



**EBRAINS**

# Embracing Change: Sense of Purpose in a Turbulent World

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SCIC Universities Conference 2022

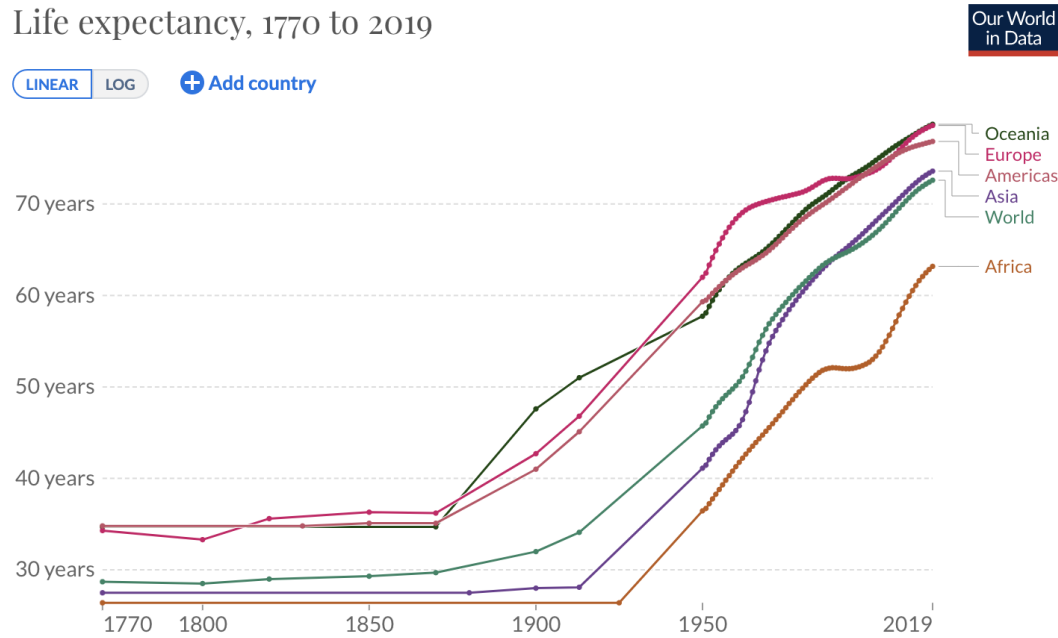


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# Period of unprecedented change

- Person arriving from the 18<sup>th</sup> century would not recognise the world as it is
- Exceptional progress: global per capita income increased by a factor of more than 10 between 1700 and 2012

Life expectancy, 1770 to 2019



Source: Riley (2005), Clio Infra (2015), and UN Population Division (2019) OurWorldInData.org/life-expectancy • CC BY  
Note: Shown is period life expectancy at birth, the average number of years a newborn would live if the pattern of mortality in the given year were to stay the same throughout its life.

THE PHENOMENAL GLOBAL BESTSELLER

## THE 100-YEAR LIFE

Living and Working in an Age of Longevity

'Brilliant, timely, original'  
Niall Ferguson



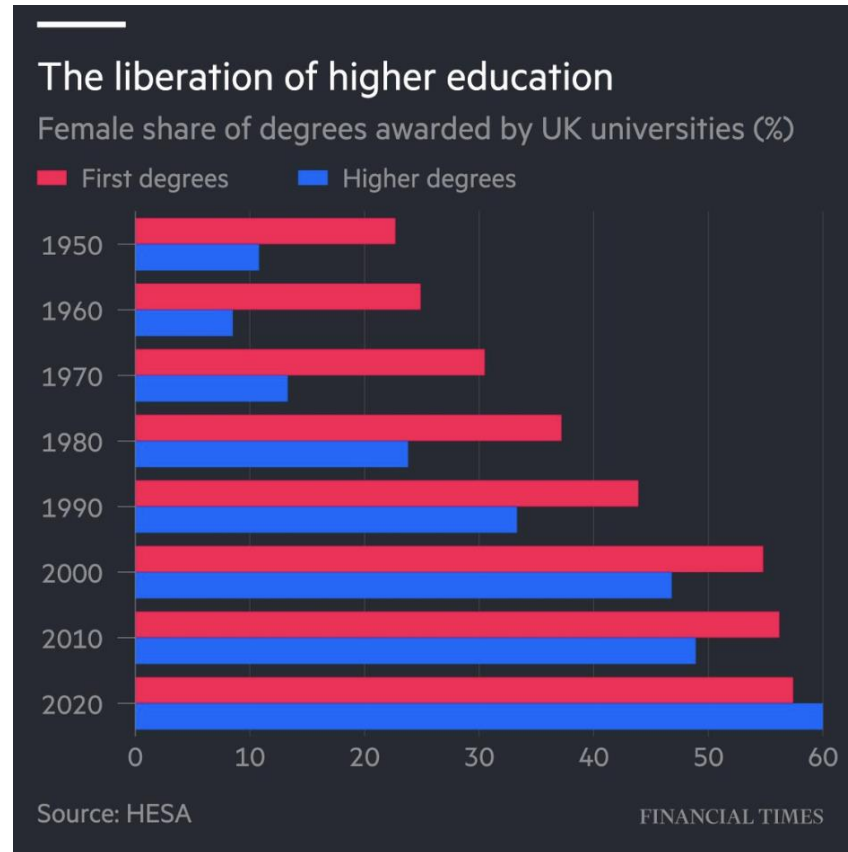
LYNDA GRATTON & ANDREW J. SCOTT

BLOOMSBURY



# One of most meaningful changes: economic activity of women

The proportion of women in the workforce has increased by a third in the past 50 years and women now account for the majority of undergraduate degrees awarded in the UK



# In parallel, rapid change has oftend produced a sense that the world is falling apart

In the 60s, the Western world seemed disorderly... but a way was found towards greater inclusiveness

## Paris students meet with brutal repression - archive,1968

**29 May 1968: During these past three weeks, the riot police were not just called out to contain demonstrators; they were let loose on the population**



📷 Student demonstrations in Paris, May 1968. Photograph: Sipa Press/REX/Shutterstock

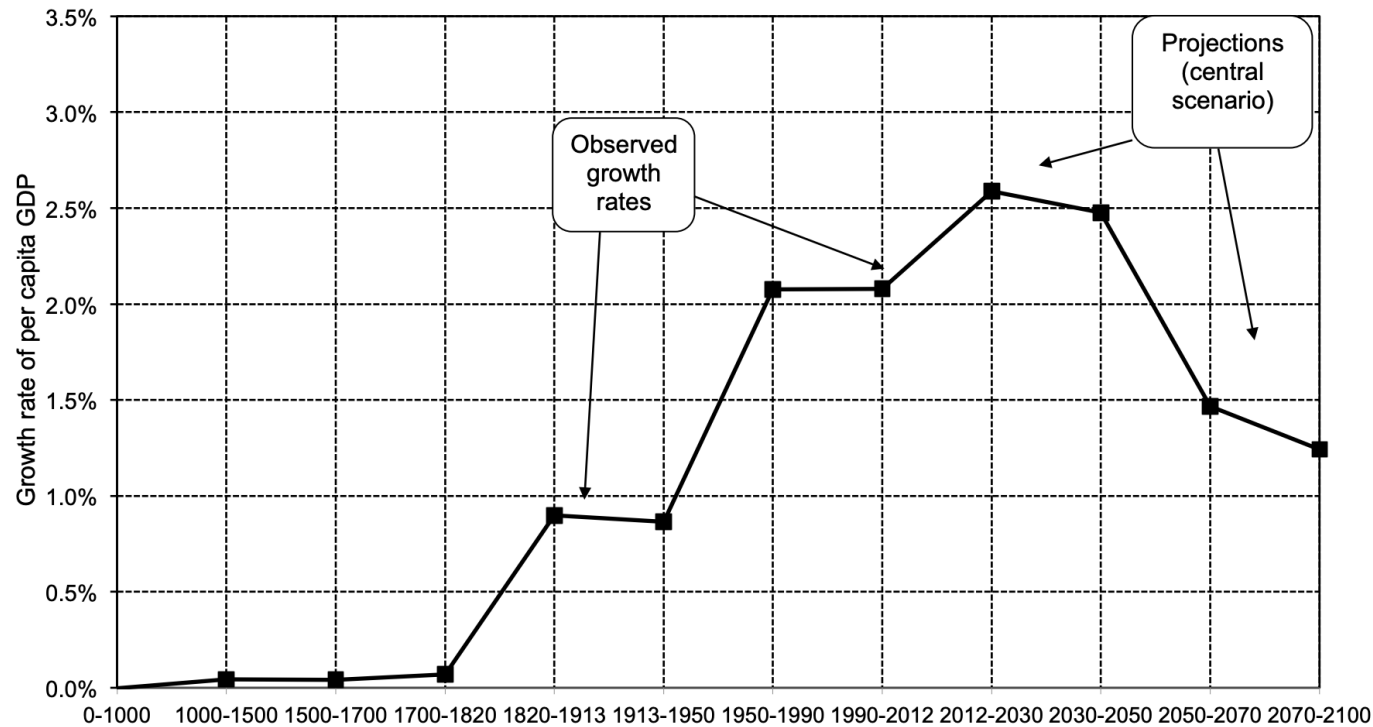
# Peak of phenomenal growth

- Humanity had mostly functioned in a low growth environment before the 19th century
- This changed after the Industrial Revolution



# We are heading back to lower growth

- Not as low as before Industrial Revolution but lower than today



The growth rate of per capita output surpassed 2% from 1950 to 2012. If the convergence process goes on, it will surpass 2.5% from 2012 to 2050, and then will drop below 1.5%.

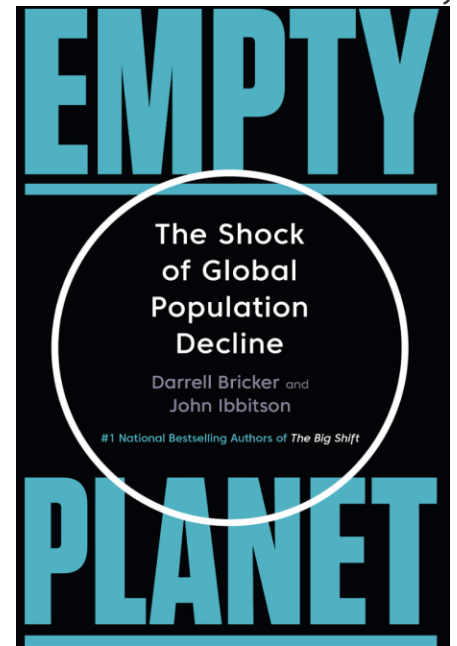
Sources and series : see [piketty.pse.ens.fr/capital21c](http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/capital21c).

# Some challenges will turn upside-down: demography

- Club of Rome reports in the 1970s warned about overpopulation. Global population has just reached 8 bln...
- However, we are nearing a period of demographic decline
- Fertility rates are falling faster than assumed to below replacement levels

*“The great defining event of the twenty-first century will occur in three decades, give or take, when the global population starts to decline.*

*Once that decline begins, it will never end.”*

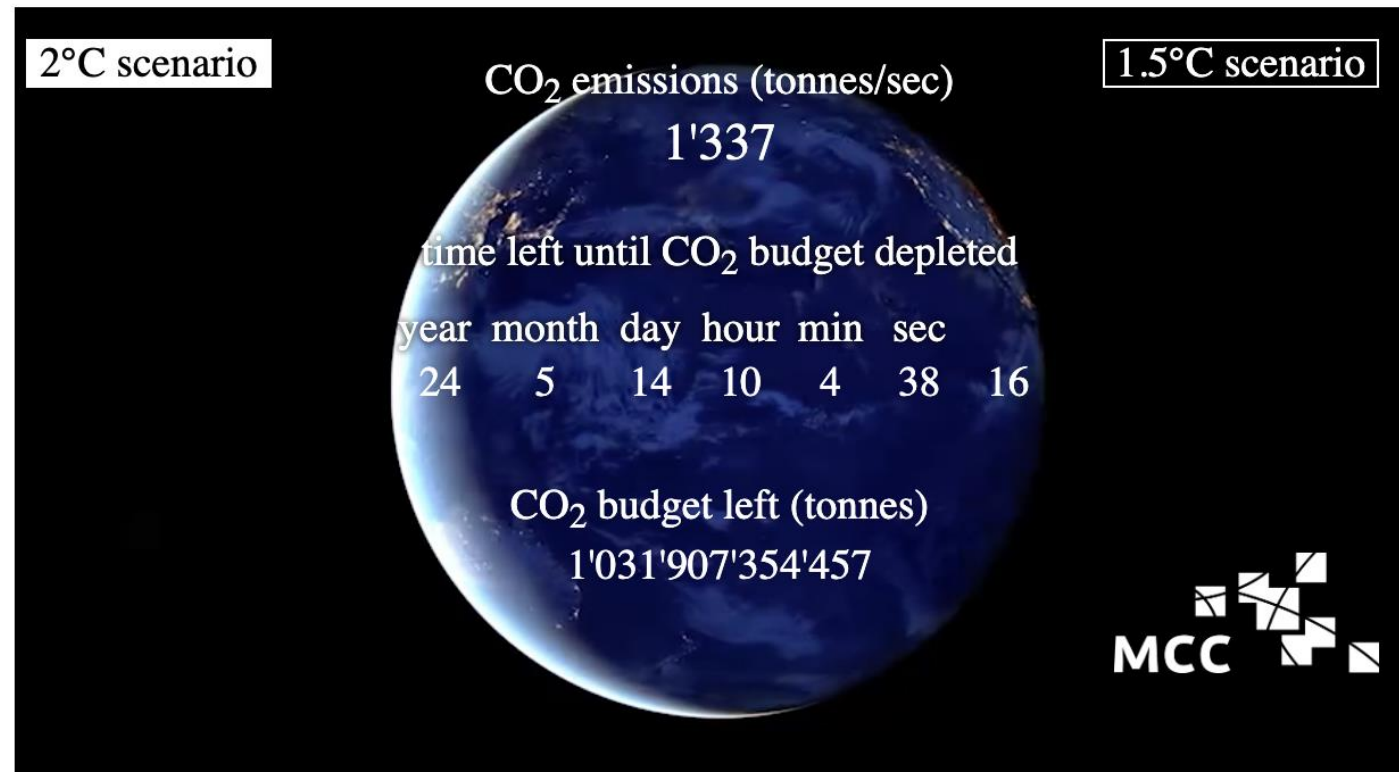


# Defining challenge of our generation: climate action

- Massive material difference between 1.5 degree Celsius scenario versus 2 degree (Paris)

## That's how fast the Carbon Clock is ticking

The MCC Carbon Clock shows how much CO<sub>2</sub> can be released into the atmosphere to limit global warming to a maximum of 1.5°C and 2°C, respectively. With just one click, you can compare the estimates for both temperature targets and see how much time is left in each scenario.

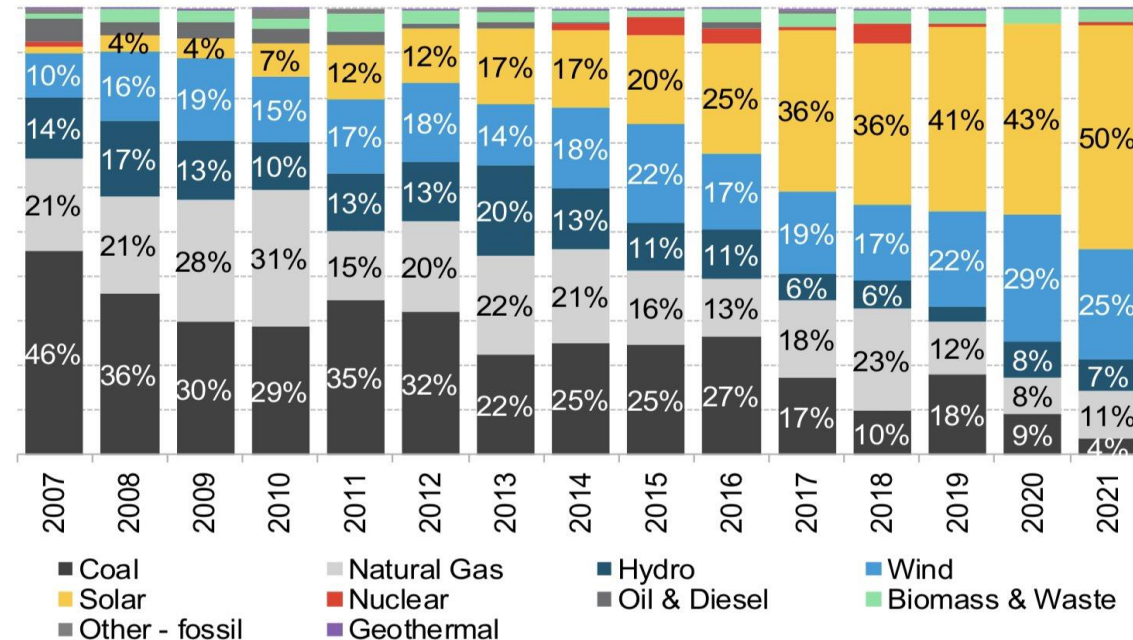




# Human inventiveness at its best: the renewable revolution

- Capital markets: massive shift in capital allocation towards renewables
- Cost of capital was the same for fossil and renewable projects 10 years ago and widely different today (20% cost of capital for fossil projects, 3-5% for renewable ones)
- Renewable power set to be the largest area of energy investment in 2022

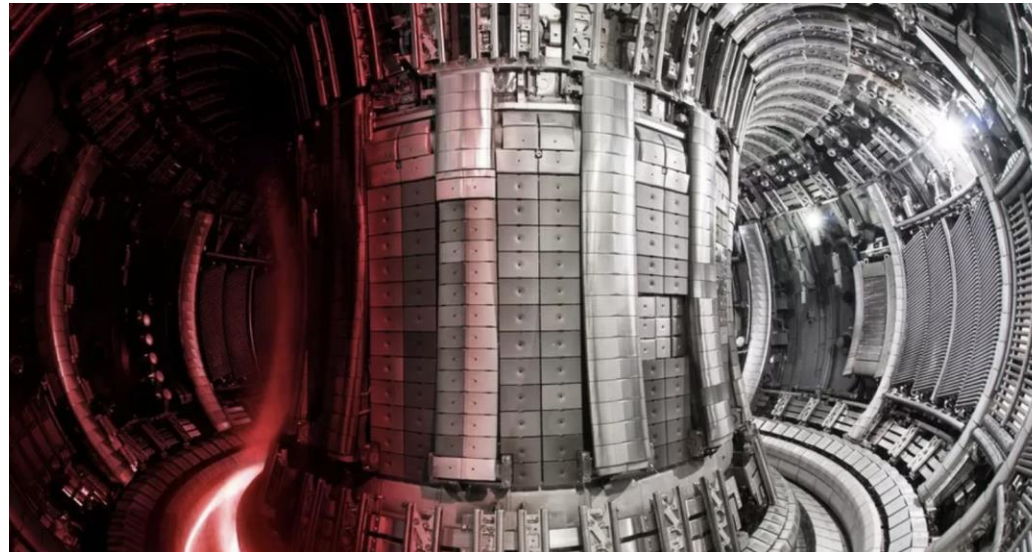
Share of global capacity additions by technology



Source: BloombergNEF. Note: Share of global capacity additions excluding retirements.

# Three decade long transition

- Slow shifts in consumer attitudes: transparency will need to help
- Global coordination on carbon pricing still to come; current average carbon price only 6 USD / tone
- Energy tightness as a result of underinvestment in orderly transition
- Innovation likely to surprise on the up-side with frontier technologies playing a key role in the 2030s: fusion, synthetic fuels and direct air capture

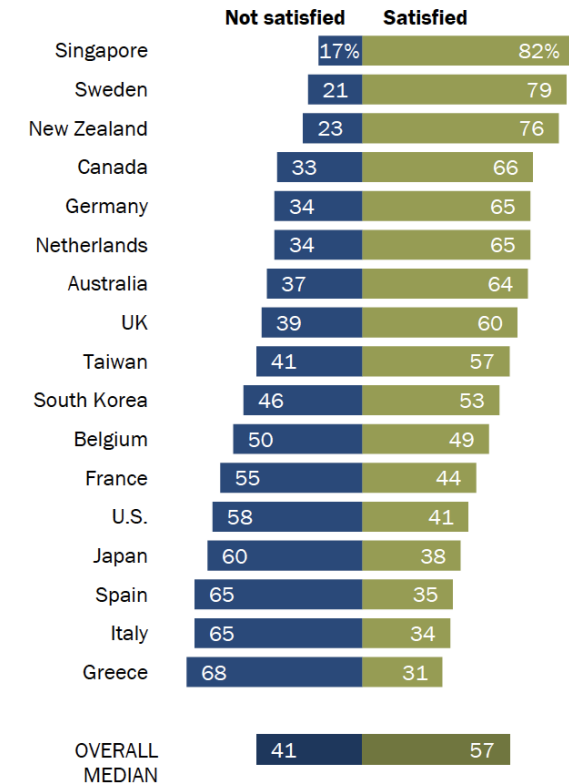


# Consensus-building will need to be reinvented

- Polarisation has reached new heights
- We have changed but our institutions much less
- New forms of representative democracy needed
- Permanent citizens' councils and assemblies
- Open legislative bills with citizen input

## Assessments of how well democracy is working vary widely

% who are \_\_\_ with the way democracy is working in (survey public)



Note: Those who did not answer not shown.

Source: Spring 2021 Global Attitudes Survey. Q3.

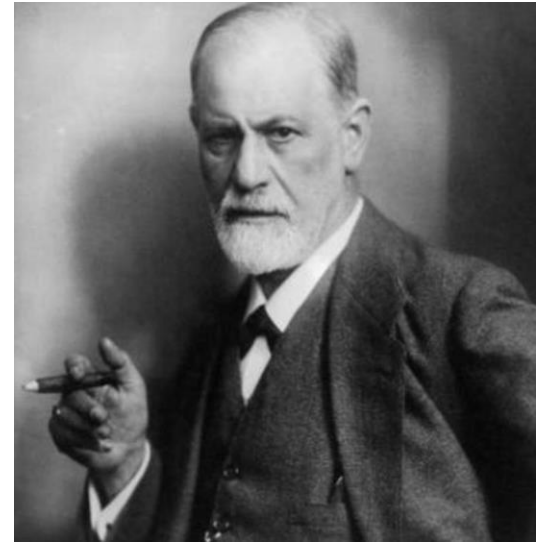
"Citizens in Advanced Economies Want Significant Changes to Their Political Systems"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

# Difficult: narcissism of minor differences

- Ideological differences much smaller than in the past (50s, 60s)

Freud believed that it is precisely minor differences between people who are otherwise alike each other that lead to feelings of strangeness and hostility.

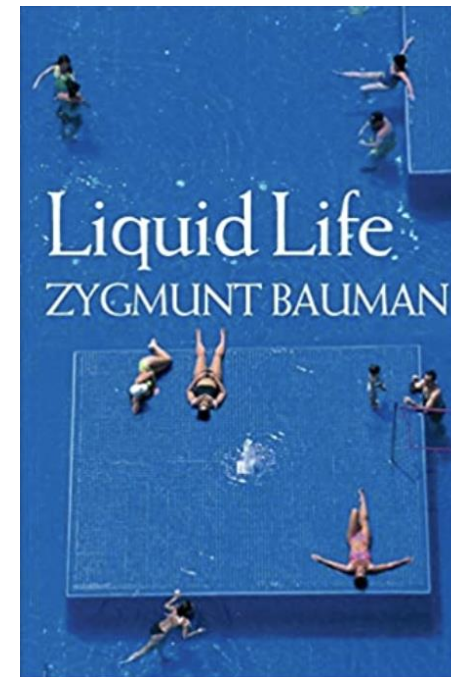


*”Ultimately, it is our fictions that drive us. People don’t unite our facts. What really drives politics is stories. Yet there isn’t a new story” being proposed. “We are entering a period of chaos” Yuval Noah Harari*

# Era of liquid reality

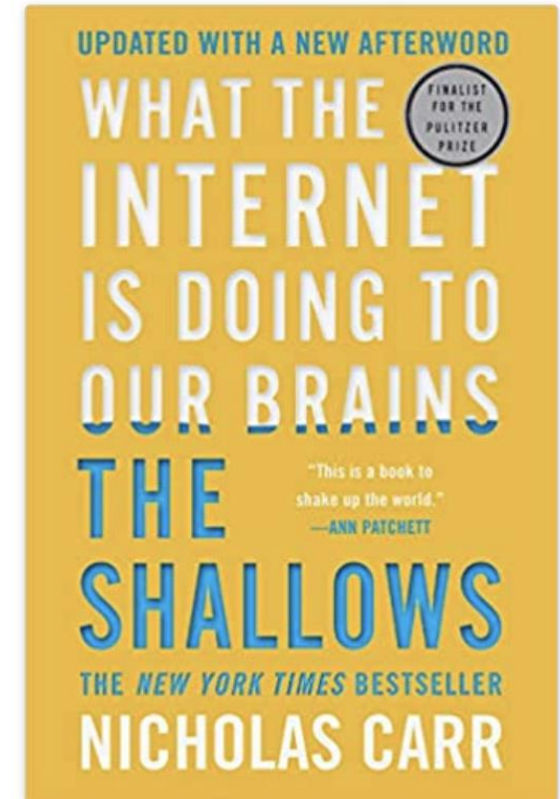
- Bauman conceptualised the idea of “liquid modernity” with emphasis on the ever-more rapid change within society

*“Forms of modern life may differ in quite a few respects – but what unites them all is precisely their fragility, temporariness, vulnerability and inclination to constant change. To ‘be modern’ means to modernize – compulsively, obsessively; not so much just ‘to be’, let alone to keep its identity intact, but forever ‘becoming’, avoiding completion, staying underdefined”*



# Expansion of Internet culture

- We have moved from oral to written and now to Internet culture
- Older cultures: acuity in reading the world
- The brain has been reprogrammed for us to become good readers
- Internet removes the contemplative side of reading



# Being from Somewhere or Nowhere

- “If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere”,  
Teresa May, 2016

Culture > Books | 17 March 2017

## Anywheres vs Somewheres: the split that made Brexit inevitable

David Goodhart's provocative take on the UK's new tribal divisions is sure to become a private manual on Mrs May's brand of conservatism.

By Andrew Marr

THE NEW STATESMAN

- Sense of disorientation is augmented by the fact that our lives are less and less rooted in the physical world
- Question arises how can collective action be formed on the basis of such diverse experiences

# What makes us?

- Consciousness is about “controlled hallucination”
- Seith: we perceive the world not as it is, but as it is useful to us
- Virtual reality: is it genuine reality? Goes back to René Descartes: How do you know you are not dreaming?





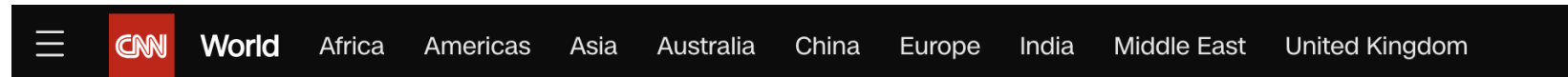
# Meshing of physical and virtual worlds

- Augmented and extended reality exist already
- Games such as Minecraft and portals such as Second Life have been antecedents of the Metaverse
- The Metaverse: immersive space that we enter through the internet
- Centred around our identity through avatars
- Disinformation could become even more pronounced in the Metaverse



# Globally: parallel worlds

- "The most widespread belief in Russia is that an individual can't do anything", Lev Gudkov, Scientific Director of the Levada Centre for Le Monde
- Impressive courage of the oppressed



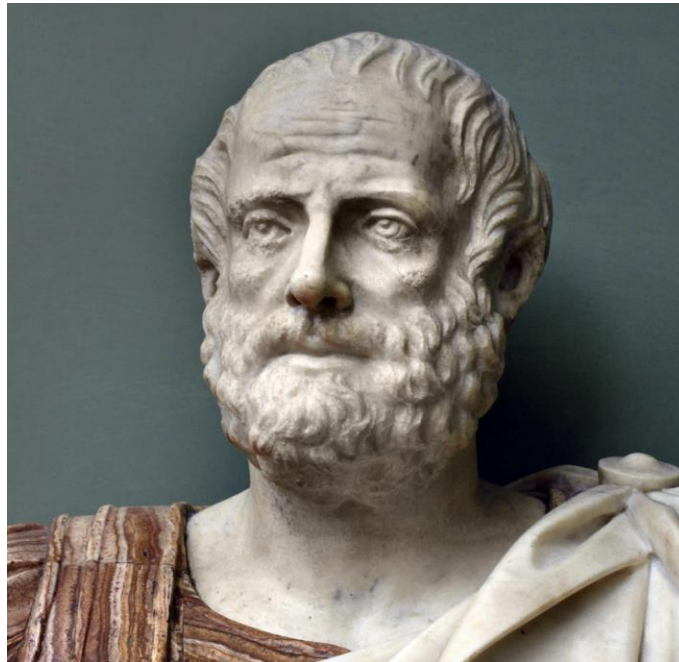
**A barrier of fear has been broken in Iran. The regime may be at a point of no return**

Being brave is our brand; we will spread our courage in the world - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

7 April 2022 - 23:39

# Back to Aristotle

- Aristotle was king of purpose-driven thinking
- Believed that doing philosophy was the ultimate goal of human **existence**. For Aristotle, if something did not have a purpose, or *telos*, it did not exist.
- A human purpose was expressed through our social relations with other people. Politics was what governed these relations and hence a political life had the highest virtue, becoming in fact an end in itself.



# Purpose as the organising principle

- The Aristotelian Society in the 1920s: criterion of activism makes society special
- In Latin, *socius* is an ally or partner while *societas* is an alliance or partnership
- Purpose of society has to do with the civility with which we solve the most pressing issues of our times

AS

THE ARISTOTELIAN SOCIETY



# Reinvention agenda

- Three aspects stand out:
  - The value system at the heart of the economy
  - Zero-carbon transition and regenerative economy
  - Restoring human-centricity of technological progress
- "B" stands for benefit - social and environmental, as well as financial. If 20th century capitalism was largely about financial returns, then its 21st century version should be about creating social value.



# Courage to be purpose-driven

- Question of **purpose** is about **verifying our assumptions**, confirming (or not) what is meaningful to us
- Being purpose-driven is about **refusing to accept that “there is no alternative”**, the belief in historical inevitability
- It also implies **taking action**, breaking through our individual comfort zones
- **Purpose** is more about the journey than the final destination

