

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

It Is All Connected. I imagine that most folks have heard the old statement that “Everything is connected to everything.” Well, in the real world it often seems that lots of things are not connected, even though they are. It’s just that the connections are not often easy to see.

But it gets complicated. That is why the news is so devoid of context. Take poverty, the housing shortage, and the accelerating concentration of wealth among the “Davos Men,” who profess concern over global crises yet act only in the interests of further accumulation of capital for themselves. As Peter S. Goodman reports in *The Davos Men*, extreme wealth is directly connected to growing poverty in the world. Housing prices and rent are going through the roof because of they are increasingly controlled (owned) by the world’s financial elites, forcing more folks into poverty. However, it is much more complex than just that one big factor.

To understand all that, first we must understand the structure of the global political economy. And, of course, that is a very complicated question. In the political-economic hierarchy of global, national, regional, and local events, usable information is filtered and controlled by that same hierarchy, especially since the news divisions of mass communications corporations have become ‘profit centers’ rather than the public information services they once were. It is not always easy for most of u to sort out the facts from the propaganda. We have jobs, or need to have jobs, leaving little time or resources for sorting out such complex matters.

On the other hand, I have never bought into the idea that we must leave decisions about technical matters up to the ‘experts.’ Yes, experts know much more than the rest of us about their ‘knowledge silo,’ but they do not know what is best for you or me any more than we do. What is important to us as human beings (not just as technical cogs in the great machine of the growth economy) is a matter of values, not the authority of technical expertise. As long as we know the consequences of a decision, we don’t need experts to tell us how to live.

Take for example the arraignment of Donald Trump in New York yesterday. Yawn! It's not really that this event was unusual; people get arraigned every day. So what if he was once the president? Well, the status of a former president, despite the never-ending travesty this one embodied before, during, and since his incumbency, seems to change everything. Mug shot and fingerprints or not (who could not identify him?), the arraignment presents felony charges to a judge based on a mass of evidence reviewed by a grand jury of ordinary citizens. The conspiracy theory that it is just a 'witch hunt' by democrats falls before the obvious facts, except for this demagogue's fan-base.

So what if this particular guy was president? Is that a license to lie, cheat, and steal? No. The depth of corruption wrought by one man whose penetration of the nation's political infrastructure by countless henchmen, seems immeasurable. Yet anyone with the capacity for critical thinking and ability to distinguish information from noise can understand it. That is what the due process of grand juries is all about—weighing the evidence to determine whether it is sufficiently strong to recommend a trial. It was.

Yet, about a third of the nation's voters still support this grifter. Mass psychology is massively complicated too. How can we understand that support in relation to the individual consciousness of his 'base'? Well, it would take an entire book to illuminate the complex of economic trends, loss of personal security, social standing, and political frustration, and white nationalism, as well as the demagoguery that drives the proliferation of conspiracy theories and extremism of 'true believers' that ultimately leads to political violence.

Nevertheless, an abundant trove of historical information offers the opportunity to understand the dangers and growing instability of the present age. Timothy Snyder, the Yale historian whose little but powerful book, *On Tyranny*, I featured in an earlier newsletter, has the best grasp of European history of anyone. His presentation of the elements of the rise of fascism there and the ensuing chaos and destruction is well worth reading his books on the topic. But, one must read.

Publishing Plan Update. With my book, *At the Edge of Illusion: Facing the New Great Transformation*, taking a new more accessible form, the first volume of the Edge of Illusion Trilogy, is complete. I am now in negotiations with a publisher who has expressed interest in *Holding It Together: Social Control in an Era of Great Transformation*. We will know how that works out sometime in the next few weeks as they review the manuscript and we talk.

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 this Newsletter are available, archived on my web site:

LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

Cause and Effect vs. Blaming the Victim. In most conversations I hear about ‘the poor,’ and in various reports of their lives and conditions, the focus is usually on the diverse dysfunctional behaviors and bad choices poor people too often make. The biggest mistake in such discussions is, I think, an underlying assumption that those deprived of resources of all kinds nevertheless have the same choices in life as everyone else has. In fact, they do not.

It may not be easy to see from outside, but we have very good evidence from the inside for that fact. Growing numbers of Americans live in circumstances where hard work and even perseverance often are not rewarded. Anyone who has read Barbara Ehrenreich’s book, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, can see from her direct experience that poverty is, above all, a lack of the resources needed to make good decisions.

I have had numerous conversations over many years, with some perfectly reasonable politically conservative friends, including those who not only recognize the intellectual flaws and psychological perversions of Donald Trump, but who also despise his divisive hateful speech and behavior. Yet, when we talk of the nature of poverty and extreme wealth, the connections elude them primarily because they ‘blame the victim.’ That results from what analysts call ‘methodological individualism,’ the seeking of explanation of behavior or events solely by the motivations of the individuals involved. This cuts off awareness of larger causal relationships.

Now, blaming the victim is itself no simple matter. After all, many who are poor engage in a variety of self-defeating and anti-social behaviors, such as drug abuse, lack or loss of a work ethic, and even crime. But how did they get from that charming smile of an infant in its crib to stealing for the next heroine fix? I have always maintained that 1) nobody is born a criminal, a freeloader, or a saint; 2) opportunity to succeed in this world involves support and access to resources, which for many do not exist; and 3) nevertheless, everyone is ultimately responsible for their own behavior. Is it circumstances or is it character? Yes.

To maintain a civil society requires that crime be controlled, or better, reduced to a rarity. It also requires that those for whom social conditions have dealt them a rotten hand in life, be responded to with compassion and support. Neither is an easy task. However, as with many things, from responding to the heating of the planet to creating a wellbeing economy, we must face up to the causes of problems instead of proposing weak palliatives or blaming victims, if we are to really fix problems by attacking their causes, rather than by trying to suppress their symptoms.

Liberal politicians have always expressed opposition to the excessive privileges of the wealthy, at least in theory. However, they, just like conservative politicians, receive campaign donations from the nation’s most powerful corporate and financial interests, although usually in smaller

amounts. Their rhetoric does not entirely fit with their voting records in many cases. In contrast, everyday conservatives who are not politicians increasingly recognize the excessive power of the financial and corporate elites who actually direct the political economy of what Sheldon Wolin calls the “inverted totalitarianism,” of *Democracy Incorporated*, the title of his book explaining the interpenetration of corporations and government.

Many conservatives confuse their notion of a ‘deep state’ with some kind of ‘liberal conspiracy’ to steal America from its people. Well, it was already stolen by the ‘Davos Men,’ the extremely rich operators of private equity and hedge funds and the CEOs of the largest global corporations who have usurped democratic institutions around the world in service to their unbounded greed. Bill Gates comes to mind, among others—see the list below, but there are many more. They spout platitudes about making the world a better place; some even donate small fractions of their obscene wealth to health projects in Africa, or other charities. At the same time, they manipulate the global political economy and deploy their ‘philanthrocapitalism’ to make themselves even richer multi-billionaires. In that context, our democratic institutions have become mere shadows of their intended selves.

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

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

Today’s Featured Image:

The world’s 10 richest people

(Source: Reuters. Data as of February 27, 2023):

Rank	Name	Source	Net Worth Feb 2023	Change 2022-2023
1	Bernard Arnault & family	LVMH	\$202B	28%
2	Elon Musk	Tesla, SpaceX	\$191B	-13%
3	Jeff Bezos	Amazon	\$117B	-32%
4	Larry Ellison	Oracle	\$113B	7%
5	Warren Buffett	Berkshire Hathaway	\$106B	-10%
6	Bill Gates	Microsoft	\$105B	-19%
7	Carlos Slim Helu & family	Telecom	\$90B	11%

Rank	Name	Source	Net Worth Feb 2023	Change 2022-2023
8	Mukesh Ambani	Diversified	\$84B	-8%
9	Steve Ballmer	Microsoft	\$81B	-11%
10	Françoise Bettencourt Meyers & family	L'Oréal	\$79B	5%

It may be interesting to list the Top-10 Super-Rich, but what are they worth, really?

Too many people idolize the rich. Does the fact that Jeff Bezos has a yacht so big that it needs another ship just to handle his girlfriend's helicopter? Does that phallic rocket he rode to the edge of the atmosphere, spewing vast quantities of carbon into the atmosphere, make him a more admirable person? Does Elon Musk's fascist-like ego justify his 'buying' the giant social medium, Twitter, just to use as his personal megaphone to bully employees and better disseminate his ego babble? Well, must I go on? I'd rather not. But I always kinda liked Warren Buffet; he seemed like just a nice regular guy who chose a life with a rather narrow purpose—capital accumulation. But he did give much of his super-wealth to Bill Gates to manage as part of his Philanthrocapitalist operation. Big mistake, Warren; take a broader view.

Anyway, what's the point of it all? Most folks just want to make enough to cover the food, rent, gas to get to work, and maybe a little spending money. Meanwhile these guys stay busy trying to own the world. As Greta would say, 'How dare you!' The whole mega-rich class is about as useful as a pimple on a snake. (well, there's an odd image, but it is what came to mind.)

The world has gone mad with hierarchy, building a global culture in which nothing matters except how high you are in the structure of power. In contrast, the happiest people on Earth focus their attention on their personal relations with family and friends, content with whatever material objects they need to live in relative comfort. The Earth System cannot tolerate the destructive force of concentrated wealth and its consequences much longer. Neither can we.

Books and other Sources on the New Great Transformation

Peter S. Goodman is the global economics correspondent at the *New York Times*. His long experience covering all things financial, including the richest players in the global political economy, has informed his richly detailed look at the most powerful financial players in the world. That is why his new book is so relevant to the increasingly dangerous trajectory of the global hierarchy today.

Peter S. Goodman. 2022. *Davos Man: How the Billionaires Devoured the World*.
New York: Custom House (Harper Collins).

I've only read half the book so far, but that's enough to recommend it to anyone who wants to understand how the mega-elites run the world and try to give us the impression that they are acting in all of our best interests. Okay, that is laughable, but it is not only true but has grave consequences for the very near future of the people and the planet, and beyond. They have set us on a collision course with reality, and the result will not be pretty.

Quotable Quotes

Vandana Shiva, is the brilliant Indian physicist, turned brilliant advocate for the planet and its people, especially the traditional farmers whose land is being 'enclosed,' that is, confiscated for development by the forces of corporate economic growth in India—just as the commons in Scotland and England were taken by the industrializing aristocracy at the beginning of the industrial revolution. She is an ecofeminist whose deep understanding of human habitats and the importance of democracy for them she has expressed in several important books.

“There is no anthropocentrism in indigenous cultures.”

~ Vandana Shiva,
Philanthrocapitalism and the Erosions of Democracy.

This quote reflects Vandana Shiva's deep understanding of the human overreach caused by the excessive capital accumulation of the super-rich and their attempts to hoodwink the public by their philanthropic gestures, which actually operate in support of their continuing domination of the world. It expresses the need to abandon the human-centric culture of industrial capital in which humans dominate Nature, instead of harmonizing with it as indigenous cultures do. Hers is an increasingly important voice for the people everywhere, who increasingly recognize the importance of creating a new great transformation of human society to build a viable path forward to an equitable *democratic ecological civilization*.

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