

RADICAL HOPE, HUMAN AGENCY AND THE PLANETARY EMERGENCY

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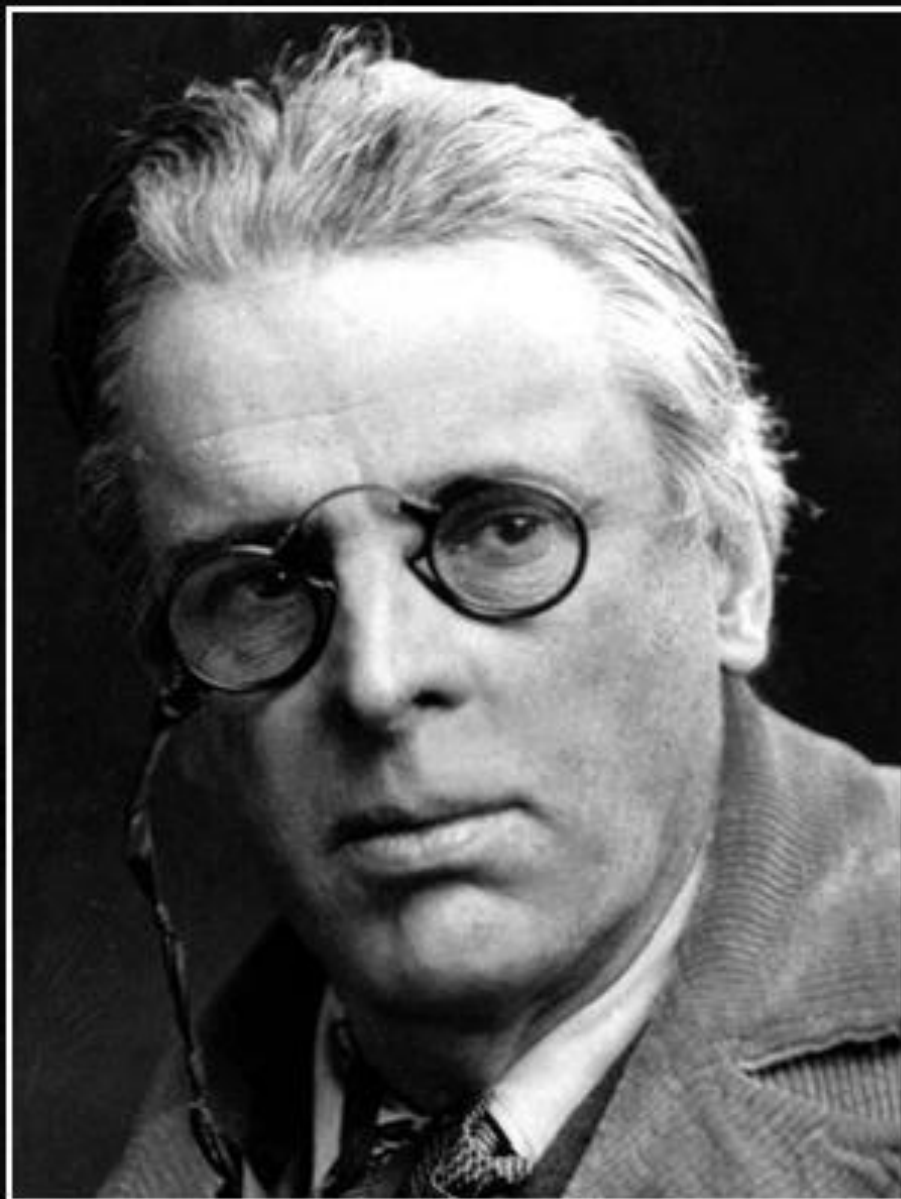
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A black and white portrait of James Baldwin, an African American man with short, dark hair, looking slightly upwards and to the left with a thoughtful expression. He is wearing a light-colored shirt and a dark tie. The background is blurred.

“Not everything
that is faced can
be changed, but
nothing can be
changed until it
is faced.”

—JAMES BALDWIN,
1924-1987



Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things
fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere
anarchy is loosed upon the world, The
blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned; The
best lack all conviction, while the worst Are
full of passionate intensity.

— William Butler Yeats —

AZ QUOTES

RHETORIC AND REALITY – THE CONDITION OUR CONDITION IS IN

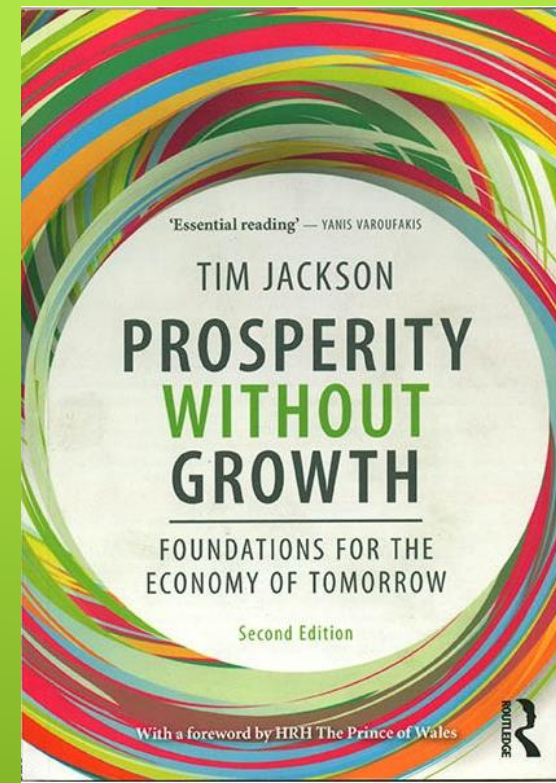
Declarations of climate &
ecological emergencies
...but ??

The response to the
pandemic is what a real
emergency looks like



THE CONTEXT: ECOCIDAL & CANCEROUS, CARBON, CAPITALIST GROWTH

“Allegiance to growth was the single most dominant feature of an economic and political system that lead the world to the brink of economic disaster. The growth imperative has shaped the architecture of the modern economy.” (Jackson, 2017, p. 37)



“(extremely) dangerous climate change can only be avoided if economic growth is exchanged, at least temporarily, for a period of planned austerity within Annex 1 nations [developed] and a rapid transition away from fossil-fuelled development within non-Annex 1 nations.” (Anderson and Bows, 2011: 41)

PHILOSOPHICAL
TRANSACTIONS
—OF—
THE ROYAL
SOCIETY



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Beyond ‘dangerous’ climate change: emission scenarios for a new world

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THE LURE OF TECHNO-OPTIMISM...GREENING 'BUSINESS AS USUAL'... I.E. CAPITALISM



The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie -- deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic. Belief in myths allows the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.

(John F. Kennedy)





“Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.”

– Milton Friedman



This what a real emergency looks like: what the response to Coronavirus can teach us about how we can and need to respond to the planetary emergency

A Green House Gas by John Barry

April 2020

<https://www.greenhousethinktank.org/gases.html>

THE PRELIMINARY
ROUND



The pandemic has cancelled the future....

but that's ok,

.... it was a pretty bad one anyhow

Three parallel diagonal lines in a light blue color, extending from the bottom right towards the top right of the slide.

3 MAIN LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC FOR THE PLANETARY CRISIS

Causes of the pandemic

Coping with the pandemic

Recovering from the pandemic



SOME LESSONS I

States can move quickly;

Finance can be found;

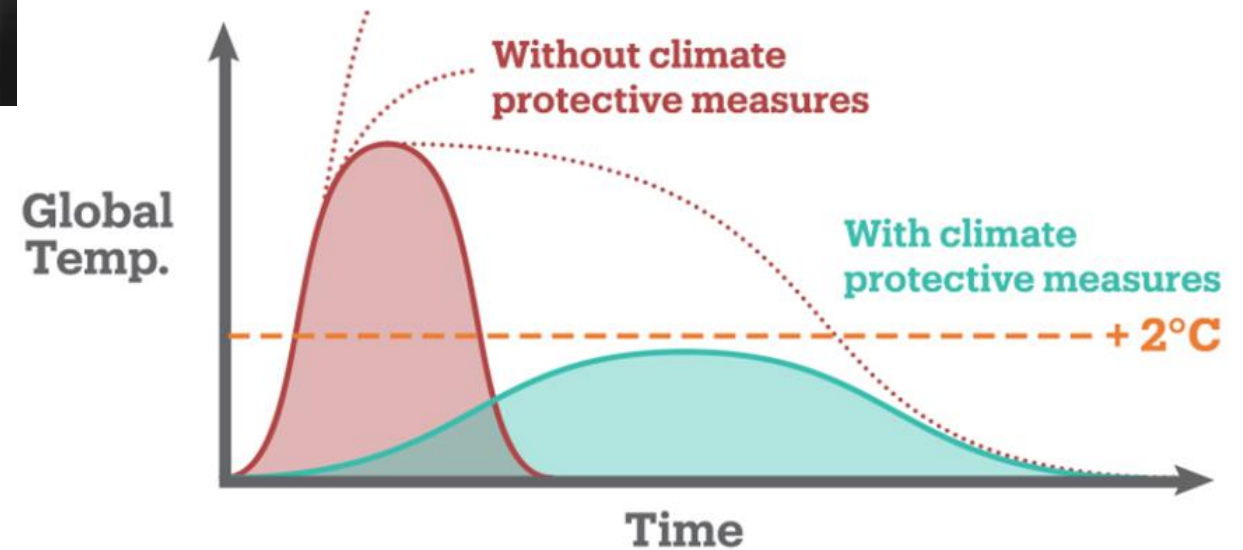
Populations can adapt;

Social innovation and individual agency is possible;

Solidarity and collective self-help as well as panic and fear are responses;

Effective communication for addressing complex issues can be forged;

COMMUNICATING RESPONSES TO CRISES: FROM 'FLATTENING THE CURVE' TO 'BENDING THE CURVE DOWN'?



SCIENCE AND EXPERT KNOWLEDGE CAN (UNEVENLY) BE LISTENED TO AND GUIDE GOVERNMENTS AND POPULATIONS;

ONCE IMPOSSIBLE POLICIES ARE NOT ONLY POSSIBLE BUT NECESSARY;

SHORT-TERM POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPACTS;

SHORT-TERM NEGATIVE ECONOMIC IMPACTS.

SO DOES THIS GIVE WARRANTED HOPE FOR TACKLING THE PLANETARY EMERGENCY?

HOPE IN AND FOR A LONG-TERM STRUGGLE

‘Solving’ the climate and ecological crisis vs learning to ‘cope’ with it.

While the pandemic may be a one-off event, coping with the planetary crisis means endlessly adapting to a dynamically unstable climate, enduring, thriving and surviving as best we can.

And this will involve endless struggle and engagement in a ‘long game’ of which the pandemic and its climate possibilities are but one chapter.

And such endless political struggle has no guarantee of succeeding.

But struggle and endure we must, not in the sure knowledge of success (and perhaps not for us here and now)

‘There is no way: we make the road by walking’

Because the idea of climate change is so plastic, it can be deployed across many of our human projects and can serve many of our psychological, ethical and spiritual needs... We need to ask not what we can do for climate change, but to ask what climate change can do for us.

Mike Hulme



WHY WE **DISAGREE** ABOUT **CLIMATE CHANGE**

Understanding Controversy, Inaction
and Opportunity

Mike Hulme

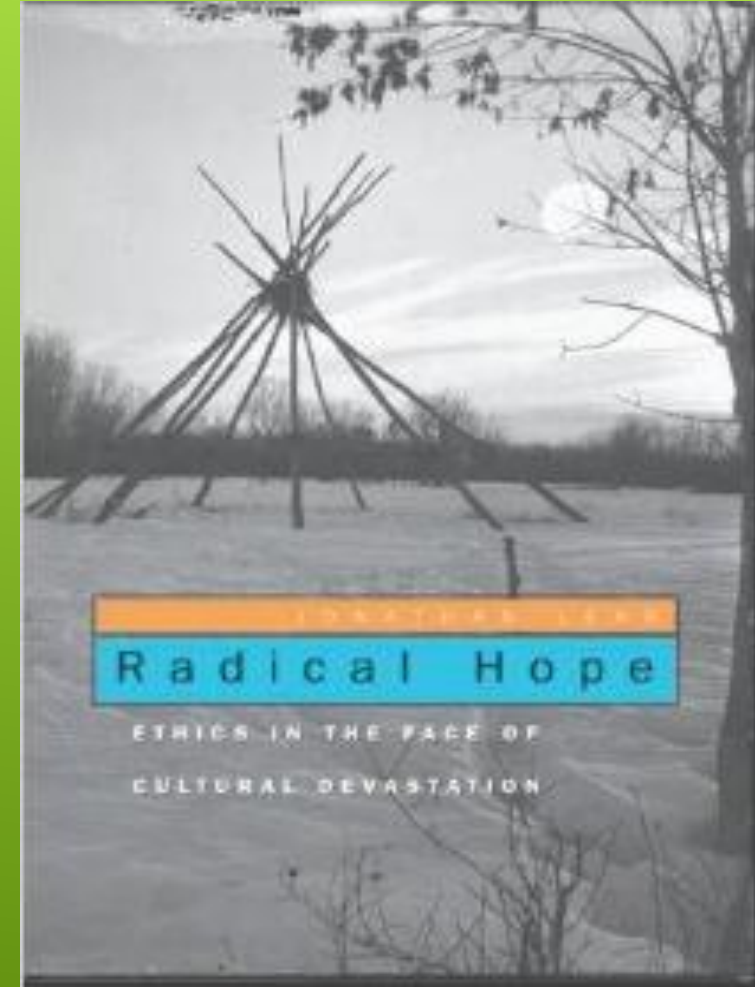
CAMBRIDGE

RADICAL HOPE IN TURBULENT, FLUXED TIMES

“What makes this hope radical is that it is directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is.

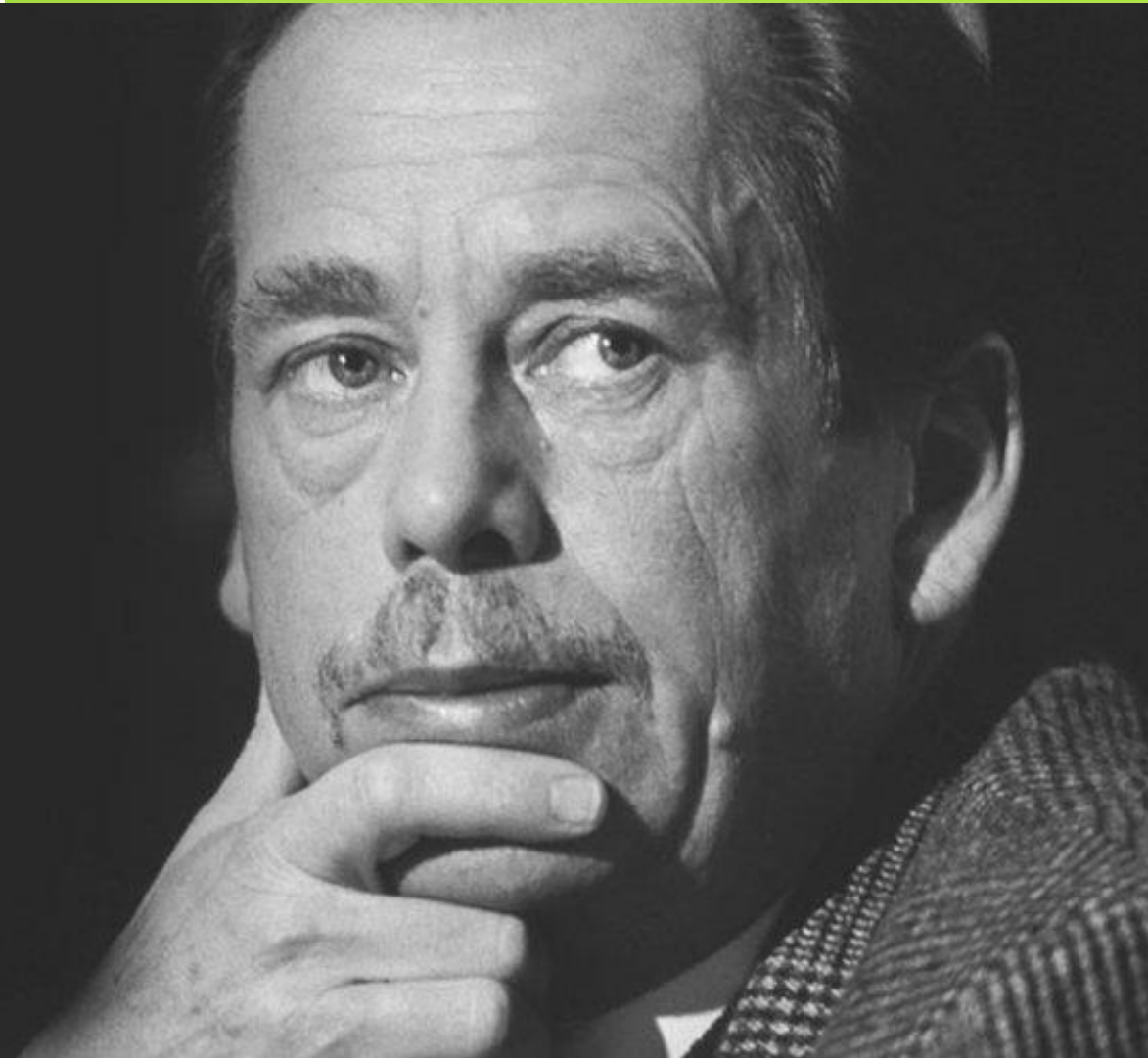
Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it”

(Lear, 2006: 103).



“Hope is not the same as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”

Václav Havel



"Klee's 'Angelus Novus' [1920; right] shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating.

His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history.

"His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress."

Walter Benjamin, *Theses on a Philosophy of History*



LETTING GO OF THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE OF 'PROGRESS'

Benjamin, anticipating modern green thinking, rejected the ideology of Progress, the almost theological conviction that western society was building Paradise on earth through technology, state social management and corporate rule.

“Where we see historical Progress, the angel of history sees only victims piled high as a storm of destruction—all justified, of course, by our historic mission, whether that be Manifest Destiny, the War to end all Wars, or the mission to bring democracy and free markets to the globe”

Benjamin

**The ecological apocalyptic imaginary as a
wake up call, not an invitation to a wake**

RADICAL HOPE

Lear's study asks what surely has to be regarded as a profound (if deeply troubling) existential question, what Lear calls 'an extreme possibility of human existence' (2006: 10), namely,

'if our way of life collapsed, things would cease to happen. *What could this mean? . . . What would it be to be a witness to this breakdown?*' (ibid: 6; emphasis added).

"We live at a time of a heightened sense that civilizations are themselves vulnerable. Events around the world—terrorist attacks, violent social upheavals, and even natural aware of a shared vulnerability that we cannot quite name . . . Perhaps if we could give a name to our shared sense of vulnerability, we could find better ways to live with it" (Lear, 2006: 7).

THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT...IS NOT THE END OF THE WORLD

The redemptive and transformative potentials of a crisis

Solidarity as well as fear and anxiety

Apocalyptic visioning? The 'lifting of the veil' – a revelation

Centrality of creativity and imagination ... (poetry and the poetic, disruptive, transformative)

NEW STORIES TO LIVE BY...

What happens when we stop believing in our cultural stories and myths?

What happens when the structures of meaning that have shaped, not only our culture, but also our identities, begin to break down?

Ecological crisis as a crisis of meaning not just a crisis of means

How do we prepare ourselves for such changes?

APOCALYPSE AND REDEMPTION



COURAGE AND COLLAPSE

We must pay attention both to the possibility of catastrophe and alternatives.

If we do not face the genuine possibility of future catastrophe, we cannot envision an appropriate set of informed responses.

That is why we should imagine the end of the world (including the end of the world as we know it...)

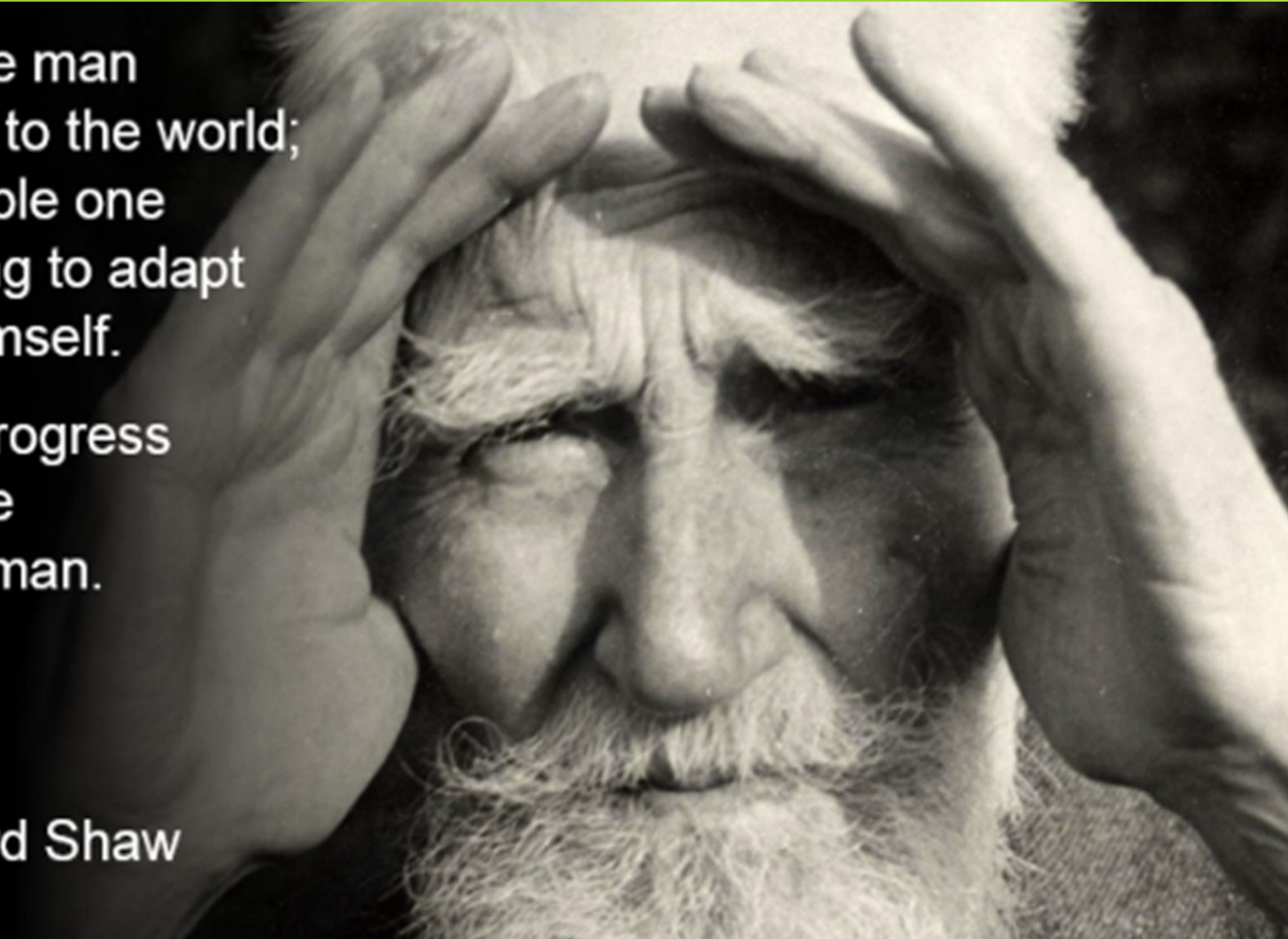
And why is it easier to imagine the end of the worldthan the end of capitalism?

RADICAL HOPE IN THE 21ST CENTURY: UNREASONABLE THINKING & ACTING IN TURBULENT TIMES

The reasonable man
adapts himself to the world;
the unreasonable one
persists in trying to adapt
the world to himself.

Therefore all progress
depends on the
unreasonable man.

George Bernard Shaw





Make no small plans for they
have no power to stir the soul.

– Niccolo Machiavelli

"When there is no vision,
the people **perish.**"



-Ps. 29:18