

**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***

**Then and Now.** Political chaos has become the one thing we can all count on in the coming months, maybe years. The situation we face may even qualify as a formal system of political pathology. It no longer seems a matter of policy differences, at least for the increasingly influential forces intent upon demolishing the very fabric of government.

Back in the day, people enjoyed debating policy differences. Now, don't get me wrong. I can be as critical of the government as most. After all, we have to live our lives in the shadow of an overblown bureaucracy and a dysfunctional Congress while the financial and political elites 'manage' what is increasingly difficult to call 'democracy.' What is a citizen to do?

It is easy to compare today's chaos with the halcyon days of the 1950s era of 'the great acceleration' after World War II, when jobs were easy to come by and the unions were able to keep wages somewhere in the area of a 'living wage.' Taxes were progressive and government was mostly able to pay its bills. Growing numbers of working families were entering the 'middle class.'

I always found it amusing that (back in the mid to late twentieth century anyway) if you asked anyone, whether rich or poor, most would say they were middle class. Nobody wanted to appear elitist and nobody else wanted to appear a failure. Today, everyone wants to be rich and famous; most seem to feel entitled to achieve a higher status than others. None of this, however, relates to the sources of human happiness.

I pity poor Mat Gaetz (R-FL), whose only pleasure seems to be spite, which is consistent with the statutory rape for which he has been accused. I pity Kevin McCarthy as well. Just how important can the holding of phantom power become, and at what personal price? Maybe they are on a constant adrenalin rush of power struggle. Can you pity someone and despise him/her too. Well, we don't want to leave out Reps. Lauren Boebert (R-CO) and Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA). I won't go down the list of less colorful perversions of the concept of representative

government. Suffice it to say, the impulse to destroy is a toxic if sometimes clownish phenomenon when executed by truly sociopathic characters. That may not be the latest news, but it is an ongoing phenomenon with significant consequences for democracy.

It was Jimmy Carter's 99<sup>th</sup> birthday the other day. In and after his presidency many vilified him for being a weak one-term commander in chief. Reagan not only set him up for that hostage-rescue disaster, but out of spite he ceremoniously tore down the solar panels Carter had put up on the roof of the White House as a symbol of environmental responsibility. The oldest living ex-president ever, President Carter exuded and still does express in manner and behavior, the epitome of high moral character.

Jimmy Carter obviously does not hate anyone. Hate and mistrust seem to be the standard operating mode for too many politicians and others today. The most difficult part of that trend is that hate and mistrust are both infective and addictive; MAGA mania obsesses on them. In direct contrast, Jimmy Carter exudes compassion and always has. Some confuse that with weakness. He is strong as he continues his commitment to the global eradication in his lifetime of the Guinea Worm and the pain it causes. That is just more evidence of his compassion-based personality. Last count, he was six cases from success. Well, maybe he hates Guinea Worms.

**The SAME Updated Update of the Publishing Plan stands. (With one changed word. Guess what it is.)** The first volume of *The Edge of Illusion Trilogy* is complete. Preparations for publishing ***Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age 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 regular eBook price is now back to normal, at \$6.99. 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 New Great Predicament.** I have had the privilege of talking with some very smart people lately. Most of them are scientists from diverse disciplines who are seeking solutions to what I

consider the greatest predicament humanity has ever experienced. So, what is this new great predicament?

Well, it resides within the contradictions we face between necessity, feasibility, and resistance. More and more people realize that we cannot sustain much longer the trajectory of climate destabilization and ecological destruction driven by unlimited economic growth on a finite planet. Climate scientists, evolutionary biologists, Earth System scientists, ecological economists, and others have done a massive amount of research in recent decades, producing unequivocal evidence confirming that conclusion. Very few institutional decision-makers have paid serious attention.

The periodic research findings reported by the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) are mere watered-down versions of the extent of the crisis their findings have documented. The conclusions in the various IPCC reports have been routinely diluted because every participating government has to approve them and they are also heavily influenced by the fossil-fuel industry lobbyists who are an ever-growing force influencing the COP meetings (the UN sponsored 'Conferences of the Parties') and the reports they produce. But, what is to be done?

Here are some of the factors contributing to the New Great Predicament.

First, and perhaps foremost, the very structure of the global corporate political economy of endless growth strongly resists any change in the trajectory of industrial civilization, which its culture considers the epitome of human progress. Every important decision-maker within the top tier of the global political-economic hierarchy is committed to perpetuating a system that requires its own endless growth on a finite planet that cannot sustain such utopian dreams much longer. It seems to me that unless 'we' somehow redirect that system, it will soon collapse of its own weight (declining resources to support its growth combined with its own destructive effects causing the destabilization of the entire Earth System). Allowed to continue, it will take us all down with it.

Second, the culture of industrial civilization developed as a direct result of the advent and primacy of the dominator/predator culture of patriarchy and Plato's bifurcation of 'mind' as divine and separate from the material world, which he saw as vile. The domination of Nature as a cultural value drove industrialization itself. Productivity of industry expanded through the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. When productivity outstripped demand for new products, the marketing industry was born and it has shaped culture to respond to industrial production with a culture of increased consumption, ever since.

Thorstein Veblen had this all figured out by 1899, when he published his famous book, *The theory of the Leisure Class*. In 1928, Edward Bernays published *Propaganda*, framing the psychosocial basis for advertising, public relations campaigns, and marketing strategies. That process shifted the locus of personal identity from traditional relations with other people to

one's relationship with the consumption of products deemed to reflect one's status and success in modern society.

Today, we have reached the pinnacle of externalized individual identity in the absorption of personality into the twists and turns of instant engagement with strangers whose judgements generate great anxiety, facilitating the proliferation of conspiracy theories and the enabling of resurgent racism and the fearful hatred to which fascism appeals. The status of science and its (often difficult to face) findings suffer in that context, which makes reasoned policy decisions that much more difficult.

Third, in the context of weakening family, community, and national engagement on traditional grounds, individual behavior and group action have increasingly involved the status anxiety that drives so much consumption. Growing alienation from others also generates reactive paranoid delusions of the threat of 'Others,' including mysterious entities such as 'the deep state,' as well as immigrants, Black folks, and other imagined evils. It is not far-fetched to look upon these developments as social pathology with political ramifications.

The rise of a neo-fascism in the U.S. and other Western industrially developed nations closely follows the pattern of the rise of fascism and Nazism in twentieth century Europe. The great historian of Europe, Timothy Snyder explains in his small but powerful book, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (2017) the dangers that result and what citizens must do about them. Under these conditions of political culture, rational thinking and reasonable evaluation of evidence of the global climate/ecological emergency has had little hope of prevailing in the determination of public policy, especially when the conditions we face indicate the desperate need to *transform* the very institutions that dominate our societies.

The New Great Predicament that confronts us all today is not just that all three of these contexts are extremely problematic on their own. On top of that, the very nature of societal change is extremely complex as well. In realizing that any attempt to turn around the accelerating environmental deterioration in multiple dimensions must involve deep transformation of society itself—since all institutions essentially run on fossil fuels—some of the very smart people I've been talking with lately are (smartly) looking for points of intervention, elements or components of society where change can be best initiated.

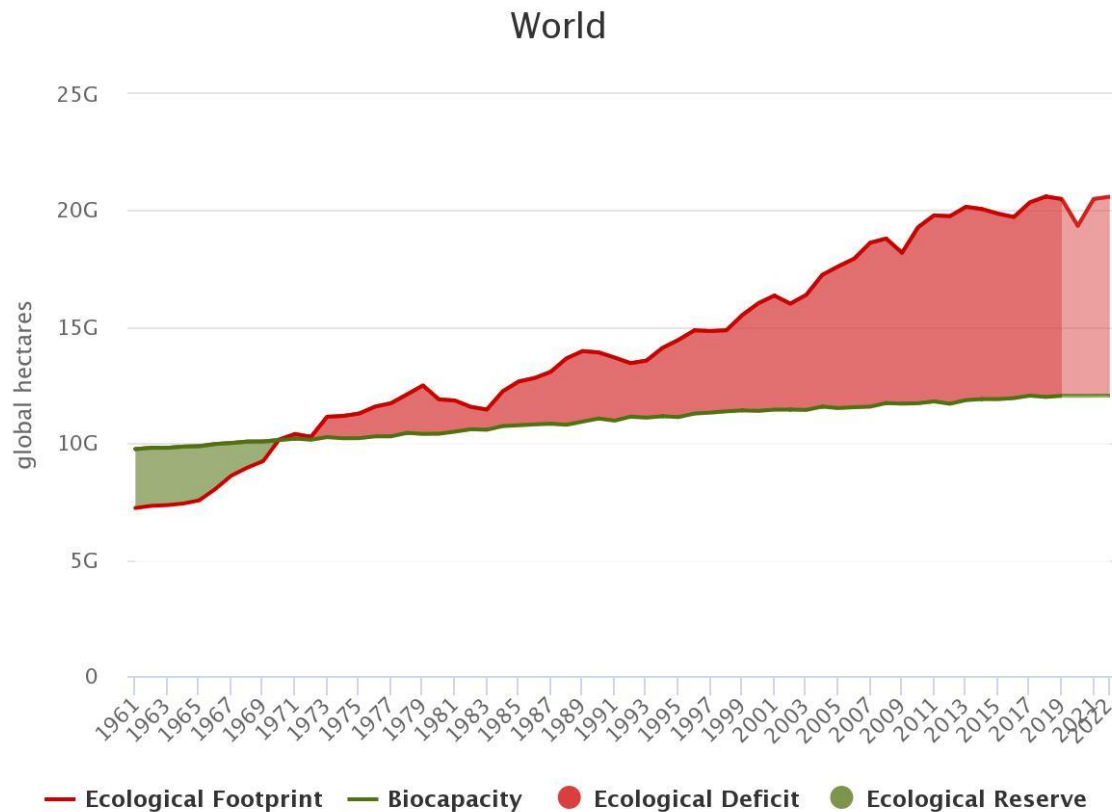
That is an extremely important and just as extremely difficult task, and we have so little time to do so much. Since everyone in ways participates in the very social structure we must change to operate on non-fossil-fuel sources of energy and less energy overall, how can individuals change their behavior without changing the social structure and how can we change the social structure without changing individual behavior? That is the urgent new great predicament we must resolve.

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:***

***Humans are using far more of the Earth System's renewable resources than it can restore. The red area on this graph represents the growth in the land-use now exceeding the capacity of the planet to support. That is why our excessive consumption is called OVERSHOOT.***



University, FoDaFo, Global Footprint Network, 2023 National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts Note: last three years are estimates

***It was only around 1969 when we began to exceed the total capacity of the Earth System to carry the load of consumption and waste by industrial civilization and the increased world population consuming more and more. The extreme level of overshoot we have already reached threatens to cause ecological collapse, more climate chaos and collapse of industrial civilization itself.***

### ***Books and other Sources on the New Great Transformation***

This source is the latest in a series of “World Scientists’ Warnings” issued by large groups of scientists who have grown increasingly concerned about the failure of institutions and their leaders to recognize growing dangers and take action. The findings of research by scientists in

diverse fields, both independently and in interdisciplinary studies demonstrate the real dangers to human and many other species as well as the overall stability of the planet, which politicians and corporate CEOs have ignored for decades.

Joseph J. Merz, Phoebe Bernard, et al. 2023. “World scientists’ Warning: The behavioural crisis driving ecological overshoot.” *Science Progress*. Vol. 106(3) 1-22.

If you want to understand the scope and depth of the predicament humans face today, read this paper. To do so, click [here](#).

### ***Quotable Quotes***

Jason Hickel is a major critic of the neo-liberal economics of endless growth. He is a strong advocate of ‘de-growth,’ which is not simply shrinking the economy; it is restructuring the economy around human wellbeing instead of capital accumulation for the few, through growth. In this quote, Hickel asserts that the change needed is far more comprehensive than mere technical changes in the use of energy and technology. The change we need is deep structural change in the economic system and the changes in politics and culture that entails.

*This is a time for revolutionary change. It is clear, however, that the environmentalist movement that has mobilized over the past several years cannot serve as the sole agent of this change. While the movement has succeeded in bringing ecological problems to the forefront of public discourse, it lacks the structural analysis and political leverage to achieve the necessary transition.*

~ Jason Hickel.

*When minority groups reached the critical mass—that is, the critical group size for initiating social change—they were consistently able to overturn the established behavior.*

~ Damon Centola, et al, <https://www.science.org/doi/abs/10.1126/science.aas8827>

I decided to include the featured quote from the previous issue of this newsletter, because it fits so well with this week’s quote. The research report from which I took the quote reflects the fact that strong social networks can effectively initiate societal change.

See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe, check out my blog posts at [The Hopeful Realist.com](#) and read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto](#).