

What is enough?

Published: September 2, 2026, 6:03 am

Why are we never allowed to have enough?

Modern economies constantly encourage us to want more: more possessions, more consumption, more experiences and often more debt. Advertising tells us that something is always missing and that buying it might finally make us happier.

But does having more actually improve our lives?

In this video, I ask whether there comes a point when our material needs have been met, and additional consumption adds very little to our wellbeing. Food, housing, security, meaningful work, relationships and participation in society for both work and leisure matter enormously. But once those needs are satisfied, relationships, achievement and understanding may contribute far more to a good life than accumulating still more things.

This is not an argument for accepting poverty. Quite the opposite. Millions of people do not have enough, while others consume resources on an extraordinary scale. Inequality therefore matters not just because income and wealth are distributed unequally, but because consumption is too.

And there is a limit we cannot escape: the planet itself. Human lives are finite, natural resources are finite, and unlimited material consumption is, then, impossible.

Maybe learning what “enough” means is not about giving something up. Maybe it is about discovering what actually makes life worthwhile.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qY0l6Rqo7bc?si=bGaTO0ZzR1AsA_Wq

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=9vyfm-1b4ba6c-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

There is no Debate Ammunition for this video.

This is the transcript:

Why isn't enough enough? That's a question I want to ask, because isn't enough good enough? Isn't that sufficient? And that's a question I think we have to ask ourselves at this moment, because we live in a society that always tells us we need more: much more. More possessions and more consumption. All of that is assumed to make life better, but there must be a point when our material needs have been met. Surely that has to be true. So why are we so reluctant to recognise when we've had enough, and what is the significance of not doing so?

My point is, does having more really make us happier? We're told it does, but that's not the point. Does it really? Because, in fact, happiness surveys undertaken by economists, including people I know, suggest that meeting basic needs does matter enormously. Having enough to live on, having a place to live in, being able to eat, being able to have fresh air and water, and, of course, being able to get to work, having a job if you want one, and having friends and social activities. All those things matter. They make a good life.

But beyond that point where relationships can happen and where we can see the people who matter to us and share our lives with them, the benefits from more material goods become very much weaker. And survey after survey shows that. More consumption does not necessarily mean greater well-being.

And let's face a fact: we are finite. There are only so many hours in a day. There are a finite number of days in a year, and there are only so many years that any of us can live. We might want to live life pretending that isn't the case, but we all know it's true, really. So there are limits to what we can do, as a matter of fact. And as a consequence, there's a limit to the amount we can experience and consume.

So there must logically be a point when we have enough, and the ultra-rich make this obvious. Their obsessive and excessive consumption is easy to see. Yachts, private jets, and multiple properties consume extraordinary resources. But does all this excess actually make anyone happier really?

Stable relationships, achievements and understanding provide much of what makes life worthwhile. More consumption cannot substitute for those things. In fact, it might mean there's just more to worry about.

That consumption is what I call 'Cumber', which is the bit of the word in the middle of encumbrance. It's the stuff that wears us down. And this excess consumption might just be 'cumber'. It's all for show. But it's not for happiness. It does not make these people necessarily feel any better or any happier.

And anyway, isn't the capacity to be happy finite? And is it really created by things or our relationship with other people? The rich may have things no better than anyone else.

So, why are we so frightened of saying we have enough? That's an important question, and the answer is fairly obvious. Advertising encourages us to believe that there's always something missing in our lives, and that fear creates pressure to consume still more. It also encourages us to go further into debt. It's fair to say that our whole economic system, as it currently operates, depends upon keeping dissatisfaction alive.

But what if we decided we'd had enough material well-being? Might we then give more attention to relationships, achievement and understanding? Wouldn't that make us happier? Well, wouldn't it make us happier if we had met our basic needs?

And I can't stress that point enough. Of course, if you have not met your basic needs, you might well still need more, and I'm not going to deny that. Dealing with poverty is an essential part of this argument, but maybe we need to deal with poverty precisely because those who suffer poverty do so because others consume far too much.

If we had less inequality, not just around income, but also around consumption, maybe we could deal with poverty very much better, and we could all then recognise when we've had enough.

And that is essential because, let's be clear, we are not the only things that have limits. Our planet also imposes limits on consumption. Excess consumption uses resources that future generations will need. The planet cannot sustain unlimited material consumption. We as human beings are finite, and critically the resources available to us are also finite. Recognising 'enough' is therefore not a choice. It is an economic and environmental necessity.

So is enough, enough? More consumption cannot be the purpose of our lives. Enough must mean having the security and resources required to live well, and not everyone does - that's a point I've already stressed in this video - but beyond that point where we do have the security and the resources required to live well, relationships, achievements, and understanding matter more.

Learning to recognise enough may then be essential for our wellbeing. But that's also especially true if we want to continue to live on this planet, and we want our children, and their children, and their children to do so as well. That is the critical point. Enough is the word that lets us imagine continued life here on Earth.

That's what I think. What do you think? There is a poll down below, of course. Let us have your views. Please like and share this video. Please subscribe to the channel. Please hit that bell button as well because that means that you will be told when we produce another video. And if you'd like to buy Tom and me a coffee using the donation button down below, that would be great, although at this moment I'm actually drinking a cup of tea.

Poll

[poll id="512"]