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The effect of rising consumerism [1]

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We're all aware of the standard critique of consumerism: that we shouldn't in fact want more at all. We should be happy with our lot, accept that there are limits and, you know, just sorta vegetate with what we can currently do and make. However, as Virginia Postrel points out, that's not really how the human race works [3]:

> Rising expectations aren?t a sign of immature ?entitlement.? They?re a sign of progress -- and the wellspring of future advances. The same ridiculous discontent that says Starbucks ought to offer vegan pumpkin lattes created Starbucks in the first place. Two centuries of refusing to be satisfied produced the long series of innovations that turned hunger from a near-universal human condition into a ?third world problem.? Complaining about small annoyances can be demoralizing and obnoxious, but demanding complacency is worse. The trick is to simultaneously remember how much life has improved while acknowledging how it could be better. In the new year, then, may all your worries be first world problems.

We only ever moved out of the caves because someone thought that house sharing with a hungry bear was unsatisfactory, only ever invented the car because of the rising tide of horse dung, it's the very things that we find unsatisfactory currently that drives the vast wave of innovation that has been sweeping us along these past few centuries.

And the real strangeness of this is that while we might indeed be desiring more transport, or food, or communication ability, whatever it is, that innovation manages to bring us that more at the expense of using fewer resources. Smartphones are, obviously, using fewer resources than trying to run Facebook on semaphore flags. So contrary to the standard story it is our very consumerism that reduces resource use via the mechanism of innovation.

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