

# “Equilibra”: The Current Threats Menacing Humanity

A Blueprint for Avoiding Extinction

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*Interview with **Dr. Paul Oquist**, Minister-Private Secretary for National Policies of the Presidency of the Republic of Nicaragua*

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**Tortilla con Sal:** *We're here with **Dr. Paul Oquist**. It's June 29th. Dr. Oquist is going to talk to us about the publication of his new book, an innovative book called [“Equilibra”](#), which covers a lot of ground relating to the current threats menacing humanity in particular as a result of environmental destruction... Dr. Oquist, “Equilibra” focuses a lot on the various dangers threatening human life on Earth and life on Earth generally, both the dangers coming from outside our planet and those we have created ourselves as humanity. Do you see the greatest danger at the moment being from man made threats? And if you do, what are the most serious of these?*

**Dr. Paul Oquist:** We have very serious threats to our existence, that are cosmic, geological, epidemiological and anthropogenic. The cosmic include meteorites, comets, electromagnetic pulses, gamma rays, solar radiation, among others. The geological threats include super-volcanoes that could spew out enough material to cause volcanic winters. The epidemiological threats include antibiotic resistant bacteria and rapidly mutating viruses like the novel coronavirus and the COVID-19 sickness associated with it.

And then we have the anthropogenic threats and they are mostly the result of our not being able to handle our own science and technology. So atomic and thermonuclear in 1945, one of the greatest accomplishments of science in history was achieved in splitting the atom. But it immediately became a threat to human existence. From its birth it was weaponized, with atomic and thermonuclear weapons that have been used as we all know on Japan in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That threat persists to this day. there are over 4000 nuclear warheads that are operational, ready to be launched and to do in humanity.

Then we have climate change, as a result of the industrial revolution onward our choice of fuels, of fossil fuels, that has led to immense emissions of greenhouse gases to the point where they can now threaten our existence if they continue unabated. Therefore the critical necessity of limiting the increase in global warming due to the greenhouse gas effect in this century to 1.5 degrees.

But there's a third category too which has to do with artificial intelligence, robots,

algorithms, the internet of things and scientists take this very very seriously. This has been well portrayed by Hollywood with all the films about the revolt of the machines, robots turning against human beings. And some of these films are very explicit that the robots decide that humans are a virus, destroying the planet and should be eliminated.

There have been scientific conferences where people of the stature of Stephen Hawking have discussed this seriously. I think the reason for that is they can't find a good argument to use against the logic of the robots about humans being a virus destroying the planet and the planet would be better off without them. So I think we should change our ways rather than hoping that the robots come to a different conclusion, so they come to look at us a bit differently.

But definitely the anthropogenic threats of nuclear weapons, climate change and artificial intelligence are greater in probability than the cosmic, geological or the epidemiological threats which is very real as we know with COVID-19. Now that is a sad commentary on our species, a species that is leading itself through masochism, a species masochism which is leading us to a species suicide by our own science and technology. We must reverse these trends, get out of this framework in which our own science and technology is the greatest threat we face. But if we don't we'll probably be done in by our own hand, our own science and technology, through atomic weapons, climate change or artificial intelligence.

**TcS:** Some people argue that in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, that the Western ruling elites that were in big trouble economically anyway, are now trying under cover of the pandemic to reset Western capitalism, restoring levels of profitability by intensifying domestic economic subjugation and financial dependency of their own populations, while overseas they intensify a kind of neocolonial subjugation of the rest of the planet's natural resources using what they are calling now the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Does your book "Equilibra" address that argument and the argument that humanity can only save itself by ending capitalism?

**Dr. Oquist :** Prior to COVID-19, we had a situation of gross inequality in the world with 1% of the world's population controlling 62% of the world's assets. Some of the calculations are even worse than that. This is a result of the dominant elites no longer taking into consideration redistribution. Previously after major crises, the elites would take into account gross inequality that produced the crisis and would work to end the crisis to try and re-balance things with regard to inequality.

If we go back to 1890, that was the end of a 20 year depression known as the Long Depression in the United States that affected of course the rest of the world as well. What was the redistribution that came out of that? In the United States it was the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, it was the breaking up of the Trusts the petroleum Trust of Rockefeller, the steel Trust of Carnegie, the railway Trust of Harriman. This was big time politics because the trust busters were confronting the most powerful men economically in the country, by definition since they had these monopolies. But that took place.

After the financial crisis of 1907, it took several years to put together, but the inequality coming out of that was addressed through the progressive income tax that came about in 1913. Big time redistribution, an income tax that was progressive in the sense that the percentage to be charged for the tax rose with the degree of wealth, or the degree of income in this case of income tax. After the great depression that began in 1929, the redistributive element was the social security insurance. Huge redistribution. Payroll tax both

for the employer and for the employee. Redistribution of income. Redistribution of wealth to re-balance.

After the crisis of 2007-2009, what happened in terms of re-distribution? Zilch. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. The only things that were of concern in Dodd-Frank or in Basel 3 of the Bank of International Settlements was to ensure the financial stability of the banks in a crisis, so that the taxpayer would no longer have to bail out the banks. And what they did there also was to increase inequality by bailing tu the banks. They could have also bailed out the mortgage holders who could have paid the banks but that wasn't on the agenda. It was a matter of saving the banks.

What's the difference between 1890, 1907, 1929 and 2007-2009? There was no longer a fear of revolution and no longer a fear of Bolshevism, no longer a fear of the Soviet Union, no longer a fear of socialist politics, no longer a fear of labor unions. All of their backs had been broken and capital no longer feared opposition to its position. And so there has been no redistribution because there's no effective counterweight to the capitalist elite.

I happened to be at UCLA in January 1961 as a Los Angeles school system honors student and we got to take a course at UCLA, the honors students from each high school so that we'd get accustomed to the universities we'd be heading to the next year. And I was at UCLA taking the course and there was the commencement ceremony which I attended and there President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had recently left the presidency made his famous military-industrial complex speech, warning of the dangers that posed as a military and industrial complex, a large standing military and a military industrial complex that the country hadn't had before the Second World War, but now it had that and the dangers that posed for US democracy.

That has evolved with time. It is now the military-police-intelligence-industrial-financial complex. There's more on board and it's more powerful than ever. Some call it the Deep State also and it is very very real and it is the power center in US foreign policy and those who challenge it are subject to the retribution of this powerful complex. And so there are two factors here.

With regard to capitalism, in "Equilibra" there's an identification of nine alienations that are leading us to extinction, subjective factors. And one of them is the belief that unlimited, endless, mindless growth of production, consumption and accumulation of wealth can continually occur on a planet with degraded, declining, limited resources. And the name of that alienation is capitalism, that believes there can be endless accumulation of capital, endless accumulation of capital based on endless production and consumption and works in that direction, which is leading us to extinction.

And, much graver, this is reinforced by a hegemonic elite based around that military, police, intelligence, financial and industrial complex that is now in a stage, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the United States decided that it was hegemonic militarily across the world and its policy was to remain that way. And derived from that has been this full spectrum domination of the world in which the domination is not only military, not only political, not only economic, not only social, but also with regard to social media, with regard to mass media, with regard to science, with regard to technology, with regard to the full spectrum, in all of the spheres it wants to be dominant.

And I'll close this with just one little example, the technological hegemony. The US

technological establishment cannot compete with China in terms of the internet of things, in terms of 5G. China is ahead. So instead of competing with Huawei that is a repository of a great part of that technology, it decides to try and eliminate Huawei from the marketplace. They quite conspicuously state that they they don't believe in socialism, that they want to combat socialism wherever it is to be found. But it would seem that they don't believe in capitalism either. they believe in their own hegemony, not in either socialism or capitalism.

**TcS :** In relation to the current context, some people think that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be possible to persuade people to snap out of some of these alienations and that there's a potential for a change in attitudes that may promote sufficiently positive change in people's behavior for them perhaps to contribute to perhaps reversing the negative trends that "Equilibra" so comprehensively covers. Do you think it's possible to take advantage of this potential change in attitudes or do you think that opportunity is going to slip away?

**Dr. Oquist :** There's an element left hanging from the last question that's an important element in terms of this question. In the period between March and May, mid-March to end of May, **Jeff Bezos made US\$29 billion. That's the largest amount of money made by any mortal in the history of humankind, by far. US\$29 billion. At the same time, in the same time period coming through now into June, 47 million US workers filed for unemployment insurance. If we had a 1% situation before this crisis, look at the accentuation of inequality due to this crisis.**

The orders of Amazon, Walmart, all of the five media companies, media oligarchies that control Netflix and all the other things people have been doing all of these months sitting at home have increased their wealth enormously. Walmart increased its sales by 57%. So there you have Amazon and Walmart. The big entities were not obliged to close down. It's the mom-and-pop shops that were obliged to close down and many of those, the small merchants, will be going into bankruptcy. Now we come to the crux of this. Of these millions of workers, many will not find a job to come back to.

Artificial intelligence has been on its way for some time now and the golden opportunity for the capitalists is that they don't have to have the social problem of firing the workers, because the workers are already out on unemployment insurance. So some people will go back to their old firm and find that they've been replaced by a robot, an algorithm, or the internet of things and their post is no longer there. Some of the Democrat Party candidates had addressed this.

The Democrat candidate Yang, you may recall, who comes out of the technology sector, was proposing a universal income. Why is he proposing a universal income? Out of largesse or noblesse oblige for the impoverished? No. Because as a tech entrepreneur he knows the mass unemployment that's going to be produced by artificial intelligence. Kai-Fu Lee who is a Chinese guru in this and who was the president of Google China, previously, he has estimated that 40% of jobs will be lost in the coming 15 years, 40% of jobs.

So I think that there will be more than enough material base for mobilizing people against this system which goes overboard with inequality and I think that's already part of what's happening on the streets of the United States. The Black unemployment rate in February was 6%. Coming into May it was 16%. That's a big shift and I'm sure it will go further, because it's not going to be below the White unemployment rate, knowing how the United States operates, so it'll go over 25%. So we'll have massive unemployment and it could be

there's a factor of cognitive coming to terms with the risks we have and the inequities in our society.

Even with regard to the COVID-19 deaths, we all know that the deaths were largely the Black and Latino communities were over represented, the White community was under represented and the Asian community was even less represented. And in some places it's very dramatic. 30% of the population in Chicago and 70% of the deaths. In New Orleans it was something similar. And that of course is a commentary on poverty, on chronic malnutrition, on chronic lack of adequate health care or the lack of a national health system that would be equitable with health care for all, which does not exist in the United States.

All this is going to generate the Great Depression 2020. And the Great Depression 2020 will lead to huge hardship, because we not only have these jobs lost, we'll have all of these businesses lost that could not survive the Great Confinement and will not be able to survive the slow economy that comes out of this. So it's a mix of subjective factors perhaps, of people increasing their consciousness, which is very visible with regard to race in the United States right now. The movement against racism is multi-ethnic, multi-class and multi-age group. So I think that things are happening. In "Equilibra" we argue that fundamental social change tends to come from social movements and I think this is taking

**TcS :** In that context, how do you see the roles that different kinds of entities have. For example, the nation state which is constantly under ever greater threat as a result of previous trends of globalization and corporate influence; international institutions like the UN which has suffered severe criticism for being so ineffective on various issues and then you have the role of non governmental organizations and something that you've emphasized, the importance of social movements. For example in the case of the environment there's this movement in Britain called Extinction Rebellion [funded by corporate foundations] and then on a broader international basis you have the movement led by Greta Thunberg [also funded by corporate foundations]. What do you think of the respective roles of those kinds of entities in the current context?

**Dr Oquist :** Let's look at a couple of examples. Why haven't the climate change negotiations come to real fruition in terms of leading to fundamental change in reality, not on paper. Kyoto was a good agreement, the Protocol of Kyoto. It was legally binding. It had goals to be met by all of the developed countries. But the United States was a signatory of Kyoto, but the US Congress, the US Senate did not ratify it. So the United States was outside of the Protocol of Kyoto. So the Europeans and the Japanese and others were in a panic at the United States not being in on the deal.

So they put together the ad hoc working groups in the Bali Conference. The Bali ad hoc working groups were designed to get the United States in on the deal. And then it was decided that Kyoto would be replaced by another agreement and the United States began to influence what that other agreement would look like. And it insisted that it be not legally binding. So it came up with a figure that was called an agreement under the conference that would have the effect of law.

Not even the lawyers of the United States could tell us what that meant. They were the ones who designed it but they couldn't tell us what that meant. The only thing we knew was that it did not mean "legally binding" because that's what it was designed to replace, with this ambiguity. Then the United States insisted that everything be voluntary. And the United States has resisted finance and the transfer of technology to developing countries. It has



resisted including loss and damages at the same level as mitigation and adaptation.

So the Europeans and the Latin American Right, which after 2017 has been the Group of Lima, were making concession after concession to the United States and the Paris Accord was approved according to that, with all these concessions to the United States included. So you can imagine the disgust of the Europeans and the Latin American Right when the Trump administration announces that the United States was retiring from Paris Agreement that had been made to order in its dimensions, like the size of the neck, the length of the sleeves... and then they tore it up.

But that's where we're at in terms of the Climate Change negotiations. The United States is not in and it has its allies like Australia and Brazil that are in effect taking the US positions at the same time. So that has thrown a spanner in the negotiations that the United States has opposed including loss and damages at the same level as adaptation and mitigation. Even in the recent Madrid COP 25 they were blocking the way to that. Despite the fact that you have Dominica, you have Barbuda, Abaco, Grand Bahama, completely wiped out and there's no international mechanism to deal with that.

**TcS :** Does that mean that in your opinion the role of social movements is futile?

**Dr. Oquist :** No not at all. I think that's the road that's left. That's the road that's left. I kind of look at Greta and Greta's evolution. Greta first talked to national leaders thinking that they could do it. And then she put great faith in the United Nations and was completely disillusioned with the United Nations when she went to the UN and then to the COP 25. And at the COP 25 she was saying "oh only the people can do this", eliminating governments and eliminating the international organizations, "only people can do this".

And she's right. But it's people organized in movements. Basic social change has come through people organized in movements. And it's not people from one country. It's people from a whole series of countries. It's not from one sector. It's church people, labor people, women, some business people, some politicians, students, from all different types of sectors.

If you study the anti-slavery movement, that's what it looked like. It was in the US. It was in the UK. It was in continental Europe. It was in different parts of the world and the people had different methods. They had perhaps differences in terms of their methods, But they had one very clear goal: Abolish Slavery. And then it clicked and in July 1831, the UK parliament abolishes slavery. And the United States in the midst of a bloody civil war in 1864 there's the emancipation and the proclamation.

You know one of the things that happens with the anti-slavery, anti-colonial, women's suffrage, the labor movement, the different movements historically that have triumphed is that they can be struggling for centuries, for years and then all of a sudden it happens. And I think that highly associated with that is generational change. That you get to a generation that has a completely different take on the issue, to which it's very obvious that slavery is a great evil and that slavery has to be abolished and so it starts to click and it starts to fall into place.

And I hope that that's the case now in the 21st Century and that these youth who are on the streets... I was very impressed at the COP 25. Coming back from the COP, Greta had had a demonstration, a concentration, a huge one in Madrid. And I was looking at the after-march.

People going home with their placards. there were 10, 11, 12, 13-year olds with their placards going home and a slew of 16, 17-year olds.

These people at 18 in these countries will be voting and the idea of the passive, complacent youth will have to be filed completely because these people will be hyperactive. They are clear what they want to do and in countries where the correlation of forces is very tight, them coming down on one side or another could make a big difference politically. So they could obtain real political power faster than we think.

But you know **Father Miguel d'Escoto**, who influenced me very much, had a book on reforming the United Nations. And he saw that that in the end was impossible, because in Articles 108 and 109 there are padlocks on the United Nations. Because it declares that to make the change, the General Assembly has to be in agreement and all five members of the Security Council.

And Article 109 says you can have a conference and that can have a majority for changing the United Nations but it must include all five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. So there's a veto on the United Nations transformation. So in the end Fr. d'Escoto had come to the conclusion that what needed to be done was to abolish it and start all over again because it will never come out of the veto power that the United States exercises in all proposals for change.

**TcS :** In relation to the US ability to put a brake on positive developments via its veto in the Security Council, their obsession with full spectrum dominance is something that you have insisted on and emphasized. Do you think the developing multi-polar world that we're currently seeing emerge will develop sufficiently quickly to enable humanity to avoid the path to some kind of destructive conflict that is implicit in US unilateralism?

**Dr. Oquist:** You said "will" and that's a very wisely chosen word, because it is not there yet. An example of that was how Hillary Clinton sneaked one through the Security Council with regard to Libya in which there was a vote to protect civilians in eastern Libya and then France, the UK and the United States took that and they bombed the whole country. They bombed the Libyan army, they supported all the opposition forces elsewhere.

They forgot about Benghazi completely and started concentrating on Tripoli. They managed to overthrow the government that had cooperated with the West disarming its nuclear capacity. It's the one success story in disarming nuclear capacity. And it had cooperated politically and had relations with Italy and France. And that didn't matter. the government was overthrown and Muammar al Gadhafi was assassinated. Hillary laughed and the country dropped into chaos and anarchy that it has not emerged from yet. So that's the story of how beneficial Western regime change operations have been for Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, which have created chaos and mass killing, mass destruction, destroying countries one after another.

**TcS:** So do you think the emergence of the Russian Federation, its very important strategic partnership with the People's Republic of China, their alliance with regional powers like Iran for example, here in Latin America their strong support which has so far enabled the Venezuelan people and their government under President Nicolás Maduro to resist...

**Dr. Oquist:** This is essential. There has to be a counterweight to the United States. That's one of the things that happened with the crumbling of the Soviet Union, the United States

was left without a counterweight. That's why they could invade Iraq in a war of aggression on false pretenses because there was no counterweight in the world at that point in time that could stop them. And the world has paid a huge price for that.

They also do other things like the unilateral, coercive, illegal measures against countries, against organizations, against individuals, which are completely illegal. But there's not the counterweight in the world to stop them right now. The United States, Great Britain, Canada, the European Union and, most recently, Switzerland for some reason, have joined in to that imperial exercise of thinking that they are morally superior to the rest of the world.

And therefore they self-appoint themselves as police, prosecutor and judge of the rest of the world in terms of human rights and in terms of corruption when it's blatantly political and in some cases blatantly commercial, what they are doing. And they get away with it because the United States has the dictatorship of the world banking system called SWIFT and the bankers of the world and many business people are most fearful of being excluded from that, because the economic consequences of being excluded from that are enormous.

And it's incredible how the Europeans meekly follow the US on this with regard to countries like Venezuela and Nicaragua when they themselves are being subject to these sanctions like the European firms that trade with Iran. The Europeans want to keep the Iran nuclear deal alive and have their firms trade and the US places sanctions, so they've invented a system to go around the US sanctions.

The US wants to sell its gas to northern Europe, to Germany and other northern European countries. So the US opposes the Nord Stream gas pipeline from the Russia Federation to Germany. It says, "oh, this will make Germany dependent on Russian gas". Or they say, as Trump says, "We're paying for their defense and they buy their gas from Russia, that's not the way things should be done". So he wants to decide German energy policy for them. What he wants is for LPG tankers to leave Louisiana full of gas for northern Europe.

So there's the threat of sanctions against the companies that work on the Nord Stream pipeline. So Europe is schizophrenic on this but they show how dependent they are on the United States even psychologically by following the US example in these coercive illegal sanctions that also affect them negatively. In fact, I mis-spoke, they're really not sanctions. They're illegal measures. The only thing that should be called sanctions are those approved by the UN Security Council which are the only ones that are legal.

These other measures have no basis in international law or any basis in any law whatsoever. Because the whole idea that countries can have transnational application of their law, like the United States claims is completely illegal also. Extraterritoriality does not exist in international law. And yet it's doubly bad in terms of the United States, because it claims extraterritoriality for its law but doesn't accept international law in the United States. So there's that duality as well.

**TcS:** So now Nicaragua and Venezuela and Cuba are subject to these illegal coercive measures, do you think that means that Nicaragua is, at it were punching, above its weight in the world, after all, why should it be the object of these measures? Do you think that Nicaragua being able to work with Russia or China or the non-aligned



movement, or regionally with SICA, the Association of Caribbean States and ALBA, do you think that Nicaragua's role in these international cooperation instances will enable it to play a positive role, perhaps the same kind of inspirational role that it had for many people around the world in the 1980s?

**Dr. Oquist :** I think that Nicaragua plays an inspirational role for the rest of the world right now. If you look at Nicaragua's special role punching above its weight in terms of all the climate change negotiations and all the things that Nicaragua has done with regard to Climate Change. Nicaragua's role in reducing poverty and inequality within Nicaragua with re-distributive policies like universal free health and education in the second poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbean. Any Nicaraguans can go to a public hospital and get attention.

**Any Nicaraguan can go to a public hospital and have an operation, have serious diagnostics undertaken by state of the art equipment and there's no bill. And the United States hasn't been able to put a system together on which there's consensus with regard to having a public health system in the United States.** Nicaragua's light years ahead of the United States. It's not presumptuous to say at all that the United States could learn a lot from Nicaragua in terms of the family, community health care system with the free universal health system existing alongside a private health care system for those who prefer that, but a truly public system.

Nicaragua has capitalized poor people with programs like Zero Hunger and Zero Usury in a highly effective manner which has taken a lot of people out of poverty. And via schemes that are much better than those proposed by the international organizations who are trying to sell Nicaragua these measures, these conditional grants, to give a conditional grant to a family, to give them money so that their child would go to school or go to the health center to have a check up. Nicaragua doesn't do that. Nicaragua didn't accept that.

Nicaraguan parents send their kids to school because that's what you should do. Nicaraguan parents have a consciousness of taking their kids to the health center to get vaccinated without anyone paying them to do it. What happens in Nicaragua is that a poor rural family receives a pregnant cow, a pregnant sow, chickens who don't need to be pregnant because they take care of it themselves.

The program also has seed, fertilizer, corral materials and so you turn the woman in the household into a second producer in the family. And you improve nutrition through the animal protein that the family all of a sudden has. The family income improves because they take their surplus to market and sell it.

In the urban area, you have Zero Usury which is the credit scheme, the micro-credit scheme like those in Bangladesh and the rest of the world that everyone knows. But this one is different and it's called Zero Usury. Micro-credit organizations in the world and some in Nicaragua too charge 30% or 40% a year for their loans. This is the problem that the model has everywhere. They had that problem in Bangladesh and in India too of a high interest rate. In Nicaragua, it's 5% per annum. So it's not the micro-credit organization NGO that's gaining the accumulation of capital.

It's the small merchant, the small artisan. Some of them are on their fourth or fifth

loans as they're capitalizing themselves. So these are policies of redistribution in terms of universal free health and education among other programs. And then of capitalizing the poor through Usura Cero and Hambre Cero and improving roads, highways, electricity, water, sanitation that improve the quality of life of the poor also.

**TcS :** Do you think it's fair to say Dr. Oquist, that Nicaragua, apart from being a model in its health programs and, to some extent too in its education programs in my opinion, more especially with regard to climate change in the way it's changing its energy matrix, but also in its food self-sufficiency, it's food sovereignty. Do you think it's true to say that all these things make Nicaragua a very special country and for that reason for example it is treated with respect by much larger countries like the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China?

**Dr. Oquist :** This is what explains Nicaragua's COVID-19 policy as well. 40% of the population lives and works in the countryside, 40%. These people cannot be confined. they have lots of things to do every day with the cows, with the chickens, with the fields, especially in April and May which is the planting season. And so it would be ridiculous to have a confinement of these people. They have to get out and earn their subsistence. They are in a subsistence or semi-subsistence economy.

Then, we have the urban informal sector, which is the majority of the workers, the informal sector and if they don't earn their livelihood every day, they don't eat, their family doesn't eat. That is where the poor people are, in the countryside and in the informal sector. So this policy has been protecting the interests of the poor people. The same with the schools in the public system remaining open. In the private schools the kids can have internet classes, because these are middle class families with computers. The kids have tablets. They have 4G cell phones.

The poor urban people and the poor rural people, their kids would be left out if you tried to tell them that they were going to have internet education. So once again the policy has been to defend the poor, while promoting strict social distancing, while promoting masks, ever more so as you hear through the media and through the recommendations to everyone to take care of themselves.

**TcS :** Shifting back to the broader global context, you say at one point in "Equilibra" that "it's easier for us to continue transforming nature than to transform ourselves" which makes you sound a bit pessimistic. Are you pessimistic about our prospects for planetary survival? What can each of us do as individuals to defend humanity and the natural world?

**Dr. Oquist :** Actually, that statement is a conclusion after seeing that the way humans have developed across the paleolithic time span, the neolithic and then coming into the copper age, the bronze age, the steel age, civilization advancing to scientific and technological revolutions. We have advanced as a species by transforming nature. By learning more about nature and learning how to transform nature to our ends. So that's what makes it hard for us to stop doing that, to stop continuing to try and transform nature.

Because it's been our success story It's been our formula for success and all of a sudden we need to put on the brake. We need to get smarter and find new ways of

doing things. That makes it hard. It makes it hard because people realize that... they're so accustomed to earning their living transforming nature. And that's another of the alienations also that are really pernicious, like favoring short term action that damages nature even when we realize the long term consequences.

That's happening. People know it's going to hurt nature, know it's going to hurt humanity, but they continue doing it. So there's lots of things to overcome. there's lots of things to overcome and there's that capitalist mindset, there's the hegemonic political, economic and social system that reinforces capitalism. So the battle is tough. But where is the hope? The hope is in the movements. The hope is in the people obliging the politicians to take action.

That's what happened with anti-slavery. That's what happened with anti-colonialism. The politicians moved in the end and the governments. But they were obliged by the people to do so and I think that has to happen again. And I hope that the generational change will push this over. All these movements, the extinction movement, the environmental movement, all of these are important in putting together a survival movement. A movement in which we recognize that we are not eternal, that we are not immortal, that we can become extinct.

And things that we are doing now increase the probability of our becoming extinct and reduce the probability that life will prevail. Why? Because we are damaging the ecosystems from which life sprang and which have maintained life on planet Earth. We can do that in a slow onset way, like increasing the world's temperature until it reaches 50° and we can no longer exist.

Or we can do it fast and dirty with a nuclear exchange that makes human life as we know it impossible and provokes a nuclear winter of 10 years with no sunshine because there's so much dust in the air for so long. And radioactive dust on top of that. So there are huge risks but we need to organize, we need to be proactive and put together this survival movement which ["Equilibra"](#) poses as the solution.

**TcS :** Something that struck me about the book is that it's very innovative in its presentation. It presents its argument and asks for feedback. Am I right in that?

**Dr. Oquist :** Yes. "Equilibra" is designed to be an interactive, living book. On the "Equilibra" web site there's Replacement 1 and Replacement 2 at [www.equilibra.org](http://www.equilibra.org), which refer to the two volumes of "Equilibra". Each theme is organized in ten statements of three or four lines each and each of those is numbered to make it easy to say, for example, "with regard to 363 this data is wrong please change the data, it should be such-and-such". Or , "with regard to 450 to 455, this analysis is weak and should be changed for such-and-such".

I'm organizing an "Equilibra" panel that will receive these proposals for changes and those that are approved will go on web site real time revision of "Equilibra" that's updated as the changes are approved. And a footnote credit will be made to those who send in the changes. That way the book can be continually changing, transforming. As new things pop up they can be included through this concept of the living book.

So one of the reasons that it's the first book written in tweets that are numbered is

so that this can be manageable. So you can cut this one tweet out and say, “this should be changed to such-and-such” and then it can be considered. While the reason for the panel is to avoid the flaw in Wikipedia, that if you just put in anything anyone sends in you can start to fill up with some garbage too, as well as good insights and wisdom. So we do want to control it, but we do want it to happen.

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*Dr. Oquist is a former Member of the Board of Directors of the Green Climate Fund, and he was elected by the developing countries in the Green Climate Fund to represent them as Co-Chair of the Board of Directors in 2018 and now remains an Advisor. Dr. Oquist lobbied for the organization of the Green Climate Fund in COP-16 in Cancun, served on the Transition Committee (2010-2011) that produced a proposal, while Nicaragua was named for the final negotiation in Durban by the G-77+China with the United States that represented the developed country constituency.*

*Dr. Oquist is a third-term member of the Standing Committee of Finance (SCF) of the UNCCC. He represented the SCF in the Interim Directorate of the Warsaw Mechanism of Losses and Damages.*

*He was a member for two consecutive terms (2010-2017) of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA).*

*Dr. Oquist was also the spokesperson for the ALBA countries at COP-15 in Copenhagen in their defense of the multilateral negotiating process in the face of the attempt to impose a parallel document initiated by the largest emitters without multilateral negotiations that take into account developing countries. The one-sided document was successfully blocked.*

*Dr. Oquist was Senior Adviser to the President of the 63rd General Assembly of the United Nations, Father Miguel D’Escoto Brockmann. In that capacity he was Chief Negotiator for the Second Financing for the Development Meeting held in Doha, Qatar, in November, 2008, which surprisingly approved a high-level United Nations meeting on the “Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development” that Dr. Oquist coordinated on behalf of Father Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann in June, 2009.*

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