



## Jay Hanson and Dieoff.org

Posted by [Nate Hagens](#) on July 24, 2006 - 11:37am

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Tags: [dieoff](#), [evolution](#), [net energy](#), [peak oil](#), [thermodynamics](#) [[list all tags](#)]

There are many layers of the Peak Oil onion. One man who has peeled away most of them, largely out of the public eye, is Jay Hanson. Jay is the quintessential Peak Oil [autodidact](#). After a successful career in software design, his ongoing quest for knowledge about energy, evolution and the environment culminated in a massive internet reference hub for these topics called [DIEOFF.ORG](#). In 1997 he predicted we would invade and occupy Iraq for their oil. ([link](#)). Jay has been intensely studying and researching topics central to energy and evolution nearly full time for 15 years, (4 of which spent solo on a yacht in the Pacific). I know many of the readers of theoil Drum got their first exposure to the concept of Peak Oil through Jays writings and research and were active readers of his dieoff listserv( [GreyZone](#), [Darwinian](#), [Angry Chimp](#) and [Totoneila](#), to name a few).

As such, I feel privileged that Jay will be visiting Robert Rapier, myself and some friends in August to discuss his latest ideas, research and predictions regarding society in the face of peak oil. He is particularly interested in working out a 'logic' framework on the human behavioral aspects of everyday life, and believes we can parse much of our behaviour into a simple set of 'if-then' analog algorithms, evolutionarily designed, context dependent.

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The geology and alternative energy situations will play themselves out naturally in the coming years but insights into our evolutionarily constructed [behavioral switches](#) are rarely talked about in decision-making circles. In my opinion (and Jay's), progress in this area thus offers the greatest leverage in understanding and promoting successful approaches to Peak Oil adaptation and mitigation. (Jay would also say that its just fun to learn and debate because of the [dopamine](#).)

Human behavior is a product of our genes and our environment (culture). Jay has often pointed out that culture is only relevant so long as it has the [ability to punish](#). Many of the dieoff.org viewpoints are difficult to envision let alone accept (like a 50%+ human dieoff in the coming decades). Yet Jay Hanson has connected many dots with research and insight difficult to refute. Below is Jay's farewell summary to his dieoff listserv from 2003. It offers a unique perspective on societies possible reactions to a decline in energy availability. (If there is interest, and we haven't started [WWIII](#), I'll follow this post one month hence with a synopsis of our mini retreat on human evolutionary constructs.)

FAREWELL DIEOFF.ORG

Jay Hanson 01/12/03

I am turning the dieoff website over to the moderator of the "energyresources" mailing list -- a fellow named Tom Robertson [t1r@bellatlantic.net](mailto:t1r@bellatlantic.net). If you are so inclined, Tom could make use of any support you could give him to keep the dieoff web site going.

I would like to bid you all farewell and present a brief synopsis of my work over the last ten years or so. Like everything else, it's all very simple when you really understand it. Unfortunately, I doubt that more than a few hundred people worldwide (perhaps far less) would be able to really understand the issues I raise in this paper. Probably no more than one or two who actually receive this mailing will really understand it -- for reasons I will attempt to explain...

## SYNOPSIS

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I developed an interest in "sustainability" about fifteen years ago when it became clear to me that our present economic system was totally unsustainable and self-destructive. It seemed little more than a well-organized method for converting natural resources into garbage. I studied modern economic theory on the assumption that our political leaders would work to change the flaws once I was able to point them out.

I became aware that something was fundamentally wrong in our political system when I ran for public office. The more I studied politics, the more bizarre it looked. I finally realized it wasn't anything like the "democracy" it claimed to be. It turns out that America is actually a stealth plutocracy <http://www.dieoff.org/page168.htm> !

Working full-time for more than a decade, I studied it all: the history of our so-called "democracy", the fundamentals and history of modern economics, sociology, cybernetics, system theory, biology, ecology, microbiology, evolution theory, physics, and so on.

After several years of research, I concluded that little -- if any -- of the so-called "social sciences" (including economics) taught in our universities had anything relevant to say about the real world. Instead of discovering facts and principles, most social science is little more than a program designed to "rationalize" (invent socially-acceptable excuses for) the current plutocracy. Moreover, I was astonished to find that the global economy is based upon Catholic religious dogma that I was able to trace back to St. Thomas <http://www.dieoff.com/page243.htm> ! Eventually I discarded social science altogether because it had absolutely nothing worthwhile to say about sustainability.

By placing the results of my research in order of importance for sustainability, I can simplify over ten years' work down to two sets of physical "laws". These laws place harsh limits on what is possible for us: #1 ENERGY LAWS, and #2 BIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION LAWS. For purposes of sustainability, nothing else matters.

### #1 ENERGY LAWS

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Once I was able to understand Odum's "eMergy" metric (actually very simple, but difficult for old minds), I realized there are only three relevant principles concerning energy: the First Law of thermodynamics (no creation), the Second Law (always a loss), and the "Net eMergy" principle ("net energy" converted for "quality") <http://www.dieoff.org/synopsis.htm> .

Once one understands the three simple principles outlined in the paragraph above, then one understands that the only way our society could actually be "sustainable" would be to continuously reduce our aggregate energy footprint -- less consumption AND less people -- until the global population level is back to a couple-a-hundred-million people

swinging through the trees. This is also Georgescu-Roegen's conclusion <http://www.dieoff.org/page148.htm> . That's the easy part...

With great reluctance (because it has worked so well for me), I was forced to conclude that our present system of capitalism is incompatible with energy laws and can never be sustainable. My only hope was that some new form of sustainable society might be possible. So I began studying human nature, intending to discover what kinds of sustainable societies might work...

## #2 BIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION LAWS

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Human nature is much more difficult to understand than energy laws for two main reasons: it's not taught, and we are genetically biased against self-knowledge. In other words, teaching human nature to someone is something like teaching a dog not to bark <http://www.dieoff.com/page193.htm> .

I will reduce several years' research on human nature down to the essentials: A COMPUTER ANALOG, and A SOCIAL PRINCIPLE. For purposes of sustainability, everything else about human nature can be ignored -- it simply doesn't matter.

### a. A COMPUTER ANALOG

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Computer software cannot function before it is enabled by the hardware. In other words, functioning hardware MUST precede functioning software.

Human thought is analogous to computer software. Any particular thought (software) cannot precede the neurons, dendrites, neurotransmitters, etc (hardware) that make that specific thought possible. Like all computers, human hardware is the physical prerequisite to human software -- but that's where the similarity with everyday computers ends.

Human brains are much different than the stored-program, digital, binary, single processor PCs we use every day. Instead, human brains are wired (not stored-program), analog (not digital, not binary), multiprocessor (not single processor) "state machines" (program logic may permanently modify itself depending upon the data). A human cannot have a specific thought unless it has been enabled by earlier brain "wiring" (e.g., pre-programmed, formal education, reflection, critical thinking). Moreover, older brains are much harder to "wire" than younger brains.

Brains are mostly hardwired by age 25. By middle age, people may need two or three years of hard work to understand something completely new (grow the brain hardware required to think the thought).

The human brain comes from the factory with a set of empirically designed pre-programs that have historically (over a billion years) tended to maximize "inclusive fitness". One of these pre-programs was specifically designed to inhibit self-knowledge with respect to social issues. By remaining unaware of our true motives, we are much more effective at deceiving others. We evolved this way because the more convincing liar has the advantage in sexual competition (e.g., Bill Clinton).

In short, people cannot think a thought unless the brain has been previously "wired" to think it. This is why civilization after civilization runs out of energy and collapses

<http://dieoff.com/page134.htm> . This is also why we are presently running out of energy and hell-bent for collapse.

Contrary to the received wisdom, people do not think and then act. They act and then rationalize. New data from the environment is routinely plugged into existing mental hardware (like entering a number into a spreadsheet), which is then followed by an appropriate thought. Since people have no wiring for "peak in oil and gas production", news of the present energy crisis cannot generate the appropriate thought. Only prolonged reflection can grow the required mental hardware to place this critical piece of news in perspective. Unfortunately, only a few people can invest the thousands-and-thousands of hours necessary to see both the energy and evolutionary aspects of the human condition clearly.

#### b. A SOCIAL PRINCIPLE

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Individuals come from the factory pre-programmed to seek inclusive fitness in ways that have actually worked in the past. In modern society, economic growth serves as a proxy for increasing fitness. This is why we "feel good" when we make money, buy a new SUV, and so on. Unfortunately, when our pre-program determines that inclusive fitness is best served by violating social norms, we will violate those norms and seek a fitness advantage. This explains the higher crime rates in our lower income populations and why nations go to war.

Societies can remain reasonably stable as long as their economies continue to grow -- continue to serve inclusive fitness for the majority. But when economic growth becomes physically impossible -- as it must -- societies will disintegrate into anarchy and war, as individuals and groups seek advantage.

#### CONCLUSION

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Once one understands the three simple energy principles outlined in this paper, then one understands that the only way our society could be actually be "sustainable", would be to continuously reduce our aggregate energy footprint. Put differently, energy laws will force us to continuously reduce our aggregate footprint whether we choose to or not.

Once one understands human nature as outlined in this paper, then one also understands that continued social stability requires us to continuously INCREASE energy use, which we now know is impossible! It should not come as a surprise that we have been pre-programmed to overshoot and crash just like other animals <http://www.dieoff.org/page80.htm> .

There are absolutely no humane solutions available to the ruling elite because it is impossible to solve the problem of human corruption (i.e., the genetic pre-program to violate norms and seek advantage). Unfortunately, the best the poor can hope for is a painless death.

Since human nature is so terribly difficult to understand (I needed about five years), I am willing to participate in a moderated discussion group to explain the contents of this paper -- providing enough people are interested -- and someone volunteers to do the moderating. There will be no "political" discussions on the list. Go somewhere else if you want to talk politics.

It will be a few weeks before I can get the list started. Send a note to me at [j@gmail.com](mailto:j@gmail.com) if you are interested. Be sure the word "farewell" is in the title of your email so I won't delete it as spam. (I use a "white list" spam filter.)

Farewell and good luck,  
Jay

I dont profess to agree with all of Jay's ideas, but everytime I've thought I logically or verbally cornered him in the past, he replied with "Nate, you still haven't read enough biology, not by a longshot". After starting [here](#), I've recently buttressed my biology background with the following titles: [The Tangled Wing, by Melvin Konner](#), [The Moral Animal, by Robert Wright](#), [Biological Anthropology- The Natural History of Humankind](#), [The Selfish Gene by Richard Dawkins](#), [The Extended Phenotype by Richard Dawkins](#), [The Red Queen by Matt Ridley](#), [The Spirit in the Gene - Humanities Proud Illusion and the Laws of Nature - by Reg Morrison](#), and [Evolution, by Colin Patterson](#).

Biology and behaviour are underrepresented in discussions of resource depletion.



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