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**Checklist of Peak Experiences Challenging Humanity**

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**Introduction**

The challenge of **peak oil** has been widely discussed and documented -- namely as the point in time when the maximum rate of global petroleum extraction is reached, after which the rate of production enters terminal decline.

The following checklist offers some pointers to other "peaks" by which humanity may be challenged. Of course these "peaks" do not reflect independent phenomena but interact to exacerbate with one another, reducing the time before any one of them is encountered.

**Checklist**

**Peak oil**: the point in time when the maximum rate of global petroleum extraction is reached, after which the rate of production enters terminal decline.

**Peak water**: the point in time when the maximum rate of use of freshwater is reached, after which the rate of access to such water enters terminal decline relative to population demand.

**Peak food**: the point in time when the maximum rate of food production is reached, after which the rate of food production enters terminal decline relative to population demand.

**Peak human empathy**: the point in time when the capacity of human empathy for suffering distant others is reached, after which the empathetic response enters terminal decline relative to the demand of those in need.

**Peak arable land**: the point in time when the ability to render available arable land is reached, after which the rate of clearance enters terminal decline relative to population demand and food production requirements.

**Peak habitable land**: the point in time when the maximum rate of settlement creation is reached, after which the rate of production of shelter enters terminal decline relative to population demand.

**Peak soil**: the point in time when the maximum rate of loss of top soil by erosion is reached, after which the rate of loss enters terminal decline relative to demands made on the soil.

**Peak social safety nets**: the point in time when the maximum capacity of social safety nets is reached, after which the rate of response to an aging population enters terminal decline.

**Peak attention (to warnings)**: the point in time when the maximum capacity to register new warnings regarding dangers to society is reached, after which the ability to recognize and respond to such information enters terminal decline. More generally it is the time when collective attention, as required by collective intelligence, is saturated by competing messages and is unable to sustain attention on any societal project vital to survival. Such a condition may be a feature of individual aging, or recognized as a challenge for disciplines of concentration and meditation. For collectivities it may be associated with the shifting response to fashion through which any degree of sustained concentration is abandoned.

**Peak employment**: the point in time when the maximum rate of employment is reached, after which the capacity to generate new employment enters terminal decline relative to demands for remunerative work.

**Peak pollution**: the point in time when the maximum rate of pollutant generation is reached, after which further generation ensures terminal systemic decline.

**Peak waste disposal**: the point in time when the maximum rate of waste generation is reached, after which any increase in that rate
ensures terminal systemic decline.

**Peak viability of sustaining species**: the point in time when the maximum rate of loss of species sustaining vital environment processes (production of oxygen, absorption of carbon dioxide, production of foodstuffs) is reached, after which further loss ensures terminal systemic decline.

**Peak spare parts**: the point in time when the maximum rate of demand for replacement parts and equipment is reached, after which systems dependent on that equipment enter terminal decline.

**Peak sustaining expertise**: the point in time when the maximum rate of generation of sustaining expertise for complex systems is reached, after which further demand ensures that those systems enter terminal decline.

**Peak health**: the point in time when the maximum rate of health care delivery is reached, after which further demand ensures terminal decline in standards of health.

**Peak education**: the point in time when the maximum rate of education delivery is reached, after which the average level of education enters terminal decline.

**Peak culture**: the point in time when the maximum rate of culture delivery is reached, after which the average cultural level of the population enters terminal decline.

**Peak quality of life**: the point in time when the maximum rate of enhancement of quality of life is reached, after which the average quality of life enters terminal decline relative to population demand.

**Peak transportation**: the point in time when the maximum transportation capacity has been reached, after which transportation capacity enters terminal decline relative to population demand.

**Peak population**: the point in time when the maximum rate of global generation is reached, after which the rate of population increase enters terminal decline.

**Peak tolerance**: the point in time when the maximum capacity to tolerate the unwelcome behaviour patterns of others is reached, after which the level of tolerance enters terminal decline relative to that required to sustain adequate social harmony.

**Peak emergency assistance**: the point in time when the maximum capacity of emergency services is reached, after which the rate of intervention enters terminal decline relative to demand.

**Peak technology**: the point in time when the maximum capacity of technological innovation (and ingenuity) is reached in response to systemic complexity, after which the rate of innovation enters terminal decline relative to needs to sustain technical systems.

**Peak hope**: the point in time when the maximum dependence on future resolution of individual, collective and environmental challenges is reached, after which the ability to depend on hope enters terminal decline.

**Peak irresponsibility**: the point in time when the maximum dependence on individual and collective irresponsibility is reached, after which the ability to depend on irresponsibility enters terminal decline.

### Reframing engagement with "peaks" through metaphor

The term "peak" is associated with the focal experience of two quite distinct communities, with some degree of relationship. It is therefore interesting to explore the above challenges in the light of the metaphorical framing offered by those communities:

- **Psychological experience**: In this case the term is used to describe certain transpersonal and ecstatic states, particularly ones tinged with themes of unification, harmonization and interconnectedness. Participants characterize these experiences, and the revelations imparted therein, as possessing an ineffably mystical (or overtly religious) quality or essence.

  It might be asked whether the required response of humanity to the above challenges is to be understood in transpersonal terms as characterized by a form of existential or mystical experience.

- **Mountaineering**: Mountaineers are necessarily focused on their ability to conquer ever more challenging peaks, and the experience they have of doing so. Typically the peaks are difficult to access and known directly only to a few in practice -- beyond the local communities who have long lived in their shadow and may regard them in some way as sacred abodes of unseen spirits. Within the mountaineering community, reputations are made in terms of the number of the highest peaks that an individual has conquered -- or the new routes "opened" to any one peak. On the other hand, some peaks (like Everest) have been reframed as tourist experiences offered by guides (assisted by local "sherpas") -- to the point that there is a major problem of waste left by mountaineers on the routes to the top.

  It would seem that there is a case for using such a perspective to reframe understanding of the engagement by humanity with the challenges listed above. Is there even a case for appreciating them (*Celebrating the Value of Deadly Problems Worldwide*, 2008)? What does it mean to "conquer" them? What training is required -- especially where there is a challenge of extreme exposure to the elements, and lack of oxygen? Who are the local communities living in their shadow and why do they view their peak with such respect – even to the point of regretting efforts to conquer it? What is the nature of the challenge evoked in those prepared to respond to such peaks -- and risk their lives in doing so? On the other hand is there a problematic competitiveness to engaging with such peaks, as in mountaineering?
If the world’s problems are to be understood like a Himalayan chain of mountains offering physical and psychological challenges, it is perhaps not inappropriate to understand the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* as an atlas of the opportunities. It documents thousands of such “peaks” -- of various grades of difficulty -- as well as the known strategic routes by which they may be approached. It also profiles understandings of the altered states of awareness that may be associated with such engagement.

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