

## Re: Wearing your conscience.

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**From:** Jim Blair ([jeb\\_at\\_wisc.edu](mailto:jeb_at_wisc.edu))

**Date:** 11/22/04

Date: Mon, 22 Nov 2004 15:23:55 -0600

"Peter Lawrence" <[peterl@netlink.com.au](mailto:peterl@netlink.com.au)> wrote in message  
news:419E5F38.21AE@netlink.com.au...

> *Jim Blair wrote:*

>>

>> *"Peter Lawrence" <peterl@netlink.com.au> wrote in message*

>> *news:419BB3CA.58A5@netlink.com.au..*

>>> *Jim Blair wrote:*

>>>>

>>>> *Wearing your conscience.*

>

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>.

>>>> *Now I could explain that several dollars a day paid in*

>>>> *local currency is better than subsistence farming, and*

>>>> *that living expenses can be much lower in poor countries,*

>>>> *or point out that since Globalization living standards*

>>>> *in most of the 3rd world are rising so fast that obesity*

>>>> *is replacing starvation as the main diet problem, and some*

>>>> *of them are now competing with the US for oil.*

>>>

>>> *I've been over this area before. These things are only improvements*

FOR

>> *THOSE*

>>> *WHO PARTICIPATE IN THEM. The rest get worse off, since the cheap food*

>> *moves*

>>> *out of their reach. In fact, the food only remains cheap for so long*

as

>> *there*

>>> *are mouths it can easily be moved away from; once everyone moves up*

the

>>> *nominal cash income ladder, nobody is left to provide food so cheaply.*

>>

>> *Hi,*

>>

>> *You seem to be stuck in a "Zero Sum" mindset. Since "some" people are*

>> *clearly better*

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- > > *off today in the 3rd World, then there must be others who are worse off.*
- >
- > *No, not at all. You get the same effect even with much weaker constraints,*
- > *e.g. these:–*
- >
- > *– There is all up increase/growth, but one trading country gets more than*
- > *100% of it because of market imperfections. Then there have to be losers*
- in
- > *the other country.*

Hi,

I don't claim that there are never any losers because of either trade or new technology.

Rather, there would be even more losers if neither trade or new technology existed.

- >
- > *– There are market imperfections and poor institutions in the developing*
- > *country, and the pace of change is high, so that trickle down is not good*
- > *enough to keep everybody from being a loser.*
- >
- > *In fact these much weaker conditions often apply.*

jeb:

- >
- > > *But just where are they?*
- > > *50 years ago famine was commonplace in much of the 3rd world: in India*
- and
- > > *China and even*
- > > *in Russia.*
- > >
- > > *So where are the famines today? Except maybe in a few places where the*
- > > *cause is civil war?*
- >
- > *Who says there are FAMINES? That is like an epidemic; ....*

Well there used to be lots of famines. The lack of them today tells me that overall, people have more access to food today than in the past. And since there are more people today, this greater access is the result of technology (Green Revolution for example) and trade.

- > *..the more usual*
- > *situation is like endemic disease, in which the normal situation is*
- weighed
- > *down but not stopped.*

If obesity is up, I think your "endemic starvation" is also down, in addition to the decline of famines.

- > *...Poverty amidst plenty.*

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Yes, but mostly because the definition of "poverty" has changed. It once meant "not able to get enough food", and those in poverty were skinny. Now it means struggling to pay the bills, and we have fat "poor people" watching TV in their living rooms. Obesity increases as income declines.

>

> *People suffering from this routinely turn up in places like India and Africa.*

> *I wrote a letter to the New Scientist on the area, after they printed*

> *something describing yet another Indian "reform". The letter is at*

> *<http://member.netlink.com.au/~peterl/publicns.html#NEWSCILET1> and it links to*

> *the original article mirrored at*

> *<http://www.animana.org/tab1/11throw20millionoff.shtml> (the original is at*

> *<http://www.newscientist.com/news/news.jsp?id=ns99992057>).*

>

jeb:

>>

>> *You say the "invisible poor" are not seen because they die off? Then why*

>> *does that not show up in shorter average lifespans?*

>

> *In an extreme case, they die off (or are not replaced). But the point is,*

> *they are NOT in the statistical base. OF COURSE it doesn't show up in average*

> *lifespan statistics either.*

>

> *More likely, though, they are the analogue of street people, not so much dead*

> *or dying as below the radar.*

So many people are worse off, but they don't appear in the statistics. So how do you know about them?

>...*They most likely die in early middle age, or old*

> *age if they were OK until middle age. What they have is a short life*

> *expectancy in that life style (counting from entering it, not from birth),*

> *with poor replacement rates. Indeed, the poorer the replacement rate, the*

> *likelier that life expectancies go up in that life style – lower child*

> *mortalities.*

>

>>

>> *And if food is not more available than in the past, why are obesity rates*

>> *increasing? And also diabetes rates?*

>

> *Oh, are they? Rates, or numbers? Your rates are still measured from the same*

> *statistical base, and the numbers only go up a lot in odd countries not*

> *previously exposed to western diets.*

>

Re: Wearing your conscience.

>>  
>>>>  
>>>> *Instead I'll just contrast this ideal of "clothing correctness"*  
>>>> *with the way it was viewed in the 1970's.*  
>>>>  
>>>> *Remember the 70's? That was when people worried about the*  
>>>> *environment and energy.*  
>>>>  
>>>> *I was teaching a Milton College in those days, and I even*  
>>>> *taught a course on environmental issues. The topic of*  
>>>> *clothes in those days was discussed in terms of energy*  
>>>> *consumption and environmental impact. The nationality of*  
>>>> *people who made the clothes was not even raised, that I*  
>>>> *can remember. But there was a big debate over cotton VS*  
>>>> *synthetic fabrics. As I recall, it started when some*  
>>>> *environmentalists made a point of wearing cotton shirts,*  
>>>> *claiming that synthetic fabrics were made from petroleum*  
>>>> *while plant matter was produced from sunlight.*  
>>>>  
>>>> *Well yes, but petroleum (in the form of diesel fuel and*  
>>>> *pesticides) is also used in growing and harvesting cotton.*  
>>>  
>>> *This is what happens when the improvements are only partly worked*  
*through.*  
>> *If*  
>>> *you also have biodiesel, this doesn't happen – but it competes with*  
*food*  
>>> *production and gets in the way of overall improvements. The whole*  
*thing is*  
>>> *more complicated than it looks.*  
>>  
>> *The analysis is in terms of energy consumption, no matter the source.*  
Only  
>> *solar/wind energy*  
>> *is excluded from the drying of clothes that are hung on a line.*  
>  
> *No, the particular point you made that petroleum is consumed. Yes, if you*  
*use*  
> *alternatives you still get energy needs. If you use other forms of energy,*  
> *renewable ones, the constraint then isn't that of running out but of*  
> *competing with food resources.*  
>  
> .  
> .  
> .  
>>> *At one level all change is for the worse, because of transition costs.*  
>>  
>> *??? You are way too Conservative. Sometime the failure to change has*  
*greater*  
>> *costs than the change does.*  
>

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- > *You jumped in before you digested the rest of what I put.*
- >
- >> *Sure any given change is likely to produce both "winners" and "losers".*
- But
- >> *we should be glad that our ancestors were willing to change, or we would all*
- >> *be a lot worse off.*
- >
- > *Tut, tut, wrong definition of the problem. Should our ANCESTORS have been*
- > *glad of it, at the time?*

If they knew that we would be better off, sure.

People often do things that reduce their pleasure but help their children.  
College for the kids rather than that Caribbean vacation.

- >...*And those collateral people who did not become*
- > *ancestors? This is the whole*
- > *descendants-of-highland-clearances/Irish-evictees thing. You're past*
- posting
- > *your bets.*

Darwin had some ideas on that.

- >>
- >>>...*You*
- >>> *just have to hope that there are other offsetting things that come*
- through
- >>> *fast enough – that the drivers of change trickle down well enough. The*
- >> *pace*
- >>> *of change is a large part of today's problems, since people don't have*
- the
- >>> *chance to get real improvement but are always having to wear (pun!)*
- the
- >> *cost*
- >>> *up front.*
- >>
- >> *If this were a widespread problem, why do people almost everywhere now*
- live
- >> *longer, have access to more information, and travel more, than ever*
- before?
- >
- > *They don't, for one thing – unless you only count those in the statistical*
- > *base.*

Your invisible people again?

- >...*Africans as a whole are far worse off now than fifty or sixty years*
- > *ago, for instance.*

I agree that Africa is the worst case. But is a typical African really worse off today than the typical African was 60 years ago?

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- >...*But again, you aren't making the right comparison. The*
- > *true comparison is with what WOULD be if the pace of change were not*
- > *thrusting us lower in the water, not with what WAS before it got under*
- way.
- > *Your comparison is with an earlier stage in the exponential growth of the*
- > *same depressed upward path – its base is also pushed lower.*

I say the comparison must be "present" VS "past". I mean everybody is "worse off" when compared to MY idea of what the world would be like today if MY ideas had been adopted in the past.

- >
- > *What I would prefer is the pace of change and improved trickle down that*
- lets
- > *everybody be a winner, with an immediate gain in the multiplier and fall*
- in
- > *the exponent. That is an overall improvement unless you really have a very*
- > *great tendency to defer gratification, and it is an improvement for*
- everybody
- > *who is now a casualty.*
- >

I would like that too. But the realistic options are to adjust to trade and new technology, or to try to stop them.

PS: I'll be offline again for a week.

""""""  
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(\_)  
jim blair (jeblair@facstaff.wisc.edu) Madison Wisconsin  
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