

# A Philosophy of Pessimism

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The 21st century will most probably be the last one for mankind. First, the threat of nuclear confrontation is imminently present in the Ukraine war, where with escalation, it becomes global. Second, global warming will make life unbearable. There is no strategically viable way out of the heating up of the planet, as every state cheats. Now, we have 425 ppm.

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## Introduction

In the standard historical narrative of philosophy, the philosopher of pessimism is A. Schopenhauer. Let us consult his *The World as Will and Representation* from 1858.

As a matter of fact, this book is not very pessimistic, as typically claimed. By the German “Wille” Schopenhauer means volition in general or will to survival in particular. His book has been misunderstood, because it is not about pessimism in general, but contains Kantian type epistemology and an anticipation of elements of Darwinism. Schopenhauer constructed a most complex metaphysical system. He had much positive to say about art, architecture and poetry.

It is true that Schopenhauer is again read with great interest, as “Wille” is interpreted as energy. But his basic subjectivist standpoint is difficult to accept. Not only are time, space and causation merely faculties of the mind, but behind all the Kantian phenomena there is just one *thing in itself*—namely “Wille” or energy.

Yet, there are other and more relevant sources of pessimism than Schopenhauer’s thesis that will restrain intellect.

## Pessimism 1

In the commentaries to the Ukrainian war, the possibility of nuclear warfare is discussed.

Nuclear warfare has again become a topic of urgent debate (Kaplan 2022). The interest in nuclear warfare concerns both strategic and tactical issues. Strategic use of nukes lies behind the present realignment of powers and coalitions like the expansion of the NATO. What, moreover, is tactical nuclear warfare?

## Putin and Russia

President Putin is waging an invasion war against the Ukraine. In reality he is putting his power at issue and perhaps the future survival of Russia, if not mankind.

The sudden invasion has turned into an attrition war, hugely costly for the two countries. Putin maintains before his Kremlin entourage that Russia will prevail. This is improbable, given the support by Western countries

to Ukraine. But can Putin take a defeat? Or will he use the huge arsenal of nuclear weapons somehow? It is difficult to see Putin stepping down orderly.

The official argument for the annexation of Crimea and the attack on Ukraine is that West threatened Russian existence. The events in Kiev 2014 would constitute *causa belli*.

Putin is often said to aiming at some enlargement of Russia, like under the Soviet period. This is simply impossible, as the former Soviet republics guard their newly won independence. What Putin wants is to deal with like-minded in the countries bordering Russia.

What has replaced the Soviet republics is dictatorships with exception for the Baltic. Government is in the hands of a “*click*” of people, who enrich themselves and their cronies. There is only one threat, namely democracy. If democracy survives in Ukraine, it would seriously affect the stability of not only Belarus and Kazakhstan but also Russia itself. Hitherto, Putin has clambered down on all opposition by increasingly drastic measures. The Ukrainian war is as much about territory as about regime.

One may add that the ambition of Ukraine to become member of the EU and the NATO is a consequence of the Russian will to control. Can Russia come to accept a democratic Ukraine?

### **Nuclear Warfare**

Is a turn to nuclear weapons possible from Putin’s Russia? One often encounters the idea of tactical nuclear warfare, but it is not clear what this amounts to.

Thinking about nuclear warfare in the Ukraine forces one to consider the distinction between strategic and tactical nuclear war. In one version tactical nukes could be handled by individual soldiers attacking a small target. The strategic employment of nukes now includes many hydrogen bombs and a set of carriers and rockets. Putin himself has on various occasion hinted at the possible use of nukes, if Russia’s territory is invaded including the land areas occupied in eastern Ukraine.

### **Logic of Nuclear Warfare**

In his general theory of war (1832), Clausewitz argued that war is the fight with violence between the wills—the will of the attacker to have his/her will obeyed. The violent confrontation between two or more parties or armies has been theorized, based on huge date information. Thus, we know much about strategy and tactics with, e.g., Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon. More important, we know the real outcomes. Not so with regard to nuclear warfare.

Now, which principles could one deduce about nuclear war on the basis of two real events and some experiments? By following the American debate, one arrives at:

1. First strike capability: No one has this.
2. Second strike capability: USA, Russia, and China have this. North Korea has neither against USA.
3. Escalation instantaneously: Inexorably expanding of nuclear warfare: Only by striking out the centre of every nuclear site can a state *prevail*.

Russia will not likely take a defeat in the Ukraine. Putin is probably going to play his last and most powerful card releasing perhaps a global catastrophe.

### **Zaporizhzhia**

The Russian performance in the Ukraine war may release a nuclear disaster at the largest atomic power plant. It would kill and harm a large number of people through radioactive contamination. The damage could not be

compared with the catastrophe of nuclear warfare in one form or another. But it would hurt the Ukraine badly.

A nuclear disaster at the largest plant in Ukraine would not only cut electricity to Kiev but also carry contamination risks for both parties. Hitherto the Russian army has erased lots of infrastructure, but the four reactors at Zaporizhzhia still operates. Perhaps the Russians hope to capture it for own use.

### Pessimism 2

The distinction between verbiage and practical action is telling when it comes to the second globally looming catastrophe. There is no new equilibrium in sight, as global warming does not release any counter forces. We can only wait for the tipping points to set in. Global warming is a cumulative process where all consequences have one direction. Figure 1 shows developments since 1990.

## CO2 emissions and global temp (1990=1)

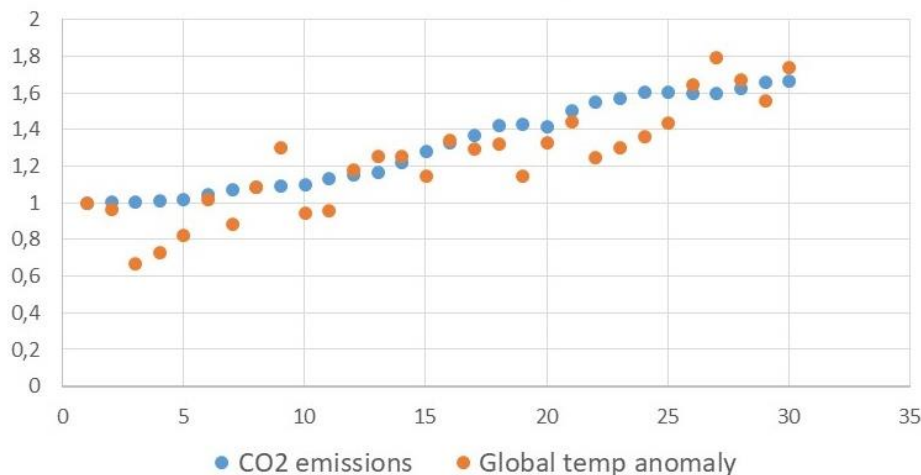


Figure 1. CO2 emissions and global temp.

Although the phenomena of climate change had been known for 200 years, the key text was published in 1989: S. Schneider's *Global Warming: Are We Heating up the Planet?* Yes, our constantly increasing need for energy leads to higher CO2 levels.

The link between global warming and energy makes it very difficult to combat climate change. Every state seeks to avoid energy shortage. If necessary, coal or natural gas will be used. In several countries wood is burnt. All advanced countries cheat in their own way.

In the developing countries the forests are cut down for a variety of selfish purposes: agriculture, charcoal, house building, and decorative goals. Poor and landless people figure prominently when the rainforest is invaded.

The energy shortages are augmented by the premature shutdown of nuclear stations. Nuclear power is a source of energy that is both valued and frightening.

### Source of Pessimism: State Egoism

States guard their sovereignty jealously. States are prepared to act when vital interests are at stake, including opportunism, cheating, and violence. Energy is high on the list of state priorities.

State egoism does not exclude intergovernmental cooperation and states' coordination. But when vital interests are concerned, states will renege. They may sign international treaties but refrain from implementing.

Hobbes following the Epicurean tradition predicted the war of all against all as well as total chaos in Parliament from his egoism axiom. He therefore preferred kingship—one will. But surely kings or autocrats can be incredibly selfish! It seems that Putin has managed to lay his private hands on some of the assets of Yukos and Gazprom. Embezzlement and autocracy hit Russia with a vengeance.

State egoism is of another order. When energy is lacking, even red-green governments look for fossils. The CO<sub>2</sub>s will continue rising.

### **The Present Rules Over the Future**

When states act, their decision making is characterized by: Myopia, Opportunism, Status quo, Reneging.

If there is an energy crisis, states go back to fossils. If some states offer much green policy-making, then others may offer little when states coordinate. If there is a threat to state existence or longevity, the money goes to weapon procurement. If states promise too much, they can always repent. As the greatest ever political philosopher expressed it (*Leviathan*): covenants without the sword are but words.

### **Conclusion**

The 21st century looks gloomy. The optimism that Elinor Ostrom (1990) expounded about voluntary cooperation in relation to commons appears undone by state egoism and opportunism.

Most states are much too much arming, although climate change will be lethal.

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