

AI and You

Transcript

Guest: Tony Czarnecki

Episode 19

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Hello, and welcome to episode 19. Today I'll be concluding the interview with Tony Czarnecki, who is a futurist in the United Kingdom. He is a member of the Chatham House in London and the Managing Partner of Sustensis, also in London – a think tank for inspirations for humanity's transition to coexistence with superintelligence. Tony is the author of several books on the subject of superintelligence, three of which form the *Posthumans* series.

In part 1, we talked about the pandemic and its current and likely effects on European geopolitics. In this part, we'll get into more of that, plus Tony's thoughts on restructuring economies to leverage technological dividends, and the existential threat but also potential of artificial intelligence in reshaping the nature and destiny of the human race.

I think you can tell already that Tony's not afraid to think big. We go between the right-here-and-now immediate issues raised by AI on this show all the way out to the possible demise or transcendence of humanity. It's amazing that one technology can span such whiplash-inducing scopes, but that's one of the fascinating things about artificial intelligence. So here we go with part 2 of the interview with Tony Czarnecki.

To move this on to a broader and long-range perspective, and to bring your background in economics into play here, I'm thinking about the dividend from artificial intelligence and advanced technology. We know that can create enormous wealth, but we don't have a wealth shortage, we have a wealth distribution problem in the same sense that for 30 years, at least, we haven't had a food shortage in the world, we had a problem getting it to the people who were starving, while in other countries, they were throwing it away. And there was never any need for anyone to starve. Now, if we consider the kinds of benefits that could accrue from deploying AI and other advanced technology, we can see all kinds of wealth that could be created as a result. But if we keep the same structures that we have now, there will still be people in grinding poverty, and there will be others that are insanely rich. And it seems to me that the current systems we have for spreading that wealth around don't allow us to make a distribution of it that creates a world that works for everyone. What are your thoughts on that?

Well, I'm always a campaigner for wealth distribution. And in my first book, I propose the creation of the global wealth redistribution fund. This is similar to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, but it goes much, much further, and the mechanism of running such a fund is entirely different. So let me just go perhaps 20 years from now, I start where we are now and how we can get it in 2040. All countries of the United Nations and members of nations, 183, were asked - it was in 2001 - to the late 0.7% of the budgets to that Millennium Fund, as it was initially called. It will then be rehashed as the Sustainable Development Goals. In

2015, only seven countries in the world made that open 0.7% GDP contribution, among them Britain, which additionally in 2015, Mr. Cameron put it into law, which is now under pressure from Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor who wants to abandon that commitment. But anyway, 0.7%. Not many more countries paid 0.7% of that fund. What I propose is that we can achieve two goals. First of all, to rectify the damage, that horrible destruction, the catastrophe that the colonial powers brought on the African nations and the Asian nations in particular, over centuries. So this is at least the time and at least the minimum that we can do to share some of our wealth with them. The second one is that such a global scheme on an entirely different basis and a different magnitude of help, would stop the uncontrolled massive economic migration. And not only economic, it might become a survivor migration, literally, physical survival. If there is a sustained drought in Africa, then these people would have nothing to lose. We may see millions of people trying to get [into Europe] in any way possible. That scenario is not far from actually being fulfilled, and I hope it won't. And therefore, the way forward would be, for instance, for the European Union, which I consider already kind of a pseudo World Government because unfortunately, we can't rely on the United Nations for all the good reasons that this – it's sad what I'm about to mention but unfortunately, when it is needed, and when some drastic and fast actions are needed there is no good. So we need a different organization. The European Union is already taking a kind of a mantle of responding instead of the United Nations. It could do more. It could propose creating such a fund, say by 2024 to which say, 0.4% of GDP is invested straight away from the 0.7 GDP contribution in the United Nations' SDG fund. And that could be topped with additional money, so that, by my calculations, in 2030, it would create a fund of roughly 800 billion euro where the donor countries, the rich countries would donate 2% of their GDP. But the whole assumption of that fund is that everyone that is in the fund contributes the same amount of GDP. So the project is similar to the European cohesion problem, which has worked so well it's enough to look at the 10 countries that joined the European Union in 2004. How fast they have almost miraculously come out of almost poverty into what they are now. Their national debts are lower than the debts of the richer countries. Anyway, that program worked very well because these countries had also to contribute to the common European budget, the same amount of money of their GDP percentage. And in the projects that were realized, they had to contribute from 10 to even 40% of the money, but most importantly, every expenditure was closely monitored. So first of all, the reason for the expenditure was analyzed whether this is worthwhile and so and so. So we could have this kind of model applied to Africa. And if you do, by 2040, that fund would amount to roughly 4 trillion euros, which is more or less the current total budget of Africa. I'm talking about in 20 years' time. So that would achieve a lot. Within that program, even in this decade, we could have a kind of welfare state for Africa. Why not? Because I believe that universal basic income will happen within the next year on the large scale in many countries being the cheapest way, essentially, to finance this. So in summary, I think the Global Wealth Redistribution Fund would clean to some extent, our conscience, but also secure for us, the whole planet, about the future, and artificial intelligence play a major role in that. First of all, it would enable the richer countries to be more productive because the artificial intelligence impact in the beneficiary countries will not make that impact because they are less advanced. But also, I would add, and what I disagree strongly [with] is the projection of the global GDP growth over the next decade. I think this happens in

many other domains of science, that the focuses and scientists, they use the same kind of past numbers and the rates of growth, as they used to that means linear growth. We forget that we will be now changing of moving forward in an almost exponential rate. And therefore 3% of GDP growth globally, as it focuses by OECD, is really not equivalent to what I think will happen. McKinsey recently came out with some of its own figures over 4%. But I think even that is lower than what I think will happen provided that we not make ourselves oblivious in the intervening period. This is a disaster waiting to happen.

Right. And that's where you're getting at an important point here, I think, because the kind of financial reshuffling that you're talking about is perhaps not new in a broad sense that people would be thinking, "Yeah, we've heard things like this before from utopian socialists of one kind or another. And if only we could just tax enough people and move the money around, then we would create a Nirvana and that's okay. Good luck with that." But here, the choice is not about doing that to create some kind of socialist wonderland. The choice is about doing that, as you say, to address the possibility of human extinction. And what do you see as the risk factors that tend towards that outcome?

Perhaps I would only add some arguments to support what I just said about the GDP growth. Take your mobile phone. Very, very few people realize that what they've got on their mobile phone, including the phone, in 1982, would be worth over a million dollars. That is the statistics for 2015, so now it is even more. Just the GPS, not the quality that you have or not on your mobile phone, in 1980 would cost you about a quarter of a million dollars for an hour. People forget about that. We live in the world that dematerialization is already happening. If you think about the prices of Amazon of some goods, they are just incredible. How can people produce something like this for peanuts? That is my case. And this is just the beginning of it. Less and less will be manually manufactured. Even today, this morning, I looked how blueberries are collected, strawberries, and so on. I thought, "Why [are they] so cheap?" They're so cheap because most of them are now collected by machines, robots. So that is my positive, if you like, view on the prosperity of humanity. Now you want me to talk about the risks? Yes, let's talk about the dark side of our future. Unfortunately, as for instance, famously had been said by Stephen Hawking, great professor of physics, and Martin Rees, we have roughly 50%, some people are saying less than 50% chance of survival by the end of this century. There are 10 top existential risks, all of these man-made, not asteroids, not volcanoes, earthquakes - the risks that we created ourselves. In 1945, we only had one such risk; that was the nuclear bomb, and the global nuclear war in the '60, and so on. Now, we have 10 such risks like bioengineering, pandemics, nanotechnology, AI, of which I mentioned, climate change whether not immediate, and I can talk about this, and the weaponized AI, and several more. So the question is, how do we deal with this? Let me start with the climate change because this is what people hear about. The Extinction Rebellion, I think was, in one sense, a fantastic happening, literally happening because it really was a happening because it drove home a notion that we are living on one planet. This is our planet. We have to fight, not just about the reason to live for our country, for our nation, but for the planet. And although some of the means were pretty drastic, and I wouldn't subscribe to them, the message and the point of view was wonderful. The last time that we had it was during the CND times, perhaps you remember.

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Yes. Although I strongly disagree with the way, what the Extinction Rebellion and CND have in common is that they look at the whole planet, they look at civilization, at humanity, that we can all perish. And that is the point departure from climate change. Unfortunately, I think it is being exaggerated in using existential or extinction. Extinction will happen, but not in the next 10 years, 20 years, no. If it will happen, it will happen say, in the next century or towards the end of the century in a literal sense. The damage is already being done. It'll be even more damaging if we don't do anything. However, there is nothing to compare it with the artificial intelligence where by 2030, we may have - and Stuart Russell, one of the top AI scientists in his book, *Human Compatible*, recently published, makes precisely that point, that by 2030, we may lose control over the development of AI. It'll be too late just the end of the day. That's why I call this decade, the decade of immature intelligence. Ignoring or passing over the other remaining risks, the artificial intelligence in this decade may have several aspects which may endanger perhaps not the species, but the fate of civilization in the extreme examples. First of all, it would exaggerate other existential risks at the same time, such as pandemics if there is any, or global warming, and others. But secondly, it will be a weapon of first use, if you like, by those who still imagine that they can rule over the world - weapon of choice, especially if it can be done sort of clandestinely, like those little green men in Crimea. "It's not us", said Russia. China will say, "It's not us." And therefore, this is the first direct malicious use of the AI in this decade. The second one, which is more probable perhaps, and may happen earlier is the inadvertent acting of AI or AI systems say, in a few years' time, that may paralyze communication, water supply, electricity, and even launching nuclear weapons.

Right. And the time that this episode airs, we will have had Roman Yampolskiy on in a previous episode, who will have talked at length about those scenarios. And I do want to visit something before our time is up here because, in your last book, you refer to the Kardashev scale, which is actually something that Richard Foster-Fletcher also got into, which is that scale on which civilization can be rated for its ability to harness the energy from either a planet or a star or galaxy. And it occurred to me when you were speaking that that's talking about physical energy that you could measure on some kind of wattmeter. But what I thought we need is some way of measuring our cooperation as a species, our level of working together because otherwise, we can make all the plans we want for how to restructure and redistribute wealth, but if we don't cooperate, that's not going to happen. We will be left like kids squabbling in a schoolyard surrounded by all kinds of building materials, but instead of making a house out of them, we beat each other over the head with them. I wonder whether there is anything that could describe and give us a goal to aspire to for the level of cooperation that is needed, the level of empathy that's needed between nation-states, major corporations, prominent leaders, for instance. Because as hard as that might be to measure, ultimately, that's what's going to drive the make or break scenarios, I believe. What do you think?

Well, it's an excellent idea. I've never thought about that, but I really have a solution. I am a solution guy. This is kind of an inheritance of my consultancy years - when there is a problem,

there must be a solution. So you posed the problem, and I think I have a solution to create kind of a meter of global cooperation. And you know what I think it might be? If the European Union gets federated, that will be the number of new members joining the European Union, or the European Federation, which with time may become a human federation. So that shows the responses I could give but you provoked me to that.

Thank you. And I had not thought of that. What would you like to be true 10 years from now?

That the war will no longer be possible because it simply is a futile weapon. The potential aggressor - I don't want to name any country - wants to wage a conventional war or nuclear war. What will be left for him? Nothing. He will perish unless he is a psychopath. And we haven't mentioned that but, in my view, this is a real danger. It's Dr. No from the first Bond film that worries me a lot, that despite the global cooperation, we may have one maverick, a very rich one perhaps, or someone that controls or is a dictator of over enough powerful state that may wage a disaster on the humanity.

Yes.

But ignoring that, I think that the way forward is not to succumb to the attempts of some autocrats or dictators of very large countries. We have to suffer. They will try to conquer the world but I think if they play war games, they will know what I just said that any conventional war or nuclear war is out of the question to conquer the world. The only way is through artificial intelligence because, like, for instance, in China's instance, they are far more advanced in quantum computing and quantum encryption, especially, than the rest of the world. So, there are several areas where China is already leading. If they think that they can use this in order to demilitarize the world by switching off all the electronics by electromagnetic bombs, for instance, or other means - some viruses - then they may think that they have conquered, using artificial intelligence, the world. But you probably remember the first Asimov Law, right? The one that uses the artificial intelligence zone are the robots to conquer the others would essentially harm others, and the law says do no harm. So, it will be very difficult for such an artificial intelligence with time to distinguish who is a foe and who is a friend. And therefore, sooner or later, such a dictator or autocrat who thought that he may have conquered the world would have perished anyway. So that is my hope. And I believe that by - I said in my last book, that roughly by 2035 all wars will be over.

Wow. What a thing to aim for - the end of history or the end of war? Sorry that this is where it has to end. For our listeners who want to follow you, find out more about you get your books, where should they go?

Well, they should go to this Sustensis website, <http://www.sustensis.co.uk> and always there I invite experts and just anybody who is interested in the subject to contribute to the website because it's like kind of a melting pot of ideas, how we jointly can think of some approaches, some counter weapons, if you like, that will stifle those who still dream of conquering the world.

Thank you. Thank you very much, Tony Czarnecki. It's a pleasure talking with you.

That's the end of part 1 of the interview.

Wow. On the one hand I have to pull myself back down to Earth to remind myself where and when I really am... and on the other hand, part of me doesn't want to. We are at one and the same time living through one of the greatest upheavals in modern history – and I'm aware that many of our friends did not live through it – and yet we are also privileged to be witnessing this renaissance in technological progress in not just AI but, for instance, commercial space development, energy storage, and environmental science. Even fusion power claims to be on the brink of break-even. There again, they've been saying that for decades, so I'm not holding my breath. But it would be great.

One of the references Tony made in that segment was to Asimov's First Law of Robotics. Isaac Asimov was a ridiculously prolific science fiction writer who coined Three Laws of Robotics, which are: #1: A robot must not harm a human, or through inaction, allow a human to come to harm. #2: A robot must obey the orders given to it by a human except where such orders would conflict with the First Law; and #3: A robot must protect its own existence except where such protection would conflict with the first or second laws. You may spot certain... loopholes in those laws. So did Asimov. We discussed these laws when the science-fiction writers Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens were on the show in episodes 2 and 3.

In today's headline from the world of AI, and pandemically-related, Amazon is using AI to enforce social distancing among its warehouse workers. Their "Distance Assistant" uses camera to track employees' movements and a TV screen to warn them when they're getting too close. Amazon likens this system to radar speed checks that give drivers instant feedback on their driving. Amazon also says they are going to open-source the tech so anywhere can do it. What do you think: Big Brother or Helping Hand? Isn't it vexing how those interpretations can be a heartbeat from each other? But these are challenging times.

Next week I'll be interviewing another Brit, David Wood, whose LinkedIn profile describes him as "Futurist, catalyst, author, singularitarian." That's a heck of a payload for a four-word bio, but David is an amazing thinker. He's also chair of the London Futurists. That's where I met David, while I was speaking in the House of Lords to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on AI. We also will be talking about our future with AI, but through the lens of David's quite different perspective and insights.

Until then, remember, no matter how much computers learn how to do, it's how we come together as *humans* that matters.

<http://aiandyou.net>