

# Climate et

What next on climate?  
*The need for a new moderate flank*

*Rupert Read*

Perspectiva is a registered charity operating as a collective of scholars, artists, activists, futurists and seekers who believe credible hope for humanity's future lies in forms of economic restraint and political cooperation that are beyond prevailing epistemic capacities and spiritual sensibilities. We work to develop an applied philosophy of education for individual and collective realisation in the service of averting societal collapse; and to cultivate the imaginative and emotional capacity required to usher in a world that is, at the very least, technologically wise and ecologically sound.

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## **Rupert Read**

Rupert Read is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK, where he works alongside some of the world's leading climate scientists. His academic work includes Ecological and Political Philosophy (including critiques of Rawlsian liberalism and of 'natural capital', and work on the Precautionary Principle). He is also a renowned Wittgensteinian scholar. Recently described as a 'leading climate activist', he has dedicated much of his life to campaigning for the Green Party of England and Wales and is a former spokesperson for Extinction Rebellion. He is co-founder of the Climate Activists Network, GreensCAN. His many books include *Parents for a Future - How loving our children can prevent climate collapse* and *This Civilisation is Finished: Conversations on the End of Empire - and What Lies Beyond*.

For those able to feel the meaning of the news, the message of the sixth IPCC assessment report from August 2021 was harrowing. Our best climate scientists said the harm humans have done to our habitat is ‘unequivocal’ and ‘unprecedented’. We are already too late in some ways, and still too slow in others, which is why Rupert Read’s emphasis on ‘transformative adaptation’ in this essay is such an important shift of perspective. Paradoxically it is only by preparing for what can no longer be prevented that we might yet avoid something even worse.

We know this is the situation scientifically because the IPCC also tells us that more than half of total cumulative global emissions since 1751 have occurred since 1990. We know it emotionally through the widespread occurrence of increasingly violent weather, and the discomfort of terms like nuclear hurricanes and wet-bulb temperatures entering our lexicon.

Like the famous Sherlock Holmes case of the dog that didn’t bark, the most important message of the 2021 assessment report is that one that is not there. The message that jumps out to me above all others is that previous IPCC reports, going back to 1990, have not been heeded. Where is the report on that? Because that’s the one we really need.

Where is the report with IPCC level rigour and authority that explains the gap between what we know and what we do at scale? Where is the widely reported executive summary that highlights the glaring absence of the pre-political We invoked by scientists (and the urgency to create one, as indicated by Rupert)? Where is the public awareness campaign on the competing commitments arising from democratic mandates? Where is the world stage where we grapple with endemic corruption that breaches trust, cultural conditioning that binds us to our consumer trance, and targeted technological addiction that keeps us diverted? Where are the day time television conversations about how fascinating and tragic it is that we get in our way, and what it might take to get out of it?

Perspectiva’s work is climate activism in disguise. We call ourselves an urgent one hundred year project as a serious joke to reflect a paradoxical phenomenon; ecological peril has been an enduring emer-

gency for decades, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. Those who say we don't have time to rethink society, we just need to decarbonise or 'throw everything at it' are not paying close enough attention to why that has not already happened, nor to the intensity of what's coming. Everything humanity does to and for itself, all the struggles for power, all the battles for resources, all the technological breakthroughs, all the cries for help; everything over these coming decades will be set within the all-too-real theatre of climate collapse.

Perspectiva's central concern is not in clamouring for action, because action can be good or bad, it will happen anyway, often has unintended consequences, and tends to be short-lived. Instead, we attend to the convergence of challenges across different features of life - systems, souls and society - and create outputs and practices that seek to help overcome our collective immunity to change. That work involves looking at our social imaginary - the widest possible grasp of our whole predicament - and considering what it means for competing commitments and hidden assumptions within and between people at scale.

Such work is beyond us, but it's necessary and we invite people to grow into it. One of the hardest things to grasp about climate collapse is that it's singular and calls for a singular response. Climate collapse is implicated in too many spheres of life to be merely an environmental issue. It is not like the hole in the ozone layer that was relatively easy to fix, because it is not happening in one place, nor arising from one cause. Climate collapse is not a war, because most of us are on too many sides at once, though it may well call for a martial spirit. Climate collapse is not like an asteroid hurtling towards earth, when questions of root causes and vested interests would not arise. Nor is climate collapse a mere problem, because it is not clearly defined, localised, discrete and time-limited, but vexed, global, porous and inter-generational. It's a predicament.

Perspectiva is therefore delighted to share the essay that follows, because it tries to convey why the singular nature of climate collapse matters to two main target audiences.

First, Rupert writes to the climate movement as a seasoned campaigner within it. He reflects on the extraordinary initial success of the movement's 'radical flank', Extinction Rebellion, for which he was regularly a spokesperson on national news. As we approach COP26

in Glasgow in November 2021, many anticipate a probable failure there. I don't say that with any righteous glee or judgment. Political leaders are often plutocratic, even kleptocratic, and sometimes they are both even when they are democratic. They should - in the moral sense - do all they can and more on climate. Yet they come to international conferences tethered to personal and national interests and to electoral mandates. Even if they reach binding agreements over decades, what can really tie the hands of almost 200 countries over many electoral cycles. We can and must prioritise the long term over the short term, but there will always be countervailing pressure.

And so it comes back to root, the people who put the politicians where they are, or allow them to remain there. That's all the more reason to re-examine what the initial success of XR in shifting public mood around April 2019 means today. There was a moment where it felt like the movement's agency became hyper-agency, where climate action was no longer about isolated plots but a shift in the overall setting, when legacy media were paying attention and the public at large were at least curious; it felt like society might after all be waking up.

In light of that encouraging but all-too-temporary success, what can we learn from XR's subsequent tactical errors, weakness for moral purity and misplaced strategic assumptions? Social movement theory stemming from the history of civil resistance is valuable and relevant, but it risks being pseudo-strategic and is not nearly as clever as it sounds if you are not paying attention to the specificity of climate change. Rupert clearly grasps this point, and highlights it here with due respect to XR.

Secondly, and ultimately more radically, in the etymological sense of 'forming the root', Rupert writes for the much wider spectrum of people who care deeply about responding to climate collapse but don't quite know how to do it. The latent power of this group, described here as a potential 'moderate flank', is enormous, but it is unlike the climate movement we currently have even when its breadth and variety is acknowledged.

The author Alice Bell once wrote that 'the people need to rise before the seas do', and that might well be right. Yet how will they rise? The people of the moderate flank are busy, they may not be political by nature, they may not be radical or even progressive in outlook, they

won't see themselves as campaigners or activists, and they won't identify with the moral rightness of gluing themselves to bridges to stop traffic, nor valorise getting arrested.

I believe it is undeniably true that this wide flank of people need to be mobilised in some way, but they are not yet any kind of 'flank' in the movement or military metaphor sense, and they look upon XR's efforts with mixed feelings at best. On the one hand there has been support for the clarion call to wake up to the urgency and scale of a global collective action challenge, and a recognition that what is called for is a deeper reckoning that goes beyond net-zero pledges and policy tweaks. And many people know that this reckoning requires extraordinary measures, whether that's dancing in technicolour to shake us from our habit energy or disrupting daily life to remind us of its forsaken ecological premise. This recognition is what led Rowan Williams to say: 'It might just work'.

On the other hand, the initial desire of XR to be post-political and to build a large alliance of actors across society does not seem to have happened. Many people remain inspired by the civil disobedience that may be necessary, but others have become alienated or demotivated. The Canning Town action of disrupting a commuter tube in October 2019 was XR's nadir, the COVID-19 Pandemic shifted perspective and priorities, and XR's model of self-organisation has led to various forms of internecine conflict. Whatever happens to XR, whether it dies or fractures or mutates or is reborn like a phoenix is not really the point, because this is not about XR as such, but about what they have wrought. Rupert argues that it is precisely the role of the radical flank to create from space for the moderate flank to arise.

The details remain unclear, but the moderate flank might well generate and organise itself because it realises beyond doubt that it has to. When I first started writing about climate collapse at the RSA around 2012, I was working on behavioural science and from that vantage point climate change looked like it was a problem designed to be ignored by human beings. For instance, Dan Gilbert used evolutionary psychology to point out that there's no obvious bad guy (perhaps not even fossil fuel companies, when you consider our complicity in using them), it is not emotive enough to violate our moral sensibilities, it is not immediate enough to feel like a threat and it's unfolding too gradually to evoke a reactive response. Behavioural economist Oliver Payne gave an elegant spin on this kind of account (of which there

are many) of why, in the developed world at least, we are not rising up. The effects of climate change) are distant in four dimensions: not here, not now, not me, and not clear.

But here's the dark hope. It is here. It is now. It is me. And it is clear. There are many more dramatic stories, some lethal and devastating, but since I am potentially part of this putative moderate flank let me put it in undramatic personal terms as an indication of how we begin to come feel that we are not just on the edge of the cliff but already over it. In July an eagerly anticipated post-lockdown trip to Scotland planned with my older son was cancelled because the sleeper train couldn't leave Euston due to unprecedented flooding. A few weeks later the whole family chose to stay indoors on a 'sunny day' in Cornwall due to the unprecedented Met Office advice about the intensity of the heat wave. And it's a first world problem, no doubt, but my wife and I decided not to buy a property near the sea, as we had long hoped to, simply because we looked into credible projections and decided significantly rising sea levels were inevitable in the near future while adequate flood defences were not.

Rupert's essay is written in this kind of context. People are beginning to realise both that climate collapse is here with us, it will get worse, that our politicians are not going to save us, and that in a way we don't quite understand yet, it is up to us to set the agenda with greater resolve. The essay gives some details about how the moderate flank might emerge, with teachers, with lawyers, with doctors, with parents and grandparents. It is already happening, though not fast enough, and I hope and believe that in the UK at least, this essay may help to speed things up.

Clive Hamilton once wrote that we live in a phase of history where power is diverging from knowledge, and sadly, on climate at least, that still seems true. The situation is really quite grim, and we cannot change the facts. But we can change our idea of power and our relationship to it. That's partly why action leads to hope, rather than vice-versa, because our sense of power is dynamic and we gain vitality and perspective by doing what we can, which is usually more than we think. The moderate flank is yet to be properly born, but it is a latent power that needs to become manifest. This essay is an important contribution to clarifying what that means for all of us now.

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## What next on climate? *The need for a new moderate flank*

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*This essay takes stock of the state of 'the climate movement' in the immediate run-up to COP26 in Glasgow - and in light of its author's expectation that that historic conference will fail us. It argues that it's certain that there will be more and more people in the coming months and years wanting to be involved in meaningful climate action, as more and more wake up to the direness of our predicament, and to there being no-one riding to the rescue. However, a movement that is not prepared to be genuinely inclusive of those who don't reach a certain pre-set standard - of arrestability, or of 'identity', or of ideology - will fail to achieve such action at scale. Thus there is a clear and present need for a new set of activities and organisations that will be able to be the 'moderates' to XR, who were created to be a radical flank to actually-existing environmentalism in 2018. This 'moderate flank' will need to reach further than the organisations that preceded XR managed to do; and to box smarter than XR itself sometimes managed to do. It will have to be designed so as to be more genuinely ideologically and methodologically inclusive.*

*Thus this essay seeks to build on XR's extraordinary but limited success by seeking to inhabit the space that XR, building in its turn on previous movements (from Occupy to Greenpeace), has so strikingly pulled open. The greatest legacy and achievement of XR may turn out to be a massive multiform moderate flank that looks nothing like it, yet is even more necessary.*

## Introduction: the specificity of the climate challenge

The ecological and climate emergency is not like other issues.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is not an issue at all. Climate collapse is a singular condition, namely that of ‘a permanent emergency’. The climate emergency is moreover a *sine qua non*; all other movements will be swept aside or rendered irrelevant over the course of the next generation or two, if this tragedy is not taken much more seriously.

Climate therefore cannot be treated like mere issues can, and it is long past time to grasp how much this realisation matters. Unlike issues, it cannot be attended to for a while and then put on the back burner. On the back burner, it will quietly fry us all. Climate change is also unlike a war in many ways, but it still requires something like a war-time mobilisation; a joined up, determined and inclusive response.

To their credit, Extinction Rebellion (XR) saw this clearly, especially in 2018-19. XR called explicitly for a broad-based approach, transcending standard ideological divisions. It called for an approach befitting an emergency. And yet over time they did not adhere to that initial vision, and this essay concerns how to continue that vision now. How to be post-ideological. How to create a response that could actually be enough. How to reorient ourselves to the emergency that we are inhabiting and that increasingly inhabits us. How to be action-based.

Such a vision demands the trademark truthfulness that XR, along with Greta and her astonishing youth movement, has helped bring to public consciousness. As I have argued for the last five years, honesty about just how bad things are is the ungainsayable place from which to begin.

Any progress will remain inadequate unless we admit the extent to which our civilisation has failed, by which I mean: science as a warning-bell has failed, the policy-making process has failed, the media has failed, the very political system has failed, and activism has failed. It was in response to all these failures that XR was formed. The strength of its premise in existing failure was a large part of its astonishing success, in 2019 in particular. But, as I’ll explain in a little

more detail in the next section, that success too needs to be contextualised in the setting of a somewhat longer-term failure, because XR's demands have of course not actually been met. And there is simply no prospect of that fact changing.

My argument here concerns what then comes next. How do we lean into the vast task of transformative adaptation that our societies face, if they are not to be erased. It is too late now to prevent dire climate damage and ecosystem loss (the latter driven so far mainly by simple human removal of habitats). You can't prevent things that are already here, and done. Our way of life will be transformed,<sup>2</sup> and we will have to adapt to the vicious changes that we've unleashed; either deliberately, or, more painfully, without our willingness.

I write here for those ready to face these painful and yet liberating facts, and for those who have sensed that something more or different is needed from what we have had so far. Perhaps you are someone who observed XR with a sense of admiration but yet of indefinable estrangement. Perhaps you crave meaningful action but not 'activism'. Perhaps you have been frustrated by a sense of there being roads less travelled. Perhaps you think XR was right then but not so much now; or you are a rebel who wants to show some leadership but are not quite sure what that means any more. Possibly you are a funder looking to fund something that could actually work, and be enough.

We need to start by making sense of the recent past.

## How Extinction Rebellion as a ‘radical flank’ has opened up a space

There is an extensive academic literature on ‘the radical flank effect’.<sup>3</sup> This considers what happens when existing reasonably ‘respectable’ organisations trying to bring about significant societal change are ‘outflanked’ by an organisation with more radical aims or methods. This literature suggests that what happens is unpredictable (radical flanks can go wrong, discrediting the whole cause), but that quite often there can be a good effect: radical flanks can shift the whole agenda, the ‘Overton window’, and make the existing organisations seem both respectable and necessary to make some kind of a deal with. The basic idea is: ‘If you don’t sit down finally with these ‘mainstream’ campaigners for change and basically give them most of what they want, then you will have to deal with escalating disruption from the radical flank’. Successful examples of the radical flank effect are thought to include the way that the civil rights movement in America was helped not only by more radical tactics being used within it (such as ‘The Children’s March’;<sup>4</sup> children getting involved and being arrested for civil disobedience) but also by the incipient rise of harder-line (viz. black nationalist), potentially even violent flanks. Famously, Martin Luther King explicitly adverted to this, basically telling the Kennedy Government that it was in its interests to deal fairly now with him, as otherwise it would have to deal with Malcolm X et al.<sup>5</sup>

Extinction Rebellion (XR) was formed explicitly as a radical flank. Its strategy from the beginning was to ‘outflank’ the existing green movement including Greenpeace; this is why in its early stages it took the counter-intuitive step of occupying Greenpeace’s office<sup>6</sup> well before it tried to occupy any Government offices. The XR strategy was to be a (wholly non-violent) radical flank exercising mass civil disobedience that aimed to bring Government to the negotiating table, and ideally with XR itself. (This sort-of happened in a very mild way, in the latter part of the successful XR Rebellion of April 2019, with an XR delegation meeting the Environment Secretary and colleagues of his)<sup>7</sup>. And certainly with other more mainstream political forces. (This too sort-of happened in a mild way, with the Parliamentary debate the day after the meeting with Gove, that (symbolically) declared a climate and environment emergency, thus conceding something to XR’s first demand).

Culminating in April-May 2019, the XR strategy was thereby partially successful. Power also conceded something to XR's 2nd and 3rd demands: The outgoing Theresa May Government legislated, unexpectedly, for a net-zero climate-emissions target for the first time (albeit with a target date of 2050, not 2025!), and Parliamentary Select Committees created a climate citizens assembly [CA] (albeit one that in various ways did not fulfil the full XR mandate, most crucially in lacking any formal decision-making power of its own). XR, in de facto concert with the school strikers (and Attenborough's Climate change: the facts programme), shifted the terms of debate on climate breakdown, dramatically altering public opinion,<sup>8</sup> which suddenly (and lastingly) acknowledged, at least on paper, the existence of a 'climate emergency'.

*What happens when a radical flank gets somewhere and itself becomes a kind of new 'centre of gravity' within the space of activism, successfully shifting public opinion significantly in the direction of its goals? What happens next?*

It is possible (though in my opinion very unlikely; the climate of opinion just wouldn't have been there for as radical a move) that Theresa May's government would have legislated for net-zero anyway, even without XR. But the creation of a Parliamentary-sponsored CA was unquestionably because of XR (XR were basically the only ones arguing for CAs). CAs were not even something that was known about in early 2019 by basically any politicians, so for them to adopt one was a massive testimony to the power of XR. Yes, it had no real teeth, but its simply happening was significant evidence of XR's impact; and its actual results when it reported were impressive. Also the fact the French not long after decided to do one with more teeth is significant.

So here is the question: what happens when a radical flank becomes, if not mainstream, at least centrally salient to the relevant political culture and to the revised Overton window, in the way that XR or at least its demands did? What happens when a radical flank gets somewhere and itself becomes a kind of new 'centre of gravity' within the space of activism, successfully shifting public opinion significantly in the direction of its goals? What happens next?

Well, what happened in fact was this. In the October 2019 Rebellion, XR doubled its numbers, and had some further clear success attracting sympathy in response to Government cracking down (too) hard on it.<sup>9</sup> But this careful alliance-building work was undone when a tube action on the underground went ahead from within XR, despite having relatively little support even within XR (in a poll, an overwhelming majority of rebels opposed it),<sup>10</sup> let alone outside it. Some

violence ensued at the scene, and a massive, perhaps-permanent tarnishing of XR's reputation ensued from the affair. Donations dried up; the era of XR's growth was over.

If things had taken a different path – a path not stopping at Canning Town – could XR have continued to grow? Potentially. But there were probably limits to that potential which sooner or later would have been reached anyway. Because even the 'climate concerned' British public don't care deeply or sustainedly enough about climate/environment to have joined so radical an organisation. They cared a bit more because of XR / School Strikers, but not enough to mean virtually any would be willing to do something which could in any shape or form threaten the fundamentals of their current lifestyle (e.g. get anywhere near being arrested).<sup>11</sup>

XR remains very much on the scene. It remains a centre of gravity for 'mass' direct action on climate and ecology. Given that, while on the one hand XR's story in its first year can (as set out briefly above) be regarded as one of some real success, on the other hand XR has since got bogged down, and the climate crisis continues to escalate, it is likely that 2021-2 — an absolutely critical one for the future prospects of the human race (with the most important climate COP since Paris happening imminently (at time of writing) in Glasgow, and with the vaccine-facilitated post-Covid reset taking shape) — will continue to see some escalation from within XR.<sup>12</sup> XR is tending to radicalise somewhat further in its tactics. This might seem logical, but it is not going to yield an increase in wide support for XR. XR's support has turned out to have a ceiling, defined in part by its very nature as a radical flank (albeit one that has succeeded much more than most observers thought it would in making itself an acceptable and indeed successful 'central' part of the scene), and in part by its mistakes (above all, the tube action of October 2019; also the vandalistic digging up of a lawn at Trinity College, Cambridge, and some other PR missteps involving Roger Hallam personally).

Note however my use of scare-quotes around the term 'mass', above. As I will explain further in the next section, XR, while a centre of gravity now for direct action and to some extent for activism generally, and while having achieved something remarkable in the shift in public opinion and political action in 2019, is marginal in terms of numbers, in terms of ongoing impact, and in terms of deep structural change or influence. To pretend anything different is dangerous,

akin to denialism about reality. To pretend otherwise, in short, ensures that the 'climate concerned' masses think to themselves 'Oh, I probably don't need to do anything, as someone else [those radical activists from XR, in alliance with scientists and wise forward-looking policy-makers] is probably taking care of it'.

It is precisely that attitude which has brought us to the sorry state we are in as a world, where the reality is that 3 of the 7 years allotted by XR to achieve carbon-emissions net-zero and biodiversity-destruction net-zero have passed, with virtually no meaningful change achieved, weather continuing to spin out of control, and populations increasingly vulnerable to disasters.

In other words: it is imperative to find a way of bringing far more people on board. It is imperative to wake up many more into realising that no-one is riding to the rescue, there are no cavalry, so the determinative issue of our time can be ignored no longer - by them. By you. By us all.

## **What next?: A moderate flank**

So what next? Is the scene set for a new radical flank, a radical flank to XR? Roger Hallam has tried to create this, with the birthing of a new political party, 'Burning Pink', which achieved a small ripple of notoriety by vandalising the offices of the Green Party etc. Whilst virtually nobody in the wider world paid any attention to this, for those that did, it was very unpopular and, while it may have sparked some useful conversations, is very likely on balance to have been counter-productive.

More recently, we have seen another radical flank, produced by Hallam and colleagues such as Zoe Cohen, Liam Norton, Ben Derbyshire, Diana Warner and Valerie Brown: Insulate Britain. This has made more of a mark, but its reception, in the wake of its blocking motorways etc, has been highly negative. One particularly interesting feature of that reception has been media commentators saying, in effect, 'We get it, we understand the need for real climate action; why push at an open door?'. Very few commentators said this at first, when XR came on the scene. XR has effected a real consciousness change. Is there still a need for radical flanks, in the wake of that?

Perhaps the real need, signalled by my title in this piece and in this section, is by contrast now starting to become clear.

*The call for a moderate flank is a call to make real that promise of and need for something as large as or larger than 3.5%.*

XR has made a good deal of space in the political agenda and the NGO scene, space that didn't used to exist. But XR is very unlikely now to grow into the realm of being a movement large enough itself to actually win in the manner imagined in its initial strategising, and very unlikely even to get anywhere near its self-proclaimed quasi-Chenowethian target of attracting 3.5% of the population to its banners.

What do I mean by 'quasi-Chenowethian'? XR legitimated its 'theory of change' by appealing to the work of political scientist Erica Chenoweth, who has argued that non-violent movements are more likely to succeed (than violent movements), and that if you attain the active support of 3.5% of your population for such a movement, you will succeed.<sup>13</sup> So, I mean in fact, Chenoweth's work indicates that one typically needs buy-in from far more than 3.5% of the population, to succeed in effecting change through direct action. The 3.5% figure of active support needs to be the tip of a much larger iceberg, the thin end of a very large wedge. The call for a moderate flank is a call to make real that promise of and need for something as large as or larger than 3.5%.

And what do I mean by saying that XR is unlikely to achieve even 3.5%? 3.5% of the UK population is 2 million. XR had probably around 3000 active rebels in April 2019, and maybe 6000 in October. This is 0.3% of the necessary numbers according to Chenoweth's analysis. Even XR's very largest 'action' ever, the relatively undemanding 'grief march' in the middle weekend of the October 2019 Rebellion, had 10-12000 participants. This is still orders of magnitude short of what the Chenoweth analysis suggests is necessary.<sup>14</sup>

The remarkable (and encouraging) thing, given this, is how successful XR was at shifting public opinion, so that the public lastingly has acknowledged the existence of a climate emergency, and shifting elites at least at the level of symbology and discourse.<sup>15</sup> I expressed this above by saying that XR has become a centre of gravity, in the changed agenda surrounding the eco-crisis, in the UK at least (and to some extent in other countries such as Australia, and the USA, and some European countries). The question now is how to move beyond opinion and symbolism to real change on the ground. My case is that,



to achieve this, XR now itself needs a flank, yes; but in the opposite direction. It needs a flank that is perceived as less radical than itself. It needs — we need, the future needs — organisations which will be much larger (much more encompassing and inviting of broad buy-in), and by nature will not be as prone to making PR errors.

Call this a moderate flank. (Or maybe, for a stickier, tastier label: a ‘vanilla’ flank).<sup>16</sup>

Those uncomfortable with radical flanks cannot just preach and criticise. They - we all - need to step up. To form something more massive, more...inclusive, in the space created by the radicals.

The academic literature is remarkably silent on this matter. There have perhaps been relatively few instances of radical flanks becoming centres of gravity; the more normal pattern, as mentioned earlier, is that they make space for a victory for their more moderate predecessors. Another pattern that can occur is for the radical flank to win outright (as when for instance a guerrilla movement wins control of a country; such as in Vietnam). Another possibility (which often occurs) of course is for it to fail completely. But what about the situation I am describing: When the radical flank becomes a kind of norm, almost a new activist normal. When a space has been opened up, but no real sufficient victory of substance by that radical flank nor by its predecessors has been enabled to occur. When the radical flank is lastingly present on the scene, but without much prospect of further success, and functioning meanwhile as a centre of gravity itself rather than as a flank any longer. Hallam’s instinct in such a situation is to try to make the former radical flank (XR) respectable by creating radical flanks to it. There will, as I say, also be attempts to radicalise XR from within.<sup>17</sup> But, as I’ve outlined, neither of these manoeuvres is even remotely likely to be successful, at least not until the ecological situation becomes or at least becomes perceived to be much worse. XR is perceived by the general public as far as one can go towards radicalism; in fact, too far.

In this situation, one that as I say is perhaps somewhat rare, and is certainly neglected /absent in the academic literature, what is being cried out for is a moderate flank. A way of mass-mobilising that utilises the Overton-window-widening that XR has achieved; in a savvier way, without being as off-putting.<sup>18</sup>

Crucially then: avoiding the PR gaffes, and not requiring the seeming need to put oneself on the line in the very most demanding ways.

For there is a gap in the market, or (to use a much more apposite metaphor) a vacant ecological niche. Because of the way that, in chunks of the world beginning with the UK, XR has, wonderfully, pulled the space of possibility wide open, the ‘movement-ecology’ of the ecology movement now has a huge gap in it. So I’m not saying to people: don’t get involved in XR, or for that matter, don’t get involved in the National Trust or Friends of the Earth. Such organisations continue to be needed, and will continue to exist and perhaps even flourish. Get involved where you see the need and where you see a fit with your own temperament and talents. But what I am saying is: consider where the need is greatest. Consider where there is the strongest possibility for the next big thing to move our whole agenda forward. Consider where there is a gap. And then look to fill it, creatively and cleverly.

Consider, in sum, the current strong prospects for a moderate flank or flanks.

What form might this flank take? Here is one obvious possibility:

The youth climate strikes too, obviously, have been contributing to the Overton-window-widening. Greta Thunberg and others, worldwide, have been creating space. Adults need to step into that space. Children have been taking the lead in the climate movement worldwide. This is both inspiring and (in a certain sense) shameful: it is shameful that it has come to this; that these the most vulnerable and powerless in relation to the situation (that they have not created) have had to come out from their schools onto the streets and beg for their lives.

Just as there has been a mass mobilisation of children, now, as the Covid restrictions start to drop away, and with the absolutely vital task in hand of getting the post-Covid reset right (or at least not as horribly wrong as it is mostly currently going),<sup>19</sup> and taking advantage of the vast spotlight that is on the issue in late 2021 with the crucial COP26 taking place at Glasgow in November, there should be a much larger mass mobilisation of adults. Of we who ought together to be parenting the future.

There is a parents' movement<sup>20</sup> taking shape, initially in response to the youth climate movement. This is the time when it needs to crystallise. Covid was most probably a product of the climate and ecological crisis; it was undoubtedly spread by jet planes; it was dealt with successfully by Governments that utilised the Precautionary Principle,<sup>21</sup> and the civilian populations of Governments that by contrast were reckless have (by contrast) suffered more grievously in some cases than they did even in World War II. There will be many more pandemics, including worse ones, unless we manage to rein in the eco-emergency swiftly and seriously.<sup>22</sup>

*If the kids can do it, then by Gaia so should we. We, the older generation at large; those responsible for parenting the future.*

XR has become a fixture on the scene. But it is widely perceived, and rightly in respect of the specific instances I mentioned earlier, as having gone too far. And it is very unlikely to break through further (though it might, after a hiatus,<sup>23</sup> if circumstances become more propitious (i.e. if/when the circumstances of the Earth become less propitious), much as Black Lives Matter arose from a position of quietude in summer 2020). A huge, but more moderate [than XR] parents' movement (with its primary tactics being, perhaps, graduated stoppages or strikes on designated days, and certainly real workplace activism<sup>24</sup> to get the changes we need happening in and through every single place of employment as well as through Government action): this is what the circumstances of 2021 suggest. Or, to use a familiar word: what they demand.

If the kids can do it, then by Gaia so should we. We, the older generation at large; those responsible for parenting the future.

## Why a moderate flank will be plural: moderate flanks

This that I have just described is not merely one possibility. It is the possibility that I passionately believe is the most crucial of all. We owe it to our kids, to the future, to do this, and to start to do it now.

But it is certainly not the only possibility. Here are some other moderate-flank endeavours well worth undertaking, to some extent overlapping and to some extent not:

> As outlined in the previous section, using the model of what our children have achieved over the past few years, it makes sense to consider as direct analogues as possible of what they have done. They've practiced strikes. That is an obvious potential strategem then for a moderate flank: adults'/parents' climate strikes, or strikes for a properly 'green' reset of the economy as it 'gets going' again. Or threats to quit, or simply actual change of your employment (your job) to something more worthwhile and less destructive.

But there is another set of workplace-based actions that might be considered simultaneously or first, more moderate still, but potentially transformative if they occur across the piece, at scale, and with determination. Consider the huge potential benefits that the tragedy of Covid has mobilised for the working environment: a massive reduction in commuting (and thus in pollution) and in business meetings abroad; plus an increase in cycling, etc. The need for such a shift in transport - towards the electrified, towards the people-powered, and (most important of all) a shift to less travel, to more localisation, less long and resource-intensive supply-lines - has been underscored by the vulnerability in our transport system plainly revealed by the recent 'petrol crisis' in the UK. All of this is a dress rehearsal for the greater climate-driven disasters and supply-shocks in store.

Or consider the scopes for employees/professionals to influence the ecological footprint of their place of work; including of procurement / supply-chains. And how your employers affect the world for good or ill through their lobbying activities, and their 'brand identity'. And how employers discourage or encourage climate- and eco- action from employees. And how profits are used: e.g. for genuinely beneficial serious philanthropy, or not. (And whether your place of work makes profits at all, or has a different mode of existence). And

what your place of work does: imagine the upsides if a company like Amazon were to discriminate and warn against climate-denialist literature. Imagine if insurers were pro-actively to lobby Government for real action on climate to save their business model,<sup>25</sup> and in the meantime were to refuse to insure companies that added to climate risks or that failed to be transformative in their approach to adaptation. Imagine if the NHS were to prioritise ‘green gyms’ [i.e. therapeutic gardening] on most of the cumulatively-vast green spaces they own around hospitals. Imagine if more Trades Unions were to get deadly serious about a just – which must mean, if there is to be justice for future generations, a deeply green - transition.<sup>26</sup> Imagine the likes of lawyers, accountants, academics, marketers, making clear that it isn’t good enough to aim only for 2050; that that target = death, and that they (we) aren’t going to be silent about this, as our corporate bodies talk up ‘net-zero 2050’ (i.e. the never-never) etc. That what we actually need is: real transformative action now.

There is, as can be seen from the profound variety of the kinds of considerations marshalled within the previous paragraphs, a whole slew of effective forms of activity that could be undertaken to effect what cumulatively could be a transformation of how we work, and thus of our political economy as a whole.

And that’s before even getting to the bolder step of mirroring as adults what our children have led on in terms of doing climate strikes.

> Political parties that are serious about learning from the pandemic and about going into an increasingly climate-damaged future with an adequate programme should learn from XR’s [and Greta’s] success: from the power of radical truth-telling, of authentic emotional relating to the broader audience (and existing policy-makers), of properly-targeted non-violent direction. Relative to XR, they should consider becoming moderate flanks. This is the opposite of the Burning Pink ‘strategy’; instead, what I am envisaging is political parties themselves (starting with sub-sets thereof) doing a vanilla-ised version of what XR did. This applies to the Liberal Democrats; it applies to Labour; it might potentially apply even to the Conservatives, as the 2020s come to manifest more starkly the phenomena of climate decline.<sup>27</sup>

It most certainly and obviously applies to the Green Party. The Greens are different to the other 3 parties: they’ve never got any-

where near power in the UK, and almost certainly won't under FPTP, at least not within this decade (which is the relevant time-scale now for the climate crisis). Whilst the Liberal Democrats are currently an irrelevance, they were in government only 6 years ago, and have risen from very low ebbs before.

*The moderate flank can be a force in party politics; and this offers hope, because part of what is needed if there is to be any chance of transformation is likely to be: change via electoral politics*

The Green Party has not succeeded in the UK in its historic mission: of coming to power and saving the world through the ballot box.<sup>28</sup> It needs to return to its roots: to its philosophical basis, incorporating the need for justified, targeted non-violent direct action that makes sense to most of the public. That can be electorally successful too!<sup>29</sup> The Green Party, in other words, needs to radicalise, and step up to deal head-on with the terrifying reality of our time, of how we are over the brink. But, relative to XR (and there is a significant overlap of personnel between the two), this would be the Green Party functioning as a moderate flank. This is the strategy envisaged by the new Greens Climate Activist Network (GreensCAN)<sup>30</sup> that I've co-launched with Cllr Alison Teal and former Green Party Deputy Leader Shahrar Ali. GreensCAN has attracted support already from Jonathon Porritt, former MEP Molly Scott Cato, and Baroness Jenny Jones, among others.

And in this way the moderate flank can be a force in party politics; and this offers hope, because part of what is needed if there is to be any chance of transformation is likely to be: change via electoral politics.<sup>31</sup> Imagine electoral politics not just affected by the agenda-shifting caused by the radical flank,<sup>32</sup> but materially-altered by the presence inside it of a growing moderate flank. I.e./e.g. An ecology/nature/climate/future movement like GreensCAN, which looks vanilla compared to XR<sup>33</sup> but which radicalises actually-existing party politics in exactly the way that our time calls for.

> XR is spawning vanilla flanks of its own. Groups that are trying to change the world using less confrontational strategies; trying to manifest the change they want to see, and thus to activate swathes of potential rebels who are looking for something more positive, and probably by and large less illegal. Watch out for what the Vision and Regenerative Culture wings of XR, now detaching from the 'parent' organisation, are working on; and 'Breaking Free' (which used to be called 'XR Breaking Free'); and 'XR Rewilding'; and Skeena Rathor's inspiring 'Co-Liberation' project; and 'Wild Card' and the CEE bill campaign; and 'Climate Emergency Centres',<sup>34</sup> and 'Trust the peo-

ple'; and, crucially, Transformative Adaptation (TrAd)<sup>35, 36</sup>. I've been heavily involved with this last. TrAd is a recognition that it is too late for a mitigation/prevention-only based approach. It functions as a moderate flank to XR, seeking to initiate thought-leadership and practical action on relocation, food-provisioning, and visionary actions to uphold these aims. It functions also as a moderate flank if you will to Deep Adaptation; TrAd does not give up on the goal of successful societal transformation without collapse... though it accepts that the current trajectory is firmly toward collapse and aims like DA to help find a way through that eventuality IF it occurs. By not aiming at arrest (but just having non-violent direct action in its back-pocket as a tactic redolent of our determination not to be deflected from our aim of surviving and flourishing) and instead taking ultra-seriously the spirit of pre-figuration, of regenerative practice (the spirit of Waterloo Bridge in April 2019, etc), TrAd can potentially attract many who are put off by the challenging spirit of XR.<sup>37</sup>

The space that XR has created can and must be filled. Action on the ground for real resilience-building / Transformative Adaptation;<sup>38</sup> political parties themselves doing some of what XR did, without the PR-fails that came with it; workplace activism on a different scale and at a different speed than it's ever been tried before; above all, a mass parents' movement,<sup>39</sup> emerging in pain and anger and hope and determination, during this time, to insist upon a post-Covid world that does not shorten their (our) kids' lives, and upon a post-COP world that gets serious about the issue of our time, at last; these are the kinds of ways in which we can stop the future from being shit, and ensure that our kids have a future. Maybe even on balance a better one.

The primary audience for the present essay is English-speaking countries across the world; which are roughly the countries where XR (and, in the USA, Sunrise) have most shown the efficacy of a radical flank. But XR's effect has also been wider, and the Greta-effect has had something of a radical-flank effect or nature; and there are other movements too of a radical flank nature that have opened up the space for the conversation that this essay has taken on and seeks to initiate and widen, in other countries.

Take Germany, for (an important) example. There (unlike in the UK), Fridays For Future includes some adults; there (unlike in the UK) one or two individual youth climate strikers have achieved a

level of media-cut-through which has brought them almost onto a par with Greta herself in terms of domestic influence; and there (again unlike in the UK) there is already a substantial, influential parents' movement (most found in many 'Parents For Future' chapters). Furthermore, Germany has not only a thoughtful and impactful wing of XR, but also Ende Gelaende, a radical direct action movement which hits hard especially at the German coal industry. I would foresee – and argue for – an expansion in size and ambition of the German parents' movement, and also an upping of ambition in the zone of workplace-based activism there. All in the context of aiming for a broader realisation to be attained, that political 'leaders' are not rising to the rescue: that the post-Covid reset is largely not being undertaken transformatively, that the climate-critical COP is poised to fail us badly. In Germany, the Green Party has had its most successful election result ever, as I write. But the German Greens are dominated by 'realos'; and their election result was actually disappointing compared to what had been hoped for (let alone what the times need). Germany needs a movement (or movements) orders of magnitude larger than XR and Ende Gelaende, to bend the political agenda seriously in the direction of genuine and sufficient climate- and eco-action.<sup>40</sup> That movement is likely to function as a radical flank to die Gruenen, but as a moderate flank to XR and Ende Gelaende. (Ideally, as with GreensCAN here in the UK, it would actually come to have real influence moreover within the German Green Party. My view is that the best chance for Green Parties to take power now is, 'paradoxically',<sup>41</sup> for them to 'call it': to admit that they have failed, to take up a more authentic stance again. Success now depends on acknowledging failure. So as to come back to fundamentals...<sup>42</sup>



## **Why climate is different: why a moderate flank is more what is needed here and now, than in previous (liberation) struggles**

The possibility of a working model of a radical flank has been brought to wide public attention recently through the hit Netflix documentary 'Seaspiracy'. I am referring especially to the remarkable success of Sea Shepherd. Sea Shepherd has had real success 'on the ground' (or rather (see (b), below): on the waves) making it harder for whalers, illegal fishing vessels etc. to do their deadly work. Sea Shepherd has a very good record of avoiding harm to humans against whom it intervenes, but its methods are very direct indeed: for example, it rams the ships it seeks to stop, when necessary! And Sea Shepherd wins somewhat wide praise for its success; it typically does not get dismissed as 'eco-terrorists' etc.

Does this make the case for a radical flank after all? Does it support the arguments made by John Foster and by Andreas Malm, for letting go of a 'dogmatic' commitment to avoiding destructive violence against property at least (IF that really is violence; it seems to me a very firm line needs to be always kept in place, between damage to property and real violence – ie. Damage to life)?

I'm unconvinced that it does. It seems to me that the Sea Shepherd case..

(a) does not seem to have translated into a more general moving of the Overton Window in the way that XR effected in the UK; just because Sea Shepherd has had some success shouldn't blind us to the catastrophic (and that is an accurate use of the word) ongoing effect commercial fishing etc. is having on the oceans. If Sea Shepherd had been successful, then that catastrophe would be in the process of stopping. Put it this way: if Sea Shepherd had been so successful, then, rather than appearing prominently in Seaspiracy, it would have obviated the very need for Seaspiracy;

*and*

(b) insofar as it HAS been successful, in creating a sense of legitimacy in stopping through direct action the activities of whalers, 'piratical'

industrial fishing trawlers, etc., has probably been so mainly because of factors specific to action on the high seas. Where it is just much easier for bad guys to maraud, in the vastnesses; where government authority, regulation and action tend to be significantly less present than on land; and where therefore the need for full-on radical direct action is just much more present and clear. I am sceptical about whether we can draw lessons from the brave and often-effective actions of Sea Shepherd to apply to our struggles on land.<sup>43</sup>

Foster and Malm, I take it, would argue that if there is to be a radical flank, in the hard times that are coming, with a rising tide of climate disasters, then it ought to be structurally similar to Sea Shepherd's, i.e. it ought to focus on the undertaking of targeted ecotage: hitting hard targets that make sense to those citizens willing to think rationally about the matter. It ought to religiously avoid violence against people. But it ought to be willing to undertake property-damage where necessary, and so bring real economic costs to the ecocidal system.

Partly for the reason given in the previous paragraph (of the specificity of the struggles at sea) I don't think doing this on land would be likely to actually help at all. Thus I do not support the Malm-Foster strategy.<sup>44</sup>

There's a further reason why I don't support such 'climate-Leninism', and it is even more fundamental:

Those, such as Malm and John Foster, who want us to envisage such an ecosaboteurist radical flank, need to face up to the reality that they spend most of their writing avoiding: that there is very little appetite among activists to the public for even such an — intelligent, sense-making — radical flank as they imagine. The climate/ecology struggle is very different from the struggles that typically get invoked, by XR and Malm alike, as would-be precedents. Because it is not a struggle for self-liberation on the part of an oppressed group. It is a struggle in which selflessness is necessary; it is an intergenerationally-oriented struggle; it is a struggle in part crucially on behalf of those (including our non-human kin) who are not and never will be us, and who are not and never will be able to defend themselves.<sup>45</sup> (It is a struggle that is therefore at best orthogonal to 'identity politics').<sup>46</sup>

Because of this, it is often harder for people to get worked up about it — to really get that actually the stakes are far higher than those in those great historic liberation struggles of the Pankhursts, Gandhi, Martin Luther King etc.

So we still have a huge conviction to do.<sup>47</sup> Precisely because the climate situation is so different from those that tend to get fallen back upon as alleged analogues (Suffragism, etc.), precisely because it demands system-change, and needs huge buy-in, we need primarily not a radical flank but a moderate flank. Contra Hallam and Malm<sup>48</sup> and Foster. We need to get a far larger percentage of the population to understand and feel the bitter truth; that no-one in authority is planning to do enough to save their kids, to save the(ir) world. That this issue of issues, this more-than-an-issue, cannot be outsourced any longer; that Governments, let alone scientists (who are thoroughly let down by a policy-making system that is not in tune with them or with precaution), are not 'on' this in a manner that will amount to enough. More people need to feel their vulnerability, and that of their children. Doing so will be painful - but also transformative.

## **Conclusion: A massive 'moderate' flank, to save civilisation from itself**

This is about saving civilisation. Everyone knows that civilisations have failed before. My argument is that this civilisation is finished,<sup>49</sup> and that the decision now is whether the full-spectrum transformation that is coming takes the form of an intelligent, voluntary transformation - or the kind of transformation that gets brutally forced on people when a civilisation collapses. We need a liveable planet for all. If we can keep that, then we can keep (a new) civilisation.

In relation to this struggle for a habitable, let alone flourishing future, we face of course huge free rider / collective action difficulties. Not to mention huge vested interests and inertias. Thus there is no alternative but to achieve a pretty wide buy-in to the needed changes. We need enough of a plurality or majority to get onside such that

the free riders and the forces of the status quo can be brought to heel, led to change. The task is far harder than that of the Suffragettes, the Indian Independence movement etc.; the aim is necessarily nothing less than system-change.

*There is no Leninist solution to the climate tragedy. Even if eco-authoritarianism were desirable, which obviously it isn't for powerful independent reasons, it is a complete non-starter.*

‘Paradoxically’, I have suggested that this is why a huge moderate flank is now what is needed. Now that things are truly desperate is the time for a moderate flank: to be enough (i.e. to be large enough to overcome the inertia that is slowly ruining the lives and prospects of our children); to be the ‘place’ where the many waking up can find and make a home, and change everything. It will be highly radical compared to the status quo, but moderate compared to XR, let alone to any Malmian (more) radical flank. There is no Leninist solution to the climate tragedy. Even if eco-authoritarianism were desirable, which obviously it isn’t for powerful independent reasons, it is a complete non-starter.<sup>50</sup> Without fairly broad buy-in from businesses, elites, and (in the end, above all) citizens, the swift whole-systems-transformation that is needed now to avert collapse (or even to significantly soften it, if it comes) is quite simply impossible. That is the ultimate reason why, on this question, the question on which our children and their children will judge us (and if we fail them, they will indeed judge us), the great cause of our time is the requirement for a great, wide, unprecedented rising-up. This should issue in due course in democratic forms such as Citizens Assemblies for the re-direction — the transformation — of our common future. But the form it will take, to get there, will almost certainly not be the mass deliberate offering up of themselves for arrest of citizen-activists. It will much more likely include a much larger number of people moving both to change their workplaces (for labour remains the greatest power of humans; that, Marx got right, and if we can get companies and institutions all really racing for zero — zero-biodiversity-destruction as well as zero-carbon — this decade, then there is still a chance) and, as and when needful, in targeted fashion to withhold their labour, as our children have inspiringly already withheld theirs from school.

Any thoughtful observer of the political scene in the early 2020s has to be operating on the assumption that climate etc. will steadily, increasingly become the issue that pre-occupies politics. This means that in one way or another Centrist and Right-wing parties will move to embrace it. This makes the stakes clear: rejecting the need to embrace a moderate flank, trying instead to remain ‘pure’, will have a

heavy cost: it would leave the field to nastier ways of taking up the climate space.

But taking seriously therefore the need for a moderate flank (for those who self-identify as Centre or Right are only in vanishingly rare instances going to be willing to embrace an approach something like XR's) implies directly that we must avoid self-presenting as 'woke', as ideological, as 'Left', etc. If you demand commitment to open borders (or to signing up to all aspects of and 100% of the trans right agenda; or to the doctrine that our society is 'white supremacist'; etc) as conditions for entry to the climate movement, do not be surprised if the movement remains small, marginal, and does not actually win. And do not be surprised if you get 'outflanked' by larger risings-up that are studiously neutral on 'woke'.

As I say, the stakes are far too high for such narrow-minded purism. We can't justify being complicit in crashing our entire civilisation just because we are determined to be dogmatic about (say) the EU, or immigration policy, or wokeness.

So it's imperative we chart a realistic, inclusive (of those whose politics is not identical to our own) way forward. One which can have genuinely wide appeal.

This point about inclusiveness is in fact emergent from and critical to the entire approach in this essay. The 'woke' ('intersectional' identity-politics-based) approach to inclusiveness involves a certain jargon that is itself not inclusive to most of the population. It is of course fine, good, for intersectional approaches to be part of the movement. Likewise decolonial approaches. It is not fine for them to demand that the entire movement take their form. For that is exclusive of the majority. It does not include precisely many of those who are needed if there is going to be a genuinely mass movement. Exactly the kind of movement being urged in this essay.

Similarly, it is obviously fine, good, for there to be leftist climate-organising. But it is not fine to take up the posture that non-leftist climate-organising is illegitimate. We need to be genuinely inclusive of those whose politics are not our own.

As I set out briefly earlier, in the section on 'Why the moderate flank will be plural', the moderate flank may and should stretch to include

Conservatives who are serious about saving our common future: about...conserving this good Earth.

*On the spectrum from conventional activism and conventional politics on the one hand through to arrest-willing non-violent direct action on the other, the most obvious vacancy is perhaps in the central area of our lives that is our work.*

XR was created to have this kind of inclusivity; that was at the heart of its 3rd demand, for citizens assemblies operating 'beyond party politics'. But in its increasing adoption of a 4th demand, its increasing pro-identity-politics partisanship, it has gradually left this terrain. The moderate flank should - must - reclaim and use that terrain. The terrain of genuine open inclusiveness.

The moderate flank concept for which I have argued in this essay sees us coming together via 'identities' that will bring us together, rather than divide us. Our identity as parents (at least: as parenting the future together). Our identity as workers. Our identity as members of a community: this last is what TrAd, Climate Emergency Centres, Trust The People etc are. Endeavours, that XR has given birth to, that seek to parlay this 'identity' into something realer that can, bottom-up,

On the spectrum from conventional activism and conventional politics on the one hand through to arrest-willing non-violent direct action on the other, the most obvious vacancy is perhaps in the central area of our lives that is our work.<sup>51</sup> What we need is for people to be delivering the transformative change that is required via their/our day jobs: working to ensure that the day job really is part of the solution, not of the problem, and working to do so on a non-reckless timeline.<sup>52</sup> And that implies a date for net-zero way before 2050; it implies real zero rather than net-zero<sup>53</sup> except when genuinely impossible and when the emissions in question are non-negotiably necessary; and it implies a broad focus on ecology and not only a relatively narrower focus on climate.

If this push - for wide, sustained, rapid action via workplaces such that our children can have a future -- fails, then there will be significant scope for escalation into strikes. But the beauty of the moderate flank proposal<sup>54</sup> is that, even if we have to go that far, we still won't be going as far as XR have already gone.

In other words: Relative to XR,<sup>55</sup> all this will be a massive, multiform, moderate flank.

The need for such a flank now could not be starker.

Unless I've got something wrong in the course of this analysis, then let's make it happen.

So reader, finally, please consider now what is your unique/best contribution to this project. How are you best-placed to make it tangible. To find and grow meaning, in this time of existential threat. Through your work? Through being a parent? Through your community? What's your flanking-movement?...<sup>56</sup>

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*Post-Script: How the 'moderate flank' is radical and the radical flank less so*

In the body of this essay, I have taken for granted the broad polarity of 'moderate' and 'radical'. Actually though, at the place we have now reached, this turns out to have been at best a crude simplification, and perhaps a complete distortion:

> The 'moderate' flank is more radical inasmuch as it tacitly or explicitly accepts that the emergency is not just going to get sorted. XR envisages something akin to a Schmachtenbergerian phase-shift; it imagines everything changing successfully on a dime, midwifed by citizens assemblies.<sup>57</sup> This is not going to occur. XR is in a way just a ramped up version of traditional activism, taking it to a higher level of urgency and scale. By contrast, Transformative Adaptation and Climate Emergency Centres - key planks in the moderate flank inasmuch as it relates to mobilisation of our communities - bake in that much damage is already...baked in, that adaptation is unavoidable and needs to be embraced (and adequately defined), that the truly radical thing is to be willing to stare awhile into the abyss, rather than to rush over it into breathless action that seeks desperately to cover the abyss. The truly radical thing now, one might venture, is to pause, and contemplate, not just act. Accepting that we are not going to achieve a radical change overnight forces us to look into ourselves. To face the grief, terror, disappointment. To actually, honestly grasp that no-one is coming to save us; that we, en masse, are going to have to do it ourselves. The really radical thing to do is to appreciate and face honestly that it is too late for a smooth transition to a long-term

viable civilisation. Once one accepts this, one's (quite understandable, correct) sense of urgency is also tempered; and then one can slow down and exit headless-chicken mode. This is one of many ways, present across this essay, in which the politics our time needs is a politics of paradox.

> The way in which the 'moderate flank' involves a more direct, positive direct action could similarly be read as more radical, in a way. Moving directly to improve business / workplaces (and using strikes/ stoppages probably mainly as a resort only if this process is resisted).<sup>58</sup> Moving directly to make communities resilient (and using traditional NVDA only if this is resisted). And so forth. This is more prefigurative, more regenerative. This goes beyond 'activism' altogether: and a good thing too, because the term activism is itself non-inclusive. The moderate flank movement needs to permeate and transform everyday life. In my experience, people are now hungry for this positive dimension. They are less interested in protest, more in making stuff actually happen.

> The radical inclusiveness of the 'moderate' flank is itself a virtue, a feature of a grown-up politics that is actually serious about transformation. It is exciting, difficult, new, in our polarised times, to seek truly to go beyond party politics and beyond ideology. Forming a first-person plural that doesn't yet exist (enough). Possibly even making real the so-called anthropos in the so-called anthropocene. (I would argue that there is nothing truly 'radical', in the end, to identity-politics-based approaches.)

> The 'moderate flank' that I have outlined is a true movement of movements.<sup>59</sup> It is the heir to what Paul Hawken called 'the blessed unrest', the unnamed movement. The difference is that the moderate flank is still mostly unsuspected; it is more incipient, yet to be. I am naming something in other words that is in the main in the early stages of becoming. And the difference is that this time, the urgency is such that there needs to be the further resort to more traditionally radical action 'thought-in' as a potential one: though again, as I stressed in the body of this essay, even work-stoppages are less of a...demand upon one than most of what XR has become famous for.



> The 'moderate flank' will probably not seek to achieve a joined-up identity. It is of its nature distributed. This too is a way in which it could be seen as more of its time, more radical, than the 'radical flank'.

The name 'moderate flank' is in the long run obviously not going to be the actual term used to describe the wide, positive climate/ecology movement that I have outlined in this essay. Because the term 'moderate flank' is defined by reference to something else. Ultimately, one will be looking for a positive way of characterising - of naming - this positive, inclusive, distributed movement: in other words. But that is a task for another essay...

## Endnotes

1 I explain this point in detail in the section 'Why climate is different'.

2 Watch my YouTube video '[Shed A Light: Rupert Read – This civilisation is finished: so what is to be done?](#)'

3 Starting with Jo Freeman's *The Politics of Women's Liberation: A Case Study of an Emerging Social Movement and Its Relation to the Policy Process* (1975); see also Herbert H. Haines' *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970* (1984).

4 See Robert Houston's documentary [Mighty Times: The Children's March \(2004\)](#)

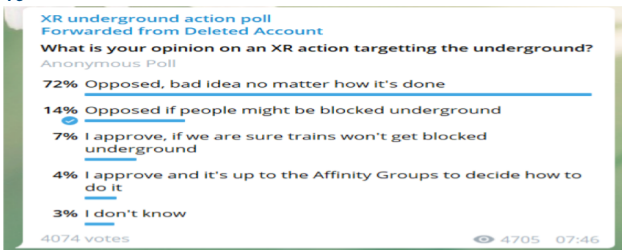
5 See pp.48-50 of Andreas Malm's book *How to Blow up a Pipeline* (2021).

6 This was Roger Hallam's idea... and it went down pretty much like a lead balloon, and pissed off a lot of Greenpeace people. But it did have the one signal virtue of marking plainly in the minds of many the deliberate intent of XR to function as a radical flank.

7 I arranged for XR to [meet with Government](#), led for this purpose by Michael Gove (then DEFRA Secretary) (and there were semi-simultaneous meetings with the London Mayor and with the national Opposition (Labour).

8 See '[Extinction Rebellion's tactics are working. It has pierced the bubble of denial](#)' by Matthew Todd in *The Guardian* (10.06.19).

9 This was an example of 'blowback' (a subset of the radical flank effect), where the government overreaches and gets sympathy from the public; for discussion, see Roger Hallam's *Common sense for the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (2019). If XR had continued growing, then it's possible/likely the government would have continued to overreach in reaction to our non-violent direct action, even potentially using violence against us, which is what happened against Gandhi, and Martin Luther King's movements.



These are the results of the poll conducted on Telegram on the proposed tube action; over 4000 rebels voted, and you can see how few approved of it. Sadly, it went ahead anyway. (See Chapter 18 of my book with Samuel Alexander *Extinction Rebellion: Insights from the inside* (2020) for my personal response to the debacle).

11 Given the widespread, though usually false, perception that simply being arrested/convicted of some minor public order offence could harm one's career.

12 An example of this happening would be Gail Bradbrook's window-breaking at Barclays in March 2021, as part of 'Money Rebellion', and similar actions subsequently. This action has been explicitly described as an escalation in response to inaction on implementing XR's demands.

13 See her book with Maria J. Stephan *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (2011).

14 Furthermore, I've argued previously that a Chenoweth-style analysis drastically understates what would be necessary for a movement on the climate and ecological crisis to succeed. See especially Section 2 of the Appendix to my book *Extinction Rebellion: Insights from the inside* (2020). See also the [more popularly-accessible video I made on the topic](#).

15 See Jonathan Rowson's '[The end of think tanks and the beginning of thinking](#)' for some reflection on why the frame of emergency is in fact inadequate here, and why crisis and meta-crisis are closer to the mark. I am currently working on an essay on this with radical climate scientist Wolfgang Knorr; it is entitled, provisionally, 'Stop saying 'Climate emergency!'.

16 This term is suggested by my colleague, Adam Woodhall, who has had a career in strategy and comms for sustainability, and also worked at the centre of XR, seeing at first hand the strategies and personalities involved in the build up to and during the April 2019 Rebellion and then stayed with the movement until Jan 2020. I owe to Adam much of the inspiration for the present essay, and thank him deeply both for that and for a brilliant set of comments on an earlier draft.

17 Gail Bradbrook is among those leading on these 'escalation' strategies; see n.12, above.

18 XR wasn't designed to be all embracing; it was a conscious and key design element that it would be off putting to big parts of the population, including many 'climate concerned' people, who were often still uncomfortable with the tactics of the April [2019] Rebellion. It was designed to feed off that controversy. Its genius was the awareness that to create change, you sometimes have to disturb the status quo, and it found the beautiful goldilocks zone of pink boats parked on Oxford Circus and grannies getting arrested on the temporarily-gardenised Waterloo Bridge. But that goldilocks zone was lost at Heathrow and above all at Canning Town. And in any case XR's 'vibe', its culture and its call for mass arrest, was going to be off-putting to many; a moderate flank may be able to involve far more people. This will be the new Goldilocks zone: stretching people but not too far.

19 See '[Revealed: Covid recovery plans threaten global climate hopes](#)' by Fiona Harvey in *The Guardian* (9.11.20)

20 Visit [Parents for a Future](#) for more information.

21 See my article '[Imagining the world after COVID-19](#)' in *ABC Religion and Ethics* (22.06.20).

22 See my article '[The Permanent Pandemic - Is a post-Covid world possible?](#)' in *Open* (with Aseem Shrivastava) (02.07.21).

23 That the key role of XR at the moment may be to lie in wait in this way is the [argument made with his customary brilliance by Ronan Harrington](#).

24 A possible model of a successful 'vanilla' flanking move in this vicinity is [Lawyers For Net Zero](#), spearheaded by Adam Woodhall. Imagine – create! – a series of such initiatives, across the professions and occupations, now/soon, and achieving critical mass. Why not. I'll discuss this kind of possibility further in the next section. Such serious workplace-based action is particularly crucial in areas that represent clear 'pinch points', leverage-points, in the system. Such as the law, audit, insurance, and [advertising](#).

25 Of course, this is not to deny that there already exist gestures in this direction, such as, [Munich Climate Insurance Initiative](#) and the [Cambridge Institute for Sustainable Leadership](#). However, they haven't had much real impact, and arguably have not been intended to have any dramatic impact, as they spring from the mild reformist paradigm of CSR. This is not what the moderate flank I am calling for amounts to; it falls significantly short of it.

26 Part of the reason why Labour's response after XR's April Rebellion wasn't as adventurous as it could be is because some powerful unions lobbied against a firm 2030 Net Zero. Sadly, when this kind of thing occurs, those unions are prioritising the jobs of the members now, over the futures of the children of those very same members.

27 Watch here for Claire Perry O'Neill's forthcoming book. And check out [Roger Hallam's recent writing too](#), the best thing he has done such co-creating XR. The appeal to conservatives should be an appeal to their wishing to conserve things; whereas, unbridled neo-liberalism is ripping everything up and harrying us over a cliff. It is anti-conservative.

28 The exception to this is in Scotland, where the Scottish Green Party have ministers in government with the Scottish National Party.

29 See '[Power or principle: a false dichotomy?](#)' by Cllr Alison Teal in Green World (20.10.20).

30 See the GreensCAN website for more information.

31 As Sunrise has pulled off in the USA.

32 This effect was obvious in the May 2019 elections in the UK, with the Green Party clearly reaping benefits in the local and European elections from XR's April Rebellion. The #GreenWave was partly an accidental gift of the radical flank effect that at that point XR had successfully undertaken.

33 It is in GreensCAN's 'DNA' to undertake actions that do not alienate; GreensCAN actions are and will be carefully calibrate to potentially build support. GreensCAN sees a key part of its role as being to bring the power of radical truth-telling (including about the way that the COPs this year will fail us; and even about the way that the Green Party itself has, tragically, not succeeded in its historic and vital mission. Such deeply-unexpected authenticity is potentially transformative) [into party politics itself](#).

34 CECs have a very smart 'business model', based in Councils charging zero rates for non-profits managing space in buildings that would otherwise be troublingly empty. You might think of CECs as civic-minded pop-up squats. Or as legal squats...thereby far less off-putting that squatting is to most 'regular people'.

35 As explained there, it is in the 'DNA' of [TrAd](#) to do beautiful actions, actions that make sense and that sense-make, actions that are prefiguratively directed toward the future we want to manifest rather than being primarily against something. (TrAd of course builds on the pathfinding work contained in Green House's '[Facing up to climate reality](#)').

36 Consider also the work of CTRLshift, and, in the USA, of Shareable.

37 We start to see here a limit to the simple spectrum of radical vs moderate. My TrAd colleague Morgan Phillips puts it thus: 'I wonder if TrAd is more radical but less confronting? Ultimately its about building an alternative future, living differently, which integrates significant systemic change. Whilst XR is still essentially within the system but pointing out the massive flaws in it. I think it's the inclusivity (of mitigation, social justice, co liberation etc) that makes TrAd more moderate compared to DA and XR. It accommodates other agendas. It is certainly radical, but it appears moderate compared to XR and DA. I examine this point more in the Post-Script, below.

38 Green House itself of course led the way in calling for Transformative Adaptation, at least in the thinktank world. For instance, in our book, edited by John Foster, *Facing Up To Climate Reality* (2019).

39 Whose actions of course might well take the form to some significant degree of (say) workplace activism – and/or climate strikes, as discussed below.

40 In the electoral sphere, the new 'Klima list' may function as a needed radical flank to the German Green Party. In the recent German federal elections (Sept. 2021), the Klima list scored poorly. But its mere existence warns die Gruenen that they cannot take the votes of the seriously/fundamentally Green-inclined for granted. For my full analysis of the German election results, see <https://www.facebook.com/rupert.read.3/posts/10165796935840537>

41 Read my article '[The politics of paradox](#)' in *Green World* (05.07.21)

42 I trust that this section of my essay answers those who say, 'But we already HAVE a 'moderate flank': we already have the Green Party, Friends of the Earth, etc'. Green Parties need to move (that is what GreensCAN is ultimately designed to facilitate); just not as far as XR. I am proposing in this essay ways to occupy a space XR has made possible: a space for mass action as parents, as employees/businesses, as members of a community on the ground. I don't think that FoE or Greenpeace or the Transition Towns movement are going to occupy this space by themselves. I think mainly it is going to need new organisations etc., not just new tricks, which fine old dogs are unlikely to take to.

43 I speak here in part as a one-time EarthFirst! activist, who was at Redwood Summer in 1990, etc. . It was always striking how much more effective Sea Shepherd were than EarthFirst! As I say, I think quite a bit of the difference can be explained simply by the difference between radical eco-action at sea and on land.

44 See [this debate](#) where Foster and I argue some of the issues out, and Foster's [Review Essay](#) comparing and contrasting my book on XR with Malm's book.

45 The magnificent, mythic rising up depicted in the fulminatory battle of Avatar notwithstanding... Gaia and the animals of the Earth are not going to ride to the rescue... (See on this the close of Chapter 6 of my book *A film-philosophy of ecology and enlightenment* (2018).

46 I offer a reason, in discussing the foundational contribution of the Combahee River Collective to the project of identity politics, for thinking that in actuality identity politics necessarily stands in opposition to activism on behalf of nature, [animals and future generations](#). For they argue that identity politics has to be about liberating yourself/ves; but the whole point about environmental activism, animal activism and activism for a better long-term future is that it involves you looking deeply beyond yourself.

47 My own effort to contribute to this includes emphasising in comms our very real short-medium term vulnerability. See e.g. the line I took on [BBC's Question Time programme](#) when I was on the panel. See also the argument of [my article](#) '24 theses on corona'.

48 Andreas Malm in *How to blow up a pipeline* (2021) is perplexed that there hasn't been more ecotage, especially re climate. This is why.

49 Read my book [This Civilisation is Finished - Conversations on the end of Empire—and what lies beyond](#) with Samuel Alexander. Simplicity Institute (2019) .

50 But the risk of authoritarianism occurring as a result of radical-flankery is real: either through the coming to power of some version of that flank, or (much more likely) as a result of a reactionary response to it. Consider the current UK Police Bill. In this context, the maintenance of non-violent discipline to make the state look bad in its over-reaction is arguably of paramount import. We need to make every action count, not fritter away public sympathy through insufficiently-thoughtful actions perceived as violent. And we need a moderate flank so as to bring more public sympathy actively on board.

51 For full detail on the potential centrality of workplace-based activism to the moderate flank, see my 'Between XR and COP: Pivoting climate movement strategy from the radical flank effect to a 'moderate' flank, via a shift toward workplace-based activism', published by *Green House*: [https://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/climate\\_movement\\_strategy\\_gas.pdf](https://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/climate_movement_strategy_gas.pdf)

52 This is what Lawyers for Net Zero is all about. Roughly its model should be creatively taken up across all sectors. But in different sectors what that means will likely look very different. That's of course why creativity is of the essence. My 'recommendation' needs to be acted on in diverse ways, ways impossible in many instances for me to predict or even perhaps as yet understand. For instance, in some (perhaps, with some creative thought and practice, many) jobs/professions, presumably, workplace action for climate- and eco- sanity can be relatively 'direct'. For instance, in farming; and indeed in teaching.

53 Read '[Climate scientists: concept of net zero is a dangerous trap](#)' by James Dyke, Robert Watson and Wolfgang Knorr in *The Conversation* (22.04.21).

54 My colleague Peter Kramer (personal communication) elaborates on this point as follows: 'Once people get involved in collective action and perhaps see the first successful results thereof, they will become more committed and ambitious, and therefore, conceivably, even more successful. So this can be imagined as a virtuous cycle, a positive feedback mechanism. If initially the immediate goals are rather modest and the whole approach moderate, after going through several turns in the virtuous cycle (several revolutions, as it were, whereby revolution just means going through the cycle once) you might have a truly transformative movement on your hand. The moderate flank does not start out that way but it might just turn into this. What seems all too slow at the beginning, might gather enough speed so that certain goals, which initially seem to be out of reach, could be achieved, certain tipping points could be avoided etc. In fact, it seems to me reasonable to assume that the likelihood of that happening is larger than the probability of radically disruptive direct action embarked upon from now on being successful.'



55 This can't be stressed enough: 'moderate' in this essay does not mean 'centrist' or something similarly useless. It means moderate given the Overton-window kicking-open that XR et al have successfully executed. Work-transformation, work-stoppages; land-transformation and so forth: these things now count as moderate. That, I have argued, is the great gift bestowed by XR.

56 Firstly, my deep gratitude to colleagues past and present in XR and elsewhere; where I disagree with you by name here, that is a mark of respect for you having made enough of a contribution to be worth marking a disagreement with. Much of my thinking here would have been impossible or simply unoccasional, without your foundational and sincere work. Huge thanks to Adam Woodhall for helping throughout the genesis of the idea of this essay, and for detailed comments that have massively improved it. Big thanks also to Vlad Vexler for further inspiration (especially in the Conclusion), and thanks to Atus Mariqueo-Russell, Peter Kramer, John Foster, Victor Anderson, Liam Kavanagh, Rosie Bell, and colleagues from XR Germany, and from Green House, for very helpful comments. Finally, big thanks to Jonathan Rowson for being a wonderful and thoroughly helpful editorial presence.

57 There are exceptions: for instance, the splendid recent framing of the August [2021] Rebellion: 'Act now, because it's too late'. See my speech interpreting this slogan, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=1AM5wDhtQSM>

58 Thus this essay makes explicit the new justification for stoppages or strikes granted by the emergency: if we get frustrated in our workplace based transformative work. Some will say that this will be hard under UK trades union laws, and harder still for the ununionised and precarious. I agree. And yet: there being a future at all for humanity is now in the balance. These are not normal times. And increasingly, I believe that that will be reflected in wider perception, including among employers. A strong soft power is at play on the side of anyone wanting to do workplace-based action for a shared future. It would be hard for (say) Sainsbury's to fire workers for pressing for reduced food waste and for moving away from crazy vulnerability-inducing just-in-time systems.

59 Read my article '[How a movement of movements can win: Taking XR to the next level](#)' on *Medium* (13.09.19)

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