



What Is Wealth?, by Ryan Holiday

What is wealth? It's having plenty, right? The variables in the equation are pretty simple. What you have, what you've got coming in, and what's going out. If those are in proper proportion to each other, you're covered. Except what we tend to miss in this equation is another set of hidden variables that most often take the shape of our relative needs and wants.

Most people accumulate their wealth by earning as much as they can. That's why they work so hard. Why they take so many risks. Why they invest. But the reason they do this is not to be covered -- it's because they have told themselves that what they need is more, more, more, and that what they have already is not enough.

Seneca, himself a very rich man, did that. The astounding financial benefits of working for Nero had to be partly what attracted him to the tyrant's service. If only he could have listened to his own advice (which he borrowed from Epicurus): "If you wish to make Pythocles rich, do not add to his store of money, but subtract from his desires."

For a virtuous person, there's absolutely nothing wrong with wanting to be wealthy. It can provide comfort, security and, quite possibly, a platform to do good for the world. The Stoics would just urge you to take a minute to think about what your definition of wealth is -- and whether you might already have everything you've always wanted.

There's more than one way to solve this tricky wealth equation, and in your case it may just be that subtraction is easier than multiplication. That changing your understanding of what it means to be rich might be more important, and easier, than changing the number of digits to the left of the decimal point in your bank balance.