

# CAN TECHNOLOGY SOLVE OUR BIG PROBLEMS? by Jason Pontin

## WARM-UP

1. In pairs, make a list of technological breakthroughs (in the 21st c.) that solved huge problems and made our life easier:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



## VOCABULARY

2. There are four words in each line below and one word in each line does not match with the rest of the group. Find the odd words:

- |                 |              |              |           |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| A) derive       | originate    | come from    | depart    |
| B) exterminate  | eradicate    | elate        | eliminate |
| C) shoot up     | spur         | stir         | stimulate |
| D) galvanize    | motivate     | provoke      | enrage    |
| E) fragility    | scarcity     | brittleness  | frailty   |
| F) redirect     | divert       | divide       | channel   |
| G) supernatural | transcendent | metaphysical | mundane   |
| H) vital        | viable       | feasible     | practical |

3. Decide which groups of words from exercise 2 could fit into the gaps in the parts of the TED talk's transcript:

- They didn't bring much back: 841 pounds of old rocks, and something all 24 later emphasized -- a new sense of the smallness and the ..... of our common home.
- At the time, the strongest emotion was of wonder at the ..... powers of technology.
- In the middle years of the century, polio was ..... and smallpox eliminated

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- It feels as if technologists have ..... us and enriched themselves with trivial toys
- Today, less than two percent of the world's energy consumption ..... from advanced, renewable sources.
- Now, technologists, business leaders and economists all basically agree on what national policies and international treaties would ..... the development of alternative energy,
- [...] we soon discovered there are many kinds of cancer, and it is only in the last 10 years that effective, ..... therapies have come to seem real.
- There is no ..... contest like the Cold War, no politician like John Kennedy who can heroize the difficult and the dangerous [...]

#### 4. Watch the TED talk and check which words the speaker used in sentences from exercise 3.

#### DISCUSSION

##### 5. Discuss the following points in small groups or pairs:

1. Do you think that landing on the Moon was a breakthrough for technology evolution?
2. Would you like to see people landing on Mars and setting up a colony there. Is it more important than the problems on Earth?
3. Are making money and capitalism something that hinder the development of advanced technology?
4. Do you believe that Silicon Valley companies are becoming less transformational and new companies are less inventive and more focused on short-term gains?
5. Why don't we solve big civilization-wide problems nowadays?
6. Do people need such a dire stimuli like war to unite for one cause?
7. Do you disagree with the video and think that we are going in the right direction in terms of technology advancement?
8. Can technology solve such big issues like lack of resources, hunger or education?