



Research: The Wild Hope of an Alternative to Economics as Usual



Our current economic system, where growth is the answer to every problem, insures a bleak future not only for the natural world but for the human psyche. Using the work of philosophers, scientists, poets, and economists, this paper outlines how our biological connection to awe-inducing wild landscapes might help us reject a society defined by consumption and create a more sustainable and rewarding economic system.

Journal Article

Limits

In an economy based on the assumption that invested capital must earn a return, the logical conclusion is that the economy must grow at an exponential rate. But in a world of finite resources, exponential growth defies logic. This idea that we live on a finite planet where growth must logically be restrained is not new. *Limits to Growth*, published in 1972, sold more than 12 million copies. Today the crisis of climate change demands that we take the environmental impact of economic growth seriously rather than casting it off as an “externality.”

Psychological Health & Materialism

The idea that material prosperity has its limits in terms of psychological well-being, is, of course an idea that is even older than *Limits to Growth*. Aristotle, for whom “happiness” (eudaimon) was the ultimate end, defined happiness as a life dominated by virtuous action, a far different idea than what we see in our materialistic culture.

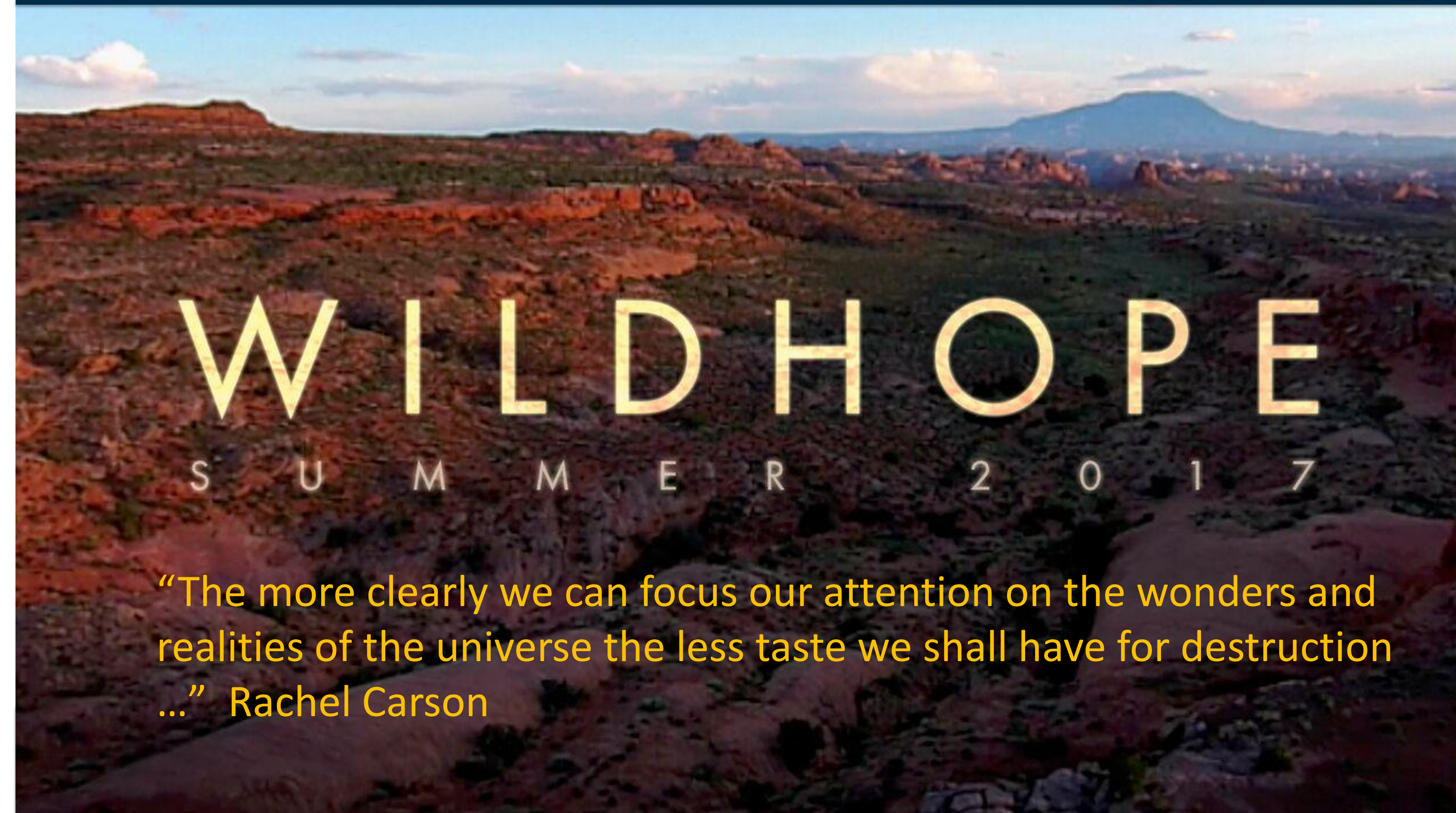
Wild Thinking

Experiencing awe in natural landscapes can provide the catalyst for reconsidering economics as usual. Academic research by psychologists tells us, “Fleeting and rare, experiences of awe can change the course of a life in profound and permanent ways.” Awe challenges “our expectations about what is and can be” diverting attention “outside the self toward something to be understood and appreciated” – “something greater than self, inviting us to transcend our day-to-day agendas and limits,” inviting us to reconsider economics as usual.

Personal Story

“The general public lives a life of stress, shackled by text messages and traffic lights. ... The day that I spent near the Boulder foothills reminded me that our plural spirits need more than what we tend to give them. Companies lead us to believe that we need the newest iPhone, that we need the biggest television, but we don’t. What we need is appreciation.” Scott Brown, Business Major, Regis College

Activism



“The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe the less taste we shall have for destruction ...” Rachel Carson



“The economic reality is that we have a system that is all about the relentless domestication of the earth.” Lisi Krall, Professor of Economics, SUNY, Cortland



“We have a problem because you can’t reconcile the depths of the emission cuts we need to avoid catastrophic warming and an economic system that needs growth in order to survive.” Naomi Klein, Author, *This Changes Everything*



“A materialistic lifestyle does a poor job of satisfying people’s psychological needs.” Tim Kasser, Professor of Psychology, Knox College



“The American dream is a fantasy... the notion that we can merrily gobble up the fecundity of the world instead of nurturing it.” Kathleen Dean Moore, Professor of Philosophy, Emeriti, Oregon State, author of *Great Tide Rising*



“Global warming is coming at us hard. It is by far the greatest crisis we have ever faced. {And} despite all our wealth we’re not nearly as happy as were fifty years ago.” Bill McKibben, Author, Activist



“When you combine population with consumerism, particularly affluence, you get a tremendous impact on the resources of the planet.” Shelley Silbert, Executive Director, Great Old Broads for Wilderness



“Wilderness humbles you, ... can be a catalyst for changing the way people think about materialism. Like a mother protects her children, we want that kind of love for the planet.” Rose Marcario, CEO, Patagonia



“Wilderness broadens you. It changes you. It opens you up to experience in a way that almost nothing else can. It makes you a better, richer person, richer in experience, richer in self-knowledge, richer in knowledge of the world. George Monbiot, Author & Columnist for the *Guardian*

Teaching: Consumption, Contentment, & Climate Change

Learning Objectives

1. To understand the magnitude of the climate change challenge
2. To relate that challenge to personal decision making and become an agent for change
3. To understand the challenge to the economic assumption that growth is good
4. To probe the relationships between consumption, materialism and happiness
5. To explore the indigenous world view and how it relates to climate change
6. To become a well-prepared, active, respectful and respected participant in class discussions through careful reading, active listening, and contributing text-based observations and questions in order to improve the understanding of the group.



Consumption Challenge

“Nearing the end of this challenge, this week I reflected longer on not only what I was doing but how I may be able to continue my work going forward with what I have chosen to do. As I have touched on before, I have been exceptionally proud that I have been able to make conscious decisions that have hopefully become full life changes that will have lasting affects.” Hayley Goncalves, Senior, Peace & Justice and Environmental Studies Major



Student Projects



“And she was lying in the grass
And she could hear the highway breathing
And she could see a nearby factory
She's making sure she is not dreaming”
David Byrne

“These lyrics have always painted a picture in my mind, but only now do they seem to have environmental significance to me. Since the start of this class, I have always wondered why the man made world and the natural world couldn’t look beautiful together. Of course, the man made world must behave respectfully to the natural world, but I personally find beauty in the image of a small factory in the midst of a flowering field...” Shannon Wheeler, Senior, English Major

Contact Info



Suez Jacobson

Professor, History & Politics Department, Regis College

3333 Regis Blvd, Denver, CO 80221

P 720.841.2914 | E sjacobso@regis.edu | REGIS.EDU

Websites

Journal of Applied Business & Economics: <http://www.na-businesspress.com/jabeopen.html>

Film Website: wildhopefilm.com

Literary website: suezwrites.wordpress.com