

Emotional Evolution

1. Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Social Conditioning for Modern Living	2
3	Leadership in WEIRD Countries.....	2
4	Parental Responsibility	3
4.1	Altruism in Childhood.....	3
4.2	Peer-pressure to Procreate	3
5	Finding a Better Way Forward	4
5.1	The Ego to Eco Mindset shift.....	5
5.2	The Emotional shift.....	6
5.3	Changes in Decision Making	7
6	Fear can drive positive action.....	8

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Summary

This paper builds on the ideas expressed in the [‘Roadmap to Ecological Justice’](#). It is intended to help the reader to embrace the Degrowth mindset in its most powerful and peaceful form.

1 Introduction

This paper elaborates on the emotional evolution that is taking place as humanity accepts the reality of exceeding the carrying capacity on our only habitable planet. Scientists have been aware of global [ecological overshoot](#) for decades; however, admitting there is no more room in our Inn is challenging to [accept](#). The global economic model continues to prioritise financial profit over the need for ecological sustainability. Ecological collapse is precipitating global financial collapse, and yet leaders are still failing to [join the dots](#). The concepts in the [Roadmap to Ecological Justice](#) prepare the groundwork for the ideas offered in this paper.

2 Social Conditioning for Modern Living

The social conditioning involved in our modern techno-industrial lifestyles is profound and relentless. Starting with toys in childhood, we are encouraged to be anthropocentric and to limit our direct interaction with the natural world. We quickly become absorbed into the artificial environment which has been created, which prioritises individual or group wellbeing over global wellbeing. In this context it is difficult to assess whether we have any capacity for global unselfishness. Most of our decision-making is driven by an assessment of likely wellbeing for ourselves, our family or our country. Very few people from the over-developed countries can grasp the scale of the global predicament that we have created.

In the modern world ‘educational’ toys dominate childhood, leaving little opportunity for children to experiment and grow intimate with the natural world outside of our artificial modern lifestyles. These toys and our formal education serve to condition us in the longer term, to be content to spend much of our time incarcerated in a concrete box, using anthropocentric tools and surrounded by anthropocentric entertainment. We are constantly exposed to advertising, diverting us toward the latest invention, entertainment, fashion, or furnishings etc.; there are endless distractions from the reality of escalating climate, ecological and financial collapse.

Those of us in the overdeveloped countries are unlikely notice that the ecosystems are now collapsing; for most of us are not directly involved in agriculture. Each country tries to shut out the horror show in different ways; although we are all directly involved the collapse. We are all destroying [the commons](#) on which we depend by persisting with growth economics long after it ceased to be a viable model.

The political leaders in the less developed countries are usually the affluent members of their communities. These individuals have usually been exposed to the Western education model, and for this reason they are therefore also disinclined to challenge the cultural memes that drive growth economics.

3 Leadership in WEIRD Countries

WEIRD countries are Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic. These countries have reaped considerable financial benefits from the worldwide commerce and growth that has taken place within the last fifty years. Simultaneously they have inflicted great ecological injury on their environment, and within the countries where they have commercial dealings. The WEIRD countries have pursued this path despite the persistent warnings from their scientists. This is primarily due to the social conditioning described earlier.

Their leaders in all walks of life are primarily people who do not challenge the prevailing economic model. They are usually people who see financial profit, and personal benefit, as

essential requirements for personal success and self-respect. This gives rise to the phenomenon where we often see individuals who prove to be clever at implementing self-serving business practices becoming widely admired as leaders, because of their personal financial wealth.

The prevailing societal dynamics dictate that those who are willing to promote their own self-interests above the common good, are likely to acquire more affluence and admiration than those who are content with far less material wealth. This means that those most suited to lead us out of our current dilemma are unlikely to be in the positions of influence at the moment.

4 Parental Responsibility

As the reality of global climate and ecological collapse becomes increasingly difficult to overlook, we urgently need to consider the justification for exposing our progeny to these dangers. Why we are still encouraging procreation? It is becoming increasingly clear that the [global ecosystems](#) cannot cope with the current human enterprise; let alone our attempts to constantly expand our enterprise. There are already women living in areas of growing food insecurity who are choosing to kill their new-born rather than expose their child to starvation. These are women who do not have access to contraception; and who could not afford to purchase these aids even if they did. These births and subsequent deaths go unreported in our global population statistics. No parent is proud of having to take this course of action, this is an act of desperation. Ironically, whilst parents in badly affected parts of the world are forced to make painful decisions of this type, we have the WEIRD countries investing huge sums of money on research for [medical 'solutions' to obesity](#).

4.1 Altruism in Childhood

In 2020 [Felix Warneken](#) led some research which demonstrated that children can display altruistic behaviour before reaching an age when social conditioning has effect. The principles of modern business and commercial marketing suppress our natural tendencies to care either for each other, or our natural environment, by replacing these instinctive 'cares' with commercially profitable 'desires'. The whole purpose of commercial advertising is to persuade the viewer to purchase goods or services. All of these goods and services come with significant ecological cost.

In modern society both love and friendship have become commercialised. Most of us buy cards and presents according to the dictate of the commercial world; otherwise we are seen to be failing in our duties towards friends and family. This is just one example of how emotional blackmail is used by the commercial world to apply constant pressure to over-consume. Only the strongest willed amongst us can stand up to this level of peer pressure; and those who dare to do this run the risk of rejection because they do not fit in with the direction of the herd.

4.2 Peer-pressure to Procreate

Peer-pressure to procreate often starts from a very young age; with dolls designed to condition children to imagine themselves as parents. The general desire to please and emulate a parent is very strong. In our current context adults are often encouraging their young to make the same mistakes. This deadlock might be prised open with a publicity campaign which explains that our global economy causes a chronically high level of ecological overshoot. Once the global community become aware that the pursuit of economic growth is fuelling ecological collapse, then priorities and expectations can change rapidly. Parents can apologise to their children for bringing them into such a dangerous situation. The old and the young can combine their

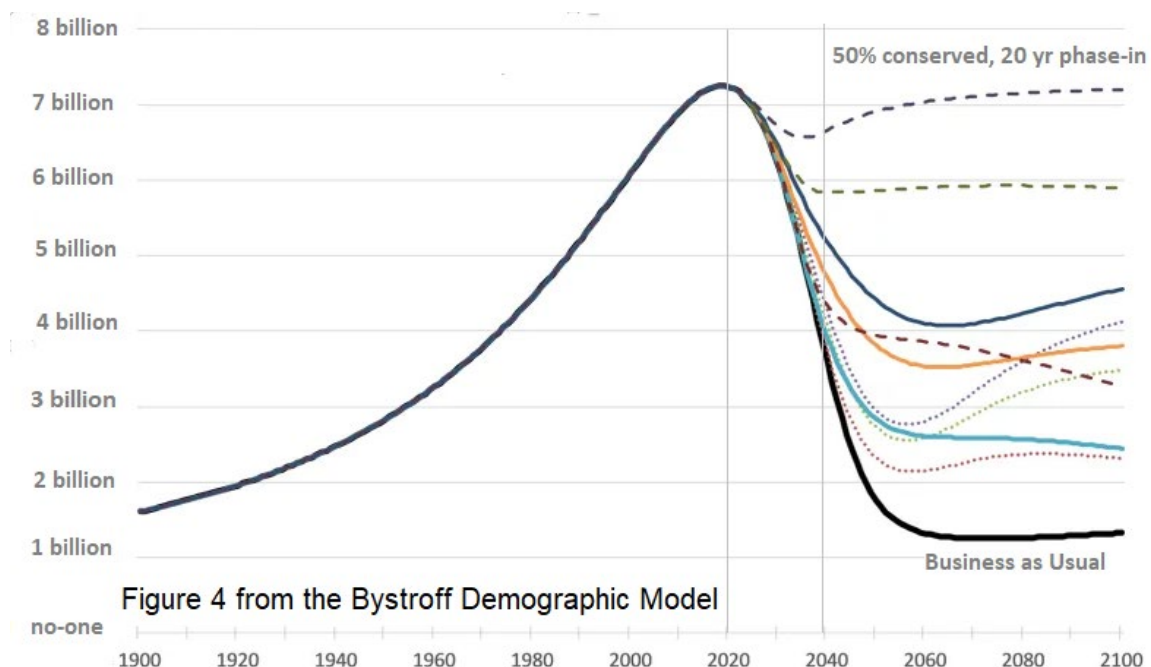
ingenuity, and their different perspectives to find different ways to enjoy Earth without further destroying her eco-systems. In this way we can start to work together to help Nature to recover from our past mistakes.

5 Finding a Better Way Forward

Despite the powerful conditioning that is built into our education system, the reality of our predicament has now become too obvious for many people to remain unaware and unaffected by climate and ecological collapse. Both adults and children are presenting with [climate anxiety](#). Involvement in climate action movements like Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain, Just Stop Oil has become a way of life for many who need to feel that they are doing something constructive to respond to their fears. However, none of these movements, nor the non-governmental organisations who are sympathetic to their cause, are identifying the need to downsize the global economy. Therefore [political parties](#) still adhere to the economic model which causes global climate and ecological collapse.

The ratification of the UN Charter for Ecological Justice would provide the opportunity to inform the public about the need to address global ecological overshoot. This can get people involved in the grieving process required to build the emotional resilience to embrace a voluntary global birth strike. The shared trauma of admitting that we have created an unstable and dangerous environment in our only available habitat, will open the door to profound re-evaluation of our priorities going forward.

There is persistent denial about the growing risk of population collapse. Prof Chris Bystroff published some demographic research in 2020 which showed several possible scenarios, depending on our efforts towards eco-recovery. The bottom line in the figure below represents the outcome if we persist with business-as-usual.



The numbers threatened by [food insecurity](#) is growing as result of escalating climate and ecological collapse and population size. Despite this, there is never any public discussion about

the risk of global population collapse. We have to overcome this silence. The anxieties experienced by those who are aware of the gravity of our predicament and its drivers are exacerbated by the fact that they realise that growth economics digs us into deeper trouble every minute of every day. No genuine mitigation can be achieved before we accept that downsizing the global economy is a prerequisite to achieving sustainability. This simple insight has been known since 1970 when the I=PAT equation was derived. Nowadays it is widely recognised that ratio between these drivers is not 1:1:1, however there is no dispute that the three factors Population, Affluence and Technology are the key drivers in ecological collapse. It can be more helpful to view this insight as follows:

$$\text{Ecological Footprint per person} = \text{Affluence} * \text{Technology} * (\text{Country} + \text{Individual factors})$$

Those living in affluent countries will benefit from eco-costly infrastructure and social welfare arrangements. Those with personal wealth are likely to spend and invest their money in eco-damaging ways.

5.1 The Ego to Eco Mindset shift

There are several facets involved in the transition to a mindset that will embrace global equitable economic downsizing. One aspect is the shift from the ego/anthropocentric view to the eco-centric worldview. Key differences are shown in the table below.

Ego/Anthropocentric	Eco-centric
Belief that financial wealth within a country provides security during collapse.	Recognition that money is already losing its power because of ecological collapse.
Belief that one is entitled to one's personal wealth and the decisions on how to spend it.	Understanding that all money is associated with an associated ecological cost.
Desire to have children and grandchildren; this usually assumes that they will help to solve the problems and will also care for us.	Reluctance to further degrade the environment, or expose one's own progeny to the tragedy of global collapse.
Belief that humans are too clever to fail; assumption that there are solutions to climate and ecological collapse.	Recognition that the 'solutions' are exacerbating and accelerating the climate and ecological collapse.
Belief that the modern techno-industrial society is a great success and is superior to the indigenous cultures that preceded it.	Recognition that the modern techno-industrial civilisation has inflicted phenomenal damage on the Commons.
Assumption that we shall be losing great advances if we choose to alter our life-styles and aspirations dramatically.	Willingness to change aspirations and hopes to focus on equitable downsizing as rapidly and peacefully as possible.
Illusion of freedom of choice and expression.	Awareness that our education constrains us to conform to the prevailing norms.
Illusion of a just society.	Awareness of the ecological injustice that lies at the heart of modern society.
Belief that laws are important to maintain discipline	Recognition that laws are only upheld because we are conditioned into obedience.
Belief that hierarchical social structures are essential for wellbeing.	Realisation that many indigenous societies operate well without these structures.
Belief that money is essential for wellbeing.	Recognition that money is powerless in the face of ecological collapse.
Belief that our leaders are acting in our best interests.	Realisation that, like us, they have mistaken money and GDP as a measure of security.

Ego/Anthropocentric	Eco-centric
Belief that our children are safe.	Realisation that none of us are safe.
Trusting experts to know the best way forward.	Realisation that experts risk being outcast if they attempt to suggest cultural changes.
Belief that we learn from our mistakes.	Recognition that we are not admitting that we have gone seriously wrong for decades.
Belief that modern education is invaluable and will solve our problems.	Realisation that modern education is designed to perpetuate the anthropocentric mindset.
Belief that military is strength helpful	Realisation that any military action will exacerbate ecological collapse.
Belief that collaborating with people who have a similar education is helpful when considering complex challenges.	Recognising the strength in applying diverse perspectives and cultures to a shared problem.

5.2 The Emotional shift

In this section we shall consider the emotions that are needed to drive the transition between the ego/anthropocentric worldview and the eco-centric worldview.

Self-Esteem – Those who have acquired financial wealth are usually widely admired and respected. This feeds the desire in others to become wealthy and gain recognition. Using financial wealth as a measure of personal achievement is as unhelpful as using GDP to measure the wellbeing of a population. In a world that is ambitiously seeking maximum mitigation from climate and ecological collapse, both these measures of success need to be viewed with suspicion. Some students at Oxford University in the U.K. have recently [challenged](#) the staid nature of the curriculum, pointing out that the twenty-first century requires a rethink. If we are to mature emotionally, those whom we have admired in the past, urgently need to show humility, and be willing to change and to admit mistakes and poor judgement in the past.

Self-interest – If the UN Charter for Ecological Justice is presented for ratification, this should generate media interest in the three scientific insights that underpin the wording. Most people are not familiar with these insights, and they are key to helping individuals to understand what behaviours are in their personal interest as climate and ecological collapse plays out. They are as follows:

- Ecological Overshoot.
- I=PAT
- Jevons paradox

Anxiety – The evidence of climate and ecological collapse is escalating daily. Collective concern needs to be channelled into constructive action. An appreciation of our global dependence on the commons should inspire a resolve to salvage the situation as soon as possible. The need for emergency measures to provide our physiological needs whilst we set about making fundamental changes to our commercial priorities will generate the Ubuntu quality as dig deep to find ways of providing our minimum requirements whilst building communal resilience and solidarity.

Anger – There will be anger and dismay as people appreciate the depth of the environmental problems that have not been shared by our media. However, if this understanding is delivered with an invitation to get involved with local authorities seeking to build a civilisation with economic downsizing in mind, everyone will feel empowered to contribute their ideas and in this way the anger will translate into constructive actions

Hate – Many countries are now polarising politically, anxiety can drive prejudice and look to apportion blame. It is important that the media do not choose to fuel this fire, and instead undertakes to encourage respect and understanding between the different players. The problems of climate and economic migration need to be addressed at source by ensuring basic needs are met when traditional food supplies run out. These provisions need to be accompanied with a focus on downsizing, and an agreement that recipient populations will voluntarily try to reduce their size in order to prevent the problems of food insecurity escalating over time.

Guilt – It is very important that the affluent population accept that they have played a far bigger role in destabilising ecosystems than the poor. Acknowledging this responsibility will inspire a willingness to make reparation to those in the front line of climate and ecological collapse.

Blame – Those in the front-line of climate and ecological collapse are showing tremendous tolerance towards the perpetrators of their misfortune. It seems to be the affluent who are more inclined to wish to apportion blame. Self-criticism is essential if we are to move forward in a positive manner.

Judgement – Judging and criticising others consumes a lot of time and effort within mainstream and social media. This effort is better spent on self-examination and efforts to establish better decision making principles. Collective discussion and collaboration which allows new leaders to emerge, will be key to inspiring trust

5.3 Changes in Decision Making

The shift to a society that is focussed on downsizing involves using very different criteria when making decisions at the individual level or the group level. Most of the things that we spend money on at the moment are a waste of ecological resources if viewed from the aspiration to downsize the global economy. Some key examples are provided in this section.

Politics – A great deal of money goes into political campaigns. There are no political parties that are advocating equitable global economic downsizing therefore all the minutiae that are discussed during political campaigns are irrelevant in the broader context. All political parties, and most people are still making the mistake of seeing affluence and technology as solutions. Both these mechanisms are tools, they only solutions if we use them wisely. Using them to make a financial profit will always incur an ecological cost which we cannot afford in the context of escalating ecological collapse. Therefore, creating an emergency cross-party government with the joint aspiration to downsize the global economy as rapidly and equitably as possible is the wisest strategy moving forward.

Using Expertise and Learning from Past Experience – Both of these common approaches need to be re-evaluated with scepticism. Whose expertise? How aware is this expert of the rapidly accelerating collapse? We must re-evaluate whether any particular past experience still applies in the context ecological collapse. The pace of social change needs to be very rapid, but that does not mean we need to act quickly. On the contrary we urgently need to step back from our current endeavours and aspirations and re-evaluate them all.

Most of our supposedly ‘green’ projects are designed to generate financial profit. The insights through I=PAT warn us to beware that making a profit will incur ecological damage. The most helpful thing that we can do at the moment is to stop and think. We must open our minds to discuss contentious issues and contentious solutions. Nothing should be taboo for discussion, but it would be helpful to have some guidelines. Suggestions below:

- Moving forward we need to address the vast inequalities in natural resource usage, in a way that equitably minimises usage per capita.
- Changes in behaviour patterns and the addiction to growth economics is best achieved by raising global awareness about: ecological overshoot, I=PAT, and the Jevons paradox. This will enable people to understand that downsizing the global economy is a prerequisite to sustainability.
- Peaceful and voluntary solutions are more likely to succeed than legislation. They are also more likely to emerge after raising global awareness about the problems with growth economics i.e. overshoot, I=PAT and Jevons.
- Encourage people in over-developed countries to challenge the norms of their civilisation
- Encourage people in less-developed countries to treasure and preserve their indigenous ways of subsistence farming

6 Fear can drive positive action

Everyone needs to fear the future at the moment, this is the only way we can build adequate momentum for the profound societal changes that are needed. When the exercise to raise awareness is executed it is important to inspire people to believe that humanity can change dramatically and behave much better than in the past. We can make the journey ahead both exciting and a fulfilling journey of discovery. Where we learn to admire very different skills and knowledge that has been treasured throughout the past by indigenous people. The joy from achieving a higher level of unity and global peace despite our diversity we fill us all with joy and remorse for our past mistake. It will inspire the determination never to go so badly wrong ever again.