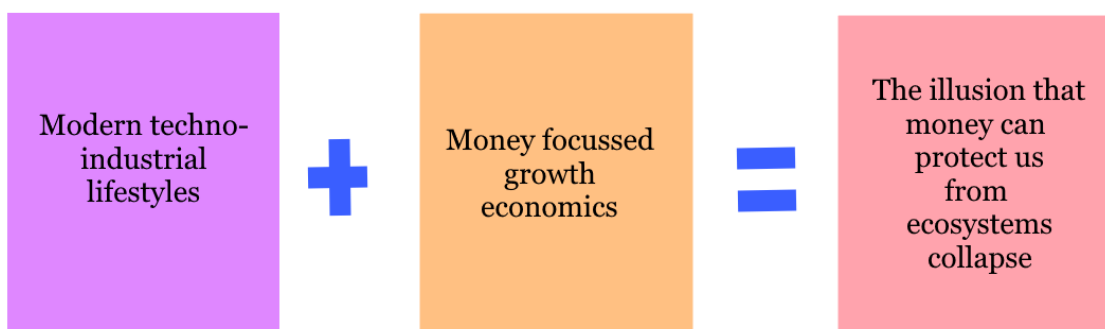


## The Cultural Causes of Climate Injustice



### Our Past Performance

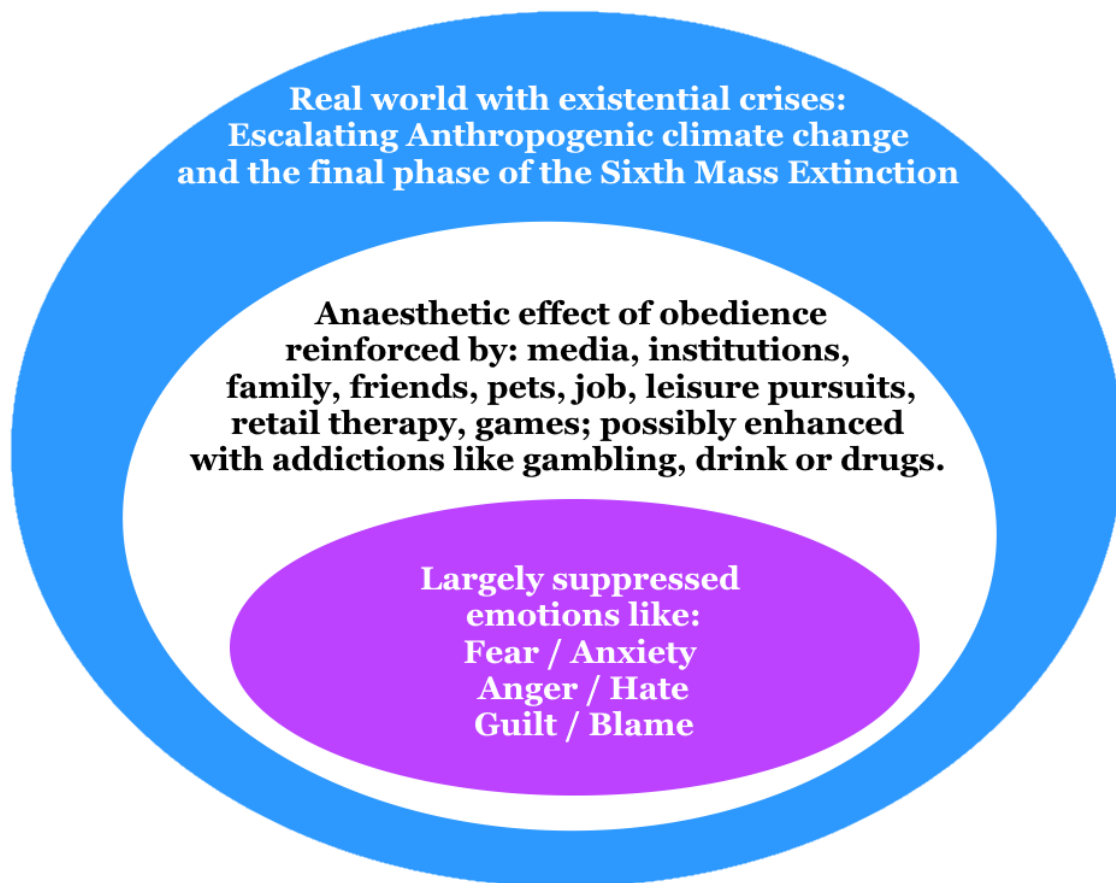
Our Human Rights declaration makes no provision for biodiversity; and does not allow for the fact that our survival depends upon biodiversity. Growth economics ignores the fact that we [overshot](#) the biocapacity of our planet more than fifty years ago. The status of money has altered; initially a useful tool, nowadays it is often regarded as an end in itself. The illusion that money is needed to feed us is a dangerous one. What is really needed to sustain us is a stable climate and environment. This fact has become obscured by industrial food-production; most people in the affluent world obtain all their food and water supplies by using their money. With the increasing possibility of global financial collapse due to climate and ecosystems collapse, this puts people in the affluent world in a very vulnerable position.



This disconnect from Nature, and the fact that modern lifestyles have many 'anaesthetic' qualities which result in the suppression of emotions like fear, anxiety, anger, hate, guilt and blame, has combined to mean that the majority of people are not

## The Cultural Causes of Climate Injustice

adequately aware of the escalating existential crises; certainly not to the extent that they are motivated to question the wisdom of 'business-as-usual' i.e. our cultural norms.



All money originates from natural resources of some sort. We rely on biodiversity and a stable climate in order to manufacture food. However inhabitants of the modern world are not directly aware how dependent we are on these things. We have put ourselves in a precarious position. Those who are sensitive to changes in ecosystems have been witnessing the process of ecosystems collapse aggravated by climate breakdown for many years. This process is now accelerating rapidly, for we have gone past tipping points, the ice-caps are melting, deforestation is escalating, the gulf-stream is weakening, the Jet stream is behaving differently. There is no way back from these massive changes in the dynamics of Earth's biosphere. We are now in uncharted territory, our climate and demographic predictive models cannot cope with the number of unknowns. Simply extrapolating past experience does not work in this new context of weather extremes and collapsing ecosystems.

## Judgement and Trust

The hype and the artificial messages from advertising have taught us to distrust the sincerity of anyone who is imparting information. In a world steered by people who are seeking monetary profit, whenever we enter into a relationship we have sadly learned that we always need to ask ourselves 'what is their motive?' It is increasingly difficult to discern which motives are sincere, even within ourselves, for we are so

## The Cultural Causes of Climate Injustice

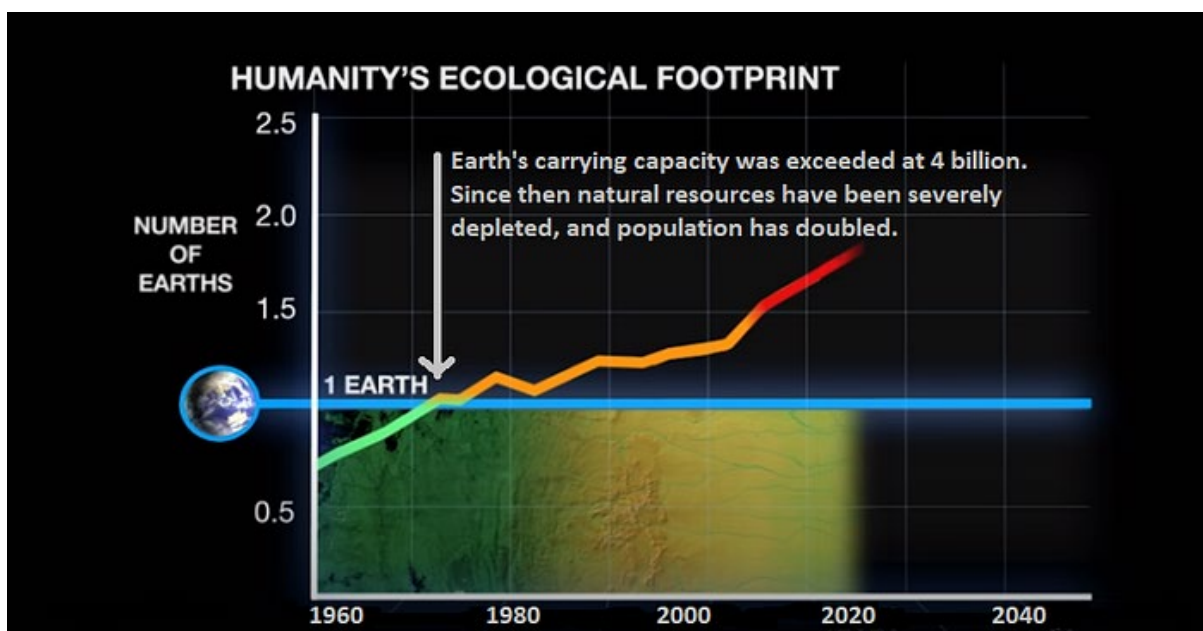
addicted to the anaesthetics and distractions that are readily available in our affluent lives.

# Addressing Climate Injustice

Respect for monetary profit as an end in itself is very deeply ingrained in our modern society. To successfully address climate injustice we shall need to move away from this dangerous prioritisation of a bartering tool which had already commenced the process of [devaluing](#) in 2022. There are five key themes that would help this culture shift to happen: Overshoot Awareness, Altered Aspirations, Ecological Ethics, Collective Responsibility, and the Emotional Evolution required to live up to an Ubuntu philosophy.

### i) Awareness of Ecological Overshoot

Global ecological overshoot is not something that has been widely discussed in the climate debate in the past. COP26 was the first Climate COP where there was any suggestion that any climate solutions will need to be grounded in environmental solutions. The graph of our ecological overshoot in the last fifty years really should be part of the primary school curriculum. It is essential that humanity recognises that we have accumulated a huge [ecological debt](#). We cannot simply step straight into 'sustainability' mode, we shall need decades of voluntary Degrowth before we can hope to re-establish ecological equilibrium.



### ii) Altered Aspirations

Altered aspirations would be a key driver for helpful cultural changes. Our current aspirations involve a concept of both 'wealth and success' which are rooted in 'money', this needs to switch to an ecological equivalent to ensure sustainability. We also need to ensure that we have a global aspiration in addition to the 'Declaration of Human Rights', to recognise the importance of operating within our ecological boundaries and

## The Cultural Causes of Climate Injustice

considering the rights of all Life on Earth, not just our own species. A simple act by the UN to ask Nations to ratify a '[Charter for Ecological Justice](#)' would be a good start point for discussions about what would be the most helpful ecological aspirations for the global population to aspire towards.

The *Ubuntu* philosophy and an *Emotional Evolution*, which are both discussed later, could feature within such a global aspiration. Focussing on our interdependence is essential if we are to successfully mitigate the unfolding collapse. Accepting the reality of global ecological overshoot involves triggering the collective trauma which is associated with the realisation that we are daily exacerbating the collapse of the eco-systems which support us. This problem will worsen all the while our pursuit of monetary profits is regarded as more important than the health of the eco-systems from which they arise.

### iii) Ecological Ethics

This is a new area which is now evolving, which will be an important key concept driving our altered aspirations. It is complex, because in many instances it is very difficult to judge the best actions to take in ecological terms. The [Earth Charter](#) takes an encouraging first step towards explaining what is involved in *Ecological Ethics*, we shall need to be willing to further expand and evolve these ideas to ensure maximum mitigation and equity as ecological collapse is now escalating rapidly. A helpful piece of [research](#) by Lucia Tamburino quantifies what ecological footprint per capita might be considered as a worthy target to establish ecological justice within the human population.

### iv) Collective Consciousness and Responsibility

We need to learn to accomplish collaborative thinking on a global scale in a way that everyone is represented. Our software skills are already enabling us to be interconnected across the world in a powerful way. It is about exploiting this interconnection in a positive way, countries could invite all their citizens to participate in voting for the most helpful way forward to mitigate the future. This would be a nation-wide type of Citizens assembly on both big and small issues, for example reduced eco-costly street-lighting, reduced eco-costly air-flights, reduced eco-costly health care facilities etc. These referenda would be accompanied with information about ecological overshoot to explain the need to achieve a net reduction in ecological footprint per capita that such changes to our lifestyle can achieve. To be really successful with this aspect of the culture shift the emotional evolution which is discussed next can help us.

### v) Ubuntu Philosophy and Emotional Evolution

Many of the African cultures embrace a philosophy that might help us to break the damaging culture in which we are currently entangled. In the Zulu language it is called Ubuntu. A helpful interpretation of the Ubuntu philosophy explains that it implies that everyone has different skills and strengths; people are not isolated, and through mutual support we can help each other and in this way we shall feel fulfilled ourselves.

## The Cultural Causes of Climate Injustice

Adopting the Ubuntu philosophy could help us to achieve the emotional evolution required to take us to a higher level of global cooperation than we have ever achieved in the past. The concept of emotional evolution involves deploying our emotional toolkit in a helpful direction. For example with collective collaboration it should be possible to navigate emotional transitions like these:

- *Anxiety* can evolve into *Resolve* to act wisely and collectively
- *Anger* can evolve into *Empowerment* if a suitable mode of expression can be found
- *Hate* can evolve into *Respect and Understanding* if a suitable environment to learn is made available
- *Guilt* can evolve into *Reparation* if an appropriate route for reparation can be identified
- *Blame* can evolve into *Forgiveness* if reparation is offered and forgiveness is sought
- *Judgement* can evolve into *Trust* in each other, or in some strategy, given enough collective discussion

We urgently need to evolve these suppressed emotions. Our emotional toolkit is incredibly powerful and we should not suppress our feelings; in each of these examples we need to facilitate their evolution into their more constructive form, but that will only happen through global collaboration and discussion.

## Our Future and our Freedom of Expression

The future is becoming increasingly challenging. With new awareness and aspirations, it is hoped that although we are about to lose much of the beautiful biodiversity of our lovely planet in this decade we shall at least be freed from the hold that money has had over us for so long. We would be wise to introduce rationing to ensure that basic necessities are made available for everyone. Whilst money still has purchasing power the new awareness and aspirations will inspire rich people to choose to invest in ecologically helpful projects.

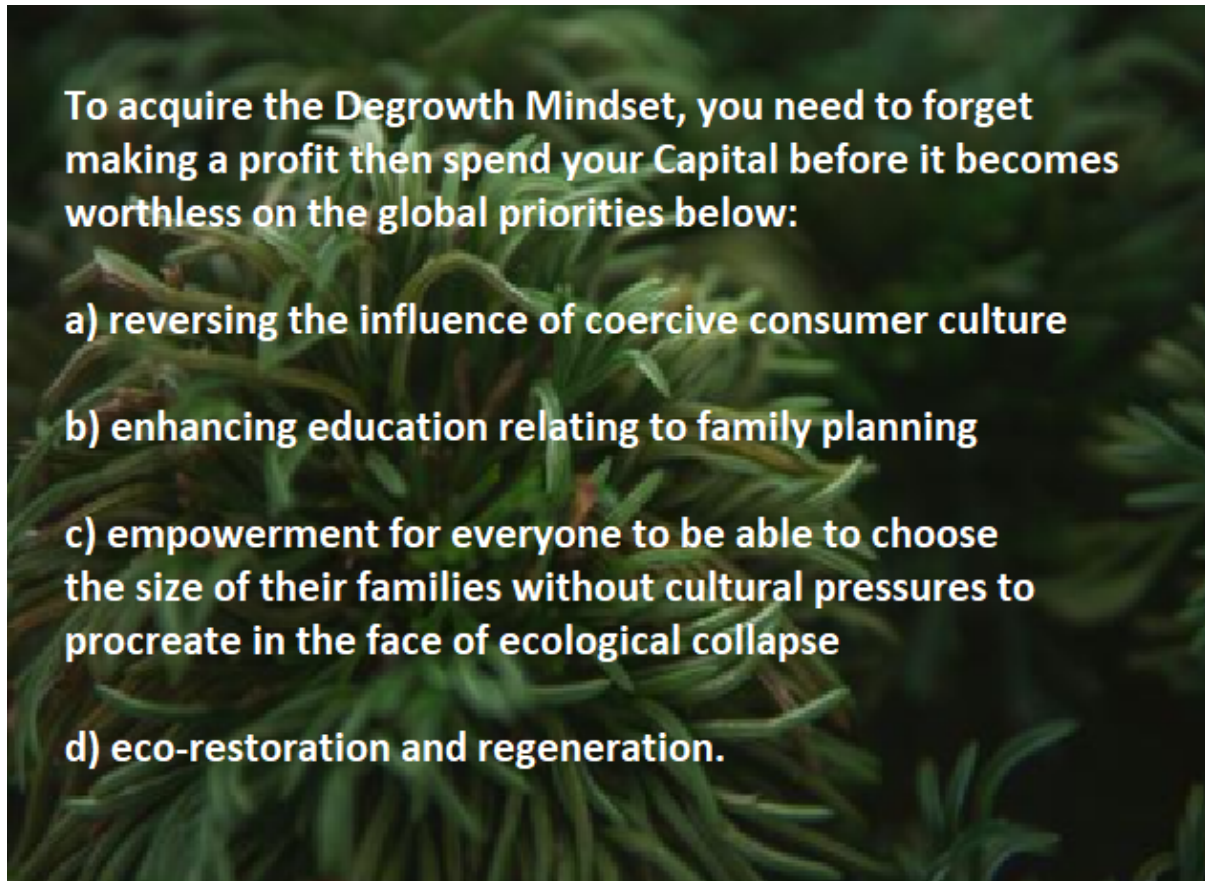
In management training there has long been a recognition of the need to make certain transitions:

- From PROFIT to PURPOSE
- From HIERARCHIES to NETWORKS
- From CONTROLLING to EMPOWERING
- From PLANNING to EXPERIMENTATION
- From PRIVACY to TRANSPARENCY

## The Cultural Causes of Climate Injustice

All of these transitions in management style are key to our success going forward. However the old domineering, bullying style is still greatly admired by many people and this is why we see people like Donald Trump, Rupert Murdoch, and Elon Musk still wielding immense control and influence.

The graphic below summarises the type of thinking that indicates a successful transition into a voluntary Degrowth mindset.

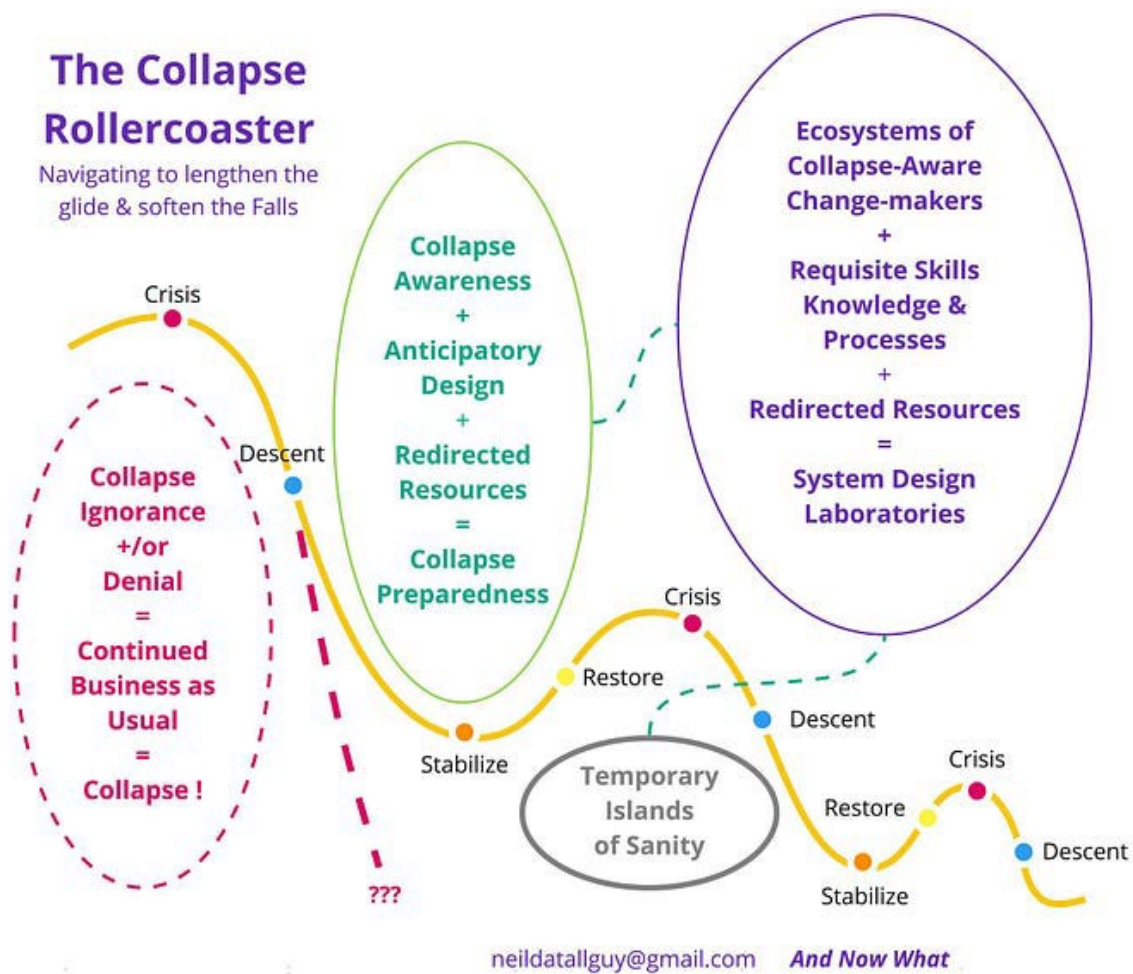


In our modern techno-industrial lifestyles we have rather lost touch with the joyful essence of 'being', we are driven by aspirations of acquiring money or recognition and we are losing sight of the beautiful diversity of life that is rapidly falling victim to our relentless demands. Work has become quite obsessive to some, at the cost of our awareness of the needs of our collapsing eco-systems. In many cases just working less and demanding less eco-costly leisure activities would drastically reduce the ecological footprint of the affluent.

Masanubo Fukuoka, was a Japanese farmer who shared his wisdom in the book the [One Straw Revolution](#). This quote is from that book *'I do not particularly like the word 'work'. Human beings are the only animals who have to work, and I think this is the most ridiculous thing in the world. Other animals make their livings by living, but people work like crazy, thinking they have to in order to survive. The bigger the job, the greater the challenge, the more wonderful they think it is. It would be good to give up that way of thinking, and live an easy comfortable life with plenty of free time...'*

## The Cultural Causes of Climate Injustice

In the graphic below we are currently on the red-line of business-as-usual as ecological and climate collapse escalates around us. Voluntary and ethical [Degrowth](#) is the only viable way to soften our descent.



The ideas in this article are crucial to the mindset shift from GDP growth to managed equitable Degrowth. The proposal for a [UN Charter for Ecological Justice](#) offers quantifiable ecological Degrowth objectives for us all to work towards. The idea for the Charter has been included in the [2023 global stocktake](#) for the Paris climate agreement.

Barbara Williams is the author of the social science paper '[Scientists Warning proposes a Roadmap to Ecological Justice](#)'. The Roadmap embellishes the ideas in this article which was originally published on Medium in February 2022.