

## **Progress - Moving Towards a Higher State**

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The accepted 'generic' meaning of the word 'progress' is contained in dictionaries and is denoted, 'to move towards a higher or better state'. While this meaning is understood, this is not strictly true calling for a possible amendment to our dictionaries or additional qualification. When we delve into progress from the perspective of physics and the second law of thermodynamics then 'progress' on the physical plane is cancelled out by the duality of positive and negative factors. This happens on all levels. The old axiom, 'there is no such thing as a free lunch,' applies.

Development on the mental plane also has a negative condition that cancels out the claim of 'progress.' The accumulation of knowledge by individuals is also thought of as progress, that is however, eroded by our short lifespans and the limits of our relative knowledge. In addition, stress of the mind is compounded by the increasing drive for knowledge and expertise resulting in mental clash and a stiffening of ones arteries particularly if intellectually inclined and involved in intense academic pursuits. This has a big impact on the nervous system setting in motion the reaction to mental actions. Such clash can easily lead to mental disturbance as the result of leading an imbalanced lifestyle or using various substances to overlay the tension and has consequences.

In this conjecture we are referring to 'advancement' or movement from 'A' to 'B'. So what you might say!

While humans enjoy creating fantasies and illusions that help us escape the hum-drum of daily existence it matters a great deal how we use certain symbols of language. The notion of progress has an important bearing on economics and what is happening to our planet. Currently, use of words such a 'progress' is a mixed metaphor that re-enforces a closed perception of our world and impacts on the way we view other cultures.

Political systems are fashioned after teachings that see progress in material terms while not taking into account the costs to the environment and social aspects such as psychic health. This is becoming apparent due to 'carbon taxes' being issued to counter global warming that appears to be running at a much faster pace than climate change caused by evolution barring an extreme clash such as a large asteroid or pole shift that has occurred several times in the past.

Longer term consequences are emerging such as ozone depletion due to industrial processes. Somewhere in our economic equations that make profit as the only goal, indirect costs are frequently left out and is often sidelined into the lap of society to deal with at a later juncture. The power of technology such as the media only serves to bolster those with power and control when changes are required to ensure the greater good and survival.

Meanwhile, nature seeks balance one way or another that should give us a clue in our collective wisdom about applying some principles in economic development with an all-round approach. As much as we like to educate our children for a better life and future, it seems that human endeavour remains firmly in the grip of exploitation and the grip of unnecessary hostilities and wars. Where is the 'progress', one may ask?

In Australia various indigenous clans lived near the coastal regions. By and large their lifestyles were idyllic. They had abundant fishing and rich cultural ceremonies with meaning of purpose. They believed that life was a transformation through cycles and a spiritual journey that closely parallels the teachings of Tantric practices in India that 'seek union' with God. They understood that a human life span was short and told stories of the 'spirit' or 'soul' as depicted by today's religions.

Indigenous cultures did not have to pay taxes, follow a nine-to-five drudgery and earn money so that they could afford a car to get to work so as to earn money. They wore basic clothing but then again did not have to farm sheep and apply chemicals to the land that ended up in waterways as pollution. Our industrial processes require large amounts of energy that has a cost to the environment. We have gone from the horse to automobiles for transportation. In societies of millions of people the impact on resource use, energy requirements, pollution and accidents has been considerable. When all costs and factors are taken into consideration the gains are cancelled out by the negative aspects.

Many things we do out of convenience or because it is directly cost effective but completely ignore other costs that are cloaked by commercial social engineering in the name of progress. Milk cartons are a case in point. Milk bottles were reused many times before being recycled for meltdown and only involved several basic chemicals. Whereas milk cartons use many chemicals in their manufacture and it is suggested that plastic linings cause molecular infusion into liquids or food. There is a case that the cost in bottles was actually cheaper than milk cartons that provide more profit to the developers. Carton use also removed local jobs.

And what about the environment? Around our lakes and seas, plastic waste is to be found everywhere – it is an eyesore and hardly denotes progress. A vast array of plastic products is causing a vortex accumulation of junk in our oceans. Carbon dioxide pollution in our air is causing the seas to acidify as the parts per million go from around 275 ppm several decades ago to around 375 ppm or more today – see <http://350.org/about/science/>.

Many people do not want to pay carbon taxes because they know that countries like China use coal exported from their country. They do not want to subsidize coal industries while countries like China remain unaccountable. Ironically, the measures required to counter pollution are neutralized by a public impasse under democratic systems. The impasse is brought about by social classes who do not want change that seeks a balance environmentally or minimizes the negative costs.

Above Earth are thousands of satellites that are essential in communications and commerce. If this network is assailed by meteors or magnetic storms the super technology network may be rendered useless. The probability may be small, but if it occurred, what becomes of the so-called progress we have made? We have not planned for such a scenario because current economic systems are unable to abide by rational choices seeking dynamic equilibrium in the interests of all.

Our immense vulnerability may become apparent if a giant earthquake or another polar shift severs the Internet cables under the oceans. It's not that there is no wisdom about these factors, it is really about social control and those with power but no vision.

Modern societies have complex systems of pipe work and cabling that require maintenance and upgrade. This is ongoing. The same applies to electricity grids and other networks. If money is diverted away from public works to save banks or businesses that caused financial losses in the first

place, then this wastage causes breakdowns in money flow towards infrastructure re-building with serious repercussions for society as a whole.

Giant car companies are massaging the public psyche about electric cars that use fuel cells or cadmium batteries based on fairly rare and expensive metals. The French have developed air cars that are cheap to run and don't require exotic metals for power systems. Although, when compressed air gets cold it loses its efficiency. Even then, the French know that public transportation and bicycle ways would be a far better use of resources as a priority. What we see is there are positives and negatives in technological development.

In hindsight the demands on resources such as oil, copper and platinum is a type of technological imperialism that requires hard-nosed governments to implement policies to exploit other countries and communities without fair compensation. This leads to conflict and war and has been going on for a long time. Increasingly the distribution of wealth gets worse despite powerful production systems only working at 60% of their capacity. Real wealth cannot be based upon ever increasing credit (debt). Clearly something is very wrong despite the images of abundance being promulgated in advanced societies.

The social disparity brought about by skewed wealth distribution results in more people resorting to anti-social and criminal behaviour. The anti-social side of economic systems results in vast resources being used to combat black markets and illicit trade networks (e.g. drug running). Wealthy people have to create enclaves to protect themselves and their families. While material possessions may adorn one's life we observe an increasing unease or disturbance in emotional and mental health in western culture.

The more people use their minds for mental work the greater the impact on nervous systems and physiology. Many people stare at computer terminals all day long and live more sedentary lifestyles as a result. Health problems of eyes and good vision are emerging. Obesity is rampant. To address the lack of physical exertion a workout at the gym is required.

There are better choices that can be made but they are not being made. The current ethos puts profit before collective welfare and works against the progressive utilization of appropriate technology.

So it can be seen that progress on the physical and mental planes is correctly speaking about advancement and movement from A to B. The next state is about spiritual development and its relationship to progress. While many religious denominations might see spirituality as adhering to a belief system based on a dualistic religious outlook, this is not the essence of spirituality. Rather, spiritual progress is defined in mysticism as involving the effort to span the gap between the finite and infinite – it is the transcendental dimension within human experience. This is often discovered in moments in which the individual questions the meaning of personal existence and attempts to understand their own self within a broader nature of being or the Cosmos. This involves some psycho-spiritual effort or practices.

Where development is towards psycho-spiritual welfare it is called progress. Human existence is trifarious, that is, it has physical, mental and spiritual aspects. Real progress should be psycho-spiritually motivated so as to elevate human existence and share that inspiration collectively.

The notion of God being a separate entity capable of hearing prayers sits at odds with the quest for mystical expansion or expansion of the mind to realise the nature of consciousness or soul. Although religious traditions include religious order such as the Jesuits with mystical leanings, the common place practice of most Christian religions is praying to God and adhering to moral tenets. While Catholic religious practice can involve a devotional outlook that is in accordance with mystical practices, it to parts ways when seeking union with God (Yoga), which is more than merely relating to God.

The artificial distinction drawn by various religious orders between their outlook and the mystical path is predominantly about religious authority maintaining doctrine over their followers and derived from history by the intellectual value class – such outlook is usually expressed as organised religion. In this regard, the spiritual practices of Christianity and that of Eastern traditions have an essential departure point.

One seeks union with God such as the 'drop merging with the ocean' analogy and the other seeks to know God primarily through worship and moral adherence. That is not to say that the mystical tradition of achieving oneness with God (liberation and perfection) do not follow moral precepts as well. To be meaningful, they must do so in order to aid spiritual progress and, of course, the society.

The practices of Eastern Yoga (as it is sometime referred to), when it comes to moral practices or the code of Yama and Niyama, also have some parallelism to the Ten Commandments of Christianity. However, the opposition of various religions to the mystical quest of merging with the 'Infinite' is most likely based upon the differences in understanding spirituality influenced by the sway of the religious, intellectual class. Over the decades that opposition appears to have become less.

Since the inherent state of physics involves duality and the negative and positive factors result in cancellation in terms of progress then what does constitute progress? As already hinted it is spiritual development that is the realm of progress and is an aspect of evolution in its own rights. Various intellectuals would argue this is nothing more than a theoretical notion without foundation especially when it comes to belief in God.

Dogmas have set up a boundary to belief and exploration that prevents further expansion in outlook and the meaning and experience of love culturally and individually. But with the expansion of human outlook and acceptance, such dogmas must give way to more universalistic ways of seeing the world and creation. Also, socio-economic systems based on a materialistic world view work for an established minority and suppresses the majority without moving together. This is evident when basic necessities of life are not provided to all people, and at the same time there is massive hoarding of wealth by a few. Social freedom is largely dependent on economic freedom. Economic freedom must ultimately be based on the sense of a common inheritance of the world for the benefit of all persons, not for a few. That also, has an inherent spirituality about it.

Prominent intellectuals and outspoken atheists of today regard spirituality as nothing more than an emotional state intrinsic to ourselves. There is a paradox in this. That paradox includes the atheists who 'thank God' for being an atheist. It is also involves a failure to accept diversity in culture and the innate human aspirations for transcendental understanding. From their perspective belief in God is the ultimate dogma directly associated with the persistent dogmas of religion promulgated over the centuries. Fundamentally, though this perspective is based on a very limited understanding of

spirituality and the fixation of 'God' being something to do with religion and its dualistic sentiments, which is a kind of denial of the interconnectedness of all things and all consciousness.

So, an anti-dogma outlook is necessary also in regard to atheism and this will be a social service in its own right and lead to a rationalistic world view which aligns with scientific inquiry in many field of endeavour, rather than confining understanding of the world and consciousness to a materialistic notion that also has its limitations or boundaries. The formations of planets and solar systems all involve a nucleus at the material level such as our sun. Everything revolves around a nucleus as seen in the macro and micro cycles of evolution.

Similarly, spiritual endeavour involves moving around a nucleus of devotion, finding a centre of love within oneself and its application to humanity. This can also be found in Christian traditions of worshipping that singular nucleus of faith or the 'Supreme Father', coupled with the creative principle of 'Mother Nature' or the qualifying principle of creation which gives rise to this expressed universe out of the infinite consciousness behind all things. Spiritual practices such a meditation, contemplation and devotional aspects of Yoga thus share some similarities with the worship practices of various religious congregations, in that there is a nucleus that is desired to be understood and felt internally – it may also be called finding God or merging with the Supreme Mind.

Moving closer to that nucleus is the goal of devotional spirituality. After all, if this Nucleus is available on an experiential level – one simply needs to develop the internal sentiment of developing love for all creation, practice it and acknowledge the singular source of that divine sentiment, and surrender internally to that flow. This can be achieved through various internal spiritual practices, not through measurable external activities. Indeed, we are on an evolutionary journey of the soul-mind or 'atman'.

Spiritual aspirants see this as a gift from God to the devotee. Since by definition everything comes from God, then in return there is only one thing we can give God, which is our hearts. This is expressed by social service to the world – rendering selfless service to all creation. This approach treats the world, indeed the universe, as one integrated whole to which all beings belong. Consequently, we all have a common Cosmic inheritance which has to be taken care of – socially, economically, culturally, environmentally, and this care happens on the three levels of existence being physical, mental and spiritual. This is integral to the spiritual journey. The spiritual journey is the only progress and is movement from the crude towards the subtle aspects of life.

Progress then, as explored in this essay, is moving towards a higher state, the spiritual state. It has no negative condition. By bringing spiritual outlook and values without dogma into our cultural, social and economic lives we can create better ways of developing our future. This is no idle dream but a practical requirement.