

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 Claims, Old Arguments, Same (rapidly changing) World...

History can move quickly, or very slowly. Our human consciousness seems to have similar patterns of change, but not necessarily in sync with the “facts on the ground” of our contemporary experience. As I have reported before, and the archeological evidence seems to support the fact that humans have lived in very stable environments for most of our time on the planet, even though often they were very dangerous as well.

In the times before the Holocene Era of the last eleven thousand years or so, humans faced danger and diverse risks of survival by banding together in mutual support to face well-known dangers with concerted action. The dangers and the opportunities were all challenging, but they were relatively consistent and stable. That is how traditional indigenous cultures evolved. Today, not so much.

It all started when the stable climate of the Holocene allowed for the development of agriculture and the surpluses of foodstuffs it produced. By some complex social processes, hierarchies of dominance emerged as the new form of social organization. Most hunter-gatherer groups, even those few remaining in modern times, organized themselves around egalitarian principles of cooperation and relative material equality. Kingdoms and empires emerged only once hierarchies of dominance appeared on the scene of human organization, when hording and theft were made possible by growing stores of wealth.

Among small hunter-gatherer bands, each member had specific roles in the hunting and gathering operations. Their work complemented that of one another, and they shared the rewards of their cooperative efforts. We could say that in a limited way about the work in a complex organization today, whether corporate, government, or non-profit. But, actually, much is different in important ways. Today’s organizations are primarily hierarchies of domination. Control emanates from the top down. Some elements of cooperation are found in modern organizations, of course, but the hierarchy almost always prevails. Sometimes working groups may rebel against hierarchic control in order to perform their work better, since they know better than some ‘educated’ manager without direct experience in the field or factory floor. Some

organizations have even experimented with ‘democratic’ organization of units within the hierarchy, but...in the end, hierarchy always prevails.

That is one important reason why today’s institutions, both public and private, have such difficulty responding effectively to change in the organization’s environment, including in the larger culture. The extractive nature of their operations, both materially and economically, as well as politically, prevents cooperation for the common good. The culture of hierarchy makes decisions in the interests of the top. That is the source of the failure of the Democratic Party to respond effectively to the needs of the people in the face of rising Republican autocracy in service to the multi-billionaires and giant corporations.

ExxonMobil executives knew in the 1970s how destructive fossil-fueled carbon emissions are to the stability of the climate and therefore to humans and other living systems. But its extractive hierarchy of domination precluded the kind of cooperation that might constrain its dominance seeking to shape an ecologically viable economy. So, multi-millions, maybe billions, have been spent since on the propaganda of denial, diversion, distortion, and outright dismissal, as the business of domination went on as usual. The same pattern exists in varying degree across nearly all sectors of the global industrial-consumer economy.

Despite all the talk of “green development,” “sustainable growth,” and claims to somehow detach economic growth from the damage it does, and all manner of other rationalizations, “the system” trundles along as if its main goal, growth for capital accumulation, were not even an issue.

Just yesterday, the very first speakers at the annual meeting of the [World Economic Forum](#) at Davos praised the prospects for continued growth of around 3% per annum—do they realize how quickly that compounds to a doubling of total size?—as if their threat to the very Earth System that supports their lives, did not exist. The Davos Men (mostly old, very wealthy males and their minions in governments and corporations) are not about to change.

Then comes another “fair and balanced” pitch by an economist in [The Atlantic](#), who proclaims himself neutral amid counter-narratives of extreme catastrophe versus intellectual complacency in the ‘debate’ over whether climate chaos and ecological collapse are to be taken seriously. The idea that what is involved is merely competing narratives is patently absurd. Science and its findings are reduced to a mere narrative of panic if it demonstrates facts and their projection toward destabilization of natural as well as social systems. It is all framed within the narrow epistemology of conventional economic theory, which fails to understand or take into account complex living systems in and between which economies operate. Scientific findings just don’t fit into the ‘he said, she said’ environmental agnosticism., which is in effect just another form of denial of reality.

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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?

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HOLDING IT TOGETHER



*Social Control in an
Age of Great Transformation*

ROBERT MACNEIL CHRISTIE, PhD

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](#) 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.

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My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available as a **free** download from Kindle Unlimited. The regular Kindle eBook price is \$6.99. Please give it a rating/review on 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-realistic-newsletter/>

LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

The Real Work: To Transform Culture, Institutions, and Our Lives

The problem with environmental agnosticism is that it adds up to nothing. Even economists who take climate change seriously, have endless ways to rationalize the framing of economic systems so that all manner of problems, even existential predicaments. Even deep dilemmas over how to salvage human and other life forms while approaching a likely collapse, are subsumed under the rubrics of conventional economics, which is, beneath all the statistical modeling and theory, no more than the catechism of the religion of economic growth. We have no more time for that privileged economic ping pong game of the self-proclaimed 'masters of the universe.'

To face the genuine existential predicament of our time is to recognize on the one hand that a wealth of historical data and trend analyses have shown that human systems, particularly in the form of empires, kingdoms, and other autocratic regimes have grown and fallen in a remarkably consistent manner. They have, however, come out of collapse in somewhat different ways. Only when dominator hierarchies are replaced by democratic surges of human values based political organization, have the outcomes of collapse taken a direction consistent with the wellbeing of the populations involved.

The work of [Peter Tuchin](#), in his book, *End Times: Elites, Counter-Elites, and the Path of Political Disintegration*, and also the work of [Luke Kemp](#), in *The Goliath Curse: The History and Future of Societal Collapse* are two prime examples of advanced scientific work that addresses the deep **existential predicament** that most folks, including economists as well as so many others in so many other professions and positions of power or convenience, wish to not be real. But it is very real indeed.

Now, here is the problem. There are many active scientists, public intellectuals, and activists who do understand the basics of the global existential predicament. They want to find solutions to problems that most institutions and funding sources do not want to recognize. Yet, there is very much complex work to be done. The problems that must be solved are of a scale and complexity that we need collective brain power to find ways to attack them. That takes resources as well as will. And it is important to remember that diverse groups with different skills and perspectives have been proven more effective in seeking solutions to complex problems than a group of experts in a single field (eg., economics or politics).

We know that at the most basic level, the current global political economy *is* a Goliath, and that it must be transformed and/or replaced. To do that requires deep cultural change involving a new vision of the role of humanity within the Earth System. It also requires a transformation or replacement of most of our major institutions, as well as deep changes in human behavior.

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Today's Featured Image:

Perhaps the biggest question on my mind these days, is how the people of this world can come together to turn the tide of destruction and begin to build viable societies based on ecological, economic, and political security sustained by systems of cooperation in assuring the wellbeing of all life on the planet.

That is possible, but not easy nor likely. It will require a New Great Transformation the likes of which most of humanity and their leaders have not yet become aware, no less initiate. With the leaders of Blackrock and Microsoft at the forefront, the World Economic Forum clearly is not the source of that kind of change.



Photo Credit: flickr

What do these flags over Davos, Switzerland, really represent? Well, certainly not the peoples of the nations for which these flags are ordinarily symbols. The World Economic Forum (WEF) is no simple gathering of nations. It is a conference of the financial movers and shakers of the world. It is designed to present to the world an image of concern, competence, and cooperation in making the world a better place. Present are some 850 CEO's and chairs of corporations, about 400 "political leaders," and about 65 "heads of state." The meetings are dominated by the interests of the global financial and fossil-fuel elites, as indicated in the opening remarks, with a goal of 3% growth this year. The financial elites who control the WEF fancy themselves as stewards of the global economy and the planet as well. In fact, they continue acting as plundering pirates of the dwindling resources of a world, which is on track to meet the Limits to Growth predicted by Dana Meadows and her colleagues in 1972. Short-term gain and competitive status seeking is their game.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

Global scientists, systems experts, and change makers Johan Rockström, Paul Polman, Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, and Carlos A. Nobre, gave an "alternative speech" to that of most presenters at the World Economic Forum, and in particular, Donald Trump.

<https://www.wedonthavetime.org/events/wef-alternativespeech-26#Register>

The fundamental difference behind the linear extractive ideology of the Davos Men and the framework for a livable economic regime that is grounded in ecological reality is expressed in this collective speech on a street corner in Davos. Characteristically, those who control the WEF Conference keep as many alternative perspectives out of the main deliberations and halls of the conference, in order to not distract from the self-congratulatory players in the “mine is bigger than yours” financial status one-upmanship game of the ultra-rich. Part of the game is also a patronizing grift feigning compassion, support, and contribution to human betterment, but only expressed via capital gains.

Quotable Quotes

These two quotations complement each other so well in relation to the topics of this week’s newsletter, that I must present them together here. First, the data are clear, as are the trends in climate chaos, ecological disruption, and both growing economic and social instabilities as well. Second, the revolt against recognizing the rapidly changing facts of change persists, without regard to the facts.

Billion-dollar climate disasters “...have become much more frequent. In the 1980s there was one event every 4 months on average. In 2025, there was one every 10 days.”

~ Katharine Hayhoe

We are living through a revolt against the future. The future will prevail.

~ Anand Giridharadas

The Davos meetings of the World Economic Forum this week offer one of the most glaring examples of the revolt of the powerful against the New Great Transformation of humanity’s role on the planet. Unless the intransigence is overcome, the inevitable new great transformation will be far messier and far more painful than if humanity cooperates in transforming our institutions and our lives in order to live within the bounds of the Earth System, and give up the illusion that we are somehow exempt from the Laws of Nature.

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