

# ‘Gaining The World But Losing Our Soul.’

## A Study Of Wealth, Status, Happiness And Justice

Dave Andrews

### What is materialism?

**Materialism** is simply an **obsession with materialistic values at the expense of non-materialistic values**. It involves an ongoing materialistic orientation towards

1. **body image and appearance,**
2. **private property and finance,**
3. **public recognition and success,**

at the expense of an ongoing non-materialistic orientation towards

1. **personal acceptance and development**
2. **social relationships and responsibilities,**
3. **communal connections and contributions.**

We need to note: **being materialistic is not ‘being rich’ - but ‘wanting to be rich!’**

**The proportion of the population** believing its ‘essential’ that they become ‘very well-off financially’ in countries like ours **rose from 39% in 1970 to 74% in 1990.**<sup>1</sup>

Ross Gittens says, in annual surveys, **students** in the U.S. **were asked their reasons for going to college. In 1971 half of them said their reason was ‘to make more money’ but by 1990 almost three-quarters said their reason was ‘to make more money’.** Over the same period, he says, **the proportion who began college hoping to “develop a meaningful philosophy of life” slumped from 76 per cent to 43 per cent’.** Gittens says that **these trends have ‘stayed unchanged.’** And, the Sydney Morning Herald journalist says that **‘I don’t doubt its true of us too’.**<sup>2</sup>

### What are the causes of materialism?

Clive Hamilton suggests that **the *ideology of progress* and the *role of advertising* are two of the basic reasons that our society is obsessed with materialism.**

Hamilton says **‘the idea of *progress* is perhaps only 200 years old’.** But it **‘has established itself in such a way that it is no longer contested by anyone’.**<sup>3</sup> He says that **‘it was given substance by leaps in applied science and technology that were suggestive of *infinite inventiveness*.’**<sup>4</sup>

Hamilton’s research shows that **‘countries rate progress against others by their income per person, which can only rise through faster growth’.**<sup>5</sup> **‘Every newspaper every day quotes a political leader arguing that we need more economic**

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<sup>1</sup> R.Gittens ‘Getting to the root of modern evil’. [Sydney Morning Herald](#) 27/08/2002

<sup>2</sup> R.Gittens ‘Getting to the root of modern evil’

<sup>3</sup> p98 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#) Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2003

<sup>4</sup> p99 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>5</sup> p1 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

**growth.<sup>6</sup> ‘Parties may differ on social policy, but there is an unchallengeable consensus that the overriding objective of government must be the growth of the economy.’<sup>7</sup> Our ideology of progress is like the ‘cargo cult’ in New Guinea.<sup>8</sup>**

Hamilton says that **the advertising industry is ‘the primary agent’ promoting the ‘cargo cult’ of material progress in our culture<sup>9</sup>. And asserts ‘the search for a marketing edge has meant the colonisation of all (our) cultural forms’ – from our city squares to our sports stadiums, from our art galleries to our homes.<sup>10</sup>**

However, Tim Kasser would argue that **while advertising may be all pervasive it is not always persuasive**. He says **different people have different responses to the same marketing stimulus - depending on personal rather than political factors**.

Tim Kasser suggests that ***high levels of insecurity and low levels of self esteem are two of the key reasons that our society is obsessed with materialism.***<sup>11</sup>

Kasser’s research shows **materialism can be induced by** a high level of insecurity brought about by -

- 1. a divided family**<sup>12</sup>
- 2. a less nurturing parent**<sup>13</sup>
- 3. a low socio-economic background.**<sup>14</sup>
- 4. a near-death experience or death of a near-relation.**<sup>15</sup>

And Kasser’s research shows **materialism can be induced by** a low level of self-esteem brought about by -

- 1. an experience of being ignored, neglected, and/or rejected.**<sup>16</sup>
- 2. the development of a negative, rather than positive, self-image**<sup>17</sup>
- 3. the manipulation of a fragile, unstable, impressionable, contingent self-image that is at the mercy of the trend-setters and pace-makers.**<sup>18</sup>

Alain de Botton suggests **three other reasons that may drive our materialism**.

de Botton suggests that two of our fundamental drivers may be ***envy and equality***.

**‘Our sense of an appropriate limit to anything – for example, to wealth – is never decided independently. It is arrived at by comparing our condition with**

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<sup>6</sup> p1 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>7</sup> p2 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>8</sup> p4 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>9</sup> p89 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>10</sup> p87 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>11</sup> Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#) A Bradford Book London England 2002

<sup>12</sup> p32 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>13</sup> p31 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>14</sup> p33/35 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>15</sup> p39-41 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>16</sup> p48 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>17</sup> p48 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>18</sup> p49-50 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

that of a reference group, with that of people we consider to be our equals. We will take ourselves to be fortunate only when we have as much as, or a little more than, the people we grow up with, work alongside, have as friends and identify with.’<sup>19</sup>

‘It is the feeling that we might be something other than what we are – a feeling transmitted by the superior achievements of those we take to be our equals - that generates anxiety. If we are small and live among people who are all of our own height, we will not be unduly troubled by questions of size’.<sup>20</sup> (See Figure 1)



Figure 1

‘But if others in our group grow so much as a little taller, we are liable to feel sudden unease and envy – even though we have not diminished in size by even a millimetre’.<sup>21</sup> (See Figure 2)



Figure 2

David Hume in a Treatise on Human Nature (Edinburgh, 1739) says ‘**It is not a great disproportion between ourselves and others that produces envy, but on the contrary, a proximity.** A great disproportion cuts off the relation, and either keeps us from comparing ourselves with what is remote to us, or diminishes the effects of the comparison.’ ‘**We envy only those whom we feel ourselves to be like; we envy only members of our reference group.** There are few successes more unendurable than those of our close friends.’ ‘**It follows that the more people we take to be our equals and compare ourselves to, the more people there are to envy.**’<sup>22</sup>

‘**For most of history inequality and low expectations had been viewed as normal.**’<sup>23</sup> ‘**But the American Revolution of 1776, perhaps more than any other event in Western history brought about a society where, according to geographer Jedidiah Morse, high expectations were normative, because “every man thinks himself as good as his neighbours, and believes that all mankind have, or ought to possess, equal rights”.**’<sup>24</sup>

In Democracy in America (1835), Alexis de Tocqueville wrote: “**In America I never met a citizen too poor to cast a glance of envy towards the pleasures of the rich.**”<sup>25</sup> **And the same may be said people in Australia today!**

<sup>19</sup> p45 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety Penguin Camberwell 2004

<sup>20</sup> p46 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>21</sup> p46 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>22</sup> p47 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>23</sup> p47 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>24</sup> p51 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>25</sup> p54 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

The third of the three reasons, de Botton suggests, drives our materialism is **love**.

de Botton states **'there are common assumptions about which motives drive us to seek "high" status; among them a longing for money, fame, and influence.'** He suggests **'alternatively'** – and, one must concede, 'counter-intuitively' - that, **'it might be more accurate to sum up what we searching for as: "love".'**<sup>26</sup>

de Botton says **'Our "ego" could be pictured as a leaking balloon, vulnerable to the smallest pricks of neglect, forever requiring the helium of external love to remain inflated.'**<sup>27</sup> He says that **'to be shown love is to feel ourselves the object of concern.'** **If our status is "high", we are "somebodies", and we get lots of attention. But if our status is "low", we are "nobodies", and we may get comparatively no attention at all'**. Therefore, he goes on to say, **in a society which values money, fame and influence, 'money, fame and influence may be valued more a means to love, rather than as ends in themselves.'**<sup>28</sup>

Adam Smith, the famous author of The Wealth Of Nations, said in The Theory Of Moral Sentiment (Edinburgh 1759), **'The rich man glories in his riches because he feels they naturally draw upon him the attention of the world. The poor man on the contrary is ashamed of his poverty (because) he feels it places him out of the sight of mankind - he goes out and comes in unheeded.'**<sup>29</sup>

In today's society **'the successful person comprises both men and women of any race who have been able to accumulate money, power, and renown through their own activities** in the commercial world (including sport, art and science)<sup>30</sup> **'The ability to accumulate wealth is prized for reflecting the presence of at least four cardinal virtues: creativity, courage, intelligence and stamina.'**<sup>31</sup> **'Accordingly, the possession of a great many goods becomes necessary, not principally because these goods yield pleasure, (though they do this too,) but because they confer honour'**.<sup>32</sup>

## **What are the consequences of materialism?**

The obvious consequence of obsession with material progress is **material progress**. We may cry 'poor', but most of us actually enjoy **a life of unparalleled luxury**.

**In Australia, over the last fifty years, the majority of the population have doubled the level of their personal incomes. In the last decade of the last century more Australians became millionaires than during any decade in history. As part of the top 20% of the world's population, we have more than 80% of the world's total income. And we are so well off by world standards - even those on the bottom of our society, living on social security - are in the top 50% of the global population - with incomparable access to world-class social, educational, and medical services.**

However, material **wealth** has not delivered the **wellbeing** we thought that it might.

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<sup>26</sup> p11 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>27</sup> p16 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>28</sup> p11-12 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>29</sup> p13 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>30</sup> p193 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>31</sup> p193 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>32</sup> p195 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

Clive Hamilton says 'If rising incomes result in increased happiness then we would expect:

1. People in richer countries will be happier than people in poorer countries.
2. Within each country, rich people will be happier than poor people.
3. As people become richer they will become happier.<sup>33</sup>

### **1. Are people in richer countries happier than people in poorer countries?**

On the surface **'there is a weak positive correlation between a country's income and self-reported life satisfaction.'** But this may be due to factors other than national income **'such as the presence of political freedom and the tolerance of difference.'**<sup>34</sup>

**'Some evidence suggests a negative relationship between income and happiness. For example, within Asia, residents of wealthy countries such as Japan and Taiwan regularly report the highest proportion of unhappy people, while the countries with the lowest incomes, such as the Philippines, report the highest number of happy people.'**<sup>35</sup>

### **2. Within each country, are rich people happier than poor people?**

**'In poor countries such as Bangladesh wealthier people have higher levels of well-being than poor people. But in rich countries, having more income makes surprisingly little difference.'**<sup>36</sup>

**'There is a threshold of around US\$10,000 above which a higher average income makes no difference to a population's reported life satisfaction.'**<sup>37</sup>

**'If we take the top 17 ranked countries, with per capita incomes ranging from \$16,000 to \$34,000, there is no relationship at all between higher incomes and higher reported appreciation of life.'**<sup>38</sup>

### **3. As people become richer do they become happier?**

**'Despite sustained levels of economic growth over 50 years the mass of people are no more satisfied with their lives now than they were then.'**<sup>39</sup>

**Over 40 year period in the US most peoples income doubled - but their level of satisfaction stayed the same!**<sup>40</sup>

( See Diagram on the next page.)

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<sup>33</sup> p23 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>34</sup> p24 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>35</sup> p24 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

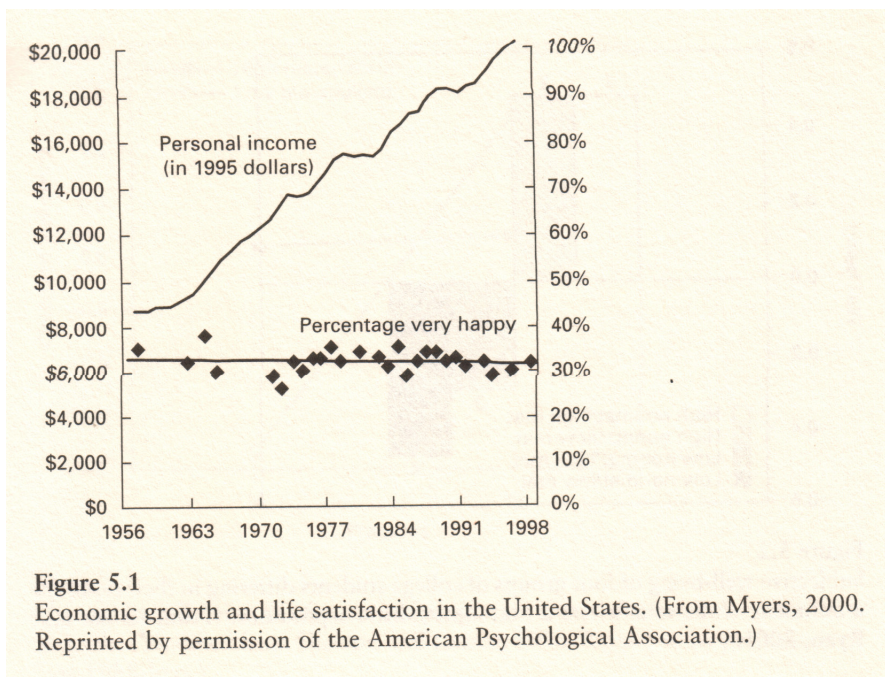
<sup>36</sup> p28 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>37</sup> p26 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>38</sup> p26 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>39</sup> p3 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>40</sup> p24 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)



**‘In the United States, where surveys have been conducted since 1946, real incomes have increased by 400 per cent, yet there has been *no increase* in reported levels of wellbeing. The proportion of Americans reporting themselves “very happy” *declined* from 35 per cent in 1957 to 30 per cent in 1988.<sup>41</sup> ‘Depression has increased tenfold among Americans born since World War II.<sup>42</sup>**

And according to Hugh Mackay in his book Turning Points **the situation in Australia is much the same. We’ve never been ‘better off’, but don’t feel any better.**

- **Depression is endemic.**
- **There is a 'record rate of consumption of antidepressants.'**
- **And each year about 40,000 young Australians between the age of 15 and 24 try to commit suicide.<sup>43</sup>**

According to Tim Kasser **the results of the research, with samples of people ranging from Americans to Russians, Germans, Turks, Indians, Chinese and Australians, from adolescents to the elderly, and from wealthy to the poor, indicate that 'the more materialistic values are at the centre of our lives, the more the quality of our life is diminished'.<sup>44</sup>**

## **Why does the pursuit of materialism not lead to happiness?**

One reason that wealth, status and success do not lead to happiness is that **the very idea - that the pursuit of wealth, status and success could lead to happiness - is an illusion.**

<sup>41</sup> p30 Tim Kasser The High Price Of Materialism

<sup>42</sup> p40 Tim Kasser The High Price Of Materialism

<sup>43</sup> p254 Hugh Mackay Turning Points Macmillan Sydney 1999

<sup>44</sup> p14 Tim Kasser The High Price Of Materialism

Tim Kasser says '**commercials often present a far rosier picture than is the case**'.<sup>45</sup>

**They do not take into account -**

**1. The Reality Of Addiction.**

'The desire for material goods is like drug addiction'.<sup>46</sup>

**2. The Law of Diminishing Returns.**

J.Paul Getty - 'A billion dollars doesn't go as far as it used to'.<sup>47</sup>

**3. The Case Of Rising Baselines.**

'Before Silicon Graphics, (Jim) Clark, (Founder of Netscape,) said a fortune of \$10 million would make him happy; before Netscape, \$100 million; before Healthon, \$1 billion; now he told Lewis, "Once I have more money than Larry Ellison, I'll be satisfied." Ellison, the founder of the software company Oracle, is worth \$13 billion.<sup>48</sup>

**4. The Cycle of Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction**

Satisfaction is only temporary. Soon the dissatisfaction sets in again.<sup>49</sup>

According to Clive Hamilton, '**The advertising industry is the primary agent of (a) massive deception. The official story is that advertising helps discerning consumers make informed choices about how best to spend their money. We are not allowed to point out that advertising influences citizens to behave in ways that are contrary to their best interests.**'<sup>50</sup> But '**the promotion of gluttony – a form of overconsumption that directly affects the body**' is an obvious and very serious example of the way advertising influences citizens to behave in ways that are contrary to their best interests.<sup>51</sup>

Another reason that wealth, status and success do not lead to happiness is that **the single most reliable universal indicator of happiness is connectedness with family and friends and, in reality, the pursuit of wealth, status and success devalues, distorts and destroys true connectedness with family and friends.**<sup>52</sup>

There are three reasons that the pursuit of wealth, status, and success, is at the expense of healthy interpersonal relationships.

**1. When we passionately pursue wealth, status, and success, we tend to devalue healthy interpersonal relationships.**

**Ambition undermines 'benevolence' - a commitment to the welfare of others eg personal loyalty**<sup>53</sup>

**Ambition undermines 'universalism' - a commitment to the welfare of all others eg social justice.**<sup>54</sup>

4-5 year old children shown a ten minute tv program - some with a commercial for a toy, some not. Then they were shown pictures of two kids - one 'nice'

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<sup>45</sup> p52 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>46</sup> p59 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>47</sup> p58 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>48</sup> p43 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>49</sup> p57 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>50</sup> p89 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>51</sup> p92 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>52</sup> p322 Robert Putnam [Bowling Alone](#) Touchstone Books New York 2000

<sup>53</sup> p65 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>54</sup> p65 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

without the toy; one 'not so nice' with the toy - and they were asked whether they wanted to play with these kids, or their own friends. 30% of those who had not watched the commercial wanted to play with the one who was 'not so nice' but had a toy, whereas 65% of those who had watched the commercial wanted to play with the one who was 'not so nice' but had a toy!<sup>55</sup>

**2. When we passionately pursue wealth, status, and success, we tend to *distort* healthy interpersonal relationships.**

**Materialism leads to 'objectification' - turning our relationships with 'people' into relationships with 'things'**

NB Martin Buber: from 'I-Thou' to 'I-It' relationships

**Materialism leads to 'utilization' - using 'people' as we would use 'things', consuming them then discarding them**

NB Aaron Ahuvia interviewing clients at a dating service said that they wanted to 'see fresh meat on the table.'<sup>56</sup>

**Materialistic people tend to develop 'instrumental friendships' which are characterised by a low degree of empathy, a high degree of manipulation, and a willingness to disclose truth only when it is useful.<sup>57</sup>**

NB 'Machiavellianism' - a cynical, self-interested manipulation of others!

**3. When we passionately pursue wealth, status, and success, we tend to *destroy* healthy interpersonal relationships**

**The more materialistic we become, we all tend to become**

- 1. more narcissistic, obsessive, and paranoid<sup>58</sup>**
- 2. more passive-aggressive and over-controlling<sup>59</sup>**
- 3. more unlikely to be self-actualised and satisfied<sup>60</sup>**
- 4. more likely to use/misuse/abuse substances<sup>61</sup>**
- 5. more prone to bouts of anxiety, anger and depression<sup>62</sup>**
- 6. more prone to headaches, backaches and sore muscles<sup>63</sup>**
- 7. more likely to alienate other people<sup>64</sup>**
- 8. less likely to have satisfying relationships<sup>65</sup>**
- 9. more likely to be abusive (insulting, swearing)<sup>66</sup>**
- 10. more likely to be aggressive (pushing, shoving)<sup>67</sup>**
- 11. less likely to invest in marriage, family, community<sup>68</sup>**
- 12. less likely to make healthy choices for 'the commons'<sup>69</sup>**

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<sup>55</sup> p66 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>56</sup> p67 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>57</sup> p69-70 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>58</sup> p12/15 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>59</sup> p17 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>60</sup> p20 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>61</sup> p12 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>62</sup> p21 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>63</sup> p11 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>64</sup> p63 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>65</sup> p62 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>66</sup> p62 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

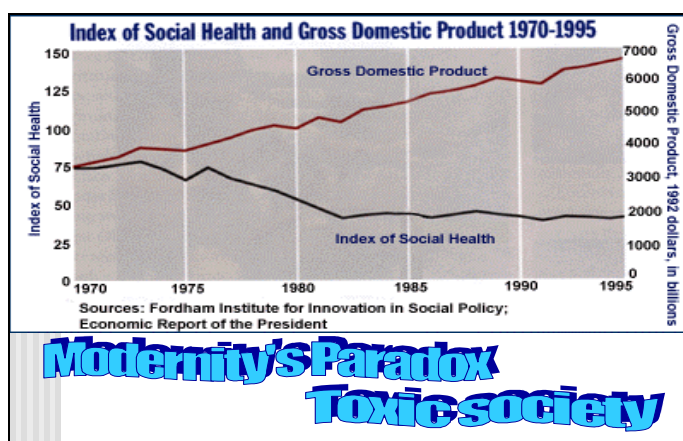
<sup>67</sup> p63 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>68</sup> p88/90 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)

<sup>69</sup> p93 Tim Kasser [The High Price Of Materialism](#)



Thus, while the indicators of economic health are still on the rise, the indicators of social health in society have trended – dangerously – downwards.<sup>70</sup>



## Why does the pursuit of materialism lead to unhappiness?

As we become more materialistic, we are less likely to make healthy choices for the welfare of other people in the world.

In 2002 there was a major independent review of aid called The Reality of Aid. It was subtitled 'Never Richer, Never Meaner' because it showed that **while the wealth per person in donor countries had doubled since 1961 (up to almost \$30,000), the aid given per person was less than it was 40 years ago.**

Graham Tupper says these days that **Australia gives 0.25% of G.N.P. in aid - or the equivalent of a paltry \$1.70 per person per week in humanitarian aid.**

Clive Hamilton asks 'Why have levels of foreign aid sunk so low at a time of unprecedented wealth, if not for the fact **that the more wealthy we are the more greedy we become?**'<sup>71</sup>

The more greedy we become the more uncaring even the most caring among us become. 'Nel Noddings, author of a book called Caring - A Feminine Approach To Ethics And Moral Education) argues that we only have an obligation to care for our own. She states - **We are "not obliged to care for starving children in Africa!"**<sup>72</sup>

Pauline Hanson says we should **put a stop to foreign aid altogether**. And no doubt many Australians who are supporters of Hanson's One Nation would agree with the infamous statement once made by a US Secretary for Agriculture who said '**We are in the position of a family with a litter of puppies: we've got to decide which ones to drown. Some people are going to have to (die).**' That's just the way it is.

**As we become more materialistic, we are also less likely to make healthy choices that are essential for the future of the planet itself.**

<sup>70</sup> Daniel Keating & Clyde Hertzman Developmental Health And The Wealth Of Nations Guilford Press New York 1999

<sup>71</sup> p235 Clive Hamilton Growth Fetish

<sup>72</sup> p86 Nel Noddings Caring University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986

Clive Hamilton says 'It is commonplace to observe that the current pattern of material consumption is environmentally unsustainable'.

'Cities with millions of high-consumption residents act like huge vacuum cleaners, sucking in resources and then blowing out huge volumes of wastes that must be buried, dumped into the oceans, or vented into the atmosphere.'

**It takes the biosphere at least a year and three months to renew what humanity uses in a single year, so humanity is now eating into earth's natural capital.'**

'Each person in the US requires 10.3 hectares of land to meet their consumption needs and absorb their waste products. This compares with "footprints" of 0.8 hectares in India and a (global) availability of land of 1.7 hectares per person.'

**'If everyone in the world were to consume as much as the average consumer in the rich countries we would require four planets the size of earth!'**

When it comes to the issue of global warming **'the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (predicts) that global warming could trigger "large, abrupt, and unwelcome regional and global climatic events"'**.

By the end of the century we could see Earth's mean temperature rise by 6 degrees centigrade. (At the height of the last Ice Age, when New York was several metres under ice, Earth's mean temperature was only 5 degrees cooler than it is now.)

**Sea-level rise of nearly 1 metre by the end of the century would see (countries like) Bangladesh lose 14 per cent of its entire land area (and a number of Pacific Island nation states like Kiribati drowned beneath the waters of the Pacific Ocean), causing a flood of environmental refugees. Tens of millions more people, mostly in poor countries, will be exposed to water borne diseases like malaria, and dengue fever.'**

**'There is only one (solution) to the terrible problems that are expected to befall Earth if nothing is done: immediately begin reducing combustion of fossil fuels and keep reducing it until fossil fuels are largely phased out. In 1997, after ten years of hard fought negotiations, the rich countries of the world agreed to the Kyoto Protocol, which would see those countries reduce their emissions by around 5 per cent over ten to fifteen years. (But) soon after his election in 2001, President Bush repudiated the protocol completely. (And) Australia followed the US lead.'**

**'There has been one, and only one, reason for the reluctance of the rich countries of the world to reduce their emission and so help stave off environmental catastrophe – the perceived impact of reducing emissions on the rate of economic growth and especially the growth of a handful of powerful industries.'**

According to the models, if policies to reduce emissions as specified by the Kyoto Protocol were implemented, GNP growth would be 1 per cent lower in 2012 than it would otherwise have been. GNP would be 39 per cent in June 2012 rather than 40 per cent. People would need to wait till October 2012 before reaching the expected level of 40 per cent GNP growth. Which means, **'confronted with a high probability of environmental catastrophe on Earth, the richest people on the planet are unwilling to wait an extra four months to increase their incomes by 40 per cent.'**

## What are the resources for change?

The **Yearning For Balance** report prepared for the Merck Family Fund in the US in 1995 reached four important conclusions.

1. **People “believe materialism increasingly dominate(s) life crowding out a more meaningful set of values centred on responsibility, family, and community.”**
2. **‘That “lust” for material things lies at the root of family breakdown and crime.’**
3. **‘That rampant consumerism is destroying the natural environment.’**
4. **That ‘they can see materialism is corroding society and themselves, but are too fearful to change their behaviour in any significant way’.**<sup>73</sup>

To change we need *increase our faith in change and reduce our fear of change.*

Alain de Botton suggests we can draw on significant **philosophical, psychological** and **spiritual** resources to increase faith in change and reduce fear of change.

### Reason – A Philosophical Resource For Change.

**‘Our sense of identity is held captive by the judgments of those we live among’.**<sup>74</sup>

In *The Affluent Society* (1958) the economist John Kenneth Gailbraith said; **‘People are poverty stricken whenever their income, even if adequate for survival, falls markedly behind that of the community. When they cannot have what the larger community regards as the minimum necessary for decency; and they cannot wholly escape, therefore, the judgment of the larger community that they are indecent.’**<sup>75</sup>

‘The approval of others could be said to matter to us for two reasons: materially, because the neglect of the community can bring with it physical discomfort and danger; and psychologically, because it can prove impossible to retain confidence in ourselves once others have ceased to accord us respect. It is in relation to this second consequence that the benefits of a philosophical approach emerge...’<sup>76</sup>

‘The honour code suggested that **what others think of us must determine what we think of ourselves** - that every insult, whether accurate or not, must shame us’.<sup>77</sup>

‘Philosophy introduced a new element to the relationship with external opinion. One might visualise **“reason”** as a box into which all public perceptions, whether positive or negative, would first have to be directed in order to be assessed, and then sent on to the self with renewed force if they were true, or ejected with a shrug of the shoulders if they were false. **Thanks to “reason”, our status could be settled according to intellectual conscience, rather than the whims of the market square.**’<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> p14-15 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>74</sup> p15 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

<sup>75</sup> p196 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

<sup>76</sup> p126 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

<sup>77</sup> p120 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

**We should not worry about the number of people that despise us, but their reasons for doing so.** Marcus Aurelius said in his Meditations (AD 167), **'Will any man despise me? Let him see to it. But I will see to it that I may not be found doing or saying any-thing that deserves to be despised.'**<sup>79</sup>

'Having watched Socrates being insulted in the market place, a passer-by asked him, "Don't you worry about being called names?" "Why? Do you think I should resent it if an ass had kicked me?" replied Socrates.'<sup>80</sup>

Epictetus said in his Discourses (AD.100), **'It's not my place in society that makes me well off, but my judgments; and these I carry with me. These alone are my own and can't be taken away.'**<sup>81</sup>

### **Restraint – A Psychological Resource For Change**

There are two ways to raise our self esteem. 'On the one hand we may try to achieve more; and on the other, we may reduce the number of things we want to achieve'.<sup>82</sup>

The American psychologist William James says **'By greatly increasing our pretensions, adequate self-esteem is almost impossible to secure.'** However, **"to give up pretensions is as blessed a relief as to get them gratified"**.<sup>83</sup>

'There are two ways to make people richer: to give them more money or to restrain their desires. Modern societies have succeeded spectacularly at the first option (giving people more money) but, by continuously inflaming appetites, they have at the same time helped to negate a share of their impressive achievements'.<sup>84</sup> 'A sharp decline in *actual* deprivation may – paradoxically – have been accompanied by a continuing and even increased *sense* of deprivation.'<sup>85</sup>

**'Every time we seek something we cannot afford, we grow poorer, whatever our resources. And every time we feel satisfied with what we have, we can be counted as rich, however little we may own. The most effective way to feel wealthy may not to try to make more money. It may be to distance ourselves – practically and emotionally – from anyone we consider to be our equal who has become richer than ourselves. We should concentrate on gathering around us (not bigger companions, but) smaller companions, next to whom our own size will not trouble us.'**<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> p121 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>79</sup> p122 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>80</sup> p120 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>81</sup> p119 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>82</sup> p56 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>83</sup> p56 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>84</sup> p62 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>85</sup> p45 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>86</sup> p62 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

## Story – A Spiritual Resource For Change

There are two types of meta-stories in our culture – one type that increases our anxiety about being poor, and another type that reduces anxiety about being poor.

### Three Anxiety-Inducing Stories About Being Poor

#### 1. The Rich Are The Givers In Society

The Capitalist story posited two classes: the entrepreneurs and their employees. The entrepreneurs became rich because of the creative risks they took with their capital. The employees start out poor - and they stay poor - because they take no initiative.<sup>87</sup> Bernard Mandeville wrote 'He that gives most trouble to his neighbours and invents the most otiose manufactures is, right or wrong, the greatest friend to society'.<sup>88</sup>

#### 2. Status Does Have Moral Connotations

One version of the Christian story suggested that there was a one-to-one correlation between status and virtue. Thomas P. Hunt wrote a bestseller in 1836 entitled The Book Of Wealth: In Which it is Proved from the Bible that it is the Duty of Every Man to Become Rich. 'Godliness is in league with riches. We see the wicked prosper only occasionally. In the long run, it is only to the man of morality that wealth comes'. p86

#### 3. The Poor Are The Takers In Society

The story of evolution was about a struggle for survival and the survival of the fittest. 'The deaths of the poor were beneficial to society as a whole, and therefore should not be prevented by government interference'.<sup>89</sup> The magnate, Andrew Carnegie, said 'Neither the individual or the race is improved by alms-giving. Those worthy of assistance seldom require assistance. The really valuable men of the race never do.'<sup>90</sup>

### Three Anxiety-Reducing Stories About Being Poor

#### 1. The Poor Are The Givers In Society

The medieval story posited three classes – the clergy, the nobles and the peasants. The peasants were poor. But they were recognised as the foundation of society.<sup>91</sup> The poet, Hans Rosenplut of Nuremberg, reflected the view of the times when he wrote in 1450 'If there were no peasant, our lives would be in a very sad condition.'<sup>92</sup>

#### 2. Status Has No Moral Connotations

The Christian story suggested that there was not a one-to-one correlation between status and virtue. After all Jesus Christ the saviour was himself a poor carpenter.<sup>93</sup> And Jesus said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven. But woe to you that are rich, for you have already received your reward.' Luke6:20,24

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<sup>87</sup> p75 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

<sup>88</sup> p76 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

<sup>89</sup> p87 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

<sup>90</sup> p89 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

<sup>91</sup> p67 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

<sup>92</sup> p69 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

<sup>93</sup> p70 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

### 3. The Rich Are The Takers In Society

The Socialist story posited two classes in society: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The proletariat were poor because the bourgeoisie stole the profit from their labour.<sup>94</sup> Karl Marx said to the bourgeoisie, 'You may be a model citizen, and even have the odour of sanctity to boot, but you are a creature with no heart in its breast'.<sup>95</sup>p72

**If we want to kick our addiction to being rich, we must set aside stories that induce anxiety about being poor, and let the stories that reduce our anxiety nurture our soul.**

### What are the options for change?

#### Withdrawing

The philosopher, Epicurus, has become the patron saint of "Epicureanism", and "Epicureanism" has become a by-word for hedonism, narcissism and bacchanalianism.

But, in spite of the spin put on his ideas, Epicurus actually advocated a simple life of simple pleasures. He said, 'Of the desires, some are natural and necessary. Others natural but unnecessary. And there are desires that are neither natural nor necessary

What is essential for happiness?		
Natural and necessary.	Natural but unnecessary.	Neither natural nor necessary.
Friends	A Large Palatial House	Fame
Freedom	Lavish Food and Drink	Power
Reflection	A Retinue of Servants	(Wealth?) <sup>96</sup>

**Epicurus says that we need three things to be happy – friendship, freedom and reflection. He says 'Wealth is unlikely to make anyone miserable, but if we have money without friends, freedom or reflection, *we will never be truly happy*. And if we have them, but are missing the fortune, *we will never be unhappy*.'**<sup>97</sup>

On Friendship:

**Epicurus says, 'Before you eat or drink anything, consider carefully *who* you eat or drink with, rather than *what* you eat or drink'. 'Of all the things that wisdom provides to help one live one's entire life in happiness, the greatest by far is friendship.'**<sup>98</sup>

On Freedom.

**'Epicurus and his friends removed themselves from employment in the commercial world of Athens, and began what could best have been described as a commune - accepting a simpler way of life in exchange for independence.'**<sup>99</sup>

<sup>94</sup> p72 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

<sup>95</sup> p72 Alain de Botton [Status Anxiety](#)

<sup>96</sup> p60 Alain de Botton [The Consolations Of Philosophy](#) Pantheon New York 2000

<sup>97</sup> p59 Alain de Botton [The Consolations Of Philosophy](#)

<sup>98</sup> p57 Alain de Botton [The Consolations Of Philosophy](#)

<sup>99</sup> p58 Alain de Botton [The Consolations Of Philosophy](#)

On Reflection.

In about AD 120 a colonnade was erected in the central market of a town in Asia Minor called Oinoanda. It was inscribed with Epicurean slogans begging shoppers to rethink their priorities. One slogan said **‘One must regard wealth beyond what is natural as of no more use than water to a container that is full to overflowing.’**<sup>100</sup>

### **Nonconforming.**

Alternative lifestyles are often called ‘bohemian’ – the word traditionally used to refer to gypsies who were mistakenly thought to have originated in central Europe.’<sup>101</sup>

‘Arthur Ransome, in Bohemia in London (1907) remarked “Bohemia can be anywhere: it is not a place but an attitude.”<sup>102</sup>

Two famous influential ‘bohemians’ were John Ruskin in the UK and Henry Thoreau in the USA.

John Ruskin ‘excoriated nineteenth-century Britons for being wealth-obsessed’. He said to them, ‘You are a parcel of thieves.’ In Unto This Last he called on them to **‘seek to be wealthy in terms of virtue, not in terms of riches - ‘to be wealthy in kindness, curiosity, sensitivity, humility, godliness and intelligence’**. He said **‘That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is the richest, who has also the widest helpful influence over others.’**<sup>103</sup>

‘In 1906, Britain’s first twenty-seven Labour MPs were asked what single book had most powerfully influenced them to pursue social justice through politics. Seventeen cited Ruskin’s Unto This Last.’<sup>104</sup> And a certain Mahatma Gandhi said the same!

‘In July 1845, one of the most renowned bohemians of nineteenth-century America, Henry Thoreau, moved into a log cabin he had built with his own hands on the north shore of Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts. His goal was to see if he could lead an outwardly plain but inwardly rich existence and in the process demonstrate to the bourgeoisie that **it was possible to combine a life of material scarcity with psychological fulfilment.**’<sup>105</sup> **‘Instead of using the word “poverty” to describe his condition, Thoreau preferred the word “simplicity”.**<sup>106</sup> **He concluded that ‘Man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can do without.’**<sup>107</sup> **‘money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul.’**<sup>108</sup>

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his essay on Self-Reliance (1840) **‘Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.’**p294

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<sup>100</sup> p67 Alain de Botton The Consolations Of Philosophy

<sup>101</sup> p277 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>102</sup> p277 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>103</sup> p209-210 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>104</sup> p209-210 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>105</sup> p285 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>106</sup> p285 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>107</sup> p285 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

<sup>108</sup> p287 Alain de Botton Status Anxiety

## **Downshifting.**

In recent years it seems that a growing number of ordinary people have found a way to overcome their fears and to make very significant changes in their lifestyles.

Clive Hamilton says 'already in society today there are large numbers of people who have decided to devote themselves to activities other than market-based ones aimed at more income and consumption. Armies of talented people work for the Red Cross and Greenpeace. These people are forerunners of the post-growth society.'<sup>109</sup>

These forerunners are 'downshiffters'. **Downshiffters, as the name implies, are not upwardly mobile, but downwardly mobile, as Juliet Schor says, 'opting out of excessive consumption to have more balance in their schedules, a slower pace of life, and daily lives that line up squarely with their deepest values.'**<sup>110</sup>

'Radical in its implications as it might be, the transition to a post-growth society, is by no means far-fetched or utopian. Many people in rich countries have already made a decision to reduce their work, incomes and consumption.'<sup>111</sup>

### **Who are *downshifting*?**

**'A remarkable 19% of the American adult population declared that in the previous 5 years they had voluntarily decided to make a change in their lives that resulted in making less money.'**<sup>112</sup>

**'A similar survey in Australia found that 23% of 30-60 year olds had *downshifted* citing as their reasons a desire for more balance and control in their lives, more time with their families and more personal fulfilment.'**<sup>113</sup>

'Evidence suggests that among the *downshiffters* are people from a broad range of social classes and income groups; they are not merely stressed out yuppies.'<sup>114</sup>

**'Most are ordinary people who have decided it is in their interests to step off the materialist treadmill and take up a more balanced and rewarding life.'**<sup>115</sup>

### **How Aussies are *downshifting*.**

**People *downshift* by reducing working hours (28%), choosing lower paying jobs (23%) changing their career (18%) or stopping paid work altogether (18%).'**<sup>116</sup>

### **Why Aussies are *downshifting*.**

**'*Downshiffters* are motivated above all by the desire to bring the daily reality of their lives into harmony with their deeply held values. To make the transition,**

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<sup>109</sup> p230 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>110</sup> p205 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>111</sup> p205 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>112</sup> p206 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>113</sup> p206 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>114</sup> p205 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>115</sup> p206 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>116</sup> p10 Clive Hamilton & Elizabeth Mail [Downshifting in Australia](#) The Australia Institute 2003



they take a crucial but simple psychological leap: they decide that they will no longer judge their own worth by the amount they earn and consume.<sup>117</sup>

**People *downshift* because they want to spend more time with their families (35%), to have a healthier lifestyle (23%), to acquire more balance (15%) and more fulfilment (15%). High-income *downshifters* tend to emphasise the need for more fulfilment. Low-income *downshifters* tend to emphasise the need for a healthier lifestyle.**<sup>118</sup>

**What Aussies feel about *downshifting*.**

**'Downshifters are overwhelmingly happy with their decisions.'**(92%!) **16% of *down-shifters* (with young families) are happy, though they feel the loss of income acutely. While 34% of *downshifters* are happy - and say they don't miss the money at all.**<sup>119</sup>

**What are the political implications of *downshifting*?**

**1. *Downshifting* shows that personal change is possible.**

**'Radical in its implications as it might be, the transition to a post-growth society, is by no means far-fetched or utopian. Many people in rich countries have already made a decision to reduce their work, incomes and consumption.'**<sup>120</sup>

**2. Personal change makes political change possible.**

**'The reason we have been unable to make the changes that are needed (thus far) is the preoccupation of most of the population (the so-called "aspirational voters") with their income, a preoccupation reinforced every time a political party declares that its first priority is more growth.'**<sup>121</sup>

**'The research reported in this paper uncovers a large and, until now, invisible class of citizens who consciously reject consumerism and the pre-occupations of the "aspirational voter". These voters, who comprise at least a quarter of the adult population, might be called "anti-aspirational voters". They reject the unquestioned assumptions of Australian politics that voters respond first and foremost to the "hip-pocket nerve"; for them the hip-pocket nerve has been cauterised.'**<sup>122</sup>

**In 1995 the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) did a survey of Americans on US spending on foreign aid. And they discovered that though the majority felt too much money was being spent on foreign aid, most of them thought 15% of the GNP was being spent on foreign aid! When asked what they thought an appropriate amount of foreign aid should be, the median response was 5% - 50 times more than was actually being spent!**<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> p207 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>118</sup> p10 Clive Hamilton & Elizabeth Mail [Downshifting in Australia](#)

<sup>119</sup> p10 Clive Hamilton & Elizabeth Mail [Downshifting in Australia](#)

<sup>120</sup> p205 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>121</sup> p234 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>122</sup> p11 Clive Hamilton & Elizabeth Mail [Downshifting in Australia](#)

<sup>123</sup> p200 Peter Singer [One World](#) The Text Publishing Co., Melbourne, 2002.

**A few months later the Washington Post did their own survey to check these results. And they discovered that though the majority felt too much money was being spent on foreign aid, most of them thought 20% of the GNP was being spent on foreign aid! When asked what they thought an appropriate amount of foreign aid should be, the median response was 10% - 100 times more than was being spent!**<sup>124</sup>

These results suggest that people would be prepared to give more to foreign aid.

**And the research in Australia supports the idea that a growing number of people would be willing to give more to support healthy policy choices that would ensure the welfare of other people and the future of the planet itself. Though the level of government aid is falling slowly, but surely and remorselessly the level of non-government foreign aid has doubled in the past six years.**

<sup>125</sup>

3. **'Nothing is inevitable and no power is invincible!'**<sup>126</sup>

Thomas Aquinas says "Whatever a man has in superabundance is owed, of a natural right, to the poor for their sustenance."<sup>127</sup>

***We could pay what we owe; and ameliorate, if not eliminate, global poverty!***

**Every day 30,000 children die of poverty related diseases. Peter Unger, a New York philosopher, did some research to assess how much it would cost to save their lives. He came up with a figure of US\$200 per child.** <sup>128</sup>

**To achieve the Millennium goals – to combat major diseases, reduce child mortality by two-thirds, halve the number of people living in poverty, without access to safe drinking water, and ensure all people have a primary education by 2015 – would cost an additional US\$ 60 billion in aid.**<sup>129</sup>

**Which sounds a lot, but is \$29 billion less than the latest increase in the US military budget. It could be paid for by giving just 0.4% of our income.** <sup>130</sup>

**But why give .4% of our income to ameliorate global poverty, when just 1.0% of our personal and national income might eliminate global poverty altogether? 'One per cent would be a more useful symbolic figure.'**<sup>131</sup>

***If we all were willing to give 1% of our income, we could change the world!***

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<sup>124</sup> p200 Peter Singer [One World](#) .

<sup>125</sup> Kenneth Davidson 'A Poppun War On Poverty' [The Age](#) Tuesday March 26, 2002

<sup>126</sup> p240 Clive Hamilton [Growth Fetish](#)

<sup>127</sup> p200 Peter Singer [One World](#)

<sup>128</sup> p205 Peter Singer [One World](#)

<sup>129</sup> p211 Peter Singer [One World](#)

<sup>130</sup> p211 Peter Singer [One World](#)

<sup>131</sup> p212 Peter Singer [One World](#)

**Some countries - like Norway, Sweden and Denmark - are already giving 1% of their national income to fund the U.N. Millennium Development Goals.**

***And there is no reason why a country, like Australia, couldn't do the same!***

**However, given the fact it is unlikely everyone will give 1% of their income, in the meantime some of us will need to give much more. How much more?**

**The controversial Australian philosopher, Peter Singer, says 'the formula is simple: whatever money that you're spending on luxuries, not necessities, should be given away. How does (that) break down into dollars and cents? According to the Conference Board, a non-profit economic research organisation, a ... household with an income of \$50,000 spends around \$30,000 annually on necessities. Therefore, for a household bringing in \$50,000 a year, donations to help the world's poor should be as close as possible to \$20,000. A household making \$100,000 could write a cheque for \$70,000.'<sup>132</sup>**

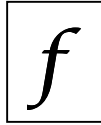
***Knowing what we could be doing - is the first step towards doing it!***

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<sup>132</sup> p118 Peter Singer Writings Ion An Ethical Life Fourth Estate, London, 2001



**‘What good is it  
if you gain the whole world,  
but lose your own soul?’**

**Luke 9:25**

### Tim's Tips

- **We need to remember that apart from the need of food, drink, clothing, shelter and security, which are material, most of our basic needs are nonmaterial.**
- **So once we have acquired food, drink, clothing, shelter and security, we should invest most of our time, energy in free, self-directed, other-orientated activities that help us develop our knowledge and skills, our connections and communications, and our function and our esteem in our communities p24/5.**
- **We need to get off the materialistic treadmill p102 and join the growing movement towards Voluntary Simplicity p99 -**
  1. **Live more with less.**
  2. **Switch off the TV.**
  3. **Cancel subscriptions to glamour and gossip magazines.**
  4. **Develop other pursuits aside from browsing in shopping malls.**
  5. **Take time to reflect.**
  6. **Go for a long walk.**
  7. **Read a good book.**
  8. **Talk with our spouse.**
  9. **Play with our kids.**
  10. **Work in the garden.**
  11. **Help out the neighbours. Etc p103**