

## 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*

#### ***Normalization of Mass Murder, Political Chaos, This and That...***

The 814-page Final Report of the House Committee on January 6, and the massive number of transcripts of testimony, most by Republican members of the former president's administration, were released the week before Christmas. The evidence of conspiracy to incite insurrection to aid in the seditious overthrow the rightful electoral transfer of power is overwhelming. Not only were several administration officials involved, but 147 congressional Republicans voted to overturn the election results, in direct contradiction to the Constitution and the core principles of democracy itself.

The House January 6 Committee findings, mostly based on testimony and communications records of Republican administrative officials and advisors, would lead one to expect that the Department of Justice will soon indict the former president and at least several of his accomplices. Surely the Justice Department has as much evidence as the Committee uncovered. After all, Justice has quietly pursued its own investigations of the January 6 insurrection, the theft and sloppy storage of top-secret documents, and unaccounted documents possibly still held by the former president. Never mind the other crimes in Georgia and New York. Jack Smith, the new DOJ special prosecutor, is apparently highly competent and aggressive.

It all seems to become closer to 'normal' the longer it drags on. Yet, so much evidence takes time to vet, process, verify, and summarize. In a similar vein, the mass media seem to be normalizing Putin's *mass murder* of Ukrainian civilians by talking mostly about the 'civilian infrastructure' that he targets in his effort to cut people off from their means of survival—water, food, electricity for heat—in the sub-zero cold of the Ukrainian winter. You hear the term 'terrorize' occasionally, but 'the war' just being called a 'war' tends to normalize "the war in Ukraine," as if it were just another thing, when it is in fact the attempted assassination of an entire people. Why all this talk of negotiation with *Putin the Terrible*? That's what you do near the end of a *normal* war.

The COP15 UN Conference on Biodiversity ended on December 19, having produced an 'agreement' called "The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)," which is the first global agreement to cover all aspects of biological diversity. The usual suspects produced the usual level of commitment (conceptual, not performative) to 'achieve' three main goals: to conserve biological diversity, to use its components

‘sustainably,’ and to share the benefits arising from genetic resources fairly and equitably. Okay, how do you achieve these lofty goals? What specific actions lead to building and sustaining biological diversity in an era when it is rapidly depleting? Again, it seems that proclaiming collective high ambitions completely devoid of commitment to compliance, is being further normalized, while the real work of restoration and regeneration of the ecosystems that support biodiversity, is left up to individuals and a few small under-funded NGOs. Raising expectations then doing nothing is now far too normal.

Mass media normalize extreme weather events by characterizing them—as in the case of the Christmas mega-storm generated in part by the unusual southward surge of the ‘polar vortex’ throughout the central and eastern U.S.—as a “storm of a lifetime.” In normal times that might be true, but today such extreme weather is becoming increasingly common. Talking heads read their script as prescribed, treating mega storms as if they were normally rare, which is no longer the case.

Accelerating rates of childhood and teenage anxiety, depression, and identity confusion continue to rise. Given the isolation of the pandemic, that is not surprising in itself. But this has been going on for decades. *New York Times* reporter [Matt Richtel](#) spent over a year interviewing American adolescents and their families. Every generation thinks the next one is a bit crazy, that is, abnormal. However, something is going on today that clearly stands out from normal intergenerational misunderstanding. And it’s not just the isolation of the pandemic, which has contributed to the growing mental health problems of teenagers.

To the extent that young folks are bombarded with ‘information’ in volume and with disconnection from their own experiences, the developing brain has problems processing all the ambiguities involved. And as research has shown, the isolation of youth from direct (not via media) interaction with their peers as well as adults, building a meaningful identity and realistic perspective on the world becomes increasingly difficult, producing more anxiety, depression, and identity confusion than is normally associated with growing up in an increasingly turbulent world. The nation’s healthcare systems remain normally unprepared.

I would be remiss to not mention newly elected to Congress, soon to be sworn in, Republican George Santos, who has lied about almost everything in his own personal history. Then, when the [New York Times](#) revealed the lies, he admitted much of it, [almost](#), while recasting it as merely having “embellished” his résumé. “We do stupid things in life” Really?

Well, I’m not so sure compulsive lying about one’s entire identity is just a few normal errors of judgement; I might even go so far as to suggest that while countless politicians lie about countless matters, and even distort the truths they tell, we might want to draw the line at misrepresenting one’s entire persona. But then, since the rise of the orange presidency, and even before, we now live in an era when even “alternative facts” are normal.

**Change in Plans.** Because of its density and length, I have decided to recast my book, *At the Edge of Illusion: Facing the New Great Transformation*, in a new form by breaking it up into more manageable works, which I will publish as a three part series. As I was finishing the writing, it became increasingly evident that the three core topics need to be understood more completely, not just in how they relate to the climate catastrophe. They may be expressed more effectively in relation to how we must revise our concept of what it means to be humans on a planet that can no longer support our industrial-consumer ways of living. When taken in sequence they lead from how we arrived at our unsustainable

global political economy, to the social illusions that constrain us, then to how we can make the changes we need for humanity to survive and thrive on the planet. The first volume, *Holding It Together: Social Control in a New Era of Great Transformation*, will be ready in January and published as soon as after that as the publishing process allows.

My eBook **HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto** is still available for free download from [Kindle Unlimited](#). The price will soon go to normal. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](#). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on Amazon. On Amazon, 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:** Past issues of The HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter are available, archived on my web site:

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

### ***LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary***

Even now, so much of 'environmentalism' is framed within the dominant dualistic culture of techno-industrial consumerism that sees 'us' as separate from Nature. That is at the root of the problem of continuing Earth-System damage and the consequent threat to human existence and to the survival of many other species as well. Mainstream environmentalists think we can 'fix' the problems we have imposed on Nature by using new technology and materials to go on with our extraction, production, consumption, and waste, as if all is well. 'Eco modernism' is a feeble attempt to hold on to what was once normal but is no longer a viable outlook on the world or ourselves. Unintelligibly, it proclaims that we can 'decouple' economic growth from environmental degradation.

So, it boils down to how can we change both the culture and the globalized political economy, which is maintained by our entire social existence, from mass and social media to the workplace, shopping center, and home. As false outsiders looking down on the world, if only in our minds, we have 'colonized' Nature and don't even recognize the systemic destruction produced by that process. The self-anointed 'masters of the universe' on Wall Street, in corporate boardrooms, and in the halls of Congress for the most part simply don't get it, as they line their pockets with the spoils of elitism.

Most 'environmental solutions' are envisioned within the cultural framework in which we live. I suppose that should not be surprising, since 'a fish in water,' etc.; or maybe they are just frogs in a pot of water being slowly brought to a boil on the planetary stove. Yet, we must change that, which, as I understand it, will require a deep *New Great Transformation* of society in response to the new great transformation of the Earth System we have caused. Yet, it seems we must do something on a larger level than talk among ourselves about the finer points of our concerns as we lament the international failures to reach agreements that enforce compliance with standards of climate action. As Greta Thunberg would say, 'hope is an action.'

In many ways, it is a problem of scale. How can we 'scale up' our grasp of the fact of Earth-System destruction and get mega-institutions to 'do the right thing'? They above all operate within the predatory worldview that promotes a very destructive model of action—take from Nature and vulnerable humans for profit and leave the toxic waste wherever it lands. 'Giving back,' even just

cleaning up the mess, is a 'cost center' and is to be avoided. Oil executives praise the wonders of plastic, even as they seek to develop new drilling projects and markets for new petroleum products and ignore the damage they do. We cannot wait for them to figure out that they too are also ultimately at risk; they are so busy right now embodying the industrial-consumer illusion of endless economic growth. They must be FORCED to give it up, not by arms, but by the power of a mobilized population. However, social mobilization is not a simple matter.

Nevertheless, we probably should be reminded that political scientists have estimated that it takes no more than 3 or 4 percent of a population to make significant social change, if well motivated and organized. Some of the cases of non-violent revolution, eg., in Eastern Europe as the end of the Soviet empire grew near, show that social mobilization is possible to simply replace regimes without armed conflict. But we need much more than just a 'changing of the guard.' We need a new great transformation of the very character of social organization and control of our relations with each other and with Nature.

On that basis, some form of global social mobilization is the prerequisite to transforming or replacing the mega-institutions that sustain the political economy of Earth-System demolition. We need to explore the potential of strongly connected strong social networks working for change.

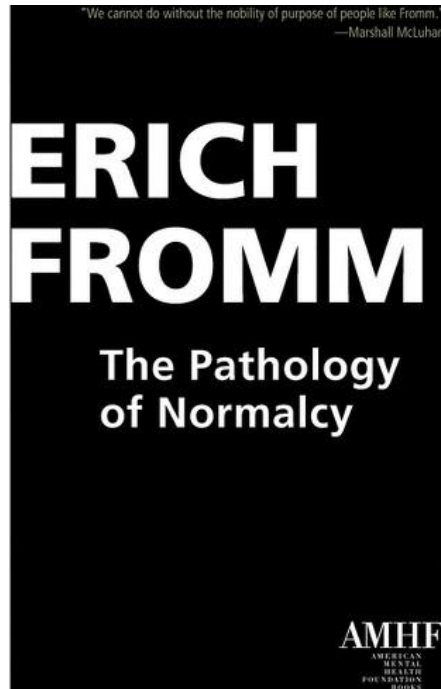
For more discussions of this and related matters, go to:

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

***Today's Featured Image:***

***Can a Society Move from the Pathological to the Normal?***

***When does Pathology Become Normalized?***



***Famed Psychologist Erich Fromm explored the relations of Pathology and Normalcy in the Modern World.***

In both the news and commentary section of this issue, what is normal, what is pathological, and how the pathological is sometimes normalized, present a challenge to our understanding. When does the pathological become normal? And, if it does, what remains of pathology? No such questions ever came up among hunter-gatherer societies. Such dilemmas are distinctly 'modern.'

From what we know of pre-modern societies, normalcy was the 'norm.' why? Because when a society is stable both internally and in relation to its environment, stability prevails. This has not been the condition of modern societies since the industrial revolution began. That great transformation that was the industrial revolution brought the search for meaning in life to a distinct turning point. Whatever traditions had been upheld, were now subject to challenge by the requirements of a new form of social organization and the newly 'rational-legal' context of meaning that was to become the dominant cultural form of the modern era.

Eric Fromm understood this well, and explored its implications for the meaning of life in modern industrial societies. Any of his books are well worth the read. In a very different way, economic historian Karl Polanyi understood the deep transformation of society undergoing industrialization and sought answers to how a less traumatic life could be gleaned out of this new societal context. The search for meaning goes on.

***Books and other Sources on the New Great Transformation***

In the research I have done over the past two decades, I had concluded that humanity is entering a period that I called a New Great Transformation. I likened it to the industrial revolution, which

fundamentally transformed societies over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, destroying traditional communities, which Karl Polanyi rightly characterized as *The Great Transformation* (1944). And it built a 'rational-legal' societal framework as Max Weber described it, which has served the interests of industrialization and capital accumulation throughout the industrial era until today. That process transformed the Earth System itself, in quite destructive ways, which is what is forcing modern societies to choose between a New Great Transformation to 'come home' to a harmonious relation with our habitat, or face chaos, violence, and possibly extinction with vast numbers of other species due to our disruption of climate and ecosystems around the world. Then I read Jeremy Lent's monumental work, *The Patterning Instinct*. Jeremy lays out with amazing insight and detail the cultural evolution that led us to our global predicament today, in his book:

Jeremy Lent. 2017. ***The Patterning Instinct: A Cultural History of Humanity's Search for Meaning***. Lanham, MD: Prometheus Books.

I was struck by the parallels I saw between what I had found by looking at the environmental degradation of the planet from an economic sociology perspective, and what Jeremy Lent found by his very deep dive into humanity's search for meaning in diverse cultures. Jeremy Lent is one of today's most important writers on the trajectory and future of humanity. He has organized the [Deep Transformation Network](#), where open-minded intellectuals, climate/ecological activists, and concerned citizens discuss how humanity may salvage a place of our own from the mess we have made of both the Earth System and the political economies that produce so much stuff by distorting and suppressing humanity's search for meaning in life. That will require nothing less than transforming our worldview.

### ***Quotable Quote***

*In diametric opposition to the dualistic framework of meaning that has structured two and a half millennia of Western thought, the new systems way of thinking about the universe leads to the possibility of finding meaning ultimately through connectedness within ourselves, to each other, and to the natural world.*

~ Jeremy Lent (2017: 441)

Jeremy Lent's vision of a new deep transformation of humanity calls for not only the necessity of saving ourselves from chaos and destruction. It also offers the chance to find meaning in a valid place of our own in Nature. (Really, we *are* part of Nature; there *is* no escape.) That will require that we replace that dualistic predatory worldview with one that expresses our connection with the world of which we are currently a delinquent part. Integrating indigenous wisdom with modern systems thinking can take us to a harmonious relationship with Nature and ourselves.

Industrial civilization was constructed around a vision of humans as above, superior to, and dominant over Nature. That worked for some, for a while, until the behemoth of industrial capital overshot the capacity of the planet to carry the load of the extraction, predation, and pollution it deployed, which has devastated ecosystems, non-industrial peoples, and the global climate.

Only a transformation of that worldview to one of unity and complementarity will allow what is left of humanity by that point, to find meaning and security in life. Now, the most useful findings of science

must serve the wisdom found in indigenous values and practices to shape new societal formations that can allow us to live in harmony with the ecosystems that we must also restore and regenerate.

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