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World Politics, Critical Realism and the Future of Humanity: An interview with Heikki Patomäki, Part 2

Heikki Patomäki and Jamie Morgan¹

Abstract: In Part 1 of this interview Professor Patomäki discussed his work and career up to the Global Financial Crisis. In Part 2 he turns to his later work. Questions and issues range over the use of retrodiction and retrodiction, the degree of openness and closure of systems, and the role of iconic models, and scenario-building and counterfactuals in social scientific explanation and the exploration of possible and likely futures (distinguished from desirable futures). Patomäki suggests that a variant of his ‘scenario A’ captures significant features of an increasingly competitive and conflictual world. Among other matters, Patomäki also discusses his recent work on the war in Ukraine, his ‘field theory’ of global political economy, and the possibility of world statehood. The interview concludes with Patomäki’s views on the imperative of hope.

Key words: Heikki Patomäki; critical realism; global political economy; war in Ukraine; world statehood.

Heikki Patomäki is Professor of World Politics (Global Political Economy) at the University of Helsinki.² In Part 1 of this interview (Patomäki and Morgan 2022) he discussed his work and career up to the Global Financial Crisis. In Part 2 Professor Patomäki turns to his later work, which has increasingly focused on possible futures and the predicament of humanity.

The following interview with Professor Heikki Patomäki was conducted by Professor Jamie Morgan for *Journal of Critical Realism*.³

Jamie Morgan (JM): We brought Part 1 of this interview to a close just as your book *The Political Economy of Global Security* was to be published (Patomäki 2008a). This was around the time that the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) was beginning, so it might be interesting to begin with some scene setting before discussing the book and your subsequent work. Most readers will be familiar with the GFC but its causes were many and built up over several years...

Heikki Patomäki (HP): The GFC was a nodal point in world history and given I work on global political economy, we likely can’t ignore it in this interview, but I had been developing and publishing the ideas that became the book since 2004 and was sent the proofs in September 2007. The writing and revision predates the main events of the GFC, so it probably makes sense to begin with some context for the book before turning to the GFC. Most, but not all, of my future-oriented work up to and including the book *A Possible World*, the final version of which came out with Zed in 2004, was preoccupied with concrete eutopias, a subject we discussed briefly in Part 1. By then I was increasingly aware of the neoconservative turn in world history and felt that this called for a realist-informed systematic analysis of its likely consequences. So, just before the Zed-version of *A Possible World* was published, I began to develop systematic global scenarios from a realist political economy point of view on the premise we need some insight into possible and likely futures, not only desirable futures.

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<https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/persons/heikki-patomäki>
<https://Patomäki.fi/en/> and <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/Patomäki/>

³ See also in this series Archer and Morgan (2020); Rescher and Morgan (2020); Porpora and Morgan (2020); Norrie and Morgan (2021); Lawson and Morgan (2021a, 2021b); Jessop and Morgan (2022); Elder-Vass and Morgan (2022); Sayer and Morgan (2022); Alderson and Morgan (2022); Groff and Morgan (2022); Little and Morgan (2022); Patomäki and Morgan (2022).

My circumstances also changed around the same time as *A Possible World* was published and I started a new job at the University of Helsinki in August 2003. Reflecting my shifting priorities, my inaugural lecture that year explored the methodology of futures studies.⁴

JM: And this also led to your paper in *Journal of Critical Realism*: ‘Realist Ontology for Futures Studies’ Patomäki (2006)?

HP: Eventually. Being back in Finland and working at Helsinki placed more pressure on my time and I was finding it difficult to find the time to write. Up until 2006 I had a heavy teaching load and I was Head of Department 2004-5 while also continually taking part in various civil society and other public activities.

Then in 2006 I received funding for research leave at Helsinki Collegium of Advanced Studies, and this involved a research trip to Melbourne, Australia in early 2007. This in turn led to a job offer and my employment at RMIT University, 2007-2010.

It was in Melbourne in early to mid 2007 that I completed *The Political Economy of Global Security* – though I was still writing the conclusion in May 2007 on a train on the way from Osaka to Hiroshima in Japan, (where I intended to visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum).

JM: This seems a convenient point for you to briefly summarise the theme and main argument of the book...

HP: In the early 2000s I, like many others, had started to think about some parallels between the era before the ‘Great War’ (WWI) and the neoliberal era. The dominance of finance in the neoliberal period was an obvious parallel invoked, for example, by thinking about Karl Polanyi’s observation that *haute finance* (‘high finance’) came to occupy a central role in European civilisation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The question of ‘globalisation’ was another obvious parallel. In the late 1990s, the ‘globalisation in question’ debate between Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson led to various other debates (Hirst and Thompson 1999). The main focus was that the world economy prior to 1914 was at least as integrated as it was in the late 1990s.

While Hirst and Thompson wanted to show that our contemporary world is not as extensively and uniquely globalised as neoliberals often assume, my focus was more on historical conflict. As readers may be aware, there is a standard liberal argument that interdependence between states tends to maintain peace over war – and yet a globalised world still resulted in the Great War in 1914, so the standard liberal argument does not seem to hold, at least not in any unqualified form. If this can be the case for the past, it may also be so for the future...

JM: So, you were taking an interest in comparisons to the age of imperialism and the potential for future conflict?

HP: That’s right, I started to think comparatively and so started to develop the idea of a book drawing a partial historical analogy; this became two chapters dedicated to explaining WWI, two chapters on the current global political economy focussing especially on global insecurity in the early twenty-first century, and two chapters on future scenarios.

My main argument owed a lot to John A. Hobson and his ‘underconsumption’ theory of imperialism (Hobson 1988). This provided a possible partial explanation of the Great War. Hobson’s explanation of imperialism was proto-Keynesian (and here I am translating some of his ideas into the later language of post-Keynesian economic theory): insufficient domestic demand, caused by concentration of ownership of assets and resources and inequality, leads to expansionism and attempts to export problems.

JM: And ‘export problems’ means what exactly?

HP: If there is insufficient demand for goods at home or in general, a state can try to open up or create markets outside its territory, or arrange a preferential treatment for its goods either at home (protectionism) or within a larger area or empire, or make its exports more competitive by internal devaluation or similar means. This is ‘exporting

⁴ Note from Heikki: Patomäki (2004a). Around this time I became interested in the connections between the long downward phase of the capitalist world economy and future crises and wars and this appeared in Finnish as Patomäki (2004b, 2004c) and English as Patomäki (2005a).

problems' in the sense that these kinds of measures typically come at the expense of foreign producers and states, which in turn can lead to a spiral of tit-for-tat responses.

Each context has its own specific paths of development, for example, Europe in the late nineteenth century. German unification was rooted in the conditions of industrialisation. From the 1870s onwards, the success of this project led to various responses, especially by the French and the British. Moreover, in the late nineteenth century context of high population growth, wide socio-economic disparities not only caused insufficient demand for goods and services but also growing social dissent and turbulence, and this fed ideas about 'surplus population' among the business, aristocratic and dynastic elites. Cecil Rhodes was an embodiment of the consequent imperialist tendencies, which by the 1880s were mimicked by all 'great powers'.

For Hobson, the dominance of finance and related special interests also encourage imperialism and militarism. To these he added that the 'sliding scale' of diplomatic and popular discourses is self-reinforcing and that the ideologies of imperialism and *realpolitik* played an important role in developments leading to war.

JM: There are, of course, numerous accounts of causes of both WWI and, more generally, the economics and politics of the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth...

HP: That's right and in addition to Hobson, I incorporated ideas drawn from Schumpeter, Veblen, Kautsky, and Lenin.⁵ I developed an iconic model partly on the basis of this reading, but with a series of added conceptual and theoretical elements (such as theories of long waves, uneven growth, and hegemonic stability; lateral pressure theory; and Marx's account of private property). An iconic model, if you recall from Part 1 is a descriptive picture of a possible mechanism, which can explain the thing or outcome to be explained, providing an image to make sense of reality. These are based on idealisations and abstractions, and involve metaphors, metonyms and analogies ('a statement-picture complex') with the aim of providing a hypothetical mechanism for something (in Part 1 we discussed the example of the role a planetary system played for the theory of structure of the atom).

However, in terms of method I started with retrodiction from WWI.

JM: In the familiar realist sense of that term? Andrew Collier in his introductory text *Critical Realism* quotes Bhaskar:

Retrodiction, exploiting analogies with already known phenomena, to possible explanations of the behaviour... construction of an explanation for... some identified phenomenon [involving] building of a model utilizing such cognitive materials and operating under the control of something like a logic of analogy and metaphor, of a mechanism, which if it were to exist and act in the postulated way would account for the phenomenon in question. (Collier 1994: 163)

That's quite a dense statement, I expect it is not immediately obvious to non-realists what that means...

HP: Retrodiction is usually combined with – but also compared to – retrodiction. In simple terms, retrodiction refers to proceeding from observations about X to hypotheses about possible explanations of X and then to the best available explanation (the pragmatist Charles Peirce used the term abduction for something similar). Retrodiction brings in time and history.

JM: The simple standard way to distinguish the two is to state that retrodiction deals with broader posited theory of how something of some general kind might happen, while retrodiction focuses on specific causes of a particular context or set of events in which something of the posited type happens...

HP: That's perhaps a bit simplistic but not false. In any case, historical explanation is conjunctural and retrodictive. Elements of a causal complex can be explained in terms of past open-systemic complexes that have constituted, (re)produced or generated those elements. For example, all the key elements that took part in producing WWI, as we know, were historical, from institutionalised practices such as power-balancing and the Gold Standard, and the

⁵ Note from Heikki: my reading list was long; for example, in the process of exploring connections, I realised that Friedrich Hayek, for one, had written that 'though we neither can wish nor possess the power to go back to the reality of the nineteenth century, we have the opportunity to realize its ideals' (Hayek 1944: 240).

industrial production and mobilisation capacities of states, to the then prevailing social hierarchies and particular military strategies such as the German Schlieffen Plan. Despite processes of constitutionalisation and democratisation, in summer 1914, the decisions to go to war were made by a restricted coterie of some six, eight, or ten individuals, consisting usually of the monarch, a prime minister, a foreign minister, a war minister, an army chief of staff and possibly a finance minister, many of them aristocrats.

Some of the tendencies and mechanisms can be relatively enduring, or they may re-emerge in a later context, and in both cases they may be transfactually efficacious, but we can't and we shouldn't think about retrodution or retrodiction in terms of general laws or regularities. Some scholars, such as Roberto Unger, formulate the basic idea in terms of the priority of history over structure – although Unger's 'formative contexts' can also endure for long periods (Unger 1997).

For the book, however, I started to also think 'counterfactually'. For an analytical philosopher counterfactual often means conditional sentences, which are characterised grammatically by their use of 'fake tense morphology' (morphology studies the way in which words are used), or something along those lines.

JM: The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (the standard reference source for 'the basics' in philosophy) introduces the subject of counterfactuals in the following way:

Modal discourse concerns alternative ways things can be... **counterfactual modality**... concerns what is not, but could or would have been. In philosophy, counterfactual modality has given rise to difficult semantic, epistemological, and metaphysical questions:

- **Semantic** How do we communicate and reason about possibilities which are remote from the way things actually are?
- **Epistemic** How can our experience in the actual world justify thought and talk about remote possibilities?
- **Metaphysical** Do these remote possibilities exist independently from the actual world, or are they grounded in things that actually exist?⁶

HP: While this decomposition has its merits, I was not interested in the formal linguistic or logical properties of counterfactual sentences, but in identifying geo-historical nodal points by using the methodology of counterfactual scenarios. This approach provided a narrative structure for the origins of WWI. I then used this as historical analogy to project the same steps the other way round to build scenarios about possible and likely futures from our location within the neoliberal period, allowing of course for difference (so the analogy is partial) and combining the procedure with an analysis of the historically specific forms of structure, agency and mechanisms of the era from 1973 onwards.

JM: Reference to retrodution etc. tends to invoke methodologies common to critical realism (accepting of course that whether there is an 'applied critical realist approach' to methods is disputed; Tony Lawson, for example, suggests there are no uniquely critical realist methods, just combinations of methods anyone might use).

HP: Well my approach for the book does draw broadly on Bhaskar's RRRE model of explanation, that is resolution, redescription, retrodiction and elimination of alternative possible causes of components – for example, as set out in *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Bhaskar 1979: 165).

JM: To be clear, RRRE was an approach developed by Bhaskar for the social sciences where there is little if any possibility of using laboratory type closed system situations to test out the way of acting or powers of something. Bhaskar's RRRE model of explanation has four steps:

1. *Resolution* of a complex event into its components (causal analysis).
2. *Redescription* of component causes.
3. *Retrodiction* to possible antecedent causes of components via independently validated normic statements.
4. *Elimination* of alternative possible causes of components. (Collier 1994: 162).

⁶ Visit: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/counterfactuals/#toc>

HP: I, however, introduced some innovations leading to two main differences.⁷ First, as suggested previously, I employ counterfactual histories in my model. This type of reasoning allows us to focus on historical nodal points and explore causation in historically evolving and, in some ways, path-dependent open systems.

Second, many critical realists subscribe to the position that prediction, in any meaningful sense, for complex phenomena in an open reality is impossible (there is an asymmetry between a known past and unknowable future). While I accept the standard critical realist critique of constant conjunctions, closed systems etc., I approach this slightly differently and argue it is possible to meaningfully theorise and explore possible futures...

JM: Both points I expect left you open to criticism and perhaps misunderstanding. Nicholas Rescher, for example, someone I know you have a lot of respect for, is quite critical of counterfactual reasoning and possible worlds arguments, at least of the kind one finds in philosophy, notably from David Lewis (Rescher 2017: 95-111).⁸

HP: Rescher is indeed one of my favourite philosophers and I have learnt a lot from him, though in some of his works there are residuals of empiricism and actualism. In any case, to be honest, it did not occur to me at the time that counterfactuals might be seen as problematic, especially among critical realists. As your reference to Rescher implies, there is a recognisable problem with theorists of counterfactual causation. David Lewis, for example, was influenced by Humean metaphysics. Among critical realists it turns out that Steve Fleetwood has criticised counterfactual analysis. He too associates it with empiricism and formal logic, 'A Humean law/tendency can be interpreted as a counterfactual claim about what would come about under certain closure conditions such as: if wages rise above a certain level, efficiency will increase *ceteris paribus*' (Fleetwood 2001: 216). So, if used in this way there is an obvious problem of counterfactual reasoning – an event regularity is presupposed, a change is made, and an outcome is definite from that change.⁹ This though is not how I use counterfactuals.

The world is structured and involves real powers, but many powers are never actualised. The set of actualised possibilities is only a subset of real possibilities. Social systems are open; outcomes depend on the simultaneous impact of many causal powers and processes; only some of the structural power possibilities are realised; qualitative changes do occur, and reflectively conscious actors have the power to act otherwise. From these basic critical realist tenets it follows that had an element of a causal complex been absent (and it is within the contingent powers of agents to absent and replace them), its effects – some of them, at least, and usually all – would have been absent as well. The world is not deterministic but rather possibilistic and agency matters. Realism holds that $D_R > D_A > D_E$ (the domain of real is greater than the domain of actual or empirical).

JM: As an aside you tend to use the term 'anticipations rather than prediction or forecasting; why?

HP: Prediction is a claim that *X* will happen at time *t* in context *C*. As critical realists argue, this can be problematic for numerous reasons. Anticipation, in contrast, is possibilistic and practical: an '*X*' is possible, there are tendencies toward that *X*, but *X* is not predetermined and our or others' actions play a role in the process, including by way of responding to any initial anticipation.

JM: Overall then, you are suggesting no more than that if we understand how we produce the social world and influence the non-social world, we have some insight into how both of these change through time and we can at least attempt to close down some futures and open up others?

⁷ Note from Heikki: it is worth also saying Bhaskar associates retrodiction with applied sciences and retrodution with theoretical sciences and incorporates retrodution in a DREI procedure (description, retrodution, elaboration and identification). See Collier (1994: 163). In many contexts, not least in cosmology, this distinction fails to hold *if* the universe as a whole is historical (which I think it is, as is the solar system, planet Earth, biological evolution on Earth, and so on).

⁸ Note from Jamie: Rescher suggests that counterfactuals that make use of 'fact-contravening suppositions' may have logical form but often lack practical traction and even in logical form amount to conjecture that involve problems of unaddressed complexity (tenacity of the world in the face of individual changes to predicates, but also overwhelming inconceivable change from the same), inconsistency and paradox (Rescher 2017).

⁹ Note from Heikki: as Menzies and Beebe (2020) note, David Hume conflated event-regularities and counterfactual analysis, though 'it is difficult to understand how Hume could have confused the first, regularity definition with the second, very different counterfactual definition'.

HP: If this were not possible in some ways then policy and any sort of planning would be meaningless and, for example, addressing climate change would be impossible.

In any case, in the 2000s I realised more explicitly than before that no real-world system is categorically open or closed. As I put it, ‘there are only systems that are open to intrinsic qualitative changes and/or extrinsic interventions by other forces and mechanisms to varying degrees’ (Patomäki 2008a: 158).¹⁰

JM: Though it is worth noting here that this statement too invites some confusion – and has done in heterodox economics if we again refer to Steve Fleetwood. Victoria Chick and Sheila Dow wrote a quite influential paper making much the same point as your quote implies and to which Fleetwood (2017) replied with an argument to the effect that this confused two different issues – for Fleetwood, critical realist use of the term closed system is about event regularity (that can be produced under given usually artificial situations) rather than systems or structures per se, (and the argument for stratification, emergence and depth realism lead to the same focus on demi-regularity and irregularity), so the criticism that real systems are matters of degree is arguing at cross-purposes in terms of meaning frames.

HP: Yes, that’s an important discussion, but I find Steve’s reply somewhat confusing, based on a rather artificial attempt to keep separate Tony Lawson’s ‘restricted closures involve contrastive demi-regularities’ from various other, closely related conceptions of ‘partially closed/open systems involving partial or semi-strict or weak/strong regularities’. The former is conceptualised non-formally in ordinary language whereas the latter is associated with ‘whenever event x, then on average event y’, or $y = f(x + \epsilon)$, and argued to be categorically different from contrastive demi-regularity.

JM: Well, I’m not sure that undermines the purpose of Steve’s argument insofar as its claim was that debate was working at cross-purposes. It is one thing to suggest the separation is problematic and another to suggest the distinction has not been made or been of significance...

HP: I am not convinced. A claim about a contrastive demi-reg such as ‘average unemployment rates in western industrial countries are higher in the 1990s than the 1960s’ requires statistical data and comparison. Of course, the data is not only imprecise but also dependent on conceptual categories, and the observed frequencies are not stable because the underlying realities tend to change, and these set limits to the possibility of using standard statistical techniques, but this does not mean that demi-regs are categorically different from semi-strict regs etc.

Moreover, I think it is a mistake to claim that the concept of system is somehow (almost) redundant in the distinction between closed and open systems. Bhaskar’s original formulation is instructive here, though obviously we should avoid any fallacious appeal to authority. For a closure, there must be a system that is either isolated from its outside or related to its extrinsic conditions in a constant way. For regularities to be possible, its intrinsic conditions must also remain constant (the elements of the system cannot change). This is pretty much the same as Chick and Dow’s ontological account of an open system (cf. Fleetwood 2017: 53).

I agree with the argument that has become increasingly common that total openness would seem to imply that anything can happen the next moment – obviously, this is not true. Structures, mechanisms, fields, etc., can endure for long periods; actions involve both time-space coordination and anticipation of futures; and partial closure implies some regular patterns, including ‘contrastive demi-regularities’. The future is, in this sense, ‘knowable’.

JM: And yet there are no facts of the future. We do not say ‘Heikki died tomorrow’.

HP: To which I might respond, the future is real but not yet (fully) determined, though the future may be more or less close, shaped, probable and so on. It is certain that Heikki will be dead by 2100, and very likely that he will have died by 2050, but we do not know the exact date or cause yet.

JM: No, it isn’t *certain*. You are conflating high likelihood based on current ways things happen with what must happen because other things cannot... By 2100 we may, for example, have technologies that enable ‘second life’ in digital form or highly extended life based on genetic manipulation (aging is a biological process not a necessity of degeneration) or cybernetic augmentation... In any case, it is not a fact that Heikki is dead in 2100 until we reach

¹⁰ Note from Heikki: for detail see also Patomäki (2006, 2010c).

the year 2100 (facticity of this kind is tensed). This, of course, does put us back in territory that Rescher for one criticises regarding counterfactuals and possible worlds.

HP: Well, I'm a bit sceptical of the idea of digitalised 'life', and while I agree with you that human biological life can be extended in the future, I am using the term 'certain' here in current common sense terms (meaning that the probability approximates to one i.e. *almost certain*) and within the confines of 'the future is real but not yet fully determined'. What is equally important is that knowledge is a matter of justification not certainty, so 'knowable' does not suggest 'fully known', any more than things that have not happened yet are 'true' before they happen.

If we have some reasonable idea about how things happen then we have some reasonable idea of what might happen and what we want to make happen (and what we want to avoid). You mention Rescher; as his classic book *Predicting the Future* highlights, many things repeat and much of our everyday activity presupposes the relative regularity of the social world and the knowability of many aspects of the (near) future (Rescher 1998). Fields of science such as meteorology, ecology, or medicine, study open and in a sense chaotic systems, with multiple and complex causation, and yet can predict many practically important things within the confines of particular categories of significance to us and limited spacetime areas. I should add though that Rescher discusses this problematic in terms of individuals, groups and statistical aggregation, not in terms of enduring structures, powers, mechanisms or fields.

In any case I claim only that specified outcomes are within a given range of variation and probability (in the intersubjective Keynesian sense) – the required accuracy depends on the practical purpose involved. We may not know the precise weather conditions on a given date in January 2023 in Helsinki – meteorologists can say something more precise just a few days in advance – but we do not need meteorologists to tell us that you must dress warmly then because the maximum temperature can be anywhere between +5C and -20C and most likely between 0C and -10C. Often rough 'forecasts' are quite sufficient and on this basis people plan their seasonal clothing and stores are preparing to sell products for the winter season.

JM: More realists should read Rescher. While ultimately he is highly sceptical regarding prediction (and also frequency table type probability calculation) he is careful to argue that great swathes of the world continually turn out as expected or as we anticipate (we might consider this trivial but it is the very basis of making our way in the world).¹¹

HP: Let me quickly add that not all knowledge of the type under discussion is trivial or just local. West European explorers, traders and colonists from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century learnt about relatively regular planetary macropatterns of winds and currents (though predicting the exact location and width of different zones was difficult), which enabled the first wave of globalisation and this has affected world history in a profound way. For instance, Jakarta was established in 1619 and Australia was found later as Captain Henrik Brouwer of the Dutch East India Company headed South from Cape Horn in 1611 and confirmed the existence of a fast moving 'ocean freeway' route to Indonesia (Dartnell 2021).

JM: I meant trivial in the philosophical sense rather than in the practical sense, but I take your point. There is, of course, also a great deal more to anticipating futures than formation of regularity. A focus on event regularity can itself be a source of future crisis (expecting current behaviours not to change the grounds by which those behaviours occur is a classic example)...

And we can 'know' we are heading to unwanted outcomes (climate and ecological breakdown), but equally we ought to take seriously the way the future continually confounds our expectations (science fiction may have paved the way for a world of hand held electronic devices and so on, but both the macro-dynamics of the modern world, its politics and powerful corporations, and the granularity of relations as they are today were not concerns of social science twenty five years ago). And yet you conclude *The Political Economy of Global Security* (around fifteen years ago) by stating that 'the evidence indicates that multiple interconnected future crises are exceedingly probable' (Patomäki 2008a: 215).

¹¹ Note from Jamie: the subject of prediction is often mixed up with critique of econometrics, analytical statistics and economics more generally. However, see Næss (2004; 2019), the latter is a response to Fleetwood (2017). See also (Derbyshire and Morgan 2022).

HP: I should stress that the book is not about methodology as such, it is a book about the future of humanity in the twenty-first century. The cover of the book depicts an underground nuclear missile silo and the scenarios also discuss climate change. Given your quote, it might be worth briefly summarising the scenarios (there are three, A, B, and C each with sub-scenarios) and their grounds.

After the ‘the golden age of capitalism’ (1950-1973), we have seen increasing reliance on free trade and markets, a new round of financialisation, rising inequalities within countries, and slackening rates of growth, combined with increased tendency (in some places) to unemployment, as well as globally more recessions and economic crises. Although the human population is bigger and the standards of living of billions of people are higher than ever, there are similarities to the context of 1871-1914.¹² Something like a new ‘imperial expansionism’ seemed to be emerging with the neoconservative turn in world politics in the early 2000s.

I argued that the world economy is vacillating between low per capita growth and deepening deflation and recession. Many signs point towards the latter. Of course, a long downward wave has been compatible with a sustained period of very high growth in some countries, such as China, which adds to tensions in the interstate field. In scenario A, the world is heading towards competing imperialisms – great power competition, arms race, and possible global military catastrophe. I outline five mechanisms:

1. uneven growth, economic imbalances and responses to them;
2. neo-imperial competition over increasingly scarce resources;
3. crisis-prone global finance and the precarious role of the US dollar in the global monetary system;
4. de-democratisation and the increasing role of vested interests;
5. securitisation, enemy-construction, and armaments race.

As the basis of my scenario A (including various sub-scenarios) I also argued that the logic leading from neoliberalisation to competing imperialisms is relatively simple: ‘first it involves the hardening of the will (self-righteous universalism); then it evolves into Weberian and increasingly violent responsiveness to resistance and emerging problems; and this response is, finally, likely to generate a system of competing imperialisms’ (Patomäki 2008a: 154). Unfortunately, subsequent world history has mostly followed the path of scenario A.

JM: And the alternatives?

HP: Scenario B is based on the alternative idea that peaceful and possibly democratic reforms of the governance of the world economy are possible without a major global catastrophe and that these reforms might mitigate and perhaps even serve to overcome tendencies of scenario A. Scenario C is based on the possibility that climate change or a relatively limited global catastrophe of some sort triggers a series of global reforms.

JM: How was the book received?

HP: Well, the early ideas for scenario A were set out in seminars in 2003-4. The post-Cold War ‘end-of-history’ euphoria was still very much alive and so I was not taken particularly seriously at the time. By the time *The Political Economy of Global Security* finally came out though, it was fairly well received, with positive reviews in some major journals (Albert 2008; Skalmes 2009) and an entire forum in *Cooperation & Conflict*, the Nordic journal of international relations (Barkawi 2008; Chase-Dunn 2008; Leander 2008). The book has, however, been less popular than my (written in Finnish) ‘Neoliberalism in Finland’ (Patomäki 2007a). I used the same underlying reasoning in both, but the first two parts of ‘Neoliberalism in Finland’ focussed on the contemporary political history of a single country and clearly struck a chord since it became a bestseller there – probably because of the controversy it raised in the local mainstream media and the public debates it provoked.¹³ The wider context and underlying logic of the argument and the future scenarios of the third part seemed to be of less interest to most readers.

¹² Note from Jamie: higher standards of living disguises a great deal in terms of ‘catch-up’ and so on. See, for example, the work of Robert Wade or Jason Hickel.

¹³ Note from Heikki: In 2008, the former prime minister Paavo Lipponen (social democrat) published a book entitled ‘Reason wins: Finnish identity in the age of globalisation’, in which he listed me as the no:1 ‘public anti-intellectual’ of the country. Not long after Lipponen himself was criticising the policy of his successor Matti Vanhanen’s government as neoliberal. As a reward, Lipponen received the ‘leading anti-intellectual 2009’ award, which was granted by Attac Finland.

JM: As for *The Political Economy* book it seems unlikely that any work attempting to sketch out possible futures on a global scale is going to pass without some degree of scepticism, and some degree of reasonable criticism regarding omission and failure of foresight...

HP: The reviewers made many good points. For example, the book not only failed to analyse the role of the ‘semi-periphery’ (as pointed out by Chase-Dunn) but also processes that were happening in the EU and in Russia. In retrospect there was also some degree of inconsistency with arguments I had made over the years. In the book I depicted the EU as evolving into a unified actor, though I had been working for years on a paper including a scenario of a disintegrating EU.¹⁴ Similarly, in the book my anticipation about a system of competing imperialisms should have focussed more on Russia, but I was content with a few brief lines such as ‘the EU will learn to behave more and more like the US, and China and other major states such as Russia, India and Brazil will follow suit’ (Patomäki 2008a: 177). This was misleading regarding the EU and downplayed the role of Russia. This contrasted somewhat with the claims I had started to make in the mid-1990s that the interactions between the West (US, NATO, and EU) and Russia would eventually involve a great deal of potential for conflict (Patomäki 1996, 80-102).¹⁵

Mathias Albert (2008: 556) characterised the project as ‘truly gigantic’ – carrying connotations of over ambitious. While I stand by the book and scenario A is proving remarkably relevant to how the world is developing, I should have spent more time ensuring consistency with what I had already thought about or written elsewhere (for responses focussing on methodology see, Patomäki 2010a). Ultimately, I tried to say too much too quickly and I was too focussed on some things to the detriment of a focus on others.

JM: With that in mind, this seems an appropriate point at which to direct the discussion to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC)...

HP: In the book I mentioned the possibility of a major financial crisis several times. Some of the discussion relied heavily on Hyman Minsky and I examined the accumulation of debt in the US in the 2000s. However, my main scenario focussed more on the possibility of ‘de-dollarization’ (reduction in use of the dollar as a global reserve currency and the consequences this might have) rather than on a major financial crisis along the lines of the GFC. I did though discuss a coming financial crisis in some detail in ‘Neoliberalism in Finland’ (Patomäki 2007a: 193-198).

JM: Still, the absence of due attention to what was to become a defining set of events might be seen as highlighting the pitfalls of anticipating possible futures...

HP: Yes, I could and probably should have paid more attention to the immediately coming financial crisis, as I did in the ‘Finland’ book, but two quick responses. On the one hand, *The Political Economy* was a result of years of work and was focussed on long term futures and global security, whereas I compiled the more topical ‘Finland’ book in a few months in the spring and summer of 2007 when the GFC was already in the air. On the other hand, the point of scenarios is not to predict but to shape history.

JM: That being so, the work is still predicated on adequate understanding of the world as it unfolds...

HP: Well, the issue is one of degree – a matter of emphasis rather than being ‘wrong’ in any simple sense, especially since the relatively regular occurrence of major financial crisis was part of the overall argument.

In shaping history, and especially long-term history, broad contours can be more relevant than attempts at pinpoint prediction. Recall the weather example. Knowing that it will be cold during the winter in Helsinki is practically more relevant for many purposes than to know the exact weather on a given day or how many days

¹⁴ Note from Heikki: my thinking elsewhere on EU disintegration involved conflicts with the UK and the new Central and Eastern European members in the context of a legitimisation crisis of the EU stemming mostly from the lack of democracy and problems caused by the EMU; this was published as Patomäki (2007b).

¹⁵ Note from Heikki: the 1996 book was the first time I had developed systematic scenarios (three in total). The three scenarios concerned the future of Russia, cross-tabled with three ways in which the EU (and the West more generally) could shape developments in Russia. The West has committed most of the mistakes I drew attention to in these scenarios and the outcome has been as catastrophic as anticipated.

Helsinki will be covered in snow. Moreover, given reflexivity, we may also ask about the practical purpose of making such predictions. For investors, correct anticipation of sudden financial changes means an opportunity to make a lot of money (to the extent that they alone anticipate these sudden movements or can cause them due to their position in the system), whereas for public actors such as central banks, it generates a dilemma. They are in a contradictory position and not only because their public predictions tend to be self-fulfilling. The very attempt to slow down the growth of bubbles or curb them may set in motion a downward spiral, for instance, by triggering sovereign debt crises or by increasing the burden of debt among investors and homeowners.

JM: That may be so but, if anything, your answer underscores the difficulty of translating adequate understanding into effective anticipation of futures. That said, one of the possibilities you suggest is a finance-led ‘super-bubble’...

HP: It is and it could perhaps be argued that it was at least for some purposes enough to maintain that a super-bubble would continue to grow; that financial innovations and increasing scale and complexity of debt processes tend to make the financial system cyclically more chaotic (although, clearly, regulatory authorities will typically try to close down major loopholes that render the system more fragile or vulnerable), and that there will be further financial crises affecting production, trade, employment, income and wealth distribution and state-finances. Of course, had the GFC resulted in a new 1930s (it was close), my omission would have been more serious, as that would have sped up developments along the lines of scenario A (by inducing struggles and conflict).

JM: Still, your clarifications do seem to suggest that you think the problem is to a large degree epistemic – better theory for error correction – rather than ontic, a world that ‘cannot’ be anticipated (since this – ‘cannot’ – would otherwise be the main lesson that ought to be learned)...

HP: I would say the problematic concerns both. Whatever post-structuralists may think, we can make epistemic improvements and insofar as systems are partly open and partly closed and reflexivity prevails, then ontology is not a definite barrier either.¹⁶ In any case, a moment’s thought makes it clear that we have no choice but to try to ‘know’ how the future might turn out while seeking to shape it. That this has limits does not license surrender as though ignorance was an option and/or everything were pure chance.

JM: Though one might note that neoliberalism and the rise of market logics has been precisely a way to delegate decision-making to abstract information processes and a variety of chance – since the very basis of market logics is that they solve problems as unintended consequences of market activity (coordination, distribution, efficiency and so on). Neoliberalism has been a policy that claims to extend this logic to as many aspects of life as possible.

HP: And yet real people in real markets (and society generally) bear little resemblance to ‘economic agents’. For example, futures-markets presuppose the idea that on average private actors know the future, which is analogical to the standard neoclassical assumptions of ‘perfect information’, ‘rational expectations’ etc. Markets are supposed to aggregate beliefs about the future in an optimal way. Your statement just brings us back to the problem of the power of ideas (ideology) and their role in reality, since market systems are institutional constructs that depend on regulation and are sites of (mainly corporate) power whose reality bears little resemblance to formal theory of markets – if it did then the GFC would not have happened in the way it did. As anyone aware of the reality of financialisation and neoliberalism is aware your market logic point simply confirms the need for well-articulated alternatives and for better ways of shaping the future (which may include better institutional varieties of market as well as other solutions).

Around the time of the two books we have been discussing I phrased the issue of shaping the future in terms of ‘contributing to the re-signification and transformation of practices’ (2008a: 216). As already indicated, over the years I have discussed this more systematically in terms of the ‘reflexivity of anticipations’ (Patomäki 2011a; 2019a). Anticipations can fail in two ways: they may get the principal structures, powers, mechanisms, and processes wrong; or they may fail to harness resources and activities in trying to avoid an undesirable possibility or in trying to realise a desirable one. Given how events have, to some degree, followed scenario A, my *The Political Economy* book failed spectacularly in the latter regard.

¹⁶ Note from Heikki: consider the example of the Delphi method (developed in the Cold War by among others Rescher) as applied in futures studies. Visit: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delphi_method

JM: This does suggest that insofar as futures are influenced by agency for change, then it requires sufficient attention be paid to a set of ideas for them to affect practice in any significant sense...

HP: This is always a problem when highlighting problems and issues and the scope for change. A storm warning is broadcast by radio to ships at sea and most of them listen. A political economist concerned about an approaching financial crisis can at least try to talk to the central bank and politicians or government of the relevant country or countries (as some tried before the GFC, but to no avail, not least because of the contradictory nature of the system). But the complexity and scope of the world system as a whole makes the potential audience much more diffuse and the task many times more demanding. And indeed, hardly anyone was paying attention to some relatively unknown and peripheral scholar publishing a Routledge-book making such a storm warning...

JM: While I take your point, since I know you; to others though, the statement might translate as ‘if only the world did what I said, everything would be fine’... The cry of every self-aggrandising narcissist and sociopath since time began...

HP: I guess suggesting there is a persistent problem of getting an audience for complex ideas might be confused with egocentrism, but my claims were hardly grandiose or self-serving. I only argued for the necessity of change (against neoliberal business as usual) and for a general direction of constructive change (scenarios B and C). The point was not to prescribe any specific political programme. Even a small contribution to collective learning (of some actors) in terms of revealing some of the contradictions of the current global political economy would have been a major achievement. Moreover, like any critical realist I subscribe to fallibilism and epistemological relativism and it should be clear from our discussion that I am happy to point out my own mistakes as part of learning processes and am suggesting no more than that the ideas set out contribute to wider discussions.

JM: If we return to your metaphor, the GFC was a major storm and this is perhaps an appropriate point at which to turn briefly to the GFC. As readers are no doubt aware (and as I noted earlier) its causes were complex and multiple, numerous works have sought to itemise them (see, for example, Lo 2012), and its consequences have been long-lasting.

HP: They have been and I have published a few things on the GFC. In the essay ‘Neoliberalism and the global financial crisis’ I analysed the concept of neoliberalism in some depth and argued that responses to the GFC were likely to leave neoliberalism mainly intact and might even elicit further neoliberalisation (Patomäki 2009a). This was against the expectations of some colleagues in 2008-10.

In a later article in *Globalizations* (‘What next?’) I discussed the generic causes of the crisis in terms of theory and anticipated that ‘after a partial economic recovery, many governments, central banks, media corporations and other authorised bodies will return to their official optimism, grounded in the standard neoclassical theory, even if qualified or modified in some minor ways’ (Patomäki 2010d: 79).

JM: ‘Qualified in some *minor* ways’ is, I guess, highly debatable given that central bank activity since the GFC has deviated far from prior monetary orthodoxy and numerous commentators have pointed out (perhaps most effectively Daniela Gabor) how central banks have gradually extended their range of interventions in banking and finance, most notably by engaging in QE (but more generally by becoming not just lenders of last resort, but also source of liquidity of last resort, market maker of last resort etc.).

HP: Yes, though that is not quite what I meant. I meant more that they could be expected to continue to do whatever was required in a financialised system whose official justifications remain broadly neoclassical.¹⁷ I also expected the underlying super-bubble we mentioned earlier to continue to grow, gradually assembling conditions for an even bigger crash around 2020 or so. Clearly, that crash has yet to happen. Instead the Covid-19 pandemic has led to massive state-led fiscal and monetary countermeasures (the consequences of which are yet to become clear).

In a third essay (an edited book chapter) I examined how the GFC and the election of Barack Obama affected the probability of the scenarios previously set out in *The Political Economy of Global Security*. ‘Exploring

¹⁷ Note from Jamie: financialisation remains problematic in multiple ways. For example, Morgan (2021); Morgan and Nasir (2021).

possible, likely and desirable global futures’ used a kind of intersubjective Bayesian logic (Patomäki 2010c). I argue in the chapter that the GFC was in line with scenario A. The GFC instigated a gradual rise of economic nationalism rather than new transformative movements and Obama’s actions seemed to fit this (variant 1) of scenario A.

JM: The material that was to become these essays though were not your main preoccupation in 2007-2008. You were in Australia I think...

HP: As you note in the introduction to Part 1, between 2007 and 2010 I was Innovation Professor of Globalisation and Global Institutions at RMIT University, Melbourne, and this overlapped with a period as Visiting Professor at University of Wales, Aberystwyth, UK, 2009-2011, where I spent a couple of weeks per year.

‘Big History’ is often associated with David Christian at Macquarie University in Sydney (Christian 2004).¹⁸ I was very interested in learning more about it, though I visited Macquarie only once, in March 2010 for a workshop – this resulted in a special issue (e.g. Christian 2011; Patomäki 2011a). In Melbourne, I was reading a wide variety of things from cosmology, complexity theory and Big History, to the history of science and science fiction (we can return to these themes later). While in Melbourne, I started to develop new projects including the one that has now culminated in *The Three Fields of Global Political Economy* (Patomäki 2022) and another one on global futures that has led to the ‘world statehood’ book that I am finalising at the moment (Patomäki 2023).

JM: Chronologically though your next monograph was *The Great Eurozone Disaster: from crisis to global new deal* (Patomäki 2013a). As readers are no doubt aware, the GFC led initially to widespread calls for major reform of finance (along the lines of ‘this can never happen again’), but this weirdly eventually mutated into acceptance of finance as a vital part of economic recovery (an issue exacerbated in many places by austerity politics and fiscal restrictions, which led to greater presumption of a need for bank-led growth). Despite the Occupy movement etc. we eventually had some minor reform and a process of continued ‘financial deepening’. I discussed this recently with Andrew P. Baker... we suggested there have been six main issue-areas on which reform initiatives have focused:

1. There has been more focus on systemic causes of financial problems and this has resulted in ‘macroprudential’ policy initiatives, albeit the concept predates the GFC.
2. There has been development of ‘resilience’ mechanisms, notably improvements to bank capital levels and leverage ratio levels, drawing on or complying with changes to the ‘Basel Committee’ rules (Basel III (IV)).
3. There has been development of ‘resolution’ strategies i.e. what to do with a failing bank.
4. There has been particular attention paid to ‘too big to fail’ banks (TBTF) and more generally to global ‘systemically important financial institutions’ (G-SIFIs), and these are the subject of greater scrutiny and are held to different standards.
5. There has been growing attention paid to researching and understanding the more complex functions and interconnections of contemporary banking within the ‘universal bank’ model (which combines retail and investment banking).
6. In conjunction with #5 there has been growing attention paid to the evolving nature of the finance system and its parts. For example, how ‘repos’ are used, the functioning and efficacy of derivatives, the growing role of ‘shadow banking’ entities etc. (Baker and Morgan 2021: 172).

Discussion, however, has not led to fundamental change in the purpose and focus of banking and shadow banking remains lightly regulated.

But to return to the context of your book. In the EU, the Commission initially supported major reform of financial regulation and a financial transaction tax. However, these attempts did not prevent the GFC from turning into the eurozone crisis in late 2009 and 2010, lasting until the mid-2010s. Events you were taking note of seemingly...

¹⁸ Note from Heikki: Big History is a multi- and cross-disciplinary project that aims to identify general patterns or trends of change. It integrates studies of the cosmos, Earth, life, and humanity, relies on empirical evidence, and makes causal claims.

HP: Yes, especially as my family and I decided to return from Australia to Europe and did so at the end of 2010. In April 2011 I ran as a Left Alliance candidate in the Finnish parliamentary election and resumed my activism in the ATTAC movement, chairing ATTAC Finland at the time of the eurozone crisis in 2011-12.

At first, I had no plans to write a book on the Eurozone debt crisis. The idea came up at an outdoor board meeting of ATTAC in Helsinki in August 2011. Initially Jussi Ahokas and Ville-Pekka Sorsa (both now established political economy researchers) also took part in outlining the idea but after that I wrote the manuscript alone and quite quickly. I felt the issue was an urgent one and completed the text by January 2012. The Finnish publishers are super-efficient and the first edition was out in the same month (Patomäki 2012c).¹⁹ For a short while, the book became a Finnish bestseller, which probably helped to raise funds for translating the text (this is the only book of mine that was first written in Finnish and then translated into English).

I checked and updated the English translation in the summer of 2012 when I was a Visiting Professor at the Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan (Patomäki 2013a). Zed Books negotiated a contract with a Greek publisher and the Greek translation came out in 2013. The book drew a bit of attention in Brussels and over the next few years, I took part in several meetings and discussions among the European left groups as well as in the European Parliament and Commission. I also became a member (2015-2018) of the Scientific Board of Progressive Economy, an initiative associated with the S&D group in the European Parliament (see e.g. Galbraith, Meyer, and Patomäki 2016).

JM: Given you'd been involved in projects on monetary union in the 1990s I take it you were familiar with the issues and found writing the book relatively easy...

HP: Yes and no. The first couple of chapters revisit some familiar terrain: (post-)Keynesian economic theory, the history of financialisation, and the Minskyan explanation of the GFC. These chapters also add some new elements such as an explanation of why the desire to accumulate wealth may be endless and become decoupled from consumption, drawing on Veblen, Bourdieu, and Galbraith (senior).

The mid-chapters are entirely new: on the contradictions of the EMU (involving reflexive anticipations), trouble with the EU's official reform proposals, and possible and likely futures of the EU. Among other things I criticise the mainstream theory of optimal currency areas...

JM: An issue that many have focused on regarding the Eurozone...

HP: Indeed, optimal currency area theory, pioneered by Robert Mundell, has been used both by EMU advocates and opponents. According to the theory, a given geographic area can form a functioning currency zone only if high factor mobility prevails, so capital, labour, and goods can and do circulate sufficiently freely within the system, if market signals function effectively, and if the production structures within the zone are homogenous enough for business cycles to occur more or less simultaneously within the system, and with the same intensity. Although Mundell himself was an EMU-enthusiast, many critics have pointed out that these conditions have never applied sufficiently to the EMU. For example, movements of labour within the EU are limited and the production structures within the eurozone are not homogeneous (cf. Greece vs. Germany).

My argument was that the central premise of Mundell's theory is wrong. It is the central state's regional, finance, or social policies that to a large degree 'determine' the ideal size of currency areas.

JM: A 'central state' is?

HP: The term comes originally from the US division between a central or federal government and the individual states that are united under that government. The EU of course is not quite the same. In the book, I develop (from various angles) the argument that a monetary union without a political union, including proper fiscal policies, cannot work. I argue that the crisis in the Eurozone 2010-2012 was because the GFC affected all euro-economies simultaneously, a different perspective than the claim that the cause was asymmetrical shocks and non-synchronous business cycles.

¹⁹ Note from Heikki: the third and last edition were published in autumn 2013.

Chapter 5 on the EU's official reform proposals was the only one that required significant revisions in 2012-13 (events were moving fast in the EU). At first sight the EU scenarios I develop in chapter 6 of the book may look unsurprising:

- neoliberalism continues creating problems and aggravating antagonisms;
- a social democratic federal EU develops as a response to these problems;
- the EU becomes part of 'global Keynesianism'.

But I had not developed the vision of social democratic federalism as daringly before and the last two chapters develop two ideas at a global scale. First, a debt arbitration mechanism (something first suggested in *A Possible World*). Second, the concept of global Keynesianism – and here I incorporate some proposals which I had not considered systematically before.²⁰

JM: Just to be clear. By 'Global Keynesianism' you mean...

HP: The term 'global Keynesianism' entered the literature in the early 1980s, and to start with was mainly used by critics of the Brandt Report, published in 1980. Soon after that, advocates of the approach also adopted the term.

In a nutshell, Global Keynesianism (GK) is an approach that frames questions of public economic policy and politics more generally on the world economic scale. One can also say that it aims to regulate global interdependencies in such a way as to produce stable and high levels of growth, employment, and welfare for everyone and everywhere, simultaneously. Global Keynesianism also aims to be an ecologically responsible doctrine: governing interdependence could not otherwise be sustainable.

I admit that the term 'global Keynesianism' is a tricky one and I have been struggling with it. In some ways it captures the orientation of some of the needed immediate reforms, but it is politically clumsy and generates all kinds of (often negative) connotations – including in terms of not being far-reaching or radical enough, while it can also be criticized for being, under the current circumstances, 'utopian'.

JM: Before moving on it is probably worth mentioning that the book (written in 2012) also discusses the possibility of the partial disintegration of the EU, which might bring into question the basic founding principles of the EU. Given the focus of the book though, you had Greek exit (Grexit) rather than Brexit in mind.

HP: Brexit though was the subject of the special forums of *Globalizations* we edited together (Morgan and Patomäki 2017a, 2017b, 2018). Both these and the previous book make clear that the 'underlying issues of inequality and lack of democratic representation have not simply disappeared, and global tendencies for growth to occur within unstable processes of financialisation have not been addressed' (Patomäki 2017b: 800).

JM: These were also the themes of your next monograph in English, namely *Disintegrative Tendencies in Global Political Economy* (Patomäki 2018a).

HP: This is a short book that covers Brexit, EuroMaidan and the war in Eastern Ukraine, and the rise of Donald Trump.²¹

JM: EuroMaidan? The demonstrations in Independence Square in Kyiv beginning November 2013, which protested the then government's decision not to sign a cooperation agreement with the EU and instead seek closer ties with Russia (and which led to the collapse of the Yanukovich's administration)?

HP: That's right. In *The Political Economy of Global Security*, I had written just in passing that the global dialectic of control may also take rather different forms from what the reformists might wish and that counterhegemonic movements may assume xenophobic, fascist or fundamentalist forms, thus ultimately precipitating a global catastrophe. In the new book, these themes come to the fore... We'll come back to this in more detail I think, but

²⁰ Note from Heikki: as well as new ideas that emerged in the course of writing book, e.g. transnational trade union solidarity and its potential role in sustaining aggregate global demand and labour's share of incomes (e.g. European and Chinese workers).

²¹ Note from Jamie: see also Gills, Morgan and Patomäki (2019).

let me first say just a couple of words about the three books that I meanwhile published in Finnish. They emerged from practical-political activities, but all of them also developed some ideas further.

The book ‘Future politics’ subtitled ‘How to increase freedom and act otherwise’ (Patomäki 2013c), was a series of short essays on the theme of anticipating things to come: local, European, global and cosmic. In the first part there is also a chapter called ‘Neoclassical economics: the ideology of our time’. This was in part a response to many quarrels and struggles with economists, at my university, as well as nationally and globally.

The next book was ‘The future of Finnish economic policy: from theory to practice’ (Patomäki 2015c). The book was more about economic theory and the EU than about Finnish policy as such, though it was motivated by the spring 2015 parliamentary election where I stood as a candidate of the Left Alliance. Still, it was perceived as stepping on the turf of economists and a neoliberal think tank, Libera, organised a strenuous campaign against me and the book through Twitter and blogging, which culminated in a televised debate between myself and two neoliberal economists. The debate went well, but for years after I was continually trolled by economists on Twitter. Throughout those years, economists have blocked attempts to develop political economy within my university and outside it as members of boards of organisations that decide upon external funding.

JM: Economists don’t have a particularly good reputation for respecting alternative points of view and engaging in free and fair debate – issues of imperialism and disciplinary boundaries and so forth.

HP: It probably doesn’t translate well but some have acted more like bloodthirsty wolves than open-minded academics. And they are not alone in this. At the time the media were siding so strongly with the official neoliberal austerity position on the EU that I had serious difficulties in convincing even the Left Alliance about the merits of an alternative – even though I was on the party’s board and even though the idea of the book first emerged in the economic policy committee of the party. The tendency to treat the prevailing situation (its transnational processes and pressures) as insurmountable has, if anything, increased my suspicion about national political parties and reinforced my belief that the future lies in the idea of a European or world political party (Patomäki 2011c, 2019f).

JM: And the third Finnish book?

HP: This was a co-authored book whose title translates as ‘a new university law 2020’ (Heinonen et.al. 2016). The book was yet another attempt (following various campaigns and the earlier ‘University Inc.’, Patomäki 2005b) to change the neoliberal course of university development in a small ‘glocality’ – in a place where local and global processes mix. We drafted a proposal for a new law constituting a democratic and autonomous university in expectation of the 2019 parliamentary elections.

As anticipated, in 2019 the social democrats in Finland formed a government that included Greens and the Left Alliance – the three parties that had indicated some support for our proposal. This resulted in a committee assessing the need to revisit the 2009 university law that had partially privatised Finnish universities and abolished university democracy. The committee surveyed a large number of academics and despite widespread criticism of the current system (and need for an alternative) they concluded that no change was needed. The university system has been going from bad to worse in Finland and as you know similar things have happened in the UK and across the world (see ‘Repurposing the university in the 21st century’, Patomäki 2019e).

So, by the time I started to work on our Brexit forums and then on *Disintegrative Tendencies in Global Political Economy*, I had gone through a series of negative experiences locally that seemed to demonstrate the power of prevailing tendencies in the European and global political economy.

JM: It seems that the tone of our discussion is becoming increasingly gloomy...

HP: Which I would suggest simply indicates we are living through scenario A...

JM: Moving on, you suggested earlier that the book *Disintegrative Tendencies in Global Political Economy* (Patomäki 2018a) picks up a passing comment from the previous book *The Political Economy of Global Security*...

HP: It’s probably more accurate to say the book is a follow-up work, a kind of ‘what’s the situation ten years later?’. The book not only develops explanations of Brexit, Trump and the Ukrainian war but also tries to give a generalised

account of what's going on in the world, including in East Asia and the global south. At the same time, the concluding chapter is about the rational tendential directionality of world history.

JM: You in particular hold that developments can be regressive and processes of 'collective learning' (a term you used earlier) can be pathological... A terminology that many might find odd...

HP: This can be clarified with a simple example. A child or a young adult can learn at an institution of education what the rule of law means. That's individual learning. The Trial of Louis XVI during the French Revolution constituted a step in collective learning. The trial meant a break with mythological thought, a better differentiation of nature and culture, and the realisation citizens are autonomous and can revise their own rules and laws. The legal and political practices and institutions were organised accordingly (despite an attempt at a restoration of the old order, collective learning continued and finally France became an established republic in 1870).

Pathological learning is a learning process that will reduce rather than increase the future learning capacity of a person or organisation. Consider, for example, a person who learns 'post-truth' practices and lives in a closed world of like-minded people in social media; or a state that curtails freedom of speech and democratic rights.

To grasp how regressive and pathological things can be one need only think of the authoritarian nationalist-populist movements that have shaped politics across the world (consider the similarities between United Russia, Fidesz in Hungary, Bharatiya Janata Party in India, the British Conservative Party and US Republicans).

JM: And the book?

HP: I try to illuminate the causes of the currently prevailing tendencies towards disintegration, antagonism and – ultimately – war, and try to show how these developments are embedded in deeper processes of human (un)learning. As such, this is an elaboration or update of my previous scenario A.

The book provides a warning regarding the increasingly likely possibility of a military disaster, but its central objective is within the current world-historical conjuncture to argue for 'holoreflexivity' and enlightened alternatives.

JM: You are a fount of neologisms. Holoreflexivity?

HP: Holoreflexivity denotes the capacity to reflect upon the conditions of one's being, agency, and actions, and also to shape the relevant planetary conditions. Thus, holoreflexivity involves a comprehension of the mechanisms, structures, and processes of the whole. As a form of understanding, 'it is global in that it encompasses all social groupings, communities cultures and civilisations, and planetary in that it comprises the totality of relationships between the human species and the rest of the biosphere' (Camilleri and Falk 2009: 537).

JM: This seems to presuppose quite a few things about the way the world is. If you were to place this concept and your intent in terms of critical realism, where would you place it? Does it for example, have some link to critical ethical naturalism?

HP: I don't think it is a good idea to seek the ground of ethics or morality in 'nature',

JM: So you don't think your state of mind may be reflected in your body and that your emotions may be a commentary on your state of mind or that there is a distinction between what allows something to flourish and what does not? That would put you at odds with quite a few critical realists.

HP: My criticism of 'naturalism' has nothing to do with the fact that our minds are embodied. Rather, I don't think it is a good idea to 'naturalise' human learning and reasoning (those attempts remind me of natural law theories that systematically confuse god, nature and reason). Reflective consciousness, agency and society cannot be completely explained in terms of or reduced to biological realities, so we have emergence beyond nature (Patomäki 2020a); and what is good cannot be reduced to our bodily being or flourishing or anything of that sort (for example, think about Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs, which forms a background to some of my analyses and includes things such as belonging, love, esteem and self-actualisation).

While the concept of holoreflexivity is closely related to the emancipatory axiology of critical realism and especially dialectical critical realism, which we discussed in Part 1, it is important to stress that truth is a value, it is not ‘naturalistic’. Bhaskar doesn’t use the term holoreflexivity as such, but the *concept* – and also that of Big History²² – are very much part of the overall argument in *Dialectic* and *Plato Etc.* (Bhaskar 1993, 1994). We contemporary humans are globally interconnected geo-historical products, who are reflexively monitoring their activities and the consequences of those activities (Bhaskar 1994: 79). In both books Roy connects transformative praxis and reflexivity and maintains that social science must be self-reflexive, critical and totalising.

Totalisation means, among other things, that we must understand that the transformational historical process is ultimately ‘grounded in our biological being and the geo-historical ecology of our globe’ (Bhaskar 1993: 207). Roy also writes that ‘the emergence of a cosmopolitan sensibility [...] may be an indispensable ratchet in the self-transformative process of the human species in the direction of a more fully human, and at least longer[-lasting], and perhaps more emancipated, being’ (Bhaskar 1993: 150).

Hence I would suggest the concept of holoreflexivity is part of dialectical critical realism.

JM: Changing tack slightly, your account of Brexit in the book is in the context of the claim that ‘a historically contingent and possibly temporary convergence of social forces [that] explains the overall shift towards renationalization of politics in the 2010s’ (Patomäki 2018a: 32). What would you say if I suggested you have two different positions on structural-systemic significance and contingency? In some of your work historically cumulative processes heavily weight outcomes towards some ends (scenario A, for example), whereas in others you highlight the degree to which things can readily be otherwise...

HP: Many aspects of the future are characterised by uncertainty in the Keynesian sense and there is no denying the possibility of inconsistencies in my analysis, but the difficulty lies also in the properties of processes. For example, no self-reinforcing process can continue forever, yet it is hard to specify the precise turning point. To put it dialectically, the accumulation of relatively small (‘quantitative’) changes in specific areas can lead to ruptures and sudden transformations (‘qualitative changes’) in others, as issues and processes are linked. After reaching a critical point, changes favouring an alternative direction can in turn become mutually (self-)reinforcing.

Scenario A merely implies that given the dominance of particular contingent historical structures, powers, mechanisms and consequent tendencies, history exhibits a tendential directionality toward multiple interconnected crises and a global military catastrophe. This is not the *rational* tendential direction of history (in the sense of a quasi-Hegelian unfolding of reason and collective learning) and there are also countertendencies, but currently the disintegrative tendencies prevail – to stress, the problem is that they can be self-reinforcing.

JM: OK let’s pick up another aspect of the book, in chapter 5 you use Thomas Piketty’s (2014) simple expression $r > g$ (where r is the average annual rate of return on capital to asset holders and g is annual economic growth). You suggest that since about 1980, $r > g$ has held, and you argue that this relation and its consequences encapsulate many of the open-systemic processes that have resulted in the current disintegrative tendencies in global political economy. As you know, while there is a lot of sympathy for Piketty’s work on income and wealth inequality, Piketty’s three laws and especially $r > g$ have attracted a lot of criticism, both empirical and conceptual (e.g. Fullbrook and Morgan 2014; Morgan 2015). With that in mind, does it make sense to organise an argument for world historical processes around a simple mathematical inequality based on data aggregations?

HP: Well, I use it only as an organising scheme, as such its explanatory power is limited to indicating that if $r > g$ pertains then wealth tends to concentrate in fewer hands. Moreover, the meaning of both ‘variables’ is ambiguous (Piketty’s ‘capital’ is in fact wealth and it may not be possible to calculate r for most historical periods, while GDP and its growth have also been subjected to a lot of plausible conceptual criticism).

Yet we know that GDP growth-rates have declined especially in the OECD world; that financialisation has meant inflation of financial assets and deflation elsewhere (these should be read as statements about tendencies), and that as also documented by Piketty, both income inequalities and the wealth/income ratio started to rise in the

²² Note from Heikki: The following passage from the *Dialectic* summarises the basic idea of Big History: ‘[...] the biological history of the human species, inserted into the global history of species and genera, itself inserted into the geophysical history of the solar system (and ultimately the universe)’ (Bhaskar 1993: 145).

1970s and 1980s and this rise has continued (Piketty 2014: 22–7). Some claim that the level of inequalities has stabilised during the past two decades, but that’s controversial and context-bound.

JM: Jamie Galbraith, for example, suggests some of the data is flawed (and change in tax data collection accounts for some of the change in the US) and Dean Baker argues that even aggregating for a country misses the granularity of the sectors that are responsible for most of the change and thus also obfuscates the areas at which effective regulation might be targeted (retail, for example, in the US)...

HP: Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* reached number one on *The New York Times* bestselling hardcover nonfiction list in spring 2014. Piketty was then in his mid-40s and his sudden stardom generated an industry of criticism, not least by those who had spent their careers in studying inequality by using different data and methods – often using ones that Piketty criticised in his book. In Part 1 we discussed the rise of Alex Wendt in IR, and sociologically speaking there are parallels between the two cases in terms of how the scholarly community has responded.

JM: Most of the critiques I’ve read have been constructive and mainly well justified – rather than obviously acts of envy...(for summary see Morgan 2020: 120-121).

HP: You’re right, and it would be fallacious to reduce arguments to motives, yet the scale and composition (much of it from heterodoxy) of the critical industry is unprecedented and calls for an explanation. Anyhow, Piketty and his team rely on tax-records, whereas Galbraith and his team are more confident about household surveys and payrolls (e.g Galbraith 2018). Despite the heat of the debate, one can see a lot of convergence in the conclusions of both teams (whether inequalities have continued to rise in many or most countries since 2000 seems to be the main issue). In addition, it is not difficult to see complementarity in the approaches as all ‘data’ is incomplete and at best indicative of the underlying complex real processes.

Baker’s idea of targeting inequalities through sector-based regulation does not sound brilliant to me, as the relevant power-relations are much wider. Piketty’s proposals for tackling tax havens and establishing a global wealth tax are more to the point.

JM: Are they? Baker analysis of inequality generating mechanisms seems pertinent...

HP: True, Baker’s analysis is insightful and some of his proposals converge with Piketty’s (a tax on the financial sector, tackling the problem of tax havens), but it seems to me that Baker does not place great weight on the way that trade unions, intellectual property rights etc are also subject to glocal processes involving global exit options, competition, regulation and meta-governance (steering of states’ policies). I would suggest his analysis is too US-centric – this is typical of methodological nationalism.

I think Piketty is also right in thinking that r and g are related. In chapter 5, I summarise some of the interconnections, for example, inequality reduces consumer demand, which has multiplier effects on GDP. The process of financialisation has enabled the rich to translate their higher propensity to save into an increasing share of aggregate wealth, but it has also contributed to a decline in fixed real investment in many places, and at the same time increased instability in the global economy. And so on.

There is no space here to explain all these interconnections but connections and related trends occur in open systems with many tendencies and mechanisms, and their effects can be delayed, overlapping, mutually reinforcing or contradictory. So these interconnections should not be taken as strict regularities, not even as time-space bound ‘stylised facts’ though this latter concept maybe all we have to work with given the absence of any attempt to use claims about these connections to build a formal-mathematical model.²³

JM: The counterargument is surely that your response can be used to justify something that is conceptually erroneous on the basis that reality is non-regular. Yet empirical variation around a tendency cannot make a set of concepts or measurements coherent if they are not... A point Yanis Varoufakis made regarding Piketty’s initial

²³ Note from Heikki: in *Economics and Reality* Lawson criticises the use of the term ‘stylised fact’ for strategic reasons, because it encourages the practice of mathematical modelling. In formal modelling, a supposed ‘stylised fact’ is intended to express a partial regularity, which is then in effect reformulated as a strict one, as a ‘law’, possibly only to facilitate model tractability, or some such.

work and it is worth noting that in Piketty's later work he starts to shift away from some of the way the original book, *Capital in the Twenty First Century*, is structured.

HP: I agree with Varoufakis that Piketty (2014) often relies on several standard ideas of neoclassical economics, though he also employs alternative ideas, which creates tensions. Yet as Piketty (2017: 548) himself later acknowledges, simple equations based on abstract concepts such as r and g can sometimes be useful if they are investigated in relation to changing multidimensional social and historical constructions.

JM: Still, (as many noted at the time) behind the simple equations sits a model using neoclassical tenets, so you are in danger here of defending what you otherwise argue is indefensible...

HP: I would emphasise that I am separating out $r > g$ from his original approach to fundamental identities and laws (and any claim about insight into the deep structure of capitalism he originally may have made). Piketty's later work widens the historical scope of comparisons and explanations a lot and in that regard it is a very welcome improvement on the earlier work.

The main point is that $r > g$ is not an empirical regularity (for three decades the inequality was rather the other way around, $g > r$). Moreover, we do not need to have precise numbers for r and g . What suffices is that we have evidence (as precise as the subject matter permits) grounding our self-reflexive qualitative judgement that since about 1980:

1. the inequality $r > g$ has prevailed,
2. we have some knowledge about the complex causal and constitutive processes that have generated this situation,
3. $r > g$ has consequences.

JM: Moving on, chapter 3 of *Disintegrative Tendencies* is titled 'EU, Russia and the conflict in Ukraine'. You use a global political economy framework to analyse the conflict in Ukraine (beginning in 2013-14)... There's a lot to this and some of your arguments are likely to appear controversial...

HP: Ukraine is not only the topic of chapter 3 but also a short dialogical book I have written with a friend and colleague Tuomas Forsberg (Tuomas was mentioned in Part 1). The joint book is titled *Debating the War in Ukraine: Counterfactual Histories and Possible Futures* (Forsberg and Patomäki 2022). But let me start with the argument of chapter 3, written in 2017.

The Ukrainian conflict has been entangled with NATO and EU expansion eastwards and with Russia and Ukraine's positioning in the world economy. A key point of chapter 3 is that the consequences of the GFC and the Euro crisis heightened existential insecurities in and caused an acute financial crisis for Ukraine. These developments provided the politico-economic context for the EuroMaidan demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine we briefly mentioned previously. The EU had offered a relatively small loan, with conditions like those imposed by the Troika on Euro crisis countries. Criticism of those conditions fed into East-West and other divides in Ukraine.

As noted, the EuroMaidan protests started in November 2013, when Ukrainian president Yanukovich began to reconsider a negotiated EU association agreement, opting instead for closer Russian ties and bigger Russian loans with fewer conditions. Yanukovich fled to Russia or was ousted, a matter of interpretation, given he was removed from office by parliament, and this probably violated the then constitution. This triggered Russia to hastily make Crimea a part of the Russian federation, irrespective of international law, arguing that the unilateral Kosovo declaration of independence in 2008 set a precedent.

Concurrently, pro-Russian movements, involving Russian citizens, were protesting against Kyiv in the Eastern and Southern parts of Ukraine. The precise roles of popular movements, provoked by Kyiv's anti-Russian language policies and neoliberal economic policies, and Russia itself, remain disputed. In the East, the situation soon escalated into an armed conflict between separatist militia supported by Russia, at times led by Russians, and the new Ukrainian government. The war in Donbas started in April 2014.

JM: There is somewhat more nuance here in how you are attributing cause and responsibility to the eventual conflict than one usually reads. In times of war we are invited to pick sides and adopt a Manichean perspective. Still, any

argument that seems to justify an authoritarian regime invading another country and committing war crimes seems awkward at best... Irrespective of any claim that there is a whole set of prior processes and different interpretations...

HP: Well, I reject 'seems to justify'. I am a peace researcher and think that modern war is hell and that military invasions tend to be costly and counterproductive, whatever their aims may be (just consider Afghanistan or Iraq). It is also clear that the unfortunate and short-sighted Russian invasion violates international law and has caused an enormous amount of suffering and turmoil, for the directly warring sides, for Europe, even the US and the world. It has also triggered a round of militarisation and, more generally, further regressive learning, especially in the Western part of the world.

As critical realists we should appreciate the importance of nuance, context and processes. For example, just consider this invasion as analogical to an act of violent crime (recalling that almost all analogies are partial). Lack of nuance, context and process implies atomism. For those taking individuals as atoms or their inner structures as given, some people just are liable to becoming criminals. To punish them and deter others from committing similar crimes, we need to have an aggressively punitive legal system.

A critical realist and political economist can respond in many ways stressing context and process, for example by simply pointing out that the rates of imprisonment tend to be highest in countries that have gone farthest in adopting neoliberal economic and social policies (notably the US and UK), in contrast to those countries where social democratic institutions remain to some significant degree still in place.

JM: So, what you are suggesting then is that the development of post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine was intertwined with wider political economy and ideological currents in global political economy?

HP: I am suggesting that the prevailing Manicheism that you mentioned is essentially linked to free market thinking, but not only that. The dominant market thinking has also played a major role in the processes of formation of countries such as Russia and Ukraine. To use categories of dialectical critical realism (which I employ tacitly in 2018: ch 3 and Forsberg and Patomäki 2022), think about Russia and Ukraine as geo-historical processes-in-product(-in-process). Following the 'shock therapy' of the early 1990s, Piketty's inequality $r > g$ became a prevailing reality in many parts of the former Soviet area in just a few years. In the 1990s, Russia and other countries such as Ukraine faced negative growth and sharply rising inequality and poverty (Russia also went through two periods of hyperinflation). Chaotic privatisation ensured the concentration of wealth.

Moreover, the rise of global financial markets and a new wave of financialization since the 1970s made it possible for those oligarchs who became rich in the 1990s (and those who have done so subsequently) to buy and sell existing assets in the hope of quick profits; tap into large financial flows and move funds to offshore centres and tax havens, including, for example, Geneva or the City of London; and to invest in housing markets around the world. They have received the same rate of return r on their assets as investors and elites in other parts of the world. This has benefited not only oligarchs but also financial centres and tax havens, while at the same time weakening local and national economic developments.

All this paved the way for a quest for 'strong leaders', who can resort to some authoritarian means when necessary to overcome the chaos of the 1990s, restore the rule of law (or at least diminish the level of crime), assume some control over oligarchs and resume economic growth.

JM: And presumably, if you are arguing that the development of post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine has been intertwined with wider political economy and ideological currents in global political economy, so has that of the US, EU etc.?

HP: The European integration project is not simply reducible to political economy, but it is through political economy dynamics that the EC/EU project has become intertwined with specific world-historical developments in the last four decades. The constitutive inner programme of the EU is premised on two (neo)liberal ideas:

1. furthering prosperity and growth through free trade, free markets and private-sector-led growth;
2. promoting formal liberal democracy and liberal human rights within states.

Both are taken as recipes for peace and ‘stability’. Similar ideas have also been the basis of US and NATO external policies and EU and NATO expansion.

JM: When people make these kinds of broader historical arguments for emotive current events they typically acquire the label of apologist or ‘useful idiot’. How would you respond to that?

HP: That we should be suspicious of the efficacy of a Manichean worldview. We should not lose our critical faculties or reason under duress. In a polarised black-and-white situation, moral reasoning and cognitive processing tend to regress. In a simplified Old Testament world God punishes the wicked and a chosen people prevail against evil. The Old Testament includes many stories along these lines where ‘God is on our side’. For example: ‘when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua approached him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?”.’

Even in the somewhat less violent and mythic context of contemporary domestic law, anyone advocating, say, social democratic social policies or arguing that imprisonment violates the democratic principle of political equality can be framed as an ‘apologist’ for criminals or a ‘useful idiot’ who only serves to support the world of crime. That’s basically an *ad hominem* fallacy involving a further fallacy of circular reasoning.

JM: OK, let me put the point slightly differently. What would you say if I suggested Russia was an aggressor and that the invasion of Ukraine is not a necessary outcome of prior processes in Russia or elsewhere... How would you respond to questions of moral agency and responsibility?

HP: Structures or prior processes never fully determine any particular action. The fact that action involves the possibility of doing otherwise is also the basis of ethical, legal and political responsibility. We can analyse the responsibility of actors in different situations, although it requires answers to questions concerning (1) the relationship between individual and collective responsibility, (2) what the applicable moral and legal rules may be, and so on. Russia’s invasion violates international law (in particular the UN Charter, but also laws of war etc), as did the unilateral US-UK invasion of Iraq in 2003, and there are other examples. Questions of responsibility are important, but like crime, war is not only a legal issue – and there are major differences between domestic and international law, which pose major obstacles to contemporary attempts to tackle wars legalistically.

For an adequate understanding and explanation, prior processes matter. The 1990s was particularly important. In Russia, the politico-economic effects and failure of, for example, ‘shock therapy’ (the sudden and massive transition in economic system in Russia and parts of Eastern Europe) led to reassessments and revisions, as did the tendency of the US and certain EU members – especially Britain – to use military force to impose their preferred world order model, often in apparent contravention of international law.

Subsequently the Putin regime has adopted ‘Eurasian’ thinking which includes international pluralism (not to be confused with pluralism within the state) articulated in terms of theories and practices of power-balancing, emphasizing the importance of regions and their special characteristics (which can also amount to ‘spheres of interest’, a point which I debate with Tuomas in the dialogical 2022 book, see below).

JM: ‘Spheres of interest’ (or influence) is a phrase that, to coin another phrase, opens a whole new can of worms, but let’s put that aside. In any case, yours is not a point of view likely to make you popular in the middle of a major war in Europe, nor is it likely to be entirely clear to a reader how it links to both your long-term work on theory and your underlying critical realist position...

HP: It links to both in a very clear way. Truth is more important than popularity. The aim of critical (realist) peace research is emancipation from unnecessary, unneeded and unwanted violence (Patomäki 2001). This involves an explanatory critique of various forms of reification and mystification, especially so when they contribute to enemy construction in contexts of potentially violent conflicts. This is often a mutual process. Through explanatory critique, we arrive at ideology critique.

Ideologies include at least some false beliefs and many false beliefs involve false universalisations: something particular is represented as universally valid (e.g. a historical perspective or interpretation, identity,

interest, commitment, a conception of justice).²⁴ False beliefs tend to have unintended consequences. For instance, the EU continues to promote particular contestable ideas as universal, even though these have attenuated growth and spawned disintegrative tendencies within the EU itself. We have already discussed in Part 1 how ideas such as the ‘efficient markets’ hypothesis can function as an ideology.

Similarly, Russian nationalism under the rubric of ‘united Russia’ or ‘Eurasianism’ and securitisation of issues can serve to maintain huge socio-economic disparities and hierarchical and repressive political rule. Dominant ideologies depending on their contents and context can contribute to manifold unnecessary, unneeded and unwanted outcomes such as economic stagnation or crises, high or rising inequalities, deep or steepening hierarchies or an (expanding) asymmetric rule.

However, in this particular international context (remember scenario A) the most important outcome is the tragedy of conflict-escalation leading to war.

JM: Given you have over the years worked in peace studies and given the various contextualising points regarding complex causation, explanation, and your motives you’ve given, I take it this is going somewhere... you’re not just suggesting ‘the world is ***ked and it’s everyone’s fault’...

HP: We are back to the ideas discussed in Part 1. Democracy is a process whereby conflicts are resolved by peaceful means, and whereby different understandings and purposes are accepted and even cultivated. This points toward a pluralist security community and global democracy as a way to tackle the concerns of pluralists.

I understand that these sound like abstract long-term goals – and they are, particularly under the circumstances where we find ourselves in the 2020s – but meanwhile, for instance, the EU should cultivate its capacity to recognize and accept ethical, political and economic differences, including those concerning the conditions of socio-economic development and progress.

Moreover, the territorial expansion of the US/NATO and the EU are liable to geopolitisation, and thus it would be much more advisable to focus on building better common institutions regionally and globally. Common institutions could also clarify and strengthen international – and later cosmopolitan – law.

JM: You’re right all that does sound abstract, but also lacking in a feasible approach given ‘where we are’... What say, differentiates your position from Henry Kissinger’s (give Putin some of what he wants irrespective of what Ukrainians want)?

HP: Kissinger is wrong in his power-political reasoning. I’ve written a piece with Tapio Kanninen in *Le Monde Diplomatique* that is due out early January 2023. We argue any possible peace deal should be acceptable both to Ukraine and Russia, meaning that it should bring more perceived benefits than losses to both (though every peace deal is a compromise and typically hard to swallow). While some legitimate security and other interests of Russia must be recognised, there should be assurances that the Russian invasion is not rewarded and that it does not lead to the destabilisation of the international system as a whole.

Kanninen and I propose that the contested territories in Eastern Ukraine be demilitarised and taken temporarily under the auspices of the UN. ‘The UN Transitional Administration of Eastern Ukraine’ would also have the task of assisting in negotiating and drafting a new legal basis for the status of the contested regions and conducting regular elections, as well as a possible referendum about the fate of those regions in the future.

It goes without saying that this kind of peace agreement would be only a small step in the long march toward a more sustainable and desirable future.

JM: And your thinking on this presumably accords with your position in *Debating the War in Ukraine* (Forsberg and Patomäki 2022)?

HP: Of course, although there is so much more in the book. The book was a result of decades of discussion and debate regarding Russia, EU, and NATO. On the day that Russia attacked Ukraine (24th February 2022), Tuomas and I were swimming at the gym, as we do now and then. We discussed the war and, above all, whether it could have been avoided and how. Metatheoretically Tuomas too is committed to a version of critical realism, or at least

²⁴ Note from Heikki: from this perspective, the standard (post-)Keynesian criticism of the fallacy of composition can also be taken to be a form of ideology-critique.

to a combination of realist constructivism and pragmatism, but in terms of the war he is closer to Western mainstream interpretations than I am.

The story of the book is told in the Preface. Here, let me just say that we decided to try the dialogue format. The history of this format precedes Plato's Socratic dialogues and subsequently several well-known 'dialogues' have been written by a single author, such as Berkeley or Hume in philosophy, and Johan Galtung in the social sciences. So we are not the first to employ this device in modern social science, but the format remains rather rare, especially as ours is a dialogue between two real scholars.²⁵

JM: And if you were to summarise...

HP: Through dialogue, we explore some of the key nodal points of contemporary history from 1990 onwards and consider future possibilities from a broad world-historical perspective. In the process, we tackle all the key debates and issues regarding Ukraine and the conflict between Russia and the West (e.g. NATO expansion), citing and discussing key theorists, identifying counterfactual possibilities, and debating for example, the future of nuclear weapons. Moreover, we have several rounds of debate about 'whataboutism' and double standards, the dangers of circular reasoning, methodological nationalism vs. globalism, the role of political economy, certainty-of-hindsight bias, evaluative language, and tasks of scholarship in the context of a violent conflict or war.

Given that the book will be out by the time this is in print, and in the interest of brevity, I'll just mention two novelties here. Tuomas and I agree on a counterfactual according to which the implementation of the Minsk II agreement of 2015 could have prevented the war, but disagree about what that would have entailed for Ukraine. This discussion may be of interest to many.

As a peace researcher (Patomäki 2001), I hope the book makes a small theoretical contribution in terms of showing how the antagonisation and radicalisation of interpretations are part of conflict dynamics. These kinds of dynamics are, I might add, also part of the process of taking the world closer to a global military catastrophe, following scenario A – and these dynamics are not confined to Russia, but also apply to US-China relations etc.

JM: Let's move on to your *The Three Fields of Global Political Economy* (Patomäki 2022).

HP: I started to work on the idea for this book in Melbourne, around 2009-10 and wrote a long related essay. I spent most of my extended leave from Helsinki from 2006 to 2010, in Melbourne. As a research professor, I had time to read a wide range of things and improve my understanding of global political economy and security processes. Apart from reading Big History and material on futures studies (taking in science fiction), I revived an old interest in the history of science, theoretical physics and cosmology, even biology.

We've already briefly discussed my 'After Critical Realism?' essay, but one of the main points I made was that realists often overemphasise the concept of 'mechanism': '[M]any realist concepts are equally relevant, including action, force, power, causation, movement, process, relation, structure, system, field, (self)production, function, reason and purpose and epistemological concepts such as analogue, metaphor, model, narrative and scenario, just to mention a few' (Patomäki 2010a: 67n2). In the essay I focus especially on the concept of field – and this is related to the discussion on causation we had in Part 1.

I argue that 'Einstein's general relativity explained gravitation more in line with a mixture of Aristotle's categories of material and formal causes, whereby mass and energy (parts) form the relevant spacetime fields (the whole) and thereby constitute the natural lines of non-forced movements of bodies' (Patomäki 2010a: 72).

In any case, aware also of Pierre Bourdieu's work, I started to think that perhaps the concept of the field could be applied to political economy – and on a global scale...

JM: And why the gap of more than ten years between your original 'long essay' and the book?

HP: The original essay was 15,000 words, which severely limited potential outlets. I submitted it to *International Organisation*, the leading international political economy journal in North America. Under review it was returned twice with a revise and resubmit decision. The editors subsequently introduced a new (fourth) reviewer, who shot it down, among other things on the basis that 'it contains too much European philosophical and social theoretical

²⁵ Note from Heikki: this is not, however, the first time I have tried the dialogue format, see Guzzini, Patomäki and Walker (1995); Held and Patomäki (2006); Brincat and Patomäki (forthcoming).

jargon'. Some of the comments from the referees and colleagues – including you and Milja Kurki – indicated, however, that to develop the argument properly, it would need to get longer not shorter. In other words, the text should be enlarged and become a book.

As we've already discussed, my return to Helsinki increased my teaching and administrative burden and I became involved in numerous projects, many of which were more immediate. On the plus side, these experiences have served to reinforce the idea – or perhaps more accurately, the hypothesis – that the concept of the field could be relevant for understanding the shape of and turns in world history.

JM: You've namechecked Bourdieu but also physics and cosmology and I guess, being who you are, you try put these to innovative use...

HP: *Three Fields* is an attempt to enlarge and generalise the realist concept of causation. We discussed INUS-conditions in Part 1 and this form of analysis is suitable for many practical explanations in open systems. The problem, however, with that form of explanation is twofold. First, it makes it difficult to analyse systematically and theoretically how the structure of a field or the organisation of an environment may be the cause of what happens within it.

JM: Just to be clear then, by 'field' you mean a structured or organised environment?

HP: Both structure and organisation have been used interchangeably by some theorists when discussing fields, but let me try to put this differently. In a social field, an 'intrinsic' condition is not necessarily an internal state of an individual or collective actor (organisation) or inside its physical envelope, whatever that may be taken to mean. The parts form a whole that extends in time and space, while the organising relational structure of the whole shapes the parts and their behaviour, and this is a dynamic process through which the parts and wholes form and change. In the relational worlds of complex human societies, entities are not only temporal but also constitutively dependent on their geohistorical processes of formation.

JM: Let me try again since what you've done here is, in the first sentence, stated what a social field is not (solely or necessarily – an internal state of some collective), and then in a following pair of sentences, you've listed some aspects of a whole without a connecting reference to the term 'social field', which would allow a reader to know with clarity what you mean by this whole... What *is* a social field?

HP: It is a concept that aims at facilitating our understanding of the dynamics of the whole. INUS-explanations focus on particular outcomes and their causes in concrete context. The concept of social field – a partial analogy to a variety of physical fields – focusses on generative historic contexts and enables examination of how structures and organisations evolve through the dynamics of the whole. One could perhaps say that this is a way to get close to what retrodiction is in theoretical sciences though obviously the historicity, complexity and heterogeneity of generative social contexts imposes limits on the project.

Fields consist of powers (potentials) and tendencies and they manifest characteristic properties and produce outcomes. The focus is not only on material and efficient causes, but also on formal and final causes, that is, ideas, designs and purposes constitutive of inner codes. The concept of the field enables distance taking and unification of constitution and causation through various concepts of cause. The inner codes of the field (prevailing ideas and theories) have causal effects through agency, economic activity, and their regulatory-institutional implications, and are co-responsible for uneven growth and cyclical changes and various other things both within countries and in the global political economy as a whole, while the fields also intra- and interact.

JM: And you draw on Bourdieu to...

HP: The concept of *habitus* introduced by Bourdieu is especially useful to understand and theorise the dynamics involved in fields. A field constitutes and bends social space-time and thus defines the relatively effortless or obvious direction of social activities in pursuit of the desirable values and things characteristic of that field. The *habitus* of embodied actors, which is acquired through learning, adopts and accommodates itself selectively to a dynamic field, while it is also a generative dynamic structure that can occasionally shape or even transform field(s).

The dynamics work through tensions, conflicts and learning within fields as well as through intra- and interactions between the fields.

JM: So, you are introducing the term in order to make better sense of some forms of causation?

Just to be clear, there is, for example, a big difference between using a concept of a social field metaphorically, to *imagine* that social space is warped, creating, say, an effect analogous to that of gravity, for what might happen, and suggesting there is in reality a ‘field’ equivalent in constitution to those employed in physics ... There’s a long history of use and abuse of concepts drawn from physics in social science (notably, these days, drawing on quantum mechanics).

HP: I agree there is a difference and many recent works have obscured this. Alex Wendt’s quantum book, for instance (a brave investigation but unfortunately an explanatory failure), or many of the ‘post’ examples discussed in *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals’ Abuse of Science* (Sokal and Bricmont 1999). Of course ‘warped’ is a metaphorical expression. Whereas we can make the effects of a particular magnetic field more or less visible to our eyes, for example, using iron filings, fields do not determine actions and the specification of contextual and complex human behaviour is much more difficult to ‘observe’.

JM: But you are still suggesting a field is real and that it in reality ‘bends social space-time’?

HP: All social theoretical concepts are metaphorical, for example ‘force’, ‘mechanism’, ‘movement’, ‘power’ and ‘structure’. The concept of the field is no different and in fact I am using it in conjunction with these other concepts. Moreover, the space and time of social interactions and processes is organised at multiple scales. Social time is organised through modes of temporality, historicity and reflexivity. Space is similarly organised through different competencies, practices and constitutive schemes.

Consider, for example, academic activities and practices that have changed in the past few decades and how those changes have shaped the patterns of activities in academia. We can specify the relevant commitments, values, and purposes as well as resources, rules and mechanisms that shape these patterns and then compare geohistorical differences. Neoliberal university reforms involve various temporalities (the concept will be clarified below), for example a direction of ‘progress’ (such as capital-accumulation and success in ranking competition), and reorganise not only imagined spaces of cooperation and competition but also physical spaces within universities (such as open plan offices and ‘labs’ in concrete-steel-and-glass buildings that reflect the architecture of business corporations). The values and purposes inherent in the systems of auditing, promotion etc specify the direction of activities that academics and units need to take to avoid working against the force fields and to ‘succeed’. We can also ‘see’ how the intrinsic conditions constitutive of university X are not within its physical or organisational ‘envelope’ – rather they stem from a much wider field consisting of ‘competing’ universities in world markets,²⁶ systems of funding by performance, transnational regulatory networks and multi-level metagovernance, which guides and regulates the state-based and other regulators.

Despite all this, we can’t directly observe any simple ‘warped lines of movement’. In physics movements can be observed and measured, but keep in mind, before Einstein’s theories, no one ‘saw’ gravitation, space, or time in the way they did afterwards. Gravitation was conceived as a mechanical force ‘pulling’ boding across distance in a homogeneous and static space. Our iconic models always involve analogies and metaphors. Whether they help to understand and explain reality is something that cannot be decided before trying.

In this spirit, I adopt the concept of ‘holomovement’ from David Bohm’s (2002: 182-199) realist reinterpretation of the underpinnings of quantum mechanics. Bohm uses an analogy to the hologram to make the reality underlying the quantum world understandable. This analogy between hologram and generation of quantum-level reality can be used analogically in social sciences. The Greek word *holos* means ‘whole’ and *graphē* means to ‘write’. Holograms are truly three-dimensional images based on an interference pattern that can be considered an encoded version of reality. The bottom line is that Bohm suggests an analogy: there is a kind of inner code that generates the quantum reality that we can observe.

JM: You are setting off a whole set of alarm bells here, you do know that don’t you?

²⁶ Note from Heikki: these markets are sometimes real (e.g. competition for student fees) yet constructed, but oftentimes they are merely imagined or simulated e.g. through the university rankings that emerged in the early 2000s.

HP: I'm not at all sure that my comments ought to set off alarm bells. As is well known, Bohm too was a scientific realist and a dialogical thinker, but that is not the most important consideration. The main thing is what the inner code is supposed to be and whether its mode of being accords with ontological realism and more specifically with a plausible realist social ontology.

For Bohm the analogy provided a basis for visualising a realist 'hidden variables' version of quantum mechanics. In my recent work the inner codes of three historical fields consist of collective learning. Bohm develops a process ontology where the causal process of determination of the whole provides a broad context in which various more or less autonomous forms are seen to be merely aspects, 'releveled' in a holomovement, rather than disjoint and separately existing things in interaction. In my political economy framework, the inner code of the evolving whole comprises the contents and structures of human learning that co-generate – in a context of power relations and previous layers – the causal processes through which the forms and parts of the whole are being determined.

Various forms and levels of learning are embedded in the *habitus* of actors and the practices and institutions characteristic of a field. Thereby constituted activities have both constitutive and causal effects – and since the industrial revolution, the extension of these fields and their effects has become worldwide.

In any case, let me reverse your point. You might want to consider why you are resisting conceptual innovation. As I've already suggested, we have become comfortable with a host of metaphorical concepts that refer to something that cannot be directly observed (in the sense of seeing). Perhaps 'read the book' is the best (short) answer I can give, in the broader context of theoretical distance taking, totalisation and fit between concepts of causation and the constitution of social reality... This invites innovation and social field, 'holomovement' and the idea of an inner code provide possible ways to address issues of theory.

JM: Briefly then, how does the book unfold?

HP: My three fields account concerns mainly the period from the industrial revolution onwards – which following Polanyi is a period of emergence of a truly planetary economy – roughly from the first half of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twenty-first century. The first field OL is constituted by economic liberalism and this has dominated many contexts since the industrial revolution, while its powers have been context-dependent and its ambiguous sources have varied and evolved. The second field C>L emerged as a response to this field in terms of collective learning from critique and crises. This field shaped developments especially during the Bretton Woods era (1944-1973). The third field SSR is constituted by the reason of the state bending social space-time. It is evoked by struggles within and among states and tends to be (re-)strengthened by contradictions in the world economy.

JM: The obvious question remains here, 'what's the point', or more accurately, what is gained by this reconceptualization...

HP: Many things. I already mentioned retrodution and totalisation, but there is also a more practical interest concerning the future. First I must mention that I agree with Bhaskar that the success of achieving goals set at different orders of purposes depends to a large extent on whether agents are capable of latching on to some tendential processes and stretching them in the desired direction (Bhaskar 1993: 266). My ultimate hope is to identify those critical points and moments where transformative (emancipatory) actors and movements could make a difference in terms of steering a course away from what I have called scenario A and toward B (or C) – or some other rationally desirable direction. As our discussion indicates this has been fulfilled, at best, only partially and rather tentatively. Arguably, and hopefully, however, *The Three Fields* takes a few steps in that direction.

JM: In what sense?

HP: I stress the importance of background competencies and collective learning. A word of caution though, any answer partly depends on who the 'us' is that is supposed to make a difference.

In any case, a focus on the background enables a systematic analysis of discrepancies between different *habitués* and the relevant (field)s, involving phenomena theorised by Bourdieu and his followers under the rubric of *hysteresis* but also the conditions of collective identity- and action-formation. This is comparable but different from, the process of making the working class in the nineteenth century. The making of the working class provides a partial analogy to the possible development of new forms of transformative agency in the 21st century, involving

the idea of a world political party. The background also includes forms of temporality and field theory suggests an improvement to the prevailing modes of temporality.

JM: I doubt a reader has a clue what you mean here by modes of temporality...

HP: I guess the same idea could also be expressed in terms of Bhaskar's concept of historicity. For Roy, historicity as a form of temporal consciousness arose with the coming of the modern age. It includes the self-reflexive consciousness of history, whereas this consciousness can take different forms (e.g. by way of assuming the linearity of history), shaping actions, practices and institutions.

The mode of temporality in *The Three Fields* is neither Whiggish nor anti-Whiggish, yet can suggest rational tendential direction. My attempt to understand the intra- and interactions between different fields enables somewhat (or at least potentially) new ways of understanding world history. This matters because practical action stems from the anticipation of possibilities of transformative action, producing outcomes based on an understanding of that which has been (history).

It may come as no surprise that the C>L field emerged from long-term collective learning and more specifically in response to the rise of economic liberalism and industrialisation. However, especially critical realists, heterodox economists and many political economists, or more generally many of those on the left, often underestimate and misunderstand the role of the SSR field constituted by the reason of state and interstate relations (Bob Jessop's work is an important exception).

JM: It seems odd to criticise other academics for failing to see the significance of something that you are conceptualising. I take it you mean they have under-appreciated the significance of processes you are putting a name and a concept to (and surely they may accept some credence regarding the process but reject your conceptualisation?).

HP: Fair enough. I should have been more careful in my phrasing since there has been a long tradition from the German historical school of political economy through Michael Mann (1984) and Anthony Giddens (1985) to some recent scholarship (e.g. Nakano 2020) stressing the role of the state and war in the development of modernity and modern states, including the Keynesian welfare state. It is precisely the non-reductionist nature of the three fields account that enables a systematic analysis of the intra- and interactions among the fields without reducing one to the other.

For example, consider the history of 'capitalism'. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the separate competing and warring states in Europe enacted a series of market and financial reforms, funding colonial ventures and wars, though the ruling aristocratic elites were often reluctant. This contributed powerfully, though at first largely unintentionally, to the emergence of a capitalist market society. These developments enabled and facilitated – under the conditions created by the collective learning of humanity in China, India and the Arabic world, and lately also in Europe – the industrial revolution. Later, of course, state powers have been harnessed in many places to create the conditions for industrial growth (building infrastructure and capabilities, protecting 'infant industries' etc.), which in turn has led to many conflicts with those states and other actors embodying the liberal field.

Conversely, the Russian revolution emerged from WWI and led to the Russian civil war, in turn involving interventions by capitalist great powers, wars of expansion and later other wars. The Russian revolution was from the start characterised by militarism and what some scholars (notably Harold Lasswell) call the 'garrison state' (a state dominated by a military-industrial complex and war-related anxieties and mentality).

As I write in *Three Fields* (Patomäki 2022: 46), the Russian revolution became a source of both inspiration and fear across the world, in a way strengthening the 'from critique and crisis to learning' field, but only in ambiguous if not contradictory ways. A result was a series of direct conflicts with social democratic and democratic-socialist parties elsewhere in the world, for instance in Germany in the early 1930s, contributing to Adolf Hitler's seizure of power in 1933-34. The 'reason of the state' field can powerfully bend social space-time.

JM: I'm still struggling with the notion of 'bend social space-time', but I suppose your fields approach might ultimately turn out to be a significant conceptual contribution – an innovative approach to philosophy of history segueing into futures studies and based on a broadly realist ontology... Be that as it may, you conclude *Three Fields* with a short section on the Anthropocene, and make the point that 'the three fields of global political economy are

changing the planet'. Referring to the Anthropocene as an 'episode in world history' you suggest this episode (and thus a period of climate emergency and ecological breakdown) are 'part of the holomovement in which the three fields are metamorphosed into something different' (Patomäki 2022: 131).

HP: The liberal world economy, where money, goods and productive capital can move freely, has been predicated on the existence of separate and competing states. The possible globalisation of some state powers and functions will leave neither the world economy nor the field constituted by the reason of the state and interstate relations intact. Moreover, the ideas and theories constitutive of the three fields exclude ecology and the planetary conditions of life and society. New forms of agency are emerging. In this context, patterns of cooperation and political conflicts will assume new configurations. Fields are temporary, they evolve and change.

For me, 'a key question is whether democratic global-Keynesian institutions are sustainable if they remain based, to a substantial degree, on growth and profit-seeking. As these kinds of questions abound, the inner codes of the whole will evolve under new multiscalar and multitemporal systems of global governance and, for some purposes, government' (Patomäki 2022: 131-132). This remark points toward my forthcoming book on world statehood.

JM: Would you say then that you are working on subjects and using concepts that share common ground with Alexander Wendt – since he too in the last twenty years has asked the question of whether a world state is inevitable and has drawn extensively on quantum mechanics...²⁷

HP: Strictly speaking, I am not drawing on quantum mechanics, just borrowing and adopting a couple of concepts that Bohm originally developed to make sense of his realist and processual reinterpretation of quantum theory. The question of the world state lies at the heart of IR theory. After decades of neglect, it has resurfaced in discussions. Although Wendt's argument about 'its' inevitability is highly abstract and his time frame is 200 years, his 2003 article was an important and brave contribution to the re-opening of these discussions.

JM: And your forthcoming book?

HP: *World Statehood: The Future of World Politics* (Patomäki 2023) should be out in summer or early autumn 2023. This is the biggest book I have written so far, both in terms of scope and number of pages. Several chapters are based on papers that I have published over the years (for example, Patomäki 2007c, 2010e, 2011c, 2012b, 2014a, 2019b) but all of them have been thoroughly rewritten (apart from Patomäki 2014a). The framing, overall argument and some of the chapters are entirely new.

The aim is to develop a processual understanding of world statehood. I pose what I consider essential questions about world political integration:

1. whether and to what degree elements of world statehood exist today;
2. whether the development of further elements of world statehood in some stronger or 'thicker' sense can be seen as a tendential direction of history;
3. whether such an evolving system could be viable.

All this is framed in terms of a common history of humanity, starting with questions about our place in cosmic evolution ('mythopoetics as a source of critique' and so on) and origins and inevitability of the industrial revolution (I suggest it was inevitable but could have occurred elsewhere at another time); and concluding with developing ideas, for example about a world political party, system of control over nuclear weapons and global initiatives such as a greenhouse gas tax (for the latter see Morgan and Patomäki 2021). There is also a new vision about a world parliament as a response to the indeterminacy of international law.

JM: Realism comes in many guises.²⁸ But what would you say if I suggested that the kind of themes you explore and the subjects you focus on – the sweep of history, prospects for the future etc. – make you quite unusual among

²⁷ Note from Jamie: see Wendt (2003, 2015, 2018). See also Jessop (2012); Little (2018); Porpora (2018); Wight (2018).

²⁸ Note from Jamie: see, for example, Meyenburg and Turcitu (2021); Newman (2019); Slade-Caffarel (2020).

critical realists.²⁹ There is some chance you will be a footnote in future academia – an object lesson in the errors of foresight inherent to grand visions. Alternatively, your work might well be seen retrospectively as extraordinarily prescient – though this might be ironic since it is not strictly speaking prediction, but rather a contribution to making better futures that turns on changes in collective agency and institution building...

HP: I take that characterization as a polite compliment, yet the options you mention are either ‘a footnote about the errors of foresight inherent to grand visions’ or ‘extraordinarily prescient’? – what can I say...

JM: There are many others things we could go on to discuss (recent influences, collaborations, your time spent at Clare Hall at Cambridge University, the roles of CSOG and the EuroMemo Group...), but we need to start to draw this interview to a close. So, on a final note, I should say that there are many others thinking about possible and likely futures, but given your interest it seems appropriate to draw an example from science fiction.

In a recent interview (subtitled ‘the imperative of hope’) the science fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson made the point that we are already in a global civilization, we just haven’t properly realised it yet, nor have we really accepted (whatever we tell ourselves) that the way we treat the planet (the system of economy and consumption that some enjoy and everyone else is encouraged to aspire to) has its real limits. He makes the rather simple yet underappreciated point that ‘what can’t go on, won’t go on’ (Bradley 2022: 5).

Robinson’s books (notably *Ministry of the Future*) are speculations focused on tipping points, where some scale of disaster somewhere sets in motion massive change. As he notes though, ‘there is a closing window for peaceful tactics to work’ (and one might add that every failed COP is another nail in civilization’s coffin). He also makes the thought-provoking point that collapse could mean reducing the global North to living like the global South (for which there is likely to be little sympathy in the global South) but it may (and increasingly seems to be heading for) a mass extinction event. Avoiding both though is the moral and practical challenge of our times and likely cannot be achieved without *global* just transition...

HP: First I must return the compliment: it is you who are fantastically well read. Robinson has come onto my radar during the past couple of years, in part thanks to you. I have not managed to read any of his novels yet, but I do have *Tomorrow Parties. Life in the Anthropocene* where this interview was originally published.

In the interview Robinson confirms that hope is an imperative. I think it is more grounded than that, even though my understanding of the planetary problematic we are now facing seems more complex than his – climate change is ‘just’ one of the major problems we have. Hope is not only essential for any future-oriented transformative action. Hope is grounded in the rational tendential directionality of world history, ultimately in our capacity for collective learning. Humanity may fail, but that would be a really stupid and pointless failure, especially (as H. G. Wells put it), ‘all this world is heavy with the promise of greater things’.

It is also worth pointing out that while Robinson stresses that our civilisation is now global, his political imagination seems to remain – at least to an important degree – captive of state sovereignty. Robinson, for example, mentions the possibility of an international agreement for solar radiation management, but otherwise, the main problem appears to be ‘capitalism’ and not also competing geopolitical states and their (un)reason. I say this not to be critical in some petty sense, but rather to make clear in concluding this interview just how important it is to have a properly conceived sense of the planetary and global, and just how much more work there is to do, if we are to make the changes necessary for our species to survive and thrive.

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²⁹ Note from Jamie: for scope in recent years see also Patomäki (2005b, 2010b, 2011b, 2012a, 2013b, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017c, 2018b, 2019c, 2019d, 2020a, 2020b, 2021); Morgan and Patomäki (2017c); Patomäki and Kotilainen (2022).

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