Globalized consumer culture
Its implications for social justice and practice teaching in social work

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Summary: Globalised consumer culture and its corresponding ethos that accumulation of material possessions equates to happiness are having a profound impact on the physical, social and emotional health of human beings. For social work practitioners and field educators the issue is how we balance the charge to serve our clients without unwittingly forcing them into a system that is designed by its very nature to increase their dissatisfaction and alienation. This essay discusses these concerns and offers some initial suggestions for how social work may respond.

Key words: consumerism, social work, globalisation, practice teaching

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We get better and better at making new and complicated things in organized ways we call economies. We figure out who is powerful and who is less so. We have come to a time when making things at a desperate pace seems essential to our worth—indeed a time when we have become things ourselves. We are worth for what we can sell ourselves. Like some Frankenstein system, our creation redefines and consumes us. The deeper tragedy is that this monster redefines and consumes the Earth as well.
(Thomas Keefe)

Introduction

At this point in history humanity has enough material resources to meet the basic needs of every person on earth. We have the capacity to enhance health care, sanitation, and meet concerns for cleaner environments in most areas. Nevertheless, a cursory look around during this period of rising international crises, growing alarms of global warming, and severe shortages of clean water, shows just how far we are from realizing these goals. The world community is instead becoming a global village of two distinct and separated groups of people. There is the first world of wealth, opulence, and conspicuous consumption and a third world of deprivation, poverty, and subsistence living.

The stratification of the world community is no longer constrained within national borders. It is no longer just an issue of rich northern economies versus struggling nations in the global south. Increasingly, one can find relatively insulated pockets of wealth surrounded by ever deepening chasms of misery in most countries around the world. Many of the world's nations are now being forced to adopt a kind of winner-take-all globalized financial system where the goal is to get as much as one can according to his or her own greed quotient. Selfishness, self-indulgence, and rampant materialism have become cardinal values for many of the world's citizens. The relentless psychological marathon of yearning and having increasingly drives the world social system. But, its darker underbelly keeps us perpetually unhappy, chronically sick in body and soul, obese, and neurotically yearning for the *spirit of the buy*. Our lives are lived in anticipation of the next purchase which is always just out of reach but always immanently possible. But we are, by most accounts, as poor in collective, meaningful connection as the Afghanis and Iraqis are in money. We literally are buying our way into deep peril,

poverty and emotional destruction while believing *this is what we ought to be doing.* We in the developed world are also endeavoring to taint the world with our peculiar malady. While we are spending ourselves into extinction we are also enslaving the vast percentage of the world's workforce and expropriating the lion's share of their country's natural resources to insure our demise.

Today everything is for sale—politics, sex, love, marriage, and gizmos and promises of every size and description. We seem never quite content, ever on the search—spiritual searches, romantic searches, experiential searches, searches for meaning, searching for the better deal. We have become the quintessence of the consumer culture that enfolds us.

Buy and Be Happy?

Most of us have been seduced by the delusion of the new world order—that having more wealth and possessions are essential to happiness. And yet, data increasingly suggests that more wealth and consumer goods, beyond a certain level, do not lead to happy or satisfied lives. This presentation will look at the problem of the globalized consumptive ethos and its implications for human well-being. It shall also address how the profession's commitment to social justice is influenced by the consumptive emphasis of traditional social justice paradigms and will offer an alternative approach to social justice and its implication for social work practice teaching. It will suggest strategies regarding how social work practice teaching might address the materialistic values and practices of late modern, consumeristic capitalism and how a change in that perspective might truly improve the quality of life of communities and the planet.

The consumer driven economy of the western world generally, and of the United States particularly, is based on a multi-faced constellation of values and ideologies about ourselves and the world we inhabit. In the main, these values minimize the relevance of intuitive, interpretive, communal, and quality of life aspects of experience in preference for the economic enterprise of consumption and amassing material wealth. The cost of industrialized consumption is externalized and not considered in the price of consumer products. Consumer culture assumes nations and economies must grow incessantly or perish. The truly happy and fulfilled person is one who accrues as much material wealth and pleasure as possible.

To have, to have not, longing and desire, abundance and scarcity, stuff and no-stuff—these are the real and un-realized essences of consumerism in America and increasingly in the rest of the world. Global capitalism has become simply the economic tool that breathes life into that moment of sheer delight when we acquire something we've not had. The giddy anticipation that holds us spellbound before the glittering incantations of *a better and brighter tomorrow*—a future resplendid with more stuff. Most of the world's work force is employed in the business of producing commodities and services. To paraphrase Rossenblatt (1999), consumer products travel, bringing both themselves and their desire to have more to countries that have less - and those who have nothing - so that one glorious day, even these places of desolation can, through spending and getting, experience the insane, but intoxicating enigma of having while always feeling they have not.

Modern culture is bombarded with messages to spend, spend, spend and in the process one shall find real worth, deep satisfaction, and a genuinely meaningful life (Kasser, 2002). Multicolor ads flash across TV and computer screens and invade our lives in every imaginable way. Latter day huskers implore us to buy everything from sexual enhancing performance supplements to personalized names for recently discovered stars. We are even told that the best defense against encroaching terrorism is to go to the mall and spend our money. Although the content may be different the message is the same: happiness and security are found in the purchasing of things, the ownership of 'stuff', and the status such things supposedly bring to us.

While no one would argue that some basic level of material comfort is necessary for essential human needs; it is quite another thing to say that higher levels of material accumulation lead to ever increasing levels of satisfaction and happiness. To the contrary, recent research (Besthorn, 2002; Brown, 2001; Cohen, 2003; Crocker & Linden, 1998; Frank, 1999; Goodwin, Ackerman & Kiron, 1997; Kasser, 2002, Myers, 2000; Rossenblatt, 1999; Wentz, 2001; Westra & Werhane, 1998) is suggesting overwhelmingly that materialistic values actually detract from well-being and quality of life experiences, such as self-expression, intimate relationships, and sense of community.

The death of personal well-being.

In recent years, investigators working in various fields have begun to assess the cost of a materialistic lifestyle. What they have found is startling. The reality is that people in the western world and increasingly in the developing world (Diener & Oishi, 2000; Khanna & Kasser, 2001; Saunder & Munro, 2000) are generally not adapting well to consumerist culture and are exhibiting rather destructive ways of living. In short, materialism is associated with relatively low levels of well-being and psychological health, as well as relatively high levels of narcissism, depression, and anxiety. Indeed, evidence suggests that aspiring to greater wealth and material possessions is associated with increased personal unhappiness. People with strong materialistic values are more anxious, more narcissistic, more depressed, use more mind altering substances, and have more relationship problems. They also tend to be more sedentary, sleep less, and tend to be emptier of heart and soul (Carver & Bard, 1998; Roberts & Robbins, 2000; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000; Srivastava, Locke, & Bortol, 2001).

Not only does consumerism negatively influence personal happiness, it has a profound impact on the social structures of society. In the US, for instance, the period between 1960 and 1995 was a time of soaring economic vitality. The market was up but the social fabric was sinking. Americans are better paid, better fed, better housed, better educated, and have more conveniences than ever and yet in the 35 year period beginning in 1960, American society has seen profound social indices of decline (Frank, 1999; Inglehart, 1990; Myers, 2000; Suzuki, 1997). For example, since 1960:

- The teen suicide rate has tripled
- The divorce rate has doubled
- The violent crime rate has quadrupled
- The prison population has quintupled
- The number of children born to unmarried parents has sextupled
- Co-habitation has increased sevenfold
- Depression has increased ten times from pre World-War II levels
- More American are overweight or obese than ever before, nearly two-thirds of the population
- Parents spend 40% less time with their children than in 1960
- Employees work over five weeks longer per year than in 1960 while

spending fewer hours sleeping and fewer hours with friends
• The number of children under six on stimulant and antidepressant drugs has increased 580 percent

Never has a culture experienced more physical comfort combined with such emotional and social misery. Never have we felt freer or have our prisons overflowed to the breaking point. Never have we been so beseeched to enjoy pleasure, or more likely to suffer broken relationships. Never have we been more able to support positive global change or felt more vulnerable or threatened.

The death of earth systems

Not only is overconsumption a threat to the physical, emotional, and social health of humans, it is the single largest danger to the Earth's eco-systems. Nature is increasingly seen as fodder for the industrial fires of production and consumption. Earth systems are valued as infinite—as an inexhaustible resource base. Human beings, particularly in the global north, are consuming resources at a rate far outpacing the earth's ability to renew itself. Water, forests and clean air are being used or polluted at rates higher than can be sustained. Biodiversity is shrinking while the orgy of over-development goes on virtually unabated. The US consumes 25% of the world's energy while constituting only 5% of the world's population. Since 1940 Americans have used more mineral resources than all previous generation put together (Brown, 2001; Suzuki, 1997). In total, the industrial countries, comprising only one fourth of the world's population, consume 40-86 percent of the earth's various natural resources.

The statistics and factual data are sobering. Consumerism, beyond a certain minimal level, is damaging to individuals, societies, and the natural environment. The question is how to begin the change process? There are no simple answers. And yet, there is a new social renewal and sustainable development movement underway. This movement has grassroots origins and is trickling upward from far-flung areas of the world, where wealth and consumption may be low but where happiness and community pride are still relatively high. And, just below the surface of the quiet desperation of industrial peoples is a perception that something in the modern ethos needs to change.

People across the globe are looking for a new story to define who they are and where they want to go (Besthorn, 2002a). Instead of one narrowly focused on material progress, they want a more coherent vision that expresses a better balance between economics, social equity, and environmental sustainability—a vision where these factors are inextricably linked. Unfortunately, too many national and international policy responses to the crisis of consumerism still reflect the current paradigm in which they are framed. Thus, reordering of the consumer world requires a radical change in the worldview of consumer societies and the individuals which inhabit them. As for social work as a profession, I am proposing that we consider alternative conceptualizations of social justice if we are to truly play a meaningful role in this transformation.

Consumer culture and social justice

Current conceptualization of social justice

Until very recently social work has generally viewed consumer culture and social justice as related only peripherally. That is, there has been a taken-for-granted and largely unexamined assumption that social justice exists within a worldview that generally accepts the underlying premises and some of the inevitable repercussions of consumer culture. The American profession has relied heavily on a Rawlsian model of justice whose main, although not sole, focus is the free and equitable distribution of available goods and services (Morris, 2002). The vehicle whereby this distribution, what Rawls (1971) calls *social primary goods,* takes place is through an increase in global material wealth by way of consumer production and spending practices. As Samuelson (1995, p.5) notes the central ambition of postwar conceptualizations of justice 'has been to create ever expanding prosperity at home and abroad … because prosperity has seemed to be the path to higher goals'. These higher goals were inevitably concerned with social progress and included such laudable ambitions as the end to crime, slums and racial injustices. It has been, and still is, ardently believed that increasing global prosperity through the production of, demand for and usage of consumer products will in the end alleviate poverty, spread democracy, and insure social and economic justice.

It is, however, futile for us not to appreciate the finely nuanced con-

nection between globalized consumerism and the hoped for equitable distribution of primary goods. The sobering reality is that as the popular desire to possess and consume more and more accelerates, both in the global north and south, it is becoming increasingly apparent this *never ending progress at any cost* is at the root of rising social injustice rather than its opposite (Mayer, 1998). Even as overall wealth continues to increase in the western world, there is strong evidence of declining social welfare for large segments of society in both the developed, but especially, the developing world. Indeed, huge gaps exist between the promise of consumer culture and its reality. As Athanasiou (1996) notes in his perceptive work *Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor,* the relative wealth of rich and poor nations has begun to change rapidly over the last thirty years. This change, largely attributable to a virulent form of predatory capitalism and rapacious consumerism, has become an ultimately end in itself and accrues its benefits disproportionately upon those countries with greater political and economic power. He notes that this has not always been the case. From 1750, when standards of living for citizens in the global north were only marginally higher than for those in the global south,

The *average citizen* of the capitalist world grew to be eight times richer than one in the non-capitalist world, and contrary to all the tales told by friends of *progress*, this *improvement* has not always been by virtue of the North's technological and cultural innovations. The less-flattering and, according to Robert Heilbroner (1993, p.55-56), *more important* side of the story, 'was the drainage of wealth from the underdeveloped periphery to the developed Center—a capitalist version of the much-older imperialist exploitation of the weak by the strong.' (pp.53-54)

In the final analysis 'consumption has become an end in itself, rather than a means to individual enlightenment or happiness, or as a means to social justice, either domestically or globally' (Mayer, 1998, p.70).

Alternative conceptualization: A capabilities perspective

It often appears to us and we have been told repeatedly that there is no alternative to the global religion of secular salvation through international markets of conspicuous consumption. And yet, many noted social critics, economists, political scientists and proponents from a vast array of non-governmental organization have been saying for decades that

curbing overconsumption and moving toward a more sustainable and socially just economy is not only possible but is absolutely necessary if the world community is to avoid catastrophic environmental and social upheaval and find ways to live in harmony (Besthorn, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2002a; Besthorn & Canda, 2002; Besthorn & Saleebey, 2004; Eckersley, 1998, 1999; International Institute for Environment and Development, 1998; Kasser, 2002; Michaelis, 2000; Myers, 2000; United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, 1999; United Nations Human Development Programme, 1998; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The earth's carrying capacity simply cannot support an American-made style of gargantuan consumptive excess. If every nation in the world were to consume at the US level it would require six earths to support such a rapacious pattern of consumption (Brown, 2001).

The emerging international consensus, although far from being fully articulated, has a number of broad parameters. In the short term, it recognizes that advocating a slowed economic agenda that places priority on *relative material equality* is critical. Until societies can agree to a new collective vision of the good life, the idea of relative material equality through more traditional consumptive practices offers an important but limited corrective to the demand for more material possessions. In the short term, if relative material equality becomes a global, social priority then the incessant process of achieving higher privilege through ever increasing accumulation of material possessions would be diminished though not totally eliminated.

Ultimately, however, initiatives toward a revised agenda of global social and economic action must go beyond an equitable redistribution of material resources as traditional models of social justice posit. A radical world political transformation of consciousness and actions has become necessary (WCED, 1987). At the heart of this new agenda is a new view of what constitutes a satisfying versus a satiated life. It is vision that seeks ways to live compatibly with a natural environment that can support the continuation of human life and well-being. It must reflect a long-term commitment to identifying sources of human satisfaction that can intergenerationally flourish in harmony with nature. The focus of human satisfaction changes from the quantity of life's possessions to the quality of life.

The Capabilities Approach, first pioneered by Harvard economist and Nobel Prize laureate Amartya Sen (1985, 1992), offers an alternative model of a socially just and fulfilling life that is not singularly dependent

on quantity of life's possessions for its ontological grounding. The perspective defines well-being in terms of experiencing non-material capabilities rather than distribution of material goods. Well-being refers to unique ways in which individuals find value in their social functioning and achievement and how these are supported within their respective communities. The emphasis shifts radically from *human having* to *human being*, from material accumulation equaling happiness to quality of life capabilities as a significant contributor to well being. As contemporary social work theorist Patricia McGrath Morris (2002, p. 368) notes:

> in contrast to the Rawlsian institutional framework that defines society's social justice principles, the capabilities approach examines the conception of what makes a good life for an individual and builds on this to develop the capabilities framework for a just society.

A significant shift of consciousness will not be an easy undertaking, especially for most Western societies, for many have lost the language and facility to assess satisfaction apart from material consumption. A capabilities social justice agenda can contribute to a new view of human satisfaction by helping people appraise ways of being that are internally rewarding, fully sustainable, not damaging to nature and not based on consumptive materialism. Important activities would include such simple activities as plain conversation, civic participation, spiritual rituals, neighborhood/community gatherings, family outings, artistic pursuits, music, dance, literature, and experiencing nature. This is a kind of sustainable life vision adorned with nonmaterial sources of fulfillment. It includes the kinds of activities and associations which most people affirm are the main determinants of happiness (Durning, 1992, 1996).

Nussbaum (1999, 2000) has built extensively on Sen's work and offers a more finely nuanced conceptualization of a socially just society from a capabilities perspective. Like Sen, Nussbaum argues that social justice, properly conceived, includes more than just a fair distribution of available goods or the freedom to pursue one's dedicated interests without interference. For Nussbaum, a socially just society ensures a safety net of core capabilities that allows each person to live a fully human life filled with opportunities to actualize one's internal and external potential within a supportive environmental context. This perspective does not adopt a kind of neo-Luddite escapism eschewing all material advances but rather shifts the uncritical focus away from material accumulation to the achievement of an inter-generationally sustainable life style festooned

with predominately nonmaterial sources of well-being. It offers to extend our understanding of social justice beyond meeting some minimal level of material need. It accentuates social work's historic emphasis on the inherent dignity and well-being of persons in their unique space. Again Morris (2002) perceptively observes:

> Similar to social work's perspective of person-in-environment, Nussbaum's central capabilities are comprised of what she calls 'combined capabilities'—capabilities that require both internal and external states of readiness. She asserts that to realize a central capability 'entails not only promoting the appropriated development of people's internal powers, but also preparing the environment' to secure the capability to achieve well-being. (p.369)

Nussbaum has developed a set of ten central capabilities critical to living a fully human life in a manner not heavily dependent upon traditional neo-liberal admonitions suggesting self worth comes most readily as a by-product of amassing material goods. These core capabilities extend far beyond a redistribution of primary goods and focus on central, generally nonmaterial, qualities necessary to a just and sustainable society. The ultimate measure of living fully human lives is how well we live rather than how long. The following table is an adaptation of Morris's (2002) review of Nussbaum's (2000) original work. The current conceptualization adds two additional factors called family/community and sustainability.

Life/well-being

Being able to live well to the end of a human life of normal length

Bodily Health
Being able to have good health, including reproductive health, to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter and sanitation facilities

Bodily Integrity
Being able to move freely from place to place; having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign; to be able to honor the sensate faculties of the body to experience its world

Senses, thought, imagination and spirituality

Being able to use the senses to imagine, think, reason and intuit—and to do these things in a truly human way….Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self-expressive works of creativity and functions of one's own choice, religious, spiritual literary, musical and so forth. Being able to use one's creative capacities in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression.

Connectivity Emotions

Being able to have attachments to things, humans and non-human beings outside ourselves. Not having one's emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety, consumeristic induced sense of scarcity, or by traumatic events of war, abuse or neglect.

Practical and Moral reasoning

Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life

Affiliation

Being able to live with and toward other human and non-human others, to recognize and show as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.

Other species

Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animal, plants, and the world of nature.

Play/recreation

Being able to laugh, to play, and to enjoy recreational activities.

Interaction with one's social and physical environment

Being able to participate effectively in socio-political choices that govern one's life, being able to hold property in conjunction with the common good; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; and having the freedom from unwarranted intrusions into one's personal life by governmental or corporate interests.

Family/Community

Being able to live safely and without fear of want or privation within

family structures that enhance individual development and communal connection. Being able to establish, maintain and choose local communities of support that are mutually fulfilling and which contribute to individual well-being and collective cohesiveness

Sustainability

Meeting the needs of present and future generations for goods, services and support that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

These capabilities become a primary epistemological starting point for social work to enrich its instructional and practice frameworks. Although embryonic, it offers the profession a meaningful framework to begin more refined critical reflection on its historic social justice efforts.

Implications for social work and practice teaching

The question our previous discussion elicits is how this impacts the teaching of social work practice. One may reasonably ask, what does all this have to do with the typical social work academic or practice instructor in the classroom or in the field trying very hard to inculcate ideas of self-determination, service and social justice into their doe-eyed students. At the level of micro practice, if social work is to live conscientiously out of its commitment to and value for social justice it must face square on it's tacit approval of a model of society that creates ever deeper inequality and environmental degradation—insuring a world hell-bent on racing to its inevitable end.

Consumer capitalism makes profit out of the disappointment and depression of the unsatisfied masses. The rage and alienation engendered by unreal and unhealthy social comparisons, overheated aspirations and inflated guarantees promising more than can ever be delivered is a significant contributory cause, , for a spiraling array of mental health and social problems in many parts of the world. As professionals, we must ask, how are we serving the best interests, dignity and justice interests of our clients by suggesting that the key to their healing and progress is to join this march to madness? Indeed, by virtue of their poverty,

ethnicity or class many of the people social worker's serve already feel lost and depressed because of their lack of access to this system—by their failure to live up to a kind of spurious individualism that defines self through purchases and possessions. Are we simply suggesting that our clients find a way, with our help, to do 'the system' better?

Social work can never just be about pandering to the interests of the elite, ruling class by serving up consumer oriented, western style homilies on family values, moral breakdown, hard work and consumer nirvana to the struggling masses in western society and the desolate poor of the developing world. Social work must begin to seriously reconsider a model of justice advocating for a solution that simply posits a more equitable and fair distribution of material resources. If we do not, we are simply finding more creative ways to encourage our clients to full participation in a culture of desire that increasingly conditions them to detest who they are, to resent how they look, to covet what they don't have and to relentlessly endeavor to meet their perceived failures through bigger or better artifacts of consumer society. The absolute critical psycho-social component to consumer capitalism is to first make us miserable and then to promise us our salvation through some item for consumption which will cure our misery. Many of our clients know this story all to well and know how utterly impossible it is to keep pace with it.

Practice teaching in the United States is commonly referred to as field education or field work. It has historically played a pivotal role in the profession's development and is one of the unique markers of social work. It is where students get their first real taste of the rigors of practice. One of most identifiable impacts of a globalized culture is the degree to which public service institutions have been eclipsed by a new emphasis on a competitive, private, consumeristic, marketplace mentality. Clients are no longer clients—they have become consumers.. . .

The potentially disastrous impact of this fundamental shift in service ideology on practice teaching specifically and social work education generally in the US is beginning to find its way into the literature (Besthorn, 2004; Donner, 1996; Emenhiser, Barker, & DeWoody, 1995; Evans, 1999; Fisher & Karger, 1997; Gibelman & Demone, 1998; Regehr, Leeson, Regehr & Fusco, 2002). No attempt will be made to elucidate those findings here. Rather, our purpose shall be to consider a number of important first principles that have emerged from a reconsideration of globalized consumer culture impact on social work's social justice and practice teaching legacies.

First, the profession must begin to incorporate insights from alternative theoretical models into a much richer and more complex worldview than that provided by traditional, neo-liberal, social welfare based economism. Social workers are world citizens first and foremost, not only having a responsibility to train students in professional knowledge and technique, but also to help catalyze a conscientization of responsibility to a world community which can only survive in a culture of permanence and peace. Secondly, social work must develop a much more sophisticated understanding of the relationship of consumerism to meeting basic human needs. What is the purpose of consumerism as currently conceived and how does it contribute to actually meeting basic human needs and improving quality of life? At a minimum, this analysis would suggest, thirdly, that we begin the difficult dialogue of appraising the ethics of a globalized consumer culture and the uncritical linkage of it with human well-being and core tenets of social work practice. Initial questions would involve assessing how one person's consumptive patterns prevents others from meeting their most basic needs, how consumerism inhibits full social participation, how and to what degree does consumerism contribute to human happiness and in what way is the earth's carrying capacity seriously strained by unfettered material accumulation. Fourth, social work must explore the meaning of each of the twelve core components of the Capabilities Perspective which we have suggested as essential for living a fully human life. We must also consider their applicability to social work's understanding of a just society and how the profession has tended to define the good life, well-being, happiness and success. The global Eco-Village Movement (Trainer, 1998), now emerging in parts of Europe, North America and the developing world, is just one example of a movement that is grabbling with these concerns in everyday reality and is a place social work can learn from and contribute to a sustainable, post-consumeristic society.

Finally, the profession must develop new ways to train future social workers through our practice teaching protocols. This means finding innovative means to educate social workers who will *not* simply work to maintain the status quo—working to shape our clients into better *producers* and *consumers*. This suggests a profession sensitized to the difference between *working with* versus *helping* clients. In a sense, social workers are more than just social workers. We are human workers, who walk beside, witness, encourage, and support the capacity of every human being *to live a fully human life*. As this quote from an anonymous

aboriginal woman proffers,

> if you have come to help us, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with ours, then let us work together. (Sheridan, personal communication)

Conclusion

This paper has suggested that we are at a critical apex of history. By most accounts, this is a very difficult transition moment in human evolution. New vision is required. In the words of Ramonet (1998, p. 1) 'there is a need for dreamers who can think and thinkers who can dream. The answer will not be a neatly-packaged, custom-built project. It will be a new way of looking at things.' In like manner, social work needs a new vision of globalization, a revised definition of social justice and creative new ways to help enhance the capacity of all human beings while steadfastly sustaining the earth. We can continue with our current ideology of consumerism and continue blindly down the path of high material accumulation accompanied by diminishing happiness, greater social stratification and increased eco-system devastation. Or, we can come together with an emerging collective consciousness and aspire to a new ascension that is grounded in sound policy, enlivened by a new commitment and inspired by a greater faith. As Myers (2000) suggests:

> This ascension is similar to climbing to the next anthropological stage. No one on earth has any other way left—but upward…Those who take this upward road—those who live remembering the future—will fulfill the ancient prophecy … 'You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in'. (p.295)

The choice and the action to birth a new world based on capabilities rather than consumption is ours. Admittedly, given the current state of human affairs this vision seems a long way from coming to fruition. But, in light of the remarkable potential emerging in the human species, it is hard to imagine a possibility more worthy of our collective imagination and inspiration.

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