ABSTRACT

One of the fundamental questions in philosophy is the question on how to live a good life. What constitutes a good life, and how should one practice it? This paper discusses the various approaches to achieving a good life as defined by philosophers and modern researchers. It explores the commercialization of the process, and discusses how materialism is marketed in addition to the impact of excessive consumerism. The paper provides a framework for approaching issues on materialism and the pursuit of the good life. Finally, it provides some possible solutions for integrating the pursuit of the good life with sustainable options.

Key words: Materialism; Happiness; Self-Actualization; Transformation.

INTRODUCTION

China’s fascination with Western lifestyles and the desire of the successful Chinese to enjoy the same material comforts as the wealthy in the West was already established by the beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. If one left Beijing sometime during early 2003 and drove north, one would notice how the landscape changed more than just from urban to rural. Beijing was already being transformed into a modern metropolis, but the countryside beyond, may have still looked poor. Suddenly though, one would pass by gated communities with names like Sun City, with broad streets, large two-car garage homes including fenced yards and swimming pools. It almost looked like Southern California. Although this development was in China, it is called Orange County and it is based on meeting the increasing fascination of the affluent Chinese with American lifestyle and material comforts. Although the average price at that time was about half a million dollars, all houses in the development sold within a month.

As globalization picks up speed, and the world becomes more interconnected, American consumption patterns are spreading all over the world. Given a chance, as soon as incomes rise, people in diverse cultures change their consumption patterns. They tend to abandon public transportation for car ownership, move to suburbs in the quest for larger homes and more space, cook less at home and eat more in restaurants, demand the latest gadgets and pay more attention to brand names. It is no surprise that some of the worst traffic jams happen in mega-cities in the developing world.

This process may have slowed down a little during the global recession that was triggered by the financial crisis of 2008, but the process is ongoing.
As this is happening, a lot of people, from French left-wing intellectuals, to Afghan mullahs, argue that imitating what they often consider vulgar American consumerism undermines local cultures and values. In other words, it goes against what one would call the good life.

This paper is an attempt to provide a framework for approaching these issues. It looks at how people try to transform their lives and pursue the good life using consumption, and it also looks at the sustainability implications of this materialist approach. Initially, the paper examines and defines the concepts of personal transformation, the good life and consumerism. Next, it addresses the way consumerism, as a means of personal transformation, interacts with the concept of the good life. Finally, the paper discusses the issues affecting the sustainability of the economy and environment, and proposes some possible solutions.

2 Concepts of Personal Transformation:
2.1 Philosophers:

It used to be that personal transformation was based on asceticism, prayer, and other forms of hard physical or mental work. The idea behind personal transformation is based on the notion that the good life has to be earned. For Socrates; virtue was knowledge, because knowledge was the key for overriding ignorance which is the source of all evil. Thus, personal transformation is focused on education [10]. For Plato, human development is the ability to overcome the illusion of appearances and to acquire the wisdom to perceive the true forms in their perfection [14]. Stoics, such as Zeno took a different approach. Zeno’s argument was that unhappiness is the result of pursuing things that are beyond our control. Any material possessions may be lost due to events beyond one’s control, and therefore, no material goods can be the ultimate goal. Instead, virtue based on knowledge is the key, and the wise man who wants to live the good life is the one who only wants what he can achieve.

Around the same time as the ancient Greek philosophers were establishing the foundations of Western philosophy, in Asia, Lao Tzu argued that the good life consists of harmonizing one’s life with the Tao. Chuang-Tzu, a Taoist philosopher of that era, provides a perfect Taoist attitude about the good life in the following story. He was living a very poor existence, but the Emperor who heard that he was a wise man sent some envoys to offer him the position of prime minister. Chuang-Tzu told them that in a faraway kingdom the sacred shell of a tortoise was decorated with jewels and put in a prominent place in a temple. He then pointed at a tortoise that was walking slowly in the mud nearby and asked them if this tortoise was happier being alive and living in the mud, or dead with a decorated shell in a temple. The envoys answered that it would prefer to live in the mud. Chuang-Tzu told them that they should give the emperor his thanks, but he too preferred his life in the mud. It is a clear demonstration of the Taoist concept of harmony and simplicity rather than artifice and status [12]. Buddhism goes one step further by arguing that the path to the good life goes through the abandonment of all desires [6].

In terms of modern philosophers, Schopenhauer took an approach similar to Buddhism, arguing that the good life consists of contemplation of art, philosophic knowledge, and sympathy for others. Nietzsche talks about the will to power, and true power comes from one’s ability to sublimate and control one’s passions [13]. Sartre, one of the founders of existentialism, made the point that people are condemned to be free and that our choices shape our reality.

2.2 Religion and Other Ideologies:

There is basically a market that consists of meaning-creating and meaning-promoting institutions. These involve the churches of different religions, national governments, political parties, and other non-profit organizations. All of these promote different ideologies, from political, to social or religious. These ideologies provide, to varying extents, meaning to the lives of people who ascribe to them. This market for meaning does not work in the same manner as the traditional markets. Unlike the market for ice cream, where consumers can switch from one brand to the next with minimal costs, the switching costs are very high in the market for meaning. Changing one’s religion, for example, may carry severe social penalties in some countries, as well as criminal charges in others.

According to the Bible [1], wisdom literature concentrates on how life is to be lived from the perspective of the daily human experience. Wisdom is described as an art that provides insight into how to form a person’s character in order to guide them to follow the wise path that ultimately leads to attainment of a good life. The Book of Proverbs provides instructions and aphorisms that allow the mind to be free to see situations in a new light. In the pursuit of the good life through materialism, consumers can miss out on the simple truths of wisdom revealed to them during everyday activities.

2.3 Modern Psychology:

Abraham Maslow theorized that a hierarchy of needs motivates human behavior. All humans have basic physiological needs to simply survive. Once surviving, humans need safety, and once that is achieved, they are motivated to fulfill the need to establish social relationships, and then ultimately, at the top of the hierarchy of needs, is what he called, self-actualization. Individuals must first satisfy vital lower level needs before progressing on towards satisfying higher level needs [16].
Maslow studied the characteristics of people whom he determined to have achieved the peak of the pyramid, self-actualization. According to his estimate, only two percent of people actually reach self-actualization. It is important to note that Maslow described achievement of self-actualization as a person reaching their full-potential; however, he did not equate it with a person achieving perfection [16].

Maslow identified fifteen characteristics of a self-actualized person; however, he noted that self-actualization is somewhat individualized because not all individuals display all 15 characteristics. Furthermore, people who have not achieved self-actualization might also display some of these characteristics. The fifteen characteristics include:

1. Perceive reality efficiently and can tolerate uncertainty;
2. Accept themselves and others for what they are;
3. Spontaneous in thought and action;
4. Problem-centered (not self-centered);
5. Unusual sense of humor;
6. Able to look at life objectively;
7. Highly creative;
8. Resistant to enculturation, but not purposely unconventional;
9. Concerned for the welfare of humanity;
10. Capable of deep appreciation of basic life-experience;
11. Establish deep, satisfying interpersonal relationships with a few people;
12. Peak experiences;
13. Need for privacy;
14. Democratic attitudes;
15. Strong moral / ethical standards.

identified these terms to describe a self-actualized person:

1. Involved;
2. Motivated;
3. Concerned;
4. Constructive;
5. Imaginative;
6. Confident;
7. Happy;
8. Responsible;
9. Democratic;
10. Accepting;
11. Tolerant;
12. Humble;
13. Integrated;
14. Successful;
15. Enriched.

2.4 Concepts Defined:

As the above approaches reveal, the good life, like any other abstract concept, means different things to different people, perhaps even more so in different cultures. For the purpose of this paper, a good life is defined as the kind of life that meets two conditions. First, it provides a sense of meaning. In that sense, a good life is a meaningful life. The operating assumption in this definition is that people who consider themselves living a good life should also find this life meaningful. The second condition is that a good life is a happy life. People who are living what they consider a good life should feel happy. By happy, it is not meant that the people live a life of uninterrupted bliss, but rather an overall sense of satisfaction and contentment with one’s life.

Consumerism has been defined in many different ways, and people have tried to develop different scales to measure it. In this paper, consumerism is defined as the quest for material affluence and the attempt to exhaust one’s resources in consumption activities and the accumulation of material items. In other words, consumerism is the tendency to consume to the maximum of one’s financial abilities without much concern about the future, and to put one’s energies into expanding one’s financial resources for the purpose of increased consumption. For the purposes of this paper, consumerism will be used interchangeably with the term materialism.

No meaningful discussion can be held about how humans choose to behave without establishment of basic assumptions. No more eloquent statement of the basic assumption of such behavior can be found than that written by Thomas Jefferson in the 1776 Declaration of Independence “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”(US Constitution, 1776, Library of U.S. Congress).

It is clear that most people would like to live happy and meaningful lives. The pursuit of the good life, although culturally mediated, is probably a constant in human societies. As most people encounter difficulties and obstacles in their quest for achieving the good life, many realize that they can only succeed if they change and transform themselves. This paper examines why and how many people use material possessions and consumerism as a means of personal transformation.

3 Materialism and Personal Transformation:
3.1 Consumerism, a Historical Perspective:

The convenience of new technology has affected people’s expectations. Nowadays people want solutions that are effective, fast, and not too demanding. A lot of them appear to come in the form of pills and supplements, or promises of fast and painless transformation based on the consumption of certain products and services. Life decisions that used to be personal are being outsourced using personal life coaches, and other life decision experts. There were no life coaches in 1940. By 2010 there
were over 30,000 in the US. Essentially, the process of personal transformation has been delegated to consumption or outsourced to the services of experts.

Consumerism is a relatively recent historical phenomenon. It can be traced back to the early 1920s when a booming economy allowed people to consume beyond the purely necessary. Of course, the wealthy had always been consuming a lot more, and in a very visible fashion, a consumption style that Veblen called conspicuous consumption [19]. However, over time, starting in the 1920s, and after a long break during the depression and the World War II, there was an emergence of a broad middle class and the manifestation of new consumption desires. Thus, consumption beyond necessities, which up to that point was limited to a small sliver of the population, became a mass phenomenon. The era of mass consumption exponentially grew directly as a result of relentless advertising, new and sophisticated ways of financing and credit, and an emphasis on the desires of the consumer via new marketing research methods [2].

Middle income people started using consumption, and by extension their material possessions, as a way to create meaning in their lives. Nowadays a person’s lifestyle cannot be described without reference to a person’s consumption activities and patterns. Consumption and materialism are not empty of meaning as many critics argue, but actually are loaded with it. This was already evident at the very beginning of the era of mass consumption. On June 6, 1923 the Philadelphia Retail Ledger recorded a statement spoken by Ms. Helen Landon Cass, a radio announcer to a convention of salesmen in Philadelphia. Ms. Cass said, “Sell them dreams – dreams of country clubs and proms, and visions of what might happen if only. After all, people don’t buy things to work for them. They buy hope – hope that what your merchandize will do for them.” [17]

Consumers actually insist that products and sellers add meaning to the goods they sell to them. The benefits sought by consumers are a combination of functional benefits and symbolic benefits. Symbolic benefits are the brand image, essentially all connotations associated with the brand name. Over time, as competitive pressures have reduced the quality and performance gap among products in a similar price range, competition for the consumers’ attention has moved into the symbolic area. Advertising, traditional promotions, and social media activities that add to a brand’s image are now just as important to success as research and development of new products.

The phenomenon of mass consumption gave rise to the development of distinct brands, with distinct images, that could be used by consumers to design their own lifestyles. As incomes rose, previous luxury goods became more available to the middle class. This, in turn, gave birth to the phenomenon that in just about any product category there is a wide range of price and quality choices, including a category for luxury brands. Even mundane products that one normally does not associate with luxury, such as ice cream, have their premium category.

This is an age where luxury is continuously being redefined. Owning a car in the 1920s was a sign of wealth. Today, owning a car has become a necessity. Plenty of activities formerly considered as luxuries, such as overseas travel or swimming pools, have become commonplace. “The biggest mistake any marketer can make is to underestimate the American consumer’s aspiration to trade up” [8]. This is a process that Twitchell [17] called “the democratization of luxury.”

This, in turn, has created the equivalent of an arms’ race for the symbolic meaning of luxury and status. The more a certain brand becomes available to more consumers, the more the company has to envision and develop a newer, higher-status, more expensive and more exclusive model. There is a continuous development of super performance and extremely exclusive automobiles, homes, customized exotic vacations, and specialized services.

These phenomena have given ammunition to the critics of consumerism and materialism. Their key arguments are:

1. The quest for symbolic meaning, especially for status is a zero-sum game, can only shift the players’ relative status position without any benefit for the whole group or society in general. This is a waste of resources [4].

2. Repeated studies have shown that money does not increase happiness, except at the very low end of the income scale [5].

3. Consumerism is a very shallow pursuit of material things or temporary pleasures at the cost of more worthy spiritual goals.

In addressing these critiques, it is important to reflect back on the definition of good life, to specifically review the two key components. As indicated previously, the good life should be both meaningful and happy. Happiness involves a minimal level of material comfort. In other words, using Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the need for self-actualization cannot be addressed unless the other needs ahead of it are met. Basic physiological needs involve the consumption of goods and services. Therefore, the good life is a situation that combines satisfactory meaning and satisfactory material comfort.

Achieving a level of satisfactory material comfort is obviously a matter of being able to consume what one perceives as satisfying one’s needs. The critique is that these needs seem to be continuously expanding with rising incomes thus turning the process into a never-ending chase. That may be to some extent true, but if pure survival were the sole criterion, mankind should just remain at the
basic comfort level found during the Stone Age. The fact that technology and the rising standards of living allows us to develop more discriminating and sophisticated desires should be seen as a liberating aspect of civilization rather than as a problem.

In developed economies, most consumer products compete not only on performance and price, but also on symbolic meaning. Materialism creates an additional source for meaning. Brand image and the subjective consumer fantasies that come with owning and using symbolic products, have become a version of a secular religion. Essentially people want their material possessions to not only provide functional benefits, but also provide symbolic value. The emphasis of marketing today is that consumption and material possessions will transform you into a better, create a more sophisticated, more popular, and happier person [9].

3.2 Does Materialism Influence Happiness?:

In today’s society, many consumers focus on the accumulation of possessions and wealth [9]. Although the pursuit of material goals is common, various research suggests that this behavior may actually result in the consumer experiencing lower subjective well-being and overall lower satisfaction with life [9]. Hudders and Pandelaere [9] question why people would continue to pursue materialism if they were not experiencing overall well-being and satisfaction with life. Hence, the authors propose that certain aspects of materialistic behavior may provide short-term rewards that serve to reinforce the behavior to pursue materialism. In particular, consumption of luxury products tends to minimize the short-term negative consequences of materialism on subjective well-being or happiness. This short-term benefit may be adequate for consumers to continue the behavior of pursuing materialism. Ultimately, this behavior creates a spiral from which it is hard to escape as consumers of luxury goods, in the short-term, do not experience the negative consequences on subjective well-being; therefore, the consumer continues to engage in the materialistic behavior.

Subjective well-being is a measurement to describe whether people experience their lives in positive or negative ways; ultimately, it is used to identify who is happy [9]. Literature on subjective well-being identified that the goals a person pursues tends to have a major impact on their well-being. Theory on self-determination [9] explains that people pursue extrinsic and intrinsic goals. While intrinsic goals, such as personal relations, caring about community and physical health, have positive influence on subjective well-being; extrinsic goals, such as wealth, materialism, and social recognition, have a negative influence on subjective well-being. Overall, happiness has a positive impact on people, leading to greater success, more intimate relationships and altruistic behavior [9].

Luxury brands are described as being unique and of premium quality; all terms that imply exclusivity and expensive. The rarity of luxury brands make them highly desired, in comparison to cheaper brands, due to the functional and symbolic value perceived by the consumers. The functional value of a luxury brand references the premium quality, while the symbolic value references the message communicated to others of the consumer’s success, social status and success [9]. Materialistic consumers may be especially drawn to the consumption of luxury goods because they use the luxury goods to enhance their self-identify and comparative self-worth. Furthermore, materialistic consumers perceive the consumption of luxury goods as a path towards gaining personal happiness [9].

According to research conducted by Hudders and Pandelaere [9], the consumption of luxury goods provides positive short-term benefits to consumers. Luxury consumption has a beneficial effect on the well-being for both the high and low materialistic consumers; however, highly materialistic consumers tend to place a greater value on the symbolic message conveyed from luxury purchases.

Since people are trying to find meaning and personal transformation in consumption. The market, and by extension consumerism, has become a key competitor to the established institutions that provide meaning-producing ideologies. As a competitor, consumerism has a major advantage. It allows consumers to create their own meaning and lifestyle through their choices, something that official ideologies are not very good at. As soon as individuals try to adjust some official ideology to fit their own personality or preference, they run the risk of being branded as apostates, heretics, or not true believers.

Consumerism allows people to become their own meaning-generators, even if that involves them abdicating or outsourcing the decision to life coaches. There is little surprise then, that a variety of institutions have attacked materialism, consumerism, and the market in general [15]. These critiques focus on the notion that consumerism undermines traditional values, and trivializes the meaning of life by focusing only on material possessions. In addition, the danger is that excessive consumption is destructive for the environment and that sustainability will require scaling back on our lifestyle and material desires [3].

4 Is Materialism Sustainable?:

In the mid 1990’s, Graham Hill, a twenty-eight year old website designer, sold his website design company for ten million dollars [7]. As one might anticipate, he used his money to purchase lots of stuff. In fact, he soon found out he had too much stuff. Hill reports that the average person in the United States has three times as much space to store stuff as they had fifty years previously. In fact, the
storage business in the United States annually grosses $2.2 billion. Over that same fifty year period, most measurable parameters of happiness have flat-lined. Therefore, acquiring more material stuff does not equate with an increase in happiness. Hill explains that the important things in life, what really matters most are memorable experiences and personal relationships. The old expression of less equals more really applies to happiness because a person can be more joyful with less stuff because less stuff gives a person more freedom and more time. Hill goes on to say that taking digital photos is a great way to retain memories without requiring more three-dimensional storage space.

Matt Killingsworth [11], at University of California San Francisco, developed a smartphone application to track the happiness of a person. He tracked over 35,000 people on a daily basis. Respondents were asked to reply as quickly as possible four questions which were sent via a daily text to their smartphone. The questions were as follows: (1) How do you feel? (2) Who are you with? (3) What are you doing? (4) Are you thinking about something else other than what you are doing? The last question is used as a direct measurement of mind wandering.

Killingsworth [11] states the typical person is mind wandering an average of 47% of the time; 65% while showering or brushing their teeth; 50% while working; 40% while exercising; and 10% while having sex. He concludes that people are less happy when mind wandering because they typically are thinking about less happy things than what they are currently doing. He continued to explain that mind wandering may be the cause, and not the consequence of, unhappiness. People who lived “in the moment” tended to be happier than when their mind was wandering. Killingsworth [11] suggests that people can redirect their attention back to task, and this focus helps us enjoy each experience more, by staying in the moment.

Harvard psychologist, Dan Gilbert, Ph.D. explains that happiness is the single most important topic [5]. Happiness was previously left in the hands of poets and philosophers; however, recently people have asked scientists to research happiness. Through evolution over the past two million years from Homo Habilis brain to modern brains, the human brain has tripled in size, primarily due to the addition of the prefrontal cortex. This is the area of the brain that has become known as the experience simulator; it is also known as the area of imagination or creativity.

The prefrontal cortex has allowed us to become a very resilient species emotionally. Dr. Gilbert [5] states that it allows us, within three months in most cases, to return to a baseline of happiness, despite major life traumas. This process is largely behind the scenes, and most people don’t realize they are capable of it. The philosophers and psychologists believe that it is important that people don’t know this about themselves because if a person did know, he or she might not take precautions to prevent tragedy from happening, even when prevention is possible. People are evolutionarily hardwired for survival. This goes back to the lower levels of Maslow’s hierarchy.

Dr. Gilbert [5] continues to discuss Sir Thomas Brown’s writing from 1642 where he described himself as the happiest man alive. Gilbert says that human beings have something that might be called a psychological immune system which is a series of cognitive processes, largely non-conscious, that help people change their views of the world so that they can feel better about the world in which they find themselves.

Gilbert continues to discuss two sources of happiness. The first, real happiness consists of events that happen to you and make you happy. The second, synthetic happiness consists of ways in which the pre-frontal cortex of the mind reframes events. As far as psychologist can tell, both sources of happiness, real and synthetic, appear qualitatively to be the same.

People need to understand that happiness can be found not only externally to them, but happiness can also be synthesized and found within themselves, by reframing an event. An example of synthesized happiness would be by finding the silver lining in a difficult situation. The amount of happiness each person feels is in their own hands. While a person does not have complete control over their happiness, individuals do have some control over it. A person’s happiness is dependent on whether they see events in a positive or negative way.

Gilbert [5] states that the human brain is not built to sustain a single emotion or feeling at the same level over a long period of time. Human beings need their emotions to be elicited and come back to baseline, and this also applies to the emotion of happiness.

Reflecting on Maslow’s pyramid, one might come to realize that balancing at the peak of the triangle of self-actualization is a precarious feat. It is more realistic to think that people do not permanently reside at the peak. As Gilbert suggests, human emotions return to a baseline. A person can rise to the peak; however, it is not a plateau. It is a continuous process of personal improvement. Happiness is a barometer that rises and falls. It is dependent on our experiences and our ability to reframe those experiences.

Brother David Steindl-Rast who lives in a Benedictine Monastery in upstate New York explains that grateful people are happy. [15]. Gratefulness is defined as something valuable that is given to a person as a gift. It isn’t something that can be earned or purchased. To live grateful, a person must recognize that every moment is a gift. In no way is anyone guaranteed another moment of life. People must avail themselves to the opportunity that is
gifted with each moment as the way to happiness. Those individuals who develop an attitude of gratitude are admired because they make something out of life. People who miss opportunities to be grateful are typically the same ones who rush through life and don’t stop to recognize opportunities.

Brother Steindl-Rast provides a method to live gratefully that includes three words: (1) stop, (2) look, and (3) go. First, stop and be quiet to listen. Next, look for the opportunity. Finally, go ahead and take action. When individuals open their hearts to opportunity, they are invited to do something. If people are grateful, they are not fearful, and they are not violent. If people are grateful, they act out of sense of enough, instead of acting out of a sense of scarcity, and the result is a willingness to share with others. If a person is grateful, they appreciate diversity among people, and they are respectful of others. Grateful living has the potential to change the current power pyramid found in the world. It doesn’t make for equality but for equal respect for everyone, which is most important. Steindl-Rast concludes by explaining that a world filled with grateful people is a world filled with joyful people.

Conclusion:
This paper discussed how modern marketing activities have changed the quest for personal transformation and the good life. Different philosophical and religious traditions have taken diverse approaches to personal transformation and the quest for the good life. Some philosophers have focused on the quest for knowledge, others for wisdom, humility, harmony with the nature, compassion, empathy and asceticism. Different religious traditions have focused on the duty of people to follow the commands of God and other related requirements of their religion. In all these cases, and regardless of their specific differences, one key theme is that personal development requires a lot of effort. It takes time, and it has to be earned. In addition, it has to be something the person does himself, or with the help of God. Historically, people in their quest for the good life were subjected to an immersion of one of the existing ideologies that provided the framework through which they had to pursue this quest.

In the modern era of material abundance and information technology, the market has come up with an alternative ideology, based on materialism and consumption. Unlike the previous eras, the market promises that transformation and the good life can happen via the acquisition of the appropriate products and services. Two major changes from the previous traditions suggest that transformation can be bought or outsourced rather than earned, and transformation can happen immediately rather than being stretched out over a long time through a slow, tedious process.

Established traditions and ideologies have critiqued the emergence of materialism and have listed the key arguments against it as well as the negative implications. However, there is also the argument that marketing has provided people with a choice that they previously lacked. They can still follow a more traditional approach, or they can go down the materialist path. Most ideologies are suspicious of giving agency to people for finding their own meaning in life, and prefer to maintain their market share in the ideology market. A consumer-based, market-oriented system where people pursue personal transformation via the consumption of services and products is a threat to the established order in most societies.

Consumerism provides the material comfort that is important, and it contributes to the symbolic meaning component. The extent to which people derive symbolic meaning from consumption and use it for personal transformation varies with each individual. Thus, materialism by itself is not the sole answer for most people in pursuit of the good life. Rather than a source of decadence and threat to traditional values, it should be seen as a contributing factor and a way to empower individuals, as they experiment via trial and error in the discovery of the best combination of material and spiritual sources to transform their lives and find meaning and happiness. All traditions, as well as the material resources of today’s market, are available to help people in their quest for a good life.

Furthermore, in pursuing a good life, a person’s overall attitude toward life events has a significant impact on their personal transformation journey. In addition, an educational system that provides knowledge and critical thinking to assess each tradition’s tradeoffs and evaluate the implications of all choices is the best answer.

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