

**'HOW TO WANT LESS', ARTHUR C. BROOKS, *THE ATLANTIC*, 2022.  
SARAH TOOMEY - S3944280**

The explorative feature by renowned academic Arthur C. Brooks explores both the psychological and philosophical meaning of human satisfaction and the limits that this drive places on the human experience.

In his relaxed and easily digestible writing style, Brooks welcomes his reader to understand in the simplest of terms the point he tries to convey throughout his work, that the human desire for satisfaction, hinders the overall enjoyment of all that life can offer, by contradicting many of societies perceived drivers for living a successful life (i.e. materialistic gain and notoriety), in that through a more minimalistic lifestyle can “we can find respite from that chronic dissatisfaction and experience the joy that is true human freedom” (Brooks. A 2022)

The introductory pages of Brooks’ work adopts an anecdotal position in a retelling of an experience he had with his daughter where she first saw video of Mick Jagger (I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction, and how it led them into a discussion of the ‘evanescent’ feeling that satisfaction holds. This use of personal accounts is a strategic way of introducing a usually overwhelming topic, in that the satisfaction of human can never truly be met, that when said in basic terms could be seen as quite heavy and hard for an audience understand. This disarming way that Brooks has chosen to introduce the topic invites his audience to continue reading further, a stark contrast to if the topic had been blatantly placed in the first sentence.

Brooks’ positions himself clearly from the beginning of his writing, that the consumerism mindset that is held by majority of people in western society is a counteractive way to achieve satisfaction, instead by saying that humans are in “a natural state is dissatisfaction” thus leading him to the introduction of the “hedonic treadmill”, a key feature that Brooks’ frequently refers back to within his writing. The “hedonic treadmill” concept that is an encapsulation the feeling that no matter how fast a person can run, they will never arrive. By using this as a support for Brooks’ argument, he suggests to his readers that you can achieve as much material success as you desire, but the fulfilment of satisfaction can never be reached by this approach. The intertwining of philosophical concepts such as these, as well as approaching the biological aspects that evolution have on the present day human from our Palaeolithic past, Brooks has created a strong and almost irrebuttable argument through immense research and a strong narrative voice.

The clear and flowing structure that Brooks’ work possess, by addressing all possible areas of concern in a way that both rebuts sceptics without even clearly invalidating their claims is a testament to the quality of language used by the writer. The combination of everyday colloquial language when describing his daughter and notable celebrities such as Lebron James and Mick Jagger, and a seamless switch when covering the works and findings of philosophers and spiritual heads like Buddha and Thomas Aquinas entices readers of all interests and academic backgrounds to find a personalisation to themselves within his work. This essay cleverly captures the overwhelming need for satisfaction that all humans possess whilst revoking it power by invalidating its ability to be achieved without personal and internal reflection.

## REFERENCES

1. Brooks, A.C (8 February 2022) “How To Want Less: the secret to satisfaction has nothing to do with achievement, money, or stuff”, *The Atlantic*”, accessed 23 March 2025.  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/03/why-we-are-never-satisfied-happiness/621304/>