

LOOK UP! 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

New Year, Emerging Opportunities, and Old Dangers Persisting...

NOTE: *I wrote most of the following reflections on the New Year, just before hearing the news of “explosions in Caracas.” I knew immediately that the U.S. had entered a new phase of its “wars of choice,” the latest iteration of the “Global War on Terror,” in which any attack anywhere would be ‘justified’ by that comprehensive trope: defending against “narco-terrorists,” regardless of whether the facts might suggest a different reality. The president had announced his reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine, which in 1823 self-righteously declared a U.S. “sphere of influence” over the entire Western Hemisphere, especially Latin American nations, as well as the North American continent.*

Later, an international attempt after World War II, to institute a global rule of law in which all nations’ sovereignty was to be respected, became a “rules based” international order, which at least partially worked until now, except for all those military strikes by the U.S. and others in support of one rebel faction or favored dictator or other. Trump’s explicitly abandoning that commitment, of course, plays directly into Putin’s desire to destroy that effort and exert a new domination over the nations formerly dominated by Moscow in the form of the Soviet Union. That is how all fascist dictators and their amateur emulators think.

But keep in mind, America’s military adventures all over Latin America, as well as in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, etc., have historically yielded more problems than solutions, including their moral failures. And, Maduro’s government is still in power in his absence, as the U.S. administration seems more interested in extracting tribute from the existing Venezuelan regime than supporting the opposition leader from whom Maduro stole the recent presidential election. Simply claiming the U.S. “will run” Venezuela will not make it so. But that won’t end it, or end well either. In the neo-fascist playbook, Cuba may be next... Does anyone remember the Epstein Files?

~~~~~

It is hard to believe that the fifth year of this newsletter has begun. In the previous four years—well, three and a half, since the first edition came out mid-year—much has happened, and far too

much has not. The juggernaut that is the global technosphere and the political economy of endless growth that drives it, continue down the terminal path to Earth System chaos and ecological breakdown. As the hierarchy of economic inequality grows worse and opportunities for economic wellbeing for the many diminish, the financial and political elites encourage their victims to blame each other, exploiting latent and blatant racism, to divert attention from the real causes of growing despair. In this newsletter, I have tried to bring some small degree of deeper understanding of what is going on and why it cannot continue without resulting in the worst outcome: societal chaos and increasingly likely collapse of most major institutions, following ecological destruction, economic chaos, and in particular the collapse of major supply chains the likes of which make the COVID collapse look like a Sunday picnic by comparison.

Unfortunately, that is far from hyperbola. This assessment comes from considering the most reliable data and the obvious scientific trends over the last few decades. I got what Jim Hansen reported to the U.S. Congress at the time, way back in 1988. Congress ignored him and many others who followed with similar sage advice. That was almost a half century ago.

It was obvious then that the road ahead would be extremely difficult, but I expected that the governments of the world would begin soon to take *some serious action* to avert not just the gradual end of industrial civilization, but its violent crash without major intervention. Instead we got platitudes and empty promises, along with the IPCC pretense of taking serious climate action while inserting wildly optimistic technological assumptions into its projections of climate futures, resulting in delay after delay for decades. Today, we have a new intense Trumpery of denial.

I was wrong back then in my slight optimism. The old dangers, which began their serious growth at the dawn of the industrial revolution, have steadily grown to full maturity. The levels of resource extraction, industrial production, and fully marketed consumption of industrial products and the proliferation of the energy intensive technologies that generate the profligate waste and destruction, are already reaching several of the limits of Earth System stability.

Several signs of destabilization are already obvious to those who choose to look. Far too many—especially economic and political elites—choose to look away. As [Anand Giridharadas](#) pointed out in a recent interview with Chris Hedges, and in his book, *Winners Take All*, the financial elite now referred to as the “Epstein class,” practices a culture of privileged *looking away* from the many forms of chaos and destruction that their policy decisions have created, whether it is the sexual abuse of children by their peers, or the destabilization of the planetary ecological order on which we all depend. One might even extend Giridharadas’ characterization to a broader population of professionals, investors, and business owners who in varying degrees also look away in order to serve their short term economic interests, as the Earth System further destabilizes.

At first, the elites and their agents simply denied the existence of a global crisis. Then they proclaimed it wasn’t so bad and we had lots of time to correct what they characterized as mere problems that could be fixed by the system itself without any structural changes or reconfiguration of economic or political power. Conditions got steadily worse and undeniable

changes in climate had already caused unprecedented floods, draught, storms, and agricultural failures, with growing populations threatened by severe food insecurity—while corporate industrial agriculture continued producing larger crops for processed ‘food products’ of less and less nutritional value, while heading for its own fall.

Climate migration became an increasing portion of the global exodus from intolerable economic and political conditions in various countries, mostly in the global south. That will continue at increasing volume in 2026 and beyond. Meanwhile, governments and corporations continue their deceit and diversions from real climate action.

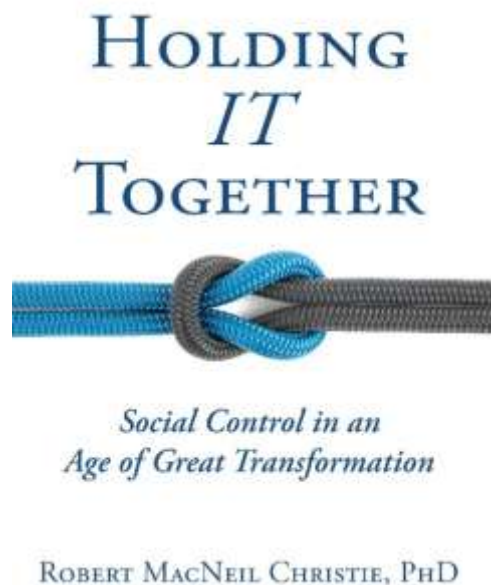
The reason for the global institutional failure to act is both simple and complex. To do what is necessary to slow and maybe stop the deterioration of Earth System stability—and maybe prevent total societal collapse—the “powers that be” in this world would have to give up their will to power over increasing wealth and work toward an ecological civilization based in equity and inclusion in a *low-energy-consumption* egalitarian regime of democratic harmony among diverse peoples, and restore the health of the ecosystems we inhabit.

I foresee no signs of movement in that direction by major corporations or governments in 2026. I do see signs of understanding and action among diverse voluntary organizations and some scientific and professional activists working toward ecological restoration, economic justice, and in opposition to the rising tide of fascism driven by elites who are trying to hold on to their hierarchy by manipulating the despair of millions of people into fear, hatred, and scapegoating. Their security at the top of a failing system is clearly threatened by any move toward ecological stability or economic justice on the way to a wellbeing society.

~ ~ ~ \* ~ ~ ~

I know that putting the advert below for ***Holding IT Together*** in every issue of this newsletters may seem redundant, but, hey, it costs me nothing. I don’t charge myself a penny. So, it is a free reminder to buy and read the book. How could I turn that down?

.....



Published July 26, 2024, and the product of decades of research and reflection, [Holding IT Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#) explains the global changes that have resulted in the catastrophic convergence of the crises of climate, ecosystems, economies, and politics, and the societal chaos, which we now see intensifying every day. In it, I also describe the deep changes that are necessary in order to effectively head off societal collapse so we can more comfortably shape the New Great Transformation of our institutions and our ways of living necessary in a world of less intensive energy consumption. We *will* transition away from fossil fuels, like it or not, and the sooner and more intentionally the better. Later would be catastrophic. Petroleum products provided great affluence for some for a while, yet are already causing chaos and environmental destruction for everyone.

[“Buy it!”](#) says the author.

Here are excerpts from some prominent editorial reviews:

*A dense and sweeping call to change the direction of human society before it’s too late. Still, his core message is strikingly direct and forceful. It’s hard to imagine any reader not being convinced that just such a massive change is necessary.* ~ **Kirkus Reviews**

*Christie embeds history surrounding social deconstruction and construction with the kinds of modern references that readers will relish...[He] offers an unprecedented opportunity for readers to apply the basics of economic understanding to the major issues facing humanity’s survival today... Hope is embedded throughout his approach.* ~ **Midwest Book Review**

*Both a wake-up call and a guide, this book calls for decisive action toward a sustainable, equitable future, making it an essential resource for policymakers, activists, and concerned citizens alike.* ~ **The Prairies Book Review**

With the publication of [Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#), by Bear Claw Press, I seek a wide span of possible readers. After all, the book’s content has important implications for the lives of everyone.

If you are a researcher or teacher and would be interested in sending me a short review (two or three paragraphs), or would consider it for use in a class you teach, please go to the [BearClawPress.com](http://BearClawPress.com) website, click on the [Review/Exam Copies](#) tab (upper right) fill in the information, and I will send you a [pdf](#) or [ePub](#) copy free. Also, copies can be bought at a nice discount from the list price at Bear Claw Press.

Otherwise, please buy, read, and offer a customer rating-review for ***Holding IT Together*** on [Goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com) or Amazon.com. Without a significant number of customer reviews, good or bad, the Amazon algorithm will ignore a book into oblivion, regardless of its quality.

Some have estimated that Amazon.com sells around seventy percent of all books sold. Nevertheless, I hope many who buy ***Holding IT Together*** will do so at their local independent bookstore. Of course, both paper and eBook versions are available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) as well as from independent bookstores via [Bookshop.org](https://www.bookshop.org). It is now also available at a discount directly from the publisher, [BearClawPress.com](https://www.bearclawpress.com)

My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available as a **free** download from [Kindle Unlimited](https://www.kindleunlimited.com). The regular Kindle eBook price is \$6.99. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](https://www.goodreads.com). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on its Amazon page. You can 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:** As always, 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 2026, What Will Progress Look Like?**

The problem with NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS is that they rely totally on our individual motivation to improve our own lives by willing particular changes in our personal behavior to happen and continue over the new year. Good luck with that! Apparently some can and most can't.

Much less often the resolutions involve motivation to be kinder to others or to treat the world and its creatures with the respect that they deserve. But more than ever, it is not that simple anyway. In the context of our waning industrial civilization, individual behavior is always dependent on a much larger and very complex societal context. We must also consider the relationships between rational thinking, uplifting motivation, and emotional distress within that larger complex context of institutional obstacles. We are not necessarily free to act as independently as we might think. But resistance is always an option.

The context of our looking forward into the New Year, however, is increasingly infused with what may seem like growing unpredictability. It is hard to plan our success in a world where the factors that will become obstacles or opportunities keep changing at an increasing rate. Almost everyone now is aware of the growing unlikelihood for most young people that they will achieve a greater (or even equal) level of success or wellbeing, no less personal or family

security, than what their parents' hard work made possible, in a very different and more unstable economic and societal context.

I have come to respect what I see as the *realism* embedded in the philosophy of *Stoicism*, and the *hopeful* outlook its developers such as Zeno of Citium, its founder in Athens around 300 BCE, and the Roman Stoics Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, who emphasized its practical ethics. I, as many others, used to think of a 'stoic' as someone who passively accepted what fate seemed to have dealt him or her. But actual stoicism is quite the opposite. No, it is neither optimism nor pessimism either. It is the recognition that there are certain things in life that are susceptible to our control and other things that are not. Further, Stoicism admonishes us to understand and act on the difference.

I hesitate to ponder how such an approach could affect foreign policy; far too many complications would extend that contemplation beyond the bounds of this little essay. Suffice it to say, for one thing, a Stoic is not a pretender to power. In the seeking of political/military power, some short-term gains may foster the imaginary notion that the would-be dictator of the world can overcome any and all obstacles to his *will to power*. Historical precedent deems that a false hope. In the meantime, the narcissistic sociopath can do a lot of damage to those who do not take him seriously.

The extreme form of American Individualism, which proclaims that 'you can do anything if you believe in yourself and put in the hard work, blah blah, blah, feeds this imaginary, but also feeds the delusions of the pretender to absolute power. The odds have been stacked against most of "you," as the trillions of dollars of income and wealth have been redistributed up the economic hierarchy over the last several decades, resulting in the extreme inequality of opportunity we experience today. 2026 will be even worse without direct intervention, such as revising the income tax system to eliminate the excessive power of wealth to take most of the economic value generated by the whole economy, for themselves. This is not a matter of individual will power.

For both the person and the political system, any political system, the people involved would do well to consider the Stoic principle of recognizing what is impossible to control and stop wasting time trying to control it, but also the principle of recognizing what is possible to control and the need, or lack thereof, to control it. Democratic control of the tax system is not easy to achieve, but it is possible, and necessary.

Climate change offers a useful lesson in that regard. Most of us know that since humans have collectively and inadvertently altered the planetary climate, then it must be possible to change our behavior in ways that will reverse the damage that the industrial era of human extraction and economic growth have wrought. But some things are far more difficult to undo than to do.

That, however, is no basis for not doing what we must do to survive in some semblance of peace, civility, and compassion. To do so will require vastly more conscious effort and sacrifice than the path that led us to the greatest predicament that humans have ever faced.

--

***Today's Featured Image(s)* [This time we need two.]:**

***On New Year's Eve—the recent Venezuela boat bombing gambit made me feel like it was a long time ago. Then, in the wee hours of New Year's Day around one AM, one of the networks, CBS News, I think, offered images of the massive fireworks displays celebrating the New Year in various major cities around the world. I watched in awe as the screen displayed one city's fireworks display after another. I couldn't help but imagine how much instant atmospheric pollution resulted from these huge spectacles of multimillion dollar wasted energy all over the world.***



Photo Credit: CBS News



Photo Credit: CNN

***What do these lavish displays really represent? Well, not the prospects for our growing populations of poor, who are expected to be dazzled and filled with hope in these expressions of industrial power—or is it military might? To the right of the photo of New Year's fireworks in London, above, is the display of “bombs bursting in air,” or on the ground in Caracas, Venezuela, as the wannabe prince of darkness tries to assert a new iteration of the old Monroe Doctrine of the expression of military might by the so-called “great power,” the U.S., over the entire American hemisphere, north, central, and South. The prospect of a reinvention of the Monroe Doctrine may be more than an imaginary source of personal power. It plays directly into Putin's plan for becoming the ‘great power’ over Eurasian and eventually Europe as well. But to the would-be U.S. dictator, it would be the epitome of personal power, regardless of the consequences for everyone else.***

### ***Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation***

I am a visual thinker, which is probably why I like graphs and charts as powerful ways to display complex facts. Given the recent report by the RAND Corporation, that shows how trillions of dollars have been *re-distributed up* the hierarchy of class and race in America, with extreme distortion of the proportions of income and wealth captured by the wealthiest American individuals and corporations (more on that later), I thought that Scott Galloway's book, *Adrift*, would give readers a good sense of the many implications of the new extreme levels of inequality in America.

Scott Galloway. 2022. *Adrift: America in 100 Charts*. New York: Penguin Random House.

A growing number of professionals in the social sciences now recognize the importance of addressing the newly extreme disparities in income, wealth, and wellbeing in America today. The ability of the economic system to serve the wellbeing of the people has been seriously compromised. Galloway's book provides a host of visual clues and data on what it all means, from the radical decline of buying power of a minimum wage from 1950 until now, to the extreme increase in the money spent by the Tech Sector on lobbying Congress in the last twenty years. It all adds up to an increasingly dysfunctional system and the decline of wellbeing for most Americans.

### *Quotable Quotes*

It is so easy these days to point fingers at villains, yet we seem to have a growing swarm of them inserting themselves into every corner of our lives. It is not just the grifters in political power, who demolish important institutions in order to assure their control over the economic and financial systems from which they extract whatever they can. It is hard to find worse villains than the political hucksters; they have become so open in their crimes against anyone they find on whom they can inflict punishment, if only for being who they are—usually just not being an acolyte is enough.

*There are three things in the world that deserve no mercy: hypocrisy, fraud, and tyranny.*

~ Frederick William Robertson

If we are to show no mercy to hypocrisy, fraud, and tyranny, then we must not tolerate them in ourselves as well as in the behavior of the tyrannical hypocritical fraudsters. That is admittedly a hard path to follow. It not only takes a lot of work and cooperation with others, but requires us to face the culpability that is inherent in our participation in the system of which we are members. We are here, we go through much the same rituals of the industrial-consumer culture as everyone else, more or less. But most importantly, we must not tolerate the behavior of those who would replace human wellbeing with personal and political power as the highest value to seek.

~ ~ ~

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](https://TheHopefulRealist.com), read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto.](#), and, buy my new book, [Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#).