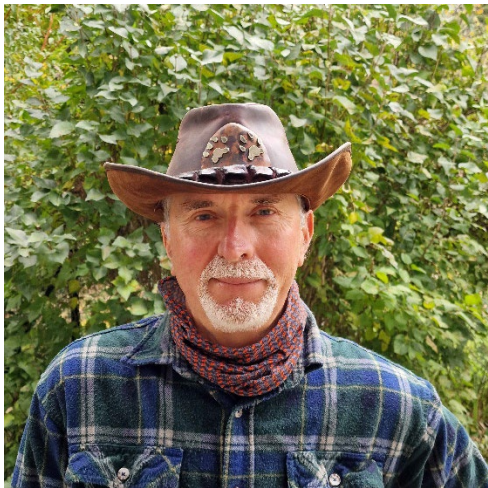


Psychological adaptation to dark scenarios

A personal essay – Andrew Morton August 2026



Contents

1	Psychological adaptation to dark scenarios.....	2
1.1	Introduction.....	2
1.2	My position and experience	2
1.3	My starting point and how this previously affected me	3
1.4	How I moved on.....	4
1.5	How I now manage and adapt	5
1.6	Further reading and support resources	6

1 Psychological adaptation to dark scenarios

1.1 Introduction

This essay aims to provide advice and psychological support to individuals who, like myself, have concluded that the future of humanity is overall not looking positive.

First, I share below my personal position and experience on this topic. Some of what you read may match your own thoughts and/or situation. I have largely solved my personal dilemma and potentially some of my ideas and solutions are transferable.

Secondly, in my research I came across an array of useful resources, which I share below.

AI was not used in the research, writing and editing of this essay.

1.2 My position and experience

If you truly and deeply believe that overall the future of humanity is looking bright, then I congratulate you on your positivity and wish you the best. I am not like that but I am not a nihilistic doomer either. My position is more complex. I summarise it as follows:

I acknowledge the impossibility of accurately predicting the future and the potential for bias and negativity. I also need to emphasise the vast difference between global scale negative events and trends and individual lives. Furthermore, from the outset, I would like to emphasise the potential in all of us to live our individual lives in a positive, mindful and humanistic manner – living in the moment and both feeling good and doing good.

Nonetheless, I do forecast an overall darkening future for humanity as a whole, and for the planet. Using foresight language, I foresee what I call dark scenarios, developing from now in an incremental manner through to 2100 and beyond. I am also confident that I cannot significantly change this global future through my own actions or resources – my agency is way too limited.

These conclusions, I believe, are based on relatively sound evidence and logic. Whilst they are outputs of cold logic their personal impact is highly emotional and psychological. In short, these conclusions sadden me, chronically, and generate an array of subtle other negative impacts.

I know that I am far from alone in developing these type of conclusions and the associated negative emotional impacts. I see and hear of many others afflicted by variants of this melancholia. This is a gross simplification of the issue, but it gets to the heart of it.

I note that I am in a highly privileged position, as my personal future looks overall brighter than the global future. My wife and I have no children, which obviously has a major influence on our general situation and outlook. We are thereby spared the real and fully justifiable concerns of parenthood in a darkening global context.

The logical follow on to all of this bleak analysis was to invest in improving my psychological situation. I noted and now wish to continue to emphasize that melancholia/depression/anxiety whatever, comes with a serious psychological, physical and social cost. It is very unpleasant to be frequently depressed. It is also very bad for your long term health and longevity and equally bad for your relationships. Finally, you are not in a good position to sustainably help others if you are chronically distracted by your own psychological issues.

So, over the period 2020-2025 I invested a great deal of time and mental energy on this topic. I am now comfortable with publicly sharing the process and key results. It is nothing radical or wholly new – just a collection of generic well proven psychological health tactics and some logic thinking adjusted to the unique global context of 2026.

1.3 My starting point and how this previously affected me

The starting point for my psychological journey was the uninvited and unwanted negative conclusions I drew regarding the likely future of humanity and the planet in the 21st century.

Looking back , I assess that my personal inflexion point between an overall positive to an overall negative forecast occurred gradually over the period 2010 – 2020. From 2020, my assessment darkened specifically on climate change, ecology, authoritarianism and inequality. This occurred in parallel with, and partly due to, an increased investment in desk research, including fact checking and searching for good news. For the purposes of this discussion, I will limit my retrospective self-analysis to after 2020.

I self-calibrate the personal psychological and practical impact of all of this as mild to moderate. Throughout this period I maintained full functionality, stability at work and positive ongoing relationships. However, it was overall quite a negative process and unpleasant. I have unpacked my experience into a number of topics and bullet points, noting that the lived experience was never that clear or defined:

- With respect to my mood, at times I was depressed and de-energized. Occasionally I was quite black, generally when the global cloud added to strictly personal issues.
- I had trouble at times in maintaining a normal extended conversation without some version of the dark global present or future creeping into the dialogue. This may have acted in part as a relief valve, but it had a negative side. As a minimum, it put an immediate damper on the conversation. Potentially it also depressed others and tainted some friendships.
- I also retrospectively noted a background feeling of urgency and an intolerance for small talk and trivia. I felt instead that I needed to focus on and discuss the important issues. This was irrational. Whilst the global situation is truly critically important, my agency at the global scale is negligible – I cannot save the world, or apparently even slightly alter its course, whether I start trying today or next year. However at the personal and local level, these feelings did have an impact – they dampened or tainted my day to day social engagement, which was a definite negative.

- From 2006 to 2025 I worked as a project developer and manager in the United Nations Environment Programme. I specialised in energy and environment and geographically focused on post conflict, post disaster and failing states. I definitely did lose motivation for my UN work, as I concluded that almost all of my prior efforts (and most of the work of many others) had near zero sustainable impact at scale and that this trend would continue. The UNEP leadership at the time employed forced positivity and an aspirational vs evidenced based approach to goal setting. I found this a turn-off, and so disengaged. The net result is that I internally I went quiet and then I retired slightly early.
- I was for several years frequently frustrated and irritable. However I hesitate to blame the global background for this, noting that my poor fit into the UN culture and routine career dissatisfaction was a more credible contributor.
- Doomscrolling the news was a real problem. It both devoured my time and fed into my negative moods. In parallel I did however read extensively, digging into a lot of balanced, in-depth and longer term academic and analytical material. Much of this was and still is extremely negative, as the facts on climate change, ecosystem degradation and democratic decline are both clear and harsh.
- I definitely stress tested my marriage. Having a partner who is simultaneous depressed, frustrated and distracted for an extended period is for certain a distinctly unpleasant experience. Such a partner may also not be very supportive – more of a burden than an asset. Happily, we have progressed past this without lasting damage.
- Practical medium to long term planning proved complex. If you add global decline and the associated risks to the normal list of variables in life and retirement planning, then the complexity can become overwhelming.
- It took three years of discussion, analysis and test visits to Australia and Canada to develop a well-informed plan. In the end, we are staying right where we have lived for the last 22 years and plan to put down even deeper roots. I received French citizenship in February 2026 and am now even more committed to supporting the “European Project”.
- I invested an inordinate amount of time and energy working out a person psychological and practical solution. I am content now with what I have developed, but note the opportunity cost of the very inefficient and emotionally turbulent process.

1.4 How I moved on

Over the period 2020 – 2022 I read widely, looking for pre-made or at least partly suitable personal psychological and master planning frameworks to apply to my situation. I am an atheist, so that excluded religion and anything that was not science and factually based. I found a great deal of wisdom and useful advice and met many friendly and admirable people enroute. However I did not find any obvious single solution package. I also found a lot of poor quality material and intellectual dead-ends.

I then invested quite some time building my own custom framework out of the components I had harvested and triaged. The framework ended up quite complex, with a process diagram and 10 categories of action. This proved to be very useful. In particular it enabled me to apply logic and critical thinking to my situation and unpack the issues into manageable packets. However the process was relatively complicated and time consuming. Looking back through

my notes, I do not see much that demands to be shared – the process itself was cathartic but the material is overall poorly written. Email me if you want more detail.

One critically useful tactic was appropriate sequencing of corrective/mitigating actions. In essence, I applied the simplest, most widely agreed corrective actions first – focusing on well-being and relationships. Early positive results from this laid a firm foundation for tackling the more complicated topics, such as post-retirement joint planning in a forecast darkening context.

As a side point, in 2023, I contracted viral meningitis and ended up severely ill in hospital. The neurological damage from this has taken 2 years to fade and some damage is permanent. This threw a wildcard into my plans, forcing me to delay and scale back some activities and park some long-held ambitions.

1.5 How I now manage and adapt

I am currently two years into retirement from a very formal professional career, so there is a lot of ongoing transitional activity and re-adjustment. Nonetheless, I feel I have largely stabilized in psychological and emotional terms and our major plans are made and under implementation. So, to summarise how I now manage and adapt:

- I (generally) maintain discipline on the well-being basics: diet, exercise, sleep, social contacts, mindfulness.
- I continue to progress multiple very small local activities, such as volunteer work on our communal orchard and chicken coop and building and donating park benches and sculptures. These activities generate immediate, simple and positive feedback loops. They are also physical and outdoors oriented, thereby keeping me away from the laptop and the news.
- I continue to read the news and current affairs, however I am able to frame what I view and avoid overly engaging emotionally in individual new items/events. The overall trend is basically as forecast, albeit with some recent serious downwards trends on authoritarianism, climate change and populism. AI is arriving faster than anticipated but proving as disturbing as foreseen by many.
- I do occasionally lapse into doomscrolling, but find that planning a busy and positive day is a useful antidote - it reduces my tolerance for both time spent unproductively and negative triggers.
- I continue to experience periods of melancholia, however I now better understand them and can control them and exit in a day or two via simple corrective actions: sleep, positive distraction, stoic and/or mindfulness thought exercises.
- I find that simple mental gratitude tactics work very well. From a rational viewpoint I actually do have a great deal to be grateful for and so I simply need to regularly remind myself of this fact.
- Agency remains very important to me. To maintain and build this, I do have a relatively clear multi-year plan and a set of projects. I have selected projects and activities that are overall inherently positive and interesting and a pleasure to plan and undertake.
- A useful side-effect of my analysis, forecasting and planning work is the removal of future anxiety related to my own fate. I worry for my wife, but that is a completely normal and manageable concern.

- My forecast remaining lifespan is 25 years at the most. The global decline that I envisage is already happening, but is foreseen to scroll out over 80 years or more. Wealthy families living in Europe are in a highly privileged position with respect to risk – we are safer than most and will continue to be for quite some time. My secure personal position thereby enables me to invest more time in helping others and progressing my projects, which generates a further positive feedback loop.

I have a few personal projects, either under implementation or development. These projects are a core part of my personal solution – they give me direction and agency. You can read about them on my website: <https://scenario2100.com/>

1.6 Further reading and support resources

Many of the longer term challenges and forces we face are global in scale, and so are broadly similar for all of us. Our individual situations however vary dramatically, so our responses will need to be similarly variable. With this caveat, I offer some broader reading and support resources that I personally found useful.

I hope that this helps.

Australian Psychological Society <https://psychology.org.au/for-the-public/psychology-topics/climate-change-psychology>

The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy. <https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2024/2-august-how-to-deal-with-climate-anxiety/>

The APS and the BACP just two of the many professional counselling and psychotherapy umbrella organizations that note the seriousness of the psychological aspects of darkening futures. Most such organizations work with the label of climate anxiety/distress and prioritise climate change, but the general advice and therapeutic responses are equally applicable to most incremental darkening futures. I found the APS guidance to be high quality.

The Climate Psychology Alliance. <https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/>

A UK non-profit association. An admirable fusion of professional therapeutic knowledge and broader perspectives on the climate and ecological crises.

The Deep Adaptation Forum. <https://www.deepadaptation.info/>

DAF is a non-profit association and an intellectual and social collective, focused on positive/less harmful responses to foreseen societal disruption and collapse. It has much to offer in terms of reading and mutual support. It is not and does not claim to be professional in terms of its foresight nor adaptation approaches.