

## A Philosophy of Pessimism

Jan-Erik Lane

Fellow with Public Policy Institute in Belgrade, Serbia

\*Corresponding Author

Jan Erik Lane, Fellow with Public Policy Institute in Belgrade, Serbia

Submitted: 2023, May 04; Accepted: 2023, May 26; Published: 2023, Jun 08

**Citation:** Lane, J. E., (2023). A Philosophy of Pessimism. *Politi Sci Int*, 1(1), 17-18.

### Abstract

*The 21<sup>st</sup> 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 become 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. Will evolution start over again when the human species can not survive?*

**Keywords:** Schopenhauer, Nuclear Warfare, Global Warming

### 1. Introduction

In the standard historical narrative of philosophy, the central 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 epistemology a la Kant and an anticipation of elements of Darwinism. There are other and more relevant sources of pessimism than Schopenhauer's thesis that will restrains intellect.

### Pessimism

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

Nuclear warfare has again become a topic of urgent debate. 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 at-

tack 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 likeminded 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 the

## 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 data 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:

First strike capability: no one has this.

Second strike capability: USA, Russia and China has this.

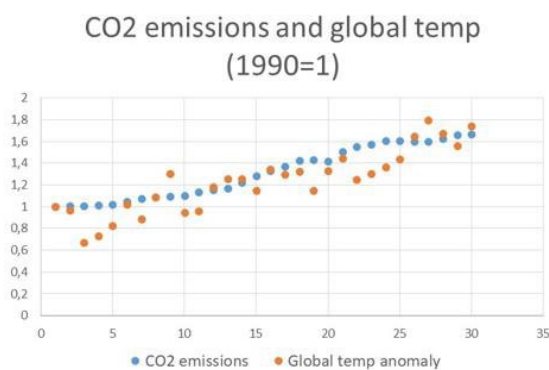


Figure 1. [title](#)

Please add a title for this figure.

Although the phenomena of climate change have 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.

The 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.

### Pessimism

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. Diagram 1 shows developments since 1990.

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.

State egoism is of another order. When energy is lacking, even red-green governments look for fossils. The CO2s will continue rising.

### 2. Conclusion

The 21<sup>st</sup> century looks gloomy. The optimism that Elinor Ostrom expounded about voluntary cooperation in relation to commons appears undone by state egoism and opportunism.

### References

1. Clausewitz, C. Von, On War. Audible 2022.
2. Schneider, S. H. (1989). Global warming: are we entering the greenhouse century.
3. Schopenhauer A. (1858) the World as Will and Representation. Audible 2023.
4. Ostrom, E. (1990). Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action. Cambridge university press.

**Copyright:** ©2023 Jan-Erik Lane. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.