

**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***

**Two kinds of Intelligence.** Artificial intelligence (AI) is all over the news these days. As well it should be. The power of AI has reached a—clearly flawed—level of sophistication that several commentators have begun to discuss it as a threat to humanity, while its advocates see it as a boon to the human future. Well, like so much, they both have a point, but it is not quite that simple.

The current explosion of commentary over AI followed the widespread distribution of ‘ChatGPT,’ a new generative AI program that Microsoft invested heavily in, supporting its developer, start-up OpenAI. It can formulate human sounding narrative in response to a question by a human. The algorithm draws vast quantities of information from the internet and constructs a response based on various rules of grammar and association of words out there in the ‘mega-verse.’ Microsoft has already deployed it to run its search engine, Bing. Nevertheless, it has produced some strange output. For example, “But beta testers have quickly discovered issues with the bot. It threatened some, provided weird and unhelpful advice to others, insisted it was right when it was wrong and even declared love for its users. Testers have discovered an “alternative personality” within the chatbot called Sydney.” ([CNBC.COM](https://www.cnbc.com)). Hal? Are you there hal?

Proponents have touted generative chatbots as software that learns, but what does it learn? Developers were puzzled to discover upon fact checking that some output consisted of flat-out lies, describing sources and ‘facts’ that do not exist in the real world.

Well, in the first online discussions in which I participated, I read several examples of ‘output’ of ChatGPT, and immediately noticed one fatal flaw. The text I read sounded very much like the term papers I had occasionally ‘graded,’ which had been submitted by undergraduate college students who had purchased them from graduate students out to earn a few bucks by applying their knowledge to the assignments their clients could not or would not complete on their own.

It was easy to spot these fraudulent term papers for one simple reason. The writer had no skin in the game except to mechanically complete the assignment by including all the right conceptual references and citing all the right sources in describing the parameters of the assignment. These papers had no soul. They had no point of view, no discernable substantive position on the matter at hand. When I confronted a student with the fact that I knew s/he had bought the paper instead of writing it, the student always looked shocked by the fact that I knew they had not written it, but they always confessed once they knew that I knew. Some I had already determined could not write with that level of technical correctness. But in most cases the paper itself was the giveaway.

That is how I felt reading the examples of ChatGPT output. Then, at the Annual Dinner of the New Mexico Writers association, president James McGrath Morris began his speech with a narrative that as I listened, I began thinking was a bit trite and clichéd. Jamie is a very good writer; his biography of Pulitzer has won literary awards. I was nonplussed. Then he revealed the fact that his opening remarks were the output of ChatGPT when he asked it to write an opening to a presidential speech to a writers association. Jamie got a good laugh in response to that revelation, then went on with his real speech about the fundraising for awards to young promising writers, and other matters of interest to the assembled 160 or so New Mexico writers.

Now, the role, or potential role, of AI in society is far more complicated and concerning than is reflected in the foregoing anecdotes. Machine production of narrative and images that seem real but are only the result of a computer algorithm raises all sorts of questions about cognition, consciousness, culture, deception, and ultimately power. (Oh, yes, some AI can take images of persons and their voice data, then construct speech with video that appears to be the actual person talking, but its product is entirely made up. Just think of the potential problematic consequences.)

Some of the complexity and societal problematics were revealed by the CEO of Google, Sundar Pichai, in an extensive interview on [60 Minutes](#) last Sunday. Pichai admitted that in some ways the new generative AI programs are a 'black box,' because even those who have developed them do not fully understand how they work. He warned that society will need to 'catch up' with the impact of the new AI capabilities quite soon. The Pichai interview is worth watching; it is on [YouTube](#).

Google's generative AI platform is somewhat different from the others. Instead of seeking vast quantities of information from the internet, which has virtually no quality or veracity control, Google's product, called 'Bard,' takes a different approach. It loads a huge database of the world's literature into its memory. Then it analyzes patterns of how words are arranged with each other, a monumental computing task, to produce output related to the question or task before it. One might hope that it would not produce lies, but sentient facticity is not a characteristic of AI.

Pichai warns that society will have to prepare for the impact of generative AI and ‘large language models,’ because the field is developing much faster than anticipated and we will need to control its deployment for the public good—I would add public safety as well. The one biggest problem I see is that AI output will soon reach a level of sophistication, despite current problems of insufficient data storage capacity, that it will be capable of deceiving people in a variety of significant ways.

But wait! There is another AI, the original AI that Jeremy Lent discussed in his recent book, *The Web of Meaning: Integrating Science and Traditional Wisdom to Find Our Place in the Universe*. Jeremy, a very sophisticated analyst of human consciousness and structures of meaning, pointed out that the ‘original AI’ was, and is, *Animate Intelligence*, the intelligence of animate beings, ranging from fungi and bacteria to Flamingo dancers to politicians. The intelligence of sentient beings involves continually organized memory of direct experience in the real world, something Artificial Intelligence can hardly mimic. Its algorithms have no memory or feelings about the experience they also lack, nor do they have the ability to make judgements of value. Hence, lies are not an issue for them.

I have no doubt that machine learning AI will have many uses in human affairs, some welcome and some diabolic. The Congress, however dysfunctional its own processes, has already recognized the bipartisan interest in shaping policies about AI that can protect society from the dangers of a powerful device so capable of deception.

**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** remains 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:

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

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

**The Global Killing Field.** Maybe it is the fact that a dear friend’s young son was in a fatal motorcycle accident last week. It stopped me cold. I remember having ridden my motorcycle on the LA freeways as a young adult, which led me to feel that ‘these people in cars are out to kill

me.’ So I sold the bike and drove cars and trucks and flew airplanes from then on. A couple of near death experiences, one on a narrow bridge in Mexico and another in a riptide off Padre Island in Texas, had caused me to reflect on life and death. I never had a run in with the police, other than being arrested and held in the drunk tank for ‘illegal parking’ in Kansas City because I was participating in a protest over police abuse of welfare mothers. But all that was long ago. Some things haven't changed much.

Or, maybe it's the constant flow of news about police killings of unarmed young black men. Or, yesterday's report of more artillery and small arms fire in Khartoum. Or, Putin's relentless massacres of the Ukrainian population and his countless war crimes; indeed, his war is itself a crime against humanity. Or, an old white man shooting a black teenager whose mistake was to ring his doorbell, thinking his was the house where his mother asked him to go get his younger siblings for dinner. Let's see, well, I don't want to go back to the news reports of the eight officers who had pumped something like 48 rounds of bullets into a young black man who they said had ‘appeared to reach for a gun’ while fleeing on foot. Yet his gun was back in his car. Nevertheless, a grand jury in Akron found that they had ‘acted appropriately.’ Well, the dozens of incidents that come to mind right now are far too many to recount, and what would be the point? We've all heard of most of them, and they just keep coming.

It is not just the American cult of the gun, or the police culture of asserting absolute authority over vulnerable populations, especially if they are black or brown. The global arms industry has deployed its products all over the world. And while the U.S. is certainly unique among ‘advanced’ nations by virtue of our steady stream of mass murders by deranged lone gunmen (almost always young men), when angry resentful people get their hands on either of the two primary products of the U.S. and Russia, the AR-15 and the AK-47 military assault rifles, the result is much the same. Grievances become executions. Compassion is a word that has little or no application in so much of human affairs today. From Rep Jim Jordan, who in all his years in Congress has never proposed legislation (too busy attacking political enemies), to Putin, of course, to that oh-so-not-charming dictator of North Korea whose people suffer from generations of his family obsession with brutally retained political power—the MO is the same.

But what puzzles me is not so much ruthless ‘leaders’—after all, Trump's narcissistic sociopathy is no mystery. It is the broader global culture of collective violence that is more difficult to explain. There is a concept in sociology called ‘collective behavior,’ which points to the process wherein all social norms of civility, respect, and restraint are suspended under certain conditions and a crowd or a mass of people act in unison, usually attacking someone or something. When those officers empty their magazines into a young black man, I'm sorry, but that did not result from their ‘fearing for their lives.’ It was mass hysteria coupled with an underlying group desire to exert personal power. And, I am sure that racism, institutionalized and/or personal was involved. Hatred of ‘the other’ has become the norm.

I know many very good people who are seeking ways to overcome the ruthlessness of the ‘rational-legal’ objectivist culture that has taken over the world. They propose much more

compassionate economics, for example, based on the principle that an economy should have as its primary goal human wellbeing, not increasingly inequitable economic growth to achieve capital accumulation for the already super-rich at everyone else's expense. "What's love got to do with it?" Well, if a nation—like most today—operates on a dehumanized model of how things should work, with people mere pawns in the power game of elites, then violence is the ultimate outcome.

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

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


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

***Generative AI is here; what shall we do?***

## Examples of Generative AI Technology

 ChatGPT  
text generation AI

 INPUT PROMPTS

 "Write a limerick about data taking over the world. Include the word: egg"



 OUTPUT


"Data taking over the world, it's true  
It's growing like an egg that's due  
It's everywhere we go  
It's taking over slow  
But it's the future, there's nothing we can do."

Real-Life Applications of this Platform

- communications, journalism, publishing, creative writing, writing assistance

 MidJourney  
image generation AI

 INPUT PROMPTS

-  • a rabbit wearing a sunhat  
• Santa Claus in a blue outfit  
• a watercolor of a red bicycle in front of a waterfall




 OUTPUT




Real-Life Applications of this Platform

- advertisements, published illustrations, corporate visuals, novel image generation

 Codex  
computer coding generation AI

 INPUT PROMPTS

 "Write script to change a website's background color in Python"



 OUTPUT

```
Here is an example script that uses the 'requests' and 'BeautifulSoup' libraries in Python to change the background color of a website.  
  
import requests  
from bs4 import BeautifulSoup  
  
# send a GET request to the website  
response = requests.get("https://www.wikipedia.com")  
  
# parse the HTML content  
soup = BeautifulSoup(response.content, 'html.parser')  
  
# locate the element you want to change the background color of  
element = soup.find('body')  
  
# add a new style attribute to the element  
element['style'] = 'background-color: pink'  
  
# print the modified HTML  
print(soup.prettify())
```

Real-Life Applications of this Platform

- web design, software development, coding/scripting, technology

***This graphic represents the most benign, even trivial, examples of the capabilities of generative AI. What else can it do? It can deceptively present 'alternative facts' that do not exist in the real world.***

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

*Building Tomorrow* is the most recent book I have seen on what needs to be done to change the economy to avert climate and ecological disaster and assure a modicum of social justice. It is well organized and technologically sophisticated without being difficult to read. I just got a copy the other day and skimmed it quickly, looking for whatever I could find that was new—I found several things that are definitely worth considering carefully.

Paddy Le Fluffy. 2023. *Building Tomorrow: Averting Environmental Crisis With a New Economic System*. First Light Books.

While there are quite a few books covering much of the same territory, Fluffy's is one of the most logical presentations around, and it brings in several factors most others have not. While I have not yet read it thoroughly, I can find only one thing to complain about. While I have always been annoyed with reviewers who complain about what a book does not do—since what is important is how well it does what it intends to do—in this case as with virtually all the other books in this genre, it fails to explore much about how to get there from here. Nevertheless, we need a clear vision of where we want to go. That is why it is well worth the read. I will be going through it more carefully this week.

### *Quotable Quotes*

Everyone knows Machiavelli as the shrewd Italian purveyor of cold political strategy. But he was also quite aware of the difficulties of innovation in a time when only slight chinks in the armor of tradition were beginning to appear in a period where new thinking was just beginning to be tolerated in science and art.

*There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new.*

~ Niccolo Machiavelli, 1532, *The Prince*.

While this statement applies today just as during the renaissance, it may have significantly different application to the explosion of artificial intelligence (AI) that is already happening versus the struggle of economic innovation to get a foothold in the midst of our Earth System emergency. AI is an evolving fact of current technological development, good or bad.

In contrast, a new wellbeing-based economy is only a developing set of ideas meant to become a basis for transforming the corrupt neoliberal economics of the corporate state. Not only that, but the evidence demonstrates that the new great transformation of the global economy, which is necessary to implement the extreme reductions in carbon emissions to stabilize global climate, must also incorporate societal redesign, including minimalized inequality as well as drastic reductions in use of fossil fuels. Some small experiments are occurring here and there. However, we are talking of the most extreme innovation—comprehensive societal transformation. Machiavelli's dictum certainly applies as societal innovators desperately try to get enough public attention to bring the necessities of change to the forefront of public discussion. So many people have done so well "under the old conditions," that their opposition extends to denying physical science. The benefits to those who "may do well under the new,"

(everyone) are not nearly as clear, except for the prospect of avoiding species extinction. We have so far to go and so little time...

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