



Programme Four: Brave New World

The following transcript contains all to-camera presentation, narration and interviews from the programme first broadcast on Edge Media TV's Controversial TV (Sky channel 200) on 13th October 2009. To ease readability as a transcript, most other parts of the script have been removed.

TITLE SEQUENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM: TRENT BUILDING BALCONY: DAY

CHRISTOPHER BARNATT (CB) TO CAMERA:

Welcome to Challenging Reality. I'm Chris Barnatt, and in this series we're questioning the certainties of the modern world, and examining the key challenges and opportunities of the future.

In previous programmes we've looked at technological and social change across history, and how human civilization has chosen to shape its own future. In this programme,, however, we're going to focus on some of those inevitable future challenges — such as Peak Oil and Peak Water — with which we have no choice but to contend.

INTER TITLE: FUTURE CHALLENGES: A NEW WORLD ORDER?

MONTAGE OF RECESSION, CITY, HUMAN ACTIVIY, ETC.

We've recently been given two very stark reminders of how rapidly the world can change. The first was the melt-down of the world's financial markets and the so-called 'credit crunch', whilst the second has been the arrival of the first serious viral pandemic for 50 years.

Whilst apparently a surprise to the political elite and the mass media, both the credit crunch and a flu pandemic were inevitable, highly predictable, and highly predicted. By who? Well, when it comes to the credit crunch, by both a few corporate risk managers rapidly sacked for speaking the truth, as well as by all of us who realized that an ever-rising property market and an economy built on debt were not remotely sustainable.

WOODLAND: CB TO CAMERA

The nerve of the majority of bankers, politicians and economists who continue to tell us that the credit crunch was neither foreseen – let alone not their fault – is simply quite staggering. Under their so-called leadership we ran head-first into a financial collapse that will cost the world economy over four trillion dollars, and which will curse the next generation with debt.

What's perhaps even more staggering is that the reality-check of the credit crunch didn't make us any more receptive to a looming flu pandemic. Several months after swine flu had arrived, most European nations were doing nothing significant to prepare their populations and were even playing down the likely human and economic consequences. As with the credit crunch, it was easier to do nothing than to take useful and positive action.

Given that we've ignored two inevitable global catastrophes, the time is long overdue for us to start facing up to other inevitable future challenges. By 'inevitable' I mean things that are intensely likely to happen barring other highly improbable disasters. So, for example, if an asteroid destroys the world next week, none of the things I'm about to discuss will ever happen. This said, such very unlikely calamities aside, the things I'm about to examine have a very, very high probability of becoming the future.

INTER TITLE: FUTURE CHALLENGES: PEAK OIL

TRAFFIC & OIL MONTAGE

All industrialized societies are based on oil. In fact, it's quite difficult to overstate just how dependent on oil human civilization has become. Oil is the lifeblood of most personal travel. It's also used to fertilize and transport most of our food, with every calorie we eat also consuming 10 calories of oil. Many everyday products are also manufactured in whole or part from oil, including all plastic bags, casings and containers, DVDs, nylon clothing, many medicines, and the tarmac on our roads. It should therefore be of great concern that we are fast approaching the situation of "peak oil" where there's less oil left in the ground than we've taken out.

When Peak Oil becomes a reality there'll be a gradual fall-off in production of several percent per year, meaning that demand will outstrip supply. A significant rise in the price of oil — maybe by a factor of ten by 2015 or 2020 — is therefore exceedingly likely.

Due to price rises, when Peak Oil hits an oil crash will occur. This is because, as LifeAfterTheOilCrash.net explains, 'An oil based economy . . . doesn't need to deplete its entire reserve of oil before it begins to collapse. A shortfall between demand and supply as little as 10 to 15 percent is enough to wholly shatter an oil-dependent economy and reduce its citizenry to poverty'.

We should also be aware that Peak Oil and a resultant Oil Crash may be even closer than we think. Quite alarmingly, a recent report from TheOilDrum.com notes that 'Only 14 out of 54 oil producing countries and regions in the world continue to increase production, while 30 are definitely past their production peak, and the remaining 10 appear to have flat or declining production' [theoil drum.com/node/5576]. We therefore need to start planning now for a world with less oil.

INTER TITLE: FUTURE CHALLENGES: PEAK WATER

CJB ON BANK OF RIVER TRENT, TO CAMERA:

Unfortunately, it's not just oil that's going to be in shorter and shorter supply. For example, within decades, we could start to run out of indium, gallium and other precious metals used in the manufacture of computers and mobile phones. Even more fundamentally, fresh water is also likely to become scarce, with the threat of 'Peak Water' now increasingly real.

WATER MONTAGE.

With oceans covering over seventy percent of the planet, the idea that we may run out of water may seem ludicrous. However, 'Peak water' refers to a state of affairs in which our supply of fresh water is not replenished at the rate it's consumed.

Ninety-seven per cent of all the water on the Earth is salty. The majority of all fresh water is then frozen in the polar icecaps. Most of the rest is in the soil or inaccessible deep underground. The tiny percentage of fresh water suitable for human and animal consumption therefore comes from lakes and accessible underground sources. And these do not replenish as easily as most schoolbook geography lessons would have us believe.

Because the fresh water in lakes and accessible underground aquifers behaves like a finite resource, if current usage patterns continue the United Nations predicts that by 2025 1.8 billion people could be short of water, with two thirds of the world population experiencing stressed or restricted supplies. Indeed, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has repeatedly warned that water scarcity will threaten economic growth, human rights, health and safety and national security within a couple of decades.

INTER TITLE: FUTURE CHALLENGES: NATURE STRIKES BACK

CB IN COUNTRYSIDE, TO CAMERA.

I've already mentioned swine flu as a global challenge with which we have no choice but to contend. As I make this programme [in August 2009] the likely implications of swine flu in terms of the number of deaths and the economic impact

are still far from clear. However, what is certain is that swine flu will far from the last global disease to threaten human civilization.

MEDICAL CG MONTAGE — VIRUSES, ETC.

As the world has accelerated into its current sorry state of over population, we've been very lucky indeed. In recent years SARS has been successfully contained and Avian flu has not become transmissible between humans. However, in 2009 alone, alongside swine flu we saw Ebola transmitted from pigs to humans and several reported cases of bubonic plague.

In the midst of the swine flu pandemic we will hopefully gain focus on that particular threat. However, more broadly we need to become aware that the natural world is starting to react more and more forcefully to the global contagion that is the human race. It is therefore not any one particular pandemic that matters, but the implications for humanity of the broader occurrence of deadly global diseases on an overcrowded planet.

As well as fighting the infestation of mass-humanity with microscopic diseases, nature is also responding to the planetary cancer of industrialization with climate change. Within fifty years to a hundred years, many highly-populated regions of the planet are likely to be flooded and uninhabitable. Fertile regions are also likely to be barren, and much of the diversity of the natural world destroyed. There are therefore predictions that by the end of the twenty-first century the Earth will sustain no more than a couple of billion human beings. Indeed, we ought perhaps to remind ourselves that there is no natural necessity for the human race to survive.

INTER TITLE: FUTURE CHALLENGES: SLEEPWALKING INTO DISASTER

With Peak Oil, Peak Water, further pandemics and climate change on the horizon, you could be forgiven for predicting a very bleak future. However, providing that we learn from current calamities, I don't believe this has to be the case.

Human civilization is not about to end anytime soon. That said, it is going to be increasingly different. As we'll explore in Part II, just how different and to what level of human detriment is likely to depend on how rapidly we all choose to respond to the fundamental challenges ahead . . .

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM: TRENT BUILDING BALCONY. CB TO CAMERA.

Welcome back to Challenging Reality. In Part One we looked at a range of future challenges including Peak Oil and Peak Water. Whilst these are now fairly certain, their potential implications are still open to debate. Discussion of potential solutions therefore remains controversial and blinds many to future realities they would rather not face. This said,, having presented what I believe to be the facts, I'm now going to discuss some of the ways we may prepare for our brave new world.

INTER-TITLE: FUTURE SOLUTIONS: A NEW COLLECTIVE DREAM

Forty years ago we achieved the impossible and went to the Moon. This finest hour of the twentieth century still also provides a reminder of what the human race is capable of, and how the greatest of challenges can unify us all.

In the 1960s the United States lived and worked for the dream of the Apollo Programme. Since that time no single peacetime goal has attracted such a substantial long-term commitment and resources. Hopefully, however, in the face of Peak Oil, Peak Water, pandemic threats and climate change, our goals for the next few decades are becoming clear. The maintenance of civilization has to be our new, collective dream. And to achieve this, we need to live more locally, to gain a greater respect for nature, to loose our obsession with economics, and to place more women in authority.

INTER-TITLE: FUTURE SOLUTIONS: MORE LOCAL LIVNG

COUNTRYSIDE MONTAGE.

The most obvious response to all of our most pressing future challenges is to live more locally. By travelling less and consuming more local produce, we could dramatically reduce our reliance on oil, the likelihood of Peak Water, and spread of global disease, and the impact of climate change. The mass individualism of the twentieth century may have been a very good thing. However, it went too far in permitting so many of us to travel as we please and to regularly consume globally. We therefore need to rebalance our lifestyles, place the needs of the future majority ahead of current, individual whim, and establish more sustainable practices.

More local living does not imply that we should never travel abroad or stop all global trade. However, it does mean that we need to start treating global travel and non-local consumption as a privilege rather than a right.

INTER-TITLE: FUTURE SOLUTIONS: A GREATER RESPECT FOR NATURE

COUNTRYSIDE, OPENING ON LOVELOCK'S GAIA BOOK IN GRASSES.

In his now classic book from 1979, James Lovelock proposes the Gaia hypothesis. This is the idea that the natural world is a single, living entity capable of protecting its own survival. Named after the Greek goddess of the Earth, Lovelock defines Gaia as 'the superorganism composed of all life tightly coupled with the air, the oceans, and the surface rocks'. He then explains that, by means as yet unclear, Gaia keeps our planet habitable.

Just because Mother Nature may have the power to function as a planetary-scale immune system need in no way imply it will act to sustain the human race. Indeed, it is against the plague of mass humanity and rampant industrialization that Gaia is now fighting. Today, the challenges of climate change and global pandemics ought to be reminding us that we are still far from masters of the natural world. Any battle against our biological roots is therefore likely at best to be uncomfortable and at worst unwinnable. We therefore perhaps need to embrace the Gaia hypothesis, and to obtain a greater respect for nature and for the power of Planet Earth.

INTER-TITLE: FUTURE SOLUTIONS: THE DEATH OF ECONOMICS

CB IN MEADOW WALKING TOWARDS CAMERA.

The discipline of economics was one of the greatest blessings and yet the greatest blights of the 20th century. As capitalism won the battle against communism, so both governments and business grew narrow-minded on a mantra of always making the best economic decisions. The very positive result was that prosperity ensued. However, the very negative was that economic logic trod all-too-heavily over so many of those other human values that allowed us to survive long before note, coin and e-banking website.

MONTAGE OF TIMELAPSE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY LIVING

The challenges of Peak Oil and Peak Water mean that our obsession with pure economic decision making has to come to an end. To combat climate change on a planet with dwindling resources, we simply have no choice but to consume less and to accept that our economy must shrink. In fact, to suggest that we can save the planet and ourselves whilst continuing to achieve economic growth is nothing short of delusional.

Life is a decision making process. Economics deals with this by paying people money that lets us all make our own, unconstrained choices. However, whilst such mass-individualism may have brought economic prosperity for a century or more, in the near future it cannot and will not continue to work.

INTER-TITLE: FUTURE SOLUTIONS: MORE WOMEN IN AUTHORITY

CB IN COUNTRYSIDE, TO CAMERA.

The credit crunch was a symptom of our blind obsession with economic prosperity. More specifically it was also a function of excessive short-term decision making in the financial markets. There's also now significant research that links such poor financial decision making to high levels of testosterone. Or as one advocate of 'womenomics' has now argues, 'women are simply better credit risks as clients, and more prudent as investors and managers'.

WOMENOMICS WEBSITE, THEN NATURE/MEADOW MONTAGE.

Placing more women in authority would help to reduce our focus on the over-competitive, short-term decision making that has created the current recession. Granted, the competition at which males so excel may be vital for our survival. However, so too is the focus on nurture and social cohesion characteristic of the female behaviour of most species.

By crafting only male-dominated power structures the human race has done much to sew the potential seeds of its own downfall. Indeed, our civilization arguably now faces some of its most difficult decades precisely because of the lack of female perspective in our key decision making processes.

Planetary cohesion and the long-term survival of the majority somehow need to become the dominant memes of the twenty-first century. However, this is extremely unlikely to happen without both men and women in authority in equal measure. Nature gave the two sexes of all species minds programmed in subtly different if highly complimentary ways. By not reflecting this in our decision-making mechanisms the human race has therefore become rather foolish indeed.

INTER-TITLE: FUTURE SOLUTIONS: THE END OF ARTIFICIAL REALITY

CB WITH TIMELAPSE CLOUDS AS BACKGROUND.

Across history, human beings have become adept not just at challenging reality, but at immersing themselves in the unreal. For example, right now you're fully aware that clouds are not chasing by, no more than I'm in outer space [BACKGROUND CHANGES TO SPACE]. Rather, I'm simply standing in front of a piece of blue paper. [BACKGROUND CHANGES TO BLUE PAPER]. We are, however, all prepared to accept digital trickery as simply a part of the modern media. There's also no particular problem with this.

TIMELAPSE CLOUD MONTAGE.

Unfortunately, there is a problem when we take our acceptance of the unreal too far. Today, we've got so used to accepting artificial reality that we've not realized

the sustainability of our current way of life is also an illusion. It may be a mark of misguided cleverness that we've somehow convinced ourselves that capitalism will be eternal, oil and water will never run out, and nature can always be kept at bay. However, we need to challenge our acceptance of such a dangerous artificial reality before it's too late.

BRIDGE OVER LAKE

CB TO CAMERA.

It used to be said that rashness is the characteristic of youth, prudence that of mellowed age, and discretion the better part of valour. These days, it is arguably humanity itself that is now transitioning from youth to mellowed age. The human race therefore needs to learn to live differently now that the rashness of its youth is no longer sustainable.

Like any individual, humanity cannot hope to survive into its middle age without abandoning at least some of the folly of its adolescence. More sustainable, local living will soon become a necessity rather than a lifestyle choice. Moving away from short-term economic decision making and placing more women in authority would also seem sensible. Unfortunately, most of the economists, politicians and other men-in-suits don't seem to have got this yet. It's therefore up to the rest of us to educate them before it's too late. Or, as I sometimes say, the future is in all of our hands.

END CREDITS

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CHRISTOPHER BARNATT is an lecturer and futurist currently working in Nottingham University Business School in the United Kingdom. He is the author of five books and the websites ExplainingTheFuture.com and ExplainingComputers.com.

For more information, please see www.ExplainingTheFuture.com/reality