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CONSUMPTION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Abstract: How should consumers exercise their basic economic powers? Recently, several authors have argued that consumption to bring about social change must be democratic. Others maintain that we may consume in ways that we believe promote positive change. This paper rejects both accounts and provides a new alternative. It argues that, under just institutions, people may consume as they like as long as they respect the institutions' rules. Absent just institutions, significant moral constraints on consumption exist. Still, it is permissible, if not obligatory, for people to pursue non-democratic, genuinely positive, change within whatever moral constraints exist.

Keywords: ethical consumption, common good anarchism, democratic consumption, positive change consumption

1. INTRODUCTION

How should consumers exercise their basic economic powers? Recently, several authors have argued that only democratic consumption (i.e. purchasing) is ethical (Hussain 2012; Christiano 2016*a*, 2016*b*).[1] Some argue, for instance, that ethical consumption must equalize bargaining power (Christiano 2016*b*). Others maintain that if consumption aims to bring about social change, it has to promote democratic decision-making about

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[1] For discussion of this view in the literature by people endorsing either similar constraints on ethical consumption or other business practices in at least some circumstances see, for instance: Navin (2015), Silver (2015), Wettstein and Baur (2015), Beckstein (2016), Hohl (2016) and Marti (2016). Some of these people may focus on how consumers should *think* about their basic economic powers, though that is not the issue here.

matters that concern the public and democratic governance generally (Hussain 2012). On these accounts, we may engage in ethical consumption for other reasons (e.g. to avoid, and compensate for, complicity in violating rights).[2] So, I focus here primarily on consumption that aims to bring about social change and these people can qualify the arguments that follow appropriately where needed. *Democratic* accounts contrast with what some label *common good anarchism*. According to the common good anarchist, we may consume in ways that we believe promote positive change. This paper rejects both accounts and proposes a new alternative.

This paper argues that if democracy is too central, it can prevent truly positive change; but, at the same time, we cannot just do whatever we believe brings about positive change and must recognize democratic processes' importance.[3] More precisely, it defends the following account: People may generally consume as they like as long as they respect just institutions' rules. Absent just institutions, significant moral constraints on consumption exist. Still, it is at least permissible for people to pursue non-democratic, genuinely positive, change within these constraints. Although promoting democracy has value, people may also promote other positive processes and outcomes. Let us call this *positive change consumption.* Allowing positive change consumption is necessary to respect individual freedom and protect important processes and outcomes (e.g. fair employment processes, environmental preservation, poverty reduction, and so forth). On the positive change account, what people are morally required to do depends on the justice of the institutions under which they must act.

In some cases, the positive change account disagrees with democratic accounts. Consider the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) case. On some democratic theories, we should praise the FSC for including corporate, as well as environmental, interests (Hussain 2012).[4] Critics assert, however, that the FSC's governance structure hinders the group's environmental aims. They say the FSC 'greenwashes' logging companies, given that companies logging old-growth forests, and engaging in other environmentally destructive practices, can receive FSC certification (Forest Stewardship Council Watch 2011). Critics argue that the FSC

[2] Waheed Hussain also says that it is permissible to consume in ways that one views as charitable. For further discussion, see Hussain (2012).

[3] All parties to this debate suppose, I think, that consumption that aims at positive change often influences outcomes for better or worse. So, I set aside here the debate about ethical consumption's causal efficacy and assume efficacy throughout.

[4] Even if the FSC does do a reasonably good job in achieving its environmental aims, it is doubtful that a truly representative membership would allow the FSC to achieve its aims. Only certain forestry companies are represented on the board of directors. Strong environmental groups' representatives counter-balance industry pressure. Hussain has revised his view more recently, however. See Hussain and Moriarty (2016).

should not include logging companies' representatives on its board, never mind give them equal voting rights in the general assembly. Suppose the critics are right that promoting sustainable forestry management can, with less deliberative and inclusive governance, secure better *outcomes* and *processes.* If so, on the positive change account, we may back efforts to reform the FSC or support other, less democratic, efforts to preserve forests like The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). In this, the positive change account agrees with common good anarchism.

In other cases, however, the positive change account parts ways with common good anarchism. Suppose that the FSC did not promote positive change (suppose for instance that it actually contributed to deforestation and no good institutions exist to prevent it from having this consequence). But, suppose that people mistakenly believe that the FSC contributes to positive change. Common good anarchists would insist that it is permissible for people to support the FSC. Common good anarchists think people may purchase *whatever* they *believe* promotes positive change. Here the positive change account rejects common good anarchism. The positive change account only claims that it is generally permissible for people to consume in ways that *actually* promote positive change.

To make the case for positive change consumption, the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 motivates the inquiry by considering some democratic and anarchist alternatives. Section 3 defends positive change consumption and responds to some potential objections to the account. Section 4 concludes by explaining how the paper's arguments provide reason to question other procedural (and democratic) constraints on consumption.

2. DEMOCRATIC CONSUMPTION AND COMMON GOOD ANARCHISM

On democratic accounts, ethical consumption (at least if it promotes social change) must aim at democratic change. On some democratic accounts, ethical consumers promoting social change should, at least, prepare to seek democratic approval from the appropriate legislative bodies (Hussain 2012). On other accounts, they must only aim to equalize bargaining power in markets (Christiano 2016*a*, 2016*b*).

On perhaps the most prominent and philosophically sophisticated democratic theory, consumption that promotes social change must respect basic liberties and advance a reasonable conception of the common good.[5] Moreover, such consumption requires transparent deliberative procedures that engage many stake-holders, and citizens must use

[5] Again, several authors have taken up this important argument in the literature endorsing either similar constraints on ethical consumption or other business practices in at least

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their bargaining power to promote social change 'as part of the wider democratic process, a kind of ongoing, informal prologue to formal democratic lawmaking' (Hussain 2012: 125). On this *proto-legislative* account, those engaging in consumption to promote social change should act as a working committee for citizens in general; they should provide the public with arguments for the rules that they believe all citizens should adopt. Those who 'represent the most important perspectives on … [an] …issue in society' should make these rules (Hussain 2012: 125–6). To illustrate the proto-legislative account, consider a hypothetical case where some refuse to use nuclear power and, thus, try to make its development too expensive. On this account, even if those boycotting are correct to reject nuclear power, they do not have license to try to prevent it in this way (Hussain 2012: 120–1). More formally, consumption that aims to promote social change is acceptable, on the proto-legislative version of the democratic account, only when:

(1) The exercise of bargaining power [consumption involves] does not deprive anyone of their basic liberties.
(2) The exercise of bargaining power is directed at (significantly) advancing an agenda framed in terms of a reasonable conception of the common good.
(3) The formal democratic process has not already addressed the issue in question.
(4) The process that guides the exercise of bargaining power is appropriately representative and deliberative.
(5) The process that guides the exercise of bargaining power generates standards and arguments that can be the basis of future legislation.
(6) The overall effort aims to raise awareness of the issue and (if necessary) to put it on the formal legislative agenda (Hussain 2012: 126).

The proto-legislative account allows, however, that some injustices are so bad that citizens need not privilege formal democratic politics in social life (Hussain 2012: 134). Nevertheless, it suggests people should privilege democratic politics in most wealthy liberal democracies (Hussain 2012: 135).[6]

some circumstances (see, for instance: Navin 2015; Wettstein and Baur 2015; Silver 2015; Beckstein 2016; Hohl 2016; Marti 2016).

[6] Some democratic theorists reject Andreas Follesdal's worry that consumers must help 'fill the global governance gap' and use their economic power to ensure that companies respect workers, communities, and the environment, otherwise global capitalism is unjustifiable (Hussain 2012: 119–20). Proponents reply that, even if someone must fill the 'global governance gap', bargaining power's unrestricted use in the global market will just ensure

Internationally, the proto-legislative account asserts that: 'whenever citizens in one community use their purchasing decisions to advance a social agenda, and advancing this agenda involves using their bargaining power to shape behavior and practices in another community, they must respect the institutions and processes of democratic change in the other community' (Hussain 2012: 142). On the proto-legislative account, it is not acceptable for UK consumers to refuse to purchase things from companies that do not meet UK labour standards in the Philippines. UK consumers may only refuse to purchase things from companies that fail to meet democratically created Philippine, or international, labour standards.

Some democratic theorists argue that only consumption that aims at proto-legislative democratic change respects procedural norms 'essential to the justification of our liberal democratic social order' (Hussain 2012: 117). These include respect for (1) basic liberties, (2) political equality, (3) democratic deliberation, (4) justified coercion and (5) managed politicization (Hussain 2012: 117). Consider each point in turn.

First, democratic theorists argue that allowing consumers to exercise their market power undemocratically undermines individuals' basic liberties. These liberties include free thought, conscience, religion and association. The better organized, who have greater resources, can force others to adhere to the way they understand the common good (Hussain 2012). So, democratic theorists conclude that consumption to promote social change must respect basic liberties.

Second, democratic theorists claim that 'citizens should be able to participate as equals in deciding how society will address important issues of common concern' (Hussain 2012: 118). They believe non-democratic social change consumption relies on unequal market power that undermines this equality (Hussain 2012: 118).

Third, democratic theorists maintain that people should deliberate together to find the policies the best reasons support. Unrestricted consumption allows those with the greatest bargaining power to

that consumers in the developed world are in control (Hussain 2012: 120). However, the governance gap is persistent and the poor and environment may do better if developed country consumers combat the gap. Legal or governance changes are often cyclical and many problems remain unresolved indefinitely. When pressing issues are not resolved quickly enough, good results often become impossible. We must preserve old growth forests quickly before people cut them all down. In the FSC case, for instance, governments have considered what constitutes acceptable forestry practices many times. Yet, the debate continues. In the USA, for example, the Bush administration made it easier for companies to log old growth forests on public lands by altering survey and manage requirements in the Northwest Forest Plan. Companies continue to challenge the Plan (Hanscom 2004). Moreover, sometimes overcoming the governance gap is not desirable. Corporations exercise great influence over many democratic governments. Actual democratic processes are imperfect and government intervention often produces worse results than purely market-based efforts to promote social change.

bypass this process in implementing their view of the common good. Consumption should not undermine the democratic process. People should, instead, deliberate democratically to resolve difficult disagreements.

Fourth, democratic theorists argue that, since states' coercive laws underwrite market power, consumers aiming to promote social change must offer a public rationale for consuming in ways that they believe promote positive change. They point out that states' coercive laws underwrite consumers' market power. They believe people should not use market power to promote their individual view of the common good. Because consumption relies on this power, some democratic theorists maintain that it may only promote proto-legislative democratic change (Hussain 2012: 134).

Finally, democratic theorists argue that consumers should not do things that undermine the 'fabric of social life' (Hussain 2012: 123). Some believe political acts beyond the formal political process undermine this fabric. They suggest we should not bring up hard disagreements about the public good in market transactions. They believe we should resolve disagreements in democratic fora as keeping them in this domain helps maintain trust and good will in society. Democratic theorists maintain that people should refrain from promoting social change in everyday market transactions because it is divisive to focus on political disagreement. To appropriately manage politicization, they conclude, consumption to promote social change must be democratic (and fulfil the conditions in the proto-legislative account, in particular) (Hussain 2012: 124).

Common good anarchists object that democratic accounts *unjustly* limit freedom because they prohibit people from consuming in ways that they believe promote positive (even if non-democratic) change. On common good anarchism, we may consume whatever we believe brings positive change. 'If individuals see that some activity is damaging the common good (e.g. harming a shared natural resource, violating basic rights, and the like), they can use their bargaining power in the market peacefully to pressure those engaged in the activity to stop what they are doing' (Hussain 2012: 128). The idea is that everyone can, in their private capacity, advance the good as they see it within borders as well as internationally; people are not constrained to promoting democratic change. On this account, if some believe it is better to stop nuclear power's development with a boycott, they may do so.

Presumably, common good anarchists care both for individual freedom and the goods that people can secure through consumption. Often people value the wrong things but common good anarchists believe people may pursue what they want. Individuals' identities, autonomy, and liberty all merit respect. Pursuing positive change helps people secure many valuable things.

Common good anarchists can invoke arguments for autonomy or liberty to defend the idea that people may choose what values to pursue in market transactions (Nozick 1974; Rawls 1993). I articulate one argument that provides some support for this conclusion below (though ultimately, I argue, it better supports positive change consumption).

Consider a well-known argument that common good anarchists might invoke. Letting people pursue their ends enhances efficiency and increases wealth: in general, we may make private purchasing decisions because doing so maximizes preference satisfaction (Hussain 2012: 137–8). Economists argue that free markets are efficient. They bring Pareto optimal improvements in preference satisfaction; they make at least some better off without making anyone worse off (Buchanan 1985). So, common good anarchists might maintain that people may purchase whatever they believe promotes positive change.

Some democratic theorists also believe in free markets' power to improve welfare and, so, allow some exceptions to the claim that consumers should only promote social change democratically. They say people may consume based on price alone at least when markets are reasonably well-managed with measures in place to constrain inequality and protect wages (Hussain 2012: 122, note 16). Democratic theorists part ways with common good anarchists, however, in arguing that we must respect democracy's procedural value, or fulfil democratic constraints, when we use consumption to promote positive change.

We should reject the efficiency argument because more than efficiency matters, and it can be bad for people to fulfil even price-based preferences. Whether people should fulfil preferences depends on what preferences they have. Some have morally abhorrent preferences even if they mistakenly believe fulfilling them will promote positive change. Moreover, purchasing goods only to save money (which is how people normally use bargaining power) can have bad consequences. If people maximize profit without concern for others' welfare, that often undermines democratic equality, even if it advances economic growth. Sufficient safeguards do not exist to ensure, for instance, that poor producers (e.g. labourers) get a living wage in many democratic countries (Ruben 2008). We should not follow Milton Friedman in arguing that intentionally using market power to bring about positive change etc. is undemocratic, whereas using market power to purchase whatever one wants is perfectly democratic even if it predictably undermines equality (Friedman 1970).[7] Sometimes we should endorse imperfectly efficient resource distribution, e.g. to help people meet their basic needs. The

[7] Friedman commits to this idea in the context of making an argument for a much different thesis. See Christiano (2016*a*, 2016*b*) for criticism of some views that may support his position.

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idea that 'no procedurally sound process' but free markets 'could achieve comparabl[y good] results' is absurd (Hussain 2012: 137).[8] What follows argues that consumption that actually promotes positive change may better help us secure Pareto superior improvements in the space of *truly moral* preferences (the preferences that bring about genuinely positive change if fulfilled).[9]

The next section defends positive change consumption against both democratic and anarchical accounts. It argues that the same deep commitment to individual freedom that animates common good anarchism constrains requirements on citizens' non-legislative activities under just institutions and, so, requires rejecting democratic accounts. However, it suggests that individuals only have the (general) freedom to purchase whatever they like *under just institutions*. At least absent such institutions, people cannot consume whatever they believe promotes positive change. They must respect whatever moral constraints exist. This requires rejecting common good anarchism. Moreover, on the positive change account, democratic processes have significant value, but this value does not always trump. Within moral constraints, people may pursue other good processes and things that matter.

3. DEFENDING POSITIVE CHANGE CONSUMPTION

3.1. The Argument

This section defends positive change consumption against both democratic and common good anarchist alternatives, but, first: a word about terminology. On democratic accounts, consumption must *respect* democratic processes. Otherwise, it *violates* democratic ideals. (Again, see the discussion of the proto-legislative account above for one way of making sense of this idea.) However, democratic accounts require people to (e.g.) try to 'raise awareness of the issue [they are concerned about] and (if necessary) to put it on the formal legislative agenda' (Hussain 2012: 126). The accounts do not always require success. So, in what follows, I sometimes say that these accounts require us to 'aim at', 'promote' and

[8] Moreover, once democratic theorists allow that efficiency can justify exceptions to the procedural requirement of promoting democratic control over production processes, they must explain why no other exceptions exist. If there is a conflict between promoting democratic control over production processes and other moral requirements, promoting democratic control over production processes does not always take precedence. We can also give an internal argument against the democratic view that allows this constraint. We can fulfil more preferences if people can pursue their preferences more broadly (not just their price-based preferences). Even introducing moral constraints, one can secure efficiency in the space of moral preferences by doing so.

[9] The idea here is that fulfilling some preferences actually promotes positive change and we should care about those, not that we should maximize the satisfaction of preferences about morality or even preferences for things people believe bring about positive change.

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'contribute to' democratic change. I do not claim that, on these accounts, promoting democratic change is merely permissible or advances the good. On democratic accounts, we must do so.

First, consider why we should reject democratic accounts (which prohibit promoting non-democratic positive change). Respect for individual freedom requires respecting individual's freedom to promote positive change as they like within institutional rules. The positive change account endorses the institutional thesis, on which good institutions should provide a framework of rules within which people may freely make choices. On this thesis, if purchasing decisions are just like other choices, people may normally consume as they like within just institutions' rules (Murphy 1998). These rules should prohibit, or at least discourage, purchasing decisions that violate rights, or other moral requirements. Moreover, people should refrain from making such decisions. Nevertheless, people may consume in ways that allow them to promote positive change.

I cannot fully defend the institutionalist thesis here, but consider its motivation:[10] We should divide moral labour so that background institutions provide rules within which individuals may generally pursue their interest (Rawls 1971; Nagel 1995: Ch. 6, 9; Murphy 1998). These institutions 'secure justice more effectively than could people acting without institutions, they also minimize the costs people must sustain to secure justice' (Murphy 1998: 259).

The institutionalist thesis differs from what Liam Murphy calls *institutionalism.* According to institutionalism, different moral principles apply to institutions and individuals. Rather, on the institutionalist thesis, just institutions establish just background rules under which 'individuals and associations are then left free to advance their ends … secure in the knowledge that elsewhere in the social system the necessary corrections to preserve background justice are being made' (Murphy 1998: 268–9). The commitment to individual freedom at liberalism's cornerstone supports the thesis. 'People lead freer and better lives … if they can devote most of their concerns to their own affairs' (Murphy 1998: 258).

The institutionalist thesis does not deny people political obligations. People often have to ensure that their societies conform to democratic principles. They may, for instance, have to vote for appropriately democratic policies or engage in advocacy or activism.[11] The thesis only asserts that people should be free to make many choices under

[10] Perhaps I should also say that Hussain may accept the institutionalist thesis even if he rejects the idea that it should apply to consumption. Some argument is necessary for doing so, however.

[11] Thomas Nagel in *Equality and Partiality* worries that, if we put such institutions in place, people will lose motivation to adhere to them (Nagel 1995). But those living under just

just institutions that help us to coordinate action and fulfil moral responsibilities.

Again, if the claim that people may do what they want under just institutions' rules applies to market choices, people may consume non-democratically. Consumption must respect just public/deliberative democratic rules that protect basic liberties and so forth. Moreover, people may consume in ways that promote democratic decision-making. Still, even if their consumption promotes social change, it need not always promote democratic change. Even if people have to promote democratic change, they may do so in other ways. Just institutions may compensate for any unjustified market distortions consumers cause in attempting to promote positive change. The commitment to individual freedom underlying the positive change account supports this paper's conception of how we should exercise our basic economic powers: under just institutions, consumption is essentially private. It falls within the space people should have for acting according to their own views. If the appropriate background institutions guarantee justice, consumption should not count as a public, or political, act – part of a community's democratic self-governance.[12] Consumption that does not aim at democratic change differs from consumption that undermines democracy. Even if the latter is unacceptable, the former is permissible.

Even freedom under just institutions is not complete freedom, however, so we can conclude, second, that we must also reject common good anarchism. Just institutions should protect procedural norms 'essential to the justification of our liberal democratic social order' including respect for basic liberties, political equality, democratic deliberation, justified coercion and managed politicization (Hussain 2012: 117). People must respect just institutions' rules and these institutions should sometimes prevent individuals from purchasing things they believe promote the common good. So people should refrain from purchasing these things. They may even have to refrain from purchasing some of these things if just institutions allow them to purchase them.[13]

Finally, we should reject both democratic accounts and common good anarchism when we lack just institutions that help us fulfil our moral responsibilities. Absent just institutions, we need not act democratically every time we try to promote positive change. In fact, it is even more

institutions can recognize that they must support just institutions even if they do not need to strive for justice in everything they do.

[12] Note that just institutions can allow individuals to promote positive change through their consumption and, in doing so, may even rely on their actions to secure justice.

[13] Even if the anarchist is right to suggest people can consume whatever they believe promotes positive change under just institutions, however, it is easy to see why doing so is problematic in their absence (see the discussion below).

important that people promote (other) good procedures and ends absent just institutions than under them (that is, when just institutions fail to secure them for us). Prohibiting people from consuming in ways that promote non-democratic positive change, prevents positive change. Moreover, absent just institutions, people cannot purchase whatever they want in markets even if they abide by the rules that exist. Given that many states do not prohibit morally impermissible consumption, individuals should refrain from engaging in it. We cannot always justify using market power that relies on states' coercive rules to pursue what we believe brings about positive change. White people should not discriminate by, for instance, refusing to buy from minority ethnic or racial groups because they think white people should rule.[14] That undermines political equality, society's democratic character and misuses coercively enforced market power. We should also refrain from racial discrimination for many other reasons (most notably because it is unjust). However, I need not list all the constraints on ethical consumption to defend positive change consumption against common good anarchism. On positive change consumption, people may consume in ways that promote positive change within whatever moral constraints exist. To distinguish the account from common good anarchism, I need only point to a few relatively uncontroversial moral constraints. Presumably, one should not engage in consumption that violates basic rights or destroys the natural environment etc.[15]

In short, the positive change account cuts against both the democratic and common good anarchist alternatives. Against the common good anarchist, people cannot just do whatever they *think* promotes positive change, though people may generally consume in ways that *actually* promote positive change. Against democratic accounts, such consumption need not aim at democratic change. If people and the environment benefit if some people boycott nuclear power, e.g., they may do so.[16] We must recognized democratic processes importance but should not prohibit non-democratic positive change.

[14] Just institutions may also prohibit, rather than compensate for, this behaviour and individuals should refrain from engaging in it under just rules. Again, freedom under just institutions is not complete freedom (though people can do other things besides bring about democratic change).

[15] There are a variety of ways in which consumption may (e.g.) constitute a rights violation and contribute to, or support, such violations. If one consumes something another person owns without permission, one's consumption presumably violates rights. If one supports firms violating rights, or purchases products that result from such violations, one contributes to, and supports, these violations.

[16] This claim is, of course, compatible with argument for the stronger conclusion that people have to do so.

Moreover, the preceding arguments imply that we should reject both democratic accounts and common good anarchism in the international case (as well as locally). We may not have to promote democracy beyond our states' borders. Even if we do, we need not purchase only from companies that meet democratic local, or international, labour standards when we consume to advance social change. We can promote democracy in other ways. Plausibly, if we decide to do business in a country with low labour standards, we may purchase only from firms that abide by better standards. Sometimes announcing our intention to purchase only from companies that meet whatever democratic indigenous standards exist will lead to better standards, but not always (Pogge 2008). Often we can better, and more fairly, promote positive change. Moreover, people should not do things that hurt the global poor or environment (e.g.) in the meantime, even if they believe doing so promotes positive change.

Consider a case that illustrates how the positive change account differs from both the anarchistic and democratic alternatives in the international arena. Suppose consumers want to change labour standards in societies that do not do enough to protect poor workers. Consumers may support organizations like United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), which work with independent auditing authorities like the Workers' Rights Consortium (WRC), to ensure that factories respond to worker complaints, maintain decent working conditions, and pay workers a living wage.[17] This is so even though these organizations are not particularly democratic and even if one does not try to promote democratic change in doing so. On the other hand, consumers cannot support organizations that undermine fair labour standards or increase poverty even if they believe doing so promotes positive change. At least absent just institutions, people cannot purchase whatever they like if doing so relies on child labour, exacerbates poverty, destroys the environment, and so forth. They may wrongly support democratic consumption efforts that employ terrible processes or have unacceptable consequences. Compare the WRC with the Fair Labor Association (FLA). Like the WRC, the FLA engages companies in conversation to improve working conditions. However, unlike the WRC, the FLA gives companies control over monitoring their own factories. Some argue that, partly because it has deliberative aims, the FLA collaborates with companies

[17] They may do so by, for instance, boycotting university branded items. Moreover, universities themselves may promote positive change through their consumption. Similarly, consumers may purchase rugs from organizations, such as GoodWeave International, that have higher standards than many local communities for preventing child labour, if doing so advances procedural justice, reduces poverty in developing countries, or helps eliminate child labour, without any bad consequences (GoodWeave International 2013; United Students Against Sweatshops 2013).

and undermines worker campaigns for fairer labour standards.[18] If so, consumers cannot support the FLA even if it is more democratic. People cannot just consume whatever they think promotes positive change nor must they always promote democratic change.

Explaining the rationale behind the positive change account may not convince those who believe promoting consumer autonomy or democratic politics takes precedence over everything else, but it provides reason to question these views. Those who have such a strong commitment to these values must explain why they have over-riding importance.

3.2. Warding off Objections to the Argument for Positive Change Consumption

What follows responds to some worries democratic theorists may have about positive change consumption.[19] Recall from Section 2, that some democratic theorists argue that only democratic consumption respects (1) basic liberties, (2) political equality, (3) democratic deliberation, (4) justified coercion and (5) managed politicization. Can the positive change account do so? I explain why the positive change account respects basic liberties and need not undermine political equality, though more than equality matters. However, I argue that we need not always deliberate democratically. Moreover, I explain that we do not need to justify consumption that promotes positive change democratically even though we rely on states' coercively enforced rules in doing so. Finally, I argue that positive change consumption may not exacerbate politicization.

First, on the positive change account, consumption should generally respect basic liberties and political equality. Just institutions can compensate for any inequalities consumption creates. Recall that, even if people may consume as they like under just rules, just states can prohibit inappropriate consumption that, for example, fails to protect basic liberties or political equality. States should not generally restrict consumer choice in doing so. In some cases, they can avoid restricting individuals' consumption decisions by changing property rights. If people boycott sustainable energy, for instance, states can tax non-renewable energy to correct the distortion. Sometimes, however, states may restrict

[18] See, for instance, Daily Emerald (2000), FLA Watch (2008).

[19] No one should say those supporting positive change consumption subvert the democratic process or fail to respect people. States can limit individuals' consumption democratically without individual consumers aiming to bring about democratic change. Moreover, people may promote democratic change in other ways than through consumption. They can, for instance, lobby their government, engage in political activism, and so forth. USAS's efforts (e.g.) do not threaten democratic processes nor do I believe morality requires modifying them to promote democratic change. Supporting these organizations does not undermine good institutions for governing child labour and sweatshops.

consumer choice directly.[20] Moreover, on the positive change account, consumption should not undermine basic liberties or political equality even absent just institutions.[21]

Second, more than equality in decision-making matters. Unfortunately, the global poor have relatively little influence over global markets. Still, people may consume in ways that reduce poverty. If the WRC successfully requires factory owners to pay higher wages, these factories may close. Poor people may lose their jobs. They may complain that they should have more control over their fates. Perhaps consumers should refrain from demanding standards so high that factories employing many poor people must close.[22] But, no matter how rich consumers exercise their bargaining power, their choices greatly impact the global poor.[23] Poor people often lose their jobs just because the winds of fashion shift.[24] If rich consumers decide to follow poor countries' rules, the poor are still at their mercy. I believe we should restructure global markets to make them more equitable. We should, for instance, change labour standards around the world.[25] Still, in the meantime, we may also help people in other ways. Requiring people to engage only in democratic consumption prevents positive change. We may consume in other ways when doing so actually helps people.

Third, we need not support democratic deliberation when it does not guarantee good results or is counter-productive. Moral opinions diverge on many topics. Consider one case: People reasonably disagree about what constitutes fair labour standards – should children have to go to school to 16? 18? 21? (Satz 2010). The democratic constraint plausibly applies in these cases: rich people cannot undermine reasonable democratic decisions. At the same time, some positions are unreasonable; 5-year-olds should go to school, not work in a dangerous mine, recycling

[20] International organizations may also have a role to play in regulating consumption.

[21] At least, this is so when tragic tradeoffs are not required.

[22] It is, of course, an empirical question when this is the case and the consumers must rely on watchdog groups and media outlets to monitor for potentially bad consequences. However, those implementing ethical consumption efforts may bear some responsibility for ensuring that these consequences are brought to light and remediated appropriately.

[23] Shifting global demand can bankrupt poor farmers and even topple governments. Moreover, recall there is significant evidence that Fair Trade programmes benefit the poor, for instance Murray *et al.* (2003), Bacon (2005) and Ruben (2008).

[24] The market has always been an institution used to bring about change: By purchasing a product, consumers create an incentive to create more of it. By refusing to purchase a product, they create an incentive to change it or to create less of it.

[25] Consumption may have a role to play in helping restructure global markets if it can spur larger institutional change – if, for instance, industries respond to boycotts and other forms of consumer pressure by changing standards at a larger scale. There is some evidence that Fair Trade programmes may help raise prices for key products in the larger community (Ruben 2008).

hazardous electronics, or as a prostitute.[26] Often people appear to disagree because they lack decent options (that ethical consumption can help create) but to send their children to work. Often they simply cannot afford the necessary school fees, uniforms or even sufficient food. Still, deliberation cannot always decide disagreement about the common good. We cannot purchase sex or even clothing from 5-year-olds, when better options exist, even if people deliberate and conclude that we can. Unlike democratic accounts, the positive change account can explain why people may use their bargaining power to provide better options for children when deliberation fails: consumption that does this actually promotes positive change.

Sometimes people need further direction to determine what they may consume – though, that problem is not unique to the positive change account and deliberation may not provide the necessary guidance. After all, telling people to engage only in democratic consumption does not ensure that they do so either. People make moral mistakes. They may wrongly believe that we should keep coal-fired power plants open because they provide jobs even if creating jobs in a different sector benefits everyone. To address the issue, we do not just need a theory about what justifies ethical consumption. We need to know what energy policies we may implement. Deliberation may not help us acquire this information. Scientific study and ethical inquiry may be more effective.

Still, on the positive change account, people may generally use consumption to promote positive change, and often we know when consumption fulfils this condition. We have good evidence, for instance, that many Fair Trade programmes benefit poor farmers and sometimes larger communities (Murray *et al*. 2003; Bacon 2005; Ruben 2008).

Fourth, democratic theorists are wrong to insist that we need public justification for using market power to bring about social change. Recall how some democratic theorists argue that, since states' coercive laws underwrite market power, consumers aiming to promote social change must offer a public rationale for consuming in the ways that they do. They maintain that, because consumption relies on this power, it may only promote democratic change (and, in particular, it must be proto-legislative) (Hussain 2012: 134). Consumers do not need to offer a public rationale for their consumption, however, just because consumption relies on states' coercively enforced property rights. We only need a public rationale for states' coercion (and perhaps for the particular property rights states enforce). As long as people respect just rules, they may generally decide what to purchase as they like. They need not seek democratic approval for efforts to promote social change. Absent just

[26] This is so even though what is reasonable may depend heavily on contextual factors and empirical inquiry is essential to figure out what is possible in any particular context.

institutions, people cannot consume whatever they want. But as long as they respect whatever moral constraints exist, people may generally consume in ways that actually promote positive change.

Finally, will positive change consumption contribute to destructive politicization? Even in non-ideal circumstances, I do not think we must manage politicization by controlling consumption. Often, I think, consumption just reflects underlying political disagreement and does not exacerbate it. The fact that my parents refuse to buy anything from China, while I try to purchase sweatshop-free clothing, does not make us any more likely to argue about our underlying political disagreements. Rather, our purchases reflect the fact that they support the Tea Party, while I support the Greens. My parents also endorse the idea that consumption may promote positive change and our disagreement hinges on dispute about what actually does so. Moreover, I feel some solidarity with them when we both boycott Walmart to promote positive change (though we have different thoughts about why doing so is a good idea). Even if we used our purchasing power differently, I believe that would only reflect, and not exacerbate, politicization. Even if this is wrong, however, positive change consumption's proponents can maintain that some politicization is acceptable; they can constrain individuals' ability to consume in ways that promote positive change, for example when necessary to keep politicization within reasonable bounds.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper defended a new perspective on how consumers should exercise their basic economic powers. Recently, several authors have argued that ethical consumers can only promote democratic change. Some suggest that we must promote democracy by equalizing bargaining power in every transaction (Christiano 2016*a*, 2016*b*). Others argue that we can only use consumption to bring about social change if we aim to bring about democratic institutional change and promote public, open-minded, transparent debate with many stake-holders (Hussain 2012). Others endorse common good anarchism. According to the common good anarchist, we can consume in whatever ways we believe promote positive change. This paper argued that if democracy is too central, it can prevent truly positive change; but, at the same time, we cannot just do whatever we believe brings about positive change and must recognize democratic processes' importance. Rather, people can consume whatever promotes truly positive change.

This paper illustrated its arguments against democratic accounts by examining the proto-legislative account, in particular (though, I believe its arguments generalize to other democratic accounts). It suggested that, if bargaining power that supports ethical consumption 'is directed at

(significantly) advancing an agenda framed in terms of a reasonable conception of the common good', is representative and deliberative, 'generates standards and arguments that can be the basis of future legislation', and 'aims to raise awareness of the issue and (if necessary) to put it on the formal legislative agenda', it can be counter-productive, procedurally unfair, and – so – morally impermissible (contra Hussain 2012: 126). Often, we can better promote the common good in other ways than via legislative change. Good outcomes and fair processes are not always deliberative. Sometimes we need not raise awareness of an issue in a way that generates arguments for legislation. It is possible to address the issue more productively in other ways. In some cases, it is only permissible to exercise bargaining power if one does *not* aim to put the issue on the legislative agenda. This is so even when formal democratic processes have not addressed the issue before. If, for instance, a CEO is sexist, it is acceptable to boycott his firm to get him removed from his post, even if it is not acceptable to outlaw his speech or get him legally barred from running the company.[27] Rather, the paper argued that it is generally acceptable for people to consume in ways that allow them to promote positive social change. Allowing this is necessary to preserve room for individual freedom under just rules. When the rules are unjust, it is acceptable for people to use consumption to change those rules and fulfil other procedural, and substantive, moral requirements. However, they do not always have to promote democratic change.

At the same time, however, this paper argued that we should reject common good anarchism. Individuals may not consume whatever they believe promotes positive change. Just institutions should leave significant room for individuals to fulfil their preferences, but some have morally abhorrent preferences, just institutions should often prevent the realization of such preferences, and everyone should respect just institutions' rules. At least absent just institutions, there are some significant moral constraints on consumption. People cannot use consumption in ways that violate basic rights or liberties or result in great environmental destruction and so forth. This requires rejecting common good anarchism.

Rather, this paper defended the *positive change* account: under just institutions, people may consume as they like as long as they respect the institutions' rules. Absent just institutions, significant moral constraints on consumption exist. Still, people can, and may have to, pursue non-democratic, but genuinely positive, change within these constraints. The positive change account recognizes the importance of the considerations motivating both the democratic and common good anarchist alternatives. Individuals' identities, autonomy and liberty all merit respect, as do

[27] The author would like to thank Avi Appel for this example.

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democratic processes, but they are not all that matters. Positive change consumption helps people secure many other valuable things too.

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