

The problem of world hunger and food wastage

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



When I was a kid, the elders specially my parents always remind us that we are blessed to have meals thrice a day. Whenever I left my plate unfinished, they will tell me that less privileged people need to work hard even at young age to have decent meals; thus, helps me to reflect on how lucky I am.

Nonetheless, the young version of me thought that finishing meal and not wasting it do not necessarily mean that I am making other people's stomach full and would stop their hunger. However, as I grow up and started seeing the world in a realistic and critical way, I realized that my parents are right.

According to the National Research Council (2006 as cited by World Hunger News (n. d.) the term hunger is the physical uneasiness experienced by an individual caused by food shortage or lack of available food resources. Global hunger is one of the current society's challenges. Studies showed that about 11 percent of the global population, or 815 million people, were suffering from hunger (Huber, 2018), 95 % of them came from developing countries in Asian and Pacific region, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and Caribbean (Turk, 2014). Meanwhile India has the highest recorded cases of starvation with over 190. 7 million undernourished people were recorded in 2014 (Turk, 2014). In analyzing the statistics, about 1. 1 people for every 10 people do not have enough food to eat and some of them were literally dying from extreme starvation. It was heartbreaking to notice that despite of the strategies of numerous governments and organizations to eradicate global hunger, their efforts seem to be not enough as the cases of hunger increases.

Despite that agricultural sector focuses their time, knowledge, energy, money, and effort on securing the food in our tables, we are indifferent on

our actions. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations about one third of the potential food supply in the world or about 1.6 billion tons were being wasted or lost annually (FAO, 2011 as cited by Food Loss and Food Waste. n. d.). Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition (BCFN as cited by Conserve Energy Future. com, 2017) stated that the food being lost during the industrial food process, wasted during consumption and distribution is referred to as food waste. Meanwhile, Parfitt, et. al. (2010 as cited by Yaqub, 2016) stresses the difference of food waste and food loss wherein the term food loss refers to the food being lost during food production stage while the term food waste refers to the food being lost during the market and food consumption stage. The food that was spilled or spoiled during the production stage is also considered as food loss while food that fell from the truck during transportation can also be considered as food waste.

Keheller and Robbins (2013, as cited by Evans, 2016) emphasize the three categories of food wastes: (1) unavailable or waste from food that is being consumed under normal circumstances such as bones and peels; (2) possible available food that other people refuse to eat such as bread crusts and potato skins; and (3) available or the edible food that is being wasted due to spoilage of food or leftover foods from excess food preparations.

Common Causes and Adverse Effect of Food Wastage

Despite of unequal food supply and distribution, both developing and developed countries show evidences of food wastage in their respective locations (Yaqub, 2016). The high-income earner countries in Europe and

North America regions have 280-300 kg/year per capita food waste. It is higher compared to the amount of food wasted in developing countries such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia with estimated 120-170 kg/year per capita (Papargyropoulou et. al. 2014 as cited by Yaqub, 2016). Food waste can be associated with the two stages of food supply systems. The early stage includes the post-harvesting, storage, and transportation of the food supply while the later stage includes commercialization and food consumption. Lack of proper food storage, poor transportation and technical difficulties are factors of food wastage in developing countries which are early stage of food supply system. Alternately, in developed countries, foods are being wasted if do not meet the market's standards; therefore, these cannot be sold. Excessive preparation of meals and not consumption of the food before its expiration date are also the reported reasons which are later stage of food supply system.

Foods are also wasted due to rejection in the market because of low food quality standards (Amaeshie, 2017). Strict compliance of the companies in food safety protocols is vital to ensure good quality and safety of food; however, it also inevitable that it generates significant amount of food wastes (Conserve Energy Future. com, 2017) Sometimes, food with little 'imperfections' on shapes, sizes, colors, and other physical attributes that does not meet market demands to the producers and sellers are thrown away or discarded without considering its initial investment. For example, bananas for export are not allowed to have anthracnose that causes black or brown spots on the skin of the fruits due to pest and diseases protection of the importing country.

Another reason of food wastage is its affordability, which causes food to be taken for granted. United State of America was recorded to have the highest amount of food waste with about half of their food produce (Goldenberg, 2016). Low price of food is the main reason why Americans were reported to have highest amount of food waste in landfills. It was determined that in a household setting with a family of four, 1, 600 US dollars' worth of food were wasted per year. Affordability affects the preference of consumers. For example, Americans become selective in choosing food products because of their unusual aesthetic standards (Chandler, 2016). Consumers opt to consume and avail fruits and vegetables with inadequacies such as discolored and oxidized products; therefore, these rejected foods have greatest contribution in the dumpsites and incinerators, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (Goldenberg, 2016).

Whether food waste and food loss were done accidentally or intentionally, these contribute to adverse effects; because aside from the depleting resources we have, these also disregard labor, time, and money given during the production of the food. It has also hostile impacts in the environmental and economical aspects. Loss of biodiversity, degrading of fertile agricultural lands, economic disadvantages, pro climate changes and water and oil resources depletion can be associated with food wastages. As the demand of the food surges, the demand of futile and agricultural land also increases which leads to deforestation of wildlife areas (Conserve Energy Future. com, 2017). Meanwhile, landfills with high amount of food wastes have high tendency to produce significant amounts methane which promotes global warming and climate change. Therefore, wasting food is a moral

irresponsible practice because it promotes danger to mankind, causes severe damage to the world and contradicts the universal law that we formulated.

Understanding Food Waste through Categorical Imperative

This paper intends to examine the act of food waste in consumer level, such as excessive food preparation and over merchandising of food products in supermarkets and groceries, using philosophical theories of Categorical Imperative proposed by Immanuel Kant. Kant's Categorical Imperative is an example of deontological theory which believes that some actions were absolutely right or wrong regardless of its consequences to the doer and to other people (Shakil, 2013). Kant opposes the idea of utilitarianism which believes that moral action should result to the most positive outcome and achieve greatest pleasure (Shakil, 2013). Followers of this philosophy disregards personal desires and intention in their action, and believe that prior to doing the action, it should satisfy first the innate moral laws or duty. To evaluate whether an act is moral or immoral, Kant proposed three formulas of categorical imperative.

The first formulation of the imperative is the Formula of Universal Law of Nature which states that " Act only according to the maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction" (Kant, 1785 as cited by Shakil, 2013). By looking at the consequence if the action become a universal law, it can be determined whether this action is moral or immoral. It is moral if the maxim conforms the duty or moral law while it is immoral if it results to logical contradiction. It is somehow analogous to the Golden Rule since you are not allowed to

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make an exemption for the things that you prohibited others to do as well. Although the difference of Kant's argument with the Golden rule is that the latter's maxim depends on one's emotions and desires while Kant opposes the idea of feelings as motivation of an action but rather it is based on reason and moral duty.

To use the formula of universal law of nature, it is necessary to formulate the maxim that encompasses your reason and the circumstances of your action, then assume that this is a general knowledge where everyone will follow it, then lastly test whether your maxim conforms or contradicts the existing universal law (Johnson and Cureton, 2016). If the action conforms the universal law then probably your action is moral.

A scenario where people practice wasting food in the household is an immoral action which can be proved by formulating first the maxim, " I waste good food when I have unplanned food preparation or I have bought excess food products in the market, in order to prevent food-borne diseases when it is near spoilage." Subsequently, consider that everyone will follow your maxim by saying, " Everyone always waste good food when he or she has unplanned food preparation or he or she has bought excess food products in the market, in order to prevent food-borne diseases when it is near spoilage." Lastly, check if this universalized maxim will contradict to the existing laws of nature. Excessive food preparation decreases the supply of good food products therefore, if everyone would practice food wasting due to fear from food borne diseases because of spoilage then we may suffer from lack of food supply that will mainly affect people who cannot afford

inadequate high-price goods. Therefore, we are duty-bound not to waste food in any manner.

The second formulation of the imperative is the Respect for Persons which states that “ Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end but always at the same time as an end.” (Kant, 1785 as cited by Shakil, 2013)

This formula evaluates moral worth of not human per se but the humanity as ends and not as means to achieve our own specific aims. According to Palmer (2006), this idea clearly emphasizes the importance of humans in this world in terms of dignity with wisdom and autonomy and not just only having desires. To attain our own dignity, we also respect the dignity of other people as it is essential to humanity.

To evaluate a certain action using this formula, principle of ends must be satisfied first. The action of wasting food due to unplanned food preparation and excessive buying of the food products from groceries and supermarkets do not conform to the end test since wasting resources could harm other people by depleting the potential food supply. Moreover, this action treats humanity as means to an end since people spend their money buying products beyond their needs. It wastes the efforts of the agricultural and manufacturing sector to secure the food supply from farms to our dining tables. Therefore, the said action did not passed both the first and second formula and it is said to be immoral action.

Lastly, the third formulation of the imperative is the Formula of Autonomy which states that “ Therefore, every rational being must so act as if he were

through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends." (Kant, 1785 as cited by Shakil, 2013). Kant strongly opposes the idea of lying because it diminishes the value of other people's trust and at the same time it is a higher moral duty that people should obey. The formula of autonomy seems to be the same as the first formula, however their difference is that this formula focuses more on who made the universal law rather than who should follow it. McCarty (2014) stated that the formula of autonomy introduces the idea that every rational being treated as ends in themselves have the ability to make their own legislations. This legislations given to oneself can be applied to other people and must not also lead to conflict to the teleological commitments, otherwise this will be concluded as an immoral action. Kant emphasizes that we are the only one who made our laws.

Consider again the universalizability test of the action where you intentionally waste the food supply due to unplanned food preparation and excessive purchasing of food products. You will realize that if all the people will do the same practice, then this action will result to contradiction to your original purpose which is wasting good food because the resources will soon get depleted and you cannot waste food anymore. Above all, the action that wasting food intentionally in a morally irresponsible practice. If you want to waste food, think twice because solving this crisis could make us inch closer in solving global hunger and possibly stopping us from ruining our world.

Possible Solution to Food Wastage

Food wastage is indeed a huge problem that raises global issues such as economic and environmental concerns. Causes of food waste and food loss
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are evident in both developing and developed countries and most of us are guilty of food waste. After trying to prove that it is immoral to waste food resources, it is now our turn to do something to eradicate this global crisis. One good thing that we can do to answer this problem is to share awareness to everyone about the crisis and effects of food waste. We should first admit that food waste is not a good practice and it is something we should eradicate first. Reliable information may help people to become more aware about the issue therefore, they will start doing something good about the problem.

Aside from awareness, consumers should demand large supermarkets to donate excess food supplies to the people who badly needs it if it was not sell to the customers instead of placing it to dumpsites. Foods that are still edible could both help humans and the environment since it reduces starvation cases and at the same time, it reduces the methane emission caused by foods in the dumpsites.

Wasting food is an immoral action. We have the most important role in addressing the problem. Consumers have to realize the importance of planning their food preparations. Excessive buying of goods as well as excessive cooking of food also increases the rate of food being wasted. The higher the rate of food being wasted would also indicate higher rate of resources depletion. Therefore, we should be more responsible customers and let's fight the crisis. This battle against food waste can also be our battle against hunger and climate change.