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Our Planetary Existential Crisis
Bainbridge Island, WA 11 May 2022

David Korten is a philosopher and visionary. He was an insider in the development establishment for several decades. He worked for the Ford Foundation and USAID and taught at Harvard's Graduate School of Business. Having severed his ties to the past, today he is a leading voice for economic and social justice. He is a co-founder of *YES!* Magazine and author of *When Corporations Rule the World*, *The Great Turning*, *Agenda for a New Economy* and *Change the Story, Change the Future*.

Never, in human history, have we faced comparable opportunity born of comparable terminal crisis. Science tells us we have less than a decade to achieve significant reduction in global carbon emissions. If we fail, we risk irreversible environmental disruption that may render Earth unlivable. Near daily reports of unprecedented storms, droughts, and floods confirm the scientific consensus. Meanwhile the COVID pandemic has disrupted most every aspect of daily life. And the invasion of Ukraine reminds us of the unconscionable suffering we are capable of imposing on one another in a ruthless competition for Earth's declining ability to meet our human needs. All the while the institutions of corporate monopoly that bear major responsibility for the devastation continue to grow the wealth and power of the world's richest billionaires.

This is our time to rethink and regroup with a unified global commitment to the wellbeing of the living Earth and all its people. It is a two-step process that requires immediate emergency action through existing institutions to reduce carbon emissions, deal with COVID, and end the war in Ukraine. While simultaneously facilitating the emergence of a global system of democratically self-governing communities dedicated to equality, deep democracy, and the wellbeing of all people and the living Earth on which our existence and wellbeing depend. It would be an impossible mission, except for our now proven human capacity to transform on a global scale with ever increasing speed. Hope lies in our rapidly growing awareness that our current path leads to a world with no winners. Or to put it more bluntly—a path to a dead Earth with no humans.

We are in crisis because we have been lured into a collective, self-destructive, competitive quest to dominate and exploit one another and Earth in the individual pursuit of money. The resulting greed and violence have become so commonplace that we assume these perversions are inherent in our nature. Yet, we know we are capable of so much more. If we reflect on what gives us true satisfaction in life, we realize that creating the world we truly want requires giving up only that by which we dehumanize ourselves and strip our children of hope for a viable future. This is our time to rediscover truths that we already know. What it means to be alive. And to reclaim that which makes

us truly human. Every living being, from microbes to humans, faces continuous life and death choices. What to eat and drink. Whom to trust. Whom to confront or flee. All under constantly changing circumstances. In making these choices, each living being depends on the guidance of learned or genetically inherited maps of the ever-changing territory it inhabits.

Humans are Earth's most sophisticated mapmakers. Indeed, our drive to ever deeper understanding of ourselves and our relationship to one another, Earth, and the cosmos is part of what makes us distinctively human. The complex mental maps that guide our human choice-making as individuals, families, communities, and societies are expressed through our distinctive personalities, cultural traditions, religions, laws, and scientific disciplines. That diversity is essential to our resilience and creativity as we move forward together in a process that at its best, unfolds much like a flowing creative dance.

Furthermore, our maps need continual correction, updating, and elaboration. Some are simply wrong and are best discarded. Because our maps are products of the human mind, we can quickly and easily correct or discard any given map simply by changing our mind. Changing our behavior, however, can be far more difficult once society has organized around a given map—even if that map is obviously defective. For example, once a city has been configured to be dependent on cars to get from place to place, it can be very difficult to get where you need to go by foot or bicycle. Once a few people own and fence all the land, you may no longer have an option to find a piece of vacant land to grow your own food.

Our collective societal choices of values, rules, technology, and infrastructure severely restrict our individual choices. Our means of getting from one place to another. Available jobs and educational opportunities. Our sources of news and other information. Established expectations of and obligations to one another.

Among our current mapping failures, one has had particularly devastating consequences. It is our misadventure with a perverse version of economics that has become a dominant, dehumanizing political ideology. I refer to the neoliberal economics taught in most universities.

Its more accurate name is ego-nomics. Rather than guide us in making a meaningful living, it celebrates and promotes an individualistic competition for money to support senseless, dehumanizing consumption that strips Earth of its capacity to sustain life. This ego-nomics has largely displaced the economics of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Henry George, Thomas Malthus, and Karl Marx—all of whom were focused on the wellbeing of real living people in real living communities.

Finding our way to the possible future now within our reach, will require the lens and maps of an authentic, significantly updated eco-nomics grounded in a deep understanding of life and a vision of the Ecological Civilization now within our means to live into being. The failures of the obsession of ego-nomics with growing consumption are obvious, beginning with the fact humans are already consuming far more than what Earth can sustain. According to estimates of the Global Footprint Network, it would take 1.7 Earths to sustain the levels of human consumption reached in the year 2020. Advocates of ego-nomics seem not to have noticed. We have only one Earth. Yet we continue to pursue growth of Gross Domestic Product as humanity's defining priority. Little, if any, benefit from that growth accrues to the billions of Earth's people who face a daily struggle for survival.

As the collapse of our interlinked environmental and social systems renders ever more of Earth uninhabitable by humans, millions abandon their homes in fear and sadness to seek refuge in what remains of Earth's still livable places. The greatest inequality in human history continues to grow at a breathtaking pace. According to Oxfam, in 2019 the combined financial assets of just 26 billionaires were greater than the financial assets of the poorest half of humanity. In the United States, the collective assets of the wealthiest 1 percent exceeded those of the bottom 90 percent. The economic disruption of the COVID pandemic widened the rich-poor gap so rapidly that financial news services now report by how many billions of dollars the fortunes of each of the world's richest billionaires grows or shrinks each day. During the year beginning March 18, 2020, shortly after the beginning of the COVID pandemic, most of Earth's people were struggling to survive while many were mourning the loss of loved ones. That same year, the planet's 2,365 billionaires saw their financial assets grow by a collective \$4 trillion—54 percent in just one year.

Meanwhile, most of the world's people have been reduced to an ever more difficult struggle to fulfill their daily needs for food, water, shelter, and other essentials.

This results in high rates of suicide and mental illness. And provides fertile ground for demagogues who gain power through hatred and violence. A viable human future requires that we acknowledge the limits of the regenerative capacities of Earth's community of life. Join in common

cause to restore the living Earth to full health. Equitably share Earth's bounty to secure a fulfilling and meaningful life for all people for all generations to come.

The failures of our global economy have been accumulating year after year, decade after decade. Public support for this destructive path is maintained by the false promise of ego-nomics that so long as we maintain our focus on growing GDP, the ultimate result will be a future of effortless leisure, comfort, and unlimited material affluence for all. We've conducted a bold global experiment to test the premise of that promise. The results are in. A few get obscenely rich. Most are reduced to a daily struggle for survival. And Earth is dying. It is a false promise based on false assumptions. When we make growing GDP our defining goal, businesses compete for short-term profits. Financial speculators compete to grow returns to money without the inconvenience of producing anything of actual value. Politicians favor the corporations and financiers whose financial donations get them elected.

We become focused on growing money and lose sight of our actual needs, the true sources of our happiness, and our responsibilities as living beings with the power to shape the future of the living Earth. Billionaire fortunes grow. Politicians compete for financial contributions from wealthy patrons. We the people compete for available jobs at pittance wages. And Earth dies.

Healing begins with getting clear that most money is only a number created by a computer key stroke. It has no meaning or purpose beyond the human mind. We cannot eat it, drink it, or breath it. It will not keep us warm on a cold night. Though life is what we seek, focused on the money, we come to value life only for its market price. Give us sun, rain, and fertile soil. And we can live without money. But give us an Earth without sun, rain, and fertile soil—and money is worthless. Freeing ourselves from our obsessive focus on money begins with recognizing our true nature, rights, and responsibility as intelligent participants in life's wondrous evolutionary journey on a finite living Earth.

Life is matter possessed of the capacity to choose as it creates and maintains the conditions essential to its own existence. Start with the living organism with which you are most intimately familiar—your body—the vessel of your consciousness and the instrument of your agency. Only very recently has technology given us the ability to observe the extraordinary nature and dynamic of the human body's inner workings. We now know that each human body is a self-organizing community of tens of trillions of interdependent, decision-making, regenerating living cells and microorganisms. These cells are engaged in a continuous self-managed exchange of nutrients, water, energy, and information mediated by the body's heart, lungs, liver, brain, skin, and other organs.

Furthermore, these cells are continuously regenerating through life's eternal cycles of birth and death, building on and adding to the accumulated learning passed on from generation to generation. We know that not all our body's cells and micro-organisms recognize and fulfill their responsibility to and for the whole. COVID and cancer cells are well-known examples. Seeking only their own reproduction and competing to control and consume the body's available energy and nutrients, they act as if they graduated from college with a major in ego-nomics.

We also know that a functioning body is not self-contained. I depend on my body's continuing exchange with the larger community of life to which I belong. And on which I depend for food, water, air, a stable climate, recycling my wastes, and companionship.

I am because of the bees that pollinate. The trees that produce oxygen. The beetles that decompose dead plants to replenish the soil. The microbes that digest the food in my gut and recycle my wastes. And the people who love and care for me as I love and care for them.

Earth is a vastly larger and more complex organism than an individual human body. Yet like any multi-celled organism, Earth survives as a living being only so long as its countless individual organisms self-organize to create and maintain the conditions of climate, pure water and air, fertile soil, and countless other conditions on which life depends. Without the constant labor of Earth's community of life, Earth would be just another dead rock floating in space. If any aspect of this internal and external interdependence suffers serious disruption, I die. It is the same for every living being, including the living Earth. Complex organisms like humans, and Earth, self-organize at multiple levels. At the lowest level in our body, each cell organizes its internal flows of nutrients, water, energy, and information to maintain itself, while engaging in continuous exchange with neighboring cells.

Because continuous local adaptation is essential, the processes involved are bottom up. Success depends on each individual cell and organ recognizing its dependence on and responsibility to and for the wellbeing of the whole.

Our individual human mind has little or no awareness of our body's internal self-organizing processes, though they have their ways of letting us know when they need us to provide them food, drink, exercise and rest, maintain a comfortable temperature, and facilitate elimination and disposal of our wastes. None of the body's self-organizing processes involve any equivalent of the tokens of exchange we humans call money. Nor is making money ever their purpose. The same is true for the self-managing processes by which the other members of living Earth's community of life manage their relationships with one another and Earth.

What we humans have created, we can change. Can we achieve that change within the time available? We will

know only if we try. The human journey has been long and often difficult. But the accomplishments during the roughly 200,000 years since homo sapiens first appeared in Africa are extraordinary. For roughly 190,000 years, we organized primarily as nomadic hunter-gatherer tribes, some warring against one another; as others learned to share and live-in cooperative harmony. Ten thousand years ago we began the transition to settled agriculture.

Five thousand years later, we began developing city states, followed by the nation states that came to define the imperial era that prevails to this day. The imperial era has been a time of extraordinary technological and artistic advances combined with unconscionable violence against and repression of both people and nature. Commonly referred to as civilization—in recognition of its positive accomplishments—for many people it has been an experience of uncivil violence and exploitation.

As human populations expanded, competition for land and labor increased. Our wars became more deadly. Ruling dynasties centralized power and authority. Transnational corporations now supersede nation states as the dominant institutions in control of land, labor, technology, and money. Power no longer resides with governments presumed to be democratically accountable to their people. It now resides with transnational corporations that acknowledge responsibility only for maximizing short-term financial returns to their wealthiest shareholders. And that claim the right to buy the favor of politicians in any country of their choice.

Technology corporations abuse their control of contemporary communications technologies to shape human culture in ways that serve their bottom line. Awareness is growing that these same technologies give current and aspiring oligarchs the ability to manipulate the human mind to further subvert the many to the will of the few. We consequently present an increasingly deadly threat to ourselves, to the Earth that birthed and nurtures us, and to the evolutionary unfolding of life. The COVID pandemic is a reminder of our ultimate vulnerability—a call to recognize and embrace our responsibility to one another, life, evolution, and creation.

Transnational corporations competing for profits cannot stem the collapse of living Earth's regenerative systems on which life depends. That collapse can be avoided only by we the people organizing as local communities to manage our own resources to meet our needs in ways that facilitate the healing of Earth's now severely compromised regenerative systems. Humanity's positive potential and our current destructive path define a choice: embrace the possibility of transforming our relationships with one another and Earth; or perish. That choice constitutes an epic opportunity to accept the responsibilities that come with our distinctive human capabilities.

Leadership, however, must come from we the people joining in common cause as a truly civil society. We commonly describe modern society as divided into three institutional sectors: government, business, and civil society. Government maintains order. Business provides our means of living. Both grant special powers to the few. Civil society, often described as the Third Sector, is the people's sector. In the civil civilization of our future it will be the first sector.

This is where we the people self-organize to place a check on government and corporate excess and to lobby both government and business to fulfill otherwise unmet needs for peace, the well-being of all, and the health of living Earth. That the need for a citizen check on the human institutions of business and government has become so extreme, suggests we the people have yielded far too much of our power to the institutions of business and government. Early humans self-organized as civil societies to meet their daily needs—through their labor—from what the land provided. As human numbers grew and competition for products of the land increased, powerful rulers emerged to maintain order and expropriate the surplus of the labor of land and people. The early rulers of the imperial-era imposed order by force of arms through the institutions we now know as government. Peoples who did not organize as militarized imperial states became dominated by the armies of those that did.

Through this process, the institutions of government emerged as instruments by which the few ruled the many. Ever more of the labor of people and nature has since been consumed in competing for power and privilege; maintaining order through military, police, and judicial power, and supporting displays of opulent excess by the winners to affirm their superiority—and thereby their right to rule the rest of us. The related violence and oppression results in dehumanizing mental and physical stress. Resulting in further systemic dysfunction.

As the rise of democracy began to challenge authoritarian rule and restore power to the people, aspiring autocrats turned to money as their favored instrument of societal control. Power passed from government to transnational corporations that control both the financial and media resources that elected politicians require to win election by the people.

While institutional power has shifted, the social structures that define the imperial era continue to feature four primary social castes: the excluded, the workers, the retainers, and the rulers. The caste system's structure rests on the excluded caste, which consists of those reduced to a daily competition for survival on whatever scraps are discarded by members of the three superior castes. The excluded caste includes refugees, the homeless, and the imprisoned. Their miserable plight secures the loyalty of workers and retainers to the rulers by reminding them of the

fate that awaits if they fail to serve the rules set by ruling and retainer castes.

Next up is the worker caste, the people who provide essential labor. They include health and childcare workers, teachers, cleaners, agricultural workers, store clerks and countless others who do society's essential work. The surplus value of their labor beyond their basic survival is extracted and used by the ruling and retainer castes to maintain the structures of power and support their own excess.

The work of the more privileged retainer caste is to secure the power of the ruling caste. Traditionally, it included military officers, tax collectors, judges, religious leaders, and influential artists and philosophers. All were well compensated for their loyal service in securing and legitimating elite rule while keeping the worker caste in line and the excluded caste in its place.

The retainer caste now includes influential academics and persons with advanced technical, media, and marketing skills. They're rewarded for their service in crafting and promoting conceptual maps that secure, affirm, and legitimate the system of elite rule.

The ruling caste resides at the top. Originally, this caste featured imperial families headed by a king, queen, or emperor. Now the ruling families are headed by the world's richest billionaires. Most hold a controlling individual or family interest in one or more major transnational corporations.

The power of contemporary ruling families depends on gaining corporate control of the means of living of the lower castes, whether it be land, water sources, housing, money, or paid employment. They then charge rent for access by others. The rent on money is interest. The rent on a job, is the difference between what the employer pays, and the market value of what the worker produces. Current technology supports an unprecedented concentration of unaccountable private control of the human means of living.

Competitive violence and exploitation will not get us to cooperative peace and sharing. The more we focus on competing for money and jobs, the less we cooperate to reclaim that which makes us human, democratizes power, and advances the wellbeing of all. The processes of separation will continue until we change our ways. Or the living Earth can bear no more, and its essential systems collapse.

The changes required might seem impossibly difficult, but for a basic truth recognized by our early ancestors and now affirmed by the leading edge of science. South Africans know it as ubuntu, which translates: "I am because you are." Such power in five words. "I am because you are." The implications are simple and profound. "I depend on you. And we all do best when we all do well."

This truth leads us from asking, “How can I make a difference?” to “How can we make a difference?” For society, it means: “We all lose when it’s about my money. We all win when it’s about our wellbeing.”

The Earth Charter is my favorite current statement of guiding principles for an Ecological Civilization. It concludes with this simple, yet profound truth: “The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more.”

Most religions call us to love and care for our neighbors and all that the eternal spirit has created. In 2015, the Parliament of the World’s Religions issued a Declaration on Climate Change that closed with these words: “The future we embrace will be a new Ecological Civilization and a world of peace, justice, and sustainability, with the flourishing of the diversity of life. We will build this future as one human family within the greater Earth community.”

The frontiers of science now give us an ever-deepening understanding of the interdependence of life. Quantum physics tells us that relationships, not particles, are the foundation of what we experience as material reality. Biology is finding that intelligent life exists only in diverse communities of choice-making organisms that together maintain the conditions essential to their individual and collective existence. The social sciences find that humans get their greatest satisfaction from mutually caring relationships with other living beings. We do better together.

Far from calling us to sacrifice for the wellbeing of Earth, we are called to embrace our current challenges as a win-win opportunity to actualize our human desire to love and to care for one another and Earth. For example, much of the need to reduce total human consumption can be met by relieving ourselves of the dehumanization imposed by war, oppression of the masses, obsessive materialism, planned obsolescence, financial speculation, and cities designed to accommodate cars rather than people. The social implications run deep and require broad global consensus on reframing how we as a now global society address purpose, power, and procreation.

The purpose of society is to provide all people with material sufficiency and spiritual abundance while supporting the wellbeing, beauty, and creative unfolding of Earth’s community of life. If we meet our wellbeing targets, whether GDP is going up or down should be irrelevant. Societies best fulfill this purpose when power resides in self-reliant communities of place

Wellbeing is the goal. Empowered, self-organizing communities are the means. Much like the cells of a healthy human body, the members of a healthy human community

act with awareness that their wellbeing depends on the wellbeing of the community of which they are a part. They also recognize that this wellbeing has many elements.

Trying to manage a community—or a nation—only with an indicator of the economy’s growth rate is like trying to fly an airplane on a dark night with only an airspeed indicator and a goal to get home as fast as possible. Guess where that will get you. A crash is the certain outcome. A safe flight on a dark night requires a panel of indicators, including airspeed, altitude, and direction. And a map with the airport location.

Managing a modern society is even more complex and requires at least two panels of multiple indicators—one for tracking how well the society is caring for its natural systems and the other for tracking how well the society is caring for all its people. Keeping the indicators in proper balance requires the committed teamwork of many local decision makers who recognize their common interest in optimizing performance on all the indicators.

There is no universal design for a local community economy. The people of each place must adapt to their distinctive and often dramatically different and constantly changing local circumstances. These include the sources of their water and food, weather conditions, local skills, tastes, tools, facilities, sunlight, and much more. Life best thrives through micro-adaptation to local conditions that can be achieved only by adaptive local choice-making by both people and nature.

To deal with its distinctive needs and opportunities while caring for its place on Earth, each human community must be able to control access to its territory’s resources, while caring for and living within its regenerative limits. So long as each local community meets its needs through its own labor in self-reliant balance with its local ecosystems, Earth’s community of life will remain in healthy balance with itself and Earth. No community is likely to ever be totally self-sufficient, but each must learn to live within its own means.

In an interdependent world, there is need for global authority. But in an Ecological Civilization the function of the higher levels of government is not to control, dominate, or dictate to the local. Rather it is to secure local community control of their economies and resources. Protecting them from predatory intrusion by foreign corporations and governments.

Earth is the ultimate source of our means of living. The literal ground of our being. This has profound implications for how we address ownership rights and responsibilities.

None of us created Earth. And we all depend on it for our essential means of living. Those who control our access to those means—the purity of the air we breathe and the water we drink, the land that grows our food, and on which we reside—they have absolute control over us. No one has a right to exclusive ownership of more of Earth than

they require to meet their basic needs—at least not until all the rest of us have met our basic needs and nature’s regenerative systems are secure. Furthermore, since future generations will depend on these same resources, rights of ownership come with inherent responsibilities to assure the continued good health of Earth’s regenerative systems.

For thousands of years, the power to rule centered on the control of access to land—the basic means of living. In contemporary society the mechanisms of elite control of access to our means of living are more complicated. They include control of money and corporations.

But the basic principle remains. Control access to the peoples’ means of living. And you rule the world. Monopolistic corporations are gaining ever greater control of our access to food, water, health care, education, and housing for which they then demand a fee. But they also control the creation of money required to pay the fee. To get the money, we must compensate them with our labor or pay them a rent called interest.

In current practice, there are few limits on what one individual or corporation can own—or on the right of the owner to deny others access, or to self-consume, contaminate, and disrupt the natural regenerative processes of the land to which they hold title. As ownership becomes ever more concentrated and results in ever more people being denied access to a means of living, rethinking the rights, responsibilities, and distribution of ownership becomes one of the most foundational issues facing humanity. We have barely begun to frame the essential questions, let alone find adequate answers.

In our emerging vision of an Ecological Civilization, the rights, powers, and responsibilities of ownership are best localized and equitably distributed. And the benefits of productive labor are best shared in ways that reward and secure the wellbeing of those who provide that labor. This implies giving priority to cooperative worker and community ownership.

A business will serve best when owned by people who work in the business and live in and identify with the wellbeing of the community it serves. They will likely take pride in the contribution of their business to that community. The stronger their family roots in the community, the stronger the connection they will likely feel.

Aligning individual interests with long-term community wellbeing is a win-win goal. And it aligns with Adam Smith’s concept of a market economy in which small scale entrepreneurs compete—as in a classic community-based farmer’s market—to provide their neighbors with quality products and friendly service at a fair price.

The world’s leading example of cooperative worker ownership comes from the Mondragon cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain. I dream of the day when today’s labor unions regain power and use it to convert

monopolistic corporate predators like Bayer, Amazon, Starbucks, Exxon, Lockheed Martin, Halliburton, Goldman Sachs, Nestle, and many more into decentralized, community-based worker-owned cooperatives. A market economy best serves the community interest when owner-decision makers live in, are known by, and depend on the community in which they do business. When decision makers are distant and faceless, the caring link is broken. And the decision makers are prone to seek quick profits while disregarding the harms done to people and nature. If that business also possesses monopoly power, it can become a mortal threat to all concerned.

The corporate charter that gives a business a presumed right to do business anywhere in the world while exempting owners and managers from liability for the consequences for others of their business decisions has no legitimate place in a civilized world.

Equally illegitimate is the current system of monopolistic, private, for-profit banks that create money by issuing interest-bearing debt. In aggregate, that debt can only be repaid if new loans are constantly putting sufficient new money into the system to pay the interest on outstanding debt. It is a system designed to crash if the indebtedness of the poor to the rich is not continuously growing to the benefit of the already wealthy. The drive for ever greater and faster monetary growth generates investments in activities ever more harmful to people and the living Earth. The growing monetization of relationships dehumanizes rich and poor alike and ultimately produces only losers.

The truth is hidden by the misleading language of conventional economics reporting. Speculators seeking instant unearned financial gains are called investors. And money—mere numbers created from nothing with a computer key stroke—is called capital, which implies it has independent utility. Money can be a useful tool for advancing the public good. However, it has become an instrument of speculation and control by which the few exploit the many supported by deeply flawed economic theory.

To fulfill money’s proper useful function, its creation must be transparent and accountable. And it must be spent into circulation fulfilling a public purpose—preferably supporting productive investments that put underutilized labor and other regenerative resources to work serving a public need. Perhaps for infrastructure. Or for education. Because the financial system is a purely human creation. We have the right, the means, and the responsibility to change it when it fails to serve.

As living beings, we must organize around what makes living communities healthy. Not what makes corporate predators profitable. A fair profit is essential to the survival of any successful business. But profit is a means, not a purpose.

Similarly, we must be clear that an economics that values life only for its market price is an ideology, not a science. The necessary civilizational transformation needs the guidance of an authentic economics grounded in these obvious truths:

1. Life is a product of the labor of living communities. I am because you are. We all do best when we look out for and care for one another.
2. Our work should be joyful and fulfilling. Mentally healthy humans are caring, peaceful, and get their greatest pleasure from helping others.
3. Real wealth is a product of labor, which should be rewarded accordingly.
4. Obsessive consumption is a distraction from that which gives us true happiness.
5. GDP measures the exchange of money without regard to whether the consequences are beneficial or harmful.
6. The regenerative systems that maintain Earth's air, water, and soils are finite and beyond price.
7. Money is just a number. Banks and financial fraudsters create it with computer keystrokes. It is a tool, not a purpose.
8. The only legitimate purpose of any human institution, or investment, is to serve the public good. Money and profit are a means, not a purpose.
9. A valid economics must draw from all our sources of understanding and be constantly updated.

A true economics grounded in these truths will lead us to the following public policy priorities.

1. Break up concentrations of corporate power, including private mega-banks. And restructure the individual pieces around local, equitable, cooperative, family, community, and worker ownership.
2. Take democracy to the next level as a participatory process of community self-organization.
3. Replace GDP as the primary measure of economic performance with measures of the health and wellbeing of people, communities, and nature.
4. Eliminate financial speculation and scams like derivatives and cryptocurrencies, while freeing individuals, community businesses, and governments from perpetual debt bondage.
5. Give special reward to those who do essential work that is unusually tiring, unpleasant or dangerous.
6. Restore and enhance regenerative health and beauty of the living Earth as we learn to nurture ourselves in ways that nurture all people and the living Earth.
7. Organize as bioregionally defined political jurisdictions around urban hubs with strong links to surrounding rural areas to facilitate their function as healthy self-reliant bioregions.
8. Eliminate gas powered vehicles in urban areas and redesign urban infrastructure to minimize dependence on private cars.

9. Minimize air travel by vacationing locally within local bioregions and hold national and international meetings and conferences on the web.

10. Eliminate waste by organizing material processes around continuous circular flows with short local supply chains within highly self-reliant bioregional communities.

11. Design products to facilitate reuse, repair, and periodic updates as technology advances.

12. Assure that every child has the care of a loving family and community and that every adult has access to a meaningful means of living.

13. Eliminate prisons in favor of adequate mental health facilities.

14. Invest in life sciences to rapidly deepen human understanding of how healthy living communities self-organize.

15. Accelerate social innovation by honoring cultural diversity and removing legal impediments to the free and open sharing of beneficial knowledge and technology.

16. Shift the focus of economics and management education from maximizing financial returns to maximizing community health and wellbeing.

These may seem like hopelessly ambitious goals. Yet they are within both our means and our common interest as a species with an extraordinary capacity for individual and collective choice. We have made disastrous choices that have led us to the brink of self-extinction. Surely, we can now make the alternative choices essential to the wellbeing of all.

Our potential to create a world of peace, beauty, creative opportunity, material sufficiency, and spiritual abundance for all resides in three foundational truths:

1. There are no winners on a dead Earth,
2. There is no life without labor, and
3. It is our true nature as humans to care and share.

Success depends on actualizing our ability to organize as a civil society, the sector where the power of we the people ultimately and properly resides.

In a fully functioning Ecological Civilization, government and business sectors will be creations of and accountable to a civil society—to we the people—embracing our rights and responsibilities as citizens of the living Earth that birthed and nurtures us. We can be citizens of only one nation. But we are all citizens of Earth—with the rights and responsibilities that implies.

The disruptions of COVID, the climate emergency, and the invasion of Ukraine remind us of our interdependence as citizens of Earth. The resulting disruption of our established ways of living creates an unprecedented opportunity to unite in common cause to advance the emergence of the culture, institutions, technology, and infrastructure of the Ecological Civilization on which our viability and wellbeing depend.

Given the speed with which environmental and social collapse are playing out, we now have less than a decade to redirect our human course as a now globally interdependent species. There was a time when change of such magnitude took centuries, even millennia. But the rate of human change is increasing geometrically. We now have the common language and communications capabilities needed to navigate an essential change of course consciously and intentionally with previously unimaginable speed.

As we contemplate the seriousness of the crisis at hand and the opportunity within our reach, we might note that this is not just about Earth and the human species. There is a yet bigger picture. The evolution of life is an ongoing process in which Earth appears to have a very special place. Science currently estimates that there are 70 billion-trillion stars within the observable universe. Nearly all stars have planets. However, we have yet to identify any planet other than Earth that we have reason to believe has Earth like surface conditions capable of supporting life as we know it.

Our current choices here on Earth have consequences not just for us. But as well for this uncommon planet and the continued evolutionary unfolding of life in the universe. There is no easy path to a healthy living Earth and a viable human future. Tragedy and challenge lie ahead. The longer we wait, the more difficult the transition becomes and the less likely our prospect for success. Our task is to recognize and act on the emergency at hand. And to do so in ways that enable the emergence of a civil civilization guided by the maps of an eco-nomics dedicated to the wellbeing of life.

The time is now. The choice is ours. We are the one's we've been waiting for.

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