



the weekly anthropocene

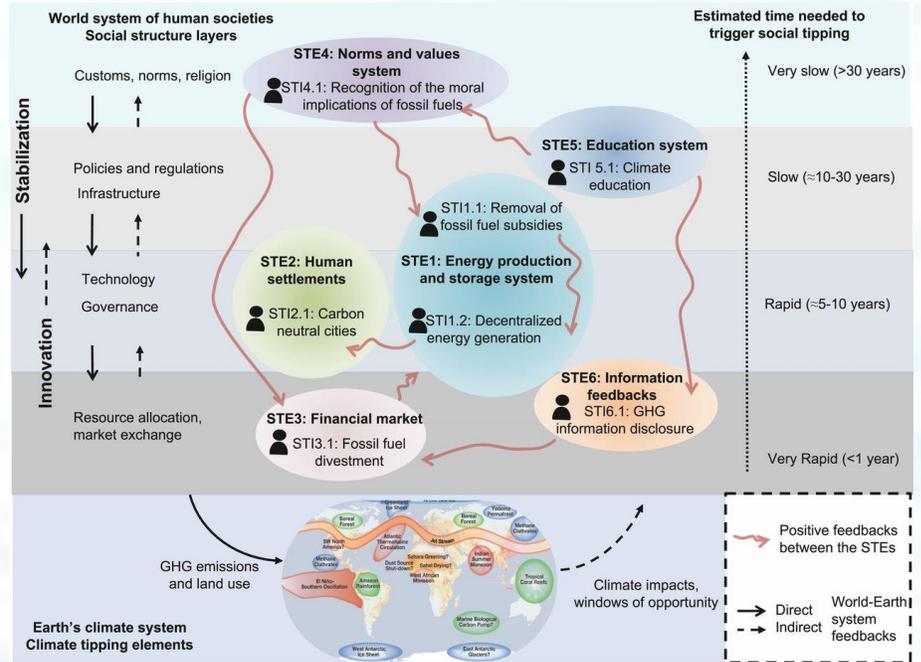
dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere



By Sam Matey, February 19, 2020

Regeneration: Social Tipping

Points. To meet the Paris Agreement goals of keeping warming below 2 degrees Celsius and avoiding catastrophic climate change, humanity has a lot of work to do. We'll need to rework our civilization to function without fossil fuels (and change many of our land use practices, from deforestation to beef cattle agriculture) in the next 30 years. Now, an international team of researchers have released a study trying to identify the key tipping points



that will be necessary to make this shift to a sustainable future. After surveying a wide array of climate scientists and other sustainability experts, the researchers identified six major “social tipping elements” (STEs) that will likely be key to our transition to a climate-safe future. STE #1 is moving the world electricity production and storage system away from fossil fuels to renewable energy, with removing government fossil fuel subsidies and building decentralized renewable energy highlighted as key intervention points. STE #2, closely related, is building and retrofitting our cities towards carbon neutrality. STE#3 is moving the world financial system away from funding fossil fuels. STE #4 is changing our cultural norms and values system to account for the moral implications of fossil fuels. STE #5 is educating students and citizens about climate change, and STE #6 is information feedbacks, consumer awareness of the carbon costs of different products and services (e.g. beef vs Beyond Meat or driving vs. public transport)

Encouragingly, we may currently be on the brink of tipping points in several of these elements. Renewable energy is being deployed across the United States and the world at a massive scale, faster than the most optimistic projections (STE #1)-although, disturbingly, major governments like China, India, Russia, Japan, and the US are still heavily funding fossil fuels. The rapid rise of the school strikes for climate movement and the clarion call to action of Greta Thunberg may have begun a meaningful shift in society’s perception of fossil fuels (STE #4), while BlackRock, Goldman Sachs, and the European Investment Bank’s recent moves to limit funding of fossil fuels could be a step towards tipping the financial system (STE #3). Best-case scenario, in the next few decades, the world could see an “ecological Enlightenment,” a cascade of positive, systemwide changes. (For the full paper, see <https://tinyurl.com/STEsPaper>).



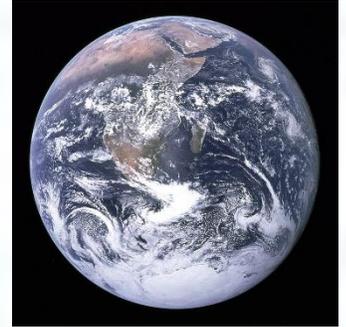
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Regeneration: The Bezos Earth Fund. In a short Instagram post on February 17th, Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon and the richest person in the world, announced that he would be allocating \$10 billion (about 7.7% of his estimated \$130 billion net worth) to fight climate change. The \$10 billion will form the new “Bezos Earth Fund” with the goal being to “amplify known ways and to explore new ways of fighting the devastating impact of climate change on this planet we all share.” Grant recipients will include “scientists, activists, NGOs — any effort that offers a real possibility to help preserve and protect the natural world.” The first Bezos Earth Fund grants will be issued in summer 2020. This is a huge new source of funding for climate solutions, and more money to fight climate change than any individual has ever spent before! For context, the budget for the entire UN Environment Program in 2018 was just under \$434 million—not even one-twentieth of what Bezos has just put on the table. It’s so much money that it will likely be a substantial logistical challenge even organizing the spending of it all (see tinyurl.com/vr4t2rm). While details at the moment are scarce, this is undoubtedly spectacular news!



Regeneration: Bird-Safe Buildings. New York City has recently adopted a pioneering bird-protection law that requires all new or heavily modified buildings, starting in December 2020, to meet bird safety standards, such as using a form of glass that they can detect as an obstacle and will not collide with. Building collisions are one of the biggest causes of bird deaths in the US, with a recent study estimating that a staggering 365 to 988 million birds die from smacking into a window they can’t see (or another part of the building) every year. The Big Apple’s new law is a great step forward to build an environment hospitable to both humans and wildlife in the Anthropocene! For more, see tinyurl.com/NYCBirdsLaw and tinyurl.com/CollisionStatsStudy.

Regeneration: #TeamTrees. In the last few months of 2019, YouTuber Jimmy “MrBeast” Donaldson started a long-shot philanthropic effort to raise enough money for the Arbor Day Foundation to plant 20 million trees. The “#TeamTrees” movement went viral, attracted a million-dollar donation from Elon Musk, and eventually raised enough to plant 21.5 million trees, in a stunning demonstration in the power of influencer-led collective action. Now, the Arbor Day Foundation has announced the 2020 planting locations for the crowdfunded trees: in recently wildfire-damaged regions of California, Kenya’s degraded Kijabe Forest, and Southern India’s much-eroded Cauvery (or Kaveri) River Basin. Planting will continue in 2022, in sites across America and worldwide. For more, see tinyurl.com/vdze99g. Awesome!