



Marian L. Tupy Talks Economics, Falling Birth Rates, And Human Creativity at The COSM Conference

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On November 10th, Marian L. Tupy, a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, spoke at this year's COSMtechnology summit on behalf of his new book *Superabundance: The Story of Population Growth, Innovation, and Human Flourishing on an Infinitely Bountiful Planet*. Tupy co-wrote the book with Gale L. Pooley, a Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute and associate professor of business management at Brigham Young University-Hawaii. Their book takes a contrarian view of economics, scarcity, and the idea that an excessive human population diminishes the world's resources. As the book's title suggests, Tupy and Pooley take the opposite view: the world's resources increase *with* population growth.

During the COSM session, Tupy said,

“The caveman had the same natural resources at their disposal as we have today, and the difference between their standard of living and ours is the difference between the knowledge they could bring to bear on those resources and the knowledge that we have today in our model. The process of knowledge creation starts with the overall population. Data suggests that only a small fraction of the population innovates, therefore the bigger the population, the greater the chance that somebody will come up with a useful idea.”

So, according to Tupy and Pooley, the more people on the planet, the more knowledge we bring to bear on available resources, leading to innovation and economic growth. He continued,

“Our book talks about an infinitely bountiful planet, which may seem counterintuitive given that the world really has only a finite number of atoms. In fact, most people would probably agree with the American environmentalist, Kenneth Boulding, who observed that anyone who believes in infinite growth on a physically finite planet is either mad or an economist. But the number of atoms is largely irrelevant because what matters is our knowledge to combine and recombine those atoms in ever more valuable ways.”

Tupy later went on to comment that, so far as we know, only human beings can come up with new ideas. Modern technology and artificial intelligence fail to attain the creativity and innovation unique to human beings. Quote:

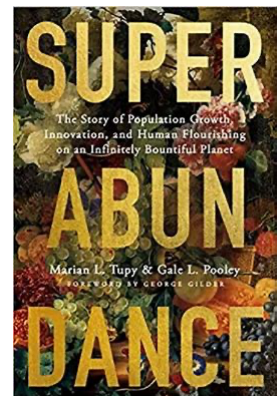
“There is a broader general economic point, which is that unless AI comes to our rescue or some form of supercomputing, at this point in time, the only entity capable of having new ideas is the human brain. And so if you don’t have humans producing new ideas, then of course the entire economic growth rate could suffer.”

Tupy also noted that, in order to get the full benefits of a superabundant world, people must be free to innovate and trade. Much of the world remains in poverty because they lack the economic and political structures needed for flourishing. He said,

“We can compensate for lowering birth rates by, for example, increasing the amount of freedom in the world. Right now, huge chunks of humanity are not really participating fully in the information and knowledge exchange, partly because they don’t have free speech of their own.”

Tupy concluded his lecture by comparing the world’s resources to a piano. It is a limited instrument, but with a skilled pianist at its keys, it holds infinite possibilities.

“The world is like a closed system in the way a piano is like a closed system. The instrument has only 88 keys, but those keys can be played in an infinite variety of ways, and the same applies to our planet. The atoms may be fixed, but the possible combinations of those atoms are infinite. What matters then is not the physical limit of our planet, but the human knowledge, the human freedom to experiment and to reimagine the use of resources that we already have.”



Superabundance came out in August and was well received by a variety of notable speakers and scholars, including Steven Pinker, Jordan B. Peterson, and George Gilder. It is now available to purchase on Amazon.