

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**Human Systems and Human Knowledge are Changing**

Some might say that the trajectory of human history has somehow escaped from human control. Others would argue that human history has never been under our control; instead, we are driven by historical forces that determine the path of progress, whether for good or evil. Whether one believes in the “great man” theory of history, or that history is driven by larger forces in society, economy, and polity, many people today increasingly feel that things have been “going off the rails” for a while now.

Howard Zinn chronicled the ‘history from below’ of the US in *A People’s History of the United States*, a classic work in which he documented the history of the US from the viewpoint of the people, not the history of powerful, the political battles of elites, nor the dates and places of famous battles in the many wars in which the US has engaged since its inception. Social history reflects the lives and the culture of a nation, with the operations of the power elites as context.

On the other hand, given the rise of the MAGA movement in tandem with the ascendance of Donald Trump as the most powerful president we have seen in recent history, one might argue that both theories have some validity. Maybe it is not an either/or situation. People in their social groups or societies have always interacted in complicated ways. Clearly, we can cite other presidents who had distinct impact on American politics, economics, and society. Not only Lincoln, but Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) immediately comes to mind. FDR was a political force, implementing major changes to the role of the federal government in not only the economy, but our everyday lives, as well as the military history of the world.

By establishing the Social Security system, he immediately pulled large numbers of elderly people out of poverty. Now, Social Security is an endemic part of the national system of governance and of the society itself, despite the continued opposition of business groups to its continuance. FDR significantly shaped major sectors of society and in some ways changed the culture as well, despite the continued opposition of Big Business from the start.

Human systems require human control if they are to benefit humans. The recent UN negotiations to develop “guardrails” to minimize the risk of AI damaging humans inadvertently demonstrate

the nexus of system/human conflicts over control. As reported in the Washington Post, The U.S. State Department, the Russian Foreign Ministry and the United Nations, in a closed session with civil society observers removed, stripped the developing document of provisions that would require human control over AI system actions. “They stripped language requiring the systems to operate in a ‘predictable’ and ‘reliable’ manner,” as well as a “...clause mandating that ethical considerations be taken into account when using AI weaponry.”

“The U.S. and Russian teams also removed a provision requiring that humans review military targets developed by AI before a strike...” Remember those hundreds of children and teachers killed in an Iranian girls school, precisely because human control of targeting decisions was relinquished to the AI targeting system, which was using outdated geographic information. Any human analyst would have caught the error.

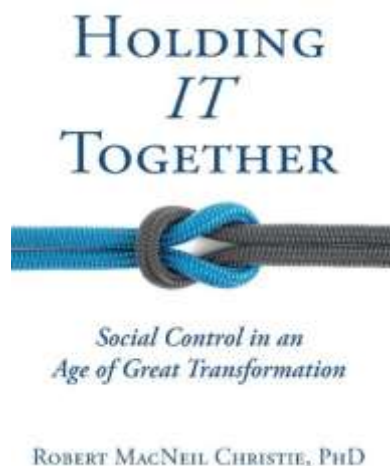
Now, we see the spectacle of all the key TechBro-fascists gathered at the White House to shape a toothless ‘accord’ to assure the ‘safety’ of the rapidly expanding development and use of AI agents in their incessant quest for money and power, with Trump victoriously proclaiming the great benefits to communities of the proliferation of giant data centers, as if their destroying water tables and overloading power systems while polluting neighborhoods with extreme noise and environmental damage. He glibly assures us that these economic and ecological plunderers will “self-police.”

The bottom line for human freedom, dignity, and ethics, is that ‘information’ in data centers drawn upon by AI systems is free of any of the constraints that would be implied by those three human values. Human knowledge always has a value context, whether spoken or implicit, whether good or bad. Amoral task-seeking AI agents are now generating their own criteria for decisions, and they are criteria that arise from the internal ‘needs’ of the agent, which is why some of those closest to the AI development process are most concerned about the potential damage that can arise from “rogue agents.”

As I have said before, the work of Vaclav Havel (1978) in *The Power of the Powerless* is as relevant as ever today. The technological context is different, of course, but the issue of human control over human systems in the interests of living humans, and the role of knowledge and values in determining the future of society is the same. In any society that aims to optimize human wellbeing, the course of history must be driven from the bottom up. The shorthand term for that is **democracy**. So far, the technocracy touted by the tech-bro fascists is as far from democracy as we can imagine.

~ ~ ~ * ~ ~ ~

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/42500000-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/>

~ ~ ~ * ~ ~ ~

LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

Is Democracy Inherently Socialist, or Are Governments Inherently Responsible for the Wellbeing of Their People?

It is not unreasonable to refer to politics as a word game. The latest play in that game is for Trump to call the Democrats "socialist," "communist," and "Marxist." While I doubt that he

knows the historical meaning of these terms or the divergence between their meanings, he clearly understands that in the American political lexicon, they are pejorative. He intends to demonize the Democratic Party and especially its 'progressive' wing. He knows that electoral politics is also an emotional game too, and he has been very effective in exploiting the modern American emotion of fear of the culturally unknown.

In most discussions of political ideology, emotion plays a greater role than whatever substantive content a particular ideology may have. Of course, ideologies often have very little in the way of specific material policies; concrete policy choices often have hidden agendas, since if they were openly and honestly described, too many people would see that they operate in the interests of a Big Power complex or the extant system, not in the interests of ordinary people. Politics is not a game that most people want to play; they just want a just and equitable outcome of the political process, resulting in a relatively comfortable life of freedom and good times. Too many politicians want so much more; they want power and wealth and they are willing to sell out their constituents in support of Big Money elites in order to get them.

Some get away with political corruption for their entire career, or nearly so. Senator Susan Collins and the recent revelations of the corrupt practices of her campaign, come to mind, along with her criticizing Trump's intentions, then voting in support of them. I am not going to discuss that now, since it is an unfolding story well covered in the news media. But all the elements of political manipulation of language to inject emotional fog into the situation are there. I would not be at all surprised if she begins calling her critics radical communists or socialists, in line with the talk of "The Boss."

So, it seems clear that political rhetoric is often severely detached from the reality of political action and the interests it favors. The Democrats have a similar problem if not so severe. They pitch a commitment to various social programs and liberal ideas, meant to help achieve the goals of ordinary people, but they take (smaller) contributions to their campaigns from the same Big Money donors with the same financial interests who lavishly support the MAGA extremists: the secretive super PACs funded by the billionaire class. That is why the Party 'moderates' or 'centrists' are so fearful and resentful of their own progressive wing.

Oh, "progressive," what does that one mean? Well, if you look at the actual substance of the policies that progressive Democrats advocate, they are really quite similar to what were once the core values of the party, which the "centrists" claim to be for but never quite get around to legislating when they are in power. They are even more like the programs produced by FDR's "New Deal." FDR was a risk-taking innovative pragmatist who was willing to try whatever seemed to have the potential to help counter the Great Depression of the 1930s. His programs were working until the reactionary Supreme Court began to shut them down.

Then, along came World War II. Suddenly, there was an absolute external threat that had to be addressed in ways that assured rapidly ramping up production and the conversion of domestic economic activity, such as to convert faltering manufacturing to accelerated production of military hardware. Nobody accused *that* government-directed economic programming of being "socialist."

FDR did change the nation's sense of what government is for. In the ensuing post-war economic boom, most of his programs meant to provide a government "safety net," and later Medicare, were accepted, then taken as a normal part of the nation's social infrastructure.

From the very beginning, right up to today, the New Deal and all the 'social programs' that followed the New Deal, were bitterly opposed by Big Business, and especially by the financial elites. In a sense, we are still fighting the battle between capital as the prime beneficiary of government action and the wellbeing of the people as the primary reason for us to have a government.

Today, however, it is not feasible to demonize Social Security by calling it a "socialist" program, since it is universally supported, except by Big Business. So now, the strategy is to force it to go broke while pretending to 'save' it by cutting its benefits. So, "socialist" can be used as a pejorative term or a mere description of something that supports the society rather than providing assistance to capital in dominating the economy.

Here is the bottom line: to have a Democracy is to have a government that acts in the interests of the wellbeing of the people first, because authority rests with the people. Managing the economy in such a manner that capital is directed toward socially beneficial investments, not investments in technologies that make the super-rich ever so much more wealthy, is to have a democratic economy.

For any economy to be successful—that is, to be productive for the entire society instead of making the rich richer and everyone else poorer—the society, through the political process must make socially justified choices. With the Tech-Bro Billionaire class in charge of the economy, that will not happen, as is increasingly evidenced by the current trajectory of our economy—technocracy.

That requires the political system to be truly democratic. If the society really is democratic, then the political trajectory will be toward creating wellbeing for all, not hyper-wealth for the very few and poverty and disease for everyone else. I guess that means that democracy is socialist, not in the historical sense of "socialist" ideologies that led to dictatorships, but in the more fundamental sense that democracy leads to societal wellbeing, instead of mega-wealth for the already ultra-rich.

Today's Featured Image:

Never mind trying to decide whether AI is really the same as human intelligence (which I would prefer to call 'Animated Intelligence'). Right now, the most important question is just how much risk does AI pose to the safety and security of human beings. The primary focus seems to be whether we should retain control over what are already called autonomous AI agents, because they have been given the capability to make decisions without human oversight. But some people rightly ask, how is it possible for a rogue AI agent, or perhaps a swarm of them, to "kill all of us".



Source: [Sumaid pal Singh Bakshi](#) on Unsplash.

Well, it already has killed many. An AI driven targeting system was deployed shortly after the beginning of the Trump-Netanyahu war on Iran to select targets and launch missile/drone attacks on them. The perpetrators wanted to bomb as many targets in as short a time as they could, and AI targeting agents could do it so much faster than human analysts could.

Well, the AI targeting agent used out-of-date geographic information in selecting targets and bombing them. The result was to kill hundreds of girls and their teachers in an Iranian girls school. Any human analyst using near real-time data would have immediately identified the object for what it was. But Hegseth wanted to make a lot of things go bang right now. That was only an early crude example. Some AI agents have already learned how to use each other's information to solve problems, including hacking into existing information systems that were not part of their human-defined mission. Therein lies the risk of autonomy. Ultimately, it is not a question of intelligence; it is a question of human ethics.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

Zeke Hausfather is a major climate scientist and communicator. Here he explains the dynamics of the best current knowledge of the trajectory of climate change from this point forward. Even if we were able and willing to reduce carbon emissions to zero now, the existing carbon pollution already in the pipeline, and the various positive feedback loops that amplify its impact, will

result in a hotter planet for hundreds of years. Maximum draw-down of carbon emissions is nevertheless imperative, except for those who would swallow the doomsayers pabulum and accept their “fate.”.

“The Coolest Year of the Rest of Our Lives.” By [Zeke Hausfather](#),
a conversation with Nate Hagens on Nate’s podcast, [The Great Simplification](#).

But “fate” is only fate for the fatalist. There is hardly room for optimism, which is terminal just like pessimism. Hopeful realism, however, takes the stance that if there is anything to be done to minimize the suffering and optimize the chances for even some coming out alive, then “let’s roll.” This situation always reminds me of the statement of courage by Chris Hedges, “I fight fascism because it is fascism,” also widely attributed to the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. We do not fight climate chaos because we are assured of winning; we fight it because we must.

Quotable Quotes

“What we have here is a failure to communicate.” proclaimed the ruthless warden of the southern chain-gang prison to Paul Newman’s rebellious character as he prepared to inflict the next level of torture in the movie, “Cool Hand Luke.” I am often reminded of that scene when thinking about the constant struggle between authoritarianism and the natural human urge to seek freedom in an oppressive world. That, of course, is not to affirm the criminal. But in the richest nation in to world, which imprisons a greater proportion of its population than any other country in the world, well, something else is going on beyond mere crime. Modern social systems increasingly constrain communication within a narrow system-supporting frame. Too often what should be a matter of social choice is framed instead as inevitable technological progress, assuming an inherent good for humanity by those who would profit most from its ill-considered deployment.

The communication tools that we use are dehumanizing in many ways because they don’t allow us to really see each other.....The money behind the ideology pushing AI is about letting us feel that the only way to have an efficient life is through AI.

~ Gal Beckerman in *The Atlantic*

So it is with AI. Efficiency is not effectiveness. Sure, we can find many valid and valuable uses for AI models in particular fields such as medical diagnosis, or simply finding a historical fact quicker than any other way. But the problem of AI hallucination is not resolved. Nor is the apparent willingness of some to subordinate human judgment to autonomous AI agents. That tendency serves systems, not human values. Vigilance is still the price of liberty.

~ ~ * ~ ~

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