

# **Less Is More: The Art of Voluntary Poverty: An Anthology of Ancient and... Study Guide**

**Less Is More: The Art of Voluntary Poverty: An  
Anthology of Ancient and... by Goldian VandenBroeck**

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# Plot Summary

"Less Is More," which is an anthology of ancient as well as modern voices, praises the concept of simplicity—living the simple, unencumbered life. By having "less" material possessions, man has "more"—more time to think, to learn, to create and to grow spiritually. The quotations are selected and edited by Goldian VandenBroeck. Editor VandenBroeck begins the anthology by prefacing its main theme and purpose which is finding the real value and worth of life by the denunciation of wealth and all its trappings.

Voluntary poverty is an ideal state as it is a chosen status and frees one from the burdens of gaining wealth and the concerns and worries about losing it. Such poverty is not to be confused with destitution, which is a state that is not chosen but rather a miserable existence that is inflicted upon one. The destitute people of the world need the help of the strong who have denounced their wealth and who are free to help the less fortunate. St. Francis of Assisi loved and honored voluntary poverty and lovingly dubbed it Lady Poverty, a thinly veiled reference to Lady Madonna. St. Francis' movement was important and gathered great support and thousands of followers who emulated St. Francis' vow to poverty. Gandhi, who famously gave up all wealth and possessions, is often quoted and offers advocacy based on his own experiences on the fulfilling life that is possible through a life of poverty.

From ancient voices like those of Aristotle and Seneca to the thoughts and ideas of modern men like Galbraith and Thoreau, the message remains consistent. The real value of life has no relation to wealth and possessions. In fact, it is the consensus of these great thinkers and philosophers that the opposite is true. The hunger for wealth and the struggle to keep it prevents man from growing spiritually and becoming a positive force in the world.

Western civilization, especially the United States, is cited as having created a false sense of what a satisfactory and fulfilling life is. The super-wealthy and influential have established standards of living that are contrary to nature and in the end destructive not only to themselves but to the destitute of the world and even to nature itself. The important things in life are free and are gifted to man by nature.

For the first time in history, there are currently no teachers or philosophers to warn man against his self-destructive path. However, new "teachers" have evolved such as genocide, terrorism and pollution, which will prove to be the strictest of disciplinarians. Mankind will soon be forced to face the inevitable—that the only way to peace of mind and the truly satisfactory life is by focus upon that which is fundamental to man's survival—rejecting wealth and recovering from avarice and self-destructive egoism in favor of the simple life.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

### Voluntary Poverty and the Monopoly of Values

Today's economic structure is rigged toward the relatively few super wealthy. The power intrinsic in that wealth is able to establish society's values—values adhered to by that sparse population—which in turn are relegated to the masses and become entrenched in society. The "success" of these super-rich create the goals or values that are thought to be ideal and become the benchmark for living the "good life." Not only is there a monopoly on the major portion of money, the accompanying values have become part of the package and have stolen the virtuous aspirations of the culture.

The only way that hunger for the mostly empty goals can be thwarted is by the presentation of alternative ideas and values. In "The Other America," Michael Harrington cites the virtue of choosing poverty over an "the desolation of empty abundance." While poverty is not the end goal of the creative community, it may be a temporary safe harbor where they can nurture their aspirations. If man does not soon conduct his own redefinition of his values, perhaps nature will. Increasingly, there are essential aspects of life that are not for sale: fresh air, clean water, health and freedom to name a few.

The rich themselves are slaves to centers of wealth—for example, the fluctuations of the markets that are under no one's control. High living, overeating and over indulgence in other miseries are followed by health concerns both psychological and physical. Solutions to the problems that are wrought from wealth lie in the restoration of values foregone by the mad dash to the pot of gold. While fighting to free oneself from the ills of wealth, the ability to survive in it goes on, which only serves to strengthen those qualities that brought one to it in the first place. The only true solution for a return to a truly rich life is to remove oneself from the false set of values. The first step to realize this transition is to enter into Voluntary Poverty.

In modern society there is no charm or attractiveness about the concept of poverty. It is difficult to reject the easy life and comfort of materialism. Man is not purely good or evil but he is partly both. The lower brain reacts positively to easily attained reward and comfort. However, it is in the deeper cerebral cortex that man must explore to find his true worth.

It is the wealthy man who often bungles his chance to choose his own experience within the confines of wealth that will free himself from the slavery of riches. Poverty can be a reality when basic needs have been met and excess begins to litter one's life with meaningless affluence. The truly poor in a society are often only poor in knowledge and ingenuity. Today's people prefer to purchase food and support the industry rather than bend over and pick berries and roots. As opposed to those who may elect to experience



Voluntary Poverty in an effort to restore worthwhile values, the desperately poor who are needy without choice have no time or effort to reflect on virtue and values; rather, they are in a day-to-day battle just to survive. Their only real hope is that a consciousness about their state will evolve among the more fortunate which can be initiated by Voluntary Poverty.

The rich are at an advantage in wealth and in an imposed poverty. While exploring the freedom of simplicity, they know that their wealth awaits them in the background should the experiment fail. While the management of wealth requires lawyers and institutions, Voluntary Poverty is a private, unencumbered journey. Wealth is necessary for the exercise of Voluntary Poverty and is, in fact, an extension of it. It is needed in a world in which wealth is a threatening and endangering entity created by its own arrogance. To guarantee its survival, wealth will increase its oppressive nature. Overpopulation and diminishing resources coupled with increasing institutionalized global poverty will naturally crimp free enterprise. Facing these coming powers, the wealthy must be able to offer a defense of conscious wealth and of capitalism as a good force. Voluntary Poverty is essential in settling the colliding worlds. To support the restoration of values, what follows in the remainder of the book is an anthology of the thoughts of those who have truly succeeded in life and have found that which is so elusive to the rich—a life filled with satisfaction.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

### In Praise of Poverty

William James (1842-1910) asserts that "the praises of poverty need once more be boldly sung" (7). Society looks down on someone who is poor, or chooses to be poor, concluding that he lacks ambition and drive. We have forgotten about the virtue of poverty that allows for the unbridled soul and liberation from materialism. Few find satisfaction in wealth; rather, the desire to gain it and fear of losing it spawns cowardice and corruption. True strength lies in the personal indifference and independence found in untethered poverty. We can speak our mind without fear of losing our affluence. James concludes that fear of poverty is the "worst moral disease" from which civilization has suffered.

### Getting the Word

In 1973, E. F. Schumacher, weighs in on the debate and provides insight into the philosophy of materialism. He asserts that modern technology is destroying the planet and mutilating mankind. Money is considered all powerful and the acquisition of wealth has become the paramount goal and has relegated the achievement of all other goals to a distant second. Never before these times has the civilized world lacked the philosophers and teachers who warn against the destructiveness of materialism. However, lessons will be learned from real events and hostile insurgencies that have taken the place of these wise men. The world's new teachers are terrorism, genocide and pollution, among others. Resolution resides in each man and in the traditional wisdom of mankind.

Ivan Illich, in 1973, points out that the world is divided into two camps: those with nothing and those with too much. The rich man has no patience with the concept of personal accomplishment or a society in which all men are free of the burdens inherent in a wealth-driven culture. Most of today's people do not understand the joy that awaits them in an unencumbered life of voluntary poverty.

### Poverty: What It Is, What It Is Not

Dorothy Day, in 1963, explains the difference between inflicted poverty, which is destitution, and voluntary poverty which champions poverty. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) asserts that poverty is a source of happiness. Charles Peguy (1873-1913) clarifies the difference between poverty and destitution whom he calls "neighbors." The poor man is separated from the destitute man by a difference of quality and of nature. St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) speaks of the holiness of the vow of poverty, the very foundation for the establishment of her Order.



The philosopher Epicurus (342-270 B.C.) defines unlimited wealth as great poverty. Bruce Barton (1886-1967) draws on his own upbringing pointing out that his family was not poor, they just did not have any money. In 1972, Rene Dubois, metaphorically defines affluence as the state in civilized society when the outhouses are moved indoors. Mark Twain (1835-1910) uses humor to underscore the uselessness of abundance: "Civilization is a limitless multiplication of unnecessary necessities" (21). John Ruskin (1891-1900) points to the changing definition of wealth which originally means "well-being."

#### Voluntary: The Imperative of Choice

In a spiritual declaration, Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), asserts that while man has the power to degenerate into lower forms, he also has the choice to aspire to higher, divine forms. Mankind has freedom of choice not bound by trends but rather by truth—this according to E. F. Schumacher. Marcus Aurelius (121-180) advocates that very little is necessary for happiness and St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) ascribes to the tenet that the love of poverty makes us all kings.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

### Lady Poverty: The Tradition

The ancient concept that man must discard all material belongings to truly tap the treasures that lie within has been missing from civilization for a lengthy period of time. For eons, from Tibet to Egypt, an idea of the simple and pure unencumbered life has been a goal of wise and spiritual man. Destitution is not the desired goal, rather it is one of "frugal plenty." Ego is seen as a non-productive luxury that stands in the way of one's true worth.

Every movement of humanity and justice is one that leads toward simplicity. Therefore, it is not St. Francis of Assisi who originates the idealization of a happy life divested of wealth and possessions although he lovingly dubs the concept "Lady Poverty." What Francis does is embody the poetry, spirit and strength of the concept. Francis is born into upper middle-class wealth, son of a prosperous merchant. From a young age, he is spirited and artistic. He learns the ballads of the Povenal from his mother who hails from the region, which has seen the birth of the fundamental idea of Lady Poverty.

Francis contemplates marriage to a noble and wealthy woman but later reality strikes when his bride became Ma-Donna Poverty. A trip to Rome rouses passion in Francis when he is confronted with true destitution. His father becomes dismayed when his son gives away everything to the poor that he can get his hands—including his father's merchandise and money. After a meeting with the Bishop, Francis denounces all his worldly possessions and wealth in favor of a life of poverty. He even disrobes before the Bishop which makes the holy man declare that he has never been so moved. Francis, in essence, is married to poverty—Lady Poverty.

Francis of Assisi literally interprets the Sermon on the Mount and ascribes to the dynamic ritual of poverty described in the Gospel, as well as the sacrament of liberation. Francis gives credit for his devotion to poverty to his Lord. He vows, "Beloved Lady Poverty! However low in the judgment of men may be thine extraction, I esteem thee, since my master wed thee" (32). Francis' dedication to the Lady gives birth to a legion of followers called the Friars Minor who will work for their keep but take only what is absolutely necessary for survival and will never take money—only food and goods. A decade after it first begins, the Franciscan movement has amassed some 50,000 devotees. Many Franciscans are from aristocratic and wealthy backgrounds. Francis also demonstrates keen foresight in his concern for preserving nature and resources.

In 1970, Joan Mowat Irkson declares that Francis of Assisi has created a "noble lady to whom he could swear allegiance. This lady, feared and despised by all, he would make his wife and serve with courage and fidelity—the Lady Poverty" (34).





# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 4

#### Lady Pecunia

The poem, "Lady Pecunia," by Richard Barnfield (1574-1627), is also known as "In Praise of Money." Barnfield explains that he metaphorically represents money as a lady because men love women. The poem tells of man's obsession with gold and riches and Barnfield uses a satirical tone to shine light on the issue and ridicule man's love of money.

#### Money as an Entity

Ruskin (1819-1900) tells of a passenger on a ship who is wearing a belt containing his gold. As the boat sinks, the man refuses to discard his belt. Ruskin asks, "Had he the gold or had the gold him?" (41). Seneca (4 B.C.-A.D. 65) notes that man does not ask the value of an item but rather what it costs. In 1961, Horace Gregory refers to money as the "invisible spirit against the human spirit" (43).

A Japanese proverb puts wealth into perspective: "The gods only laugh when men pray to them for wealth" (46). Seneca is dismayed that gold was too easy to remove from the earth. The scriptures address the issue in I Timothy 6:10 declaring that the love of money is the root of all evil, which Bruce Barton clarifies by proclaiming that it is the "love" of money that is the root of all evil. Longinus (213-273) observes that man is destroying himself with his love and quest for money and that it is a disease of small and petty men. He speaks of the inherent evil that comes from the quest of unneeded abundance and how this dark force will take over the cities and the world. There is agreement to Longinus' words in Proverbs 1:32: "For the prosperity of fools shall destroy them" (48).

Editor VandenBroeck summarizes this chapter by concluding that with the quest for money, man has diminished society and immobilized it into an entity in which money is made to create more money that will create yet more money. The purpose of life is reduced to its monetary value. The wealthy in society are divided into two categories for the future. One group will venture on a journey to improve the true value of man while the other will stay behind in their struggle to make more money. The second group is destined to eat its young.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

### The Right Thing

#### Righteous Wealth

No man is without work, whether he is gainfully employed or not. Man's obligation is to live under God in all his actions. Men are not equally gifted nor burdened—much has been given to those from whom much will be required. This sentiment paraphrases the thoughts of William Law (1686-1761). Clement of Alexandria (150-220) declares that the man who is truly rich is rich in virtues and eager to use his fortune in a holy manner. Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) addresses the matter of wealth concluding that the only purpose of having money is using it.

In Mildred Binns Young's 1939 piece entitled, "Toward a Functional Poverty," she states her thesis that the path to freeing oneself is by drastically limiting ones material possessions. Only with such limitation, can one realize his true worth. An austere existence opens the path to growth in wisdom and love. Thoreau (1817-1862) concludes that wealthy men are the most destitute of all because they do not know how to use their wealth.

#### The Political Coil

As Gandhi (1869-1948) feels pulled into the "political coil," he tries to determine how to remain untouched by immoral influences. Gandhi's solution, if he is to serve mankind, is to rid himself of all wealth and possessions. Gandhi recalls how the process is a difficult one at first, but as time passes the more he gives away the easier it becomes. A burden is lifted from his shoulders. Gandhi declares that the only true way for mankind to have equality is non-possession by all. Once a person has reached this ideal state, he then possess all the riches of the world.

#### Varieties of Ethical Poverty

Socrates pledges his spiritual devotion when he declares that he is in utter poverty because of his service to God. Every good thing comes from God. Diogenes wrote in the third century about Pythagoras' daughter who could have sold his writings for large sums of money but refused to because poverty and keeping her father's words were more precious than gold. Tao Te Ching refers to the rich as robber barons who are self-indulgent and starving the people.

#### Just Desserts

R. H. Taney (1880-1962) addresses the enormous compensation received by some corporate executives. Economic conditions are not the only consideration in paying an



individual—honor is involved. What a man is worth is between him and his god. A man needs only enough to perform his job. Mencius (372-289 B.C.) asks what a salary is if it is earned against one's principals. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) observes that avarice is insatiable and leads to a desire for more that never ends.

### Business Man

John Wollman (1720-1772) learns that a life free from complexities is best for him even if the salary he receives is small and that an increase in wealth increases the desire for more wealth. Roman de la Rose in the 13th century observes that the wealthy merchant is never at ease—an inner desire for more wealth never rests.

E. F. Schumacher writes of a man, Ernest Bader, who establishes his own business in 1920. The man is successful but always remembers his humble beginnings and how his workers are responsible for his success. As a result he changes his company's philosophy to one that fits industry to human needs. He divests himself of ownership and allows his employees to become his partners under the establishment of the Scott Bader Commonwealth. Bader's voluntary actions allow the creation of a true community and prevent him and his family from becoming inordinately rich.

Thales of Miletus (640-546 B.C.) asserts that justice can only exist with the absence of excesses in both poverty and wealth. Solon (638-559 B.C.) proclaims that when things are even there can be no war.

### Mammon Avenue

"Mammon" is a term used to describe greed or love of money. The editor VandenBroeck entitles this section which covers advertising as "Mammon Avenue" which is a play on words—a reference to the location of the world's largest advertising center—Madison Avenue in New York City. This chapter focuses on advertising, which people rely on to tell them what they need and how miserable and deprived they are without it.

According to John Kenneth Galbraith in 1958, wealth in a society creates new things to be coveted but which result in continuously diminishing satisfaction. Production to satisfy new desires cannot be justified if it serves only to create more wants. In its quest for wealth, industry conspires with other entities, including the world of advertising which is devoted to selling society on the things that they really do not need but must have. Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) addresses the advertising medium, emphasizing that the industry's sole purpose is to prevent the "will from ever achieving silence." Confucius (551-479 B.C.) would agree. He writes that the "superior man understands what is right" while the "inferior man understands what will sell."

Daniel Bell, in 1956, refers to advertising and the installment plan as the two most egregious inventions since gunpowder. According to Jerry Mander, an advertising executive himself, his industry will one day reach its end. There is a limit to how much a society can grow in its wants and needs. Alvin Toffler, in 1970, writes that many products are throw-away items designed to match society's throw-away mentality.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Desire/Greed, Necessity/Need

The Ten Thousand Things

In his writings, Jean Rousseau (1712-1778) speaks of the happiness of the family when it is independent and untethered to the rest of society. A family can subsist within itself, providing enough food and clothing and shelter for its small number of members. However, once mass production begins to provide everything and takes away the responsibility of providing for himself from man, he has the leisure time to dream about all the many things he wants and suddenly realizes he needs.

In 1840, Jeremy Taylor writes that the status we miscall poverty is actually more appropriately defined as nature. Nature metes out to all men the proportion of possessions he needs. The poor man feels fortunate when he receives the discarded clothes of the rich man who thinks the clothing is too old and tattered to wear. The same item is perceived entirely differently by the two men yet the poor man was made joyful by them while the rich man is ashamed of them. Who between the two men feels more satisfaction?

Louis Mercier (1740-1814) speaks of the facade of the rich—how their furniture seems like stage settings and their celebrations are like pageants. Luxury to them is as much an affliction as poverty is to the poor. Sri Baba Hari Dass writes about the nature of desire, how it is never fulfilled. The king of a country desires another country while a man who wants no possessions possesses everything.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Controlled Folly

Enough Is Enough

William Penn (1644-1718) writes that few people know when they have enough and fewer yet know how to use it. Seneca proclaims that the "enough" provided by nature is adequately abundant. Thoreau finds that he is rich as long as he is able to leave things untouched. George McDonald (1824-1905) writes that when a man has what he wants, he is rich; when he is able to do without what he wants, he is powerful.

Fortuna: Stopping the Wheel

Plutarch (46-120) is thankful that his only ship has been lost at sea. Left penniless, he will be able to lead the life of a philosopher. Boethius (480-524) writes of Fortune stopping the wheel—a metaphor that illustrates that wealth causes man to stop growing.

Sweet Content

Contentment with one's life is truly what makes one rich. (Tao Te Ching) If a man discards avarice, he will discover contentment. Patanjali, 2nd century B.C. writes that supreme happiness stems from contentment.

Temperantia: The Happy Medium

Moderation is the key to a successful life. E. F. Schumacher defines "temperantia" as knowing when enough is enough.

The Golden Mean: The Middle Way

Taking a balanced approach in life is key to satisfaction. According to Epicurus, being too frugal has its downside. Pythagoras, 6th Century B.C. declares that one should avoid excesses in everything. Confucius proclaims that the "highest good is to hold fast to the Golden Mean," meaning that a moderate and balanced approach to everything in one's life is most laudable as well as most satisfying.

Via Negativa: The Art of Refusing

Rejecting riches is a way to free the spirit. St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) writes that in order to possess all things, man should seek to possess nothing. The spirit finds peace and quiet in coveting nothing.

Detachment: Breakthrough



Having a remote attitude to wealth is preliminary to breaking from its grasp. Johannes Tauler (1300-1361) writes about detachment. He describes it as that which clings to nothing. Spiritual poverty liberates the soul—it clings to nothing and nothing clings to it. Socrates is surprised at how many things there are in the world that he does not want.

### Being vs. Having

The ideal man is yet to emerge. Current man is hungering for more than just what he can possess. William James (1842-1910) proclaims that lives based on having things and having wealth are less free than those that achieve. Johannes Tauler puts it another way: true freedom is the absence of material possessions. To desire is to be a slave while the renunciation of wealth leads to liberation (Swami Ramdas, 1886-1963).

### Giving It Up: The Great Renunciation

The renunciation of wealth and possessions provides true freedom. According to Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) every man will eventually come to the great renunciation. Al-Ghazali declares that man realizes that what he renounces is not as valuable as what he receives in return. To William James, once man gives up that which he formerly relies on, a new energy for life emerges.

### Letting Go: Giving It Away

Man's spirit grows by giving away that which he does not need. Marcus Aurelius counsels that wealth is something that should be received without arrogance and it is something that one should be prepared to let go of. Gandhi convinces the women of India to give him their jewelry. With the starvation and poverty that exists, it is offensive "to the eye" to see the unnecessary baubles worn by the women. Gandhi trades the jewelry in for food and items that the poor are in need of.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

### Eco-Logic

#### Holding Back: the Limits of Growth

Nature has a major role in what man is given to succeed and to live a happy life. Nature's gifts cannot be bought: sun, rain and fresh air. However, according to Seneca, man is seen as at war with nature. Man does not limit how much he builds on the earth or how many fish he pulls from the rivers. Man annihilates more natural resources than any other living thing. Man is inefficient at limiting himself. Epicurus proclaims that poverty, that confirms with the laws of nature, is great wealth.

#### Love vs. People: Population Check

Overpopulation is a threat to the world. Aldous Huxley writes that the West is over-consuming the resources of the world and sinking it into disaster. The three main threats to the world are over-population, militarism and ignorance. In Huxley's opinion, of the three issues, over-population presents the gravest consequences. The Ford Foundation issues a report on zero population growth in 1974. In this report, if the wealthy nations such as the US adhere to zero growth, there can be a more balanced sharing of the earth's resources, especially in the area of energy consumption.

#### Alternative Energies

The need to develop alternative energies is essential in providing energy for the world's population. Farrington Daniels writes in 1964 that we owe it to our descendents to develop alternate sources of energy. The waste of the current population, especially in the west, is well known and portends great consequences for the future. Garrett De Bell writes in 1970 that the term "standard of living" has been warped by the luxury the United States deems as normal. Robert Theobald in 1961, warns that a society that over-consumes will not ultimately survive.

#### Conservation: Want Not, Waste Not

The West, in particular, the United States, wastes approximately half of the energy it produces. It would seem sensible to try to conserve some of the wasted energy rather than building new energy producing plants. The poet, William Wordsworth (1770-1850), addresses over-consumption: ". . .getting and spending, we lay waste our powers" (163). An advocate of conservation, Thoreau painstakingly builds the chimney in his house from materials he already has or that are discarded by others.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Voluntary Poverty and Space

The Art of Traveling Lightly

Once wealth and possessions have been renounced, everything should be left behind. The voyage is easier the lighter one travels—this according to Minucius Felix, 3rd Century. Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), weighed in with the comment that the "baggage" one carries throughout life is a hindrance to the journey as well as a disturbance to victory.

Gandhi, who experiences both wealth and poverty, finds that he can worship god most devoutly when he is poor and unencumbered. As in the case of Saint Bernard, if one ignores his wealth and possessions and does not allow them significance in his life, it is the same as having renounced them. Saint Bernard is criticized for riding a magnificent mule while making his rounds to the poor. He is sorry but explains that he never notices the magnificence of the beast—it is just a means to visit the poor people and minister to them.





# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

### Voluntary Poverty and Time

#### Instant Now: Living the Moment

It is human nature to save for the uncertain future. However, Gandhi writes that a seeker after Truth and a follower of the Laws of Love must put his faith in god that he will be provided for and thus does not have to save against tomorrow. Bertrand Russell addresses this issue, making the observation that saving for future misfortune takes the joy away from today. Seneca speaks of the inherent fear of worry of losing the riches one has.

#### Homo Ludens: Leisure vs. Idleness

A life that is dedicated to work and disdains leisure is a joyless one. Leisure is not the same as idleness, which is inherently a time that is found to be boring. Leisure allows one to be quiet and learn about himself. Aristotle writes that in quiet times, man does whatever he loves to do and does so solely for his own sake. Marcus Aurelius speaks of a dismal life so busy that it has no leisure. Richard M. Huber, in 1971, comments that in America, leisure is perceived as interrupting work.

#### Homo Laborans: Right Livelihood

This sections warns against putting too much emphasis on one's occupation at the detriment of leisure time and spiritual growth. Pascal (1623-1662) notes that man is not content with reality; rather, he envisions himself in an imaginary life that he has been taught is ideal and becomes his goal. The man then labors incessantly to neglect the real in favor of the imaginary. Benjamin Franklin warns against becoming obsessed with one's work: "Drive thy business! Let not that drive thee!" (199).

There are also precautions about avoiding manual labor and despising one's work. John Burroughs (1837-1921) remarks that life is a struggle but that work should be done happily with other laborers where one can think and sing and rejoice in one's work. Maurice Nicoll (1884-1953) writes that a man must work from love of the work.

#### Karma-Yoga: Work as Meditation

Work is good for the mind and spirit. St. Benedict of Nursia writes that idleness is the enemy of the soul and that man should do manual labor but take time for sacred reading. Swami Sivananda (1887-1963) proclaims that work is the worship of the Lord. According to Emile Male in 1913, knowledge and manual labor are given equal places of honor in the cathedrals of medieval times.



When a man works for nothing other than his labor—not for fame or money—he will become a Buddha which represents the highest ideal of karma-yoga (Swami Vivekananda, 1862-1903).

#### In Praise of Manual Labor

Honest labor with one's hands is praiseworthy. St. Francis of Assisi prays that all his brothers can enjoy labor with their hands. According to Henry George (1839-1897), when men work for the sake of work they improve mankind. Karl Marx (1818-1883) refers to the superior laborer who is flexible and prepared to take on a new job as industry changes and eliminates jobs.

#### Elevation of the Working Class

It is inherent in man's nature that he will strive to work toward a higher goal. Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) proclaims that even when man is outwardly working at his lowest level, he is inwardly toiling for the highest. Editor VandenBroeck writes that man should be allowed to fully develop his own specific skills or art. By doing so, he is not only satisfying his own need to achieve but is contributing his ultimate to society.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

Choosing the Image: Life/Style

Simplicity: The Power of the Minimal

Living the simple life, free of the burdens of wealth and possession, is the ideal and most satisfying. Man struggles with how to live his life—what lifestyle is most satisfying. Seneca writes that it takes man a lifetime to learn how to live. Robert Henri writes in 1923 that the most beautiful life contains three elements: freedom, happiness and value which can only be obtained through the sacrifice of many unnecessary things. Thoreau proclaims that to live the life of a philosopher means more than loving wisdom and founding a school—most importantly, it means living by the dictates of a simple life. The poet Walt Whitman sees the ideal life as living with animals which are placid and not "demented with the mania of owning things."



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

Creative Poverty: The Ascetic Aesthetic

Voluntary Poverty and the Artist

Artists and the creative community are perhaps the sole group of people who understand the meaning of life and enjoy existences that are truly rich. David Riesman in 1964 comments that the artists regard their work as play and their play as work. To Honore de Balzac (1799-1850), the artist has always kept the true balance between poverty and riches. John Burroughs has been too busy enjoying the world to seek wealth.

Artists make up a group that, to a person, is generally unconcerned about wealth. Robert Henri writes that the art life is a privilege one is willing to pay for. Robert Graves in 1965, points out that while there is no money in poetry, there is no poetry in money.

The artist is in touch with the true meaning of life and can recognize its riches and tragedies. Walt Whitman writes that the poet understands that the young man who sacrificed and lost his life for a worthy purpose led a life far superior to the man who reached old age with his riches but who really achieved nothing else worth mentioning.

Shelter

Where a man lives is an important aspect of life. Too often the beauty and size of one's home become more important than its cost. Animals and other natural structures are created without a particle spare. There is no waste—every part of the structure or animal has a purpose. St. Francois de Sales (1567-1622) proclaims that no artifice can surpass simplicity. Each cell in a beehive is built at an angle which provides the most strength but requires the least amount of wax to hold it erect. Thoreau notes that most men are less concerned with what their own home is than whether it is better than his neighbor's house. Cicero (106-43 B.C.) cautions against building one's house beyond reasonable expense and splendor.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) feels that small dwellings are more conducive to clear thinking than large homes in which one can get lost. In architectural design, there is resistance against the "less is more" school of design because there is concern that people will think those who buy small houses cannot afford large homes (Karen Fisher, 1972).

Garb

Just like a big expensive home, expensive clothing and accessories are just superfluous items that have no real meaning. Thoreau cautions that poverty should be cultivated



and that new things like clothes should not be the focus. He also views clothing as something that is often obtained merely to impress others.

One's emphasis should not be on the clothes he puts on his back. The sage wears clothes made of coarse cloth but has jewels in his heart (Tao Te Ching) Although expensive clothing is not necessary, the neatness and cleanliness of one's attire and appearance are important. Plutarch (46 B.C.—120 A.D.) writes that "untidiness disgusts." Seneca cautions that one may be perfectly plain but can be neat at the same time.

### Feasting and Fasting

The focus on eating appropriately mirrors the sections on garb and shelter. One who eats meager amounts of food leads to perfect health for both body and mind. Meagerness in diet means that one should eat just enough to sustain the body so that it can allow one to do the job God has designed one to do. The right diet is one in which an extraordinarily small amount suffices (Gandhi). Thoreau's food costs only 27 cents a week. It is an east Indian diet consisting largely of rice and meal. It is a good fit for Thoreau, a devotee of the philosophy of India. Seneca writes that man should find the food that nature has provided for him in his homeland rather than searching for it in distant lands. He also believes in fasting, suggesting that several times a week one should have the "scantiest fare."



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

Applied Poverty: Education

Cryless Babies: Playing without Toys

Children are taught to want for things at a very young age. They quickly learn that they often get what they want when they cry. Philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) cautions against spoiling children by teaching them to expect more and want the "finer" things in life. A little girl receives positive feedback from her mother when she wears a new dress. The mother calls her little princess or little queen. The mother is teaching her to admire herself, especially when she is wearing fine clothing. Children should be taught that clothing is for warmth and protection and modesty. Surya Prem, 1965, puts it simply: "Teach children to want little while they are little" (274). Emerson asserts that children living in a sea of dolls and toys are not taught to love nature—they ignore the real treasures of the sun and the moon and water.

Deschooling the Self

Education should be free and available to every child and it should teach every child the real values of life. Although the philosopher would probably be forced to think differently in today's world, no education that is bought, according to Seneca, is respectable. He advocates a "liberal education" as it gives man his freedom—freedom to think and create. Seneca cautions that one may not learn true values from one's parents who focus on teaching their child about the value of gold and silver over the value of a free spirit. He comments further that study is not helpful unless it teaches one to live the simple life. Marcus Aurelius writes how learning is a life-long experience. He first learns from his mother, then from his governor and then from his philosopher.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

Voluntary Poverty and the U.S.A.

America in the Alembic

An "alembic" is a device that is used to purify. This section focuses on the purification of America, an event that would benefit the entire world. The West, particularly the United States, has cultivated a culture that has confused comfort with luxury. Cocteau advocates a luxury that has nothing to do with money; rather, he sees it as food for the soul—a reward for those not afraid of discomfort. Thoreau looks at the nation as ruined by luxury. Pie-Raymond Regamey, in 1954, reproaches America, declaring that the presence of the destitute in any society heralds a need to lower its standard of living. Mildred Binns Young addresses spoiled America's obsession with luxury, declaring that if every American gave away possessions that they did not need to poor countries, the United States would be the leader of a peaceful world.

Do-It-Yourself Economics

Each individual can change his own value system, regardless of the outside influences of the society in which he resides. If the individual does not "buy" what is being produced by either industry or government, these entities would be rendered powerless (Charles Reich, 1970). Civilization has forced out any previous haven from the quest for more efficiency, more excitement and more novelty. Mankind is pushed into competing and innovating and possessing and ultimately destroying a system which was destined to fail since it would not be able to continue to out-perform itself (E.J. Mishan, 1967). The dangerous cycle can only be stopped by the individual.

The Power of the Individual

The power of the individual is unlimited and is the tool that changes culture. Lewis Mumford writes that a person through non-conformity and rejection can free himself from the powerful. Wendell Berry, 1970, declares that while the government is doing its "big thinking," each individual can do his own "little thinking," and go on to live his life as he sees fits. Man should not wait for an outside force for change—the potential for change lies within each man. "There will be less external discipline, the more internal discipline there is. Simone Weil, 1909-1943" (p. 291). Using satire, Marya Mannes in 1970 writes a piece addressing the avarice and dysfunction of America. It begins with a prayer of thanksgiving to the gods of America: the god of plenty, the god of profit and the goddess of convenience.

Editor VandenBroeck concludes this anthology by asserting that Voluntary Poverty and its denunciation of wealth is essential for freedom. Such transition would not be a event; rather, it would be a genesis—a new beginning. Voluntary Poverty is the cure for

outsized egos and mankind's suffering. Voluntary Poverty provides the only true gift: peace of mind.





# Characters

## The VandenBroecks

Goldian VandenBroeck and her husband, Andre, collaborated to create "Less Is More." Goldian is the editor of the book which is the anthology of ancient and modern thinkers and philosophers who praise the value of the simple life, one that is unencumbered by wealth and all its trappings. In the forward of the book, economist E.F. Schumacher praises the efforts by VandenBroecks in collecting and editing the many quotations and excerpts that comprise this work. The anthology contains hundreds of relevant quotations that support the benefit of the simple life. Goldian VandenBroeck apparently took great care and painstaking effort in locating and categorizing quotations and writings from great voices from as far back as Seneca and Aristotle.

Andre VandenBroeck himself takes a role in presenting the concept of "Less Is More" in the first chapter in which he defines and describes the fundamentals of the somewhat radical thinking and concepts that are presented in this anthology. Editor VandenBroeck suggests that in man's quest for riches, he has transformed society into one that is obsessed with money and how to make more.

In the concluding chapter of the anthology, Andre VandenBroeck summarizes the value of Voluntary Poverty which leads to peace of mind and a satisfying and worthwhile life.

## Gandhi

Gandhi (1869-1948) who is celebrated for his life of poverty and self-sacrifice, is quoted quite often in the anthology "Less Is More." He, in fact and in deed, is the epitome of the concept. Gandhi was led to renounce his wealth and possessions by his concern that he was coming under unfair scrutiny for his purported political leanings. Since he wanted to be trusted and free to serve mankind and did not want to be thought of as corrupt in any way, he decided that the best way to assure the people that he was not swaying to any political influences nor taking any bribes, was to denounce his wealth and all his possessions.

At first, the process was a difficult one, having to deal with the concerns and objections of family and friends as well as his own personal adjustment. However, as time went by, he realized that he felt more liberated with each item he parted with. Ultimately, he felt an immense burden being lifted from his shoulders. Gandhi advocated that the only certain way for mankind to finally enjoy true equality was a transition into a totally non-possession society. Gandhi learned through his experiences that when an individual reaches this perfection in life that he truly possess all the riches of the world.

Gandhi greatly influenced his community and country in his concept of self-sacrifice. He was persuasive in getting the women he encountered to turn in their jewelry to him. He



rightly observed that the flaunting of such riches in the face of extreme poverty was an "offense to the eye." Gandhi would trade the jewelry to feed and clothe the poor of India.

## **E. F. Schumacher**

Economist E. F. Schumacher wrote the forward to the book, "Less Is More," as well as contributing material to portions of the anthology, including "In Praise of Poverty," "The Right Thing," and "Controlled Folly."

## **Michael Harrington**

Michael Harrington's "The Other America," is quoted in "Less Is More." He wrote of those "of talent and insight who are driven to prefer poverty, to choose it, rather than to submit to the desolation of empty abundance."

## **St. Francis of Assisi**

St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) was a young man who was so overwhelmed with sympathy for the poor he encountered while visiting Rome that he denounced all wealth and made a lifelong vow to poverty. His movement had amassed some 50,000 devotees shortly after its inception.

## **Seneca**

Seneca (4 B.C.-A.D. 65) was an ancient Roman philosopher known for his works on moral issues. He is quoted quite frequently in "Less Is More."

## **Thoreau**

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was an American philosopher and naturalist who was known for his work in conservation. The words of Thoreau are quoted frequently in this work.

## **Lady Poverty**

Lady Poverty is the name that St. Francis of Assisi lovingly gave to poverty. He wrote a poem to Lady Poverty to praise and honor her.



## **Lady Pecunia**

Lady Pecunia is the title of a satirical poem written by Richard Barnfield. The title, Lady Pecunia, is synonymous with "In Praise of Money." He used the term "lady" because of man's love for women and for money.

## **Walt Whitman**

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) is a celebrated American poet whose words of wisdom are interspersed throughout the anthology "Less Is More."



# Objects/Places

## Voluntary Poverty

Voluntary Poverty is another word for the simple life. By electing to live in Voluntary Poverty, a person denounces wealth and materialism.

## United States

The West, particularly the United States, is often cited in "Less Is More" as the source of the corrupted standard of living that has been established as the ideal. In this anthology, many wise people call on the United States to change its obsession with wealth in order to set a new standard for the world.

## India

The antithesis of America, India is cited in "Less Is More" as an impoverished nation and a victim of the avarice of the rich and powerful.

## Righteous Wealth

Righteous wealth refers to the man who is rich in virtues and is devoted to helping his fellow man. A wealthy man who uses his wealth in virtuous ways can also be included under this definition.

## Mammon Avenue

The term "Mammon" is synonymous with greed or love of money. The section entitled "Mammon Avenue" is a satirical reference to the location of the world's largest advertising center—Madison Avenue in New York City.

## Technology

Western technology has taken the responsibility of man providing for himself and his family. With idle time on his hands, man has begun to work less and want more.

## Manual Labor

Manual labor, or working with one's hands, is lauded frequently in "Less Is More." Manual labor is considered a positive and prudent use of one's time and superior to mass production, which creates idle hands.

## **Nature**

Wealth and greed has caused man to abandon their appreciation of it. There are many gifts from nature that cannot be bought—water, fresh air and sunlight, to name a few.

## **The Golden Mean**

The Golden Mean is a reference to the perfection found in nature and a mathematical reference to a ratio where the longest portion of a geometric shape is equal to all its shorter lengths.

## **Standard of Living**

The Western standard of living has been established by the wealthy and presents a distorted example to the rest of the world, especially the impoverished.

# Themes

## Less Is More

The concept of "less is more" is a liberating one. It is a tenet that allows the liberation of self and provides a pathway to a truly rewarding, satisfying and worthwhile life. When one makes the transition to realizing that he does not need a plethora of material possessions and wealth to be "successful," the less worries there are about how to make yet more money or most importantly, how to fight against losing it. It then follows that with less encumbrances and burdens, there is more available time and energy that can be used in more important pursuits like improving personal relationships, helping the less fortunate and growing spiritually. There is only one way to attain peace of mind and that is through the freedom from wealth and the accompanying destruction that it causes. True wealth is that which is supplied by nature and that is freely attained.

In order to accept a seemingly incoherent concept such as "less is more," it is necessary that an individual learns to look at things in new ways and let go of old, established standards. As opposed to simple logic like that of a child who calls black black and white white, the mature adult must acquire a sort of warped or curved logic whereby one can understand the radical notion that less can indeed be more. Once there is an understanding of the fulfillment that the simple life can provide, an individual achieves peace of mind and can relax and enjoy the benefits of a liberated existence.

## The Valueless Society

The small population of the super rich among the world's culture has set the standard for "success." Their quest for money only leads to yet another quest for more money and an enormous amount of effort and worry as to how not to lose it. This unnatural obsession with materialism has diminished the appreciation of real talent and creativity and thwarted ideas that were formerly considered words of wisdom. Philosophy and art have taken a back seat to the quest for money, when in ancient civilizations the paramount success and ideal life was that of a wise man or or an individual with superior artistic abilities. In the current day, the talented and rich are often swept into corporate America, their output anonymous and their talents subdued.

Those with opulent wealth and wide-ranging influence have made the goal of riches and possessions as the mark of a successful and fulfilling life when it fact such an existence is almost devoid of true values such as self-sacrifice, self-exploration and spiritual growth. The emptiness of the idle rich becomes apparent when no matter how much they try to fill the nagging void within them with more possessions and money, a sustaining satisfaction eludes them.



## The Love of Wisdom

The dream of the simple, pure and unencumbered life has been a goal of wise and spiritual men for eons. Based on those who have taken the plunge by denouncing wealth and possessions, living the simplistic life—one free of the burdens of power and affluence—has been advocated as the most worthwhile existence possible. The sacrifice of many unnecessary things paves the way for the three elements that must exist to live the satisfying yet simple life: freedom, happiness and genuine values.

Many of the philosophers of yesterday not only loved wisdom and espoused the value of the simple life, they followed the dictates of the concept within their own lives. Studies are worthless pursuits unless classroom time and attention are devoted to the potential and value that exist by living simplistically. Parents do not do their children a favor by teaching them, from infancy on, to fret and cry in order to get needless things that they think they want. By teaching a child to be happy with the minimum instead of the maximum is the first step toward that child someday attaining and reaping the rewards of a simple life.

By learning to live with less—in living quarters, clothing and food—there is more time that can be dedicated to abstract thinking, learning, creating and enjoying spiritual growth. The pathway to the pure and simple life leads one to the denunciation of wealth and all it entails. Man will one day be forced by external influences to reject wealth and recover from greed and materialism in favor of the simple life.

# Style

## Perspective

The perspective of the anthology "Less Is More" is that of the editor, Goldian VanderBroeck, who goes to great lengths in proving her belief that the simple life is the most worthwhile and satisfying one possible. She has obviously gone to extreme efforts in accumulating hundreds of quotes and excerpts from the words and writings of a broad range of people of note in proving her thesis. VanderBroeck has gathered her "evidence" from the far corners of the world and has extended her search to all recordable history, going back as far as Seneca who lived in Rome between 4 BC and AD 45 and served in Nero's court.

In addition to the wise men whose thoughts and ideas are included in this anthology, the experiences and spiritual enlightenment of self-sacrificing holy men such as St. Francis of Assisi and Gandhi have been made part of this work. These men, both wealthy at one time, denounced their wealth and abandoned their lofty positions in favor of a simplistic way of living that they were only allowed to pursue as a result of their selfless actions. By living lives devoted to their god and doing his work, these men were able to provide the world with their personal testaments as to the strength and meaning of such existences. It was important for VanderBroeck to include the personal experiences of such men as Gandhi and St. Francis since their contribution was more than just ideation and theory. Presenting the similar views and observations of a wide variety of philosophers, thinkers and spiritual men who originated from different eras and regions, gave credence to the editor's beliefs and theory.

## Tone

The tone of "Less Is More" is that of a devoted teacher who is fervent in educating her pupils as well as that of the careful lawyer who goes about proving his case with a wealth of supporting evidence. The hundreds of quotes and excerpts serve to promulgate and drive home the fundamental theory that "less is more," and provide unrelenting documentation that proves the benefits of the pure and simple life and advocates for its value and satisfaction.

Looking at the specific quotations and excerpts that are included in "Less Is More," one finds a variety of rhetorical flourishes employed to sharpen the message. In the poem, "Lady Pecunia," satire is used to shine light on the obsession man has with wealth and possessions. The title, "Lady Pecunia" is synonymous with "in praise of money." The poet refers to Lady Pecunia (money): "But now unto her praise I will proceed, which is as ample as the world is wide. . ." and goes on to list all the things man will do for "her." Sarcasm is also used by Marya Mannes in her thanksgiving prayer that is addressed to the gods of America: the god of plenty, the god of profit and the goddess of convenience.





Personification is used to make some points. For example, "Fortune is a woman who is to be kept under, must be beaten and roughly handled. . ." (122). Parable is used as well: "Lately in the wreck of a California ship, one of the passengers fastened a belt about him with...gold with which he was afterward found at the bottom...had he the gold or had the gold him?" (41).

Metaphor is used as well: "As life carries its own bundle in the form of the body, so does the monk carry a traveling bundle over his shoulder" (172). And, "The American chases after money with all his might, exactly as on the tennis court he tries to hit the ball" (106).

There are spiritual references as well—pertinent quotes from the Bible and other religious writings.

## Structure

The anthology entitled, "Less Is More," is comprised of hundreds of quotes from voices both ancient and modern in praise of the virtues of the simple life. The book is divided into fourteen main chapters, the majority of which are further divided into relevant sub-sections.

The forward of the book is written by economist E.F. Schumacher who is the author of "Small is Beautiful." The first chapter entitled, "Voluntary Poverty and the Monopoly of Values" is written by Andre VandenBroeck, husband of editor Goldian VandenBroeck. This initial writing lays out the concept of voluntary poverty and encapsulates the premise for the remainder of the anthology. Andre VandenBroeck also provides a short summary at the conclusion of the last chapter which contains a brief recap of the fundamentals that are essential in living and reaping the rewards of the simple life.

The chapters that fall in between consist largely of quotations and excerpts from philosophers, holy men and other persons of note who advocate the editor's theory of the real purpose of life and underscore the belief that such a life is the most satisfying and worthwhile. The quotations are enjoyable as well as pertinent and educational.



## Quotes

"Fortune is conceivable today only in terms of economic value. The striving of nations and individuals is overwhelmingly geared to the attainment of wealth, regardless of the effect on natural resources and personal integrity." (Chapter 1, p. 1)

"We make the word poverty a synonym for calamity, but it is in truth a source of happiness, and however much we may regard it as a calamity, it remains a source of happiness still." Tolstoy (Chapter 2, p. 15)

"Money, the abstract entity extracted from matter, turns upon itself like a caged beast. It clamors for redemption by spirit." (Chapter 4, p. 51)

"Any discussion of world poverty that does not come round to demanding a radical change in our habits of consumption and waste, our tastes, our profligate standard of living, our values generally is a hypocrisy. There are no technical answers to ethical questions. Theodore Rosak, 1972" (Chapter 5, p. 87)

"The wealth demanded by nature is both limited and easily procured; that demanded by idle imaginings stretches on to infinity. Epicurus." (Chapter 6, p. 101)

"To be content with what one has is to be rich. Tao Te Ching" (Chapter 7, p. 124)

"It is a pity when man is not aware of this privilege of being human; and every moment in life that he passes in this error of unawareness is a waste, and is to his greatest loss. Hazrat Inayat Khan, 1882-1927." (Chapter 8, p. 167)

"If you are wise, you will dread a prosperity which only loads you with more. Emerson." (Chapter 9, p. 177)

"Deep in the sea are riches beyond compare, but if you seek safety, it is on the shore. Saadi of Shiraz (1184-1291)" (Chapter 10, p. 183)

"To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom, as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity. Thoreau, 1817-1862)" (Chapter 11, p. 222)

"Beauty rides on a lion. Beauty rests on necessities." (Chapter 12, p. 244)

Luxury enters into cities in the first place, afterwards, satiety, then lascivious insolence, and after all these, destruction. Pythagoras." (Chapter 14, p. 283)



## Topics for Discussion

How did St. Francis of Assisi's life begin? What compelled him to take a vow of poverty? How many followers did his movement create and how did they emulate him?

Who is Lady Poverty and how did this name originate? Who is Lady Pecunia and what did the poem with that title represent?

What concerns compelled Gandhi to take a vow of poverty? Why did he ask women he encountered to give up their jewelry? What did Gandhi consider to be an adequate diet?

What is the difference between Voluntary Poverty and destitution? What will electing to make a transition to Voluntary Poverty restore in one's life?

What does Mammon Avenue refer to? How are people convinced that they need things they never knew existed?

What is important about the size and cost of one's home? What is advocated by many of the wise men of the ages about one's home, clothing and food intake? How does their advocacy of these elements mirror the concept of Voluntary Poverty?

How does nature figure into the concept of the ideal life? What things does nature provide that money cannot buy? Without current day philosophers to advocate the simple life, what forces have become today's "teachers" to the detriment of mankind?