



**CASSE**

Center for the Advancement of the  
Steady State Economy

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## Steady State Quotes

### **Herman Daly, 1977 in *Steady-State Economics***

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Once we have replaced the basic premise of “more is better” with the much sounder axiom that “enough is best,” the social and technical problems of moving to a steady state become solvable, perhaps even trivial.

If economic reality is actually so complex that it can only be described by complicated mathematical models that add epicycles to epicycles and externalities to externalities, then the reality should be simplified.

Growth economics gave technology free rein. Steady-state economics channels technical progress in the socially benign directions of small scale, decentralization, increased durability of products, and increased long-run efficiency in the use of scarce resources.

... production and consumption are not the precise words, since man can neither produce nor destroy matter and energy but only transform them from one state to another.

Since procreating is a more popular activity than dying, and is likely to remain so, we eagerly reduce death rates and only half-heartedly talk about reducing birth rates.

With limits on population and economic growth (i.e. within a steady-state economy), free food, and free energy as well, would be a blessing. But in the current growth context they would be a curse; free energy would simply make it easier for a growth society to destroy the ecosystem. This consideration itself is a powerful argument against growthmania – any context that converts free energy and free food from a boon to a bane must embody some serious irrationalities.

Thus we may succinctly define a steady-state economy as an economy with constant stocks of people and artifacts, maintained at some desired, sufficient levels by low rates of maintenance throughput, that is, by the lowest feasible flows of matter and energy from the first stage of production to the last stage of consumption.

To do more efficiently that which should not be done in the first place is no cause for rejoicing.

The nature of the ultimate end does in fact limit the *desirability* of continual economic growth, and the nature of the ultimate means does in fact limit the *possibility* of continual growth.

Organisms cannot survive in a medium consisting of their own final outputs. Neither can economies.

The entire evolution of the biosphere has occurred around a fixed point – the constant solar-energy budget. Modern man is the only species to have broken the solar-income budget constraint, and this has

thrown him out of ecological equilibrium with the rest of the biosphere. Natural cycles have become overloaded, and new materials have been produced for which no natural cycles exist. Not only is geological capital being depleted but the basic life-support services of nature are impaired in their functioning by too large a throughput from the human sector.

It is imaginable that someday we will discover how to create materials from nothing, how to achieve perpetual motion, how to reverse time's arrow, and so on. But to take such science-fiction miracles as a basis for economic policy would be absurd.

The Keynesian revolution did not occur because Keynes' arguments were so compellingly lucid and unanswerable. It was the Great Depression that convinced people that something was wrong with an economic theory that denied the possibility of involuntary unemployment. Likewise it will probably take a Great Ecological Spasm to convince people that something is wrong with an economic theory that denies the very possibility of an economy exceeding its optimal scale. But even in that unhappy event, it is still necessary to have an alternative vision ready to present when crisis conditions provide a receptive public.

The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, not the reverse.

#### **John Kenneth Galbraith, 1956**

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... sooner rather than later our concern with the quantity of goods produced – the rate of increase in Gross National Product – would have to give way to the larger question of the quality of life that it provided.

#### **Clive Hamilton, 2003 in *Growth Fetish***

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In the face of the fabulous promises of economic growth, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are confronted by an awful fact. Despite high and sustained levels of economic growth in the West over a period of 50 years – growth that has seen average real incomes increase several times over – the mass of people are no more satisfied with their lives now than they were then.

People buy things they don't need, with money they don't have, to impress people they don't like.

#### **John Stuart Mill, 1848 in *Principles of Political Economy***

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On conditions under a steady state economy:

...as much scope as ever for all kinds of mental culture, and moral and social progress; as much room for improving the art of living, and much more likelihood of it being improved.

...the increase of wealth is not boundless. The end of growth leads to a stationary state. The stationary state of capital and wealth ... would be a very considerable improvement on our present condition.

#### **John Maynard Keynes**

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On solving the "economic problem" (struggle for subsistence):

...that avarice is a vice, that the exaction of usury is a misdemeanour, and the love of money is detestable... We shall once more value ends above means and prefer the good to the useful.

The day is not far off when the economic problem will take the back seat where it belongs, and the arena of the heart and the head will be occupied or reoccupied, by our real problems - the problems of life and of human relations, of creation and behavior and religion.

The difficulty lies, not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones, which ramify, for those brought up as most of us have been, into every corner of our minds.

“The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.”

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**Milton Friedman, 1962 in *Capitalism and Freedom***

Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around.

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**Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen**

Only economists still put the cart before the horse by claiming that the growing turmoil of mankind can be eliminated if prices are right. The truth is that only if our values are right will prices also be so.

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**Gary Gardner and Thomas Prugh, Worldwatch Institute’s 2008 *State of the World Report***

The assumed independence of economic activity from nature, always illusory, is simply no longer credible.

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**E.F. Schumacher**

What is quite clear is that a way of life that bases itself on materialism, i.e., on permanent limitless expansionism in a finite environment, cannot last long, and that its life expectation is the shorter the more successfully it pursues its expansionist objectives.

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**Kenneth Boulding**

Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist.

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**The Once-ler in Dr. Seuss’s classic, *The Lorax***

Well, I have my rights, sir, and I’m telling you I intend to go on doing just what I do! And, for your information, you Lorax, I’m figgering on biggering and BIGGERING and BIGGERING and BIGGERING...

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**Brian Czech in *Shoveling Fuel for a Runaway Train***

Those with a vested interest in economic growth will probably build a strawman of the steady state revolution, portraying it as an emotionally driven attempt to enforce one set of morals on the rest of society. Such a portrayal will be a transparent attempt to buy time for economic growth and the attendant profits for some, and its transparency will increase as the economy congests and the environment degrades. In a concurrently increasing fashion, the steady state revolution will be seen by objective observers as a logical attempt to debunk a harmful myth that has been perpetuated by a cadre of professionals who serve (more or less wittingly) powerful economic interests.

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**Thomas Homer Dixon in *The Upside of Down***

In countries that are already very rich, we especially need to figure out if there are feasible alternatives to our hidebound commitment to economic growth, because it’s becoming increasingly clear that endless material growth is incompatible with the long-term viability of Earth’s environment.

**Peter Victor, 2008 in *Managing Without Growth: Slower by Design, Not Disaster***

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The dilemma for policy makers is that the scope of change required for managing without growth is so great that no democratically elected government could implement the requisite policies without the broad-based consent of the electorate. Even talking about them could make a politician unelectable.

**Henry David Thoreau**

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It is not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?

**Edward Abbey**

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Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell.

**Frederick Soddy**

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You cannot permanently pit an absurd human convention, such as the spontaneous increment of debt [compound interest] against the natural law of the spontaneous decrement of wealth [entropy].

**Simon Kuznets in a warning to U.S. Congress in 1934**

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The welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income.

**Richard Feynman**

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There are  $10^{11}$  stars in the galaxy. That used to be a huge number. But it's only a hundred billion. It's less than the national deficit! We used to call them astronomical numbers. Now we should call them economical numbers.