

This essay on environmental ethics, written in 2016 to call attention to the work of Raj Jasinghani and *The Fisher of the James*, should probably have been included in the collection, *Religious Hygiene for Wild Men*. It is now added to the website Unsettled-Things.com and to the RichardLRose.com site under *The Fisher of the James*.

--RR 20260415, Henrico, VA

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Just Enough

by

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Many issues would disappear and much pain be alleviated by setting wants more closely to needs. In a way, this would be like the recalibration of an instrument, but in personal and societal terms it would be a transformation. One may find many examples of such transformations among minimalists¹ who have reduced living space, commuting, and consumption or who have even removed themselves from the electrical power grid. Other examples of re-calibrations are LEED architectural standards, mitigations required for building projects, attempts by institutions and individuals to decrease their footprints for energy and water-usage, regulations on foods, pesticides, herbicides and industrial pollutants, the standards of civil and criminal law, and various assessments for the value taken by corporate entities from their employees and the public interest. Re-adjustments are always controversial, particularly given the different aims of the private, public, and commercial sectors.² And personal re-adjustments are equally vexing.

In our retirement, my wife and I have reduced our living space to about 800 square feet in a rented apartment. We live within walking distance of the stores and services needed, including bus service. I no longer drive. Our fresh food comes from a farmer's market. We do not eat prepackaged dinners, most canned foods, pastries, breads, and processed foods. We have given away most of our belongings and continue to pare down what is left. Our infrequent out-of-state travel is by train. We are engaged with those who live nearby on the basis of family, neighborhood, health, religion, arts, and civic and daily activities. We use our smart-phone or laptop several times daily but do not refer to them continually. Most of our time is spent talking to others, reading and study, writing, composing, and performing or worshipping with others. We generally avoid pastimes such as shopping, restaurant- or take-out dining, night-life, and attendance at large concerts or sports events. We walk a great deal and make a point of doing what we can to help others in need. This is how we pursue our *private interests*.

Of course, we are all in need. Our friend David waits at the corner for money from passing motorists. Occasionally he can find an odd-job, but since being laid off after working at a local plant for twenty years, he has spent his time waiting to be old enough for a basic income from Social Security that will enable him to move out of the motel and find part-time work. Another friend and her daughter have depended on her Social Security as one job after another has disappeared through bankruptcies, automation, the vagaries of demand, and the increasing tendency of employers to count employees only as costs and only grudgingly to supply no more than 30 hrs. work per week so that they

1 Producers of the film *Minimalism* and website are Joshua F. Milburn and Ryan Nicodemus. Their presentation has popularized the movement.

2 Yes, I separated "commercial" from "private" interests. Where they apparently overlap, the commercial interest prevails so much that the private is nullified. Consider, for example, the many examples of "social welfare" nonprofit groups described by Jane Mayer in *Dark Money* (2016).

will not be required to provide benefits. Although these friends have skills and even college degrees, their situations are already minimalist. The land-rich, cash-poor farmers at our markets are also minimalists—by necessity. None of these working and laid-off people are fortunate enough to have the pension that pays for our small apartment. Other friends have single-family homes with several thousand square feet of living space, large yards and patios, pools, and gardens. They may spend a weekend on shopping, dining and theatre venues in New York or Washington. Cruises and time-shares fill their conversations. Their children attend private schools; receive BMGs in high school, foreign adventures before college, and destination weddings costing tens of thousands. While they live large, our other friends and family have their thirty-year-old unemployed sons living in spare rooms, and cannot pay back college loans or the co-payments on medical bills.

So what is “just enough”? In Jane Mayer's *Dark Money*, we learn about rich citizens who apparently have no upper limit. Their wealth-protection network provides for the purchase of legislatures, judges, Congress members, and laws to conduct business as they choose, deplete resources, release toxins, create wealth-multiplying financial products, and avoid taxes. Apparently the network also pays for self-serving propaganda to be developed and released by foundations, universities, and media outlets. This is unsurprising behavior from those who had most to gain from the large commercial entities which generated not only employment and many useful products but also knowingly produced dangerous products,³ and exploited people and resources while creating a culture of waste. The same kind of wealth-protective behavior may be found in relationships between military industries and the Defense Department; the Department of Agriculture, FDA, pharmaceutical, food, and health industries⁴, and universities and the commercial donors of their grant-driven research. Clearly, for many “corporate-people” and the real people behind them, there is no enough. Only profits and continual growth of profits—and the kind of comforts they provide—are of consequence. All efforts, even the most benevolent, serve wealth-protection. For this reason, I distinguish *commercial interest* from *private interest*.

Whenever a group claims to have a private interest, I immediately suspect that it really has a commercial interest. Even nonprofit groups can often be traced to commercial entities. Perhaps the individualist tradition of Emerson & Thoreau makes me suspicious of any group asking for money to do something in my interest. Certainly the suspicion is often justified when the group appeals to fear, class, race, and ideology. Yet there must be ways to link our private interests to support of the public good. How do we do this? In *The Fourth Branch of Government*, Jack Trammell and Guy Terrell make a case for holding a Constitutional Convention to amend the document so that it will meet modern needs. The authors want to prevent Congressional stalemates, eliminate the Electoral College, introduce a fair system of e-voting, enlarge and reform the House and Senate and eliminate commercial interests from political campaigns and from the three

3 Cigarettes (See the Surgeon General's *Report on Smoking*, 1964 and Alan Blum's article “Blowing Smoke,” in *Oncology*, May, 2014, Sugary & fat-free foods (See *The Big Fat Surprise* by Nina Teicholz), MSG-laden foods (See *Excitotoxins* by Russell Blaylock), soy products (See *The Whole Soy Book* by Kayla Daniels), asbestos insulation, etc.

4 See the film *Bought* by Jeff Hayes and Bobby Sheehan. The transcript provides their sources.

branches of government. These desirable ends might not be the consequences of such a convention, however. The same commercial interest which has bought politicians and, through persuasive media, bought votes, would try to undermine the effort, much as agrochemical companies have sometimes successfully undermined referendums designed to rein them in. Additionally, the establishment of e-voting, while ostensibly a more fair method, also raises a security issue. As Cory Doctorow⁵ has noted, as long as we are using general purpose computers, hackers will always be able to exploit weaknesses in players or keys to undo security measures. Security breaches are therefore guaranteed. My initial response to Trammell and Terrell, therefore, is that the danger of the subversion of a convention movement outweighs the danger of the *status quo*.

Not to say that I'm happy with the *status quo*—if I were, I wouldn't be trying to specify what is meant by “just enough.” Personally, I have enough; that includes having had enough of life itself. I have reached the eighth decade. Most people do not. Because I am an American, I also have had more of life, opportunity, and possessions than most Syrian, Somali, and Congolese migrants who arrive in Europe by the thousands. Few possessions come with them and they have abandoned their cultures. What is “just enough” for them?

We live within multiple frames of reference. We are simultaneously organisms, social, individual, private, commercial, public, national, and global. What is enough in one realm may be excessive in another. What is enough? What are the facts? If we were to “white hat” this issue, as Edward DeBono⁶ advised, we would simply look for verified facts and opinions about the meaning of “enough.” I can't promise to obediently follow DeBono's rules, but let's shift the frame of reference slightly.

Anyone can give you a list of threats to human existence. There's always the tribe or warring nation next door, predators with four or two legs, falling or launched rocks, fires and storms. For several thousand years, ice was a problem. Dramatic threats like earthquakes, volcanoes, and floods troubled inhabitants of the Pacific Ring of Fire. Even our way of life threatens our lives, since it entails desertification, toxic pollution, climate change, and habitat degradation. As a species we are not notably astute in responding to imminent threats. We camp out on volcano rims and keep fishing until the fish are gone or the tsunami arrives. Even the uninsured floodplain makes a nice place for a trailer park and convenience store. Our disaster training is on-the-job.

With these shortcomings, perhaps the consideration of *carrying capacity* is superfluous. After all, why wonder about how much beating a fighter can take before he passes out when the match has already been called on a technical knock-out? The Earth has been absorbing the blows from its human inhabitants for centuries. If humans are

⁵ *Information Doesn't Want to be Free* by Cory Doctorow, 2016.

⁶ Edward DeBono, *Six Thinking Hats*, 1985. Thanks to Gayle Turner for reminding me of this useful little book. One must be cautious, however, in slavishly adopting any system of managerial thinking for two reasons: 1. Decisions may simply be a way of guessing what the boss wants. (Groupthink) 2. The contributions of loner individuals are likely to address the issue rather than make the group feel good. (See Susan Cain's *Quiet*, particularly her criticism of the Harvard MBA program familiar to DeBono.)

determined to take their habitat and themselves down, why make measurements? The Earth will endure without humans.

Rajan Jaisinghani has taken these issues personally, however. His handbook, *Homo Sapiens: An Appraisal of Modern Humans*, is a responsible assessment, but it is not cheery. As an engineer, he has been trained to define problems and account for variables. All of the usual suspects are considered in detail: pollution, population pressures, climate change, consumption, agricultural crises, increasing shortages of water and other minerals, and the imponderable forces of governance and economics. Rajan also assesses humans' collective behavior and risk analysis when faced with long-term concerns. The record is not encouraging. He remembers his boyhood in Bombay, a populous city of parks and access to the countryside. The modern city of Mumbai, capital of Maharashtra, is another kind of place. He writes,

The India that I lived in 50 years back does not exist. It has been wiped off the map and only exists in my mind. To me, except for the food and some cultural aspects, it has been transformed into something else. The population has gone from half a billion to 1.2 billion and culturally and physically the country has been transformed by technology and by the population—far more in the last 30 years than in the past 250 years. Indian society has transformed from a philosophical, non-materialistic and spiritual-based agricultural society that looked at our current existence as a small stepping-stone on the path of life. It is now largely a materialistic society, more materialistic than the U.S. . . . The country seems to be bursting at the seams. All one has to do is stand at a street corner and observe, while being continuously bumped by the stream of pedestrians at all times of the day . . . (pp.121-122)

Rajan's handbook also suggests some preconditions for addressing the accelerating degradation of the human habitat, the most important being to lower population growth rate, which drives consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, and depletions and degradations of all kinds. He does not advocate draconian regulations, it should be noted. While some decrease has been noted in the population growth rates for some countries, they are not “brakes” of sufficient magnitude to address such accelerating problems as greenhouse gas emissions. Similarly, Rajan argues that other kinds of brakes, such as policy changes, voluntary decreases in consumption, and technological innovation, while useful and needed, will not significantly affect an accelerating process. Indeed, even during the World Wars, the global population growth rate rose. Both the new book by Travis Rieder⁷ and the *Conceivable Futures* website of Josephine Ferorelli and Meghan Kallman⁸ provide useful updates on the urgency of population growth.

7 See <https://www.facebook.com/travis.rieder.1>

8 See <https://www.facebook.com/Conceivable-Future-1027016217311680/?ref=ts>

Cally Caswell⁹, writes about Pope Francis' concern, both in the encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, and in public statements, that Western countries blame the countries of South America, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent for high growth rates when the per capita impact of Western nations is so much greater. Even though Americans' average birth-rate is 1.86 and Nigerians' 6.79, she writes, "at current rates it would take a person from Niger about 200 years to produce the carbon the average American emits in one year." World-wide, about 2.03 billion people make enough money to significantly contribute to climate change, according to Daniel Schensel, of the UN Population Fund. He reminds us that "the answer to sustainability was not to restrict and abuse human rights" but "to put women first." In other words, the first steps to finding what is just enough at a global frame of reference are properly to evaluate the effects on the *public interest* by the wealthiest consumers and to pay attention to the *private interests* of those who have been treated most inequitably.

The population growth rate is the difference between exponentially increasing birth-rate and the death-rate (natality and mortality). Under the usual conditions, the climbing population *does* ultimately come under control. Disease, famine, war, and ecological depletion are signs that the beating taken by the human habitat has finally driven it down for the final count. This limit is the carrying capacity for the population. Malthus made dire predictions in the early industrial revolution. His timing was incorrect, but his reasoning sound. Population increases geometrically while resources increase at best arithmetically. Given a rate that grows like compound interest, the intersection of curves is inevitable. In this way, galloping consumption, pollution, and degradation are brought under "control" in the same way that a buggy meets a freight train.

But do we know the carrying capacity of the Earth?

Paul and Anne Ehrlich considered this question in *Population, Resources, Environment: Issues in Human Ecology*, a textbook published in 1972. They defined total environmental impact as the product of population size and impact per capita, where impact could be measured in such terms as rates of water consumption, waste production, greenhouse gas generation, global temperature change, and so on. They made the point that the multiplicative power of exponential population growth drives total impact. In other words, various measures to affect individual impact, such as reduction of consumption, while desirable, do not appreciably affect the growth of total impact. They point out that "no technology can completely eliminate the impact of a given amount of consumption." (p.261) As for trying to define the carrying capacity of the Earth, one must somehow sum the total impacts of multiple factors in relationship to human health and well-being. This is a different kind of problem than dividing arable land area, available water, or available coal by the population number. The Ehrlichs pointed out that the *determination of an optimum population size is ultimately a moral and social calculation*. The carrying capacity is better conceived as a chosen environmental setting that will support the many desirable ways of life followed by humans over the planet. Key

9 *Sierra*, September 2016, pp26-29.

considerations are recalibrations of health, economy, equity, well-being, education, and preservation of desirable cultural patterns.

This is the long-term way to think about carrying capacity which Rajan Jaisinghani so passionately urges his readers to consider. As long as we only think of carrying capacity as the freight train that must ultimately hit the buggy we are operating in short-term mode. While doubtless we are all dead in the long term, this is hardly a justification to sabotage future generations by failing to control the rate of population growth. Indeed, when Brian O'Neill¹⁰ modeled effects on carbon emissions by low, moderate, and high growth rates, while also accounting for differences in consumption and other demographic factors by region, he found that even at a moderate growth rate, carbon emissions would be decreased by 1.7 gigatons per year. This reduction is one fifth of that needed to prevent the worst effects of climate change. This finding underlines Rajan's argument that no alleviations such as decreasing consumption or making technological innovations will suffice to address climate change and resource depletion *unless population growth is also lowered*.¹¹

Calculating what is *just enough*—to lower growth, to live on, to spend and consume, to produce—requires re-calibrations of private, public, and commercial interests. It requires more than an invisible hand. It requires a sense of urgency about population pressure, climate change, and political reform. I wish I could say that I am optimistic about others feeling this urgency. In fact, I have been occupied for many years with the question of how to impart a sense of urgency prior to the catastrophes, shortages, droughts, disease and violence which will inevitably usher in a new set of life-requirements. To date, this preoccupation has resulted in books and performances¹² and a series of workshops¹³ These efforts were small, imaginative undertakings with an indirect and meditative approach.

10 Ibid. p. 29. O'Neill's study was done in 2010.

11 See for example: <http://cognizantsystems.com/CO2.htm>

12 *Frameshifts*, a two-volume work of stories and poems published in 2011 about an imaginary community in northern Virginia during a major transition. *Coming Around* (2016) is a short book of poetry which concludes with a verse novella, *Palliative Care*, about caring for people as they are. The main performance at issue was *The Fisher of the James*, performed in various venues around Richmond. It was based on the Grimms' fairy tale, *The Fisher and His Wife*, and concluded with an encore, the song "Just Enough". For *Frameshifts*, see https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=Frameshifts+by+Richard+L.+Kose or for free public access see the manuscript at https://frameshifts.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/2001916_frameshift1-2011-version.pdf For *Coming Around*, see <https://frameshifts.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/coming-around.pdf> . For the libretto of *The Fisher* . . . see <https://frameshifts.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/music-book-scan.pdf> . For "Just Enough" see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqzFUKN7xgc> . For my blog, see <https://frameshifts.com/>

13 The workshops were entitled *Healing Breaths*. See: <https://frameshifts.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/hb-2-0-handbook.pdf> and <https://frameshifts.com/2014/05/>

The approach of *computational sustainability*¹, on the other hand, attempts to reach adjustments by considering computational methods which can bring together facts and decision-making in ways which avoid the interference to be expected from wealthy elites or commercial interests. While these methods offer intriguing possibilities, however, I do not believe that major transformations arise from either “white hat” thinking or sophisticated simulations. To recruit the moral and spiritual energy for change one must turn to religion and the arts. Participants in indirect and emotionally engaging confrontations with differences in values can be carried farther in vehicles of art and worship than in those of rational argument. Jonathan Haidt², the moral philosopher, reminds us that “circling around something with others binds you to the group” and that although the same values can both “bind and blind” us, we can also be led to change through inviting expressions and discussions of values.

The *Story Bridge* of Dr. Richard Owen Geer³ uses ancient narrative techniques to lead a group to circle around potentially painful issues. It reminds me of Gayle Turner’s work with the *Storytellers Channel*⁴ in our region. The inclusiveness of the narrative circle gives it reach. Haidt finds that conservatives and liberals, for instance, share the same values—caring, authority, loyalty, fairness, sanctity, and liberty—but the significance of the values may be quite different. A conservative view of “fairness” emphasizes proportionality and avoiding cheating; a liberal view emphasizes the quality of the outcome. Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, reminds us that fairy tales are able to reach the inner life of the child because “in a much deeper sense than any other reading material (they) start where the child really is in his psychological and emotional being. They speak about his severe inner pressures in a way that the child unconsciously understands and . . . offer examples of both temporary and permanent solutions to pressing difficulties.”⁵

In this discussion about public, private, and commercial interests, I have been talking about adults; but the appeal of narrative, theatre, music, and worship touch the same emotions in adults and children. Just as some political candidates appeal to fear and separation anxiety; ridicule outsiders, and favor magical thinking over formal reasoning and critical thought, so any storyteller appeals to the child in the adult. This is not an argument for another line of deception, however. Good storytelling, whether it’s done in or out of a house of worship, leads the child to confidence, independence and wisdom. Adults who have listened and engaged in the making and telling have gotten their hands around an issue through the power of expression. Later they may be ready to explain it rationally. They may be ready to act on what they have come to know and believe. Coming to wisdom within the narrative circle also means that their relationships to others

1 Eaton, Eric, Carla Gomes, and Brian Williams, “Computational Sustainability,” *AI Magazine*, Fall, 2014, pp. 3-7. Articles in this issue explore computational methods for addressing issues of sustainability, such as sequential decision making, probabilistic models, spatio-temporal modeling, remote sensing, crowd sourcing, game theory, and agent-based modeling.

2 See <http://righteousmind.com/>

3 See <http://www.communityperformanceinternational.org/about-us/our-team?view=employee&id=1>

4 See <http://storytellerschannel.com/gayle-turner/> and <https://www.facebook.com/gayle.turner.79>

5 Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1975), p.6

are strengthened. These strengthened relationships are the foundation required for recalibrating our private, public, and commercial interests.

Having been thinking about this matter since 1969, however, I wonder if there's time.

Just enough

My pal Sammy had a perfect plan.
When he started, all his worldly stuff
Filled the back of an old chevy van.
He wanted more, he said, but just enough.

Many of you prob'ly know his brand.
What line had—all flash and bluff.
Soon his chain was spread across the land.
He wanted more, he said, but just enough.

Big penthouse on the Jersey shore,
grand hacienda in L.A.,
rentals blooming across the west,
hotels in Singapore—
and more are on the way.

And when he looked upon his worldly stuff,
he wanted more, he said, but just enough.

And anything he can collect he does—
from wines to wives, from high-end suits to judges,
and from his laptop he can send his drones
to give himself a buzz
or settle business grudges.

And when he looked upon his worldly stuff,
he wanted more, he said, but just enough.

My pal . . . (Repeat first stanza.)

Now you may think that Sammy's fortune sank.
Maybe a bubble burst, a market crashed
Or all those heavy dinners made him ill.
Truth is, he had enough.
He finally had his fill.

Oil fields and power plants had made him rank
above all nations and the stuff he trashed
would later, in a million applications,
when the times were tough (*Chinpa's include: transparent*)
give survivors just enough.

Now, when we look upon our worldly stuff,
Who knows? It may be just enough.

--R. Rose