

## Progress Talk Ideas

### Progress

Much of today's debate concerns the contrasts between

The Western concept of progress

The Eastern concept of optimization

Progress

Western civilization is energized, vitalized, by  
the aspiration for growth and progress.

Indeed, those civilizations which ceased to grow  
became stagnant and began to decline (British Empire,  
Roman Empire,...perhaps U.S.)

One might even argue that Western civilization is  
almost unique for its capacity to achieve progress  
through reason...the scientific method...

Conservation, optimization

Eastern cultures are more content to accept and attempt  
to optimize the status quo...to make the best out of  
whatever the present condition, but not to make  
great efforts to change it.

(Although here modern Asia...Japan, Korea, etc. seem  
to have embraced western ideas by aggressively  
seeking progress

Some questions

Is the "environmental/conservationist" philosophy growing  
out of the 1960s...and more recently the acceptance  
of limits...basically at odds with Western thought?

Do we need a "grand challenge" such as the colonization of  
the solar system or manned voyages to other planetary  
systems in order to keep our civilization alive?

Is just remaining on Earth, regardless of how well we  
treat our environment, really enough for mankind?

### A Contrast

Growth/Progress Theme

There may be two paths before our society

Path 1: finite world, constraints, rationing

Path 2: Western Civilization--> progress\

...but this will require expanding into the solar system  
and beyond...(perhaps this is the key reason for  
supporting the manned space program...)

But how to generate the necessary investment?

(although it is small compared to defense spending)

Western Cultures--stress progress

Discovery, bettering mankind's condition,  
expansion, prosperity....

Revolutionary Change

Individual Freedoms

East Cultures--stress optimizing

Making best of the situation

Slow, evolutionary change

Respect for cultural traditions

Collective Good

### Observation:

Most of the "progress" of the last 500 years  
has been driven by western culture...

In particular, concept of rationality, science...

Yet today in the face of the limitations of our planet,  
which mankind is rapidly approaching...

Along with the increasing influence of eastern cultures  
through globalization

We find the concept of progress under attack.

### Question #1:

What is mankind's destiny for the 21st Century

An Eastern Vision: Optimization:

Earth-bound

Stability

A Western Vision: Progress, Discovery

Breaking the bounds of Earth

...colonizing the Solar System...and beyond

Continued rapid change.

**Question #2:**

Can western cultures survive without the ability to progress?

Is space exploration essential for continued human evolution?

**Question #3:**

What are the real frontiers of the 21st Century?

...space (solar system...and beyond)

...mind (brain)

...information technology, artificial intelligence, robotics,...

...genetic engineering, controlled evolution

...new social structures (collaboratories,...)

...intellectual frontiers

How do these contrast (and conflict) with other perceived challenges?

...disparity in wealth--rich vs. poor, North vs South Hemisphere

...Global Change

...inability of government structures to track change

...specific U.S. problems

...education

...economic competitiveness

...infrastructure

...fragmentation of society, family,...

...drugs, crime,...

Note: In a sense, the latter challenges are "minor distractions", at least on the scale of the "grand frontiers" listed above.

Can we (should we) create more of a sense of hope and optimism and willingness to deal with short term challenges by focusing on the excitement of the frontiers?

**Possible References:**

i) HTS analysis of world history

ii) analysis of science fiction futures (Eric Rabkin?)

iii) recent book on intellectual foundations of progress

**Professional Theme**

Portray post WWII as time of "manipulative professions"

...law

...business

...accounting

...advertising

with no value-added.

21st Century as a time for "creative professions:

...engineering

...architecture

...arts

...convert dreams into reality