

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

Policy, Strategy, and Practice vs. Reality

The extent and popularity of irrational behavior among humans seems to be growing—or, is it just taking on new forms? In any case, it appears that there is no limit to human folly, especially when autocratic attempts are in play. “Somethin’s happenin’ here.”

On the one hand, industrial civilization—driven by the requirement that all investment must cover debt and produce a profit for the investors—has developed a level of technological sophistication beyond our imagination. The disruptive potential of AI is daunting at best. Yet the development and application of technology are less and less commensurate with human needs; instead technology development focuses on assuring a large return on investment and potential for further growth of the organization that deploys it, and on the continued growth of the power of the techno-oligarchy.

On the other hand, a widespread social illusion assumes that all problems, including the degradation of ecosystems and climate, upon which we all depend for life itself, can be resolved by further investment in hyper-technologies. However, the new technologies often have next to nothing to do with supporting how humans must live to survive on the only planet where we will ever live. Elon Musk’s fantasies of billionaires traveling to Mars have no bearing on that fact. Artificial Intelligence (AI) exemplifies technology’s great potential for controlling things and people while posing a great danger to human freedom and ecological survival.

But wait; there’s more... In a recent Medium post, [Raj K](#) pointed out that history shows that “whenever any empire is heading towards decline, instead of fixing its internal problems, it throws all its strength into war.” I would add that ‘leaders’ in such situations also tend to focus on building monuments to themselves at the cost of everyone else’s suffering. Ring a bell?

All that seems quite consistent with the recent and current behavior of the Russian empire in its war on Ukraine, as well as the irrational aggression of the current U.S. and Israeli regimes in their attack on Iran, and the self-aggrandizement of the tyrannical leaders of all three. They engage in failed ‘strategies,’ which are illusory in their premises as well as in their attempts to

deploy power. When we add the personal pathology of the so called leaders of these dying empires, it only gets much worse.

The history of industrial civilization is built upon a fundamental illusion, which was not evident to most until the industrial-capital system of perpetual growth began to confront the reality of physical and ecological systemic facts that objectively limit that growth. Some of those real-world limits are more subtle than others, and take more time to reach their catastrophic tipping points. But as limits to growth are approached, increasing damage to ecosystems and human health begin to accelerate even faster than the economic growth that caused them.

National economic policies are driven by the illusions inherent in the ideology of perpetual economic growth. Many of the consequences of the ideology of perpetual growth—which ignores the finite limits of extraction from Earth System resources, and the limits of ecological systems’ health—lag behind the actual behavior of the ubiquitous extractive-productive-consumptive systems. The onset of a growing pattern of extreme weather events, for example, emerges gradually, following the acceleration of carbon emissions that cause climate chaos, then accelerates toward tipping points of collapse, while so many sit back assuming that climate chaos is about the future.

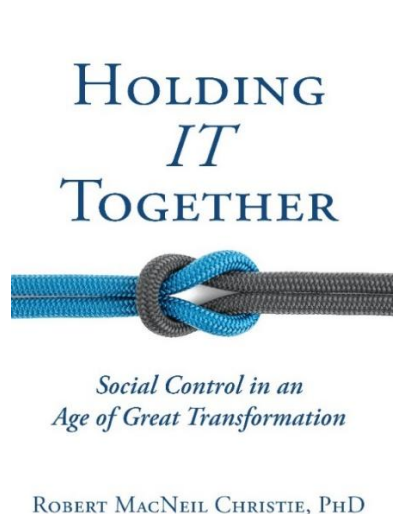
That is why the simple-minded or the disingenuous who would deny it all are able to claim that things are not actually as bad as the science findings clearly imply. Most economic projections rely almost totally on data from the past. But when scientists project destabilization patterns, and especially when they forecast ‘tipping points’ toward collapse, they are denied legitimacy. We have seen how powerful the “Big Lie” can be, even when confronted with obvious facts and reliable predictions. So far, the climate scientists have been right, except that most of their predictions have *underestimated* the climate chaos that they forecast. Only their caution has been unjustified. Meanwhile, the meaningless wars go on, adding toxicity to the death toll.

Conventional economic projections extend the recent trends, as if nothing new is to be seen in the world. Ecological impacts on economies are ignored by their abstract models of economic systems out of Earth System context. Many climate scientists themselves are very conservative, hesitating to make firm public pronouncements about the implications of their findings for public policy. Except for a few top scientists, their willingness to project dire conditions based on their analyses, is very limited. “More research is needed.” When they do point out the implications, especially in relation to practices that are unsustainable if we want to overcome the huge impending crises, they are ridiculed and denied legitimacy or simply ignored by both politicians and mass media outlets.

Truth, however, is a function of actual evidence, which is deemed “subversive” by those who refuse to give up their practices or the profits they make from destroying the stability of our home. As Greta Thunberg put it, “Hope is an action.” And the actions needed are entirely out of range for the conventional policies and practices of modern industrial-consumer economies or the tyrants who would dominate them. The needs of people and planet are especially anathema to the would-be tyrants of the current political regimes controlling most industrial nations.

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Here is a shorter promo for *Holding IT Together* which, in every issue of this newsletters may seem redundant, but, hey, it costs me nothing.



Can Modern Civilization Transform Itself in Order to Survive?

In *Holding IT Together*, Dr. Robert MacNeil Christie explains how we got into this mess and what it will take to come out alive. Despite its many benefits, industrial civilization has become an existential threat to itself and our Earth System. It may even threaten our survival, along with many other species. We must transform ourselves, our communities, and our societies into responsible members of the ecosystems of which we are a part. We must 'hold it together' to find a place of our own within the living Earth system, Gaia.

Libraries seeking treatises on the major dilemmas of modern society and living, who look for well-researched blends of and contrasts between different viewpoints...will find Holding IT Together especially relevant... ~ **Midwest Book Review**

Christie's writing is sharp and thought-provoking, making complex ideas accessible...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**

"Buy it!" says the author.

My eBook *HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto* is available on Amazon.com. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4250704.Hopeful-Realism). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on its Amazon page.

Note: As always, past issues of this Newsletter are available, archived on my web site:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/hopeful-realist-newsletter/>

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LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

Ideology, Issues, and the Distortion of Politics

Ideology is generally defined as the promotion of ideas that serve the political or economic interests of their promoters. Ideology is not grounded in facts; it is grounded in the will to power of those who deploy its ideas in their service. Pretenders to power or those who seek to retain the power they have attained, use ideology to excuse their assertion of power over others. The key to successful ideology is the control of information. That is why the ideologue is hostile to science; after all, science is about facts, which are indifferent to ideology.

Issues, on the other hand, reflect those wishes and values expressed by ordinary people in response to the conditions of life they experience. Issues are often framed within ideologies in order to give the ideology power over the people. That aberration is far more prevalent than we may want to believe.

When we consider the course of public discussion of issues, we can see how ideology distorts issues for the purpose of gaining political power. In this, the Republicans have been far more successful than have the Democrats. As the famous linguist, George Lakoff pointed out in his book, [*Don't think of an Elephant*](#), and other writings, Republicans have captured the language and symbols of patriotism and emotionally associated them with Republican ideology and policies. Democrats, on the other hand, cite facts and figures in dull attempts to intellectually counter the power of emotions the Republicans energize. It doesn't work.

One thing I have found fascinating is that when a progressive piece of legislation is up for a vote and the Republicans attack it by deploying their ideological negation, and surveys ask voters how they feel about the bill, they react negatively. But when asked how they feel about the specific components of the bill, in terms of their generic description, they are supportive. People want things like social security and universal healthcare, even though they react negatively when exposed to *framing* that distorts the meaning of the legislation by raising negative patriotic emotions.

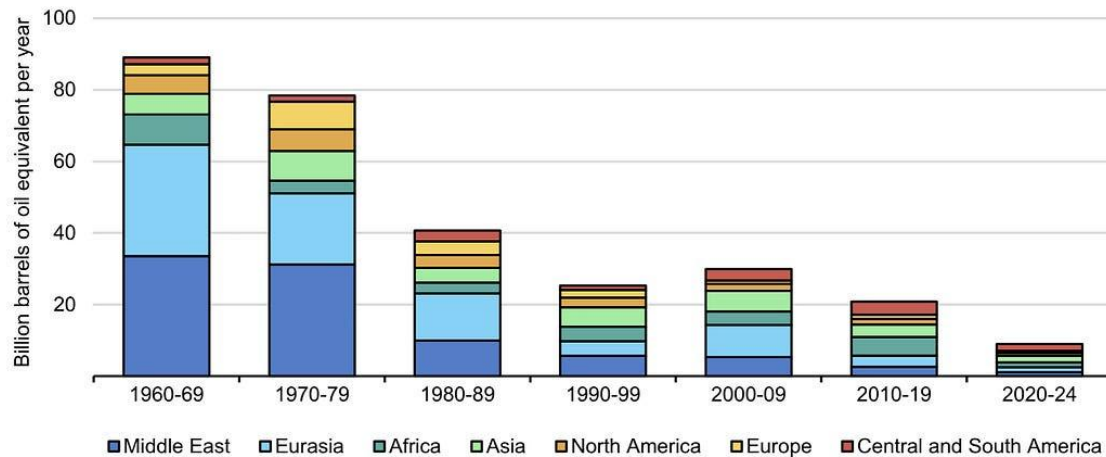
American *politics is distorted* by the infusion of false narratives, which rely on patriotic emotions to distort voters' understanding of the issues. Democrats, whose 'liberal' ideology is constrained by the fact that they take money from the same wealthy donors as do the Republicans, are partly to blame. They are not likely to re-capture the trust of the voters until they formulate a genuine message that conveys a plan to directly address the biggest concerns of the voters, instead of focusing only on abstract (however legitimate) claims of the need to rescue American democracy from the MAGA grip on the institutions of government. That will not come from ideological adjustments as much as from honestly facing the hard facts of overcoming the influence of major financial donors to become genuine representatives of the public interest.

Today's Featured Image:

Politics doesn't necessarily reflect reality. Here we are fast entering a world in which petroleum and its many products are becoming rare and hard to extract and produce. Never mind the rapidly approaching tipping points into climate chaos, which require that we rapidly reduce the consumption of all petroleum in order to constrain carbon emissions and ecological destruction. The fact remains that we will

run out of the quantities of fuel and other petroleum derivatives needed to operate the soon-to-fail industrial civilization, anyway.

Figure 12 Average annual conventional oil and gas discoveries, 1960-2024



IEA. CC BY 4.0.

Source: IEA analysis based on data from Rystad Energy (2025).

Image credit: Average annual conventional oil and gas discoveries, from IEA's "The Implications of Oil and Gas Field Decline Rates" report.

But here's the catch: the decline in access to these commodities will be gradual, but the catastrophic convergence of multiple system collapses will occur rapidly and soon. The loss of fossil fuels will stagnate the global economy—all things being equal—but the collapse of ecosystems and climate chaos wreaking havoc on humanity and all other living beings, will likely come much sooner. That is what I mean when I say that we will experience a New Great Transformation, one way or the other. If we act collectively on a grand scale now, we can influence the inevitable transformation in ways that minimize the damage and offer some semblance of a chance to create an ecological civilization.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

Anyone who entertains the notion of taking action to change the world is in for a struggle. Not only do you have to organize others as well as yourself, but then what? In the present context of the suppression of dissent by wannabe tyrants who not only ban books, but take action to stifle the public media, major television networks, and who "primary" dissenting politicians within their own party, it is even more difficult. To overcome such challenges we must understand the processes of social influence and how they work and don't work.

Jonah Berger. 2016. *Invisible Influence: The Hidden Forces that Shape Behavior*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Jonah Berger. 2013. *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

The big social change we need today will not come from individual actions. Some kinds of protest can help raise public awareness, as it did in the Me-Too movement and in the widespread public protest over the ICE murders of innocent citizens in Minnesota and now elsewhere. Very large crowds must peacefully congregate (with discipline) to express widespread public outrage. But so much more is necessary to “change the world.” We must understand what can be the “wisdom of crowds,” or the “madness of crowds.” Collective behavior and social movements can be very powerful but are very hard to control and keep on track to succeed in achieving their goals. These two books illuminate many of the social-psychological elements of how behavior is shaped collectively, and they are not all rational...

Quotable Quotes

The crisis cluster we all face today—climate collapse, ecological disasters, wars of choice devoid of meaning, political turmoil amplified by the autocratic attempts by neo-fascists, etc.—call upon us to act quickly, decisively, comprehensively and collectively. I know the prospects seem dim, but we do have our human agency waiting to be activated.

Rather than asking people to fight for a distant utopia, show them how action today improves their lives.

~ Kasper Benjamin Reimer Bjerkskov

<https://illuminem.com/illuminemvoices/beyond-hope-crafting-narratives-that-inspire-action-through-meaning>

Kasper Benjamin Reimer Bjerkskov offers many insights along these lines. He and Erin Remblance have created an online course in how to recognize the elements of the crisis we are in and take personal and collective action. Check out their site at <https://beyondduality.org/>.

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