

The HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter:
Looking at the World Today as if Facts Matter

Robert MacNeil Christie, PhD

Here we explore the latest facts, actions, and perspectives on the New Great Transformation of the Earth System, as it unfolds before our eyes. We apply the Hopeful Realism we all need to work through the greatest predicament in human history.

Latest News from the Hopeful Realist

Imperial Implosion or what? It seems a week does not go by without some new twist in Putin's war on the people and nation of Ukraine. Nothing has gone as planned, from the first failed assault that bogged down on the road to Kiev, to the current stalled campaign in the East. The only thing consistent in the Russian attacks is the brutality of the war crimes. Poorly tested experimental submersibles are not the only human construction that can implode.

When you hire a mercenary army to prosecute a major portion of your war, you get what you pay for: a ruthless rogue running a band of ruthless rogues. The politics of empire makes for strange bedfellows—well, maybe not so strange. We might liken the so-called 'Wagner Group' to a band of pirates, without the romance of Hollywood comedic myth. Yevgeny Prigozhin is no Johnny Depp! Furthermore, gratuitous brutality and capricious mass executions of civilians are not the stuff of entertainment, except for the world's greatest sociopaths. Yet, what is Putin but a brutal pirate with state power?

I have heard more than one person express shock that 'in this day and age,' or, 'in the 21st century,' (as if we humans are oh so advanced) anyone could still think that war is a legitimate way to achieve any goal... So-called progress has not involved the abandonment of evil. Nevertheless, the blind belief in the precepts of 'modernism' framed in naïve optimism and the collective fetish over 'modern technology' as the solution to all human problems remains strong. Really, not much has changed in global politics or in the brutality of autocrats, except that the danger posed by the misuse of technology is vastly greater than it was before the twentieth century.

Occasionally, news media give a passing nod to the extent of environmental destruction, along with the demolition of infrastructure that Putin's war on Ukraine has caused. Military operations along with the direct physical damage inflicted by munitions of all sorts, can be some of the most polluting activities humans have ever engaged in—look at Iraq in the

aftermath of the U.S. war against Saddam Hussain and the 'weapons of mass destruction' he never had.

The ecological damage in Ukraine, which had some of the world's most bountiful croplands, reaches beyond calculation. Their full pollution by war is not yet measured. War is not conducive to farming.

Before all this, I had no idea that Ukraine was one of the most important supplier of grains in the world. Some nations, especially in Africa, now face the potential (and in some cases immediate) reality of mass starvation. The combination of climate chaos (draught, floods, and crop failures) with the loss of imported grain, is already an existential threat to survival and an impetus to expanded climate refugee migration.

The Wagner Group is partly funded by brutally plundering Africa for 'blood diamonds' and gold, militarily supporting autocrats for profit and to pay for its other military operations.

After the Russians are finally gone, the job of repair and restoration of Ukraine will be immense. When I traveled in Europe, I marveled at the near total absence of signs of the devastation of World War II that I had seen in newsreels when I was a child. Ukraine's recovery will be painful and hard, but it is possible, even though the Earth System itself cannot take much more destruction by human folly.

Meanwhile, I find myself saying again, amid the distractions of 'ordinary' political-military outrages, the headlong rush to global climate and ecological chaos accelerates, despite the pompous protestations of 'authorities' everywhere. Elites whose dealings transcend most nations are too busy scrambling for an ever-bigger slice of the pie they don't seem to notice is burning.

New Updated Update of the Publishing Plan being implemented. The first volume of *The Edge of Illusion Trilogy* is complete. Preparations for publishing ***Holding It Together: Social Control in an Era of Great Transformation*** in the next few months are underway. The tentative publication date is January 10, 2024. Traditional publishers take from eighteen months to two years, sometimes even more, from signing a contract to an actual publication date. By publishing the book independently, we can do it in 6 months. That is the target anyway; we shall see.

My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available for free download from [Kindle Unlimited](#). The price will soon go to normal. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](#). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on Amazon. On Amazon, do so by clicking the button on the lower left of the book's Amazon page below "Customer Reviews," and say a few words about what you think about the issues and how I frame them.

Note: Past issues of this Newsletter are available, archived on my web site:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/hopeful-realist-newsletter/>

LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

IN TOO DEEP: Under Water in More Ways than One. It was hard to not focus attention last week on the four adventurers thirteen thousand feet below the surface of the North Atlantic Ocean. I wondered if they actually got a glimpse of the iconic ocean liner Titanic on the bottom, before they perished in the implosion of their submersible.

While all sorts of questions have arisen about the failure to follow marine safety protocols in testing the experimental carbon fiber pressure chamber, etc., most of us marvel at the spirit of daring-do exhibited by such a deep dive in an experimental vessel. We wonder what drives some to take such risks, just to see an old shipwreck at the bottom of the ocean. Okay, it is the iconic unsinkable ship that sank, which generated an aura of mystery, but that trope emerged mostly after the fact. Some of us are risk-averse and some of us are not.

Some risks are ‘manageable’—when things go wrong there are things you can do to save yourself from certain death by mitigating the risk. If the engine fails in your experimental airplane, you can at least look for a freeway or other level area for what might turn out to be a ‘good’ landing—one from which you could walk away. (Ironically, I wrote that sentence the day before my own engine momentarily lost power at only a thousand feet above the ground on Monday, leaving me little room to maneuver for a forced landing if the engine had actually quit.) In such situations, one can mitigate the increased risk with situational awareness and skill. On the other hand, some risks are binary—they happen catastrophically or do not happen at all. As someone put it, there is no such thing as a slow leak in the pressure chamber at depth; a pinhole leak becomes an implosion. If such an event happens, there is no looking for a spot to land, and there is no walking away. Implosion at 13,000 feet below the surface of the ocean is an instant catastrophic termination of both the mission and its crew.

At the same time, such expensive activities as viewing the sunken Titanic—\$250,000- per passenger—express a particular kind of privilege in a world of increasing danger for everyone. Just a few days earlier the drowning of over seven hundred refugees in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Greece, desperate to escape diverse forms of violence, starvation, and hopelessness in failed states or climate chaos made the news briefly. These people were risking everything to escape death or oppression in their homeland in the hope for a chance for a new tolerable life. Their demise garnered a few headlines and cable-news reports, but little else.

The risks taken by refugees are just as real and dramatic as those of wealthy adventurers, maybe even more, but they are not taken for the thrill of it; they are taken out of *necessity*, in the hope of survival and perhaps a little security at the other end of their treacherous journey. Crossing the Sonoran Desert smuggled across the U.S. border by a ruthless ‘Coyote’ is not the business of a dilatant; it is the life-affirming effort of people dealt a terrible hand in life.

Most folks in the industrial-consumer cultures of the Global North get most of their adventure in front of the television set. They neither want nor are forced to face the adventure of risking their lives for either the thrill of it or for survival itself. It may not be long before that choice is gone.

For more Hopeful Realist discussions of these and related matters, go to various posts at:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/the-hopeful-realist-blog/>

Today's Featured Image:

Everyone makes choices...



Source: <https://www.islelisten.im/2019/09/06/the-science-of-positive-risk-taking/>

Positive risk taking involves consideration of not only the thrill of victory but also the possible agony of defeat. It is a matter of reflecting on the value of potential benefits and the potential damage of the costs. When we look at the trajectory of climate chaos and ecological collapse, taking what most would call the extreme actions needed to avoid the risk of societal collapse, seems an easy choice, even though it involves literally transforming the way we live. Making major changes in our lives, even to avoid catastrophe, is hard. Yet the risks of creativity, especially in this case, are very small compared to the extreme risks of doing nothing.

Books and other Sources on the New Great Transformation

It may be that risk aversion is a characteristic of consumerist modernism, maybe not. We all take risks every day, mostly small ones, but in the belly of the consumer-industrial economic beast, the most serious risk results from whether or not one is safely ensconced in a secure job

with benefits, especially medical insurance. Well, of course there is always risk in freeway traffic and being present in a convenience store when a drug-crazed shooter walks in, but for the average person those are relatively random.

On the other hand, we all face a growing risk of societal collapse under the pressure of climate chaos and ecological destabilization. But is there anything to be done to mitigate such catastrophic global risk—can we find a place to land? Well, it is far more complicated than a forced landing, but Paddy Le Flufy thinks we can, and he shows exactly how to do much of what I needed, if we have the collective will to get started, right now.

Le Flufy, Paddy. 2017. *Building Tomorrow: Averting Environmental Crisis With a New Economic System*. First Light Books.

Many good ideas come from people who have taken a different path. Paddy Le Flufy has lived with Hadza hunter-gatherers and with an indigenous tribe in the Amazon rainforest; he has traveled with economic migrants, among other ‘life experiences’ most of us have never imagined. That probably helped him to look at our ‘modern’ economy from a broader perspective than that of the conventional economist. There are a bunch of good ideas out there and he found several that have significant potential.

Based in London now, Le Flufy has put together a remarkable range of creative ideas on how to organize communities for economic prosperity without depending on the dominant extractive global economy that fails to serve the human interest. His thinking is strongly influenced by Kate Raworth’s ‘Doughnut Economics’ and several real-world experiments in regenerative circular economies that serve ALL stakeholders. Most of the risks now lie in the status quo.

Quotable Quotes

The greatest obstacle to the survival of humanity is the culture of industrial consumerism. It could also be argued that the greatest obstacle is actually the power of the financial, corporate, and political elites who perpetuate that culture by dominating society’s main channels of communication. But it is a moot point, since the two reinforce each other and sustain the status quo, defeating efforts to respond aggressively to the existential threats of climate chaos and ecological collapse.

“The true revolution is a different culture: learning to live with less waste and more time to enjoy freedom.”

~ José Mujica, President of Uruguay, 2010-2015

We tend to hold to a narrow definition of revolution—we think of the Russian revolution, the Chinese revolution, and the Cuban revolution as icons of radical change that not only failed in their ideals but were fundamentally authoritarian and anti-democratic despite their claims.

However, a *societal* revolution is a great transformation of the structures and processes by which society operates. That has nothing to do with armed insurrection or military victory.

The call to transform our industrial-consumer global economy into local/regional ecological societies is revolutionary in the sense that it is all about a major 'societal makeover,' not a 'changing of the guard' in the traditional sense of an armed overthrow of one government and its replacement by another political regime.

Today, the hard facts of Earth science, climate science, and ecological science lead to one inevitable conclusion. Our industrial-consumer culture and the political-economic structure that drives it are both unsustainable on this planet, and we have nowhere else to go. Essentially, it is over. It is time to face the facts.

We have all the technical knowledge to re-shape our economies to serve the wellbeing of all humans instead of serving the interests of capital accumulation through unfettered and misdirected economic growth. All the studies of happiness lead to the conclusion that we can best achieve it in a low-waste society focused on our social relations instead of unlimited consumption. Freedom is release from the chains of the consumerist culture.

See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe and read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto](#).