"Unprecedented Challenges Ahead--March 2024"

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Note: The supporting evidence included below is only a representative fraction of the evidence accumulated in longer documents compiled by this writer [for four examples of longer documents, see the Section "Larger Compilations of Challenges and Solutions" in "About The CPCS Initiative" (left side-homepage)]--and in b) below. The overall picture is clear enough. The gains in quality of life we've made by progress through industrialization and technology have come with significant downsides. Five other key CPCS Initiative risk assessment and solution pathways documents:

a) "17 Tweet Series as a Document" [10 pages; June, 2020]
b) "Do We Have Moral Compasses We Can Rely On?" [147 pages; April, 2021; supplemental "Table of Contents" (13 pages) = Executive Summary]
c) "Triggering Positive Social, Environmental, Economic, and Cultural Tipping Points" [20 pages; September, 2022]
d) "Summary of The CPCS Initiative" [4 pages; February, 2024]
e) "Key Sources of Inspiration" [51 pages; Sept., 2021 31 key sources of inspiration listed followed by corresponding entries, with inspiration excerpts and links]

1. The Climate Emergency and the urgent necessity to achieve Zero Carbon economies ASAP

1) "… the study finds that six tipping elements (which may *cascade* into Runaway Global Warming) could become 'likely'--and a further four 'possible' --if global temperatures rise to 1.5C above pre-industrial temperatures. And 13 tipping elements will be either 'likely' or 'possible' if the planet warms by 2.6C."
[from Carbon Brief "Global warming above 1.5C could trigger 'multiple' tipping points" (Sept., 2022), and p. 4 in my paper "Triggering Positive Social, Environmental, Economic, and Cultural Tipping Points" (20 pages; Sept., 2022)]
2) "Dr. Euan Nisbet (University of London)--Methane Climate Termination Event--Wetlands are turning on (summary version)" [Interview on YouTube (key highlights 11:50-16:40); October 17, 2023)]
3) "… there is increasing evidence that global warming has accelerated over the past 15 years."
"… because the aerosol pollutants have dangerous health effects on people, eventually societies decide to clean them up--causing dramatic warming to reveal itself in the process." [Washington Post; Dec. 26, 2023]
4) "Greenland losing 30 million tonnes of ice an hour, study reveals" [Guardian; January 17, 2024]
5) "It's official: For the past 12 months, the Earth was 1.5 degrees Celsius higher than in preindustrial times…" [Washington Post; February 8, 2024]

2. A marginalization of the treasured wisdom associated with religious, spiritual, and moral traditions.
These "hidden" resources include teachings which inspire and encourage people to--

a) sacrifice personal desires for the greater good of the whole
b) find contentment and quality of life while consuming less material goods and ecological services
c) *prefer peacebuilding which supports and actualizes mutually beneficial understandings, forgiveness, and reconciliation--and which abstains from violent conflict resolution--as a way of bringing cycles of violence to an end*

d) use resources carefully, so that there is surplus available for emergency assistance

e) support community life and cultural traditions which "… bring to the fore how many good people there are, how many ways there are to do good, and how much happiness comes to those who extend help, as well as to those who receive it".

3. Cultures of violence, greed, corruption, and overindulgence--which have become so common that many of us accept such as inevitable.

a) "The global drugs trade and the global arms trade are integral to violence in both developing and industrialized countries. Even modest progress on either front will contribute to reducing the amount and degree of violence suffered by millions of people. To date, however--and despite their high profile in the world arena--no solutions seem to be in sight for these problems" [World Health Organization, "World report on violence and health" (2002), p. 254]

b) Unfortunately, there are many people in our communities who--regardless of the difficulties and urgencies associated with resolving multiple crises--choose to focus their attention on trying to make money by preying of people's fears, manipulating people's trust, and/or encouraging people to abandon hope in higher aspirations, and indulge in unhealthy, or immoral behavior

c) *"The satisfaction of one's physical needs must come at a certain point to a dead stop before it degenerates into physical decadence"* [Mahatma Gandhi; The 15th Annual Gandhi Peace Festival booklet (2007), p. 13, paragraph 3)]

d) "… media programming can be regarded as a text that reflects, reinforces, and shapes the attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, and myths that define a culture." ["International Communications: A Media Literacy Approach", (2015) Section I Chapter 3 "Cultural Context", paragraph 15]

4. The increasing world population and its implications relating to widespread resource depletion--with special focus on the increasing number of people who are consuming material goods and ecological resources *indiscriminately*

a) "In 1960, the world population was 3 billion. As of March 12, 2024, the world population was nearing 8.1 billion." (Worldometers)

b) *"It would be foolish to underestimate the challenge of checking the consumption juggernaut…."*
[Christopher Flavin, "State of the World 2004 Special Focus: The Consumer Society" Worldwatch Institute; p. xix]

c) "Half the world's people live in countries where water tables are falling as aquifers are being depleted…"
[Lester R. Brown, "World on the Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse" (2011), Chpt. 2, para 8]

d) Toxic air in large cities: "90% of world's children are breathing toxic air, WHO study finds"
[Guardian, (2018)]

e) 6th extinction event ["Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history--and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely…" [UN IPBES Report "Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented'; Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating'" (2019), paragraph 1]

5. The end of the Fossil Fuel Era

a) "The evolution of modern cities was tied to advances in transport, initially for ships and trains. But it was the internal combustion engine combined with cheap oil that provided mobility for people and freight that fueled the phenomenal urban growth of the twentieth century." [Lester R. Brown, "Plan B 4.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization" (2009), Chapter 6, paragraph 1]. However, "limiting global warming to an agreed U.N. ceiling 'means that three quarters of the fossil fuel reserves need to stay in the ground'…." [Christiana Figueres, "U.N. climate chief urges radical clean-up of oil, gas industry" (2014), paragraph 4]--and yet: lifestyles and habitats are still very much dependent on high fossil fuel input infrastructures

b) *During the ten to fifteen years of unprecedented cultural transformation needed to limit the number of negative tipping points associated with Global Warming to a minimum, this writer believes many serious blind spots will be discovered--issues which are far from being fully appreciated now, and issues which are serious enough to cripple our best efforts, if not remedied.*

6. Current trends indicate that we are creating more and more "urban agglomerations"

a) There are 512 cities with at least 1 million people, but only 31 megacities ('with a population of over 10 million people')." (Infoplease)

b) Cities with over 1 million people require extremely complex and energy intensive infrastructures, where it is extremely difficult to trace the consequences of our individual investments of time, energy, and money--and which are the least appropriate models when it comes to implementing resolutions to many of the other challenges in this ten point assessment

c) *"Almost all cities with populations over 1 million are running massive 'ecological deficits'" ("resource consumption and waste discharge…in excess of locally/regionally sustainable natural production and assimilative capacity"*) [William E. Rees, "Revisiting Carrying Capacity: Area-Based Indicators of Sustainability"(1996), p. 207, paragraph 3 and p. 205 in box]

d) *(re-emphasized)* "Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history--and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely…." [UN-IPBES Report, "Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented'; Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating'" paragraph 1]

7. Global inequities and the tragic cycles of malnutrition, disease, and death

a) "Hunger and malnutrition are in fact the number one risk to health worldwide—greater than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined." (Mercy Corps, see subtitle "Hunger Kills", paragraph 1)

b) "In 2022, 2.5 billion adults aged 18 years and older were overweight, including over 890 million adults who were living with obesity. This corresponds to 43% of adults aged 18 years and over (43% of men and 44% of women) who were overweight."   [WHO, in "Key Facts", bullets 3-5]

c) *"The top 10% own nearly three-fourths of the world's wealth, while half the world's population is almost entirely deprived of wealth."* [World Inequality Database, in "Key Findings", paragraph 1)

d) Drinking Water--"2 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water at home. Of those, 1.2 billion people have basic drinking water service." [Center for Disease Control, Section "Drinking Water", bullet 1]

e) Sanitation--"3.6 billion people, nearly half the world's population, do not have access to safely managed sanitation in their home. Of those, 1.9 billion people live with basic sanitation services, and 494 million people practice open defecation." [Center for Disease Control, in Section "Sanitation", bullet 1]

f) Hygiene--"2.3 billion people lack basic hygiene services, including soap and water at home. This includes 670 million people with no handwashing facilities at all." [Center for Disease Control, Section "Hygiene", bullet 1]

8. Significant progress towards positive tipping points for the other challenges cited in this list will almost certainly make it impossible for the U.S., and many other countries, to resolve unprecedented public debt

a) Unfortunately, too much of "economic growth" is debt-based, and *too much of such debt-based "economic growth" requires the continued exploitation of flaws and weaknesses in human nature, fragile ecosystems, and already significantly depleted natural resources.*

b) "Some might assume that bond markets are shielded from the effects of climate change, ecosystem degradation, and water scarcity. With more than $40 trillion of sovereign debt in global markets at any given time, that is a very high-risk game." [Achim Steiner, UNEP and Sarah Burns, Global Footprint Network; in "Sovereign Environmental Risk" (2012), paragraph 6]

9. Deterioration of trust/confidence in institutions responsible for guiding public discourse—and the related loss of social and spiritual cohesion

a) "Most economic development and growth strategies encouraged rapid accumulation of physical, financial and human capital, but at the expense of… depleting the world's stock of natural wealth--often irreversibly ….. Existing policies and market incentives have contributed to this problem of capital misallocation *because they allow businesses to run up significant, largely unaccounted for, and unchecked social and environmental externalities"* [United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), "Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication" (A Synthesis for Policy Makers) (2011), in "Introduction" p. 1-2]

b) Confidence (not just confidence in financial markets, but confidence in our viability as a species) will be dimmed by a lack of clarity until there is widespread public discourse on the full dimensions of the critical challenges ahead.

10. Sorting out what are real challenges and what are sound and practical solutions is becoming more and more difficult, as there are now, in most communities of the world, a multitude of ideas of all kinds coming to the fore in personal, family, community, and cultural life--all at the same time. Thus, even analysis supported by much credible evidence--that *there are many danger signs flashing now, involving significant threats to ecological stability and social cohesion*--can be easily lost amidst a swirl of misinformation, other more trivial information, and the "siren song" of multiple entertainment venues. *People who are not sufficiently informed about critical issues are everywhere, and they are investing their time, energy, and money--voting--all the time.*