption or rather, basic consumption, it strongly critiques heedless indulgence in consumption as part of the consumer culture or consumerism. In this regard, Kaza (2010) comprehensively charts out three main components of Buddhist's critique of consumerism and over-indulgence in consumptive activities. These are first, consumerism produces false identity; second, consumerism inherently promotes harm to other living beings; and third, consumerism promotes clinging and attachment and distracts one from the right path of spiritual development. Here, I argue, the first and the third critiques provide some unique moral basis of approaching consumerism, as against the overall critique of consumerism being one of the main causes of the current environmental crisis, primarily, put forth by the second one. These two critiques also indicate why consumerism could be marked as an equally harmful activity toward oneself, like it is to the other living beings or the environment as a whole. Particularly, considering the possibility of exploring a new ground to morally evaluate consumption, a further in-depth exploration of these two critiques will perhaps help us evaluate whether wasteful indulgence in consumption activities such as driving a gas-guzzling car just for amusement can be morally justifiable or not.

One of the primary foundations of consumerism is that increasing consumption actually helps fulfilling various wants and needs of an individual and in turn, provides happiness that every one of us innately seeks. Buddhist philosophy, however, strongly opposes this belief, and contends that this is nothing but an upshot of the deeply rooted ignorance about the true nature of things. Ash (2011) noted “The starting point for a Buddhist analysis of the ‘happiness problem’ is the starting point of the Dhamma, the Buddhist world-view, itself: dukkha – suffering, unsatisfactoriness – and its cause. Its proximate cause is *taṇhā*, strong desire or craving. Its root cause is *avijja*, ignorance.” Buddhism also adds, due to this far-reaching ignorance, human beings in consumer culture, are oblivious to the fact that the only permanent thing in this world is the complete impermanence of everything (Ash 2011). As per the theory of impermanence, there is no stable form of the material world—everything is in a constant process of change and modification (van den Muyzenberg 2011). On that same vein, Ash (2011) again added “It would be hard to find a more obvious illustration of *avijja*, the Buddhist notion of ignorance: not understanding the nexus between impermanence, identity and discontent.” Not only refuting the presence of the material world, according to Buddhism, happiness cannot be achieved through continual fulfillment of material wants. Rather, as per Buddhist philosophy, indulgence in the everlasting urge to fulfill one’s desires, is the main cause of suffering. Zsolnai

(2011) in this regard highlights that “From a Buddhist point of view the optimal pattern of consumption is to reach a high level of human satisfaction by means of a low rate of material consumption. This allows people to live without pressure and strain and to fulfill the primary injunction of Buddhism: ‘Cease to do evil; try to do well.’” We feel that we desperately want something to accomplish our needs and sooner or later, the final objective of fulfilling the need becomes secondary and we remain caught up in a constant persuasion from one desire to another, ultimately leading us to suffering. In a way, any behavior that fuels the craving or the feeling that “I want to have or possess,” actually instill suffering in our lives.

Consumerism in the Light of Four Noble Truths

To elaborate on the above idea of craving leading to suffering, let us revisit one of the main components of Buddhist philosophy: The Four Noble Truths. As per Kaza (2000), these truths can be seen as a medical diagnosis: where suffering is the disease, and craving or *taṇhā* is the main cause of the disease. In other words, the second truths for the Spiritually Ennobled (*ariya-saccas*) as *taṇhā*—craving, or demanding desire—is seen as the key factor responsible for the suffering and unhappy state of human life (Harvey, 2013). The same is reflected in the following quote from Harvey (2013) as well:

Now this, monks, for the spiritually ennobled, is the originating-of-the-painful true reality. It is this craving,

giving rise to rebirth, accompanied by delight and attachment, finding delight now here, now there. . . (SN V. 421).

Here, *taṇhā* can be literally translated as thirst, and can be taken as indicative of that overpowering and demanding desire that is always looking for avenues to gratify itself. Just to elaborate, as per Harvey (2013), *taṇhā* instills suffering and painfulness in human life in three different paths. First, this leads to the suffering due to frustration. This perpetuating and everlasting desire never gets fulfilled and subsequently, impels human beings to relentlessly look for ways to fulfill it. At the same time, it also constantly induces one to crave for something other than what the individual possess at a particular moment. In a way, it never allows one to feel the contentment and gets satisfied with one's own possession. Thus, naturally, always one would suffer for the things one does not possess at any particular moment. Second, *taṇhā* also constantly drives one to plunge into some or the other action, and subsequently, diverges that individual from a right spiritual path that can lead her to liberation. In other words, it does not provide any scope to an individual to relax and reflect on one's life, which is absolutely instrumental in following any path of spiritual progress. Failing to attain or even proceed toward liberation, human beings remain caught in the perpetual cycle of birth and rebirth, and also suffer continually in each and every life. Third, the strong drive to fulfill *taṇhā* often gives rise to conflict, clash, and

quarrels between groups as well as among individuals, and most importantly, hinders liberation for all of them. In this regard, Harvey (2013) identified three types of craving or *taṇhā*: sensual pleasure or *kāma*; attaining and maintaining certain identity or enhancing one's ego, this also prompts individual 'to become' somebody; getting rid of things that are unpleasant or thought to be so. In this regard, I posit, the second type of craving for ego-enhancement is really becoming prominent in the current consumeristic society (Belk, 2013; Grabel, 2013; Khanom, 2010; Xavier, 2016) and will be dealt separately in this essay, as being one of the main drivers of the recent proliferation of consumerism. Hence, evidently, according to Buddhism, true happiness cannot be achieved if one approaches desire materialistically, rather, one has to come out from this vicious cycle of desire, craving, and wanting, to attain a state of happiness and bliss. The insight from Buddhism that over-consumption is actually counterproductive in attaining true happiness is clearly captured in the following statement by famous Buddhist writer David Loy (1997):

The final irony in this near-complete commodification of the world comes as little surprise to anyone familiar with what has become addictive behavior for 59 million people in the U.S. (Dominguez and Robin 171). Comparisons that have been made over time and between societies show that there is little difference in self-reported happiness. The fact that we in the

developed world are now consuming so much more does not seem to be having much effect on our happiness. (Durning 38–40)

Based on this understanding, as per Ven Payutto, Buddhist philosophy distinguishes wrong and right consumption, with the former indicating the use of goods and services “to satisfy the desire for true well-being,” and the latter for satisfying “the desire for pleasing sensations or ego-gratification” (p. 41), limited only by one’s ability to afford what one wants (p. 43). Zsolnai (2016) noted “Right consumption based on *chanda* is the use of goods and services to achieve true well-being. Wrong consumption arises from *taṇhā*; it is the use of goods and services to satisfy the desire for pleasing sensations or ego-gratification.” Unfortunately, in the present society, individuals are increasingly getting attracted toward the latter one or the wrong one for that matter. Even, simply driving a gas-guzzler can also be marked as a wrong one, as primarily this type of status or conspicuous consumption practices is directed toward differentiating oneself from the masses for enhancing and establishing one sense of self or can be denoted as ego-enhancing consumerism.

To further elaborate on ego-enhancing consumerism, now I will explain how Buddhism problematizes the creation of false identities by consumerism. It is already indicated that striving toward gaining a greater sense of identity, is one of the prominent types of craving that generally

does not lead to any life satisfaction or happiness (Kilbourne 1989). Zsolnai (2016) explained why it was so difficult to find happiness through the pursuit of consumerism. He elaborates:

The pursuit of income and consumption is unsatisfactory in itself because of eventual adaptation and social comparison. Trapped on hedonic and social treadmills, we over-invest our time in paid work and associated commuting at the expense of building and maintaining valuable relationships with family and friends, and within the wider community. Clearly many of our choices – what to buy, how many hours to work – often do not bring us happiness. (Zsolnai, 2016)

In a way, acquiring material objects to create an extended self or enhance one’s ego, is like chaining oneself to a vicious cycle of illusive consumption. In this regard, Thompson (1995) rightly described the self in the present world of consumerism as a *symbolic project*. This is *symbolic* because each and every individual needs to create it based on the symbolic meanings of various consumer goods, and it is a *project* because one has to carefully construct one’s identity by actively appropriating the socio-culturally defined meanings of things. It is like “the individual weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self-identity” (Thompson, 1995, p. 210). The symbolic self-completion theory by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982), suggested that “if individuals feel insecure in social

roles, then they will attempt to ‘complete’ their discrepant self-concept by the use of symbols they believe to demonstrate role competence” (Wattanasuwan & Elliot, 1999). This over-emphasis on creating selfhood or identity through a symbolic project can be considered completely a false persuasion, as Buddhism always advocates the concept of no-self or *anatta*. Generally, this concept of “no-self” is interpreted as if, it promotes there is no-self which is intrinsically present, and which can’t be marked as unified, transcendental, or fixed (Wattanasuwan & Elliot, 1999). The real concept of *anatta* in Buddhism, however, cannot be equated with the idea of mere no-self, rather,

...the Anatta Doctrine in Buddhism advocates that individual existence, as well as the whole world, is in reality nothing but a process of ever-changing phenomena. There is nothing absolute in this world; everything is in continuous flux and is relative, conditioned and impermanent (Wattanasuwan & Elliot 1999).

Thus, to avoid getting caught in false identities and suffering, we should avoid indulgence in various symbolic projects directed toward creating different identities to appreciate the true nature of things as *anatta*.

The conclusion of Buddhism that happiness cannot be achieved by any attempt to fulfill *taṇhā* or for that matter, by striving to create newer identities with the help of various consumer articles,

actually make it necessary to look for some alternative ways to achieve happiness. In a way, Buddhist scholars clearly demonstrate that the path of consumerism cannot really lead any one to happiness as being fueled by *taṇhā*. It strongly promotes that instead of hedonistically driven self-centered pursuit of happiness, one should realize that by only helping others, true happiness can be obtained. Generosity and sharing are always considered as a sustained source of happiness in Buddhism as against the present consumerist society’s focus on consumption as being that source. As Nāgārjuna says:

Through using wealth there is happiness here and now, Through giving there is happiness in the future, From wasting it without using it or giving it away, There is only misery. How could there be happiness? (RPR.315).

Moreover, Buddhism also prescribes that the right mode of achieving happiness, perhaps, could be of enjoying the success of others. It provides a different level of happiness that generally termed as *mudita* or emphatic joy in Buddhism. If one can really achieve this emphatic joy, then one will not feel miserable upon seeing someone else’s possession and naturally, new desires will not be ignited to direct that individual into suffering.

Consuming with Mindfulness

At this juncture, it is quite clear that heedless engagement in certain consumption activities can be morally judged as wrong beyond its

socio-environmental impacts. Rather, if one acknowledges the worldview promoted by Buddhism, then it is clear that one would fail to really attain any long-lasting happiness and satisfaction in pursuing the path of status consumption. Hence, it is important to develop some moral principles and ethical guidelines to explore the manner in which we can collectively promote mindful consumption practices, which will help us to follow a path of spiritual and moral development for ensuring both individual as well as collective wellbeing.

The Buddha has provided us the Noble Eightfold Path, which presents a teaching about the right way to conduct and live one's life. It shows us how to evaluate, develop, and practice the right way to do everything that one does throughout the course of her lifetime. According to me, it does seem to be a particularly well-suited point of reference for finding the right way to consume. Here, I would accentuate on the proposal made by Wilker (2004) that while consuming, one must strive to adhere the three essential wisdoms of any Buddhist training and practice, the threefold skills: wisdom, morality, and mental discipline.

First and the foremost, *sila* is particularly pertinent to developing an ethical dimension toward consumption. This means that one needs to be more mindful and should incorporate moral considerations while consuming, instead of just prioritizing *tanhā* and trying to blindly fulfill that. As per Wilker (2004), we should be completely conscious about the harm or the good, a product might cause to individuals, society

and to the environment. If a product is found to have some harmful component, then we should restrain ourselves from consuming that. We should find some better ways to spend our hard-earned money, instead of just spending on some consumer goods to gain happiness. We can find some ways, where it will not only benefit us, rather, would benefit others as well (Wilker 2004).

Moreover, considering *sila* alone, may not be enough, and one needs to consider it along with *Samadhi* and *Panna* (Kaza 2000). *Samadhi* and *Panna* primarily, suggest that any moral behavior should be based on right condition of mind and wisdom. Indeed, the foundation of any moral behavior in Buddhism is "to be mindful" (*samma sati*) of one's doings. The reason behind mindfulness being the fundamental principle for moral behavior in Buddhism can be understood if one considers the Buddha's doctrine of mind, which says that the mind is the source of all the good and evil that arises within and befalls us from without (Wilker, 2004). Highlighting the same point, the *Dhammapada* opens with the words: "Mind precedes all things; all things have mind foremost, are mind-made". Mindfulness can be considered as being aware of one's own thoughts. If we extend this principle in the present world of consumerism, one needs to be consciously aware of each and every thought. This awareness will guide an individual to be able to control those thoughts that give rise to desires in one's mind to buy new stuffs and indulge in various consumption practices. By consuming mindfully, we must be able

to see the effects of our consumption and also be aware about the futility of indulging in desires.

In this regard, I contend, the role of wisdom is also needs to be highlighted. Wisdom can be considered as the first two factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, namely Right Understanding (*samma-ditthi*) and Right Thought (*samma-sankappa*). These two faculties help us to get rid of the clouded view of things—to see life as it really is (Wilker 2004). These also enable us to understand the reality of the way things are; to see that all that is subject to arising is also destined to ceasing, and to thus accept the nature of all things “as being impermanent (*anicca*), subject to suffering (*dukkha*) and void of self (*anatta*)” (Wilker, 2004). These two faculties also uphold the view that everything is subject to the law of causes and conditions, the law of *kamma*. Equipped with such understanding, we can make truly wise and virtuous decisions, even, while deciding what to consume and how much would be sufficient for a simple but a virtuous life. In the light of this understanding, it can be concluded that for consuming mindfully, we need to be reflective of each of every action of ours, so that we are able to identify our motives behind each of them (Armstrong & Jackson, 2015). In this regard, Armstrong and Jackson (2015) further added:

Mindfulness offers us a different way of approaching the continuous project of negotiating our personal and social identity. It supports our intrinsic value orientations, and helps us navigate our own priorities in the face of powerful

extrinsic forces which threaten to undermine pro-social behavior and privilege selfish hedonism. It allows us to negotiate meaning: personal meaning through an enhanced understanding of what matters to us; social meaning through greater connectedness with the world around us; and perhaps even existential meaning, by allowing us to face up to our own mortality and the mortality of those we love. (Armstrong & Jackson, 2015)

This will enable us to abstain ourselves from any consumption that is purely driven by greed, hate, or delusion. Even consumption toward ego-enhancement also must be avoided as constantly striving toward attaining newer identities can only invoke psychological suffering and make our life miserable. Moreover, the most important thing is to stop oneself from continual persuasions of desires and instead, focus more on spending quiet moments to be able to provide our conscience the necessary scope and space for critical self-evaluation and self-reflection.

CONCLUSION

This essay begins by charting out that in literature, there is a growing body of scholarly works that promotes individual should not be held responsible for indulging in any wasteful consumption activities, as the direct contribution of an individual's consumption to global warming is rather insignificant. I delineate in this essay, how Buddhist philosophy offer us a way to go

beyond the prevailing mode of evaluating consumption from the point of view of the subsequent environmental degradation. Instead, as per this philosophy, over-indulgence in consumptive activities is not at all recommended from the point of view of human well-being, which is absolutely necessary for a spiritually and morally motivated life. At this juncture, although one might argue that the wasteful consumption practices still can be considered as a valid means of obtaining happiness for consumers, Buddhist philosophy clearly establishes that it is solely an illusion, and in the long run, the consumer would not be able to achieve any form of sustained happiness. The utter futility of the commonly held notion about the link between consumption to happiness or contentment, can also be empirically verified with the present unrest and upheaval in the society, as even, with so much of progress and advancement in our quality of life (primarily defined as the convenience one experiences in this highly energy dependent era of consumerism), we can find human beings are still suffering and are not at all satisfied with their lives. Even though, in the past three decades or so, GDP of US and Japan witnessed staggering upsurge, the subjective measures of happiness have consistently remained the same, even for individuals who have acquired more wealth in that said period (Daniels, 2011). Neuroscientific research has clearly given credibility to the claim that just satisfying many of our desires do not bring us happiness which is long-lasting (Colin, 2007). In other words, once

individuals fulfilled their basic needs for shelter, nutrition, and health, accumulation of further wealth generally do not make them more satisfied (Inglehart, 2000; Jackson and Marks, 1999; Michaelis, 2000; Schwarz & Schwarz, 1998). To express in the words of Schwarz and Schwarz (1998), “the emerging global market is in effect a new world empire worshipping false gods of consumerism and greed.” Particularly, pertaining to that, I see, numerous psychological issues are surfacing day by day due to the immense societal pressure of establishing your very own identity through the help of various material goods like one’s car, house, or other consumer articles (Dittmar, 2007). So, in a way, these energy intensive consumption practices can really be termed “wasteful,” as these use up a significant amount of energy and material, but completely fail to provide consumer any long-lasting happiness.

As a ray of hope, although the pursuit of consumerism may not lead to any kind of contentment, it is quite evident that the less-energy intensive simple lifestyle can make one happier and satisfied with one’s life. Thus, if an appropriate worldview is adopted, environmental sustainability and mental satisfaction both can be achieved at the same time. For this reason, Jackson (2005) had termed the pursuit of simple and environment-friendly lifestyle as a path of “double dividend.” In this context, Yaacob (2004) stated “Authors like Walter and Dorothy Schwarz (1998) spent three years travelling in Britain, Europe, USA, Australia, India and Japan to find out how is it like to live a simpler life beyond

supermarket. They found that people who live a simpler life is much happier.” I see, this type of simple living could possibly help individuals realize the importance of *mudita* or emphatic joy. As already indicated, in this state of happiness, one goes beyond any relative happiness that constantly compares oneself with others. Rather in this state, one attains a different level of satisfaction with oneself by abstaining from the consumeristic persuasions solely driven by *taṇhā*. I see, in this state, one can consciously choose a different form of living to be on the right path of spiritual development and also help others to follow that path. This simple living, I propose, could also give rise to an alternative form of consumption as in this state, one no longer wants to aid one’s sense of identity with various consumer articles. In this mode of living, consumption remains just as an indispensable way to sustain oneself and to maintain a healthy mind where a healthy soul can flourish. This simple living in a way reduces the role and importance of consumer goods to mere sustenance and in turn, promotes a detached approach towards these goods. However, theoretical understanding does not always translate that effectively in the pragmatic realm. Rather, I see, a massive socioeconomic reformation of our societal structure is highly required for assisting individuals in choosing the right worldview towards life. At the same time, extensive awareness building at the level of individual is equally essential to make this simple mode of living a choice that individuals would like to make. A

comprehensive philosophical understanding as provided by Buddhism is particularly conducive to induce the necessary changes at the individual as well as the collective realm for moving towards a sustainable and just society, where all the citizens would be completely satisfied with their simple but highly motivated and holistic lifestyle.

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