

The “Great Reset” or the “Great Pretext” ... for Dystopia.

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In their World Economic Forum treatise Covid-19: The Great Reset, economists Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret bring us the voice of would-be Global Governance.

By titling their recently published World Economic Forum treatise *Covid-19: The Great Reset*, the authors link the pandemic to their futuristic proposals in ways bound to be met with a chorus of “Aha!”s. In the current atmosphere of confusion and distrust, the glee with which economists Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret greet the pandemic as harbinger of their proposed socioeconomic upheaval suggests that if Covid-19 hadn’t come along by accident, they would have created it (had they been able).

In fact, World Economic Forum founder Schwab was already energetically hyping the Great Reset, using climate change as the triggering crisis, before the latest coronavirus outbreak provided him with an even more immediate pretext for touting his plans to remake the world.

The authors start right in by proclaiming that “the world as we knew it in the early months of 2020 is no more,” that radical changes will shape a “new normal.” We ourselves will be transformed. “Many of our beliefs and assumptions about what the world could or should look like will be shattered in the process.”

Throughout the book, the authors seem to gloat over the presumed effects of widespread “fear” of the virus, which is supposed to condition people to desire the radical changes they envisage. They employ technocratic psychobabble to announce that the pandemic is already transforming the human mentality to conform to the new reality they consider inevitable.

“Our lingering and possibly lasting fear of being infected with a virus ... will thus speed the relentless march of automation...” Really?

“The pandemic may increase our anxiety about sitting in an enclosed space with complete strangers, and many people may decide that staying home to watch the latest movie or opera is the wisest option.”

“There are other first round effects that are much easier to anticipate. Cleanliness is one of them. The pandemic will certainly heighten our focus on

hygiene. A new obsession with cleanliness will particularly entail the creation of new forms of packaging. We will be encouraged not to touch the products we buy. Simple pleasures like smelling a melon or squeezing a fruit will be frowned upon and may even become a thing of the past.”

This is the voice of would-be Global Governance. From on high, experts decide what the masses ought to want, and twist the alleged popular wishes to fit the profit-making schemes they are peddling. Their schemes center on digital innovation, massive automation using “artificial intelligence,” finally even “improving” human beings by endowing them artificially with some of the attributes of robots: such as problem-solving devoid of ethical distractions.

Engineer-economist Klaus Schwab, born in Ravensburg, Germany, in 1938, founded his World Economic Forum in 1971, attracting massive sponsorship from international corporations. It meets once a year in Davos, Switzerland – last time in January 2020 and next year in May, delayed because of Covid-19.

A Powerful Lobby

Image on the right: Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman, World Economic Forum, on Jan. 21, 2015. (World Economic Forum, Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



What is it, exactly? I would describe the WEF as a combination capitalist consulting firm and gigantic lobby. The futuristic predictions are designed to guide investors into profitable areas in what Schwab calls “the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)” and then, as the areas are defined, to put pressure on governments to support such investments by way of subsidies, tax breaks, procurements, regulations and legislation. In short, the WEF is *the* lobby for new technologies, digital everything, artificial intelligence, transhumanism.

It is powerful today because it is operating in an environment of State Capitalism, where the role of the State (especially in the United States, less so in Europe) has been largely reduced to responding positively to the demands of such lobbies, especially the financial sector. Immunized by campaign donations from the obscure wishes of ordinary people, most of today’s politicians practically need the guidance of lobbies such as the WEF to tell them what to do.

In the 20th century, notably in the New Deal, the government was under pressure from conflicting interests. The economic success of the armaments industry during World War II gave birth to a Military-Industrial Complex, which has become a permanent structural factor in the U.S. economy.

It is the dominant role of the MIC and its resulting lobbies that have definitively transformed the nation into State Capitalism rather than a Republic.

The proof of this transformation is the unanimity with which Congress never balks at approving grotesquely inflated military budgets. The MIC has spawned media and Think Tanks which ceaselessly indoctrinate the public in the existential need to keep pouring the nation's wealth into weapons of war. Insofar as voters do not agree, they can find no means of political expression with elections monopolized by two pro-MIC parties.

The WEF can be seen as analogous to the MIC. It intends to engage governments and opinion manufacturers in the promotion of a "4IR" which will dominate the civilian economy and civilian life itself.

The pandemic is a temporary pretext; the need to "protect the environment" will be the more sustainable pretext. Just as the MIC is presented as absolutely necessary to "protect our freedoms," the 4IR will be hailed as absolutely necessary to "save the environment" - and in both cases, many of the measures advocated will have the opposite effect.



Public street art on 6th Street in Austin, Texas, depicting the impact of Covid-19 closings. (Leah Rodgers, CC BY 4.0, Wikimedia Commons)

So far, the techno-tyranny of Schwab's 4IR has not quite won its place in U.S. State Capitalism. But its prospects are looking good. Silicon Valley contributed heavily to the Joe Biden campaign, and Biden hastened to appoint its moguls to his transition team.

But the real danger of all power going to the Reset lies not with what is there, but with what is not there: any serious political opposition.

Can Democracy Be Restored?

The Great Reset has a boulevard open to it for the simple reason that there is nothing in its way. No widespread awareness of the issues, no effective popular political organization, nothing. Schwab's dystopia is frightening simply for that reason.

The 2020 presidential election has just illustrated the almost total depoliticization of the American people. That may sound odd considering the violent partisan emotions displayed. But it was all much ado about nothing.

There were no real issues debated, no serious political questions raised either about war or about the directions of future economic development. The vicious quarrels were about persons, not policy. Bumbling Trump was accused of being "Hitler," and Wall Street-beholden Democrat warhawks were described by Trumpists as "socialists." Lies, insults and confusion prevailed.

A revival of democracy could stem from organized, concentrated study of the issues raised by the Davos planners, in order to arouse an informed public opinion to evaluate which technical innovations are socially acceptable and which are not.

Cries of alarm from the margins will not influence the intellectual relationship of forces. What is needed is for people to get together everywhere to study the issues and develop well-reasoned opinions on goals and methods of future development.

Unless faced with informed and precise critiques, Silicon Valley and its corporate and financial allies will simply proceed in doing whatever they imagine they can do, whatever the social effects.

Serious evaluation should draw distinctions between potentially beneficial and unwelcome innovations, to prevent popular notions from being used to gain acceptance of every "technological advance," however ominous.

Redefining Issues

The political distinctions between left and right, between Republican and Democrat, have grown more impassioned just as they reveal themselves to be incoherent, distorted and irrelevant, based more on ideological bias than on facts. New and more fruitful political alignments could be built through confrontation with specific concrete issues.

We could take the proposals of the Great Reset one by one and examine them in both pragmatic and ethical terms.

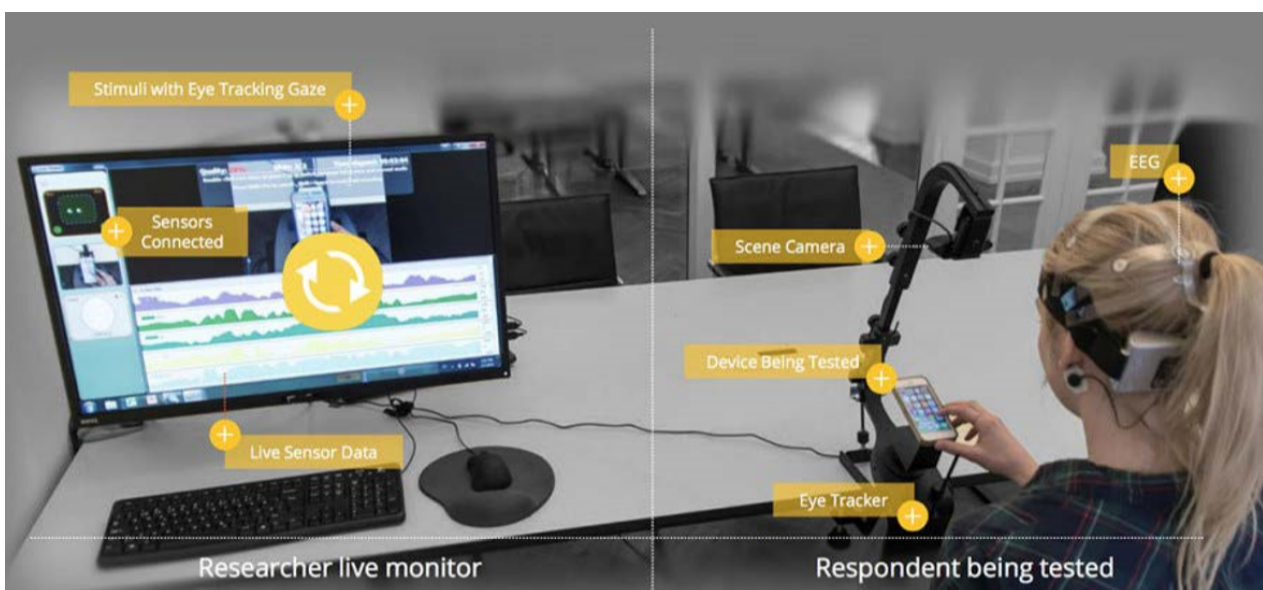
No. 1 - Thanks to the pandemic, there has been a great increase in the use of teleconferences, using Skype, Zoom or other new platforms. The WEF welcomes this as a trend. Is it bad for that reason? To be fair, this innovation is positive in enabling many people to attend conferences without the expense, trouble and environmental cost of air travel. It has the negative side of preventing direct human contact. This is a simple issue, where positive points seem to prevail.

No. 2 - Should higher education go online, with professors giving courses to students via internet? This is a vastly more complicated question, which should be thoroughly discussed by educational institutions themselves and the communities they serve, weighing the pros and cons, remembering that those who provide the technology want to sell it, and care little about the value of human contact in education - not only human contact between student and professor, but often life-determining contacts between students themselves. Online courses may benefit geographically isolated students, but breaking up the educational community would be a major step toward the destruction of human community altogether.

No. 3 - Health and "well-being". Here is where the discussion should heat up considerably. According to Schwab and Malleret: "Three industries in particular will flourish (in the aggregate) in the post-pandemic era: big tech, health and wellness." For the Davos planners, the three merge.

Those who think that well-being is largely self-generated, dependent on attitudes, activity and lifestyle choices, miss the point. "The combination of AI [artificial intelligence], the IoT [internet of things] and sensors and wearable technology will produce new insights into personal well-being. They will model how we are and feel [...] precise information on our carbon footprints, our impact on biodiversity, on the toxicity of all the ingredients we consume and the environments or spatial contexts in which we evolve will generate significant progress in terms of our awareness of collective and individual well-being."

Question: do we really want or need all this cybernetic narcissism? Can't we just enjoy life by helping a friend, stroking a cat, reading a book, listening to Bach or watching a sunset? We better make up our minds before they make over our minds.



User being monitored in a biometrics lab. (Grish068, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons)

No. 4 - Food. In order not to spoil my healthy appetite, I'll skip over this. The tech wizards

would like to phase out farmers, with all their dirty soil and animals, and industrially manufacture enhanced artificial foods created in nice clean labs – out of what exactly?

The Central Issue: Homo Faber

No. 5 – What about human work?

“In all likelihood, the recession induced by the pandemic will trigger a sharp increase in labor-substitution, meaning that physical labor will be replaced by robots and ‘intelligent’ machines, which will in turn provoke lasting and structural changes in the labor market.”

This replacement has already been underway for decades. Along with outsourcing and immigration, it has already weakened the collective power of labor. But clearly, the tech industries are poised to go much, much further and faster in throwing humans out of work.

The Covid-19 crisis and social distancing have “suddenly accelerated this process of innovation and technological change. Chatbots, which often use the same voice recognition technology behind Amazon’s Alexa, and other software that can replace tasks normally performed by human employees, are being rapidly introduced. These innovations provoked by necessity (i.e. sanitary measures) will soon result in hundreds of thousands, and potentially millions, of job losses.”

Cutting labor costs has long been the guiding motive of these innovations, along with the internal dynamic of technology industry to “do whatever it can do.” Then socially beneficial pretexts are devised in justification. Like this:

“As consumers may prefer automated services to face-to-face interactions for some time to come, what is currently happening with call centers will inevitably occur in other sectors as well.”

“Consumers may prefer...”! Everyone I know complains of the exasperation of trying to reach the bank or insurance company to explain an emergency, and instead to be confronted with a dead voice and a choice of irrelevant numbers to click. Perhaps I am underestimating the degree of hostility toward our fellow humans that now pervades society, but my impression is that there is a vast unexpressed public demand for LESS automated services and MORE contact with real persons who can think outside the algorithm and can actually UNDERSTAND the problem, not simply cough up preprogrammed fixes.



“Corporate agility in the Fourth Industrial Revolution” session held in Tianjin, China, September 2018.
 (World Economic Forum, Faruk Pinjo, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

There is a potential movement out there. But we hear nothing of it, being persuaded by our media that the greatest problem facing people in their daily lives is to hear someone exhibit confusion over someone else’s confused gender.

In this, I maintain, consumer demand would merge with the desperate need of able-minded human beings to earn a living. The technocrats earn theirs handsomely by eliminating the means to earn a living of other people.

Here is one of their great ideas. “In cities as varied as Hangzhou, Washington DC and Tel Aviv, efforts are under way to move from pilot programs to large-scale operations capable of putting an army of delivery robots on the road and in the air.” What a great alternative to paying human deliverers a living wage!

And incidentally, a guy riding a delivery bicycle is using renewable energy. But all those robots and drones? Batteries, batteries and more batteries, made of what materials, coming from where and manufactured how? By more robots? Where is the energy coming from to replace not only fossil fuels, but also human physical effort?

At the last Davos meeting, Israeli intellectual Yuval Harari issued a dire warning that:

“Whereas in the past, humans had to struggle against exploitation, in the twenty-first century the really big struggle will be against irrelevance... Those who fail in the struggle against irrelevance would constitute a new ‘useless class’ - not from the viewpoint of their friends and family, but useless from the viewpoint of the economic and political system. And this useless class will be separated by an ever-growing gap from the ever more powerful elite.”

No. 5 – And the military. Our capitalist prophets of doom foresee the semi-collapse of civil aviation and the aeronautical industry as people all decide to stay home glued to their screens. But not to worry!

“This makes the defense aerospace sector an exception and a relatively safe haven.” For capital investment, that is. Instead of vacations on sunny beaches, we can look forward to space wars. It may happen sooner rather than later, because, as the Brookings Institution concludes in a 2018 [report](#) on “How artificial intelligence is transforming the world,” everything is going faster, including war:

“The big data analytics associated with AI will profoundly affect intelligence analysis, as massive amounts of data are sifted in near real time ... thereby providing commanders and their staffs a level of intelligence analysis and productivity heretofore unseen. Command and control will similarly be affected as human commanders delegate certain routine, and in special circumstances, key decisions to AI platforms, reducing dramatically the time associated with the decision and subsequent action.”

So, no danger that some soft-hearted officer will hesitate to start World War III because of a sentimental attachment to humanity. When the AI platform sees an opportunity, go for it!

“In the end, warfare is a time competitive process, where the side able to decide the fastest and move most quickly to execution will generally prevail. Indeed, artificially intelligent intelligence systems, tied to AI-assisted command and control systems, can move decision support and decision-making to a speed vastly superior to the speeds of the traditional means of waging war. So fast will be this process especially if coupled to automatic decisions to launch artificially intelligent autonomous weapons systems capable of lethal outcomes, that a new term has been coined specifically to embrace the speed at which war will be waged: hyperwar.”

Americans have a choice. Either continue to quarrel over trivialities or wake up, really wake up, to the reality being planned and do something about it.

The future is shaped by investment choices. Not by naughty speech, not even by elections, but by investment choices. For the people to regain power, they must reassert their command over how and for what purposes capital is invested.

And if private capital balks, it must be socialized. This is the only revolution – and it is also the only conservatism, the only way to conserve decent human life. It is what real politics is about.

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Featured image: Viewing the virtual-reality film "Collisions" at a session of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, January 2016. (World Economic Forum, Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

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