

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

News from Nowhere: Emerging from the COVID Fog. If you read my [blog](#) from last week, you would know that I was beginning the 'downhill run' out of a COVID Fog. Yes, it is still out there and it is as communicable as ever. Actually, considering the circumstances, I think the writing was relatively coherent. However, you don't just 'get over' COVID overnight. This particular corona virus seriously sucks up your energy and it takes at least several days if not weeks after you are sick to gradually build back your 'normal' energy levels. Careful! If you push it too fast a relapse is in your path. For several days, I felt like a slug, then Sunday it was almost as if my normal energy level had returned...almost, but not quite. I did a few things, minor ones it seemed, and quickly I fell into exhaustion again. Today, I feel much closer to normal. *¡Cuidado!*

Around the time I 'caught the COVID,' word was going around that it was resurging, hitting Southern California pretty hard; Mexico too. Those careful tracking protocols seem like ancient history. But for me, it was only that one person somewhere I'd been who was my personal spreader. At the same time, deniers refer to COVID as 'just another flu blown all out of proportion.' As with the January 6 insurrection, people don't see what they don't want to see.

Despite being a social psychologist most of my adult life, I never fail to be amazed at the extent to which people participate in social illusions. Significant evidence has shown that images can be much more powerful than words in influencing people. But not always, as evidenced by the bodies stacked up outside hospitals in refrigerator semi-trailers because at the peak of the pandemic the morgues were overloaded with COVID victims. That did not persuade the unpersuadable, especially when encouraged by the lying demagogue denier at the top, who left quite a mess for his successor to try and clean up, both medically and culturally.

Video of insurrectionists beating capitol police with flag polls, shouting 'hang Mike Pence' because he would not join in the insurrection, did not dissuade MAGA adherents from proclaiming the innocence of those who inflicted injury and death at the Capitol. Pence had sought the advice of conservative constitutional scholars who told him he had no basis for

holding up the congressional acceptance of the results certified and presented by the Electoral College.

A strong and growing tendency in American politics is the search by the fearful and angry for a 'maximal leader,' no matter what. They think they are losing 'our' democracy because others hold views differing from theirs. Democracy remains an image in America, mostly without much practice.

The COVID pandemic was, in a sense, a trial run, testing American democracy's ability to respond to ever-growing crises. It did not fail, but it almost did. One of our biggest problems is that democracy relies on a well-informed well-intentioned citizenry willing to engage in the messy process of collectively figuring out what to do next. The autocratic attempt of Trump and the growing white-nationalist nativist factions (as if the original inhabitants of the continent never existed—although a serious attempt to annihilate the first nations almost succeeded) continue to sway vast and shocking numbers of citizens. The name-calling, criminal allegation inversion (eg., Trump calling Biden a "dictator"—Trump's obvious personal ambition) and other propagandistic gambits seem to be working. The parallels with Europe in the 1930s are scary at best. (See Timothy Snyder, *Tyranny: Lessons from the Twentieth Century*.)

All this is happening right in the face of the growing destabilization of the entire Earth System, which requires equally great human cooperation to deal with in a manner that at least gives us a chance to avoid species extinction amid planetary chaos. Can humans rally and overcome all the fear, hatred, racism, and collective violence to take the unprecedented united action that is required to change our ways in the interests of our own survival?

One would prefer to hope so. Widespread cooperative action to counter climate chaos, ecological collapse, and the collapse of modern civilization seems our only hope for survival. To accomplish that will be very good news from somewhere real.

Here is hope that the downslide from COVID will signal the uplifting of the greatest of human potential to achieve what will otherwise be terminal. That would be the most Hopeful New Year imaginable, really.

Another NEW Updated Update of the Publishing Plan. The first volume of *The Edge of Illusion Trilogy* will shortly go out to some pre-publication reviewers, who will receive 'ARCs,' that is, 'Advance Reader Copies' of ***Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation***. The tentative publication target date is now April 10, 2024. By publishing the book independently, we control almost everything, which of course takes more work.

My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available as a 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. 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 People Running the World are, well, Not So Good. Let's face it. Just about anywhere you look, you will find one very unfair situation or another. Despite the fact that there are so many good people in the world, they are not in charge. It is not just that 'the rich are different; they have more money.' The obsessive quest for endless power by the most powerful may have something to do with it. But it is so much more than that.

We tend to look at individual situations and ask why victims of circumstance do not make some other 'more effective' choices to avoid disaster. But we have not had the personal experience of having been '[nickeled and dimed](#).' That is why 'blaming the victim' is so common. We 'middle-class' Americans especially—that is, Americans who are still able to economically claim that status—tend to see the world from the perspective of 'people who think that they are white' (I like that phrase from Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* because it captures so much of the illusions of white privilege). Of course, people don't constantly think about 'being white,' but they mostly live in a white world, just like fish in water. Certain things are assumed.

Most of white privilege, and that of others who 'the system' has allowed to enter that world, is held unconsciously. It is merely assumed, taken for granted without much if any thought. But the affluence of the technocratic and professional classes is not really the issue here. We are the modest secondary beneficiaries of the fact that the global corporate financial elites need 'functionaries' to keep their infrastructure and systems of capital accumulation afloat. You can only automate so much, even though that process is not yet complete.

The worldview of the modestly privileged is controlled by the hierarchy of information-control, which drives the culture of industrial consumerism in which we all live. The aspirations of the unprivileged, who participate in the same mass and social media sustained culture, parallel those of the privileged, but are simply out of reach. That is the context in which anyone working for the massive social change we need to draw down human overshoot (extraction and consumption beyond the capacity of the Earth System to sustain), re-stabilize the Earth System, and give ourselves and other species a reasonable chance to survive, has to work.

Here's the thing: we all live in that cultural environment and it affects us in ways we do not even notice, as well as the ones of which we are aware. Fish in water. Yet, at the same time, most of the things I read about how to resolve the climate emergency, global inequality, and the growing instability of both economy and society, focus on individual behavior change. Well,

even if that were to work over time, the time it would take to achieve such individual change for the whole population (even if it were reduced in size) would be so far beyond every tipping point in these trajectories of disaster, that they would be pointlessly too late.

Don't get me wrong. We undeniably need a great deal of behavior change. But some behavior is much more important NOW than everyone's individual behavior collectively. Yes, it's the hierarchy. The higher you go in the institutional structure, the more important it is to change the behavior.

The billions of dollars spent each year convincing people that climate is not an emergency also work to convince people that it is really 'the individual's fault.' You don't recycle enough; you should buy an electric car, don't eat so much meat, etc. Meanwhile, those who fund such propaganda spend lots of leisure time on luxury yachts consuming large quantities of energy before they land in their private jets to attend Davos meetings of self-congratulation and contrived concern for the state of the world.

[Michael Roberts](#) gives a much more sobering assessment of the evolving global chaos and the World Economic Forum's utter failure at their Davos meeting to honestly address it except for impacts on capital. This year they have the gall to proclaim the 2024 Davos theme as "Rebuilding Trust." Well, it can only go down from here.

But don't worry, it's all good. So says Hannah Richie in her new book, *at the End of the World: How We Can Be the First Generation to Build a Sustainable Planet*. It is all a buzz among the media talking heads as she does the talk show rounds. Uncharacteristically, even Christiane Amanpour gave her a pass with a bunch of softball questions on her show [Amanpour and Co.](#) last week.

Somehow, Richie claims, we will solve all these problems if we will just stay optimistic; that is how we will find solutions, all by the way, within the framework of holding on to the 'business as usual' model of modernity the prospects for which even the Davos Men (mostly rich old white men) are increasingly worried about. She decried harsh headlines yet offered no solutions to go with her *a priori* optimism.

Meanwhile some recent [research](#) indicates earlier collapse of earth's ecosystems and climate is likely because of accelerating interacting stressors. Other research indicates that global heating is [accelerating](#). The combination of these two dangerous trends may be devastating. Why am I not surprised? Because these are self-amplifying processes as every scientist understands by now. nevertheless, many current models focus on trajectories single variables without considering the context of interaction with others, which accelerates change.

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:

Davos, Switzerland has become infamous as the luxurious ski-resort venue for the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum, the group of the richest, most powerful financial, corporate, government, and business 'leaders' in the world. Klaus Schwab cleverly organized the Forum as the high-status meeting where the most elite of the elite meet to pontificate on their own importance and how they are making the world a better place (for capital investment anyway).



If anything, the world's mega-billionaires are insatiable status seekers. They obsess over achieving recognition for their 'importance.' Well, they are very important, but in a bad way, since their individual and collective decisions still force the global political economy to continue down its current terminal path to world-wide environmental and social collapse.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

The big question before us today is not whether the world will experience a New Great Transformation. Rather, it is a question of what kind of transformation we will experience and to what extent we will turn it in a positive direction, or let it devolve into global chaos and even more massive species extinction, including our own. This week's source of information on the emerging New Great Transformation is:

Michael Roberts, “Davos and the melting world economy.” January 16, 2024.
Brave New Europe. <https://braveneweuropa.com/michael-roberts-davos-and-the-melting-world-economy>

Michael Roberts is an Economist in the City of London and a [prolific blogger](#). His assessment of the World Economic Forum is powerful and extremely relevant to the potential for a viable human response to the rapidly degrading condition of the Earth System and the global political economy as well. It is a must read for anyone who wants to be pro-active in working toward a livable world. Thanks to Jeremy Lent for bringing this to our attention in a post on his important platform, [Deep Transformation Network](#).

Quotable Quotes

David Hindin was an “enforcement attorney, manager, and executive at the Environmental Protection Agency in the compliance assurance program. He recently completed a fellowship in Harvard University’s Advanced Leadership Initiative and is now working on sustainability with a behavioral science focus.” He has a lot of direct field experience in facing the dangers of the American political economy of endless growth.

The focus on “more is better” is so ingrained in our culture and economy that when growth creates a big problem, the incentive is to not fix the causes of the problem but to create new industries to address the symptoms.

~ David Hindin, 2022. “The Root Causes We Ignore.” *The Environmental Forum*. P. 37.

This statement captures the essence of the way the American business culture captures every attempt to address a societal problem. It insists that every problem the political economy creates must have a ‘market solution.’ However, corporate dominated ‘free markets’ (free to corporations and very costly to everyone else) are precisely the root of the global human predicament. At the root of it all is the system of financial domination of society itself.

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