



Moving from Consumption to Restraint: A Review of Irresistible Arguments

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How the case for minimizing consumption is made to address the existential challenges of ecological disasters and exclusive development, is summarized here for the benefit of the introductory economics and management students who otherwise would not be knowing the imperative of doing this due to their indoctrination to the contrary in mainstream education. Only heterodox real-world observations and interdisciplinary investigations enable us to not only diagnose the multifaceted ecological crisis rightly but also suggest sane solutions such as degrowth and minimalism to save the people and the planet from the fast-impending dooms day. A set of inter-connected facts and ideas of non-mainstream scholars and activists constitutes the narrative here for intelligent students to examine dispassionately and in detail.

Keywords: overconsumption, marketing, psychology of consumption, degrowth, minimalism, public policy, economic structure, people's actions

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1. Description of the Problem

There is a real problem to be noticed. This is the problem of consumption fetishism in economic thinking as, for example, endorsed by Boudreaux (Undated), which is the beginning of our narrative here.

Economics and management students are brainwashed by mainstream economic education to believe that economic activities must grow incessantly based on rising consumption which in turn will have to be facilitated by more and more resource extraction, manufacturing, supply chain and retailing on the part of the business people aided by governments. That is the way, they are told, of ensuring “job creation, sustained economic growth” and national as also global “prosperity”.

However, students as college freshers are not told as to how consumers carrying the national economies and global economy on the basis of their personal expenditures are causing terrible damages to people and environment the value of much of which is monetarily immeasurable—“the permanent loss of livelihoods of millions of traditional farmers and fishermen, forced displacement and mass migration, resulting in serious illnesses, ethnic conflicts and irreparable disruption of social fabrics” along with compression in quality of life due to “environmental contamination, biodiversity loss and climate change”. There is, therefore, the grave and desperate problem in that neither national nor global policy discourse emanating from the mainstream is really bothered about the link between our consumption behaviour and the current human-induced environmental catastrophes (Sarkar, 2022; Roach et al., 2023).

How this link has been made and how it can be broken is the botheration of the narrative here. This topic is all the more relevant now to seriously study on the part of the students in Indian cities because, as Bhattacharya (2025) has humourously remarked, there is environmental hell on Earth and it is close by in Delhi NCR—“As the pub artiste sings to the smog outside, for the nth time, you can check out but you can never leave”!

2. Disturbing Facts

College students need to know lurking facts with dangerous consequences such as these.

First, the rising overall human consumption in the world has led to overconsumption. This means that people as consumers are consuming goods and services more than they need to do, which in turn means that people are using resources at a faster rate than they can regrow or extract them so that eventually—not far away—they will run out of resources. That these processes have been worsening over time is revealed by the metric called Earth Overshoot Day. It refers to “the date on which humanity’s consumption of resources exceeded the planet’s ability to regenerate those resources within the year”. For example, “In 1972, overshoot day fell on December 27. In 2024, however, it fell on August 1. This means that in 1972 we were almost living within our means from a global resources standpoint. To put it differently, in 1972 we would have needed 1.01 Earths to support our consumption habits and by 2024, we would need 1.7 Earths to provide enough resources to match our consumption” of goods and services (Millstein, 2025).

To put it differently, “we have reached the point where the ecological footprint is currently 2.75 global hectares per capita while biocapacity is only 1.63 global hectares per capita. In other words, we are using the resources of the Earth 70% faster than they can be replenished. That means we are overproducing and overconsuming.” (Lianos, 2025). Lim (2022) explains well the ecological footprint as distinguished from the carbon footprint: Ecological footprint “is a method of gauging humans’ dependence on natural resources. It calculates how much of the environment is needed to sustain a particular lifestyle. It measures the amount of biologically productive land or water that enables the population to sustain itself. Biocapacity refers to the ability of a biologically productive area to continuously generate renewable resources and clean up its wastes. An area is considered unsustainable if a land’s ecological footprint is greater than its biocapacity.” The whole earth is unsustainable in this sense. On the other hand, carbon footprint “measures the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions caused by an individual, organization, or activity. It is measured in units of carbon dioxide equivalents, or CO₂e, which quantifies how much a certain amount of a greenhouse gas would impact global warming in reference to carbon dioxide.”

The carbon footprint concentrates on only activities that would be related to greenhouse gas emissions, whereas the ecological footprint considers the impact of an entire lifestyle on environment.

Second, the pattern of overproduction and overconsumption does not mean that everyone and every country is responsible for it. High-income people and high-income countries are the main culprits. Given growing inequalities, they are disproportionately responsible for increasing global use of materials and energy to process them, by breaching planetary boundaries. There are billions of people—at least about 50 percent of world's population—who still cannot meet basic needs. These people cannot be said to be responsible. They need minimum material and energy requirements to secure a decent life standard. Although this is estimated, it is not clear "whether countries with shortfalls in energy and material use are increasing their consumption towards sufficient levels, and whether countries with surplus consumption are reducing theirs to sustainable levels" (Millward-Hopkins et al., 2025).

3. Disaster-inducing Reasons

It is tempting to point to population growth and the consequent overpopulation (Bish, 2024)—whereby "the Earth cannot regenerate the resources used by the world's population each year"—as solely responsible for overconsumption. But it is not so. Overconsumption of goods and services and consequently overuse of resources is due to many more important factors like increasing waste in current production systems; technological advances enlarging and cheapening production; people mindlessly succumbing to exponentially more advertisements from fewer and fewer corporations controlling production and distribution and greedy to make more and more money by selling more and more; and online shopping. All these factors have led to unfolding global disaster in terms of destructive resource extraction with attendant pollution, climate, extinction and displacement crises, which we do not want to describe at length here like our references have already done (e.g. Millstein, 2025; Nuwer, 2014; Prager, 2022).

Thanks to Wilson (2019), Greenpeace (Undated) and Bittman (2021), we can discern these factors at work interrelatedly in the food industry operating especially by the principles of industrial agriculture.

There is enormous waste in terms of unconsumed stuff created in food industry and especially in seafood and other meat industries, which significantly constitutes overconsumption. We can succinctly take the hit from Wilson (2019) and Bose (2021) as follows. "Our food desires are not shaped by the knowledge of the needs of our bodies. Instead, our desires are shaped by the quantity of foods that are supplied to us, by their cost, and by the stories we are fed about them, often through advertising. Much of what we consume is virtually pushed down our throats by forces of supply over which we have no control, and of which we are only dimly aware. Average incomes are higher and food prices are generally lower than for previous generations, and yet this new prosperity has not translated into higher quality diets. The relative price of goods over the past two decades has pushed consumers strongly in favour of ultra-processed foods, meat and sugar. The quality elasticity of many basic foodstuffs is remarkably low, which means that most of us do not want to pay more for better quality foodstuffs if we can manage to pay less for worse quality ones. Governments have encouraged the massive oversupply of certain ingredients which we consume without recognizing what we are doing. A case in point is refined vegetable oil, whose ubiquity in modern food is mainly a story of supply-side economics. Governments are hands-off about food standards... Individualism, impatience and a desperate sense of urgency about time have increased the risk of heart disease. When we feel lacking in time, we will cook less, enjoy meals less and yet end up consuming more, especially of 'convenience' foods or nutrient-poor snack foods which are unhealthy. The rhythms of life have changed with bad timing and tricky routines and our diets often come out as the losers. Food waste has also increased in the process. In the developed countries, food waste arises due to no chance to consume it, and in developing countries, most of the waste happens due to faulty transport and storage. Much of the food waste everywhere is driven by the way our food is supplied to us by retailers, who encourage us to buy more food than we can eat... the reality today is that, as never before, populations have become erratic in their choice of foods. Culinary trends, food fads and food frauds abound. Expensive superfoods are marketed, but they mask the truth that a healthy diet need not include a single fashionable ingredient.

No superfood can equal the value we would get from consuming a daily mix of vegetables and fruits, plus a range of other wholesome foods—but this is the kind of boring old news that no one wants to hear these days. But there is no escaping the fundamental concern as to how to combine the busyness of modern life with steady meals that give us both pleasure and health.”

Sarkar (2022) similarly demystifies the fast fashion and apparel industries, and the electronic devices and home appliances industries. Fast fashion is aggressively pumping out “cheap, trendy clothing on ideas from the catwalk or celebrity culture, mass production at low cost, the extensive use of polyester and nylon, and making garments readily available in high street stores and online.” Consequently we are paying a “terrible environmental price” with its “extensive reliance on oil for the production of synthetic textiles, the use of large amounts of water and pesticides for cotton, the release of textile dyes into the environment, the burning of fossil fuels in shipping, and discarded clothes ending up in landfills”. Electronics is characterized by declining average lifespans “essentially due to manufacturers’ strategy of planned obsolescence and consumers’ growing desire to buy new designs and improved versions of products.” This has led to the add-on problem of increasing waste due to premature discarding of fully functioning products. “This electronic waste is transported to the global south in the name of recycling, but the major parts of them are dumped due to lack of resources to recycle all the components. It is also important to note that recycling and recover of waste also require enormous amounts of water and energy.”

It follows from the above realities of different industries that the mainstream education misleads the students by not telling the facts of how these industries operate and consumers behave. As Davey (2015) points out, societies now are made to be consumerist by the business world—societies fetishizing consumption. Consumerism means that the rich as also other strata of society are “using consumption goods to profile and project themselves.” In other words, it means “having one’s sense of identity and meaning defined largely through the purchase and use of consumer goods and services” (Roach et al., 2023).

Davey (2015) explains that marketing has become far more prominent—“particularly the all-pervasive presence of brands which work together with advertising to create...a society of technicolour appearance and empty narratives designed to manipulate...Money is made when people have to have products and stay on the treadmill of work, spending and debt. Society functions by advertisers ensuring that people feel uncomfortable, inadequate and bereft unless they have the latest product designed...advertisers do this...by an astute manipulation which forms motivations through the use of stories, rituals, ceremonies and culture. The moral of the stories told by the advertisers is that the audience is lacking in something that possession of the brand will give them...The message of the advertising stories is to convey how products will make us a better and more desirable person...Over and over again, visual and narrative connections are made between sex, glamour, wealth, power, speed, desirability, happy families, and shiny new products magnified and flashing in front of our eyes, dynamically displayed with clever graphical effects...Correspondingly a large part of the economy—its institutions, its technical infrastructure—exists solely for the purpose of grabbing our attention...the information space used by society is buckled to massively magnify the concerns and priorities of the super-rich elite and their hangers on. At the same time rendering virtually invisible and unintelligible the suffering, concerns and needs of the large part of the world’s population...this situation allows environmental policy to be colonized by corporate agendas which have very little to with the saving the world from environmental destruction and everything to do with corporations gaining strategic control of value chains...A techno-innovation juggernaut is constructed with the help of the state...the destruction of the environment continues and economists give their blessing.”

Mainstream economic education does not reveal why the consumers in the real world are what they are—susceptible to the manipulation of the advertisers. An undergrad econ student who is also President of the Economics Society at the University of Stirling in Scotland has recently sensed this well (Wren, 2025). The heterodox Komlos (2023) tells us, based on the contributions of Sigmund Freud and Ivan Pavlov, what the psychology of the consumption underlying demand creation really is. First, consumers do not have the rational mind controlling much of what they do.

"Decisions are often directed not by the prefrontal cortex but by emotions and desires, which originate in the unconscious mind and are not subject to the laws of logic. These thought processes induce feelings and thoughts that influence our actions in profound ways and motivate us, although we are unaware of their origin." Secondly, there is conditioning as an important psychological marketing principle. Just as dogs can be taught to respond involuntarily to any stimulus, so also humans can be trapped into habit formation that influences behaviour without awareness. "Advertisers take advantage of conditioning by depicting young good-looking people in fashionable attire smiling and enjoying themselves drinking a brand of soft drink. We involuntarily associate that soft drink with enjoyment and covet it...We may choose to buy a six-pack without thinking about it... Such marketing strategies are both demeaning and exploitative since they appeal subliminally to difficult-to-control primordial desires and take advantage of our psychological limitations. Our choices often lead to buyer's remorse, as advertisers entice consumers into buying products that they subsequently regret having purchased." Finally, reinforcing behaviour by rewarding it is yet another conditioning technique. "That is why there are so many reward programs like frequent-flyer miles, free gifts, and premiums. The conditioning starts early: fast-food chains present toys to toddlers to condition them to want the food at those eateries long after they received the toys. Cigarette companies give samples to youth...Parents are unable to shield children from this multibillion-dollar effort at conditioning. Reward points for using credit cards have also been very effective means at enriching banks which earn money at practically every purchase we make."

The mainstream does not also reveal various nuances about real-world consumers as, for example, that because humans are social animals, their desires for consumption are stimulated, in the first two decades of life, perhaps much more (than by the influence of ads and media) by "what friends and family have" and "desire to be different from peers". Also, "consumers may have preferences regarding what their tastes should be. A consumer may, for example, prefer that she lose the taste for smoking, or acquire a taste for jogging." In which case "public policy may recognize this and act to try to shape the development of preferences in the directions that people would prefer" (Hill, Undated; Swann, Undated).

A most telling critique of the mainstream theory of consumer choice is that people as consumers do not appraise all the available information in conditions of "rational expectations". Most likely, they take decisions in a variety of "states of knowing/unknowing" as mentioned by Witte et al. (2008) thus: "Known unknowns; Delusions and wishful thinking; Denials; Informational asymmetry; Costly information; Deception and secrecy; Technical information; Taboos; Paranoias; Granfalloon; Choosing definitions that hide and distract from problems; Attention manipulation; and Unknown Unknowns." We do not know the empirical sense of the net effect of these various decision determining factors. But one thing is crystal clear. It is impossible for consumers to get accurate information. It is, therefore, worth thickly underlining that "Our mind is not a super-computer; we are not Superman or Superwoman. In the real world we must make complex decisions with imperfect information when the outcome is uncertain, and the repercussions of those decisions extend well into the future. Under such circumstances we are unable to maximise a theoretical utility function, and must rely on our intuition or a rule of thumb to decide, or alternatively copy the action of others to avoid becoming catatonic, often unbeknownst to us, guided by our unconscious mind beyond the control of our prefrontal cortex. In such cases we generally satisfice, i.e. we seek a satisfactory solution, one that is good enough but may not be the best conceivable. However, satisficing frequently leads to mistakes" (Komlos, 2023).

4. Desirable Goals

We need to sanely distinguish between three types of consumption, as Komlos (2023) argues, in terms of basic needs, comfort goods and luxury goods.

Genetically controlled basic needs are required for biological survival. We will perish if we do not have "food sufficient to avoid hunger, safe drinking water to relieve thirst, healthy shelter to protect from the elements, clothing appropriate for weather conditions, and medical care to maintain health".

Dignified survival in modern society requires comfort goods like automobiles where there is shortage of public transportation, access to education, computers, the internet, and telephone. These goods "enhance one's capability to function with self-respect within the society in which we live."

Luxury goods “are not necessary for life, either biologically or socially; they are demanded (a) because of an acquired taste (soft drinks); or (b) because consumers are manipulated psychologically into wanting them (the latest iPhone), or (c) in order to signal social status by virtue of their exclusiveness (a Mercedes)”.

Once we have this classification of goods, we can understand that the assumption in mainstream economic education that wants are unlimited does not hold good for basic needs and comfort goods the judicious (healthy) provision of which for everyone must take priority over luxury goods. However, free markets cannot lead to a good life in terms of decent living standard by basic needs and comfort goods since “markets are not content with producing” them. Instead, we find corporations devoting humongous expenditures to coax consumers into coveting luxury goods and self-social-environmental-destructive items even within basic needs and comfort goods that they want the consumers to buy more and more.

It follows from above that, people as consumers will have to opt for “voluntary simplicity” or negate luxury goods consumption or governments will have to impose a steeply progressive consumption tax (Roach et al., 2023) on luxuries (conspicuous consumption) so that all people settle for the contentment of having decent living standard based on basic needs and comfort goods. This is what is meant by stopping unwanted overconsumption. When we strip away the stress that is involved in constant consumption beyond what we essentially need, we are able to “make space for more important experiences and relationships and to have more clarity and peace” which is the essence of minimalism (Snow, 2017; Dallas, 2020). Decreasing clutter, waste, and not buying unnecessary objects and reducing carbon footprint along with seeking personal satisfaction and a sense of wellbeing characterize minimalist homes and lifestyle. By carbon footprint is meant “the total greenhouse gases (like carbon dioxide, methane) released by an individual, organization, product, or activity, measured in carbon dioxide equivalent tons, reflecting the impact on global warming from fossil fuels, consumption, transport, and industry. It covers direct emissions (driving, heating) and indirect ones (manufacturing, food production), showing the total environmental burden from daily life and consumption patterns, urging efforts to minimize it.”

Unfortunately, so far, public policy has ignored principles of minimalism. And there can be a misconception that “people in poverty are living a near minimalist lifestyle. Rather, they are more likely leading a more environmentally unfriendly lifestyle, such as living in energy inefficient homes, using energy-inefficient gadgets, driving fuel-guzzling old cars (if they own any vehicle), eating packaged semi processed/processed cheap foods, living in congested homes located in low-income neighbourhoods with poor civic amenities and recreational facilities (narrow streets without bike lanes, inadequate waste management, unsafe parks, no space for community gardening, and less green space resulting in more heat islands in summer)”.

Minimalism in lifestyle, on the contrary, actually means “using materials for their full lifespan, bringing back the culture of repair to further delay obsolescence, and buying materials based on our minimum requirements...Such approach can be applied to diet, clothing, housing, power, consumables, and transportation, and it should not just be limited to individual choices; rather, it can extend to corporate strategies and governance” (Sarkar, 2022).

Public policy has also ignored degrowth or post-growth. Degrowth refers to “equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human wellbeing and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level” (Sarkar, 2022). Post-growth means the same or complements degrowth with a focus on a beyond-GDP economy in terms of “wellbeing, equity and environmental balance” (Damiani, 2025). There are fascinating post-growth ideas of designing economy according to nature’s principles in the name of “regenerative wellbeing economy” (Schumacher Institute, 2024). It is high time students are exposed to discussions on them like Fullerton (2025) and Brandsberg-Engelmann (2024-25) are doing. For the time being we are mentioning a definition of regenerative economics as “the restoration of intelligent and wise management of our global planetary ecosystem whilst re-igniting a spiritual renewal... of the human species” (Sanford, 2020). We are not expanding on these attempts at futuristic education here.

Even without these avant-garde ideas, students can be simply sensitive to one of The Global Goals, viz. responsible consumption and production—Goal 12 (UN, Undated).

The United Nations rightly emphasises thus: "Unsustainable consumption and production are the root causes of the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, pollution, and waste. Humanity's relentless resource extraction causes a devastating impact on the natural world, propelling the climate crisis, destroying nature, and raising pollution levels." But, unfortunately, the United Nations directives are not seriously minded by most national governments and are easily bypassed by the global corporates pretending to be addressing them via the World Economic Forum (TNI, Undated) as their respectable mask. The behemoth economic power of these super-rich minority is certainly militating against environmental reconstruction (Solnit, 2023).

Achieving decent living standard for all in the material sense is not the only desirable goal. Even more important is seeking "meaning in life in intangibles". This means that we seek improvement in 'quality of life' by emancipating ourselves from the corporate domination; that we become "self-actualised individuals... enjoy autonomy in personal development... rich in spirit, creative and wise enough not to depend on influencers to tell (us) how to live"; and that we tap into "an unlimited supply of good feelings that can be generated from the beauty of nature, from self-respect, lasting friendships, loving relationships, and spiritual connectedness" (Komlos, 2023). Minimalism and Degrowth are also the stepping stones towards this desirable intangible goal.

5. Doable Interventions

In light of the above, there is no need to labour the point that all of us as consumers are not going to voluntarily change as "conscious consumers" (Overconsumption.Org, Undated). Most people will not choose "voluntary simplicity" as long as conspicuous consumption or 'luxury fever' is not curtailed and eradicated in the pecking order from top to bottom. Even 'ethical consumerism' or 'green consumerism' does not free us from consumption fetishism. It is of no use as it stresses "the power of the marketplace and consumer choice/freedom" and "Marketers and market researchers are very aware of and wish to further tap into the "feel good" factor involved with ethical consumerism" (Gunderson, 2014).

The ethical consumption movement which is also the compassionate capitalist movement, is the individualistic advocacy of high income people and it is not going to change the nature and character of capitalism: "Exploitation, oppression and environmental destruction are inherent to a system based on private ownership of the means of production and production for profit" (Pape, 2018).

As such, we can think of two ways of changing capitalism: concerted action to regulate social behaviour by public policy or revolutionary social change by changing economic structure of society. Action can, thus, be an ensemble of gradualistic interventions as outlined by Sarkar (2022) or drastic interventions as emphatically and non-negotiably put forward by Smith (2013).

Consider first gradualistic-interventions-based policy and practice. Sarkar (2022) has discussed how suitable public policy can be designed by interconnectedly using Behavioural Economics (BE), Circular Economy (CE) and Ecological Economics (EE). The ideas of these subjects are opposite to those of the mainstream. Behavioural Economics seeks to "understand how and why we behave the way we do in the real world". It uses insights from social sciences and human psychology to understand "consumer behaviour, social norms, herd instincts in decision-making, and acceptance of the social policy." And it "also helps devise strategies by which individuals are allowed to make their own choices, but the choices are framed so that they are nudged into choosing the wise option" (e.g. agroecology products)! Circular Economy aims to keep the waste out of the production and distribution system by slowing down material flows and extending the product life span and circulation time of materials within the economy. And Ecological Economics is concerned about three interrelated goals of "sustainable scale (the size of the human economy relative to its containing, sustaining ecosystem), fair distribution (of wealth due to limit to economic growth), and efficient allocation (of land and natural resources)" in order to bring about human wellbeing and sustainability.

The entire product life cycle can be changed by public policy using the interconnected ideas of these subjects. Sarkar (2022) puts forward the integrated framework as follows:

"In retailing BE can be applied to promoting green products (including locally produced products), such as lowering tax/exemption on green products and high tax on high carbon footprint products. By green default rules, the products should have mandatory mention of water and carbon footprint on the labels. Consumers can reduce consumption by adopting a minimalist lifestyle and preferring green products. For waste collection, pro-environmental behaviour will help proper waste management, such as segregation of waste, generating less waste, appropriate disposal of waste, etc. BE can contribute to CE by reducing waste generation by repairing or refurbishing, or reusing products and buying products made of recycled materials; and to EE by promoting fair trade products (guaranteed protection of labour, rainforest, and environment), eating more vegetarian foods. CE can be applied to innovative product design in component production and end-point manufacturing, making high-end recycled products to ensure viability of the industries. CE approach can recover mining and agriculture waste (for example, conversion of post harvest stubble to bio-fertiliser, bio-fuel, building construction materials or mining slags can be recycled to extract other valuable minerals, cement production, pollution treatment, soil treatment, etc.), repair or replacement of spare parts of machineries for mining process, agriculture and material production, stop using high environment footprint components, promote repairing facilities (developing a network of spare parts and training), and extended producers' responsibility. CE can contribute to BE by generating awareness and motivating the public and retailers, making them active partners to make CE more effective, such as targeting to make zero-landfills waste management; and to EE by designing low energy and water-intensive products and recycling technologies. EE can be promoted by strictly adhering to sustainable mining, agriculture, production (material, component, and end-product), and supply chain (environment protection, reduce greenhouse gases), promoting equity (gender, ethnicity) in the entire product lifecycle. EE can contribute to CE by promoting equity and justice, such as stopping the installation of incinerations in low-income neighbourhoods and their emission monitoring, proper protection of the workers involved in mining/agriculture activities, material/component production, end-product manufacturing, waste management (particularly in unorganized sectors);

and to BE by connecting to retailers and consumers, sharing knowledge on sustainable development, degrowth, equity, and justice concerning high consumption and potential reversing trend by adapting minimalist lifestyle."

Sarkar (2022) argues that the above framework "focuses on minimizing consumption at the individual and societal levels", integrating theories and principles of BE, CE and EE whereby there is a "creation of pro-environmental attitude in all levels of society (producers, consumers, and government) and translating the individual's perspective to collective and coordinated action for protecting the biosphere." We cannot understand what Sarkar is saying without the knowledge of ecology. It may be noted that the biosphere belongs to "the ecosphere which is the part of the Earth that includes living beings and divided into what are sometimes called compartments or reservoirs. The compartments include the: lithosphere: rocks of Earth's outer crust; hydrosphere: water of the ground, streams, lakes, and oceans; biosphere: the detrital and grazing food chains; and atmosphere: divided into the two layers closest to Earth's surface, troposphere: spanning the atmosphere from Earth's surface to 10 km high, and stratosphere: the layer above the troposphere up to 40 km high" (Weber, 2023).

The drastic-interventions-based policy interventions to put into practice are owed to Smith (2013). According to him, through a non-market approach by "a combination of planning, rationing and democracy", eco-socialism will have to be established by nothing less than a revolution in terms of doing the following structural overhauling and reorganisation: "Put the brakes on out-of-control growth in the global North— retrench or shut down unnecessary, resource-hogging, wasteful, polluting industries like fossil fuels, autos, aircraft and airlines, shipping, chemicals, bottled water, processed foods, unnecessary pharmaceuticals, and so on. Abolish luxury goods production, the fashions, jewelry, handbags, mansions, Bentleys, yachts, private jets etc. Abolish the manufacture of disposable, throw away and repetitive consumption products. All these consume resources we are running out of, resources which other people on the planet desperately need, and which our children and their children need; Discontinue harmful industrial processes like industrial agriculture, industrial fishing, logging, mining and so on; Close down many services the banking industry, Wall Street,

the credit card, retail, PR and advertising industries built to underwrite and promote all this overconsumption. Most of the people working in these so-called industries would rather be doing something else, something useful, creative and interesting and personally rewarding with their lives. They deserve that chance; Abolish the military-surveillance-police state industrial complex, and all its manufactures as this is just a total waste whose only purpose is global domination, terrorism and destruction abroad and repression at home. We cannot build decent societies anywhere when so much of social surplus is squandered on such waste; Reorganize, restructure, reprioritize production and build the products we do need to be as durable and shareable as possible; Steer investments into things society does need like renewable energy, organic farming, public transportation, public water systems, ecological remediation, public health, quality schools and other currently unmet needs; De-globalise trade to produce what can be produced locally, trade what cannot be produced locally, to reduce transportation pollution and revive local producers; Equalize development the world over by shifting resources out of useless and harmful production in the North and into developing the South, building basic infrastructure, sanitation systems, public schools, health care, and so on; Devise a rational approach to eliminate and/or control waste and toxins as much as possible; and Provide equivalent jobs for workers displaced by the retrenchment or closure of unnecessary or harmful industries, not just the unemployment line, not just because otherwise, workers cannot support the industries we and they need to save ourselves."

Interestingly, any action—gradualistic or drastic—as briefly described above factors in minimizing resource use and thereby consumption. Degrowth and minimalism are integral to changing social behaviour and/or economic structure (Gregoletto, 2023). Their success depends much on the success of tackling inequalities in income and wealth, which is not an easy topic to sort out as discussed in Hodgson (2021). Resource consumption certainly needs to be redistributed away from the richest and towards the worst-off among people and among countries. Also, the problem of "unequal distribution of resource use in production processes" needs to be globally resolved (Raworth, 2017). All these actions also require a committed 'League of Nations"— global governance and governance in each nation to be in sync with one another.

However, there is a disappointment here: "The truth is that we are not well governed globally; in fact, we are often misgoverned or governed badly. We remain prey to the power of a dominant ideology that does not serve the interests of even the majority of the world's peoples, let alone all of them. We have not put in place consistently effective mechanisms for bringing off the complex coordination needed to advance solutions to the most wicked of global problems. We tolerate the unequal access of different types of actors to the main sources of power and decision making in the international political economy and we do not subject the resulting arrangements to sufficient, rigorous, ethical interrogation. Regardless of how well we think we do as academic analysts, we ought to be honest enough to recognize that our collective record as citizens of a troubled and threatened world needs, very quickly, to become a lot better" (Payne and Phillips, 2015). This is the most bitter reality to reckon with.

6. Denouement

There are two merits to our unconventional narrative above. First, we have told a non-imaginary, mostly jargon-free and reasonably coherent explanation of consumer culture that militates against human-ecological harmony as also inclusive development and how it can be changed for the better. And secondly—most importantly—we could not have told this narrative had we stuck to the mainstream framework. The mainstream story is contrived to be purely a fairy tale in which people as consumers are consistently rational as also self-interested, and have all the information with which to maximise their utility (or happiness/satisfaction), and there are business people who respond to their given non-interdependent preferences. But this is not at all the case in the real world as pointed out above. It is also elaborated excellently in the teaching module by Roach et al. (2023), which ought to replace the typical orthodox mainstream classroom instruction. They point to an alternative and true model of consumer behaviour factoring in four principles as follows: "1. People try to choose the best option available to them, but they often make mistakes. While people may seek to maximize their utility, they sometimes aren't successful due to insufficient or inaccurate information, poor judgment, limited resources, and other issues. We might think of economic decisions as being a somewhat "muddled" process; 2.

People make economic decisions using various reference points to help them... people's choices can change based on their Social Security number or the price of other products; 3. People have self-control problems. Most people have a "present bias" when making decisions with long-term impacts. The fact that most people fail to adequately save for retirement is perhaps the most obvious, and important, example of this problem. Running up large credit card debts is another example; and 4. People can be influenced to make bad (or good) decisions. Advertising can clearly be effective, leading to choices that are unhealthy and unwise. Advertisers can also take advantage of anchoring and present bias to influence people to buy things they don't really need. But the fact that people's preferences aren't always fixed, or even known to them, also means that policies can be designed to help them make healthier, wiser choices." It follows that to say to the college freshers that there is 'consumer sovereignty' as the mainstream does (Hill, Undated) is a 'cosmic lie'—"a fabricated universal truth to keep us from seeing the real one" (J@WriteFore, 2025). This is preposterous indeed, politely as also rigorously speaking like Fellner and Spash (2015) do. And this is surely not the way to inspire and motivate students to understand and change the world (Zaman, 2018). But again, regrettably, given that there are "bribe offers for academics" from corporate powers that be, "In the world we live in, refraining from telling the truth is often worth lots more than telling it" (WEA, 2018).

Our narrative is not without a very serious demerit, though, which is, of course, not just only ours. Exemplary heterodox and interdisciplinary scholars like the ones consulted here, are in the dark about whether and how national politics in each country and global politics will emerge in the world to implement what is to be done as proposed here—"A particular blind spot concerns geopolitical relations, and how changes in international governance and world orders open up, or close down, opportunities for post-growth and sovereign development", and so "the question of politics emerges as an important research frontier" (Kallis et al., 2025). In fact, we think that the lack of and the case for political courage to undertake the task of radical change in consumption envisaged here is the most important social as also individual concern now. In other words, can there be politics for eco-socialist democracy/civilisation (Pillay, 2025; Barkdull and Harris, 2024; Smith, 2013),

or at least "regulated market socialism" (Lane, 2023) factoring in degrowth or post-growth and minimalistic lifestyle principles in the place of the currently rampant social and ecologically destructive, pro-growth as also green-growth authoritarian populism? Pillay's hope is nevertheless our hope too, albeit palpably very vague to us now: "The search for democratic ecosocialist politics, as counter-hegemonic alternatives to the dominant paradigms, continues in many spaces throughout the world. Only meaningful dialogue based on mutual respect amongst social movements and engaged intellectuals can build on the gains that have already been made. The aim must be to forge ever-larger alliances—meaningful partnerships—that can shift the balance of forces against the hegemonic powers, in both incremental and dramatic ways."

Whether there will be light of universal salvation from anthropocentric views (Canavan, 2021) or deathly deluge all around (Markley, 2023) at the end of the tunnel, is to be seen in this regard, so to say. Which are beyond our concern here, although there is some wonderful fantasy and science fiction in this regard. It may be noted that the word 'anthropocentric' conveys the "idea that nature is there for human use...(which is) at the root of the environmental problem". The counter-idea to be endorsed is that only when "humans take nature centric view" will there be "protection of earth" and the variegated life in it (Davey, 2015).

Noteworthy are the points that drastic interventions as suggested by Smith (2013) are compatible with eco-socialist democracy or civilization as a worthwhile utopia to be realized in this world while the gradualistic interventions as suggested by Sarkar (2022) are in sync with 'regulated market socialism' as a "minimalist move in the direction of socialism within capitalist market societies with established party-based electoral political systems" (Lane, 2023). To put it better, the interventions of Smith follow the achievement first of socialist social organization for the entire world under the aegis of an enlightened world government whereas the interventions of Sarkar are related to slowly transforming the existing capitalism to acquire some socialistic or social-liberalistic features like in the Nordic countries in the post-war period. In the words of Lane (2023), it can entail a definitive political economics thus: "A democratically controlled socialist state could provide a hierarchical framework ordered by a national plan,

within which economic markets operate. Extreme levels of inequality would be curtailed by blockage of the sources of inherited wealth. Public ownership, taxation policies, the creation of a full employment economy and the provision of universal basic services would level up. Private ownership would also level down by eliminating the source of unearned income...The state would have a comprehensive purposive planning role and would be a major actor with considerable ownership of industrial and financial assets. The economic plan would define the parameters of the market. As wealth increases, so would the free supply of collective goods (health, education, pensions, economic welfare). As technology develops, the working day could be shortened. Such measures would result in a cumulative reduction in surplus value, of profit for private means. An emphasis would be put on sustainable economic development and social security—the provision of fundamental social services, environmental sustainability, poverty reduction, human development, and the expansion of local and regional industries. Consumer satisfaction would not be neglected and here the market would be important. A modern form of socialism would provide mechanisms to evaluate social costs, particularly ecological consequences of industrialization.”

There are, thus, reformative as also revolutionary political economic possibilities.

We dedicate this narrative to John Komlos, Brian Davey, Atanu Sarkar and Richard Smith. Their heterodox approach to consumer psychology and interdisciplinary contributions seeking social-ecological-political-economic-policy pathways towards life-enhancing welfare of the planet and all of its species, are exemplary. They have given us a strong dose of critical awareness. They have also instilled in us an authentic hope to share with the reader, especially the reader from conventional economics or management background that explicitly or implicitly magnifies the make-believe power and glory of capitalism as it is now, wherein “Instead of being sovereigns, consumers willingly conform to business interests since they are socialized into the dominant ideology of consumption, instant gratification, and being oblivious to the extreme degree of income inequality.”

The truth, alas, is that capitalism is “locked into economic growth that has undermined the very foundation of life on earth”. It does not “develop or implement systemic solutions to high consumption”. It persists in the “generation of enormous waste, over exploitation of natural resources, and destruction of biodiversity with an imminent perfect storm of ecological, social and economic crises” (Sarkar, 2022).

The failure of COP30, as the environmental researcher and activist Kothari (2025) says, proves this well-entrenched truth again and again and leads to the insurmountable pessimism that governments (even the progressive ones), inter-governmental institutions and national and global corporates (‘the polluter elite’) will never effectively deal with the imminent ‘perfect storm’ dating with the Dooms Day coming up sooner or later. In which case, the only optimism that is there, as he points out, is that “solutions lie in people’s actions on the ground”—“Indigenous people’s movements, local community assertions, some urban collective movements, and many from the new Left, feminists, Gandhians, the Kurdish and Zapatista movements and others are advocating and demonstrating grounded forms of democracy”—all amounting to *Radical Ecological Democracy*. We, thus, arrive at matters of ‘political ecology’ which are beyond our concern here. It is well said, though, that ‘it is all politics’ now, notwithstanding the fact that consensus politics is rarest of rare with regard to the humanistic and planetary concerns of this narrative.

To reiterate, we have abundance of sound ideas of humanistic and planetary economics of meeting all essential needs of people without damaging Earth’s life-supporting systems in the name of ‘real world economics’, ‘regenerative economics’, ‘doughnut economics’, and ‘minimalonomics’, which we have mentioned here only rudimentarily. But worldwide and united political pathways to put them into practice are not palpably visible at all.

One realization with regard to the focus of this narrative, which has come from an eminent environmental feminist scholar, is indisputable. “To frame policies that are transformative and not just palliative, we require a less individualistic approach to development. In particular, we need an approach that recognises the potential of groups and collective action as necessary components for change” (Agarwal, 2025).

Such a conclusive realization is in response to dealing with a set of urgent questions which ought to be the pressing concerns of basic as also advanced research for university students: "Can development be reimagined beyond extraction? Can societies move from consumption to restraint? Can ecological balance be restored without rethinking the ethical foundation of modern life?" (Shaji, 2026).

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