



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Episode #24: The Vanishing Horizon of “Enough”

Please note: This is an unedited transcript, provided as a courtesy, and reflects the actual conversation as closely as possible. Please forgive any typographical or grammatical errors.

- Martha Beck: [Intro Music] Welcome to Bewildered. I'm Martha Beck, here with Rowan Mangan. At this crazy moment in history a lot of people are feelings bewildered, but that actually may be a sign we're on track. Human culture teaches us to come to consensus, but nature — our own true nature — helps us come to our senses. Rowan and I believe that the best way to figure it all out is by going through bewilderment into be-wild-erment. That's why we're here. [Music fades] Hi, I'm Martha Beck!
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan and this is another episode of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. I myself have been trying to figure it out since we last caught up, by driving up and down the New Jersey turnpike relentlessly. And then Marty just got herself a little remote control car and went out on the driveway. Boom, figured out.
- Martha Beck: I did. I figured it out. I wrote it on a sacred scroll. I tucked it in into the car and then I let the car go out in the woods and I've got the controls in my secret closet. And you will never figure it out unless you find the car, but know as you search the woods, that I still have the remote.
- Rowan Mangan: I can only as assume that your secret closet is a euphemism.
- Martha Beck: Well, let's just say it is.
- Rowan Mangan: Okay. It's very complicated. I never knew until this moment that what you'd figured out was going to be a secret.
- Martha Beck: Oh yeah. If everybody figured it out who would listen to our podcast? It's for people trying to figure it out.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, right. We would lose our audience.
- Martha Beck: We can't tell them.
- Rowan Mangan: Okay. That makes sense.
- Martha Beck: No offense, darling listeners. But Ro, what are you trying to figure out?



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Rowan Mangan: I have an earworm problem.

Martha Beck: Oh, that is disgusting. I've heard of yak leaches that stick in your nose but not earworms.

Rowan Mangan: I think you hid a similar thing in your secret closet, recently.

Martha Beck: The secret closet is full of earworms. What's your damn earworm, Ro?

Rowan Mangan: Lila sometimes in the morning will watch a couple of minutes of a show on YouTube that I don't know its name, but the lady who does it is called Miss Rachel and she's wonderful and she teaches the small ones to talk. And one of the ways she does this is by creating earworms that go into their parents' poor heads when the parents are just trying to drink their coffee and get through the more morning as best they can.

Martha Beck: Imbibing the caffeine and Miss Rachel's voice just slurches down with it.

Rowan Mangan: Slides in with it. Anyway, long story short, without even knowing it, I have been, this is so bad, Marty. I have been walking around the house.

Martha Beck: I think I know what you're going to say because you've been doing it out loud.

Rowan Mangan: Singing. I can't even, all right, but this is what she says. "Put it in, put it in, put it in." And that's it. That's all I've got in here.

Martha Beck: And that's what you keep saying.

Rowan Mangan: Put it in, put it in, put it in.

Martha Beck: Let's not even discuss why we think this is funny.

Rowan Mangan: Hey, do you remember the other day when you asked me what time we were leaving?

Martha Beck: Oh, right.

Rowan Mangan: Do you remember?

Martha Beck: Yeah. Tell them.



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Rowan Mangan: Okay. This is what happened. Marty said to me, "What time are we leaving?" And me, knowing the answer, said to her, "2:00."

Martha Beck: And I just stared at you.

Rowan Mangan: Martha Beck proceeded to give me the weirdest look you can imagine, not just blank, not just confused but a little bit accusatory. She was kind of like, what the hell are you saying to me right now? Was the look but she didn't say a word and we were suspended in silence, staring at each other for probably and a good 30 seconds.

Martha Beck: And I was like, what do you want from me? And I said, "What time are we leaving?" And she said, "2:00." And I said, "Oh, I thought you meant also." What?

Rowan Mangan: What?

Martha Beck: My tiny feeble brain is just gasping its last these days.

Rowan Mangan: Gang, it's been a weird week. Marty, what are you trying to figure out, please?

Martha Beck: Well, I've been trying to figure out what the child is saying.

Rowan Mangan: Oh yeah.

Martha Beck: Lila, as she watches Miss Rachel.

Rowan Mangan: I think she's saying, "Put it in, put it in, put it in."

Martha Beck: That is just wrong. That's wrong. Fortunately, I have not heard her saying that. I've heard her say, "Rap." And she says it a lot, "Rap." And I don't know what the consonants are. And we thought for a while we thought it was cat because we thought she said it when she saw a cat picture. And then it was that for a while. I thought it was, thank you. I thought she was growing up to be polite. Joke's on me.

Rowan Mangan: At one point, Lila launched a chunk of food off her highchair towards the dog and Marty goes, "Oh, it's catch."

Martha Beck: Catch, yeah.

Rowan Mangan: But of course the dogs do not need to be told what to do when a baby launches food at them.



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- Martha Beck: Anyway, it reminded me of the confusion of consonants that came one day when I was living in a different house. It was the middle of the night and the phone rang. This is when we had phones that rang. And as you know, you may have heard, my name is Beck. My last name is Beck. What I didn't realize at the time is that the consonants B and V are really close together.
- Rowan Mangan: B for Bob and V for Victor.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And so are K and T, like Beck and bet, they sound quite similar, especially on an old timey phone. This is how it went, 3:00 in the morning. I pick up the phone, "Hello?" "Is this the vet's?" said the woman, but I heard is this the Beck's? So I said, "Yes." And she said, "I have a sick horse." And there was a long pause. And then I said, "I'm sorry." And she said, "Well, what should I do?" And I was like, "I don't know." And she said, "But aren't you the vet's?" And I was like, "Yes." And she said, "Then tell me what to do for my horse." And I was really getting into it because I know that horses are delicate and when they get sick, it's no joke. I was desperate. I was like, "I really, really wish I knew what to do." And she's like, "Don't you even care?" And I was like, "I love animals." She was like, "And that's why you're the vet's." Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: She thought you were supposed to go to school for that.
- Martha Beck: And I did not figure out during the entire conversation that she thought it was the vet's. I just thought she was calling the Beck's to see what to do about her horse and I was so confused and I finally just had to say, "Ma'am, I am so very sorry and I hope you get help for your horse." And I did hang up the phone and it was a tragic night for both of us and probably the horse.
- Rowan Mangan: Did you at least tell her that you went to Harvard?
- Martha Beck: Oh, I did slip that in. It was more like, "Hello. I went to Harvard." Because that's how I always answer the phone.
- Rowan Mangan: You're like, you mean Dr. Vets, PhD from Harvard?
- Martha Beck: Dr. Vets. I have a PhD in sociology. Then what should I do with my horse? I should know really, but I don't. Anyway, it reminds me and it makes me worry that Lila's going to be - she's saying, "That." And probably she means something like, I need a blood transfusion and we just aren't getting it.



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Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Oh well. Stay tuned. We'll let you know. We'll be right back with more Bewildered.

I have a favor to ask. You might not know this but ratings and reviews are like gold in the podcasting universe. They get podcasts in front of more faces, more eyes, more ears, all the bits that you could have a podcast in front of, that's what they do. It would help us enormously if you would consider going over to your favorite podcasting app, especially if it's Apple, and giving us a few stars, maybe even five, maybe even six, if you can find a way to hack the system I wouldn't complain. And a review would also be wonderful. We read them all and love them. Thank you very much in advance. Let's just go out there and bewilder the world.

Marty, this week's topic is enough.

Martha Beck: Enough.

Rowan Mangan: Yes. I was thinking about it because I heard or read an anecdote that later on Google, I discovered, came from John Bogle's book, *Don't Count on It!* But I did not know that at the time. And it's a story about Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut chatting together at some LA billionaire's party one night and Vonnegut says to Joseph Heller, "Do you find it weird that this guy who's holding the party makes more in a week," might have been a day, "than you made from the entire phenomenon of Catch 22?" And Heller was like, "Yeah, I guess that's something. But I've got something that this guy will never have." And Vonnegut said, "What?" And Heller said, "Enough." You see, enough. And that made me think about the phenomenon of enough and how it functions psychologically and especially in our culture.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Yeah. I had a client once who made \$400 million in one day.

Rowan Mangan: Ooh, really?



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- Martha Beck: Yeah. He went public with his company and it was this massive PIO and they had a huge party and he called me at 3:00 in the morning. Again, that's a theme of this podcast. And there was this blasting rock band in the back and he was completely three sheets to the wind and he was just yelling into the phone, "It isn't enough. When is it ever f-ing ever going to be enough?" And I pitied him and for a short while, felt, whoo, there but for the grace of God. And then I noticed that I buy a lot of, if anything helps me in any way, I immediately buy a lot of it. I have dry eyes so I buy, I don't just buy one bottle of eyedrops, I buy seven. And then when I go to store the extra six, they join the other 300 bottles of eyedrops in my secret closet. It's just eyedrops and earworms in there.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Right. You actually said to me, not that long ago, you said, "I have a drug problem. Not taking them but just keeping them." And it's true that you needed to find extra space recently for just this hoard of DayQuil and NyQuil and Tylenol.
- Martha Beck: Over the counter stuff.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. It's all perfectly legit stuff. But God, there's a lot of it and you never use it.
- Martha Beck: No.
- Rowan Mangan: You never use it. And so when she talks about putting the eyedrops, it's literally true. That's literally true.
- Martha Beck: There you go.
- Rowan Mangan: But they're all out of freaking date.
- Martha Beck: See, you guys believe in things like out of date. I feel if they're packaged, they're going to be good til the next millennium, at least.
- Rowan Mangan: Marty is like, doesn't believe in food going off either. She's like, "Ah, it'll be fine." And then later she's like, "Ooh, when was that chicken supposed to be eaten by?" Yeah, good times.
- Martha Beck: That's the thing. And when I'm sad, I buy a lot of art supplies. I watch people doing painting videos online because I don't have time and then because I get so identified with the painters, I buy the equipment that they're using, the type of paint they're using and then I never paint with it because I don't have the time.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm sorry.



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- Martha Beck: Yeah. Anyway, I'm caught in the tragedy of not enough in these ways.
- Rowan Mangan: Can I just tell a story that we might have already told on this podcast but I just suddenly thought of it with all these billionaires. We launched a little writing, oh, we might have talked about this. Probably have. Look, things are going to get repeated. It's all right. We launched a little writing program and our friend Liz Gilbert said, "Hey, I'll help you promote it."
- Martha Beck: Oh right.
- Rowan Mangan: On my social media. And so she did and she said, "I'm not affiliated with this. I'm not making any money from this. I just think it's a great program. If you like it, go visit." And the first comment she got, she posted it, was and I quote, "How many millions are enough for you, Liz Gilbert?"
- Martha Beck: Poor Liz was like, free?
- Rowan Mangan: Poor Liz.
- Martha Beck: I do it for nothing.
- Rowan Mangan: Poor Liz.
- Martha Beck: People notice. This woman was projecting her "it will never be enough", I think because Liz wasn't going there. Liz is one of the enoughest people I've ever met.
- Rowan Mangan: Absolutely.
- Martha Beck: You could give that woman a swizzle stick and a gumdrop and she'd be like, I am set for the year.
- Rowan Mangan: Not pizza though or any Italian food. She likes that a lot. She'll have more.
- Martha Beck: She'll get there with her swizzle stick and her gumdrop that's the thing. Anyway, Liz always has enough. And it's so interesting that Eat, Pray, Love was this massive success because when it was published and going out into the world, she had very, very little money. But she lives with the feeling that life is absolutely abundant and then abundance seems to find her.
- Rowan Mangan: It does. It does.
- Martha Beck: Anyway, we're jumping too soon to solutions to this problem.



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- Rowan Mangan: I know.
- Martha Beck: Let's dig into the meat of the cultural nastiness around enough.
- Rowan Mangan: Marty, as you know, and as our listeners know, in this podcast we help people from bewilderment to bewilderment, to their wild true nature. What that means is we take the cultural consensus. What's the culture telling us to do? Does that feel bad? And then we come to our senses and try and find a way to feel good. Is that fair to say?
- Martha Beck: I think that's fair to say.
- Rowan Mangan: Good.
- Martha Beck: Wow. That's sensible. Nature, culture, we clearly have something in our nature that is a sort of hunting foraging gene. I've never known a child, I've never been a child who did not always appreciate good sticks and good rocks. When you were a kid, did you see sticks sometimes and you're like, I cannot just leave that there, that's a perfect stick.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And stones on the beach, shells.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Shells, stones, things like that. Pretty flower. We gather as we go through nature and that's part of what kept so many traditional peoples going for hundreds of thousands of years. But in our culture, which denies any value except material wealth as being valid and important, this instinct to acquire has gone absolutely nuts and people are out just craving stuff we had never heard of day before yesterday, but suddenly we have to have it. And people going, I have a lot of clients who have gone manically shopping just to, it gives them a dopamine hit, I think. And I was once, I was really late on a book deadline and so I basically stayed awake for two weeks writing and every night at 3:00 AM to keep going, I would drive to the drugstore and I would buy shiny objects.
- Rowan Mangan: Not eyedrops?
- Martha Beck: No, not eyedrops. I didn't care about that at the time. It was a pen that lights up or a glittery CD case or something. They had CD cases at the time. Anyway, it was shiny objects. I was like a crow. And it would give me such a jolt. It was like, whoa, I can write for another four hours.



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. It's funny you mention the dopamine thing because that idea of rewarding ourselves. And so you were rewarding yourself after writing all night, by a shiny object, like a crow, probably gets the same feeling from their buttons or whatnot. I don't know what they do, the crow community.
- Martha Beck: Oh yeah. You want to know the literal truth?
- Rowan Mangan: No.
- Martha Beck: Oh, but you're going to hear it now. You brought up animals. Crows look for burning embers because what they do is they take them and they put them in a nest of straw and then they spread out their feathers and they let the smoke kill parasites.
- Rowan Mangan: You're kidding me.
- Martha Beck: This is why they're called firebirds sometimes. And so a lot of barns burn down because a crow will take something like a lighted cigarette stub that hasn't quite gone out, take it to a barn, put it in a haystack, wait for it to smoke, get rid of all its parasites and then out of here, while your barn burns.
- Rowan Mangan: How did I never hear about this? That's brilliant.
- Martha Beck: Just haven't spent enough time with me, bro.
- Rowan Mangan: Not possible.
- Martha Beck: There's nothing in nature except fire that sparkles that brightly, so crows generalize to like little mirrors. I once was in the 17th floor of a hotel in Miami and we had the windows open and I had a pair of sunglasses on the coffee table and a crow came through the window and took my sunglasses and flew away.
- Rowan Mangan: Your recall for animal stories, is like 17th floor Miami hotel. But your recall for, "got a meeting, 3:00 PM."...
- Martha Beck: Zero. Recall for passwords, no.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh God. Don't start me.
- Martha Beck: Anyway, so yes, there are these impulses to acquire for various reasons that every creature has and ours, we're tool using mammals so we really have it strongly, but now it's gone nuts.



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- Rowan Mangan: Well, and part of where it goes nuts for me is the Amazon convenience part of our culture right now. You know how you would, back in the day where you had to go to the exact store for the exact thing. And so you would think, oh, I would like to get a pair of headphones. That would be really good. Must remember. And you might have put it on a list and then next time you were at the store, you would have to think, oh yeah, headphones. You had to really have wanted it consistently over a while and had it front of mind for a while in order to eventually make the purchase. But I could wake up at 2:00 AM and go, headphones, app. Plus by the way, apps, shiny objects like embers.
- Martha Beck: Ooh, ooh, ooh. You say you could do this. I think it's more accurate to say you do, do this.
- Rowan Mangan: Let's just say, I may have been known to do that from time to time.
- Martha Beck: I have a friend who sometimes used Ambien to go to sleep. And she said, "Thank God, I'm not one of those people who does things and then I don't remember them in the morning when I'm on Ambien." And then one morning she got up after an Ambien sleep and she went to amazon.com and she had 400 emails saying, "Thank you for your order." And they were like 17 volumes of the same book on 19th century sailing ships or something.
- Rowan Mangan: Not enough.
- Martha Beck: Not enough, right?
- Rowan Mangan: No, this is a detour, but I hope you'll let me take it. Marty's obsessed with this woman who uses her security footage to film herself. She's a sleepwalker and it is so funny. Ambien, there's a connection there.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. We should link to this wonderful, wonderful gem of a person in whatever links up. You know these things, sausage, I don't know what links.
- Rowan Mangan: In the show notes, we will make sure you can watch the funniest, funniest thing of this woman's sleepwalking. It's gold.
- Martha Beck: The point remains that when sleep is disinhibiting people, people typically eat peanut butter and a lot of it. It's like there's something that's not enough, not enough, not enough. And it's always gearing around in our brains. And our culture basically says, "Yeah, feed that beast and never stop feeding it."



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And we were talking about, it's interesting because we were talking about this in terms of a kind of spectrum that we could identify between a neediness of there's not enough, there's not enough. And that kind of point of view, through to that where it gets really distorted I think in the culture and by the culture to that Gordon Gekko, greed is good, Wall Street. And there's something kind of voracious and more, more, more, which is different from, oh, not enough. I need more. You know what I mean?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And the niece of a certain ex-president, who I will not name, wrote a book about her uncle and she called it Too Much and Never Enough. And you could just put that on American culture. He's a product of his culture. And he was in charge of the culture for a while. That's the driver in the seat. And when you have pure materialism with nothing else as an even close rival value, you get this culture where everybody's trying to get more and then you get the capitalist need to sell more in order to get more. And that means that there are advertisers and psychologists out there hacking our brains to find out what will make us want more, more, more, more and then putting that in front of us. And as a result, we've made a plastic gyre in the Pacific that's bigger than Texas. We made all that stuff, thinking we need this. Clearly, we didn't completely need it because we put it all in the ocean. It's not good.
- Rowan Mangan: It's not good. It's not good. There's the dopamine thing you were mentioning before, you think about gambling as another way that that never enough can kind of express itself in our psychology, right?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Yeah. And the irony is that people, the reason the house always wins is that people never quit when they're ahead. Very few people quit when they're ahead because the dopamine spike of getting a hit or winning, actually makes you crave the experience again. Again and again and again. It's so weird, I used to think that it is a fact, this is literally true.
- Rowan Mangan: This is literally true.
- Martha Beck: That the worst day for domestic violence is Super Bowl day. That's when more, and sorry to gender stereotype, but it typically goes this way that men physically beat their wives after the Super Bowl. And I always thought it was because their team lost. And then I was assigned to write an article on it and it turns out it's the winners who beat up on people.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow.



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- Martha Beck: They get sort of drunk with like, there's not enough hitting and tackling.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, right.
- Martha Beck: And bashing. And there's just this kind of veracity for everything. And think about the Super Bowl. How full of bright lights and big sounds and screaming. And it's just, it's human energy frothed up to this frenetic, incredible high point and then unrelieved.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. Intense stimulation.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. This is a serious cultural issue, I would say.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I think that when you take a psychology that's predisposed to, I need more, and then give it everything it wants, it becomes more. It's funny, we were watching, we've been watching the Sopranos. For me, it's the first time so we've been watching the series. Karen and Marty have seen it before, but there was just this little interesting subplot that we watched recently where there's a character, Steve Buscemi's character who is released from jail. There's no spoilers in this, is there?
- Martha Beck: No.
- Rowan Mangan: No. He gets out of prison, jail? I'm trying to learn difference.
- Martha Beck: Prison.
- Rowan Mangan: Prison, silly. And he's trying to go straight.
- Martha Beck: Australia's just one big prison so you don't need the words over there.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. We have oceans instead of bars. No, we have bars, plenty of bars. Don't get me wrong. This guy gets out of prison and he's trying to go straight and he gets a job delivering linens and stuff. And then at a certain point, he gets a financial windfall by complete blind luck. This money comes his way of cash, untraceable, just boom. And it was just that quickly for him to fall back into all the organized crime stuff. Just within hours, it seems like he was back in that life because he got some more, he got more.



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- Martha Beck: And it's interesting because the correlation between violence and acquisition is in that too, because he's working for this laundry where he has this boss and they're going back and forth and they seem pretty cordial. And as soon as he gets this money, he goes back to work with the man and then just suddenly beats the crap out of him. Becomes very aggressive and it's something I said, feed the beast a while ago. And by the way, I love the Super Bowl. And please go ahead and watch it. And the commercials are works of art. They're amazing.
- Rowan Mangan: Halftime show, hello.
- Martha Beck: I don't watch that. I'm in the kitchen eating. Anyway, if you just are aware, that look at what this culture creates as this is a good time, the incredible level of excess of money just to make those commercials to put them on TV. It costs millions and millions per commercial and the whole football franchise thing. It's just, it's an astonishing portrait of the culture.
- Rowan Mangan: And what's missing in all of that, again and again, in everything we've been describing? Enough. Completely missing - it doesn't exist. It's not meant to exist.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, that would be a disaster for the whole culture. It's the other way. In Asia, a lot of the Asian philosophies and religions are very dedicated to getting rid of illusion, getting rid of excess, as opposed to accumulating. "In the way of knowledge, every day something is added, in the way of enlightenment, every day something is dropped," says Lao Tzu in the Tao Te Ching. There's something in Buddhism called the realm of the hungry ghosts. And it's filled with these creatures that have these endlessly, achingly hungry stomachs and these tiny pinhole mouths and they're always just attaching to people and sucking energy out of them but they'll never get enough.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, I met a few of those.
- Martha Beck: Exactly. I was watching this thing once where there was a group of people who were sitting at the feet of some Asian monk and he was very sweet, very humble and this American said to him, "I'm curious about the realm of the hungry ghosts. What does that look like?" And the monk just said, "America."



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I feel like I so understand what it is to be a hungry ghost or be in the realm of the hungry ghosts living here. And when we were talking about this earlier, I thought, oh, that's what it was like when I was pregnant during the pandemic and it was my first time being a mother. And just this sense of everywhere that advertisers because they know, they know when you're having a baby and they know. I think the whole industry of stuff knows when you feel particularly insecure because -
- Martha Beck: Oh, absolutely.
- Rowan Mangan: Because the messaging about, "if you don't buy this, you will be a bad parent". I've never seen it as strongly as when I was pregnant.
- Martha Beck: Wow.
- Rowan Mangan: And then the overlaid fear of the pandemic being everywhere, I was just a sitting duck for the "more" people. And I bought some really random shit, you guys, out of fear of not being a good parent, if I didn't have the whatever it was, the costume.
- Martha Beck: What's this? What's this? It swings her back and forth. Okay, but what's that? It swings her up and down. They were trying to niche sell things. It was quite something.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm sorry.
- Martha Beck: But it was fear related. And the hungry ghostness of us accompanies our anxiety. And I actually think creates a vicious cycle of anxiety. Because if you address your anxiety by getting more and then that feeds back into the idea that there's not enough, it cycles upward. And I know when I'm most scared, that's when - I was scared when I was writing that book and I only had two weeks. And I also, I remember once I went to this gathering of a bunch of really influential people and I'd never met any of them and I was driving to go to the meeting and I passed an everything store, a Target or something. And without even thinking what I was doing, I was panicking thinking, how do I meet these people? I pulled into the parking lot, parked my car, ran in, bought a backpack and just stuffed it with I don't know, cookies and liniment.
- Rowan Mangan: Liniment.



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- Martha Beck: And snake oil. And pasties. I don't know what, whatever you might need, meeting a group of influential strangers. And I did not ever open that backpack. Months later I was like, okay. It was just me trying to self regulate my anxiety with the dopamine of acquisition.
- Rowan Mangan: So Marty, when you did that at Target and I'm sure that I've done that so many times, I'm sure that there's no one listening who can't relate to that experience. Do you think we are actually in pursuit of enough? Or have we been so hypnotized by the more, more, more that we've forgotten that enough is ever the destination? Does that make sense?
- Martha Beck: I think people believe if they get enough, they'll feel better. I've worked with so many people who are like, yeah, I have six houses but until I get this next one, it's not enough. And now I have to knock down the entire front of the house and extend it 18 feet so that I will have enough and it never happened.
- Rowan Mangan: But what we're actually caught up in is this hamster wheel of more, more, right?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And it's like, take it to the logical extreme. This is a true thing. Hoarding is I think the severe, when the acquisition urge in the brain gets to the point of dysfunction, people get so much stuff that every year people are literally killed by the stuff they've acquired that falls on them in their sleep and suffocates them.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh wow. That's sad.
- Martha Beck: This is not just one person a year. It's a handful of people every year, all around the world.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. I got to clean my secret closet.
- Rowan Mangan: I'll clean it for you.
- Martha Beck: Oh. Anyway, so if you're living in this culture, as we all are, I think we need to be aware that this malformation of enough is being fed to us. And if we accept it, it's like a cancer. Cancer is just a cell that doesn't remember when to stop growing, stop replicating. And boy, we want to get that out of there as fast as we can because remembering to stop is one of the most important things to keep our ourselves in regulation. And it's something that we don't have in our culture. We really don't.



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- Rowan Mangan: Trying to come to our senses in the face of the distortion of enough, the malformation of enough.
- Martha Beck: The vanishing horizon of the enough.
- Rowan Mangan: Vanishing horizon of enough. We called it the vanishing horizon because you can sail and sail and sail, always, but you never reach it. It's impossible to reach. And so actually it's funny, Marty, because I was thinking about the coming to our senses. And I remember this time when we were living in California and I don't know what was happening in our lives at the time but I remember waking up with this feeling and it was very much the voracious Gordon Gekko kind of "more" feeling, but what I wanted more of was less. And I just said to you, "I want more less." There was that sort of craving for simplicity and the stopping that you were talking about, the remembering to stop. But it was such a funny thing of, I want more less.
- Martha Beck: I know. And when you said it, wait, because it sounds a little nonsensical, if you logic it out but it landed in my body as, oh, thank God. I want more less too.
- Rowan Mangan: Too. What do you mean too?
- Martha Beck: We're leaving at 2:00. I think it kind of resonated because you and I have both had experiences of not as much stuff, not as much activity, not as many physical possessions. Maybe everybody out there listening has had a few times like that.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I think probably most of us have. What was yours?
- Martha Beck: Oh, I was in South Africa for about a month. It was the longest, I go there once a year, barring pandemic, and I usually just stay a couple of weeks but this time it was a full month and I minimized my packing. I had to teach a seminar that had five days so I took five different outfits to wear and very minimal eyedrops. There was barely even a separate suitcase for the eyedrops this time.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm so proud of you.



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Martha Beck: I put them in tiny bottles. No, I really, I compacted man. And even my phone, they didn't have wifi at the time, now they do. But I had my iPhone and that was the only machine I had and very few clothes. And I would just, now I was being very entitled and I recognize that I was being very entitled, but I was staying in this lovely thatched cottage that had cement floors and it was beautiful but very basic. And I would meditate during the day and always hang up everything I'd worn, always make sure everything got cleaned and had these little routines, like a monk and it was absolute bliss. I don't think I've ever been happier.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Isn't it funny? When we're away from our own stuff, our own abode where we keep all our stuff, because what else is a house for, other than a place where we put our shit? You remind me of the time that I spent traveling around India because that was a very, I had to carry everything and it was a long trip. I was there for three months and I remember I worked in a call center saving up the money for that trip. And whenever it was quiet, I would be on forums and stuff about packing, what do you bring? What do you bring? How do you get it right?

Because unlike a lot of places you go where you're like, oh, well, if I forget it, I can buy it over there. That's not always the case if you're in rural India. And so it was just, but I remember the absolute delight and it was a similar sort of thing, packing my backpack every day. And every object had been so carefully chosen and had such a specific function. There was nothing there that was like, ah, might need that. No, it was all, I was telling you, I even had, you need duct tape in India because you there's a lot of different reasons. Not just India, everyone look -

Martha Beck: Taking hostages, whatever.

Rowan Mangan: We all need duct tape.

Martha Beck: That's true. Everyone should always have duct tape. You will never have enough duct tape. And that is the final message here. No, not really.

Rowan Mangan: And WD-40. Anyway, but I didn't have any WD-40.

Martha Beck: Put it in. I didn't say that.



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- Rowan Mangan: No. I needed that but someone brilliant on a forum had pointed out to me that a roll of duct tape is a very large object to have in a backpack when you're traveling for months on end. And so, I had a pencil that I had wound the duct tape around. I still have that pencil with a little bit of green duct tape left because I loved it. It was my friend. And the backpackers, the sort of Western, hippy, roaming lost soul types who were all circulating at the same time as me, there was quite a good book exchange, a novel exchange where as soon as a couple of white people saw each other, they would fall on each other and go, "What have you got to read?" Because this was pre-devices.
- Martha Beck: Wow.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I remember once reading a Dan Brown novel and not even the first one, three times in a row because I couldn't find.
- Martha Beck: Oh honey. I'm so sorry.
- Rowan Mangan: Thank you. Thank you. I don't usually like to talk about it.
- Martha Beck: Oh, okay.
- Rowan Mangan: But anyway, the point was that I had very little stuff and it was enough and it was a wonderful thing to have enough.
- Martha Beck: And I remember coming back and being back in sort of American housing and everything and it struck me that we spend most of our money, what most people spend most of their money on is for their mortgage or their rent or whatever. What we're paying for mostly is space. And every time we acquire something, it's eating a bit of that. The most valuable thing we have. And I was thinking what if the neighbors came over and said, our neighbor down the street came up and said, "Look, I have six books that you're not going to read, give me \$10, I'll put them in your house." I buy books that I don't read. And they sit in my house and they're eating space and they're eating money.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow.
- Martha Beck: Space is actually an important component of our lives, a very important component and every time we give into not enough and we start cramming more stuff in, we're losing this incredibly valuable resource that we don't credit as being anything.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Space is a thing. But for some reason it's not caught up in the whole more, more, more cycle.



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- Martha Beck: Yeah. And again, Eastern philosophy, I remember when I read the Tao Te Ching for the first time, I was particularly struck by one short chapter, which I'll quote here almost in its entirety.
- Rowan Mangan: In the original, I hope.
- Martha Beck: It's been a while. Maybe later. My brain was too full of Chinese so I took it out.
- Rowan Mangan: Fair enough.
- Martha Beck: Anyway, in English it goes, "We shape clay into a pot but it is the emptiness inside that holds what we want. We hammer wood for a house but it is the inner space that makes it livable. We work with being but non-being is what we use."
- Rowan Mangan: We work with being but non-being is what we use. Can you just unpack that a bit for those of us who may not be as familiar with Lao Tzu?
- Martha Beck: Well, it's funny how it hit me first as true, without making any sense. Which is one of the things I love most when something hits me very strongly as the truth but my mind doesn't know how. I did have to sit and sift through that. And I had many thoughts. And the first thing I thought is that every one of us, every atom in our bodies is mainly empty space. And even the matter in the nucleus is really just wave energy, if you take it a certain way. But literally if you look at this, what looks like solid matter in our bodies, that is the tiniest percentage. The amount of us that is empty space, and I'm going to give you the accurate number is 99.99999999999999. That's the percentage.
- Rowan Mangan: 9, 9, 9, 9, 9, 9, 9, put it in, put it in.
- Martha Beck: This is deep Asian philosophy.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, sorry. Everything's just turning into nonsense in my head.
- Martha Beck: No, first thing is, we are mainly made of space.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. That's wild.



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- Martha Beck: There are these tiny, tiny flickers of energy that we see as matter and they accumulate to create our bodies. But what we really are is emptiness. And in Asia, the emptiness doesn't have that horrifying ring that Americans put to it. You're going to go into emptiness? When I was raised Mormon, it was outer darkness. If you weren't a good Mormon, you would be sent into the emptiness, into the nothingness. And the opposite of the nothingness is the everything-ness: just get it, get more of it, get more of it, get more of it. And I actually think we're starving for space.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow.
- Martha Beck: In this culture.
- Rowan Mangan: I think you're right. I think you're absolutely right.
- Martha Beck: To my point, a few years ago, there was a book in Japan that was a bestseller. And then it made it across the pond. It's very hard for a book from outside English speaking world to come in and be a massive bestseller in the US. And across the pond of the Pacific came this book by Marie Kondo. Marie Kondo? Mariko Kondo? I don't know how you would say it.
- Rowan Mangan: She just says Marie Kondo in English.
- Martha Beck: Oh, okay. Marie Kondo. And it was called *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. And people went nuts over this book. And on its face that doesn't sound like a massive, bestseller. But it was all about how much stuff can you discard? And she tells her life story in terms of her tidying history. When I was five, I was the kid who couldn't wait to get home and tidy my room. And you were the only kid in the world doing that but I'm so glad she did because she would buy, as a tiny child, she would buy tidying up magazines, which apparently they have in Japan where they know space is at a premium and they also have Buddhist philosophy. But then as she matured, she tells this life changing moment when she discovered discarding.



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And she says in all seriousness, "It's probably not right to discard other people's stuff without telling them first, but oh the joy, the absolute joy." And the fact that she was just so out there with it, I think it hit this nerve that has been growing slowly underneath our culture, going, please space, I'm made of space. I need more space. Space is what I use, being is what I work with. But what I need is the space inside. The family is what we see around us but it's the love between us that is really the power. In one of my books I said, "The meaning of life isn't what happens to people. The meaning of life is what happens between people." It's in the space between. And when I was teaching art at Harvard.

Rowan Mangan: What? Sorry, I didn't catch that. Where were you?

Martha Beck: Oh, it's just a little, nevermind. You wouldn't know it. But I taught with this brilliant professor who would say, "When you draw two objects, two bananas or whatever, you're actually drawing three things because the space around the bananas is also a visual element." The space between can actually be the most important part of a piece of art or a relationship or anything.

Rowan Mangan: Can I just add an obligatory, Ani DiFranco lyric to this conversation?

Martha Beck: Of course.

Rowan Mangan: There's a lovely little bit where she sings, talking about herself in the third person I assume, but maybe it's just a character in the song but half of learning how to play is learning what not to play. And she's learning the spaces she leaves have their own things to say. And that's the musical version, the spaces between notes.

Martha Beck: Space, the musical.

Rowan Mangan: It's funny that Marie Kondo's thing is so much about discarding though, because I feel like there's something to be said for, I don't know, for the space that exists before we acquire in the first place, as well. What about buying less before we have to throw it out, because there's that classic thing of, throw it away. There is no away, there's nowhere to throw it - back to the plastic gyre in the ocean. And I feel like part of the nastiness of the more, more, more is that it is a landfill creation machine. And I have this particular bug bear about the idea of stocking stuffers at Christmastime and this idea of stuff that is understood to be crappy plastic, nothings that won't work and will be thrown out immediately so that someone can go, "Ah," one time and then forget it exists. And I just feel like so much of this. I don't want to go on too much about the environmental side of it but that's a real thing.



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- Martha Beck: It's a real thing.
- Rowan Mangan: Every single thing that's ever been made is still here.
- Martha Beck: And here's the thing, Marie Kondo says, "If it sparks joy, then get it. If it sparks joy, then keep it." But I think that with her sensibility, she's very aware of what sparks joy and what just sparks the monster of more.
- Rowan Mangan: It's about coming to your senses in making that initial decision, is this sparking joy? Or is it sparking crazy dopamine, chemical addiction in the brain?
- Martha Beck: And I think a really good acid test would be to say, "Is this more than enough? Do I have enough without this? If I didn't have this object, would it still be enough? Would there still be enough for me?"
- Rowan Mangan: Wow. Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Bring enough back into your lexicon and into your conceptual horizon so that you can say, "I already have," the stocking stuffer, the word stuff, it's like we're just stuffing and that is not a comfortable sounding word.
- Rowan Mangan: No.
- Martha Beck: Put it in.
- Rowan Mangan: Put it in.
- Martha Beck: Sorry. I am so sorry. You started it. There's this very famous Zen story of a guy who comes to a monk and he says, "I've got so much in my head. I've learned and learned and learned and learned and learned," because that's another aspect, you can never know enough in our culture. You always have to be super smart. And the priest just says, the Zen monk says to him, "Have a cup of tea." He's like, "All right." He picks up the one of these cups with no handles, these little cups in Japan and the Zen master pours the tea, which is scalding hot and when he gets to the top, he just keeps pouring and it gets all over the guy's hands, then he drops it and it gets all over his body and it burns him.
- Rowan Mangan: Then he goes, "How'd you like them apples?" And runs away laughing.



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- Martha Beck: No, that's the end of the story. That's the thing about Zen stories, they leave you to figure it out. And so he's just, obviously the sort of metaphor is you're looking for less, you're asking for more, but you're looking for less. When you're longing to fill this craving inside you.
- Rowan Mangan: You're actually, you're looking to fill the space because that's what we want spaces for, to fill them with stuff. But what you are saying, what I hear you saying is that what we're actually craving is space itself.
- Martha Beck: And you know what? This is so interesting because when I used to go to the methadone clinic in Phoenix and talk to the heroin addicts who I would go life coach them. Because I wanted to work on hard cases and I would ask them and these were active addicts and they were still living on the streets. And I would say, "What are you chasing with all of this?" And they'd given their whole lives, all their money, they'd spent time in prison. They were robbing houses and things all for this feeling that they got the first time they took heroin. And I would say, "What did it feel like?" And they said, "Absolute calm, absolute peace, no thought, no need, no anything. It was just, ah."
- Rowan Mangan: In other words, it was the feeling of enough.
- Martha Beck: Space. In Asia, they call it emptiness.
- Rowan Mangan: Space and enough. Is that kind of the same thing, isn't it?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. I think here's the thing. If you keep consuming something because you think it's going to make you well and it keeps making you sicker, try consuming something different. More, more, more, more, more is not healing us. Maybe less, less, less, less, less will heal us. This may be a bit prescriptive. I tend to get prescriptive but I'm going to take this advice myself and I would really offer it for our listeners. Find something you have that doesn't spark that kind of easy joy, that maybe feeds the beast of more but isn't really satisfying you at the level of spaciousness and get rid of it.
- Rowan Mangan: And maybe also bear in mind the space that you have already and think twice before you fill it with something.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Because it's like walking from a busy city into a cathedral full of just this huge, vast, lovely stillness. That's what they call space consciousness or emptiness in Buddhism and it is not forlorn. It is gorgeous and delicious and it's what we're mostly made of and it's what we're all headed on to become in the long run.



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Rowan Mangan: In the meantime, stay wild.

Martha Beck: Stay wild.

Rowan Mangan: We hope you're enjoying Bewildered. If you're in the USA and want to be notified when a new episode comes out, text the word, WILD, to 570-873-0144. We're also on Instagram. Our handle is @bewilderedpodcast. You can follow us to get updates, hear funny snippets and outtakes, and chat with other fans of the show.

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