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If I had Jeff Bezos' Money

Geoffrey Holland

At this moment in time, Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com, is the richest man in the world. According to *Forbes*, Bezos alone has a net worth of \$131 billion... that's **billion with a B**. Let's put that in perspective. A hundred billion is 1,000 million times 100. If you spent \$10 million every passing day, it would take more than 35 years to exhaust the Bezos coffers.

I'm not interested in judging Jeff Bezos on how he is actually spending his unprecedented wealth. He owns Amazon and its increasing diverse network of profitable spin-offs. He owns the *Washington Post* Media empire. He also owns a space technology company. The latter appears to be his primary passion. Nothing wrong with any of that. He can buy anything he wants. He can do pretty much anything he wants. Sadly, up to now, there appears to be nothing earth-shaking or transcendent about the Jeff Bezos story. Unless, of course, you count the way his success with online sales and distribution has changed the way we acquire the products we need... and in a lot of cases, don't need. Shopping malls and retail chains like *Toys R' Us* are disappearing across America, in large part because of the 'Amazon' revolution.

Anyway, back to Bezos' money. Even a modest share of \$131 billion dollars is enough money to have a huge impact on the human culture. If I had that kind of wealth, I would use it to encourage a fundamental reshaping of the increasingly dysfunctional world we know.

Let's start with the assumption that if I set aside \$10 million for myself, that would be more than enough money for me and my family to live very comfortably for the rest of our time on Earth. That leaves a ton of money available to effect the kind of change I want to see.

What kind of change would that be? Perhaps the most important change would be to prioritize biodiversity protection. Ecologist, Michael Tobias calls biodiversity the economic bottom line for the planet. It is the essential currency of the biosphere all life depends on.

At the moment, the market brand of capitalism that has defined the human culture for the past two centuries is about exploiting our biosphere for all it's worth. That no longer works with a population that has doubled in just in the last 50 years. At the moment, there are about 7.6 billion humans on Earth. By 2100, there could be 10-12 billion. The Earth has not gotten any bigger. Too many people, too few resources...that's what it amounts to.

To preserve our planet's biodiversity, humans cannot take all the planet's resources for themselves. We cannot. We should not, but that's exactly what we are doing. We must mend our ways and learn to live within the planet's ability to provide. We need genuine leadership from good people with money, who are able and willing to use their financial resources to reshape the world we know.

The reality is even \$131 billion will evaporate quickly if passed out as direct subsidies to meet the needs of the 7.6 billion people currently living on Earth.

So, if I had billions in my bank account, and my business was raking in revenue, and needed less and less of my time, why not become a change agent of the highest order.

I would start by focusing on gender equality and economic fairness. We are a long way from that at the moment.

So, gender equality and economic fairness, that's a must if we are to evolve a human culture that is inclusive, with dignity a fundamental right we extend to every person. Dignity is something that comes from having clean water, enough to eat, and comfortable shelter. I would also include health care and free access to education for all as basic human rights.

The way to take care of the biosphere and assure dignity for all is to reshape the culture, so its organizing institutions, principally government, provide the economic and social structure

needed to encourage those basic goals. That's a tall order. For a very long time government has been subject to manipulation by billionaires, bankers, and giant multi-national corporations. There is no mystery about where their money-driven political machinations have left us.

In the early part of the 21st century, our Earth and its resources are being exploited to near exhaustion by ravenous human demands. At this moment, one billion people have limited access to clean water, or adequate sanitation. Chronic food insecurity is a reality for a substantial share of humanity. We are cutting down our forests, losing critical top soils, strip mining the life from our oceans, and causing a deadly dangerous warming of our atmosphere. Humanity is currently on a sure path to self-destruction. The evidence is everywhere... nothing fake about it.

As a global human culture we must choose a new direction that offers the best chance to deliver dignity for all and a sustainable relationship with the Earth and its biosphere.

If I had Jeff Bezos' money, here is how I would use it to shape the new, life-affirming change I wish for.

- **Acquire TV, radio, and other select media outlets across the country, or buy in significantly to media syndicates that own multiple media outlets.** Instill a commitment in those media outlets to honestly report the news, and encourage dignity for all and responsible planetary stewardship in entertainment and educational programming.
- **Support a Constitutional Amendment that gets the dirty influence money out of our politics.**
- **Provide financial support for politicians who support dignity for all and responsible planetary stewardship.**
- **Provide financial support for non-profit groups that fight for dignity for all, and responsible planetary stewardship**
- **Provide financial support for new, nature friendly technologies** that move us toward the sustainable world we wish for.
- **Use my platform to speak out personally** to encourage a cultural transformation that is life-affirming and sustainable.

It's going to take a real leader, or a group of leaders –people who possess wealth like Jeff Bezos– who will muster their courage and their wealth to push back against the old ways. They must focus on reshaping the world to be life-affirming and sustainable.

Over all of human history, tens of billions of humans have come and gone. Most leave little or no reason to remember them. Only a very small number make a mark on history. A glaring and unfortunate fact about lasting fame is that it is something that happens pretty much only to men. Of those men, many are remembered for being exceptionally murderous, cruel, or contemptible: Hitler, Stalin, and Vlad the Impaler come to mind. Others, like Gandhi, Mandela, and Abraham Lincoln have achieved lasting adulation for their courage and transcendent leadership.

One can become a giant of history for the right reasons and also for the wrong reasons.

If I were the richest person on Earth, as Jeff Bezos apparently is, I would choose to be remembered for my transformative presence and my assertive commitment to reshaping the human culture in a way that views dignity as a universal right and caring stewardship of the planet as a responsibility shared by all.

If wealth is the standard, Jeff Bezos is already the most successful business person of all time. He can be so much more. If he steps up and helps the world transition to a future that is genuinely worthy of our species. If he does that, he will forever be lionized as one of the most consequential humans that ever lived. Perhaps Mr. Bezos already has this in mind. I hope so.

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