

Watt's Happening? #99

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When more is never enough...



We're on our own here on planet Earth. Our job now is to figure out how to live happily and sustainably within the limits set by a finite world.

There does not appear to be a human gene that programs us to know when we have achieved “enough.”

Instead we are genetically programmed to always strive for “more” which, up to this point, has made a lot of sense. One buffalo is great, but two would just be better. In fact, if I had four I could work on how to store that meat, so in lean times my family and I could get by.

Thus all science and technology was born, and in the blink of an eye members of the human species were walking on the moon.

For the million years or so we have inhabited on our little planet more or less in our present form, more was definitely better. And of course it still is, to a point.

But when billions of intelligent beings want a continuous, never-ending “more”, (driven at first by necessity and then, when the basics are fairly well covered, by the genetic imperative of survival at any cost through growth) the *answer* to survival becomes a *threat* to survival.

The world's resources are finite. The ability of our planet to absorb our pollution is limited. Our desires and imaginations are not.

In the midst of the abundance that much of the world enjoys today, “more” can become so very large, so very much measured in the billions and trillions, that it becomes destructive, threatening the survival of our species and so many others with us.

This represents a complete reversal of the evolutionary imperative. Can we handle such unprecedented change? Can we come to terms with “good enough for now” and “living more lightly on the Earth?” Can quality of life replace quantity?

ALONE BUT NOT ALONE

Perhaps a new cosmic perspective will help us come to our senses.

Thanks to robotic space probes we have now had a good look at all the other planets in our solar system, our planetary neighbourhood. They are all hostile, deadly environments. Nothing compares to Earth. We are perfectly adapted to living here, and trying to sustainably live on another planet (like Elon Musk's dream of a colony on Mars) will be difficult in the extreme.

Looking even further out, we see that we are not alone in the vast and cosmic sweep of the universe. We have for the first time discovered thousands of other planets orbiting other stars, a few of which will no doubt be much like Earth.

But they are so vastly, unimaginably far away that travelling at the speed of our fastest space probe, it would take tens of thousands of years to get to the nearest star.

We are not alone. We are part of a vast, complex and beautiful cosmic web of life, but we are isolated by infinite, incomprehensible distances. We are on our own here, and our next job is to figure out how to live happily and sustainably within the limits set by a finite planet.

Anyway, saving the Earth is infinitely safer, easier and saner than preparing to leave it. Developing renewable

energy resources produced by the sun, wind, the tides and the geothermal heat of the Earth is cheap and easy compared to spaceflight. The technology needed to move quickly to a low carbon world is simple compared to building spaceships and Mars colonies.

A BETTER DREAM

Its not technology that is lacking, nor understanding, knowledge, or information. Not any more.

The problem that holds us back and may ultimately defeat us is the outdated biological imperative of infinite, unlimited, endless growth. The boundless, unsustainable, suicidal "more" that drives us as individuals and the world economy is the biggest single issue we must now face and overcome.

The dream of a stable and clean environment run by renewable energy, where quality replaces quantity, is a dream that calls on the better part of humanity. It calls for cooperation and commitment to something we can only do together. It calls on our intellects to create and invent many new good things, and it calls on our hearts to care for our children, future generations, and a compassion for all living things on this paradise planet we call home.

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