

## [ Letter to the Editors ]

by Miguel Ferrero

Full Professor of Theoretical Physics.

Physics Department. Oviedo University. Spain.

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## The world is better than it has ever been

Reading the brief opinion article of C. Hidalgo in the 47/1 number of Europhysicsnews one may get the impression that the world is falling apart. The pessimism permeates the two columns of the paper, in which strong words and expressions (inequality, social instability, unemployment, *etc.*; by the way, the word inequality is repeated eleven times) are used. This pessimism is very old. Against Enlightenment, the Romantic and all kind of pessimist counter-Enlightenment were opposed, Schopenhauer being one of the most notorious. But, fortunately, the state of the world is not as bad as the “declinists” seem to think. From my point of view the questions to answer in this respect are:

**First.**- Have we (humans) made progress in the last 70 years, let us say?, and

**Second.**- Is it possible to quantify the progress or regression?

To answer these questions a physicist should look to the data, not to personal intuitions, subjective impressions or following the opinions of any other scholar. And the reality is that, in this lapse of time:

1. 1.- Extreme poverty has more than halved worldwide (more than a billion people have escaped it).
2. Material wellbeing has increased at its greater pace ever, measured by increase of life expectancy; worldwide access to education, including women; income; decline of mortality; and so on.
3. The number of people killed in armed conflicts has decreased by at least 60%.
4. The number of democracies has tripled.
5. *etc.*

This is not the place to make a detailed account of these data. For a critical and personal assessment, the interested reader may consult: <https://ourworldindata.org> (Max Roser) and <http://humanprogress.org> (Marian Tupy). I also recommend reading: *The Better Angels of our Nature* (Steven Pinker, 2011). So, progress can and has been quantified and the result is that the world is better than it has ever been. Does this mean that we have to fall into complacency? A clear no should be given: we must keep the pace to further improve. But to push in the good direction we need to know the reality that the data is giving to us. ■