

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

Survey Results, Part II: Here are the rest of the preliminary results from our little survey on Face Book. Later, we may cross-tabulate some of the data to explore what other patterns we may find.

Remember from last time, **Ninety-seven percent** of those who responded to our survey on Facebook felt that climate change is either a serious problem or a global disaster. While it may seem paradoxical, that is a hopeful sign, since knowledge is potentially power. However, most respondents probably answered because they already know that climate change is a serious problem or worse. Surveys of the U.S. population suggest that only around 60% of Americans recognize the seriousness of the climate emergency. As increasingly unprecedented disasters hit, more and more people are coming to realize that the destabilizing climate is no longer a problem for the future—the climate emergency is now.

4. How accurate do you think climate scientists’ current estimates are for climate change over the next ten years?

1 Too Pessimistic	7	2.0%
2 Slightly pessimistic	26	34.1%
3 about right	121	34.1%
4 Slightly Optimistic	106	29.9%
5 Too Optimistic	95	26.8%
Total	355	

Considering all the political challenges to climate science, it is almost comforting to see that the majority of those who are aware of the climate emergency recognize that the scientists’ estimates are about right or even a bit too optimistic. Yet, over half the respondents perceive the scientists’ estimates as slightly or overly optimistic; 89% say the estimates are about right or overly optimistic. Why? Well, many probably know that the IPCC reports—the primary inter-governmentally authorized source of climate knowledge—are approved only after a certain amount of scrutiny by political authorities. Recent IPCC reports are rumored to have been subject to direct corporate influence, which minimizes the urgency of the findings. In this context, it would only be prudent to assume the worst.

5. Who is most responsible for taking action to control climate change?

Everyone	219	61.3%
People who don't recycle & drive "gas guzzlers"	2	0.6%
The government, which needs to make new pollution rules	64	17.9%
Corporations that refuse to stop emitting carbon waste	66	18.5%
No worries; Nature will rebalance itself.	6	1.7%
Total	357	

Nearly two thirds of respondents answered that 'everyone' is most responsible. Well, yes, we should all take responsibility for our own actions. However, individual actions will not solve global problems. The climate crisis will only be resolved by *large-scale* carefully organized *concerted action*. Furthermore, we all live in very complex social systems all over the world—carbon emissions are globally **systemic**.

On top of that, the people of the industrialized nations have caused the vast majority of carbon (and all other forms of) pollution. Certainly, **not** everyone is equally responsible. Responsibility exists in equal proportion to power and consumption of energy. The head of Exxon Mobil has more responsibility than do you or I. It is an easy out to blame everyone, which implicitly denies the extreme imbalances of power in the world. That was acknowledged by the 36.4% of respondents who see corporations or governments as most responsible—they are! Why? Because they hold the political and cultural reins of power. And that is precisely why the rest of us must mobilize to force the powerful elites of this world to make the necessary institutional changes to give us all a chance to survive.

6. How best to reduce carbon emissions to avoid heating the planet more than 1.5^o C. above pre-industrial levels.

Carbon pricing for every economic activity and product	55	15.4%
Energy conservation in every sector of the economy.	64	17.9%
Strict carbon emissions standards with penalties.	102	28.6%
Carbon offset (trading) markets to reach net-zero emissions.	31	8.7%
Create new jobs by subsidizing carbon-neutral (clean) energy.	105	29.4%
Total	357	

This is a tough one. Given the situation we should probably do everything we can to rapidly reduce carbon emissions. Yet, some actions take longer than others to initiate. Others may have only modest or minor effects. Some, such as carbon trading, may actually be distractions from real climate action as well as being profit centers for corporate scammers. Most 'market based' approaches are dodges.

Maybe I should have offered the old 'all of the above' option. However, mandatory emissions standards and creation of clean energy jobs seem the most direct and effective strategies. One of the most overlooked and important actions would be to reduce the total use of energy. We cannot allow increases in clean energy to contribute to profligate energy waste.

7. If industry, governments, and people reduce their carbon emissions to zero within the next decade, what do you think will happen?

a. Massive disruption of the economy with large job losses.	0	0.0%
b. New carbon neutral industries will emerge, with many clean jobs.	38	10.7%

c. The economy will crash due to excessive government debt caused by overspending on climate action.	3	0.8%
d. We will have to re-organize the way we live in ecologically safe ways to restore the Earth System to livable conditions.	29	8.2%
e. Both b and d above.	<u>285</u>	80.3%
Total:	355	

I'm glad I offered the 'b and d' option on this one. The results show that over 80% of respondents recognized the necessity of re-organizing the way we live and that industries must now be carbon neutral. And such industries will require many carbon-free jobs. However, if emissions were reduced severely and no policy action to replace the lost economic activity with low energy consuming production, 'a' and 'c' would ensue.

The problem is not that these things cannot be done; it is that we have never even imagined transforming the economy to achieve them before. It is important to understand that using less energy and using only clean energy are not steps back in history to become 'cavemen.' They are a great opportunity to be creative in shaping a livable future.

I discuss much of this in my eBook *HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*. Please read, [review and rate](#) it by clicking the button on the lower left of its Amazon page below "Customer Reviews," and say a few words about what you think about the issues it. If you don't do Kindle, email me and I will send you a .pdf version directly.

Note: You can find past issues of The HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter archived on my web site:

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

LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

Plausibility is a state of mind. Can I accept something I see as real or should I not believe my lyin' eyes? Well, perception is an extremely complex phenomenon. We often see what we expected to see. Conversely, we often miss what we did not expect, even though it is in plain sight. It is not that we are being untruthful (although some are, of course). Instead, our frame of reference influences what we see and how we see it. Leaving various kinds of error aside, consider what is involved in perception and interpretation. We learn through experience and from what respected others tell us. Then we apply our resulting frame of reference to what we observe or overlook.

In that context, the physical process of perception is itself extremely complex. Vast numbers of bits of data flow into our perceptual systems every waking moment. How in the world is our brain able to process it all? Well, we have to filter all that data down to a mentally manageable volume. Our perception of the world is the result. We build conceptual frameworks to organize perception through our entire lives and our 'point of view' shapes much of what we see. When some phenomenon or some statement of fact fails to fit anywhere in our 'framework of knowledge,' we may not see it at all or we may entirely misinterpret what it is.

'True believers' and victims of conspiracy theories see what they expect to see, sometimes in iextreme ways, especially when their perception is mediated by fear, hatred or both. That is why so many presumptive 'witches' were burned at the stake in medieval Europe and America. The conclusions as to

whether some woman was a witch relied on vague beliefs and fears about witches, not any direct evidence of specific behaviors and their consequences.

Today, so-called 'climate deniers,' insurrectionists, white nationalists, and domestic terrorists perceive existential threats in their fellow citizens, where the rest of us see their autocratic penchant for violence as a threat to democracy.

For more discussions of various related matters, go to:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/the-hopeful-realist-blog/>

Today's Featured Image:



Hurricane Ian: Not more, Just a Whole Lot Stronger.

Our Most Likely Future Will involve a lot More Severe Destruction

The images of destruction caused by Hurricane Ian are just pictures, unless you were there. A picture may replace a thousand words, but it cannot adequately represent the experience. People who have experienced the ravages of unprecedented extreme weather events tend to give climate science more credence than many others do. Admittedly, it is difficult to process extreme events and conditions that we have never known before. That is just one of the reasons it is so difficult to get 'authorities' to take serious climate action.

One of the biggest problems we have in finding ways to mitigate and adapt to the growing chaos of the early Anthropocene is that so much of it is emotionally unbelievable, even when a highly respected scientist present clear-cut facts to us. Now, one of the benefits of science and the new computing power that can handle huge amounts of data (so necessary for the complex modeling of climate change) is that

with adequate data we can accurately predict future events—if they are not too far into the future, when previously unknown factors have a tendency to befoul our predictions.

One of the things I worry about most is timing. I know that most people will eventually recognize and accept the facts of climate and ecological destabilization. I really hate even considering the concept of that happening “too late.” However, I always try to temper my hope with the most precisely realistic assessment of the facts.

What I fear most is that too many people will avoid facing the climate/ecological emergency until some important options are closed. Here is the predicament. Clearly, when enough people experience the trauma of climate chaos, they will become climate realists and demand that authorities take appropriate action. No, rebuilding on the Florida sea coast when we know seas will rise and hurricanes will be ever more destructive, is not a very good idea.

Books and other Sources on the New Great Transformation

Two books stand out in the literature on economic growth and degrowth. They are Jason Hickel’s *Less is More*, which I discussed in a previous edition of this newsletter, and Kate Raworth’s ***Doughnut Economics***, cited here:

Kate Raworth, 2017. ***Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st Century Economist***. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.

Like Hickel, though in different settings, Kate Raworth experienced the real world in significant ways outside of the academic sphere. They both saw the world of economic life first hand, not out of Paul Samuelson’s classic economic textbook, which for almost every economist in the twentieth century shaped her/his economic world view. The harsh world of global poverty and economic struggle put the lie to the professionally convenient paradigm that Samuelson provided mainstream economics. While the focus on the circular flow of incomes in the conventional model captures part of the whole economy, it completely ignores extremely important factors. Hickel and Raworth come at those factors from complementary perspectives of realists who have been shaping a vision that points to the economics we need in the twenty-first century—an economics organized around human needs instead of capital accumulation. It is that simple, although achieving the transition between the two is not.

In doing so, they absolutely nail the current predicament of the global corporate political economy that has dominated mainstream economics for most of the industrial era, and that the vast majority of people take for granted as the natural order of things. If you read nothing else, read Kate Raworth’s second chapter, which contrasts the abstract self-contained market of economic theory with the real world necessity to embed economics within the needs of real societies.

This is not a made-for-TV drama; we are living in a new reality still unrecognized by too many people. We don’t get to change the channel. We are trapped at the edge of a downward spiral of our own making. The Earth System is undergoing a *new great transformation* into increasingly unstable unknown conditions, one that we caused but are reluctant to acknowledge. Those who so many dismiss as doomsayers are pleading with us to become survivors; after all, we are all in this together whether we like it or not. The bottom line is whether we take massive collective action or die without trying.

Quotable Quote

“The Political and ideological systems that guide today’s societies no longer have the qualifications necessary to prevent disaster; they have become fatally incompetent.”

~ Dieter Duhm, 2019. *Towards a New Culture: From Refusal to Re-Creation: Outline of an Ecological and Humane Alternative*. (translated from the German.) Bad Belzig, Brandenburg, Germany: Verlag Meiga

The global political economy claims to produce progress via economic growth. Yet, it is destroying the very living systems—ecological and climate systems—that we depend on for our survival.

As I have mentioned before, the film a [World Out of Balance](#); reflects our unbalanced world today in powerful images. Political and economic ‘leaders’ fail to see the crucial system dynamics involved; nor do they have a clue about how to respond to the increasingly unstable conditions we face. They retain the mentality of victims, proud, stupid, and condemned to failure. Indigenous peoples know the difference.

The power of self-amplifying feedback loops built into the globalized political economy are driving societies into extreme economic and social inequalities and the accompanying societal instability, while simultaneously forcing the destabilization of multiple planetary living systems. Without decisive and powerful action, we will become our own victims. Extreme danger requires extreme action. Only a *New Great Transformation* of society will make us survivors.

See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe and read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto](#).