

# Funding the Future

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It feels like we are living through history at the moment.

I am not just referring to the collapse of US power in Afghanistan, although that obviously contributes to this feeling.

Nor am I just referencing Covid, although the world's inability to beat a disease when it had been assumed for lifetimes that nature had been tamed is clearly an issue.

Humankind's current denial of the impact of climate change is also a factor. That is staggering, and maybe the biggest historic failure we are moving through.

But there is something else as well. And that is the feeling I have that we have just made life too complicated, and that we cannot keep up with it now. That possibility seems like an epoch changing moment as well.

The first three of these events are easy to spot. I will not say more about them. I fully accept that the last point I am making is based on nothing more than a hunch. Well, that and the fact that the world's carmakers cannot get enough chips to make their products. [Toyota is cutting production by 40% because of this chip crisis](#). VW is also making cuts. The situation is ongoing, and it's not wholly clear it is simply Covid related now.

It is obviously possible to claim that this issue is merely logistical. And at some levels that is obviously true. But I am not quite convinced of that. There has been an assumption that the continued computerisation of the world is possible, and inevitable. The assumption that computing power could increase exponentially and be applied to almost any task has been implicit in most product development logic for decades. But now it's hit an obstacle. The most basic product required to fulfil that assumption is not available. The chips are literally down.

This matters for all sorts of reasons. In economies built around meeting consumer demand inability to meet it is a major failing. It disrupts employment, pricing, corporate fortunes, and even the ability of companies to survive. Inflation is in part being driven by demand for second hand cars as new ones are not available, so this has macro as

well as micro implications. And it is not clear that this problem is necessarily soluble.

I am not suggesting that chip production might not increase again. Maybe it will. Instead what seems to be possible is that so complex are supply lines that their disruption in the face of other threats, like conflict, disease and climate change, is something that appears to be considerably more likely now.

As evidence I noted a couple of weeks ago that at the height of the UK soft fruit season plums were not readily available in supermarkets. Now the supply issue appears to be chicken. It is out of stock. Of course Brexit has exacerbated this in the UK, but that supply chains are now so vulnerable to even minor disruptions is my point. We have a world economy dependent on everything functioning as it is assumed it should.

My suggestion - and I stress it is purely speculative - is that this moment is historic because it is the time when supply chains might have stopped functioning as they should. And that is for one common reason. It is that they are too complex.

We do not need the number of chips found in the modern car for it to function, for example. It is entirely possible to open a car window mechanically, but that is almost unknown now. That example is itself simple, but also symbolic of the point that I am making. Maybe we have just made the world too unnecessarily complicated, especially where complication is not required. Maybe that is why there aren't enough chips in the world. And maybe that is why we aren't prepared for many of the risks that we now face.

I simply offer it as a thought. Maybe there is merit in keeping it simple, after all.