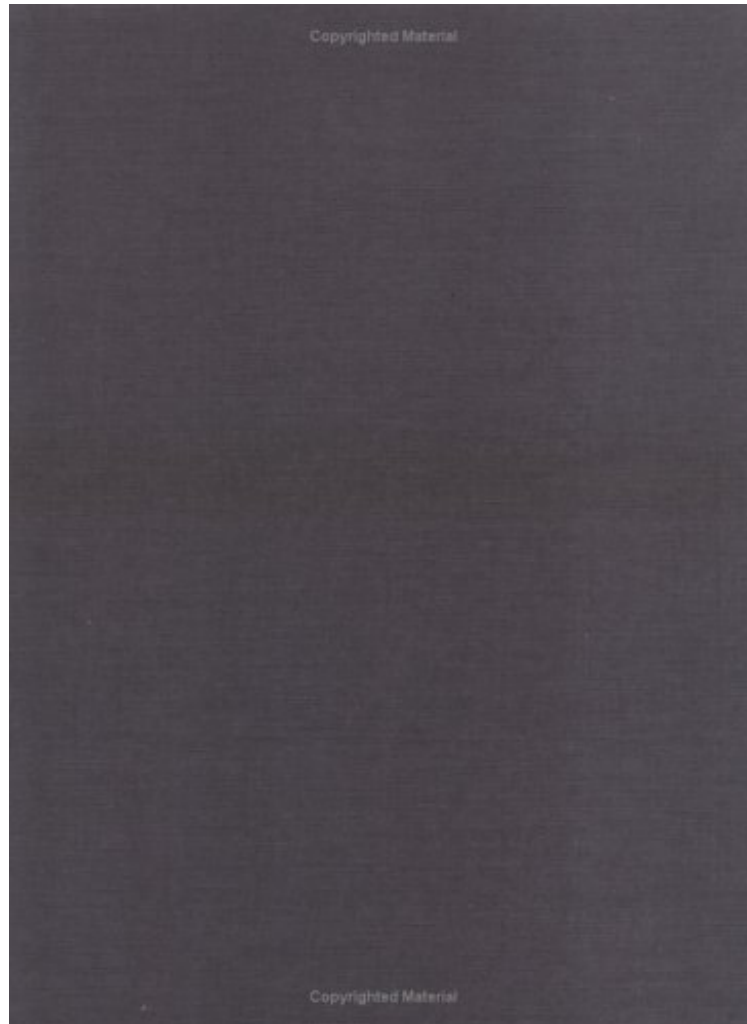


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The Logic of Sufficiency

Thomas Princen

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Thomas Princen : The Logic of Sufficiency before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Logic of Sufficiency:

18 of 18 people found the following review helpful. A powerful argument, with loads of insight and examplesBy NateThis is a very well-written book, whose importance cannot be emphasized strongly enough. It deserves to be read widely, not only by academics and policy makers, but by all those who are concerned with the status quo and know that something has to change in our way of doing things, but have a hard time seeing how. As a whole, the book presents a detailed and compelling response to those who think there is ultimately no better way to solve the world's problems than to create better technologies, expand the economy, and let the markets solve the problems of displaced or hidden costs to the environment.Princen shows, first, that the logic of efficiency (according to which maximizing goods and minimizing costs tends to be the ultimate argument for doing things) is only one among many approaches to

good reasoning, and that its predominance came about as a result of a good deal of struggle and support by a wide range of institutions. It is also deceptive, in that there are always hidden costs and unexpected outcomes when a given efficiency is instituted. Suppose, for example, that we achieve the goal of more fuel efficient cars. Does that guarantee we will have less pollution and use less gas? Maybe it will mean more people will drive more often (using more energy and creating greater pollution in total even if not individually) and there will be a greater need for roads and higher numbers of fatalities on these roads. Moreover, such an achievement may help obscure and prolong some of the many problems that are at least in part caused and supported by global fuel dependency and the need to constantly find new oil sources and to transport oil across the world: oil spills, destruction of ecosystems, not to mention worldwide conflict and economic inequality, even religious strife. The point is that we live in a complex world, where maximizing one variable can have an unexpected impact on other variables; or worse, where the choice of which variable gets maximized can be deliberately picked in order to obscure other outcomes that are less palatable. The "logic of efficiency" and "cost-benefit analysis" approaches to decision making are in the end not efficient and rarely take into account the real costs of the practices they endorse. As an alternative (not as a replacement, but as a viable but different approach), Princen offers the logic of sufficiency, a principled extension of the commonsense intuition that sometimes enough is enough. Just because we can build faster cars, does that mean we should? Just because we can extract oil from the Alaskan wilderness, does that mean it is incumbent upon us to do so? The answers to these questions are complicated, but sometimes, under the sway of the logic of efficiency, we seem to forget to ask or we assume that the answers are obvious: if it makes things cheaper, or faster, or gets us more of what we want, then of course we should! But we are often unprepared for the "side effects" of such improvements -- like urban sprawl and increased crime, or (to pick another example) the spread of disease that came as a side effect of our convenient and inexpensive new methods for delivering fresh spinach. What is perhaps most distinctive and worthwhile about Princen's book is that he shows the logic of sufficiency is not just a principle. It underlies what a number of flourishing communities have done in order to avoid the losses to their livelihoods and communities that they saw would follow if they followed the trends of maximizing profits and goods. They saw that in order to maintain their lifestyles they had to draw limits and restrain themselves. He deliberately chooses what he terms "hard cases" -- not those who deliberately isolate themselves from the modern world for ideological or religious reasons -- but companies and communities who, for both reasons of self-interest and as a result of their unique circumstances were led to make decisions that go against the grain of "progress" and "growth" and in the direction of sufficiency and sustainability. Princen sees the stories he tells of such peoples as reason to hope that as the rest of us grasp our own increasing dependence on a precarious and limited set of natural resources we will also begin to think differently and will come also to decide that enough is enough. Thomas Princen has written a very important and hopeful book, full of insight and thoughtful argument that can help guide us through such a transition. Highly recommended. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Understandable, inspiring, utterly original... By C. Maria An inspiring, original, and thought provoking attack on today's environmental problems. Moreover, solutions are suggested rather than the average "go green" book that lists off the world's problems and leaves the reader with the question of "Now what?" I whole heartedly agree with the major themes of this book- they challenge the average American to be conscious- a trait each citizen is completely capable of having. 1 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Princen Presents Powerful Argument Challenging Status Quo By Richard Paul Thomas Princen presents a unique view on sustainability, introducing and developing the concept of sufficiency while using a creative and original style of writing.

What if modern society put a priority on the material security of its citizens and the ecological integrity of its resource base? What if it took ecological constraint as a given, not a hindrance but a source of long-term economic security? How would it organize itself, structure its industry, shape its consumption? Across time and across cultures, people actually have adapted to ecological constraint. They have changed behavior; they have built institutions. And they have developed norms and principles for their time. Today's environmental challenges -- at once global, technological, and commercial -- require new behaviors, new institutions, and new principles. In this highly original work, Thomas Princen builds one such principle: sufficiency. Sufficiency is not about denial, not about sacrifice or doing without. Rather, when resource depletion and overconsumption are real, sufficiency is about doing well. It is about good work and good governance; it is about goods that are good only to a point. With examples ranging from timbering and fishing to automobility and meat production, Princen shows that sufficiency is perfectly sensible and yet absolutely contrary to modern society's dominant principle, efficiency. He argues that seeking enough when more is possible is both intuitive and rational -- personally, organizationally and ecologically rational. And under global ecological constraint, it is ethical. Over the long term, an economy -- indeed a society -- cannot operate as if there's never enough and never too much.

After reading this book, anyone still using the word 'efficiency' is bound to stumble and stutter. Masterfully dissecting the hidden economism among policymakers, Princen audaciously calls for 'sufficiency' as the cornerstone of a growth-free society. (Wolfgang Sachs, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment, and Energy) Our economy depends on

maximized growth and consumption but our finite planet simply cannot sustain endless expansion. Tom Princen challenges the status quo and demonstrates how the principles of restraint, moderation, and thrift can guide us safely into a sustainable future. This book is a terrific guide for those who are deeply troubled by a runaway global economy that seems to be doing as much damage as good. Princen calls for a new focus on human well-being and a rejection of efficiency as the supreme economic value. Anyone in search of a clearer economic vision for our future should read this book. (Betsy Taylor, President, New American Dream, author of Sustainable Planet)[A] detailed and engaging history of the efficiency principle and its role in supporting the paradigm of unlimited economic growth. (Nature)...an admirable and timely book... a first-rate effort at breaking new ground in the consumption debate. (Science) The Logic of Sufficiency is the most thought-provoking book I have read on the interaction of the individual, society, economics, and the environment. You will not be disappointed with Thomas Princen's cutting-edge thinking about humans living in harmony with the land that sustains us. (Mike Dombeck, GEM Professor, University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point, UW System Fellow of Global Conservation, and former U.S. Forest Service Chief)This book is a significant contribution to the field of global environmental studies. Many books and articles in environmental studies mention sufficiency, but none develop the concept in a systematic way. The book will remain the core text that critiques the principle of efficiency and advocates the principle of sufficiency for years to come. (Peter Dauvergne, Canada Research Chair in Global Environmental Politics, University of British Columbia)In this thoroughly original, imaginative, and deftly written book, Princen presents a powerful critique of the environmental consequences of economic efficiency while advocating, with intelligence and thoughtfulness, the principle of sufficiency. Many books and articles in environmental studies mention sufficiency, but none develop the concept in a systematic way. The scholarship is comprehensive, cutting across numerous disciplines with depth and accuracy. This book will be at the forefront of normative global environmental studies and will remain a core text for years to come. (Peter Dauvergne, Canada Research Chair in Global Environmental Politics, University of British Columbia)About the AuthorThomas Princen explores ecological and economic sustainability at the University of Michigan. He is the author of Treading Softly: Paths to Ecological Order and The Logic of Sufficiency (both published by the MIT Press).