

Technology Blues?

You leave your climate-controlled car to walk to your climate-controlled house. You thaw out the meat for supper in our microwave and go shower under your pulsing, water massage shower head, pull a clean towel off the rack—the one you washed in our automatic washer and dried in your automatic, natural gas heated drier—dry off and blow-dry your hair, the hair you rinsed with conditioner. You cook supper on the high-tech range in the kitchen. The cooked vegetables come from the refrigerator freezer, the salad from the crisper below it. You pick rice, in a boil-in bag as the starch for that night's meal.

You decide to eat supper in the living room, in front of the sixty-inch, flat screen TV, where a news story comes on, decrying the global warming caused by humanity's "carbon footprint," largely due to the "industrialized countries of the West." As you chew the food, the very food you cooked so quickly and easily, you nod in agreement. What the news story fails to mention is one simple fact: all that "evil," Western technology made everything you used and enjoyed possible!

This is the dirty little secret that "environmentalists" sweep under the carpet. They, like the rest of us, have grown used to the convenience and benefits of the things our industrialized society provides us. Did these things originate in the East (Asia and the Subcontinent)? Perhaps some, but it took Western (Europe, Scandinavia and the USA) thinking to exploit them to their full potential.

Honestly, who wouldn't want these things?

Having said all of the above, I'm not unaware of the excesses and damage technological improvement has foisted on our environment. Part of the psychology of living on a huge continent like the US caused us to "expend and move on," leaving a mess in our wake. New, pristine vistas (and raw materials) lay just over the horizon. [As an aside, the American Indian tribes were no better at this, only their "expend and move on" mentality, based on their nomadic life, left far less damage for nature to repair.] The same mentality existed (to some degree or another) in countries like Australia and Canada. Russia, China and Eastern Europe have environmental problems that make those of the West pale by comparison.

I've always been impressed with how beautiful the landscape in European countries is. No mystery there, since they, quite simply, have run out of room, which brings me to my main point. Technology, which provides us with the things we love and use, tends to correct the problems it creates. Face it, the men and women who come up with the stuff some decry aren't idiots and they live on the same planet we do, which brings me to a corollary to my main point.

In the past, societies that ruled through oligarchies, as opposed to the more democratic, city-states of Greece, for instance, tended to stifle technological improvements. Why? Make no mistake; technology has always existed as a means to improve the life of the so-called "common man." Well, when you are a member of the elite, you have thousands of less-fortunate "peons" to do all the work, thereby helping you to enjoy all your wealth and the things it provides. Who needs technology?

Okay, so far so good, but what about the problems? Who regulates these? Ah, here's the sticking point. Some of my "eco-freako" friends (sorry for the slur) want government to handle that task. Oh, really? And what makes you think government, once it gets its hooks into the problem won't run us right back to the eighteenth century? For every instance where government intervention did a good job, there are ten instances where it didn't, causing other problems. Back in the late sixties, when gas prices began to climb, someone came up with a great idea. Remove gas from the government regulation scheme of things and let market forces drive prices. Well, some pundits wailed that gas would soon top five bucks a gallon (that seems to be the magic figure all the doomsayers agree on). Well, not only did gas prices *not* reach five dollars, they went *down*! Sure, it fluctuates, but the rule of supply and demand allows it to go down as well as up. I'm aware that there are other forces at work here, too (a la the so-called "gas crisis" of the early seventies caused basically by an embargo by oil producers to—guess what?—drive prices up), but they don't change the fact that market-driven pricing works.

The same, basic things happened with the airlines. Yeah, some decried the loss of safety, etc., but it worked as well. We may not get all the full-service we did under regulation, but no one can argue that it's a heck of a lot cheaper to fly today than in the past and, guess what?, planes aren't falling out of the sky any more than they used to, perhaps less.

Here's the bottom line. That evil, bugaboo, Capitalism, invented in the West, has made technology possible, at least when government stays out of it. We don't need government to regulate technology and the free market. WE can do it! Think about this: how long will a business stay solvent if no one buys its products? Quite simply, it can't. Additionally, when an environmentally aware populace gets wind of a business's rapacious, environment-destroying practices, will they keep buying said company's products, especially when another company makes an environmentally friendly, similar product? Yep, you heard me right. One of the positive aspects of the "environmental craze,"—once you move away from the religious ("Earth, Gaia, is our Mother."), fringe arguments ("We must save the planet!") and governmental intrusion ("We must spend trillions to stave off environmental collapse in the next ten years!")—concern for the environment, the environment in which we live, is a good thing. After all, we're not saving the planet, we're saving *ourselves*!

I'm thrilled at the wonders that await us in the near future. I'm seeing stuff that used to be fodder for far-future science fiction! When I pull out my "smart phone,"—something I no longer refer to as a cell phone, but an "information station,"—I feel like a character in a sci-fi film, using technology that didn't exist as little as twenty-five years ago, no less fifty years ago, when I graduated high school! All these wonders came from technology, coupled with capitalism, so we can eventually afford them. So, the next time someone moans and groans about how we're "raping the planet," point them in the direction of the eighteenth century and forget all the doomsday, apocalyptic movies you've watched. Next, pull out your "smart phone" and make a note on your social network to post, tweet, or whatever, to your fellow "friends" followers, etc. about how cool technology is and go, use it, by all means!

Viva technology!