



Editor'sBLOG

The news and views from the editor ofbusinessGreen



Climate change

The climate optimist dilemma



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2 Comments



Can you be a climate optimist if you are pessimistic about climate change?

Are you a climate optimist? Yes? No? Maybe?

For what it's worth, I really don't know the answer. Some days I'm an optimist and some days I'm a pessimist. Can you be climate confused? Can I tick that box?

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To be honest I'm not sure I even like the question. Does the climate care about the level of hope or despair I imbue in it? Do I have to choose between optimist and pessimist? Why can't I be both?

Last week, a direct message pinged its way to me via Twitter asking if I would support a 'thunderclap' in support of the new **climate optimist campaign** and declare myself a climate optimist. I'm still yet to officially sign up, on the not unreasonable grounds that I just don't know.

Am I a climate optimist? I'm in no way optimistic my sons will enjoy the same flow of the seasons that I enjoyed when I was their age. That ship has sailed. I'm supremely pessimistic about that.

I'm not particularly optimistic for low lying islands or the countries lying in the path of tropical storms that are expected to become ever more

powerful. My optimism for the embattled communities suffering **worsening levels of hunger** as a result of climate impacts is seriously dented.

The news we may have a little longer than scientists previously thought to keep **temperature increases below 1.5C** should be a source of optimism. But all the latest research does is downgrade the required task from virtually impossible to eye watering, gut churningly difficult. It's like we've been told we no longer have to scale Everest, we've just got to climb K2 instead, without oxygen, in our underpants. We still need to transform the entire global economy on a scale and at a pace that has never been achieved before.

My optimism about our ability to meet this challenge wavers from time to time, along with my optimism that we are wise enough as a society to dismiss the hacks who seize every opportunity to tell us there is nothing to worry about.

And yet, does that make me a pessimist? I'm not sure about that either. You see, I do think deep emissions reductions and a rapid transformation of global infrastructure is possible. I think we can still be saved from ourselves.

The news coming out of Climate Week Summit in New York and BNEF's summit in London this week provides a welcome antidote to excessive pessimism. The **tipping points in the cost competitiveness of clean technologies** and the sight of many of the world's most powerful multinationals **committing to deep emissions reductions** and the widespread adoption of renewables and electric vehicles suggests rapid economic transformation is possible.

But to present this encouraging trend baldly as justification for climate optimism feels reductive in a world of staggering complexity.

I know the counter arguments. I know optimism can be a self-fulfilling prophecy, that hope is a renewable resource, as Al Gore puts it. I know fatalism gets us nowhere and that economic and environmental progress is powered in large part by optimism.

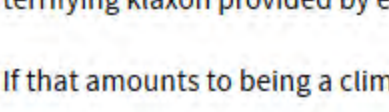
But equally the idea it is proven beyond doubt that optimism inevitably drives effective action feels presumptuous. **Social science** is a field too awash with hunches and gut feels and **unreplicable experiments** to be treated without a truck full of salt. Yes we need optimism, but an excess of optimism just as easily results in complacency as it does action. We see a similar narrative at work currently with the Brexit negotiations, as leading Brexiters insist everything will be fine if we are just upbeat enough about our prospects. No. No it won't. It's going to take a lot more than optimism to navigate this journey.

None of this is meant to disparage the climate optimist campaign or the good intentions behind it. Climate Group's track record of mobilising corporate action to tackle climate change is hugely impressive and Futerra are similarly adept at making environmental issues more engaging to a wider audience. The **campaign's manifesto** makes it clear the goal is to drive action along with a change in attitude towards climate change. Lots of people I respect massively have backed the campaign and declared themselves climate optimists.

But I still haven't signed up. Maybe I am overthinking it but I just can't decide whether I'm a climate optimist or not. I'm certainly not a **rational optimist** - that's feels like too glaring a contradiction in terms. I would say I'm a climate realist, but that's been purloined by 'sceptics' as well.

I do think widespread reporting of and engagement with the scale of economic transformation that is firmly underway is urgently required. I think mass appreciation of the viability and competitiveness of clean tech and green business models could yet save civilisation. I think climate optimism can be much more effectively generated through a **full spectrum prioritisation** of decarbonisation across political, corporate, and civil society. But I also think the terrifying klaxon provided by escalating climate impacts needs to be heard.

If that amounts to being a climate optimist then count me in.



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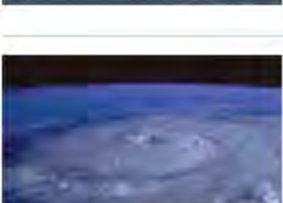
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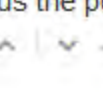


me • 3 days ago

Oh my word. Stop dragging your feet writing moaning uninspiring articles, that's exactly what climate optimism is trying to change. You are not a climate realist because your 'real' is giving up, you feel powerless to change it. The climate optimism campaign is empowering the people, if we believe that we can change the damage we've caused and strive to become a fully sustainable world then we'll do it! If we realised how powerful our actions are as a herd we'd all make a massive difference. Climate optimism gives you some ideas but we all know what to do and if we all actually did it then we'd solve climate change in a generation! Being pessimistic doesn't change anything and neither does sitting on the fence. Being optimistic brings confidence and motivation giving us the power to do anything, so get on board and inspire!

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Ian Miller ➡ me • a day ago

Cost, will determine whether so-called Green Energy ambitions will be realised. Neither the UK Treasury nor the end users appear to have any idea of how much these costs will escalate, but ultimately, short of the establishment of a totalitarian World Government - there will undoubtedly be massive revolt.

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