



106. Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, Part 1

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Future Sense is a podcast edited from the radio show of the same name, broadcast on BayFM in Byron Bay, Australia, at www.bayfm.org. Hosted by Nyck Jeanes and well-known international futurist, Steve McDonald, Future Sense provides a fresh, deep analysis of global trends and emerging technologies. How can we identify the layers of growth personally, socially and globally? What are the signs missed; the truths being denied? Political science, history, politics, psychology, ancient civilisations, alien contact, the new psychedelic revolution, cryptocurrency and other disruptive and distributed technologies, and much more.

This is Future Sense.

Nyck: You're tuned to BayFM and *Future Sense* here, broadcast from the studios of BayFM in Byron Bay on the east coast of Australia on Monday mornings from 9 to 11. You can tune in any time on demand to BayFM on www.bayfm.org for any programme, but also to our podcasts of the show, which are edited within 24 hours of the show going to air. Those podcasts are usually in a couple of parts and are available through our website, www.futuresense.it or your favourite platform.

So Steve, what are we talking about today?

Steve: Well, I think we will take an extended look at the coronavirus and its impact today, because as we've been saying for the last few weeks, there's a lot to learn from this in terms of how the world is changing and what we might do to deal with these more complex issues that we're facing these days. So we'll have a look at the virus itself, we'll check in on the latest news and statistics and actions being taken in different places around the world. We'll have a talk about how human responses to problems can sometimes create extra problems, especially when fear is the main driver, and we'll also look at human value systems and how our dominant value system or worldview shapes our problem-solving approaches, particularly at a national level at the moment; check-in on the economic impact, which has been quite considerable with the stock market crash over the weekend, and maybe have a talk about what we could do differently from a potential Second Tier approach to problem-solving around this issue, which might help us in the future.

Nyck: Because there is quite a lot of reporting about the opportunities this presents to us, too, in terms of things like relocalisation and resilience locally, and the changes of supply chains and the like.

Steve: Yes.

Nyck: A lot of possibilities here. Also, the media, which is able to give us perhaps a much broader view than we used to get from these sort of things, and a lot of different approaches to it—some of them, of course, a bit crazy and wacky and not always trustworthy, and others possibly a little bit more free and informative for the general population, we would hope.

Steve: That's right, and add to that the confusion of having so many different sources to look at.

Nyck: Absolutely, and there are lots of them, and we have them in front of us here, all of them.

Nyck: You are tuned to *Future Sense* around the world. Thanks for listening on the podcast everywhere out there. You are tuned here with Nyck Jeanes and Steve McDonald, and today we're going to be talking about the coronavirus.

Steve: So the coronavirus. There's so much happening here and so much to learn globally from the way this is panning out. We decided that we'd do a longer piece this week, looking at where it's at and how the issue is being approached by different countries around the world, and also different value systems and how their particular ways of problem-solving are playing out.

We'll start with where things are at. The statistics that are coming out of China are indicating that typically 80% of cases of coronavirus will be mild. When we say mild, we say, just like the regular flu where you might be able to rest and look after yourself at home and get over it within a relatively short space of time. 15% of cases will require treatment in hospital and 5% of cases will require intensive care, with fatalities sitting at roughly around 2% of those people who contract the virus. Those fatalities seem to be mostly with vulnerable people such as the elderly or people weakened by other health issues.

Nyck: Though not with children and infants, which is interesting. Not very susceptible, although they may be passing it on. That is also the case. They don't know, but so far, children, and even babies, have not been particularly affected.

Steve: Yes, that is very interesting indeed. Absolutely.

If we look at the numbers, we've got some numbers here as of February 21st, so that's almost 10 days ago now. In China, there were 75,569 reported cases and 99% of those cases are on the Chinese mainland; and 2,239 deaths from the virus. In the US, as of 24th February, there were 14 diagnosed cases through the US health care system and 39 cases among repatriated US citizens—in other words, citizens that have come back from overseas where they'd been infected—and as of the date of this report, no deaths and no critically ill patients at all, and no evidence of transmission in the US amongst the community there.

I can't help but reflect on the way that this is being reported in the media. It's getting headline news regularly, and still, today. Imagine if we were reporting the regular flu statistics in the headline news in the same way and giving them such priority. If we were, we'd be hearing that as of 15th February in the US, there have been 16,000 deaths from the regular flu. If we did a headline media report saying they'd been 16,000 deaths from the coronavirus, imagine what actions it might prompt in the community, and yet here we are quite happily not looking at all these statistics in the same way.

It reminds me just how incidental and emotionally-driven human responses often are. For example, there are things that are far, far more risky. Take alcohol, for example. Here in Australia, it's calculated that around about 15 people die every day from an alcohol-related issue. We acknowledge that that's usually not straight after you drink the alcohol—although it is in some cases—but it's also a long-term diseases that develop over time which don't tend to get the same sort of priority as short-term issues.

Nyck: Well, that's right, exactly.

Steve: You could drum up a sensational news story very easily from a whole bunch of other things, including alcohol deaths. 15 people died since this time yesterday from alcohol, and how many people died from coronavirus?

Nyck: Yes, and I think this just shows us how once an issue has sunk into the culture—into society, into the politics, into the structure, into the media—it becomes sort of normalised in a way. So we don't really consider these things, but we are also in a time where the latest sensational thing—and sensationalised as much as possible—is what actually attracts people to the news and to the media and so forth. So you get that.

Is there a deeper issue here in terms of scaring people for one reason or the other, or is it just the way our culture is operating now?

Steve: A lot of it is driven by outcomes that people are wanting from their news reports. For example, in commercial use places, they have ads and stuff to sell, and even people who aren't benefiting commercially from their transmissions, they generally have some kind of aim, whether it be to gather more listeners or have more influence for some reason.

As we've been saying all along with this particular issue, the coronavirus, there are a few strange things about it, and one of the strange things is that the general response globally seems to have been a little overblown. Ultimately that's been driven by fear—and we'll unpack that a little bit during the show today and just talk about what fear does to us and how we behave differently when we're being driven by fear—but it's always a fine balance with these issues. I mean, clearly, it is a health risk, it is a little more serious than the regular flu in terms of the percentage of people who are dying from it, and so it's a matter of finding that fine balance of responding appropriately and not neglecting to respond adequately, but also not overdoing the response to the point where it actually creates more problems; and that's what's happening on quite a large scale globally at the moment, is that the response, particularly in China, is creating all sorts of issues around the world—economic and trade issues particularly.

Nyck: Yes, and, of course, the nature of China to be relatively secretive, to not let things leak out about any issue, is part of the problem right there; and quite different from a democratic—supposedly democratic—nation's response, although there is some argument about that, too, about how we respond.

Nyck: Well, the key way of really understanding that is to look at the value systems. China operates from a different dominant value system than most Western countries.

Nyck: Very authoritarian, yes.

Steve: We'll unpack that a little bit later in the show.

Nyck: I thought I'd mention, too, a couple of important numbers that I didn't know about. Epidemiologists often talk about two important numbers: the R0, or how infectious a disease might be, which expresses the number of people that are infected by each person who's been infected; and the Case Fatality Ratio (CFR)—the number of people who die as a result of being infected.

Steve: And for those who might not know what epidemiology is, it's the branch of medicine dealing with the incidence and prevalence of disease in large populations and with detection of the source and cause of epidemics of infectious disease.

Nyck: Thank you very much.

Steve: My pleasure.

Nyck: Great. Okay, we'll be back to start teasing out some of these issues after another track on BayFM 99.9. You're tuned to *Future Sense*.

Nyck: You are tuned to BayFM; you're tuned to *Future Sense* here with Steve McDonald and Nyck Jeanes through till 11 o'clock. We do have a text line, as most of you know, if you'd like to text and be part of the conversation.

Steve: We're just taking stock of where things are at with coronavirus to start with. Some more stats: we were speaking just before the break about the issue of how the coronavirus is being reported and the coronavirus versus regular flu numbers; and imagine if the regular flu was being reported the same way that the coronavirus is being reported. There would be far more fear and response in the community.

According to Johns Hopkins Medicine from the US, typically, in terms of the regular flu, there are somewhere between roughly about 300,000 and 650,000 deaths worldwide every year from the regular flu, every flu season, bearing in mind, of course, this is flu season in the north and the flu season in the southern hemisphere. In the US alone, there are around about 12,000 to 61,000 deaths from the regular flu every year, so we're far, far short of that at the moment in terms of the coronavirus.

Nyck: And flu is a coronavirus, isn't it? It's a similar viral structure.

Steve: The coronavirus is named because it has a particular shape when you look at it under a microscope, which looks like a sort of a spiky crown thing, but obviously they're both in the same sort of class of illness.

Last week we mentioned a map that *Al Jazeera* have on their website just showing territories around the world with confirmed cases of coronavirus. At the moment—the last update of that map was February 28, so it's a couple of days old at the moment—but I'm just going to skip over the map and point my mouse at a few places and tell you what the numbers are. In China, 79,968 cases; in South Korea, 3,736—I think I heard this morning that that's up over 4,000 now. In South Korea, they are attributing a lot of the spread of the virus to a particular Christian church there, which has a large following—I think about two and a half million people—and they have regular gatherings where they pack a whole lot of people into fairly tight spaces. According to our Australian *ABC News* report this morning, part of their normal meetings is for the followers to shout 'Amen' after the leader of the church makes a point. Apparently that happens a lot during the meeting, so you can imagine, with this particular virus being spread by body fluids, how that could be spreading the disease quite badly; and apparently it is, to the point where I think the founder of the church is actually being charged

under South Korean law with not responding appropriately to the risk of the disease with his followers.

So back to the map: Iran is, of course, standing out—593 cases according to this 28 February update; only 5 in Russia, 19 in Canada, 62 in the US; Mexico has 3, 2 in Brazil, only 1 in Algeria; the U.K. 35, and I think Italy's have been a standout. Italy has 1,694 cases as of 20th February, according to the *Al Jazeera* map.

Nyck: We just had a call in from an Italian listener who we know quite well, and she was saying that there is a sense of panic in Italy, apparently, because the test for coronavirus there is free, so everybody's rushing to get the test. So I guess, either you're going to get more reportings, perhaps, for that. In the US, on the other hand, it costs us something like \$3,000, which I find extraordinary, but then the medical system in the US is.

Steve: It is extraordinary!

Nyck: It's an extraordinary medical system if there is such a thing. And as you said, South Korea, the strange case of the of the Christian cult there, or the cult that is infected.

Steve: That's right, and I did see a report over the weekend from the South Korean government saying that one of the reasons that they've got more identified cases there is because they've been testing more intensively than most countries, and so I guess this does point to the fact that there may be a lot of undiagnosed cases in these other countries.

Nyck: Well, those figures you just quoted, I find interesting that there are now, as of today, I think, 26 confirmed cases in Australia and 1 death—a man in Perth, 78 year old, who died. 26 out of our population compared to the US which has 35 out of a population that's 20 times as much is kind of interesting. What does that point to?

Steve: I think, probably—I'm not sure exactly how many cases came from the cruise ship here.

Nyck: Because the death did, for sure.

Steve: Yes, but that's one of the key issues with this, is where you've got a whole bunch of people in close quarters, obviously there's going to be a higher likelihood of the disease spreading. In such small numbers, like you just said—62 in the US and 26 or something in Australia, and then just that one particular isolated case of a whole bunch of Australians being on a cruise ship where there were infections, it's going to explain it.

But with regard to the message from our Italian listener, it is a good one to think about and it just makes us reflect on all of the different specifics that can contribute to explaining the news. So much of this we miss in mainstream media reporting these days where we just look at the headlines and just get the sensationalism and don't actually get the underlying analysis that explains why things are so. Of course, that then points to what actions we take in terms of preparation and dealing with the issues, and unless we really drill down and get the facts, then we might be making things worse rather than better.

Nyck: And not many people are going to do that. That's the thing. As we said earlier, there is so much information and it is very overwhelming to tease through it, to understand it, to try and make the connections that are real and true, and discard the chaff from the wheat, so to speak.

Steve: That's right. Exactly.

Here in Australia, our government declared a health emergency just recently, although there's not a lot being done apart from, I guess, telling people and health organisations to prepare and take precautionary measures, and thinking about what to do if things get worse. Some of the things in the government *Emergency Response Plan*, in terms of what the government might do if things get worse, they've listed the possibility of cancelling large gatherings, perhaps asking people to work from home, prioritising mortuary services to deal with coronavirus cases, locking down aged care homes, of course, with the elderly being particularly vulnerable to this virus, and also closing childcare centres. That's some of the things that they've floated.

Nyck: As we've mentioned already, the death rate so far is predominantly people over 50 years old—almost all of those—and under 50, very little; and as you get younger, there have been no fatalities whatsoever of kids between 0 and 9 years old, which is good news indeed. It's interesting, though, isn't it, the Federal Health Minister here, Greg Hunt, said that the message from today after this meeting from States and Territories was 'go about your ordinary business: go down to the Chinese restaurant, go out to the football or the Grand Prix or the netball', although Mr Hunt said that although the global spread of coronavirus meant there was now high likelihood COVID-19 would reach Australia at some point—or has—there was no need for people to panic. So I guess it's a good message, but you need to be conscious of where you are and where you may possibly be more susceptible, I guess.

Steve: It is, and balance that with understanding that a lot more people are affected, a lot more people are dying right at the moment from just the regular flu. It's really a matter of balance and being sensible.

The *World Health Organisation* is continuing to put out travel warnings. The one I have here is this news story reporting that—it's updated 24 February, so, again, that's about a week old—but they're talking about, or advising people, not to travel to mainland China,

obviously, and if you are travelling to some other places, to exercise caution, including Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia or Thailand.

Nyck: Another statistic I have in front of me here from <https://www.worldometers.info> is the male-to-female ratio, which is also kind of interesting. One might expect that men may die more than women, and at the moment, that is the case. 4.7% of confirmed cases have died that are male and 2.8% that are female. When looking at China, though, they do make the point that smoking in China is much more prevalent amongst men, and that makes them much more likely to get some kind of respiratory complication.

Steve: I just noted, too, here in Australia there is no evidence yet of human-to-human transmission, and I'm guessing that is at least in part due to the fact that the government has been isolating people who come back from overseas and are either infected or at risk of having been infected.

Nyck: Certainly the advantage we have, being an island continent here, if we are on the ball enough, then we can trace and know where people are coming from and put them in isolation pretty quickly. So that's an advantage we have.

A text has come in here, too: "It's quite serious and not to be played down too much in that it adds to the number of ticking time bombs we have." Yes.

We'll come back to some of those points a bit later on, I think, in terms of fear and some of the results of this and some of the opportunities, possibly, that also exist here.

We'll take a break now here on BayFM. You're tuned to *Future Sense* with Steve McDonald and Nyck Jeanes.

Nyck: We're talking about the coronavirus. We're going to look at the global economy and how it's affecting that right now.

Thanks for your texts. We've got a good long one coming in and we'll look at that shortly.

Steve: So, huge economic impact is flowing from the response to the coronavirus. I'm talking particularly about China's immediate response, which effectively shut down a whole lot of their industry and has had an enormous economic impact for them, and for the world in general, much of which is still coming home to roost. Because of delays in shipping and those sorts of things which take time to get to places, some places around the world are already feeling the shortage of stocks and equipment that comes from China, and other places are yet to really have the full impact hit them.

I've got a story here from *The New York Times* about the US stock market (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/28/business/stock-market-today-coronavirus.html>). Late last week, the stocks tumbled for a seventh consecutive day—on Friday at the end of last week—with the S&P 500 Index falling about 0.8%, bringing its loss for the week to about 11.5%. That's the worst weekly decline for US stocks since the 2008 financial crisis back in 2008. In early October of that year, the S&P 500 fell about 18%, so it's more than half of that.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell more than 1% on Friday. The sell-offs have been fuelled mostly by worry that measures to contain the virus will hamper corporate profits and economic growth—of course, they already have been doing that—and fears that the outbreak could get worse, bringing larger economic impacts. The selling that's been going off in the stock market has dragged the world into a correction—a very significant market correction—a drop of around 10% or more globally. That's being taken as a measure of extreme pessimism.

A couple of other main issues reported in this *New York Times* article are that the US Federal Reserve is saying that it's willing to act by lowering interest rates, which are already extremely low, of course, if the outbreak worsens; a major video game conference has been postponed in the US; sentiment is generally dismal amongst Chinese manufacturers; and Wall Street's jitters extend beyond stocks.

Nyck: We're going to be referring a little bit in the next time slot on the show, to an article from an organisation called Exponential View. In part of this, they asked a question here: "How rapidly will this make firms think about complicated transnational supply chains? Will this accelerate the trend of reshoring? Will it accelerate the unwinding process of the last three decades of globalisation?" (<https://www.exponentialview.co/p/-coronavirus-on-the-latin-bridge>). Reshoring—I hadn't heard that term before, but it basically means bringing manufacturing back home, and this is something, of course, that Donald Trump has been espousing since he entered the White House and continues to do so. It actually is a trend that's happening, and has been happening for about five years anyway.

Steve: It's actually part of the paradigm shift. As we move beyond the Scientific-Industrial era into this new emerging paradigm, one of the very, very clear trends that has already been there is relocalisation, for good reasons, obviously.

Nyck: Exactly.

"Initially this pattern started to emerge because the rising living standard in China was eliminating the cost advantage of overseas manufacturing ", that's fairly obvious. "Great automation meant local production, even in high cost markets, did not carry as much of a premium as offshore."

In another piece from *Al Jazeera* to do with China's economy (<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/1/17/chinas-economy-grew-at-slowest-pace-in-nearly-30-years-in-2019>), they say it's a "bruising" year for China economically; a trade war

with the United States left its economy expanding at the slowest pace in 30 years and economists estimate 4,000,000 jobs may have been lost in 2019. This year, it's already been defined by the outbreak of the coronavirus, which has killed thousands and infected many more, putting the brakes on China's economy. Economists polled by *Reuters* expect China's growth rate to slump to 4.5% in the first quarter of this year, from 6% in the previous quarter. That would be the slowest pace since the financial crisis. Also, with much of the country in lock down, the virus could affect up to 42% of China's economy, according to *Standard Chartered*. So, pretty strong stuff on China there.

Steve: Absolutely, and as we've said previously during our coronavirus reports, China has been in a very, very difficult situation. While we still don't know the exact circumstances around the way that the virus emerged. Of course, the generally accepted explanation is that it escaped from a wet market in Wuhan, most likely transmitted from an animal to a human, but of course, there have been other speculations that it may have escaped from the lab in Wuhan; and then there have been some really strange goings on which haven't had much media reporting, such as the link between the lab in Winnipeg, in Canada, and the lab in Wuhan, and the fact that we know for sure that the staff from the lab in Canada were travelling backwards and forwards to Wuhan and helping the Wuhan lab upgrade their security measures.

Nyck: And those Chinese staff have been evicted.

Steve: Yes, a couple of the Chinese nationals who were involved in travelling backwards and forwards have been charged by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for taking viruses out of the lab in Winnipeg and taking them to Wuhan. None of those have been identified in the reports as the coronavirus, however ...

Nyck: Of course it happens all the time between these high security facilities, the transfer of biological material.

Steve: That's right. It is a normal part of the research process, but adding to the strangeness that's been happening in the background, a former head of the lab, a professor from Winnipeg, had passed away fairly recently, since the coronavirus outbreak happened, while attending a conference in Kenya. So, it's good to keep an open mind about what might be going on in the background, and we must also just acknowledge that there are a lot of things that happen in the murky world of international espionage and competition and undercover warfare that just don't get reported in the mainstream media.

Nyck: A couple of other pieces here from *Al Jazeera*: "Companies may struggle to make payments on loans leading to a rise in what is called non-performing loans of \$1.1 trillion,

according to *Standard and Poor's*. Chinese airlines have been forced to ground planes that are expected to lose \$12.8bn in revenue. And globally, the airline industry is set to lose \$29bn, according to the International Air Transportation Association (IATA)" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8fT8z9lkrM>). Pretty intense.

We have a text in here which is referring to the statistics we've been quoting. I think I'll read this out, too, from Captain Zilch, a listener quite often here. He says: "Why are we obsessed with statistics when we've learnt over again that they are easily manipulated? Viral case numbers coming from known liars, votes for leaders manipulated to look like a close race, even actual population numbers on a global scale are easy to distort. Number and measure, especially unreliable, are a weak source of guidance. Trust is what makes us a group super-resilient. However, there is a scourge that aims to fracture that. One of the fracturing techniques is insidious lying, the antidote for which is fourfold: wide open mindedness, accurate naming, abundant generosity and selfless service will lead to a more refined capacity or sense of the dirty that we need to stop feeding." Some good points there.

Steve: There are some good points, and maybe just a little bit of contradiction in there. It's very difficult to be open-minded when you discard some of the information that's out there, so we like to consider everything on this show, and as you said, keep an open mind.

I think a big part of the economic disruption at the moment is related to debt levels around the world and the fact that when business gets shut down and people don't have income, they can't service their debts; and of course, that just multiplies the issue.

Nyck: Yes.

We'll take a break, but I thought I'd throw in a little bit of humour here. We just found this, this morning: "Of all places to be quarantined for the coronavirus, a brothel in Valencia, Spain, might not be the worst. You've got booze, you've likely got a small buffet of fried foods and you've got entertainment. But in all seriousness, that was exactly the case a day ago when authorities found that a woman working at the 'La Selva Negra' brothel had tested positive for coronavirus. The findings forced authorities to quarantine the premises and the 86 customers that were inside. The employee, who is now in the hospital, had slept with several clients the same night, according to a translated blog post. In addition to the customers, the club's owners, waitresses, security and cleaning crew were also quarantined. When adding up to the total of 86 customers, that makes 119 people under quarantine. They've been asked to keep calm and to just live a normal life inside the premises. That may be easier for some of the patrons than they'd like to admit, and for all those guys who told their wives they were going to a wine tasting with their buddies and instead went to the brothel, the news may be worse than coronavirus—you're officially busted."

Steve: Oh dear, oh dear. A bit of red light therapy there.

Nyck: Absolutely outrageous. Here on BayFM 99.9 on *Future Sense*.

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