

Anthony Comegna ([00:20](#)):

All right, everybody. Welcome back to another week of Ideas in Progress here. One of the really great things about doing a show like this is that I get sent a lot of free books. Most of them are regular book books, academic books, they're purely about the content and the cover and design is just the sort of necessary packaging. But then once in a while, I opened that box and out spills a really, truly beautiful, wonderfully designed and well-written informative important book. Even with the world as goofy, garish, and all around messed up as it is right now, just the sight of this book is enough to convince you to be optimistic. Ronald Bailey and Marian Tupy of the Cato Institute have recently published, *Ten Global Trends Every Smart Person Should Know: And Many Others You Will Find Interesting*. And Marian Tupy joins us now.

Anthony Comegna ([01:16](#)):

Well, Marianne, thank you so much for joining us. I really can't help but start off this way because I don't think.. I've gotten two really, truly beautiful books as a result of doing this show so far. And you know what I mean, when I say really truly beautiful books, they're kind of few and far between, because most of them all kind of look the same. But this book, it's right up there for me with Mungi Ngomane, we did two shows on her book, *Everyday Ubuntu*, a little while ago, and that's a really beautiful book. And so is this one, it's just full of illustrations and the graphs and charts in here are almost like part of the artwork almost, a collection by different artists or something. It's just a really gorgeous, gorgeous book.

Anthony Comegna ([02:10](#)):

And of course the material is interesting too, but everything about it is very well calibrated to look great. I'm wondering if you could just start us off here by telling us a bit about how this book came to be. Because it's not, I don't believe at least, it's part of a series that the Cato Institute is run, maybe it's the first of a series. But tell us a bit about the conception of this book and its production.

Marian Tupy ([02:41](#)):

Oh, thank you very much for having me, much appreciated. Well, about two years ago, I had lunch with Ron Bailey, the science correspondent from Reason Magazine. And he said that he had an idea for a book about human progress and wanting to know if I would be up for helping him to write it. In other words, if that so the two of us would co-author it. And Ron, at that point in time, already had six books written. I never wrote a book before. I've written obviously hundreds of op-eds and studies and things like that, but I didn't actually think about writing a book, but when he said, "Do you want to join me and co-author a book?" I said, "Absolutely." And Ron's idea, which I'm very happy to say has translated into reality, was to have a coffee table book, a coffee table data book.

Marian Tupy ([03:45](#)):

Statistical books and data books can be quite, quite a heavy lift. Very often, they don't look very good because charts are done cheaply or in an ugly kind of way. But what we really wanted to do was to create a book that would be beautiful to look at, that the charts and the graphs would be well done, that it would be a glossy book and that you wouldn't have too much text. Now, of course, anywhere you open the book, it consists of two parts. On the one side, you have the chart, and on the other side, you've got about 300 or 400 words explaining what the chart is about. We don't go into heavy theory or anything else, we simply explain what the chart is about, what it says.

Marian Tupy ([04:38](#)):

And the book, as I said, is supposed to be pretty much sitting in your living room on a table. If you have visitors who come in and maybe you're making dinner or have to go and fetch food from the delivery guy, maybe the person will start flipping through it. And it will lead to an interesting conversation, such as for example, "Oh my goodness. I didn't know that population is going to peak in 2060s or 2070s and then start declining." Or "I didn't quite realize how many children go to school." And things like that. So it's supposed to be a conversation starter.

Marian Tupy ([05:23](#)):

And the reason why it's designed to be so pretty is because we hope that people will not sort of put it on their bookshelf and then forget about it, but that it will be displayed precisely because we want as many people as possible to flip through it in the same way that they flip through books on architecture or books on interior design, which is what people usually have in their living rooms on their tables. So that's how the book really came about as an idea. And it was released on the 31st of August and I'm very happy with it.

Anthony Comegna ([06:02](#)):

Yeah. I love hearing that that was the sort of conception of the purpose here, because it is, I got to say again, gushing a little bit, a runaway smash hit success in that regard. It's just great.

Marian Tupy ([06:17](#)):

Well, that's very kind of you. I should probably just add very quickly that the design of the book was a very lucky confluence of what I and Ron wanting to achieve. And then the fact that on the team at Cato at The Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity, we have two young people Guillermina Satish Schneider, and then Louis Almada who have taken courses in web design and book design and that sort of thing. And we're also eager to put their newly acquired knowledge to use. And so it really is very much an internal production at Cato. And lastly, I don't know if this is going to be a series of books, what I can say is this the first time that Cato's tried to do something like this and who knows, maybe it will take off. It's a one-off at this point, but it could lead to something, to more volumes like this in the future.

Anthony Comegna ([07:24](#)):

Yeah. At the very least, I know I would love, say five years from now or something to see an updated version that probably includes a few more sections or something like that, but I could see this continuing on being a continuing hit. So I'm just thrilled to be talking with you here and now I do want to dig into the content, because otherwise I could go on all day about how gorgeous it is. But now it's really loaded up front with the top 10 major trends that people should be aware of. Things like we talk about all the time here at IHS, the great enrichment, for example, Deirdre McCluskey is so famous for discussing the hockey stick of improvements since the industrial revolution.

Anthony Comegna ([08:16](#)):

Things like the impending end, it seems, complete elimination of poverty in maybe the next couple of decades. But I wanted to really focus the interview on what we could pull out of some of the other trends that the bulk of the book is focused on. So before we move on to the other trends, what do you have to say for us? What do you think are the most important things to pluck out of that section on the top 10 trends?

Marian Tupy ([08:49](#)):

Well, obviously the most important trend, which is not actually part of the top 10 trends because this so well-known is increasing life expectancy. I think it's a trend number 26 or something like that. And the reason why we didn't put into top 10 is because it is so well known. But people can live long lives, but what also matters is whether those lives are quality lives or whether they are enjoying themselves. And so from the top 10, I would probably pick the end of famine or alternatively, the access that people have to an ever increasing amount of calories.

Marian Tupy ([09:33](#)):

As you I'm sure know, for most of human history, people used to obsess about food for a very good reason and that is that famine was always just around the corner. In that sense, of course, Thomas Malthus was a good historian in a sense that he talked about that the famines of the past. And in the last 200 years, which is to say that Malthus lived at that juncture in human history, when things started to change, in the last 200 years, we have really conquered hunger to a much greater extent than we thought imaginable. So out of the top 10, I would say access to calories.

Marian Tupy ([10:16](#)):

Now, let me give you a couple of statistics. The United States Department of Agriculture says that an average American should consume 2000 calories per day. Now the range is actually and much greater because say for example, an elderly woman could eat many fewer than 2000 calories, whereas a very active male in his prime will have to eat somewhere close to 3000 calories. But my point is that on average a nation should produce or import about 2000 calories per person per day. Well, in the last 70 years or so, actually in the last 60 years, the global production of calories has risen from 2200 calories to almost 3000 calories per person per day. And even in Sub-Saharan Africa now, people consume well, okay, over 2000 calories on average. And today in Sub-Saharan Africa, people consume as many calories as the Portuguese did in the early 1960s.

Marian Tupy ([11:22](#)):

So when I was growing up in the 1980s, I kept watching those terrible videos from the Horn of Africa, with a lot of children with swollen bellies and masses of flies in their eyes and things like that. And we thought, this is what the future was going to look like that famines and hunger was going to be omnipresent. And in fact, that's not what happened. Agricultural productivity has increased, governance became better and transport of food has become better. And as a result of which, famines have really disappeared from the world outside of war zones or outside of places which are terribly mismanaged by politicians such as Zimbabwe.

Anthony Comegna ([12:12](#)):

Well, yeah that's great to hear because I was thinking the same thing that those children in need videos and things like that, right, they were very common when I was watching TV growing up in the '90s too. And it's frankly, a really great thing to know that that kind of thing is just disappearing at a pretty rapid clip. At least, not that it's totally gone, but disappearing pretty quickly faster than most of us imagined.

Marian Tupy ([12:41](#)):

Yeah. And since talking about the Horn of Africa and places like that may be a little bit too remote for the American audience. I do want to bring home to our American listeners, something else that I was thinking about. It's not part of the book, but it's still a very interesting statistic. Today, the minimum wage, federal minimum wage, is somewhere under the \$8 per hour, but about 90% of workers in the

United States who work on the minimum wage, bring in about \$12 per hour. So once again, even though minimum wage is now around \$8, a federal minimum wage, 90% of workers who are minimum wage take home about \$12 an hour. And an entire chicken at Costco costs \$5. So for an hour of labor on minimum wage, you can bring home two chickens, if you will, which contain about 2200 calories each. So we really live in a world where even the poorest people can have a chicken in every pot.

Anthony Comegna ([14:01](#)):

Yeah. I think it's actually cheaper to buy whole chickens than something like chicken wings, which makes sense, there are only two wings on the whole chicken, but still by the pound, you get a whole chicken for almost nothing and it's crazy. I would almost love to see a whole giant statistical compendium of the differences in prices a hundred years back.

Marian Tupy ([14:25](#)):

Oh, we've done that actually. Definitely we've done that at human progress. We looked at prices of 48 food items between 1919 and 2019. And obviously all of that food has become much, much cheaper relative to income. And so I urge your listeners to Google food prices, human progress, and perhaps my name and they will find those articles very quickly

Anthony Comegna ([15:00](#)):

All right, great. Now let's move to some of these where I'm a little skeptical for reasons we may or may not agree with. I mean, these are data gathered by all sorts of different groups. Your list of references is huge here so I'm sure that you have your own problems with plenty of these. But one of them stands out first off here, trend 12 global happiness is rising. And I'm kind of skeptical of this just because happiness seems like such a ridiculous thing to measure in the first place to me. And it's been declining a little bit here recently, and I don't know when it's going to go back up. So tell me about that.

Marian Tupy ([15:50](#)):

Well, the book is not aimed at libertarians or classical liberals specifically. It is aimed at a general audience and as such, authors like me, don't really have the luxury of addressing only things that are of interest to us. We have to address topics that are topical and interesting to people who may be on the left or the right of the political spectrum, who may have views and priorities very different from ours. In other words, the hierarchy of priorities, hierarchy of interests may be different. I agree with you that I am uncomfortable talking about happiness statistics, but I don't get a choice in the matter because a lot of people do talk about happiness as a measure of wellbeing in the West today. You know, because you are a historian that since the enlightenment and the start of the industrial revolution, the opponents of the enlightenment and the opponents of capitalism have always searched for some sort of an overwhelming criticism that would undermine the legitimacy of free markets in the 19th century.

Marian Tupy ([17:19](#)):

People used to talk about things like capitalism zapping, or destroying the vitality of European nations, things like that. And today, a lot of people who criticize capitalism on the left talk about capitalism leading to unhappiness. And then some people on the right criticize capitalism because it contributes, they believe, to a lack of meaning in life, okay? So with regards to meaning, we don't actually have any data at all. With regard to happiness, we do have data. And luckily for us, it is actually going in the right direction, not constantly, but over a period of time that we looked at, which was since 1980, it has risen dramatically and, it hasn't risen dramatically, but it has risen. So in that sense, at least we have some

statistics to push back against those who say that, okay, capitalism may create a little wealth, but it makes people unhappy. So once again you have to address the arguments that the opposition has, even though you are uncomfortable with those arguments in the first place, that's how I would look at it.

Anthony Comegna ([18:38](#)):

Well, I think you sort of ruined my question on education then with your perfectly measured and reasonable answer there. Because I was going to make the obvious libertarian joke that more kids being in school can't possibly be a good thing, they need to get out of those government schools. But I think you make a perfectly valid point and to most people it's obvious and apparent why more kids should be in school and that's a good thing. Just like I was going to say in my serious half to the question that I perfectly well, as somebody in higher education, I perfectly well understand why it's a good thing that people are educated later in life. I mean, come on that's my bread and butter there so I get that one. Tell us a little bit about what you think about these education trends and why they're so significant.

Marian Tupy ([19:34](#)):

Well, why do I think that is significant is because a lot of people measure against success of let's call it the age of modernity or the age of globalization since 1918 in terms of education. And if you think about the human development index and very important measure of global wellbeing, which is put together by the United Nations. That is really an average of three distinct measurements, which is income per capita, life expectancy and education. So education does have this totemic value for a lot of people who are trying to understand whether the world is getting better or not. And in that sense, of course, the world is getting very much better.

Marian Tupy ([20:33](#)):

The amount of education that a person can receive today as a global average has risen from less than a year in early 18 hundreds to close to nine years today. The gap between women or rather girls and boys in terms of receiving education is also shrinking which is a positive sign. And education, at least basic education, I think does have a value. Obviously we want people to be able to read and write. I understand your argument that very often one questions, whether children leaving schools in from government schools are very good at reading and writing and calculating, and maybe their not, but even some education is better than none, especially in developing countries where access to education has been so recent and the gains there have been so dramatic.

Anthony Comegna ([21:42](#)):

Another trend that I am much more seriously skeptical of here, but for non-hostile reasons, let's say, is a trend 41, nuclear arsenals dwindling. And I guess this is the abolitionist in me coming out, in a thick way to all sorts of different issues. I'm on a nuclear abolitionist trajectory here. And I think that essentially all the governments around the world that hold nuclear weapons either openly or in secret are holding the rest of us hostage to the continued existence of their regimes. And I kind of don't think that the world will be safe from this threat until absolutely every one of them is gone.

Marian Tupy ([22:38](#)):

So as an international relations major, I was many years ago, I can tell you that there are quite well-developed theories about how nuclear weapons contributes to the maintenance of global peace. One of the aspects, one of the very interesting findings of Steven Pinker, and of course we address that in the book, is that international conflicts have pretty much disappeared from the world. Which is to say that

the notion of one government declaring a war on another government and then sending troops across borders to fight in pitched battles, and that's pretty much disappeared from the world. In fact, on that definition, there isn't a single conflict in the world today, that is to say international conflict between two countries that have declared war on each other. And part of the reason for that, for the long peace, as it is called, in the post second world war era, many international relations scholars argue was the presence of nuclear weapons, which is to say that the terror of what nuclear weapons or nuclear explosions would have brought to the world was so great that people actually toned down their propensity for violence.

Marian Tupy ([24:05](#)):

Now I am a nuclear weapon skeptic just like you are and I would like them to be abolished. I don't think that's going to happen because I don't think that knowledge that was once discovered can disappear or at least nowadays can disappear. Obviously knowledge has disappeared during the dark ages after the fall of Rome, but it will be much more difficult now because knowledge is so widely disseminated. What I think that we should be striving for is to get a good sense from the scientific community as to what would be the maximum number of nuclear weapons that could explode in the world without destroying civilization in its entirety. And then try to get the number of nukes through a peace negotiations under that number. So that even if there was some sort of an accidental nuclear launch or an accidental nuclear war, the result of launching and exploding all of these nuclear weapons, wouldn't destroy the planet and civilization in its entirety and we could begin again.

Marian Tupy ([25:19](#)):

Now, this is obviously not an optimal scenario, but I don't think that here we have a choice between good and bad option. We just have a choice between bad and worse options. And obviously the worst option is if we keep on adding to the nuclear arsenal in the way that the Chinese are doing now. What we should be aiming for is to reduce it to an absolute minimum where the deterrence value is preserved, but it doesn't threaten the survival of the globe.

Anthony Comegna ([25:50](#)):

Well again, you undercut my response question here because I was going to ask, well, it sounds like you think there might be some optimal number of nuclear weapons, and of course, I'm also skeptical about that. And I seriously doubt you would want to put a fixed number on that either, but I hear you.

Marian Tupy ([26:11](#)):

I wouldn't to, I certainly wouldn't in large part because main part, because I'm not a scientist or a physicist. But it should be possible for people much smarter than I am to determine what is the maximum number of nuclear weapons, or I should maybe say that the maximum amount of TNT that the world could absorb?

Anthony Comegna ([26:41](#)):

Well, let's move to trend 47 universal emancipation. And this is probably a simpler problem for us to work out here, because the amazing thing about this particular trend is the thing in the question actually is completely eliminated by the end of it, and that is chattel slavery, holding people as property in servitude for life. It's been abolished and criminalized in every country in the world. Now, of course, there are all sorts of other forms of slavery and servitude out there in existence. I immediately think of North Korea, but there are other regimes that treat people as essentially they're slaves and we have

millions and millions of people held to forced labor here in our prison systems. So I'm wondering, and you say this in your written portion of this chapter two, that our definitions on this sort of thing, if shifted over time. So then what do we do with this statistic that is on the one hand pretty amazing, and yet on the other hand, shockingly limited.

Marian Tupy ([27:58](#)):

Yes. Well, I think it is precisely because it is so amazing that it should have been included. And the amazement comes from the fact that since the beginning of agricultural settlement, 12,000 years ago, and the rise of the first empires 8,000 years ago, the slavery was an omnipresent and perpetual institution in the world, no matter where you looked. Recently, I've been to Mexico, well, not so recently, maybe a year ago, and I was walking amongst the pyramids and having it explained to me that the engravings on the stones showed the Emperor any slaves. So there was slavery in MesoAmerica. There was obviously slavery in North America. There was slavery in Africa with Africans enslaving each other. There was slavery in Arab countries. And of course the very word slavery comes from slav, which is to say my ancestors who were enslaved by the Turk.

Marian Tupy ([29:13](#)):

And so my point is that we have lived with slavery for close to 12,000 years, and then midway through the 18th century, people decided that this was unconscionable and it had to be abolished. And then in a blink of an eye, historically speaking, this institution was abolished in advanced countries. And eventually even in the less advanced countries, I think Mauritania was the last country to abolish slavery in 1980. So the amazement to me is the speed with which something, something that would have seemed completely obvious to our ancestors, which is that, yes, you can own another person, disappeared under the blessing influence of the values of the enlightenment.

Marian Tupy ([30:12](#)):

Now, as problems disappear, we tend to redefine problems and then focus on new ones. And obviously in our own age, it is not necessarily the position of one person of another, but different kinds of what we now call slavery, but wouldn't have called slavery maybe 300 years ago. And what we do about that, well, we do about it, exactly what we have done with chattel slavery, which is that we push against governments that do beastly things to their people, to be the Chinese and the Uyghers, be it North Korea, and we try to lead by example and we try to show that life can be better and that people deserve dignity no matter where they live.

Marian Tupy ([31:10](#)):

But the process of making the world a better place is just an ongoing process and it's a gradual process. And when one problem disappears, we focus on another one. And when that disappears look, there will always be problems and progress is a gradual process. And we will never reach perfection, we will never reach utopia, so we better get used to it. But that doesn't mean that the prevalence of problems should discourage us. In fact, the fact that we have accomplished so much should imbue us with optimism about what we can do in the future.

Anthony Comegna ([31:53](#)):

I love that answer so much. Honestly, I would love to finish the show right there, but I can't let you go without asking you about a couple of the sort of really, really, really broad, almost trends within trends that I saw in the course of the book here. Like for example, there are several different statistics here,

which indicate that a sort of non-human nature is reclaiming huge amounts of land and even sea. And that the amount of space the human beings take up and exploit on the planet is gradually shrinking. And to me, that sounds like a really, truly amazing sci-fi kind of trend. I would love you to tell about a little more,

Marian Tupy ([32:40](#)):

Well, let's start with a very important book that came out earlier this year, or maybe it was last year, by Andrew McAfee, who is a board member of Human Progress called, *More From Less*. And what Andrew identified was truly revolutionary, which is to say that today, in the most advanced economies in the world, like the United States and the United Kingdom, we are producing more goods and services while using fewer resources. I'm not talking of relatively, I'm talking absolutely. In other words, we keep on growing our economies, or at least we did prior to COVID, producing evermore cars and evermore services online and so forth. But our consumption of natural resources is declining. And why is that important? That's important because I think that a lot of opponents of capitalism worry that if people become rich, not just people in the West, but people in developing countries, once we become rich, we will consume so much stuff that we are going to destroy the environment.

Marian Tupy ([33:49](#)):

And I think they worry that the next 50 or a hundred years will look like the first 100 years of the industrial revolution, just having a lot of steel mills, spewing poison into the air, spoliating of the environment left-hand right and so forth. But economic growth doesn't have to come from making things bigger. Economic growth can also come from making things smaller, from miniaturizing things, from dematerializing things. Think about your cell phone. Your cell phone is not just a phone, it's a television, if you will, it's a camera, it's a radio, it's a notebook. It's all sorts of things that you no longer have to buy because you can just use your smartphone. And that means that instead of using tremendous amounts of natural resources, in order to build all of these different appliances, you can now use fewer resources in order to build a smartphone.

Marian Tupy ([34:58](#)):

And that's just a long way of saying that in the future, we could be using fewer resources and having less of an impact on the environment and therefore return nature to the wilderness, to animals, preserving the biosphere and this sort of a trend we are seeing all over the world. People are moving to the cities away from the countryside, which then reverts to nature. People who live in the cities use much less energy and many fewer resources than people live on farms, so that's a good thing too. And our agriculture is also becoming incredibly productive, which is to say that the greater the kilos of rice or wheat or barley that we can get from an acre of land, the more land we can return to nature. So there are a lot of trends happening in the world where we can keep on growing as a population, we can consume more, and at the same time have less of an imprint on the environment, which seems to me like a very happy state of affairs.

Anthony Comegna ([36:26](#)):

Marian Tupy is a Senior Fellow with the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity. And he is the editor of [humanprogress.org](#). He holds a PhD in International Relations from St. Andrew's University. If you all really would like to do something nice for yourself, then take it from me, this book is a great idea. I wouldn't want us all to be overly optimistic after all, sometimes a broken system works pretty well for a while, and until it doesn't and everything falls apart. But short of absolute global

catastrophe, I think there is finally a strong case to be made that humanity has truly broken the stagnation trap and progress will just keep coming. My best to all of you out there and we'll see you back next week.