



## Peak Oil Media Redux (or "The Course of Our Lives WILL Be Determined by the First Derivative of a Function, Redux")

Posted by [Prof. Goose](#) on July 22, 2007 - 5:12pm

Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

Tags: [albert bartlett](#), [exponential function](#), [james kunstler](#), [matthew simmons](#), [peak oil media](#) [[list all tags](#)]

Here's some peak oil media for the folks who haven't seen them. The first is an oldie, but a goodie by Albert Bartlett. Also under the fold are links to recent media appearances by Matt Simmons and Jim Kunstler.

It has always seemed to me that one of the keys to the puzzle of why people don't understand the problems that peak oil and other sustainability issues present is a lack of understanding of measurement, pure innumeracy and/or a lack of understanding spatial/change functions--namely the meaning and implications of constant growth.

Here's the best lecture that I can find as a primer ([linked over at GPM here](#)) by Dr. Albert Bartlett. Dr. Bartlett professes physics at the University of Colorado. He knows what he's talking about--that much I can vouch for.

If you need me to sell it to you so you'll watch it, that's under the fold, as well as links to the Simmons and Kunstler pieces. (Feel free to link to other peak oil media pieces in the comments.)

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Now, for my sell of the Bartlett lecture, a real mainstay in the peak oil arsenal. If you haven't watched it, watch it.

The tagline of the [Bartlett lecture](#)? "The greatest shortcoming of the human race is our inability to understand the exponential function (as related to peak oil and sustainability)." Bingo.

Now, I know/use calculus and differential equations and teach econometrics pretty frequently, so this stuff is already in my head. But, because I use it so much, for some reason, I forget some days that most folks do not have exposure to these ideas or the ability to use them in their daily lives.

It can be intimidating stuff. But we've used versions of calculus statements around here all the time by saying phrases like "8% depletion" or "we aren't actually running out of oil and that we're at half of supply."

But what does 8% depletion *really* mean?

The problem is that people, journalists, even some experts do not know what the functions behind these ideas mean, or more importantly their implications for the future. The numbers hide the meaning. Bartlett's lecture can help you give these numbers the meaning they deserve.

I don't mean to say that these people who don't get this or have never gotten are not intelligent.

It's that they haven't connected those wires in their head, that's all. Bartlett is wonderful at making those connections, and that's why I am bringing this to you today.

So, if you're a wannabe geek and you have an hour, I would suggest that everyone in the world watch this lecture by Dr. Bartlett. Please. It's an easy piece to understand. In fact, it's damned near enjoyable for an arithmetic lecture.

One of the main points of Dr. Bartlett's lecture is that "we cannot let other people do our thinking for us." So, so true. But to do that, you have to have the toolbox to actually think for yourself!

Which reminds me, there's another book that I suggest for my students: [Joel Best's Damned Lies and Statistics](#). It's a wonderful primer on how experts, politicians, and the press screw measurement and statistics up on a daily basis. This is another important book I would suggest that everyone reads to pick up the daily fallacies that try to enter our cerebra.

< rant >

I swear, every single person on this earth should have to take a research methods course (understanding measurement, science, modeling, etc., etc.) and a basic calculus or statistics (understanding what to do with those measurements) course, damn it.

< /rant >

Now here's the other two pieces, first Matt Simmons on the GAO Report (7 mins), then JHK (1 hour).

*"The GAO report found no focussed coordinated government plans to prepare for peak oil or other supply disruptions."*

*"We are on the verge of replacing the term 'global warming' with the term 'peak oil.'"*

*"The best new oil basin we will ever find is the one called 'conservation.'"*

And then, James Howard Kunstler, author of *The Long Emergency*, [speaks to the Commonwealth Club of California](#) (.mp3 warning) about the American car culture and our illusions of maintaining it with alternative fuels. (thanks to [Global Public Media](#)). (It's about one hour.)



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