

Power: Limits and Prospects for Human Survival: A Conversation with Richard Heinberg

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“I gave them hope, and so turned away their eyes from death”
— Aeschylus, [Prometheus Bound](#) [1]

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Not to boast, but we humans have been gifted with remarkable abilities to not only be able to adapt to our changing environment, but to actually adapt the natural world to our own needs.

Our ability to build and control fires for example did a remarkable job of heating our fur-less bodies when the nights got cold. And it cooked our food greatly expanding our ability to nourish our bodies. Our use of simple tools, like a knife carved from a competitor’s fangs or a hammer from stone allowed us to construct huts and devices. And our ability to communicate would transfer our innovative ideas so we wouldn’t have to reconstruct everything from scratch.

But it was only in the last two hundred years, when fossil fuels were utilized and made human beings multiply their own power by far more than by using slaves, simple tools or even animal power that we expanded our abilities in the real world to previously unimaginable, limits.

With the debut of workplace machinery, we had more time to develop lifestyles and medical knowledge that increased life expectancy. Before long, we could fly! And the [population of humans has expanded](#) from 1 billion at the dawn of the fossil fuel era to almost 8 billion in just over two centuries!

However, these wonderful gifts that have benefited our species for so long have had the

unfortunate side effect of threatening our survival along with all our fellow organisms. We are in the midst of the [sixth great extinction](#), due in part to climate change. Likewise, our fossil fuel sources that have been our godsend are now [beginning to peak](#)! What happens when the day comes when the oil and gas we depend on to power our engines and grow our food is more expensive to mine than it is to use!

Our species is Homo Sapiens, latin for the 'wise ape.' (We, of course, named ourselves!) The divine gift that allowed us to survive in ancient times is now threatening us with a catastrophic extinction. How can this trap be undone?

Joining us today on the Global Research News Hour is a man who has devoted decades of research to the question of surviving this dependence on fossil fuels, and is very much a proponent of transition – Richard Heinberg.

In a nearly four hundred page book entitled [Power: Limits and Prospects for Human Survival](#), Heinberg takes the unusual approach of studying 'power' itself and its ability to shape all life from the simplest levels until today. He also studied the way this ability to develop power over our surroundings got supercharged with the arrival of the fossil fuel aids. And importantly he identifies how previous species of humans possessed a power to limit control in the present so as to have more of an ability to prosper in the future.

Richard Heinberg is our feature guest on the Global Research News Hour.

Richard Heinberg is Senior Fellow-in-Residence of the [Post Carbon Institute](#), and is regarded as one of the world's foremost advocates for a shift away from our current reliance on fossil fuels. Richard is the author of fourteen books, including some of the seminal works on society's current energy and environmental sustainability crisis. His monthly [MuseLetter](#) has been in publication since 1992 and has been included in Utne Magazine's annual list of Best Alternative Newsletters.

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Notes:

1. Aeschylus (~480 BCE), Prometheus Bound;
<https://booksvoooks.com/prometheus-bound-pdf-aeschylus.html>

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