

HAPPINESS FOR THE 21st CENTURY

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(1) At the beginning of the 21st century, the global biosphere of Earth, dominated by a single biological species, *Homo sapiens*, is extremely stressed. Cumulative cultural evolution is so fast and the generated complexity so high that they exceed human capacity to grasp them, to adapt to them and to manage them. The dynamics of changes in science, technology and human affairs are such that earlier than we find a solution to a problem, the problem has already been changed and supplanted by new problems that call for new solutions. (2) Astronomer Martin Rees pointed out in his 2003 book that the 20th century was the first in which humanity may have realized the real chance of self-destruction and that the 21st century may become a critical moment in the entire evolutionary lifetime of the human species, in the fate of the Earth and maybe even the entire universe [1]. Rees saw in modern technology a very serious menace, with problems far greater than is commonly realised. He considered possibilities of error, but mainly emphasized the risk of intentional destruction. In the present, the most serious consequence and menace of technology is the unintended global warming, which, at the end of 2019, seven prominent climatologists characterized as a state of planetary emergency, a danger of imminent tipping points and “an existential threat to civilization” [2]. Under such threat, the Parliament of the European Union (EU) is going to enact in March 2020 the “European Green Deal”, with the goal to make the EU economy by 2050 carbon-neutral, with no net emission of greenhouse gases. (3) Amazingly, some politicians and the lay public continue to believe that such a revolutionary switch from economy driven by energy from fossil fuels to energy from “renewable” sources should not affect the growth of economy. This is a false assumption, a mirage. It is more than obvious that the first condition for humanity to mitigate the climate change is the radical reduction of the material consume in the developed countries of the world and, by implication, the economic slowdown, degrowth [3]. (4) Under the impact of utilitarianism, classical economics and welfare economics, economists have long regarded well-being as the ultimate accumulation of wealth. Individual well-being results naturally, it has been thought, from material richness. The question whether “money buy happiness” has been a favourite subject of countless novels and fictions, but also a subject of contentions of researchers on happiness, mainly stimulated by the well know Easterlin paradox. The problem has been considerably clarified by Kahneman and Deaton [4]. They showed that when considering the relationship between pecuniary richness and happiness two aspects of subjective well-being must be taken in account: First, emotional well-being, which refers to the emotional quality of an individual’s everyday experience, the frequency and intensity of experiences of joy, stress, sadness, anger, and affection that make one’s life pleasant or unpleasant. And second, life evaluation, which concerns the thoughts that people have about their life when they think about it. When plotted against log income, life evaluation rose steadily, and so also did the emotional well-being, but it was no further progressing beyond an annual income of

~ 75,000 US \$. Thus, above a certain level of stable income, individuals' emotional well-being is constrained by other factors. They concluded: "This observation underscores the importance of the distinction between the judgments individuals make when they think about their life and the feelings that they experience as they live it." (5) Transition from the worship of the "high living standard" to consumer minimalization and even ascetism, the necessary consequence of attempts to rescue the global biosphere, will not be a simple and painless process. As economist Friedrich Hayek put it already in 1944, "the one thing which democracy could not stand without breaking down is the inevitability of a substantial decline of the living standard in times of peace, or just only a long-lasting economic stagnation" [5]. (6) The science of happiness, felitics, should analyse the precarious situation of contemporary humanity, but along with mere descriptions it must provide conditional statements, „if...then“. Two options can be envisaged, both respecting the need to reduce the energy expenditure and material spending and assuring satisfaction of basic biological needs: (a) people would minimise their secondary material needs and replace them with spiritual aesthetic and moral needs, or (b) the majority of them, driven by human hedonotaxis, would continue in their habitual ways of living and preserve their search for satisfactions but no longer in the customary material world but fully emerged in virtual reality. Eventually, as the third option science should also consider the possibility that the present state of evolution of the human species is an indication that it has reached a dead end from which there is no way out [6].

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