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I am finishing up one project (Keep It In the Ground: Accelerating the End of the Fossil Fuel Era), returning to a back burner project (An Ethic of the Long Term), and beginning a new one (The Politics of Urgent Transition).

The fossil fuel project begins with the premise that, because the fossil fuel era will inevitably come to an end and yet, by most accounts, not soon enough to avert catastrophic environmental change, a “politics of early exit” is needed. Conventional approaches typically focus on global management, energy efficiency, technology, and individual lifestyle choices. They do not confront the concentrated power that follows from concentrated energy. This project explores the dynamics of “going upstream”—environmentally, politically, ethically. It takes extraction, not end-of-pipe management as key. Case studies in Ecuador, El Salvador, Norway, Australia, Germany and the United States illustrate the possibility of “starting to stop” using fossil fuels.

The project on “an ethic of the long-term” is primarily conceptual and normative, with short case studies. It represents my ongoing attempt to construct a “language of sustainability,” what I have done previously with the concepts of distancing, cautious consuming, sufficiency, and home economy. To construct the ethic I develop social organizing principles and complement them with world views, both seeking consonance between the biophysical and social. I begin the argument by establishing the biological capacities of humans for long-term decision making and their organizational capacities in select businesses. I then explore more philosophically conceptions of the future—extant and prospective—via discount rate, risk, and trust.

The third project, “urgent transition,” follows logically from the fossil fuel project and an earlier project on localization that led me to take ever more seriously the implications of energy descent at the same time environmental costs are rising. Not only is this energy transition unlike all previous ones (there will be less concentrated available energy, not more) but its social dimensions, especially its politics, is largely unexplored. I construe transition to be a long-term process of social change that differs from emergency and crisis in the time frame and in actors’ expectations of the future. Transition spans long periods of time, decades or centuries, and leaders and publics alike see no possibility of going back. Whereas in an emergency and a crisis a primary objective is to “get back to normal,” in transition it is to “get to a new normal.” Decisions

in emergency and crisis are reaction, response, recovery; in transition adaptation, innovation, entrepreneurship. I will explore transition and the politics thereof first by positing a plausible scenario for the future: cheap energy (that is, energy that has been cheap economically, energetically and environmentally) is coming to an end and payments for past environmental abuses are coming due. I will then conceptualize transition in decision-relevant terms such as motivation, perception, cognition, world view, and ethics.