

# **Beyond Individualism**

**Quakers, community and climate change**

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**Living Witness Project –  
Quakers for Sustainability**

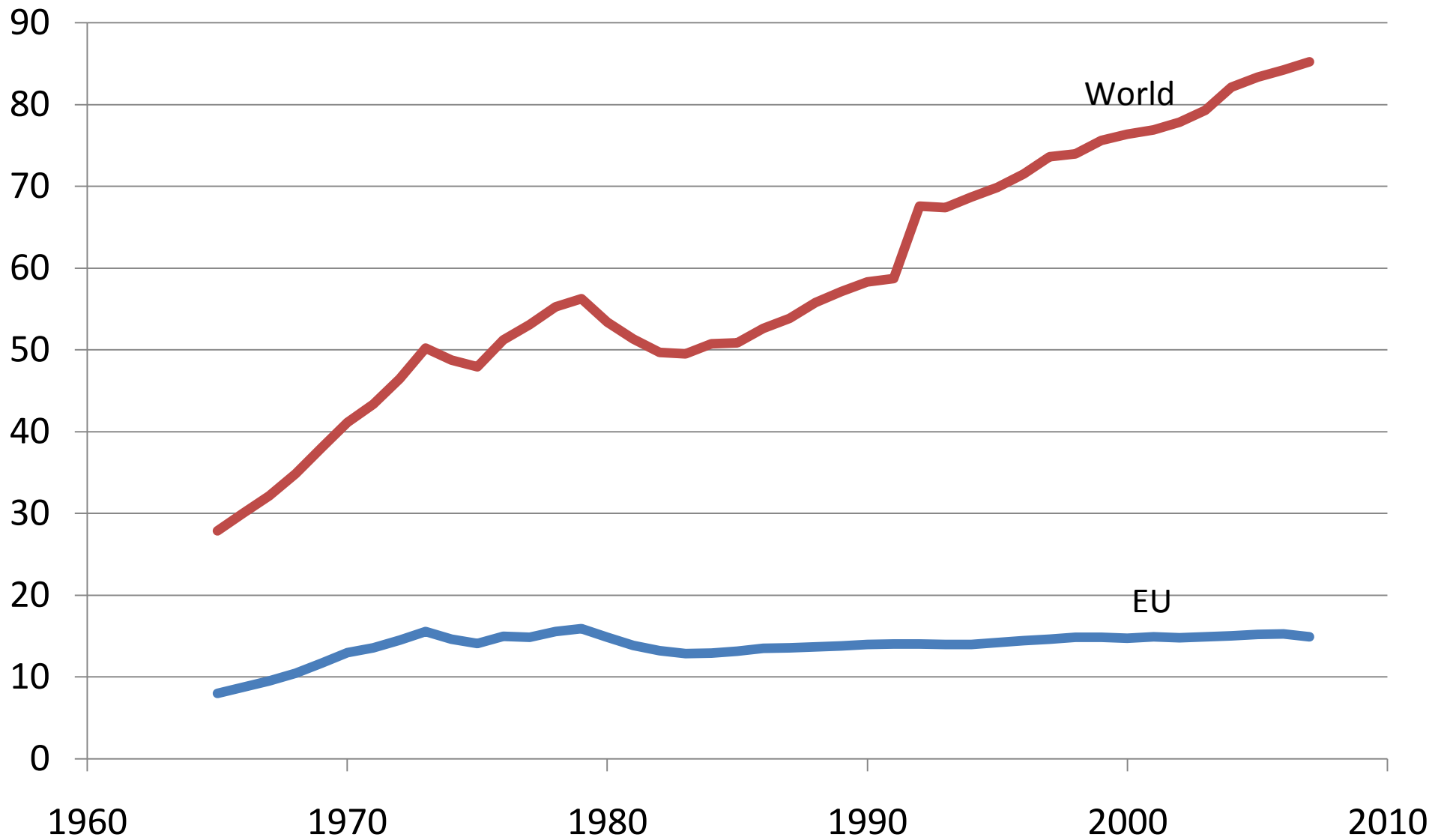
Challenges for our time lecture series at New Jordans

19 March 2009

# Three crises

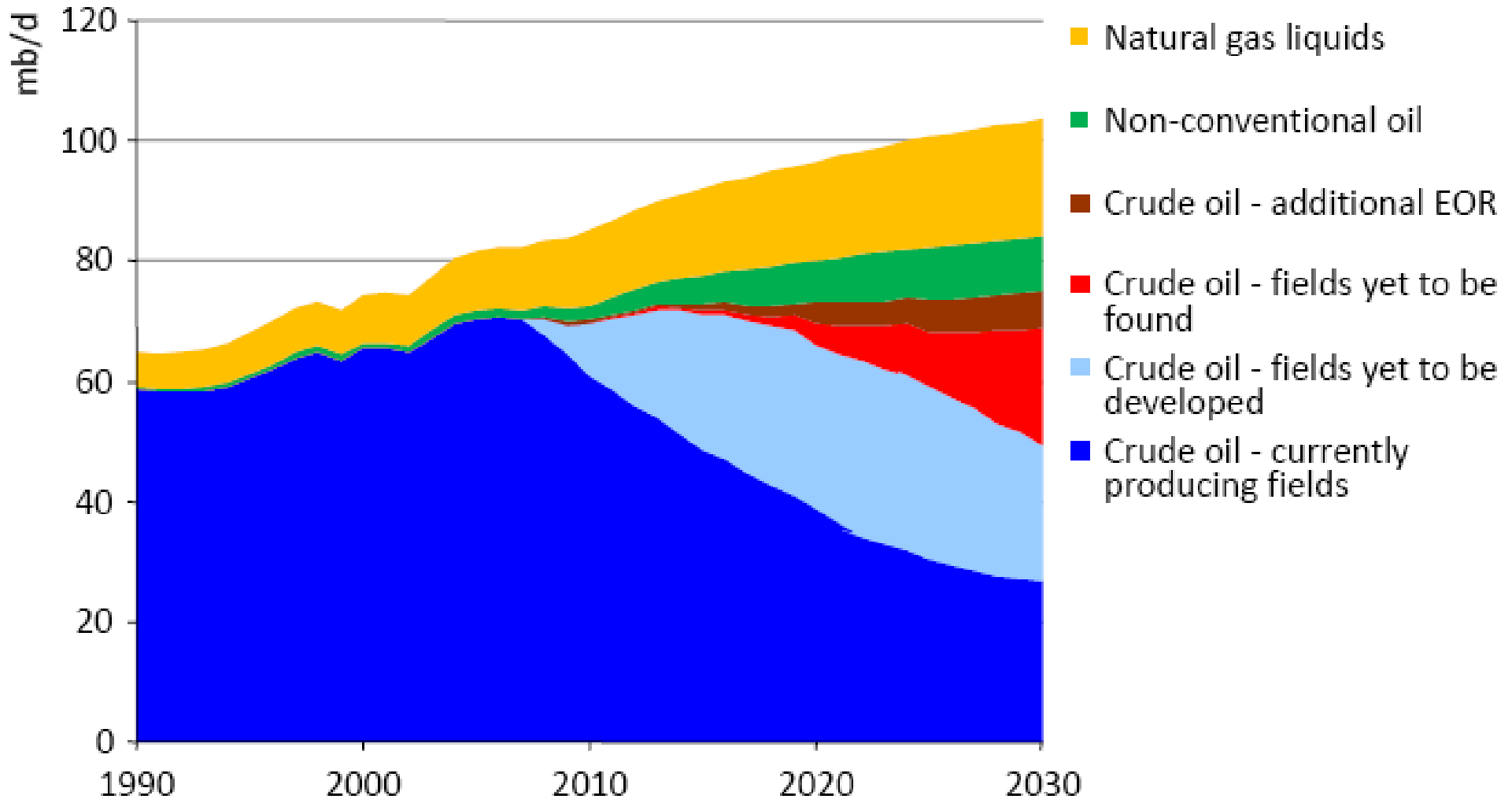
- Oil and other resource shortages
- Climate change
- The economy

**World Oil Demand, million bbl/day 1965-2007**  
(BP Statistical Review, 2008)



# World Oil Supply to 2030

(IEA World Energy Outlook 2008: reference scenario, leading to 550-600ppm CO<sub>2</sub> by 2100 and up to 6°C warming)



# Key messages from IPCC 2007

- Human activity is causing climate change
- Impacts are already well-documented.
- Severe impacts on food and forest production expected in Africa and South Asia by 2020.
- Limiting temperature rise to 2 C means reducing emissions 85% globally by 2050; **more in Europe.**

**But...**

new observations suggest climate is more sensitive than expected with increased likelihood of feedback effects amplifying warming and of rapid sea level rise

# **New observations: climate feedbacks/tipping points**

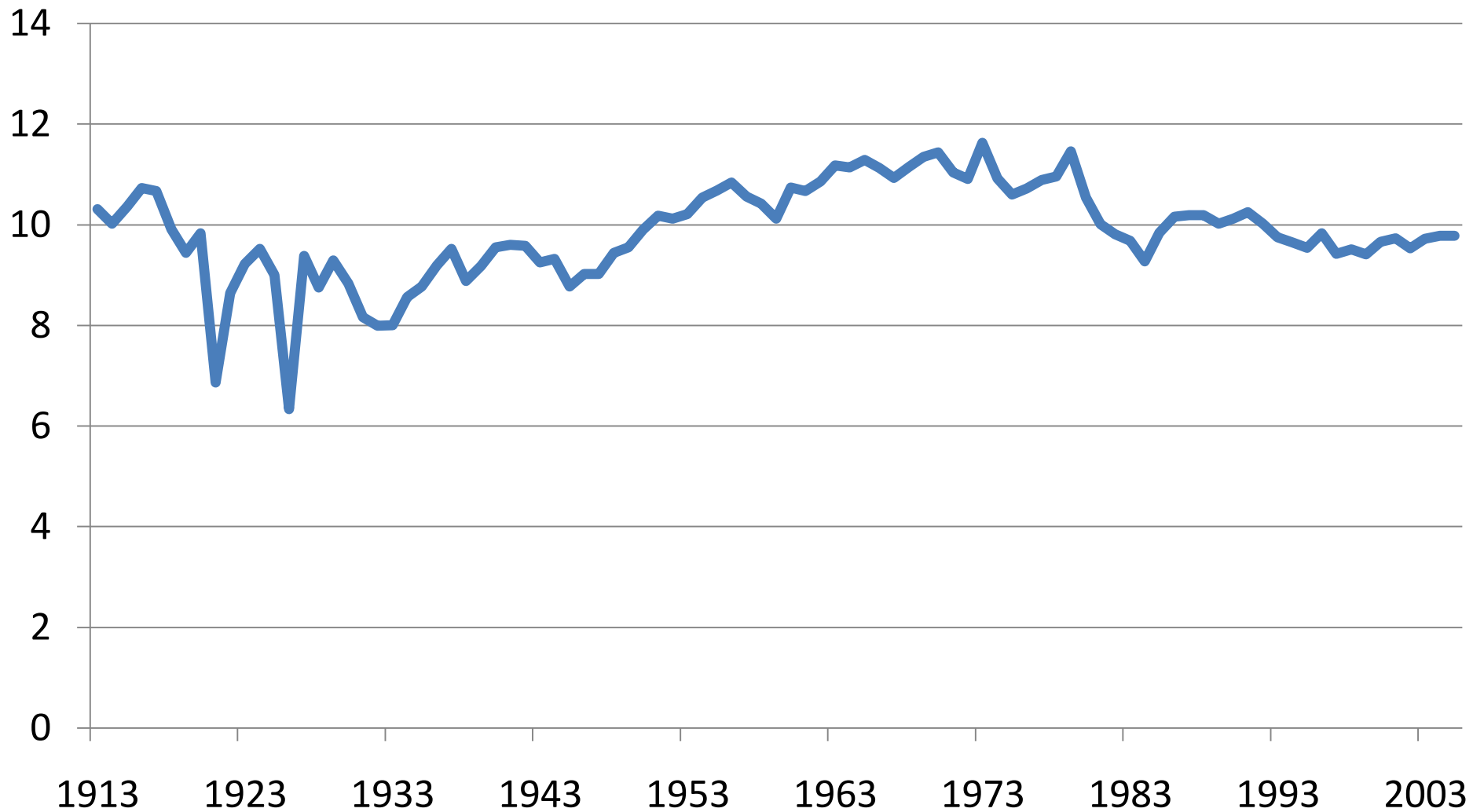
- Loss of arctic sea ice
- Methane from permafrost and deep oceans
- Reduced CO<sub>2</sub> absorption in Southern Ocean and tropical vegetation
- Breakdown of tropical soils

**Calls to reduce emissions faster and sooner to get CO<sub>2</sub> down to 300-350ppm (currently 385ppm)**

# But what does that really mean?

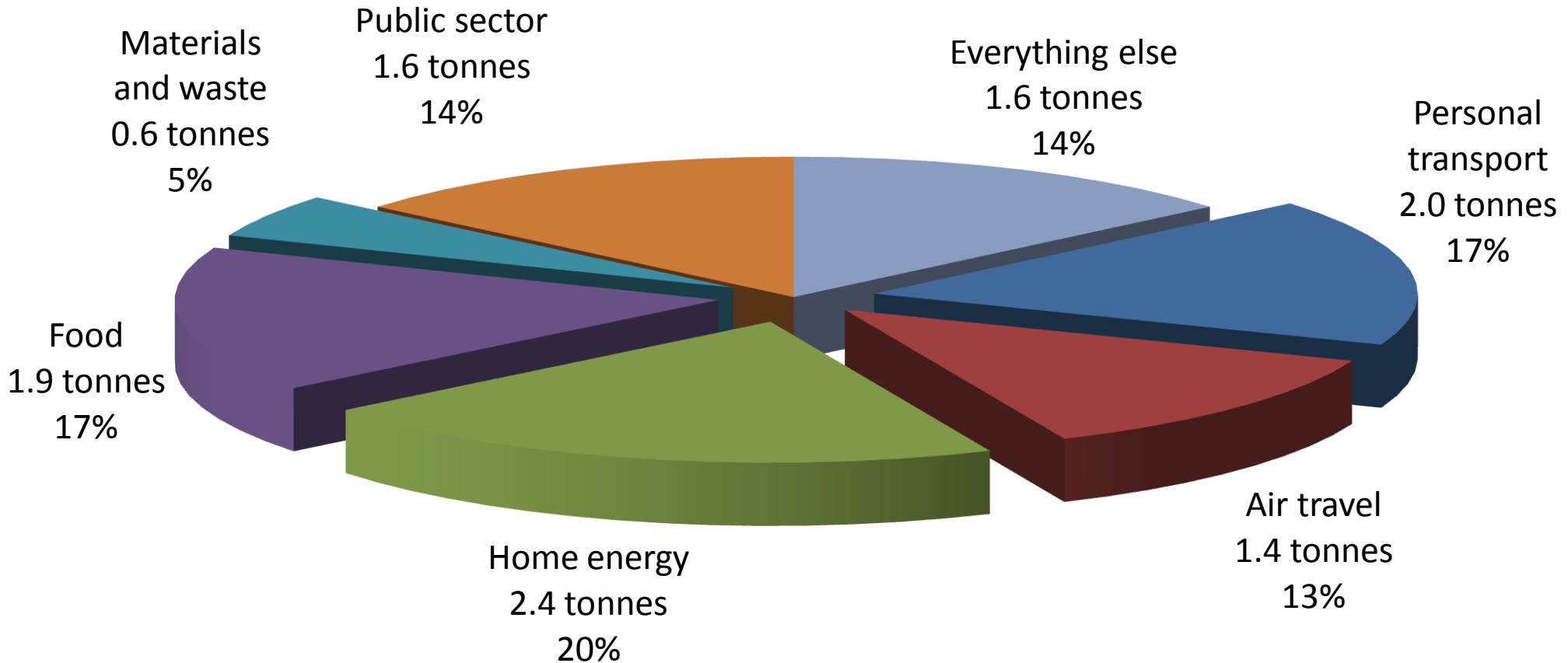
- Avoiding 2 C warming requires **at least 5%** cut per year in **global** emissions
- If GDP grows 3%/year that's 8% reduction per year in emissions/GDP
- History of productivity improvements → maximum is less than 3%/year
- New technology is vital but not enough
- We must consume less energy – perhaps by a factor of three

# UK CO2 per capita from inland fossil fuel consumption, 1913-2005, tonnes



# Most greenhouse gas emissions can be traced to lifestyles

Emissions per average UK resident - total 11.5 tonnes/year CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent



"Materials and waste" includes only materials thrown out in household collections -- not cars, building/DIY waste, large appliances etc.

Public sector includes schools, hospitals, government buildings, the military etc.

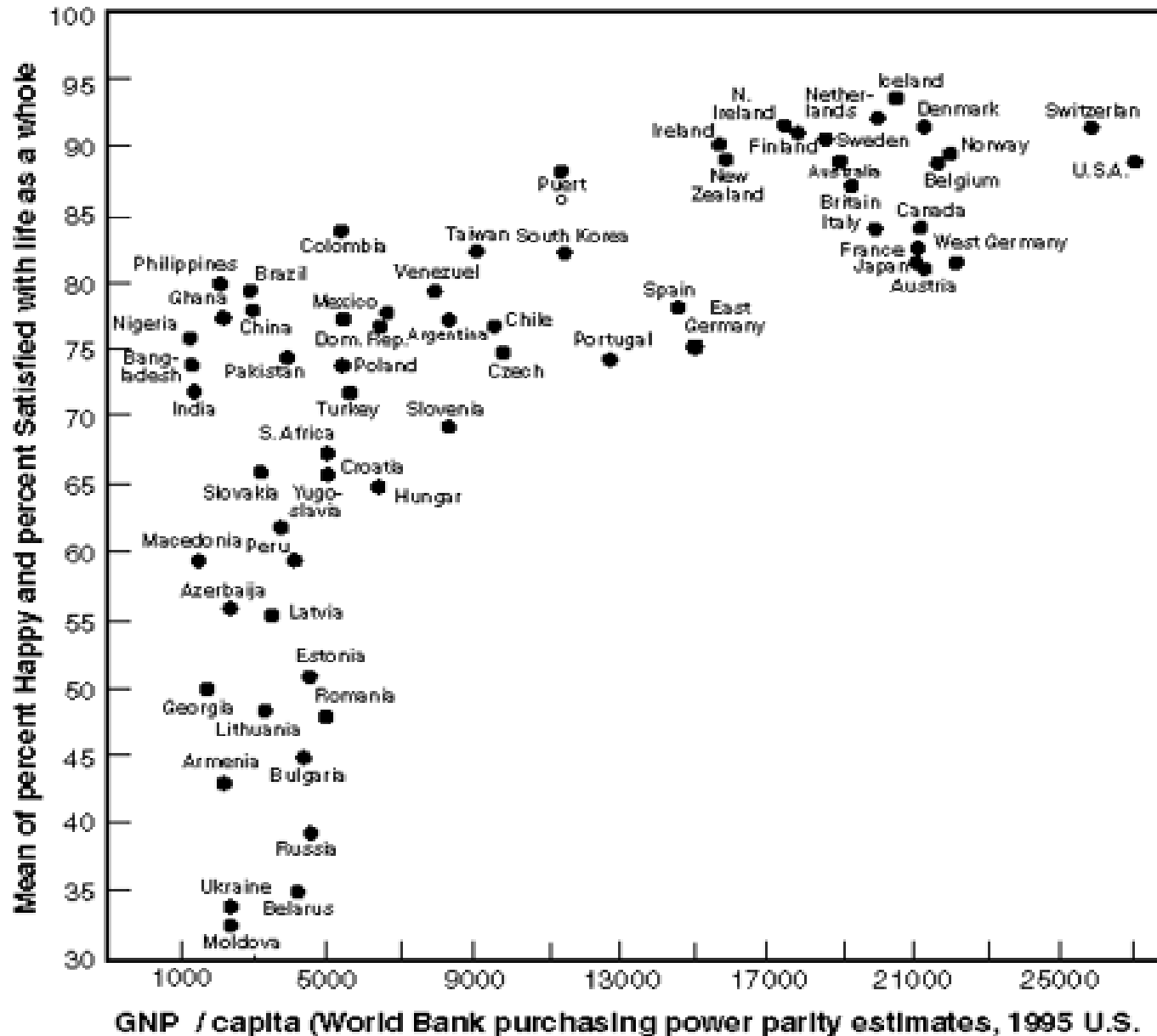
"Everything else" includes supply of clothing, furniture, electrical equipment, house building, and services such as telecoms, finance and entertainment.

# Denial narratives

- It's just natural variation – sunspots, ocean currents etc.
- It's someone else's fault – industry, government, third world population
- “They” will fix it with new technology
- I'm already doing my bit (recycling, saving plastic bags)
- The plane was going anyway
- I'll wait 'til we are all forced to change (by government regulation, oil running out, etc.)
- I will if you will, but not if you don't

# Life Satisfaction vs. National GDP

Graphic from: R. Inglehart, Modernization and Postmodernization (Princeton, 1997).



# The consumer society: an unsustainable culture

**Individual  
self**

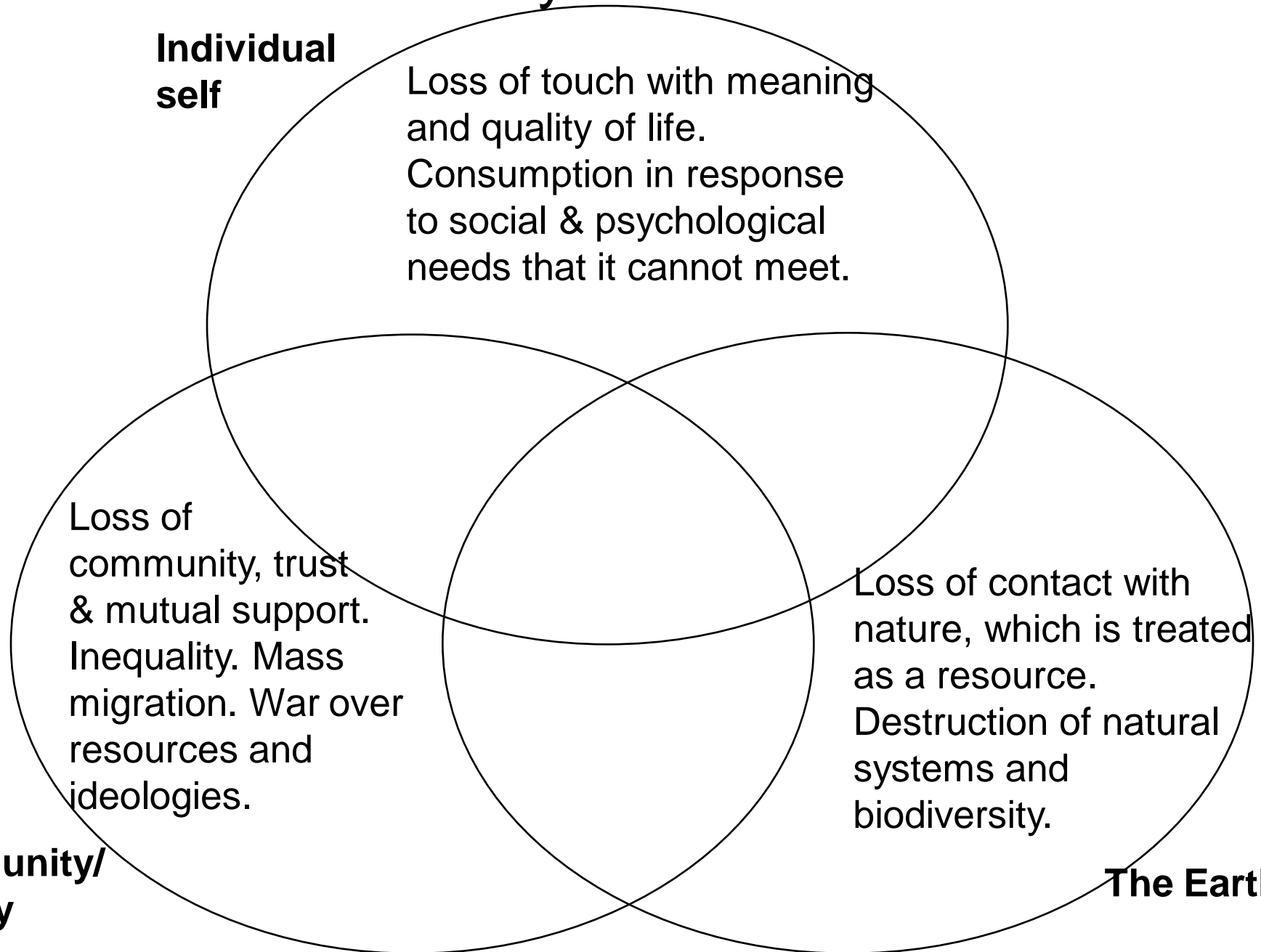
Loss of touch with meaning  
and quality of life.  
Consumption in response  
to social & psychological  
needs that it cannot meet.

Loss of  
community, trust  
& mutual support.  
Inequality. Mass  
migration. War over  
resources and  
ideologies.

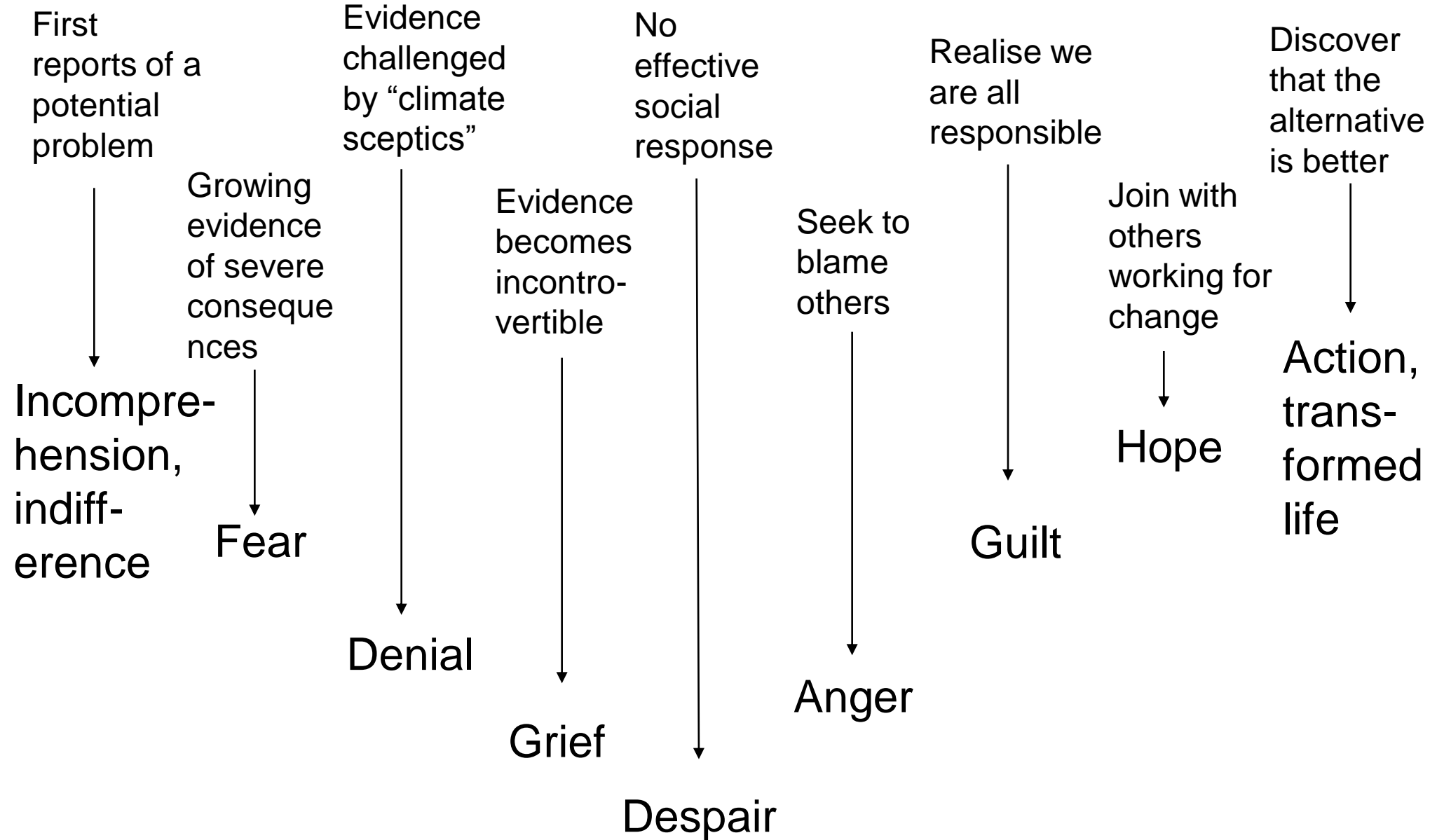
**Community/  
society**

Loss of contact with  
nature, which is treated  
as a resource.  
Destruction of natural  
systems and  
biodiversity.

**The Earth**



# Transforming feelings



# Communities matter

- Main source of personal well-being
- Practical need for collective action
  - Infrastructure, economies of scale, lock-in
- Social support: peer group solidarity
- Community is where ethics are developed, spread and consolidated
- Provide dynamic tension between people with different ideas, world-views
- Provide a sense of self-in-relation → bridge to identity with wider humanity + non-human life

# Who's doing it

- Transition Towns
  - Fast growing grassroots movement responding to climate change and “peak oil” => energy descent plans
- GAP EcoTeams Programme
  - Small groups following a handbook to monitor and reduce waste, electricity & gas use
- Christian Ecology Link – EcoCells
  - More accessible & adaptable variant on EcoTeams
- Quaker Living Witness Project
  - Network of Quaker groups supporting changed lives and action

# Why Quakers?

- Spirituality – based in individual and corporate experience, listening, openness to that of God in the other
- Core values – peace/non-violence, equality, simplicity
- Practices – listening community, decision-making, working with conflict

# Living Witness Project

~80 meetings throughout UK involving c. 2500 Friends

Regular Link Group gatherings, summer school

Shared resources – guides to footprint evaluation, study and action, policy briefings, earthQuaker etc.

## Variety of action:

- learning and reflection – shared meals, ecological footprints, environmental audits, EcoTeams etc.
- engaging others – public events, writing/speaking to MPs, high street leafletting, working with churches, schools, local communities
- practical action – tree planting, organic growing, community shop

# Outcomes

It feels slow and hard but when it works it brings:

Low-impact lifestyles:

- 60-80% reductions in GHG by a few

Collective action and stronger communities:

- working with diversity: mutual respect and understanding

Political and social engagement

- working for change with other groups & networks

Personal enjoyment:

- fun activities, sense of purpose and achievement

# Lessons learned

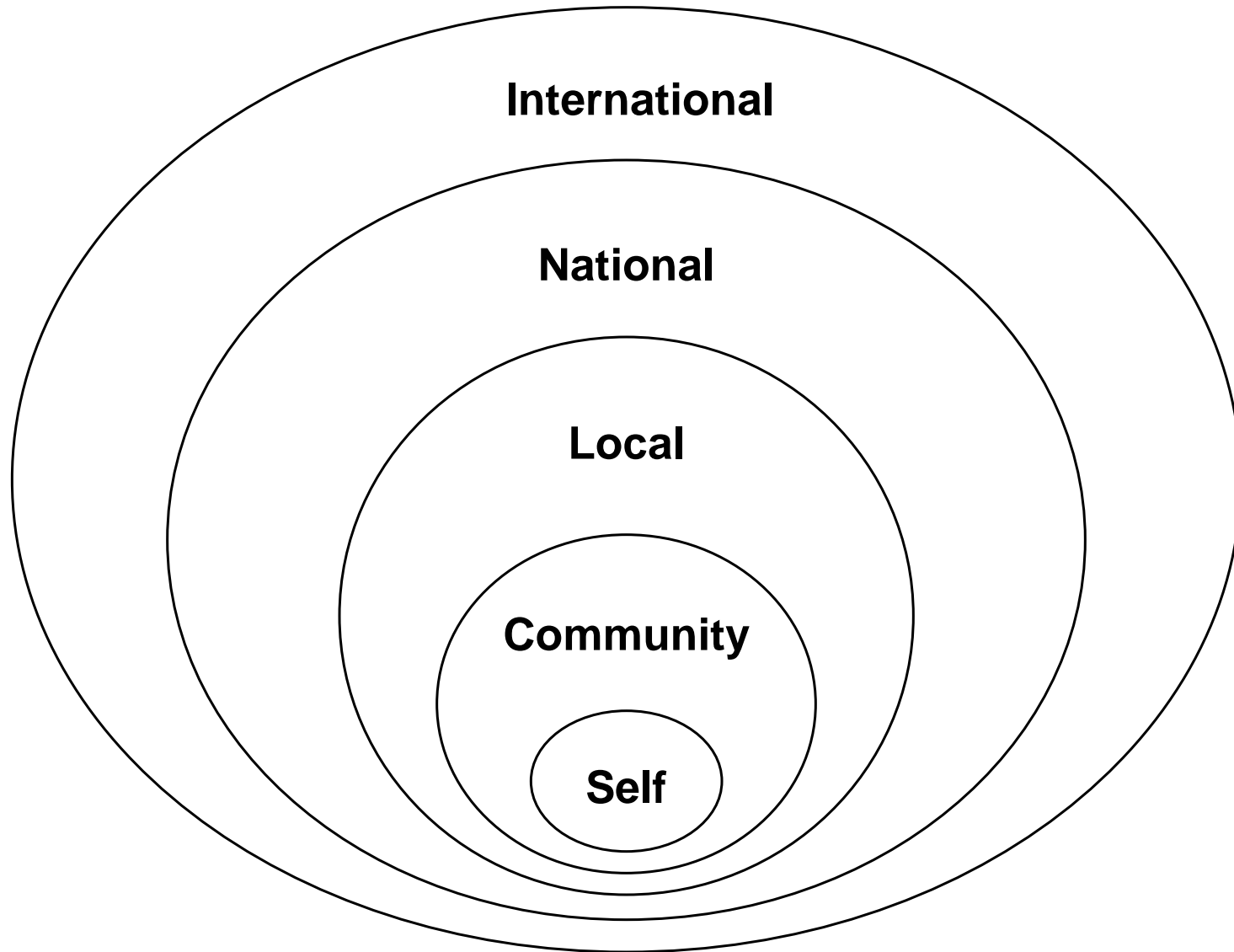
Most successful groups have:

- shared leadership
- inclusive, listening culture, valuing diversity, responsive to group's interests rather than pushing a particular approach.
- mixture of activities – discussion, learning, action etc.
- action at many levels – own lives, the meeting, community etc.
- regular meetings
- shared food, often on LOAF principles

Best outcomes have come from regular social events setting up and hearing reports from smaller, short-term action groups.

It takes a lot of time and consistent support

# Acting locally and globally



# Valuing diversity

- Everyone is needed
- No “right” approach; people have different world-views and reasons for being involved
- All approaches are needed
  - Technology
  - Behaviour change
  - Campaigning
  - Community building, nurture & support
- Conflict can be a basis for learning and stronger community