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A relentless advance toward superabundance

History shows that scarcity is no match for ingenuity

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Escaping grinding deprivation has been the aspiration of humanity since the dawn of time. Now that many of the planet's peoples are blessed with sufficient means of survival — and some with plenty — a trendy narrative threatens to turn the dream into a nightmare. It claims that unless today's prosperity is forsaken in favor of subsistence, future generations are destined to fall back into a dreadful state of destitution. Nonsense. Retreat on the journey of human achievement is not an option.

The upward course of progress is described chapter by chapter in a newly published book, appropriately titled, "Superabundance: The Story of Population Growth, Innovation, and Human Flourishing on an Infinitely Bountiful Planet," co-authored by Marian Tupy, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity, and Gale Pooley, associate professor of business management at Brigham Young University-Hawaii. It's a welcome antidote to the dire warnings of doomsayers.

That steady population growth on a limited Earth inevitably leads to scarcity would be a reasonable assumption — except for innovation. Limits to growth are historically shattered when increasing numbers of human beings train their limitless imaginations on stubborn roadblocks to prosperity. The authors employ "time price" — the span of minutes, hours or days needed to produce a commodity or service — to demonstrate their point. If today's world, approaching 8 billion souls, is indeed on the cusp of privation, the time price of essentials for life should likewise be escalating rapidly.

The opposite is occurring. Comparing the time price required to produce items at decadal intervals since 1960, Messrs. Tupy and Pooley find the cost of staples such as coffee, rubber and cotton has fallen by 90%. On average, the time price of many essentials has declined by 83% over the past 60 years, meaning products today are made with maximum efficiency and sold for a minimum price. The conclusion: Doom and gloom do not loom; the future portends superabundance.

To be sure, one publication cannot depict the entirety of global development, and some trendlines are admittedly heading in the wrong direction. Most disturbing, life expectancy in the United States is in decline, thanks primarily to COVID-19 and opioid trafficking. Averaging 78.8 years in 2019, life expectancy fell to 76.1 in 2021, the steepest slump in a century.

If relentless innovation solves human quandaries, unbridled authoritarianism can prolong the process. Post-pandemic government overspending is Exhibit A. It has triggered the onset of stagflation, in which skyrocketing inflation, falling real wages and shrinking stock markets are leaving households poorer around the world.

Moreover, the current crop of "Great Reset" politicians are revealing their true anti-humanitarian colors with their callous efforts to turn back the time-price clock on energy production, forcing

nations to transition from affordable fossil fuels to expensive “sustainable” forms. Sadly, poverty makes mass starvation more likely.

The popular prophecy that only a dwindling global population is sustainable may resonate in President Joe Biden’s White House and in gilded halls of power in other lands, but human aspiration has overwhelmed history’s every barrier, including man-made ones. The arc of history, thankfully, bends toward superabundance.