

Musings of a Free-Lance Commentator

ETHICS AND ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS
MAY 18, 2020

THE EEE CONVERSATION WILL START
AT 1:30 PM, MOUNTAIN TIME.

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ECO-JUSTICE MINISTRIES



1

Today's Project

- I promised interdisciplinary reflections, so watch out! There will be several sections, on somewhat related themes.
- After each section, we'll pause *very briefly* to see if there are questions or comments on that section.
- There will be longer and broader questions and comments in the second half of our time.

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The Sections for Today

- A theological prelude: the world is relational
- A scientific grounding – what we know
- Musings on social change
- The pandemic and the importance of coming months
- Decisions and discussion

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The World Is Inherently Relational

A THEOLOGICAL-ECOLOGICAL PRELUDE

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Starting with God

Christian theology and doctrine have always affirmed:

- That “God is love” – which demands relationship
- That the Trinity is about relationship within the Godhead
- That *shalom* or the Realm of God is about right relationship within communities

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Looking at the World

Relationship is everywhere!

- In the gravity that holds galaxies together, and in the molecular bonds that hold atoms together
- In every aspect of human society – economics, government, sociology, legal systems, arts
- In the natural world – as revealed in ecological science

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Earth Community

“That nature is a community is the scientific discovery of the twentieth century. That earth, human society included, is also a community has not yet registered with us. At least how to sustain it as a community has not.”

-- Larry L. Rasmussen

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Of course!

Of course God’s creation is inherently relational.

What else would we expect from a God who is all about relationship!

(But our economic system sees only objects with monetary value, and centers on choices made by individuals.)

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A Relational Theology

- Looks not at individuals or objects alone, but at communities and relationships
- Finds great value in what science tells us about the world
- Is richly ecological, valuing and protecting the web of life
- Is concerned with justice in human relationships

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Inherently Relational

- Ecological and bio-physical relationships are part of the structure of the world. We can't act as if those laws of nature can be changed to suit our convenience.
- "Nature does not negotiate."

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Wisdom from the wombat

*Hold on while
I switch to a
different window ...*

View the 1-minute "wombat" video at
<http://www.eco-justice.org/wombat.mp4>

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The World is Inherently Relational

That's the end of section 1.

*David –
are there questions
that have turned up
in your chat?*

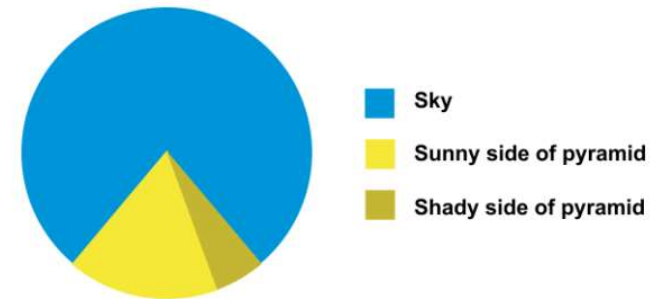
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The Science

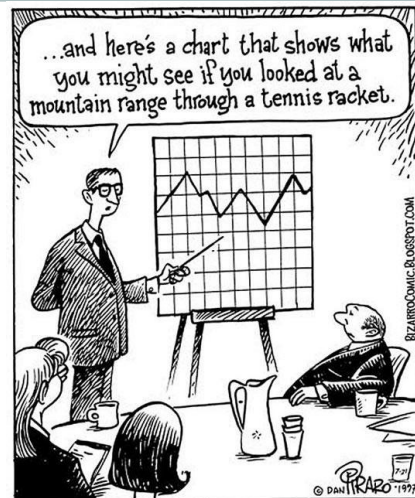
I THINK WE ALL KNOW THIS,
BUT LET'S PUT TOGETHER
SOME OF THE BIG PIECES

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A pie chart?



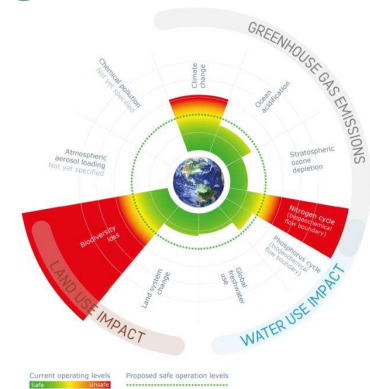
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Planetary Boundaries

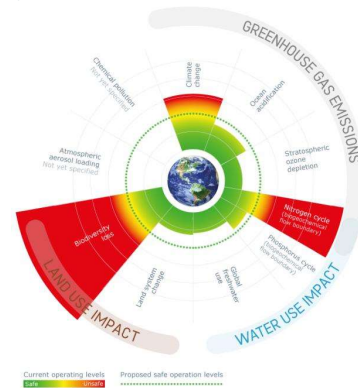
- Climate change is not the only – or even the worst – crisis.
- Biodiversity loss, nitrogen overload and climate are all in the “unsafe” range



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Planetary Boundaries

“For the first time,
our power to destroy
outstrips Earth’s power
to restore.”
- Daniel Maguire



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Before we go too far ...



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Biodiversity loss

- Decline in honeybees and dramatic losses of coral are all “old news”
- Late in 2018, the New York Times had a major report on The Insect Apocalypse
- In the spring of 2019, a major UN report on biodiversity loss.

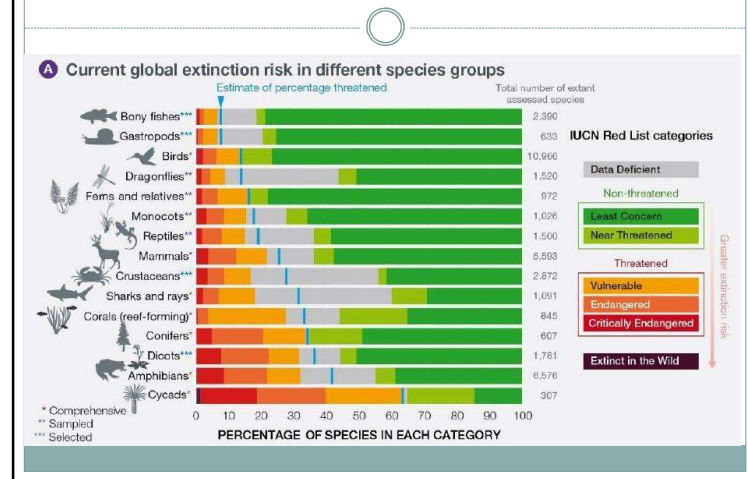
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Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

- "Humanity is a dominant global influence on life on earth, and has caused natural terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems to decline."
- "Human actions threaten more species with global extinction than ever before."
- "The global rate of species extinction is already at least tens to hundreds of times higher than the average rate over the past 10 million years and is accelerating."
- 8 to 13% of all species on Earth could be extinct within decades, and many more will be greatly diminished.

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Species Extinction



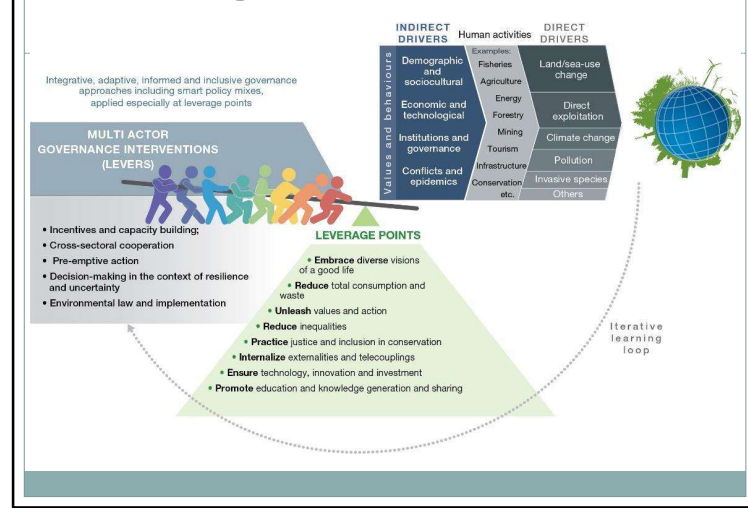
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UN Biodiversity Report

- Nature can be conserved, restored and used sustainably while simultaneously meeting other global societal goals through urgent and concert efforts fostering transformative change."
- "By transformative change, we mean a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values."
-- the chair of the IPBEC, Sir Robert Watson

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Leverage Points for Transformation



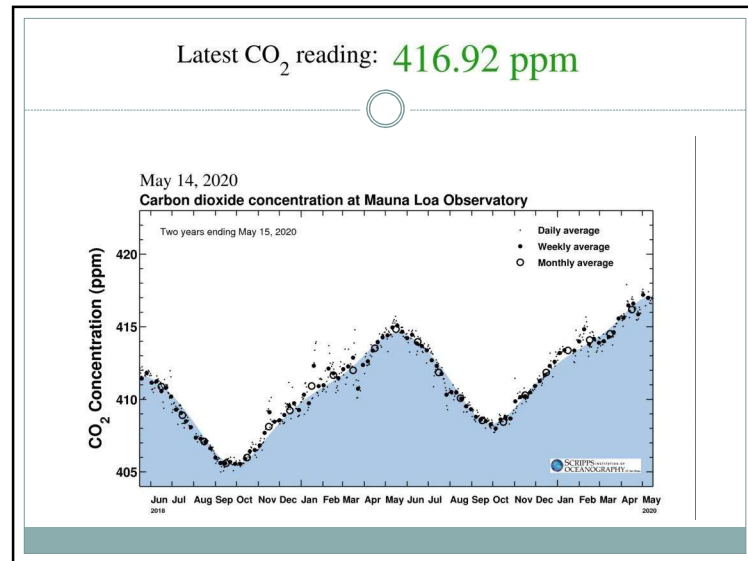
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Climate Change

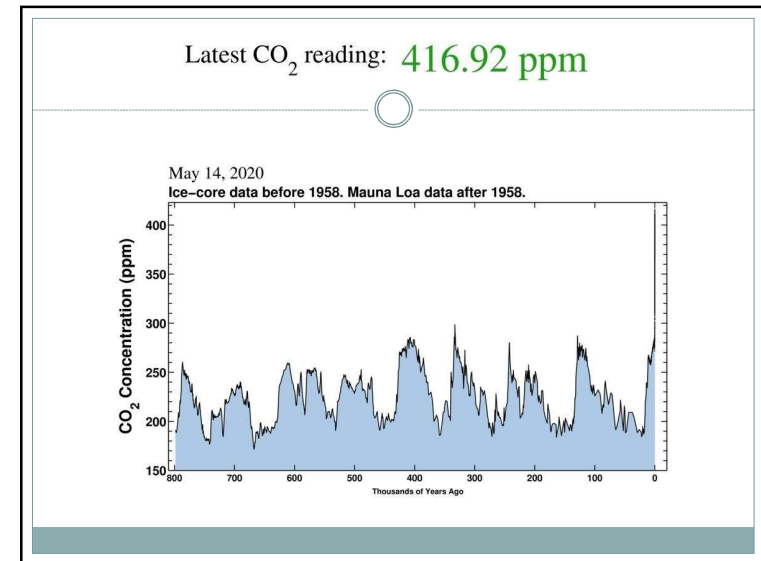
Five Key Points from IPCC Report

- 2°C is ***much*** worse than 1.5°C
- It ***is*** possible to hold rise to 1.5°C
- Doing so is easier with an emphasis on social and economic justice
- The need for action is extremely urgent – a major turn must happen by 2030, now 10 years
- An unprecedented challenge

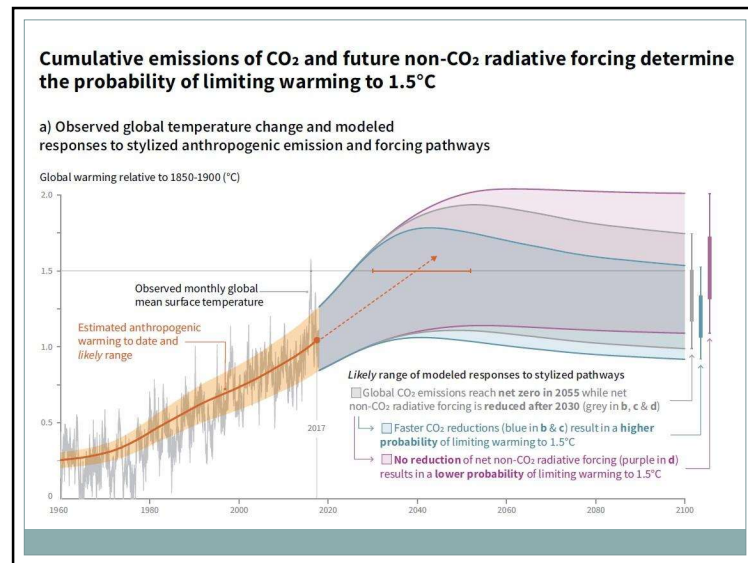
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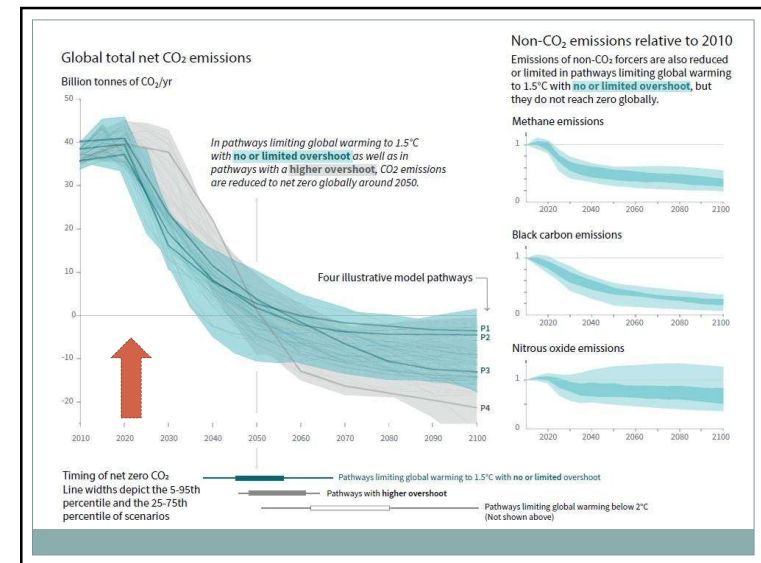
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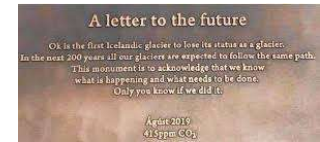
Climate Change & IPCC

- October, 2018 report: "Limiting warming to 1.5 °C is possible within the laws of chemistry and physics, but doing so would require unprecedented changes."
- The IPCC does not put it in quite this way, but if we attempt to maintain "business as usual" with only some technological fixes to reduce climate impacts, there will be countless roadblocks to effective action. If we are willing to take a larger look at how to make our global society more just and sustainable, then more strategies for mitigation and adaptation become possible.

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A letter to the future

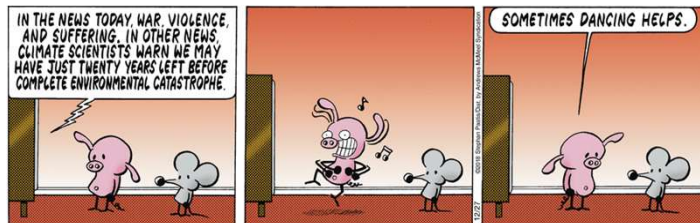
"This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done."



"Only you will know if we did it."



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The Sciences

That's the end of section 2.

*David –
are there questions
that have turned up
in your chat?*

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Musings on Social Change

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Power and Social Change

The plaque in Iceland says: "This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. "Only you will know if we did it."

- Change to address species extinction, climate chaos and other crises is – at least in part – a political process.
- Political change requires good ideas (hopefully!) and it requires political power.

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President Obama talks about power

*Hold on while
I switch to a
different window ...*

View the Obama video at

<https://www.facebook.com/NowThisElection/videos/566712117215011/>

I was going to use about the last 30 seconds.

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Musings about political power

- In recent decades, some liberals have acted as if truth was enough to guarantee change. "If we just teach the facts about climate, they'll act!"
- Many progressives place great hope in democracy as the way to bring about change.

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Other kinds of political power

In today's US politics, we see perversions of that idealized political process.

- Mitch McConnell won't even hold hearings on a Supreme Court nominee.
- The Trump administration slams through changes to environmental rules, immigration policies, etc. without following procedures.
- States implement gerrymandering and voter suppression.
- Cory Gardner doesn't bother to make personal appearances, or answer the phone.

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Political Power

We see two conflicting versions of political power.

- "We the people" who instruct and guide politicians.
- Hard-core politics that wields raw power for its own ends. (We'll look later at "disaster capitalism.")

There are other kinds of power, too:

- Economic
- Moral
- Military
- Legal

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Three Approaches to Change

I've presented this framework before at EEE, so briefly:

	<i>Conformist</i>	<i>Activist</i>	<i>Transformational</i>
<i>The system:</i>	Is basically OK	Is OK in principle, but not functioning properly	Is deeply flawed, and based on the wrong values

- The conformist accepts normal forms of economic and political power.
- The activist tries to use economic, political and moral power to improve the system.
- Transformation uses moral and philosophical power, along with economic and political, for dramatic change.

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Three Approaches to Change

	<i>Conformist</i>	<i>Activist</i>	<i>Transformational</i>
<i>The system:</i>	Is basically OK	Is OK in principle, but not functioning properly	Is deeply flawed, and based on the wrong values
<i>Question:</i>	What can I do?	What laws and technology can make it work better?	Who are we? Where are we going?
<i>Approach:</i>	Personal or very local choices	Political and technological change	Confessional and transformational
<i>Strategies:</i>	Education, encouragement	Legislation, lawsuits, economic incentives	Public witness, stories of identity, model new possibilities

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Three Approaches to Change

	<i>Conformist</i>	<i>Activist</i>	<i>Transformational</i>
<i>Primary question:</i>	What can we <u>do</u> ?		Who <u>are</u> we? (and <u>then</u> , what does that say about how we live and act?)
<i>Issues:</i>	Focus on fairly specific behaviors or issues		Systemic and intersectional

How do you get a Sumo wrestler to lose 100 pounds?
(He has to stop being a Sumo wrestler!)



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Peter's Painful Question

- My analysis tells me that transformational change is necessary to address climate & species, economic inequality, etc.
- I don't see clearly expressed transformational values, or empowered constituencies, that can trigger this change in the short time that we have.
- Smaller steps of incremental change may be possible, but will not be sufficient to turn society.
- **How can we act effectively?**
(We'll talk about this at the end.)

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Musings on Social Change

That's the end of section 3.

*David –
are there questions
that have turned up
in your chat?*

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The Pandemic

AND THE IMPORTANCE
OF THE COMING MONTHS

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COVID-19 Changes

- In just five months, Earth's human societies have been profoundly disrupted.
- Economies have crashed, and governments have poured trillions of dollars into relief programs.
- The big crises (species, climate, inequality) are still with us, but the context for action is profoundly different.

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7 Lessons from Pandemic

Margaret Bullitt-Jonas and Leah D. Schade

1. Science matters
2. How we treat the natural world affects our well-being.
3. The sooner we mobilize for action, the less suffering will take place.
4. We have the ability to make drastic changes very quickly.
5. All of us are vulnerable to crisis, though unequally.
6. Holding on to a vision of a just, peaceful and sustainable Earth will give us strength for the future.
7. We need practices that nurture spiritual resilience.

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5 Lessons from Coronavirus for Climate

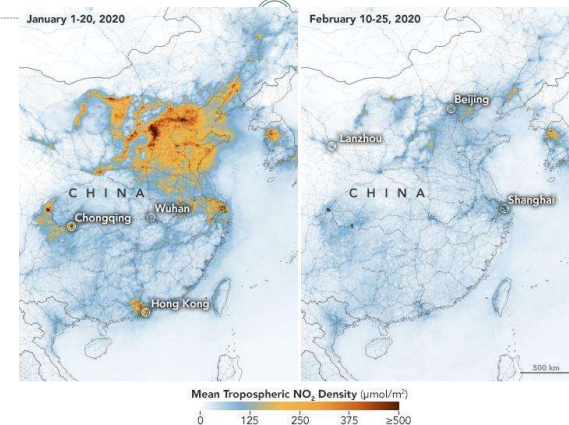
Christiana Figures in Time Magazine

1. Global challenges have no national borders.
2. As a society, we're only as safe as our most vulnerable people.
3. Global challenges require systemic changes
4. Prevention is better than cure.
5. All our response measures need to be based on science.

Q: Does the pandemic help us work for change?

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Momentary Healing



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Some is worse during pandemic

- The deforestation of the Amazon rainforest has accelerated during the coronavirus pandemic. In April, deforestation increased by 64 percent from the same month in 2019.
- “Even as [climate] emissions may be going down in general, methane emissions could actually increase during the pandemic, which not only exacerbates climate change, it also creates a big public health problem.”

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From Scripps Observatory (Mauna Loa)

- Fossil fuel use would have to decline by about 10 percent around the world and would need to be sustained for a year to show up clearly in carbon dioxide levels.
- CO₂ emissions from China have dropped by 25 percent since the beginning of the outbreak. That alone represents a 6-percent drop in global emissions.
- If there were a sustained 10-percent decline, Keeling estimated CO₂ levels in the atmosphere would deviate by roughly 0.5 ppm.
(That's nowhere near what is needed to hold to acceptable levels of warming.)

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Heightened Divides in the US

Efforts to contain the pandemic have brought two conflicting worldviews into sharper contrast and conflict.

- Fairly substantial majorities are accepting science, embracing some sense of community and the common good, and accepting limitations
- A very vocal minority is ignoring science, insisting on personal freedom, and protesting any restrictions; others see the economic harm as worse than the health threat.

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Disaster Capitalism

- Naomi Klein: “shock doctrine” and “disaster capitalism” – calculated, free-market “solutions” to crises that exploit and exacerbate existing inequalities.
- The pandemic offers perfect conditions for governments and the global elite to implement political agendas that would otherwise be met with great opposition if we weren’t all so disoriented.
- Cut payroll taxes, kill the post office, “big tech” take over education

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What kind of recovery?

- The latest relief proposal from the House (said to be DOA in the Senate) includes some “green recovery” provisions.
- Previous relief bills have provided support to fossil fuel industries and airlines.
- If the next big stimulus boosts “business as usual” – with infrastructure like highways and pipelines – the path to climate catastrophe will be locked in.

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The Pandemic & Urgency

That's the end of section 4.

*David –
are there questions
that have turned up
in your chat?*

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Decisions & Discussion

PETER WILL SHUT UP SOON!

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The old crises are still there

- We have 10 years to cut greenhouse emissions by 50%, and there's nothing within the US that comes close to that level of response.
- Biodiversity loss is being addressed on a species-by-species level (Monarch butterflies, bees), but not in a transformative way.
- Social justice crises are visible: inequality, poverty, health care, etc.

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Disorientation and Change

- The pandemic may have provided a moment of “disorientation” where we see the world and ourselves differently.
- The “old normal” may appear either as impossible or unacceptable. We don't want to go back.
- Or, there may be a desire for restoration, and getting back to normal as quickly as possible.

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The situation right now

- The big crises need transformational change, but there isn't political support for those steps.
- Current politics are barely able to enact positive incremental change; brutal politics & disaster capitalism are moving us in the wrong direction.
- The next steps of pandemic recovery/stimulus will put in place finances and infrastructure that will lock in whether the old crises will be addressed.

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Hope

There are two senses of the word “hope” –

- Optimism – (I hope we get a vaccine soon!)
Looks into the future for a desired outcome.
- Commitment – (I place my hope in democracy.)
Identifies where we place our trust.

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Questions

- Is Peter’s take on the relational world and the great environmental crises accurate?
- What are the viable options for social change (political, economic, legal, worldviews), and can they achieve transformation?
- How might the pandemic shape efforts at social change in the coming months?

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It is your turn!

Questions,
comments,
suggestions &
rebuttals?

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