

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

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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

Unanticipated Absurdities Unlimited. Can a candidate run for president of the United States of America from federal prison? It might be reasonable to call that an absurdity. Do the constitutional qualifications for the presidency include not being a criminal? Apparently not.

“No Person except a natural born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the Office of President, Neither shall any person be eligible to that Office who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty five Years, and been fourteen Years a Resident within the United States.” Article 2. Section 1. *The Constitution of the United States of America.*

That is it. Now, if the Framers had included mental age...well, they didn't. The Constitution stated no other requirements “to be eligible to the Office of President.” It seems reasonable to assume that the Framers of the Constitution anticipated that any candidate for the Office of the President would be a citizen of the nation in good standing, neither a criminal nor a scoundrel. Certainly, various wannabe autocrats existed then, just as they do today. But the faith in democracy among the elites precluded anticipating the rise to power of a fickle demagogue. Politics was a largely interpersonal game then, played by the nation's elites.

Of course, in the immediate aftermath of the birth of the nation, neither women nor slaves could vote. And nobody imagined that anyone would consider a thief, debtor, or murderer in jail to be available or allowed to run for public office. It would just be too absurd to consider the possibility. Even today in some states former convicts who have served their time well are not allowed to vote.

But there it is. Technically, a mass murderer could run for the Office of President from his cell in prison and it would be ‘legal’ for him to do so. I am sure that nobody even considered the prospect of such an absurdity, when the Framers wrote that section of the Constitution. However, today we are faced with the possibility that a candidate, indicted for high crimes

against the nation's core democratic institutions, and maybe convicted by then, is determined to run and win, on the prospect that he may then pardon himself for his treasonous behavior. There's another absurdity: How can a president legitimately pardon himself? Another absurdity not anticipated. Nevertheless, I see no reason to tolerate that.

Well, in 1776, a year the insurrectionist MAGA pseudo-Republicans love to invoke in their rants about 'taking back the nation' (for white nationalists it is implicitly assumed), the art of demagoguery had not been perfected to the level of our modern mass politics of fear and hatred. Sure, the colonists hated the British, but that was a rational hatred born of British political-economic oppression of the commercial elites in the colonies at the time.

Today, as the Framers could not have imagined, a mass movement of disaffected citizens who have fallen for the demagoguery of a narcissistic sociopath confronts us. This man's strange compassionless charisma rests on cruelty, denigration of 'the other' (that is, anyone other than old white males, who would dare to assert her/his human rights) expressed in the fascist ideology of the maximal leader being 'above the law.' He plays the victim whose suffering he endures 'for the people.' It is a bizarre though classic twist on a misappropriation of populist sentiment to fascistic ends.

As if that were not enough, it all happens at a time when another unanticipated absurdity has come to dominate our lives, even as demagoguery and other distractions have prevented many from anticipating the most catastrophic events we could ever imagine. We have viewed ourselves and our society as 'rational.' We still live in the dream of an 'invisible hand' expressed in our individual self-interest somehow producing the maximal good for all.

Blind faith in the inevitability of progress through extraction, chemistry, engineering, and economic growth has infected the public mind, orchestrated and sustained by oppressive commercial propaganda. It all happens in a culture of industrial-consumerism that projects infinite growth on a finite planet, which is plainly absurd. That happens only because we have been carefully trained to just 'look out for number one' in the immediate present shaped by a hierarchy we have been assured cannot overcome. Few have time or resources to look to the future consequences of our societal actions.

A New Great Transformation of the very Earth System upon which we all depend is well underway, and our most recent 'extreme weather events' are just the tip of the metaphorical iceberg, which is rapidly melting into sea-rise. From the top of the increasingly rigid political-economic hierarchy down to the most down-and-out victim of "disaster capitalism," the blinders, for the most part, are still on. The only way now to counter the rise of Earth System chaos and societal collapse is to recognize the calamity for what it is and transform our lives and our society into an ecological civilization to replace the dying industrial civilization that has brought us to the brink of apocalypse. Little has moved in that direction, but major climate action must happen sooner than soon.

The Updated Update of the Publishing Plan stands. 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, maybe sooner. 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 or less.

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

The HIERARCHY has a Short Shelf Life. Clearly, autocracy is a dysfunctional profile for any society, despite the enthusiasm and totalistic aggressiveness of its adherents. Although we might dig up a few historical examples of 'benevolent dictatorships,' they are few and far between. Autocratic rule tends toward violence in the exercise of oppression. It is almost inevitable. If a 'leader' thinks of himself (it's almost always a him) as so omniscient and righteous as to have the right to rule everyone else, then he is likely to exert whatever level of violence he may perceive as necessary to retain control of his victims in service to the embodiment of the state in himself.

Autocratic systems are inherently unstable. They are structurally 'off-balance.' In a truly integrated system, all of the parts operate in coordination with each other not based on top-down 'enforcement,' but based on mutual cooperation founded in trust and respect. We may respect the power of an authoritarian leader. But do we trust him to act in all of our interests? No, simply because the primary value and goal of the autocrat is to retain and exercise maximum power over all others.

Nevertheless, we observe new growth of autocratic attempts across the industrially developed nations today. Why now, why in the 'developed' nations? It is really quite simple in concept, even as it is very complicated on the ground.

First, an underlying principle is at play. Power begets more power unless some intervening process is offsetting this inherent source of instability. The more power a person or an institution has, the more power is available to apply to getting more power. That is one underlying reason why representative democracies tend increasingly toward hierarchy as the

means to power move further from the people. The U.S. Electoral College is an institution that amplifies this process.

Second, under the conditions of increasing centralization of power in a national hierarchy, not only political power but economic power too, that centralizing power is drawn away from the 'real economy' and subsumed within a growing financialized uber-economy. Today, the 'financial sector' generates a great deal of what can only be called "phantom wealth." Financial wealth is increasingly extracted from the everyday economy of real people trying to earn a living under conditions where increasing numbers are excluded from the means to economic power. Moreover, the financial sector generates more phantom wealth by stock buybacks, etc., driving the value of equities far above any measure of their value to the real economy.

None of this could happen in an integrated economy grounded in an underlying principle of economic policies based on enhancing human wellbeing instead of capital accumulation. A banking system driven by the insertion of *sovereign money*—not debt based—into the economy on that basis would be directed to making investments in society that would enhance the public interest in 'the good life,' by which I do not mean accumulation of more mega-yachts or private business jets, but instead maximizing the wellbeing of the whole population.

Does this all sound foolishly utopian? That is exactly what the forces of hierarchy want you to believe. Well, a few nations are actually trying to build 'wellbeing economies' designed to fit the basic needs of the people while taking precautions to minimize any damage to the Earth System upon which we all rely for our survival and even comfort.

New Zealand, Wales, Scotland, and Iceland are moving toward building wellbeing economies. Canada too is beginning to take a similar approach. All have a long way to go, though much less than the nations still in denial of the emerging Earth-System chaos and failures of mainstream economics to provide for the people's wellbeing. Too many of the giant globalized industrial-consumer nations are ruthlessly directed by hierarchic anti-democratic economies, which are inherently incapable of operating with the goal of enhancing human wellbeing.

On looking at the trajectory and consequences of the dominating hierarchical anti-democratic global economies as we approach the end of the industrial era, it becomes quite clear that hierarchy has a short shelf life.

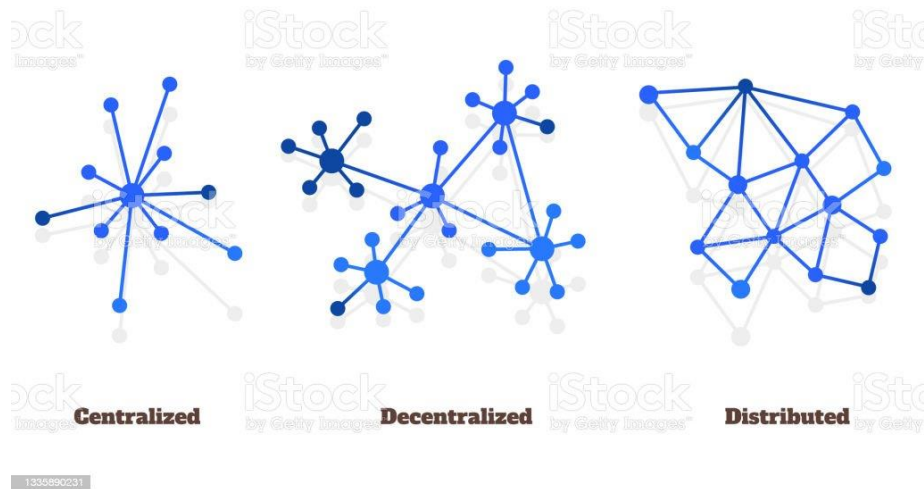
For more Hopeful Realist discussions of these and related matters, go to various blog posts at:

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

Today's Featured Image:

Systems have varying degrees of Hierarchy. Some are highly Centralized, with all components relating only to the Central source of power. Others are more Decentralized with multiple centers of power. Finally, in some systems

***both Power and Function are widely Distributed.
Distributed systems are the most democratic.***



Source: <https://www.istockphoto.com/search/2/image?phrase=social+hierarchy>.

Autocratic and democratic systems rise and fall. Their fate is determined by the degree of trust in their social relations and the degree of power sharing they maintain. When a democratic culture falters in the face of increasingly centralized economic and political power, its increasing instability may slide into autocracy or even fascism.

Books and other Sources on the New Great Transformation

In a media world inundated with extreme-wealth funded 'right-wing' talk-radio show hosts and cable-TV pundits who spout only the talking points of their would-be autocrat funders, a very refreshing voice of facts and reason is welcome. Thom Hartmann opens the radio window for a fresh breeze of facts and science grounding his socio-political analysis on his daily radio show and website.

The Thom Hartmann Report. <https://hartmannreport.com/>

Hartmann is a liberal media entrepreneur. His radio show has commercial sponsors. He has written more books than I care to count. Several compose a series, *The Hidden History of _____*. One, for example is *The Hidden History of American Democracy: Rediscovering Humanity's Ancient Way of Living*. Another title: *The Hidden History of the Supreme Court and the Betrayal of America*. This prolific author/analyst and communicator has an unlimited supply of contrarian perspectives on the illusions of American Exceptionalism and the Empire of growth, extraction, waste, and oppression, to counter the self-congratulatory narrative of the American Elite—all Thom's interpretations are grounded in the facts of modern life.

Quotable Quotes

Hierarchy and democracy remain in a pitched battle of central political-economic control versus distributed social control. They are, for the most part incompatible. The concentration of wealth to the detriment of the many excludes the practice of democracy.

We must make our choice. We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both.

~ Justice Louis Brandeis (1856-1941)

Democracy, after all, is a practice. Its hope, as Greta Thunberg would say, rests on action. To the extent that a social, economic, or political hierarchy precludes participation in decisions, then it is explicitly anti-democratic. On the other hand, democracy can tolerate a modest degree of hierarchy as long as it is temporary and tied to specific operational projects and is recognized as situational, not fixed. It is in our best interests to follow a trusted ally who we know has special technical skills and who we trust to apply them in the collective interest. Of course, decisions to invoke such trust must be made democratically, or they will fade into autocracy.

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