

Economics & Politics

We need limits

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Growth is the mantra of every economist and every business leader, and therefore of every politician. Listeners to Radio 4 at 6.20 every weekday morning can hear the 'business update' where they will hear growth extolled and forecast. The perspective is infinity.

These people live in a virtual universe, where profits will always go up and where there are no buffers against which the process might eventually run. They are fools and blind, but the blindness stems from the apparent success of the various technologies of the past forty years.

The fundamental question of the whole of human history, how we will produce the means for life, is, it seems, no longer an issue. Creeping up almost unseen, meanwhile, are increasing water shortages all over the world, and behind that a growing failure of GM technology. When these two finally spring their ambush, we may finally need to think about limits again.

In our conceit we tell ourselves reality is virtual, but it is not. Everything is finite but desire, and for this reason every ancient ethic prioritised moderation. This is not something to be lamented. On the contrary, it is the disciplining of spirit which makes art and every real achievement worthwhile. The infinity of the business update is vapid and destructive. What we need are creative limits.

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