

The party's over by richard heinberg

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Introduction Energy is the critical element of our daily performance. Energy is the matter of our survival on earth. Those who possess energy possess the world, and balancing our energy needs with the availability of renewable energy sources is essential to provide us with sufficient opportunities to survive tough environmental conditions.

To a large extent, we ourselves are guilty of not being reasonable in energy consumption. Moreover, we are responsible for resolving the majority of the current energy issues. Since humans are expected to be reasonable, our attitudes toward energy should be reasonable too. How often we are willing to look deeper into the causes of the major energy crises will also predetermine our chances to balance technological advancement,

industrialization, the growing energy needs with the limitedness of energy resources.

As humans, we constantly seek to capture the most promising sources of energy. In this context, oil has been widely recognized as the most attractive and universal source of energy. However, this impression is at least deceptive, and our energy issues grow out of our unreasonable attitudes towards the most widely used sources of energy. Heinberg (2005) is correct: “ it is because living things are open systems, with energy and matter continually flowing through them, that they can afford to create and sustain order.

Take away their sources of usable energy or matter, and they soon die and begin to disintegrate” (p. 11). That is one of the reasons Heinberg (2005) provides – the reasons that should push us toward reconsidering the traditional patterns of energy consumption in society. In other words, where energy serves the basis of stability and social order in society, energy should also be reasonably consumed, and the need to preserve this social order is the basic reason why we should review the traditional ways of using and consuming energy from different sources.

Unfortunately, we tend to forget that energy is not inexhaustible; even the basic laws of thermodynamics suggest that the transformation of energy from one form into another is accompanied by losing of the certain amount of this energy in the form of heat. These amounts of energy are readily used but are not easy to reproduce, and if we don't address the current energy scarcity, we will soon follow the rabbits that in their desire to inhabit

Australia (another Heinberg's example) have sentenced themselves to death.

It should be noted, that the example of rabbits is very demonstrative: in simple words Heinberg (2005) tries to explain WHY and HOW we should pay more attention to HOW MUCH energy we consume and how much energy we are able to reproduce. In simple words, Heinberg (2005) explains the consequences which insufficient energy is likely to cause, and apart from disrupting social order and social stability the lack of energy resources leads humans to inevitable death. Since the proliferating rabbits may eat available vegetation at a faster rate than it can naturally be regenerated, the rabbits may actually reduce their environment's rabbit-carrying capacity; [...] the rabbit population will rapidly crash – that is, the rabbits will die off” (Heinberg 2005, p. 19). Even the threat of death cannot serve an argument convincing enough to change our attitudes toward energy. Heinberg (2005) shows that changing our approaches to energy consumption is the matter of life vs. death, but we tend to believe that the most serious energy troubles will leave us intact. Moreover, we are not always prepared to look further into the future and to evaluate the long-term impacts of the current energy crisis.

As humans, we always seek to establish our rules of the game and to gain and preserve control over the most important natural resources. However, as “ energy supplies are not always limited; there is no free ride; and in the long run, it is in every species' interest to use energy frugally” (Heinberg 2005, p. 0), our unreasonable energy consumption will lead us to losing control over the resources, and as a result, our lives. As soon as energy comes to an end,

we will no longer be able to prove our dominance in the natural hierarchy of species and will be doomed to surrender to the dominant forces of nature. This is one more reason which Heinberg (2005) tries to explain in his book, and if the need to save energy does not seem persuasive, applying for power, omnipotence and natural human dominance is expected to change human beliefs about energy.

Does that mean that we are at the edge of the new energy crisis? Does that mean we cannot do anything to improve the situation? Moreover, does that mean that the energy party is over? It depends on how we tend to interpret the meaning of Heinberg's (2005) "Party". If "party" implies the age of unreasonable energy consumption, then humanity does not have other choice but to recognize that it has finally come to an end. If "party" is associated with energy in general and energy use in particular, we have not yet lost our chance to expand our survival opportunities.

Personally, we can contribute into the development of more reasonable behaviors by being more attentive toward the amounts of energy we use and lose daily. The use of renewable sources of energy may also provide humanity with a chance to preserve its natural dominant position. For example, developing the means to capture usable energy from sunlight can satisfy prodigious energy appetites of industrial societies (Heinberg 2005, p. 156).

The age of cheap oil and related sources of energy has gone forever, and even if the oil price falls, we will not be able to replenish what we have lost during the last century. Changing the structure of energy sources, however,

will be meaningless without changing human mentality. As a result, whether we succeed to improve our wellbeing and our chances to survive, will depend on how well we work to restructure our personal attitudes toward energy, as far as all social changes begin at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Conclusion. Energy means life, and if we want to survive the current energy crisis, we must also realize that the age of cheap oil has come to an end. Developing reasonable attitudes toward energy consumption is necessary to satisfy the growing needs of industrial societies. Renewable sources of energy could help us maintain social stability, but promoting energy changes is impossible without changing human mentality. As a result, whether we are able to develop effective energy strategies will depend on how we change our individual attitudes toward the principles of consuming and saving energy.