



Enoughness: Exploring the potentialities of having and being enough

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abstract

With this note, we offer an invitation to those who live in affluence to explore enoughness – an experience of inherent contentment that has the potential to undermine a doctrine of ‘moreness’. We begin with a brief critical description of the prevailing cultural obsession with growth, which lacks consideration of sensible limits and meaningful purpose. In the remainder of the manuscript we describe enoughness as an alternative condition that is rooted in the prosperity of a good enough rather than in the lack of wanting more per default. We argue that this condition of having and being enough is accessible for everyone and that it has a liberating quality and emancipatory potential. Enoughness is not presented as a solution, but we believe that exploring and cultivating a perspective of enoughness can support a cultural departure from ‘always more’ and a move toward a post-growth economy and society.

Introduction

Enoughness denotes a state or condition of having and being enough, thereby negating the need for an external reference point and avoiding comparability, as we will show in this note. When enoughness is the focus, standards and ideals are replaced by questions concerning characteristics, circumstances and reasons for something being enough. We first came across this phenomenon in interviews with business leaders who avoided growing the size of their businesses to protect certain qualities of their business’s status

quo that they considered of higher value than an increase in profits. Essentially, they did not want more (or different, for that matter) simply because they experienced contentment with what they had. The specific qualities these business leaders did not want to jeopardize were close personal connections with various stakeholders, connectedness to place and nature and a feeling of personal integrity.

Appearing in texts that offer perspectives on a sustainable, post-growth economy (Dietz and O'Neill, 2013; Princen, 2005; Reichel, 2017), the term enoughness is usually seen as one of the necessary conditions for 'a post-growth economy: an economy beyond the growth imperative, beyond scarcity, and beyond consumerism' (Reichel, 2017: 109). Similarly, Alexander calls for a 'philosophy of enoughism' to depart from a culture of always more and ask questions about what and how much we actually need (Read et al., 2019). With this text, we seek to contribute to this line of thought.

The problem with limitless improvement

Demands, opportunities and ways to improve or to increase everything – from income, impact and knowledge to looks, health and happiness – permeate our everyday lives with a doctrine of seeking and striving (Cederström and Spicer, 2015; Charitsis, 2016; Cremin, 2010). While there is nothing wrong with improvement per se, its motivations and directions demand critical attention, particularly in a consumer society and economy that simultaneously contribute to and depend on a sense of things never being (good) enough (Bloom, 2017). In this context, improvement is frequently used synonymously with more; with an increase in numbers being employed to capture, compare and maximize an economic value. The numerical change resulting from such measurement turns the complex qualitative question of what something's value is into a simple quantitative given. Consequently, improvement that equates to better numbers is not fundamentally concerned with a development's implications regarding social, ecological, spiritual, aesthetic and moral values. Increasing quantity is an end in itself, instead of a substantive improvement of value. Any status quo is tainted by the thought that there is always the potential for more and that numbers can grow infinitely. In an endless quest, every temporary success raises the bar without

any regard for the question of purpose. Irrespective of how good something is, the omnipresence of a 'more' prevents it from seeming enough (Dietz and O'Neill, 2013). In a doctrine of moreness, being content with anything short of affluence carries the stigma of a lack of ambition or capacity and evokes suspicion of a lack of competitiveness or diligence. And if those who have more also get more respect and recognition, having more and being more become inextricably intertwined. This creates a divisionary social environment fundamentally rooted in comparison, within which people look enviously up to those who have more and anxiously down on those who have less. The glorification of moreness and the coinciding absence of a positive outlook on moderation justifies greed and selfishness (critically: Galbraith, 1958) and fuels excess production and excess consumption. It therefore contributes to the deepening of social divisions between the poor and the wealthy and is fully at odds with a proclaimed necessity of slowing down and producing and consuming less in the face of finite planetary resources (Alexander, 2015; Kallis et al., 2012).

Following Deleuze's (1988) recommendation that we remain critical of what is, and imaginative about what might be, this text explores the experience of *enoughness* as a space beyond lack and excess that emerges in the absence of an insatiable desire for more and better.

What enoughness is

Enoughness resides in a *good enough*, which according to John Lachs covers a range from 'the upper reaches of what will do' to things being truly good or 'even great, in fact so good that they do not need to be better' (Lachs, 2009: 2). Enoughness describes one's experience of a situation as being perfectly fine at a given moment in time, an experience that does not depend on that situation's objective degree of perfection. Rather, the experience of enoughness is rooted in the absence of a desire for something bigger, better or more.

A feeling of enoughness, of having and being enough, is based on the subjective perception of a moment as adequate. In a sense, this means to view it independently from alternatives and potential, simply for what it is. In a

moment of enoughness, what or how something was before or what it could be is irrelevant. Something that is experienced as good enough is independent from favorable comparisons and trajectories. It is context-bound, subjective and momentary, drawing its validity from an intrinsic assuredness and not from any external reference point. A home-cooked meal that is plenty good and thus good enough might not compare favorably to a dish prepared by someone else or at a restaurant, but in a condition of enoughness this is irrelevant. If anything, the experiencing of enoughness is confirmed by a lack of desire to be in a different place (a restaurant) or eating a different meal. Enjoying a home-cooked meal does not depend on its quality reaching professional standards, or on it tasting better than the food you had the day before. Indeed, even a less good meal might be gloriously satisfying, for instance if it comes close to the taste you associate with childhood experiences in your grandma's kitchen or if you share it with those close to you.

A sense of enoughness thus stems from a situation's intrinsic value, which can be based on perceived comfort, on the sensuality of touch, on the smell and taste of ingredients, on fond memories, on a feeling of self-efficacy and on an indeterminable range of other subjective elements that contribute to a moment's integrity. Here, it is important to emphasize again that enoughness is neither bound to objectively identifiable features, nor to outshining an earlier point in time. Enoughness celebrates singularity: it is what it is, simply for what it is – not for what it is not, nor for what it could be. This is the acknowledgement of an intrinsic value that is not subject to any standard but its own. It is a value that arises from within a subject rather than being created and assigned to an object. Intrinsic value is not the outcome of measurement. It is not an outcome at all; it is inherent to a situation. A situation's intrinsic value is both a singularity (hence incomparable) and a plurality (hence immeasurable). Intrinsic value does not lend itself to comparison and measurement; it is never an object to anything. As a subject it can be acknowledged or ignored, but neither action affects its substance in the least.

Of course, this is not at all to say that each situation is, or can be perceived as, adequate: if someone's true needs are not met due to genuine lack, this is simply and unquestionably a situation of not having enough. But what we would like to draw attention to is that in a condition of affluence – beyond the

threshold of an enough – feelings of having and being enough are purely subjective, situational and momentary. They result from personal judgement based on occurrences, actors and their values (Lachs, 2009: 4). However, these individual values are themselves contextual (Daoud, 2010: 1222) and people are constantly both exposed to and subjected to logics of quantification and measurement. Rather than having enough and being enough, the dominant paradigm of growth and a culture of individualization rely on striving for more and being better, as well as idealizing maximization and perfection. This begs the question: what can give rise to experiences of enoughness – even in the face of a doctrine of ‘moreness’ (Princen, 2005)?

How enoughness might arise

Access to the experience of having and being enough is intuitive for some people, in that it is a process of returning to connectedness and immersing oneself in presence. For others, enoughness can be initiated by a shift in perception, a process of affectively and cognitively becoming aware of and moving beyond limiting standards. We will first describe the intuitive pathway to enoughness and then the shift in perception.

Overcoming a tyranny of ‘more’ requires emancipating oneself from an obsession with utility. It requires presence and connectedness to focus on the wealth and prosperity of the moment. As demonstrated by our recollection of moments when enoughness simply happens to us, such presence and connectedness are neither unrealistic nor hard to achieve. When we stand on top of a mountain or at the ocean shore, or when we look at any other stunning scenery, we are drawn in. We cannot help but be overwhelmed by the present, and all comparisons become irrelevant and inappropriate. For a short moment, our minds do not wander. Experiencing nature seems to give us easy access to enoughness, as does being socially connected. Small children in particular demand our undivided attention and, if we are willing to release ourselves from our preoccupation with ‘musts’ and ‘wants’ for a moment, they can take us with them to a realm of openness and presence.

Connectedness (with nature and humanity) subtly provides us with a strong, intuitive frame of reference that is substantially different to economic

doctrines of rationality and utility (Dietz and O'Neill, 2013: 6). The essence of connectedness is a love and appreciation of nature and a strong sense of community, both of which are an inherent part of who we are. Thus everyone has the natural ability to experience enoughness. Rather than being something we need to learn, it is something to return to after it was superimposed by concepts that are further removed from and further remove us from pure intensities of life and presence.

The more deeply we are caught up in the prevailing culture of moreness and comparison, the harder it is to acknowledge simple everyday moments as wonderful opportunities to experience enoughness. Practicing mindfulness by being present can help restore our ability to immerse ourselves in the plentitude of qualities. In an interview, performance artist Marina Abramović (2013) recounted a lesson she learned about being present from theater director Bob Wilson. Wilson criticized the actors for lacking presence in the moment because they were already focusing on their next movement. This was when she realised that it was impossible to think ahead without taking something away from the present moment and ending up 'actually missing that moment of presence'. Ever since she has used the simple example of consciously and slowly drinking a glass of water to illustrate the richness and sensuality of being present in a moment and fully immersing oneself in an experience. Drinking water is a useful example, because it is a regular process to which we normally pay no attention; therefore, an exploration of the qualities found in the process of drinking water can beautifully illustrate that the intensities of life are immanent to everything at all times. We have the potential to immerse ourselves in every chosen moment, dive into it and swim in it, stretch it and delve into it. For example, if you look at a glass filled with cold water, you might notice some drops of water on the brim that reflect the light surrounding them. There is always a slight shimmering in drops of water if you look closely. If a drop of water trickles down the side of the glass, you might feel a sense of arrival in the moment when the drop reunites with the body of water. Then, if you consciously and slowly touch the glass, you will likely do so in full appreciation of its vitality. At this point, your perspective will have changed and, with it, your experience. Once you have acknowledged the inherent qualities of cool fresh water, taking a sip of it not only quenches your thirst, but it fills your body with the water's vitality.

One can immerse oneself in everything. The decision of what to immerse oneself in is a personal one. ‘Be drunken continually. Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will,’ suggests Baudelaire (1945/1869) in his poem ‘Envirez-vous’. In this poem, Baudelaire unequivocally advocates that we open ourselves up to experience so much that we allow life to intoxicate us with its intensities. Hence, Baudelaire’s notion of drunkenness is not an escape from reality but rather a pathway to freely and fully experience life. In his view, such a condition enables you to appreciate the richness of what you have and forget what could be. This experience lifts your spirits beyond its duration and reshapes your outlook on the world.

In addition to the pathways that lead to enoughness through connectedness, presence and immersion (see also Burch, 2013), we can also access enoughness through an affective and cognitive process of becoming that starts with ‘achieving the freedom of understanding, through the awareness of our limits, of our bondage’ (Braidotti, 2006: 134). In reflecting upon limiting sets of standards – upon what we feel we cannot do and what we must do – we begin to explore what drives our passions and to stop ourselves from blindly pursuing needs and wants that are not entirely ours (Daoud, 2011; Lachs, 2009). In so doing, we open up space for a continuous *ethical transformation* of our desires. What is it that we value? What nurtures our souls, our bodies and our minds? Outside a realm of general demands, needs and expectations, the answer to this question is based on singular experiences of what each of us perceives as good enough. These ‘enoughs’ cannot be compared to a specific standard or frame of reference. Every enough feels right, because ‘the experience of the good enough is valuable on any level of sophistication’ (Lachs, 2009: 5). In the dismissal of universal standards and measures, enoughness requires and re-establishes an unmediated relationship between people and qualities of experience. This inherently shifts the focus from moreness to good measure, which denotes a space beyond lack and excess. Measurements don’t provide for good measure. Why would we even feel the need to put qualitative phenomena – even feelings like love – into an imaginary measuring cup? Just consider declarations like ‘I love you so much’ and ‘I love you more’. Wouldn’t it add to our experience if we could forego the drive to compare and maximize, allowing our loves be joyous,

fundamental, passionate, free, fervent, lively, safe, magical, playful, easy, crazy or something quite different altogether? An infinite array of possibilities, incomparable and thus each in itself enough in their essence. The habitual use of comparisons and quantifications to describe personal experiences is one example of how moreness discursively permeates our lives. Against this backdrop, every individual decision to account for the qualities within an enough can be regarded as a form of resistance against a language of moreness, since every verbalized account of enoughness reflects the possibility of qualitative wealth within a quantitative enough.

This is one reason why enoughness, as a way of avoiding quantification, can be powerful: Enoughness exposes morenesses' obliviousness to qualities. It shows us that measurement compares things that cannot be compared meaningfully. Enoughness also tells us that maximization increases some things by taking away from others, maybe from things we value. For example, why would you and should you increase your materialistic wealth if this comes at the cost of a reduction of your already meagre leisure time? The subjectivity of enoughness opens up questions you have to answer yourself, whereas the proclaimed objectivity of measurement shuts them down.

Why enoughness matters

Enoughness undermines the tendency to limitlessly and meaninglessly want more; therefore, it is a remedy for excess. As such, enoughness is desirable on a personal level because a mentality of never (good) enough diminishes one's life satisfaction (Hamilton and Denniss, 2005). It is also important on a global level because of the problematic ecological and social consequences of unbridled growth (Alexander, 2015). In conditions of abundance, 'more' does not correspond to improvements – neither with regard to personal life satisfaction (Naish, 2009), nor in terms of ecological sustainability, public wealth and social equality (Galbraith, 1958). In the richest nations, economic growth has become 'uneconomic' in the sense that, overall, it is more detrimental than beneficial (Daly, 1999).

Calls for limits, for a reduction and a slow-down in consumption and production (D'Alisa et al., 2015; Korten, 2010; van den Bergh and Kallis, 2012)

are indispensable in response to present and impending individual, social and ecological problems that are induced by an insatiable thirst for more in private lives, in consumption and in business (Sekulova et al., 2013). In this context, sufficiency relates to the quantifiable biophysical limits of the planet. However, while sufficiency is a necessary response, critical alternatives to moreness, growth and measurement must not stop here. There is a need for visions that contribute to ‘shifting the minds and the imaginaries [...] from one that sees ever-present scarcity and is constantly preoccupied with things running out to one of “we already have enough”’ (Chertkovskaya et al., 2017: 193). This is to say that rich nations should leave room for growth in poor nations, where the benefits of growth are evident (Meadows et al., 2004). But it seems unlikely that this objective can be achieved within a paradigm of quantities, because the inherent doctrine of moreness in measurement is a reality that is neither to be neglected nor ignored. Within the confines of a doctrine of ‘more’ concepts of sufficiency are stigmatized with notions of sacrifice and deprivation. In the context of a culture in which having more equates with being more (Daoud, 2011) such claims easily resonate negatively with those ‘looking enviously at those above them and anxiously at those beneath them’ (Riesman, 1981: 287) and sabotages any quest for ‘less and different’ (Kallis, 2011; Kallis et al., 2012).

Indeed, on a socio-economic level, a doctrine of moreness seems to be associated with inequality, resource conflicts, competition and a mentality of plundering. Meanwhile, societies that keep their needs modest are said to be more peaceful (Schumacher, 1993). The indigenous peoples’ activist Rebecca Adamson uses the term enoughness to describe indigenous philosophy and advocates for a sufficiency economy consistent with this culture (Adamson, 2016; First Peoples Worldwide, 2013). Paralleling this indigenous account, photographer Cristina Mittermeier also describes an inherent orientation toward sustainability in traditional indigenous societies that stems from a culture of enoughness (Mittermeier, 2013). A philosophy of enoughness – as the essential reference point in these accounts – is deeply rooted in the experience of connectedness with nature and humanity. It therefore nurtures compassion and solidarity and elicits socially and ecologically sensible behavior.

We encountered responsible conduct based on the concept of enoughness in an empirical study we recently conducted on business policies related to growth (Edlinger et al., 2020; Raith et al., 2020). We met several business owners whose entrepreneurial strategies are informed by a sense of enoughness. These individuals regard running a business as a means to contribute to a well-lived life, and their understanding of a well-lived life extends beyond the quality of their own and their co-workers' personal and professional lives to supporting the well-being of other stakeholders (e.g., suppliers, residents, customers and competitors) and preserving the natural environment. From this perspective, a business is fundamentally connected to its immediate environment and limits are regarded as thresholds to a loss in quality of life. For example, the owner and manager of a timber business considered it essential to only use timber that could be locally and sustainably harvested, not mainly because of global ecological concerns but simply because of his personal connection to the place. This individual's deep appreciation of nature and attribution of noneconomic value to trees led him to use medium quality timber for his business, because this kind of timber is normally used as firewood and is thus unnecessarily wasted. When the owner of a small sawmill in a neighboring village wanted to copy this idea, our interview partner encouraged him to do so. The timber business owner believed that supporting another business owner in the local community was of higher value than market shares. Indeed, several entrepreneurs in our study consistently and unwaveringly transferred their personal values, such as fairness and frugality, to the business sphere. These individuals' sense of enoughness leads them to naturally accept confined markets and cooperatively share markets with other businesses. They are persistently oriented toward successful stagnation in terms of their company sizes because their understanding of success extends beyond economic viability to personal integrity, purpose, solidarity, loyalty, reciprocity and respect. The business owners' perspectives illustrate that the cultivation of enoughness can induce changes that align with aims of the degrowth movement. Our empirical data reflects this alignment in the context of business; however, a similar relationship between enoughness and degrowth can be found in the sphere of consumption, where enoughness facilitates a departure from consumerism.

The freedom of positive passions is akin to a quiet, unspoiled confidence in having and being enough. Meanwhile, what lies beyond enoughness changes the essence of our passions from a vantage point to a quest. In this sense, enoughness can be seen as liberation, because ‘ethical behaviour confirms, facilitates and enhances the subject’s *potentia*, as the capacity to express his/her freedom’ (Braidotti, 2006: 134). It counters the lure of opportunity, which can otherwise ‘ruin our satisfaction with what is clearly excellent and therefore good enough’ (Lachs, 2009: 4). Enoughness can lead to a lifestyle of voluntary material simplicity, an ‘individual political choice’ (Zamwel et al., 2014) that is an alternative to consumer culture (Alexander, 2009, 2011; Alexander and Ussher, 2012). According to Elgin (1993: 93), it is the main goal of voluntary material simplifiers ‘to unburden ourselves [...], to establish a more direct, unpretentious, and unencumbered relationship with all aspects of our lives [...], to live with balance in order to realize a life of greater purpose, fulfilment, and satisfaction’ and to pursue ‘a manner of living that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich.’ This agenda is sometimes critically perceived as a feel-good movement for the materially well-off. But while some choose to live simply to escape moreness for the sake of their own well-being, some cultivate this way of living in accordance with their social and ecological conscience (Etzioni, 1998). Regardless of motive, voluntary material simplicity is associated with a reduction of material wants and needs, and it therefore contributes to a reduction of material throughput. The cultivation of a sense of enoughness supports sufficiency as a new sociopolitical paradigm because it provides access to the qualitative and immaterial dimensions of the good life. It simultaneously opposes the stigma of scarcity or forced abstinence that are associated with being content with a material ‘enough’.

Within a paradigm of moreness, which manifests as a cultural and economic obsession with growth, measurement, maximization and optimization, enoughness has a liberating potential on the individual level and a subversive potential on the collective level, as it questions and potentially undermines the dominant view that more is better and opens up possibilities for the political agenda of degrowth to unfold. Enoughness puts *good measure* in the place of right measure and herewith stimulates an ethical reflection of what we value. In this way, Princen (2005: 18) identifies ‘a sense of “enoughness”’ as an essential precondition for sufficiency. The reduction of want, slowing

down and producing and consuming less are the likely effects of enoughness, which shifts our focus from scarcity and wanting to abundance and being. This focus on qualitative wealth supports individual sovereignty in evaluating one's needs from a place of confidence and connectedness, not from a place of restlessness and isolation.

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