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How to preserve and improve the Western Way of Life

As we confront a growing global crisis of expanding population and dwindling resources, we should address the deep social effects stemming from it. The crisis is sweeping away the most popular political and ideological dichotomies typical of the past century. The bases of opposition between capital and labor, liberalism and socialism, right and left are fading rapidly – embers of the old Industrial Age. With equally impressive speed, the emerging fundamental conflict is quite different: development vs. stagnation, growth vs., contraction, progress vs. social decline.

All of the conditions that in the past paved the way to heavy anti-democratic and authoritarian involutions are more and more quickly developing, in the current critical and dangerous historical period. When economic conditions turn for the worse, uncertainty and fear spread in all social classes. That increases the likelihood that “saviors”, whatever their particular ideological delirium, will find fertile ground among large parts of population willing to believe fairy tales in hopes of better living conditions. In spite of many negative historical experiences, charismatic personalities will have tremendous opportunity to be perceived as the best administrators of scarce resources, regardless of how much coercion is needed to make people digest “unpopular but necessary measures”. Nor will it matter which real or imagined enemies will be given to the people, to concentrate their anger towards external forces. The result will be a heavy decline for most of the population and a fierce concentration of resources in the hands of bureaucratic castes and monopolistic feudal powers. This will lead to further conflicts, with the inevitable increasing waste of the few remaining resources.

For many decades the *Western Lifestyle* has been criticized, often rightly, as a waste factor, a source of social inequality, consumerism for its own sake. Finally, the environmental movement indicated it as the main source of the progressive degradation of the natural environment. The so-called “happy decrease” (or degrowth) movement is the latest in this philosophical thread, of which Serge Latouche is the most fervent and active ideologue. This movement is gaining traction in the world of both “leftist intellectuals” and extreme right-wing currents, even neo-Nazis who long for a return to mythical feudal and vassalage “values”. Without developing alternatives to the bureaucratic-authoritarian involution of the Twentieth Century socialist revolutions, the ideologues of the decline agree on one goal: the destruction of the Western lifestyle and of the so-called *free market*. Unfortunately, such a perspective includes the destruction of the technology platform built during the Industrial Age, which made possible mass education, the emancipation of women and minorities and, ultimately, the development of the global network.

The most obvious misconception on which much of the environmental movement was originally based was the claim that things that are natural are good, non-polluting, sustainable, and things that are artificial (i.e. man-made) are bad, polluting, consumerist and unsustainable. However, now it stands to reason that a civilization of seven billion people can get a more sustainable production only through a sustained effort in technological innovation, and not destroying technology. Evidently Latouche and his followers never felt the need to analyze the food production history, the production increase (a factor of seven) brought by the revolution of pesticides, just as an example, and the real problems of food production development. We are thus confronted by a false moral model, aimed in reality to dismantle the production systems that feeds – albeit inadequately – billions of people, in favor of infinitely less productive systems capabilities. Such a process, should it gain momentum, would lead to unsustainable growth in prices for most of the population, bringing the clock of history back at least to the bread riots and serfdom told us by the Medieval chronicles.

It is therefore definitely clear that the concept of happy decrease is an oxymoron, like saying “dry rain”, or “luxurious poverty”. The emerging contraposition, of which there is still little awareness in society, and almost no awareness at the political level, is between progress and decline of civilization.



The way of decline leads to a nightmarish future, as opposed to the positive view of the open world and the extraordinary industrial and cultural revolution outlined in the Space Renaissance Manifesto (http://www.spacerenaissance.org/papers/The_Space_Renaissance_Manifesto.pdf).

The way of progress demands economic growth, and therefore has no chance to develop if civilization remains confined within the limits of our home planet, where material and energy resources are no longer sufficient. This became quite evident with the current crisis, in which the dramatic lack of resources is being translated directly into evanescence of global money mass.

As to the Western lifestyle, apart from some deplorable tendencies, there is nothing that is not ethically sustainable, provided the opportunity of access it to be truly given to all citizens of the human nation. This might seem like just another utopia, but we astronomical humanists dream of a full inclusive society, where politics really helps to free up the market and keep it clean from monopolies, trade barriers and under the table cartel agreements, various mafias and potentates. We believe in a society where everyone is given according to their imagination and ability to conceive the individual desirable good. And the society receives by everybody according to their creativity, and ability to imagine and create the beautiful and desirable social goods. The above is possible only with a platform of resources and energy so wide as to allow all members to reach the upper echelons of the Maslov pyramid, where it is unnecessary to consider the basic needs and individuals can fulfill the realization of one's creativity and desire (natural for most of people) be remembered for a worthy contribution to society. It would be a logical extension of the Western way of life, where everyone can enjoy what were once the privileges of the bourgeois class. The natural consequence would be a truly free market and individual freedom to do business and contribute with good works to the well-being of humanity.

In times of crisis we hear over and over that we must tighten our belt, and resign ourselves to the continuous deterioration of living conditions. The notorious policy, propionated by stalinist or coercive regimes of any ideological trend: socialization of misery, inevitably accompanied by the privatization of wealth in few greedy hands, heedless of any cultural degradation. But this sort of forced *Franciscan* life is not inevitable, nor desirable, in spite of those who see a new Middle Ages, or worse a global Armageddon, as a chance for atonement for moral decay or our "sins" against nature.

Well, we new-humanists claim the Western lifestyle and its further growth as the path for poor people to become wealthy, for the wealth to become rich and the rich ones even richer – as long as they move most of their wealth, spending and investing in productive enterprises to create jobs, opportunities, growing markets and increased well-being for everybody. This is not just another utopia. ***The age of self-targeted finance is over! Now it's time for big projects, and the human expansion into space is the greatest one, a project that can trigger hundreds of related new industries and market environments!***

Just outside the backyard we'll find the resources of the Moon, the nearly pure metals, water and oxygen of the near-Earth Asteroids, billions of terawatts of solar energy, 24/24 hours, 365/365 days, with constant efficiency, all that is required for the growth of an incalculable population. And, further, in a slightly more distant future, Mars, the asteroid belt, the moons of Jupiter. And, perhaps in the next century, the incalculable reserves of ice and basic components of life of the comets of the Oort Cloud, the great *cosmic freezer*, where our entire solar system is contained. The only alternative to the decline – which by its nature could only result in a nightmare (nothing but happiness!) – is to initiate a robust exo-development, assuring all possible support to the nascent civilian astronautics industry in terms of both private and public investments, tax discounts, incentives to recruitment of qualified staff disused by the old telecommunications space industry, and, above all, a consistent policy of international cooperation among all countries and entities willing to share the Space Renaissance vision.

Aim High! Ad Astra!

Adriano V. Autino, SRI, President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adriano V. Autino', is positioned below the typed name. The signature is stylized and fluid.