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Abstract. Minimalism has appeared in recent years as a lifestyle that helps people regain control over their lives when they are feeling overwhelmed by work and expectations. It seems that what most of us perceive as our personal failure to meet demands is in reality a perfectly normal phenomenon in today's world governed by consumerism. As observed by philosopher Herbert Marcuse, people have become trapped in consumerism. Consumerism has embedded in us a need for consumption, a need that we can no longer identify as false because it subjectively feels as our own. Minimalism is an attempt to simplify one's life in order to gain more enjoyment and fulfilment and it involves becoming aware of the trap of consumerism. By consciously choosing to own fewer material possessions people have been able to free themselves from unfulfilling pursuits and exhausting work hours. The main idea is that the fewer material needs we have, the more freedom we gain and this idea is nothing new. The very same principle was taught by Diogenes in Ancient Greece. Diogenes lived with minimal material possessions to show that happiness was possible even without money or social status and this ancient wisdom is still relevant today.

Key words: minimalism, consumerism, Marcuse, Diogenes

Minimalism has appeared in recent years as a lifestyle that helps people to regain control over their lives when they are feeling overwhelmed by work, commitments and expectations. Evidently there is a significant number of people who feel unhappy with their everyday lives and overwhelmed by their to-do lists. It seems that what most of us perceive as our personal failure to meet the demands of our specific situation is in reality a perfectly normal phenomenon in today's world, which is why no matter how much effort and time we invest in improving our situation it seems that we simply cannot get ahead. No matter how much effort we invest we seem to be continually buried under a mountain of expectations, obligations and chores. As long as we believe this to be our personal failure we will overlook the fact that this condition is simply a product of the modern world. We live in a consumer society and this influences all aspects our lives even though most of us do not think about it until we feel overwhelmed, lost and depressed. It has been suggested that adopting a minimalist lifestyle could be the solution to many of our modern problems and while the people promoting minimalism are not philosophers but instead people of various backgrounds who have personally experienced the benefits of minimalism, I believe the main ideas of minimalism can easily be found in the teachings of Ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes. This is just another interesting example of how ancient philosophy can still be helpful, meaningful and relevant in modern society if we remember to look to it for advice.

Depression and various other mental health issues have become so common and prominent in rich western countries that it seems imprudent to consider those issues anomalies and look for their causes in people's personal lives and situations. It does rather seem that the issue is systematic, that there are foundational elements of modern society that cause this phenomenon. Depression and other mental health issues are diagnoses that generally correspond to an intense feeling of unhappiness, a lack of fulfilment, wellbeing and stability in one's life. When this becomes a common occurrence it brings into question the basic paradigm of our modern lives. If there is a foundational element of modern society that causes people to become deeply unhappy and unsatisfied with their lives, then there is something fundamentally wrong with the way our society is structured. If we try to identify the fundamental structure in today's modern world, we will inevitably find that consumerism has shaped the way we function in the world today and even the way we perceive the world and ourselves.

Our everyday lives are subjected to the imperative of consumption. We invest our time and hard work in an attempt to satisfy our role as consumers without even consciously realising the motivation behind our actions. We are constantly in pursuit of the next purchase, our list of needs seems to expand indefinitely and we therefore continue to fall short of our own and society's expectations. If our main goal in life was to obtain a certain material object, while seemingly shallow, this goal would at least be attainable. The problem lies in the fact that a single purchase does not support consumerism as a system. Consumerism requires us to keep extending our list of desired material goods. Consumerism cannot exist without consumers so it naturally reaches beyond economic structures and institutions, it influences us as well, our psychology, our being. As astutely observed by philosopher Herbert Marcuse, people have become trapped in consumerism. Consumerism has embedded in us a need for consumption, a need that we can no longer identify as false because it subjectively feels as our own. While I have not observed an increase in the popularity of Marcuse's philosophy I have noticed that his ideas are appearing in public discourse in relation to a "new" lifestyle called minimalism. Minimalism is a method of reducing distractions in one's life in order to focus on what matters. Minimalism is an attempt to simplify one's life in order to gain more enjoyment and fulfilment and it involves becoming aware of the trap of consumerism. By consciously choosing to own fewer material possessions and decreasing their consumption people have been able to free themselves from stressful obligations, unfulfilling pursuits and exhausting work hours. Consumerism has influenced our perception so that possession of material things is integral to our social status, but it is possible to become aware of this trap and choose to own less despite the social pressure we will probably encounter. Stepping outside the popular crowd might be nothing new for those who are philosophers at heart, but it is a major struggle for most people which is precisely why the consumerist system functions perfectly. The key is, as Marcuse observed, for people to develop a false perception of their own needs. Instead of fresh air, clean water, free time and being surrounded by nature we value material possessions to the point that we not only perceive all those needs as equally important, but we actually forget about our real needs and focus only on the false needs for consumption. The lack of focus on our actual needs such as free time and proximity to nature may still damage us deeply even if we are not aware of it, which is in my opinion why so many mental health issues have an undefined cause. Far too many cases of

mental health issues are blamed on genetics while the fundamental structure of modern society that places unnatural and overwhelming burdens on us is not identified as one of the possible causes. As a society we overvalue material possessions and consequently glorify busyness as a commendable trait while rest and relaxation are perceived as problematic and indicative of laziness. This is contradictory to the understanding that rest and relaxation are among our fundamental needs which means that the pursuit of goals dictated by consumerism prevents us from fulfilling our real and fundamental needs. Another product of constant busyness in pursuit of material goals is the lack of time for pursuing meaningful non-material goals. This can include a lack of intimacy in our closest relationships as well as a lack of activities meaningful to us such as volunteering, helping our community or self-improvement. As all these phenomena occur at once as a consequence of living a normal life in the modern world there seems to be more than sufficient cause for a development of a health problem such as depression. The basic paradigm of our modern world as dictated by consumerism leads us to investing all our time and energy into a pursuit that does not give us true satisfaction and at the same time divests us of the time and energy necessary for activities that we actually need to be happy.

Fortunately, some people have started to understand the underlying causality in our common lack of happiness and through making changes to their own lives discovered that their time and happiness can be reclaimed once we free ourselves of the demands of consumerism. The message of minimalism is that by choosing to stop investing so much of our time and energy into material possessions we can reclaim our lives and discover the freedom to spend our time and resources on what is meaningful and truly fulfilling. Minimalism seems to be working for many people and as there are no strict rules to follow it is not very difficult to understand and implement so the popularity of the idea is growing. The main idea is that the fewer material needs we have, the more freedom we gain and this idea is, of course, nothing new. The very same principle was taught by Diogenes 2000 years ago. Diogenes lived with minimal material possessions to show that happiness was possible even without money or social status. It is always interesting to rediscover how relevant and useful the wisdom of ancient philosophers is. Of course it is not necessary to adopt all of Diogenes' extreme lifestyle choices for this one principle to be beneficial. As evidenced by the people who have found happiness through moderate versions of minimalism, happiness is still attainable in the modern world if you are able to resist the pressures of consumerism and expectations of society and focus instead on what truly gives meaning to your life.

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