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Summary:

The notion of well-being is often shortened to its aspect of material achievement or financial security. Factually, it is that aspect that is being putted in question by the question of resources shortage. This issue can be partially addressed by the means of efficiency in energetic consumption and better conceived technologies, but that will by far not be enough.

The individuals have to change their lifestyles drastically. In some extend, it could be perceived as a loss of one's well-being, but in fact, even if it is difficult, making choices in one's life more consciously may bring more satisfaction in the long run.

Well-being is often reduced to the only aspect of economic wealth, or material prosperity. Even if financial security is indeed an essential component of human well-being, it is reductionist to limit it to that.

That is, if you ask someone how he's doing in life, he may answer that he has a good job, with which he makes good money, can pay a nice house and a big car (bigger than the neighbour's one), and goes several times a year in vacation. That's an image of achievement in one's life.

Then if you ask about how he really feels about his life, he may not be able to give you a proper answer. He does not really have asked himself the question before, on the one hand because he goes through life on a hectic pace and on the other hand maybe because of being afraid of what the answer might be.

Said simply, much people in developed countries do reduce their perception of well-being on materialistic values. But, indeed, it is not possible to pretend that people in developed countries are feeling better in their lives as people living in least-favoured ones. Depression or health problems (heart diseases, obesity) are pretty much wide spread over developed countries, and they are not really signs of feeling good.

Materialistic lifestyle could be accepted as a validated model of well-being since it would be chosen by individuals exclusively on their own. But the domination of this system of values is deeply influenced by factors on the macro level, also not mainly emerging from an individual but from the society as an integrated system.

The gigantic consumption of resources caused by a materialistic way of life harms the natural capital of the earth so that it is feared that the quantity of food available in future will decrease, as in the same time the world population is expected to grow to 9.2 billions about 2050. As a parallel process, the energetic reserves are becoming less and less reliable.

Till, there are solutions proposed on a technological level that may be used with gain to remodel our industrial systems to comply with the limits of the biosphere and the processes it can support on a long term (see the notions of efficiency and consistency). Some options do really exist and if they are not longer neglected, they may help the mankind to reduce its impact on the environment.

Cars using fuel more sparingly is a typical example of energetic efficiency. But as fossil reserves decline, and the burning of petroleum releases pernicious gases in the atmosphere, some other sources of energy are researched for moving cars, like agro-fuels. These are indeed more consistent, but the amount of them needed to continue the "business as usual" is by far over earth's carrying capacity and is responsible of food shortages.

This example is to illustrate the fact that technological improvement alone will by far not be enough to challenge the usage of natural resources by an expanding world population.

Indeed, the emerging world middle class is orienting itself on the dominant set of values in western countries, that is (by part) demonstrating its wealth through conspicuous consumption, that is through a waste of resources. As mentioned above, this path conduces to a dead-end, because of the shortage of resources.

As I think that one's own well-being is also influenced by the well-being of the other human beings living on this earth, the option of continue not asking ourselves questions and over-using resources without addressing the matter of fairness among all humans, can not be accepted as a possibility.

For a human being feeling well, in addition to material safety, some other needs and expectations have to be taken in account. There are the willing of being part of a community, the need to love and being loved, to grow up a family, to develop one's intellectual capacities through instruction, the wish of a good health and the knowing that medical care is efficient, the need for security, the wish to be useful and to be able to give a sense in one's life, the quest of a spiritual achievement, and so on.

All those criteria are part of one's feeling of well-being. But they do not impact the biosphere on the same scale. Indeed, it is a matter of personal choice. Furthermore, over-filling some desires at the detriment of others can have for result a discomfort, i.e.: less well-being.

For example, driving one's own car allows going fast to one point to another, without many efforts or constraints. But this "freedom" obliges one to allocate much more money (that is also the time needed to earn it) to mobility as with some other means of transport like public transportation, bicycle, one's own feet or even inline skates or car-sharing. Furthermore, through the last options, the pressure on the environment is not so high, and the health issues are also addressed. That is, the felt speediness decreased, but the answer given to our needs is more complete and the difference of the impact on the limited pool of resources of the biosphere is significant.

Another example is the consumption of meat. Consuming less meat is better on a macro level (less resource-intensive lifestyle) and also on an individual level (less illnesses). A reduction of the meat over-consumption in developed country may minor drastically the effects of the expanding tension on the global food markets.

That is: these changes have to be seen as suitable by the society before then can emerge on large scale. Another prerequisite is that individuals have to ask themselves consciously what effects do have their actions and what benefits they are awaiting from those.

Indeed, by being conscious of the environmental impact of the means we select to achieve our well-being, we could be able to re-orient our choices to less material-intensive ones and also disrupt the mental image of parallel growth well-being and financial wealth.

The challenge we face that we have to change our way of live is not easy to answer. Not only that we are prisoners of a long-established set of habits, main of them not really being conscious, but also that this change is frightening. Overwhelming these barriers, defining new models of achievement must be an absolute goal.