Entertaining Illumination Unleashed

Book Two of the Earth Manifesto

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The Earth Manifesto: Saving the World through Sensible Ideas!

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Entertaining Illumination Unleashed

Book Two of the Earth Manifesto

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This book contains an entertainingly illuminating concatenation of interesting stories, provocative perspectives and visionary ideas. Check out the Home Page of the Earth Manifesto for a good idea of the extensive and wide-ranging contents of these writings. Every essay linked to the Home Page is contained in one of the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto. For the book titles and Table of Contents Cover Pages of each of these 12 books, see the link immediately above Part One on the Home Page.

This *Entertaining Enlightenment Unleashed* is dedicated to Aisholpan, *The Eagle Huntress*. Tiffany Twain urges readers to see this extraordinary documentary film, which tells the amazing and compelling story of a girl who lives in remote reaches of northwestern Mongolia. Encouraged by her family, Aisholpan made the choice when she was only 13 years old to be a hunter, not a gatherer, despite the extent to which her involvement upset the 2,000-year-old tradition that only males engage in this challenging form of hunting. Aisholpan is the daughter of a skilled eagle hunter father, so she bravely takes up a role that has been exclusively male throughout all of Mongolian history -- that of capturing and training a juvenile golden eagle, and then using it to hunt foxes during the harshly frigid winters in the mountains of Mongolia. In the highly traditional and rather primitive culture of her village and region, Aisholpan's courage and fortitude are admirable as she faces opposition and dismissive attitudes that most men demonstrate who are engaged in this activity, and they demean her efforts and try to shame her into conforming with traditional gender roles.

Less than one year after Aisholpan captured an eagle and trained it with help from her father, she entered an annual contest in Mongolia at the Golden Eagle Festival to test her capabilities. She competed with 70 of the best Kazakh eagle hunters -- and she stuns all her competitors and onlookers by actually winning the competition. While she is practicing an ancient art, Aisholpan's story is a modern and inspiring one because she represents a world where the dreams of a young girl can actually come true, even in the face of overwhelming obstacles.

Entertaining Enlightenment Unleashed is also dedicated to revolutionary positive change and the auspicious potentials found in adaptive intelligence and the vision to embrace progressive changes to the status quo. Realizing that the key to figuring out how best to address big problems is to develop the most insightful and comprehensive understandings of them, I have incisively summarized the main ways our economic and political systems are rigged against the common good. See *The Top Ten Ways Our System Is Rigged*, online, for sunbeams of clarity concerning the biggest issues we face. Also, peruse *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Society* for overarching ideas on how we could truly make ours a better world. It would be eminently wise and fair to choose to be guided by a proposed future-respecting *Bill of Rights for Future Generations*.

We need to come together to achieve these goals by creating win-win solutions to serious problems. Ever since Aesop and his fable *The Four Oxen and the Lion,* it has been known that "United we stand, divided we fall." Abraham Lincoln invoked biblical words back in 1858 when he spoke of the great perils of our nation being a "house divided", and today we must act, stronger together, to create a fairer, safer and more sustainable world.

One of the core ideas expressed in my *Common Sense Revival – Book One of the Earth Manifesto* is that better education and greater empowerment of women around the world would yield valuable benefits for everyone concerned. Programs with this goal would contribute to an improved overall quality of life, so it is one of the best ideas for creating healthier, saner and more peaceable societies. Perhaps the commendable Dalai Lama was right when he asserted at a Vancouver Peace Summit in 2009, "The world will be saved by the Western woman." Somebody's gotta do it!

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A Quite Curious and Illuminating Biography of Mark Twain

Latest revision: April 21, 2024

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in rural Missouri on November 30, 1835 and he died on April 21, 1910 in southwestern Connecticut. At the moment he was born, Halley's Comet was visible in the skies, and the next time the comet returned was the year he died. The famous Halley's Comet has a highly elliptical orbit that brings it inside Earth's orbit from the outer reaches of our solar system once every 75 years. It is remarkable that two of the near approaches of this brilliant comet to the Sun coincided with the birth and death of Samuel Clemens.

In the year 1909, by then internationally known as Mark Twain, he wrote: "I came in with Halley's Comet in 1835. It is coming again next year, and I expect to go out with it. It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if I don't go out with Halley's Comet. The Almighty has said, no doubt: 'Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, and they must go out together.'" And sure enough, he died the day after the comet's closest approach to the Sun in 1910.

This biography is intended to shed light on Mark Twain's formative influences, motivations, character, and deep psychological impulses. The deservedly famed writer and public speaker was extraordinarily prolific in writing letters, and because many of his letters were saved over the years, an extensive collection of correspondence by this famous person still exists. These letters provide a fascinating look into his persona, richly adding to the perspective provided by his writings and his *Autobiography* and various biographies, along with the record of his lectures, extensive travels, personal associations and social activism.

Late in life, Sam bragged that, as Mark Twain, he had become "the most conspicuous person on the planet." He once wryly noted that he was "born modest, but it didn't last." In 1897, he declared: "I am not *an* American. I am *the* American. I am the human race compacted and crammed into a single suit of clothes, but quite able to represent all its massed moods and inspiration. I am only human, though I regret it." I chuckle appreciatively, and utter an existential Ha!

The Purpose of These Words

The purpose of this biography is to explore the sensational cultural phenomenon of one of America's greatest historical characters, and to apply his humor, wry wit, occasional exuberant cheerfulness, irreverently trenchant observations and wise insights to our modern day challenges and conundrums.

Mark Twain is highly relevant to people in the world today for a number of good reasons. For one, he cultivated open-minded, even revolutionary attitudes toward vital concerns like the curious nature of human follies, political corruption, war, slavery, discrimination, and attitudes of disrespect for women. His thoughts on these topics can give us a deeper context to discover the greater truths that lie beneath many of the serious conflicts and social antagonisms and reactionary movements in the world today.

Mark Twain had a facile and mischievous faculty for being able to mock absurdities like rigidly dogmatic religious fundamentalism and political extremism. His light-hearted approach toward patently preposterous beliefs is an attitude that could help us today to clearly see the growing insanity of religious fanatics in their unholy alliance with extreme social conservatives and ruthless abusers of authority. We could surely benefit from an effective

new means of derailing obstructionist opposition to forward-thinking ideas, ecumenical understandings, social progress and initiatives that facilitate peaceful coexistence and protect the environment and make our existence more likely sustainable. Mark Twain's humorous perspectives have been as powerful and influential -- and as serious -- as earlier salvos by the great philosopher Voltaire, who railed against the crushing infamy of socially nefarious and wrongheaded doctrines promoted by established authorities in various religions and in politics.

The serious side of the famous humorist was revealed by his love of liberty and hate of shams. He wrote in a letter to the president of Yale University in 1888 that the trade of satirical humorists is useful and "a worthy calling; that with all its lightness and frivolity it has one serious purpose, one aim, one specialty, and it is constant to it -- the deriding of shams, the exposure of pretentious falsities, the laughing of stupid superstitions out of existence; and that whoso is by instinct engaged in this sort of warfare is the natural enemy of royalties, nobilities, privileges, and all kindred swindles, and is the natural friend of human rights and liberties."

Mark Twain coined the phrase "Gilded Age" in a book he co-wrote in 1873, and he provided valuable perspectives concerning the negative impacts of wealthy "robber barons" and irresponsible big business activities and drastic inequalities in the society of his times. His early thoughts about these topics provide a provocative point of view that could motivate us to make honest investigations into our own increasingly inequitable modern age with its unfair concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few, and the ratcheting up of disparities between the "haves" and the "have nots". This fresh way of seeing could give us new purpose in investigating how and why we are creating socially harmful, risky and instability-stoking increases in inequalities between people.

Mark Twain was angered by the brutal conquest of the Philippines by the United States after the Spanish-American War and during the Philippine-American War. This emotion-charged personal reaction gives us a rather important perspective on imperialistic aggression in war. He was upset by activities of American missionaries, who he regarded as a front for imperialism, so he summonsed them back, declaring: "Come home and Christianize Christians in the States." In our new age of rigid Christian nationalism, brash authoritarianism, militarism, terrorism, counterterrorism, drone bombings and nuclear brinksmanship, the need has grown more urgent than ever for new fair-minded movements to arise. The world today is dominated by economic and political systems that are largely controlled by wealthy people and giant corporations prepossessed with the drive to maximize profits. One of their favorite ways of accomplishing this is by foisting costs onto others, making the need for common sense reforms increasingly urgent. A powerful movement is needed that should be guided by fairer dealings, sensible ideas, smart understandings, more respect-worthy moderation and more empathetic attitudes.

The historian Will Durant once wrote, "a sense of humor is born of perspective, so it bears a near kinship to philosophy; each is the soul of the other." A modern Twainian perspective offers us good hope of succeeding in altering the exceedingly dysfunctional status quo and helping make the world a healthier, safer and saner place. So the Earth Manifesto is a philosophical effort to "save the world", and it is my hope that the hook of achieving a better understanding of Mark Twain's life and worldviews will be effective in advancing this goal, and do so from a more modern, sensible, fair-minded, progressive, feminine and heart-centered perspective.

The ideas of three men who lived contemporaneously with Mark Twain have had some of the most profound impacts in human history on the way we understand the world. These three men were Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein, and they each helped launch revolutionary new understandings into human awareness -- of biology, psychology and the physical nature of the universe.

<u>An Overview of the Life of Sam Clemens</u>

Since Sam Clemens was born in 1835 and died in 1910, he witnessed far-reaching changes during his lifetime. He grew up in a Missouri culture that accepted slavery and was then involved in fighting a terrible Civil War over the issue. Missouri was a border state that sent men, armies, generals and supplies to both opposing sides during the conflict, and it endured a neighbor-against-neighbor war within the state that took place as the larger national war unfolded. More than 600,000 people died in that horrible War Between the States. In the span of his lifetime, Clemens also saw the emancipation of slaves by Abraham Lincoln followed by sadly inadequate postwar reconstruction efforts in the South. He also witnessed many violent conflicts with Native Americans. He lived through times of extraordinary economic turmoil, including financial panics in 1857, 1873, 1884, 1893 and 1907. He

was alert to the nature of the Gilded Age of robber barons and the extreme inequalities of that era. He spent a good number of years in the Wild West, which was experiencing rapid growth after the legendary California Gold Rush and the bonanza silver strike in the Comstock Lode of the Nevada Territory. During his lifetime, communications improved from correspondence carried by Pony Express riders to communications by electric telegraph and then the telephone. Transportation remarkably improved from horses, covered wagons and steamboats to railroads, automobiles and early airplanes. Steam power was largely replaced by the internal combustion engine and electric power. The world's population increased by more than 50% from 1.1 billion to 1.7 billion while he was alive, and the United States expanded from 25 states to 46 states.

As these events were unfolding, Sam spent most of his boyhood in Hannibal on the west bank of the mighty Mississippi. Hannibal at the time was a small town about one day's steamboat journey up the river from St. Louis. Sammy was a mischievous boy, full of fun and games and all manner of pranks and mischief. He had an idyllic but adventurous boyhood, as one may surmise from the novels he later wrote about the colorful characters Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, Becky Thatcher and others. He happily regarded his youth as a lovely thing, especially in retrospect, "and certainly never was there a diviner time to me in this world," he later noted of his childhood.

The Early Life of Samuel Clemens

Sam was born into a poor family, and received only a rudimentary education. But he was an avid reader and became a lover of books and later a lifelong advocate of public libraries. As a teenager, he worked at a variety of jobs in Hannibal, his most significant early occupation being as an apprentice doing typesetting in the burgeoning newspaper printing business, where he eventually began to write clever stories for newspapers. He dreamed of becoming a respected riverboat pilot on the Mississippi River, and eventually wrangled his way into a position as a pilot's apprentice, where he spent two years learning the intimate features of the treacherous, ever-changing river between St. Louis and New Orleans. Such knowledge was vital to a steamboat's safe passage, and the undertaking helped satisfy his love for adventure and travel, so he reckoned this period of his life was marvelous.

The fabled Golden Age of Steamboats on the Mississippi River lasted less than 100 years, but Wow! was it eventful. The first steamboat to navigate the Mississippi was a coal-fired side-wheel steamboat named the *New Orleans* that set off from Pittsburgh in October 1811 and made its way down the Ohio River to the Mississippi, and then down south, traveling through seven states and arriving in New Orleans on January 10, 1812. While the steamboat was en route, the region suffered some of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded in North America, on a fault centered near New Madrid, Missouri. The quakes caused shocking ruptures in the land, and the mighty Mississippi was said to have even flowed backwards for a period of time. The geographer and geologist Henry Schoolcraft was so moved by the calamitously scary nature of the shaking earth that he turned to poetry:

"The rivers they boiled like a pot of coals,
And mortals fell prostrate, and prayed for their souls."

By the time Sam Clemens was born in 1835, more than 250 steamboats were plying the Mississippi, primarily on the route between St. Louis and New Orleans. The number of steamboats proliferated rapidly, and reached a peak of perhaps 1,200 in the 1850s. Many perils plagued riverboat transportation, and these dangers surprisingly made the average duration of a steamboat's existence less than five years. Floating ice in the upper reaches of the river during the spring thaw could sink boats, and many were lost due to hidden snags or submerged sandbars. Collisions were an ever-present danger, and both floods and tornados caused shipwrecks. Numerous fires and boiler explosions destroyed boats, and a multitude of lives were lost in these calamities. Faith-filled believers in a loving God might wonder what "He" had against this aquatic mode of transportation!

It was during this time, in May 1858, that Sam met Laura Wright, a 14-year-old niece of a riverboat pilot friend of his. Imagine the scene when Sam spent two of the most memorable days of his life in Laura's company in the bustling bawdy port city of New Orleans way back then. It was said that there were so many steamboats tied up along the Louisiana waterfront that you could walk a mile from boat to boat without touching the riverbank, and the sounds, smells and frenzied energy of the French Quarter were no doubt colorful, pungent and stimulating. New Orleans was famous for its great music at the time, as it is now, and many steamboats offered live entertainment in the form of brass bands or banjo-playing minstrels. Loud, lively steam calliopes were popular, featuring upbeat

tunes that created a carnival-like atmosphere. Later, the South became home to music infused with plaintive soulfulness that reflected the feelings of those who lived their lives in endless toil. Ragtime, jazz and the blues all incorporated the offbeat syncopation of rhythms inspired by soulful African roots.

The lovely young lass Laura struck Sam's fancy with such infatuation that, decades later, he would still think of her charms. Her sweet Victorian character was an idealized fantasy for him, and he found her to have a cheerful presence, a precocious wisdom and an alluring innocence. She became a source of inspiration to him for the rest of his life, and he used her memory to model some of his female characters in his novels around her image. She was a magnificent muse for his imagination, and he later wrote that he regarded her as his "dream-sweetheart".

After two years as an apprentice under pilot Horace Bixby, he became a licensed pilot himself on paddle-wheel steamboats. He loved the exciting work as a riverboat pilot, but then -- dang it! -- commerce up and down the Mississippi was rudely and abruptly interrupted by the outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861. Sam joined a local group of Confederate militia in Missouri when the war broke out, but he resigned after two weeks, joking later that "I was incapacitated by fatigue through persistent retreating".

Soon after the start of the war, Sam "absquatulated to the territories", heading off with his brother Orion on a stagecoach journey across the Great Plains and over the Rocky Mountains and through Salt Lake City to the rough-and-tumble Wild West towns of the Nevada Territory. In the aftermath of the Gold Rush to California, this region was in throes of a mining frenzy seeking riches of silver, gold and other minerals, and the Comstock Lode near Virginia City was in the process of becoming the single most valuable source of silver in all of history.

The Comstock Lode was discovered in 1859, and soon thereafter Virginia City and its environs were transformed from a sparsely populated near-wilderness area into a mining boomtown. As can well be imagined, change was chaotic when adventurous risk-taking miners from all over the world descended upon this area and indulged in a carelessly destructive mania of mineral mining and hard living. The zealous gold-fever enthusiasm of miners in the Old West is legendary. "They came to the Comstock to get rich! Some did, most didn't, and many died trying."

Samuel Clemens began calling himself Mark Twain while writing for the *Territorial Enterprise,* a newspaper in Virginia City, when he was 27 years old, in February 1863. He signed off, "Yours, dreamily, Mark Twain", and this pen name was to become the most widely known in all of American literature. Knowledgeable observers point out that "mark twain" was a nautical shout to a riverboat pilot from a leadsman on the boat's bow who was charged with plumbing the depth of the water ahead. It meant "mark two fathoms deep", or twelve feet, which was the depth of relatively safe water for Mississippi riverboats to navigate.

Virginia City was a boomtown that had many saloons and 'houses of ill repute', and even an opera house. There was a seedy "Barbary Coast" area that had many different ethnic groups and lots of gambling, drinking, prostitution and crime. Interestingly, frontier newspapers of the nineteenth century tended to routinely print rumors, personal attacks, racist invective and flat-out fabrications, and were little concerned with fair or accurate reporting. They shamelessly promoted commercial interests, as for instance the *Solid Muldoon* did in the Ouray region of western Colorado when it lobbied for the dispossession of the native Utes. Why did the *Solid Muldoon* do that? Oh, yes, the Ute Indian Tribe held title to much of the San Juan Mountains, where prospectors and real estate profiteers were seeking their fortunes. The newspaper was published by David Day, who once had 42 libel suits pending against him, and he regarded them almost proudly, "like a row of combat medals." A roadside interpretive sign near Ouray once pointed out: "Slanted though they were, publications such as the *Solid Muldoon* were the only news sources available, making them very influential in shaping opinion -- *and events*." (Manipulating opinion, and skewing the lives of many; it might be regarded as an early precursor of Fox News.)

With the advent of social media and its algorithms and use by devious emotion-manipulating politicians who often push misinformation, there has been a dramatically more complicated reality to the wry observation Mark Twain once made, "If you don't read the newspaper you are uninformed; if you do, you are misinformed."

Mark Twain worked for the *Territorial Enterprise* as a full-time reporter and journalist for almost two years until May 1864, and then he went to California, where he lived until March 1866. By the end of 1865, he was very poor and in debt, so he sought a commission to write letters for publication by the *Sacramento Union* newspaper for $20

apiece on a journey aboard a steamship to the Sandwich Islands (now known as the Hawaiian Islands). These letters proved to be entertaining and popular, so they helped launch his career as a writer.

Mark Twain spent time in bawdy San Francisco at various times between 1863 and 1867, so it is entirely possible that he went up to the top of Twin Peaks. The view to the west of this prominence from a proper vantage point on a clear day reveals the almost mystical but very real Farallon Islands. These rocky islands are situated about 30 miles northwest of the Golden Gate. The islands teem with seabirds like Tufted Puffins and Storm Petrels, and with "charismatic megafauna" -- marine mammals like harbor seals, sea lions and elephant seals. This aquatic wilderness was the scene of an awesome display of the living world's mysterious, beautiful and daunting natural order when wildlife enthusiasts on a whale-watching expedition in 1997 reported having witnessed an attack just south of the Farallons in which a killer whale lifted a great white shark right out of the sea. Ouch!

Twenty-four hundred miles to the west and south of the Farallon Islands lie those mythic-sounding Sandwich Islands. Mark Twain spent more than four months there in 1866, traveling, absorbing a wealth of experiences, and writing captivating sketches. He later developed a highly entertaining and creative series of lectures about the curiosities of those Sandwich Islands, real and invented.

In the years to follow, Mark Twain became famous for his humorous stories about a wide variety of topics, including his celebrated story about a jumping frog contest in Calaveras County in the Sierra Nevada foothills. He would regale crowds with tales of the Sandwich Islands as well as his *Roughing It* adventures in the Wild West, along with his 1867 "Innocents Abroad" travels to Europe. He later recalled that his book *The Innocents Abroad* marked a turning point in his life, because its publication led to his extraordinary literary success after he turned to writing novels like *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Mark Twain became an American icon because of these great novels and his clever humor, incisive social commentary, insightful journalism, captivating lectures, philosophical thinking and opinionated persona. He gave public talks to overflowing audiences for decades, frequently provoking uproarious laughter and receiving great acclaim for his performances. He was down-to-earth and neighborly in his talks, and he spoke with a deadpan delivery and a dry drawl, and made dramatically effective use of pauses to heighten anticipation and amusement. He asserted that the judicious usage of pauses in verbal expression can have "exceeding value", and he exemplified this virtue in his often-hilarious talks.

His lampooning wit, whimsical observations and practical jokes were a kind of genius that sprang from a uniquely perceptive awareness of humankind's natural pretensions, vanities, follies, shams and fraudulent behaviors. His ability to humorously depict these foibles endeared him to audiences. He often related ludicrous stories and expressed astonished bemusement, and was genuinely funny with his appealing delivery. He was a canny observer of life, and also sometimes startled his audiences with his eloquence, unpretentiousness and accessibility.

I highly recommend filmmaker Ken Burns' almost poetic film *Mark Twain,* for it is a production that provides excellent images and insights into the life and character of Sam Clemens. It's available on Netflix -- check it out!

<u>Formative Influences, Including the Genesis and Revelations of *The Innocents Abroad*</u>

Mark Twain loved to travel, and once he had left Missouri, he rarely returned to the Midwest for the rest of his life. He lived primarily in the Northeast, and spent more than eight years living abroad during the 1890s. His extensive travels reflected the fact that he enjoyed the variety and cultural experiences involved in traveling. Like Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, he loved freedom and hated routine. Similarly, most people enjoy variety and dislike routine, and many people demonstrate strong desires for freedom, adventure, travel, escape and sometimes even an ardor for undertaking a heroic odyssey of some sort. There is no doubt that travel broadens horizons and perspective, and Sam would likely have agreed that all who wander are not necessarily lost. Ah, wanderlust! (But make no mistake about it, "wherever you go, there you are.")

Many people also have contrasting urges to put down roots and find a calm and connected balance in often hectic lives. Most of us would consider it ideal to have a secure base in life from which we could be somewhat free to make our own individualistic and adventurous excursions. Such situations foster variety, which is a real nice existential spice, stimulating and rather satisfying.

Mark Twain's first travels to Europe and the Middle East were on a five-month voyage from New York City to the Mediterranean and the Holy Land in 1867, aboard an elegant side-wheel steamship named the *Quaker City*. He accompanied a group of 75 other passengers on this trip, most of whom were notably staunch in their religious beliefs. Their pilgrimage to the Holy Land revealed to him a shocking reality of appalling conditions, desolate landscapes, squalid ruins, filth, beggars, braying donkeys, melancholy dogs, ignorantly superstitious people, petty frauds, vandalism and historical falsifications. As he later ruefully observed of his trip, "It is an awful trial on a man's religion to waltz it through the Holy Land."

After returning from his voyage aboard the *Quaker City*, he assembled and revised the many stories he had written for newspapers about the journey, then published them in *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrims' Progress*. He was ostensibly striving to piggyback his book on the shoulders of the extraordinarily successful 1678 classic by John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is To Come*. This was a simplistic Christian allegory that is one of the most widely published works of literature in history. Evangelist, Faithful and Pliable would so attest. *Innocents Abroad* became Mark Twain's best-selling book during his lifetime.

By the time the *Quaker City* returned to the East Coast, Mark Twain regarded people who believed in a literal "Second Advent" of Jesus Christ with severe skepticism. He had seen that believers in this biblical myth seemed to relish the idea of innocent non-believers being slaughtered in mass during foretold apocalyptic End Times, even more than they appeared to actually look forward to a time of potential fellowship, love, peace, beauty, glory and redemption in an idyllic afterlife in Heaven. In keeping with this point of view, Mark Twain portrayed characters in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as being far more devoted in their religious observances to self-righteous attitudes and duty to God than to brotherhood with the poor or concerns for downtrodden folks.

Some say Mark Twain once remarked: "This thing of stretching the narrow garment of belief till it fits the broad shoulders of a wish, is too much for my stomach." He was, however, often skeptical, keenly observant, witty and in favor of critical thinking, so it gives credence to another possibly apocryphal quote attributed to him: "It's easier to fool people than to convince them that they have been fooled." This captures an essence of questioning and stretching one's beliefs beyond reason, especially in these modern days of human gullibility, "fake news", propaganda, deceit, dishonesty, the challenges of dispelling misconceptions and the difficulty of changing people's minds once they've been indoctrinated with false beliefs. After all, "A lie can travel halfway around the world before the truth can get its boots on", and social media is drastically amplifying this state of affairs.

A deeper investigation into religious fundamentalist End Times concepts is explored in *Rapture Mania: Bizarre Beliefs and Epic Epiphanies*. Read therein about the bizarre Rapture Index, and the wiser gauge of my own Sustainability Index, which could help us collectively see ways to achieve vital greater good goals like reducing injustices, mitigating inequalities, solving difficult problems, mitigating global warming-induced climate change, stopping rainforest destruction, protecting wetlands, cutting down on production of toxic wastes, protecting biological diversity, building peace, and discouraging risk-laden rapid growth in human numbers and potentially disastrous population overshoot. As human numbers now exceed 8 billion, attention here now!

<u>Samuel Clemens' Opinion on Women</u>

"The sun rose upon a tranquil world, and beamed down upon the peaceful village like a benediction."

--- *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

Mark Twain had a paradoxical character, and he lived in curious times. Victorian sensibilities were puritanical and conformist, so he interestingly was able to rise above prejudices of his times to regard women with sometimes enlightened perspectives. His observation in his Notebook in 1895 is especially admirable: "We easily perceive that the peoples furthest from civilization are the ones where equality between man and woman are furthest apart -- and we consider this one of the signs of savagery. But we are so stupid that we can't see that we thus plainly admit that no civilization can be perfect until exact equality between man and woman is included."

Samuel Clemens had aspired to become a part of the respected Eastern gentility, despite his lower class origins and tawdry Wild West experiences and humorous ridicule of pretentiousness. He met a slender and attractive girl named Olivia Langdon in December 1867 at a reading of scenes by Charles Dickens from his novel, *David*

Copperfield, and he was immediately smitten with her charms. Olivia was the sister of Charles Langdon, one of the passengers he had met on his voyage to the Holy Land aboard the *Quaker City*. She was sophisticated, well-educated and genteel, and she came from a wealthy family that lived in Elmira, New York. She was reputedly a fine representative of the Victorian upper class. The Victorian Age was one in which the favored feminine look and attitude was the demure, shy and obedient, and Livy veritably embodied these alluring character traits.

Sam began to court her, hoping to gain her hand in marriage, but his stature at the time was too insignificant and coarse, and her family considered him to be too irreverent for their religious sensibilities. Since Sam came from a poor family, his struggle to make money and gain respectability and fame was a notable aspect of his endeavors and compulsions. After *The Innocents Abroad* was published and achieved great success, Olivia agreed she would marry him, and he remained married to 'Livy' for 34 years, until her death.

Though Mark Twain had gained his early renown as a humor writer, this was regarded as a somewhat low and disreputable form of writing. Once he married Livy, he strived to be more respectable and to write books with more gravitas and literary value. Livy acted for decades as an editor of his writings, paying particular attention to their tone and content. She proved to be a wise and intelligent woman, and an excellent spouse.

<u>An Aside Concerning Theodore Roosevelt</u>

Mark Twain loved leisure time. Since he had traveled around the world more extensively than almost anyone else alive in his day, he had earned the right to consider it a luxury to stay in bed until late morning. His penchant for enjoying leisure time contrasts distinctly with the inclinations of Theodore Roosevelt, another iconic figure who was a contemporary of his, albeit almost 24 years younger.

Roosevelt lionized "the strenuous life", and criticized a life of what he described as "ignoble ease". He lived his life in ways consistent with this active philosophy, bustling with incredible energy and intrepid undertakings in the years before, during and after his presidency. His nearly fatal journey down the *River of Doubt* in Brazil in 1914 (five years after the end of his presidency) makes an extraordinary story of its own. This river was an uncharted tributary of the Amazon that snakes through one of the most remote and treacherous jungles in the world.

While I deeply admire Mark Twain's iconic persona and the effect he has had in America and around the world, I also admire the character of Theodore Roosevelt. After he had become president in 1901, he sought to protect America's natural resources from the greed of Big Businesses. One of his signature accomplishments during his terms in office was to conserve forests, fresh water resources and wildlife habitats. His convictions in the importance of conservation were so strong that he succeeded in having 230 million acres of land set aside for the public in the form of five National Parks and 150 national forests, along with 51 federal game preserves and bird sanctuaries and 18 national monuments and 24 fresh water reclamation projects. Among the five National Parks he established was beautiful Crater Lake National Park and the impressive Mesa Verde National Park.

Think about this great accomplishment. "It was an astounding record, unprecedented and against all odds; for much of what the president did, he had to do despite Congress," declared biographer Philip McFarland. "But Congress and the property interests that Congress by-and-large spoke for -- the lumbermen, ranch owners, mine owners, commercial hunters, the beef and other trusts -- fought him along the way. The Constitution had charged the House of Representatives with spending the people's money; and Joe Cannon, Speaker of the House, wouldn't spend one cent of it, he said, on scenery."

> "Others protested the government's interference in what belongs to all of us. Why was the President meddling with that? Those were our lands out there, our forests, property to purchase and use as we chose. They were, yes, the young president agreed, except that 'we' and 'our' included Americans yet unborn, who far outnumbered the nation's current inhabitants."

This is a valuable perspective for us today, because any assessment of the collective best interests of all humankind are shifted substantially when the well-being of generations of people to be born in the future are taken into account. Let us honestly begin to do this, and reject the conflict-of-interest-filled ambitions of rash resource exploiters and power-abusing conservatives, in every future election!

Theodore Roosevelt is somewhat of a hero in my mind because he was an aristocrat and Republican who actually fought the corrupting influence of powerful corporations. During his tenure as president, the Department of Justice brought more than 40 lawsuits against huge corporate trusts. Dozens of big corporate entities were busted up into smaller organizations so that they wouldn't be able to abuse monopoly power so easily. Today's Republicans, operating in our Big Money corrupted political system, are veritable cowards and treacherously pandering pushovers by contrast! And libertarian anti-environmentalists in the Republican Party cast a dim light on the integrity and respectability of their public service. Their rigid ideological unwillingness to compromise for the common good seems madly myopic and misguided, I do passionately declare! (Make America Great Again?)

Theodore Roosevelt spoke the following words in 1910 in a speech titled *The New Nationalism:* "At every stage, and under all circumstances, the essence of the struggle is to equalize opportunity, destroy unfair privilege, and give to the life and citizenship of every individual the highest possible value both to himself and to the commonwealth." Right on!

He continued: "I stand for the square deal. But when I say that I am for the square deal, I mean not merely that I stand for fair play under the present rules of the games, but that I stand for having those rules changed so as to work for a more substantial equality of opportunity and of reward for equally good service." Excellent call, Theodore! Our leaders today should honorably stand for a much fairer deal than the "conservative" agenda.

Roosevelt also spoke in *The New Nationalism* about the epic and contentious strife between Capital and Labor. This conflict has been intense since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and it has been a "conflict between the men who possess more than they have earned and the men who have earned more than they possess." It is "a struggle of freemen to gain and hold the right of self-government as against the special interests who twist the methods of free government into machinery for defeating the popular will." These sure are percipient and highly relevant words today!

Remarkably, President Roosevelt was among the first to support a kind of universal health insurance plan. He did so because he believed that no country could be strong whose people were sick and poor. Well over 100 years have passed since Roosevelt's presidency, and today there sadly are millions of people without health insurance who get their "health care" in emergency rooms. In pandemic times, this is especially pathological. There is still sensationally strong opposition by conservatives to fair and sensible reforms that would make healthcare available to all, and they even seem to oppose a smart emphasis on prudent preparedness and preventative measures, and on making medical care and prescription drugs more affordable. And "dignity in dying?" They're against it!

Of course, almost anything can be judged in dramatically different ways. Consider the fact, in light of Theodore Roosevelt's virtues, that Mark Twain once wrote in private that he regarded Roosevelt as "far and away the worst president we have ever had." Samuel Clemens expressed this sentiment because of Roosevelt's enthusiasms for war, and because the president had subjected Henry Rogers, one of his friends and a financial savior of his, to a vituperative verbal lashing. Rogers at the time was vice president of Standard Oil and a famously shark-like capitalist known as Hell-Hound Rogers. The jury is still out on both Roosevelt and Rogers, as it is on us all.

<u>On Early Rising</u>

Mark Twain definitely did not like to get up early. He wrote an article about the misadventures of a trip made "at an hour in the morning when all God-fearing Christians ought to be in bed." In this humorous sketch titled *Early Rising, As Regards Excursions to the Cliff House,* he made note of the rude contrast between the anticipated pleasures of an early morning excursion to San Francisco's Ocean Beach and the actual nature of the experience.

Expectations and reality often do not coincide, as most everyone knows. We may make plans in hopes of enjoying some pleasure as a result, but as travelers can attest, plans can go awry, and distinctive inconveniences -- or worse -- can occur. It turns out that unexpected and fortuitous pleasures are often of a richer variety than those we intend. Adventures, interestingly, are frequently considerable inconveniences that we regard in revisionist retrospect as more memorable good stories than more mundane experiences. Things may fortuitously turn out to be better than we expected (for a while), but of course the certainty of our own personal deaths provides us with a cogent context in which to see our lives, and to appreciate Being Here Now. Philosophers point out that rather

than regarding our mortality as lamentable, we should see it as a reminder to focus on living well in the here and now, and realizing *What Really Matters,* and appreciating any good fortune we have, while it lasts. Eat, drink, and be merry?! (And still, strive to leave a positive legacy.)

Mark Twain on Belief, Fate, God and Satan

The circumstances surrounding Samuel Clemens' towering achievements after humble beginnings contributed to his occasionally megalomaniacal self-image, as revealed in some of his correspondence with others. He had, fortunately, a contrasting inclination to be slyly self-deprecating, and was able to laugh at himself, which is a healthy attitude to have in life.

Early in his career he had realized that ridiculing others could be an occupation that would generally be met with anger and criticism in reaction, and was fraught with a certain measure of hypocrisy. Ridiculing the fool within is a vein that can be much more profitably and safely mined. A collateral benefit of this approach is that one's own fool is generally a fairly good representative of the fool in others. All miners know that some veins are richer than others in the quest to hit paydirt, and Mark Twain had discovered that specific veins of duplicity, shamelessness, hubris, absolute certitudes and ethnocentric convictions of righteous religious superiority are like the Comstock Mother Lode of folly and absurdly hypocritical small-mindedness and mean-spiritedness.

Fate has a fickle finger, whether or not one believes in any sort of circumstantial determinism. A particular concatenation of events led to Sam's younger brother Henry suffering an agonizing death in June 1858. Henry was in the wrong place at the wrong time when a boiler exploded on the steamboat *Pennsylvania,* killing 250 people. Sam had gotten Henry a job working on steamboats, so he felt anguished guilt and terrible self-reproach when his brother suffered an excruciating death from severe burns. This event contributed to his belief in the randomness of good and bad luck in life, and to his skepticism concerning religious claims that there is an all-knowing, all-powerful Christian God whose divine will is providential, paternalistic, caring and loving.

This accident reinforced Mark Twain's doubt as to whether a benevolent force exists in the cosmos, and these feelings eventually became subsidiary themes in his novels, written sketches and public talks. It was a tragedy that contributed to his fascination with dreams and parapsychology, especially in the wake of a dream that had foretold Henry's death in striking detail, like a bona fide premonition. In my personal experience, most accidents and calamities arrive without being announced, so in the year 2024, with 20-20 hindsight, I observe that it is hard to explain the principles, beyond coincidence, by which a phenomenon such as premonition might operate.

Mark Twain lived in times where superstitions and fears of Hell had powerful portent. Remember that religious authorities fervently promoted a concept of "eternal damnation" for sins in those days, and vivid beliefs in supernatural causes were widespread. Today we might be rather more inclined to be skeptical, though most folks might agree with novelist Joseph Conrad words, written in 1911: "The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness." Yes, indeed -- and tragically so! And in the era of Trump and MAGA extremists, things in general seem to be getting rashly worse. Religious evangelicals, repent!

Advances in knowledge in the past century have corroborated the fact that geophysical events like earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes and destructive storms have natural causes. Some people attribute such things to an angry God that is supremely peeved about moral transgressions, but those folks are generally merely revealing their own deep biases, judgmental prejudices and superstitious ignorance. Such projections onto a deity reflect fears, anger and spite that can horribly and malevolently be used as a basis for real evils like discrimination, ethnocentric hatreds and even brutal violence against immigrants, poor people, females, gay men, lesbian women and people in racial minorities -- or against those who believe in a different God (or none at all).

Mark Twain had become disillusioned when he was young with teachings in the New Testament that asserted people would get what they asked for, if only they prayed hard enough. Prayer just didn't seem to him to yield hoped-for results, and besides it seemed self-centered and "so ignoble" to him. His novels convey the strength of fears and superstitions that were inspired by religion in his day, especially among black slaves. His books also reflect the author's suspicions that fate may be largely determined by happenstance and good or bad luck.

"Then I see a snake, a puff adder gliding along as smooth as silk. This is the queer part I'm trying to tell. I don't shoot off like a rocket and lam out of there, I just lay quiet watching it come along the ground till it reaches my foot where it stops, surprised I'm still there, not scared or nothing. … I knowed right off it's a sign, but the meaning of it was a mystery."

--- *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* by Greg Matthews

Have you ever experienced a coincidental circumstance that seemed to you to be a sign? All manner of such occurrences may take place, but assessing the meaning of them puts me in a frame of mind to contemplate John Fowles observation in *The Aristos:* "below the surface, we do not know; we shall never know why; we shall never know tomorrow; we shall never know a god, or if there is a god; we shall never even know ourselves. This mysterious wall around our world, and around our perception of it, is not there to frustrate us, but to train us back to the now, to life, to our time being."

In his later days, Sam was plagued by disappointments, hardships and tragedies, so he harbored a conviction that the dark forces of 'Satan' may have more influence in human affairs than the sometimes bright forces of 'God' and 'angels'. He had an almost compulsive fascination with seemingly malevolent forces in the universe, recognizing that bad fortune is often the result of circumstances, and that adversities are often made worse by the harsh and heartless inhumanity of robber barons, criminals, murderers, corrupt government officials, authoritarians, die-hard ideologues, religious fundamentalists and other such-like villains.

Samuel Clemens' mother had suffered a number of misfortunes in her life, but she had a spirited love of living and managed to maintain a "sunshiny disposition". This seems to be an excellent attitude to maintain in life. See and appreciate the positive! Gratitude itself can be a boon.

<u>A Digression Concerning Sam Clemens' Parents</u>

I once stumbled across the rich online archive of New York Times articles about Mark Twain that were published in the long span between 1867 and 1970. I read with lively interest an article from February 1928 about Mark Twain's mother and an interview with the woman who was a real life character model that he used in his novels in portraying Becky Thatcher.

Mark Twain's mother, Jane Lampton Clemens, was a great lover of fun. "She preferred folks who were full of life, liked anything gay, and hated the solemn and morbid," according to this article in the *New York* Times about the boyhood sweetheart of Mark Twain's who figured prominently in his novels as Becky Thatcher. At the time of that article, the woman was then 90 years old, but still had vivid memories of the Clemens family. To her, of course, the famous humorist was Sam, not Mark. "Sam was always full of mischief," she said, "and liked to tease his mother. For this she often reprimanded him. She never knew what he was going to do next."

In dramatic contrast to his mother's disposition, Mark Twain remembered his father as a dreamy kind of man who was proud, silent and austere. After the family moved to the town of Hannibal from where he was born in Florida, Missouri, Sam remarked about his father, "He had no particular luck except that I was born." Tragically, his father died when Sam was only 11 or 12 years old.

It is said that Sam's father had once been well off, but had lost his money, so when he brought his family to Missouri, "they were very poor but mighty fine people." Being "mighty fine people" is a great thing to aspire to!

Jane Clemens resembled Sam in that she possessed a dry sense of humor and held strong opinions. She and her family were said to have liked the "colored people" in the Hannibal area, and they liked her, and would do almost anything for her. "She was never a Puritan in any sense but she tried to raise her children to be good and dutiful."

In 1849, when Sam was 14 years old, gold seekers on the way to California were streaming through Hannibal, and "many of the men and boys, including Sam, got the gold fever. Mrs. Clemens excitedly watched the covered wagon processions go through town. Sam, not content with mere watching, expended his energy with his gang of friends playing at mining; they borrowed skiffs and went down the river three miles to the cave where they would stake their claims and pretend to dig gold."

These reflections take me back to the life and times of the great author, and provide fodder for contemplation.

The Light and the Dark

Things had gone so well in his life by the age of 50, by-and-large, that Sam Clemens was astonished at the extent of his good fortune. He had a happy family and an extensive group of friends and was living a storied existence in a large mansion in Hartford, Connecticut. He had come from very modest roots and had achieved great fame as Mark Twain, and he was proud to have earned substantial wealth and worldwide accolades.

Sam Clemens' immense success by the age of 50 can be seen as his glory years. Wouldn't you know it, these years were followed, in contrast, by some very challenging times in the last 25 years of his life, when he had cause to feel bereft and adrift due to the tragic deaths of his beloved daughter Susy in 1896 and his wife Livy in 1904. He also had squandered huge sums of money and invested poorly, and his publishing firm Webster & Company was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1894. Feeling the financial pinch as early as 1891, the Clemens family had been obliged to move to Europe to save money and get their financial house in order. In the summer of 1895, Sam and Livy and their oldest daughter Clara sailed forth on an around-the-world cruise and lecture tour to pay off debts. By 1898, he had earned enough money to honorably succeed in that task.

One of the most tragic events during this period was the death of his first daughter Susy. She was the favorite in the family back in those innocent days long ago "when such open partiality was commonplace", according to biographer Philip McFarland. Susy provided a fertile source of inspiration to her father, who regarded her as a prodigy. "She is the most interesting person I have ever known, of either sex," said one good family friend. "She knows all there is of life and its meanings," said another about her when she was still a teenage girl.

Susy secretly wrote a biography about her father in 1885-86, starting when she was 14 years old. It was titled *Papa: An Intimate Biography of Mark Twain.* She kept it under her pillow, and wrote nearly 20,000 words before breaking off in mid-sentence, and never continuing it. Samuel observed late in his life, writing about this biography by his daughter: "I had had compliments before, but none that touched me like this; none that could approach it for value in my eyes. It has kept that place always since."

One of Susy's most important insights was that the world didn't accurately understand her papa. People tended to see Mark Twain as "a humorist joking at everything", but she saw that "he has much more in him that is earnest than that is humorous", and she was determined to set the record straight. In her biographical journal, Susy documented her world-famous father -- from his habits (good and bad!) to his writing routine to their family's colorful home life. Her biography was "frank, funny and tender", and it gives rare insight and a compelling way of seeing this American icon.

In Susy's biography, she asserted that her father did not like going to church for the reason that he loved to hear himself talk but couldn't bear to hear someone else go on and on and on, like a preacher. She clearly loved and admired her father, but also shared some of his personal faults, as she wrote, like having a quick temper and being somewhat absent-minded. Hmmm … well, stuff happens.

Sam Clemens openly admitted that he thought of Susy when he wrote his *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc:* "Susy at 17, Joan of Arc at 17. Secretly, I drew Joan's physical portrait from Susy at that age, when I came to write that book. Apart from that, I had no formally appointed model for Joan but her own historical self. Yet there were several points of resemblance between the girls, such as vivacity, enthusiasm, precocious wisdom, wit, elegance, mental penetration, and nobility of character." Wonderful qualities!

Susy was reputedly attractive and charming, with "dark eyes full of intelligence and an alert eager manner." She attended Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania in 1890-91, just five years after it was founded to give young women academic opportunities that many young men took for granted. She later expressed a strong emotional longing for an intimate friendship she had forged with Louise Brownell, a fellow classmate at Bryn Mawr. Susy had sent Louise more than three dozen letters that have survived in the historical record, and she expressed a love-filled, romantic and passionate longing for Louise in these letters. One observer noted that in dealing with what might be regarded as a lesbian relationship today, "There was as yet no clear notion in the 1890s of a fixed gender identity determined by the object of one's desire." … "College girls could develop 'smashes' on one another and have intimate

romantic relationships without such choices or activities constituting an 'identity' as we have come to know it in the twenty-first century." Victorian times may have been "innocent", but could be passionate.

Susy tragically died at the age of 24 in Hartford while her parents and her sister Clara were on their years-long trip around the world. Perhaps there is nothing quite like tragedy and loss, remorse and adversity to catalyze the imagination and provoke daunting dreams, and provide intense and provocative insights. Sam Clemens experienced visceral dreams of disaster and calamities after Susy died. For instance, in *The Enchanted Sea-Wilderness,* he imagined a story of a sweet, heroic and much-loved St. Bernard dog that was abandoned aboard a flaming ship. And in *The Great Dark,* he conjured up visions of a man with a happy family peering into a microscope at infinitesimal creatures in a drop of water, and then morphing in the dream world into a family aboard a ship under sail on that very same drop of water, in perpetual darkness among grave dangers.

Sam Clemens felt a deep sense of loneliness later in his life after Susy had died, but it was the death of his wife Livy that made him more frequently disconsolate. Then he suffered a final sling and arrow of tragic sorrow and angst piercing his heart in the last year of his life when his youngest daughter Jean died of a sudden epileptic fit while taking a bath on Christmas Eve in 1909. As a result of the many adversities of his last twenty years of life, the aging observer can be forgiven for having harbored doubts about the existence of a benevolent God.

An Aside on Passages in Life

Every person is on his or her own individual life journey, and we all go through our own personal life passages. It is not rare that some famous men like Mark Twain achieve triumphant success in their lives but then experience dramatically different stages in their lives as they get older. The famous pianist and composer Ludwig van Beethoven and psychotherapist Carl Jung were two others who had been greatly successful in the middle years of their lives, and then experienced serious adversities that forced them to become much more philosophical in their waning years. *Being Mortal,* it seems, one never knows what course the fickle vicissitudes of fate will take.

Beethoven has been called the "first rock star" for the fame his virtuoso piano playing and brilliant musical compositions engendered after he had moved from his native Germany to Vienna, Austria. He had three defining stages in his life, the most notable being his "heroic period" when he wrote pieces like his Symphony No. 5, with its famously booming opening notes. Later, his musical compositions underwent a transition to a period when his health was faltering and he was losing his hearing, and his music took on a more meditative character and seems to reflect a pensive, muted and transcendent spirit.

Likewise, Carl Jung had achieved great fame early in his career as a psychologist, but then later in his life he experienced a "metanoia" life crisis and sought healing in "the spirit of the depths". It was during these years that he created his deeply meditative *Red Book,* in reflective response. Jung's life and fascinating perspectives are explored in *Transcendental Musings: A Bugle Horn Sounds for Solidarity of Purpose.*

The Value of Great Literature and Artistic Perspectives in Better Understandings

History itself is like a turbulent river, a great confluence of people, ideas and events. The course of history, like the course of a river, can be reshaped by distant storms. Since the remote days of our ancestors' incipient awareness, human beings have strived to comprehend reality and understand things that are mysterious or implacable, or sublime or ineffable. The history of philosophical ideas and understandings can be regarded as a series of stages that began as superstition, evolved into theology, and were later explained by curiously abstruse metaphysical abstractions. Finally, today they are understood in a more comprehensive way through the coupling of direct experience with scientific observations, hypotheses and experiments that reflect the functioning of the world in accordance with natural causes and effects. Like a river, life undergoes evolutionary change, and it does so highlighted by meanders and "punctuated equilibrium" events. Notably, our interpretations of reality profoundly influence the way we believe reality to be, whether our perspectives are accurate or not.

"Reality is merely an illusion," wrote Albert Einstein, "albeit a very persistent one." A curious observation!

Great literature can provide us with deep understandings by presenting compelling ideas and universal themes and underlying motifs. Literary passages often use subtle but powerful symbolism. In the days before the visual

imagery of mediums like photography and television, such themes and motifs and symbolism appealed to reader's imagination much more cogently than the concrete and numbing specificity of more modern forms of media with their rapid sequences of images. Unfortunately, mass media today tends to be obsessed with sex, violence, scandal and the sensational -- and the algorithmic modes of media that often inform us are filled with bad news, conflict, war, brazen propaganda, ideologies, gaslighting, BS, indoctrination and suasive marketing. And media is frequently interrupted by shallow, distracting and subliminally manipulative materialistic commercial messages.

Symbolism can be simple, transparent and allegorically plain, as it was in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, with its characters Christian, Evangelist, Obstinate, Pliable, Worldly Wiseman, Faithful, Hypocrisy and the like. Symbolism can also be complex, abstruse and even shadowy, as in Melville's *Moby Dick*, in which deranged Captain Ahab sees an evil malignity and despair on an all-consuming scale, and projects these feelings as an embodiment onto a great white whale.

The symbolism in Mark Twain's stories is one of their most noteworthy aspects. To him, the Mississippi River symbolized a godlike force, with its unpredictable and impersonal natural currents, floods, snags, fog and other dangers. The river also represented adventure, escape and the essence of freedom. Like a wide river with a turbulent flow, every person's life metaphorically swirls with complexity. We are all affected by inexplicable eddies, unfathomable undercurrents, labyrinthine undertows of uncertainty, subconscious biological imperatives, seductions of status and power, and motivating desires for validation, self-esteem and the accumulation of material goods. Mark Twain recognized that each and every one of us, including the author himself, has tragic flaws and almost comic foibles and stunning shortcomings, as well as individual promise and rich potential.

Naturalists and psychologists alike recognize that wisdom can be gained through insights gleaned from close observations of natural phenomena, and from insightful introspections into human nature. Time spent by a lovely river that cascades out of majestic mountains, for instance, allows one to reflect on life, and may help one see the value of going with the flow, of letting be what is, and of making the best of whatever comes our way. "Breathe in slowly and deeply, and breathe out, letting go." (Repeat!)

The Jewish Buddhist Sylvia Boorstein once sagely observed, "We don't get a choice about what hand we are dealt in life. The only choice we have is our attitude about the cards we hold and the finesse with which we play our hand." Yay for right mindfulness and positive thinking! While hiking in areas with swift streams that must be crossed, it becomes clear that one should pay close attention, and focus on maintaining balance and being nimble as you go. These are good lessons for coping in life!

> "All great books are symbolical myths, overlaid like a palimpsest with the meanings that men at various times assign to them."
>
> --- Clifton Fadiman, in his Introduction to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*

Symbolism can be an essential way of apprehending and understanding reality, because it contains a compellingly sensuous and intrinsically visual quality. Literary symbolism can reveal much about the conscious and subconscious aspects of an author's life experiences and passions and ways of thinking. Symbolism is interpreted by readers according to their own personal perceptions, emotions, moods, conditioning, biases, worldviews and projections. Thus, symbolism can be a kind of Rorschach test that evokes feelings and reveals readers even unto themselves.

In an actual Rorschach test, intricate inkblots are used as a psychological tool to assess a person's subjective interpretations of abstract visual images. This can reveal fascinating insights into the subject's personality and mental projections and emotional make-up and thought processes. Aha! For associated insights, see extensive explorations of world literature and philosophy -- and imaginative reflections -- that are contained in the Earth Manifesto essay, *Inspiration, Imagination, and the Deep Well of Human Impulses*.

<u>A Subjective Perspective of Storytelling and its Significance</u>

Storytelling is one of humanity's oldest creative traditions. The telling of stories began as oral histories that were passed down through many generations in various cultures, long before the invention of alphabets and the written word. Languages themselves are like rivers, ever changing and flourishing and sometimes altering course, and even sometimes drying up or dying away.

Some people wax philosophical and say that storytelling is an effort to achieve a kind of immortality. Think about this. Sam Clemens achieved the enduring attention and appreciation of millions of people around the world, and his novels continue to be discovered long after his death. A fair number of his writings have been published posthumously in the century since he died, and articles and books continue to be written about him, so in many ways he has indeed achieved a kind of immortality. A salute to the sly and perceptive humorist!

In a literal case of storytelling contributing to longer life, the famous *Arabian Nights* is one heck of a fantastic tale, and one that Mark Twain happened to hold in high regard. It is a story about a beautiful, wise and clever woman named Scheherazade who married a Persian king notorious for marrying a succession of virgins and then executing each of them the morning after he married them. He supposedly did this because his first wife had been unfaithful to him, so he was intensely motivated to prevent any other woman from being able to commit any such infidelity. Scheherazade told the king compelling stories night after night, weaving unfinished tales in such a captivating manner that she kept him in thrall, eager to hear more, and more, and more, and thus he ended up sparing her life again and again and again for 1,001 nights. Bravo!

Scheherazade's tales were entertaining, but they also taught morals and kindness. These stories progressively enlightened the king, and he finally made her his queen. Storytelling saved her life, staving off the premature mortality that would otherwise have been her fate at the hands of her mercilessly dastardly despotic husband. In many of the stories Scheherazade told in *Arabian Nights*, characters are waylaid by chance and circumstance, thus making preordained destiny and inevitable fate seem like plausible things in which to believe. This may have been one reason Samuel Clemens loved the stories in the *Arabian Nights* so much. He found them to be among the most creative and original tales in the history of literature, and they stimulated his thinking about circumstance and chance in the meandering course of life.

Samuel Clemens also respected his contemporary, the brilliant novelist Charles Dickens, as well as the famous theatrical plays of the Bard of Avon, William Shakespeare. He marveled at Thomas Paine's fearlessness and power, as expressed in books like *The Age of Reason*, and he loved Miguel Cervantes' fabulous stories of the knight-errant Don Quixote who traveled around the La Mancha region of Spain on his horse Rocinante, with his sidekick Sancho Panza. Don Quixote's ridiculous behavior, tilting at windmills, led to a new word, "quixotic" that means "romantic without regard to practicality". Ah, Dulcinea, to dream the impossible dream!

A wide variety of techniques such as the 'frame story' (which contain stories within stories) have been used in literary composition to captivate readers. Two of the most famous examples of frame stories are *Arabian Nights* and *The Canterbury Tales*. Though Mark Twain began his writing career as a journalist, a humorist and a travel writer, he later created some of the greatest American novels by using his mastery of telling stories and tall tales in his own unique kind of frame narratives, such as the adventures of Huckleberry Finn seeking freedom that take place during a journey on a raft with the escaped slave Jim as they floated together down the ever- changing and sometimes turbulent Mississippi.

Mark Twain's great novels are notable for his characters' use of vernacular speech that authentically reflected the Negro culture of the South and the anything-but-genteel culture of the Wild West during Gold Rush days. Vernacular refers to the native language and colloquialisms of a region or locality. Mark Twain's use of vernacular made his stories more evocative, accessible and genuine to the general public. Most original editions of his novels were extensively illustrated, a fact that gave his readers an additional dimension for appreciating his works.

Mark Twain kept notebooks that he filled with observations as "his way of processing experience." Many people regard him as a keen observer and a deep philosophical thinker, and he was able to interweave his rich personal experiences, vivid imagination and great sense of humor into highly entertaining stories. His fervent brain drove him to observe astutely and express himself both authentically and facetiously, and sometimes eloquently. He also had a way of writing things that are wildly exaggerated and preposterous, and he often wantonly made things up. He was fond of adjusting facts and exaggerating circumstances to make a good story. Albert Bigelow Paine, one of his biographers, explained that he had "curious confusions of memory and imagination that more than once resulted in a complete reversal of the facts." I wonder if that's ever happened to anyone else?! "Let it be!"

"You know, I never told the truth in my life that someone didn't say I was lying, while, on the other hand,

I never told a lie that somebody didn't take it as a fact."

--- Mark Twain

A Slithering Aside on Snakes and Humor

Here is a funny passage that demonstrates Mark Twain's wonderful creativity. Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer were mischievous boys, oh, I reckon so! They knew that women generally were not fond of snakes, and this warn't something they learned in Sunday school. The boys, just for some fun, collected "a couple dozen garters and house-snakes" in a bag and hid them in a bedroom of the home of Tom's Aunt Sally. The snakes soon got loose:

> "No, there warn't no real scarcity of snakes about the house for a considerable spell. You'd see them dripping from the rafters and places, every now and then; and they generly landed in your plate, or down the back of your neck, and most of the time where you didn't want them. Well, they was handsome, and striped, and there warn't no harm in a million of them; but that never made no difference to Aunt Sally, she despised snakes, be the breed what they might, and she couldn't stand them no way you could fix it; and every time one of them flopped down on her, it didn't make no difference what she was doing, she would just lay that work right down and light out… And if she turned over and found one in bed, she would scramble out and lift a howl that you would think the house was afire … Why, after every last snake had been gone clear out of the house for as much as a week, Aunt Sally warn't over it yet; she warn't nearly over it; when she was setting thinking about something, you could touch her on the back of her neck with a feather and she would jump right out of her stockings. It was very curious."

Ha! Those boys were real rascals. Bravo for Mark Twain's humor -- and perspicacity!

Note that all the ideas in this biography are, in a sense, elaborations of observations and philosophies contained in the 121 Soliloquies of the original Earth Manifesto, published in October 2004 (Book Nine, and Part Seven online), AND of such treatises as the 'magnum opus' of the Earth Manifesto, *Comprehensive Global Perspectives: An Illuminating Worldview* (Book Seven). At the moment I write this, none of these writings have ever been read in full by anyone. Make history! And speaking of tall tales and the truths they may embody, I encourage readers to check out *Tall Tales, Provocative Parables, Luminous Clarity, and Evocative Truths: A Modern Log from the Sea of Cortez.* This story advances the brilliant ideas of writer John Steinbeck in the context of my own excursion to the Sea of Cortez with a group of great gal friends a dozen years ago.

The Liberating Effects of Writing under a Nom de Plume

Sam Clemens was fascinated with switched identities, multiple personalities, relativistic uncertainties, confused identities, imposters, twins and the true reality behind appearances. He explored these things in short stories like *The Siamese Twins,* and in novels like *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *The Prince and the Pauper.* I suspect that this interest may have been correlated to his adoption of a *nom de plume.* His use of a pen name seems to have inspired his interest in dual personas and situational ambiguities, and it also gave free rein to his alter ego. It may even have had the substantial effect of helping stimulate his creativity.

Mark Twain once wrote, "In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination." He bemoaned the unfortunate "decay of independent thought". This is why Mark Twain's intellect, clever wit and irreverent satire were brazenly directed at people's odd behaviors and the frequent folly of their actions. His laughter at preposterous beliefs and sanctimonious piousness, and at hypocrisy, strict puritanism and literal interpretations of the Bible stem from such cynicism. Since boyhood, he had been enveloped in a culture steeped in conventional propriety and Victorian modesty, yet despite this fact, he personally indulged in "sinful behaviors" like smoking cheap cigars from a young age, and occasionally drinking alcohol intemperately. He fell prey to a gold rush mentality, gambled, used profane language, wrote with biting satire, and sometimes acted with vindictiveness toward people he perceived as having wronged him.

Everyone has their own bright ideas, to be sure, but they are not always consonant with reality. Most ideas are like "Corn Pone Opinions", inherited or learned as a result of the ways parents bring up their children or through repetitive indoctrination by churches, or other forms of peer and social conditioning. All too many people have, sadly, swallowed wrongheaded conservative political ideologies and religious dogmas "hook-line-and-sinker".

Trying to definitively define Mark Twain is, of course, fraught with difficulty. His character was chock full of contradictions, so all commentaries about him are only partly true. He had a kind of split personality: he was "an agnostic, almost anarchistic enemy of established everything", as Malcolm Jones wrote in a Newsweek article titled "Our Hippest Literary Lion" -- and yet he became a somewhat bourgeois man who "married above his station" and loved to hobnob with rich and famous people. In his final decade of life, Mark Twain lived large and sumptuously, "a first-class life", according to Michael Shelden in *Mark Twain: Man in White.*

Malcolm Jones also noted the curious fact that few people quote Mark Twain's contemporary, Walt Whitman, a man who helped define the shape of American poetry much as Mark Twain defined its prose. Whitman once said, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself." So be it.

A 'Second Advent' of Mark Twain

Picture Mark Twain sitting in his octagonal gazebo at Quarry Farm in western New York State, reflecting and writing atop a knoll overlooking a lovely river valley. Among the many books he wrote there is the illuminating satire, *Letters from the Earth*. It was not published until 1962, more than 50 years after his death, because of its scathingly irreverent, irreligious and satirical nature. He had considered the book to be too blasphemous and sacrilegious for his times. He had once written: "We never become really and genuinely our entire and honest selves until we are dead -- and not then until we have been dead years and years. People ought to start dead, and then they would be honest so much earlier." That's a creatively witty way of looking at it!

At the time Samuel Clemens made this observation, he was no doubt thinking about all the things he had written that he was afraid to publish during his life. In *Letters from the Earth*, for example, he ridicules people's concepts of heaven, expressing astonishment that there is so much singing and praying and harp playing in heaven, and yet such a complete lack of respect for intellectual accomplishments -- or interest in sexual intercourse -- which are such unmistakably prominent features of many people's preoccupations while they are alive.

Hear Mark Twain's astonishment about mankind having left sexual relations out of his conceptions of Heaven:
" … the human being, like the immortals, naturally places sexual intercourse far and away above all other joys -- yet he has left it out of his heaven! The very thought of it excites him; opportunity sets him wild; in this state he will risk life, reputation, everything -- even his queer heaven itself -- to make good that opportunity and ride it to the overwhelming climax. From youth to middle age, all men and all women prize copulation above all other pleasures combined, yet it is actually as I have said: it is not in their heaven; prayer takes its place." Oh, my!

Yours truly, Tiffany Twain, considers it even more exceedingly odd that Churches leave the healthy expression of human sexuality out of their moral conceptions of life while we are alive. The purpose of sex is not only to reproduce, no more than the purpose of food is merely to keep us from starving to death. For those who are prudish and atavistic in their opposition to anyone using contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies, I editorially observe, get a life!

In *Letters from the Earth*, Mark Twain also made a telling comment concerning the Christian Bible: "It is full of interest. It has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and some good morals; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies." I would bet that, in another advent of Mark Twain's life today, he would complement the observations like those he made in *Letters from the Earth* with more modern inclusions, ones that I imagine would embrace a truer spirituality, and perhaps resemble a humorous version of the ideas contained in the Earth Manifesto epistle *Revelations of a Modern Prophet.*

"A little rudeness and disrespect can elevate a meaningless interaction to a battle of wills, and add drama to an otherwise dull day."

--- Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*

Mark Twain was intently interested in geology and paleontology. His interest led him to write *A Brace of Brief Lectures on Science* in 1871. If he were to be resurrected today in some sort of miraculous Second Advent, he would be startled and impressed with the extraordinary advances in scientific understandings that have been made since his death, especially in arenas of astronomy, astrophysics, geology, biology, psychology and the curious electrochemical nature of the workings of the human brain.

An extensive discussion of geology precipitated out of this biography and became *Gaia's Geological Perspective: Episodes Since Genesis,* an essay that delves into things like the astonishing geologic processes by which the Hawaiian Islands have been formed over many millions of years. And how the gold came to be in "them thar hills". And how marine limestone rock layers that formed at the bottom of the Indian Ocean much later have come to be found at the top of the world's highest mountain range, the Himalayas. One of the most important insights in my Gaia essay is one that Mark Twain would have been fascinated to have been able to hear and understand, long before geologists discovered the true nature of the genesis of the beautiful volcanic Hawaiian Islands. This is the surprising discovery of the processes of plate tectonics and the causative relationships between a hot spot deep in Earth's mantle, below the overlying mid-Pacific oceanic crust, and the formation of these tall, roughly conical volcanic mountains. These understandings are included in *Gaia's Geological Perspective,* along with further reflections on Mark Twain's thinking, and they are hereby incorporated into this biography with this reference.

Mark Twain would have loved to be able to more fully comprehend the processes by which the Hawaiian Islands were formed, and to understand that a 4,000-mile-long chain of former Hawaiian islands, which have weighed down and been eroded down to underwater seamounts (which still tower far above the deep ocean floor) march all the way across the Pacific Ocean to the planet's deepest sea trenches near the Kamchatka Peninsula and the western end of the Aleutian Islands of southwest Alaska. There, they slowly subduct down into Earth's crust.

In a Second Advent of Mark Twain, he'd probably even try to put all the scientific discoveries made since his death in 1910 into an extensively articulated elaboration of modern developments in human thought. As likely as not, he'd marry this astute analysis with a satirical barrage of sly observations about the ridiculous follies of human nature and the fascinating pathos of the human condition. Maybe he would even assert that the waste in our societies is meretricious, and the level of political corruption is colossally abominable, and neo-Gilded Age inequalities are outrageous -- and militaristic aggression is so misguided and costly as to be lame-brained insane. He would probably be cynical about ruthless wars waged by the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq, and by Russia in its horrible war against Ukraine, for he had once declared: "An inglorious peace is better than a dishonorable war."

During Mark Twain's extensive travels throughout his lifetime, he developed a deep concern for the exploitation of native peoples (though not for American Indians, whom he largely scorned, in keeping with strong prejudices of his times.) He was aghast at the stupidity and barbarity that were rampant in American culture. This is one reason he opposed U.S. imperialism and jingoistic hawkish leadership. (He would NOT like authoritarian rule!)

At the time Mark Twain co-wrote *The Gilded Age – A Tale of Today* in 1873, there were maybe 1.5 billion people on Earth. Today, with human numbers having first exceeded 8 billion persons in late 2022, what would Mark Twain, the perceptive social critic, have thought of this perturbing trend, and its attendant glaringly daunting challenges? He loved inventions, so he would be astonished at technological advances since his day, but in his cynicism about human folly, he would likely direct scathing sarcasm at the new set of absurdities that accompany our immoderate consumer activities and MAGA maniacal current day fundamentalist forces that treacherously undermine women's rights and stubbornly oppose sensible family planning policies.

In a Second Advent, Mark Twain would probably suggest that we boldly dare to doubt primitive mythological conceptions of the universe. I imagine he would valiantly strive to attain greater clarity of perception, and with his astute critical thinking abilities, he might even suggest that it would be wise to cultivate social and emotional intelligence in our daily lives. He would clothe his lessons in humor, and would use satirical wit to refute blind beliefs of moralistic, judgmental, hypocritical and evangelical fire-and-brimstone authorities and their narrow-minded brethren. He would be particularly cynical about attitudes that negatively affect others, instead of respecting truer virtues like generosity of spirit and love, and neighborly goodwill and "Christian" compassion. And he would also, in this day and age, likely be incisively serious about the need for us to clearly recognize the intensifying impacts that our growing human needs and desires are having on the health of Earth's ecosystems. He thus might conclude that aggregate behavioral changes must be encouraged and incentivized so that we begin to give greater respect and protections to life-supporting natural habitats and oceans -- and a stable climate!

<u>Entertaining Illumination</u>

Mark Twain made a good point when he once wrote: *"It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."* Sam Clemens was much more familiar with the Bible than anyone I know, and he felt that people who swallow the biblical whale of a story as literal truth, rather than regarding it as myth and allegory, are far more gullible than a child who fervently believes in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, the Easter Bunny and a Boogeyman. After even a small dose of virgin births, resurrections after death, a planet-wide flood, men who lived for more than 900 years, and assertions that "There were giants in the earth in those days", most people begin to seek more metaphorical meanings in their holy books, and in the ways they interpret such stories. And they should soundly reject all encouragements and glorification of genocidal attitudes against others.

Religious fundamentalists, perplexingly, feel that only a properly literal and inflexible belief in their dogmatic doctrines and mythological stories is adequate to demonstrate obedient faith. These are people that become dangerous when they affiliate with extremists and the lunatic fringe. Such folks often have been indoctrinated from their childhoods in a belief that their holy book is wholly holy, so they believe in bizarre notions and follow absurd paths. Taken to fanatical extremes, they are even willing to murder abortion doctors, blow themselves up to hurt others, or launch "holy wars" of aggression.

Political violence is wrong, and those who encourage it are unacceptably odious.

Mark Twain's humorous scorn for the God portrayed in the Christian Bible is revealed in his exclamation that the Bible is "the most damnatory biography that exists in print anywhere." He had been brought up as a Presbyterian, and he regarded that faith as preferable to being in the mainstream of Christianity with its domineering Vatican hierarchy, meddling missionaries and hypocritical faithful. He had forgiving pride in Presbyterian moderation, observing: "You never see us Presbyterians getting in a sweat about religion and trying to massacre the neighbors." Ha! That's an excellent call, especially in light of violent conflicts between monotheistic religions in the world today, and between conservative religious folks and more liberal folks.

<u>Politics 2024</u>

Look here now. Extremist MAGA Republicans managed to grab control of the House of Representatives beginning in January 2023, and immediately set out to wreak havoc. After an embarrassing 15 ballots, Trump's "my Kevin" McCarthy was finally anointed as Speaker, and a chaotic and turgid nine months of his ineffective leadership ensued. Then in early October, he was thrown out of power and replaced a few numbing weeks later by religious zealot Mike Johnson of Louisiana. Mike Johnson is a reactionary authority-abusing religious fundamentalist who introduced himself from deserved obscurity by declaring that interested citizens should read the Bible to learn how he feels about any issue. Really? That's PREPOSTEROUS, as anyone could see if they actually read the Bible and then tried to apply its broadly bizarre and contradictory stories literally to current day circumstances!

Mark Twain once humorously assailed the hypocrisy of Bible-thumping master manipulators by making the sly observation, "The Christian's Bible is a drug store. Its contents remain the same, but the medical practice changes." Mike Johnson is like a pusher, championing an agenda opposed to women's reproductive rights to choose to get an abortion, and siding with right-wing Christians against LGBTQ persons, and doing the bidding of fossil fuel conglomerates and wealthy people.

Another quote often attributed to Mark Twain is, "It's easier to fool people than to convince them they've have been fooled". This is a keen observation, although there's uncertainty about its exact origin. The idea aligns with Mark Twain's skeptical and witty perspective, and his belief in the value of critical thinking and the questioning of zealous beliefs, and casting a critical eye on people and their motivations. And surely there are plenty of deceitful manipulators, and there is a lot of human gullibility, and there are great difficulties in dispelling misconceptions and changing people's minds once they've stretched their beliefs beyond reason by embracing indoctrinated dogmas or false information.

Note: A proposed *Bill of Rights for Future Generations* should rightly be ratified in order to galvanize efforts toward achieving common good goals. See my PART FOUR of the Earth Manifesto, *Overarching Considerations – Transformational Ideas and Enlightened Proposals* for additional understanding.

<u>Creativity, Intelligent Design, and the Church</u>

Mark Twain loved science and rational thinking, so he would have heaped praise on the amazing discoveries made in genetics in recent decades. He would have been astonished by confirmations of Darwin's scientific theory of evolution by natural selection that paleontologists have found in the fossil record, and that geneticists and molecular biologists have discovered in DNA and the genetic record. He would have found an expanded basis for heaping ridicule on the stubborn intransigence of Creationists in their embrace of denial, ignorance and blind belief in biblical literalism.

He might have particularly appreciated a stunning rebuke given to disingenuous dogmas of Intelligent Design that came out of a trial in a federal court in Pennsylvania in 2005. In this legal challenge, science teachers opposed religion-motivated members of the Dover Area School Board who had advocated questioning the scientific theory of evolution in biology classes. Judge John Jones, a conservative judge who heard this widely watched case, eventually decried Intelligent Design as manifesting "breathtaking inanity". He asserted that this was a dogma consisting of untestable hypotheses grounded in religion, not in science. He sensibly noted that Intelligent Design had been introduced for religious reasons as a form of repackaged Creationism. With poetic irony, one month before Judge Jones made his ruling in this case, voters in the Dover Area cleaned house by electing 8 out of 9 people to the school board who did not hew to orthodox religious views that question the extensive evidence of biological evolution. For deeper insight into this case, watch the *Nova* episode *Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial* (available on Netflix).

"God made the Idiot for practice, and then He made the School Board."

--- Mark Twain

Charles Peirce's 2009 book *Idiot America – How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free* discussed the Dover Intelligent Design case in Chapter Six: *God and Judge Jones.* Pierce also examined idiotic undertakings like the bizarre Creation Museum that opened in 2007 near the town of Petersburg, Kentucky, which lies about 400 miles southeast of Hannibal. This fake "museum" depicts people riding dinosaurs that have been saddled up to show that the two species existed contemporaneously, in a ridiculous attempt to deny the fact that 65 million years separated the times that dinosaurs last lived and the evolutionary arrival of *Homo sapiens*.

"Like so much of the blasted landscape of Idiot America," Pierce wrote, "the Dover trial was a war on expertise". Intelligent Design was being "sold in such a way that people would speak loudly and authoritatively in its support; then, enough people would believe it to make it a fact, and they would believe it fervently enough to make it true." Ha! Hmmm … The tradition of Mark Twain's skepticism and ridicule lives on in America today!

Churches in the U.S. are making concerted efforts to market themselves and their ideological doctrines, as if emulating a clever sloganeering sales pitch for a "Gospel According to Wal-Mart." These efforts have served to cheapen almost everything worthwhile about their faiths, even their purported virtues as moral institutions. The manipulation of faithful folks into giving support to reactionary politicians, forced birthers and egomaniacal Donald Trump makes our nation unnecessarily dysfunctional, vulnerable to authoritarian dictates, anti-progressive and somewhat stupid, and anti-feminist, and less flexible and adaptable in dealing with overarching challenges. "Churches, evolve!"

Denials of expertise, like those of Republicans about climate change, or the knowledge of the foremost disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci, are proving to be both cataclysmically costly and deadly. More instances of idiocy!

<u>Other Churchy Considerations</u>

I love the phrase used by conservative Judge John Jones -- "breathtaking inanity" -- which he had used in referring to Intelligent Design ideologies. Mark Twain, even in his grave, might be envious that he had not come up with those words himself to describe dubious religious fundamentalist doctrines. He would probably guffaw with suppressed glee at the richly cogent nature of this characterization. And scowl seriously at vile Christian nationalist abuses of authority. Resign, extremist Mike Johnson!

The reason Mark Twain heaped sardonic ridicule upon those who mindlessly touted biblical certitudes was presumably because of the variety of unnecessary and socially undesirable conflicts such attitudes create. This is why he once indicated that the frivolousness of his literary work had one overriding serious purpose: again, "the

deriding of shams, the exposure of pretentious falsities, and the laughing of stupid superstitions out of existence." He famously wrote: "Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand," so it is curious in this light that a revival of religious evangelism in the United States in the last few decades has brought into question the effectiveness of both rational thinking and ridicule against the pitched defenses of dogmatic unreason.

Religion often presents its doctrines as a believe-it-or-else-go-to-hell proposition. This is patently absurd. Four of the Ten Commandments, and revealingly enough the first four, are concerned with the proper honoring of a jealous Lord God and "His" holy word and the Sabbath day. Of all the possible missing injunctions against bad human behavior, like Thou shalt not rape, Thou shalt not sexually abuse children, Thou shalt not persecute others for their personal religious beliefs, Thou shalt not commit violence against thy spouse, and dozens of others, God overlooked them all and spent four-tenths of his Commandments obsessing over any person taking "the name of the Lord thy God in vain". It is as if cursing is one of the worst sins, or that believing in some more likely truth than the supposed existence of a loving jealous wrath-prone vindictive and inscrutably capricious male God is a threat to human well-being.

I personally believe that social cohesion is becoming increasingly important as the world gets more crowded, and that monotheistic rigidity of ideological beliefs is dangerous. The need is growing for people to come together to solve problems, and this should take precedence over compulsions to find righteous justifications in beliefs in One and Only One True God. Demagogues who demonize others and impose reactionary dictates and obstruct fair-minded progress are the real "losers"! (Damn them for the oppression they impose, especially on women.)

Fear and insecurity have remarkable motivating power, and they contribute to the strong staying power of established religions. People have deep hopes for a caring personal God, and for a better life in some 'hereafter', so they are easily manipulated from a young age by religious authorities and indoctrinating catechisms they teach.

"Doubt is not a pleasant condition," declared Voltaire, "but certainty is an absurd one."

One main theme of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* was that the Roman Catholic Church is ultimately an enemy of the people because it embodies the established evils of churches when they manipulate religious believers for political purposes and to get money. The Catholic Church purports to serve noble spiritual functions, but such laudable purpose is subverted when it allies itself with political reactionaries and helps enable abuses of power. In *Connecticut Yankee*, the protagonist visits early medieval England and accuses the church of helping prolong the ills of 6th century society. The ills in those days of legendary King Arthur included a supposition that persons in the nobility had hereditary rights and deserved prerogatives, a perpetuation of social inequalities, and a helpless subservience of the masses to domineering authority. Occupy these ideas!

Established churches have extremely sordid histories of violently opposing evolution in their dogmas, other than shrewdly deceptive ones. The creative transmogrification of creationism into creation science and then into intelligent design has been a cunning ploy to try to sell archaic mythologies as science, not religion. That attempt has been done with such blatant duplicity and a dose of downright incompetence that it has been transparently full of holes. Church leaders seem to think that once any part of their supposed truths are seen to be hogwash, then a closer examination might be made of ALL their assertions, even by loyal believers.

Thousands of women were burned at the stake during the Middle Ages by authorities in the Catholic Church for what were minor offenses that Church leaders saw as threats to their hegemony. Then in 1633, Galileo, "the father of modern science". was confined under house arrest for the remainder of his life after he dared contradict the Church's antediluvian dogma that asserted the Earth is the center of the Universe. The Church refused to admit the colossal error of its geocentric worldviews for more than 350 years after the persecution of Galileo. Three hundred fifty years! Finally, after Pope John Paul II commissioned an oddly long 13-year investigation into the Church's condemnation of Galileo, the Church formally admitted that Gosh, it had erred in condemning him, and that, by the way, Copernicus and Galileo were actually right that the Earth orbits the Sun.

Let's hear from the famous astronomer and philosopher himself! Galileo Galilei stated: "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same god who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use." -- Hallelujah! Let's not envision our God as pettily vindictive, lest we normalize it in our politics and society.

It may be that, as Albert Einstein once observed, "A foolish faith in authority is the worst enemy of truth."

Conservative religious authorities demand fidelity and obedience, even to the most bizarrely antiquated aspects of the doctrines of church, temple or mosque establishments. To disagree and thus be considered a heretic or an infidel is dangerous worldwide, even still today. The Mormon faith makes Utah one of the most bone-headedly conservative states in the Union. And places abroad where Shariah Islamic Law is practiced can be intensely sexist, barbaric and cruel. For instance, the death penalty can be applied under Shariah law for 'crimes' of blasphemy, adultery or homosexuality, and theft can be punished by amputating a thief's hand. Shariah law also holds that both "fornication" and public intoxication should be punished by flogging.

People's adherence to religious dogmas is, in some ways, a barbarous waste of moral energy. As John Fowles observed in *The Aristos,* his towering philosophical treatise, misguided religious thinking and action are "like keeping ramshackle water mills on a river that could serve hydroelectric dynamos." Much more positive outcomes could be achieved if these formidable energies, along with the enormous amounts of time and money devoted to churches, were to be redirected into more moderate, inclusive, wholesome, sustainable and peaceable channels.

Imagine, for instance, if we could transcend the terrible conflicts over religious supremacy that are taking place between Christianity and Islam in the world today, as manifested by the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the U.S. and the retaliatory military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the disastrous war in Syria, and the drone assassinations of Islamic extremists (and assorted innocents in the vicinity) in places like Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. American involvements in the region have for years used air supremacy to bomb insurgents, yet terrorist extremism has gained excessive influence, as it did with the Islamic State of Iraq. The costs of these conflicts are terribly high in a world so much in need of smarter and more salubrious investments of money and energy.

Think how different the world would be if more people honored big picture open-minded progressive ideas that are future-respecting and enlightened -- rather than ideas that are closed-minded, reactionary, myopic and narrowly parochial. The synapses of our brains have remarkable neuroplasticity, and maybe with broader ways of seeing, these synapses would build new circuits and snap into new healthier perspectives and understandings and worldviews, which could revolutionarily affect our societies in positive ways. This might even make it easier for us to work together to achieve greater good goals! Like flourishing, and survival.

Consider what a difference it would make if more people studied progressive ideas today rather than the Bible and Quran. The world would be a better place if millions of people explored and debated ideas that are socially and ecologically intelligent, like those articulated in this manifesto, instead of listening to authoritarian lies or believed in archaic commandments, improbable stories and cartoonish concepts of a Supreme Being -- and the divisive, antagonism-provoking supremacism of monotheistic religions and autocratic rulers.

Religious devotion, of course, may not be a barbarous waste of time, energy and money from the perspective that religious beliefs may have considerable value in people's lives by providing compensatory consolation, structured values and affirmative social connections. Such beliefs can be a convenient vehicle for people to express their deep spiritual needs -- sing out loud! -- and they can be a good outlet for people to indulge their hopes and assuage their fears, insecurities and stresses. But when fervent convictions cross the line and begin contributing to progress-opposing political activities, or when they provide strong support to politicians who seek personal advantages by rationalizing harm to the environmental commons, or when they act to impose or perpetuate a host of harshly discriminatory biases or result in outright violence, then they should be rejected!

<u>Stories, Facts and Telescopic Illumination</u>

Science and rational thinking, in contrast to religious orthodoxy, promote ideas that are consistent with the evidence of experience. Science adaptively incorporates incisive understandings that are much more accurate whenever new insights or advanced scientific instruments come along that provide better ways of seeing the world. To believe blindly, with no evidence other than the distilled and manipulative hearsay of 'holy books', is like taking an irrational and stultifying plunge from the vaulting battlements of reason.

Galileo significantly improved telescopic lenses more than 400 years ago, in the year 1609, allowing him to observe four moons orbiting the planet Jupiter. This was a surprising discovery that helped confirm the theory, first

advanced 66 years earlier by Nicolaus Copernicus, that the solar system operates on a different principle than one involving everything revolving around a stationary Earth. This knowledge effectively displaced the Earth from the center of the Universe in our understandings, whether people liked it or not. The Catholic Church refused to admit this fact for centuries; its leaders seem to have preferred to burn people at the stake for heresy for refusing to conform to their narrow, dogmatic, manipulative and erroneous version of reality. Dastardly!

Telescopes and microscopes are instruments that have vastly improved our ability to see the cosmically big and the extremely small in the universe. The insights gained from such expanded vision should not be denied merely because they contradict primitive understandings of the world. Seeing is believing! The photos taken by the Hubble Space Telescope provide us, for instance, with extraordinary pictures of things like "The Pillars of Creation", huge clouds of interstellar gas and dust in the Eagle Nebula in which new stars are being created. The Hubble Space Telescope also gave us a beautiful view of "The Perfect Storm" in the Swan Nebula, revealing another hotbed of star formation, along with thousands of other almost artistic visions of astrophysical reality.

The greatest advance in the resolution of telescopes since Galileo's day was achieved after the Hubble Space Telescope, launched in April 1990, had its optics properly focused in December 1993 and helped revolutionize our human understanding of the universe. Its images have been used to determine that the universe is almost 14 billion years old, and to confirm the "existence and ubiquity of black holes". Images from Hubble have surprised scientists with discoveries about deep space and early developments in the universe, and they have helped us learn more about the planets in our own neighborhood of the cosmos. These images led to a "recent revolution in human conception of the universe" that has more-or-less "done away with the old sense of a benign firmament filled with twinkling lights. In its place looms a forbidding realm of surreal violence and weirdness."

Mark Twain fans in the Midwest may be heartened to know that the 43-foot long Hubble Space Telescope was named for Missouri-born astronomer Edwin Hubble, the first scientist to discover, back in the 1920s, that the Milky Way is not the only galaxy in the universe. It stunningly turned out that there are hundreds of billions of other galaxies. Edwin Hubble also was the first scientist to establish that the universe is physically expanding, as if from an initial colossal Big Bang impulse. And now, the new James Webb Space Telescope, which was launched in December 2021 and uses infrared observations of the cosmos, has sent us images of some of the earliest galaxies formed after the Big Bang, about 350 million years after the universe appears to have begun.

Our understandings have come an extraordinarily long way since the days of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Copernicus and Galileo. Nonetheless, ultimate mysteries remain. We are insecure seekers of the agent behind Creation, and seekers of a universal purpose in existence. Most people's heads spin when they think too hard about ultimate mysteries, so they tend to choose to believe in simplistic explanations that just happen to be provided by evangelical preachers and manipulative ideologues and assorted other control freaks.

Every God ever conceived by human beings is an anthropocentric personification of forces, human archetypes or attributes of our own better or worser natures. Gods are a convenient receptacle for our hopes and fears, and they reflect a need that many feel for some sort of absolute in a relative world. Gods provide a good channel for our spiritual impulses and prayers, our thanksgiving and our curses -- and for our powerful desires for hope and meaning and beliefs in an afterlife to compensate for the slings and arrows of misfortune that inevitably eventually afflict each of us in our lives.

Divine personifications tend to take the form of a 'She', or a 'He', like the Great Mother Goddess of primitive humankind or Goddesses of infinite love, wisdom and virtue, or the Father God of monotheistic patriarchal religions like the tyrant God in the Old Testament that craves adulation and commands faith, obedience and sacrifice. The reason Mark Twain poked fun at absurdities involved in this entire God-inventing business was because he found it to be so pathetically affiliated with odd rationalizations, discriminatory biases and repressive impulses to control people, along with hypocrisies and violently merciless conflicts, Inquisitions, pogroms and wars.

Intelligent Athenians 2,500 years ago likely understood that their Greek gods and goddesses were actually personifications of natural forces, concepts, qualities or aspects of life. How could evangelicals today actually believe their anthropocentric God is a real Supreme Being, so obviously made in our own human image, rather than a

metaphorical personification? How could people today be more gullible in some ways than our ancestors long ago in classical times?

Science is not static like most religions. Vastly more expansive understandings have been revealed by science since the days of Sam Clemens. Astrophysicists today use sophisticated instruments like mass spectrometers to confirm that countless galaxies of matter are hurtling through space in a billions-of-years long unfolding of the cosmos through space and time. Nonetheless, many people who cling to literal interpretations of the Bible still obtusely adhere to primitive explanations of our origins. In 1650, Irish bishop James Ussher proclaimed that he had traced the lineage of Jesus and the ancestral life spans given in the Old Testament of the Bible back to the time of Adam and Eve, and he declared that God created the Universe on Sunday, October 23, 4004 B.C.

Really?! Some Biblical literalists have blindly believed this genealogy ever since, despite the fact that beliefs like this have grown increasingly absurd in light of more accurate understandings. Mark Twain was right in many religious instances when he perceptively wrote, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so."

It is fine to "believe what you know ain't so" -- it's a free country! -- as long as such beliefs do not have negative impacts on others. But the aggressive promotion of religious doctrines that condemn all people who believe differently is proving to be inimical to the prospects of peace and justice on Earth. It may even be dangerous to the survival of our species to have large segments of the population cling to primitive beliefs and deny crucially important social, environmental and ecological understandings. (And to support deceitful representatives.)

Regressive and repressive forces supported by stubbornly rigid believers in established religions are having many impacts that are much more detrimental than they are beneficial in our societies. We should strive for better understandings of the emotional motives behind blockheaded inanities that deny more accurate ways of seeing. This is why we should formulate public policies that encourage good education and broad-minded critical thinking. It is simply becoming ever more urgently necessary for us to deal effectively with the daunting problems facing us, and to insist on finding ways to transform our societies into fairer and more sustainable ones. The time has come for us today to strive with greater collective commitment to actually achieving a more propitious destiny.

A Whale of an Illuminating Story

In Sam Clemens boyhood, cities were illuminated by burning whale oil made from blubber of slaughtered whales. Jonah in the Bible might have felt prodigious vindication at the poetic justice of this development, for surely Jonah was mortified at having been swallowed alive by a whale back in the days of old. I'm just speculating, because if Jonah was anything like the LORD GOD in the Old Testament, he could easily have held a grudge against an entire species throughout all eternity for the supposed wickedness of a single action. Forgiveness does not seem to have been in fashion back then. After all, the whale had "vomited out Jonah upon the dry land", and some of the whales' descendants might have been given some small break for that consideration, instead of having been mercilessly hunted by mankind to near extinction in the last 200 years. I imagine that it was ignominious for Jonah to have been swallowed whole and then to be required to spend the biblical interregnum of three days, cramped and clammy in the belly of "a great fish", before being resurrected in so rude a way at God's direction!

For an extraordinary true story about a huge sperm whale that attacked and sank a whaling vessel in the middle of the South Pacific Ocean in 1820, read *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex.*

Ironies certainly abound in our world. Urban and rural illumination is achieved today by using electricity for lighting that is derived not from burning whale oil, but from burning coal, oil and natural gas. Good God! --- Here we are using fossil fuels formed from fractious deposits of organic matter far back in Geologic Periods eons ago, like the swampy Carboniferous (a 60-million-year long period in the Paleozoic Era, several hundred million years ago) -- and yet more than a third of people in the U.S. still claim they don't believe in evolution!

The most basic facts about the Universe is that everything changes and everything is in constant motion. Countless galaxies are hurtling through space, as if away from some colossal explosion of initial genesis. Each of these galaxies consists of billions of big balls of burning matter. Planets, asteroids, comets and other stellar debris orbit around each burning star, just as our home planet and a bunch of other matter orbits around the Sun. Earth's atmosphere is also in motion, with the continuous phenomena of winds, air currents, jet streams and the

agitation of gas molecules. Oceans are in motion with daily tides, undulating waves, flowing currents and turbulent upwellings. Even the Earth's crust moves slowly in giant slabs called "tectonic plates", and earthquakes and volcanoes reveal the continuous nature of these subterranean forces at work. And every electron of every atom of every molecule of everything on Earth is in continuous motion in every moment.

Motion is change, so everything is changing all the time. Ironically, all things change in accordance with what seem to be unchanging "laws of nature", as described by scientific disciplines of physics, mathematics, chemistry and geology. This irreversible sequence of altering matter through time and space can be seen as a physical evolution. This evolution is evidenced in the formation and lithification of sedimentary rocks, fossilization, mountain building, erosion, chemical weathering, glaciation, volcanism and earthquakes. Geophysical changes like this demonstrate the continuous evolution of our home planet. The photograph on the front cover of Book Two of the Earth Manifesto shows the aftermath of the collapse of a high rock arch onto the beach of a sandy Pacific cove that is a fine example of the "punctuated equilibrium" nature of some of an infinite number of such changes.

Charles Darwin's scientific theory of biological evolution by means of natural selection grew out of a recognition that all forms of life are found nearly perfectly adapted to the conditions that pertain in the habitats and ranges where they live. This adaptation of life to an infinite number of changing ecological niches is compelling evidence of biological evolution.

Tidy new evidence surfaced in 2015 that provided surprising confirmation of Darwin's theory of evolutionary adaptation by means of natural selection in response to changing conditions. Think about this proof, a surprise that scientists call a "null hypothesis" confirmation. Certain types of microbes have been found living in very stable sediments on the bottom of deep seas, and fossil evidence indicates that these microbes have remained evolutionarily unchanged for more than two billion years. Imagine it: our ancestors at the time of the Cretaceous Extinction 65 million years ago were early primates that resembled little lemurs found today on the island of Madagascar. Since then, our ancestors evolved into an amazing succession of new species along the branching tree of life that included tarsiers then monkeys, then gibbons, orangutans, gorillas, chimpanzees and early Homo species, before finally evolving into *Homo sapiens sapiens* -- human beings. Yet over a period of time that is more than 30 times longer than the last 65 million years, life forms found in deep ocean sediments have remained unchanged! (See Wikipedia entries for *The Ancestor's Tale* for information about the path traced backwards in time from today to meet humanity's forbearers as they converge on common ancestors of all species of life.)

Anyway, it really is astonishing that about one third of Americans say they don't believe life has evolved. What sophistry! (Sophistry is superficially plausible reasoning that is actually fallacious, like much faulty thinking that characterizes the beliefs of hard-right conservatives.) It is stunning that so many people deny some of the best modern understandings just to cling to primitive myths and dogmas -- and the whole right wing agenda.

In April 2009, many people were fearful that an outbreak of 'swine flu' in Mexico would spread into a global epidemic. This flu virus was widely understood to be one that was mutating. No matter how fervently people stick their heads in the sand, the factual evolution of a virus can strike us, and such antigens can make an end-run around our miraculously well-adapted immune system defenses, whether or not we believe in evolution. Vastly more proof materialized with the early 2020 inset of a global pandemic that has featured numerous adaptively evolving strains of a coronavirus. By April 2024, the disease had killed more than 1.2 million people in the U.S.

Rapidly mutating varieties of viruses strike fear into our hearts, and yet some religious fundamentalists still deny that species of life have changed since "the Beginning". The delta variant mutation of COVID-19 in 2021 proved to be shockingly deadly, and subsequent variants have adapted to be much more easily transmissible. Denials about this are dangerous and lethal.

Clearer thinking is vitally important at this juncture in human affairs. Mark Twain was particularly sensitive to the personal peculiarities of the human animal, having made note of people's Corn Pone Opinions and remarkable sincerity of self-deceit, and amazing propensities to indulge in self-justifications and foolish follies and bizarre leaps of faith. Can't we restructure our societies in recognition of these aspects of human nature, and through a process of wiser understanding, achieve a goal of creating fairer, healthier, more sensible, more peaceful and more sustainable societies? (Yes, we could; and, YES, we should!)

Let us shake ourselves awake, elevate our sights, and momentarily escape the workaday concerns and widespread distractions that command our attention and practically devour our souls. We are like quixotic knights absurdly tilting at quiescent windmills, mistaking them for monstrous giants and hoping for glory in combat, victory and vanquishment. More likely than not, however, such distorted vision will leave us in a sorry condition, as it did with Don Quixote on the Spanish plains of La Mancha.

The Big Picture

We live in a world of universal hazard, with Chaos pitted against Order. In this situation, "the whole" seems to be indifferent to every individual thing in it. In this whole, nothing is unjust or good or bad; all is relative. Things are fortunate or unfortunate to one individual or another, but not to the whole. One person's gain is often another person's loss. Nature itself can be seen to be seemingly supremely indifferent to individual outcomes. As an example of this truism, when a meteor slammed into Earth 65 million years ago, causing the Cretaceous Extinction in which the majority of living organisms on the planet were wiped out, this catastrophe was certainly a severe misfortune for almost every individual and species of life alive at the time. But the cataclysmic event eventually proved to be a boon for descendants of the survivors that were able to take advantage of the opportunities inherent in the altered conditions and reduced competition, and these plants and animals evolved into untold numbers of new species, including all of our mammalian ancestors.

Today, a new wave of mass extinctions is occurring, and humankind is significantly contributing to causing them by destroying habitats, over-harvesting, creating huge quantities of noxious pollutants and spewing billions of tons of climate-destabilizing gases into the atmosphere. This threatens our own collective well-being. No God will save us from this assault; no one can save us but ourselves. We should recognize and acknowledge this, and honorably commit ourselves to taking appropriate actions! Hear these words.

Some of this "biography" was written near Earth Day 2012, when it seemed appropriate to champion ideas that celebrate marvelous aspects of the Earth and the wonderful balance found in healthy ecosystems that support us. I saluted Mark Twain, and expressed the sincere hope that the influence of accurate understandings will come to inform our actions and public policies more powerfully in coming years.

The writer Nikos Kazantzakis imagined Jesus as a real man giving his first sermon on a hill above a lake in Galilee. "Forgive me, my brothers, but I shall speak in parables", he said. "The sower went out to sow his field, and as he sowed, one seed fell on the road and the birds came and ate it. Another fell on stones, found no soil in which to be nourished, and withered away. Another fell on thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. Finally, another fell on good soil; it took root, sprouted an ear, brought forth grain and fed mankind. He among you who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

An Underlying Digression

In the essay *The Odd Brilliance of Dante's Epic Poem, The Divine Comedy,* an intriguing investigation is made into Dante's great allegorical tale about Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso. Guided by Virgil, a famed Roman poet of antiquity, Dante makes a journey through an interesting place called Limbo, full of distinguished eminences like Socrates and Plato who lived centuries too early to have had the chance to be saved by the latter-day arrival of Jesus Christ. After Limbo, the intrepid and philosophic duo then travelled down through the eight lower circles of Hell. Dante uses Virgil, who had lived over 12 centuries before him in the first century BCE, as his guide on this transformative journey because Virgil was considered to represent the embodiment of reason.

The Home Page of the Earth Manifesto features a quote by Virgil that is one of the most thought-provoking observations ever made: "We make our destinies by the gods we choose." The course of our lives can be quite profoundly influenced by the choices we make, and by the things we believe in, so it behooves us to make smart choices, and to honestly proportion our beliefs to actual evidence and probabilities.

Each and every person indisputably does, to some extent, make his or her own destiny by the gods they choose. Even more definitely, we all together influence our collective destinies by the beliefs we entertain and the attitudes and worldviews we adopt -- and the politicians we support to represent us. There is a strong correlation between the worldviews we hold and the impacts we have on natural ecosystems, and since everything is

interconnected and interdependent, our beliefs also affect the destinies of all other forms of life on Earth. Honest mindfulness is called for, so that we can ensure better prospects, now and in the future.

A culture that strongly believes in personal responsibility for the stewardship of our home planet is more likely to protect the natural world than one that advocates expansive personhood rights for large corporations. A nation that makes bold commitments to protecting natural ecosystems and ensuring the sustainable use of resources would be certain to give higher priority to environmental protections and sane ecological activities than a nation that believes in Mammon or a God that encourages people to procreate and multiply with no limit and subdue every form of life that creepeth, crawleth, breatheth and liveth upon the planet. A culture that honors people who work together to create a more prosperous future would be much more likely to do well in the long run than a different culture that eagerly defends the freedom of individuals to indulge in excessively selfish drives at the expense of the greater good and the providential health of the ecological commons.

Boethius, an influential Roman consul and philosopher who fell from grace and power due to some arcane political intrigue in 524 CE, wrote *Consolation of Philosophy* while in prison for a year awaiting execution. This book became the most widely copied work of secular literature in Europe for centuries. In it, he sought healing from Lady Philosophy, writing: "Understanding of the self only arises in relationship, in watching yourself in relationship to people, ideas and things; to trees, the earth, and the world around you and within you. Relationship is the mirror in which the self is revealed. Without self-knowledge there is no basis for right thought and action."

"Know thyself" reads the ancient inscription above the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. That's good advice! Think about Mark Twain's observations in the sequel he started, but never finished, to his great novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* In this tantalizing sequel, he wrote about the religion of Native American Indians -- a religion he alleges posited the existence of two gods, a good one and a bad one. It seems apparent that when people devote stupendous energies to propitiating a bad god, it is a much worse plan than to honor and celebrate the virtues and ethical spiritual truths of a loving good god. Hallelujah for that Twainian insight!

Look at it this way. If we worship Mammon and regard money as the most important thing in life, and continue to allow a small group of rich people to grab the biggest share of the monetary gains generated by the efforts of workers and the exploitation of Earth's resources, this priority will make us a vastly different people than if we were instead to extol virtues of conservation and greater social and environmental justice and commit our nation to fairer dealings toward all people alive today, and toward all those to come in future generations.

<u>Recipes</u>

In case anyone who reads this soliloquy feels they aren't getting their money's worth, here is a reward: yummy cookies and exceptionally healthy beverages! Before reading the rest of this essay, brew some Ginger Infused Health Beverage or make a version of a Papaya Blueberry Banana Lassi, or bake some Dark Chocolate Chip Cookies Made with Almond Meal and lots of Oats, Walnuts, Pecans, Sunflower Seeds, Sesame Seeds, Chia Seeds and Ayurvedic Good Health Spices. The recipes for these drinks and delicious and nutritious cookies can be found in *Twelve Delicious Recipes for Good Health and Gourmet Appreciation*.

Let Mark Twain entertain us for a moment with this humorous passage from *Roughing It,* for it can give us an enjoyable pause for reflection:

> "In Syria, once, at the head-waters of the Jordan, a camel took charge of my overcoat while the tents were being pitched, and examined it with a critical eye, all over, with as much interest as if he had an idea of getting one made like it; and then, after he was done figuring on it as an article of apparel, he began to contemplate it as an article of diet. He put his foot on it, and lifted one of the sleeves out with his teeth, and chewed and chewed at it, gradually taking it in, and all the while opening and closing his eyes in a kind of religious ecstasy, as if he had never tasted anything as good as an overcoat before, in his life. Then he smacked his lips once or twice, and reached after the other sleeve. Next he tried the velvet collar, and smiled a smile of such contentment that it was plain to see that he regarded that as the daintiest thing about an overcoat. The tails went next, along with some percussion caps and cough candy, and some fig-paste from Constantinople. And then

my newspaper correspondence dropped out, and he took a chance in that -- manuscript letters written for the home papers."

"But he was treading on dangerous ground, now. He began to come across solid wisdom in those documents that was rather weighty on his stomach; and occasionally he would take a joke that would shake him up till it loosened his teeth; it was getting to be perilous times with him, but he held his grip with good courage and hopefully, till at last he began to stumble on statements that not even a camel could swallow with impunity. He began to gag and gasp, and his eyes to stand out, and his forelegs to spread, and in about a quarter of a minute he fell over as stiff as a carpenter's work-bench, and died a death of indescribable agony. I went and pulled the manuscript out of his mouth, and found that the sensitive creature had choked to death on one of the mildest and gentlest statements of fact that I ever laid before a trusting public." (Verily funny!)

In *Roughing It,* Mark Twain also tells a funny story of Dick Baker, an earnest gold miner in a place named Dead-Horse Gulch. Baker had a large grey cat named Tom Quartz. It was "the remarkablest cat" anyone ever did see. He had "a power of dignity -- he wouldn't a let the Gov'ner of Californy be familiar with him. He never ketched a rat in his life -- 'peared to be above it." Tom Quartz seemed to love to superintend the miners in their placer-mining search for gold, but when miners got into pick'n 'n' blast'n shafts along visible veins of quartz, that cat regarded it as the most "cussedest foolishness". He developed a powerful prejudice against the activity after having gotten blown up only once, and he became quite sagacious. It proved to be impossible to cure him of his prejudice: "Cure him! No! When Tom Quartz was sot once, he was always sot -- and you might a blowed him up as much as three million times 'n' you'd never a broken him of his cussed prejudice agin quartz mining."

Hilarious! Marvelous! Thank you, Samuel Clemens, for having enriched our world!

One observer said we should expect wisdom from writers, and that, while art may stop short of Biblical revelation, it ought to tell us more than we already know. Mark Twain's books do this; they help clarify the world and make it a more sublime place. In the film *Mark Twain* by Ken Burns, Russell Banks calls Mark Twain "a wise guy who was wise." Amen!

<u>On Racism and Folly</u>

Hear me now, as I turn to important perspectives on issues that Mark Twain was too courageous to shy away from. Sam Clemens' home state of Missouri had become the twenty-fourth state in the Union in August 1821. It entered the Union as a "slave state" as part of the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which admitted Maine as a "free state" to maintain the political balance between free and slave states in a growing conflict between the North and the South. Sam was accustomed to the seeming normalcy of domestic slavery in his family and in the economic and social culture of his boyhood. Even though the institution of domestic slavery in Missouri was more benign than the harsh farm slavery of the Deep South, slaves could still be beaten for any reason, and slave owners routinely sold slave families asunder, according to the will, exigencies and prerogatives of those who owned them.

The Civil War pitted advocates of abolition of slavery against those who defended the conventional rights of "property owners". Many people in Missouri during Clemens' youth regarded abolitionists as low-down radicals and subversives who threatened the established rights of slave owners. One infamous abolitionist, a white man named John Brown, struck fear into the hearts of many people in 1856 by advocating militant actions to abolish slavery. In light of these facts, it took considerable courage of conviction and fair-mindedness for Mark Twain to confront the issue of racism that was implicit in the institution of slavery. He did this through the character of Huck Finn in his most famous novel in which the young protagonist-narrator Huck and the good-hearted avuncular runaway slave Jim escape together down the mighty Mississippi River on a raft.

Lest anyone be uncertain about Mark Twain's personal feelings about black people, one need only read his *Autobiography* (published in 2010). In this oddly weighty tome, he writes, "All the Negroes were friends of ours, and with those of our own age we were in effect comrades." He expresses a strong liking for the black race and an "appreciation of certain of its fine qualities". The crowning epitome of these qualities for Mark Twain was embodied by Uncle Dan'l, "a middle-aged slave whose head was the best one in the negro-quarter, whose sympathies were wide and warm, and whose heart was honest and simple and knew no guile."

Mark Twain used his memories of Uncle Dan'l as the persona model for the character Jim in a number of his novels because he remembered Uncle Dan'l fondly and respectfully from his boyhood experiences. Of Uncle Dan'l, he wrote: "He was a faithful and affectionate good friend, ally and advisor."

To better understand literature, it is helpful to cultivate a good idea of the times and places and the culture in which the writings are set. It is also valuable to understand the formative influences that affect those who set pen to paper, or equivalent. Such insights can give readers a fuller context for better comprehension. In this regard, a passage on Page 212 of Mark Twain's *Autobiography* is quite illuminating: "In my schoolboy days I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing, and that the doubter need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind -- and then the texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure; if the slaves themselves had an aversion to slavery they were wise and said nothing. In Hannibal we seldom saw a slave misused; on the farm, never."

In Southern states further south from Missouri, slavery was a harsher, more heart-rending economic and social institution, and white supremacism was more deeply embedded then, as it is now. It took a whole lot of political maneuvering and the terrible Civil War to finally bring the issue of slavery to a conflict-filled legal end, and to bring freedom to Blacks (more-or-less; Reconstruction and then Jim Crow laws were disasters!). Much troubled water has figuratively flowed under the bridge since those days. A clearer comprehension of the evolution of injustices in American society since those days is explored in this resurrection of Mark Twain's perspectives.

The USA had an articulate and intelligent black man as President for 8 years, and then it had a vindictive con man who seemed zealously focused on reversing every one of Barack Obama's accomplishments. This sharp contrast should force us to grapple more honestly with the serious issues of racial discrimination that are still embedded in our economy, workplaces, culture, policing and politics. Racial prejudices have deep roots, and so do male chauvinism and anti-gay fervor and anti-immigrant sentiments. Social injustices make these conflicts more virulent. It's time for us to seek more honest understandings of psychological and social underpinnings behind these biases, for that might providentially help mitigate these injustices and facilitate healing in our nation.

Deep-seated ethnocentric prejudices live on, but we must transcend them as we did in repealing Jim Crow laws and statutes against "miscegenation" (marriages between black and white men and women). Our nation overcame stubborn opposition to the right of women to vote, and attitudes changed toward strict strictures against cohabitation of unmarried couples that persisted for way too long. It is unfortunate that much discrimination against women and sexist attitudes continue, and that biased attitudes toward lesbian women and gay men are so often preached. These issues should be addressed by extending the fairness principles in our Constitution to include the right of life, liberty and reasonable opportunities for the pursuit of happiness for ALL!

Perhaps emblematic of the shift of attitudes toward lesbians and gay men today, despite the glacially slow pace of social changes in general, are two bumper stickers seen on vehicles some years ago:

HATE is Not
A Family Value
--- Bumper Sticker, 2009

I'm Straight,
But Not Narrow
--- Bumper Sticker, 2010

Mark Twain was no saint, and he did not transcend all of his biases, like those against Native Americans or his occasional stereotyping of Jews. But his personal evolution from being a poor small-town Missouri frontier boy to world-famous literary superstar and humorous lecturer -- and wise observer and extraordinarily conspicuous character -- has had a prodigious positive influence in the world.

Mark Twain's attitude toward slavery is compellingly explored in *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*. This tale included some cutting-edge ideas of the times when it was published in 1894. Set in a fictional Missouri frontier town on the banks of the Mississippi, it tells the story of David Wilson, who had made an unfortunate remark about a howling dog that earned him serious ridicule and the mocking nickname of "Pudd'nhead". Wilson was avidly interested in people's fingerprints, a standard forensic science today, but a sensational and controversial new understanding in those days. Fingerprint analysis is a discipline that relies on the fact that each and every person

has unique genetic patterns in their fingerprints. Roxy, the female slave in this story, was 1/16 black. She was responsible for taking care of two children who were born the same day. One was her own son, and the other was the son of her master. Roxy realized that her son could be "sold down the river" to the Deep South, being a slave from Missouri, and since such a possibility was widely regarded as equivalent to being condemned to hell, she switched her baby with the master's, and the two boys grew up in their switched roles.

Roxy's real son grew up as Tom Driscoll, the master's son. He eventually got into a terrible bind with gambling, and ended up murdering his uncle. A jury trial ensued, and Pudd'nhead Wilson, acting as his lawyer, discovered that fingerprints on the murder weapon were Tom's. Further, he discovered that Tom was actually part Negro, thereby revealing the switched identities. Tom was condemned to life in prison for the murder, but Missouri's Governor sympathized with creditors of the slave-owning uncle's estate and immediately pardoned him -- so that he could be sold down the river!

This story is a tragedy, said one literary critic, that reads like an episode of Matlock written by Jonathan Swift, "and in it Mark Twain somehow manages to be heartbreaking, entertaining and viciously funny all at once". The story casts light on the racism of the antebellum South, and on the pathetic ways that Negro slaves were treated in American society at the time. This backdrop can be poignantly mined to uncover the lingering legacy of racism in the USA today, particularly in the South -- which is getting worse with GOP gerrymandering.

As time continues lapsing from the future to the past, new developments take place that have relevance to these ideas. Many of them reveal how intractably stubborn the systemic injustices are that continue to put Black people and other people of color at serious disadvantages. We live in extraordinarily interesting times, and big picture perspectives expressed by Mark Twain are cogent -- like his observation about history not repeating itself, but surely rhyming a lot. In February 2016, as intense competition for the office of the presidency heated up, racist invective was veritably oozing out from under the veneer of civilized behavior, and conservative presidential candidates ridiculed "political correctness" with bombastic fervor, claiming it is a form of tyrannical suppression of free speech. They proclaimed absurdly negative and devious characterizations of the impressive accomplishments of the first black man to preside as president in the White House, and tried to ignore the role conservatives played in their obstruction in the House and Senate of all attempts to improve society and the economy for the majority. In 2024, Republican demagoguery about immigrants, offensives against reproductive rights, Congressional obstructionism and threats to democratic fairness are becoming existentially grave.

History will judge Barack Obama's tenure in a far more positive light, for when he took office a severe financial crisis was unfolding and an economic recession was underway, and unemployment and national debt were spiking, and unprecedented bailouts were required to save banks and the auto industry from bankruptcy. Subsequently, millions of jobs were created and a significant amount of progress was made on a wide range of issues during President Obama's tenure in office, and all of this despite a Republican "hard times swindle" and stubborn obstructionism that Republican adversaries employed to try to make him fail.

Many conservatives appeared to suffer from a case of what was called "Obama Derangement Syndrome". This was due in part to their listening too faithfully to Fox News and right-wing talk radio zealots like Michael Savage and Rush Limbaugh. This contributed to extreme polarization and political partisanship that is so consequentially pervading our politics today. The degree of this rancorous disagreement erupted into glaring view and stunning perspective in February 2016 after Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died. The Supreme Court had been deciding many cases in favor of conservative ideological positions by a narrow 5-to-4 vote, ever since Sandra Day O'Connor retired and was replaced by the more politically partisan Samuel Alito. Scalia's death had temporarily ended the conservative dominance, but then imperious partisanship on the high court was reestablished, tragically, with Trump gaining power and appointing Neil Gorsuch. Intransigent "conservatism" was strengthened with Trump appointee Brett Kavanaugh -- and then with the religious fundamentalist Amy Coney Barrett.

Soon after Antonin Scalia died, the Republican echo chamber immediately erupted with disrespectful antagonistic opposition to having President Obama fulfill his Constitutional duty to appoint a justice to replace Scalia on the Supreme Court. This vitriolic opposition was led by the obstructionist-in-chief of the "Party of No", Senate Leader Mitch McConnell, who declared almost before Scalia's corpse was cold that the Senate would not consider any

replacement President Obama nominated, cheating Democrats of critically important influence.

Note that journalists have a serious responsibility of helping hold powerful people and institutions accountable, as Boston Globe journalists did in the case of widespread abuses of children by priests and the cover-ups of this scandal by Catholic Church officials. This story is told with skill and powerful impact in *Spotlight*, a film that was recognized for excellence as the Best Picture of 2015 during Academy Awards ceremonies in February 2016.

Reflections on Patriotism

Ethnocentric biases are often expressed through nationalistic fervor and misguided loyalties that masquerade as patriotism. Again Mark Twain was 'right on' when he noted: "My kind of patriotism and loyalty is loyalty to one's country, and not to one's institutions or officeholders." See my essay *My Country, Right or Wrong* for an in-depth exploration of this perspective in the era of MAGA Republicanism.

In truth, patriotism in America should be an honest commitment to the principles and ideals that this country represents. This includes the primary concerns of our Founding Fathers: fairness, freedom, guaranteed human rights, reasonable justice, limited government intrusiveness, and fair representation of the best interests of all citizens. It still irks me that George W. Bush and Dick Cheney and the Republican political apparatchik perverted patriotism into a caricature of righteousness in which opposing opinions and dissent were suppressed to promote corporate power, inequitable initiatives, anti-environmentalism, aggressive militarism, male patriarchal dominion, evangelical Christianity and the uncompromising excessive influence of rich people and right-wing politicians. As Mark Twain once observed, an attitude of "My country, right or wrong" is an insult to the nation!

In the biggest picture context, if Mark Twain were alive today, being the Big Thinker that he was, he would be a strong advocate of two important things: (1) a new brand of foreign policy based on social justice, competition that is fairer, greater efforts to achieve peaceful coexistence, the freedom of religion for all, concerted efforts to marginalize religious extremism, and a more committed striving for the USA to be a better neighbor to others; and (2) a transformation in our national policies on the domestic front to make them fairer and more humanitarian and just, and longer-term oriented and more ecologically sane. He would probably agree that the best hope of humanity would be to find more effective ways of collaborating together to solve the serious challenges we face.

Joseph Heller provides a relevant point of view in his satirical novel Catch-22: "It was miraculous. It was almost no trick at all, he saw, to turn vice into virtue and slander into truth, impotence into abstinence, arrogance into humility, plunder into philanthropy, thievery into honor, blasphemy into wisdom, brutality into patriotism, and sadism into justice. Anybody could do it; it required no brains at all. It merely required no character." From 2017 to 2021, with a reality TV show celebrity, con man and political charlatan and his cronies having seized power, that last sentence would be changed to "It merely required a demagogic deceiver and king (dictator) wannabe with a fraudulent, egomaniacal, unhinged and deviously manipulative character."

Observations about Empire and Propriety

Another salient aspect of Mark Twain's involvement in political affairs was his participation as an outspoken member of the Anti-Imperialist League; this organization was the first national American peace movement. Mark Twain was commendable for having expressed outrage at politicians who unethically capitalize on national tragedies to push through unrelated agendas. (In 2024 Republican politicians torpedoed immigration reforms to use the galvanizing issue against Democrats for the nefarious purpose of being able to use power to push through a particularly devious agenda, and an exceedingly dangerous one of proposed corporatocratic abuses of power in Congress and the Executive Branch -- see Project 2025.)

Not long after the battleship USS Maine was hit by mysterious and still unexplained explosions in the harbor of Havana in February 1898, killing 260 people, the United States intervened militarily in Cuba and the Philippines. A decisive victory was soon won over colonial Spain. Mark Twain initially found this triumph "glorious", and asserted it was the worthiest war ever fought because it was waged for the freedom of other peoples. Not long thereafter, he was shocked and disillusioned to realize that prime considerations for the war were for the U.S. to strengthen its empire with coal stations for the navy, and to seek expanded markets for American goods, and to establish new places for missionaries to convert the disrespected "heathen" natives.

The U.S. and Spain ended the war with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898. In this peace agreement, Spain ceded Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines to the United States. Mark Twain saw that America then occupied the Philippines and subjected its people to "benevolent assimilation", which Philippine people regarded as a new form of oppression by a different foreign master, so he went ballistic. Listen to the words he wrote in the year 1900, because they are important:

> "I left these shores, at Vancouver, a red-hot imperialist. I wanted the American eagle to go screaming into the Pacific. It seemed tiresome and tame for it to content itself with the Rockies. Why not spread its wings over the Philippines, I asked myself? And I thought it would be a real good thing to do. I said to myself, here are a people who have suffered for three centuries. We can make them as free as ourselves, give them a government and country of their own, put a miniature of the American constitution afloat in the Pacific, start a brand new republic to take its place among the free nations of the world. It seemed to me a great task to which we had addressed ourselves.
>
> But I have thought some more, since then, and I have read carefully the Treaty of Paris, and I have seen that we do not intend to free, but to subjugate the people of the Philippines. We have gone there to conquer, not to redeem. We have also pledged the power of this country to maintain and protect the abominable system established in the Philippines by the (pious Churchly) Friars.
>
> It should, it seems to me, be our pleasure and duty to make these people free, *and let them deal with their own domestic questions in their own way.* And so I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land."

Mark Twain then penned his famous anti-imperialist article *To the Person Sitting in Darkness,* in February 1901. He borrowed this ironic phrase from the Gospel According to Matthew, a phrase used by Christian missionaries when referring to the "savage," "heathen," and "uncivilized" populations of lands that aggressive imperialists were conquering. This is how *To the Person Sitting in Darkness* begins: "Extending the Blessings of Civilization to our Brother who Sits in Darkness has been a good trade and has paid well, on the whole; and there is money in it yet, if carefully worked -- but not enough, in my judgment, to make any considerable risk advisable."

Mark Twain referred to Herbert Kitchener in *To the Person Sitting in Darkness*. This was a British Army officer whose troops in South Africa bayoneted unarmed Dutch farmers and other colonists (Boers), even some of those trying to surrender. "Kitchener knows how to handle disagreeable people who are fighting for their homes and their liberties," he satirically stated. He also harshly condemned similar atrocities committed by American forces against Filipinos. In bold letters he claimed that America knew how to treat the rebels: "WILL SHOW NO MERCY: KITCHENER'S PLAN ADOPTED!" Kitchener's Plan in South Africa included herding tens of thousands of Boer women and children and Black Africans into the world's first "concentration camps", where many died.

Some people accused Mark Twain of not being patriotic when he took this outspoken stance against imperialistic national policies, and there can be real questions about exactly who is patriotic, and who is not. Twain observed in 1901, during the Philippine-American War in which revolutionaries in the Philippines fought for independence: "It would be an entirely different question if the country's life was in danger, its existence at stake, then -- that is one kind of patriotism -- we would all come forward and stand by the flag, and stop thinking about whether the nation was right or wrong; but when there is no question that the nation is in any way in danger, but only some little war away off, then it may be that on the question of politics the nation is divided, half patriots and half traitors, *and no man can tell which from which.*"

It is an odd fact that one person's "freedom fighter" can be regarded by another as a terrorist, or that it can be difficult to determine who is a patriot and who is a traitor. Ronald Reagan supported anti-communist groups that he called "freedom fighters" in countries like Nicaragua, Afghanistan and Angola, but members of the groups he supported, like the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan, later come to be seen as dangerous foes and terrorists when their insurrections came to violently oppose American economic goals, interventions and military hegemony.

History can provide us with provocative perspectives that often prove to be astonishingly revealing. Ronald Reagan, for instance, regarded Nelson Mandela as a terrorist who opposed what Reagan saw as the legitimate white rulers

in South Africa during the racist apartheid era. Reagan even vetoed legislation passed by Congress that would have divested from investments in South Africa until the discriminatory apartheid system was ended. After Reagan shamefully vetoed this law, both houses of Congress actually overrode his veto for one of the few times such an override took place during his eight years in office.

We can see that the difference between a freedom fighter and a terrorist insurgent can be an ideological matter that involves deeply biased opinion and a none-too-subtle underlying agenda. Nelson Mandela had been confined for 27 years in prison for his activist stances against the apartheid segregation of white rule in South Africa. His life was a "long walk to freedom", and after gaining liberty from his long incarceration, he laudably led his deeply divided country through a remarkably peaceful transition to democratic government. He was appropriately awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his honorable statesmanship. Bravo for Nelson Mandela! When he died in December 2013, his accomplishments in helping bend the arc of the moral universe toward equitable justice were highlighted in the news. Mandela represented a triumph in the struggle for freedom in South Africa.

Mark Twain, with his intellect, philosophic understanding and skepticism of the motives of politicians, adopted a critical perspective toward American expansionist actions in places like Panama, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and the Dominican Republic, as well as in Cuba and the Philippines. He would be astonished and outraged at the far-flung extent of our military presence today, and at the more than 175 American interventions in foreign countries in the century from 1900 to 2000, not to mention the rash and harsh occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq since then, and the permanent military bases that the U.S. has established in more than 130 nations worldwide.

"The radical of one century is the conservative of the next'" wrote Mark Twain. "The radical invents the views. When he has worn them out, the conservative adopts them."

A further elaboration of Mark Twain's ideas is contained in *Reflections on War – and Peace,* an essay in which I discuss 'false flag operations'. Some people say the explosion aboard the USS Maine in Havana in 1898 might have been this kind of treacherous operation, which is used as a convenient pretext to get a nation involved in military interventions. Such ruses are a type of perfidious activity that has been repeated periodically throughout history. I elaborate on other more definitive instances of false-flag operations like the occasion when the RMS Lusitania was sunk by a German submarine in 1915, which led to the U.S. getting involved in World War I, and the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident that led to our nation's involvement in the Vietnam War. Some people suspect that the 9/11 attacks may also have been some kind of precipitated exploitation of events to get our nation involved in military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. But no wild conspiracy theories are needed to conclude that this modern military adventurism has proved to be excessively costly. The fact that it has been hugely profitable for some giant corporations and influential investors, and good for the careers of many people in power, is a pathological indictment of the rash opportunism that contributes to war.

A correspondent named John Nichols once wrote:

> Mark Twain was no fan of war, which he described as 'a wanton waste of projectiles', and he nurtured a healthy disdain for anyone who suggested that patriotism was best displayed through enthusiastic support for military adventures abroad. … But Twain's deepest disgust was reserved for politicians who played on fear and uncertainty to promote the interests of what would come to be known as the military-industrial complex. Describing how Americans were frequently goaded into war by their leaders, Twain recalled: 'Statesmen will invent cheap lies, putting blame upon the nation that is attacked, and every man will be glad of those conscience-soothing falsities, and will diligently study them, and refuse to examine any refutations of them; and thus he will by-and-by convince himself that the war is just, and will thank God for the better sleep he enjoys after this process of grotesque self-deception.'

<u>The Big Bang of the Mind</u>

Recalling that Mark Twain was fascinated by accurate understandings, I think of perspectives articulated by a brilliantly sensible professor who teaches Lifelong Learning courses. He is a man who finds merit in philosophic wisdom traditions like Buddhism and Taoism. He was once asked by a respectful and heart-aware student: "Do you think we have an immortal soul?" The professor did not hesitate. "I don't believe so. There is a soulful aspect of the mind, but death is as likely to be final for us as it is for every other animal on Earth."

Following this line of inquiry, the student asked, "Do you believe in reincarnation, like they teach in Buddhism?" The down-to-earth professor replied, "No, I don't. The accretions of dogma in every religion appeal to the hopes and fears of their adherents, but I don't think it likely that an immortal soul came to be for human beings during the processes of biological evolution." This professor first exposed me to the compelling idea of a prehistoric "Big Bang of the Mind."

Most biological experts believe we *Homo sapiens* developed self-conscious awareness and expansive capacities like foresight sometime about 50,000 to 75,000 years ago. This was relatively recent, from the point of view that the brains of our ancestors had been in the process of tripling in average size over the previous 5 million years. Others of our ancestral relatives like Neanderthals actually had bigger brains than we do, so it was not simply brain size that led to this tremendous developmental leap forward.

This Big Bang of the Mind allowed us a burst of creative thinking that modern thinkers associate with higher intelligence. This development in our awareness was related to the emergence of a suite of higher intellectual functions that facilitated our ability to plan ahead, use chains of logic, imagine outcomes, communicate better, develop syntax in language, give structure to music, invent games with arbitrary rules, and be able to discover hidden patterns and seek coherence in the world. The archeological record shows that subsequent to this mental advance, people began to create more sophisticated art and music, and to invent religions, and to ceremonially and reverently bury their relatives after they died.

It is intriguing to study some of the hundreds of different Creation stories that have been created in the human mind over the many millennia of the cultural evolution of our kind since this development of self-awareness. The realization that we have a mortal nature -- that we are aging slowly, getting older and will die -- and the ideas of love and a soul that will outlive us all seem to have been prominent features of this expression of human hopes and fears. And these aspects of our conscious awareness have surely been all balled up with our spiritual theories of deities even from the earliest days of animism and polytheism, long before monotheistic ideas of one God sprang into being and gained ascendance.

Mark Twain would have chuckled when he was 50 years old, at the height of his success, at these ideas. Later in his life, after he had experienced so many hardships and emotionally difficult losses, he would likely have sighed rather ruefully.

A Revealing Sidebar Concerning Revelations on Walks in Nature

Mark Twain was in San Francisco in 1865 when a moderately powerful earthquake struck. He wrote in *Roughing It*, "… at that moment a third and still severer shock came, and as I reeled about on the pavement trying to keep my footing, I saw a sight! The entire front of a tall four-story brick building on Third Street sprung outward like a door and fell sprawling across the street, raising a dust like a great volume of smoke!" Later, he wrote a humorous piece in which he observed: "I will set it down here as a maxim that the operations of the human intellect are much accelerated by an earthquake." Duck! Run!

A better understanding of the cause of earthquakes can be gained by taking a walk along the Earthquake Trail near the Bear Valley Visitor Center in Point Reyes National Seashore, about an hour's drive northwest of San Francisco. The half-mile-long trail follows the famous San Andreas Fault, a 'transform fault' that roughly marks the boundary between the Pacific Plate today as it moves north relative to the North American Plate. A rough rupture line is still visible there from the 1906 earthquake that wreaked destruction on San Francisco. An old fence marches down the hill and then abruptly continues on a parallel trajectory about 16 feet to the north, where it had jumped in a few moments back in 1906. An old story alleges that the rupture swallowed a cow in what was then a dairy farming area, but this may be an apocryphal tale, like so many others that spring up after traumatic events. Sample rocks have been placed on the east side of the interpretive Earthquake Trail that are characteristic of the rock mélange that typifies the North American Plate, and distinctly different sample rocks characteristic of the Pacific Plate have been placed on the trail's west side.

Some years ago, 25 miles south of the Earthquake Trail, I went on a long hike with a slender, attractive and enthusiastic friend of mine, and it turns out that she had recently begun to follow a path less taken, and it is

making a whale of a difference in her life. We followed a trail up to the 'Spiritual Driver's Seat of the Bay Area' on distinctive Mt. Tamalpais. This is a natural chair formed in a barren outcropping of pale blue-green serpentine rock. The seat has a commanding view of the entire region to the east and south, which includes Mount Diablo, the East Bay, Mt. Hamilton and San Francisco. A short distance away along the ridge to the west, we stopped at a stone bench dedicated to "Dad O'Rourke". It has a similar view but also includes the Farallon Islands to the west. That morning was one of those startlingly clear days when God seems to have moved these fabled islands closer to the coast under cover of the dark of night. A plaque set into the stone bench in 1927 records the legendary outdoorsman Dad O'Rourke's words on the occasion of his birthday; it reads, "Give me these hills and the friends I love. I ask no other heaven." I personally find this as a perfectly appropriate and marvelously holistic sentiment!

As we approached the stone bench commemorating Dad O'Rourke, we saw a rattlesnake with bold markings enjoying the warm late-March sunshine in a crevice in the rocks. Since these creatures are quite territorial, it is likely that the snake spent most of its time there. My friend told me she had never actually heard a rattlesnake rattle, which is a sound that inspires fear deep in our limbic brains, so I gently agitated the snake a bit and it stirred awake, coiled, rattled a scary warning and slithered back into recesses of the rocks in retreat.

We continued our hike along the ridge and made our way cross-country down to Cataract Creek, a beautiful chortling mountain stream in March after good winter rains. We crossed the stream a half mile above the point where the water begins a rapid descent down fabulous cataracts and waterfalls into a lovely succession of pools, and then we ascended through a forest of oak, madrone and fragrant California bay laurel trees past a green meadow and up onto a ridge where endemic Marin Manzanita and Sargent Cypress grow. Decades ago, some hard-working soul had constructed two large stone seats on this ridge, and they are locally known as "The Throne". The site has marvelous views toward the Point Reyes peninsula and the line of the San Andreas Fault that can be seen in long and narrow Tomales Bay and distant Bodega Bay.

After enjoying the view, we hiked over to a place named Barth's Retreat, where we had a tasty picnic in the warming sunshine. My animated friend talked at length about the significant changes in circumstances that had been taking place in her personal life, involving a new love relationship. and the effects these challenging changes have had on her relationships and psyche, and we enjoyably philosophized at length. But that's another story.

Here's the curious part I'm trying to tell. A snake must have somehow slithered into my friend's daypack during our delicious repast, for she reported that, later in the day after taking a refreshing shower at home, she was startled to discover an uncoiled serpent next to her daypack in her living room. She managed to capture the snake in a box without harming it, and released it outdoors into a nearby Open Space, making note that the snake had a bright orangish-yellow ring around its neck and a similar coloration along its belly. That description identifies it as a harmless Ringneck Snake, but in the moment all she could think and exclaim was "Yikes!" and "Holy cow!!". One can well imagine! Was it some sort of a sign? (And if so, what pray tell did it signify?!)

Some say that "Everything happens for a reason". I particularly dislike hearing this maxim right after being smitten by some embarrassing or painful misfortune. This saying has been extrapolated into an uplifting "Author Unknown" philosophical ditty that enumerates the truly valuable lessons that can be learned from adversities. This ditty concludes that we should live in the moment, forgive others and love unconditionally. Let it be!

But let's examine the meaning of this conventional belief that everything happens for a reason. All effects naturally have causes, but the contention is often followed by prejudiced rationalizations, like when religious bigots claimed that the reason for severe damages wreaked on New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina was that Ellen DeGeneres, a New Orleans native, was a lesbian, and God was venting his anger at homosexuals. Oh, right!

Opinions like this are an expression of the prudish, biased and patriarchal dominion of our societies by men who strive to deprive women of rights and fair treatment, and to relegate them to inferior roles in our culture. Curiously, snakes sometimes symbolized positive feminine attributes in pharaonic Egypt and ancient Greece and Rome, and snakes were respected more than feared. When the patriarchal religion of the Bible arose, it blamed a serpent and Eve, the first woman, for seeking knowledge, and it made snakes and women scapegoats for the wrath of an angry male God at the dawn of Creation.

Lisbon in Portugal was destroyed by an earthquake and subsequent tsunami on November 1, 1755. Many of the religious leaders at the time attributed the calamity to God's anger at sinners, and claimed this was one of 'His' punishments. It is a fact of supreme coincidental irony that this powerful earthquake killed tens of thousands of people on the day of the Christian holiday known as All Saints' Day, and that large numbers of the faithful died as churches crumbled onto them during religious services. Many superstitious types had a field day with this remarkable coincidence, insisting that the Portuguese people had been living lives of sinful indulgence. Reasons attributed to happenings often reflect projections of the sometimes malicious biases of observers, rather than more probable and sensible explanations. What a world -- Can't we all just get along?!

When Nikos Kazantzakis wrote his version of the *Odyssey*, he rewrote it repeatedly to "broaden its scope, until it came to include all he had ever seen and heard and thought." It was not my intention to report exhaustively on barely-related digressive details in this biography, like some blog-obsessed reporter or Instagram-enamored influencer, so I'll return to the 'red meat' of this story of Mark Twain's life.

Observations from the Gilded Age

Okay, I have digressed. This is a biography of Mark Twain, the most successful travel writer of his time. Travel writing suited him well, according to professor Richard Bridgman, because it freed him "to use his special literary gifts: short bursts of pointed observations, anecdotes, episodes and tales. He could examine the diversity of the world without worrying overmuch about such matters as consistency or transitions." And thanks to "the sequence of the journey itself," his narratives have "at least a simulacrum of coherence."

Mark Twain's groping thoughts and digressions parallel the way our minds operate, with intricate courses taken by discursive consciousness. Richard Bridgman wrote that the ostensible order of the world "remained tantalizingly elusive for him". But today we have the wonderful opportunity to easily gain more accurate ways of understanding our world. This is one reason why my own ideas, philosophic explorations and observations have been so extensively set forth in this manifesto.

People could so easily know more and understand better, and our world would be a much more propitious place if more of us did. This is why it is one of my motives to share my perspectives, hoping that they will lead to a fairer and saner world. This is one reason I regard the transformative ideas contained in *Common Sense Revival,* and the subset contained in Part Four of this manifesto online, to be so crucial. Check them out! And review *See Clearly: Sanity During Insane Times – Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto* for the latest sensational details of how bizarrely rigged the world is, against the greater good -- and what should rightly be done about it.

Mark Twain had coined the term *The Gilded Age* in a collaborative novel with essayist Charles Dudley Warner in 1873, doing so partially out of his deep concern with the politics, economics and political corruption of the era. During the materialistic times of the Gilded Age, things like huge homes built using Victorian Gothic Revival architecture were considered to be reflections of intellectual and moral worth. Wealthy people indulged in highly visible conspicuous consumption during that era, and this indulgence contributed to a recognition of the injustices involved in poorly regulated capitalism, along with the detrimental aspects associated with it, including its abuses, wasteful profligacy, and ruthless exploitation of working people. These excesses sparked many muckraking exposés in the early 20th century, and a Progressive Era of reform. Important reforms were made to combat unfair monopoly practices, long working hours, child labor abuses, unsafe working conditions, racial and gender discrimination, public corruption and the oppressive growth of the conglomerate power of corporations.

Disparities of wealth today have grown to be as large or larger than they were during the Gilded Age that Mark Twain wrote about in the late nineteenth century. At that time, industrialists, financiers and 'robber barons' dominated American society, and Mark Twain decried what one observer at the time called "the Great Barbeque" of brazen extremes in economic inequality.

While the policies that led to this lopsided concentration of income and wealth sparked a turbulent reform movement in reaction, it was not until decades later, when the Great Depression made the failings of capitalism even more starkly clear, that economic collapse, massive labor unrest and social turmoil forced political elites to take actions to really make society fairer and more secure for the masses -- and to accept policies that led to a

larger and healthier middle class and a reduction in the concentration of income and wealth in the years between 1940 and 1980. It's time for more such actions once again today!

The ethical standards of American businesses have never been notably high. When referring to the markedly widespread business corruption of his times, Mark Twain stated in 1905: "We gave the world the spirit of liberty more than one hundred years ago, and now we are giving the world the spirit of graft." That's not a good thing! Fast forward more than 115 years, and Disaster Capitalism is having deeply harmful impacts on millions of people, and conservatives are too cowardly to take smart steps to honestly help repair our woefully rigged system.

In the years since Ronald Reagan became president, an expanding anti-egalitarian trend has once again become dominant. The main reason for this is that corporations and wealthy investors have been given greater power and they have been subjected to fewer regulations and lower marginal tax rates. At the same time, organized labor has been crushed as a counterforce that could help balance out corporate power and unbridled greed. American workers have been deprived of being allowed to share in gains made from their increasing productivity, and their 'real wages' (after inflation is taken into account) have more or less remained stagnant for decades. Working people have also been subjected to less job security, fewer healthcare benefits, and inadequate retirement plans, especially in recent years. The richest 1% of Americans, meanwhile, has seen their fortunes increase fabulously.

Labor unions, like businesses and governments, have had notorious episodes of corruption, bureaucratic idiocies and market distortions throughout the Industrial Revolution. But labor unions in the private sector have been a somewhat effective aspect of a free market economy. They have helped give working folks a fairer shake, and contributed substantially to the growth of a stronger middle class in the decades after World War II. Labor unions could once again today become an effective force in stopping systemic labor-law violations and in reining in absurd levels of executive pay. A stronger labor movement could be one of the best ways to advance progressive agenda goals that would be consistent with our founding American principles of liberty, equality, justice and fair representation. A proposed Employee Free Choice Act that Congress has failed to pass would likely help rectify the increased worker injustices that have taken place since 1980.

Globalization and the export of jobs abroad complicate this situation, and stubborn ideological arguments confuse the issues. High costs and distortions created by employee unions in the public sector have given union organizing efforts a negative connotation in many people's opinions, sometimes with good reason due to pension-spiking scams and huge unfunded liabilities. It is time for us to come together to deal sensibly and fairly with all these issues, keeping the interests of the greater good foremost in our national and international priorities.

<u>Somebody Spoke and I Went into a Dream</u>

A writer named Fitz Hugh Ludlow had suggested to Mark Twain in 1865 that he should focus on humor writing rather than straight news reporting and writing sketches. So he began "seriously scribbling to excite the laughter of God's creatures." Soon thereafter, Clemens sent a letter to his brother Orion, saying "I have had a call to literature, of a low order -- i.e. humorous. It is nothing to be proud of, but it is my strongest suit." Just a few weeks later his humorous short story *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* made him nationally known and launched his great literary career. "He'd hit upon his most marketable talent, with the aid of Ludlow's advice, and possibly hashish, too," noted the writer Ellen Komp.

Hashish?! Ellen Komp was referring to the fact that Mark Twain used hashish when he lived in San Francisco in 1865. This form of concentrated cannabis was both legal and commonly available in drug stores in those days. His friend Fitz Hugh Ludlow was well-known as the author of the 1857 book *The Hasheesh Eater*. Ludlow had found hashish to be a boon to creativity, and gave high praise to Mark Twain in a newspaper article, observing: "In funny literature, that Irresistible Washoe Giant, Mark Twain, takes quite a unique position. He makes me laugh more than any Californian. He imitates nobody. He is a school by himself."

"When I was younger," Mark Twain humorously wrote, "I could remember anything, whether it happened or not."

It is noteworthy that a long list of well-known comedians and humorists have used cannabis, including George Carlin, Whoopi Goldberg, Jon Stewart, Rodney Dangerfield, Lily Tomlin, Bill Maher and the late, great Robin Williams. In this context, consider again Mark Twain's observation, "Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand." With

so many insightful luminaries having used this mindset-altering herbal inspiration, it is high time we end the harshly unjust, counterproductive, racially discriminatory, ridiculously costly prohibition against cannabis.

Laughter Possessed Me

I actually laughed out loud when I happened to re-read Chapter 12 of *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* some years ago. Something in that passage about Tom moping around "as dismal as a hearse" because Becky Thatcher was absent from school for a while -- and so wasn't around for him to show off to -- got me reading about Aunt Polly's peculiar obsession with quack remedies and her experiments on Tom to try to get him out of his doldrums. It was when I got to the part about Tom's Aunt Polly having heard of "Pain-killer" for the first time, and ordered up a lot of it at once, that my peculiar laughing spell took hold. Listen in:

> She tasted it and was filled with gratitude. It was simply fire in a liquid form. She dropped the water treatment and everything else, and pinned her faith to Pain-killer. She gave Tom a teaspoonful and watched with the deepest anxiety for the result. Her troubles were instantly at rest, her soul at peace again; for the "indifference" was broken up. The boy could not have shown a wilder, heartier interest, if she had built a fire under him.
>
> Tom felt that it was time to wake up; this sort of life might be romantic enough, in his blighted condition, but it was getting to have too little sentiment and too much distracting variety about it. So he thought over various plans for relief, and finally hit upon that of professing to be fond of Pain-killer. He asked for it so often that he became a nuisance, and his aunt ended by telling him to help himself and quit bothering her. If it had been Sid, she would have had no misgivings to alloy her delight; but since it was Tom, she watched the bottle clandestinely. She found that the medicine did really diminish, but it did not occur to her that the boy was mending the health of a crack in the sitting-room floor with it.
>
> One day Tom was in the act of dosing the crack when his aunt's yellow cat came along, purring, eying the teaspoon avariciously, and begging for a taste. Tom said: "Don't ask for it unless you want it, Peter."
>
> But Peter signified that he did want it.
>
> "You better make sure." Peter was sure.
>
> "Now you've asked for it, and I'll give it to you, because there ain't anything mean about me; but if you find you don't like it, you mustn't blame anybody but your own self."
>
> Peter was agreeable. So Tom pried his mouth open and poured down the Pain-killer. Peter sprang a couple of yards in the air, and then delivered a war-whoop and set off round and round the room, banging against furniture, upsetting flower-pots, and making general havoc. Next he rose on his hind feet and pranced around, in a frenzy of enjoyment, with his head over his shoulder and his voice proclaiming his unappeasable happiness. Then he went tearing around the house again spreading chaos and destruction in his path. Aunt Polly entered in time to see him throw a few double summersets, deliver a final mighty hurrah, and sail through the open window, carrying the rest of the flower-pots with him. The old lady stood petrified with astonishment, peering over her glasses; Tom lay on the floor expiring with laughter.
>
> "Tom, what on earth ails that cat?"
>
> "I don't know, aunt," gasped the boy.
>
> "Why, I never see anything like it. What did make him act so?"
>
> "Deed I don't know, Aunt Polly; cats always act so when they're having a good time."
>
> "They do, do they?" There was something in the tone that made Tom apprehensive.
>
> "Yes'm. That is, I believe they do."
>
> "You do?"
>
> "Yes'm."

The old lady was bending down, Tom watching, with interest emphasized by anxiety. Too late he divined her "drift." The handle of the telltale teaspoon was visible under the bed-valance. Aunt Polly took it, held it up. Tom winced, and dropped his eyes. Aunt Polly raised him by the usual handle -- his ear -- and cracked his head soundly with her thimble.

"Now, sir, what did you want to treat that poor dumb beast so, for?"

"I done it out of pity for him -- because he hadn't any aunt."

"Hadn't any aunt! -- you numskull. What has that got to do with it?"

"Heaps. Because if he'd had one she'd a burnt him out herself! She'd a roasted his bowels out of him 'thout any more feeling than if he was a human!"

Aunt Polly felt a sudden pang of remorse. This was putting the thing in a new light; what was cruelty to a cat might be cruelty to a boy, too. She began to soften; she felt sorry. Her eyes watered a little, and she put her hand on Tom's head and said gently:

"I was meaning for the best, Tom. And, Tom, it did do you good."

Tom looked up in her face with just a perceptible twinkle peeping through his gravity.

"I know you was meaning for the best, aunty, and so was I with Peter. It done *him* good, too. I never see him get around so since --"

"Oh, go 'long with you, Tom, before you aggravate me again. And you try and see if you can't be a good boy, for once, and you needn't take any more medicine." …

Tom reached school ahead of time. It was noticed that this strange thing had been occurring every day latterly. And now, as usual of late, he hung about the gate of the schoolyard instead of playing with his comrades. He was sick, he said, and he looked it. He tried to seem to be looking everywhere but whither he really was looking -- down the road. Presently Jeff Thatcher hove in sight, and Tom's face lighted; he gazed a moment, and then turned sorrowfully away. When Jeff arrived, Tom accosted him; and "led up" warily to opportunities for remark about Becky, but the giddy lad never could see the bait. Tom watched and watched, hoping whenever a frisking frock came in sight, and hating the owner of it as soon as he saw she was not the right one. At last frocks ceased to appear, and he dropped hopelessly into the dumps; he entered the empty schoolhouse and sat down to suffer. Then one more frock passed in at the gate, and Tom's heart gave a great bound. The next instant he was out, and "going on" like an Indian; yelling, laughing, chasing boys, jumping over the fence at risk of life and limb, throwing handsprings, standing on his head -- doing all the heroic things he could conceive of, and keeping a furtive eye out, all the while, to see if Becky Thatcher was noticing. But she seemed to be unconscious of it all; she never looked. Could it be possible that she was not aware that he was there? He carried his exploits to her immediate vicinity; came war-whooping around, snatched a boy's cap, hurled it to the roof of the schoolhouse, broke through a group of boys, tumbling them in every direction, and fell sprawling, himself, under Becky's nose, almost upsetting her -- and she turned, with her nose in the air, and he heard her say: "Mfff! Some people think they're mighty smart -- always showing off!"

Tom's cheeks burned. He gathered himself up and sneaked off, crushed and crestfallen.

Evocative, beautifully clever, and wryly funny!

<u>Give Us Cause to Laugh, Mark Twain</u>

Our understandings of issues are often confused by manipulative marketing, deceptive spin and other forms of promotion and propaganda. As Mark Twain wrote in THE PUDD'NHEAD MAXIMS (in *Following the Equator,* 1897): "Noise proves nothing. Often a hen who has merely laid an egg cackles as if she had laid an asteroid."

Speaking of cackling, Senator Ted Cruz made arrogant efforts to emulate Don Quixote's quixotic quest in La Mancha by grandstanding before the Senate in a vain, confounding and costly 21-hour filibuster-style protest against the Affordable Care Act in Sept. 2013. Over the years, Republicans in Congress spent an incredible amount

of time and effort trying to get rid of the Affordable Care Act, voting on more than 60 occasions to repeal this signature law of President Barack Obama's administration. Then they doggedly tried to eliminate provisions of the law under Trump to give wealthy investors a tax break. To offset the loss in revenues, they wanted to cut social safety net spending, depriving millions of Americans of health insurance. It is confounding to reconcile their extreme antagonism with what Senator Edward Kennedy considered to be the most important cause of his career -- health care reform. Kennedy, known as "the Lion of the Senate", wrote as he was dying of cancer in 2009: "What we face is above all a moral issue; that at stake are not just the details of policy, but fundamental principles of social justice and the character of our country."

Republican hubris and wrongheaded antagonism to fairness in this impactful public health issue is really stunning. Hubris has an element of character-deficient vanity to it. And once the coronavirus pandemic insidiously spread around the planet, the lethal vulnerabilities of millions of people to the shortcomings of our healthcare system -- and cruel politicking by "conservatives" -- have become shockingly clearer. Then again in May 2023, with the hostage taking manufactured debt limit crisis, MAGA Republicans showed their true anti-social colors.

A funny story in *Following the Equator* refers to the loud level of noise in India, and to one of the primary instigators of that racket, the Indian crow. This passage illustrates Mark Twain's wry sense of humor and his easy capacity for exaggeration, which he elevated to a form of art:

> "Some natives -- I don't remember how many -- went into my bedroom, now, and put things to rights and arranged the mosquito-bar, and I went to bed to nurse my cough. It was about nine in the evening. What a state of things! For three hours the yelling and shouting of natives in the hall continued, along with the velvety patter of their swift bare feet -- what a racket it was! They were yelling orders and messages down three flights. Why, in the matter of noise it amounted to a riot, an insurrection, a revolution. And then there were other noises mixed up with these and at intervals tremendously accenting them -- roofs falling in, I judged, windows smashing, persons being murdered, crows squawking and deriding and cursing, canaries screeching, monkeys jabbering, macaws blaspheming, and every now and then fiendish bursts of laughter and explosions of dynamite. By midnight I had suffered all the different kinds of shocks there are, and knew that I could never more be disturbed by them, either isolated or in combination. Then came peace -- stillness deep and solemn and lasted till five."
>
> "Then it all broke loose again. And who re-started it? The Bird of Birds, the Indian crow. I came to know him well, by and by, and be infatuated with him. I suppose he is the hardest lot that wears feathers. Yes, and the cheerfulest, and the best satisfied with himself. He never arrived at what he is by any careless process, or any sudden one; he is a work of art, and "art is long"; he is the product of immemorial ages, and of deep calculation; one can't make a bird like that in a day. He has been reincarnated more times than Shiva; and he has kept a sample of each incarnation, and fused it into his constitution. In the course of his evolutionary promotions, his sublime march toward ultimate perfection, he has been a gambler, a low comedian, a dissolute priest, a fussy woman, a blackguard, a scoffer, a liar, a thief, a spy, an informer, a trading politician, a swindler, a professional hypocrite, a patriot for cash, a lawyer, a reformer, a lecturer, a conspirator, a rebel, a royalist, a democrat, a meddler, a practicer and propagator of irreverence, an intruder, a busybody, an infidel, and a wallower in sin for the mere love of it. The strange result, the incredible result, of this patient accumulation of all damnable traits, is that he does not know what care is, he does not know what sorrow is, he does not know what remorse is, his life is one long thundering ecstasy of happiness, and he will go to his death untroubled, knowing that he will soon turn up again as an author or something, and be even more intolerably capable and comfortable than ever he was before." Ha!

<u>Personal Reflections</u>

The Big Dipper and the constellation Cassiopeia both bear mute but eternally majestic witness to celestial realities that are witnessed in the northern hemisphere of our home planet. The stars in these two clearly visible constellations appear to rise and set every night, each roughly opposite the other in the night sky, and their nightly movement appears to circumscribe a circle around the North Star. There is a good reason for this, which involves the axis of Earth's North Pole and the planet's daily rotation, but I may be forced to absquatulate and figuratively

"light out for the territories" if I keep providing these explanations like a real nowhere gal sitting in a nowhere land making all my nowise explanations for nobody. Who cares?!

There is one thing that is importantly certain, however: it is mighty hard to find frontiers these days to which one can absquatulate. Besides, whereas the impulse was powerful for Samuel Clemens to achieve recognition, praise and fame, my own preference is to enjoy my good fortune in life while remaining largely anonymous -- and I have had remarkable success at this, so far!

Sam Clemens noted during the time he wrote his first successful book that he had no expectations that many people would actually read it, so he felt a considerable "freedom from restraint" in expressing himself in *The Innocents Abroad*. "The idea that nobody is listening," he wrote, "is apt to seduce a body into airing his thoughts with a rather juvenile frankness." I know the feeling! (And YAY! for the freedom of expression!)

Observations and Introspection

Within every adult, the suppressed remnant of a curious, adventurous and enthusiastic child lies hidden deep in our individual psyches and souls. It is to this child within, in part, that Mark Twain's novels appeal. Perhaps everyone secretly regrets they have suppressed the child within, a child that wants to show off and gain glory like the kids in Sunday school in the *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Maybe everyone envies the smitten smart alecks in that sketch as they skylark through the sermons! (I like that image. Reprimand me?!)

In the first chapter of *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck had whittled a snake from a stick as a totem "like the Injuns do." He showed it to Jim and explained that the Indians carved animals on a totem pole for good luck. Jim said, "Is dat a fac'? Den how come dis totem got a snake on it? A snake ain't no animal."

Huck replies, "What is it then, if it ain't an animal?"

Jim says, "Huck, you know more'n anyone 'bout most ever'thin', but even a nigger knows better'n to call a snake a animal. Animals got fur an' claws an' such."

"Well all right then, what is it?"

"Why a insec', Huck. Ain't nothin' else for it to be, I reckon."

Ideas, literature and richly descriptive stories are wonderful stimulants for the imagination. One reason people read Mark Twain's books is to gain a perspective on his good-natured, humorous, and unpretentious perspective on life. His way of creatively exploring ideas is valuable, as was the case with his invention of traveling companions he used in his travel writing to express vulgar observations and give byplay with others in his stories. I have always remembered the character Mr. Ballou in *Roughing It*, who described the old horses on their journey across the desert as being "bituminous from long deprivation". Mr. Ballou complained mildly about the familiarities of their camp dog being allowed in their bed, saying that such a dog as that was not a proper animal to admit to bed with tired men, because he was "so meretricious in his movements and so organic in his emotions." Ha!

Mr. Ballou's "one striking peculiarity was his Partingtonian fashion of loving and using big words for their own sakes, independent of any bearing they might have upon the thought he was purposing to convey. He always let his ponderous syllables fall with an easy unconsciousness that left them wholly without offensiveness. In truth, his air was so natural and so simple that one was always catching himself accepting his stately sentences as meaning something, when they really meant nothing in the world. If a word was long and grand and resonant, that was sufficient to win the old man's love, and he would drop that word into the most out-of-the-way place in a sentence or a subject, and be as pleased with it as if it were perfectly luminous with meaning." I salute the sesquipedalian!

Mark Twain's Vivacious "Angelfish"

Another of Samuel Clemens' distinct eccentricities can be found in the little-known fact that he had what was like a grandfatherly obsession in his old age that led him to associate chivalrously, eagerly and perhaps just a bit pathologically with young girls. He formed an 'Aquarium Club' with girls between the ages of 10 and 16, and he called these surrogate granddaughters his "angel-fish". He loved their company and was able to live vicariously

through their inspiring enthusiasms. Maybe they reminded him of his long-felt infatuation with Laura Wright, whom he had met when he was 22 years old and she was only 14, when they were both in New Orleans.

Mark Twain liked girls who were pretty, sincere, straightforward, vivacious, enthusiastic, naïve and frank, and he loved innocence, purity and nobility of character. Sam Clemens was also probably trying to assuage his lonely heart in his later days after his wife Livy and daughter Susy had died. An interesting online summary of "Mark Twain's Angel-Fish Roster and other young women of interest" provides old photos and information about some of these girls and the roles they played in his life.

There seems to be a "gravity of attraction" of older males to younger females in our society, then and now. Today, this attraction carries vastly less innocence, and this fact makes it important that we support fair-minded principles and public policies that help protect our daughters, and young people in general. (Especially from authority-abusing males -- and priests!) This issue assumed new urgency after the Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein was accused of sexual abuses by dozens of women, and this led to the #MeToo movement, which exposed countless episodes of sexual improprieties by powerful men in politics and business in the U.S. and around the world -- and sadly continues to do so.

Smart remedial actions are needed on this issue, and on issues like the excessively easy availability of assault weapons in the USA, and the dangers of democracy-undermining politicians and insurrectionists, and the folly of debt-financing tax cuts for the rich, and many other crucial concerns. Dr. Tiffany Twain is throwing down a proverbial gauntlet, and wonders, "What commendable activists will pick it up and run with it?"

> "It appears to me, my dear Mr. Copperfield," said Mrs. Micawber forcibly, "that what Mr. Micawber has to do, is to throw down the gauntlet to society, and say, in effect, 'Show me who will take that up. Let the party immediately step forward.' "
>
> --- Charles Dickens, in *David Copperfield*

Biography and Autobiography

Mark Twain hobnobbed with colorful characters, rich people and many dignitaries and even European royalty during his lifetime. I'm sure those interactions had their marvelous merits, advantages and enjoyment. He gained widespread fame while he was alive, and was prominent in American literary circles for more than 40 years, working or socializing with notable writers that included Bret Harte, Artemus Ward, William Dean Howells, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Rudyard Kipling, Henry James, Harriet Beecher Stowe and many others.

Mark Twain began extensive dictations of an autobiography in 1906. Everett Emerson, one of his biographers, observed: "The entire exercise encouraged his egotism and his love of showing off". Everett Emerson made this alliterative observation in *Mark Twain – A Literary Life*. Audaciously, it soon thereafter came to pass that this prominent personality began to wear his signature white suits even in the wintertime.

Oxford University conferred an honorary "Literary Doctor" degree on the great author in 1907, and he made a triumphant trip to London to receive it. He judged the honor to be the world's most prestigious intellectual distinction, and was particularly proud of it because he had been "a formerly barefoot truant from Hannibal schooldays", and he had essentially educated himself. Sam Clemens had left school at the age of 12 after his father died, so he was proud of this distinction, along with having been awarded honorary degrees from Yale University and the University of Missouri.

At times his written expressions were characterized by "half-insane tempests and cyclones of humor." His boasting and craving of attention and compliments were sometimes offset by periods of moodiness and lonesome melancholy. Some of his biographers point out that he became more bitter, pessimistic, deterministic and cynical in his outlook as he advanced into old age, but I like to think that he merely became more passionate in his conviction that the forces of nature are ruthlessly impersonal, and that human follies frequently lead to adverse consequences, and that life will likely smite each and every one of us with seemingly cruel heartlessness before we die, as it did him. Many are the indignities associated with getting old! But, oh well, "C'est la vie!"

Mark Twain was said to have been occasionally tortured with self-doubt. After the hysterically funny comedian Robin Williams committed suicide in August 2014, I pondered the profound curiosity of human creative genius and its many disparate expressions and coincident pitfalls. This line of thinking sent me to my Germinating files to read again about the deep psychological underpinnings of the Impostor Syndrome, which happens to broadly affect females in our post-women's-liberation American societies, and to do so much more than it affects males.

The Impostor Syndrome is a phenomenon describing people who are unable to internalize their accomplishments. "Despite external evidence of their competence, those exhibiting the syndrome remain convinced that they are frauds and do not deserve the success they have achieved." Ironically, impostor syndrome is particularly common among high-achieving women, and this may be partially due to dismissive cultural attitudes toward females in our paternalistic patriarchal societies. Psychologists and researchers coined the term Impostor Syndrome in the 1970s, explaining that many people feel so deeply insecure that they tend to dismiss any proofs of success as luck or good timing or a result of deceiving others into thinking they are more intelligent and competent than they actually believe themselves to be.

How can we change this calculus? Women are needed in responsible roles more than ever in our society, and they should be given greater encouragement, opportunities, rewards and recognition. After all, consider a bottom line measure. Big Fortune 500 companies with the highest representation of women on their boards of directors attained measurably better financial performance, on average, than those with the lowest numbers of women in such capacities, according to *Catalyst* ("the leading nonprofit corporate membership research and advisory organization working globally with businesses and the professions to build inclusive environments and expand opportunities for women and business.")

There are, of course, many other reasons that females should be accorded more respect in our societies, and Mark Twain would have agreed wholeheartedly with this idea. Remember those words he once wrote that "no civilization can be perfect until exact equality between man and woman is included."

Michael Shelden portrays Mark Twain in an interesting light in the later days of his life, in his 2010 book *Mark Twain: Man in White – The Grand Adventure of His Final Years.* He makes it clear that Mark Twain was proud of his works, and of his life. Shelden also tells a curious story about the great author having suffered a debacle of treachery when his assistants Isabel Lyon and Ralph Ashcroft took advantage of his trust to secure their own futures at his expense. This episode makes a compelling tale, and reveals that Mark Twain was a man "who wore his passions on his sleeve, and who cares too much about the truth to let it be obscured by half-truths and lies."

Mark Twain's extensive musings on human nature were not unified in any one definitive philosophy. Fatalistic determinism was distinctly reflected in his stories like *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg,* and in *What Is Man?*. His sometimes bleak determinism was based on his own "corn pone" analysis and his absorption of the lessons of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer and the scientific revolution of the late nineteenth century. His darker perspectives were also shaped by personal adversities that he endured, which tended to reinforce his angst and pessimistic perspectives. These included his financial hardships and all the deaths that touched him, including that of his younger brother Henry, his daughter Susy, his beloved wife Livy, and his daughter Jean.

These events were intense tragedies to him, and he naturally wrote with less whimsy, humor or enthusiastic vitality as he got older. I recently read Tom Quirk's *Mark Twain and Human Nature,* which was published in 2007 by the University of Missouri Press, to gain a broader perspective on Mark Twain's points of view with regard to "the human race". It is a book that contains many fascinating understandings.

A quote by Scotsman Robert Louis Stevenson is etched into a polished granite tablet in the shape of an open book on the flanks of Mt. St. Helena, high above California's Napa Valley, in a spot where Stevenson lived in 1880 while writing *The Silverado Squatters*. It reads:

"Doomed to know not Winter, only Spring,
A being trod the flowery April blithely for a while,
Took his fill of music, joy of thought and seeing,
Came and stayed and went, nor ever ceased to smile."

"Doom" is, in a sense, the fate of each and every one of us. Some people have more Aprils to live than others, and some have more to smile about; and some have more of a natural disposition to smile. Yay for being Chipper! The imagination is stimulated in giving consideration to what brain scientists have found out about how our brains function. Neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine play significant roles in our attitudes, dispositions and moods. Studies done in recent years of the structure and functioning of the brain, and of the influences of neurochemicals on our perceptions and moods, reveal that our ways of seeing the world are intricately and profoundly affected by chemical messengers in our brains, including oxytocin, adrenalin, dopamine, cortisol and norepinephrine. Curious and curiouser!

The ghost of Dorothy Parker, aghast at this new dimension in understanding, might query once again, "What fresh hell is this?!" The extensive indignities inevitably involved with aging are almost always regarded as preferable to the finality of the alternative -- death! These indignities can ironically be accepted with greater or lesser amounts of dignity, depending upon one's grace, disposition, circumstances, philosophy and fortune.

Mark Twain's fascination with determinism may have been a reflection of more complex springs of action than the ones we usually recognize or acknowledge. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung once observed, "The more one sees of human fate, and the more one examines its secret springs of action, the more one is impressed by the strength of unconscious motives and by the limitations of free choice." That is provocative food for thought.

In the Earth Manifesto treatise *Comprehensive Global Perspective*, valuable perspective on issues of free will and the freedom of choice are contained in Chapter #52 - So Many Choices, and So Hard to Make the Right Ones. Anyone, incidentally, who thinks that folks who are most fortunate in their lives are not distinctly 'lucky', really hasn't thought much about the nature of the "cosmic lottery" of birth and inheritance, or of the rather random happenstances of circumstance, or of the unpredictable aspects and mechanisms of what we call fate. Our health and appearance are both strongly affected by our genetic inheritance, and poor health or unsightly looks often have a genetic genesis. The fact that we are born to parents who are wealthy and privileged, or to ones that are poor and underprivileged, is to a large extent a matter of good fortune or bad luck, especially in terms of financial security.

The ideologies of various political parties tend to coalesce around people who champion either the interests and prerogatives of the jealous rich or the contrasting interests of the envious masses. Conservatives, revealingly, tend to defend a maximum amount of freedom for those who have the most money and privileges to be able to maintain and expand their advantages, while liberals tend to want measures that would ensure greater equality of opportunity, legal justice and social equity for all. Given the reality of the vagaries and vicissitudes of fortune, it seems to me that the idea that we should structure our societies in fairer ways should appeal to everyone.

<u>Introspection into the Concept of Corn Pone</u>

"You tell me whar a man gits his corn pone, en I'll tell you what his 'pinions is," declares an "impudent and satirical and delightful" young black slave who preached sermons to Sam Clemens during his boyhood, from the top of his master's woodpile along the banks of the Mississippi. This was long before Clemens became known as Mark Twain. The young man "imitated the pulpit style of the several clergymen of the village, and did it well, and with fine passion and energy."

Corn pone is a cheap form of corn bread made without eggs or milk, which poor people created out of necessity. Just as the corn in their corn-pone was grown in nearby fields, and ground by a miller they knew, and bagged by others in nearby communities, their opinions were acquired second-hand from their families and fellow members of their church, and others in their towns and region. Seasonings that made individual batches of corn pone distinctive revealed much socioeconomic information, and told a penetrating story about economic constraints that affected the cooks.

Mark Twain extrapolated the proclamations of his philosopher atop the woodpile into a scathing set of incisive truths in his thoughtful 1901 essay, *Corn Pone Opinions,* exploring the pitfalls of unthinking opinions and beliefs. "The Black philosopher's idea was that a man is not independent, and cannot afford views which might interfere with his bread and butter." Interestingly, using Mark Twain's analysis, author Greg Beatty wrote an excellent

article titled *Quarter Pound Opinions,* in which he confirmed that people tend to accept the opinions of those around them, "especially Americans with their divided allegiances to God, democracy, and the dollar".

"Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forebears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought."

--- John F. Kennedy

On the off chance that readers are less than intrigued by this commentary, here is a compensatory reward for you. Here is a good recipe for my own modern version of Corn Pone Polenta that creates a delicious and healthy meal to be shared with a dozen friends or family members. I recommend serving it with a Greek Salad that contains tangy French Feta cheese as a first-class first-course accompaniment. Note that space considerations have led me to eliminate the recipe here; it can be found online in *Healthy Recipes and Provocative Worldviews - Book Five of the Earth Manifesto.*

Sliding toward a Conclusion

Mark Twain, like his fellow American author Jack London, was among the small number of writers who achieved substantial monetary success while they were alive. Both of them had vivid imaginations, observant minds, keen memories, lucid dreams, adventurous spirits and powerful needs to express their experiences and perceptions and ideas. Both of them also managed to spend large amounts of money on big expensive houses and to make poor judgments in speculative risks. At least Mark Twain was able to live in his large mansion in Hartford, Connecticut for many years; in contrast, Jack London spent a fortune on a 15,000 square-foot stone mansion on his Beauty Ranch above Glen Ellen, just west of Sonoma Valley and north of San Francisco, but he never got to live in it.

Jack London had stated: "My house will be standing, Act of God permitting, for a thousand years." Ironically, God apparently had other plans. Jack and his wife Charmian had spent three years building the so-called Wolf House, but then a fire destroyed it just days before they were to move in. The cause of the fire was never definitively determined. The impressive ruins still stand on the hillside estate that is now a beautiful State Historic Park with lots of good places to hike, and there are also extraordinary Broadway musical performances by the Transcendence Theater Company outdoors under the stars during the generally balmy summer evenings.

Mark Twain invested and lost an equivalent of $4 million in a 'Paige Typesetting' machine that was never brought to commercial success. Despite his substantial earnings, he was beset by financial problems and investments that went awry, and in 1894 his publishing firm was forced to declare bankruptcy. This is what led him to travel with Livy and live abroad for eight years in the 1890s, because it was much cheaper back then. He finally got out of debt by earning money from writing and lecturing during those extensive travels.

Sam Clemens had his idiosyncrasies, sure enough, but then again, so do I have mine, and you, I suspect, have yours! He once wrote, somewhat disingenuously, "I don't care anything about being humorous, or poetical, or eloquent, or anything of that kind -- the end and aim of my ambition is to be authentic." Really?! Both the conventional and the renegade actually seem to have struggled mightily in Mark Twain, and he toned down his satire against religion and his language in many instances. His upper-class wife had, after all, acted as his editor in recommending what language and topics to self-censor for respectability, and to ensure popularity.

Certain aspects of his authenticity shine through in his writings, like his scathing sardonic humor, his occasional eloquence, and his propensity to exaggerate wildly. In addition to the impulse for expressing himself, he was driven by many other motivations. He had an often urgent need to make money to support his family, extravagant lifestyle and properties, servants and investments. On the whole, he is one of the most fascinating characters in American history. His great literary accomplishments led to him being called "the Lincoln of our literature", for he, like Abraham Lincoln, made a spectacular rise from humble beginnings to great prominence.

Mark Twain would have appreciated a word that was invented by a Washington Post reader: "Sarchasm, n. The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the person that doesn't get it." Ha! As Henry Miller once wrote, "Profundity and nonsense have certain unsuspected affinities."

So That's All, Folks!

As this point is reached in my discursive narrative, I note that the acclaimed actor Hal Holbrook did a one-man show giving extraordinarily well-prepared talks onstage as Mark Twain for more than 60 years -- longer than the great writer himself filled that role. He once made the observation that he had a natural affinity for some of Mark Twain's sentiments, such as his cynical disapproval of racism, injustices, shallow principles and idiocies that are prevalent in our society. I saw Hal Holbrook perform some years ago, and he did an outstanding job. ("May he rest in peace"!) As a substitute to seeing him live, now that he has died, watch the curious animated clay-model film, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* In this film, James Whitmore gives voice to Mark Twain's words as he is accompanied on a hot-air balloon voyage by a jumping frog and Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher. Whitmore gives a good rendition of Mark Twain's speaking style, and the film contains some of Mark Twain's most famous quotes. It starts with the story about Halley's Comet, and this brings my story full circle.

The 75-year long orbit of Halley's Comet traces a long elliptical path that takes it far out to a distance more than 30 times the distance of our home planet from the Sun. Half an orbit later, Halley's Comet streaks inside our own orbit to approach the Sun at a proximity closer than the planet Venus. The comet has a small core composed of ice, cosmic dust and gases that is less than ten miles in diameter, but when it gets close to the Sun it warms up and a nebulous coma, or tail, can be seen extending 60 million miles across the sky. This makes an impressive display to us Earthlings. To stretch a point, Mark Twain's orbit within circles of literary and popular imagination extends not only far and wide, but vividly onward through history in influence and impact. Bravo for him!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain April 21, 2024 (evolving since 2008)

Huckleberry Finn, the Forty-Niner Gold Rush, and Sensational Related Reflections

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

This is the second essay of the second book of my save-the-world Earth Manifesto. It is my hearty conviction that these writings just might be a real game changer, and deliver the goods. Please follow closely.

My literary and philosophic hero Mark Twain first published *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1884. Folks who are familiar with this great novel might recall how the story ends. Huck was an adventurous and observant fourteen-year-old boy, and Jim was a Negro slave running away on a quest for freedom, and Huck had found out that his father was dead, so he had been set free from his abusive Pap, the town drunk. He gave consideration to his personal situation, and reckoned he had to "light out for the territory ahead of the rest" ... "because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before."

Wouldn't you just love to read a sequel of Huck actually setting out for the territories on a new quest for freedom? Imagine what wild adventures Huck and his great friend "the nigger Jim" (important disclaimer later in this essay) could have had, back in those Gold Rush days of yore in the Wild West. Here's some good news for lovers of delightful literature. Just 99 years after Mark Twain published his novel about Huck Finn and his boyhood friendships and adventures, another writer named Greg Matthews impersonated the author and created an almost equally good and possibly funnier and more entertaining sequel, with the straightforward title, *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

Mark Twain was a master impersonator himself, having adopted the persona of a teenage boy and written one of the greatest classics in all of American literature. He wrote in the first-person voice of Huck Finn, and used common vernacular dialects of the times. Greg Matthews likewise used vernacular speech and wrote from a first person point of view, and his copycat style and imaginative creativity is so true to Mark Twain's that it is truly remarkable. This book is a brilliant, colorful and entertainingly humorous conceptualization of Huck and Jim as they set out on new adventures out west. It is downright delightful to read.

From the opening paragraph, readers suspect they are likely to be "in for a good read". The tale begins: "There was another book I writ before this one which gives the story about how me and Jim went down the river on a raft, him looking for freedom on account of he's a nigger slave and me looking to get away from the Widow Douglas who's trying to sivilize me, and you could say we both wanted the same thing. I reckon most people don't read but one book in their life, so if that warn't the one you read, I best tell what happened at the end of the story ..."

In this new narrative, instead of rafting down the mighty Mississippi in search of freedom, Huck and Jim join the river of humanity heading for the 'gold country' of the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada. A colorful collection of pioneers, miners, adventurers, rogues and assorted misfits were making the perilous journey across vast prairies, high mountains and harsh deserts, traveling through sometimes-hostile Indian lands and Mormon territory. Many hoped to strike it rich out west. Mark Twain himself had made his own dangerous westward journey, absquatulating for the territories in 1861 and generally *Roughing It* right after the Civil War had so rudely interrupted his short but exciting career as a steamboat pilot plying the sometimes treacherous Mississippi.

Authorities were in hot pursuit of Huck and Jim in this new tall tale. Huckleberry had been accused of having murdered Judge Thacker, and of having lifted Becky Thatcher's skirts, to boot. It is an incidental cause of literary

misfortune that Becky Thatcher makes so few appearances in this new adventurous cavalcade of Huck and Jim's experiences. When she does show up, Huck observed, she was "kind of hard to reckernize without Tom Sawyer draped all over her, but I picked out the curls and the frilly dress and the smug look easy enough."

Ha! *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is well worth reading for Chapters 6 and 7 alone. In these two chapters, Huck and Jim have fallen in heading west with the McSween Traveling Church of Christ the Lamb, and readers are introduced to Phineas and Ma McSween and their 'seven virtues' daughters, Faith, Charity, Constance, Hope, Mercy, Grace and the retarded "pinhead" Chastity, who are all traveling around the open spaces and small towns of the Old West in a congregation of five colorfully painted wagons. Accompanying them is stern Reverend Mordecai, a fire-and-brimstone preacher. One of the wagons features a wall with "a picture of Jesus squeezing a lamb next to him and staring out at you with big lonesome eyes." Visualize that!

It turns out that the members of this close-knit family are traveling minstrels of the Lord who put on a highly unusual kind of religious revival services. When they arrive at a farm near Slocombe, Missouri, Huck is sent to put up posters in town to advertise their popular annual faith meeting the following night. Reverend Mordecai will be officiating, says the poster, and hymns will be sung by the McSween Heavenly Angels Choir. The next day they set up a big meeting tent in a field with a steam calliope featuring a forest of tall pipes with valves up and down them, and when the organ's keys are played, chubby angels on the valves open and shut, emitting beautiful music.

A couple hundred town folk show up to participate in this locally renowned event. Phineas begins the religious meeting by playing the steam calliope with its merry-go-round sounds. In the meantime, the lovely choir of girls are dressed in long white gowns with big red crosses stitched across the fronts, and they sing a string of hymns in sweet and harmonious voices. Then the fiery preacher Mordecai starts in with some intimidating speechifying.

"Who among you is without sin?!" roars Mordecai. He sermonizes along in such manner for a fair bit, urging the faithful to repent of their sins, and then he slaps all the sinners one-by-one to drive Satan out. But curiously, at about this time, all the men begin to slide out of the big tent, leaving their devout wives behind. They depart in ones and twos, and then tilt a bottle outside and wait in line to enter the wagons behind the tent, where six of the seven virtues -- all the daughters except Chastity -- are providing highly personal services to the men.

Huck surmises that "fornicatering" is going on in the wagons. "I went over to the trees and lit my pipe to give the matter consideration," Huck reflects, "and by and by I got to smiling on it, one of them crooked ones you smile when you see the joke's on you. It's a feeling I reckernized from other times before this, when big expecterations come crashing down, and all you can do is ask why you was sap-head enough to have had them expecterations anyway." You've gotta chuckle!

Phineas McSween later leveled with Huck about the true nature of the services provided by the McSween Traveling Church. Phineas managed to make it seem entirely plausible that his troop of vice-propagating virtues was actually doing a distinctly honorable part, in a way, of "holding together the sacred institution of marriage." Really! Huck observed, "I seen how it's possible to take things and twist them into whatever shape you want, and *see them another way entirely that don't have no resemblance to the truth.*"

Hold that thought, for incisively honest and scathingly valid big picture understandings are one of the main purposes of these observations, and you can bet that deceitful MAGA Republicans and their consequential antics will be an illuminating sideshow. In any case, this tale about Huck and Jim and the McSween family is a verily surprise-filled, sensationally humorous one, and includes some enlightening reflections on religion. Check it out:

"Huck, I bin thinkin' on dis here travelin' church. Why you reckon dey does it?"

"Humans got a basic need for religion, Jim. It fills in all the holes that can't get filled in with just thinking and pondering. There's questions that's just too big for understanding, so folks put it all down to God and His workings. That way they can sleep at night and not have to worry about not finding the answers to the questions."

"What kinder questions, Huck?"

"I reckon the biggest is why we got to die. Philosophers has been asking it for hundreds of years and they ain't got the answer yet."

"Why you reckon we has to die?"

"It's obvious, Jim. If we never died the whole country would get cluttered with people just getting older and older, and you know how cussed and cranky old folks is. They'd be three and four deep everywhere, just complaining and snapping their gums and getting in the way of everyone, so they got to die to make room for them that's young. We get our parcel of years and when they're done we wing it up to heaven. That's the theory of it."

Ah, instantaneous lucidification, indeed! This discussion may have been prompted by a sly observation that Mark Twain once made: "Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world."

Jim then inquires why some of the characters in the Bible like Methuselah lived "nine hunnerd years. How come he got de extra portion?" Huck reckons, "It must have been his holiness. If you're really holy, God gives out another hundred years or two as a reward." When Huck mentions Cartaphilus, the longest-lived mortal ever, Jim whistles in contemplation of how holy he must have been. But, no! -- Huck explains that there was a completely different reason for the incredibly long life Cartaphilus led.

Huck launches into an imaginatively funny tale of the curse of Cartaphilus, who is better known as "the Wandering Jew". It turns out that Cartaphilus had been condemned by Jesus to wander and wander for all of eternity. What happened was this, Huck explains. Jesus once sought directions in the Holy Land to the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem, and Cartaphilus repeatedly sent him on a figurative wild goose chase, giving him a succession of wrong directions to the north, east, south and west from an arid crossroads in the Near East. The story is a riot! In the end, Cartaphilus pulls out a calendar and exclaims, "April Fools!" This gesture makes Jesus really mad, so he cursed Cartaphilus to a fickle fate of wandering around forever. So, *that* was the real key to his burdensome longevity. Huck ruefully concludes, "… and I just bet he kicks himself every April Fool's day." Ha! LOL!

In concluding these introductory thoughts, I give sudden perspicacious attention to an important conundrum. I say to myself, sotto voce, "Are there any new territories anymore that any of us can light out to, if our civilizations become too conflicted, onerous, unlivable, uncompromising, unjust or otherwise unsivilized?" Perhaps the new territories we need are spacious areas of the mind -- and maybe we mainly need to escape from the delusions, confusions, absurdities and paradoxes of our increasingly stressed, inequitable, viral, turmoil inflicted, indoctrinated, excessively partisan, trumped up divided, poisonous social media algorithm afflicted, overcrowded and environmentally-compromised world.

"The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."

--- Marcel Proust

<u>On the Horns of a Perplexing Moral Dilemma</u>

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Huck and Jim were floating down the Mississippi River on a raft and saw a steamboat wrecked in the river on their fifth night below St. Louis. They landed alongside it, but their raft unfortunately broke loose and they were forced to escape in the dark on the skiff of some scoundrels they had glimpsed aboard the wreck. Huck and Jim then managed to catch up with their raft in the skiff, and the next day they "judged that three nights more would fetch us to Cairo, at the bottom of Illinois where the Ohio River comes in, and that was what we was after. We would sell the raft and get on a steamboat and go way up the Ohio amongst the free states, and then be out of trouble."

Well, things didn't work out that way. On the second night of drifting down toward Cairo, a dense fog suddenly descended on the river. Huck decided to jump in the skiff to tie the raft to a tree on the bank of the river, knowing how dangerous it is to go downriver in a powerful current when you can't see where you're going. The raft boomed down so lively in the stiff current that it tore out the sapling by the roots, and Huck in the skiff was thus separated in the fog from Jim on the raft. The river's strong current then took them on opposite sides of a series of islands, and by the time the fog dissipated and they were reunited, they were hyper alert to try to find the confluence with the Ohio River.

As they were looking out sharp for the lights of Cairo during the night, Huck began to struggle mightily with his conscience about helping the slave Jim escape from his rightful owner Miss Watson, who had always treated Huck fairly. Miserable with his thoughts on this troubling dilemma, Huck finally resolved to paddle ashore at the first light and turn Jim in. He set off in the skiff, but the realization dawned on him, just in time, that he would feel really bad for betraying his good friend Jim, who was so close to gaining his freedom.

Reasoning to himself, Huck said: "Well, then, says I, what's the use learning to do right when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck. I couldn't answer that. So I reckoned I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this always do whichever come handiest at the time." When daylight came, Huck and Jim were horrified to discover that they had indeed passed Cairo, and were headed deeper into the stricter slave states of the South. They bemoaned their bad luck, but had little time to belabor their plight because more adventures were in the offing, and they had to keep their wits about them.

I love Mark Twain's image of Huck coming out of a dense fog into a scene of clarity under a brilliant night sky. And sure enough, sometimes a poignant glimmer of clarity is the best we can see, and it is foolish to hold out for the bona fide certainty of a transcendent epiphany. Humanity is faced, all together, with profound existential dilemmas here in the third decade of the 21st century, and it seems obvious that it is growing increasingly urgent for us to wisely strive to make the world a better place for all, and to honorably collaborate with one another to accomplish this goal. Honest leaders, please demonstrate greater integrity, and help us save ourselves!

<u>More Incisive Perspectives</u>

Huckleberry Finn lived in significantly simpler times than the ones we live in today. Way back then, before the Civil War, one way to achieve freedom was to quit school and absquatulate to frontier territories in search of gold or fertile lands or other opportunities. Today, dropping out of high school and choosing not to go to college generally results in undesirable personal socioeconomic outcomes, due to the fact that success in our society is so strongly correlated to education.

Think about the powerful drive of high-income earners to get politicians to assess low marginal rates of tax on the highest levels of their incomes. This goal is being financed, in part, by slashing public funding for schools. A resulting heavy burden of debt is being forced on young people, so it is a form of cynical, shortsighted and extremely unfair exploitation of younger generations. From a perspective of young people, this gambit resembles a modern form of feudal bondage. Record levels of student debt make this onerous yoke ever more dishonorable. This adds insult to the grave environmental injuries described below. (Note that Robert Reich proposed four good solutions back in 2016 in his video on YouTube, *The Student Debt Crisis.)*

One of the most provocative Enlightenment Era ideas our Founders embraced in the Declaration of Independence was the idea that all people are endowed "with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." To properly protect such rights, Right Action is required!

Consider the surprising studies that show people feel happier when they earn an annual income of $50,000 to $75,000 than others who earn less money, yet that those who earn more than $75,000 per year don't particularly profess to be happier. Even more surprising, there is an inverse proportionality between various levels of wealth and true well-being. In the framework of a person's net worth, if any of the bottom 50% of persons in net worth managed to gain a fortune of $1 million, it would make a profound difference in their lived experience of security and well-being in their lives. In contrast, anyone whose net worth skyrockets beyond $5 million finds that additional wealth, in general, does not necessarily make their lives happier.

These are powerful reasons why our top national priority should NOT be to make the rich richer at the expense of everyone else, and that we should make our system of taxation much more steeply graduated. The public debt-financed Republican Tax Cut law in December 2017 brashly and rashly violated this understanding.

The promotion of "the general Welfare" of the people, as set forth as a guiding purpose in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, can best be achieved by making our society fairer, rather than by continuing to egregiously peddle influence and pander so exclusively to wealthy people by allowing them to corrupt our national tax policies to low tax rates for the top income earners. This perspective makes it clear we should strive to maximize the happiness

of the vast majority of the American people by ensuring that our national policies share opportunities and after-tax income more broadly. It is high time we stop allowing the super-rich the privilege of dominating our policies and priorities, and imposing national policies that generate and concentrate wealth ever more narrowly in the hands of the few.

Jim once asked Huck about the Exodus passages in the Bible where God repeatedly hardened the heart of the Pharaoh. Moses had told the Pharaoh that the LORD was the God of Israel, and that God wanted Pharaoh to "Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert." Jim wondered why the Pharaoh had rejected these pleas. Why, instead, did Pharaoh give an order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: "You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. *They are lazy;* that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Make the work harder for the men, so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies." Watch for this code word 'lazy' in today's political discourse.

Huckleberry sensibly explained to Jim that the world is a complicated place, and that "some things just can't be properly comprehendulated." Mitt Romney once stated, "I'm not concerned about the very poor, we have a social safety net". Romney was right about that, we do have a social safety net -- and the majority of people in the Republican Party want to systematically dismantle this smart form of social insurance! They want to do this in abject deference to the preferences and great financial advantages of rich folks, and to the sly and greed-driven spin they finance so lavishly. Unite, citizens, to alter this pathetic calculus!

Think about the compelling observation made in *Comprehensive Global Perspective: An Illuminating Worldview:* "The small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has the extraordinary idea of measuring well-being by endorsing comprehensive 'Gross National Happiness' indicators. Bhutan's first ever elected Prime Minister Jigme Thinley once elaborated, with this observation: 'The four pillars of Gross National Happiness are the promotion of equitable and sustainable socioeconomic development, the preservation and promotion of cultural values, the conservation of the natural environment, and the establishment of good governance.'"

"Imagine if the American people were able to commit themselves to more enlightened ideas like these! Instead of hyping up consumption, stimulating the depletion of natural resources, stoking economic growth no matter how counterproductive, and driving up the national debt, we could once again become the beacon of sanity and hope to the rest of the world. We could strive to attain a more broad-minded approach to domestic and foreign policies, and pass sensible laws that would better protect the environment, and finance insurance policies to cover the most risky aspects of climate inaction. Good governance would be a positive change from today's extremely partisan and corrupt political landscape with its serious shortfall in cooperative problem-solving, civility in national discourse, truth-telling, expansive voting rights, social responsibility, ecological sanity, reasonable discipline, greater fairness, fiscal soundness, and better oversight and accountability."

Check out the entertaining, funny and informative new film *The Monk and the Gun* for perspective on democracy in Bhutan since King Jigme Wangchuck abdicated in favor of democratic governance.

<u>A Eulogy for Martin Luther King, Jr.</u>

The night Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy spoke Indianapolis, saying these words: "Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice between fellow human beings. He died in the cause of that effort. In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it's perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are, and what direction we want to move in. … What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness, but is love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country …"

That's a good call. Let's try to heal the deep divisions in the USA, and reduce the stark divide between the richest 1% and everyone else, thereby creating a fairer nation that is more secure for all. The Roman philosopher Cicero counsels us with words echoing from the first century BCE: "Let the passions be amenable to reason."

Let's find good ways to unite, and to reconcile the left and the right! Otherwise, by continuing to drive extreme political partisanship, wealthy people will be able to prevent people from coming together to create a fairer and

healthier society. By keeping Americans divided against each other, they will be able to continue to perpetuate their socially detrimental set of national policies and inequitable conditions and unsustainable plans. And by effectively promoting a growing economic insecurity of the vast majority of American workers who must live from paycheck to paycheck, and pushing policies that keep minimum wages low and squelch labor organizing, they will be able to continue gaining the preponderance of the national wealth for themselves.

It is dangerous to worsen prospects of the bottom half of Americans, who collectively have an average "negative net worth" (according to French economist Gabriel Zacman), for they will regard their treatment as being a hurtful result of systemic injustices and a viscerally severe form of disdain for them, and for the common good.

Abraham Lincoln made a famous House Divided Speech in which he declared: "If we could first know *where* we are, and *whither* we are tending, we could then better judge *what* to do, and *how* to do it." Republicans, join me in thinking about where your political party really stands, and where it should be heading!

If we truly "want to make America great again", here would be an excellent place to start to honestly achieve that goal. The wrong way would be to give support to Republicans and their plans by going along with their version of "voodoo economics", cutting taxes for rich people, ratcheting up military spending, slashing funding on public education, healthcare, environmental protections and a myriad of other civilized things -- and doing this while stoking divisive tensions and generally empowering white supremacists, religious evangelicals, racists, persons who favor discrimination against women and gay people, and those opposed to immigrants and asylum seekers.

Tom Sawyer always reckoned that almost any occasion called for concocting some elaborate scheme, but if he were to be transported to modern times and be apprised of the far-reaching implications of the real challenges involved in truly making America great again, he might well appreciate something simpler, and enthusiastically recommend, "let's manage better by trying smarter and more equitable plans!" (Hold our leaders to account!)

Famously, eight years before Lincoln's House Divided Speech, Sam Houston proclaimed during a Senate debate on the Compromise of 1850: "A nation divided against itself cannot stand." This wisdom was derived from Matthew 12:25 in the Bible: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand." This gives us good reasons to seek collaborative solutions to big challenges, and to transcend the negativity and divisive partisanship and damaging polarization that is allowing domineering factions to abuse power and prevent us from coming together to create a better and healthier country.

<u>Ponder the Facts about the California Gold Rush, and Their Implications</u>

Hark back, for a moment, to the Gold Rush era that Mark Twain wrote about in stories like *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*. Gold had been discovered in January 1848 at Sutter's Mill on the South Fork of the American River, in the foothills of California's Central Valley. An epic Gold Rush ensued in which some 100,000 adventurers arrived in 1849, coming overland on perilous journeys in wagon trains or by ship either from the Panama isthmus or around Cape Horn at the tip of South America. These Forty Niners swelled the population of non-Natives living in California, and by 1855, perhaps 300,000 people had come. Miners are estimated to have extracted more than $12 billion dollars worth of gold in the first five years of the Gold Rush, at today's equivalent prices. That is a lot of money for a rowdy bunch of risk-taking frontier 'pan handlers'!

The human story of tens of thousands of gold miners in the Sierra Nevada, and in the boomtown of San Francisco, is endlessly fascinating. The city of San Francisco experienced the fastest urban growth of any city in American history during those years, and it stimulates the imagination to contemplate the stories about the bars, gambling halls and bordellos, and the opportunist shopkeeper Sam Brannan who became the first millionaire in the West by selling supplies to gold seekers. The jumping-off point for many overland adventurers in wagon trains was the then-small town of Independence, Missouri, and that place lends a nice symbolism to this tale, so I liberally leap to the fore to focus on another prominent aspect of those times.

The Gold Rush became one of the most destructive environmental onslaughts by human beings in world history, as everyone who lived downstream from hydraulic mining operations was well aware back in those days. This harmful kind of mining had its heyday in California from 1853 to 1884, when miners in the mountains channeled pristine water from Sierra Nevada rivers into flumes many miles long. The water was then funneled into high-pressure

torrents in hoses and blasted against gravel hillsides from iron nozzles called monitors. This process washed huge quantities of gravel and silt from remnants of ancient river beds down through large sluices where nuggets and flakes of gold could be captured.

This mining method had severe adverse unintended impacts on people who lived downstream. Large volumes of sediments were washed into creeks and rivers, and were carried down into the Central Valley, where they caused significant flooding damage to people's homes, farms, crops, businesses and towns. Streambeds became so choked with silt that large ships could no longer navigate upstream to Sacramento from San Francisco Bay. Populations of fish, oysters and other species of life in this river system and the Bay were decimated. The scars of these hydraulic mining activities are still starkly visible in eroded foothill locales like Malakoff Diggins, the site of the largest hydraulic mine in California.

Intense legal battles took place due to the big conflicts of interest between hydraulic miners and those who lived downstream from the heedless activity. The conflict was finally resolved in what was to become a watershed environmental ruling by Judge Lorenzo Sawyer in the U.S. District Court in San Francisco in 1884. Judge Sawyer set a sweeping injunction that mandated an abrupt and permanent halt to all hydraulic mining activities in the state. This was one of the first legal decisions to require a stop to environmental despoliation.

This early defense of environmental protection was essentially a first step toward fairer and bigger picture adjudications of inherent conflicts of interests that exist in many arenas. Big mining operations and fossil fuel extraction businesses have outsized negative impacts, as do rash real estate developments in flood-prone areas or ecologically vulnerable locales, or other activities that exploit natural resources regardless of impacts the activities have on people, wildlife, habitats, entire ecosystems and the global climate. The Sawyer Decision leads us to a precipice of vitally important insights for humanity from the vantage point of May 1, 2024.

Who should sue today, one might wonder, to fairly adjudicate between the epic conflicts of interest that exist between ridiculously heedless current day activities and the tsunami of future needs of all our heirs yet to be born? Who should sue about damages to ecosystems worldwide, and the squandering of vital resources, and natural disasters being made worse by extreme weather events and ominous changes in the global climate?

These questions and the insights they illuminate provide a springboard into better understandings of the many overarching challenges caused by abuses of corporate power, and by efforts to maximize private profits by means of the insidious expediency of allowing giant corporations to socialize costs and foist environmental damages and other harms onto society as a whole. These insights provide provocative perspective, in addition, into some wider considerations, like the corrupting influences of Big Money in our country and the role of corporate lawyers in advancing such unfair influences, as well as broader understandings about society, greater good goals, racial injustices, the growth of overweening corporate power, judicial ideologies, extreme political partisanship, our corrupted system of civil justice and incarceration, and the freedoms, rights and responsibilities of individuals.

Not long after having first posed this question about who should sue over environmentally damaging activities, a revelatory concatenation of curious circumstances occurred that provided an excellent answer, as if inspired by a Goddess of Timely Coincidence. It turned out that a thought-provoking legal case began to be considered in the U.S. District Courthouse in Eugene, Oregon in early 2016. The case involves a complaint filed in 2015 against the federal government and the fossil fuel industry on behalf of 21 young plaintiffs, aged 8 to 19 at the time, by an Oregon nonprofit organization, Our Children's Trust. The plaintiffs in the case asserted that they have been deprived of key rights by their own government, as have all people in younger generations. Their argument is that, by failing to take steps to mitigate climate disruption, the U.S. government has valued its own generation more than future generations, and ignored the fact that those in the future will bear a much heavier burden of hardships due to the damaging impacts of human activities on healthy ecosystems and a stable climate.

A 15-year-old indigenous activist who is a plaintiff in the case defended young people's perspectives at a press conference after an early hearing. "We are valuing our futures over profits," he said. "We are valuing this planet over corporate greed." This critical point of view sounds eminently reasonable, for the young plaintiffs have very good justifying arguments that the government is allowing vested interests to endanger their right to a livable planet, and there is extensive supporting evidence of unfolding and accelerating harms.

The serious complaint alleged that young people's Fifth and Fourteenth Amendment rights are being violated with regard to due process and equal protection under the law. "By failing to act on climate change, it argued, the government discriminates against youth as a class. Without access to a healthy climate, they are deprived of their fundamental rights to life, liberty, and property."

Clayton Aldern, a senior fellow at *Grist*, elaborated: "The complaint is also built on the public trust doctrine, a carryover from English common law that says a government has the duty to protect certain natural resources and systems on behalf of current and future generations. The public trust doctrine originated with Emperor Justinian in Rome, as Alex Loznak, a 19-year-old plaintiff, explained to the press. 'It's reflected in the Magna Carta, the writings of Thomas Jefferson, and cited in U.S. court decisions dating back to the 1800s.'"

Winning this case would be a real watershed moment, but it was a long shot, considering the powerful entrenched interest groups arrayed against the plaintiffs. One must honestly admit, however, that the idea has overarching merit. It is obvious that one of the most seriously underrepresented constituencies in the USA is the more than 72 million Americans under the age of 18 who are too young to vote. Politicians demonstrate an objectionably inadequate concern for the best interests of these young people, because they are so busy pandering to rich people and big businesses and old folks, instead of taking strong stands to ensure a propitious and sustainable world. It is provocatively illuminating to realize that the best interests of young Americans are shared with billions of others around the planet, and with countless numbers of children to be born in the future.

In April 2016, U.S. Magistrate Judge Thomas Coffin of the federal District Court in Eugene, Oregon decided in favor of the 21 young plaintiffs on behalf of future generations in this landmark case concerning anthropogenic climate disruption. The Court's ruling was a victory for the young people in what Bill McKibben and Naomi Klein called the "most important lawsuit on the planet right now." One legal argument made in the lawsuit was that the interests and future well-being of young people should be given greater consideration, instead of permitting and encouraging and wantonly subsidizing a continued exploitation, production and combustion of dirty fossil fuels. More than $500 billion in subsidies are given annually in countries around the world to facilitate this rent-seeking profiteering swindle. These are misguiding and wrongheaded "perverse incentives".

The Department of Justice under Donald Trump tried to get this lawsuit dismissed, rejecting young people's claims against the government for failing to address climate change. But in March 2018, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco denied the motion for dismissal, giving recognition to the merits of the case, and the Supreme Court refused to block that denial in November 2018. Finally, after 5 years of litigation, the lawsuit was dismissed in January 2020, with an appeals court writing that the youngsters made a compelling case that action is needed, and agreed that climate change is undeniable, yet said the proper venue for addressing the nation's emissions policies and fossil fuel use is the U.S. Congress or the electorate. It is true, however, that Congress is corrupted by Big Money from gigantic industries like those narrowly representing fossil fuel interests, and has been incapable of passing most remedial measures that would address the unfolding climate-destabilizing calamity, due mainly to stubborn opposition by Republican politicians.

This case is only one of its kind, with similar lawsuits having been filed by youth plaintiffs in Alaska, Colorado, Washington, New Mexico, North Carolina, Massachusetts and Maine. Another ploy often used to prevent lawsuits like this from succeeding in courts has been to use procedural technicalities to assert that most persons do not have "standing" to participate in such lawsuits. Judges like Neil Gorsuch have used this tactic throughout their careers to throw judicial roadblocks in the way of environmental litigation and public land disputes. In the lawsuit by Our Children's Trust, the appeals court admitted that the plaintiffs did have standing in the case, and that some of the plaintiffs met the requirements for actual injury, but the court reckoned that remedying the problem required "much more than cessation of the government's promotion of fossil fuels." Instead, we need "no less than a fundamental transformation of this country's energy system, if not that of the industrialized world." The judges indicated that it is beyond the authority of courts to adjudicate a remedy.

In antagonistic countermoves to the climate change lawsuit, Republicans are trying to increase the rate at which fossil fuel resources on Earth are being used up. This is bizarre because scientists are finding overwhelming proof that the resulting impacts of excessive greenhouse gas emissions are exceedingly costly, and will get worse due to

the disruption of normal patterns of temperatures, storms and amounts of precipitation and snowfall, and due to inexorably rising sea levels from melting glaciers and ice caps. In 2017 alone, the costs of hurricane damage, flooding, wildfires and debris flows exceeded $300 billion in the U.S. We should honestly assess projected future costs of climate inaction, so as to have a truer understanding of these future costs.

Most scientific experts agree that about 80% of known reserves of fossil fuels should be left in the ground during the rest of this century to prevent a catastrophic onset of hotter temperatures, apocalyptic hurricanes, destructive tornadoes, hellish wildfires, harsh droughts, creeping desertification, coral reef bleaching, and coastal flooding. But Republicans instead push for a strategy of opening up coastal waters and protected public lands to increased extraction of coal, oil and natural gas. These actions resemble those of hydraulic miners in the 19th century, being heedless activities that will have harmful downstream impacts. Republican politicians today, however, are much worse, for the impacts of their stubborn refusals to take steps to mitigate the climate crisis will have cataclysmic impacts all around the planet, and will persist for centuries and millennia. Politicians and judges who oppose responsible environmental actions today are trying to torpedo the sensible Clean Power Plan, eviscerate rules limiting methane emissions, reduce fuel efficiency standards for vehicles, prevent carbon fee-and-dividend plans from being enacted, evade obligations under the Paris climate agreement, and eliminate many environmental rules they regard as overly burdensome to the profitability of corrupting fossil fuel industries.

We would be wiser to heed the trenchant observation President Lyndon Johnson made when he signed the Wilderness Act of 1964: *"If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them something more than the miracles of technology. We must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it."*

<u>Crucial Understandings</u>

> "In the nineteenth century, anti-capitalist critics like Karl Marx insisted that economics must be contained within an ethical context; they contended that social justice counted for more than industrial efficiency or private profit. In the late twentieth century, the environmental movement is trying to teach us that both economics and ethics must be contained within an ecological context."
>
> --- Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth, An Exploration of Ecopsychology,* 2001

Human beings are collectively treating our home planet like a business in liquidation, rather than doing what is inevitably necessary to live sustainably in a habitable world by working to make it a thriving and sustainable concern. We are figuratively fouling our nests by myopically dumping toxic pollutants, chemicals and plastics into nature, damaging natural ecosystems, and spewing huge quantities of global warming gases into the atmosphere. And in a frenzy of repetitious consumer advertising created to maximize short-term profits, large amounts of minerals are being wantonly and rashly wasted after being extracted from millions of polluting mines worldwide.

We can't afford to allow unprincipled Republicans (and others) to continue abusing political influence that they illegitimately wield. The risks are too wide-ranging and far-reaching. As pointed out in *The Nation*, for instance, " ... Trump's energy policy -- one that denies climate change, doubles down on fossil fuels, strangles incentives for renewable energy, and guts the regulations that protect our air and water -- would flood our coasts, burn our forests, parch our cities, and leave the whole planet a smoldering wasteland." This is inimically wrongheaded!

In one of Annie Leonard's excellent online videos in her series *The Story of Stuff*, she asserts in *The Story of Change* that the real power to create a fairer, healthier and sustainable economy lies not in individual choices that we make in buying things, but in coming together as citizens to build a better future. Right on! Read on for some valuable perspectives and recommendations.

> "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in our philosophy."
>
> --- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

<u>Highly Compensated Lawyers Skew Justice, and Make Those Who Obey Rules into Chumps</u>

Heavy hands are being laid on the scales of justice by means of huge amounts of *Dark Money* that are being contributed largely in secret. Ruthless capitalists trumpet stentorian absolute certainties about how rich people

and giant corporate entities should be given ever more advantages and privileges. Anti-government operatives tout righteous convictions concerning the unrestrained exploitation of resources and corporate personhood prerogatives, which in effect allow costs to be socialized as externalized harms and burdens upon society.

Fred Koch, the father of system-corrupting billionaires Charles and David Koch, was a rich industrialist who supported the right-wing John Birch Society and helped both Joseph Stalin's dictatorship in the Soviet Union and Adolf Hitler's fascist Third Reich in Germany during the military buildup to the Second World War. Fred Koch realized, after one very long lawsuit, that justice can be bought, and that "rules are for chumps."

A modern day Tom Sawyer, his inventive cleverness having matured into an admirably perspicacious sagacity, would succinctly summarize this state of affairs. "See," he would say, "rich folks hire a bunch of high-priced lawyers and retain the services of cunning marketing and public relations companies and people in right-wing think tanks, and they push self-serving goals as top national policy priorities." It is easy to see how this is done. Wealthy conservatives assert that progressivism poses an existential threat, and they garner support from avaricious billionaires to finance unprincipled politicians and yes men, and phony front groups, and shrewd manipulators of the media who use a virtual array of minaret-quality loudspeakers to blare their "alternative facts" and deceitful propaganda to indoctrinate the masses. And presto! -- they convert our democratic republic into a plutocratic "winner-take-all country", in which the top 1% have managed to increase their share of the national income from 12% in 1990 to about 25% today, and even worse to have increased the proportion of wealth they own from 33% twenty-five years ago to over 40% today, and headed toward 50%, thanks to the December 2017 Tax Cuts largess for the rich.

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis was surely right when he sensationally warned, “we can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few, but we can’t have both.”

We would be wise and responsible to manage our national affairs much better to help guarantee greater fairness and achieve common good goals, and to ensure every American of reasonable personal liberties and broadly shared opportunities for happiness and more environmentally sane national priorities. To succeed in better managing our democracy, the steps required are rather simple, though Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell would say they’re politically impossible. To create a safer nation with an auspicious character, the politically impossible must now become the inevitable, and be actualized as soon as possible. The first step needed is to vote out of office all narrowly self-serving right-wing politicians to reduce the malignant power of Republicans in government.

A Powerful Political Proclamation

In November 2008, a majority of *We the People* voted for "Change We Can Believe In", and we were not just in favor of the catchy slogan, we wanted real positive change. Since that time, it is astonishing how pathologically successful “conservatives” have been at stubbornly obstructing fair-minded positive change in our wrongly rigged economic and political systems. For eight years under President Barack Obama, the Do-Nothing Congress of our representatives seemed to have completely forgotten that in a constitutional democracy, one of their top responsibilities should be to fairly balance all competing interests, and to prevent the wealthiest few from abusing the influence of their outsized riches to gain an increasing concentration of wealth and power.

I, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, have a top-notch Better Management Master Plan to dramatically improve conditions by giving much more respect to greater good goals. As the illegitimate great-granddaughter of the estimable observer and humorist Mark Twain, I have sprinkled details of this positively propitious plan liberally throughout a dozen evolving books. The biggest collection of good ideas and recommendations can be found in *Common Sense Revival – Book One of the Earth Manifesto,* which is available right now from the on-demand publisher Lulu Press. A summary is contained online in the compendium of ideas in Part Four of the Earth Manifesto.

The esteemed author and satirical humorist Mark Twain famously declared that we have the best government that money can buy, and sure enough, that satirical observation contains a vital kernel of truth. The principal problem with the current state of affairs is that Big Money has far too domineering an influence in determining our laws and national priorities and decision making. We need a larger framework to provide better and fairer guidance, and

I feel strongly that this can be found in a much more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of issues in light of the overarching context of a *Bill of Rights for Future Generations.* Check it out!

"All the forces in the world are not so powerful as an idea whose time has come."

--- Victor Hugo

The need for good solutions to big problems continues to mount, especially because our leaders have been so stubbornly unwilling to work together for the *Common Good, Properly Understood,* as evaluated from perspectives of "consequential ethics" and the greatest good for the greatest number of people over the longest period of time. Some 2,500 years ago, the wise Athenian lawmaker Solon made historic efforts to reform the Greek economy and politics in what are remembered as Solon-wise compromises that saved Greece from violent revolution by the desperate poor against the jealously greedy rich. Solon is known as the Father of Democracy for the reforms he implemented to reduce conflicts between the angry Many and the privilege-protecting Few.

Tens of millions of Americans justifiably feel that our political system is rigged, and that they are personally shut out of the political process, often due to the distorting influence of Big Money. Every one of these people should strongly support democracy reforms such as the guarantee of voting rights for all citizens, the elimination of extreme gerrymandering, the public financing of elections, and new laws that overturn the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling that allows excessive influence of money in our elections and law-making. Ever since this wrongly-decided Supreme Court ruling, any person or any company can spend as much money as they want to influence our elections, even anonymously. The consequences have disastrously left voters in the dark about who is trying to buy their vote, and what special interests their politician representatives are beholden to.

Huck Finn chafed under the bonds of civilization and the humdrum world, so it is easy to imagine that he would have grown into a passionate young man who would champion a fairer and more just world that would give greater opportunities to young people. And it turns out that the best hopes for such a world may be found in more honorable governance in a strengthened democracy. This would also help assure that our towns, cities and societies would be more peaceable and sustainable in the future. Conversely, in the current day, it is folly to continue to allow political corruption and dominating power for wealthy folks and big corporations, because the inevitable outcome of such harm-engendering influences is an increasingly oppressive world with more extreme inequalities, dire injustices, revolutionary discord, repressive government and environmental insanity.

Extreme gerrymandering of congressional districts is responsible for giving Republican politicians nearly 20 extra seats in the House of Representatives that should have been held by Democrats on behalf of the best interests of their constituents. This estimate was provided in an expert analysis done in 2017 by the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law, a nonpartisan law and policy institute. This means that the swindle of gerrymandering has deprived progressive voices of a significant number of seats in Congress. Add to that the millions of voters who have been deprived of their ability to vote by Republican voter suppression tactics, and it becomes clear that fairer national policies and priorities are seriously undermined by dirty politics. In Wisconsin in November 2022, the Democratic Party got over half of the vote statewide, but Republicans have so seriously gerrymandered its districts that Democrats got less than one-third of the seats in the state legislature. A similar situation woefully pertains in North Carolina, and many other states of the South.

It might help to honestly understand the many ways our system is rigged to favor the wealthiest 1% over the best interests of the other 99%. One of the main political strategies for preventing collaborative solutions to big problems has been by dividing people through outlandish manipulations of their emotions and resentments. To achieve this immoral goal, Dividers have used hot button wedge issues, polarizing politics, stoked fears, goaded antagonisms, supremacist religious dogmas, and appeals to base human motives like bigotry, white supremacy, male chauvinism, racism, misogyny, demonization of LGBTQ folks, scapegoating of immigrants, self-righteousness and hate. These strategies have been effective in giving conservatives too much political influence, and allowed them to impose harsher control over the populace. This has also facilitated the running up of the national debt to give more tax breaks to the rich. But these strategies are contrary to the general welfare, national security and social cohesion. This is antithetical to the founding principles of our democratic republic. In a healthy democracy, greater fairness is given more respect, and people are protected from the predations of abusers of authority.

John Fowles noted in *The Aristos* that there may be an "obvious emotional heroic-defiant appeal" about a "violent plunge from the battlements of reason", like that revealed in fervent beliefs in absolute certainties, or in stubborn adherence to indoctrinated dogmas. "But this is as if, finding myself in doubt and in darkness, I should decide, instead of cautiously feeling my way forward, to leap; not only to leap, but to leap desperately; and not only to leap desperately, but to leap into the darkest part of the surrounding darkness." OMG!!

Today, in the face of powerful and legitimate populist discontent on both the political left and the right, we are faced with a similar dilemma with regard to leadership and positive political change. The majority of Americans want salubrious change, but it is crazy for so many millions of them to believe that MAGA Republicans and their manipulative propaganda, provocations of outrage, false conspiracy theories, authoritarian abuses of power, trickle-down tax cut swindles, racial and gender discrimination, and stubborn defense of domineering white male privilege are acceptable and worthy of support. Trump is a malignant narcissist bent on vindictive retribution, and a dictator wannabe who absurdly claims he is above the law. It's as if his supporters are willing to leap desperately in the darkest direction by giving the erratic Trump, with his scheming, frauds, bullying, demagoguery, self-dealing, hair-trigger temperament, poor intellect and character-deficient sociopathic persona, the power to manipulate, control and direct our lives and futures.

It was a YUGE mistake to have allowed this unstable, scandal propagating, shamefully dishonorable, women-exploiting, chaos generating and divisive demagogue to become such a powerful leader in the most influential government in the world. He was a horrible choice for representing the best interests of the American people on the stage of international affairs, or to have honorably safeguarded the well-being of the people at home in our great republic. It is a radical contrast to have had this bombastic demagogue instead of Hillary Clinton, who dealt very effectively with dozens of world leaders as Secretary of State for four years from 2009 to 2013. And it would be crazily wrong to allow him to again grab power.

John Steinbeck spoke the insightful and somewhat satirical truth when he observed, "Power does not corrupt. Fear corrupts ... (especially) the fear of a loss of power." Donald Trump is understandably fearful, for there is a good chance that he will be found guilty for some of his many violations of the law.

With a modicum of poetic justice, this sly and entertaining Earth Manifesto would serve as a force for social good, and these writings would contribute to a renaissance of more responsible leadership, and cause power-abusing conservatives to suffer the sting of social rebuke in legislative defeats and ignominious landslide losses in future elections. And American voters should give many more progressive candidates, especially women, the opportunity to serve our nation and help make it fairer, safer and more compassionate.

Inspecting Our Believing Brains

One might wonder, when in a mind-wandering mood, why established religions have such a powerful hold on the consciousness of the faithful. Most doctrines of various religious faiths are neither particularly plausible nor rational. And is it probable that these dogmas are not even relatively true. Every single experience we have in our lives, after all, involves us and the natural world. Every belief in some supernatural explanation of things is a leap of faith that involves superstition, not insight or common sense. Michael Shermer asserts in *The Believing Brain* that beliefs tend to come first, then rationalizing explanations for beliefs follow. Ultimately, Shermer demonstrates "why science is the best tool ever devised to determine whether or not a belief matches reality."

Most myths were originally concocted to explain some specific aspect of the pervasive mysteries of life. All ancient myths were stories that had their archaic genesis in pre-scientific days when the bar for accuracy in providing explanations was much lower than today (in theory, at least!).

> "I've said many times that we can expect delusional beliefs to rise in proportion to the economic hardships we experience. That's exactly what's happening."
>
> --- James Howard Kunstler, *The Long Emergency: Surviving the End of Oil, Climate Change, and Other Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-First Century*

The famous novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand was an atheist who believed that not one of the mythological deities that humankind has invented over the millennia, in attempts to explain existence and the inexplicable, were literal

beings that actually existed. This perspective is in accord with the definition of religion provided by Ambrose Bierce in his *Devil's Dictionary:* "Religion, *n.* A daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable."

John Steinbeck had noted in his *Log from the Sea of Cortez:* "We knew that what seemed to us true could be only relatively true anyway. There is no other kind of observation." It turns out that narrowly-focused beliefs and observations are similar to overly-wrought convictions: they are fraught with risks of being rather rudely inaccurate, and are oft wrongheaded, so they generally involve the sacrifice of truths about the objects of our beliefs -- and about ourselves, our motives and impacts, as well.

John Steinbeck and Doc Ed Ricketts had debated and articulated valuably holistic worldviews during their famous voyage on the Sea of Cortez in 1940. One conclusion they reached was that seeing things clearly and with keen insight is a prerequisite to "breaking through" to fuller and more holistic understandings. John Steinbeck saw humankind as "a creature of earth, not a heaven-bound pilgrim", so he believed it was vitally important to see things whole, and to work purposefully to change the way things are, for the better.

The implication is that useful social action is required of us all. We need to demand a smart restructuring of our economic and political systems -- and the federal judiciary -- to assure more positive outcomes for all. It seems apparent that we should strive to minimize the adverse effects we have on others, in accordance with the ethos of the Golden Rule, and we should responsibly contribute to achieving goals that are broadly consistent with the greater good. Smart incentives should be instituted to effectively accomplish this.

Authorities in established religions assert that they should be the final arbiters in arenas of morality and ethics. What they really seek appears to be a monopoly on judgmentality, which they use as a beachhead to control and manipulate people, all too often for base motives like power, profit and dominating control. They usurp the highest moral concepts of language by claiming words like exaltation, reverence, righteousness, enlightenment and sacred. By placing these concepts in an ecclesiastic, supernatural and otherworldly frame, they basically debase them and degrade mankind at the same time, especially when doctrines are used to discriminate and oppress.

Morality should be emancipated from religion and brought into the realm of empathy, reason, logic, Golden Rule fairness, personal responsibility, compassionate understanding and ecological sanity. Morality is in essence what is consistent with the overarching human good. Spirituality should be anchored in open-minded ways of seeing, and loving kindness, and an inner path to deeper connectedness, NOT in narrow orthodoxy and siding with tribal partisanship and repressive rule. Further explorations of the topic of people's beliefs are to be found in Earth Manifesto essays like *Revelations of a Modern Prophet*, and in *Rapture Mania: Bizarre Beliefs and Epic Epiphanies.*

What's the Big Idea, Buddy?

Humankind became the first species of animal to have foresight and to realize that each and every one of us will eventually die. This recognition was one of the impulses for people to begin performing rituals and burying their dead, and maybe even for creating art in human cultures 40,000 years ago during the upper Paleolithic period. The knowledge that all human beings will die has caused profound existential anxieties. This was no doubt one of the original impetuses that gave shamans the motive to invent religious stories. The fear of death, after all, has been accurately characterized as "the mother of all gods".

Much vidence points to the fact that early religions honored Mother Earth goddesses and females, and fertility and motherhood. As seen through the eyes of Dr. Leonard Shlain, an accomplished polymath who sought to explain the biological roots of patriarchal domination in human clans at the dawn of human history, social roles underwent a drastic transition about 4,000 years ago. Women-respecting, motherhood-honoring attitudes in these cultures gave way to paternity-protecting and women-controlling male dominion. This was a negative development for females, and it took place at the same time that feminine goddesses were overthrown in creation stories by jealous male gods that insisted on domineering supremacy. This far-reaching change curiously coincided with the advent of alphabets and the time when written words and literacy became widespread in early civilizations. This was an early instance of social media drastically affecting the populace!

Dr. Shlain explained the correlation of this change to physical shifts that took place in the brain synapses of our ancestors and the lateralization of the two hemispheres of the human brain. As our ancestors' brains became more specialized in connection with the analytical development of literacy, a coincident upshot was that women's rights and roles became curtailed by the effects of left-brained dominance, and male privilege, power and ascendancy triumphed over more fair-minded attitudes.

Sometime after the recognition dawned on humankind that all people will die, females realized that having sex with a male was sometimes directly correlated to having a child nine months later. Pregnancy and childbirth were dangerous, especially back then. Not only does pregnancy involve a variety of health risks and heightened vulnerabilities, but having children is also a big lifelong commitment, so females began to be much choosier about WHOM they would have sex with. The veto power over sexual relations gave women the substantial power of "original choice". Males bridled, and men have used social convention bridles to lord it over women ever since.

Males also cottoned on to the realization that they had a role in paternity, and began to appreciate the subtly death-defying nature of having their genes be perpetuated through fatherhood. This made them increasingly interested in making sure they controlled the sex lives of women, so they formed long-lasting commitments like marriage in an attempt to mandate sexual exclusivity. Without such exclusivity, after all, there can be no assurance of who fathered a child. So virginity became important, and divorce was made illegal or was subjected to intimidating threats of excommunication from churches. For further insights on this topic, read Dr. Leonard Shlain's brilliant *Sex, Time, and Power: How Women's Sexuality Shaped Human Evolution.*

Today these understandings are often lost in the battle between the sexes, and in attempts by men to restrict women's freedom of choice and the right to a fair degree of self-determination in their lives. Many males try to evade responsibility for getting a woman pregnant, yet strive to deprive females of any choice in whether or not to deliver offspring, and some even want to deprive them of easily accessible contraception. This dastardly double standard is deeply wrong! Here is another arena in which fair-mindedness and collaborative problem solving would be more advantageous than unempathetic repression or ruthless competition! Let's never forget that democratic governance should value fairness, and that we need <u>good governance</u> that effectively prevents authority abuses, political corruption, and chaos in governance like that in the U.S. House of Representatives, where MAGA Republican extremists are dishonest and refuse to compromise for the common good.

<u>Freedom and Responsibility</u>

When *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* opens with words about Huck and Jim going down the river on a raft looking for freedom, it inspires us to exclaim, "Hallelujah for freedom!" I reckon that we live in a free country -- more or less. This freedom is assured to every citizen, thanks to the positive dispensation of our Constitution and Bill of Rights and evolving rules of law. Everyone is free to believe ANY thing they choose, but with freedom comes responsibility. Ecological responsibility, civic responsibility and Golden Rule responsibility toward others, and also an ethical inter-generational responsibility -- hence, again, the need for real strong commitments to a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

One example of the fact that liberties and assured rights are irrevocably accompanied by real responsibilities can be understood in light of the Second Amendment right to bear arms. Owning a gun is a right, but gun owners should be required to be responsible for keeping their guns safe from accidental discharges by their kids, and to refrain from murdering their spouses, neighbors or strangers in fits of anger, or in insane attempts to achieve notoriety like the Aurora, Colorado shooter or the mass murderer at an elementary school in Sandy Hook, Connecticut or the slaughter at a gay bar in Orlando, Florida -- or the worst mass shooting ever, in Las Vegas. Or the Florida high school teenager who killed 17 people with a still easy-to-obtain assault rifle. Having private citizens own rapid-fire assault weapons has little reasonable justification, so we should re-authorize the Federal Assault Weapons Ban that was in effect from 1994 to 2004, and implement better gun safety plans.

Another freedom guaranteed in the Bill of Rights is the free exercise of religion. I personally find it interesting that Constantine the Great, the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity more than 1,700 years ago, back in the year 313 CE, was smart and fair enough to issue an "Edict of Milan" that not only legalized Christian worship but also proclaimed religious tolerance of all religions throughout the empire. Good call, I say!

Twelve years later, Constantine convened a council of old men bishops in Nicaea, a town on Lake Iznik in present-day Turkey. His goal was to resolve all of the many theological disputes that roiled the early church. Was Jesus human or divine? Was he God incarnate, or just a man? After months of heated debate, the Council handed Constantine what became known as the Nicene Creed. This document outlined for the first time the officially sanctioned and thereafter Absolute Truth orthodox stories of the Christian church. Jesus was deemed to be the literal Son of God, and anyone who was foolhardy enough to disagree with this dogma was banished from the empire, and their ideas were violently suppressed. So much for religious tolerance!

In my opinion, there is a much more probably true story than the myth that the Lord Almighty is a supreme male god like Zeus that came down from the heavens and impregnated a human female who remained a virgin and then gave birth to a Son of God. For instance, historian Joe Atwill sets forth a surprising, controversial and thought-provoking theory about Jesus in his book *Caesar's Messiah – The Roman Conspiracy to Invent Jesus*.

But it does not really matter whether or not these stories are true. What is most significant is that, as Reza Aslan writes in *Zealot*, "The council's decision resulted in a thousand years or more of unspeakable bloodshed in the name of Christian orthodoxy." Not so good, Constantine! An inquisitive person would wonder how so much violence could have been rationalized in the name of a Christian God and Jesus. It seems obvious that this must be an issue of control, influence and power. I feel strongly that we should reject ideological arguments that tout orthodoxy and conservatism when they are likely to cause widespread conflict and harm.

The implicit value of tolerance in polytheistic religions is a crucial moral value that is socially advantageous, so it is better than the whole set of supremacist underpinnings of monotheistic religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism. I enthusiastically recommend that people read Jonathan Kirsch's insightful book about many misuses of monotheistic belief systems in *God Against the Gods - The History of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism*. That story concerns the era of King Tut's father in ancient Egypt, and it is well worth reading.

A virtual marriage of church and state has often throughout history proven to be a dastardly affair. This is why a representative democracy requires a separation between government and religious institutions. Such a fair balance is important for the health of a society -- and so are robust checks and balances between the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of government.

Every religion, like every body politic, has adherents who are scattered across a wide continuum that extends from the radical far left to the reactionary far right. Sadly, right-wing voices are too dominant in almost all established religions. It would be a far safer and more humane world if liberals and moderates in every faith were able to exercise greater influence. Extreme conservatives bring pathological shame to their creeds through intolerant attitudes toward others, and reactionaries in many faiths cling to extreme beliefs, doing much harm to females and other under-represented people in their cultures by abusing the influence they have in politics. The tax-exempt status of churches should be revoked for all spending on political goals such as endorsing or opposing candidates, or opposing rights for women and gay people.

Political interference by religious establishments is not only sad, but dangerous as well. Hard-nosed attitudes and influences in faith traditions can have deleterious effects on people and the fairness of government policies. It seems nearly disastrous that right-wing Christians have so much power in the USA today, and that they misuse this power. It is socially harmful to have extreme conservatives wield so much influence -- people like (the since deceased) Rush Limbaugh, Fox News political commentators, the disgraced Jerry Falwell, Jr., Mitch McConnell, Mike Johnson, Ted Cruz, Lindsey Graham, Pat Robertson, Newt Gingrich, and members of The Family, a secret Jesus-loving group of fundamentalists who pander to the rich and powerful. In odd ways, these partisans often emulate the repressive Ayatollahs who rule in Iran. They even resemble extremists in terrorist organizations like al Qaeda and the Islamic State, because they apparently believe that any means, no matter how scurrilous, is justified to achieve their goals for gaining and maintaining domineering power and control.

Extensive adversities have been caused by weddings of church and state throughout history, as can be seen in any study of the negative impacts of the "divine rights of kings" over the centuries, or of the Crusades, the Catholic Inquisition, or Muslim wars of conquest. The retrogressive influence of reactionary elements of and the Christian Right and Christian nationalists in American politics today is similarly misguided and socially harmful.

Early in *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck inadvertently slides head first into the mighty Mississippi, "which give the bullfrogs something to croak about for days, I bet." So may these reflections!

An Interlude of Introspection

"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right-doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there."

--- The 13th century Persian Muslim poet Rumi

I recently recited aloud the pledge of allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, (under God), indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Then I re-read the bronze plaque memorializing the sentiments in Emma Lazarus' *The New Colossus,* which was originally placed on the inner walls of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor:

"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

This poem led me to muse over the words President Franklin Roosevelt spoke in 1943, as he signed the repeal of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act: "We are a nation of many nationalities, many races, many religions -- bound together by a single unity, the unity of freedom and equality. Whoever seeks to set one nationality against another, seeks to degrade all nationalities. Whoever seeks to set one race against another seeks to enslave all races. Whoever seeks to set one religion against another, seeks to destroy all religion."

Recognizing the rise of right-wing anti-immigrant movements in the USA and Europe and elsewhere, I reflected on the fact that millions of refugees are seeking asylum from desperate circumstances around the world today, and that many millions more are all but certain to find themselves in similar straits as the decades pass and as the human population increases by another one billion people in the next 15 years. Heightened conflicts will inevitably unfold over ideologies, extreme inequities and drastic injustices, and shortages in availability of land, fertile soil, fossil fuels and fresh water. Simultaneously, sea levels will continue to inexorably rise, and climate disasters will intensify, mercilessly wreaking increasing havoc.

I thought about the pre-Olympian Titan gods of Greek mythology, Prometheus and Epimetheus, the deities of forethought and afterthought, and of the first woman Pandora, who the Olympian ruler Zeus had created and "endowed with numerous seducing gifts that then would plague humanity from then on."

These philosophic musings reinforced my passionate conviction that humanity must pay closer attention, and consciously and conscientiously seek consensus in championing foresight-informed decisions and smarter national planning to create fairer, safer, more just and more peaceable and sustainable societies. Once again, it can be seen that to accomplish these goals, the guidance of a farsighted Bill of Rights for Future Generations is needed.

Today, fair-minded democratic governance and the public good in America are under concerted assault by the people with the most wealth, power and influence. These people's motives are often ignoble, which is most consequentially outrageous when they undermine the greater good. We would be wise to consider the dangers this presents, and to do so from the largest and most comprehensive perspective possible.

Bill Moyers succinctly stated that "The soul of democracy -- the essence of the word itself -- is government of, by, and for the people. At the core of politics, the soul of democracy has been dying, drowning in a rising tide of big money contributed by a narrow, unrepresentative elite that has betrayed the faith of citizens in self-government." This is why the need is so critical for campaign finance reform and Congressional ethics reform, and for legislation to limit the tsunami of spending by Super PACS and corporations that was unleashed by the Supreme Court with their governance-corrupting *Citizens United* ruling.

When democracy made its debut on the American continent, it required the consent of the governed. Not long thereafter, those who were skilled at manufacturing consent set up operations. They were in the employ of those

who were driven to take advantage of people and exploit resources to maximize the amount of wealth they could get for themselves. Such gambits are generally quite contrary to the greater good.

In *The Price of Civilization: Reawakening American Virtue and Prosperity,* economist Jeffrey Sachs "offers not only a searing and incisive diagnosis of our country's economic ills, but also an urgent call for Americans to restore the virtues of fairness, honesty, and foresight as the foundations of national prosperity." Right on!

An Aside on Inspiration

Sometimes the sun rises and beams down upon us like a benediction. It's just too bad that most of us are not usually awake -- or in an appreciative frame of being -- for this sometimes particularly lovely spectacle! Note that no higher power or authority communicated the insights in these observations to me, either by booming voice from the skies or burning bushes in the mountains. Nor do I lay claim to having found any Golden Plates etched with scriptures containing divine truths -- though if I had, such plates certainly would not have mysteriously disappeared. Besides, to lay claim to having found inspiration written on Golden Plates suffers from a stupendous difficulty: the almost insurmountable challenges associated with the need to magically translate engravings on metallic pages from the Deity level to the level of revelatory human understanding.

Mark Twain wrote about the Book of Mormon in *Roughing It* in 1872. The founder of the Mormon religion, Joseph Smith, Jr., claimed to have translated engravings made by the Lord on golden plates, and Mark Twain satirized the resulting Book of Mormon as "imaginary history", calling it "an insipid mess of inspiration", and "a tedious plagiarism" of the Bible. The phrase, "And it came to pass" was used so repetitiously in Joseph Smith's attempt to evoke olden-days authenticity in his 1830 writings that Mark Twain wryly stated: "If he had left that out, his bible would have been only a pamphlet." Ha! -- You've got to laugh at that sly quip! I recommend the theatrical production *The Book of Mormon*, for it provides audiences with outrageous funny entertainment and perspective.

Mark Twain was by nature rather cynical about the Bible itself, having written in *Letters from the Earth* that it has some clever fables, some blood-drenched history, and upwards of a thousand lies. But this is neither here nor there. My inspiration in the Earth Manifesto has been to try to advance big picture worldviews that would help humanity find ways to live more wisely, fairly and sustainably. These insights into the nature of things have been affected by my upbringing, experiences, education and propensities, along with a dose of good fortune in having a fair amount of free time and propitious personal circumstances. These conditions have allowed me to devote myself regularly to exploring objective, subjective and introspective ideas concerning vitally important issues.

One reasonable conclusion to reach is that wildlife and natural habitats should be given greater protection, and that we should make more concerted efforts to ensure that our activities do not cause severe damage and disruption to Earth's natural ecosystems. The far-reaching scale and impact of human activities in this new Anthropocene Era of modern times has become "so large that it has thrown every fundamental life-sustaining system on Earth off kilter," says Jeffrey Sachs in his book *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet.*

Much bigger investments are needed to avert the most serious risks facing the world, including anthropogenic climate disruption, resource depletion, the extinction of many species, rapid population growth and dire poverty. Each and every person should feel a larger responsibility for supporting such goals. **Note to wealthy people: you can afford to do a lot more!** Pillars of our communities, please agree to progressive taxation reforms that will generate more funding to help solve the many problems that confront us. Investments in the well-being of people in the future require this activated commitment, as do hopes for greater social justice and environmental sanity.

Most people do not have the time or energy to be more responsible in civic activities. Relatively few have the financial resources to generously donate to good causes. Yet it is exceedingly important for us to somehow come together to make bolder commitments to common good goals. This will require an honest restructuring of tax laws to make them more steeply graduated, and provide more funding. It is an inadequate plan to leave such positive goals to the vicissitudes of voluntary philanthropy. This reform will make sure that the people who can most easily afford to help make our societies fairer and healthier will be required to make bigger contributions. At the same time, incentives for making charitable contributions should be made more attractive for all.

One of the biggest 'quality of life' issues concerns protected parks, open spaces and public lands. People need a more intimate exposure and access to the natural world so that they feel more of an appreciation for it -- and a greater willingness to protect it. Parks and open spaces improve our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health, so they deserve better protections. This understanding is an idea that originated with Parks Victoria in Australia, and is now part of the U.S. National Park Service's 5-year *Healthy Parks, Healthy People Strategic Plan*. This commendable effort acknowledges the role parks play in contributing to social wellbeing and the sustainability of the planet.

I call on civic leaders and rich people to give more generous support to protecting National Parks, Wilderness Areas, National Forests, National Marine Sanctuaries, National Wildlife Refuges, Wild and Scenic Rivers, State Parks, and County and municipal open spaces. A civilized society should not sacrifice these critical natural areas for short-term private profiteering, just as it should not abandon art, science, good public education, honest ethics, endangered species or other aspects of greater good goals.

"Invoke a little moxie. Think big. Risk failure. Laugh at yourself. Make a difference."
--- Tiffany Shlain, UC Berkeley 2010 Commencement Convocation (paraphrased)

Hopi Indian Elders have long recognized *Koyaanisqatsi,* a word in the Hopi language meaning 'life out of balance'. We are unwisely upsetting the natural balance in the world, so Hopi Elders advise us to walk more gently upon the earth. They essentially recommend that we give greater respect to ecological precautionary principles. They tell us to honor Mother Earth and to respect "our sacred life-giving waters and all life for future generations of our children." Our elders have spoken. Let us pay attention, and heed these words!

<u>Lifetime Ecological Footprint Tally (LEFT)</u>

Chief Seattle, a Native American leader in the Pacific Northwest, is reputed to have made the following wise observation in 1854, and it provides a succinct and essential reason for the necessity for us to choose to live our lives in more sustainable ways: "Whatever happens to the Earth, happens to the children of the Earth. All things are connected, like the blood that unites one family. Mankind did not weave the web of life; we are but one strand within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves."

Everything on Earth is interconnected and interdependent, so each of us is involved in impacting everything else. These impacts live on after we die as a legacy, like the fading echoes of ill-considered activities. To a significant extent, we help determine the destinies of our children and theirs, and theirs, and theirs, through the individual and collective choices we make today. We thus materially choose the legacy we will leave to our heirs.

Even if someone lives to be 100 years old, life goes by relatively quickly in the context of the duration of our species' existence. Each person is born, lives an indeterminate but distinctly limited amount of time during his or her own individual lifespan, and then dies. The ecological legacy of each person varies, depending on a number of factors. This legacy ranges from relatively inconsequential for those who die in childhood to more significant for those who live a long life or contribute in major ways to the common good or intellectual advancement or spiritual illumination. Those who have seriously detrimental impacts because of their excessive greed or outsized material consumption, or despotic acts, or prodigious child-bearing, can be understood to be leaving more consequentially adverse legacies of stresses on the providential natural world.

Every one of us has an aggregate impact during our lives, which could be measured by evaluating a Lifetime Ecological Footprint Tally, or LEFT. What's LEFT? This is a measurement that would represent a total of all energy and resources used throughout an individual's lifetime, plus a per-person share of the infrastructure costs of the nation in which they live. A factor would be included for the number of children a person produces, due to the multiplier-effect impact that having children has on resource depletion and damages to Earth's ecosystems. The use of non-renewable resources would be given heavier weight than the use of renewable resources in assessing these lifetime impacts. The LEFT would also take into account total amounts of garbage, toxic wastes, plastics and carbon dioxide a person produces, directly and indirectly, over the span of their lives.

This idea would be an extrapolation of the Global Footprint Network's measurements of how many planet Earths would be required to sustain consumption indefinitely at current rates for all the people in each nation. The World

Footprint currently reveals that nearly two planet Earths would be needed to sustainably provide the resources collectively used by the more than eight billion people alive on Earth today. The aggregate "lifestyle" of people in the United States has an impact so heavy that if everyone on the planet consumed at the same rate, FIVE planet Earths would be required to provide for their needs and indulgences. Needless to say, there is only one Earth! And the biocapacity to support humanity is diminishing in almost every nation on Earth as a result of our heedless aggregate activities. For more information, see the website at footprintnetwork.org.

Business as usual is simply not tenable in the long run because it is diminishing the carrying capacity of Earth to sustain us. Fisheries are collapsing, forest cover is being reduced, and fresh water resources are being degraded and depleted. In addition to these adverse developments, the growing concentration of greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere is causing ominous changes in high temperatures and rainfall patterns, along with record floods, droughts, wildfires, intensifying weather-related disasters all around the globe, and damages and threats caused by rising sea levels. These are noticeable effects of "ecological overshoot", a phenomenon of overuse that contributes to ecosystem damages, serious conflicts over resources, and starvation, wars, diseases, mass refugee migrations and many other tragedies. These trends tend to have a disproportionate impact on poor people, who cannot buy their way out of problems or afford to relocate or obtain resources from somewhere else.

Continuing to encourage increases in human numbers is a colossally foolish course of action, and it is made much worse by stoked consumption that diminishes the ability of planetary ecosystems to support us. Better ideas on how to remedy these problems are investigated in this narrative. See the Earth Manifesto essay *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity, and Ecological Overshoot* for an expansive exploration of the best current understandings of these issues.

An Aside on the U.S. Supreme Court

Staunch conservatives understand that if only they had had a more ideologically "conservative" court in 1884 in San Francisco, rather than having had an insufficiently business-friendly Republican Judge Sawyer presiding, then hydraulic mining could have continued for an indeterminate number of years longer, yielding bigger profits for the hydraulic mining companies, despite the accumulating costs of downstream impacts being much higher.

Fast forward to modern times, and extreme conservatives have demonstrated that they learned this lesson, that if their guys had dominated the courts back in the 19th century, they could have prevailed. In shrewd recognition of this fact -- and cynically seeking expanded opportunities to abuse power -- Republicans have mercilessly spent the last 50 years pursuing a plan to stack federal courts and the Supreme Court with politically partisan judges who will impose their unpopular agenda priorities. They have been terribly successful in insidiously achieving this goal, and this is sadly allowing them to push pathologically retrograde plans and actions that harm countless millions of people -- especially women. Read all about the story of this legal system intrigue in my revelatory essay *Calamitous Consequences of Success of a Secret Conspiratorial Scheme to Capture the Courts.*

A strong and independent judiciary is vitally important to promote fair justice in a democracy, so federal courts should be independent of dominance by ideological extremists, and especially of those who want to allow the improper influence of private partisan interests. Judicial independence is an important aspect of the smart separation of powers in our Constitution, for it provides a balance to excessive concentrations of power in the executive or legislative branches of government. An independent judiciary is a part of the brilliant system of checks and balances that was designed to prevent abuses of power that unduly harm the nation's citizens.

The most consequential impacts of having conservatives dominate the Supreme Court is that they generally side with moneyed interest groups and amoral corporations against the best interests of the people. This is true in particular with regard to facilitating the corrupting influence of Big Money and *Dark Money* in our elections. The reason this is so consequential is that domination of the Supreme Court by conservatives aids and abets "the Biggest Financial Crime in World History", as described in *Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy.* In brief, this legal malfeasance involves on-going abuses of power that have allowed politicians to pile more than $33 trillion onto the national debt since 1980 to finance low tax rates for people on the highest levels of their incomes. To add insult to injury, this public borrowing swindle is made worse by allowing corporate entities

to artificially boost profits by foisting high costs of compromised public health and safety onto the people, instead of requiring real social and environmental costs to be included in the prices of goods and services.

The terrible irony in having social conservatives dominate the Supreme Court with politically partisan judges like Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett, is that they stand for two grotesque perversions of justice. First, they are committed to weakening the destiny-determining reproductive rights of women and the human rights of gay people. Simultaneously, and perhaps even more significantly, the records of ideologically conservative judges prove that they want to give giant corporations expanded rights and prerogatives, to the severe detriment of working folks, communities, and all people in the future.

How epic this irony! In a misplaced enthusiasm for taking away the rights of others, indoctrinated supporters of conservatives in the judiciary are willing to sacrifice many hard-won personal liberties, and to unconscionably allow infringements of the law against common sense protections of the greater good. Republicans torpedoed the independence of the judiciary by appointing more than 200 conservatives to lifelong appointments to federal court between January 2017 and January 2021. During that time, Mitch McConnell stopped obstructing dozens of Obama's judicial appointments and gave Trump the green light to appoint many of Leonard Leo's (the Federalist Society's) curated list of reactionary justice-undermining anti-democratic judges. They unfortunately expect these eminences to be counted upon to generally decide issues in favor of corporations and far-right partisans, even though this means their rulings will be harmfully negative to people and the best interests of society.

The judicial ideologies of Neil Gorsuch have been assessed as being more conservative than those of Anthony Kennedy, John Roberts, Samuel Alito and Antonin Scalia, and almost as extreme as those of Clarence Thomas. We are at a critical time in history, and we need a more moderate judiciary to counterbalance the authoritarian takeover in the USA that Donald Trump tried to cement into place in horrifying ways with regard to voting rights, trade tariffs, immigrants, refugees, Homeland Security secret police, abrogations of human rights, foreign intrigue, support for authoritarians like Putin, environmental despoliation, and the health, well-being and security of working people, children and millions of people in communities around the nation -- and billions in the world.

It is exceedingly unfortunate that crucial economic and environmental issues are inextricably tied to hot button social issues in the judicial divide between liberals and conservatives. What this means is that conservatives are able to fire up support for judges who are ideologically extreme by hijacking the emotions of those who are fervently opposed to women having a right to get an abortion, or gay people being guaranteed fair civil liberties and human rights, or government exercising sensible restrictions on the availability of guns and assault weapons. And then this support is used to decide unrelated issues in favor of economic elites and big corporations against the populace on matters relating to things like affordable healthcare, workers' rights, voter ID laws, campaign financing laws, protections of the environment and unconstitutional usurpations and abuses of power.

The most reasonable stance on hot button social issues would be to abide by the Golden Rule and give respect to live-and-let-live principles of fairness and mutual acceptance. Men should allow women to enjoy more equal rights! And let's put aside hot button issues for a moment, and concentrate our attention on important matters that involve the best ideas for creating a propitious future that respects well-being and sustainability.

After Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died in February 2016, his demise upset the narrow 5-4 advantage that ideological conservatives had managed to gain on the Supreme Court after Samuel Alito was appointed in 2006 to replace Sandra Day O'Connor, who had retired after 24 years of fair-minded service on the high court. Immediately after Scalia's death, unprecedented obstruction erupted in opposition to having President Obama fulfill his Constitutional duty to replace Scalia on the Court. This rancor revealed some fascinating facts. The fanfare and fury that faced a replacement for Scalia was supposedly about abortion and other hot button issues, but of course the most important issue to rich people and right-wing politicians is about judicial stances that favor corporations over the best interests of the vast majority of the American people. What Republicans want is an ideological high court, not an impartial one. They want someone in the mold of Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas or Scalia himself, for they can't stand having a more progressive Supreme Court. After all, they have wealthy patrons who have big expectations in return for political donations. Following Trump appointments of Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett to the Court, liberals could be seen expectorating in disgust.

Sandra Day O'Connor had been a conservative judge in Arizona before Ronald Reagan appointed her to the Supreme Court in 1981. Soon after retiring from her distinguished tenure on the high court to care for her Alzheimer-stricken husband, O'Connor expressed how important it is for our courts to remain independent from politics, stating: "… some political attacks on the independence of the courts pose a direct threat to the constitutional freedoms of Americans." She pointed out that judicial independence is under serious attack at the state level as well as the national level, and astutely added, "it takes a lot of degeneration before a country falls into dictatorship, but we should avoid these ends by avoiding these beginnings." Authoritarian dictatorship is becoming significantly more likely after the increasingly unhinged scheming demagogue Trump seized power and began appointing extremist judges, so the need for greater judicial integrity has become more and more crucial.

Sandra Day O'Connor also appropriately criticized "nakedly partisan reasoning" and political retaliation when senators or congresspersons dislike the result of certain cases. And she sensibly urged that a smarter system for "merit selection for judges" be created. A clever Tom Sawyer, transported to modern times, would really appreciate the common sense in this suggestion and enthusiastically exclaim, "Let's try it!"

In February 2016, O'Connor stated that President Obama should name a replacement for Antonin Scalia, and the Senate should consider the nominee, thereby opposing intently partisan arguments by Republicans that the vacancy should not be filled until after the 2016 national elections. She said, "I think we need somebody there to do the job now, and let's get on with it". Considering that it was President Obama's duty to name a replacement, and the Senate's duty to give fair consideration to the nominee, we should have gotten on with it! George W. Bush had called for a "dignified process" in the Senate after Sandra Day O'Connor retired in 2006, to be "characterized by fair treatment, a fair hearing and a fair vote." Then when the shoe was on the other foot, Republicans adamantly refused to give President Obama's eminently well-qualified nominee, Judge Merrick Garland, a hearing at all, thus engaging in a consequential dereliction of duty, and an egregious abuse of power.

Judicial appointments were a crucial issue in the 2016 elections because the new president would be in a position to select several Supreme Court Justices in the ensuing four years, and sure enough, Republicans imposed a "nuclear option" change in Senate rules in April 2017 that allowed them to appoint an extreme conservative to the Supreme Court without any support from Democrats. Five years earlier, Mitch McConnell had said he would not invoke the nuclear option *for Supreme Court nominees,* calling the right of the Senate minority party to filibuster "one of the most cherished safeguards of liberty in our government -- the right of a political minority to have a voice." This act upset the 4-4 balance between conservatives and liberals on the Supreme Court, and allowed conservative politicians in Congress and the White House to rig the highest court in the land to promote their retrograde agenda. This is another act of anti-democratic belligerence by the cunning politicians that controlled the U.S. Senate, who were disingenuously and wrongly acting as if the American people had given them a mandate to jam the rudder of the ship of state to the extreme right to benefit big corporate entities.

There was good reason to fear that Donald Trump, once taking office after being elected in 2016, would appoint judges who are likely to be a menace to constitutional rights of the American people. "Trump has an extensive and consistent record on two important constitutional issues: freedom of speech and property rights," wrote Cameron Smith in the Washington Times. "And that record is deeply troubling." Trump has a long history of filing bogus lawsuits to try to silence his critics or gain advantages, and he declared on the campaign trail that he wants "to open up those libel laws so when the New York Times writes a hit piece we can sue them and win money."

Cameron Smith continued: "For the uninitiated, that type of legal action is known as a strategic lawsuit against public participation (or SLAPP). A SLAPP uses the legal process as a weapon against free speech; it isn't designed to assert a claim likely to succeed on the merits. Instead, the plaintiff uses the cost, hassle and reputational damage associated with a lawsuit to force silence, avoid transparency, or intimidate a defendant from expressing their views. When it comes to elected officials, especially the president of our nation, the public has a significant interest in hearing information, opinion and commentary about their actions and words. That may not be convenient for the political class, but it's certainly a type of speech we have a national interest in protecting."

We should rightly fight abusive uses of SLAPPs with "SLAPP-back laws" that protect participation by the public in local and national decision making by penalizing blatant SLAPP actions. Since Trump so clearly demonstrated that he

is extremely thin-skinned and hates to be criticized, and that he wanted to use the law as well as the bully pulpit of Twitter and his bombastic rhetoric to suppress criticism, his stance is anathema to good governance and democratic fairness. He is one of the least admirable men to have ever won national political office, on account of his offensively litigious involvement in thousands of lawsuits, and his bigotry-amplifying and arrogant exploitation of courts, taxpayers, communities, and employees, contractors, immigrants and minorities.

I read the news today, oh boy, and once again it's a mind-blowing doozy. Even conservatives in Missouri look askance, on occasion, when they regard neighboring Kansas to the west, where the folks sometimes seem to be going crazy with bizarrely reactionary political shenanigans. Here's the scoop:

Our federal court system has become exceedingly politicized, so Republican-dominated state governments are taking steps that would shock our nation's Founders. In one sordid instance, according to an observer, "Kansas has officially gone insane." Dissatisfied that some judges in Kansas described cuts in spending on education as "destructive of our children's future", and that the Supreme Court of Kansas ruled that Republican spending cuts are unconstitutional, the GOP-stacked Judiciary Committee of the state senate debated legislation that would permit the impeachment of any Judge who acts contrary to the wishes of the legislature or the governor. "In other words, any Judge who strikes down or modifies any law the legislature passes, for any reason -- whether the law is blatantly unconstitutional, violative of existing laws, or otherwise, is thereby subject to impeachment proceedings by the state Legislature." This action ratcheted up strife within Kansas state government, where a previous law designed to cut off judicial funding was declared unconstitutional by the state's highest court.

Strange days, indeed! These authority-abusing Republicans apparently despise the checks and balances that our nation's Founders astutely wrote into the Constitution to prevent abuses of power. As Dartagnan wrote in the Daily Kos, eight months before the 2016 elections: "What's happening to Kansas should be a stark example to the rest of us of what the Republican Party in control of the U.S. Congress would do under any Republican President: Trump, Cruz, Kasich, any of them, it makes absolutely no difference. Any one of them would act as a willing and eager rubber-stamp for a Republican legislature hell-bent on satisfying the desires of a tiny minority of obscenely wealthy donors, leaving the rest of us to suffer the consequences. The behavior of the Republican Senate majority in refusing to even consider the President's nominations to the Supreme Court (under Barack Obama) is just another ominous reminder of their total disregard for government 'by the people.' And they absolutely will not stop, even if it means trashing the rest of the country -- and us along with it." Voters should take note in every election, and reject Republican politician's manipulative bids for One Party power. Otherwise, the USA will suffer highly negative consequences.

<u>The Key Value of Social Responsibility</u>

Jared Diamond made a cogent observation in *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed.* He contended that a paradigm shift is needed in how our leaders think and act. America needs leaders with "the courage to practice long-term thinking and make bold, courageous, anticipatory decisions at a time when problems become perceptible, but before they reach crisis proportions."

I love our country, and believe in Enlightenment Era principles that our Founders respected and found to be useful. These included the ideas of John Locke, an English philosopher, who along with other Enlightenment philosophers advocated respect for reason and critical thinking. They urged all people to question traditional institutions and customs, and endorsed liberal ideas of fair democratic representation, individual freedoms, and equality under the law for citizens. John Locke was one of the first socio-political philosophers to write about protections of people's civil interests, including personal liberties and certain guaranteed rights.

Clear understandings of situations and issues are crucial to good governance and future well-being. This point was confirmed by the character MacKenzie in HBO's *The Newsroom*, when he said: "There is nothing more important in a democracy than a well-informed electorate. When there is no information or, much worse, wrong information, it can lead to calamitous decisions that clobber any attempts at vigorous debate."

As debate after debate took place in the absurdly long run-up to the 2016 presidential election, the whole concept of people being well-informed was given glaring attention. Republicans in a debate in South Carolina charged each

other vituperatively with propagating lies, and the public was right to not trust what they were hearing. The notion that the substance of Republican doctrines is valid was convincingly challenged by economist Paul Krugman in a sensational New York Times opinion article, *The Time-Loop Party,* in February 2016. Listen in:

> The truth is that the whole G.O.P. seems stuck in a time loop, saying and doing the same things over and over. And unlike Bill Murray's character in the movie "Groundhog Day," Republicans show no sign of learning anything from experience. Think about the doctrines every Republican politician now needs to endorse, on pain of excommunication. First, there's the ritual denunciation of Obamacare as a terrible, very bad, no good, job-killing law. … Strange to say, this line hasn't changed at all despite the fact that we've gained 5.7 million private sector jobs since January 2014, which is when the Affordable Care Act went into full effect.
>
> Then there's the assertion that taxing the rich has adverse effects on economic growth, and conversely that tax cuts at the top can be counted on to produce an economic miracle. This doctrine was tested more than two decades ago, when Bill Clinton raised tax rates on high incomes; Republicans predicted disaster, but what we got was the economy's best run since the 1960s. It was tested again when George W. Bush cut taxes on the wealthy; Republicans predicted a "Bush boom," but actually got a lackluster expansion followed by the worst slump since the Great Depression. And it got tested a third time after President Obama won re-election, and tax rates at the top went up substantially (actually only from 35% to 39.6%); since then we've gained eight million private-sector jobs.
>
> Oh, and there's also the spectacular failure of the Kansas experiment, where huge tax cuts have created a budget crisis without delivering any hint of the promised economic miracle. But Republican faith in tax cuts as a universal economic elixir has, if anything, grown stronger, with Mr. Rubio, in particular, going even further than the other candidates by promising to eliminate all taxes on capital gains.
>
> Meanwhile, on foreign policy the stock position has become one of utter confidence in the effectiveness of military force. How did that work in Iraq? Never mind: The only reason anybody in the world fails to do exactly what America wants must be because our leadership is lily-livered if not treasonous. And diplomacy, no matter how successful, is denounced as appeasement. Not incidentally, the shared Republican stance on foreign policy is basically the same view Richard Hofstadter famously described in his essay, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics:* Whenever America fails to impose its will on the rest of the world, it must be because it has been betrayed. The John Birch Society seems to have won the war for the party's soul."

Paul Krugman concluded *The Time-Loop Party* with this rueful observation: "But don't all politicians spout canned answers that bear little relationship to reality? -- No!"

<u>The True Wealth and Well-Being of Nations</u>

The economist Adam Smith had contended that an "invisible hand" naturally promotes the best interests of the public, though that seems to be a dubious proposition. Almost all the rewards of our capitalist system have been going to the top 10% of Americans, and a ridiculously big proportion to the top 1%. The top one-tenth of 1% is doing even more astonishingly well. Meanwhile most of the liabilities are dumped on everyone else, including all people in future generations.

In contrast to what is truly consistent with our national needs, the domineering control by those who advocate economic fundamentalism and Strict Father ideologies is contrary to fair policy-making and smart national planning. Uncompromising conservatives have been insisting in recent years on the triumph of a narrow agenda, which always includes -- generally at the top of the list -- a dictate that taxes be cut for those with the highest incomes. The fact that tax rates on the top levels of income are near the lowest level since the end of the Roaring Twenties in 1929, at the beginning of a harsh economic depression, makes this priority unacceptable.

> "Those who corrupt the public mind are just as evil as those who steal from the public purse."
> --- Adlai Stevenson, in *Speeches of Adlai Ewing Stevenson* (1952), p. 99

Accompanying debt-financed tax cut schemes, public funding for schools and universities is being cut, and tens of millions of young people are being saddled with huge burdens of debt for their educations. These debts are being

foisted on students not only because our political representatives are becoming less willing to adequately fund public education, but also because the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 imposed large administrative and bureaucratic costs on both state and local governments, thereby reducing the amount of money available to teach children well. The net effect is that we are literally leaving millions of students behind in favor of red tape and bureaucratic testing, and of excessively high interest rates and oppressively unfair terms on student loans.

In general, debt-financed low tax rates for rich people are a bad plan. So are absurd provisions that allow giant multinational corporations like Exxon, Bank of America, Google and Apple to make record profits yet dodge billions of dollars in income taxes. These schemes are forcing spending cuts for many programs that make life a little easier for people in the middle class, and those who are poor. Engineers of austerity are ratcheting up stresses on the masses, in effect, in both the USA and Europe. Our nation's physical infrastructure is sadly dangerously deteriorating, and our national debt is spiraling upwards, while rich people are getting richer. The current level of our deficit spending and national debt represent a real folly -- and a serious crime against our descendants. Let's act to alter these outcomes!

A more sensible and fairly conceived allocation of national spending is needed. Our emphasis should be refocused on ways to provide truer national security for the majority of the American people. The 98% of people who earn less than $250,000 per year should DEMAND that taxes on all personal incomes over $250,000 be assessed at rates that are progressively graduated at higher rates. And, as is contended in the illuminating film *We're Not Broke*, big corporations should be required to pay income taxes on their profits instead of being allowed to hide them overseas. It is time to find ways to achieve vital goals without always yielding to rich people's desire to pay a bare minimum in taxes. The best interests of the vast majority of Americans are NOT to be found in economic fundamentalism and political conservatism!

When we are struggling to decide how to rein in the dangerously burgeoning national debt, we should refrain from focusing so exclusively on politically misguiding "small potatoes" budget items like the Trump administration did -- cutting budgets for the Environmental Protection Agency to undermine its effectiveness, and slashing funding for Planned Parenthood, public broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts and other institutions and civic organizations that contribute to making our society salubriously civilized. More recently, Kevin McCarthy and MAGA extremists in the House held the USA hostage to achieve their regressive goals by threatening to cause a default on our debt.

Conservatives often work tirelessly to cut spending on programs that benefit poor people and those in the middle class, and they combine this approach with allowing tax loopholes for corporate entities and real estate moguls and hedge fund managers and other well-connected people. And they staunchly defend high levels of military spending and inflated costs for police and prisons, and give tax exemptions to churches, no matter how political their activities. These are crazy priorities!

<u>Authoritarian Leaders and Authoritarian Followers</u>

"Social conservatism and neo-conservatism have revived authoritarian conservatism, and not for the better of conservatism or American democracy. True conservatism is cautious and prudent. Authoritarianism is rash and radical. American democracy has benefited from true conservatism, but authoritarianism offers potentially serious trouble for any democracy."

--- John Dean, *Conservatives Without Conscience*

Social conservatives tend to be "authoritarian followers", says Bob Altemeyer in his compelling online book, *The Authoritarians*. Altemeyer is a psychologist who outlined a list of twelve revealing tendencies in the behavior of extreme conservatives, and he has examined many studies about authoritarian followers and the authoritarian leaders they obey. He concludes, "… the greatest threat to American democracy today arises from a militant authoritarianism that has become a cancer upon the nation."

Altemeyer noted that it is "mind-boggling" that conservatives revere those who serve their country in military capacities or sacrifice their lives defending freedom, yet support moves to take people's freedoms away. He asks

"How can they go on believing things that have been disproved over and over again, and disbelieve things that are well established?" He also wondered, "Why do their leaders so often turn out to be crooks and hypocrites?"

Right-wing extremists and fervent believers in the righteousness of white supremacy and racist groups, it turns out, have been behind many domestic terrorist attacks and mass shootings and much gun violence and repression, along with the defiance of folks in the U.S. involved in public land disputes like the Sagebrush Rebellion. Despite what conservatives claim in order to scare people into supporting them, the main threat to America is not Islamic extremism. Statistics show that white supremacists and non-Muslim extremists have been responsible for almost twice as many people being killed since the 9/11 attacks than have been killed in the U.S. by radical Muslims. Statistics like this "reveal a vast difference between public perception and the number of actual cases in which Muslim extremists have claimed American lives. So why aren't more people outraged about domestic terrorists? Because then we'd have to admit that white supremacy is still a problem." Black Lives Matter!

"The secret of freedom lies in educating people, whereas the secret of tyranny is in keeping them ignorant."
--- Maximilien Robespierre

Clarity of Understanding

Conservatives willfully characterized Barack Obama's presidency in wildly inaccurate and demeaning ways, and blamed him endlessly, and portrayed America's prospects in bleak terms. After Trump gained the power of the presidency, the economic, social and environmental ideologies that conservatives want to impose on the country had the perverse effect of making such desolate characterizations actually come true.

In Trump's inaugural address in January 2017, he talked about "American carnage", claiming that it "stops right here and stops right now." With his manifest failures in coping with COVID-19, and politicizing it, and the 2020 recession and continued systemic racial injustices -- and his assaults on decency, honesty and democracy -- this "carnage" has become horrific. We must fix this, and no deceitful authoritarians should be eligible for office.

Paul Ryan once warned that we need to prevent the social safety net from becoming "a hammock that lulls able-bodied people to lives of dependency and complacency." The 2017 Republican Tax Cut plan that borrowed trillions of dollars to give bigger tax breaks to wealthy people and corporations is crazily irresponsible, especially because the scam also involves slashing spending on the social safety net. Yet that is the ideological bent of most Republican politicians these days. Many of them have the brazen effrontery to call people who earn so little that they pay no income tax "moochers", and even more preposterously, "lucky duckies."

Paul Krugman set a vivid scene in an Opinion piece in March 2016 titled *Republican Elite's Reign of Disdain*. Analyzing why the angry base of the Republican Party had rejected establishment candidates at that time in favor of Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, Krugman pointed out that party elites blame moral and character failings of voters themselves, rather than admitting their own role in contributing to unnecessarily dire circumstances being experienced by millions of blue-collar workers. Obstruction-oriented tactics of Republican politicians and their backwards stances have sadly contributed to creating these adverse conditions. Hear Paul Krugman's words:

> Stripped down to its essence, the G.O.P. elite view is that working-class America faces a crisis, not of opportunity, but of values. That is, for some mysterious reason many of our citizens have, as Paul Ryan puts it, lost "their will and their incentive to make the most of their lives." And this crisis of values, they suggest, has been aided and abetted by social programs that make life too easy on slackers.
>
> The problems with this diagnosis should be obvious. Tens of millions of people don't suffer a collapse in values for no reason. Remember, several decades ago the sociologist William Julius Wilson argued that the social ills of America's black community didn't come out of thin air, but were the result of disappearing economic opportunity. If he was right, you would have expected declining opportunity to have the same effect on whites, and sure enough, that's exactly what we're seeing. Meanwhile, the argument that the social safety net causes social decay by coddling slackers runs up against the hard truth that every other advanced country has a more generous social safety net than we do.

An evaluation of whether people in other advanced countries are suffering the same morbid symptoms as middle-

aged whites in the U.S. is contradicted by a United Nations study of 156 countries that found the Scandinavian country of Denmark to be the happiest nation on earth. Denmark has achieved this enviable distinction by creating a society that makes its citizens feel more secure, and there is little political corruption. This lofty evaluation was based on a variety of factors, including people's health, access to medical care, family relations, job security and social factors that include political freedom and degree of government corruption.

Denmark is a notably egalitarian nation where women hold more than 40 percent of the top jobs in the public sector, and it is known for its extensive and generous cradle-to-grave caring for the welfare of its people. Few people complain about the high taxes they pay to help finance this successful state, because in return they all benefit from a health care system where everybody has free access to a general practitioner and hospitals, and there are excellent schools and universities, to which students are given monthly stipends for up to seven years.

Economist Jeffrey Sachs from Columbia University was one of the authors of the UN's report. He expressed the laudable opinion that happiness and well-being should be high in every nation's priorities. "Human well-being should be nurtured through a holistic approach that combines economic, social and environmental objectives," he said in a statement before the World Happiness Report 2016 was officially presented in Rome in March 2016.

The Roman Catholic Church welcomed the study, declaring that happiness is "linked to the common good, which makes it central to Catholic social teaching," according to Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, a key adviser to Pope Francis. After Denmark, the next happiest nations were Switzerland, Iceland and Norway, followed by Finland, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Australia and Sweden. The United States was in 13th place, and there is no doubt we could and should do better by adopting much more egalitarian measures, and by choosing to root out corrupting forces that stand in the way of creating a healthier and happier society.

Paul Krugman continued his March 2016 article *Republican Elite's Reign of Disdain:* "But the Republican elite can't handle the truth. It's too committed to an Ayn Rand story line about heroic job creators versus moochers to admit either that trickle-down economics can fail to deliver good jobs, or that sometimes government aid is a crucial lifeline. So it ends up lashing out at its own voters when they refuse to buy into that story line."

Psychological Understanding

A unique animated film titled *Inside Out* tells the story of the animating inner emotional workings of the human mind through its characters Joy, Fear, Anger, Disgust and Sadness. Watch this thought-provoking film produced by Pixar to better understand essentially how the emotional control center in our brains functions. Then imagine, in the context of these psychological impulses in each of us, everything that is going on in the consciousness of the general public in reaction to the narration of events being filtered through the bizarre self-centered interpretations spewing forth from the twisted and deceitful point of view of the brain of Donald J. Trump.

All the characters in the emotional control centers of our brains have important purposes, and every person is healthiest and most sane when they do not repress any of them. Sadness helps us connect with other people, so that we feel empathy at afflictions experienced by others, and it encourages us to try to alleviate their sadness with sincere expressions of compassion, thus contributing to healing. Fear can keep a person safe from harm by imagining worst-case scenarios. Anger can protect people from injustices. Disgust can keep one safe from being poisoned. And Joy orchestrates these emotions in an effort to make a person happy and whole.

Every time I see a new image of Trump making his latest outrageous, dishonest and/or nonsensical proclamation, I imagine virtually plunging into the brain of every person who sees or hears or reads his bombastic and toxic demagogic spin. In our minds, we can visualize the Trumpster struggling to grab the colorfully animated emotion controls, and one can just imagine him wearing a Wizard of Oz costume with a pointy hat. He has smugly banished Joy and her happy perspectives from the premises, and all the other control center characters have been suspended on puppet strings. The inner Trump is fiendishly holding Fear and Anger over a bonfire, and agitating them, and he is goading Disgust with a tiny pitchfork. A stream of vaporized "Social Truth Serum" is being pumped into the control center, but it has come from a real cheap batch that tends to make people lie while pretending to tell simplistic, disingenuous and or idiotic versions of the truth. Trump has bound poor Sadness to a chair in her short skirt, and silenced her by putting ear muffs over her ears in a spot where she can only witness the

proceedings, while the wily master manipulator is trying hard to slut-shame her, and has forbid her from expressing her feelings or enjoying her natural rights -- or telling her #MeToo story about sexual abuse.

In such an agitated state, each person's mind is being subjected to anxiety, irritation and a new trumped up variety of Psychological Adjustment Disorder. Curiously, when any memory is seen as salient or relevant enough to us -- or when it has revealingly been repeated enough times -- neurotransmitter messengers in our brains like dopamine and glutamate reinforce the preservation of short-term memories in long-term memory.

The psychological toll being taken on the American people by Trump's rancorously divisive attacks on millions of people is incalculable, and the price we are paying in intensified strife and insecurity with excessive Republican influence is beyond full comprehension. There is no doubt that the overall well-being of humanity on planet Earth is taking a severe hit due to Trump and his fellow Party members' racist invective, inflammatory anti-Muslim and anti-Chinese attacks, anti-Semitic incitement, offensives against immigrants, and his anti-environmentalism, climate change denial and zeal to undermine the common good in shameless pursuit of money and power. Trump's crudeness, antagonistic rhetoric and distractions will have psychological ramifications for years to come, because he stirred up toxic racist prejudices in the political bloodstream of our culture, amplifying their affect.

These ideas remind me of the 1993 novel *The Celestine Prophecy* and its insights into "Control Dramas." People seek to control others, and arguments between people are often about who will hold "the power." This goes all the way back to our deepest existential fears and core anxieties about survival, and about finding meaning and purpose in life. Control Dramas arise when people try to manipulate others to dominate them, or force others to give in to their wishes. The Celestine Vision website clarifies: "As we try to control this core anxiety, what is still our greatest tendency? We attempt to repress the fear by pushing it out of our minds with desperate activities of choice, pursued with a kind of unconscious frenzy. We shop when there is no money in the bank. We follow celebrities instead of studying our own lives. We play video games or watch sports obsessively. We partake in all sorts of addictions and diversions and ideologies, all with a desperate need to fill that void of unknown meaning in our lives. We try to manage this deep anxiety by seeking power and control over other people. This gives us a false sense of security because each controlling act only temporarily gives us the energy and surety we need." … "In a real sense, the core of what is wrong with humanity is one that is a spiritual matter."

An awareness of control drama behaviors in others, and in ourselves, can make it easier for us to take steps "to transcend and interpret them on a much deeper level, both spiritually and psychologically." Donald Trump is the Control Drama Queen of our time, and his outrageous conflicts of interest and abuses of power have been unprecedented in their far-reaching threats to national security and the general welfare. All sane Americans should resoundingly renounce him and the shenanigans he perpetrated and continues to evade accountability for.

We must find a way to right our ship of state by emasculating the extremism of Republican politicians, and to force them to help fix our democratic republic by getting Big Money out of the driver's seat. We should soundly reject corporate hegemony over affairs around the world, and demand more honorable commitments to common good goals. We can't afford to continue to allow corporations to run roughshod over people and the environment to maximize private profits and funnel them into the bank accounts of the wealthiest few.

We must find ways to offset the *Dark Money*-fueled crusade to discredit progressive politicians, which was first directed at Bill Clinton and then at Barack Obama, and indeed toward every Democratic politician who dares to oppose the political machine of the Koch billionaires and the harangues by dishonorable operatives like Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson and staunch fundamentalists on the Religious Right like Ted Cruz and the money-corrupted Trump supporter Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham. Franklin Graham perversely engages in political stunts like promoting a national day of prayer "that God would protect, strengthen, embolden and direct" Trump against his "enemies." Under his leadership, "the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association has gone from preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to preaching hatred and Trumpism." Time and time again, he has exploited his father's legacy for political purposes. like when he questioned President Obama's Christian faith for years and more recently when he demanded that Mayor Pete Buttigieg repent for being gay.

Above all, we must throw MAGA Republicans out of office to derail their unethical and downright dangerous demagoguery and their efforts to fight for business prerogatives that reduce protections of American workers

and torpedo protections of the environment, and fail to take steps to mitigate the spiking costs and risks of climate disruptions. We cannot let them abuse power like dictator wannabes in a third-world banana republic.

To lead the USA into a better future, the fixes needed are not all that revolutionary. Consumers and investors must agree to some concessions to advance good citizen goals, as articulated in *The Common Good, Properly Understood,* and everyone should get on board to support plans like those set forth in a visionary *Bill of Rights for Future Generations,* and in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies.* These action plans should be implemented in powerfully non-regressive ways, and as soon as possible.

"Don't Mess with Texas!"

The odd alliance between economic fundamentalists and religious evangelicals in the U.S. today is not really about misconceptions, ignorance or backwardness. It is about a more ignoble motive: the struggle to gain and maintain domineering power and control. "Conservative" religious people like former Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin and former Texas Governor Rick Perry and the sternly bombastic Ted Cruz and the now deceased Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia sometimes seem to emulate the hyper-conservative Wahhabi sect of rulers in Saudi Arabia, whose highest values are strict control of the populace and austerely puritanical accepting obedience.

These American brethren deceive the faithful by speaking of freedom but then revealing their true colors in the things they support: trying to teach Creationism in public schools, and pushing an economic agenda that is most favorable to billionaires and a social agenda that opposes the real interests of poor people and those in the middle class -- and most women, young people, gay persons, African Americans, Latinos and immigrants. And these partisans are hostile to the best understandings of modern science. These are atavistic attitudes that make their dogmatic convictions suspect, and render absurd their contorted literal interpretations of their holy books.

Curious proofs of these contentions can be found in numerous places. Consider this revealing one: the official Platform of the Republican Party in Texas! This falls in the "you-can't-make-up-this-stuff department". Here is what the Republican Party wrote into its 2012 platform as part of a section on education: "Knowledge-Based Education: We oppose the teaching of Higher Order Thinking Skills, critical thinking skills and similar programs."

This condemnation of the teaching of critical thinking skills is downright dumb. Texas conservatives apparently want Americans to close their eyes to more expansive understandings. Even the hard-line anti-evolutionist Pat Robertson once declared that young people and the future of the Christian religion will be lost if religious authorities insist on literalist teachings that are contrary to evolving scientific understandings. When Texas Republicans try to rewrite history, as they have done for years in school textbooks by insisting on teaching religious dogma as being fact, it is a desperate, wrong-headed effort. It is socially foolish to oppose early childhood education, accurate sex education, broad multicultural understanding, or the teaching of evolution in biology classes. In stark contrast, Texas Republicans officially support "school subjects with emphasis on the Judeo-Christian principles upon which America was founded." What happened to commendable commitments to the separation of church and state? Manipulative intrigue by social conservatives sometimes coincides with an insidious form of theocratic Christian Dominionism, making it invidiously fascist-like, and corruption incarnate!

The highly respected cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead offered a cogent counterpoint when she observed: "Children must be taught how to think, not what to think."

Stephen Colbert ridiculed the Texas Republican Platform in a program piece he called *On the Straight and Narrow-Minded.* He called their platform "an attempt to repeal the Enlightenment", and then humorously added, "I blame Galileo. For centuries we had a perfectly good explanation for the order of the Universe. The Bible says the Sun goes around the Earth, making us the center of the universe. And you know what? Everyone was happy. And then numnuts over here (Galileo) gets a telescope for Christmas, uses his precious critical thinking skills and suddenly the Earth goes around the Sun, blah blah blah, and now we have lesbians." LOL!

When right-wing school administrators in Texas and Florida make misbegotten ideological attempts to establish a strict curriculum and controls over independent thought, this emulation of extreme social conservatives like those in Saudi Arabia is ridiculous. The hostility of Texas conservatives to science makes it appear that they want their schools to be strict, like Islamic *madrasas* (schools that indoctrinate children in places like Pakistan). In these

Islamic schools, dogma and rote learning are emphasized, and critical thinking is suppressed. Obedience is the highest value in such systems, and in male-dominant cultures. Knowledgeable people realize that Texas isn't necessarily being backward or ignorant, but that conservative politicians in the state are striving to gain political advantages by imposing rigorous control over young people to force them to conform, and to prevent them from thinking for themselves. Extreme evangelical fundamentalism is a relatively recent development in the USA, and attitudes like those held by rigid Dominionists are negative ones for our society as a whole. Shame on them!

Trump, for his part, once declared without conscious mockery, "I love the poorly educated". Flatter 'em and fool 'em, eh, Trump? This master manipulator wanted, in effect, to increase the ranks of poorly educated folks by arrogantly prioritizing huge new tax breaks for rich people and promoting private schools, and deplorably further crippling our ability to invest in public schools and young people's futures.

Sold Down the River!

It is noteworthy that Samuel Clemens, aka Mark Twain, expressed a wide range of marvelous understandings that are still highly relevant to the biggest issues we face today. The value of his common sense far-sighted ideas is explored in detail throughout this manifesto. Think again for a moment about the captivating tale Mark Twain spun in his novel *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson.* This story is set in a period before the Civil War when slaves in Missouri regarded being sent down the Mississippi River to more oppressive farm slavery in the Deep South as equivalent to being condemned to hell. A beautiful white woman in the story happened to be a slave because her ancestry was 1/16th black. She had an infant son who was born the same day as her master's son. Realizing that her son could be sold down the river to a harsh fate at the whim of her master, she switched the two boys, and they grew up in reversed roles. The tale unfolds many years later with a murder, a trial, and the use of the then-new forensic science of fingerprint analysis. The denouement is surprising; the real murderer is condemned to life in prison, but because he has been discovered to be 1/32nd black, the Governor of Missouri sympathizes with the slave owner and pardons the prisoner --- so that he can be sold down the river!

Fast forward to today. Now rich people and Republicans in Congress are selling the American people down the river. In the years from 1980 to today, the average incomes for the bottom 99% of Americans have been more-or-less flat, after inflation is taken into account, and things got much worse with the pandemic recession. Hard times? Not for the rich! The richest Americans have been increasing their share of the economic pie, and they have achieved this by radically rigging our tax system to primarily benefit those who are already wealthy.

A tax expert has stated, "The U.S. tax code is the most political law in the world." Think about this provocative perspective. When judged from the outcome of overall changes in our tax code in the past 40 years, the primary goal of these changes has been to shift the burden of tax obligations from wealthy people and big corporations to all other taxpayers. It is practically obscene that such a shift has been financed by using more than $33 trillion in borrowed money. This shift is regressive because it adversely affects middle class and poor people while generously rewarding the rich. By giving excessively extravagant financial advantages to the super-rich, this irresponsibly fails to promote the greater good of the American people, and is egregiously unfair to young people and those to come in future years.

As Corsican national hero Pascal Paoli stated, "Who is to be rich and who is to be poor is not divinely ordained."

There is no question but that our tax system has played a determining role in making the rich vastly richer since 1980 while the poor have become poorer and compensation for middle class workers has stagnated, and the national debt has exploded. The saga of these trends is incisively exposed in David Cay Johnston's *Perfectly Legal: The Covert Campaign to Rig Our Tax System to Benefit the Super Rich - and Cheat Everybody Else.*

These understandings make elections decisive for our future well-being. Almost all Republican politicians push plans to slash taxes even further on the highest income earners, and on corporations. They claim over and over again that such actions will trickle down to help everyone else, even though the evidence, trends and statistics prove this claim to be false and deviously disingenuous, and to have obscenely inequitable impacts. The national motto of France proclaims a higher ideal: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* -- Liberty, Equality and Brotherhood! These surely would be more honest ways to "make America great again" -- by aligning policies a little more with ideals that are

increasingly fair-minded and broadly auspicious.

"One of the most striking differences between a cat and a lie is that a cat has only nine lives."
--- Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar*

A Broadside Against Con Men, Unrepentant Liars and Duped Followers

Any true patriot would be concerned about interference in our elections by a hostile foreign power to influence the outcomes of our choices of leaders in our democracy. They would feel strongly that effective steps should be taken to prevent future episodes of pernicious election meddling. Here is what the Mueller report had to say: "Russian intelligence officers who are part of the Russian military launched a concerted attack on our political system. They used sophisticated cyber techniques to hack into computers and networks used by the Clinton campaign. They stole private information and then released that information through fake online identities and through the organization WikiLeaks. The releases were designed and timed to interfere with our election and to damage a presidential candidate (Hillary Clinton, to help Donald Trump get elected.)"

"If our country's political health were better, the Russian attack would get the attention of every American", wrote columnist Dana Milbank. "But Mueller gives us more credit than we deserve. His report assumed that our leaders would take seriously the Russian threat when presented with overwhelming evidence. Instead, Trump laughs about the whole thing with Putin, Republican leaders quash bipartisan efforts to protect the 2020 election from on-going attacks, and GOP lawmakers, instead of pondering the president's culpability and Mueller's damning findings, demand investigations of investigators, who they ludicrously accuse of 'treason' and an attempted 'coup.' In appealing to their better angels, Mueller was naive. Yet even as he entered the Justice Department briefing room, stooped and alone, he continued to act as though things were on the level. Russia is preparing to attack us – again, and Trump is poised to benefit. Unlike in 2016, we now know Russia's bad intentions, thanks to Mueller."

A 5-minute video by 'Republicans for the Rule of Law' revealed a damning perspective of Trump and hypocritical Republicans in Congress who unpatriotically deceive the people for their own partisan political advantages. The video featured three prominent former Republican officials who are among more than 1,000 former prosecutors who signed a statement asserting that Robert Mueller's findings would have merited felony obstruction of justice charges against Trump, if he wasn't the sitting president (and thus supposedly protected from indictment by interpretations of the Department of Justices' Office of Legal Counsel).

The Mueller Report was basically a referral to the House of Representatives to begin impeachment hearings, as it is the duty of Congress to investigate "high crimes and misdemeanors". These treacherous activities included misconduct by officials such as perjury, abuses of authority, bribery, intimidation, misuse of assets, dereliction of duty, unbecoming conduct, refusal to obey lawful orders, tax evasion and other crimes against the people.

Donald Trump should have been removed from office for ten Articles of Impeachment that were considered by House Democrats, as set forth by ethics lawyer Norman Eisen in his book *A Case for the American People.* Eisen was appealing the Senate's impeachment not-guilty verdict "to the higher court of public opinion".

Those offenses include not only the Ukraine Plot extortion, but also Trump's colluding with Russia to interfere in the 2016 elections, his violations of election finance laws, obstruction of the Mueller investigation, stonewalling of subpoenas to cover-up malfeasance, torpedoing congressional investigations, telling many lies, engaging in financial conflicts of interest and abuses of authority, involving himself in a hush money scheme carried out by his convicted lawyer/fixer Michael Cohen, dangling pardons to keep potential witnesses against him silent (like Roger Stone), usurping the power of Congress by spending money on his border wall without authorization, targeting his adversaries with abused powers of the presidency, and violating the emoluments clause of the Constitution.

Tom Coleman, a former GOP congressman from Missouri, penned a powerful Op-Ed in late May 2019 that appeared in *The Kansas City Star,* in which he called not only for the pretender Trump to be impeached, but also his enabler, V.P. Mike Pence, because he said their installation in the two top positions in the executive branch involved many misdeeds and much wrongdoing, and so was not legitimate.

Before the Ukraine high crimes intrigue, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, along with many other Democrats,

expressed serious reservations about impeaching Trump in these tribally hyper-partisan times, seeing that it would be politically risky, even though no American leader has been more egregious in violating laws, decency, honesty, ethical norms, shared values, real populist priorities and the U.S. Constitution. One reason Democrats hesitated on this issue is because Republicans had a narrow majority in the U.S. Senate at the time, so it was highly unlikely that a required two-thirds of Senators would vote to remove Trump from office. Nancy Pelosi recognized this situation, and stated that, as Abraham Lincoln said in a debate with Frederick Douglas, "... public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed."

Public opinion eventually moved to the point that Trump's reelection was unlikely, even though most Republican politicians are deeply complicit in supporting their cultish and authority-abusing leader. This is exceedingly odd. Yes, it was politically risky for House Democrats to vote to impeach, but it is the sworn constitutional duty of all of our representatives to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic," and to "well and faithfully discharge the duties" of their office, "So help me God." One of the main duties of our representatives in defending the Constitution is to protect it against acts of despotism and high crimes and misdemeanors. The first impeachment investigation built on the findings of the Mueller Report in exposing Trump's misdeeds and obstruction of justice and attempts to cover up all these things.

Trump deserved to be impeached and removed from office, as Pete Buttigieg, the impressively poised, intelligent former Mayor of South Bend, Indiana, said during a town hall on MSNBC in early June 2019, even before the Ukraine plot revelations. Then, after outrageously inciting violence against Congress on January 6, 2021, Trump richly deserved to have been found guilty in the second impeachment trial and prevented from ever seeking office in the future. And now, as 2024 begins, the Department of Justice has indicted him for his seditious conspiracy to prevent the peaceful transition of power, and for his illegal removal of classified documents from the White House and concealing them in Mar-a-Lago. His legal shenanigans to evade acceountability are unethical.

Mitt Romney's business record at Bain Capital proved that he is a shrewd capitalist, and he would likely have been a good chief executive of our nation if the primary goal was to eliminate hundreds of thousands of government jobs and eviscerate collective bargaining rights for workers, and outsource work to people in nations abroad that have cheap labor and fewer environmental protections. Romney was a spokesman for the wealthy who is out of touch with the reality and sensibilities of working people. He acted as if high rates of joblessness are important to him, which they should be to every politician, but his instincts and propensities as a capitalist made him ruthless and unempathetic. "I like being able to fire people who provide services to me …", he said during the 2012 presidential primaries. Even in the context he delivered this remark, he sounded like a tone-deaf Donald Trump on *The Apprentice*, arrogantly declaring, "You're fired!"

Some Catholic bishops in the U.S. characterized the plans of Republicans like Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan during the 2012 election as "immoral" because they would have given hundreds of billions of dollars in additional tax breaks to rich people while slashing spending on education, infrastructure and social safety net programs. Sister Simone Campbell called the Romney/Ryan budget plan "totally antithetical to either scripture or sanity." Sister Simone is a Catholic nun and Executive Director for a social justice organization named NETWORK. She had famously invited Mitt Romney to spend a day with a group of nuns so that he could honestly understand the true plight of working poor people. Romney declined, for he apparently had better things to do, like attending a $50,000-per-plate fundraiser dinner where he demeaned the 47% of Americans who earn so little money that they pay no income taxes. These nuns expressed the moral conviction that people should honor sensibilities like the ones Jesus expressed with respect to poor people, rather than demonizing the working poor and accusing them of being lazy, or blaming immigrants for taking millions of jobs most American citizens are unwilling to do.

<u>Insights Engendered from the Gold Rush</u>

Samuel Clemens was just 27 years old in 1863 when he began calling himself by his defining *nom de plume* Mark Twain. The Civil War was raging that year, and President Abraham Lincoln gave a famous address at Gettysburg in Pennsylvania in November 1863 in which he expressed a strong conviction in the vital importance of government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Unfortunately, the Gilded Age of robber barons was then just

getting underway, and wealthy industrialists were overwhelming the power of the people with often unethical or downright illegal business and political activities.

"Behind every great fortune," Honoré de Balzac reputedly declared, "lies a great crime." That is a crude and rude generalization that happens to have numerous instances that corroborate it. Jane Meyers quotes a billionaire in her sensational exposé *Dark Money* who sets forth the primary parameter of an über-crime that he perversely calls the "golden rule" -- *He who has the gold is deserving of the power to rule.*

One of Mark Twain's most famous satirical observations was: "We have the best government that money can buy." Let's chuckle ruefully along with the great author as we ponder his meaning in these words. Clearly he was NOT expressing admiration for the powerful corrupting influence of Big Money in our political system. So let's delve into the messy particulars of the money being spent to buy our government and representatives in modern times, and assess how well this deal is turning out.

There are several categories of this spending. First, there are the big bucks being spent by politicians to get elected, and by Super PACs on their behalf. Much more money was spent on the national elections in 2012 than on any elections in the history of the world, and this outcome was directly due to the wrongheaded 2010 ruling by the Supreme Court that corporations and unions should be allowed to spend unlimited amounts of money buying "free speech". Every national election since then has featured much more spending, especially by billionaires like those in the Koch network and their coldly calculating ilk. Institutionalized bribery is obviously thriving.

Huge sums of money are also being spent on lobbying activities to influence legislation at federal, state, county and local levels of government. The amount of money spent by special interests to influence laws has increased substantially since the year 2000, probably more than tripling in the past 24 years. Over 12,000 lobbyists actively work in Washington D.C. to sway politicians to do their bidding, despite the fact that our representatives really ought to be striving to improve the general welfare of the people rather than putting policies into effect that further enrich the few. One can just imagine the shenanigans going on in the halls of Congress, and the pressure exerted by this overwhelming tide of special interest money and advocacy on the 100 Senators and 435 House members who should be standing up for the best interests of the people.

Another gauge of whether we have the best government money can buy can be found by looking at the total amount spent by the federal government. In 2023, spending was just over $6 trillion, which is more than triple the $1.8 trillion spent in the year 2000. Back in Mark Twain's day, federal spending was less than $3 billion, which is equivalent to an inflation-adjusted $95 billion today. Spending has thus basically increased from $95 billion to more than $6,000 billion. In terms of the percentage that federal spending represents of the GDP, in 1910 we spent about 8% of GDP, and by 2023 almost three times as much was spent, at more than 21% of GDP.

So we have ratcheted up the amount of money spent by the federal government in the past century, and with all this spending, do we really have good government? The cost of buying and running the government is at record highs (and it really spiked during the pandemic), yet the degree of fairness in our democratic process is fading, and it is less than the fairness found in many other nations. Our representatives have become extremely partisan and unwilling to work together to achieve common good goals. Giant banks, oil companies and other multinational conglomerates are evading taxes and exploiting their advantages at the expense of the best interests of their employees and the people in general. The national media is controlled to a large extent by big corporations that often present a distorted view of issues and the news. All in all, we have poor governance at a very high price.

The folksy celebrity Will Rogers provided an incisively funny counterpoint: "Be thankful we're not getting all the government we're paying for"!

A new Gold Rush mentality seems to be pervading our twenty-first century economic and political systems. Giant corporations are rashly exploiting resources and showing a serious disdain for the law, and moreover seriously evading taxes. They are often obtusely and selfishly disregarding the collateral consequences of their actions. Many industrial activities have harmful impacts on natural ecosystems and human health, and these negative effects take place literally and figuratively downstream <u>in location</u>, as well as downstream <u>in time</u>.

These are reasons that, when we are formulating national priorities and public policies, we should think beyond ourselves and our times, and give closer consideration to the impacts of our aggregate activities on the well-being and prospects of our descendants in the future. This is another reason why there is such a transcendent need for a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

Disclaimer: A Digression on Racism

Mark Twain's original novel about Huckleberry Finn became big news in 2011, 101 years after the author's death, when a whole hullabaloo took place over a revised edition of the book in which more than 200 references to "nigger Jim" were replaced with a sanitized "slave Jim". Political correctness has its place, and there surely have been too many offensive and ill-willed uses of the N-word in the past century. But it is foolish to misconstrue the social satire of this book, which "allows mature readers to see the social injustices of the time period for what they were", as one observer saw the situation. "Mark Twain knew that the very baggage of the word itself would leave readers feeling wounded and uncomfortable. And yet he used it. Over and over again to make a very clear point -- that racism feels uncomfortable *because it is wrong.*"

Far-ranging racial prejudices still exist in the USA, especially in Southern states of the Bible Belt. These are revealed in attitudes like that expressed by Donald Trump, according to John O'Donnell, a former president of Trump Plaza Hotel & Casino, who has written about Trump having accused a financial executive who was black of being lazy, "because laziness is a trait in blacks. It really is; I believe that. It's not anything they can control."

Such biases are grotesque, and we should strive to mitigate the far-reaching legal, social and economic injustices associated with them, and with the discrimination, racial inequalities, and lack of opportunities that accompany them. Unemployment among black people in 2012 was over 14% during the hard times in the aftermath of the recession of 2008, compared to about 8% among white people. And unemployment among black teenagers was startlingly almost 40%, while it was about half that among white teenagers. A similar dynamic played out with job losses after the pandemic began. Profoundly far-reaching social problems are affiliated with such statistics, so they should be more fairly addressed in our national policies and priorities.

With regard to efforts to sanitize Mark Twain's novel, it was admittedly undertaken with the commendable goal of helping ensure this great book would be more widely read. It is an unfortunate fact that the book has been banned from libraries and classroom reading lists in many places over the years because of its use of the N-word. Hmmm … There is always a wide variety of different ways to look at any situation. "Whatever!"

I personally feel that altering the vernacular speech of the times and its cultural context alters the authenticity in Mark Twain's writings. I further feel that readers should be alert to issues that underlie stories in renowned literature, and should try to understand historical context and symbolism used by prominent writers, as well as deeper and more important themes and meanings in their words.

This issue reminds me of a video of Chris Rock doing a funny comedy routine in Johannesburg, South Africa. He did a riff about the context in which words are used, like the word "nigger" that Mark Twain had used to such controversy. Chris Rock exclaims, "Shit, last year the NAACP had a funeral for the word nigger!" Then he provided many exclamatory contexts in Black culture in which the word is used with cultural appropriateness between Blacks, but he repeatedly poses the question, "Can white people ever say the word nigger?" The refrain in his routine, in answer to this question, is repeatedly "NOT REALLY!!!" This part of the comedy routine ends with one amusing context in which it actually would be appropriate. But the bottom line is this: there is no question that when words are used insensitively, disdainfully, manipulatively or with malicious or racist intent, that is when they are the most reprehensible.

Observations Concerning Social Fairness

If Mark Twain were alive today, he would write scathing satirical diatribes against modern day robber barons and billionaires who have bought our political representatives and caused our national priorities to be distorted and our national decision-making to be corruptly determined. Since the great writer and philosopher has been dead for over 112 years, this obligation is being assumed by yours truly, his illegitimate great-granddaughter, Tiffany B. Twain, Doctor of Philosophy.

I will channel Mark Twain again here by quoting his observation, "Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand." Against the laughably preposterous prescriptions of rich people on Easy Street, no one should be duped into standing for their retrogressive agenda. Wealthy people chose money-obsessed Mitt Romney as their standard bearer and slick spokesmen in 2012, along with the social conservative Paul Ryan, a supposed deficit hawk who had voted with George W. Bush numerous times to cut taxes and increase government spending by using the expediency of deficit financing. Facts like this, along with disinclinations of Tea Party and MAGA Republicans to compromise for the common good, have led some observers to charge these politicians with pathological hypocrisy. The eagerness of most conservative politicians to undermine women's reproductive prerogatives and human rights for LGBT people makes these attitudes even more objectionable.

Trump and almost every Republican politician push to slash taxes on earned income, capital gains, dividends and inheritances. These scheming politicians personally often have big vested interests in lower tax rates, just as Mitt Romney did when he made similar proposals in 2012. Tax cuts targeted to benefit the rich represent a blatant conflict of interest for such politicians. If Romney's tax plan had been in effect in 2010, the tax rate on his earnings would have been reduced from 14% to less than 1% on his $21 million income. That made his position on this issue corrupt and outlandish! And Trump? Try to imagine the huge personal gains he has made from the regressive changes Republicans made in the tax code in December 2017. His tax returns should be examined!

Americans made the consequential mistake of giving power to Republican politicians despite their unfair political positions, which are often dishonest, biased against non-whites, fiscally irresponsible, and contrary to the greater good of most Americans. Let's demand that all of our representatives compromise together to commit our nation to fairer policies that really serve to strengthen the middle class and increase overall security. Citizens should demand that new policies be put into place that increase opportunities and move a significant number of people out of poverty, and facilitate social mobility while also addressing overarching environmental challenges. These are more reasons why a Bill of Rights for Future Generations is needed for guidance, as articulated in the Earth Manifesto. Join me in demanding such an initiative be promoted and ratified.

Republicans in many states have been passing laws that deprive millions of people of their right to vote, especially after they lost the presidency in the 2020 elections. These vote-restricting efforts are mainly designed to deprive Blacks, Latinos, students and low-income voters of the ability to vote. The Republican Party appears to be looking back longingly at the days before 1920 when women weren't allowed to vote, and even seem envious of the good old days when the U.S. Constitution was being written, because black slaves at the time were counted as being equivalent to only three-fifths of a white person in political representation and tax apportionment.

If women could be denied the right to vote and votes of black people could be discounted by two-fifths, Republicans might be able to dominate our politics permanently. They could more easily impose authoritarian rule and "right-wing social engineering" plans and fiscal austerity measures on the masses, and dismantle more provisions of the social safety net. They could also proceed with a further emasculation of collective bargaining rights of workers, and prevent reforms designed to limit Wall Street abuses of power. They could enforce more forced birth anti-choice laws against women's prerogatives in life, and they could undermine more of those inconvenient protections of the environment. White folks in the Southern States, still angry about federal government requirements to end racial segregation that were enacted in the 1960s, could then get rid of such bothersome aggravations, and Republicans and Dixiecrats could enact new Jim Crow laws, and give personhood rights to fertilized eggs while unreasonably taking rights away from all females of reproductive age.

Conservatives see that liberals have managed to get many progressive changes instituted in our society, and they apparently believe that a return to the halcyon days of old can only be achieved by slashing the size of the government and giving those rich people who own half of all the money and assets in the U.S. a significantly larger proportion. They in effect subscribe to the slogan, "Power to the Few!" The swindles and shrewd propaganda of the moneyed class have managed to enlist to their distinctly unholy causes the unsavory passions of racists, white supremacists, extreme religious fundamentalists, enthusiasts of unrestricted gun ownership, anti-establishment and anti-government types, and people who oppose women's liberation and empowerment.

Dirty politics associated with uncompromising ideological "purity" are resulting in socially negative outcomes by undermining policies oriented toward the greater good. Broadminded initiatives are being sabotaged that would otherwise help fairly solve big problems. Bubble economic policies and inadequate regulation of banks and Wall Street have led to widespread global economic and social turmoil. These adverse impacts on the lives of billions of people are the newest face of what Naomi Klein called "disaster capitalism" in her compelling book, *The Shock Doctrine*. These policies, being so narrowly focused, are strongly correlated with abuses of power by rich people, and with right-wing authoritarian drives for domineering power. Let's unite to demand positive change!

That's All, Folks!

A veritable plethora of philosophers and spiritual leaders, scientists and visionaries, politicians and economists, poets and writers, and artists and filmmakers have informed my thinking in this manifesto. John Fowles. Will and Ariel Durant. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Galileo Galilei. Voltaire. Dante Alighieri. Mark Twain. Thomas Paine. Charles Darwin. Ambrose Bierce. Jack London. John Steinbeck and Doc Ricketts. The Dalai Lama. Pope Francis. Karl Marx. Ayn Rand. Bill Moyers. Martin Luther King, Jr. Paul Hawken. Carl Jung. Sigmund Freud. Albert Einstein. John McPhee. Bill Bryson. George Lakoff. John Maynard Keynes. Joseph Stiglitz. Milton Friedman.. John Kenneth Galbraith E.O. Wilson. Robert Reich. Paul Krugman. Jeffrey Sachs. Dr. Leonard Shlain. Tiffany Shlain. John Lennon and Paul McCartney. It has been a long and winding road!

These people have vitally important perspectives to convey to us all, and I hope readers will find this rambling assemblage of ideas to be illuminating and valuable. Once we have achieved more holistic understandings, let us then break through to making positive changes in our world and economy, politics, behaviors and habits!

Ideas germinate in the arcane interstices of our minds, and they percolate and evolve. In a sense, they are the collective expression of a boldly progressive strain of evolving thought. Such ideas posit that a revolution in our worldviews is necessary to throw off the yoke of business-as-usual activities, and to offset arguments by apologists, promoters and enablers of the status quo, and by backwards social and political movements.

The revolution we need is a peaceable one within our minds, to prevent a more violent one in the streets. Comprehensive understandings of problems and issues are needed, and should encompass both causes and consequences. They should also help us identify and implement the best solutions. We need a revolutionary transformation in our human modus operandi, and we must soon begin to act more fairly and sanely, and in ways most likely to be sustainable.

This manifesto is an entertaining yet seriously fair-minded assessment of history, trends, understandings and ideas designed to help us together break through to more comprehensive worldviews. By setting forth good ideas, they will be lying around conveniently available to provide overarching direction for us to begin a far-reaching and propitious restructuring of our societies when they are needed. Hopefully, we will not wait too long, or be required to experience too much of a long unfolding emergency of catastrophic events in the twenty-first century before taking smarter courses of action, for there will be plenty of economic challenges, natural disasters, environmental calamities, resource wars and violent conflicts to come. The time is long overdue for us to truly remake the world in ways that are fairer, safer and more sustainable. That's the theory of it, anyway!

I'm beginning to feel another one of those Huck smiles coming on; "one of them crooked ones you smile when you see the joke's on you. It's a feeling I reckernized from other times before this, when big expecterations come crashing down and all you can do is ask why you was sap-head enough to have had them expecterations anyway."

Well, hope springs eternal, and it's a powerful force that may drive us to achieve great things. I sure hope so! Help!! Let us all seek a way to collectively move forward toward a goal of fulfilling Mahatma Gandhi's advice: "Be the change you want to see in the world"!

As astute Adlai Stevenson once said, "Change is inevitable. Change for the better is a full-time job."

Thanks for reading this.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

Hannibal, Missouri

May 1, 2024 (First composed on April Fool's Day, April 1, 2011, and updated occasionally thereafter.)

The Common Good, Properly Understood

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
Latest update: March 12, 2024

Introductory Observations

The common good is a core value for humanity, and it is taking on vastly increased importance as our population has grown over the years. Back in the hardscrabble days of hunting and gathering, before methods of growing crops and domesticating animals emerged, small clans of nomadic peoples lived in the most advantageous niches on Earth, and their impact on the natural world in their struggle for survival was relatively slight. Today human civilizations have grown to include more than 8 billion people, and they have become much more widespread and destructive all around the planet, starting with the choicest places and expanded to more and more marginal ones.

Our human numbers have quadrupled since 1930, growing from only two billion people at that time. This rapid growth is causing a wide array of significant problems. Our proliferating needs are depleting fossil fuels and mineral resources, and decimating wildlife populations, overexploiting fisheries and causing extensive harm to wildlife habitats. We are also rashly causing erosion loss of vital topsoil, and polluting waterways and oceans. We are paving over wetlands, clear-cutting vast tracts of forests, and dumping large quantities of wastes and toxins into the environment. We are even causing portentous changes to the temperature and alkalinity of the oceans, and altering the gaseous composition of the atmosphere, contributing to ominous changes in weather patterns all around the world. We are thus upsetting the crucial natural balance of ecosystems on Earth.

We are confronted with a growing realization today that the survival and well-being of our species is becoming increasingly threatened by these developments. The best hope for our heirs in future generations is that we will find good ways to mitigate the most severe impacts of our activities. Competition for natural resources is getting more intense as they are being depleted, and the dog-eat-dog nature of our profit-prepossessed economic activities is becoming a serious liability. The wiser collaborative qualities of our human natures are consequently becoming ever more important to the overall health, well-being and sustainability of life.

Our understanding of common good goals, and of the best means to collectively achieve them, is becoming more critical to our flourishing and survival. This essay explores these big issues, and casts the bright light of sanity and common sense on better ways forward.

Thomas Paine in *Common Sense* stated, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." Let's figuratively start the world over again, and do so in ways promisingly consistent with the greater good!

Perspective on What Constitutes the Common Good

President Theodore Roosevelt was one of the greatest conservationist leaders in American history. He played a pivotal role in having created the U.S. Forest Service in 1905, with a responsible mission of sustaining the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands in order to meet the needs of people in current and future generations. Gifford Pinchot, the first Director of the Forest Service, sensibly defined conservation as being "the greatest good to the greatest number of people over the longest period of time".

This concept is also an excellent definition of what constitutes the common good. The main things that characterize the common good are a productive economy, broadly-shared prosperity, measures that ensure fairness of opportunity and a strong middle class, good governance, responsible leadership, public safety, good public schools, fair access to healthcare, an affordable social safety net, effective measures to improve the overall quality of life, fair political representation for all citizens, democratic self-determination, strong commitments to collective security and peace building, robust checks on political corruption, sensible regulation of banks and big businesses, prudent preparedness, openness and accountability in politic, a reasonably independent and non-partisan judiciary, fair trade, a free press, a clean and secure energy system, smart investments in both urban renewal and well-being in rural areas, well-managed public transportation, and guaranteed freedom of speech and civil liberties, beginning with those guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. The common good also requires strong protections of healthy ecosystems, fresh water sources, unpolluted air, and a stable climate, along with reasonable safeguards to preserve biological diversity and protected parks, open spaces and wilderness areas.

In contrast, there are many things that are drastically antithetical to the common good and well-being in general. These include things like allowing water and air pollution, environmental damages, the stimulated depletion of resources, wasteful energy policies, uncontrolled emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, suburban sprawl and "tragedy of the commons" assaults on the ecological commons. Many other aspects of human actions, behaviors and institutions are contrary to common good goals, including monopoly practices, harmful abuses of power, excessive corporate influence in elections and lobbying, unfair cronyism, fraudulent activities, severe inequities, no-bid government contracts, discriminatory employment practices, excessively expensive education, unaffordable healthcare, boom-and-bust economic policies, harm-engendering special perks and privileges for elite constituencies, government secrecy in vital civic matters, overly harsh punishments for those who commit crimes, ruthless racial injustices, oppressive gender discrimination, and aggression in war.

People could, and should, strive to create fairer societies that operate in much better harmony with public health and the common good, and with core principles of human dignity, individual liberty, fair representation and equal treatment under the law. The common good is much broader than corporate goals, because corporate purposes are narrowly focused on just two overriding objectives -- maximizing profits and limiting liabilities of owners and top management. This essay examines these topics, and other related ones, in detail.

"The status quo has many guardians, but the future is an orphan."

--- Timothy E. Wirth, United Nations Foundation

<u>Invisible Hands of Self-Interest</u>

Famous Scottish economist Adam Smith wrote the veritable manifesto of capitalism and free enterprise in the momentous year 1776. His book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* postulated that the wealth of a nation is measured by the productivity and living standards of *all of its people,* not just by its accumulated wealth in the hands of a few. His belief was basically that private interests and self-interested behaviors contribute to the good of the whole of society. He was clearly interested in the greater good of a nation and society in its sum total. This is a consequentially important idea.

Adam Smith contended that "the invisible hand" of individuals pursuing their own self-interest naturally serves, in a free market, to promote the good of the whole of society. He believed that the welfare of the entire community would generally be improved by private interest activities and self-motivated behaviors. But he didn't seem to have foreseen the extent to which social and environmental ills associated with industrialization would be made worse by unbridled greed and abuses of power inherent in human nature and capitalist economic systems.

Adam Smith did not imagine the far-reaching extent to which the majority of people would be manipulated by corrupting influences of Big Money, powerful vested interests, political propaganda and insidiously persuasive marketing and promotion. And he could not have anticipated how terribly divisive it would be for micro-targeted advertising on social media platforms to hijack people's emotions and skew national decision making and priorities. Adam Smith also did not recognize the significant risks the economy would encounter, or the adverse potential for economic depression and systemic collapse due to the short-term orientation of business goals. It has become clear

that, when groups like bankers, investors and homeowners rationally ignore risks of "low-probability, high impact events", financial meltdowns can occur like the one suffered beginning in late 2008.

How should we rightly understand self-interest? -- Ah, here's the catch! Self-interest is one of the most powerful of human motivations, but self-interest is NOT identical to our own individual selfish interests. In the end, self-interest is necessarily linked to the common good. What exactly is right and proper with regard to self-interest and the public good? What is best for humanity as a whole? This essay grapples with questions such as these, and provides some good answers.

Economic fundamentalists and people in corporate-sponsored think tanks have used the metaphor of an invisible hand to conceal the actual hands that rig the system and exploit resources -- and take advantage of workers. These interests regard the maximizing of profits as the highest purpose. But the corporations and politicians that wield the most powerful influence in our society often contribute to increased inequities, harsh injustices and notably heightened systemic risks. They also are significantly responsible for environmental damages, and lamentably even for reckless aggression by the military, to the detriment of the common good.

Adam Smith also believed, it is stated in Wikipedia, that "a sort of system of social pressure persuades the wealthy to do, of their own volition, what the society around them requires." That was then; this is now -- many rich conservatives today seem to have developed a money-stoked hubris that makes them feel entitled to an ever-growing proportion of the nation's wealth, so they act as though they are immune to conscience-provoking social pressures and guilt and shame -- and acting responsibly. They consequently support politicians who reject voices calling for a more steeply graduated system of taxation, and instead they demand further public-debt-financed tax breaks for rich people and corporations. This disproportionately funnels profits into their pockets, thus undermining society's best interests and democratic fairness of elections and good governance altogether.

Mark Twain may have given indirect recognition to Adam Smith's ideas about rich people and their inextricable relationship with others in society when he noted: "In all the ages, three-fourths of the support of the great charities has been conscience money." But in this era of MAGA Republicans, fears of social ostracism for overly obtuse selfishness, brazen greed and compulsive pursuits of power sadly seem to be having a diminished effect.

<u>Creating Fairer Societies</u>

To promote the common good and improve the general welfare of the people, one of the most important things we must do is to strengthen our democracy. This has become sensationally clear at this moment in history because our democracy is under severe strain due to political polarization, deceitful misinformation, false conspiracies, big lies about widespread election fraud, insurrectionary sedition, and threats posed by divide-to-conquer abusers of authority and factions using Big Money to cement their domineering and undemocratic power in place.

Republicans profess a faith in trickle-down economics, but what they really do with large new debt-financed tax cuts for rich people is to radically increase inequalities in our society. This is dangerous. According to the highly respected historians Will and Ariel Durant in their brilliant *Lessons of History*, the wise Athenian statesman and lawmaker Solon was faced with a similar dilemma of conflict between influential elites and the rest of the populace in Greece more than 2,500 years ago. He was given the responsibility and power to reform the status quo to save the republic from violent revolution, and succeeded at this by instituting far-reaching changes in the Greek constitution and economy to deal fairly with this serious situation.

To achieve common good goals, smart Solon-wise compromises are needed between the Few and the Many, and we must farsightedly and wholeheartedly embrace progressive reforms designed to make our country much fairer.

Let's come to our senses, my fellow Americans! We've been sold down the river by politicians pandering to rich people and corporate entities that have corrupted our system of taxation and our national spending priorities, as well as our international trade deals and our elections, voting laws and our campaign financing rules -- and our federal courts and the Supreme Court and our system of criminal justice. Our very values themselves are being undermined by this misguided faith in a deceitful trickle down tax-cutting ideology. Our representatives have allowed vested interests to abuse the power of their money to deprive the American people of a fair voice in these

matters. This shrewd strategy is now posing an existential threat to our great American experiment in democratic governance.

Mark Twain provided a good ray of hope in these matters, and some guidance, when he wrote, "In this country we have one great privilege which they don't have in other countries. When a thing gets to be absolutely unbearable the people can rise up and throw it off. That's the finest asset we've got -- the ballot box."

To strengthen our democracy, we should take steps to ensure more people are able to exercise their right to vote, and listen to voices of all constituencies, and not ignore the best interests of the vast majority of the people. We should reduce the determining influence wielded by corporations and their lobbyists in our national decision-making and governance. We should support strengthening the power of workers and organized labor to collectively bargain, thereby reducing the colossal imbalance of power between employers and employees. And we should make the judiciary more independent and less politically partisan, and enact reforms that a significant majority of voters want, like guaranteeing reproductive rights to women, protecting DACA individuals, passing more auspiciously effective gun safety laws, protecting the environment, and getting Big Money out of the driver's seat of our politics.

"We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive."

--- Albert Einstein

Having a megalomaniacal demagogue demanding to be elected to exert dictator-like control over a freedom-loving people is decidedly antithetical to the common good. Those who commit racial violence or hate crimes against Jews, Asians, Muslims or people of color are despicable, and so are those who dog whistle for such violence. Those who perpetuate sexual violence against women are also disgustingly reprehensible. And those who incite political violence are guilty of a horrible crime against the common good, shredding social cohesion and causing harm to people and our communities and societies. Such people are like mob bosses, the most guilty of all.

<u>The Big Lie – A Massive Grift</u>

The Big Lie has become "a grift" that is being used to motivate Republican voters and donors to give money to support conservative candidates and political groups and their often democracy-undermining agenda.

We are faced right now with a severe deterioration of U.S. elections and liberal democracy. More than 100 top political scientists and democracy scholars issued a joint Statement of Concern in June 2021 to express their "growing alarm" about events since the 2020 presidential election. "They all agreed: Trump's crusade to delegitimize the 2020 presidential election, combined with the GOP's state-level efforts to suppress voting in state legislatures across the country, 'call into question whether the United States will remain a democracy.' These aren't the words of online pundits or partisan talking heads. Leading experts on how democracies survive -- *and how they fail* -- are issuing an urgent call to action to the Senate: Do whatever is necessary to pass federal voting rights protections."

A sensational investigative report published in the *New Yorker* makes it starkly clear that conservative organizations funded by *Dark Money* -- like the Heritage Foundation, ALEC and the Federalist Society -- are primary pushers of big lies about election fraud being told by Trump Republicans, and they are using the ginned up outrage over Donald Trump's loss to push laws that disenfranchise voters of color and millennials and Democratic-leaning groups. They are cynically doing this under the guise of "election integrity." The insightful investigative journalist Jane Mayer tells this sensational story in her article *THE BIG MONEY BEHIND THE BIG LIE.*

Note: Black lives matter. White lives matter. All lives matter. Greater equality is the only acceptable recourse.

Internecine efforts to prevent greater fairness are scary and dangerous, in addition to being undesirably anti-democratic. Another sinister dark-money organization, funded by secretive donors, is the group FreedomWorks that was founded by the billionaires David and Charles Koch. This organization "once concentrated on opposing government regulation, and is now demanding expanded government regulation of voters."

For decades now, these groups have proven to be extremely successful at getting narrowly focused and often unpopular laws passed through state legislatures. Since the 2020 elections, more than 400 laws have been

introduced in 49 states with the tactical aim of keeping voters from casting their ballots one way or another. This rewriting of elections laws to favor Republicans and their donor-class agenda has led to 18 states enacting more than 30 laws aimed at suppressing votes. These laws are designed to achieve the goal of further rigging election outcomes to benefit Republicans, and white people, and men over women. Reactionary Republican elected officials didn't like what voters had to say at the polls, so now they are silencing them.

Richard Haven, a law professor at the University of California, Irvine, and one of the foremost election-law experts remarked about the array of new laws passed by Republican state legislatures since the 2020 election: "It's not just about voter suppression. What I'm really worried about is election subversion." Some provisions in these new laws would make voter intimidation at the polls easier, and allow state legislatures to put in place partisan election officials that could overturn the expressed choices of the majority of voters. Trump now completely controls the Republican Party, and is basically "laying the groundwork to steal the 2024 elections."

David Frum, a political commentator and former speechwriter for George W. Bush, evocatively observed: "If conservatives become convinced that they cannot win democratically, they will not abandon conservatism. They will reject democracy." This is reprehensible, and it is NOT good. And it is happening right now in the USA.

It is a falsehood that election fraud is widespread in America. Actual instances of voter fraud in the U.S. have been rare. However, the truth of the matter is that there really IS consequential malfeasance in elections, and it involves voting restrictions, extreme partisan gerrymandering, institutional bribery, discriminatory practices, misinformation, big lies, the stacking of federal courts with political partisans, and the excessive influence wielded by Big Money and Dark Money interests and corporate money in elections and lobbying.

To win political battles, Republicans use *The Reactionary Political Debate Playbook: Karl Rove's Bag of Dirty Tricks*. One of the worst of these tactics is to accuse others of doing what they themselves are doing. Since the 2020 elections, Republican operatives have been repetitively proclaiming that their supporters must "stop the steal". But look here -- the main steal that has been happening for years has been the steal of excessive political influence by Republicans. They probably gain nearly 20 seats in the House of Representatives through surgical gerrymandering of congressional seats. They win many election contests by successfully depriving people of the ability to vote who are likely to vote for candidates opposing their own. They use deceit, subterfuge and devious messaging talking points, and fear mongering and right wing propaganda financed by Big Money donors to usurp and abuse power and push trickle down policies.

<u>Ideas Seeking Their Place in the Sun</u>

In the context of these deliberations, let us seek the truth and implications contained in Senator Edward Kennedy's remarks (born in 1932, he died in 2009), when he said: "If by a liberal, they mean someone who looks ahead and not behind; someone who welcomes new ideas without rigid reactions; someone who cares about the welfare of the people, their health, their housing, their schools, their jobs, their civil rights, their civil liberties; someone who believes we can break through the stalemate and suspicion that grips us, if that is what they mean by a liberal, I am proud to be a liberal."

One odd thing about extreme conservatives is that they stridently defend freedom, but many of their ideas about freedom are contested concepts that are grotesquely contrary to Golden Rule understandings of freedom, or truly fair stances. The insightful linguist George Lakoff evaluated the nature of contested concepts like this in his thought provoking book *Whose Freedom? The Battle Over America's Most Important Idea*. This book is a reply to repeated invocations of "freedom" by conservative people trying to justify their narrow agendas.

This issue became a hot button issue during the calamitous coronavirus pandemic. Conservative politicians politicized preventative public health measures like mask wearing and social distancing mandates and lockdowns during crisis hospitalization surges, and then when vaccine requirements were put into effect.

Indiana University became ground zero for its eminently reasonable requirement that students and faculty must get vaccinated to attend classes in person beginning in August 2021. This put sensible emphasis on the greater good of the student body and surrounding community. Eight students cynically filed an emergency appeal to the Supreme Court to overturn this requirement, despite the fact that it already allowed religious exemptions. They

bizarrely demonstrated with signs that read MY BODY, MY CHOICE -- very weird for a staunch red state where coldly-calculating politicians like Mike Pence have railed against women's reproductive rights for decades.

"Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on," wrote Mark Twain, "or by imbeciles who really mean it."

It is sometimes valuable to give balanced consideration to all opinions. Steven Pinker, a respectable linguist and psychologist, wrote an article delving into the perspectives that George Lakoff provides to readers. He criticized Lakoff's analyses as a "cartoonish depiction of progressives as saintly sophisticates and conservatives as evil morons". But since truth generally lies somewhere between conflicting contentions, let's just agree that more honest perspectives on unalienable rights and fair-minded concepts of freedom and social responsibility are needed to ensure the broadest and most responsible possible constellation of personal liberties for the American people. Steven Pinker's astute summary is a bit abstruse, but worth hearing:

> Conceptual metaphor, according to Lakoff, shows that all thought is based on unconscious physical metaphors, with beliefs determined by the metaphors in which ideas are framed. Cognitive science has also shown that thinking depends on emotion, and that a person's rationality is bounded by limitations of attention and memory. Together these discoveries undermine, in Lakoff's view, the Western ideal of conscious, universal and dispassionate reason based on logic, facts, and a fit to reality. Philosophy, then, is not an extended debate about knowledge and ethics, it is a succession of metaphors: Descartes' philosophy is based on the metaphor "knowing is seeing," Locke's on "the mind is a container," Kant's on "morality is a strict father." And political ideologies, too, cannot be understood in terms of assumptions or values, but only as rival versions of the metaphor "society is a family." The political right likens society to a family ruled by authoritarian parenting, whereas the political left prefers a family cared for with nurturant parenting.
>
> Political debates, according to Lakoff, are contests between metaphors. Citizens are not rational, and pay no attention to facts, except as they fit into frames that are "fixed in the neural structures of their brains" by sheer repetition. In George W. Bush's first term, for example, the president promised "tax relief", which frames taxes as an affliction, the reliever as a hero, and anyone obstructing him as a villain. The Democrats were foolish to offer their own version of tax relief, which accepted the Republicans' framing; it was like asking people not to think of an elephant. Instead, they should have re-framed taxes as "membership fees" necessary to maintain the services and infrastructure of the society to which they belong.
>
> Lakoff says that American conservatism appeals to a notion of freedom rooted in strict-father morality, but that this is a hijacking of the traditional American concept, which is based on progressive values of nurturance and empathy.
>
> The left and the right are also divided by another cognitive style: conservatives think in terms of direct causation, where a person's actions have an immediate billiard-ball effect (people get fat because they lack self-control), while progressives think in terms of systemic causation, in which effects fall out of complex social, ecological, and economic systems (people are fat because of an economic system that allows the food industry to relentlessly promote unhealthy fast foods and lobby against government regulation).

<u>An Aside on Foreign Entanglements</u>

Theodore Roosevelt's strategy on the international stage was "to walk softly, but carry a big stick". This was an approach that is much more consistent with common good goals and the desire of our Founders to avoid foreign entanglements than our pursuit of interventionist military policies since the Second World War, and the use of the U.S. Air Force, Army, Navy and Marines to implement strategies that entangle us in foreign involvements. Aggression allows American armed forces and drone bombers to act as judge and jury and executioner in geostrategic operations that cause civilian deaths and casualties to countless numbers of innocent people, along with terrible turmoil and the displacement of millions, while heightening destabilizing risks of terrorist blowback.

George W. Bush once claimed that God told him, "George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq." I don't know if he was being stunningly delusional or coldly calculating and colossally deceitful in these words, but it seems suspicious that the rationalizations he used to sell the war in Iraq to the American people kept changing, and that they were

formulated to downplay the costs and risks and highly probable negative outcomes of preemptive warfare aggression. I personally think Bush should have listened to a more reliable voice than God's, like Mark Twain's when he warned Americans that it is much easier to stay out of a war abroad than to get out. Mark Twain saw through flimsy and deceptive rationales to the heart of the matter when he declared we ought to let peoples in other countries "deal with their own domestic questions in their own way". He expressed the convincing conviction that the American eagle should not put its talons into peoples in other lands, especially when motivated by fundamentalist religious motives to impose our values on *Persons Sitting in Darkness.*

The Ecology of Macro-Economic Theory

Macroeconomic theory provides the largest scale and biggest picture perspective of how we should rightly understand economic activities in terms of self-interest and the common good. There are basically two ideas of macroeconomics. One is that societies should be structured to maximize production and consumption and the creation of wealth. This theory posits that propitious prosperity will result from such policies, and that it will trickle down to the masses, and the prosperity will somehow allow the environmental harmfulness of business activities to be mitigated and the injustices associated with industrial capitalism to be alleviated.

A contrasting and more comprehensive idea is that we should emphasize behaviors and decision-making that create a broader prosperity that is consonant with the sustainable ecological health of human communities and natural ecosystems. This latter idea posits that only by nurturing, protecting and restoring the soundness of natural systems will a more salubrious and widely beneficial well-being be realized that will be most advantageous for the vast majority of people in the long run. This is the best and most probable route to a sustainable future.

"We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals; we now know that it is bad economics."
--- President Franklin D. Roosevelt, January 1937

It is simple, really, in a complex kind of way. There are overarching considerations to all our individual, national and global problems. Ultimately, the only sensible and moral courses of action are those that are in harmony with the long-term common good, *including the interests of people in future generations*.

Morality, in its origins, consists of those things that are essential to the health and preservation of a social group. Moral right action should therefore be a function of sociology, and what is right for society depends on the well-being of the majority AND of people in the future. Right action is not merely a function of economic expediency or political ideology or of religious orthodoxy, theological dogma or stimulated fears. Since the things that are right and proper can most accurately be seen as the ones that are best in the long run, it is clearly not right to neglect the interests of our heirs in future generations by pandering principally to greedy and heedlessly short term oriented interest groups today.

If we irresponsibly choose to live as if there will be no tomorrow, the tomorrows that our children and theirs, and theirs, and theirs will inhabit will be ones that are far less salubrious than they could be, and should be.

Illuminating Reflection

We need a better gauge of what really serves to increase our "national happiness". This would be a truer measure of the common good, not just some cartoonish propaganda or manipulative whitewashed ideological deception.

The Golden Rule ethic of reciprocal respect represents a salubriously adaptive truth that provides the most auspicious guidance in human affairs. This age-old ethic predates the Bible, and embodies an evolutionary fact that cooperative collaboration within social groups is the overriding human good. Even in stiff competition, a reasonable modicum of fairness is a prime value.

Properly regulated competition has many positive aspects. In contrast, laissez-faire ideologies are anti-social and anti-democratic when they allow monopoly practices or harms to consumers or excessive pollution or financial fraud or the wanton squandering of natural resources or excessive exploitation of the populace or the absurd piling on of national debt to give the highest income earners nearly the lowest tax rates since 1929.

Praying for Ascendancy and Victory

"If you beseech a blessing upon yourself, beware! lest without intent you invoke a curse upon a neighbor at the same time."

--- Mark Twain, *The War Prayer*

Barack Obama noted in his first Inaugural Address that "a nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous." A broadly-based prosperity is much more in accord with the common good and the ideals of our Founders than a narrowly-focused one. It is a tragedy for the majority of Americans that the dominant ideological arguments of the Reagan, Bush and Trump Republican years rationalized bigger disparities of wealth in the world and a new age of conspicuous consumption and stoked inequalities. It is now time for us to redesign our system to ensure that trickle-down economics is replaced by policies that encourage middle class and bottom-up prosperity. It is time for governments and tax systems to be made fairer and more progressively structured.

Contemporary conservatives say that lower taxes, laissez-faire governance, smaller government and free markets are the best ways to achieve general prosperity. They promote public debt-financed tax cuts that mainly benefit taxpayers who have the highest incomes and highest net worths. They claim that tax breaks are the best strategy to stimulate the economy and create jobs and wealth, and ramp up investments. 'Trust us!', they say, claiming that such policies will trickle down to benefit all Americans. Such people are often basically trying to make economic and moral justifications for greed and selfishness.

On the other hand, many others see empathy-based moral values that champion both individual and social responsibility as being more important than conservative ideas that leave out the latter half of the equation. These people understand the compelling need for protecting the common wealth and assuring ecological sanity and striving for domestic tranquility and peaceful coexistence. Such people recognize an overriding need for us to restructure our societies to ensure greater economic justice. They see that it is much fairer to make the tax system more steeply graduated. They believe the government should be managed frugally and more efficiently. They know that federal and state governments need to demonstrate greater integrity to earn the trust of citizens, so they advocate that they play stronger, smarter, more sensible roles in preventing monopoly abuses of power and corporate corruption. They also understand that we should find better ways to prevent political influence peddling, institutionalized bribery, government waste and corporate fraud.

Many people also see the greater social good of higher minimum wages for workers, so they support rights for workers to organize to improve their bargaining power and obtain more of the benefits of productivity increases and a fairer shake in the hard-fought struggle between capital and labor. And the need is glaring for reforms to be made to criminal justice laws and systemic racial injustices in the United States. At the very least, mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent offenders should be reduced, and initiatives should be implemented that would be effective in reducing recidivism. Bipartisan efforts in Congress to achieve some of these just and cost-saving objectives were stymied for a long time by political calculation, but were finally passed. Further steps to end the war on drugs and racial injustices in incarceration need to be taken.

<u>The Proper Role of Government in Our Lives</u>

The main institutions that have determining influence on our national priorities are corporations and governmental entities. Our economic system is flexible and resilient largely due to the initiative of private enterprise and small businesses and the processes of 'creative destruction' that allow well-run companies to prosper while poorly run companies go into bankruptcy. But the economy has gotten so complex that without effective Federal Reserve monetary policies and spending by the federal government, economic recessions could slide into worse depressions. Government bureaucracies, on the other hand, can be wasteful, inflexible and vulnerable to being exploited by corporate interests and public employee unions.

History shows that too little regulation of business, particularly of banks and large corporations, leads to unfair dealings and bad practices and many costs being externalized onto society. These things can cause significant social and environmental harms. Economic hard times generally reveal that inadequate regulation of the economy contributes to an increase in debt leveraging and overly risky speculation and the inflation and bursting of economic bubbles. And when the government allows huge businesses to dominate the economy, there are inevitably undesirable increases in malfeasance and inequities and injustices.

It is also clear that governments have a propensity to become swaddled in red tape and fiscally irresponsible actions. The federal government has indulged in unprecedented amounts of deficit spending since 2001, dangerously driving up the national debt from $6 trillion to over $31 trillion today, and it excessively panders to vested interests and gives ridiculously generous amounts of corporate welfare to companies that oppose innovative new initiatives and industries. The need for fundamental reform is abundantly clear. Instead, the only thing Congress generally delivers is timid tinkering, or even worse, misguided legislation that is regressive, retrogressive, and favorable mainly to interest groups that already have the most power in our dysfunctional political system. During the pandemic, huge amounts of money have been expediently borrowed for all kinds of purposes, piling obligations on every taxpayer in every future year to provide needed relief.

The main reason we do not have lean government and well-regulated businesses in the USA is because CEOs and large multinational corporations have excessive influence in our national politics. They make sure that laissez-faire ideological arguments have outsized influence, and that regulations are minimized. As a result, businesses are subjected to ineffective rules, and they pay low effective amounts of corporate tax. The reality is that our public policies are too myopically focused, and short-term oriented, so they are contrary to the common good.

The time has come today for us to work together to achieve goals that are more likely to result in the greater good. Our leaders should cooperate together to ensure that these goals are sensibly formulated. While powerful forces oppose a broadening of prosperity, our nation's true ideals offer positive guidance. Let us again hearken back to the ideals of our Founders.

Thomas Paine, writing in *Common Sense* in 1776, called government "a necessary evil." He argued that government should be constituted principally for the public good, and NOT for "despotic" ends. He believed true security for citizens is the proper purpose of government, and that national policies should be designed to ensure security at the least expense and for the broadest benefit. His idea of the optimum form of government was one modeled after a principle of nature: "that the more simple any thing is, the less liable it is to be disordered, and the easier repaired when disordered."

Wow! -- How far we have come from that concept! Congress, take note! Congressional approval ratings have been very low in recent years, and for good reasons. For one, complexity, not simplicity, dominates our policy-making in Congress today, for the basic reason that the more complex a law is designed to be, the more fine print there will be in the law and thus the more hidden lobbyist provisions it can contain to advance the narrow goals of special interest groups. This complexity almost always comes at the public expense.

Thomas Paine envisioned an American nation that would have a fair and representative democracy and respectable guarantees of a maximum amount of individual liberties for all citizens. He asserted that such an auspicious form of government would be best suited to "embracing and confederating" all the various competing interests throughout the country. I feel strongly that it is of utmost importance for our society to become fairer and more just, and that effective mechanisms should be put in place to make sure our collective activities and resource usages are more likely to be indefinitely sustainable. To achieve these salubrious goals, a proper balance is needed between the extremes of anarchic freedom and centralized control.

What should the proper role of government really be in our lives? Ronald Reagan glibly declared in his first Inaugural Address: "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government IS the problem." With this, Reagan set off on a concerted effort to cut taxes for the rich and increase military spending, and to reduce regulations on banks and corporate entities, and to champion laissez-faire capitalism and weaken the power and prerogatives of working people. In contrast, Barack Obama stated in his Inaugural Address: "The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works for the majority of people." Surely we need a federal government that is less bureaucratic and less profligate where it should be, and smarter in its operations and spending and investments of taxpayer dollars. The overriding goal should be to make government work better for the vast majority of the people.

A significant development has been taking place in the past century that requires clearer understanding. The size of the U.S. government has increased dramatically, as measured by federal spending as a percent of Gross Domestic Product. Such spending was less than 10% in all the years before 1918, then it spiked to almost 30% in

1919 to help finance the First World War. Government spending averaged about 12% through the decade of the 1920s, and then 20% through the Great Depression. It spiked to more than 50% in 1945 in fighting the Second World War, and then it averaged 27% in the 1950s, 30% in the 1960s, 32% in the 1970s, 35% in the 1980s and 1990s, and 37% in the first decade of the 21st century. This increasing trend culminated in 2009, during the financial crisis and recession, when government spending totaled more than 45% of GDP, according to data at the website, usgovernmentspending.com. (It got even higher during the desperate days of the pandemic.)

This raises a question whether such growth in the size of government is a good thing or a bad thing for the greater good. People in conservative think tanks adduce a long list of reasons that big government is bad. These reasons are, on the whole, somewhat convincing. But other nations like those in Scandinavia have a higher average quality of life compared to people in the U.S., and their governments levy higher taxes and spend relatively more money than ours to provide their citizens with inexpensive college education, universal health care, better retirement programs, paid sick leave, more vacation time, good child care and more affordable housing.

The growth of U.S. government spending and the national debt seems like an undesirable state of affairs because it is a considerable risk to run huge budget deficits and have so much government debt, and to support what are unaffordably large military expenditures year after year after year. We face the serious dilemma today that if we take drastic steps to balance the budget, it could cause another recession and increases in unemployment. This is a lesson that was learned in 1937 and 1938, when cuts in government spending and a tightening of the money supply torpedoed a nascent economic recovery from the severe Depression. Actions that seemed to be responsible at the time were thus seen to have caused a contraction in the economy and higher joblessness.

Advocates of privatization point out that government ownership or control of resources gives political considerations more clout than economic considerations in determining how resources are allocated. Privatization is NOT, however, the panacea for all social ills, because it also creates many problems. Instead of promoting positive goals like lower costs, greater efficiency, better management and the improvement of society, the outcome of privatization is often a spike in price gouging, costly no-bid contracting, excessive fees, socialized costs, increased fraud, more unfair cronyism, and less accountability. The privatization of government functions and concomitant deregulation can create big new opportunities for rich persons and giant corporations to swindle taxpayers. These are NOT good things!

"A banker is a fellow who lends you his umbrella when the sun is shining, but wants it back the minute it begins to rain."

--- Mark Twain

<u>The Supreme Court Sides with Corporate Dominance of our National Priorities</u>

Republican appointees to the Supreme Court like Clarence Thomas, John Roberts and Samuel Alito have worked together to make retrogressive rulings on a variety of issues. The most blatant example of this was the January 2010 *Citizens United* ruling that overturned campaign finance laws that had restricted corporate spending in elections. The high court thereby "rejected the common sense of the American people, who have fought against the distinctive corrupting potential of corporate electioneering since the days of Theodore Roosevelt," according to one of the dissenting Justices. The impacts of skyrocketing political spending have been harsh.

Congress should correct this challenge to the common good by enacting legislation that would make our government more responsive to the people. If American citizens are to have a fair voice in our national priorities, we need to find a way to govern corporations better so that their already powerful influence does not make institutional bribery even more pervasive, especially in light of Supreme Court rulings that effectively allow huge organizations to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence election outcomes. There are many good ways to accomplish this, including by enacting a 'Fair Elections Now Act' and expanding voting rights (NOT by restricting them!), and by ending extreme partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts.

<u>Better Ideas and Better Plans for a Better Future</u>

It would be an excellent plan for us to manage our national affairs better, and to support more sensible priorities and smarter, fairer governance. Instead, we have too much red tape, dysfunctional regulation and bureaucratic

inefficiencies, on the one hand, and too little good supervision, oversight, honorable integrity, and smart policies and rules, on the other. And we have too much influence peddling and political corruption.

Many of these ideas were set forth well before Trump Republicans seized control of the federal government and began broadly abrogating most of the sensible proposals advocated herein. Check out *See Clearly: Sanity During Insane Times* for incisive perspectives on this development and its woe-filled impacts.

Regulatory agencies often fail to act in the public interest because of "regulatory capture". This refers to the process by which powerful vested interest groups and their lobbyists succeed in getting what they want for themselves to the detriment of the greater public interest. When such regulatory capture occurs, dominant businesses and industries use their insider political power and financial resources to "capture" favors rather than allowing the agencies to fulfill the regulatory purposes they were created to enforce. Regulatory capture operates in ways similar to the Tragedy of the Commons phenomenon in which individuals or groups with high-stakes interests in regulatory decisions or policy outcomes focus their energies and resources to gain outcomes they prefer, while members of the public, who each have a less focused individual stake in the outcome, are much less influential. When intently-focused entities devote their energies to particular policies by capturing agencies whose purpose is to regulate them, it almost always undermines the greater good. One glaring instance of this was the failure of regulatory agencies like the Federal Reserve and the SEC to anticipate and prevent the financial meltdown of 2008-2009.

Once Trump managed to grab power in the 2016 elections, regulatory capture was superseded by irresponsible Trojan horse agency heads who sabotaged the purpose and missions of the government agencies directly. This was true particularly of Scott Pruitt and his successor, the former coal lobbyist Andrew Wheeler at the Environmental Protection Agency, and Ryan Zinke in the Interior Department and his successor, the corporate lobbyist David Bernhardt, and Betsy DeVos in the Department of Education, and Bill Barr as Attorney General.

Since environmental issues are crucial to all people in the future, it was catastrophic to have fossil fuel interests largely control Trump's EPA, and demonstrate some of the most egregiously irresponsible ecological short-termism imaginable. New questions emerged almost daily in 2018 about EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's ethics violations and profligate spending, but his reprehensible assertion related to his position was even more worrying when he said, "the biblical world view with respect to these issues is that we have a responsibility to manage, cultivate and harvest the natural resources that we've been blessed with." Religious persons who interpret the Bible to mean human dominion over all other forms of life on Earth without responsible stewardship of Creation are rationalizing actions by immoral profiteers and treacherous spin doctors and cantankerous exploiters.

These facts once again lead to the inescapable conclusion that our economic and political system must be honestly and extensively reformed so that corporations and government are better managed in ways consistent with the greater good.

Thomas Paine noted that freedom can be dangerous in the hands of the poor, due to ignorance, just as it can be dangerous in the hands of the rich, due to excessive influence. This is why he advocated public education to overcome ignorance, and a robust representative democracy strong enough to prevent political corruption.

Both liberty and equality are important to the common good. To the extent that these two ideals conflict, we should wisely strive to establish the fairest balance between them to benefit the maximum number of people. Liberties should be protected by assuring openness in our societies and the freedom of speech and religion for all, and by establishing laws that guarantee a maximum amount of economic self-determination and individual rights. And equality should be guaranteed especially with regard to fairness of opportunity and representation for every individual. We need fairer elections -- not "electoral autocracy" afflicted by dirty election tricks, censorship, disinformation and repression. And we need equal treatment for everyone under the law. Persistent efforts by retrogressive leaders that serve to bring about more extreme inequalities are anathema in a democratic society, and they should be opposed and reversed.

Broader perspectives should be welcomed. Economists, when they are being cautious and honest, point out that it is unwise and improvident to borrow heavily from taxpayers in the future for misguided purposes. They know it is

folly to promote priorities that are too short-term oriented because such courses of action are likely to leave a disastrous legacy for our descendants. Ecological philosophers and environmentalists advise that long-term impacts should be taken into account in all assessments of courses of action taken by governments and businesses. They also provide us with cautionary tales regarding the damaging and risky impacts of activities like the depletion of fisheries and the clear-cutting of forests, and they warn us of the increasing costs of greenhouse emissions-stoked climate change and risks associated with recklessly wasteful uses of fossil fuels and fresh water and other natural resources. They tell us that there is an overarching need for a transformation in our societies to make them sustainable. And they remind us about the risks of failing to courageously address the causes and consequences of human population overshoot.

Religious fundamentalists also weigh in on the common good, as they understand it. They proclaim they have the absolute truth about what is right and wrong, and what is good and evil, and what is best for us sinners. They derive their truths from a variety of ancient 'holy books' in which the alleged words of their particular God are interpreted by religious authorities in ways that are often self-serving, male chauvinistic, inflexibly rigid, narrow-minded, domineering and/or doctrinaire. Established churches should become less reactionary and more a force for good in our societies. They should cooperate with reasonable politicians, statesmen and diplomats to make sure they do not become forces that contribute to discriminatory prejudices, conflict, terrorism, war, genocide or ecological calamity. They should stop opposing family planning programs and contraception, because most of the biggest challenges that face humanity are made worse by having too many people using limited resources and contributing to ecological overshoot of the carrying capacity of the Earth for our demanding kind.

Let's emulate Thomas Paine in his responsible credo: "To do good is my religion."

The Long View of Historical Change

Our Founders made a courageous commitment to the creation of a nation based on ideals of individual liberty, equality, social justice, fair representation and limited government. They did this to "promote the general Welfare", as stated in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. Many Americans have been trying to ensure that we live up to these ideals ever since.

Many progressive milestones have been enacted to achieve these ideals, and to reduce the disparities between America's ideals and reality. Salient examples of this progress are the Bill of Rights ratified in 1791, the legal freeing of black slaves in 1865, the granting to women of the right to vote in 1920, various worker protections established during the twentieth century, the New Deal that included a Social Security system and other safety net programs that were created in the 1930s, Medicare for Americans age 65 and older that was established in 1965, and consumer rights, investor rights and civil rights that were strengthened in the 1960s, along with vital environmental protections set forth in the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Wilderness Act of 1964.

This progress has been difficult to achieve, and America has at times slid backwards, especially during times of war. For example, habeas corpus rights were denied during the Civil War; dissent was suppressed during World War I; Americans of Japanese ancestry were deprived of their freedom, rights and property when they were interned in prison camps during World War II; illegal surveillance was done on anti-war protestors and the underground press during the Vietnam War; and numerous incursions have been made against civil liberties, privacy and other fundamental citizen rights in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. This is another good reason for citizens to demand that their government resort to war ONLY when all other alternatives have been exhausted, and to have a defensive strategy, not an aggressively offensive one.

Nonetheless, the long trajectory of American political history has been toward a fuller realization of Founding ideals. This includes a clearer recognition of the overarching importance of doctrines that emphasize fairness and the common good. After the original 13 colonies declared independence from Great Britain in 1776 in a Big Bang of revolutionary zeal, and joined together to form the United States of America, our Founders established a government with a strong system of checks and balances. They recognized with visceral immediacy the serious undesirability of abuses of power and taxation without fair representation, so they created a new form of government that governed under the auspices of a democratic Constitution and Bill of Rights and fair-minded rules

of law. The Founders were justifiably suspicious of big government, big businesses, infringements on personal freedoms, entangling foreign alliances, and anything that would subvert the will of the people.

Today, another revolutionary transformation is required to ensure that we continue our historical progress toward making our societies better. Our nation's policies should be made more consonant with the bigger-picture greater good, and we really should strive to realize a new and more positive relationship between all of humanity and the web of life that includes and sustains us.

This new relationship should include a fairer and smarter balance between common good goals and (1) the goals of consumers, who want good values for products and services at low prices, (2) the goals of investors, who want to get high investment returns, regardless of the harm this may cause to society and the environment, (3) the goals of government employees, some of whom appear to be more concerned with getting bigger benefits for themselves than fairly serving the public, and (4) the impulse of corporations that serve as tools of the wealthy to maximize profits by getting subsidies, tax reductions and expanded allowances for them to externalize worker healthcare costs and pollution and environmental damage costs onto society.

This new relationship is unnecessarily hard to achieve because of the Supreme Court's *Citizen's United* ruling that overturned limitations on campaign financing. The way to establish this new relationship now is for Congress to honorably formulate intelligent rules that honestly help ensure that the best interests of *We the People* will be more fairly represented. With the ungodly ascendancy of too many extremist MAGA Republicans, unfortunately, these hopes are suffering severe setbacks.

Strategic Initiatives

George Lakoff wrote about strategic initiatives in his thought-provoking book, *Don't Think of an Elephant*. Such initiatives are plans that have broad impacts across many issues. For instance, conservatives give high priority to making regressive cuts in taxes, and such efforts accomplish a wide range of objectives they hold dear, including enriching wealthy supporters, receiving big contributions from donors, constraining social program spending, and reducing funding for government agencies that should be regulating corporations and holding them accountable.

An example of a contrasting liberal 'strategic initiative' is the Endangered Species Act. This law is designed to protect species and require companies to mitigate the environmental harms they cause, and help defend public lands from damaging exploitation. It also makes it more necessary to plan ahead wisely with a wise long-term sustainable orientation. A progressively structured system of taxation is another example of a liberal strategic initiative, for it raises money to finance a wide variety of needed programs and functions, and does so in a way that is equal for every person at every level of income. One goal of such a plan is to tighten controls on the fraudulent scheme of borrowing money from people tomorrow to give it to people who don't need it today.

George Lakoff writes about traditional American progressive values, principles and policy directions. It seems abundantly clear to me that Broad Prosperity, Effective Government, Mutual Responsibility and a Stronger America would be better goals to achieve than narrower conservative ideals of a Strong Military, Strict Father Values, Laissez-Faire 'Free' Markets, Low Marginal Tax Rates on Rich People and Ineffective Smaller Government.

Since the effect of giving tax breaks to the already wealthy is to increase disparities of wealth, such policies make our societies less equitable and physically less healthy, and therefore less secure. Contrasting policies that increase social fairness have positive implications for the overall physical and psychological health of a nation's people. This was proved to be true by the impacts of measures implemented in Japan after World War II. When the U.S. occupied Japan after the unconditional Japanese surrender on board the USS Missouri on September 2, 1945, many of the Allied Occupation staffers who worked under General Douglas MacArthur were policy veterans of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal program. At the time, Japan was a deeply unequal society. Americans worked to transform it into a more equal one by using the "three D's" of economic equality: demilitarization, democratization of the political process, and decentralization of wealth and power.

These reforms made people in Japanese society more equal, and the population became much healthier as a result. Sensationally, the average life span of a person in Japan was less than 45 years before World War II, and then life expectancy increased extraordinarily because of the public policies put into effect to increase equality in Japanese

society. Within 40 years, the people of Japan had achieved the greatest average longevity of any nation in the world at over 80 years!

The U.S., meanwhile, has chosen to pursue policies that are increasingly anti-egalitarian since 1980. A significant increase in inequality in American society is revealed by trends toward more pronounced disparities in earnings and wealth between the top 1% and everyone else. The "conservative" policies that helped create this state of affairs have led to America being ranked behind 46 other countries in the world in life expectancy today, according to World Bank Data for 2023. Woe is us! Our sadly unfair and dysfunctional healthcare system is disturbingly costly, and so are such things as deregulatory policies that create risky economic bubbles and military policies that harm and infuriate people around the world. We should implement initiatives that are more egalitarian -- domestic 3 D's! -- to create greater fairness in our health care system, as well as in opportunity, education, legal justice, political representation, taxation and the military.

The health insurance industry is dominated by huge corporations obsessed with making bigger profits every year, so they have rapidly increased insurance premiums at the same time that they deny coverage to millions of people and try to avoid providing insurance to people who have 'pre-existing condition' health problems. These strategies may be good for maximizing profits, but they are negative for the vast majority of people!

The exposure of faults and weaknesses of ideological doctrines make it clear that we need to be more flexible. Flexibility will allow us to be more effective in achieving propitious outcomes. Reckless consumerism, lavishly wasteful resource usages, trickle-down unfairness, speculative excesses, ideological shortsightedness, ruthlessly exploitive disaster capitalism, a lack of sensible regulation and oversight, and antagonism to sensible family planning programs are all facets of a doctrinal worldview that denies vital understandings about ecological well-being, sustainable resource uses, and the value of moderation, prudence and smart pragmatism.

President Obama made commendable efforts to create a form of post-partisan political pragmatism that would result in more positive conditions for our nation and the world. Millions of people hoped from the day he was first elected that he would succeed in fostering truly farsighted, even transcendent change. A review of Obama's eight years in office reveals how astonishingly high the hurdles are to basic reforms in our political system, and it is astonishing how rancorous Republican opposition was to his efforts -- and now to those of President Biden. But this in no way diminishes the overarching need for fair-minded cooperative problem solving!

After Trump Republicans seized power in 2016, they demonstrated loyalty to their Party's extreme policies, not to the best interests of the country. This shows that short-term goals can be achieved even though they are contrary to the common good. Once Donald Trump was in power, he made it his top priority to try to reverse almost everything President Obama accomplished, as if in a fit of egomaniacal and racially prejudiced pique.

Trump is a lifelong self-promoting con man who promised with demagogic fervor to "drain the swamp" in D.C. -- and then filled his administration with a cast of characters so compromised by conflicts of interest that the news almost every day brought to light a toxic brew of new instances of betrayals of public trust. In this pervasive culture of corruption, treachery and tyranny were par for the course, and these fraudulent eminences cheated on their scorecards by claiming their double bogies were birdies, banking on dishonesty and deceitful spin to absolve them of their wide-ranging misconduct and wrongdoing.

The Republican Party deserved to lose power for having fostered the negative conditions that led to political extremism and divisive developments, for it betrayed the country with its crazy policy priorities and pandering slavishly to rich people, and its helping to empower giant corporations, male chauvinists, white supremacists, racists, abusers of authority, violent domestic extremists, opponents of environmental protections, and those who are against sensible gun regulations and comprehensive immigration reforms.

"We're living in a season of corruption the likes of which we haven't seen but in a banana republic," observed Steve Schmidt, a veteran GOP strategist and Trump critic, after one of many chaotic weeks in the Trump administration. "Everywhere you look you see incompetence, malfeasance, self-dealing and corruption."

Trump was one of the most pathetic "standard bearers" in political history. One of his most prominent social-conservative supporters, Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, made a revealing observation in reaction to

the disclosure of the outrage-provoking *Access Hollywood* tape in which Trump told Billy Bush that he liked to kiss beautiful women even without their consent, and "grab them by the pussy". Perkins said these guarded words: "My personal support for Donald Trump has never been based upon shared values."

I guess not! Perkins is a sycophant who gives support to a man who was a "one man Constitutional crisis", as the ACLU stated before the 2016 election. "In the event of a Trump presidency," the ACLU had written, "we have undertaken a constitutional analysis of his most controversial policy proposals. These include his pledges to deport over 11 million undocumented immigrants, to ban Muslims from entering the United States, to surveil American Muslims and their houses of worship, to torture again, and to revise libel laws. We have found them all wanting, to say the least. According to our analysis, Trump's proposals taken together would violate the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Eighth Amendments to the Constitution."

It is a national embarrassment that the once respectable Republicans have demonstrated obsequious loyalty to such a man, for he is deplorably an ultimate divider, as if his presidency were a Reality TV Show where winning by any means whatsoever was the top priority. In this situation, victory by Republican politicians means the American people suffer the imposition of a disastrously illegitimate set of policies. Many Republican politicians were forced to distance themselves from the toxic Trumpster after his outrage-provoking words bragging about sexual assaults on beautiful women came to light in October 2016, just before the elections. Yet almost every Republican in Congress and state politics is willing to let women die from complications from pregnancy, as a blogger at OnTheLeftCoast has written, "even if those pregnancies came from the kind of assault or rape that Donald Trump boasted about. Let that sink in. Republicans might say they're disgusted by Trump's words but they're perfectly willing, no, they DEMAND, that women be allowed to die if they were raped. And we're supposed to believe they're upset with Trump's statements? Really?"

> "Oh, I'm sure a few Republicans will condemn Trump's latest outrage. They'll do the political math and decide he's too much of a liability for them (I'm looking at you, Paul Ryan). But until they stop trying to control women's bodies with transvaginal ultrasounds, or forcing the Hyde amendment into every spending bill, or requiring burial of miscarriages, or demanding 72 hours "waiting periods" to get an abortion, they are no different than Trump bragging about grabbing pussy. They just use different words to get what they want."

Trump asserted with bizarre dishonesty, "Nobody has more respect for women than I do". That claim was really preposterous, given his oft-repeated vulgar insults and grotesquely demeaning comments about women who he deems to be insufficiently attractive, and in light of his crudely lewd, sociopathically lascivious and piggish sexual objectification of women, and his history of cheating on his wives and sexually harassing women, and his "locker room talk" descriptions of how he likes to abuse his celebrity status to kiss and grope women against their will. Treating women as sex objects is a seminal aspect of gender interactions in male dominated patriarchal societies, but times, they are a-changin', and everyone would be best off if people strived to become more inclusive, more nimble, and more supportive of gender equity, golden rule fairness, broadly shared opportunity and general prosperity, along with more expansive initiatives designed to help improve human well-being.

Common Sense and Precautionary Principles

Humanity has been making big gambles, rather than acting with precautionary prudence and sensibility. Our leaders have created perverse incentives and stimulated debt leverage and encouraged risk-taking, resulting in the financial crisis in 2008, and then a country unnecessarily vulnerable to the ravages of a global pandemic. They have hyped up wars and religious conflicts and divisive antagonisms, and domineering forces have continued their unmitigated exploitation of planetary ecosystems, damaging them mindlessly even though we ultimately depend on them completely. And the American people have allowed social conservatives and religious evangelicals to grab excessive influence in our societies. These partisans often oppose sensible family planning measures and broader initiatives to educate and empower women.

One of the most sensible strategies would be to follow more honest and reasonable approaches focused on actions and behaviors consistent with shared prosperity and the common good. This idea is like the "no regrets" approach that serves as the basis for the precautionary principle enunciated in Principle 15 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. This principle states: "Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage,

lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

All legislative considerations should include a Precautionary Principle of ecological propriety. Such principles should be designed to make sure we "pay forward" deeds that are auspicious for our heirs, rather than leaving them a legacy of depleted resources, polluted environs, widespread injustices, record levels of burdensome and risk-laden debt, and ruthlessly internecine conflicts. To the extent that our actions damage the environment and are not sustainable, new methods should be developed to guarantee the vitality of the environment and protect the prospects of life on Earth in coming years. We simply cannot continue to plunder the planet without regard for the consequences of our actions.

We should also establish a Precautionary Social Principle that enshrines a fair and bipartisan concern for the common good as the highest value. Barack Obama was right when he noted that "a nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous", so an ethical earthquake is needed to shake up our entrenched, wasteful and inequitable priorities, and to emasculate shortsighted doctrines and deceptive propaganda.

Another Precautionary Principle is needed in arenas of economics and finance. We should limit the level of our national debt to 100% of GDP, and take strong steps to prevent economic bubbles and unsustainable schemes. The Ponzi scheme perpetrated by Bernard Madoff, which "robbed Peter to pay Paul", cost thousands of people their life savings, yet a much larger Ponzi-type scheme continues unabated. This is an insidiously inter-generational one -- the Social Security system. Workers today pay taxes from their earnings to the government for Social Security. These funds, plus matching amounts paid by employers, are put in a fund that is continuously being disbursed to people who have reached retirement age. As more and more people retire, the number of people collecting Social Security payouts increases and the burden on current workers becomes more oppressive. Eventually the system will be bankrupt unless it is restructured and made more financially sound. Without a growing population of working younger people and immigrants, the Social Security scheme will fall apart as currently structured. It is like a Ponzi scheme rather than a sound retirement plan because money from today's workers is given to retired people rather than being saved and invested for future obligations. The federal government has, in fact, borrowed every cent and more of Social Security "surpluses" for decades and then commingled the money with general funds and squandered it on annual exigencies and excesses of the moment.

It is time to honestly begin treating Social Security as a retirement insurance plan rather than a Ponzi-like scheme, as spelled out in *Radically Simple Ways to Make America Fairer, and to Fix Both Social Security and Health Care So We Can Move On to Address Much Bigger Issues*.

A Precautionary Principle of Reproductive Responsibility should also be embraced. Nadya Suleman represented a metaphor for human irresponsibility; she is the woman who had six children she could not afford to support, and nonetheless sought artificial fertility procedures that resulted in the birth of octuplets in 2009 -- another eight children! Just as Suleman was stupidly selfish, and her fertility doctors were outrageously irresponsible, we are collectively being foolish to deny we cannot afford to continue policies that encourage rapid population growth.

The quality of life for our children, and NOT the number of them we can spawn, must become a more important consideration. From this qualitative standpoint, the opposition to family planning programs by social conservatives should be overcome and rejected. Public family planning programs prevent about 2 million unwanted pregnancies and 800,000 abortions every year, according to a study by Guttmacher Institute. This saves billions of dollars in taxpayer money and staves off more negative outcomes. Let's take a stand against imposed bans on abortions.

<u>The Promise of More Fairly Shared Prosperity</u>

Worker productivity rose more than 100% in the 35 years from the end of World War II until 1980. Simultaneously, median family income rose by roughly a similar amount. Since then, worker productivity has more than doubled again, but median family income has barely increased. To create a fairer system in which prosperity is more broadly shared, we need to implement policies that reconnect real growth in wages to worker productivity. This could be done by tying both management and worker incentives to performance, increasing the minimum wage, strengthening labor laws, and expanding education and job training. And by levying higher taxes on the dividends

and capital gains of shareholders, and reducing taxes on working people so that all the benefit of corporate profits do not go to capitalists while little goes to working people. Or we should implement progressive tax reforms that would reduce taxes on every taxpayer's first $50,000 in taxable income, and offset the lower tax revenues with higher rates of tax on higher levels of income.

Studs Terkel was a working class hero who died in 2008 at the age of 96. Studs was a journalist who stood up against the Establishment to defend the rights of workers and the common good. He always seemed to be a step ahead of everyone else, expressing outspoken opposition to fascism and McCarthyism in his early years. At a time when the mainstream media was largely enthralled by Ronald Reagan's "Morning in America" rhetoric in 1986, Studs neatly sized up the era: "The only thing trickling down from the top is meanness."

Studs Terkel received a Lifetime Achievement award in 2006 from the workers' advocacy organization American Rights at Work. After accepting the award, he said: "What brings workers together can be a belief, a hope of improving the climate and community at work -- the spaces where so many of us spend so much of our lives. Respect on the job, and a voice at the workplace, shouldn't be something Americans have to work overtime to achieve." Right on! It would be a great contribution to the common good to find better ways to deal more respectfully with working people, and to provide them with fairer compensation and more influence at work.

Hurrah for Studs Terkel! Asked if he was optimistic about the future, Terkel was cautious, but he did say that "you've gotta have hope. Hope dies last." Hope is good, and it is even better with actualizing energy to provide improved prospects of flourishing and salvation in the here and now. Unfortunately for the vast majority of the American people, MAGA Republicans have been abusing power by professing to care mainly about working people to dupe voters into giving them support, but then diabolically pushing regressive changes in taxation that are primarily benefitting the biggest shareholders in corporations and the wealthiest Americans.

We should righty demand greater honesty and fairness, and throw the authority abusers out of office who are betraying the American people.

<u>A Progressive 'Slippery Slope Strategic Initiative' for the Greater Good</u>

Think about the scope and nature of our human activities, and how exhaustively and rapidly we are depleting natural resources like fossil fuels. Consider also the enormous wealth transfer from consumers to those who get profits from fossil fuel production and who externalize costs of pollution and fighting wars in the Middle East to protect access to oil supplies. And think about deforestation and the billions of tons of greenhouse gases we are spewing into the atmosphere every year, and related phenomena of global warming and changes in weather patterns almost everywhere, all of which contribute to growing environmental problems and assaults on biological diversity. Here are some of the most serious and far-reaching challenges that humankind has ever faced, and it is simply astonishing that ALL these existentially daunting obstacles could be effectively addressed with the same policy prescription: by committing to making significant investments in a new Apollo-like program to develop renewable clean energy alternatives, more efficient resource usages and better ways of conserving fossil fuels.

A bold strategic initiative like this would contribute to solving many of the big problems we face, and it would also create jobs, improve public health, and mitigate impacts of anthropogenic climate disruptions. Such an initiative should be designed to help developing countries with new greener technologies for their energy needs. By reducing existing subsidies to fossil fuel and nuclear industries, and increasing investments in renewable energy alternatives, there would be a desirable movement away from our dependence on polluting fuels and resources that are non-renewable.

Powerful resistance exists to such courses of action. This is ironic, since a sensible restructuring of our economies is clearly needed to make our human activities sustainable over the coming decades and centuries. We should alter the cold calculus that contributes to these increasingly adverse circumstances and the partisan bickering and ideological deceptions promoted by excessively greedy vested interest groups and deceitful leaders who are hijacking our national priorities and causing us to fail to solve overarching problems.

Everyone across the entire political spectrum from very conservative to very liberal should be willing to come together to form a broad consensus as to the optimal courses of action for the greater good. Then we need to

support good plans to achieve these courses of action. This should include powerful motivating incentives and disincentives designed to encourage people to act in more responsible ways. This would be among the best means for ensuring that we move along a pragmatic path toward well-being in the long run.

Here is this concept presented in *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity, and Population Overshoot:* "Marvelously, there are good solutions to daunting dilemmas like climate change that confront us. Putting a much higher price on carbon emissions through a fee-and-dividend plan, for instance, would create powerful incentives for the conservation of resources, more efficient uses of fossil fuels, and a more rapid transition to renewable alternatives. Such a system could be structured in non-regressive and egalitarian ways that would be fair to the majority of Americans, including people living in poverty and those struggling in the middle class. It also would be vastly fairer to people in future generations to take such action to slow the depletion of fossil fuel resources and reduce the culminating harm we are doing to natural ecosystems by failing to rein in emissions."

This proposal to implement an eminently fair carbon-fee-and-dividend plan is so compellingly convincing that it is astonishing that we Americans cannot put it into effect. Hyper politicized politics and political corruption and excessive influence by fossil fuel industries are the main obstacles standing in the way.

The motto of Boy Scout and Girl Scout organizations is "Be Prepared". Everyone can try to prepare themselves better to deal with challenges and potential emergencies by knowing the right thing to do at the right moment, and then doing it. The moment has come for us all to be prepared to support smarter priorities. Lend your voice!

Kyoto, Copenhagen, and Obliviousness

The Copenhagen Climate Change summit held in December 2009 was said to be one of the most remarkable meetings of world leaders in history. The summit emphasized scientific evidence and facts about global warming, and highlighted the failures to rein in emissions of greenhouse gases since the 1997 Kyoto Accords. The summit most unfortunately failed to produce strong steps to avert future climate disasters, principally because vested interests blocked effective reforms. The summit also made it clear that a minority of people obtusely deny the overwhelming preponderance of scientific evidence that reveals global warming IS occurring, AND that it is caused in large part by human activities. These activities include the burning of fossil fuels, the cutting down of vast tracts of forests, and the maintenance of large herds of methane-gas-producing cattle and sheep.

A reasonable surcharge on energy use should be included in prices of all products and services to fund actions that mitigate climate change impacts. Rational individuals and societies should be willing to pay this cost as a form of insurance against future damages. A reasonable projection of cumulative economic damage costs due to climate change in the U.S. through 2050, if we follow a business-as-usual plan, is $50 trillion. The International Monetary Fund estimates that an extra investment of a cumulative $12 trillion to $20 trillion is needed to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. This would be a smart course of action to prevent an untold amount of human suffering associated with increased costs related to widespread flooding of islands and coastal areas, and damages to regional food production due to more frequent powerful storms and intense floods and droughts. Should we not be required to pay an additional surcharge on the price of every gallon of gasoline, or some such similar measure, to finance remedial preventative measures like reforestation, effective conservation initiatives, more efficient uses of energy, and greener renewable alternatives to fossil fuels?

It is a distinct 'tragedy of the commons' that individuals and vested interest groups are so strongly opposed to paying a reasonable and affordable on-going price to prevent or mitigate such risks. This is a matter of political will. We could dramatically alter our current propensities by using wisely-targeted incentives and disincentives. Market methods like this have been proven to be very effective in modifying collective demands and behaviors, and they seem to be one of the fairest ways to affect people's actions. Targeted incentives and disincentives would change our collective course of harmful activities. This would be preferable to alternatives like laws and regulations that are burdensome, in general, since they are fairer mechanisms for influencing choices people make. Many recommendations are set forth in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies.*

Climate Change Deniers

The psychological underpinnings of denials that human beings are contributing to global warming and climate change are 'curious and curiouser'. So what, some say, if the human race is spewing tens of billions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year? They tend to dismiss concerns about the unsteady increase in a geologic instant of the concentration of carbon-dioxide from a pre-industrial level of 280 ppm to the highest level in millions of years, at over 424 ppm on May 29, 2023. So what, they say, if current trends portend a probable increase to more than 500 ppm of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere within 50 years or so? Gee, say the skeptics, it's still real cold in Chicago in the winter, and a little warming would be welcome! So what if we happen to flood more than 100 million people out of coastal areas worldwide in the next 100 years? These 'deniers' cling to ideologies propagated by entrenched interest groups that say we simply can't afford to alter our habits and shift incentives from dirty fossil fuels to cleaner energy sources. Many of them even deny that renewable energy sources are a better plan than aggressive exploitation of the remaining fossil fuel resources in the world. Climate change deniers often seem to think that liberals and the majority of scientists are too radical because they advocate that we take precautionary steps. I believe differently! We should seek the most accurate understandings, and follow where they lead!

Record snowfalls paralyzed Washington D.C. in February 2010 when severe winter storms hit much of the East Coast. Climate change deniers were practically apoplectic with jubilant derision about this alleged refutation of the fact that the planet has been on a warming trend for decades. Sean Hannity on Fox News took advantage of the snowfalls to declare that these weather events "seem to contradict Al Gore's hysterical global-warming theories." Stunning! Even junior high school students know that scientists have been warning for many years that atmospheric warming will inject more energy into the climate system and cause more extreme weather events of all kinds, including more severe hurricanes, floods and droughts -- and yes, cold snaps and snowstorms. Weather and climate are different things, and as one pundit put it, "we owe it to our offspring" to know the difference.

Deniers not only reject precautionary principles, but they also seem to be zealously willing to gamble that current trends will not result in a double-glazing warming of the Earth in coming decades. These skeptics hold this risk-taking conviction mainly so that people will not be collectively required to invest responsibly in inevitably necessary efforts to wean our civilizations from our addiction to burning finite reserves of non-renewable fossil fuels. Most of these deniers admit the obvious -- that changes in weather patterns have been taking place in recent years -- but they dispute that increasing incidences of record-unusual storms, melting glaciers, heat waves, droughts and wildfires are related to human activities. Maybe it's just sunspots, they say.

These same people tend to be the ones on the extreme right who rashly support aggressive American military occupations of Middle Eastern nations. They are often the same ones who buy the shrewd propaganda that says the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were unrelated to our economic efforts to assure access to global supplies of oil. The largest remaining reserves of oil on Earth are located in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and other Persian Gulf countries, and this fact poses real risks to our well-being and security.

The U.S. has already burned more than 200 billion barrels of oil from its own domestic supplies. As these reserves dwindle and we frack the hell out of underground formations, the temptation tends to increase to use military means to assure access to oil supplies abroad. In international matters, we should always remember that our greatness as a nation can best be measured by our free, fair and peaceful trade with other nations, not by our coercive military might.

What happened to our faith in free markets, fair competition, peaceful coexistence, cooperative problem-solving and respect for the sovereignty of people in other countries? Why are we so eager to involve our country in preemptive warfare when threats to our national security are not imminent? Could our military aggression in Iraq actually have been merely a front for our supremacist hubris and resource needs and the greed of investors in fossil fuels? Shouldn't all nations agree that every country should, without exception, honestly and fairly compete for declining reserves of fossil fuels and other resources? "Wars are not the answer."

Climate change deniers are not stupid people, but they are easily duped by corporate spin that says we should allow costs related to pollution and climate-related natural disasters to be externalized. Such people sometimes figuratively have poor peripheral vision, or are most comfortable when they wear blinders. It may be convenient

for them to blindly believe in partisan ideologues who cherry-pick facts and distort accurate understandings and hold more constricted points of view, but the time has come for us to see and seek the most propitious perspectives for the long-term common good, rather than for short-term advantages and profit-making.

It is easy to be cynical about people who deny risks of global warming and climate change. It is ridiculous that they can be so strongly opposed to economic initiatives that would require every product and service to include a small assessment to mitigate future climate catastrophes and help pay for the spiking costs of natural disasters. Such insurance is needed to minimize the extent to which we impose burdens on people in future years. We simply must be much more responsible for taking actions to guarantee our home planet remains habitable.

California's state legislature passed a farsighted Resolution in October 2016 that urged the federal government to pass a revenue-neutral carbon tax. This proposal should have been an inspirational tipping point for effective action to begin mitigating the costly impacts associated with anthropogenic disruptions of previously normal climatic conditions. This is a great idea, and a good plan that would alter the current status quo that allows costs and damages associated with anthropogenic climate disruptions to be foisted upon everyone in the future. Such a fee-and-dividend system of incentives to reduce carbon emissions could be used to reward people who have a light carbon footprint and make those with heavy carbon footprints pay more for the harms caused and costs incurred due to natural disasters exacerbated by climate change. Let's adopt this smart national carbon tax plan!

This California legislature Resolution read: WHEREAS, A national carbon tax would make the United States a leader in mitigating climate change and the advancing clean energy technologies of the 21st Century, and would incentivize other countries to enact similar carbon taxes, thereby reducing global carbon dioxide emissions without the need for complex international agreements; Now, therefore, be it Resolved by the Assembly and the Senate of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature hereby urges the United States Congress to enact, without delay, a tax on carbon-based fossil fuels; and be it further Resolved ... That all tax revenue should be returned to middle- and low-income Americans to protect them from impacts of rising prices due to the tax.

It is disturbing that, according to a *Planet Politics* manifesto, "the current architecture of international society is failing to see and address the global ecological crisis. Our global governance is too focused on interstate bargaining and human interests, and sees the environment as an inert backdrop and resource for human societies. Yet the reality is that the fates of society and nature are inextricably bound together -- and the planet is letting us know that." The writing on the wall is clear.

The global need for more farsighted planning is greater and more crucially important than ever, and must take precedence over the myopic exigencies of allowing corporate entities to rashly exploit resources and make unsustainable profits by foisting extensive costs on people in the future. It is absurd to act like we can continue with impunity to undermine the health and sustainability of natural ecosystems and the biological diversity of life on Earth, for these are the very foundations of our human well-being. Aristotle wrote long ago in his Nicomachean Ethics that VIRTUE is acting "at the right times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way." We ought to respect this -- and more virtuous initiatives in our politics.

Why Are Common Good Values So Often Subverted?

Vested interest groups fight ferociously to gain and maintain perks and privileges for themselves. Our system unfortunately panders to many things contrary to the common good. Workers, investors, consumers, retirees, homeowners and people both rich and poor all tend to want the most they can get from the government for themselves. Our political system is dominated by insider groups, with powerful influence exerted by corporate CEOs, bankers, wealthy people, Wall Street 'masters of the universe', retirees and religious conservatives. As a result, these interest groups manage to skew our national policies to their own narrow advantages, while the general public is betrayed by big corporations and government. Those with the most influence win this serious game, and those who have little power have little voice, and consequently lose. Big ambitions for making profits should not succeed so wildly -- while ambitions for the self-preservation of humanity falter and threaten to fail.

"Men of aim must always rule the aimless. Yet there will always be singing birds."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Expediencies often dominate our national decision-making, to the pronounced detriment of the average person. The most harmful expediency in the long run is our sacrifice of the foundations of a good quality of life for people in future generations because of our unwillingness to find fairer ways to live within our means today. It is folly to borrow huge sums of money from everyone in the future instead of courageously seeking to achieve a better balance between spending and revenues, and between the ultra-rich and everyone else.

In addition, it is unwise to use up natural resources as fast as humanly possible, and to deplete and degrade fresh water resources and pollute and dump obscene amounts of toxic wastes into the environment. These activities damage habitats and ecosystems, and drive untold numbers of species of life toward eternal extinction. This undermines the foundations of survival found in healthy conditions that support biological diversity. Is nothing sacred anymore? Factions also obstruct initiatives for social justice and let the status quo prevail even in the face of absurd policies like excessively risky banking deregulation and speculative debt leveraging, outrageous healthcare inequities, instability-creating bubble economic policies, and amoral profiteering by health insurance corporations, Big Pharma, Big Oil and the military-industrial complex.

Deconstructing Social Darwinism

Ironies abound in our crazy world. Who would have imagined, for instance, that the "conservative" political party would work so steadfastly to undermine precautionary ecological principles? Who would have been able to guess that conservatives would be the main ones who would recklessly promote risk-engendering deregulation, bubble economics, and fiscally imprudent deficit spending? Who would have thought that conservatives would thus be most responsible for causing the most serious global economic crisis since the 1930s (which began in 2008)? Who would have anticipated that Republican rule would have led to bigger and more intrusive government, and to the consequently urgent need for even BIGGER government and more government interventions to bail out banks and stimulate spending to create jobs and get the economy out of its hardship-engendering doldrums?

Who, for that matter, would have thought that social conservatives would reject Charles Darwin's scientific understandings of biological evolution while at the same time finding such mesmerizing merit in theories of Social Darwinism that justify special advantages for the few and the imposition of austerity policies on the masses even though they are contrary to many of the principles and ideals that our Founders held dear?

Social Darwinism is a theory that sees the struggle for existence as being driven by fierce competition and the survival of the fittest. It in effect holds that this competition overrides needs for ethical fairness in the social compact between citizens. Social Darwinism rationalizes the domination of the weak by the strong, and thus is used to justify the deepening of class inequalities, the intensification of resource exploitation, the oppression of workers, and even military imperialism. The Social Darwinist theory was first formulated by philosopher Herbert Spencer during the highly inequitable Gilded Age of so-called robber barons in the late 19th century. He coined the phrase "survival of the fittest" to justify a political philosophy that opposed humanitarian justice initiatives.

By championing such simplistic and selfish theories, Social Darwinists try to undermine constraints like social justice, fair-minded democratic governance, and equal treatment of all citizens. They portray capitalism and its sink-or-swim gambits as being necessary and inevitable, instead of recognizing how important it is to establish a fairer social compact. This ideology has been used as a justification of pathetic policies that are opposed to the egalitarian principles enunciated by our Founding Fathers. It does so by promoting profit making and "progress" in an oddly retrogressive sense, and by discounting the general welfare and other fair-minded values.

The fact that accidents, diseases, bankruptcy and other adversities can afflict anyone at any time suggests that the best system a society could establish would be one that provides fair opportunities for every person to improve their circumstances while also creating an affordable social safety net for everyone. Healthy societies should establish effective incentives and disincentives to guide citizens and entrepreneurs and businesses, and they should encourage organizations to operate successfully in ways that are consistent with the common good.

In actual fact, Social Darwinism appeals to entrepreneurs, industrialists and rich people because it gives a rather deterministic and seemingly superior moral justification to capitalist schemes in their long-fought struggle against fairness to workers. Social Darwinists use ideological arguments to persuade people of the desirability of laissez-

faire policies and reduced regulation of corporate entities. This ideology is promoted in conjunction with traditional methods used by capitalists to suppress the prerogatives of labor, which include the coercion of workers, efforts to undermine the freedom of workers to organize and bargain collectively, corrupt politics, the oppression of minorities and people in lower classes, and even outright violence against workers.

The incisive writer Frank Norris wrote a number of novels, most famously *The Octopus – A Story of California*. This novel, published in 1901, was one of the earliest muckraking novels of the Progressive Era. It is based on a pivotal incident in which an actual bloody shoot-out took place in 1880 between ranchers who were growing wheat on land leased from the Southern Pacific Railroad in California's central San Joaquin Valley and a United States Marshall and his deputies who were acting on behalf of the railroad conglomerate to evict the ranchers. Complicated legal efforts had been made before the deadly confrontation by the Settler's League, an organization of wheat farmers, but the ranchers had lost out to the Railroad in both the courtroom and in the legislative chambers of Sacramento and Washington D.C.

The story revolves around the growth of the railroad industry at a time when the expansion of the railroads was being heralded as a vehicle for progress. In *The Octopus*, Frank Norris "was telling the rest of the story -- the real story as it affected the lives of people who were subjugated and oppressed by the sprawling railroads. We follow the lives of farmers and aspiring business-folk who are crushed by the untethered demands of the railroads, and we watch with heartbreak as their lives are ruined by the greed of this new industry."

The Octopus exposed the operations of ruthless laissez-faire capitalism that was sanctioned by turn-of-the-century Social Darwinists. In it, Norris "pictures with bold symbolism the raising of wheat in California and the struggle of the wheat growers there against a monopolistic railroad corporation." The novel is a shocking tale of greed and lust for power, and of betrayal that plays out during the last days of the western frontier. "The Railroad personified evil back in the late 19th century as a type of corporate monster that encircled and strangled farmers. Through its owners and agents, the company controlled the local paper and the land and the legislature, and after the farmers organized to protect themselves, it even manages to exert domineering influence over representatives on the state transportation rate-fixing commission."

This novel is an excellent example of the Naturalist movement in American literature. Naturalism, among other things, sought to apply discoveries of science to literature: "scientific order in the world, random occurrences, and most of all the indifference of the universe. Contrary to the concept of a loving and benevolent God maintaining order in all things, Naturalist writers portrayed the universe as a cold, indifferent machine that could and would crush anything that is in the wrong place at the wrong time." In his Introduction to *The Octopus,* historian Kevin Starr discusses the debt of Frank Norris to Emile Zola, a French novelist and journalist, on account of the extraordinary sweep, scale and abundance of characters and details in the novels of both writers.

This epic turn-of-the-century novel about the rapacity of the monopolistic Railroad corporation gives us pause to consider the dangers of giant corporate entities today that will stop at nothing to maximize their profits and extend their domination. Like the tentacles of a giant octopus, the tracks of the railroad reached out across California back in those days, "as if to grasp everything of value in the state." … "To the tough-minded and self-reliant farmers, the monopolistic land-grabbing railroad represented everything they despised, including: consolidation, organization, conformity. But Frank Norris idealizes no one in this epic depiction of the volatile situation, for the farmers themselves ruthlessly exploited the land, and in their hunger for larger holdings they resorted to the same tactics used by the domineering railroad: subversion, coercion and outright violence."

In stark contrast to the laudable Progressive era back then, we are living in an era with powerful reactionary regressive factions today, and the need is growing for journalists and progressive politicians and responsible citizens to join together to overthrow the hegemony of giant multinational corporate entities and authoritarian leaders that are uncompromisingly abusing their power, to the detriment of the vast majority of people alive today, and everyone in the future.

We've had quite enough of Wall Street financial elites and corporate CEOs who rig our economic system to gain outlandish blessings for themselves at the expense of the stability of the system and the greater good. The costs of allowing this state of affairs were proved to be excessively high with the hardships engendered by the 2008

recession. It has become starkly apparent in recent years that weak economic and financial conditions can create negative feedback loops that reinforce themselves and threaten to spiral into even worse problems.

Economic turmoil creates a risky state of affairs. Volatile job markets and home values and equities markets and high levels of national debt, along with a sustained non-productive cost of wars-without-end, are all converging to cause increasing threats to our national security and well-being. It would be a better plan to create a sound economy with moderate levels of consumption, slowly rising asset values, a balanced level of risk-taking and reasonably limited debt leveraging than to stimulate boom-and-bust economic bubbles, wasteful consumerism, unsustainable usages of resources, poorly regulated risk-taking, high levels of leveraging and volatile asset values.

Many people might disagree with these ideas. The novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand, for example, undertook a monumental assault on what she saw as collectivist ideas in her novel *Atlas Shrugged*. She created a towering paean to individualism, rational self-interest and personal freedom in this novel and other works, and she harshly portrayed forces like government and organized labor that fight against the presumed deserving triumph of industrialists and their selfish motives. Let us honestly debate ideas like these, and create a new approach that incorporates our best understandings in light of the common good in the long term.

"If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own."

--- Wes 'Scoop' Nisker

Parenthetically, Ayn Rand's first name is pronounced to rhyme with "mine". This little known fact is curiously appropriate because her philosophy was staunchly oriented around selfishness and egoism. Mine, mine, mine, chimed Ayn! She even wrote a collection of essays titled *The Virtue of Selfishness*.

<u>The Sorry Advent of Con Man Trump</u>

Robert Reich, writing about the specifics of Donald Trump's shrewd con game in an editorial piece in July 2016 concluded: "The real Trump isn't a populist. He's a plutocrat. Above all, he's a con man. And the people being conned are average working Americans who are buying Trump's ruse of being a man of the people."

Paul Krugman wrote another of many thought-provoking opinion pieces in *Trump Is No Accident*. Hear his words:

> The truth is that the road to Trumpism began long ago, when movement conservatives -- ideological warriors of the right -- took over the G.O.P. And it really was a complete takeover. Nobody seeking a career within the party dares to question any aspect of the dominating ideology, for fear of facing not just primary challenges but excommunication.
>
> You can see the continuing power of the orthodoxy in the way all of the surviving contenders for the Republican nomination, Mr. Trump included, have dutifully proposed huge tax cuts for the wealthy, even though a large majority of voters, including many Republicans, want to see taxes on the rich increased instead.
>
> But how does a party in thrall to a basically unpopular ideology -- or at any rate an ideology voters would dislike if they knew more about it -- win elections? Obfuscation helps. But demagogy and appeals to tribalism help more. Racial dog whistles and suggestions that Democrats are un-American if not active traitors aren't things that happen now and then, they're an integral part of Republican political strategy.
>
> During the Obama years, Republican leaders cranked the volume on that strategy up to 11 (although it was pretty bad during the Clinton years too.) Establishment Republicans generally avoided saying in so many words that the president was a Kenyan Islamic atheist socialist friend of terrorists -- although as the quote from Mr. Rubio shows, they came pretty close -- but they tacitly encouraged those who did, and accepted their endorsements. And now they're paying the price.
>
> For the underlying assumption behind the establishment strategy was that voters could be fooled again and again: persuaded to vote Republican out of rage against Those People, then ignored after the election while the party pursued its true, plutocrat-friendly priorities. Now comes Mr. Trump, turning the dog whistles into fully audible shouting, and telling the base that it can have the bait without the switch. And the establishment is being destroyed by the monster it created.

A Compelling Case for Better Ways of Achieving Peace

One of the subtexts of all Earth Manifesto writings is that a stronger role for women would be a positive thing for our societies. Dee Dee Myers, the White House press secretary for President Clinton from early 1993 until the end of 1994, advocated this idea in her book *Why Women Should Rule the World*. She noted that women have stronger inclinations to cooperate and seek a win/win consensus than men do, so in nations where women are educated and empowered, democracy is stronger and those nations are characterized by a greater cooperative spirit, and generally have fairer and more practical priorities. Women in power tend to favor spending on health, nutrition and education, and to be less eager to commit excessive amounts of money to the military.

Dee Dee Myers wrote that history reveals an increased likelihood for a country to get involved in wars when that nation spends heavily on its military. She concludes from this fact that policies oriented toward making more generous investments in the education and empowerment of women would provide a strong impetus for fewer wars. For deeper introspection into ideas about this topic, see my essays *A Peaceable Proposition: The Golden Rule 'Greening' of U.S. Foreign Policy* in the Earth Manifesto, and *Reflections on War – and Peace.*

Politics Makes Odd Bedfellows!

"The Republicans are the party that says that government doesn't work -- and then gets elected and proves it."
--- Political satirist and writer P.J. O'Rourke

Political expediencies can create some exceedingly odd alliances. Republicans were traditionally the party of small government, but they have been the most ardent supporters of a large interventionist military and they have often championed the ideological and practical goals of expanded corporate power and vested interest privilege. The Republican Party continues to affiliate itself with obnoxious and rigid religious evangelicals who oppose the rights of women to determine their own destinies when it comes to choosing to use contraceptives to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. And most conservative Republican politicians indulge in hot-button-social-issue politicking when they almost unanimously align themselves with government intrusiveness in women's lives, as can be seen by their boneheaded opposition to Planned Parenthood or allowing women the last resort of choosing to have a safe abortion, often even in cases of rape, incest or a high risk of complications in a pregnancy that is likely to kill the woman.

Strengthening Democracy by Empowering Women

Many more young Americans under the age of 30 cast their votes for Bernie Sanders in the 2016 primary elections than they did for both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump combined. Young people have a longer-term stake in living in a fairer, more just and environmentally sound world than older people, so their best interests should be given greater priority. The interests of all people under the voting age of 18 should be given more consideration, as well as the interests of all people to be born in future generations. To accordingly shift our national priorities in this proper direction, voting rights should be extended to 16 and 17 year-olds, and a Bill of Rights for Future Generations should be enacted, as spelled out in this manifesto.

We all live in a house divided. The insightful pollster Nate Silver of FiveThirtyEight adduced statistics that show that not only are we divided by age, but also by gender. Silver reported that, if women were not allowed to vote, Trump would have overwhelmingly won the presidential election in 2016, instead of having barely eked out a narrow Electoral College victory over Hillary Clinton. This is due to the fact that Trump won by a big margin among men, but lost by an even bigger margin among women. The understanding of this outcome spurred a number of Trump supporters to create a Twitter hash tag that called for the repeal of the 19th Amendment, so that women would once again be denied the right to vote, as they had been prior to 1920. Republican sexism, misogyny and white male supremacism reached new depths with this revelation.

There is a good gauge for determining when social unfairness is too dangerously excessive, and that is when wealth becomes too concentrated in the hands of the few. When there is too extreme a degree of social and racial injustice, it is bad for everybody, including the rich, for this dangerous condition leads inevitably toward either violent revolution or a police state needed to defend the unfairness of a deeply unjust status quo.

Women should be given more influence in helping create a healthier and safer world AND a heavier overweight emphasis should be given to the best interests of young people, who have a longer time horizon concern in wanting to have a habitable world in the future.

Miles Rapoport, a longtime democracy advocate who served as Secretary of State in Connecticut, penned a convincing article in *The American Prospect* titled *From a Contentious Election to a Stronger Democracy -- Strengthening democracy is the key to all other reforms.* He expressed this persuasive idea in 2016:

> Reviving our democracy will be a paramount challenge for the new administration. The intertwined issues of race, inequality, and democracy have been at the center of the 2016 campaign. Hillary Clinton put it well at the Democratic National Convention in July: "Our economy isn't working the way it should because our democracy isn't working the way it should." The primary challenge to Clinton by Bernie Sanders was driven by the widespread feeling that big money is crowding out the voices and views of the people. Fights over voting rights have roiled states around the country. And in a perverted way, these issues have fed Donald Trump's appeal, too. Many Americans feel unheard and unrepresented. Trump conflates real issues of the dominance of money with the paranoid message that voter registration and voting tallies are "rigged" as well.

Millions of Americans are legitimately angry that politicians have betrayed them by rigging our economic and political systems to primarily benefit (1) rich people, (2) giant corporations, and (3) politicians themselves. And most Americans want injustices in our society to be remedied. But millions of Trump supporters are willing to go along with simple-minded or bombastic proposals for solving national and global problems, even buying into Trumpian prescriptions and embracing dangerous attitudes like denying risks related to anthropogenic disruptions of the global climate and beliefs in the righteousness of white supremacism and overriding male prerogatives. Trump uses misdirection and deceit to come up with wrongheaded dictates on how we should fix things, and they generally revolve around rejecting everything his smart black predecessor accomplished. He wants to build walls instead of bridges, pushing to have a wall built along the entire border with Mexico, and to deport millions of immigrants and impose protectionist tariffs that would launch damaging trade wars. People are foolish to trust the man, because he is like a macho male drama queen who has shown himself to be pathologically dishonest, obsessed with money, brazenly unethical, belligerently divisive, eager to evade taxes, aggressively intimidating, hyper-litigious, ruthlessly vindictive, hyper insecure, vile in personal insults, inadequately empathetic, exploitive and demeaning to women, female objectifying, narcissistically maladjusted, reactively authoritarian, overly willing to use demagoguery and fear mongering and the evoking of dark visions, and filled with hubris and lacking in human decency.

In *Rebellion and Authority - An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts,* the authors talk about classic theories of the deterrent influences that authorities have on those who would defy them. Recognizing that excessive social unfairness undermines the legitimacy of leaders, Malcolm Gladwell provides a better explanation for why people obey or alternatively defy authority, and it involves LEGITIMACY. Gladwell's theory describes three main circumstances under which people willingly obey an authority: (1) if they feel they have a voice that will be heard and respected; (2) if the authority or system is regarded as trustworthy and predictable; and, (3) if they feel the authority or system is fair. "It can't treat one group differently from another."

When people feel that an authority or a system isn't legitimate, they get angry. A mistake authorities make over and over, Gladwell says, is underestimating such anger. When those in authority want the rest of us to obey them, it matters above all how they themselves treat people.

<u>Why Are Our Public Decision-Making Processes So Messed Up?</u>

Mark Twain once observed: "In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination."

It is becoming increasingly important for us to honestly examine our beliefs and the things we are told by the media and our leaders, and to make better public policy decisions in light of these better understandings. We should base our decisions on the broadest range of relevant facts and information, and on fairer and more clearly established priorities. Unfortunately, our public decision-making is profoundly affected by culture war conflicts, fomented antagonisms, racial biases, selfish ideologies and undue influence of narrowly focused vested interests.

Researchers have found that there is an apparently genetic component to the way we see and feel the world. In a study done in Nebraska, a surprisingly strong correlation was found between the degrees that a person is susceptible to sudden noises or scary images and how strongly they hold political opinions. It turns out that conservatives tend to be much more easily frightened than liberals. This means there may actually be a basic *biological component* of political beliefs. This is one reason that actuating people's fears is such an effective way to manipulate them. This is one reason that micro-targeted advertising on social media outlets like Facebook was so effective in allowing Republicans to win election contests in 2016 by employing fake news and pushing often bizarre conspiracy theories and using character assassination tactics.

This research was reported in the September 2008 issue of the prestigious journal *Science,* in an article titled *Political Attitudes Vary with Physiological Traits.* The researchers found a strong correlation between political views and unconscious reactions to immediate threats. Subjects had been tested for strongly-felt attitudes related to issues like foreign aid, military spending, gun control, the death penalty, the Iraq war, warrantless searches, the Patriot Act, torture of political prisoners, women's rights, premarital sex, school prayer, gay marriage and immigration policies.

The researchers explored this so-called 'Startle Reflex" and found that people tend to react either strongly or more calmly to a sudden threat. Watch out! Those who had the most significant physical reaction to stimuli tended to have conservative attitudes on political issues, and those who had calmer responses tended to have liberal attitudes toward these issues.

So people not only have rational reasons for philosophical differences on issues and deeply ingrained socially-conditioned biases, but even biological predispositions that affect what they believe. When we recognize this, we can see that it's important for us to communicate better and debate more honestly, and be more willing to compromise on finding the best plans for public policies. While it would be advantageous for us to reduce the institutionalized bribery in our dysfunctional political system so that rich people and lobbyists do not dominate it so excessively, we also need to find ways to facilitate constructive public debate so that we can find the fairest compromises between all competing interests. To do so, we need to keep in mind the greater good, as it is most reasonably assessed in light of the long-term best interests of society as a whole. A focus on long-term goals is sometimes even a good way to make better things happen in the short run.

How can we diffuse the hyper-partisanship and win-lose tribalism that gives public support to ideological arguments that affect our public policy making? Deep subtexts affect partisan conflicts, as was evident in the preposterous 'birther' controversy that was fomented against President Obama by an extreme fringe that thereby unscrupulously gained power. Those folks cultivated suspicions about Barack Obama's citizenship and rejected definitive proofs of it. This and many other facts make it clear how difficult it will be to overcome biases, racism, economic fundamentalism, radical anti-environmentalism and authoritarian rule in the USA. By having constructive debate in our communities, and by working together, and by marginalizing those with extreme viewpoints and agendas, we could move forward together toward a rosier future.

A marvel-inducing conundrum confronts us with the rise and persistence of Trumpism. Americans apparently don't really want politicians who tell it like it is, they seem instead to want politicians to "tell it like it isn't." During the run-up to the 2016 national elections, politicians made many promises that are bigger, bolder and less tethered to reality than those of previous presidential races. "Voters appear to want candidates who will deliver nothing short of their wildest partisan dreams (and delusions), alongside the unconditional silence and submission of their ideological adversaries."

We are living in topsy-turvy times in which shrewd politicians are channeling the anger and frustrations of disaffected people by exploiting their increasingly desperate anxieties and the growing envy of the Have Nots, while also obsequiously pandering to the increasingly reactive jealousies of the Haves. These trends are playing out in a context of national priorities that are excessively focused on contributing to increases in inequalities and fomented discord and stoked passions and goaded anger and trumped up feelings of frustration and disaffection.

Republican presidential candidates like Trump and Ron DeSantis, along with extreme conservatives like Sean Hannity (and Tucker Carlson) and other Fox News commentators have riled up people's passions over religion and

women's reproductive prerogatives and acceptance of gay men and lesbian women and other hot button issues, but let us not "take our eyes off the birdie". Much better governance and policy-making are achievable, and marching to the tune of bigots, billionaires and charlatans is the wrong way to achieve desirable goals.

John Steinbeck gave voice to downtrodden folks like migrant farm workers who faced harsh conditions in a society without a social safety net during the hard times of the Great Depression. He focused in *The Grapes of Wrath* on refugees who were forced to flee the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma and other parts of the Midwest. He saw clearly that dissatisfactions and political unrest grow in the fertile soil of economic despair and social upheaval. It was in such soil that the fascist demagogue Adolph Hitler rose to power in Germany by exploiting people's feelings of humiliation and struggle due to the hard times that followed World War I and the harsh reparations imposed by the victors of that war, and a severe inflation that buffeted the Weimar Republic as a consequence.

Today we should strive to improve conditions so that the soil is prepared for a saner, healthier and more providential harvest, and we should demand that our leaders stop sowing bitter seeds. Vote accordingly!

Opportunities and Obstacles

The French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States for nine months in 1831. After his return to France, he wrote the renowned book, *Democracy in America,* in which he provided insightful observations about the USA and its politics, economy and people. One idea he introduced was "self-interest rightly understood". This concept is valuable in the world today because of the seriously adverse consequences being suffered as a result of misguided understandings of what actually constitutes true self-interest and the common good. Our prosperity ultimately must be consistent with basic human values, and with an adequately protected environment and renewable resource usages and a sustainable economy -- AND with a stable number of people on Earth, rather than a rapidly increasing number in relatively poor countries.

Proponents of specific special interest groups focus intently on their goals, so they are well organized to assert their power and exert powerful pressure on politicians to give them special privileges and benefits. In contrast, common good interests are less immediate and somewhat less tangible, so they generally do not have equally strongly committed proponents. This is why socially beneficial priorities in our political system do not receive the support they should. Tragic assaults on the environmental commons result, along with rapid resource depletion and the unethical exploitation of government profligacy and corruption.

People who believe in economic fundamentalism, and others like those who formulate policies in right-wing think tanks, tend to cloak their arguments in spurious spin about why courses of action are most desirable for the nation. These rationalizations serve their own greedy interests and those of the cash-flush constituencies that finance such propaganda. The tickle-down theory that champions tax cuts being given mostly to rich people, for instance, is an example of excessively greedy and often dangerous perspectives of such people. Ideologies like this facilitate selfishness, avarice, shortsighted politics, partisan intransigence and wrong-headed ideological certitudes, all of which -- in general -- detrimentally affect our world.

It is sensational how effectively the inertial forces of the status quo subverted Barack Obama's "change you can believe in". Wall Street bankers grabbed huge bailouts and obstructed meaningful reform of the banking system despite the Great Recession. Since then, we have been unable to make our system of taxation significantly more progressive. And the best ideas for really good healthcare reform have been torpedoed, even though millions of people are being made less secure as a result. And the pandemic revealed catastrophic vulnerabilities that harshly impact millions of essential workers, especially people in racial minorities and persons in nursing homes.

The need to get Big Money out of the driver's seat of our political system is becoming clearer every day. And the challenges to this goal have been dramatically ratcheted up by the narrow majority of conservatives on the Supreme Court while Antonin Scalia was still alive, and by their rulings that corporations and wealthy people should be allowed to spend unlimited amounts on influencing elections. "Free speech" for Americans is being dealt a blow in favor of 'paid speech' by corporations. We really need to reform our system, and do so boldly, and soon!

As the League of Women Voters succinctly states, "When citizens are frozen out of the process, government doesn't respond to our needs -- it only serves special interests." The organization rightly recommends that we

need to take our democracy back from corporate and partisan interests.

Context and Perspective

> "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us …"
>
> --- Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

These opening lines by the famous British author Charles Dickens launched his tale of London and Paris during a period of economic and social turmoil in England and France in the latter half of the 18th century. Taxes and war-engendered national debt were heavy burdens in France at that time. This was the period of King Louis XVI's reign from 1774 to 1792, a time characterized by popular discontent and political unrest that culminated in the French Revolution of 1789, a violent upheaval of the people against an oppressive aristocracy. Charles Dickens concluded the opening paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities*, quoted above, by noting that "… in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only." Today, hyperbole is proliferating like a deadly algal bloom!

Similar outrage against tyranny and neglect of the common good contributed to the Revolutionary War against British hegemony that American colonists began waging in 1776, and won in 1783. At a bleak point early in that war, Thomas Paine, the English immigrant to the American colonies who had become a passionate advocate for American independence, noted in the pamphlet *The American Crisis:* "These are the times that try men's souls."

Today we are living in another era with widespread economic, political and social turmoil. Once again it seems like this is the best of times and worst of times. And once again our souls are being tried. And the souls of many of our representatives seem to be in the process of being tried and convicted of treasonous wrongheadedness!

In addition to serious domestic problems, there are many violent conflicts around the world, and poverty, hunger and strife haunt societies worldwide. There are many crises today that involve impacts that are more intricately intertwined and global in scope than ever before. Environmental side effects of agricultural and industrial activities are growing more complex and damaging every year, and human activities are causing increasingly ominous changes in the basic ecological, biological and climatic conditions on Earth. All these conditions together are contributing to social and geopolitical challenges around the globe.

Economic and social malaise provides us with a "dangerous opportunity" to reform our econopolitical systems and to invest in a more positive future. In theory, the financial crisis of 2008 should have made it necessary to alter the absurd aspects of partisan politics. As playwright Tony Kushner wrote: "There are moments in history when the fabric of everyday life unravels, and there is this unstable dynamism that allows for incredible social change in short periods of time. People and the world they're living in can be utterly transformed, either for the good or the bad, or some mixture of the two."

We should not have let that crisis go to waste! We should have taken advantage of the opportunity to transform our societies in ways that are best for the common good in the long run. We should be more honest with ourselves and embrace a new freethinking "Great Awakening" attuned to accurate understandings and common sense and prudence -- AND to fairness to future generations. This modern Great Awakening should be far-seeing and ecologically smart, in contrast to historical episodes of "awakenings" that were bizarrely obedient to blind faith in religious myths and strictly fundamentalist interpretations of ancient "holy books."

Let us acknowledge the strong connection between the unprecedented rapid growth in the number of human beings on Earth and all the overarching problems we face, including human-caused climate disruptions, shortages of fresh water, deforestation, habitat destruction, the decimation of wildlife, ocean warming and acidification, resource depletion, poverty, inter-generational conflicts and violent wars, injustices and terrorism. Let us accept more responsibility for future human well-being, including social responsibility, fiscal responsibility, environmental responsibility and reproductive responsibility.

Like a kaleidoscope colorfully morphing from one pattern to another, the relative equilibrium of our societies is being shattered by economic hard times for millions of people. During this unsettled interregnum, we have the great opportunity to create a more sustainable and sensible future. We should find better ways to prevent powerful vested interests from hijacking our societies, as they have done during other crises. Naomi Klein wrote about this tendency in her valuable book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. During a crisis, we are more vulnerable to increased injustices and fraudulent forms of profiteering and the imposition of harsh austerity measures and more authoritarian forms of government. For this reason, we should choose to use periods of radical upheaval to implement real reforms, and not just yield to reactive and manipulative forces. Unfortunately, cunning demagogues have seized such opportunities, proclaiming to be populists and fooling enough people to enable them to grab power, and they are sowing distrust, causing chaos and egregiously abusing their ill-gotten power.

During times of unrest and upheaval, whether personal or societal, it behooves us to learn the larger lessons contained in the challenges we face, and to make "the growth choice, not the fear choice". In this way, we can take good advantage of adversity and improve our lives and future prospects. As our nation took desperate measures to contain the economic contagion caused by the bursting of the engineered real estate and equities bubbles, we should have realistically evaluated what had taken place, and why. We should also "think outside the box" for optimal solutions. In addition to the ideas explored herein, I highly recommend a review of the specific proposals in Common Sense Revival, or in Part Four of the Earth Manifesto online, particularly *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform our Societies,* and the *Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity.*

New Directions: Progressive, Not Regressive

Entrenched interest groups that support the status quo are extraordinarily influential, and they are generally staunchly opposed to changes that would benefit the common good. In 2008, the American people voted for "change we can believe in", and we really should seriously begin to make fundamental changes that are needed in our government and business world. Our failure to do so is propelling powerful efforts for revolutionary change like that advocated by Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders in 2016, and this failure also gave impetus to anti-establishment sentiment that helped Trump get elected. I feel strongly that stoking partisan conflict is a much worse strategy than uniting and cooperating together with fair-minded intention so that truly important goals can be achieved. We should seek common ground on what these goals should be, and on how best to accomplish them. Then we should commit our societies to act in ways consistent with these goals to achieve them. The backlash to hubristic Trumpism should rightly heed these idealistic sentiments.

We should begin to make the federal government a bit leaner, and stimulate the powerful engine of small businesses to create jobs. We should help finance micro-loans to people who need them, and reduce interest rates on student loans, rather than giving trillions of dollars in bailouts and cheap money to mega-banks and corporate entities. We should make health care a right for all citizens, and find ways to implement smart and effective cost controls. And we should give much greater respect to the sovereignty of other nations on the international stage, seeking win-win solutions and acting as good neighbors rather than reckless dominators.

We should dramatically restructure subsidies and incentives to reward activities that facilitate the common good, and discourage those that are counterproductive. We should make our societies fairer by making our graduated income tax system more progressive, with higher marginal rates on the highest levels of income. We should advance a 'green revolution' in several ways. For instance, we should give federal rebates to people who purchase high mileage vehicles, and finance this with fees on sales of SUVs and other vehicles that get poor mileage. We should revise property taxes, graduating them so that they are lower for small energy-efficient homes and higher for homes larger than 2,500 square feet. We should invest in greening the construction of homes and businesses in order to help us break free from our dependence on polluting and climate altering fossil fuels. We should finance these energy initiatives by increasing gasoline taxes and by putting a reasonable cost on carbon dioxide emissions, and we should begin to solve the national security threats posed by global warming and climate change.

We should enact a Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as was advocated by the great ecologist and explorer and filmmaker Jacques-Yves Cousteau. We should use this Bill of Rights as an overarching guide to help us determine

how to live our lives without harming the prospects of our descendants. We should, in summary, strive to make this a better world with brighter prospects and greater cause for hope, rather than a more unfair world with ever-worsening problems and ultimately unsustainable courses of action.

But we are not doing the right things. We have not faced the need to reduce wasteful spending on the military. We have not cut misguided subsidies for oil and coal industries. We have slid backwards instead of being smart in reforming our political system to reduce institutional bribery and limit excessive influence of lobbyists for large corporations. We are failing to change our political system to make opposition parties constructive and to discourage extreme partisanship. We have been unable to take steps to reduce economic inequities. We continue to indulge in the expediency of deficit spending and so are dangerously driving up the national debt. We could make the changes needed, but only with courageous and fair-minded action. NOW is the time to start!

Partingtonian Propensities of an Explanatory Mind

It seems to me that people have collectively been denying the proverbial elephant in the room, that the majority of taxpayers cannot afford to pay more to invest in future well-being, and that we have already borrowed way too much money from all taxpayers in every future year. This makes it clear that there is really only one good plan of action: to require profitable businesses and wealthy people to pay higher amounts of tax. Successful businesses and rich people must be obligated to contribute more to the greater good, by enacting a progressive tax scale that is more steeply graduated on the highest levels of income. And these solutions should be put into effect in nations worldwide to prevent multinational corporations and rich people from evading taxes and failing to act responsibly in our societies.

It is in everyone's best interests to tap into the large source of funds of those who can afford it. We could probably even design some creative plan that would make it profitable in the long-term for successful businesses and rich people to contribute to the greater good today because they would ultimately benefit from better economic conditions and the greater prosperity for the majority.

While the global pandemic and economic and ecological crises continue to envelop our nation and the world, AI innovations in communications on the Internet and social media are having a major influence. These technologies, along with television, give people extensive knowledge about trends, circumstances, causes and interrelatedness of economic activities and social outcomes, and they also make us more acutely aware of inequities and injustices. As a result, it is becoming increasingly important for people everywhere to have clearer and more comprehensive understandings of what constitutes the common good, and not to fall hook, line and sinker for all the partisan spin, misinformation, fear-mongering and stoked anger that pervades the airwaves and haunts online forums. It is vital that people become more aware of the whole --- AND show more consideration for it.

Good Cause for Hope: The Positive Potentials for the Presidency of Barack Obama and Joe Biden

People want to have hope. They want to hope that their leaders will be honest and care about the common good. They hope for a government that protects them and invests in them, not a government that rips them off and abandons them in favor of a privileged few. They hope their own interests will be more fairly represented, and not just the interests of bankers, CEOs, and the 2% of Americans who own half of the wealth in the country.

We live in a society with short attention spans where sound bites and "bumper sticker sentiments" and simplistic talking points are used to mold public opinion. Right mindfulness involves smarter, more expansive and more inclusive ways of seeing things.

Think about the competing mega-interests in every country. It is desirable from the standpoint of the whole of society to have high quality and affordable education, better job opportunities, adequate protections for workers, good healthcare for all, a reasonable modicum of retirement security, and a healthy environmental commons. In contrast, from narrower points of view of businesses, which regard profits as the primary priority, it is desirable to have higher unemployment and thus conditions that favor lower wages, lower health care costs and smaller employer contributions to workers' retirement costs. Perhaps this is why statistics show there is a higher rate of joblessness during Republican administrations than during Democratic ones. Republicans favor business interests,

so they tend to be more adamantly opposed to government initiatives that promote broadened opportunities and common good goals, and that advance the rights and prerogatives of working people.

Statistics indicate that stock market returns have in general been higher under the administrations of Democratic presidents than Republican ones. This may seem surprising because the enactment of business-friendly policies would seem to be most likely to create bigger profits and therefore higher investor returns and stock prices. This may prove that policies designed to maximize benefits for a small segments of the people actually turn out, ironically, to be worse for society as a whole than policies that emphasize a greater modicum of fairness to people in the working classes.

Conservative talk radio hosts and people in right-wing think tanks confuse millions of Americans into believing spin that basically asserts that regressive policies are better than progressive ones. It is amazing that "conservative" propagandists have managed to create so much fear and distrust of tax-and-spend policies, yet when they have had domineering federal power, they implemented policies that were fiscally irresponsible by borrowing heavily to finance high-end tax cuts and many significant increases in spending. They managed to convince many Americans that job creation is better under Republicans than Democrats (the opposite is historically true), and that stock market averages do better under Republican administrations than Democrat ones (again, the opposite is true).

Facts and distortions of facts are used manipulatively by partisans of every stripe. In the face of such barrages of obfuscation, we need to understand the greater truth of the matter, in order to achieve better outcomes. The truth is that the policies of the hard right have seriously harmed our nation so far this century.

Early in President Obama's administration, I expressed the conviction that we should all hope that Barack Obama SUCCEEDS in making our country fairer, and not that he fails like the obstructionist naysayers of the radical right "hope". Consider the treachery of that sabotage! First, this crowd contributed both intentionally and inadvertently to the engineering of an economic disaster through deregulation of banks and fiscally irresponsible tax cutting combined with rash increases in government spending. And when they controlled Congress, they passed crooked legislation like a new Prescription Drug entitlement program in 2003 that was designed in ways that would substantially increase profits for big drug companies at the public expense. They also irresponsibly pushed further deregulation and trickle-down economic policies, helping inflate speculative bubbles in real estate and risky financial derivatives. Then, in the throes of the ensuing economic hard times, they stubbornly refused to go along with most of the needed remedial measures.

Like a scratched old record album, they claim over and over and over again, in a tired refrain, that the only way to solve any problem is to cut taxes, even though this means running up the national debt. In the small print, these tax cuts are always designed to primarily benefit big corporations and wealthy people. In December 2017, Republicans rammed through more regressive tax cuts, without support from a single Democrat, and tried to conceal the details from the public.

Conservative politicians often deny scientific understandings, so they no doubt give little credence to the incisive insight of Albert Einstein, who defined INSANITY as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." It is high time to give greater influence to more trustworthy leaders and smarter approaches!

<u>Should We Be Radically Cutting the Size of Government?</u>

Most Republicans still march to the beat of discredited voices that say we must shrink the size of government until it can be figuratively drowned in a bathtub. Their actions have ironically resulted in the necessity for the federal government to take a much more active role during economic crises. In Sept. 2008, Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae were nationalized and the giant speculative insurer AIG was bailed out, along with numerous banks, and then the auto industry. That financial crisis, and more recently the coronavirus pandemic, have made it all but mandatory for the federal government to increase already high levels of deficit spending to prevent the economy from sliding into a more serious recession or a depression. And yet Republican politicians still strive to obstruct solutions and perpetuate policies and systemic injustices that got us into these problems.

Good God, politics! Irresponsible politicians have dug a deep hole that is proving to be extremely difficult to get ourselves out of, and the failure to take smarter steps to improve the economy is hurting many millions of people.

To Bailout or Not to Bailout, That is the Question

Some people say that we should let businesses go into bankruptcy when they falter. Others say that when corporations become too big to fail, we must bail them out to prevent economic disaster. Good arguments can be made on both sides of this question. Bankruptcy proceedings allow corporations to reorganize in such ways that costs are reduced and workers as well as CEOs, top managers, suppliers and lenders are all forced to make concessions to save the organization. If successful, reorganizations like this help a business survive and emerge from bankruptcy as a healthier, more competitive entity. On the other hand, when government bails businesses out, it allows the persistence of excesses, inefficiencies, waste, and egregiously large bonuses for CEOs and management. Such bailouts are generally done at the expense of taxpayers and future generations, so they are radically inequitable. The danger of NOT committing to bailouts of banks and mortgage giants like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and insurers like AIG in 2009, and the auto industry, is that such failure to act would likely have led to a ripple effect that would have caused a further financial and economic meltdown.

One reasonable option would be to prevent giant corporations from growing so large that they become too big to fail. Trust busting was a responsible movement during the Progressive Era a century ago, when three U.S. Presidents -- William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft -- acted to break up monopolies that exerted too much power. Today, corporate abuses of concentrated power are once again too extreme, so we should again break up big businesses that have grown too dominant, and act to give smaller businesses a greater chance to succeed.

Ben Bernanke, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve from 2006 to 2014, declared during the financial crisis: "I want to be very, very clear: too big to fail is one of the biggest problems we face in this country, and we must take action to eliminate too big to fail." Congress should rightly take action to do this. But a majority of politicians have been bought and paid for by big corporations and their enablers, so they sabotage sensible efforts to fix problems related to monopolies. In 2016, Bernanke stated that, "... if major structural changes in the banking system are necessary to avoid another crisis, to promote financial stability, and to control moral hazard and excessive risk-taking, then we should all be for making the changes." Let's act accordingly!

We should once again implement sensible regulation of banks by reinstating the Glass-Steagall Act that kept depository banking separate from investment banking. And we should create laws that regulate financial instruments like mortgage-backed securities and derivatives like credit default swaps. See my essay *Existence, Economics and Ecological Intelligence* for further insight into economic issues like this.

Confidence in a Fairer and More Propitious Economy

President Franklin Roosevelt gave his first inaugural address during the depths of the Depression in January 1933. In that speech, he asserted his belief that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself". Interesting call, Mr. Roosevelt! There are no doubt valid things to fear, yet it's also true that in a market economy it is fundamentally important for people to have CONFIDENCE in the system so that credit is available and there is reasonable security and good prospects for the creation of both jobs and wealth. Market participants need to be able to trust in the legal tender of money, and in the adequate availability of credit; they must believe that unfettered supply and demand mechanisms work; and they need to feel assured that the marketplace will be managed well by state and federal governments to insure fairer competition and free exchange while at the same time protecting people against fraud, misinformation, monopoly abuses, dangerous products, unsafe workplaces, unfair labor and trade practices, and environmental damages.

Of course we need to have confidence in sound policies and institutions, and we should not harbor delusions about failed policies and corrupt institutions. Overconfidence has contributed to every Ponzi scheme in history, so we surely need to have confidence in good ideas, not in dangerously unsound ones. Confidence in a system that is inevitably unsustainable may be beneficial to those who benefit by perpetuating a corrupt system for a while longer, but ultimately we need confidence in a different way of doing things, one that IS sustainable. A solid foundation is needed for a durable structure, not shoddy construction or house-of-cards construction techniques or smoke-and-mirrors illusions. A house divided as a result of political treachery should be rejected.

Confident Attitudes vs. Confidence Tricks

There is an unfavorable tendency for special interest groups to employ "confidence tricks" to exploit advantages and make gains at the public expense. This is very different from the real confidence we need, so it is no wonder such scams inspire uneasiness. Nobel-laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz wrote about the 2009 banking bailout by the federal government, saying that the Bush administration "talked about confidence building, but what it delivered was actually a confidence trick. If the administration had really wanted to restore confidence in the financial system, it would have begun by addressing the underlying problems -- the flawed incentive structures and the inadequate regulatory system."

The repeal of the Depression-era Glass Steagall Act in 1999 was foolhardy, as was the passage of the Commodity Futures Modernization Act in the year 2000 that contained provisions preventing the regulation of many types of banking derivatives and mortgage securities shenanigans. These actions contributed to the onset of the "Great Recession" that began in 2008. Let's reform these laws! ("Yes, we can!")

It was no big surprise that the Governmental Accounting Office reported in December 2008 that the Treasury Department was implementing the $700 billion Wall Street bailout plan without adequate oversight, transparency or accountability to taxpayers. Similar ploys were employed in the gargantuan $2.2 trillion pandemic relief CARES Act. Much evidence shows that grave damage can be done by leaders who are deceitful, ideologically inflexible, intellectually incurious, or overly influenced by vested interest lobbyists. The right wing in politics, in particular, has shown how selfish, greed-driven, obstructionist, corrupt, hypocritical, and mercilessly retributive it can be.

Almost no one predicted back in the year 2000 how detrimental Republican rule would be in the eight years that followed for the American people and others in the world -- either in terms of economic outcomes or of negative social impacts, or of environmental harms, or of the hopes for peaceful coexistence in our relations with other nations. When the stock market hit its bottom in early 2009, gloom and doom attitudes of investors coincided with people's fears and angst about economic prospects. Now, 15 years later, the banking system is plenty profitable and the stock market has been in a choppy bull market phase despite pandemic uncertainties and negative impacts. And life is exceedingly difficult for many billions of people around the world.

Conservatives mercilessly criticize and attack liberals. This is understandable; it is politics, after all, and counter-supporting power can be gained by demonizing opponents. But it's also ironic that Republicans have been impeding almost every initiative to honestly improve conditions for the masses. The need is growing for us to support smarter and more effective and fair-minded initiatives and more honest and responsible leaders.

We need to give more power to the people by finding ways to reduce the domination of our politics by narrowly-focused corporations, especially in light of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling on corporate "free speech". We should also recognize when individually rational decisions are leading to collectively irrational ones in our capitalist economic system, and accordingly formulate 'rainy day' plans to prevent systemic failures. And knowing our human natures and natural propensities better, we should strive to live healthier lives and embrace saner priorities and broader, more honest worldviews. If we cannot live with greater 'voluntary simplicity', we should at least "live large" in ways that are more responsible, and that reduce our depletionary demands on Earth's resources and our harmful impacts on our home planet's wildlife, biological diversity and ecosystems.

Capitalism is Coming to an End, Says World Renowned Economist

A former Greek finance minister named Yanis Varoufakis has claimed that capitalism is going to make itself obsolete. Varoufakis was a former economics professor, and an expert in economics, so it is thought provoking to hear that he told an audience at University College London that the increased prevalence of artificial intelligence and mechanization means the capitalist system will undermine itself. Varoufakis warned that Karl Marx "will have his revenge", saying technology is going to "destroy a lot more jobs than it creates." He says that capitalism will undermine itself because technology companies will make many other businesses and the private means of production obsolete. The pandemic dramatically accelerated these trends.

Mr. Varoufakis said the current system is "unsustainable" as vast swathes of people become unemployed due to the advent of automation in many industries. To get around this, Varoufakis said governments need to enact

redistributive policies. One way they could do this, he suggests, is to put 10% of all future issues of shares into a "common welfare fund" that would be owned by the people. From this fund, a "universal basic dividend" could be paid to every citizen. This idea, remarkably, is consistent with a global wealth tax recommendation made by French economist Thomas Piketty in his tome *Capital in the Twenty-First Century.*

This type of visionary plan is needed because all developed nations on Earth are likely, astonishingly, to experience job loss rates of up to nearly 50% within the next 20 years due to mechanization, robotics, artificial intelligence and other labor-eliminating technologies, according to an Oxford study. Just as employment in retail sales is being disrupted by e-commerce, many jobs in other arenas are at high risk of being automated over the next two decades. Refining this prediction in a September 2017 report, Carl Frey of Oxford said human employment in retail could vanish entirely and 80% of jobs in transportation, warehousing and logistics and 63% of jobs in sales are at risk of being lost to automation. Amazon is a prime example of this trend. And Frey argues that "we are only on Day 1 of the impact of robot and artificial intelligence technology on employment." He added, "Technological progress on sensors, data and software are as important as that in robots and drones to enable this automation."

While Frey argues that many retail jobs are going to disappear, consumerism is not, and people are going to be buying more and more stuff. It is just that a greater proportion will be done via online commerce, accompanied by colossal quantities of wasteful packaging. These clear understandings mean that we face huge challenges, so it is titanically foolish for our leaders to be emulating the Roman emperor Nero, who fiddled while Rome burned. At least Nero did not set the fires! We must demand better!

Observations in the Age of Reason: Satisfying Our Needs without Destroying Planet Earth

In conclusion, we need to rethink what is right and proper. We must reassess what is best for our society as a whole. Reason, common sense and wisdom should guide us. There will always be big differences of opinions, and plenty of uncertainties, so we need to seek guidance from the most knowledgeable experts and the wisest leaders and philosophers among us, and we should familiarize ourselves with the lessons of history.

Two maxims carved in stone in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in ancient Greece offered good advice: "Know Thyself" and "Nothing in Excess". These principles are important for us as individuals, and they are even more crucial for us collectively. A better understanding of human nature and ourselves could help guide us in re-designing our public policies and laws and social institutions. It is valuable to clearly recognize our needs and our wants, our virtues and vices, our strengths and weaknesses, our emotional insecurities and compensatory behaviors, our consumer psychology and motives, our susceptibility to greed and speculative excesses, our drives to manipulate and control others, our compulsions to be right, our contrasting tendencies toward either 'Tough Love' or compassionate generosity, and our practically innate propensities toward either conservative strictness or more empathetic liberality.

"It's not only the most difficult thing to know oneself, but the most inconvenient."

--- Josh Billings

Everyone has basic wants and needs, as summarized by the famous psychologist Abraham Maslow in his "hierarchy of needs" pyramid. We have basic physiological needs for oxygen to breathe, water to drink, food to eat, and clothing and shelter to protect us. Beyond these basic needs, we have the desire for a more secure existence. We also have outer-directed impulses to belong, to be accepted, and to be liked and respected. We yearn to feel competent and gain status, and to have a good sense of self-esteem. Above these needs in Maslow's hierarchy are inner-directed needs, like the desire to learn, explore, satisfy creative impulses, appreciate aesthetics and actualize inner drives. At the top of this pyramid, according to Maslow, are drives to transcend selfishness and to be of service to others -- essentially to be good citizens in our communities and country.

The maxim at Delphi, "Nothing in Excess," has a corollary. BALANCE is desirable in almost all things. Balance is needed between individualism and social responsibility, between national security and citizen liberties, between thriftiness and lavish spending, between materialistic consumerism and sustainable consumption, and between excessive regulation and inadequate regulation. Businesses are by their nature oriented toward narrow short-term goals, so we need to subject them to sensible regulation and oversight, and there should be a better balance

between laissez-faire activities and accountability. Government should be managed in better ways that are more effective and more fiscally sound, so that devastating boom-and-bust economic cycles are prevented and there are fewer economic injustices. And our system should not be so unjust to people of color.

Wouldn't it have been better, in retrospect, if American leaders had promoted understandings that are more enlightened, rather than being emotionally hijacked to give support to Trump Republicans? Wouldn't it be better if we saw more holistic understandings of the greater good, and worked together to make our societies healthier and fairer and saner? Such guidance could help unify us and heal our societies of the deep divisions between competing and conflicting interests.

Finally, another right understanding of the common good is that it should include conditions in which individuals are encouraged to flourish, and their potentialities are fostered rather than being repressed. There is much to do, so let's get started -- and head with alacrity in the right direction!

When some of these words were first being written early in the year 2010, a new year and a new decade were upon us. The start of a new year is always a good time for reflection and assessment, and maybe even a resolution or two. A new year provides us with a rich opportunity to acknowledge the passage of another part of our lives, and it gives us a chance to step back, to assess, to acknowledge and appreciate, and to honor the positive things in our lives. I have spent New Years' Day many times on a fork of a Sierra Nevada river at about 2,500 feet in elevation, appreciating the granite-bouldered streambed and the clear flowing water of the river in its infinite babbling continuity. This experience has always been conducive to seeing valuable lessons in life. Lessons like these: Go with the flow. Make the best of whatever comes your way. Be nimble and maintain a sense of balance. Smile. Laugh. Live and let live. Breathe deep, and let go. Accept the ephemerality of all things. Appreciate the beauty of life and nature. Cultivate equanimity in the face of adversities, and humbleness in the arms of success. Let the river figuratively run through you!

Much remains to be done to re-focus our public policies on achieving common good goals. To create a society that has less stress, less conflict and fewer inequities, we must implement fairer policies -- ones that are affordable and sustainable. We need to have tax policies that are more progressive, and opportunities that are more broadly shared. We need better education and universal health care, and a more just legal system. And we must make a more serious commitment to peaceful coexistence. The sun has never shined on a cause of greater worth, as Thomas Paine liked to say.

We have it in our power to figuratively begin the world over again. This is our rendezvous with destiny. Let's do it properly! Let's all strive to become citizens deserving to be celebrated, as Jim Hightower suggests in *The Hightower Lowdown*, "who refuse to be *'idiotes'* -- a word the ancient Greeks used for people who might have a high IQ but are focused exclusively on their own lives with no concern for the common good."

Remember the words of Dr. Seuss in his marvelous tale, *The Lorax,* in which Once-ler, a cantankerous exploiter, declares that the word of the Lorax -- who "speaks for the trees" -- suddenly seemed perfectly clear, UNLESS people like us care a whole awful lot, things aren't going to get better.

Thanks for your consideration of these ideas!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

March 12, 2024 (originally published in March 2010, and revised occasionally thereafter)

Gaia's Geological Perspective: Episodes Since Genesis

Latest Revision, March 12, 2024

"Well, I never!"

--- Mark Twain

Earthlings, call me Gaia. I have been majestically speeding around the star you call the Sun ever since the solar system formed in this remote outpost of the Milky Way Galaxy. You humans study me and call your studies "geology" or "deep ecology", but it is all existential physics and holistic biology to me.

Elemental physical forces have been fundamental in determining my nature and how I actually came to be. *Gravity* is the most obvious of these forces. I was born, along with my seven sister planets, more than 4.5 billion years ago when the accretionary forces of gravity caused matter orbiting the fiery star you call the Sun to collide together, forming large and roughly spherical masses.

My early days were wild, believe me! Matter was flinging with energetic abandon through space way back then. The entire universe had begun with an initial Big Bang more than nine billion years earlier, and burning masses and cosmic detritus had been hurtling forth from this explosive materialization of matter for eons. Long before the solar system came into being, untold numbers of stars had existed and forged new elements from primordial hydrogen and helium, and then been blown apart in unfathomably intense supernova explosions. The atomic debris of these stars eventually contained all the elements of matter that now exist on Earth, including the elements most critical to life: carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, calcium, iron, phosphorous, sulfur and potassium.

At the dawn of the solar system, asteroids, planetesimals, meteors, comets, frozen gases, water and "cosmic dust" existed in accretion disks orbiting the Sun. As this matter consolidated in occasionally colossal collisions, some of it eventually came to form my dense inner core and hot outer core and thick mantle and thin rocky crust, and my oceans and atmosphere as well. A similar process created all the other planets and moons in the solar system. Huge quantities of other matter still whirl around the Sun, captive to the powerful gravity of its gigantic mass. This includes a large swath of asteroids between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, and millions of chunks of icy debris in the far-out Kuiper Belt, and countless comets in the Oort Cloud on the outer reaches of the solar system.

Every month, as the Sun sets, a full moon appears to you humans, looming up brightly on the horizon in an easterly direction from wherever you are. The full moon's visible crater-pocked surface provides silent testimony to the impressive impacts that have taken place over the long span of the Moon's lunar history. Similar impact craters would be everywhere evident upon my terrestrial surface, except for the fact that the processes of erosion, mountain building, volcanism, tectonic plate movements and the growth of vegetation have continuously altered my landscapes and obliterated most of this evidence of impacts that took place since my formative years.

I've surely seen a lot of comings and goings in my time. I was a lifeless and inhospitable mass of matter for most of the time during my first 700 million orbits around the Sun. Then, sometime thereafter, a form of primordial life was sparked into existence in the oceans from inanimate nucleic acids and proteins that were catalyzed by the energy of sunlight. Life proliferated into many kinds of single-celled organisms in ancient seas, and yet I made more than 3 billion additional circuits around the Sun before primitive single-celled species of life stumbled upon a way to organize together to form more complex multi-cellular forms of life. Not long after this awesome

development, a Cambrian explosion of biological diversity ensued, and I have made more than 500 million orbits around the Sun since then. During this time, a marvelous variety of life forms has evolved and adapted to prevailing conditions, and left genetic progeny before dying out in a wondrous eons-long kaleidoscope of evolving species of plants and animals.

More than 99% of all species of life that have ever lived in my ocean, fresh water and terrestrial habitats went extinct in the long course of my geologic history. Nonetheless, many millions of species of living things are still alive at this very moment, and every one of them is a descendant of earlier ancestors all the way back along the figurative branches of the tree of life.

One of the fundamental physical forces of Nature that have defined my existence is the energy generated by nuclear reactions in the Sun. This heat and light energy drives my water cycle and influences my weather patterns, and allows plants to photosynthesize nutrients that feed and sustain essentially all forms of animal life in my biosphere. The key to a deep understanding of life is to be found in a clear comprehension of the physical nature of light, energy, atoms and molecules. An infinite range of conditions of soil, temperature, sun exposure, competition, food sources, water distribution and physical barriers to movements of different forms of life have all contributed to the evolving creation of a plethora of different species of life that inhabit an infinite number of ecological niches and defining biotic ranges and distributions.

The nature of necessity has shaped all forms of life to exist in a dynamically adapted balance within constraints of the biological conditions in my many habitats. Plant life has adapted to my seasonal cycles and chemical properties of the soil, and profoundly influenced them, so plants are as fundamental to my nature as the falling of the rain or the flowing and ebbing of the tides. Photosynthesis by plants is as basic to me as the erosion of mountains and the blowing of the wind. My vital ecosystems are the sum total of all the habitats and life forms created within these natural cycles and physical characteristics.

My ecosystems provide "services" that are critically valuable to the human race. These services are optimally provided when my ecosystems are in a healthy state. My wild lands, forests, rivers, lakes, wetlands, riparian habitats and coral reefs provide food, fish, lumber, minerals and raw materials to human beings. These habitats serve as nurseries for wildlife on land and in wetlands, streams and seas. My forests have many beneficial influences by helping determine patterns of rainfall and fresh water flows, preventing erosion, mitigating floods, and regulating concentrations of oxygen and carbon dioxide in my atmosphere. These gases help establish and maintain global temperatures in a range that is propitious for all current forms of life.

The single most notable feature of my land surface, when regarded from space, is the vibrant green color of an incomprehensibly vast number of tiny living photosynthetic cells that utilize water, carbon dioxide and sunlight to create providential forms of energy that serve as nourishment, either directly or indirectly, for almost every living creature. The green that you humans perceive as the color of plants is a result of the pigment in plant's chlorophyll that absorbs light in the blue and red parts of light's spectrum, and reflects the green. So the color you associate most with plants is actually a frequency of light waves for which the plants have the least use! This paradox indicates that there may be a degree of illusion in all realities, even on a physical level. Albert Einstein would have corroborated this sense of relativity.

You human have imagined a lot of curious ideas about me in the course of your time on my surface, but you simply don't know the half of it. When you are being generous in heart and mind, you refer to me as Mother Earth, and you've even come up with enlightened ecological views of me that recognize that you are naturally interconnected and interdependent with my ecosystems. But most of the time your geologic studies are rather simplistically utilitarian, and your scientists collaborate with efforts by industrial organizations that are mainly focused on finding better ways to exploit my assets with more rapacious and often destructive efficiency. It's a veritable tragedy of the commons.

From the solipsistic perspective of you humans, everything is all about you. You figure you are miraculous beings that a special Creator, presumptuously visualized in your own image, must have been responsible for having created. You believe this because of what you see as intelligent design in your own marvelous and complex nature and that of other forms of life, and of the physical Universe itself. The magnitude of miraculousness of the biochemical

processes involved in plant photosynthesis, which creates carbohydrates that support all life, are just as amazing as the processes of respiration by which mitochondria, existing in almost all the trillions of cells in each human body, transform food into the energy needed to power your every activity. Every form of plant life is essentially consuming carbon dioxide and transforming it into organic nutrients using the energy of the Sun, so you might more meaningfully picture your God as light itself, as ancient Egyptians did with their sky God Horus.

Those of you who gullibly cling to superstition, ideology, dogma or religious revelations by supernatural beings perplex me, though I am omniscient about motivating factors. It is revelatory of people's character for them to advocate self-serving doctrines that rationalize selfishly short-term-oriented activities without any overarching sense of responsibility for the harmful impacts of their behaviors.

For your own good, you should give greater respect and appreciation to my life-sustaining biotic wonders. Your obsessive and damaging exploitation of my resources is myopically foolish, especially when you fail to honor a responsible stewardship of my environs. I say unto you, please feel free to gather together and ignore these words completely, oh, ye of great faith but little true understanding! Your apparent lack of insight is rather confounding, because your collective denial of larger truths comes at your own peril, and it will likely prove to be severely detrimental to all your descendants in future generations.

You are like a self-aware kind of red blood cell that courses around a human body, thinking that <u>it</u> is the whole purpose of existence, rather than in reality being an interdependent part of a body in a grander scheme of things. In such a state of odd misapprehension, and unfortunately for you yourselves, you are failing to recognize that my health and the well-being of my habitats and ecosystems are critically important factors for your own vitality, flourishing and survival.

The impacts of your human activities have become so extensive and damaging that they could cause abrupt and practically irreversible adverse changes in my environmental conditions in the relatively near future. My highly evolved natural systems are being ruined by your reliance on industrial activities and monoculture agriculture and the chopping down of vast tracts of my forests. Your mindless consumption and reckless burning of fossil fuels are behaviors that endanger the future prospects of your kind, and of most other forms of life in my biosphere.

You humans have already usurped almost half of my land surface for crops, animal husbandry, timber harvesting, mining, real estate development and recreational activities. In so doing, you are upsetting the vital natural balance of my ecosystems. You would be much wiser to collectively understand the important realization that my ecosystem services in a healthy state are crucial to your well-being. This awareness would motivate you to take effective steps to protect these underpinnings of your general welfare, now and in the future.

<u>Fish Finally Discover Water</u>!

The British scientist James Lovelock was the first person to recognize the obvious -- my existence! Lovelock wrote a book titled *The Revenge of Gaia,* which happens to contain valuable perspectives, particularly about the risks of global warming and climate change to my biological diversity and the health of my ecosystems. But the title of this book is preposterous. I am NOT a vengeful being. In fact, I am not in the least partial to any particular species of life. I am as impersonally indifferent to outcomes as a carbon dioxide molecule. I do not feign any sort of Olympian detachment, nor do I have an inscrutably divine sense of absolute justice, and it would be a misapprehension to see my existence in such a way, for I am dispassionate and selfless beyond fathoming.

Everything takes place within me and about me in accordance with what you think of as 'laws' of Nature. This natural order is an aspect of reality, independent of your thoughts, theories, biases, subjective judgments, belief systems and quantum mental gymnastics. Every form of life has lived, adapted, and died within the big context of these natural laws, in every instant, through times that can be judged as good or bad from the point of view of any life form's survival. The adapting and evolving ancestors of every plant and animal alive today have survived extinction almost forever. This is natural order.

I don't play favorites with any individual plant or animal, or with any particular species of life in my biosphere. I have developed a dynamic, almost uncanny ability to resiliently recover from biotic catastrophes by cultivating a broad diversity of life forms that have evolved through processes of natural selection to encompass many

different strategies for replication, reproduction and survival in infinitely variable habitats. After a natural cataclysm takes place, like a meteor impact or a devastating volcanic eruption or a searing wildfire, the relative equilibrium is upset, and new competitive forces come into play. After such disturbances, predictable natural steps of succession take place. When a forest burns or is clear-cut, the plant species that initially colonize the denuded landscape eventually give way to others in a long process that unfolds until a stable and dynamic equilibrium is finally reached in mature old-growth forests or other climax communities, and a harmonious balance is established once again.

While it's a fact that I am an entity simply not attached to outcomes, it is more precise to understand that not only is nothing good or bad to me, but nothing is right or wrong. Things can obviously be either fortunate or unfortunate from the perspective of specific individuals and groups, but to my whole self in the long term, all is relative. Think about the huge meteorite that struck the Yucatan region 65 million years ago. The resulting conditions drove the dinosaurs and more than half of all other species of life to extinction, so the event was a terrible calamity for almost every living thing alive at the time, yet it created new opportunities for different plants and animals to evolve into the void created by the catastrophe. This was, in fact, how the extinction of the dinosaurs allowed your mammalian ancestors to eventually come to dominance. Come what may, my biosphere has an almost eternally long history of survival, even through some terrible mass extinction events, so no matter how severe the damage you humans inflict on my biotic wonders, it is likely that life will go on, and recover in new evolutionary directions, long after your own species is permanently gone.

I do not grieve for any form of life that has ever disappeared from my habitats. It is YOU for whom the bell tolls. It is you who are choosing to act in ways that are leading to resource depletion, ecological harm, habitat deterioration, eternal extinctions, population overshoot, and probable collapse of your complex civilizations. Since transformative changes in your habits and behaviors are within your individual and collective capabilities to achieve, your salvation is really up to you. Take my impersonal advice: seek a better knowledge of my true nature -- and give me more respect -- and radically reorganize your activities to be compatible with my general health and biological diversity. Do this for yourselves, your heirs, and your own common good!

<u>Me, Me, Me, Me, Me</u>

The human race never ceases to be impressed by every tremor in my interior, and every time my hot innards erupt, and each time my crustal faults are shockingly revealed. I chuckle at all the many deities you have invented in hundreds of different cultures since prehistoric times and the obscure days when your species first emerged from the shadows of your earlier mammalian ancestors. "Zeus did this …"; "Goddesses did that …"; "God did such and such …". *HELLO!* I am right here! I am not a hypothesis, and I am more than a mere perspective, and more than an illuminating and valuable way of looking at the world. I am natural reality.

One of your more creative thinkers, Michael Pollan, has written about "the botany of desire". In *The Botany of Desire,* he insightfully considers the fate of plant species from <u>their</u> point of view. He delves into the successful proliferation and transformation of various varieties of apples, tulips, marijuana plants and potatoes, tracing them from their native places of origin and original genetic characteristics into, respectively, sweeter, more beautiful, more potently intoxicating, and more nutritious sustaining forms. Plants have achieved this success by taking advantage of a mutualism similar to the mutually beneficial relationship between plants and pollinators. By appealing to human needs and desires, plants have manipulated people, in effect, into selectively growing, breeding and propagating them around my surface. In general, the results are evolutionarily propitious for human beings -- as well as for the widespread dispersal of the plants themselves.

This way of looking at things from an alternate point of view should be enlightening. It should free you to perceive and envision important bigger picture perspectives. Unconventional ways of seeing and apprehending the world can be more accurate and valuable, especially when they are focused on being more comprehensive and holistic. Like MY whole-istic point of view! Appreciate it!

You call yourselves *Homo sapiens … wise humans.* 'Wise', my core! Most of your stories about me throughout history have been fanciful and astoundingly anthropocentric, and have often been mere fables and superstitions and geomyths. It is amazing how simplistically credulous and naïve you are capable of being! So many of your

beliefs are transparently fueled by hope or driven by fear, and conjured up due to vanity, pride, insecurity, compensatory arrogance, conflicting interests, greed, control drives, selfishness or self-centered hubris. It's no wonder that the clever Mark Twain became so famous by satirizing your far-flung foibles!

I must hand it to you, though, in one regard: modern scientists and ecologists and philosophers have made great strides in developing an ever-improving Big Picture understanding of my physical, chemical, meteorological and ecological processes. Deep ecologists express their appreciation for a holistic and more wholesome view of me and my living communities, and this gives your species better hope that you may begin to act more intelligently, ethically, sensibly, sustainably and sanely in the future, for your own sakes!

Knowledge and foresight, not ignorance and denial, will prove to be of paramount importance to you. Your survival and prosperity depend upon it. If you are to endure and leave me habitable to your descendants for even 100 years more, or a thousand years, or a million years, you will succeed only by working in greater harmony with each other and other forms of life in my biosphere, and by refraining from destructively upsetting the providential balance of my healthy habitats, waterways, ecosystems, atmosphere, climate and biodiversity. Get it together!

A Shifty Aside by the Author

You just gotta love Gaia. She's like the best of Mother and Father, and God, and the most generous benefactor ever. While she is demonstrably indifferent to our hopes and fears, her self-regulatory processes are amazingly beneficial to our existence, and to that of all other forms of life on Earth. Ken Burns' film series about our wonderful National Parks gives us beautiful images of awe-inspiring natural places, and there are assuredly many more of them. Make no mistake about it: the processes that make the world so wonderful are a fortuitous boon to us that is beyond full comprehension.

It may seem odd to imagine Gaia speaking to us, because Gaia is not 'a being' in the way we think of ourselves as individually conscious and aware beings. But think about a bee community living in a hive that the bees have created in the cavity of a tree. Such a hive of bees cannot be fully understood in a context of individual bees alone, because there is so deep an inter-dependence between the specialized functions of the colony's queen, its workers, and its drones. The entire bee society of the hive must be understood to find out how the hive is built, how food is gathered from the pollen of wildflowers, how honey is made, how the queen bee mates with drones, how the next generation of bees is fed and supported, and how swarming takes place.

The beehive community basically has an instinctive social organization that cannot be comprehended by the study of specialized individuals alone. The hive community does not think as a being, but it operates as if it is a single entity. Likewise, no species of plant or animal can really be understood independent of the habitats and ranges where it lives. Nor can it be accurately understood in any way independent from the interconnections with other species upon which it relies. The naturalist John Muir made a real accurate observation when he noted a similar sentiment: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."

A knowledge of genetics is helpful to understand the heritage of individuals, and of entire species, and of all of life. A knowledge of biochemistry and physics is necessary to understand the context of how life exists and how any individual is able to perform the functions required for survival. A knowledge of the hydrologic cycle, the photosynthetic process, capillary action, microclimates, soil nutrients and sun exposure are necessary in order to understand how plants prosper. In turn, one fact is clear: every animal is either directly or indirectly dependent upon plants for food and survival.

So, in a sense, a Gaia-level understanding is a more accurate way of realistically comprehending the world. Gaia has marvelous capacities for resilience and spontaneous healing, especially when in a healthy state. All species are basically actors in a co-evolutionary dance of survival, and almost all rely on the benefits of mutualism for continued existence.

These ideas themselves are analytical, yet we must recognize that a synthesis of knowledge often contains the truest understandings of life and the world. The most holistic conceptions are generally the most valid. Our perspectives are constrained by natural physical limitations of our senses and the inextricable subjectivity of our perceptions, and by curious shortcomings in assumptions we make about reality. Existence is a wonder beyond

fathoming, and one that is best understood by cultivating a more expansive awareness of the whole. We should find better ways to achieve health and fitness, and to mindfully appreciate existence, and to accept the ephemerality and uncertainties in life, and to transcend our petty conflicts while honoring the sublime. Let's celebrate the expansive nature of our own spiritual essences. Gratitude is in order.

The "miracle" of Earth's biosystems far exceeds what is generally understood. When we breathe, our lungs utilize oxygen that has been produced by plants and trees through the all but miraculous process of photosynthesis, a process that beneficially removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The water cycle is driven by heat from the sun that causes evaporation from bodies of water and evapotranspiration of moisture from plants and trees. These processes contribute to the formation of clouds, and precipitation from these clouds subsequently drops life-sustaining moisture in the form of rainfall and snowfall that is crucial to most species of life.

Even the dynamics of plate tectonics are critically important to organisms over the long run. This process helps drive changes that allow our planet to achieve long-term climate stability by pulling carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and burying it in sedimentary rock. Movements of the Earth's crust are caused by the inner heat of the Earth that percolates around in convection currents of hot magma, which occasionally wells up from beneath the planet's rocky crust. These actions periodically result in earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, which can be devastating and real scary to people, yet they are a part of necessary processes for life on Earth.

"Civilization exists by geological consent," wrote historian Will Durant, "subject to change without notice."

A Surprising and Provocative Insight

The Creation myth in the Old Testament of the Bible is a vividly imaginative tall tale that happens to contain a daunting cautionary message. It tells us that God can intervene directly in our lives and punish us harshly for sinful behaviors like disobedience to his commandments. The epic Noah's ark Flood story in Genesis is ominous because it says the LORD God got so disappointed at mankind's "wickedness" that "it grieved him at his heart" and 'He' decided to destroy mankind and all other life from the face of the earth. Precaution! What if this vengeful God comes back for an encore?

Cautionary tales have value, and there is one such story that is more sensational -- and intrinsically compelling -- than any other such narrative in all of world history. Evidence in the fossil record tells us that the worst mass extinction event ever to occur in the incomprehensibly long history of life on Earth was the Permian Extinction. In this extinction episode, which took place about 250 million years ago, fossil evidence shows that "about 95 percent of marine species, and an uncountable but probably comparable percentage of land species, went extinct in a geological heartbeat." This catastrophic paroxysm of species loss was a terrible biotic calamity that brought the Paleozoic Era to an end, and demarcated the beginning of the Mesozoic Era.

Inquiring minds want to know what caused this crippling blow to life on Earth. This story is intriguing and scary, because the proximate cause of this ultimate catastrophe appears to have been an extreme shift in environmental conditions that was characterized by a combination of an excessive concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and correlated increases in ocean acidity and water temperatures.

It would be enlightening to know the cause of these changes in ecological conditions. Speculation centers on a devastating meteorite strike like the one that later caused the Cretaceous Extinction that wiped out dinosaurs and a big proportion of other life forms 65 million years ago. This theory of the Permian Extinction holds that the biggest asteroid to hurtle into Earth's atmosphere and slam into the planet in the last 500 million years did so in the vicinity of Wilkes Land in East Antarctica -- 250 million years ago. This impact caused a long series of volcanic eruptions in Siberia, at the antipodes of the impact site on the opposite side of the planet. These voluminous flows of lava formed the Siberian Traps, an extensive stair-like hilly region in northern Russia that consists of more than one million cubic miles of basaltic lava that was ejected from the Earth over many millennia of volcanic eruptions. Along with this epic outpouring of volcanic flood basalt, enormous quantities of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases were emitted by the volcanic activity, creating this largest "igneous province" on Earth. Note that one million cubic miles of lava would cover the entire continental U.S. to a depth of more than 1,500 feet. That's a lot of molten rock!

This understanding is daunting because today humankind is spewing the heat-trapping gas carbon dioxide into Earth's atmosphere at a faster rate than those Siberian volcanoes did long ago, and these greenhouse gases are having similar impacts on the biosphere. We are thus collectively causing the web of life in the seas to fray by upsetting the propitious conditions to which all marine life forms have adapted, and we seem to fail to recognize that our own well-being depends upon this healthy ecological balance. This realization should make us see how utterly insane it is to continue to burn fossil fuels -- especially coal and the dirtiest sources of oil -- at the rate we are currently doing. It also tells us that we are practically crazy to continue causing a proliferation of "dead zones" in formerly vital ocean habitats, or to overfish the seas by effectively strip-mining them of fish and shellfish, and to engage in other equally insensate, exploitive and damaging practices like the "finning" of millions of sharks. It also helps us see how obscene it is to be obtuse about our role in causing mounting harm to extraordinarily beautiful and vitally important coral reef communities and the biological diversity of life they support in warm water locales around our lovely Blue Planet. Living Planet Reports make it clear how urgent it is for us to take courageous and responsible steps to reduce the extent of our assaults on biological diversity.

A Big Picture understanding of these things could help save us from a collectively disastrous destiny. For more information on the mass extinctions that have wiped out so many species of life on Earth, see writer Ben Fishler's thought-provoking online book, *SOLVING THE MAJOR EXTINCTIONS: A New Theory of Antipodal Impact Effects Answers the Extinction Questions of the Past 500 Million Years.*

Oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle urges humanity to take heed of how disruptive our activities are, so she would no doubt nod genially to hear Ambrose Bierce's astute definition of Improvidence as "the provision for the needs of to-day from the revenues of tomorrow." It is improvident, to be sure, for humans to destroy the biological underpinnings of our prosperity, merely so that profits can be maximized to benefit corporations and CEOs and investors, in the short run. This is an extreme example of a Tragedy of Activities Contrary to the Common Good.

Rocks Speak

Countless layers of rock have been exposed by the forces of erosion in the amazingly colorful and awe-inspiring Grand Staircase region of the American Southwest. These rocks are more than one billion years old in the deepest exposed places of the continental crust, like at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. A rudimentary knowledge of geology and of the geophysical genesis of rock formations gives anyone who ponders it a profound appreciation of the age of the Colorado Plateau, and of the processes by which it was formed over the eons. Travelers who visit the National Parks of southern Utah are familiar with the colorful sandstones, siltstones, mudstones, limestones and shales of this variegated stone staircase, which extends down from the most recent rock formations through what geologists identify as rocks from the Tertiary, Cretaceous, Jurassic, Triassic, Permian and Carboniferous geologic periods, back to the Paleozoic Era, and to before that in the Pre-Cambrian.

The Grand Staircase consists of high plateaus that break into cliffs crumbling down into talus slopes, alluvial fans, outwash plains and canyons with numerous remnant rock towers, pinnacles, arches and natural bridges. Volcanic peaks intrude into this fascinating geologic jumble, providing viewers with a revelation of slow-motion evolutionary change characterized by a "punctuated equilibrium" of more rapid physical changes in which mountain building and erosion take place most dramatically during epic event episodes like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, flash floods, landslides and rockfalls.

Geologists and naturalists have learned a lot about planet Earth in recent decades. A compelling story is told by erosion-exposed layers of sedimentary rock that are angled askew from the horizontal plane of their formation, revealing the physical processes of lithification and angular uplift that have taken place over unfathomably long periods of time. Curvilinear striations of lithified sand dunes contain their own secrets of their genesis long ago, as do stream-rounded pebbles embedded in uplifted conglomerate sandstone, and ancient seashells of long-since extinct species of marine life found in exposed sedimentary rocks. So do white veins of quartz in granite, and beautiful crystalline structures in exotic minerals, and lateral and terminal glacial moraines, and the impressive extensive evidence of ancient volcanic eruptions, like that of the surreal Cappadocia region of modern day Turkey.

The knowledge that can be gained from studies of the natural world can provide us with a thought provoking understanding of who we are and how we fit into this marvelous world, and of how we would be well-advised to live in better harmony with natural processes, healthy ecosystems and other forms of life on Earth.

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth," wrote the marine biologist, writer and conservationist Rachel Carson, "find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature -- the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter."

Geologic understandings expose the archaic nature of *misunderstandings* that characterize pre-scientific myths and superstitions and fictions that underlie the ideas of the men who wrote various holy books. It is astonishing that some people still literally believe in the Biblical stories of Genesis and the genealogies of the Old Testament from the time of Adam and Eve to the time of the legendary Great Flood to the time of Jesus. Those who cling to these stories in light of better understandings of the actual age of the Earth and its geophysical evolution are deluded, as proven by the overwhelming fossil evidence of the biological evolution of life in its multifarious niches and ranges. Prehistoric creation stories are simply not credible as accurate explanations of the world.

The known facts of geology are awe-inspiring, so it's strange that many people prefer to cling stubbornly to improbable stories in "holy scriptures". The forces and processes and time spans involved in rock formation, mountain uplift and erosion, and eons-long punctuated equilibrium episodes of earth movements and volcanic activity are nearly unfathomable. It is a marvel to gain knowledge of the basically infinite and eternal causes and effects that have resulted in tectonic plate movements of continents and the physical evolution of mountain ranges, outwash plains, glacial moraines, U-shaped valleys, volcanic peaks, large lakes and meadows, underwater seamounts and deep ocean trenches.

Irony sure is an entertaining damsel. The state of Utah contains some of the most extraordinary and beautiful eroded landscapes in the world, including those found in the National Parks of Zion, Bryce, Capitol Reef, Arches and Canyonlands. Nonetheless, the Mormon religion flourishes in Utah, which promulgates a dogma that denies the ancient age of Earth. Rock formations found there provide cogent evidence of rocks and fossils that definitively contradict the fallacious doctrinal conceptions of the Bible and the Book of Mormon. When Mormons marry their retrogressive dogmas to social conservatism, it often impedes solutions to serious global problems that face humanity today -- problems like resource depletion, habitat damages, overpopulation, immigration and global climate disruptions being caused by the burning of fossil fuels that spew voluminous emissions of heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere.

On the southern edge of beautiful Ouray in western Colorado, there is a viewing area above Box Canyon Falls that points out a dramatic "angular unconformity" of rock layers in which billion-year-old layers of black slate and white quartzite have been uplifted from the horizontal state of their formative deposition into a vertical position, and on top of them there are countless layers of sandstone from another much later period of sedimentary rock deposition. Anomalously, the sandstone layers are almost perpendicular to the older layers of rock. This angular unconformity provides clear evidence of eons of various rock layers formed, and later exposed by the faulting of the Colorado Plateau and erosion by streams and glaciers along the Ouray Fault.

The first time I visited the beautiful narrow gorge and waterfall in Box Canyon, an evangelizing white-shirted Mormon man approached me and tried to convince me of the absolute truth of Mormon doctrines, which dogmatically deny that the Earth is much older than 6,000 years, as the faithful think is revealed by the Book of Mormon and the Bible. Honestly! There was, at one time, a colorful billboard-sized painted diorama alongside an interpretive Nature Walk in Box Canyon. The diorama depicted an evolutionary summary of various species of life from the ancient Paleozoic Era and the Mesozoic Era, as well as more recent forms of life from the Cenozoic Era. That exhibit has been removed, possibly to satisfy the sensitivities of dogmatic religious fundamentalists. This diorama, along with the nearby geologic evidence, provides an astonishing contrast to the myopically absurd doctrines of established religions. As Galileo's father Vincenzio once pointed out, the search for truth should involve an alert freedom of questioning, not a reliance on the weight of strict authority, or slavish obedience to it.

Only a few miles east of Box Canyon, there is an intriguing vista point along the "Million Dollar Highway" that runs from Ouray to Silverton through the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado. There, a curious visitor can

see a glacial moraine that was deposited something like 16,000 years ago at the bottom of the Bear Creek watershed, just above where a "hanging valley" is cut off by the deep chasm of the Uncompahgre River. Bear Creek plummets over a waterfall some 200 feet down into the deep river gorge. Directly across the canyon, one can see rock that is more than one billion years old that shows pronounced ripple marks of an ancient sandy sea floor that have been preserved in the lithified rock. This sandstone has been uplifted at a rakish angle from the horizontal plane in which it had been deposited, and these ripple marks, metamorphosed, have been exposed by glaciation and erosion in a fascinating here-and-now testimony of what has been.

From this roadside stop, one also can see a great view of dramatic Mount Abram to the south. This is a prominent volcanic peak that has a distinctive profile towering 4,000 feet in elevation above the viewer. Mount Abram is a volcanic cone that was spewed forth about 35 million years ago, which is like yesterday compared to the billion-year-old rock upon which the volcanic rock was emplaced. A good photo that I took of Mount Abram looming above Ouray in "the Switzerland of America" can be seen on the back cover of Book Eight of the Earth Manifesto.

It is likely that no Native Americans had yet come across the Siberian land bridge to inhabit the North American continent at the moment in time during the last Ice Age when the Bear Creek glacial moraine was deposited. At that time, the continent was home to a wide variety of megafauna that is awe-inspiring to try to imagine -- saber-toothed cats, elephant-sized mammoths and mastodons, dire wolves, giant ground sloths, short-faced bears and native American camels and horses -- a list that includes more than 40 species of large mammals. Many of these species of mammals disappeared from the American fossil record within a period of a thousand years about 12,000 years ago near the end of the Pleistocene epoch, according to radiocarbon dating techniques. The cause of these extinctions may have been a relatively sudden change in climate, possibly caused by volcanic activity. Another probable principal cause may have been pressures of predation by early human hunters.

Another Perspective

> "Experience of the way of all flesh might lead you to think that hard rocks, high mountains and broad continents would be stable and lasting, while the tiny molecules of life are fleeting; biology *brevis*, geology *longa*. In fact, over the history of the planet, the reverse is true. Mountains are worn down to sea beds, continents pulled asunder and ground together; oceans open and close. As a result, only a tiny fraction of the earth's early crust is still available for inspection today. … Yet molecules from those shattered days are all around us today, in the form of DNA sequences. Many of our genes are billions of years old; some date back to the universal ancestor itself. While the winds and waves of entropy erode earth's heights, life maintains its inner order across cosmic spans of time."
>
> --- Oliver Morton, *Eating the Sun*

Conceptual Art Looms Majestically in Our Collective Imagination

Visualize vividly in your mind's eye a brilliant new art installation on Easter Island in the remote South Pacific. Twelve of those huge iconic monolithic bigheaded volcanic stone statues, known as moai ("mow eye"), will be positioned on rock platforms facing outward across the beautiful South Pacific toward the horizon where the sun rises. This positioning will contrast to the inland-facing posture that the inward-looking Rapanui natives had placed their famed statues. These statues will evocatively commemorate far-sightedness, and remind us of the Rapanui's myopia in depleting the natural resources on Easter Island that led to the collapse of their civilization.

This impressive line of solemn human-faced statues will be dedicated to the great civilizing accomplishments of our venerable ancestors, and to a transcendent concern for the prospects and well-being of our descendants. Two golden plates will declare these noble dedications. The first will honorably commemorate the courage of the early Polynesian colonists who had intrepidly crossed vast expanses of open ocean to discover this most remote island on Earth. The second will declare our respectful commitments to all human beings in future generations by proclaiming our collective intention to leave them a legacy of wise governance, a stable climate, protected lands and oceans and biological diversity, and enough resources to ensure indefinitely sustainable civilizations.

The poet Rumi: Come, come, whoever you are

Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving, it doesn't matter.
Ours is not a caravan of despair.
Ours is the portal of hope.
Come, even if you have broken your vow a thousand times.
Come, yet again, come, come.

The Geologic Crux of the Matter: Simple but Accurate Understandings

I love simplistic understandings. Actually, I love relatively accurate ways of seeing things, as opposed to simple-minded and preposterous ones like those contained in ancient holy books that basically theorize that Presto! -- a magically manifested Supreme Being decided to make things the way they are, and that's the way they have been ever since. Mark Twain loved to tell tall tales, but he also loved deeper truths. He was known for his irreverent skepticism, and he would have been eager to know more about the actual geological processes that affect the Earth. Many such things have become far better known in the century since his death in 1910.

The simplistic understandings that I value most are those that are rudimentary versions of underlying greater complexities. I highly recommend watching *How the Earth Was Made*, a video presentation of History Channel that provides provocative insights and valuable perspective concerning Earth's physical evolution from the time it formed about 4.5 billion years ago until the current day.

Most scientists are not good at clearly communicating their understandings. Some, however, like the writer John McPhee and physics professor James Trefil, are known for being able to explain complex topics in simple terms to non-scientists and a general audience. James Trefil, for instance, tells readers in *Meditations at Sunset* exactly why the sky appears to us to be blue on a sunny day. Blue, baby, blue. (Or ask ChatGPT.)

In his enlightening book *Basin and Range*, John McPhee relates stories about his travels and talks with expert geologists as he explored with them around the American West, where they examined rock formations that naturally reveal compelling insights. He explains how geologic understandings were deduced from explorations like this, and how they led to a greater comprehension of how Earth geophysically evolved. In doing so, he explores the scientific evolution of geologic knowledge. He writes about James Hutton, known as "the father of geology", who discovered and named the revelatory phenomenon known as an 'angular unconformity' in England in 1787.

Recall that an angular unconformity is a place where two contrasting layers of sedimentary rock formations lie at different angles to each other, revealing that different eras of rock formation have taken place. Lower layers of rock in angular unconformities had been displaced out of horizontal positions of their deposition long after their formation. This was followed by a new era of submersion and sedimentation, and lithification, in layers askew from those of the earlier era, and this assemblage was later uplifted into positions where they are found today. This discovery led to the confirmation that the age of the Earth has been very, very, very long, and definitely NOT merely Biblically short. Hooray, Ouray!

A period of intellectual ferment followed James Hutton discovery. During this time, the entire Geologic Time Scale was fleshed out, with its Eras and Periods and Epochs. It was not until later that improved methods of rock dating were developed that determined how long ago the various layers of rock found around the world were formed. Geologic time is still classified into these broad categories. This is big thinking, indeed! The three Eras of geologic time are demarcated by the two most severe mass extinction events in geologic history, the Permian Extinction 250 million years ago and the Cretaceous Extinction 65 million years ago.

This Geologic Time Scale resonates with evocative terms. The last 540 million years of geologic history or so, in which all evidence of multi-cellular forms of life are found, is divided into three parts. The Paleozoic Era, or 'old life' era, consisted of the Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian, Carboniferous and Permian Periods. This Era ended with the Permian Extinction, the worst mass extinction ever. Most forms of life in existence at the time were snuffed out. Revealingly, however, ancestors of every single form of life now alive somehow clung to survival through those harsh hundreds of thousands of years of biotic annihilation.

Next came the Mesozoic Era, or 'middle life' era. This era is known as the Age of Reptiles. It consisted of the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous Periods. This era ended with the Cretaceous Extinction 65 million years ago.

Since then life has persisted throughout the Cenozoic Era, or 'recent life' era. This, the Age of Mammals, includes the Tertiary and Quaternary Periods and Oligocene and Pleistocene Epochs.

Some say that the relatively rapid extinctions taking place today are likely to wipe out so many species that we are now entering another age, the Anthropocene. We're making history! And it is definitely NOT something to crow about. Living Planet Reports make this fact crystal clear, with findings that almost 70% of the average global number of animals in 10,000 representative species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish have been wiped out in the years since 1970. The bell is tolling for us all, and we surely should heed its clarion call.

Remember This One Thing at Least

John McPhee writes in *Basin and Range* that if readers are going to remember only one thing from his book, it should be that the visible stripes of rock on the face of Mt. Everest, the highest mountain in the world above sea level, consist of marine limestone. This ancient rock was formed by the 'biological precipitation' of the remains of calcium-shelled marine organisms onto the bottom of the Indian Ocean, hundreds of millions of years ago. These sediments accumulated into deep layers as the eons passed, and they were subsequently compressed and lithified into rock. Then, about 50 million years ago, the subcontinent of India began to crumple into the landmass of Tibet on the Eurasian tectonic plate, and the seafloor rock was driven upwards, earthquake by earthquake. It eventually created the highest mountains on Earth in the immense Himalaya Range. A devastating earthquake occurred in the mountains of the Kashmir region of Pakistan in 2005, killing more than 86,000 people; this was just one in an unfathomably long string of upthrust events that has accompanied the uplift of these mountains.

Mark Twain's Perspective

Mark Twain on occasion visited the Museum of Natural History on the Upper West Side in New York City, where he regarded with awe the 70,000-pound iron meteorite called Ahnighito (Ah-na-HEET-o), which had been brought from where it had been discovered in Greenland. He also marveled at the dinosaur skeletons in the museum. According to his friend and biographer Albert Bigelow Paine, "To him, these were the most fascinating things in the world. He contemplated the meteorites and the brontosaur, and lost himself in strange and marvelous imaginings concerning the far reaches of time and space whence they had come down to us."

Interestingly enough, Joseph Campbell, the world's leading scholar of mythology, had also been inspired in this same Museum of Natural History that had so intrigued Mark Twain's imagination. Joseph Campbell had been excited by trying to understand who had made the totem poles and mysterious masks that came from British Columbia, and exactly what they may have meant to the native people who created them.

Visualize the Earth during the 90% of its 4.5 billion year history before there were any terrestrial habitats because no form of life had yet evolved to venture out of primordial seas. All landscapes were crumbling rock like that of high alpine peaks or rock detritus in outwash plains. No vegetation or trees had yet existed on land, so there was no organic soil. In the steepest places on mountains, rock has a tendency to erode down precipitous declivities, forming steep talus slopes that reveal a physical principle known as "the angle of repose".

I evoke this visual picture obliquely, because this manifesto is vaguely haunted by the character Rodman Ward in Wallace Stegner's famous book, *The Angle of Repose.* "Like other Berkeley radicals, Rodman is convinced that the post-industrial post-Christian world is worn out, corrupt in its inheritance, helpless to create by evolution the social and political institutions, the forms of personal relations, the conventions, moralities, and systems of ethics (insofar as these are indeed necessary) appropriate to the future. Society being thus paralyzed, it must be pried loose. He, Rodman Ward, culture hero born fully armed from this history-haunted skull, will be happy to provide blueprints, or perhaps ultimatums and manifestos, that will save us and bring on a life of true freedom."

Sometimes I feel like I too am a Berkeley radical from the late Sixties rather than an earnest gal from Hannibal, Missouri who is following the vanguard of the Baby Boom. This manifesto, after all, is an ambitious and somewhat quixotic endeavor designed to save the world and liberate people's thinking from complacency and the blinders of corporate propagandists, narrowly-focused entrenched interest groups, self-serving politicians, and control-demanding religious authorities and the stubbornly faithful believers in their fundamentalist dogmas and dictates.

Look at it this way. At the Gaia level in the scheme of things, humanity is quite expendable. In fact, from the standpoint of most other forms of life on Earth, it would actually be greatly advantageous if we were gone already! But our conscious awareness is surely an astounding aspect of existence, because it reflects perceptively on the physical universe and life and evolution and the practically unfathomable expanses of space and time in which we presently find ourselves. Our extinction would be a terrible tragedy for us because this pinnacle of reflective perception would be snuffed out forever. And it would, of course be a tragedy of the most stupendous proportion for ourselves. Our big brains have helped us succeed, but if we want to survive indefinitely into the future, we simply must begin to figure out how to live in ways that are less damaging and more truly sustainable.

Many people believe that technology will save us, and that "the market" with its laws of demand and supply will always deliver substitutes as we deplete non-renewable resources. These people tend to play down the risks of our continuing to exploit renewable resources like fresh water aquifers at rates that exceed natural rates of replenishment. Unfortunately, most technological advances are geared mainly for more efficient exploitation of resources, not for more intelligent courses of action like conservation, frugal usages, regeneration or resilience.

Some new technologies are focused on creating better alternatives. Again unfortunately, established interest groups often oppose new innovative technologies. In addition, new inventions are often useful for "evil purposes" -- like weapons and wars of aggression -- instead of "good purposes" like ecologically sane initiatives to make our civilizations sustainable. Our collective failure to see how shabbily we are treating our descendants in the future surely defies comprehension!

This largest of contexts, involving our legacy to future generations, is a main concern of the Earth Manifesto. See *Comprehensive Global Perspective, An Illuminating Worldview*, along with prescriptions for saner actions in *Common Sense Revival,* for visionary and positive proposals that would help assure better future outcomes for humanity. This has been the underlying motivation for the writings in this save-the-world manifesto. Read on.

Global Warming Is Neither Myth nor Hoax!

***Fiat Lux!* -- Let There Be Light, for Better Illumination!**

Our home planet is a marvelous place. Like many a good thing, we should respect and appreciate it rather than taking it for granted or mindlessly harming it to extract resources. For an interpersonal relationship to be healthy, people need to be responsible in working to maintain the relationship in good condition. We should not abuse relationships without respecting the best ways to keep them mutually beneficial. One vital way to appreciate the natural world is to cultivate comprehensive understandings about our interconnectedness and interdependencies with healthy natural systems.

I recommend that everyone watch the stunning film *Home*, with its beautiful images of planet Earth. This film, created by the aerial photographer and ecologist Yann Arthus-Bertrand, can be viewed on YouTube. The visually stunning and ecologically sound messages conveyed in this film are crucial to the future well-being of humanity.

Everyone alive is privileged to be living at a time blessed with Peak Resources, and are enjoying relatively good fortune, collectively. It is a grave misfortune that these resources and the wealth generated from them are so poorly shared around the world. We are lucky to be living under these conditions -- before severe resource depletion sets in, and before the number of people on Earth without access to adequate supplies of fresh water increases from about 800 million people today to over 3 billion people within 15 years -- and before the damaging impacts of human activities drastically reduce the carrying capacity of Mother Nature for our kind.

Nature provides us with a cornucopia of things to eat and materials to use in our daily pursuits, and the ecosystem services we derive from nature are critically valuable. We surely should take steps to assure that the growth of our human population and our consumption do not, in aggregate, exceed the carrying capacity of the Earth to support us.

We should in particular heed the warnings of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change about the dangers of global warming and destabilizing climate change, for this is "the defining challenge of our age". We should take bold steps to reduce increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide, and make sure we do not severely harm

the health of the ecosystems upon which we depend. There have been hopes that the international climate accords reached in Paris in December 2015, and signed by every other country at the United Nations on Earth Day 2016, would be successful in accomplishing this necessary goal.

But during the COP27 climate conference in November 2022, which took place in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, it was revealed that all major oil companies are on track to increase oil production by 2026 -- despite all the talk about fixing climate change. "If they are still planning to extract all these fossil fuels in perpetuity," one observer noted, "there's no way we're ever going to meet any of the goals that all the countries have committed to in this whole long, expensive process that so much time and effort has gone into." Let's get serious!

Climate Change Findings

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published its latest findings in August 2021 in a landmark report that declared "a code red for humanity", warning that worse climate impacts will come unless greenhouse gas pollution is dramatically reduced. The scientists detailed how humans have altered the environment at an "unprecedented" pace and cautioned that the world risks increasingly catastrophic impacts in the absence of rapid greenhouse gas reductions.

The landmark report, compiled by 234 authors relying on more than 14,000 studies from around the globe, bluntly laid out for policymakers and the public the most up-to-date understanding of the physical science on climate change. Released amid a summer of deadly fires, floods and heat waves, it arrived less than three months before last year's important COP26 summit in Scotland, where world leaders faced mounting pressure to move more urgently to slow the Earth's warming.

The sprawling assessment stated that there is no remaining scientific doubt that humans are fueling climate change. That much is "unequivocal." The only real uncertainty that remains, its authors say, is whether the world can muster the will to stave off a darker future than the one it already has carved in stone.

"Humans can unleash less than 500 additional gigatons of carbon dioxide -- the equivalent of about 10 years of current global emissions -- to have an even chance of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) above preindustrial levels. But hopes for remaining below that threshold -- the most ambitious goal outlined in the Paris agreement -- are undeniably slipping away."

"Each of the past four decades has been successively warmer than any that preceded it, dating to 1850. Humans have warmed the climate at a rate unparalleled since before the fall of the Roman Empire. To find a time when the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere changed this much this fast, you'd need to rewind 66 million years to the meteor that killed the dinosaurs."

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that the impacts of climate change have now become "widespread and pervasive." Only immediate steps to transition to a net-zero carbon economy, the panel stresses, can avoid irreversible damage to the planet.

Scientists have determined that the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was about 280 parts per million at the end of the last ice age, some 12,000 years ago. At that time, so much water was locked up in glaciers, ice fields and ice sheets that sea level was 300 feet lower than it is today. Carbon dioxide has now increased to a record high of about 425 ppm in March 2024. This is largely due to human activities of cutting down millions of trees, raising animals for food on cleared land, and spewing out about 40 billions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year in the process of burning colossal quantities of fossil fuels. This concentration is increasing by more than 2 ppm every year. Many scientists think that 350 ppm is the upper limit of safe carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, yet 'conservatives' ironically strive to sow doubt about whether global warming is even occurring, or whether human activities are a main causative factor.

A graph of carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere shows annual fluctuations, including net decreases during times that vegetation is rapidly growing in spring and summer in the northern hemisphere, where two-thirds of all land masses on Earth lie. But this annual decrease is followed by bigger net increases as leaves fall and decay in the autumn and winter there, and one thing is clear: this graph shows carbon dioxide levels have been increasing

every year from each prior year. Google the "Keeling Curve" to see a graph of carbon dioxide measurements that have been made continuously since 1958 at an observatory near the lofty summit of Mauna Loa on the Big Island of Hawaii. The year-on-year increases roughly match the amount of carbon dioxide that is given off by burning fossil fuels each year. There is little doubt about this, and the implications are ominous.

The trend of global warming is adding up to increasingly costly and risk-amplifying impacts. It is thus puzzling that people can be opposed to precautionary principles that advise us to pursue less reckless aggregate behaviors. Without more concerted actions to reduce increases in the amount of greenhouse gases accumulating in the atmosphere, a point of no return may be reached where dangerous feedback loops will kick in. One such trend is that the Arctic tundra is thawing, releasing large quantities of methane into the atmosphere. The big risk in this is that methane is a greenhouse gas many times more potent than carbon dioxide in trapping heat. Such feedback loops are processes in which effects amplify causes, and such loops could cause global warming to spike and melt all of Earth's ice fields and glaciers, raising sea levels catastrophically and making storms more severe, and causing more flooding and crop failures in many places. Time to DRAWDOWN!

We humans would be wiser to embrace a "no regrets" stance of precautionary principles to promote the common good of all, remembering to take into account those in future generations.

UC Berkeley physicist Richard Muller was one of a small minority of scientists around the world who had been skeptical of assertions that global warming is being primarily caused by human activities. But in July 2012, he surprised knowledgeable observers by changing his mind. He stated he had become convinced by evidence from 36,000 observation stations worldwide that show an overall trend of significant warming since the Industrial Revolution began some 250 years ago. These findings confirm that this warming is strongly correlated to the amount of carbon dioxide we are spewing into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels. Periodic volcanic eruptions like that of Krakatoa in 1883 spewed so much sunlight-blocking particulate matter into the air that they had short-term global cooling effects, but the overall trend of warming has been unmistakable, and is accelerating.

Ironically, Richard Muller had been the beneficiary of funding from the Charles Koch Foundation, which denies that industrial activities are contributing to an overall warming of the planet's oceans and atmosphere. The billionaire Koch brothers (David has since died) -- and their giant Koch Industries -- are staunch foes of climate initiatives, because they are big beneficiaries of being allowed to pollute the atmosphere without offsetting the costs to society associated with this "privilege". These billionaires give record sums of money to politicians who promise to continue to allow corporations to avoid including costs required to mitigate global warming in prices of their products. The Kochs are corrupting our politics to defend the status quo; this should anger all Americans.

Carly Fiorina, when she ran as a Republican candidate for U.S. Senate in 2010, mocked Senator Barbara Boxer's concern that climate change could be a serious national security issue, even though personnel in the Pentagon had declared this to be true. Fiorina said, "Terrorism kills -- and Barbara Boxer is worried about the weather." This was blatant pandering to the right-wing base of the Republican Party. Then, in December 2015, when Fiorina was running for president, she was the only Republican woman in the anti-progressive field, but she offered ideas that were little better.

Mark Twain would likely have told us that mockery is most effective when it comes from an unassailably incisive perspective, rather than from seriously shaky ground. It is curious to me that Carly Fiorina seems to have been so willing to irresponsibly suck up to the lunatic fringe in environmental matters. It was as if she really believes conservatism has no other choice than to ally itself with insistent demands by disaster capitalists and resource exploiters and moneyed interest groups. It is as though corporate executives prefer to maximize profit-making in the short run by proceeding like the Captain of the Titanic, "full-speed-ahead in treacherous waters" -- and damn the costs and risks to all.

Decision makers at annual UN Climate Change Conferences every November or December for the past 28 years (after COP28 in Dubai) should have given more responsible heed to these perspectives. They should have found some way to choose a more courageous approach to limiting the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Let's all strive, individually and collectively, to find ways to alter our wasteful and polluting ways! Incentives and disincentives are the best way to put this change into effect. After the historic climate agreement

was reached at the 2015 Climate Change Conference in Paris, it has become even clearer that the need is great to find ways to translate the agreements reached in Paris into truly effective actions that will reduce emissions and mitigate harms being done. Betraying this understanding, MAGA Republicans are banking on tribalism, stoked antagonisms, gullibility, myopic greed and stupidity to push an egregiously irresponsible agenda that allows profit-making on fossil fuels instead of responsibly promoting the true greater good.

All the insights of the Earth Manifesto essay, *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity, and Ecological Overshoot,* are included here by this reference, and especially those related to climate injustices that harm poorer nations disproportionately, even though they are small contributors to greenhouse gas emissions.

Another Way of Looking At It

In his 2009 book *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning*, James Lovelock says humanity is "Earth's infection." While in theory it would be difficult to destroy this planet, it's not such a stretch for some scientists to imagine us making it a place that doesn't support humans. The planet would go on, the thinking goes, but it would get rid of us, much like we shake the flu.

The notion that human activity, or the activity of any organism, can affect Earth on a planetary scale is still a hard one for many people to swallow. And this kind of disbelief fuels much of the public skepticism surrounding global warming.

Human-caused global warming -- "anthropogenic" global warming -- is the latest example of life altering Earth, but it is not the most dramatic. That distinction probably goes to the oxygenation of Earth's early atmosphere by ancient microbes as they began to harness the power of sunlight through photosynthesis.

"What we need to be thinking of as humans causing changes to the Earth system is what the consequences will be to us human beings," said Katrina Edwards, a geo-microbiologist at USC (RIP). "The Earth could care less. We will be recorded as a minor perturbation in the Earth system. The Earth will go on. The question is: Will we?"

A Carbon Dioxide Emissions Budget

Scientists have set a cumulative upper limit on how much carbon pollution could be put into the atmosphere from the beginning of the industrial era through the end of this century. To avoid calamitous conditions that would result if global warming exceeds a temperature rise of more than 2 degrees Centigrade (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), the IPCC now agrees that 1 trillion metric tons is the absolute maximum amount of carbon pollution that the planet can withstand without intolerably costly consequences.

We've already used up over half of this carbon emissions budget in the last 250 years, and with our current habits, we're on course to blow through the rest in the next 25 years. In twenty-five years! We have enough experience already with the devastating economic costs of climate change to know that we should start living within stricter carbon emissions limits. We cannot violate this target limit if we want to leave a fair legacy of a hospitable world. The extraordinarily powerful hurricanes that hit Texas and Florida and the Caribbean in 2017 gave emphasis to this contention. So did the terrible wildfires in Northern California in October 2017. And there have been many many more calamities since then, including powerful Hurricane Ian that hit Florida in 2022.

The estimated reserves of coal, oil and natural gas still in the ground represent more than 3 trillion tons of potential carbon emissions. The simple fact is that we collectively need to leave most of these fossil fuels where they are, in the ground. That's a precautionary good idea. Unfortunately, "conservative" politicians are unwilling to lead a global solution on climate change, and many of them oppose promoting the most compelling economic opportunity of our time -- clean energy technology. Many American politicians are intent on developing every source of fossil fuels despite the fact that such plans are setting us on an even faster course to costly disasters. The brilliantly clear-eyed linguist Noam Chomsky calls the Republican Party the most dangerous organization in history for its head-in-the-sand stands against remedial actions like the Clean Power Plan, energy efficiency measures, investments in renewable energy, carbon taxes and myopic support for burning fossil fuels.

The drive to drill and mine anywhere, especially on public lands and in the Arctic, is a disastrous substitute for a coherent energy policy. If we drill the remaining oil in the Arctic and allow fracking of oil and gas around the

country, and blow the tops off mountains to more profitably mine coal, and set out to pump all the oil out of Alaska and Texas, and mine all the coal in the Powder River Basin of Montana and Wyoming, we will have no hope of avoiding catastrophic climate changes. Based on estimates by the World Bank, the fossil fuel infrastructure already built will consume the remaining carbon budget, so we should not build more projects like pipelines carrying dirty tar sands and export facilities for liquefied natural gas. "Drill, baby drill" is a downright dumb idea.

We need only look at the Arctic to understand why a radical shift in energy policy is necessary. This northern polar region is warming more than twice as fast as the global average, causing destabilizing perturbations in jet stream winds that are diving extreme weather in the mid-latitudes. This includes heat waves and droughts, AND heavy snowfalls like those in harsh noreasters and powerful "bomb cyclones" experienced in recent years.

Scientists today are observing glaciers melting faster than before, contributing to sea level rise and increased incidences of extreme weather events around the world. The IPCC projects sea-level rise of more than 3 feet by the year 2100, an increase that would be devastating to coastal communities around the world, including in the U.S., as waters rise and storm surges reach further inland. The costs will be so high that responsible action is mandatory. A 2013 study estimated that average annual global losses from flooding in the world's biggest coastal cities -- including New York City, Miami, New Orleans and Boston -- could rise to $1 trillion per year by 2050. Remedial measures are needed NOW!

A Reckless Form of Planetary Socialism Masquerading as Laissez-Faire Capitalism

The externalization of significant costs related to health adversities and environmental damages are called *negative externalities.* These aspects of laissez-faire capitalism are a form of "global socialism" at its worst. This is particularly true of the issue of anthropogenic climate disruptions and the impacts of human activities on Earth's many microclimates. As we spew billions of tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere every year, weather patterns around the planet are disrupted and tens of thousands of temperature and storm-intensity records have been shattered. And this is just the beginning of much worse events to come.

On average, an American is responsible for generating almost 20 tons of carbon dioxide emissions every year. Each European emits an average of about 10 tons per year. The poorest four billion of the eight billion people on Earth today emit an average of 1 ton of carbon dioxide each year. With humanity altogether spewing around 40 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year, most scientists agree that we need to reduce these global greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2050 to prevent serious damages to economies and ecosystems.

Voluntary individual actions will never be enough to achieve this goal. Effective collective action is necessary. To rely on people to individually choose to reduce emissions is a foolhardy strategy that distracts us from this overarching necessity. When communities at large are forced to pay the price for these global disruptions, there is not an adequate incentive for individual people to take bold steps to prevent them.

> "Self-interest, not self-sacrifice, is what induces noticeable change. Only the right economic policies will enable us as individuals to be guided by self-interest and still do the right thing for the planet."
>
> --- Gernot Wagner, *Going Green but Getting Nowhere,* The New York Times, 9/8/11

A compelling documentary film titled *The Island President* won the best documentary award at the 2011 Toronto International Film Festival. The film followed then-President Mohamed Nasheed of the Indian Ocean island nation of the Maldives and his struggle to heighten awareness of the dangers of global warming and related increases in sea levels being caused by thermal expansion and melting glaciers, ice sheets and polar icecaps.

The Maldives consist of almost 1,200 islands that have an average ground level less than 5 feet above sea level. It is the nation with the "lowest highest point in the world" -- less than 8 feet above sea level. President Nasheed understandably spoke out boldly on the need for worldwide efforts to reduce global deforestation and emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Without such efforts, his entire country could be submerged like a modern-day Atlantis under rising sea levels within the next 100 years or so.

President Nasheed famously held a cabinet meeting underwater, with scuba gear, to highlight the existential threat global warming poses to his low-lying nation of beautiful atolls. Later, after the failure of the 2010

Copenhagen Climate Change Conference to replace the Kyoto Protocol with a more effective mechanism to limit greenhouse gas emissions, Nasheed declared that leaders of the world's nations must act soon to prevent catastrophic climate change. "We do not have the luxury of time to meet year after year in climate negotiations", he said. "We cannot cut a deal with Mother Nature." MAGA Republicans pretend to believe a different reality, but their selfishly myopic vacuity and treacherous political calculations are dangerously misguided.

Another cautionary tale can be found in the failure of the native peoples of Easter Island in ancient times to heed the dangers of their deforestation activities and population growth. They depleted their resources by cutting down every tree on their home island, and this led to the collapse of their civilization, as related by Jared Diamond in *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed.* Rats!

Another island calamity is related in *Chapter #2 – The Astonishing Parable of Nauru* in the Earth Manifesto's *Comprehensive Global Perspective: An Illuminating Worldview.* These understandings provide clear insights into past follies, along with advisory stories about the need to heed the risks of ignoring this most consequential challenge in the history of human existence. These narratives make it clear that the pursuit of business-as-usual activities is excessively foolish, and that we must work together to make far-reaching and fair-minded changes in the status quo. To obstinately go backwards is idiotic.

Coastal flooding and other ecosystem disruptions caused by the unfolding climate crisis are bringing on much more costly security risks than any conceivable terrorist threats. Tens of millions of people will become refugees from environmental disasters in the world in coming decades as calamities and food shortages caused by climate change, drought and flooding take place in a world that is becoming increasingly crowded. Seeing this, we would be wise to shift our national priorities from an emphasis on spending trillions of dollars on military matters to helping finance efforts to mitigate climate change, invest in resilience and adaptation, reduce desperate poverty, and encourage family planning. This course of action would be a much truer form of security in our homeland than military efforts made since 9/11, which have been wastefully and unconscionably costly.

<u>Indulgence or Abstinence, That Is the Question: Competition vs. Cooperation</u>

The indigenous Piaroa people who live along the banks of the Orinoco River in Venezuela have an interesting worldview. They laud cooperation and view competition as spiritually evil. They support individual autonomy, and are staunchly egalitarian and strongly anti-authoritarian, and are opposed to hoarding resources. Knowledgeable experts of these people regard them as one of the most peaceful of human societies, with murder a concept that is unknown and entirely nonexistent. "The Piaroa shaman in each community gathers children together when they reach six or seven years of age for lessons on personal responsibility, self-restraint, and respect for others."

These attitudes present a dramatic contrast to ones that characterize American society. Curiously, many people regard the United States as a pinnacle of civilization, yet Americans can be seen as unwitting slaves to ruthless competition and emotion-manipulating propaganda, and many people are victims of hard-nosed social attitudes, unprecedented levels of gun violence, record rates of incarceration, vulnerability to getting involved in far-flung wars, irresponsible debt swindles, and extreme disparities in social, economic and public health. Think about it!

We all grapple with conflicting drives and emotions in a variety of arenas. We do this in our striving for competitive advantages and in selfish behaviors, practical moral dilemmas, materialistic impulses, sexual drives, greedy compulsions, the consumption of food, the imbibing of alcoholic beverages, urges to gamble, uses of drugs for "recreation", and even in our spiritual perspectives.

People frequently yield to temptations likely to cause harm to others. Alternatively, each of us sometimes more honorably chooses to abstain from such courses of action. Genetic and hormonal impulses may drive us in one direction, while conscience and understandings of ethical right action and moderate discipline may compel us in a different and more commendably responsible direction.

Freedom to choose is often complexified by such conundrums, and by the affliction known as "choice congestion". This phenomenon can transform a simple choice into a paralyzing decision among too many options. A wide range of choices may even cause us to invest an absurd amount of time and energy in undertakings that create "no small amount of self-doubt, anxiety and dread"!

John Steinbeck may have sensed something similar when he expressed this observation in *Sweet Thursday:* "It was Fauna's conviction, born out of long experience, that most people, one, did not know what they wanted; two, did not know how to go about getting it; and three, didn't know when they had it."

All of these individual quandaries and conflicts add up to a challenging societal conundrum. Given the wide range and profound complexity of motives, and the difficulty of leaders optimally managing the needs of large numbers of people and a sizeable complement of excessively greedy ones, how can we adopt goals that are truly consistent with the greater good, and enforce moral codes, and prevent tragic harm to the global ecological commons?

A filmmaker named Tom Shadyac was seeking to understand what is wrong with our world, and what we can do about it, so he created a documentary film titled *I Am,* in which he stated that hunger, poverty, greed, war and the environmental crisis are symptoms of a deeper endemic problem whose root cause is found in the exaltation of competition and individualism over cooperation and working together to achieve common goals. Interestingly, Shadyac found good cause to believe that cooperation may be the most basic operating principle for many species of life on Earth.

Cooperative problem solving would be far superior for our societies than hyped-up tribal polarization and bitter partisanship. Competing interest groups should seek more fair-minded compromises, and we should not allow religious supremacism to dictate national policies, or those with the most influence to improperly abuse their power. United we may prosper, but divided, only the few who divide us benefit, making out like ruthless bandits.

The film *I Am* tells the story of the aftermath of a life-threatening accident that caused Tom Shadyac, who had achieved significant success in making Hollywood films, to question the entire ethos of 'success', consumerism, and compulsive impulses to acquire ever-more possessions. As many homeowners have discovered, possessions can come to possess people -- and this can have adverse effects on personal well-being!

Some superbly sensible people say that, in many respects, "less is better". Since obsessions over possessions can negatively affect one's life, 'success' can lead to a diminishment in the quality of life and personal freedom. Compulsive needs to buy things can seriously diminish the quality of life, especially when purchases are financed with bondage-inducing amounts of debt.

Many costs are being incurred due to people's indulgence in hyper-consumerism and the mindless subjugation of nature to human ends. Errors of perception and understanding are causing us to fail to see and appreciate the things that contribute to a truer quality of our lives, for ourselves and for our descendants.

Many people are beginning to suspect that what youthful bohemians and hippies in the 1960s called "the rat race" may be a competition whose goals are ultimately a chimerical and unfulfilling illusion. Furthermore, it can become clear upon honest introspection that some of our defining drives are insanely and unsustainably eroding many of the basic qualities that make life meaningful, fulfilling and enjoyable.

The prodigious biological insights into the long history of evolutionary change driven by natural selection were discovered and published more-or-less simultaneously in 1858 by Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace. The way the two men interpreted this understanding, however, revealingly diverged. Darwin's harsh view of "survival of the fittest" led to Social Darwinist ideologies, skewed economics, eugenics societies and the idea of "the selfish gene". Wallace, in contrast, focused on tendencies of evolutionary change to generate a world of complex co-dependence, so he became an activist advocating social justice. Let us see more feelingly, and cultivate better understandings of these issues -- and find better ways to co-create the greater good!

Fascinatingly, a stunning proof that Darwin and Wallace were correct about life having evolved came to light in early 2015. Scientists found ancient communities of bacteria that have remained virtually unchanged for more than 2.3 billion years in muddy sediments at the bottom of the deep sea. Researchers say these microscopic organisms are an example of "extreme evolutionary stasis", and that they represent *the greatest lack of evolution ever seen*. Since evolution involves an adaptation to changes in the physical and biological environment, there is naturally no evolutionary change when no changes take place in the surrounding environment. J. William Schopf, a paleobiologist at UCLA, calls this the "null hypothesis", and says it proves Darwin was right about evolutionary biological change by means of natural selection.

"Moderation in All Things"

Pro-corporate apologists and "conservatives" have hijacked the vocabulary of Jeffersonian liberalism and turned words like "progress", "opportunity" and "individualism" into tools for making the plunder of America sound like a divine right. Ideological proponents of anti-government laissez-faire economic policies have distorted Charles Darwin's theory of evolution so much that politicians and even judges passionately promote the notion that the greater good is best achieved by enacting trickle-down economic policies, which tragically create extreme inequalities and inequities between financially successful people and everyone else.

Impulses to abandon the most vulnerable people in society are gaining traction as our huge national debt mounts, and partisan politicians are becoming increasingly intransigent. We need to be able to see more clearly that spending and tax decisions reflect moral values, and accordingly find new ways to deal with the challenges we face without abandoning under-represented people and those who are the most vulnerable. And we should stop allowing right-wing politicians to put top priority on further enriching the already wealthy.

"Committing to what is right, what is just, and what is good will bring you fulfillment."

--- Coretta Scott King, quoted in Joyce Tennyson's *Wise Women*

Moderation is desirable in almost all things. Moderation is a healthy attribute for society in many arenas, and a more propitious one than either excessively undisciplined indulgences or harsh prohibitions. This is true in things as diverse as budgetary decisions, fiscal policies, sexual relationships, and the use of intoxicants. Discipline and moderation and self-denial may be hard to achieve in the face of many temptations and alluring self-indulgences and escapist pursuits, yet it would be desirable if we all began to see bigger picture perspectives and committed ourselves to making our societies healthier by demanding that the incentives in our economic system be sensibly restructured to encourage broader, fairer and more wholesome activities.

The Extraordinary Saga of Alexander von Humboldt

Alexander von Humboldt was the father of environmental awareness. He was a Prussian naturalist and intrepid explorer who was one of the first persons to regard nature as a web of life. Because he intimately experienced nature as being profoundly interconnected, he recognized the threats posed by human activities, and he thus came up with the idea more than 200 years ago of human activities having impacts that can change the climate.

Thirty-two years before Charles Darwin set off on his famed voyage on the HMS Beagle, which led him to some extraordinary insights about biological evolution, Alexander von Humboldt set sail on the ship Pizarro, heading from Spain to Venezuela on the first leg of what turned out to be a five-year-long voyage of discovery around the world. As he crossed the Atlantic, he saw a scene of vivid bioluminescence that presaged the brilliant illumination of his understandings, which came to include a heightened awareness of the interconnectedness of the web of life around the world and an incipient awareness that human beings even then, in the early years of the 1800s, were severely impacting natural habitats.

One of the first great insights on his expedition came when he visited the beautiful Lake Valencia region of Venezuela. There he recognized that deforestation was making the land barren, and he saw that the lake's water level was falling and torrential rains were washing away the soils on surrounding slopes. He was the first person to explain the fundamental functions of the forest for ecosystems and the climate: the ability of trees to enrich the atmosphere with moisture, and their cooling effect, and their importance for water retention and protection against soil erosion. He also wrote about the impact of trees on the climate through their generation of oxygen. He warned that humans were meddling with the climate, and that humanity's impacts were already "incalculable". He saw that this would have unforeseeable and potentially catastrophic impacts on people in the future, if such disturbances in the natural world continued so "brutally." Today, serious pollution is further degrading Lago de Valencia, and the lake is being afflicted with algal blooms caused by a continual influx of untreated wastewater from urban, agricultural and industrial land uses in the area, all of which contribute to ongoing eutrophication, contamination and salinization of the lake.

As with Darwin's voyage on the HMS Beagle 32 years later, all of Humboldt's written work was founded on a single momentous journey. This voyage is the centerpiece of Andrea Wulf's fascinating biography, *The Invention of*

Nature. Humboldt traveled in the Americas with a botanist, Aimé Bonpland, and together with some hard-working natives they paddled by canoe into the botanic richness of rain forests, ascending the Upper Orinoco River that flows north to the ocean through Venezuela. They sought the river's common source with the Rio Negro, a tributary of the Amazon that flows to the south and east. Humboldt was thus the first to map the Orinoco's union in the Casiquiare Canal area with a tributary of the Amazon -- a juncture that defied contemporary assumptions, which held that two watersheds could not share the same source.

The two men continued on a nine-month, 1,300-mile trek along the northern Andes, crossing snow-swept passes and then descending into humid jungle through regions never seen by any naturalist before. Humboldt was boundlessly energetic, climbing some of the highest volcanoes in the world. Not only did he see the profound interconnectedness of the natural world, but he also discovered similarities between climate zones across the world, and saw that humanity was already causing changes in the climate in the early 1800s.

Humboldt's "scientific passion all but blinded him to danger. When an earthquake broke around him, he calmly set out his instruments to measure and time it; and his experiments with electric eels might well have killed him. In the plateau lands of Peru, he discovered the magnetic equator and soon afterward studied the cold nutrient-filled waters of what is now known as the Humboldt Current, whose rainless air has the effect of parching the coasts of northern Chile and Peru."

"But Humboldt's biggest achievement lay less in geographic discovery than in the insights the journey sparked." With such observations, Andrea Wulf strives to establish Humboldt's relevance to us today, and her fluency in German facilitated the sifting of his massive volume of writings for impressive data, and revealed the extent to which Humboldt was one of the most famous scientists of his age, and how his restless life was packed with adventures and discoveries. "Humboldt reached his epiphany on the slopes of Mount Chimborazo in today's Ecuador, a mountain then considered the highest in the world. Climbing to more than 19,000 feet, he attained a mountaineering record unsurpassed for 30 years, and he gazed with awe at the vast landscape spread before him. Here, Wulf asserts, he was struck anew by his founding conviction: that the world was a single, web like, interconnected organism."

Humboldt spent five years traveling before he returned to Europe via Cuba, Mexico and the United States. "In North America, which he loved, he hobnobbed with a delighted President Thomas Jefferson." The only subject they avoided was slavery, for Humboldt was revolted by its inhumanity, and he detested colonial greed that perpetuated it. His sensitivity to environmental degradation found its voice in two well-researched books published after his return.

Humboldt turned scientific observation into poetic narrative, and his writings inspired naturalists and poets like Darwin, Wordsworth and Goethe, as well as world leaders. Andrea Wulf argues in *The Invention of Nature* that Humboldt's influence contributed to John Muir's ideas of ecological preservation, and helped shape Thoreau's *Walden.* She also traces Humboldt's influences through the great minds he inspired in domains such as evolution, ecology, conservation, art, literature and revolutionary zeal, and thereby brings this lost scientific hero and almost forgotten father of environmentalism back to life.

"The transcendentalism in much of Humboldt's writing deeply affected Whitman, Thoreau, Poe and the English Romantics. In South America, the liberator Simón Bolívar, whom Humboldt had known in Paris, asserted that the German's vision had awakened the South American people to pride in their continent. Later, environmentalists from George Perkins Marsh to John Muir saw Humboldt as their spiritual ancestor."

Inspiration is a marvelous thing, and the awareness of our vital connection to the natural world is so important that understandings like those gained and shared by Alexander von Humboldt are highly commendable. "This is the most remarkable story about the most colorful, captivating man I have ever heard of," writes Andrea Wulf. Her biography reveals details of the extraordinary life of this visionary naturalist, and how he helped create the way we understand nature today. "If I could invite only one person from the past to a dinner party, it would be him." Personally, if there is any world exploration I would rather have gone on, other than Darwin's voyage on the HMS Beagle, it would have been Humboldt's journey around the world, despite the hardships he endured, which are reminiscent of Theodore Roosevelt's arduous, nearly fatal journey down the "River of Doubt" a century later.

Developing a Big Picture Bearing – A Short History of North America

The Bering Strait is about 50 miles wide at its narrowest point. This waterway lies between Alaska and the most easterly point of Siberia in Russia, and it connects the Bering Sea to the south (part of the Pacific Ocean) with the Chukchi Sea to the north (part of the Arctic Ocean). The depth of this narrow strait is no deeper than 200 feet at any point, so this is why scientists believe that humans migrated from Asia to North America across a land bridge when ocean levels were significantly lower.

And this is no mere Aleutian illusion! The first human beings to discover North America likely came by way of the Bering Strait something like 15,000 years ago during the last Ice Age. So much water was locked up in glaciers and continental ice sheets that sea levels in oceans at the time around the planet were 300 feet lower than they are today. This caused a dry land corridor to connect what is now Alaska with the eastern part of Siberia. Over the millennia, these first explorers and early settlers prospered and managed to proliferate across the North American continent, eventually consisting of hundreds of various tribes of Native Americans.

Fast forward 14,000 years to the 10th or 11th century CE, and we see Norse Vikings exploring and settling land areas in regions of the North Atlantic that included the northeastern fringes of North America. From the vivid perspective of conventional European versions of history, the American continent was discovered much later, when Christopher Columbus arrived in the Caribbean in 1492. The city of St. Augustine, Florida was founded by Spain in 1565, so it is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the present-day United States. But "white man" did not arrive from Europe in significant numbers to explore, conquer and colonize the continent until the 17th century. About 100 English colonists arrived in 1607 along the west bank of the James River in Virginia to found Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in North America. Then in 1620, the first Pilgrims arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Many millions more were to follow these immigrants, seeking better opportunities and freedom from religious oppression, among a myriad of other individual motives.

Relations between the colonists and the natives did not go well, partly because the religions of the colonists regarded the natives as "heathens" who did not believe in the right God. Many Indians were slaughtered, and millions of others died from diseases that they had no immunity to, having evolved separately from the rest of humanity for so many millennia.

The ancestors of most of the people living in North America today came from Europe and Asia and other parts of the world in the next several centuries. They were joined by large numbers of black people kidnapped in Africa and brought to America for sale as slaves. The original immigrants had formed 13 colonies on the East Coast in the 150 years before 1776, and they had begun to bridle at Britain's exploitive mercantile economic system and its policies of taxing the colonists without fairly representing their interests. Revolutionary dissatisfaction had grown so intense by 1776 that a courageous group of colonial leaders got together and issued a Declaration of Independence, and then colonial militia forces were organized under General George Washington to fight a Revolutionary War to throw off the hegemony of British tyranny. It took six years, but the Americans finally won a treasured independence, and the Treaty of Paris was signed to end this war in September 1783.

The fractious colonists then laudably organized themselves to hammer out a Constitution and Bill of Rights to guide this new experiment in democratic governance, and all of the competing interests managed to find enough common ground to create a brilliant system of checks and balances within the federal government, and between it and the new States.

The infinitely variegated saga of the ensuing two centuries is an extraordinary one of westward and southern expansion, massacres of the natives, internal strife, a terrible Civil War, industrialization, urbanization, and the progressive evolution of fairer representation and rules of law designed to balance evolving interests. A succession of gold rushes, mining claims, trappers, homesteaders and exploitation of the homelands of the Native Americans led to much travail. A Gilded Age of gaudily conspicuous consumerism and robber barons and giant business trusts unfolded, and then a Progressive Movement of reforms in reaction. Then the first World War took place, and the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the Second World War, and dozens of other foreign wars.

The economic history of the United States in the years since the calamitous economic collapse of the 1930s is a fascinating one, and one that contains many important lessons for us today. Rash speculation and extremes of economic inequalities had reached such a peak by the end of the Roaring Twenties that this bubble frenzy finally burst, causing a worldwide economic depression. To deal with the terrible social ills associated with inadequately governed business activities, President Franklin Roosevelt's administration instituted a flurry of changes that were focused on three primary initiatives: (1) economic relief for unemployed people and the poor; (2) recovery of the economy to help banks, railroads, industry, farmers and investors; and (3) reform of the financial system to prevent a repeat depression. New labor laws were passed, and banking and securities legislation was enacted, and great public works were undertaken, and a New Deal social safety net was put into place.

The period from the end of World War II until 1980 was characterized by significant economic expansion and big increases in productivity, the benefits of which were relatively fairly shared with working people. But rich people and speculators had finally had enough of this fair sharing of the benefits of the capitalist system with workers, so beginning with Ronald Reagan in 1981, wholesale changes were made to slash taxes on the wealthy and significantly reduce the collective bargaining power of workers. Regulations on Big Business were reduced, and defense spending was ramped up, and America indulged in a stunning and increasingly risky binge of federal deficit financing. The smart protections established during the Depression were dismantled, and concerted efforts were made to undermine the New Deal safety net, and the rich got richer. Big Money served to further corrupt our political system, and it became less fairly representative and increasingly vulnerable to systemic shocks and fraudulent schemes. A high-tech stock market bubble grew and grew, and then burst in 2001, and then a real estate bubble was inflated and subsequently burst in 2008, causing another global financial crisis.

Now, as the past five years have slipped into history, a new bubble was inflated again by means of historically low interest rates, regressive debt-financed tax cuts, and new record levels of national debt. The Federal Reserve pursued a strategy of buying assets to stimulate the economy in the absence of fairer national policies, and we have learned a lot about best practices and worst practices. After the coronavirus pandemic struck and revealed the U.S. to be the worst prepared in the world to prevent its spread, huge amounts of money began being injected into our casino capitalist economy. We are still allowing vested interest groups to continue to rig the system for their own narrow short-term self-interests at the expense of the well-being and safety of people worldwide. And then after the electoral coup by Trump Republicans in 2016, terrible abuses of power took place, as evaluated at length in *See Clearly: Sanity During Insane Times - Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto.*

It is our duty now to alter this state of affairs! When in the course of human events, grievous adversities and risks arise, it is the right of the people to institute new measures of governance so as to ensure their safety and happiness. This need is becoming urgent, and we should act in accordance with best understandings of Solon-wise statesmen and ecological economists and common people honorably committed to using common sense.

Some Ominous Stories Concerning the Destabilization of Geophysical Streams

Queue up the scary music. Here is another cue for better understanding. We humans are seriously messing with Mother Nature and her geophysical character. This is an elementary story of three great streams, one in the Atlantic Ocean and two in the atmosphere.

First, let's think about the Gulf Stream. This is a current of warm and relatively swiftly-moving water in the Atlantic Ocean that originates in the Gulf of Mexico and follows the eastern coastlines of the United States and Newfoundland, and then splits in two. The northern stream, known as the North Atlantic Drift, crosses the Atlantic Ocean to Northern Europe, and the southern stream, the Canary Current, recirculates off West Africa.

The relatively warm water of the Gulf Stream influences the climate of the east coast of North America and the west coast of Europe, making weather patterns in Europe significantly warmer than they would otherwise be, due to the North Atlantic Drift. According to a team of scientists, there is growing evidence that the Gulf Stream is slowing down because of climate change. This weakening of the Atlantic Ocean circulation that carries warmth into the Northern Hemisphere's high latitudes is due to disrupting flows of cold water from melting glaciers and ice sheets in Greenland. This development is a result of the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and resultant anthropogenic global warming, which ironically contributes to extreme weather events that could cause

more frequent cold snaps in Europe as the climate changes in response to changes in the circular system of ocean currents, which is collectively called the North Atlantic Gyre.

What this suggests is that one of the most feared consequences of warming temperatures is already coming to pass. Understand this. Global warming could cause an ice age in Europe, with average temperatures plunging and weather conditions running amok. The system of currents in the Atlantic Ocean is evocatively known as the AMOC, the "Atlantic meridional overturning circulation". This is characterized by both the northward flow of warm, salty water in the upper layers of the Atlantic, including the Gulf Stream, and a southward flow of colder, deep waters that are part of the phenomenon known as "thermohaline circulation". This "large-scale ocean circulation is driven by global density gradients created by surface heat (thermo-) and freshwater fluxes and salt content (haline) that together determine the density of sea water." Thermohaline circulation is sometimes called an ocean conveyor belt or the great ocean conveyor.

The AMOC ocean currents have declined in strength by 15 percent since the mid-20th century to a new record low, according to scientists in a peer-reviewed study published in the Journal Nature. "That's a decrease of 3 million cubic meters of water per second, the equivalent of nearly 15 Amazon rivers."

The currents that compose the North Atlantic Gyre include the Gulf Stream in the west, the North Atlantic Current in the north, the Canary Current in the east, and the Atlantic North Equatorial Current in the south. This gyre is particularly important for the central role it plays in the thermohaline circulation that brings salty water west from the Mediterranean Sea and then north to form the North Atlantic Deep Water.

The second categories of great streams that humankind is inadvertently altering are the two jet streams in the atmosphere. These are the polar front jet stream and the subtropical jet stream. These fast flowing, narrow and meandering air currents in the atmosphere directly affect our weather systems in the Northern Hemisphere. The polar front is the boundary between cold North Pole air and warm equatorial air. The polar jet sits at roughly 60°N latitude, where the polar front is generally found. The subtropical jet blows at roughly 30°N latitude because of the temperature differences between air at mid-latitudes and the warmer air nearer the equator. Both the polar and subtropical jets are westerly, meaning they come from the west and blow toward the east. Both jets fluctuate north and south with the seasons as the horizontal temperature fields across the globe shift with the areas of strongest sunshine.

The polar jet stream is a continuous gale, "as wide across as the Amazon, that blows west to east in a ring around the Arctic, between four and eight miles above Earth's surface." Its fluctuating path and speed exert a powerful influence on weather in the Northern Hemisphere. When it snakes south over North America during winter, it brings extended periods of intense cold. When it snakes north, warm weather prevails in northern climes.

<u>Insights Related to Easter Island</u>

Think about the geographically most remote inhabited place on Earth. It is Easter Island in the South Pacific, which lies two thousand miles west of the South American continent. Its original inhabitants knew it as Rapa Nui. It had taken the human race more than 100,000 years to find Rapa Nui, after spreading out from Africa to the Middle East and Europe and China and Southeast Asia. Long before early explorers had found North America and South America, courageous Polynesian adventurers sailed the vast expanses of the Pacific on large wooden sailing canoes, using 'dead reckoning' to navigate (this was at a time long before the invention of modern navigational instruments). A small contingent of these courageous seafarers had discovered Rapa Nui about 1,600 years ago, and they settled down and lost contact with their ancestors who lived on islands hundreds of miles to the northwest. They set about building an agrarian culture and honoring their ancestors with huge stone statues.

Dutch sailors discovered the island of Rapa Nui on Easter Sunday in 1722, so they named it Easter Island. The island has an area of 64 square miles, and features a number of volcanic cones that vault up from an ancient hot spot deep below the surface of the Earth's oceanic crust on what is known as the East Pacific Rise. All of the tall stone statues had been carved from volcanic rock in a crater named Rano Raraku on the northeast side of the island. The largest of hundreds of stone statues that were carved and transported out of this crater weighs an estimated 87 tons. Some apparently megalomaniacal chieftain had managed to have a statue carved that would have

weighed more than 200 tons, but it was too heavy to move out of the crater. The Rapanui, it seems, were short on foresight!

The Rapa Nui people knew nothing about birth control, so their population increased until they depleted their food and forest resources over a period of about 1,000 years. This ecological destruction led eventually to the complete collapse of their civilization. One might extrapolate and say that many modern human endeavors are almost equally obtuse in their disregard for the implications of their depletionary impacts, and the extent to which they cause damages to vital natural systems. We are not much different in the USA today, or around the globe, than the Rapanui people. We are all somewhat like the Roman Emperor Nero, who figuratively fiddled while Rome burned.

The geology of Easter Island is interesting. A heavy basaltic chunk of the Pacific Plate called the Nazca Plate is splitting away from the Pacific Plate along the East Pacific Rise. Molten lava erupted forth from this fissure until volcanoes there rose above sea level and formed what we know today as Easter Island. On the far boundary of the Nazca Plate to the east, the plate is colliding with the South American Plate, and subducting into the deep Peru-Chile Trench. As this rock subducts beneath the South American continent, plunging under the continental crust and melting into magma, it has created 67 active volcanoes that tower in the awesome Andes Range, inland from the coast and roughly parallel to it. The Andes Mountains stretch thousands of miles from Colombia to Ecuador, Peru, and the southern tip of Chile. This is one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world, and yet many of its volcanoes are still active today.

The North American continent also has an interesting geophysical genesis. Old sedimentary rocks of the ancient Colorado Plateau can be seen to have been uplifted long after their deposition and lithification. This uplift has exposed rocks that are dated to be more than one billion years old, like those near Ouray, Colorado. Lithified footprints can be found in these rocks that are revealing remnants of dinosaurs that lived before the biotic catastrophe known as the Cretaceous Extinction took place 65 million years ago.

In contrast to the old age of the Colorado Plateau, the beautiful mountains of the Sierra Nevada in California have been uplifted within geologically recent times -- within the past 5 million years or so. The granite of the Sierra Nevada formed when parts of the Pacific Plate subducted deep into the Earth and melted into a vast pool of magma that cooled slowly under what is today eastern California. This cooling and hardening process took place over a period of maybe 100 million years. Then, relatively recently, the 400 mile-long and 50 mile-wide and indeterminately deep granitic batholith began to be uplifted. Older metamorphic rock that covered it has mostly been eroded away, exposing this wondrous granite, which evocatively exfoliates according to its physical nature. Likewise, the dramatic volcanic peaks of the Cascade Range in Washington, Oregon and northern California have also been formed geologically recently, in the past several million years, in an active tectonic and volcanic process similar to the process that created the Andes.

<u>Astonishing Occurrences in the Physical Evolution of Planet Earth</u>

Imagine traveling through the islands of Indonesia in the late 1970s. You land on the southern tip of Sumatra, the sixth biggest island in the world, and you take a rough bus ride for 24 hours from the southern end of the island to an inland body of water known as Lake Toba. This is the largest lake in a volcanic caldera in the world. It is 50 miles long and 15 miles wide, and it has a big tropical mountainous island in the middle named Samosir Island. The boats that once took locals and a few tourists out to the idyllic island were so dilapidated in that era that the crew would bail water out of the rickety ferries carrying hundreds of passengers during the trip across the lake. It was a real adventure! The local Batak people live in small communities on Samosir Island in colorful houses that have a distinctive architecture resembling hulls of propped-up ark-like boats.

Lake Toba is an ancient volcanic caldera that has partially filled with fresh water, similar to Crater Lake in Oregon. Geologists say that the Toba caldera is a remnant of the largest volcanic explosion on Earth in the last 25 million years. This eruption took place about 75,000 years ago. The explosive eruption of hot magma that eventually resulted in the deep crater that became Lake Toba is estimated to have ejected about 670 cubic miles of lava and ash. For perspective, the explosion of Mt. St. Helens in 1980 ejected less than one cubic mile of material, and the former Mt. Mazama in southern Oregon (now the Crater Lake crater) is estimated to have ejected about 12 cubic miles of lava and ash when it underwent its climactic eruption.

The Toba explosion threw so much volcanic particulate matter into the atmosphere that it caused many years of "volcanic winter" around the planet. This stressed all forms of life to such an extreme degree, as Bill Bryson states in his fascinating book *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, that "The event, it is thought, may have carried humans right to the point of extinction, reducing the global population to no more than a few thousand individuals. That means that all modern humans arose from a very small population base that survived in the Rift Valley area of Africa, which could explain our lack of genetic diversity."

Another famous lake-filled caldera is Yellowstone Lake in northwest Wyoming. Covering 136 square miles, this is the largest freshwater lake above 7,000 feet in elevation in North America. The Yellowstone vicinity, like the Big Island of Hawaii, lies over a hot spot in the middle of a tectonic plate. A hot spot is a "stationary thermal plume rising from deep within the earth's mantle". According to Wikipedia, many caldera-forming eruptions have taken place from the Yellowstone hotspot as the North American Plate slowly moved over it in the past 16 million years. Yellowstone Lake itself lies in three discernable overlapping calderas that were created by violent eruptions above the hot spot within the past two million years. It is estimated that these enormous eruptions spewed out ash and lava in quantities exceeding 2,500 times that of 1980's impressive eruption of Mt. St. Helens.

Bill Bryson states that supervolcano eruptions in Yellowstone have averaged "one massive blow every 600,000 years. The last one, interestingly enough, was 630,000 years ago. Yellowstone, it appears, is due." Bryson also notes that an early eruption from the hot spot that currently lies below Yellowstone took place about 12 million years ago, and it caused so much ash to be deposited a thousand miles to the east, in what is now eastern Nebraska, that it killed many kinds of animals there. A plethora of fossils found at the Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park in Nebraska surprisingly include many mammals from the early Pliocene like species of camels, rhinoceroses, zebra-like horses, and saber-toothed deer. Saber-toothed deer in Nebraska! Rhinoceroses and camels! Oh, my! Geological history sure is amazing!!

Visualize This!

The most violent volcanic eruption in modern recorded history took place on August 27, 1883. This notorious explosion blew apart a pointed conical island known as Krakatoa, which lies in the Sunda Strait south of Sumatra and west of Java. Most of the island of Krakatoa was blown away in the eruption. Tsunami waves were generated that killed more than 36,000 people on the coasts of nearby Java and Sumatra. It is estimated that this phenomenal explosion ejected about 6 cubic miles of magma.

There are 21 active volcanoes on the island of Java alone, and 87 in the archipelago that includes the thousands of islands of Indonesia and the Philippines. Volcanoes occur in this area because the Indo-Australian Plate is moving down under the Eurasian Plate, subducting into the 25,000-foot-deep Java Trench. As the oceanic crust below the Indian Ocean subducts under the continental crust of Sumatra and Java, it melts in the same natural processes as those that have created the Cascade Range and Andes Mountains. As molten magma rises towards the surface under Indonesia, it creates dangerous stratovolcanoes. This region has been prone to the most explosive volcanic activity in modern times of anywhere on Earth. Check out the informative book *Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded* by Simon Winchester for a fascinating description of this event and related facts.

A Brief Interlude on Geological Understandings and Plate Tectonics

In contrast to stratovolcanoes, "shield volcanoes" exhibit different types of eruptions of molten rock. Shield volcanoes tend to pour forth streams of hot lava above 'hot spots' in the middle of Earth's crustal plates, instead of at the edges. Shield volcanoes tend to be less explosive than the Indonesian or Cascade stratovolcanoes that occur near the edges of converging plates. The volcanoes of the Hawaiian Islands are classic examples of shield volcanoes. Consider these mountains for a moment.

Mark Twain wrote an article titled *The Great Volcano of Kilauea*, which was published in the Sacramento *Daily Union* in 1866. Visiting the Big Island of Hawaii, he observed: "Occasionally the molten lava flowing under the superincumbent crust broke through -- split a dazzling streak, from five hundred to a thousand feet long, like a sudden flash of lightning, and then acre after acre of the cold lava parted into fragments, turned up edgewise like cakes of ice when a great river breaks up, plunged downward and were swallowed in the crimson cauldron."

Mark Twain was a man with a deep curiosity, a vivid imagination and a keen capacity for insightful observation. He would have loved to have been able to gain a fuller understanding of the geological forces at work in Hawaii. But, alas!, the science of geology was still mired in relative ignorance, and many people were in denial of new ideas. Fervent embraces of dogmatic beliefs in biblical literalism still persisted widely in those days. Such convictions are a barrier to the open-minded attitude that allows folks to see reality in more accurate and comprehensive ways. Those who cling to literal beliefs in Bible stories regard modern understandings as heresy, rather than seeing them as corresponding vastly more accurately to reality.

Charles Darwin published his great book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, introducing to substantial controversy the scientific theory that populations evolve over the course of countless generations through a process of natural selection. At that time, Sam Clemens was just 24 years old, four years before he began calling himself by the famous *nom de plume,* Mark Twain. Most people back then faithfully believed the earth is the center of the universe. This belief largely defined humankind's worldviews. Knowledge of the actual nature of the geophysical processes involved in the physical evolution of Earth was still many decades away. In fact, the marvelous scientific theory of plate tectonics was not clearly articulated until the 1960s. The natural processes were still largely unexplained in Mark Twain's time that cause 'continental drift', earthquakes, seafloor ridges, seafloor spreading, and mountain building through 'basin and range' faulting and folding of Earth's crust. Native Hawaiians, for their part, attributed volcanic activity to the roiling whims of an awe-inspiring goddess named Pele.

The geologic saga of the Hawaiian Islands makes an amazing story, and one that is too good to ignore. Though it was not well understood in Mark Twain's day, we can easily picture it today. Imagine looking down from a satellite orbiting the planet onto a Pacific Ocean completely drained of water. This visualization will help to understand the whale of a surprise that scientists discovered when the bottom of the Pacific Ocean was charted after World War II. If you Google a seafloor map at "National Geographic Pacific Ocean Map", the ideas in this discussion will become clearer. Better yet, watch the extraordinarily thought-provoking film *Drain the Ocean: Opening Sequence* on YouTube about the sea floor landscape, and you'll be both better informed and astonished.

The mightiest range of mountains on the planet extends from just south of the Big Island of Hawaii to the Kamchatka Peninsula between Alaska and Japan. This mountain range begins abruptly just southeast of the Big Island of Hawaii, and extends to the island of Kauai to the northwest, and then it continues as tall underwater seamounts on the abyssal ocean floor all the way to the deep Kuril Trench to the north. The Kuril Trench is one of the deepest canyons in the world at more than 34,000 feet below sea level at its deepest point.

Mauna Kea, on the Big Island of Hawaii, is the tallest mountain in the world, as measured from its base on the Pacific Ocean floor to its summit. It towers more than 33,000 feet above the deep ocean floor. The mountains in this 4,000-mile long range are volcanic cones with steep profiles from top to bottom. This chain of volcanoes runs in what is a more-or-less straight line all the way across the Pacific seafloor, except for a "kink" in the line at a point northwest of Midway Island where the line of seamounts suddenly veers in a more northerly direction. This "kink" in the line of mountains has a fascinating genesis, as does the entire mountain range itself.

Read on! Our home planet, enveloped by a life-supporting oxygenated atmosphere, has a surface that is more than two-thirds covered by oceans. Earth is like a massive ball of rock 25,000 miles in circumference that has an extremely dense inner core, a molten outer core, a highly viscous mantle, a rocky outer crust, and a large amount of salt water covering much of its surface. Earth's outer crust is relatively thin, comprising only about one percent of the volume of the planet. It is composed of a number of enormous slabs of rock, called 'tectonic plates'. These plates basically float viscously on the hot mantle below. The entire crust of the planet consists of about a dozen major plates, and twice as many minor ones. The Pacific Plate is the largest of these plates.

Earth's crust consists of two kinds of plates: continental crust, which averages 25 miles thick and is as old as 4,000 million years in places, and oceanic crust, which averages 5 miles thick and is no older than 180 million years anywhere. There is a very good reason that the oceanic crust is so much younger than the continental crust. The maximum amount of time it takes for rock that spews forth at the leading edge of any of the oceanic crustal plates to move away from the fractured rift zones where they form, and to travel at an average rate of two inches per year all the way to where they subduct back into the Earth, is about 180 million years. Oceanic crust is denser

than continental crust, so it generally subducts under the continental crust in slow-motion collisions at plate boundaries. Thus, recycled rock of the ocean crust disappears, while continental crust survives much longer.

The Hawaiian Islands have been created by molten magma coming up from a hot spot in the Earth's crust in the middle of the Pacific Plate. This hot spot is located below the abyssal floor of the Pacific Ocean, which lies more than 15,000 feet deep. Since the oceanic crust beneath the Pacific moves about two inches to the north each year, new volcanic islands keep being created above the relatively stationary Hawaiian hot spot over the long span of geologic time. The volcanoes become dormant after sufficient movement away from their hotspot source of flowing lava, and later become extinct. The older the islands get, the more dramatically eroded they become. The beautiful island of Kauai lies furthest northwest in the current chain of islands, so it is the oldest of the Hawaiian Islands, and as visitors can see, it is the most sensationally eroded. See the Na Pali Coast!

The hot spot is currently under the Big Island of Hawaii. Lava flows out from the hot spot almost continuously through the crater of the volcanic mountain Kilauea, just as it did when Mark Twain visited. Volcanic activity is also taking place in a new fissure that is building a volcanic seamount just to the southeast of the Big Island. This mountain has already been named the Loihi Seamount. It towers more than 10,000 feet above the sea floor, but is still several thousand feet below sea level. Scientists estimate this submarine seamount will become a new Hawaiian island in about 100,000 years, when the flowing lava finally makes the volcano tall enough to reach sea level. But "the rest of the story" is even more interesting. (Kudos to the late Paul Harvey, who entertained us for so long with his radio broadcast explanations of *The Rest of the Story!)*

Natural processes of weathering and erosion wear mountains down. Once any mountain stops being uplifted or emplaced by volcanic flows, erosive processes begin to reduce it to a remnant as the long eons pass. The chain of seamounts found in the Hawaiian Ridge, and in the Emperor Seamounts that continue further to the north, consist of former Hawaiian islands that have been eroded down and whose weight has pressed into the ocean bottom until they no longer reach the surface of the sea. At its farthest northern end, this chain of mountains is slowly subducting back into the Earth in the deep trenches of the northern Pacific, at the far edge of the Pacific Plate.

As noted, the most explosive volcanic activity on Earth takes place at plate boundaries, not at the more unusual 'hot spots' in the middle of tectonic plates like that under Hawaii. Boundary volcanoes are of basically two types: ones at the formative edges of plates, where new oceanic crust is being created in undersea ridges, and ones just inland of the boundaries where oceanic plates subduct under continental plates. During processes of subduction, oceanic crust at 'convergent' plate boundaries melts down into hot pools of magma under the edge of the continents. This is why earthquakes and volcanoes are common there, in this Ring of Fire around the coasts of the Pacific Ocean where subduction occurs. Alaska, the Pacific Northwest, South America, New Zealand, Indonesia, and Japan all have active volcanoes just inland from these plate boundaries of this Ring of Fire.

Anyway, back to the "kink" in the line of volcanoes in the Pacific. Think again about the seamounts that extend from the archipelago of the Hawaiian Islands to the deep North Pacific trenches. These seamounts extend northwest in a more-or-less straight line halfway across the Pacific from the current position of the Hawaiian Islands along the Hawaiian Ridge to a point past Midway Island, but then they continue in a more northerly direction up through the Emperor Seamounts. Why the kink? The distance from the hot spot to this kink in the underwater ridge is equivalent to the distance that the Pacific Plate has moved in the last 50 million years. It seems probable that the reason for this change in direction of the motion of the Pacific Plate is due to a jamming of Earth's tectonic plates that was caused as the collision began between the massive Indian island continent and Tibet on the Eurasian Plate, some 50 million years ago. Hmmm … it all seems to fit together!

As Albert Einstein once said, either everything is a miracle, or nothing is!

<u>A Little More Geology, and Some Correlated Biology</u>

The plot thickens; Mark Twain would have loved this! Consider for a moment what is happening at the formative edges of tectonic plates. These 'divergent plate boundaries' are where intrusions of hot magma are forcing the tectonic plates to move slowly apart in a process known as seafloor spreading. Thermal convection upwellings of hot rock from the Earth's mantle create this movement. A similar process can be observed when one looks at the

action of fresh ginger chopped up and tossed into a pot of boiling water. Distinct convection currents can be seen rising from the source of heat, moving the ginger around in interesting patterns.

Recipe: Add a mixture of cinnamon, cardamom, coriander, nutmeg, pumpkin pie spice, cumin, turmeric, black pepper and a pinch of cayenne to the simmering ginger for one of the healthiest beverages ever invented, having a propitiously alkaline-forming effect. Add Chocolate Malt Ovaltine and some milk or vanilla oatmilk to include other nutrients and vitamins, and you'll have a tasty and healthful beverage that is much better for you than coffee! Add chia seeds, and honey if you like sweetness in your hot drinks.

When hot magma spews forth as lava at a spreading center of an oceanic plate, like along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, it forces the plates apart, creating a conveyor belt of oceanic crust that moves away from the rift zones in both directions from where they formed. It provokes the imagination to visualize this ridge in the Atlantic, because it is part of the longest mountain range on Earth. Geologists tell us that this spreading center has driven the European continent and North America apart as the ancient supercontinent known as Pangaea broke apart, creating the Atlantic Ocean itself.

Greywacke-Inspired Ideas

One time as I was writing some of these words, absorbed in ideas, I was startled by the sudden crumbling of a trailside rock upon which I had been seated for some time. In my surprise, I wondered if this might have been some sort of mysterious sign from the Universe. Almost immediately thereafter, I realized that, as usual, there was a pretty good explanation for this occurrence. The rock was a sedimentary rock that looked like a kind of mudstone. I gave the rock a gentle kick, and it shivered and a whole slab crumbled to the ground. A few more swift kicks and the entire rock fractured into a beautiful natural pattern, shadowed in its crevices by the angular rays of the sunshine, and it appeared as though the rock beckoned deeper understanding. Nearby lichens were thriving on a more durable variety of rock, possibly a greywacke sandstone, and I could just imagine the lichens chortling about the importance of sensibly choosing an ecological niche that is durable and secure.

The origin of greywacke sandstone was the subject of turbulent scholarly discord. It is a bit of a mystery why this rock contains a mixture of gravel, sand and mud not normally laid down together during the processes of sedimentation. Geologists scratched their heads about this for decades, and then finally realized that greywacke rock was formed by submarine avalanches or turbidity currents on the continental shelves of oceans. These events churn sediments and create slurries with mixed sediments. Eventually, these sediments lithify into contrasting layers of rock. This is why greywacke sandstone is found on uplifted edges of the continental shelves and the bottom of deep-sea trenches where underwater landslides and turbidity currents occur.

Submarine avalanches are punctuations in the general equilibrium of slow change throughout geologic time. They are just one aspect of on-going processes of sedimentation, lithification, uplift and erosion that have been continuous since the beginning of time. Greywacke sandstone is found in some of the same vicinities as Radiolarian chert, which was formed deeper in the ocean by a process in which countless gazillions of microscopic skeletons of tiny ocean animals have precipitated to the ocean floor over millions of years. Layers of this chert rock are composed of tiny silicate skeletons of Radiolarian protozoans that are found in a jumble of what John McPhee explains is called Franciscan mélange. These distinct layers can be seen in intriguing uplifted contortions along the Pacific coast of North America.

Not long after Charles Darwin published his world-shaking tome on evolution *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, a German marine biologist, naturalist, philosopher and artist named Ernst Haeckel wrote an extensively illustrated book about these minuscule single-celled marine organisms whose mineral skeletons, when magnified, exhibited beautiful symmetrical patterns. In *Radiolaria,* published in 1862, Haeckel created "an image-laden monograph on these microscopic organisms, turning his eye and exquisite line to their intricate and varied forms." Marvelously, Haeckel's beautiful drawings of the forms and structures found in nature, such as these skeletons of Radiolarian protozoans, helped inspire the lovely Art Nouveau style, and artists began to utilize natural shapes to harmonize their art with the natural environment.

Species of radiolaria are over 500 million years old, "among the earliest skeletonized life forms. They are like an alphabet of possibilities, as if the ancient sea were dreaming in its depths all the future permutations of organic and invented forms, from backbones to bridges, and from the earth to the stars."

For Ernst Haeckel, the single-celled skeletoned radiolaria became "a lifelong obsession, a doorway to the mysteries of life itself. Through them, he would become a major figure in the history of evolutionary theory."

Haeckel philosophically expressed an intriguing insight in the extraordinary documentary *Proteus (2004)*, which is about him and his role in 19th century science, art and philosophy. He almost poetically wrote, "Many years ago, as now, my mind strove with eager delight to study and discover the creative life of Nature. It is eternal unity in manifold manifestation. The great is little, the little is great and everything after its kind, ever changing and yet preserving itself, near and far, and far and near, and so shaping and reshaping itself. I am here to wonder at it." To better appreciate Ernst Haeckel and his contributions to science and art, see the 8-minute clip from *Proteus* in the online article *Proteus: How Radiolarians Saved Ernst Haeckel*. Or better yet, watch the entire 59-minute film *Proteus 2004* (on YouTube). One fact conveyed is that Haeckel spent ten years analyzing radiolarian samples brought back by scientists on the sailing ship HMS Challenger, which was one of the most remarkable voyages of scientific exploration. That expedition took place from late 1872 through May 1876, and the Challenger traveled almost 70,000 nautical miles on an oceanographic trip circumnavigating the globe.

Interestingly, there have been many species of radiolarians in Earth's oceans over the past 500 million years, ever since the beginning of the Cambrian Period in the Paleozoic Era. Their variety over time in the fossil record makes them excellent diagnostic "index species" that help in dating rock formed in various geologic periods and epochs. Indeed, it was the observation that certain fossils were associated with various rock strata around the planet that led early geologists to recognize that life on Earth has existed over the course of an unfathomably long geological timescale, rather than a short biblical timeframe after some sort of special Creation. Again, this fascinating history in the unfolding understanding of geology is explored in John McPhee's *Basin and Range.*

After the crumbling rock episode, I was thinking about the fact that ideas have great potential power. An ideologue like Adolf Hitler, for instance, used his supremacist ideas, ruthless propaganda and the manipulative force of his authoritarian personality to launch a terrible war of aggression and genocidal assaults that resulted in tens of millions of people being killed. In contrast, ideas can also be powerful forces for the greater good, a realization that has driven the creation of this manifesto. When we understand the nature of ideas and their impacts, such insights can energize or inoculate us against foolishness or even tyranny, and heal us or give us valuable perspective. In theory, anyway. Thinking, however, seems to have become a perplexing jumble in today's cultish demagogic narcissistic Trumpian era, with its surfeit of emotion-hijacking tweets and insurrection by a MAGA mob, and what are, in effect, public health endangering and malicious inequality-stoking ruses.

Fervent ideological convictions can range the gamut from terrible to wonderful. The difference is determined to a large extent by how honest and moral the ideas are, as seen from perspectives that take consequential ethics and big picture perspectives into account. Make no mistake about it, though, as Albert Einstein once said, "Force always attracts men of low morality."

Discrimination, hate and genocide all share common origins. An art exhibit at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco in 2010 explored these roots. Titled "Our Struggle: Responding to Mein Kampf", the exhibit contained submissions from more than 400 individuals who used pages torn out of a copy of Adolph Hitler's infamous book *Mein Kampf* to create haunting emotional responses to the narrowly ideological words the book contains. One of these responses was a compelling cartoon that showed a hand pushing a section of a page filled with words down into a food-processor-like head that had a human face. Bits and pieces of people in the forms of miniature skulls and limbs spewed out of the mouth. Ideas can be powerful, for sure!

Adolph Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf ('My Struggle')* while imprisoned for political crimes in Germany in 1925. Hitler basically advocated the domination and subjugation of the weak by the strong. *Mein Kampf* became popular in a Germany ravaged by hyper-inflation, and hobbled by large debt obligations for war reparations that the victors in the First World War imposed on Germany. *Mein Kampf* became a bible of Nazism, and it facilitated aggressive

militarism and the atrocities of the holocaust genocide against Jews, and others. We should strive to find better ways to inoculate our nations against the impulses that facilitate such dastardly evil despotism!

Donald Trump demonstrates that he is terribly unempathetic, and a despotic con man who resembles Hitler in his demagoguery and desire to rule imperiously. His first wife reported that he kept a copy of Hitler's speeches by his bedside, giving credence to such concerns. In 2016, I advocated, "Reject his bid for power!" It is exceedingly tragic that, by hook and by crook, the cultish bamboozler managed to seize power, and then abused it with divisive, detrimental, snide and calamitous fervor. And his influence is now threatening our democracy and democratic fairness even more dangerously.

It is good for a society to strongly encourage beneficial behaviors in individuals, and to discourage ones that are socially harmful. Collectively, people in nations everywhere have a profound need and obligation to create proper incentives and establish economic and political systems that maximize the freedom, health and safety of their citizens, while ensuring they act responsibly toward other people and natural ecosystems. In light of the certain mortality of each individual, and the fleeting nature of each of our lives, and of moral considerations inherent in our being, it is our serious duty to leave a more auspicious legacy to our descendants.

It is precisely because good solutions to problems require a clear understanding of the real nature of the problems that we should rightly delve into root causes, and avoid merely addressing symptoms. With a much greater emphasis on comprehensive ideas of the common good, we could and should create healthier societies.

Philosophy North of the Golden Gate

I could, and shall, tell you a lot more things that I don't know. My mind digresses, but it is a curious thing to follow. About 10 miles south of where a beautiful bridge was built in 1937 across the Golden Gate entrance to San Francisco Bay (and was painted an iconic International Orange color), the San Andreas Fault plunges into the Pacific and forms a northerly line through Stinson Lagoon, the Olema Valley and Tomales Bay to Bodega Bay. Geologists say that the entire Point Reyes peninsula to the west of this rough line will become an island in less than a million years, due to periodic movements of the Pacific Plate along this fault. Those who walk along the Point Reyes Earthquake Trail see an old fence that runs down a hillside -- and then abruptly continues its trajectory 16 feet to the north. This discontinuity was caused in the span of mere moments of time by the epic 1906 earthquake rupture in this area. This abrupt and rare periodic earth movement makes it cogently clear how long the arc of time will be that will lead to Point Reyes peninsula becoming an island.

Geologists say that the "big one" earthquake interval of slippage there along the San Andreas Fault averages maybe once every 200 years. A jump of the Point Reyes peninsula of 16 feet to the north in 1906 means that it will move about 15 miles north in a million years. The remnants of a jagged volcano 200 miles to the south of Point Reyes along the San Andreas Fault provide mute testimony to such movements. Known as the Neenach Volcano, it formed in the San Andreas Fault Zone about 23 million years ago, and was then split as the Pacific Plate moved north. The two halves of the volcano are 195 miles apart today, with the northern half being the striking Pinnacles Peaks in Pinnacles National Park, just east of Salinas Valley.

Near Point Reyes, deep canyons and steep ravines are found that feature towering Coast Redwoods whose far-flung ancient range is restricted today to valleys near the Pacific Ocean that extend from the Oregon border to the central coast of California near Big Sur. Tall Douglas fir trees also inhabit these canyons, and streams cascade there enthusiastically in springtime, making riparian areas alive with the sound of cataracts of flowing water. Above these canyons, brilliantly green hills are festooned with riotously colorful wildflowers, those lovely ephemeral emblems of Springtime. Among dozens of varieties of wildflowers found there are California Poppies, Lupines, Gold Fields, and rare, endangered, inconspicuous but pretty purple Jewelflowers on serpentine barrens. God must have been an aesthete, and practically a poet!

Beautiful Hounds Tongues, Milkmaids and Shooting Stars are the suggestively-named triumvirate of early wild flowers in these hills. They have nearly finished flowering for the year by the vernal equinox, but under the canopy of Douglas firs, sultry Calypso orchids then bloom in late March and early April. These wildflowers are singular little things some six inches tall that have one solitary pinkish purple flower crowning a naked stem, its dappled

orchid lip insolently outspread as if it believed it was the whole darned purpose of existence. Later, under oak trees encrusted with moss and lichens, beautiful flowers called Chinese Houses bloom in pagoda-like whorls in May through early June. These indigenous lavender-and-white wildflowers are pollinated by bees that enter the flowers seeking nectar. When the insects alight on the lower lavender landing-pad petals, their weight pushes the petals down, exposing a protectively-encased anther. The anther is the male part of a flower that produces reproductive pollen. Some of the pollen adheres to the bee, and by such a subtle process, the pollen is transferred to the receptive female part of other flowers of the same lovely species. Botanical sex!

This mutual benefit to flowers and bees offers either confirmation of the dogma of Intelligent Design, or it provides proof of the amazing co-evolution of flowers and bees through a long process of natural selection. One's perspective on this question depends on the particular belief projection of the beholder. Personally, I find this intertwined adaptation of flowers and pollinators to be a marvelous aspect of Gaia and her evolutionary biology. The idea of biological change over unfathomable spans of geologic time is a compelling and marvelous story, and far more elegant and sophisticated -- and probable! -- than simple-minded explanations that God made everything the way it is, according to "His" inscrutable divine plan, and things have remained immutably unchanged ever since.

Many species of pollinators are being driven to extinction by pesticide use, industrial farming practices, habitat destruction, introduced pathogens and warming global temperatures. A scientific report by the United Nations warned that bold actions need to be undertaken to alter the increasingly adverse consequences of this state of affairs. This report was approved by a congress of 124 nations that met in Malaysia in 2016. As with the Paris Accords on climate change, the next steps must be taken SOON to deal with this challenge, before it's too late.

Pretty native Crimson Columbines grow in the same ecological niches as Chinese Houses. They seem to trumpet this miracle of botanical design. Invasive Italian thistles strive to crowd out the native profusion of lavender and white, as if mimicking the competition between the contrasting theories of genesis. Nearby a cataract of rushing water makes its way down a steep ravine toward the Pacific Ocean. A colorful butterfly flutters by, seeming not to know where it is going, but it soon alights exactly where it wants to be, on some sweet flowers or mineral deposits. Huckleberry bushes abound on partially shaded slopes; their small fruit, come the warm and dry days of late August, will prove to be delicious, but only occasionally plentiful. Moss covers oak trunks and rocks, and though it gets lushly soft during rainy times, it soon becomes scraggy as it survives the long dry season, stoically awaiting wetter days. As I hiked in these hills, I drank all of this in, in a speechless rapture.

In such environs, a vital spirit of place flourishes. It should come as no surprise that, not far below this natural scene, the entire spectrum of human indulgences is given full rein in our hyperactive culture. Revolutionary ardor thrives; so does contemplative spiritual practice; culinary appreciation and pleasure-filled indulgences are prolific, and there are even a few strains of ascetic denial, at least hypothetically; hot tub free-spiritedness commingles with dedication to work duty; good music and sophisticated artistic endeavors coexist with down-home simplicity; and creative social action also thrives, in contrast to scattered pools of a withered civic sense. Shut up!

Serpentine outcroppings on the ridges above these canyons have been colonized by unique species of cypress and manzanita. Serpentine is the greenish State Rock of California. It weathers into rocky metallic soils that inhibit plant growth because they contain low amounts of minerals essential to plant growth, along with high levels of metals like nickel and chromium that are toxic to most plants. Species of plants found growing in serpentine soils tend to be endemic and uniquely adapted to such challenging conditions. Almost every naturalist gleans revealing knowledge from evidence for the adaptation of various kinds of plant life to the soil conditions and precipitation patterns of the habitats, niches and ranges in which they're found. What does it reveal? Adaptation!

> "I calmly chewed my food in the sun and felt a deep physical happiness, as if I was floating on the cool, green waters of the sea. I did not allow my mind to take possession of this carnal joy, to press it into its own molds, and make thoughts of it. I let my whole body rejoice from head to feet, like an animal. Now and then, nevertheless, in ecstasy, I gazed about me and within me, at the miracle of this life: What is happening?', I said to myself. How did it come about that the world is so perfectly adapted to our feet and hands and bellies?"
>
> --- The 'boss' in *Zorba the Greek*, by Nikos Kazantzakis

How did it really come to be that pollinators like honey bees are specifically adapted to the plants they pollinate? How did it come to be that predators are adapted to their prey, and that parasites and commensals coexist in parasitic or symbiotic relationships? And how did it come about that animals inherit instinctual behaviors from their parents? Charles Darwin and his theories were significant forces in Mark Twain's times, and his thinking is valuable, coupled with honestly better understandings of these questions. The more we know of the 'genetic blueprints' of every life form, and of hormonal influences in mammalian brain development, the more we can come to understand and appreciate the complexity and sophistication of the wide variety of life processes. And the better prepared we will be to make the right choices in adapting to changing conditions.

Insights Elucidated by an Oreo Cookie

Our world is miraculously knowable. As Albert Einstein once noted, "The eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility", and "The fact that it is comprehensible is a miracle." And, "One cannot help but be in awe when one contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries to comprehend only a little of this mystery every day." I enjoy trying to understand our wondrous world, and this is one reason for my setting forth these words to share insights that have come my way.

Biological evolution is intimately intertwined with the even more basic physical evolution of our home planet. Serpentine rock, for instance, has an impressive genesis: it is magma from Earth's mantle that spewed forth long ago deep in the ocean at an oceanic crust spreading center. The intensely hot magma cooled rapidly in the cold water, as one can well imagine, and became the newest rock of the oceanic crust. The fact that this rock is now found in outcroppings on top of coastal hills at the western edge of the North American continent, far from where it formed, is testament to the conveyor-belt-like movement of oceanic crust, and to the not quite comprehensible physical processes involved in its emplacement on continental shores. This, along with 150-million-year-old blueschist metamorphic rock not far away on top of Ring Mountain, just north of the Golden Gate, provides mute testimony of the inscrutably long periods of time involved in the history of geologic changes.

When oceanic crust subducts beneath continental crust, some of the heavier oceanic crust ends up being accreted onto the continental shelf during these slow-motion collisions. Geologists have been known to give students on field trips a simple demonstrative analogy. They liken this process to what happens if you take two halves of an Oreo cookie that has been twisted apart, and push one half at an angle against and under the other half; some of the white frosting from the 'subducting half' ends up on top of the other half. Similarly, some of the subducting serpentine and chert rocks have piled up onto the continental crust, rather than plunging slowly beneath it. This hard rock has subsequently been uplifted into coastal mountain ranges. Eons of erosion have sculpted these hills and removed softer overlying sedimentary rock. All of the Oreo, incidentally, ends up in the mouths of students after this illuminating experiment!

For a vivid understanding of the creation and accretion of island arcs onto continental land masses, read John McPhee's book *Assembling California*. Or, alternatively, Google 'Plate Tectonics' at Wikipedia, and you will find a good high-level summary of information.

An Aside on Ring Mountain

Ring Mountain has a history that is anything but quiet, according to Horst Rademacher in a 2007 article. "The rocks underneath the hiker's feet have been squeezed and folded, smashed and pushed, chemically altered and physically tortured. Indeed, the geologic story of Ring Mountain is probably among the most violent of the entire Bay Area. Scientists believe that most of the rocks underlying this modest 602-foot-high 'mountain' once lay at the bottom of an ocean, and beginning about 165 million years ago, they were driven many dozens of miles into the earth's mantle in a process called subduction -- only later to be pushed back up to the surface, displaying the scars of their voyage into the fiery cauldron deep inside our planet."

"Were Ring Mountain located somewhere in the Mediterranean, ancient texts might speak of a jealous cyclops who had cast the boulders about in an angry fit. But geology tells another story, perhaps more plausible but by no means less tumultuous. Almost without exception the rocks on Ring Mountain belong to a class scientists call

metamorphic. Metamorphism is a process by which rocks -- which may be sedimentary, igneous, or other metamorphic rocks -- change in composition and appearance, losing their original identity."

Further Considerations Concerning the San Andreas Fault

Check out the entry for the Farallon Plate in Wikipedia. It provides a good general overview of some of the awe-inspiring concepts of geologic evolution. A vast amount of stress tends to build up along the edges of tectonic plates that move against other plates, and this leads to periodic earth movements that release the stress on any given fault. The average time between such shocking ruptures is known as the *recurrence interval* of that fault. The 1906 earthquake along the San Andreas Fault had a devastating effect on San Francisco. The recurrence interval of that fault in this region has historically been between 80 and 200 years. In its southern reaches in the Tejon Pass area, south of Bakersfield, the recurrence interval is estimated to be shorter than this. People wonder when the next Big One will strike!

The San Andreas Fault is a deep rupture along the tectonic boundary of the Pacific Plate and the North American Plate. It runs more than 750 miles from the vicinity of the Salton Sea in the southern part of California up through the Carrizo Plain and dramatic Pinnacles area, and then through the Santa Cruz Mountains and western edge of San Francisco and Bolinas Lagoon and Tomales Bay up to the Mendocino Junction where the Gorda Plate meets the Pacific and North American Plates.

The Gorda Plate is a northern remnant of the Farallon Plate. It is subducting under the northern region of California, contributing to creating towering Mt. Shasta and Mt. Lassen well inland from the coast. These tall volcanic peaks have been formed in a similar manner to the way the beautiful Cascade Mountain Range in Oregon and Washington has been created by the subducting movement of the Juan de Fuca Plate. The last big eruption of Mt. Lassen took place in 1915, when an explosive eruption devastated nearby areas. As dense oceanic plates subduct under the North American Plate, high temperatures and pressures cause some of the earth's pliable mantle to melt, and the hot magma rises toward the surface, where it periodically bursts forth in such eruptions.

For an enthralling story about the Juan de Fuca Plate, which involves the mystery of a drowned "ghost forest" of red cedars near the Washington coast, read the extraordinary article *The Really Big One*, which was published in the New Yorker in 2015. It can be read online right now.

The Really Big One is an exceptionally informative, intriguing and revealing story about tectonic forces building in the Pacific Northwest. This brilliant article is one of the best examples of geologic sleuthing ever published. It is the story of the powerful earthquake that will someday strike the Pacific Northwest, and likely in the not distant future, as the Juan de Fuca Plate continues its slow subduction under the North American Plate. One of the most interesting insights in the article enlightened me with regard to the intensity of earthquake shaking. I have felt a fair number of earthquakes during my lifetime, and I generally thought that when I felt a moderate earth tremor, it was either 5-ish on the Richter scale if the epicenter was not far away, or 9-ish if it was many hundreds of miles away. It turns out that such an assumption is not strictly the case. The power of an earthquake is correlated to its duration, so an earthquake that is less than 30 seconds in duration is not a real big one, while one that persists for four minutes or more is generally very powerful.

It also turns out that the potential maximum magnitude of any earthquake is strongly correlated to the length of an earthquake fault, so to the great surprise and chagrin of people living in the Pacific Northwest, the potential biggest Big One on the Cascadia fault that stretches from northern California to northern Vancouver Island is more potentially powerful than the biggest quake probable on the shorter San Andreas Fault in California.

An ancestral San Andreas Fault complex extends 1,000 miles south of the Salton Sea. It is responsible for the creation of the Gulf of California, also known as the Sea of Cortez. This gulf began to be created about 5 million years ago when tectonic forces started shearing off the Baja California peninsula from mainland Mexico. Near the middle of the Sea of Cortez, an undersea escarpment forms a submarine cliff that plunges down nearly 6,000 feet in places. At its deepest, the Gulf basin is almost 10,000 feet deep, so the elevation difference between that place the sea floor and the highest peak in Baja California to the west is more than 20,000 feet. These tectonic processes not only created the deep Gulf, but they also gave expression to intense compressional forces to the

north that thrust mountain ranges skyward, including mountain ranges like the San Jacinto, Santa Monica, San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains.

Interestingly, all visible rock is just the weathering exterior surface of all the rock beneath it. This part of the landscape changes very slowly on a geologic time scale that seems much slower than the one affecting the living coverings of forests, shrubbery, lichens and the like. Many generations of plants live and die, after all, while hard rock shows little sign of weathering away.

A shift in perspective reveals that exposed rock is veritably melting away like butter in a microwave compared to all the rock beneath it, when considered from the relative standpoint of geologic time. Unexposed rock has not yet been subjected to forces of erosion. Even exposed granite in mountains like the beautiful Sierra Nevada is weathered down an inch or so every 10,000 years. Mountains seem permanent to us in the context of our relatively short lives, but this perspective is revealed to be an illusion. While physical change is continuous, the principal changes that are perceptible to our notice are sudden and remarkable ones like rockslides, landslides, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Such events are accurately seen as punctuations in the geologic equilibrium of practically eternal change

A gust of wind ruffles tall trees in a deep ravine below the mountain ridge where I once sat, changing the appearance of the vista as I beheld it. Flowers dot the hillsides in the springtime, decorating this image with festoons of ephemeral aspiration, cyclical birth and death, and even a measure of frivolity.

Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch: The Evolution of the Theory of 'Continental Drift'

Another feature of geologic activity is noteworthy. The Earth has a powerful magnetic field that is created by electrical activity generated by the planet's dense core. This magnetic field creates patterns similar to those that a simple bar magnet manifests when it is placed below a sheet of paper with lots of iron filings on top of it. On a grand scale, this magnetic field is revealed by the Aurora Borealis, a phenomenon also known as the Northern Lights. Charged particles from the Sun are pulled down toward the North Pole by Earth's magnetic field, and when these charged particles collide with gases in the atmosphere, they create a fabulous natural light show that is thrilling to watch, as anyone will attest who has beheld the eerie shimmering lights.

Curiously, scientists tell us that Earth's north magnetic pole occasionally reverses, switching places with its south magnetic pole. This is known as "variable magnetic field direction". Evidence of it is found in rocks of differing ages in the Atlantic Ocean. This switching phenomenon has occurred about once every 800,000 years for hundreds of millions of years. This fact helps explain a discovery that confirmed the Earth's crust does indeed consist of continuously moving tectonic plates.

The wild hypothesis known as 'continental drift' had largely been discounted as impossible prior to the 1960s. It was a simplistic theory that recognized that on a globe, the continents of Europe and North America, and Africa and South America, seemed to fit together, at a remove. The German geologist Alfred Wegener had speculated in 1915 that these distant continents were once part of a mega-continent, and that they had drifted apart. Wegener was vilified and ridiculed for this theory for the rest of his life.

But then suddenly in the mid-1960s, scientists studying the magnetic alignments of crystals in volcanic basalts on the floors of the world's oceans discovered that the rocks had moved substantially from their initial positions at the time they had been spewed forth from vents at leading edges of plate boundaries. This discovery was corroborated by the fact that iron crystals in molten magma basically lock in position as they cool, pointing to magnetic north. Rocks that are now oriented in a different direction than what was north at the time of their formation have therefore moved subsequent to the time they cooled.

The mechanism for this theory, and its surprising corroboration, was finally found when the bottom of the world's oceans was mapped and studied after World War II. When the volcanic ridge was discovered that runs down the middle of the Atlantic Ocean from points north of Iceland to the vicinity of the Antarctic in the south, this finding was a key confirmation in the development of the sophisticated theory of Plate Tectonics.

Hot magma was found to be spewing forth at 'spreading centers' in the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, creating new oceanic crust that thrusts outward from this ridge and causes the rock of the North American Plate to move further and further from the rock of the same age on the Eurasian Plate in the North Atlantic. The same effect is driving the South American Plate apart from the African Plate in the South Atlantic. When the rock initially wells up into the ocean, it quickly cools and the iron in the rock leaves its magnetic orientation figuratively frozen into place, marking the specific orientation of "north" in Earth's magnetic field at the moment in time the rock cooled.

This magnetic orientation operates on a similar principle to that of a compass, an instrument that functions by freely balancing an iron needle so that it points to the north pole of a magnetic field. When Earth's magnetic North Pole has switched places with the South Pole throughout history, this flipping is duly recorded, frozen in parallel bands of rock extending out from the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Since the Eurasian and North American Plates move away from their spreading center at a rate of about one inch per year, widening the Atlantic Ocean, the bands with magnetism pointing north are about 800,000 inches wide (12 miles!) and then the next band of similar width has its iron magnetized pointing the opposite direction. These bands are mirrored on both sides of the rift zone at similar distances, all the way across the Atlantic. This is an abstruse but remarkable confirmation of crustal plate movements!

This revelation led to more discoveries and corroborating facts, and then the puzzle of the dynamics of the Earth became much clearer as the new and now universally accepted mega-explanation of Plate Tectonics came to be understood as the cause of earthquake movements, volcanic activity, the orogenies of mountain ranges, and the creation and eventual subduction of the earth's oceanic crust. Eureka!

<u>How the Gold Got in "Them Thar Hills"</u>

An awe-inspiring aspect of our world is that there are good explanations for almost everything, and it is just a matter of finding them. The brilliant trajectory of science has been to reveal ever better explanations, slowly but surely, and it is a strength of science that it is flexible and cumulative. When better understandings come along, they are eventually accepted. There just happens to be an excellent explanation for how gold came to be found in veins and localized deposits in places worldwide.

It turns out that molecular compounds of gold and silver are water-soluble at high temperatures, and they seem to have a distinct affinity for themselves, so they percolate around and gather together in hot batholiths of molten rock as it cools. Hot magma forms crystalline structures of various kinds of rock as cooling takes place. Minerals like gold and silver tend to concentrate together with quartz, which is one of the last minerals to harden. This is why gold and silver in hard rock deposits are generally found associated with veins of other minerals like quartz. This is also a reason why other elements like copper, lead, zinc and sulfur end up together, concentrated as rock hardens from cooling magma.

Geologists discovered that long ago much of the land that is now California and Nevada had been accreted onto the North American Plate back when the Farallon Plate was subducting under it. "Island arcs" and parts of the Pacific oceanic crust were accreted onto the North American continent in a manner similar to the way that the subcontinent of India has been accreted onto Tibet. John McPhee's book *Assembling California* provides extensive evidence for this geologic history.

During the eons that oceanic crust subducted under the North American plate, the rock being subducted melted as it slowly plunged deep into the Earth under the continental crust. Molten magma eventually found its way to the surface in volcanoes like the dramatic Dardanelles in the Sierra Nevada, but most of it cooled beneath the surface over a period of tens of millions of years. This is how the Sierra Nevada granitic 'batholith' came into being. Anyone who has visited areas like Yosemite or the ten "fourteeners" of the southern Sierra has seen the top of this batholith in exposed peaks like Pyramid Peak, Half Dome, Mt. Starr King and Mt. Whitney, or in areas scraped bare by glaciers like the beautiful granite lake area, the Desolation Wilderness, just west of Lake Tahoe.

When the Sierra Nevada batholith was uplifted in relatively recent geologic time, long after its formative period and its subsequent eons-long cooling, the rock of the mountains was subjected to erosion and weathering, and thus

the gold and silver were exposed at the surface in places, and it became concentrated in river gravels that were part of sediments being carried down from the mountains.

Gold was mined in California beginning in 1848 in three ways. First of all, it was found in rivers, and it was mined with pans and sluices from river gravels. This was how the Gold Rush of the Forty-Niners began. The source of gold found in the rivers was quartz veins that had been exposed by the erosive power of rushing water and the grinding weight of glacial ice.

A few years later, gold began to be mined using hydraulic mining methods in "placer deposits". What are these? They are gravel deposits of ancient rivers found in current day hillsides. The technique of hydraulic mining involved the channeling of river water into miles-long flumes and then into hoses, from which the water was blasted under high pressure from iron "monitors" against the hillsides. This washed the gravel down into sluice boxes where the gold could be captured and then gleefully sold, resulting in huge profits. This method of mining had extremely negative environmental impacts, as discussed in *Huckleberry Finn, the California Gold Rush, and Sensational Related Reflections.* Included here by this reference are the insights pertaining to Judge Sawyer and his watershed environmental ruling in 1884 that abruptly halted all hydraulic mining activities in California due to their destructive downstream impacts. This was "one of the first great legal decisions in history to mandate a stop to environmental despoliation."

The third method of gold mining was hard-rock mining. This activity reached a technological epitome in the Empire Gold Mine and North Star Mine under Grass Valley and Nevada City in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. Hundreds of miles of mines were bored into the rock there, with shafts reaching down as deep as 11,000 feet as they followed veins of quartz and gold. Great fortunes in gold were extracted from the Empire Mine before it finally closed in 1956. A visit to the Empire Mine State Historic Park is fascinating for its insights into the technological innovations sparked by this fever for gold.

It makes the head spin to try to grok all the devastating impacts that mining has had, and will continue to have around the world. Mountaintop coal mining is one of the most destructive of these widespread activities. When will we learn that addiction to misguided consumerism, ecologically damaging activities, unrestrained population growth, Ponzi-like schemes, and tax cut swindles are dangerously risky and foolishly unsustainable?

<u>Speculation and Metaphysics</u>

Anyone who ventures very far into the wide-ranging and convoluted labyrinth of ideas explored in this manifesto will discover its natural philosophic bent. Philosophy literally means the love of wisdom. It is a dispassionate passion that gives existence a close inspection, and strives to achieve a clear and objective interpretation of perceptions and events and the nature of existence. Philosophers try to be open-minded in their investigations of the causes and propensities and laws of physics that underlie reality. It is a synthesis of many ideas learned.

The marine biologist Ed Ricketts was made famous by his friendship with John Steinbeck. Doc' Ricketts was an ecologist and a philosopher who professed calm amazement that most people appear to not really want to know the truth of matters. This insight was cogently brought home to him in connection with legal proceedings that followed a fire in 1936 that destroyed his biological laboratory on Cannery Row in Monterey, California. This fire was caused by a surge in electrical current. A jury in the case eventually decided that the electric company was blameless in the fire. John Steinbeck cynically concluded that the disaster was obviously just "an Act of God".

Doc Ricketts took a great interest in the court proceedings, and afterwards said with equanimity and a certain measure of wonder, "You see how easy it is to be completely wrong about a simple matter." He noted that, because each side wants to win in any dispute, it generally turns out that opposing interests have drastically differing points of view, especially when money is involved. Vested interests with differing goals thus have little interest in the truth, and they even seem to disdain or abhor it.

Facts and truth are like wily trout, a bit slippery and hard to catch. But it is growing to be ever more vitally important for all of humanity to gain honest, holistic and farsighted understandings. And in light of them, we need to demand that our societies and institutions be restructured in ways that are consistent with the greater good over the long term. We must in particular strive to find ways to ensure that our collective purposes and activities

are organized in new ways so that they are more consistent with holistic social, economic and ecological understandings. An overarching wise philosophy is needed to provide these ways of seeing. We should stop trusting the assertions of entrenched interest groups and people with narrowly partisan purposes, like shrewdly manipulative politicians and politically partisan judges and dogmatic religious authorities and biased pundits in the media and "conservative" billionaires. We should rightly reject greedily selfish apologists for the status quo, and those who push an even worse agenda that causes retrogressive changes in national policies and priorities.

"Perhaps truth is only the common denominator of our delusions," wrote Will Durant in *The Pleasure of Philosophy,* "and perhaps certainty is merely an error in which all men agree." Nonetheless, let us proceed.

The adjective "philosophical" connotes calmness, equanimity and detachment. It means this, presumably, because in the largest context, any striving to understand the world's ways transcends individual lives and every preference for outcomes. A bigger picture perspective tends to resemble Gaia's impersonal point of view, in which nothing is absolutely good or bad, or evil, or right or wrong.

One of the salient influences of Earth Manifesto writings has been the compelling philosophical exploration of ideas by John Fowles in *The Aristos,* and by John Steinbeck and Doc Ricketts in their "speculative metaphysics" together on Cannery Row and on their 1940 voyage to the Sea of Cortez. I enthusiastically recommend that readers check out my entertaining exploration of ideas in the story *Tall Tales, Provocative Parables, Luminous Clarity, and Evocative Truths: A Modern Log from the Sea of Cortez.* Among a variety of motivations that has led to the creation of all the stories, essays and epistles in this manifesto, I want to again emphasize my conviction of the vital importance of the ideas in *Common Sense Revival,* and in Part Four of the Earth Manifesto online. I encourage readers to review the comprehensive compendiums of ideas outlined therein. Let the evocative bright light of a full moon figuratively illuminate our understandings.

Entrenched Meanders

There is a river in southwest Turkey named the Meander River. It follows a very convoluted path along its lower reaches. This river's name has been ascribed to the geophysical phenomenon of rivers everywhere that meander. Rivers that cross gentle slopes or plains tend to create watercourses that are sinuous because the force of moving water erodes sediments from the outside of bends and deposits them on the inside. Wikipedia proffers: "The result is a *snaking* pattern as the stream meanders back and forth across its down-valley axis."

One of the most astonishing geological phenomena I have ever seen is the "entrenched meander" of a feature known as the Goosenecks of the San Juan River in southeastern Utah. The river had once followed a meandering course across a broad plain, long ago, and then the Colorado Plateau began to be uplifted, and the river cut down through the limestone and shale as it was uplifted, maintaining its meandering course. It thus managed to cut an impressive 1,000-foot deep canyon that flows maybe five sinuous miles to make approximately a single mile of headway downstream. Outstanding photos of this entrenched meander can be seen online, and on the cover of *Existential Enlightenment - Book Three of the Earth Manifesto.*

Entrenched meanders in a river course are impressive. Nature, without biases or preferences, can teach us the lesson that flexibility, resilience, perseverance, open-minded understanding, and free-spirited inquiry are the best keys to honestly see the most propitious ways forward.

Geologic Consequences of Plate Tectonic Activities

Mt. St. Helens is an active stratovolcano in the Cascade Range. It lies roughly 100 miles south of Seattle in Washington state. This volcano underwent a catastrophic eruption in May 1980. In an instant, the top 1,300 feet of the summit of the mountain were blasted off, along with much of the north face of the volcano. Fifty-seven people were killed and large swaths of trees in forests were blown down like matchsticks. Hundreds of homes and many miles of highways were destroyed.

I climbed to the summit of this beautiful 8,365-foot tall volcanic mountain from the south side in 1998, eighteen years after this eruption. An adventurous gal friend accompanied me who has climbed to the top of all 54 of Colorado's mountain peaks that are taller than 14,000 feet. We ascended through dense forest and then up

through a jumble of jagged volcanic rocks that clearly had been extruded in a molten state and had solidified into all manner of fantastic shapes. When we reached the crater rim, the view was spectacular. To the north, the top 5,000 feet of the mountain's flanks are missing from the previously conical summit. A new dome is building in the bottom of the eviscerated cone as the magma chamber underneath the mountain is being slowly replenished with more molten magma. The 1980 eruption had poured huge quantities of lava and ash, together with thousands of trees, into once beautiful Spirit Lake, just to the north of the volcano. Almost instantly, the surface level of Spirit Lake was raised by 200 feet. The landscape in the vicinity has been recovering since then, as wildflowers and vegetation and trees grow back in the mineral-rich volcanic soil.

Mt. St. Helens is geologically quite young. Geologists say it formed through a series of eruptions over a period of the last 40,000 years. This compares to the older volcano fifty miles to the north, the spectacular 14,412-foot Mt. Rainier, whose lava flows date back to beginnings more than 850,000 years ago. The entire range of the Cascades, which extends from British Colombia to northern California, has been created by the forces of movements of Earth's tectonic plates. A relatively small portion of the oceanic crust, known as the Juan de Fuca Plate, lies between the giant Pacific Plate and the large North American Plate, and this small plate is slowly subducting beneath the North American Plate. As it does so, oceanic crust and some seawater that accompanies it are forced down under the continental crust at an angle of 30 to 45 degrees. As it dives down, the basalt rock and overlying sediments melt with the heat and pressure, and supercritical fluids rise into the overlying mantle. This causes the rock to melt and rise, creating large reservoirs of magma that are the source of all the volcanoes in the Cascades. Similar processes are responsible for the volcanic activity all around the Pacific Ocean's "Ring of Fire", where more than 90% of the world's active volcanoes are found.

The Curious Genesis of Geomythology

Long before science gave human beings real good explanations for natural phenomena, our ancestors sought to explain geophysical events with stories they made up. These stories were grounded in observation, legend, myth and anthropocentric interpretations, and they reflect the powerful affect on our imaginations of awe-inspiring landscapes and inexplicable events.

Such legends probably had positive value for survival. Consider, for instance, the wary trepidation of ancestors of the Native American Klamath tribe in the vicinity of Crater Lake in the Cascade Mountains of what today is southern Oregon. Only about 8,000 years ago, a mere moment in the vast expanse of geologic time, Mt. Mazama towered over the surrounding landscape. This volcanic mountain was something like 12,000 feet tall, and it had been formed by a multitude of eruptions from a number of volcanic vents over the previous 400,000 years. Flows of lava from these hot vents had created a broad mountain that was one of the tallest in the Cascade Range. Then, about 7,700 years ago, a climactic eruption of Mt. Mazama took place during which an estimated 12 cubic miles of magma were ejected, probably in about one week's time. This led to a sudden collapse of the mountain peak into the enormous empty magma chamber, creating a hole so deep that when it eventually partially filled with water, it became the deepest lake in North America.

The remnant rim of this volcanic caldera is 4,000 feet lower in elevation than Mt. Mazama was, and it is 33 miles in circumference. The slope is so steep from the encircling rim down to the incredibly pristine deep blue waters of the lake that there is only one route hikers can follow to get down to the lake. There, they embark on extraordinary boat excursions around the lovely waters and out to the beautiful setting of Wizard Island.

The ancestors of the Klamath tribe understandably regarded the mountain as very dangerous. Having witnessed the fiery explosions that resulted in the disappearance of more than a half mile of the summit of this towering mountain, they created a story of Mt. Mazama as the home and battleground of powerful spirits. In their legends, Llao was the chief spirit of the "below world" beneath Mt. Mazama, and Llao had fought many battles with Skell, the chief sky god spirit of the "above world". In a final conflict, Skell was said to have killed Llao and thrown him into the mountain, which crashed in upon him. The impressive cliffs of an imposing volcanic feature known as Llao Rock on the northwest rim of the caldera is named for this vanquished spirit.

Geomythology is the study of oral traditions that have been created by pre-scientific cultures to explain geologic phenomena like volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, fossils and other natural aspects of the planet. A folklorist named

Adrienne Mayor notes that people in these ancient cultures often used mythological imagery and poetic metaphor to explain events. She instructively states, "Some geomyths are simply fanciful stories based on imagination or popular misconceptions, such as tales of humans or creatures that were magically transformed into rock to explain the shapes of landforms. Many geomyths, however, contain surprisingly accurate insights into geological processes, as well as important eyewitness data from the distant past. Modern scientific investigations have revealed that much ancient folklore about the earth was based on rational speculation and understandings grounded in careful observations of genuine physical evidence over time."

Many ancient cultures in places such as China, India, Greece, the Americas and Australia told tales of dragons and monsters to account for fossils of skeletons and footprints of animals that they had never seen alive. These geomythological explanations are rooted in direct evidence of prehistoric creatures, but they aren't nearly as plausible as modern scientific explanations about the evolving tree of life, and the physical processes by which forms of life now extinct have left fossilized remains and imprints in sedimentary rocks. These ideas reinforce my conjecture that our best hopes for creating a better world are to be found in accurate understandings, not in superstitions or myths, and definitely not in ideological deceptions and denials of crucially important perspectives.

Accolades Galore for Galileo Galilei

Myopia is a narrow view of something, often caused by a lack of discernment or foresight. The vital importance of seeing a bigger picture, rather than clinging to myopic worldviews, has inspired me to speculate that Galileo Galilei could be considered one of the most important scientists in history.

Two of the most revolutionary instruments ever invented were far-seeing telescopes and infinitesimally small-seeing microscopes. Both of these instruments have helped humankind see the world in a new light, and in a much more expansive way. Galileo Galilei was the scientist who improved these optical devices more than any other person. His vast improvement of primitive optical glass lenses from the Netherlands in the early 17th century allowed him to confirm the earlier hypothesis made by Niccolo Copernicus, who had asserted that the Earth is not the center of the Universe, and that it is, in fact, a planet orbiting the Sun.

This helped explain why there were "wanderers" in the night sky that did not conform to the pattern of all other bright objects in the sky -- the stars -- because the wanderers were planets that were also in orbit around the Sun, and therefore did not hew to the seemingly otherwise fixed nightly procession of all stars appearing to revolve around the North Star in the night sky. It wasn't long before the idea was conceived that the Sun was not the center of the Universe either. Then in the 1920s, humble Missouri native Edwin Hubble discovered that the Milky Way is not even the whole Universe, and that instead, astonishingly, there are billions of other galaxies, and that the center of the Universe is billions of light years away from us, presumably where a Big Bang inception took place almost 14 billion years ago.

Galileo's invention of a compound microscope also gave humanity an expanded ability to see. He called it an "occhiolino", or "little eye". One of his friends coined the term *microscope* for this magnifying instrument. Today, an even more important instrument is evolving, and Galileo pointed the way to this third epic invention with these words: "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with senses, reason and intellect has intended us to forgo their use, and by some other means to give us knowledge which we can attain by them."

This third tremendous technological advance is now being heralded on planet Earth, and it will be known as a MACROSCOPE. One of the great marvels of this new instrument is that it's free, and available immediately! In addition, no special knowledge or training is required to use it, in theory. It is a virtual instrument that is a type of Instantaneous Lucidification device that allows anyone using it to focus sharply on any issue of interest.

It is being marketed as *Super Spectacles,* and they have three fabulous features. First, they allow anyone to see any issue with vastly improved clarity. These glasses work on a principle similar to an integration of the optics of a high-resolution telescope and a powerful electron microscope. You put these hyper-reality glasses on, and look around … and see startling clarity in every issue.

These Super Spectacles provide a brilliant big picture perspective of the true nature of any contention. And these ingenious optical instruments let you see through flimsy thinking and devious spin, straight to the heart of a

matter, and to do so instantaneously, without need for studious analysis. They accomplish this feat by utilizing an optional Humor Mode adjustment that provides a simultaneous appreciation of irony and absurdity, mixed in with the profound perspective. This marvelous feature can make the viewer laugh right out loud, and is thus ideal for assessing a situation and then galvanizing an attentive viewer's ideas into a powerful response capable of motivating millions of people to join in and help change the staunchly staid status quo in vital ways.

The first time I put on my Macroscope *Super Spectacles,* I was immediately transported into an earlier version of myself in my twenties, and I saw myself snorkeling through a coral reef community just off the shore of Treasure Island in the west part of the Fiji Islands archipelago. A Giant Grouper the size of a Volkswagen Beetle swam slowly past me, and colorful Parrotfish were going about their rounds feeding near the corals. I could clearly see that the Parrotfish had a symbiotic relationship with the corals in the reef, and that their feeding activities incidentally benefitted the health of the entire coral reef community. A small school of squid sailed past me through the water in a spurting profusion of motion, revealing their own unique mode of propulsion. Then suddenly my heart almost stopped as a Great White Shark loomed into view from out of the depths, where the reef that fringes the island drops off into deep obscurity despite the excellent visibility of the beautifully clear waters. The shark seemed to look askance at me with its steely eyes, but apparently thought my svelte bikini-clad body looked like an unappetizing mortal morsel, and there were plenty of other tasty fish in the sea.

I blinked hard as the scary shark slowly cruised past, and presto! -- my Macroscope lenses instantaneously transported me like one of those old ViewMaster Slide Shows to a different scene in the tropical rainforest of Costa Rica. Here I was in a new habitat that was almost as biologically diverse as the coral reef community. The rainforest has a riotous diversity of life forms, but I saw only one: two feet in front of my nose was a Red-Eyed Tree Frog. You really should view this species of amphibian (photos online) to appreciate their colorful markings. It is as if they had been painted by a masterful but rather unhinged creative artist who had little sense of moderation in her wanton use of the brightest colors in an artist's palette. The Super Spectacles provided a nicely illuminated understanding that this frog is an important indicator species that happens to be affected by environmental changes in tropical rainforest habitats much sooner than other types of animals. Sadly, these resplendent frogs are on the brink of extinction. In contrast, humanity itself is a lagging indicator; our human numbers continue their growth despite the fact that this is NOT a sign of ecological health. In fact, our numbers are a contra-indicator because, as our numbers grow and grow, the fates of almost every other species on life on Earth are adversely affected. This insight made me reflective, but then the brilliant feature of the Humor-mode of the Macroscope modified my perception and allowed me to see that today is the first day of the rest of our lives, and that NOW is the best starting point for appreciating life AND for making a positive difference to create a healthier world in the future.

The next shift was peculiar, but once again sensational. All of a sudden I saw myself sitting in a lecture hall listening to a talk on "The Tragedy of the Political Commons". A foremost authority on trickle-down theory was speaking, and Voila! -- I saw the real nature of this ideology. Curiously, this perspective was highly contradictory to the one provided by an expert parroting Fox News' points-of-view, who declared that the only way to a better world is to give rich people more of the benefits of the economy so that some crumbs will trickle down to the masses. The masses, you know -- you and me! Instantly, I realized that this rude rationalization is a slick swindle, a tawdry trick, a devious dogmatic justification for public-debt-financed tax cuts that are unaffordably generous to the rich at the expense of every taxpayer in every future year, i.e. those who will be forced to pay for the spiking interest costs on borrowings that finance this wantonly profligate scheme. The Super Spectacles, in effect, reveal the folly of allowing wealthy people to rig the system to give themselves huge slices of sensationally rich desserts so that a few crumbs might fall to the hungry huddled masses below.

The expansive vision of the Macroscope allowed me to see as clear as day, as if I was again on top of a vaulting mountain peak on an exceptionally clear winter day when you can see more than 100 miles in every direction. I saw that there are many types of thefts, scams, swindles, petty frauds, Grand Thefts, and Ponzi schemes. Prisons are crammed full of people who have been caught red-handed engaging in small-time versions of these illegal behaviors. The big-time cheats, however, are much more cunning, and they live in mansions rather than being locked up in prisons. They use their money to rig the rules of the system so that they are actually incentivized to commit their

mega-crimes, and these crimes are ones that reckon ill-gotten gains in the billions, not in chump change. Their crimes additionally tend to cause widespread hardship, and there is generally havoc when the game is finally up -- when, astoundingly, instead of the perpetrators being forced to pay, or to be thrown in jail for their frauds, taxpayers are stuck with exceedingly high costs in the form of multi-trillion dollar bailouts. This is socially irresponsible disaster capitalism at its worst. Much better design is possible!

An Arcane and Previously Untold Story

I once got lost for more than 24 hours in tall mountains in a remote part of Nepal. I had just spent a few days in the Annapurna Sanctuary, a high basin surrounded by five peaks of the Annapurna Massif, all of which tower above 24,000 feet in elevation. From within the Sanctuary, the views of the extraordinarily beautiful "fish-tail" mountain Machapuchare to the east are stunning. The native Gurung people in this region believed this mountain was the home of the "Great God" Shiva and other deities.

The gods did not seem to smile upon me as I descended from the Sanctuary. I had decided to make my way through a maze of terraced hillside fields up to a poorly marked route across a towering ridge, in hopes of finding a route to the deep canyon of the Kali Gandaki and the small village of Tatopani to the west. Best-laid plans can be waylaid by unforeseen circumstances, and sure enough, I became lost and was engulfed by a disorienting whiteout of heavy fog. Being adequately prepared with food and a tent and sleeping bag, this wasn't too big a problem, but the next day I still didn't know where I was, or which way to go. So I followed an old dictum: When lost in mountains, follow a stream downward. I did. After several hours, I was confronted by a very steep, treacherous and impassible canyon, so I adroitly made a new plan, and headed back in a different direction, which is surprisingly often an excellent thing to do when faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Extrapolating this truism to aggregate American dilemmas concerning our involvements in costly wars with poorly defined objectives, or with huge amounts of deficit spending and record levels of national debt -- or with gaping contrasts in prosperity and economic security between ultra-rich people and the bottom half of the world's adult population who own only 1% of global wealth -- one would be forced to conclude that it would be wise to undertake a radical rethinking of our current directions and national policies and priorities. Flexibility, open-mindedness, and adaptive wisdom are, after all, the keys to providential resilience. Clear-eyed folks convincingly suggest that we should make positive peaceable revolutionary change to save capitalism from influence-abusing capitalists.

Back in Nepal, I eventually found my way the next day to a point where I had originally gotten lost. I retraced my steps until I discovered the rough route I had earlier missed at a stream crossing, and it led up to the ridge summit that lay between where I was and my intended destination. After climbing to the top of the commanding ridge, I descended far down to Tatopani, located at an elevation of 8,000 feet and nestled between 26,000-foot mountains in a gorge that is, by some measures, the deepest in the world. A tributary of the great Ganges River flows down this canyon, and there are a number of natural hot springs. Immersing oneself in soothing hot waters is an activity known to make one feel perfectly relaxed, and at one with the world. I did. (Some might say it sometimes sounds as if Tiffany Twain is disoriented but I'd hasten to remind them, "All who wander are not lost.")

Manifesto Interruption - May 2010

A terrible oil spill began fouling and poisoning a large area of the waters of the Gulf of Mexico on April 20, 2010. This ecological disaster was caused by an explosion on an oil rig that had been drilling a well in the ocean floor of the Gulf at a depth of 5,000 feet. The energy giant BP had been taking big risks and short cuts in order to make larger profits. BP had made nearly $200 billion in profits in the previous decade, but despite such huge profits, the company decided not to install a relatively inexpensive safeguard device known as "a remote-control shutoff switch on a blowout preventer" for the oil well, where a subcontractor, Transocean Ltd., was using a deep water drilling rig to "drill, baby, drill" for oil. Such devices are required by countries like Brazil and Norway to protect the environment from oil spills, and such a mechanism might have prevented this disaster.

BP did not install this safety device so that it could save $500,000 on the drilling project. The lack of such a safety device contributed to the explosion that destroyed the $350 million 'Deepwater Horizon' oil drilling rig, so it was not only a reckless environmental gamble but also a costly business decision. The total costs to BP of this

environmental disaster were probably around $20 billion. These facts make it abundantly clear that short-term-oriented profiteering can be terribly irresponsible. Risky deep-water drilling projects obviously should be subjected to more thorough and sensible regulation.

This environmental debacle exposed oil industry deceptions and their inadequate concern for technologies related to safety and oil spill clean-ups. It also revealed poor government oversight and the egregious extent to which industry has had too much sway with rule-making by federal agencies. The Minerals Management Service is an arm of the federal Interior Department that had already been known to have serious conflicts of interests in its responsibilities. It had previously been embarrassed by its Denver office, whose employees were found to have accepted gifts from representatives of energy companies and even partied with them and used drugs and had sex with some of them during the years of the Bush administration. That's a BIG and pathetic conflict of interest!

It is ironic that a corporation that gives itself a company name of "Beyond Petroleum" adheres to such bad practices as skimping on safety devices and manipulating environmental rules to produce bigger short-term profits from the rashly wasteful exploitation of fossil fuel resources. Revelations by the investigative journalist Greg Palast show that BP also played a role in the Exxon Valdez oil spill and in other spills in Alaskan waters and on the trans-Alaska pipeline. This casts a much different light on BP's true character than their public relations spin attempts to portray.

The Goddess of Irony seems to have a cynical character, as revealed by her apparent love of poetic justice, even if it is dirty. The Gulf oil spill was an ecological disaster that came on the heels of a national tragedy in which 29 coal miners died when an explosion wrenched a West Virginia coal mine on April 5, 2010. This coal mining tragedy was caused by lax worker safety concerns and violations of rules by giant conglomerate Massey Energy, another bad actor in the energy industry and on the political stage. Don Blankenship, the CEO of Massey Energy at the time of the calamity, spent one year in prison for his culpability in the coal mine explosion. Specifically, Blankenship was convicted of conspiracy to willfully violate mandatory federal mine safety and health standards. He had also been accused of securities fraud and conspiracy to impede federal mine safety officials and making false statements to the Securities and Exchange Commission. Fast forward to 2018, and Blankenship, a staunch Trump supporter and crony, ran unsuccessfully for a West Virginia seat in the U.S. Senate, despite his complicity in swindles against the common good.

Concerns for workers and the environment often take a back seat to making big profits, and governmental entities are often too cozy in their collaboration with industry, especially when they allow environmental damages and harm to workers to be externalized onto taxpayers. The costs of reasonable protections for workers and the environment should be borne by industry, and thus included in costs of products and services, instead of being allowed to be externalized onto society. We simply should not allow CEOs and investors to benefit in the short term by foisting large costs onto taxpayers and workers and people in future years.

Our national and international dependence on oil, natural gas and coal involves costs that significantly exceed the price we pay for gasoline, heating oil and electricity generated by burning fossil fuels. Some of the costs not included are the adverse health impacts of particulate air pollution and water pollution and costly environmental impacts associated with global warming and an increasingly destabilized global climate.

Corporate propaganda undermines the common sense obligation of corporations to bear these costs. When we allow harms to people and damages to the biosphere without requiring corporations that cause the adversities to pay the resulting costs, we effectively subsidize product prices and distort buying decisions, and also contribute to worser extents of health, social and ecological problems.

Ever more costly environmental tradeoffs are involved with our society's increasingly wasteful demands for more fossil fuels. Drilling for oil on U.S. lands gave way to drilling in shallow waters as oil reserves were depleted, and this has given way to riskier drilling in deeper waters. In 1985, only 6% of oil in the Gulf of Mexico came from wells drilled in water more than 1,000 feet deep. In 2009, more than 75% of oil in the Gulf came from such deep-water wells. The inescapable conclusion is that we should use engineering smarts to figure out good ways to use less energy and develop cleaner and 'greener' alternatives, rather than pushing riskier, dirtier and more harmful and environment-damaging technologies.

Many people deny that human well-being is tied intricately to the health of Earth's biosphere. They do this due mainly to motives of greed and narrow self-interest. Those who make such denials are perpetuating a shrewd deception that should be rejected. Expedient courses of action are often too short-term oriented to be consistent with the best plans for the greater good. We simply should stop allowing so many costs to be externalized onto society and people in the future. The Supreme Court should take these understandings into account instead of making anti-regulation rulings, and Project 2025 must be seen as a catastrophic plan.

"Drill, Baby, Drill" has served as a snappy, cheer-engendering electioneering slogan for the Republican Party, but conservative politicians have simplistically ignored larger issues and deeper complexities. This environment-be-damned slogan was used to rally faithful diehard conservatives who applauded wildly at the Republican National Convention in Minnesota in 2008, but the slogan was stupid from standpoints of more rational and broadminded thinking. Two years later in May 2010, in the aftermath of the oil spill ecological disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, a newspaper headline conveyed a funny understatement: <'Drill, baby, drill' has lost its luster>. This slogan represents a lustily mindless and irresponsible attitude toward drilling for oil with a minimum of common sense regulation, in light of the real ramifications of such activities.

The idea of allowing Big Oil companies and other huge corporations and multinational banks to take financial and environmental risks, and to then saddle taxpayers with cleanup and bailout costs, is too unfair, shortsighted and foolishly wrongheaded. Republicans in the Senate like Mitch McConnell and Lisa Murkowski made tortured arguments to defend the paltry $75 million limit on liability that legally pertained at the time of the Gulf oil spill for companies involved in environmental disasters caused by offshore oil drilling. But their dogmatic assertions begged a question: Why should fishermen and tourist industries along the Gulf Coast, and taxpayers, be saddled with crippling costs, instead of the rich oil companies whose activities are direct causes of such ecological harm?

Republicans tend to obstruct progressive initiatives for political reasons, and it is scandalous that "conservatives" champion rash risk-taking as a central tenet of their doctrines, rather than supporting more responsible and truly conservative approaches. The human race will have burned practically all of the remaining one trillion barrels of known reserves of oil on Earth within the next 50 years, and huge amounts of dirty coal, with likely catastrophic impacts on Earth's ecosystems, normal sea levels and the global climate. This could become the ultimate cause of extinction of a large proportion of all species of life on Earth, with far-reaching implications, including a serious threat to our own future well-being and maybe even the survival of our kind.

A prudent and responsible course of action would be to begin making a concerted Apollo-mission-type national effort to jump start an inevitable and necessary transition to alternative cleaner renewable forms of energy to power our civilizations. Simultaneously, we should implement bold conservation and efficient-use measures rather than squandering fossil fuels at nearly the fastest possible rate.

Our best national strategy would be to follow an honest and reasonable "no regrets" approach to energy policies. This approach should be focused on actions and behaviors consistent with the common good, and with social responsibility, shared prosperity and ecological intelligence. This 'no regrets' idea was a smart basis for the Precautionary Principle enunciated in Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in 1992. This Principle makes the eminently responsible declaration, "Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

The insightful book *The Corporation - The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, and also the provocative Canadian film *The Corporation* that is based on the book, both provide compelling understandings of the sometimes psychopathic character of corporations in their dealings with people and their employees and the environment. In the film, a psychologist and FBI criminal profiler named Dr. Robert Hare describes the many ways that corporate behavior closely corresponds to a checklist of characteristics used by the World Health Organization to define psychopathic personalities in individuals. These characteristics include a callous unconcern for the feelings of others, a reckless disregard for public safety, deceitfulness, conning others for profit, an inability to experience guilt or remorse, repeated deceit and a failure to conform to social norms regarding lawful behavior. When

disasters strike, corporations like BP and Massey Energy are revealed to have been manifesting these sociopathic and ethically pathetic characteristics.

"Accidents happen", say apologists for the recklessness with which the human race is treating Mother Earth and Gaia's ecosystems. Just after the record oil spill began in the Gulf of Mexico, politician Joe Lieberman said exactly this to rationalize more offshore drilling. Such people are, of course, quite right. Accidents do happen, and they are much more likely to happen when profits are valued higher than precautions, and when ecological integrity is valued less than short-term goals, and when people are valued less than the money that can be made and the power and privileges that can be gained by pursuing greed-driven strategies and ideological deceptions. We should find ways to minimize risks to workers and reduce the extensive damages being caused to habitats.

Images are often more impactful than words. Certainly the images of an oil rig exploding in a fireball were evocative. So were images of big quantities of oil spewing out of a deep pipe, and beaches being fouled, and wildlife dying, and wetlands being damaged, and the livelihood of fishermen being compromised. Images of bodies being pulled from coal mines where safety regulations were notably lax were also viscerally compelling. Images like this are more powerful than words about corporate responsibilities and precautionary principles. Being that images are so emotionally influential, they force us to consider the complexities involved in defenses of the status quo, and the lack of wisdom in allowing profit-obsessed corporations to unduly influence decision-making.

See my essay *The Reality and Ramifications of Peak Oil* in this manifesto online for further perspective on the issue of our addiction to fossil fuels. Environmental, political and economic concerns like these are echoed throughout these writings, even rather repetitiously, I reckon. A modern incarnation of Mark Twain would have said so! But it is one of the main purposes of these writings to bring close attention to such problems, so I will repeat them over and over again in the hopes that such understandings will reinforce the potential for this manifesto to become a force for positive change in altering our economic and political systems, which foolishly allow and even encourage such madness.

A Window on the World

Imagine opening an enormous window in the sky out over the middle of the Pacific Ocean and walking out onto a lofty terrace with the most marvelous oceanic vista to the west ever seen. Author Oliver Morton describes what you might see in his Introduction to *Eating the Sun: How Plants Power the Planet.*

> "Here's what happened today. What really happened.
>
> Dawn broke first in the Pacific: because our international date line is in the middle of our largest ocean, that's where the day's dawn always breaks first, its tangential light reflected from a million waves and a few container ships into an empty sky. What wasn't reflected lit up the upper layers of the ocean, a soft new light for the fish and the plants they feed on.
>
> When it made landfall in the north, the sun swept over the tundra like water up a beach; a couple of hours later, at the other end of the world, it broke like a wave against the mountains and pastures of New Zealand. Soon it was filling the rice paddies of the Philippines and the shallows of the South China Sea. And every time the sunlight hit something green -- something truly green, not something painted green or dyed green: something with a greenness that grew -- the most important process on the planet began again.
>
> When the light shown on the greenness, the greenness welcomed it, and comprehended it, and put it to use. The greenness was chlorophyll, a pigment. It was arranged in pools and the sunlight's energy bounced from one molecule to the next like a frog across lily pads before reaching the subtle trap at the pool's center, the three-billion-year-old trap where the light of the sun becomes the stuff of the earth. As the trap's jaws snapped shut on the sunlight, the spring that powered those jaws pulled electrons from a nearby water molecule, breaking it up into hydrogen and oxygen. The hydrogen was used, along with the stream of electrons that flowed up through the trap, to turn carbon dioxide into organic matter. The oxygen was discarded.
>
> In every plant reached by the dawn, this extraordinary mechanism came to life millions of times over. There are hundreds of thousands of pigment pools and sunlight traps in every green cell, hundreds of thousands of cells in

full-grown leaves. And once awakened by the light, the flow of electrons through the leaves did not stop until darkness fell. The carbon dioxide to which those electrons were channeled was turned first into a sugar and then into all sorts of other molecules. Some of them were used to thicken the plants' stems, to lengthen their leaves, to enrich the soil beneath them and to colour the flowers still held tight in their buds. The rest were used to fuel the processes that make such growth possible. Light made life; that is what photosynthesis means.

If the light-driven flow of electrons stopped, on this day or any day, so would everything that evolution has wrought. The planet wouldn't stop turning; dawns would still arrive with impressive regularity. But they wouldn't matter. No more datelines. No more dates. …

The greenness of life is so important and all-pervading that evolution has tuned our eyes to discriminate among its various hues more precisely than among those of any other colour, and so shaped our brains that we take solace in it. The green, we know without thinking, is good.

We don't just enjoy seeing the green. It shapes the possibilities of our lives. More than two billion of us will have tended to the eaters of the sun in some way today. We will have hoed the ground for them, planted them, fed them fertilizers. We will have picked their fruits, dug up their nutritious roots, fed them to our livestock and ourselves. We will have made their carcasses into fabrics and furniture and firewood. We will have tended to some of them simply for their beauty -- and to others because we know no finer surface over which to run while kicking a ball.

And even if we ignore today's plants completely, if we cut ourselves off in concrete and steel, we will still rely on yesterday's. On this day we will burn over thirty million tons of fossil fuel to generate our electricity and drive our cars and fire our factories and warm our homes. And all that power and warmth comes from sunlight eaten long ago. Energy trapped 300 million years ago by trees … ended up stored in coal; plankton like those now blooming off the Azores were transformed into oil and gas. The carbon in the carbon dioxide we give off by burning them is carbon taken from the ancient atmosphere they breathed. …

As the dawn moves past Hawaii, the day is almost done. On this day, and the next day, and every day, a scarcely conceivable 4,000 trillion kilowatt hours of energy reached the top of the earth's atmosphere as sunshine. Some was reflected back into space and some was absorbed by the atmosphere. Some warmed the land and the sea, its warmth driving the winds and the ocean currents. Only a small fraction of one percent of that sunlight was captured by the pools of chlorophyll. But this tiny fraction of a vast number is still vast: the scrap of sunlight eaten by the plants today represented a similar amount of energy to that stored in all the world's nuclear weapons put together. And over the course of the day, that energy served to turn hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide into food and living tissue.

And as a result the world stayed alive. That's what really happened today."

<u>Physics Is Proven to Be Tangible</u>

Amazing advances in the science of physics have been made in the past two centuries. Scientists, one might imagine, would realize how sensational the march of knowledge has been, so I find the following story to be illuminating. In 1900, the revered Lord Kelvin reportedly told the British Association for the Advancement of Sciences: "There is nothing new to be discovered in physics now." Nothing! As it turned out, he couldn't have been more wrong! This was confirmed not long after he made his remark, when Albert Einstein, a brilliant young physicist who worked in the Swiss Patent Office, published his revolutionary theory of special relativity in 1905.

Lest any reader suppose that physics is too dry a subject to be appreciated, here is a brilliantly witty and humorous story that provides an unexpected proof to the contrary. This story was gleaned from the Internet and was included right here until my publishers proclaimed I had plagiarized the copyrighted piece by including it verbatim. Titled *HELL EXPLAINED BY CHEMISTRY STUDENT*, it is a story that provides readers with a hearty chuckle, for it contains a classic science-informed joke about whether Hell is expanding or contracting. The folks at Snopes.com characterize the story in its many incarnations as a "LEGEND", but anyway, it has been exorcised from this essay and I encourage readers to check it out online for a good laugh.

A Journey from the Infinitesimal to the Infinite

Modern microscopes reveal entire worlds in a drop of water. Even a hand-held magnifying glass can present us with a perspective of insects feeding on a wildflower that provoke our imaginations with new insights into a seemingly whole other world. Likewise, expansive insights can be gained by looking through a good telescope at the night sky, which can reveal astonishing things to our imaginations.

With thoughts like these impinging on my mind, I took a walk one day in the coastal hills of Northern California. Bright wildflowers grow there in the early springtime beside weathered lichen-encrusted rocks, and wild grasses sprout exuberantly, reaching skyward alongside the taller skeletal stocks of the previous year's wildflowers. I recalled the Powers of Ten video (1977) that takes viewers on a sensational journey from a picnic on a blanket expansively up to an entire view of the universe and then back down to the picnic spot and on down to the subatomic level of electrons and the nuclei of atoms and their constituent quarks.

The grass is new, I thought to myself at the time, "and I am somehow more than 60 years old -- my, how the long years seem, in retrospect, to have flown! The serpentine rock found in outcroppings on these coastal hills is something on the order of 100 million years old. The source of the bright sunshine that impinges upon my skin on a lovely day is a fiery furnace more than 4.5 billion years old."

Not far away, a natural rock arch on the north end of beautiful cliff-encircled Tennessee Cove suddenly collapsed onto the beach on December 29, 2012. This arch had been a focus of thousands of photographs over the years, especially near sunset around the time of the annual summer solstice, when the sun sets furthest to the north, and rays of the sun would shine at an angle down through the big hole in the rock, casting an almost mystical illuminated shaft of sunlight through mist from waves breaking onto the beach. This revealed sublime beauty and the divine in nature that was manifest to fortunate and appreciative observers in such marvelous moments.

An engineering geologist with the California Geological Survey happened to be at the lovely cove when the collapse of the arch took place. His son, Robert Wills, a graduate student at the California Institute of Technology was with him, and took a marvelous succession of photographs of the event. They can be seen online.

This occurrence provided direct evidence of the punctuated equilibrium nature of geologic change. The large pile of crumbled rock and boulders on the beach (shown in the photograph on the cover of Book Two) would initially have been equivalent to about 12 heaping dump truck loads. In the 3 months that followed the arch collapse, most of the rock had disappeared, succumbing to the periodic high tide onslaught of incessant waves onto the reddish sand beach. Sensationally, one year after the collapse, the only remaining evidence of the rockfall onto the beach consisted of a dozen smallish boulders in the sand. One month later, more than twice as many rocks surprisingly appeared just after full moon high tides, and it became apparent that one way the rocks disappear there is by settling deeper into the tide-shifting sand.

I just happened to sit on one of these remnant rocks on the last day of 2013, as another year lapsed into history. The tide was relatively low, and the ocean swell transferred its rhythmic energies to gathering and crashing waves. The sun glinted off the sea to the southwest, and I contemplated the import of the pending discovery of the Earth Manifesto, practically mature and hiding in plain sight, no one yet aware of its existence. Hmmmm ... "Whatever!", to use a word judged to be one of the most annoying and overused words in the previous 7 years. When the Marist Institute for Public Opinion published its annual survey of the most annoying and overused word of 2013, sure enough, it was once again, "Whatever!" This word is said to have originally been a quizzical expression of "inexpressive ignorance", but has evolved to be a "facile dismissive exclamation".

Mark Twain liked to be precise in his use of words, even as he promiscuously exaggerated some of the details of his tall tales. As he once said, "The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug." Aha!

Waves in Tennessee Cove tend to come in sets that alternately run up the beach between 10 feet and 50 feet. Periodically, regardless of whether the tide is coming in or ebbing out, a much bigger swell occasionally manages to amplify itself into a sneaky rogue wave, which makes the old adage about never turning your back on the sea particularly vivid with import. The sign seen upon arriving at this beach is similarly precautionary. TSUNAMI

HAZARD ZONE, it reads, with an appropriately scary graphic of a cascading wave, along with the words: IN CASE OF EQRTHQUAKE, GO TO HIGH GROUND OR INLAND. This is excellent advice, since the San Andreas Fault runs along the coast just a few miles offshore.

Since I'm a gal that almost libidinously likes to extrapolate concepts into imagined parallels, you could probably have seen this observation coming: The importance of not turning our backs on the oceans has never been more urgent, because our global exploitive impacts and polluting ways, in aggregate, keep getting worse as there is another net increase of more than 70 million people around the world every year. Our failure and collective disinclination to slow human population growth, along with our apparent inability to responsibly limit greenhouse gas emissions, is causing ocean warming as well as a decrease in the overall weak alkalinity of the world's seas. Catalyzed by carbon dioxide, this "acidification" is having lethal impacts on corals and other forms of marine life. We must face the waves, figuratively, and see clearly. And take remedial action.

Long before the arch collapse, here is a description of the Cove and its locally famed arch:

> "Some of the most eloquently sculpted sea cliffs in the Headlands are at Tennessee Cove. The high sheer wall on the north side of the cove is primarily chert, hollowed by millennial waves into shallow caverns under layered arches that are greenish on the surface, except near the cornerstone of the wall, where the contorted layers are yellow-gold. Some 75 feet up the cliff is a "keyhole" -- a 10-foot clerestory window in the wall affording a view of the sky. It is a result of waves from both sides of the wall cutting into a fault zone and undermining the wall until it broke through at its narrowest point, creating the window."
>
> --- *Marin Headlands: Portals of Time,* by Harold and Ann Lawrence Gilliam (1993)

As I was looking at the sedimentary rock in this vicinity, at the north end of this beautiful National Park beach, these ideas were spilling sideways into the curiosity center of my consciousness. Within 25 feet of the rockfall area, the greenish and reddish rock layers have been uplifted into almost vertical positions in impressively distinct striations twisted at amazing angles. The contortion of the rock layers in these uplifted marine terrace cliffs attests to the effects of elemental formative forces on this continental edge of the North American Plate.

I tried to imagine the existence of this rock in every moment from the process of its deposition on the floor of the Pacific Ocean until pressure and heat fused it into thousands of layers of lithified rock and it was slowly moved on the Pacific tectonic plate of Earth's oceanic crust until it was emplaced on the North American continental shelf and later uplifted into its present position, all of this over the eons-long course of geologic time. While these towering rock cliffs seem permanent from the standpoint of a single human lifetime, they were uplifted almost yesterday from the perspective of geologic time, and here again it can be seen that all exposed rock is melting away like butter under the continuously operative mechanics of weathering and erosion. On a human time scale, things seem real different, yet relatively long-term considerations are increasingly desperately needed in our national planning and policy making.

This train of thought reminded me of the stunning visual beauty of the coastline of Oregon, which is punctuated in many locales by rugged "sea stacks" just offshore. These natural rock islands are a result of what geologist's call "coastal geomorphology". Sea stacks are remnants of headlands along coastal cliffs that have eroded unevenly, leaving small islands. The headlands are worn away by the relentless action of the sea as it erodes the coast by actions of wind, rain, thrashing storms, crashing waves and chemical weathering.

Easter Island lies 4,500 miles southwest of Tennessee Cove. Famous for its mysterious volcanic rock monoliths, the Rapanui islanders who lived there curiously placed all these mystifying monumental statues looking inland, with their backs to the sea. The idea of this peculiar insularity transforms my conceptions of reality into a wave of metaphysical thoughts and mystical imaginings. Let us not similarly turn our backs on the vital seas!

Antoine de Saint Exupéry's words come to me, from *The Little Prince* "Here is my secret. It is very simple: one sees well only with the heart. The essential is invisible to the eyes."

<u>Further Reflections from Nearby</u>

Immediately to the north of Tennessee Cove, there is a prominent peak that provides some sensational vistas on a clear day. From this spot, three rocky points can be seen jutting out into the swell-sculpted Pacific Ocean further

to the north. The first rocky point is Muir Beach Overlook, and the second is Bolinas Point, and the one in the distance is Point Reyes, about 30 miles distant. To the south of this peak, Point Bonita Lighthouse is visible, and then Land's End in San Francisco just to the south of the Golden Gate, and Ocean Beach stretching south down to distant Point Montara. I slyly mention this visualization because I like the evocative symbolism of these place names … John Muir would have approved!

This particular vantage point above Tennessee Cove lies within a few miles of the infamous San Andreas Fault, a 750-mile long fault that begins in southern California and runs offshore from Mussel Rock, just south of San Francisco, and on north through Bolinas Lagoon, Tomales Bay and Bodega Bay. Mussel Rock is the closest point to the epicenter of the destructive 1906 San Francisco earthquake. When the next Big One hits, if you were on the top of this cliff, it would be like riding a bucking bronco. It would be frightening, and dangerous, but impressive in its startling scale and punctuated equilibrium import. As I returned to my car along Coyote Ridge on this occasion, the year 2013 was approaching its end, and an awe-inspiring orange ball of illumination arose over the Tiburon Peninsula to the east, announcing the rising of the last full moon of the year.

The driest year ever recorded in this area took place in calendar year 2013. Never since records have been kept beginning in 1849, at the beginning of the California Gold Rush, had so little rain fallen in a 12-month period here. Less than 5 inches of rain fell in nearby San Francisco, compared to a normal of about 23 inches. I use the word "normal" hesitantly, because precipitation averages these days tend to deviate from normal more than usual, and this is true in many locales around the world. This trend is confirmed by predictions made by climate scientists who use computer models to assess the probable destabilizing effects of global warming on weather patterns.

The record dry weather in the West was caused by a "ridiculously resilient ridge" of atmospheric high pressure that kept storms from reaching California by driving the jet stream to the north. This weather pattern was correlated to a polar cyclone that dove down into the Midwest in early 2014, causing bitter cold temperatures. In Hannibal, as an example, frigid temperatures set a record low of 14 degrees below zero in Jan. 2014, according to data from the Board of Public Works Water Filter Plant in Riverview Park along the banks of the Mississippi. People on the East Coast in the previous few winters also experienced this impressively cold phenomenon.

The causes of these blasts of cold air are disturbances of the normal polar vortex. This is a spinning vortex of very low atmospheric pressure that generally hangs around polar regions more religiously. This weather contrasted in an extraordinary way to the warm sunny days that were experienced almost every day in January 2014 in Tennessee Valley, during the normal cool wet season, without a cloud in the sky, day after day after day.

The fact that precipitation and storm patterns worldwide seem to be shifting so much is beginning to make those who deny the extensive evidence of climate change look like complete fools. And such denials can be dangerous.

The balmy record dry weather in California in the winter of 2013-2014 caused severe drought conditions, and coastal hills that are usually a lovely green during that time of year stayed brown until a "Pineapple Express" storm finally broke through in February 2014 to deliver heavy rains for a few days. Snow accumulations in the Sierra Nevada only reached about half of normal that year, and an all-time record paucity the following year, providing ominous signs for water supplies later in the hot and dry summers. Nearly 40 million people and some of the world's most productive farming areas were affected by the record dry weather.

These conditions of severe drought intensified throughout 2015, and then good El Nino storms in January 2016 inspired hope that a fifth consecutive year of drought would be avoided. February 2016, however, featured unusually dry weather, and record warm temperatures, so some locals began to do rain dances in hopes of propitiating the rain gods. And maybe it finally worked, for after five years of below normal precipitation, an amazingly wet winter arrived in 2016-2017. A rain gauge at Lake Lagunitas, just north of Mt. Tamalpias in Marin County, which records an average of over 52 inches of precipitation each year, recorded an astonishing 96 inches in the 2016-2017 rain year. But every year from then until 2022 unfortunately reverted to subpar rainfall.

On December 31, 2022, weather whiplash really hit home, as downtown San Francisco received 5.46 inches of rain in the 24 hour period. This was the second-wettest day in more than 170 years since record keeping began in 1849.

The storm was one of a succession of "Pineapple Express" atmospheric rivers that battered the region and continued through April 2023, hearteningly delivering a bounteous 76" for the rain year.

Something is definitely going on here, and what it is, is becoming increasingly clear. It is a bad plan to obtusely mess with Mother Nature. Failing to exhibit collective discipline in our activities is foolhardy. There is evidence that even conservative folks in Missouri are beginning to wonder how wise it is to believe denials by cunning billionaires in the Koch network and big oil companies that the burning of fossil fuels is a serious problem, unworthy of concern or remedial actions. Smart green taxes and effective incentives are needed to help us mitigate or avoid the much worse conditions that are to come in the future due to the on-going destabilization of global weather patterns being caused by increasing emissions of greenhouse gases.

Like towering cliffs crumbling slowly into the sea, the tide of progressive change could overcome the bulwark of head-in-the-sand opponents of effective action, and might even help mitigate the severity of the anticipated impacts of a changing climate. Let's heed Precautionary Principles! We should specifically begin to find ways to live within a "carbon budget" required to keep planetary warming below the threshold of extreme risk. The time for remedial action is now!

Many of these far-seeing words were written before reactionary Republicans seized one-party control of the government in the 2016 elections. Sadly, this made it easy for them to put Mammon greed on a high altar, and to look down on Mother Nature and disparage her as unworthy of respect or protection. It seems impossible that such incredibly irresponsible politicians have wielded such drastic influence in Congress and the White House, and on the Supreme Court, and that they are being so successful with a long litany of assaults on protected lands, endangered species, clean power, the Paris Climate Accords, the best interests of working people, health care, fair tax schemes and the like. "May we live in interesting times" -- but not THIS interesting!

The fact that "conservatives" are making these ultimate sacrifices to maximize short-term profits is astonishing, as is the fact that, by design, these profits are being funneled up to rich people who have no need for the largess. These treacherous sacrifices are being made for no higher purpose than satisfying the greed, control urges, ambition, ego, status-seeking compulsions and pleasure of power-abusing rich folks. It is high time that the American people stand up and demand that these condemnable people stop being allowed to succeed at corruptly abusing the power afforded them by their Big Bucks. Vote against every Republican in November 2024!

These are times that try men's souls, as Thomas Paine declared when revolutionary zeal was washing across the thirteen colonies. Today, men's souls are being tried, and guilty verdicts are in the process of being rendered.

<u>An Interim Conclusion</u>

Billions of years have passed since the Earth formed, and billions more will come before the Sun finally burns out. These realizations, along with accurate geophysical understandings and the extensive evidence of biological evolution, provide us with factual proof that our home planet is ancient beyond fathoming. It is NOT merely Biblically young! Understandings like this should give religious leaders cause to reform their founding Creation myths. Mystery is a powerful and potent motivating force, but it should be cultivated for positive and meaningful purposes, not for suppressive and ignorance-embracing purposes, or even worse, to promote divisive, destructive, discriminatory or conflict-fomenting actions/policies that exacerbate overconsumption and ecological overshoot.

To understand the natural world, it helps to understand the nature of change. Make no mistake about it: time seems to slip slowly but surely past. Change and motion are continuous at every level from the subatomic to the macrocosmic. Change is essentially eternal and infinite, and it generally takes place in imperceptible increments, like a rivulet carrying mud into a stream during a gentle rain. But sometimes change takes place with sudden exclamation, like a cloudburst following a searing bolt of lightning suddenly sundering a sultry sky full of darkly towering cumulus clouds. To doubt that change is a cumulative evolutionary lapse of the old into the new is to deny the most basic of observable understandings. And to further make the supposition that evolutionary change is GUIDED is to make the mistake of misunderstanding the nature of both cause-and-effect and random chance in galactic, geologic and biological change.

The science of geology studies the physical reality of the Earth and reveals that continuous physical change has been occurring throughout eons of geologic time. The most profound insight of geology is that we exist at a moment in time that is merely an infinitesimal portion of an incomprehensibly long saga of the planet's existence. Marvelous geological processes have been occurring throughout the history of the Earth. While understandings of plate tectonics and the causes of volcanoes and earthquakes are relatively new, the processes they comprehend have been taking place for millions of millennia. Constant forces and processes act in accordance with natural laws of cause and effect. Forces that cause the uplift of mountains are whittled away by continuous countervailing forces of erosion that wear them down. While mountains have the illusion of permanence in the span of a single human lifetime, it is clear that landscapes change with the passage of time. Rivers and glaciers move in response to the pull of gravity, and they combine with wind, chemical actions and freezing and thawing to erode entire mountain ranges to mere remnants once they are no longer being uplifted. Dramatic places like Yosemite Valley, Zion Canyon, Arches National Park and the ancient 'Cedar Mesa' sandstone formations of Natural Bridges National Monument provide mute but beautiful and awe-inspiring testaments to such forces.

Geophysical changes in Earth's crust that occur in dramatic spurts are much more obvious to us than gradual ones. We witness these forces with awe. Floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, landslides, rock falls and hurricanes and tornadoes shock us with their impersonal power. When scientists characterize this natural aspect of the physical evolution of our home planet as a punctuated equilibrium, they are expressing the simple fact that extraordinary geophysical events are like dramatic punctuations of barely perceptible geologic change. Folks who are superstitious say these events are the result of angry gods forsaking or punishing people for various sins. This seems, however, to be just SO inadequate an explanation! What is really happening here is that Nature is taking its natural course!

The science of geology tells us that earthquakes are ruptures that take place when tension builds up between tectonic plates and then is suddenly released. Stresses build up as the plates either collide with other plates or move laterally against them. Rather than having a well-lubricated motion, friction causes the plates to get stuck, until they finally snap in energy-releasing earthquakes.

While people in California are wondering when the next Big One will strike along the San Andreas Fault, there is a near certainty that there will be something like 75,000 'Big Ones' in the next 15 million years. These earth movements will be the cause not only of making beautiful Point Reyes peninsula a coastal island within a million years, but also the cause of the area where Los Angeles is now, on the Pacific Plate, eventually moving north of San Francisco, which is on the western edge of the North American Plate. This will occur within 50 million years or so. Unimaginable? Check the facts! The distance from Las Angeles to San Francisco as the crow flies is 400 miles, and the evidence shows that the Pinnacles Peaks have moved 195 miles in 23 million years. Yep, the place where Los Angeles is now will be just northwest of San Francisco's current location!

<u>The End Is NOT Near</u>

Human beings have evolved a consciousness capable of understanding and appreciating the Earth with a rich awareness. In the long span of geologic time, we will eventually become extinct. In some ways, human beings are like a cancer in Earth's biotic arena, harming the whole, much more than we are like vibrant white blood cells that propitiously act as parts of the immune system to defend the whole body from infection or disease. Dr. Leonard Shlain makes this point compellingly in his book *Sex, Time and Power: How Women's Sexuality Shaped Human Evolution.* He writes that, when considered in biological terms used to describe the animal kingdom, *Homo sapiens* began as a "symbiotic prey" and managed to evolve into a highly successful "symbiotic predator". But then our species has since degenerated into a kind of "very large parasite". And now, with our pollution, deforestation, strip mining, overgrazing, overfarming, overfishing and other extinction-causing activities, we have transformed ourselves into a "planet-devouring pathogen".

"Think of the entire planet with its blue oceans and pristine mountains, as a host," he writes. "We have arrogated many of the earth's resources simply to satisfy our craving for material comfort. While we have been congratulating ourselves on our species' unrivaled domination, alarm bells are figuratively beginning to sound in all regions of the planet. From the perspective of most other life-forms, we have transmogrified into the planet's most virulent pathogen, and our frenzied degradation of our host, Earth, signals that we may be just another stupid parasite too feeble-minded to realize that one should never bite the hand that feeds one." Yeah.

The average duration of a species in the long arc of time has been maybe 5 million years. As noted by Gaia above, so much time has elapsed since the genesis of the Earth that 99% of all species ever in existence have long since gone extinct. The main goal of humanity should be to try to make sure that we survive and flourish indefinitely. Such a goal would improve our chances of leading higher quality lives, while also helping ensure that we would have some glimmer of hope for us to make it the long, long ways to the average species' duration of 5 million years.

How will we accomplish this? How will we survive another 1,000 years? Think about this! Humanity must focus on the goal of long-term survival by better understanding Mother Earth's self-regulating systems. We must manage our activities more

sensibly, and organize more effectively, and plan ahead further, and cooperate together to avoid the depletion of resources, the destruction of habitats, the serious risks associated with anthropogenic climate change, and the dangers of war-without-end that diminish the future prospects of humanity.

Worst-case scenarios should be honestly evaluated, and intelligent steps should be taken to mitigate the severity of outcomes that threaten the survival of the human race. We must think in terms beyond pessimism and beyond optimism. Desperate need and unmitigated greed are powerful forces that stand in opposition to wise planning, but the human race is finding it imperative to develop a less destructive and less rancorous way of making crucial decisions than we do in our current distinctly dysfunctional, money corrupted and short-term-oriented political and economic systems. Much more responsible leadership is urgently required.

I highly recommend that readers consider Professor Jared Diamond's insightful observations about political and environmental instability in nations around the globe that are contained in *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. See Chapter 16, "The World as a Polder: What Does It All Mean to Us Today". Professor Diamond summarizes the 12 most significant environmental problems facing us in the world, and he points out the parallels these difficulties have with challenges that contributed to the collapse of some earlier civilizations. Diamond also provides an objective assessment of the weaknesses of talking points adduced by those who oppose protections of the environment, and he evaluates the ideologies of vested interests that are arrayed against bold efforts to address environmental challenges. His perspective is immensely important.

It seems clear that, in addition to courageously addressing overarching problems, an effective means needs to be found to mitigate sources of extreme inequities and conflicts between various peoples and constituencies. It would be a good idea to find ways to reduce injustices and to prevent levels of inequality from increasing to an ungodly worsening extreme. With the global pandemic and street protests in 2020 against systemic racism and injustices, the gravity of extreme inequalities and vulnerabilities suddenly came into sharper focus. REFORM!

Mark Twain: "It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare."

Since some of the worst sources of conflict and retrogressive impulses lie in narrow-mindedness of parochial religious beliefs, it is becoming increasingly important for us to allow more tolerant and ecumenical worldviews to gain ascendancy. We should honor the resilience of our human spirit, and ground our attitudes in healthy embrace of the noble aspects of our beings, rather than in the competition for supremacy of parochial beliefs. We should get over our conviction that 'our God' is better than someone else's God. My own belief is that more honest religious leaders must step forward to help make sure that their doctrinal traditionalism reflects fair-minded moral systems rather than claims of literal absolute truths and their rationalizations for dogmatic dictates. It may well be that a more honest and noble spirituality will prove to be key to survival for our species. I beseech all adherents of the various denominations of Christianity and Islam, in particular, to heed these words!

When it comes to religion, let us adopt a 'live and let live' attitude. Let us adhere to the Golden Rule. And let us strive to make sure we begin to live in ways that will result in a fair and healthier legacy to all people in future generations. Let us strive to make sure we do not leave our heirs a legacy of conflict, destitution, uncontrolled viral disease, spiraling debt, authoritarian totalitarianism, and a feverishly devastated and unstable home planet!

A Parting Sprig of Philosophy

"It is not our place to complete the task; it is ours to begin it." As Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu wrote long ago, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." Even the longest journey begins where we now stand, and it seems obvious that the most intelligent and sensible plan is to head in the right direction. That means forward, not backward! MAGA maniac cult-like followers, hear these truths!

This is a new aspect of the "fierce urgency of now", a phrase coined by Martin Luther King while preaching in the year before he was assassinated. If we are not able to prevent the human species from upsetting the healthy and providential balance of natural ecosystems, we will surely be unable to save ourselves. There will never be a convenient time for the inconvenient need for us to begin boldly addressing the overarching challenges related to economic injustices, climate change, excessive debt, immigration, and growing risk factors associated with overpopulation. We have been avoiding the solutions to these problems, and our partisan and vituperative haggling over these and other issues is a tragic example of figuratively fiddling while our civilizations burn.

Everyone who lives in an environment should be an environmentalist, as David Brower once said. In Hebrew, there is a phrase, *tikkun olam,* which means, "mending the world." In Judaism, this concept of *tikkun olam* requires that a practice be followed not because of Biblical law, but because it is consistent with the greater public good. *Tikkun olam* implies we should all work to make the world a better place and to relieve human suffering, and to create conditions in which people coexist peacefully and protect biological diversity of life on Earth. Hallelujah!

The people I respect most are those who are passionate advocates of good causes. Perhaps I'm just a "meshuga shiksa"? (A "crazy non-Jewish woman".) Honest civic virtue and public service, it seems to me, are at the core of civilized behavior. Firsthand experiences of inequities and injustices in our society lead people toward transcending self-centeredness, and breaking through to ethical values. These are the seeds of humane and just societies. All too many inequities and injustices exist, so I am impatiently waiting for anticipated breakthroughs! Join in to help out!

Renowned poet Robert Frost once ruminated philosophically about The Road Less Taken, remembering about having stood before two roads that diverged in a yellow wood. Today we are collectively reaching a defining national moment, an abrupt juncture, and are faced with a choice of taking a right fork or a left fork. It seems abundantly clear to me that the best plan would be to avoid taking the fork that veers sharply to the right into the undergrowth that likely leads to retrogressive rule (or a Slough of Despond and Unnecessary Discord). A better course to take would be to take a path that meanders off to the left towards a providentially propitious destination that offers salvation and solace in old-growth forests of Providential Health, Ecological Sanity, Precautionary Virtue, Progressive Sanity, and Sustainable Prosperity.

"Perhaps the truth depends on a walk around a lake", Wallace Stevens once poetically opined. Maybe the real truths lie in introspective circumambulations around more interior bodies of water -- like our brains!

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
March 12, 2024 (First published in November 2009 and revised periodically since then).

<u>What Makes a Great Geologist</u>

Gaia's Geological Perspective: Episodes Since Genesis is dedicated to the locally famed naturalist and birdwatcher Rich Stallcup, who died in December 2012. Rich Stallcup had an extraordinary knowledge of birds and led many birdwatching trips, often reminding people that "there is always something uncommon to discover, yet there is discovery and wonder even in the common things." He would conclude such excursions that he led by telling his appreciative acolytes, "Thanks for being a good human."

An Internet piece explored the question of "what makes a great geologist". It adduced several fine qualities, copied below, and then concluded that "a Good Geologist has many of the qualities of a Good Human Being." These character traits are:

Humility. The Earth is greater than all of us. Up until now it has provided the basis of our everything. And equally it can take it all away in a flash.

The ability to imagine. What you see now in our world is not necessarily what has come before and the Earth System has a track record that goes back 4.5 billion years, but has only preserved a portion of its tale. The rest we have to infer.

The ability to handle uncertainty. Unless you can pick up something in your hand and sample it, then you'll always be relying on second-hand analysis of what it is. Often you will be sampling no more than a trillionth of the bigger picture.

Synthesis. You will pull from a myriad of sources of information from the nanometric to the galactic. And you may voyage through this universe in a single day.

Grace. You will tap into all the other grand sciences which peer down at you, but you will have a wry smile to yourself that without you no one would understand Home.

Passion. How can you not be excited by the Earth? This is a subject you never need to switch off from and keeps giving for as long as you ask questions.

Being a Good Story-Teller. You are suspicious of dogma for you know that too much is unknown, but there is still much meaning to be gleaned from careful and fair observation.

Patience. You will never likely have all the facts. But you are adding to a Great Story.

Having a capacity to never stop learning. Your "office" will be the grandest thing you're ever likely to encounter and you will only ever discover a proportion of what there is to know about it. Cultivate curiosity!

Vastly Positive Common Sense 2025 Proposals vs. Authoritarian Project 2025 Plans

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
October 25, 2024

Here are highly positive Common Sense 2025 Proposals that offer a brighter, fairer, more inclusive and more hopeful future than the darkly dystopian, apocalyptic and absolutist Republican Project 2025 plans.

These Common Sense 2025 Proposals contain plans that prioritize fairness, individual freedoms, public health and safety, environmental stewardship, and the integrity of our democratic institutions. They offer to create a much better future than the regressive and repressive Christian Nationalist Project 2025 blueprint for totalitarian "conservative" rule. These Common Sense 2025 proposals envision reforms that will serve the public good rather than narrow interests. See my essay *The Common Good, Properly Understood* for a clearer idea of what really constitutes the public good. Here are key areas where Common Sense 2025 Proposals offer a better path forward:

1. **Tax Fairness and Fiscal Responsibility**. Instead of shifting the tax burden onto ordinary citizens, the Common Sense 2025 plan proposes modest tax cuts for the bottom 90%, and ensures that the wealthiest Americans pay their fair share. This policy would reduce income inequality while trying to more responsibly bring the national budget into balance, and would sensibly address the unsustainable generosity of policies that give debt financed tax cuts to disproportionately benefit the ultra-wealthy. Review the scandalous details of this in "The Titanic Tax Cut Swindle" in the Appendix below.

2. **Restoration of Reproductive Rights and Healthcare Privacy**. The Common Sense 2025 plan guarantees reproductive freedom, ensuring that women have the right to make decisions about their own bodies and futures without government interference. It would also protect access to contraception, support fertility treatments like IVF, and safeguard healthcare privacy from invasive tracking.

3. **Compassionate Immigration Reform**. In contrast to deportation-heavy immigration policies, Common Sense 2025 Proposals advocate for good ways to properly secure our borders while treating immigrants and refugees humanely. They would provide protections for young Dreamers and enact comprehensive immigration reforms that would take into account both economic needs and humanitarian concerns.

4. **Support for Public Service and Good Governance**. The Common Sense 2025 plan defends the integrity of civil service by protecting federal employees from being fired for politically motivated reasons, and promotes nonpartisan governance to ensure that public institutions remain dedicated to serving the people rather than special interest groups and politically partisan agendas.

5. **Justice and Accountability for All**. A key pillar of these Common Sense 2025 Proposals is to prevent the politicization of the Department of Justice. It ensures the DOJ serves as a fair and impartial body that will promote the rule of law and safeguard individual rights while holding everyone accountable, regardless of political affiliation, and would protect the right to dissent and criticize inequities and safely protest against political corruption, graft and abuses of power.

6. **Strengthening Democratic Institutions.** Unlike Project 2025 plans to centralize executive power, the Common Sense 2025 Proposals would reinforce congressional oversight and transparency. They champion accountability across all branches of government, and ensure that no one is above the law.

7. **Free and Fair Elections for All.** The Common Sense 2025 plan promotes voting rights, fights voter suppression, and ensures that elections reflect the will of the people. It supports legislation like the Freedom to Vote Act and works to eliminate extreme gerrymandering to guarantee fairer representation.

8. **Environmental Responsibility and Climate Justice.** To combat climate change, the Common Sense 2025 plan would invest in clean energy and strengthen the Inflation Reduction Act to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change while creating millions of green jobs. It would also use smart regulations to reduce pollution and emissions of greenhouse gases that are harmfully destabilizing global weather patterns and causing temperatures to spike, and exacerbating the intensity of storms, and causing extreme floods and droughts around the planet.

9. **Commitment to Public Education and Student Debt Relief,** Rather than eliminating the Department of Education and further dismantling public education, the Common Sense 2025 agenda supports well-funded public schools and prioritizes educational opportunity for all, ensuring a stronger future for the next generation. It also would offer relief to those burdened by big amounts of student debt.

10. **Strengthening the Social Safety Net**. The Common Sense 2025 plan would protect healthcare access by expanding Medicaid and improving Medicare. It would ensure that the social safety net remains intact for those who need it most, while responsibly controlling military spending to focus on domestic priorities.

11. **Civil Rights and Protections for All People.** The plan emphasizes equality by safeguarding LGBTQ rights and countering hate crimes. It ensures that everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, can live free from discrimination and violence.

12. **Sensible Gun Safety Measures.** The Common Sense 2025 agenda would promote public safety by banning assault weapons, especially for persons under 21 years of age, and limiting devices that enable rapid-fire shooting, and it would implement other sensible plans designed to reduce gun violence while respecting responsible gun ownership.

13. **Honest Education and a Fair Society.** To foster a more just society, the plan rejects divisive narratives about "anti-white racism" and supports teaching history accurately. It promotes policies that expand economic opportunity and diversity, helping to ensure fairness for all Americans, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status.

Summary

The Common Sense 2025 Proposals offer a hopeful vision for the future -- one that prioritizes equity, freedom, environmental sustainability, and democracy. They seek to unite Americans around shared values, in stark contrast to the Project 2025 agenda, which would erode our institutions and liberties. The 13 planks of these Common Sense 2025 Proposals are elaborated upon below.

Note: This essay was initially titled *Project 2025 and the Most Egregious Wrongs that Right-Wing Extremists Are Planning, Together with Contrasting More Propitious Common Sense 2025 Proposals.* And then it was subsequently appropriately titled *A Damning Denunciation of Project 2025's MAGA "Mandate" for Dictatorial Rule.*

The Republican Project 2025 agenda is an alarmingly anti-democratic hard-right plan for the takeover and rigid control of the U.S. government by partisan conservatives and Christian religious extremists. The blueprint would heavily favor rich people and corporate entities over everyone else, and it is particularly offensive for the following plans that are set forth in the 920-page *Mandate:*

1) Project 2025 would impose a regressive tax plan that would onerously shift the burden of taxation from the top 1% to all other tax payers, wrongly making income and wealth inequalities even more extreme than they already are. Worse, it would finance this tax scam by perpetuating the long-running public-debt-financed tax cut swindle, borrowing trillions of dollars more, and irresponsibly adding to the already very costly and dangerously large $35 trillion national debt. See the Appendix for extraordinary details about this highly inequitable tax cut swindle.

A much fairer and more socially responsible Common Sense 2025 Plan would enact legislation that shifts more of the burden of paying taxes to the top 1%, and give all taxpayers in the bottom 90% a modest tax cut. This would rightly reduce the extreme inequalities of income and wealth that prevail under the current system. Deficit

spending should simultaneously be reduced every year by more responsibly balancing tax revenues and government spending, in effect reducing the amount of the Santa Claus Tax Cut Swindle that allows the top dogs in our society to pay low tax rates every year through the ruse of further mortgaging the future.

2) Project 2025 would subjugate women to the heinous hegemony of anti-abortion reactionaries, contemptuous control freaks and misogynistic Christian nationalists by forcing women who do not want a child, or another child, to remain pregnant and deliver an unwanted baby. The medical fallout from abortion restrictions in red states is becoming dire. And access to contraceptives would be restricted. In vitro fertilization would be outlawed or restricted, preventing many women who want to have a child using fertility treatments from being able to do so. A regime of invasive abortion data tracking would also be implemented, invading women's healthcare privacy, and the 1873 Comstock Act would be misused as a means of banning abortions in every state in the country by criminally prosecuting anyone who sends medication abortion drugs through the mail. "It's a detailed roadmap to rip away a woman's right to choose in every single state in America -- and they don't even need Congress to try to do it! All Americans need to understand that abortion rights are on the ballot this November, in every single state."

A much fairer Common Sense 2025 Plan would enact national legislation that restores reproductive rights along the lines of the Supreme Court's sensibly fair 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, giving all pregnant women federal protections for the freedom to get a safe and legal abortion before fetal viability. It would also provide stronger protections for women's healthcare privacy, and for all women (and men) to be able to freely obtain and use contraceptives. And it would prevent extremist politicians from outlawing or restricting in vitro fertilization that helps women become pregnant when they face fertility difficulties, and it would prevent the government from invasive abortion data tracking, or misusing the 1873 Comstock Act for anti-choice purposes. In doing these things, the American people would reject authority-abusing, freedom of choice-opposing extremists who are striving to force women to have unwanted children, and it would help women who want to become pregnant to do so using IVF.

3) Project 2025 pushes decidedly immigrant-harming plans like deporting millions of immigrants, circumventing Congress and the courts. It would also terminate the legal status of hundreds of thousands of young Dreamers, and separate families, and end birthright citizenship, and inhumanely dismantle our nation's asylum system. Cruel!

The economic repercussions of deporting millions of hard-working immigrants would be cataclysmic. And most of the jobs these hard-working immigrants do are ones few people want to do because of the low pay, hardness of the work, lack of benefits, degradation, and considerable workplace dangers.

A fairer Common Sense 2025 Plan would strengthen border security, deal more sensibly with problems there, and take steps to protect young Dreamers and treat legal immigrants and refugees more fairly and decently. The new session of Congress beginning in January 2025 should make it a top priority to formulate and pass a new border bill, a better plan that will replace the hard-nosed one primarily authored by Georgia Republican Sen. James Langford. That plan was torpedoed by Donald Trump, who demanded that all House Republicans vote against the solution because he diabolically wanted to divisively work his demagogic magic by shrewdly and manipulatively keeping the anti-immigrant scapegoating ruse fired up and insidiously motivating. Note that chaos is draconianly unwise!

4) Project 2025 would undermine good governance by firing tens of thousands of public servants and replacing them with loyalists to MAGA Trumpism. This would be contrary to more responsible patriotic propriety. It would dangerously further concentrate power in the presidency, with a planned goal of giving Trump (if he wins) and his appointees more power over the executive branch relative to nonpartisan civil service professionals (who are disparaged as the so-called "deep state"). This would obviously lead to abuses of power and more opportunities for political malfeasance. Such policies would impose repressive rule on *We the People* that would be "of corporate entities and the rich, by corporations and the rich, and for the rich and rightwing extremists."

A more politicized federal bureaucracy -- under a more politicizing dictator wannabe and the current reactionary Republican Supreme Court -- would be grotesquely irresponsible, especially as regards the economy, fairness, true justice, public safety, unity, people's freedoms, the police state, and our democratic (and autocratic) allies.

The more decent Common Sense 2025 Proposals would protect civil servants from political termination, and maintain a strong separation between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the federal government.

5) Project 2025 plans would allow the president to weaponize the Department of Justice against critics and political opponents, including those who honorably protest against abuses of authority.

A Common Sense 2025 Plan would prevent the politicizing of the Department of Justice and its use in partisan prosecutions and attacks against honest, courageous and patriotic Americans.

6) Project 2025 would not only expand executive power but also defang congressional oversight, dangerously allowing a President to exert unfettered power. This is on top of the greater power that the Supreme Court has given the President in its absurd ruling on absolute immunity for "official acts" wrongdoing. The plan would wage an offensive against responsibility, transparency and accountability of elected officials in favor of political corruption, graft and malfeasance. It would carry out these nefarious plans through personnel in key White House staff and Cabinet positions, judges, federal agencies, and Congress members, in addition to Trump loyalist civil servants.

A Common Sense 2025 Plan agenda would support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and choose fair-minded persons and people who put Country over Party for White House staff, cabinet positions, federal agencies, Congress, and the Supreme Court and other federal courts.

7) Project 2025 would push anti-democratic plans against having free and fair elections and fair representation, by making efforts to restrict voting and suppress voter turnout by people most likely to be opposed to their authoritarian plans. Republicans in red states are already using devious misinformation to justify outrageous voter suppression laws that make it harder for millions of Americans to vote. Also, they plan to prevent the proper certification of votes that express the popular will, using the cunningly deceitful tactic of falsely claiming that there is widespread voting fraud in our elections, thereby perpetrating massive fraud against the majority of the people. And Project 2025 calls for green-lighting Trump's racist citizenship question on the next U.S. census, and turn management of the census over to the same types of right-wing political operatives that wrote Project 2025.

A Common Sense 2025 Plan would strengthen our democracy and its guardrails by taking steps to help guarantee voting rights, free and fair elections and fair representation, and prevent extreme gerrymanders of congressional districts, and it would make sure that all votes are properly certified and accurately express the popular will.

Congress must pass legislation to strengthen our democracy by making elections more democratically fair, such as the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and its companion bill, the Freedom to Vote Act.

8) Project 2025 promotes irresponsible stances on fossil fuel use and refuses to deal with the horrible legacy such policies will have on all people in the future by making "climate hell" worse than it would alternately be with fairer, more reasonable and more farsighted policies. The agenda pushes for slashing regulations, exacerbating pollution, stoking climate injustices and gutting the Inflation Reduction Act, which is "the Biden administration's wide-ranging law that would generate some 10 million climate-friendly jobs over the next 10 years. The policy agenda also advises eviscerating greenhouse gas regulations and clean energy programs."

A more sensible Common Sense 2025 Plan would move boldly toward a fossil free energy future to prevent climate catastrophes by implementing fairer and more farsighted policies. It would use smart incentives and regulations to curb pollution and create greater climate justice, and strengthen the Inflation Reduction Act to help generate millions of climate-friendly jobs while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and advancing clean energy programs.

9) Project 2025 aggressively promotes plans to benefit religious schools and private schools at the expense of improved public education for the vast majority of young people. It would also eliminate the Department of Education in an extraordinarily pernicious Orwellian policy imposition plan, partially to keep young people ignorant. And it would prevent relief for tens of millions of borrowers saddled with mounting levels of student debt.

A more sensible Common Sense 2025 Plan would strengthen our commitment to improving public education for the vast majority of young people, rather than subsidizing religious schools and private schools, and give debt relief to tens of millions of borrowers saddled with onerous amounts of student debt.

10) Project 2025 plans would give states the ability to impose work requirements on Medicaid, which would reduce benefits for low-income people that help cover their medical costs, and in general reduce federal spending on the social safety net and poor people, and those in the middle class, while achieving another longtime conservative

priority -- ramping up military spending and facilitating more crony capitalist private profiteering.

Project 2025 includes a plan to gut and privatize Medicare, which would be a huge gift to private insurance corporations that would make health care for seniors much worse.

A Common Sense 2025 Plan would expand Medicaid, improve Obamacare and Medicare, and sensibly strengthen the social safety net, and more adequately control military spending and corporate "greedflation".

11) Project 2025 would ramp up assaults on LGBTQ rights and wipe out certain federal protections for gay Americans, which would facilitate an increase in the current avalanche of anti-LGBTQ legislation being introduced in Republican-led statehouses. It would also make the "epidemic of violence" much worse against these people, due to the woeful impacts of extremist rhetoric. And it would undo marriage equality.

A Common Sense 2025 Plan would protect the civil rights of all people, including straight people, gays, bisexuals and transgender individuals, and it would strive to reduce hate crimes.

12) The Project 2025 agenda on guns would favor profit making by gun manufacturers to the detriment of gun safety and a more secure citizenry.

A Common Sense 2025 Plan would improve public safety from gun violence by banning private ownership of assault weapons and limiting the use of bump stocks and other machine gun-like devices that allow rapid fire of ammunition.

13) The right-wing Project 2025 blueprint contains rhetoric claiming that the biggest problem in America today is "anti-white racism", in furtherance of efforts to deny the anti-black racism that persists in the USA today. One goal is to permanently cement white supremacy in the status quo by abolishing affirmation action programs, among other things. Another goal is to ignore the onerous racism against people of color and "to erode 1960s-era policies that have nourished economic opportunities for Black Americans, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion programs that have flowered since the 2020 murder of George Floyd."

A fairer Common Sense 2025 Plan would teach history accurately, and make our society fairer and more secure.

Common Sense 2025 Plan - A Proclamation

Whereas moderation is broadly advantageous, extremism is excessively narrow and widely undesirable from the standpoints of societal well-being as well as with regard to the economy, politics and the environment;

Whereas the Project 2025 plans are retrogressive, it would be broadly desirable for us to rededicate our Country to its founding Constitutional principles: that *We the People* be honorably dedicated to trying to "form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity."

And whereas the 2024 elections will have determinative impacts on democratic fairness and future well-being;

Let it therefore be resolved that our representatives boldly embrace the goals set forth above in the Common Sense 2025 Plan by strengthening our democracy and democratic institutions and the checks and balances in our government against political corruption by scheming authorities in the White House, Congress or the judiciary.

Let us also commit to strengthening the accountability provisions in our Constitution to prevent political corruption and ensure that the federal government is not weaponized for political purposes against courageous individuals or opposing parties. And let's strengthen the separation of church and state to prevent religious discrimination and the corruption of our federal and state governments by religious authorities.

An Important Environmental Perspective

A core idea in the Earth Manifesto is that we must pay forward a positive legacy to those in future generations. Considering this, it is wrong that Project 2025 is particularly onerous for its anti-environmental offensives:

It would curb the Environmental Protection Agency's oversight capacities, preventing it from managing pollutants, tracking methane emissions, and conducting research on causes of climate change and destabilization.

It would eliminate the legal mechanism that requires the EPA to address carbon pollution, putting all of our nation's

most vital climate policies at risk.

It would dismantle the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and eliminate many of its functions, even though the agency plays a mission-critical role in extreme weather events like hurricanes. This is crazy, for public safety depends on accurate weather information -- and accurate data saves lives. Yet a hurricane of rumors, lies and misinformation swirls in MAGA echo chambers about hurricane evacuations, disaster responses, recovery efforts and FEMA funding. This is creating much anger, misunderstanding and distrust, unnecessarily endangering vulnerable people. These manipulative emotion-hijacking falsehoods are unconscionably reckless and irresponsible, just as conspiracy-addled misinformation during the Covid pandemic about vaccinations had such harmful effects, costing tens or hundreds of thousands of people their lives.

Project 2025 would dismantle offices within the Department of Energy focused on clean energy research and implementation, severely hindering progress at a critical time for developing renewable energy technologies.

It would rubber-stamp permits for fossil fuel drilling on public lands and new fossil fuel power plants -- encouraging more sunk-cost investment in dirty-energy sources that are fueling climate change and climate catastrophes.

It would curtail federal investments in renewable energy technologies, such as solar and wind power.

These radical changes would take a fossil fueled wrecking ball to much climate progress, and make the U.S. climate commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement unachievable. And, of course, they would also endanger public health and well-being, and disproportionately impact low-income communities and people of color.

Damning Denunciations of Project 2025's MAGA "Mandate" for Dictatorial Rule

As The New Republic notes, the dystopian Project 2025 is "a remarkably detailed guide to turning the United States into a fascist's paradise." The primary document of Project 2025, the magazine explains, lays out what is essentially a "Christian nationalist vision of the United States, one in which married heterosexuality is the only valid form of sexual expression and identity; all pregnancies would be carried to term, even if that requires coercion or death; and transgender and gender-nonconforming people do not exist."

"It's a terrifying vision of what American life could look like, but what's most concerning about Project 2025 is its playbook for the first 180 days of a hypothetical second Trump term. Much of the 180-Day Playbook reads like a cult's recruiting pamphlet, explaining how department and agency heads should be vetting potential candidates."

Paul Dans, a former Trump administration official who led Project 2025's Presidential Transition Project, wrote in the introduction to the Playbook: "Our goal is to assemble an army of aligned, vetted, trained, and prepared conservatives to go to work on Day One to deconstruct the Administrative State."

By blaming and villainizing the "Deep State", this cloaked offensive would undermine democratic fairness and protections of people from oppressive right-wing extremists who want to destroy Constitutional protections of people's freedoms and the general welfare and the common good. Don't doubt that the army they assemble would instantly become an enemy to the people!

A Facebook post summarizes: "The MAGA right is declaring war, and Project 2025 is their battle plan. Project 2025 threatens our rights, attacks communities of color, hurts middle- and working-class families, and undermines our democracy. But we will not back down or let Trump steamroll our nation."

Trump/Vance and Project 2025 call for infringing on our freedoms and privacy. They plan on banning abortions nationwide, and attacking LGBTQ+ families. Kamala Harris and Tim Walz have one simple and powerful response for those trying to dictate our lives: "Mind your own damn business!"

The most significant mention of Project 2025 at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago came from Mallory McMorrow, a Michigan State Senator, who brought the entire fascist manifesto as a prop with her on stage, enlarged to appear to be a huge format book. Her poise and delivery were excellent, and most importantly, her message was received loud and clear -- Project 2025 is a brazen, unapologetic, undemocratic, unhinged attempt by MAGA Republicans to permanently install Donald Trump as an unrestrained and cruel dictator-like king. We simply cannot risk underestimating how massive a threat Project 2025 is to our democracy and general well-being.

Cogent and Persuasive Endorsements

To save our great constitutional republic, American citizens must vote, and a majority must reject Trump's brazen and increasingly dystopian and unhinged bid to grab power again. Vote for Kamala -- and Democrats in Congress!!

The Biden/Harris administration has managed to create an economy that is the "envy of the world", with low unemployment and now low rates of inflation. And experts have assessed proposals made by Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, and found that Trump's proposals would destroy Social Security within 6 years, and his aggressive plan to impose tariffs on all imports would hyper stimulate inflation, and his tax plans and promises would increase the national debt much more than Kamala Harris' proposed policies would do.

The highly esteemed magazine and multi-platform publisher *The Atlantic* recently gave a powerful endorsement to Kamala Harris, observing that she "respects the law and the Constitution. She believes in the freedom, equality, and dignity of all Americans. She's untainted by corruption, let alone a felony record or a history of sexual assault. She doesn't embarrass her compatriots with her language and behavior, or pit them against one another. She doesn't curry favor with dictators. She won't abuse the power of the highest office in order to keep it. She believes in democracy. These, and not any specific policy positions, are the reasons *The Atlantic* is endorsing her."

The New York Times had earlier endorsed Kamala Harris, on September 30, spelling out the persuasive reasons why, and declaring her to be "*The Only Patriotic Choice for President.*"

"It is hard to imagine a candidate more unworthy to serve as president of the United States than Donald Trump. He has proved himself morally unfit for an office that asks its occupant to put the good of the nation above self-interest. He has proved himself temperamentally unfit for a role that requires the very qualities — wisdom, honesty, empathy, courage, restraint, humility, discipline — that he most lacks.

Those disqualifying characteristics are compounded by everything else that limits his ability to fulfill the duties of the president: his many criminal charges, his advancing age, his fundamental lack of interest in policy and his increasingly bizarre cast of associates.

This unequivocal, dispiriting truth -- Donald Trump is not fit to be president -- should be enough for any voter who cares about the health of our country and the stability of our democracy to deny him re-election. For this reason, regardless of any political disagreements voters might have with her, Kamala Harris is the only patriotic choice for president.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* endorsed Harris in a blistering editorial, saying: "America deserves much more than an aspiring autocrat who ignores the law, is running to stay out of prison, and doesn't care about anyone but himself."

The New Yorker endorsed Kamala with these words: "The 2024 election also comes at a moment of national crisis. This time, however, the threat to the country's future -- to its rule of law and its democratic institutions, its security and its character -- resides not in a foreign capital but at a twenty-acre Xanadu on the Florida coast. For nine years, Donald Trump has represented an ongoing assault on the stability, the nerves, and the nature of the United States. As President, he amplified some of the ugliest currents in our political culture: nativism, racism, misogyny, indifference to the disadvantaged, amoral isolationism. His narcissism and casual cruelty, his contempt for the truth, have contaminated public life. As Commander-in-Chief, he ridiculed the valor of fallen soldiers, he threatened to unravel the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and he emboldened autocrats everywhere, including Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un, and Viktor Orban. When Trump lost to Joe Biden, in 2020, he tried every means possible to deny the will of the electorate and helped incite a violent insurrection on Capitol Hill."

"In contrast, the Democratic Party's nominee, Vice-President Kamala Harris, has displayed the basic values and political skills that would enable her to build on the successes of the Biden Administration and to help end, once and for all, a poisonous era defined by Trump."

More Introspection into the Republican *Mandate*

The upcoming U.S. elections are perhaps the most consequential in all of U.S. history, so it is our duty to *See Clearly* and act sensibly. I urge readers to peruse my latest Earth Manifesto essay *He Said, She Said, The Much Greater Desirability of Democratic Fairness Over Dictator-like Despotism.*

Trump has made consequentially deceitful denials that he knows much about the totalitarian takeover Project 2025. This is preposterous, suspicious and weak. And these devious denials don't diminish the gravity of the existential dangers the Republican Party poses to citizens, and to the longevity of our democratic republic.

Surprisingly to most, Project 2025 is not some sudden plot materializing in our midst like an insidious seditious authoritarian subterfuge set forth by fringe extremists. It is, in fact, merely the latest iteration of far right plans that the Heritage Foundation has been pushing on America for decades, with lavish funding from anti-social billionaires and scheming corporate executives and immoral Christian nationalist extremists.

"Project 2025 is not a new plan; it has been in the works for decades. The first version was published just after Ronald Reagan took office in 1981. In 2015 the Heritage Foundation gave the incoming Trump administration the seventh iteration. Should you think that Trump and his cronies know nothing about any of this, the Heritage Foundation boasted that Trump instituted 64% of the policy recommendations in that document, including leaving the Paris Climate Accords." And in red states, many Project 2025 plans are already being ruthlessly imposed on the citizenry, especially disadvantaging women, LGBTQ folks, and Blacks, Latinos and other people of color.

This is happening at the same time that our American society is becoming ever more multicultural and diverse, and long-term demographic trends show Whites as steadily diminishing from 90% in the 1950s to about 60% in the 2020 Census -- and will become a minority of less than 50% before 2050. It sure seems to me like it would be a good time for today's white majority to set a precedent of treating people in minority groups better, and not so savagely inequitably.

Yet the reactionary architects of Project 2025, and its proponents, want control in America to be wielded permanently by white men, heterosexuals and far right Christians. "The ideals of our 250-year-old form of government, in which majority rules, are anathema to them. They want to inflict their beliefs on everyone, representative democracy be damned."

Many of Project 2025's recommendations are deeply unpopular with Americans. A survey conducted by YouGov found that almost 60% of respondents opposed several big tenets, including the elimination of the Department of Education, giving more tax cuts to corporations, upending the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), and changing the law to allow the president to fire civil servants.

"It is difficult to convince voters that the project's policy recommendations are real because they are so radical," said Anat Shenker-Osorio, a political strategist who spoke about the challenges of discussing Project 2025 with focus groups on the podcast *The Wilderness*.

"When we actually cut and paste verbatim from the Heritage document, people are like, that's a bunch of bull****. Like, why did you make that up? And what is wrong with you? And why are you lying to us?" she said.

To that end, here are just a few of the most democracy-threatening suggestions, *verbatim*:

On child labor: "With parental consent and proper training, certain young adults should be allowed to learn and work in more dangerous occupations."

On education: "Federal education policy should be limited and, ultimately, the Federal Department of Education should be eliminated."

On LGBTQ+ rights: "The next secretary should also reverse the Biden Administration's focus on 'LGBTQ+ equity,' subsidizing single-motherhood, disincentivizing work, and penalizing marriage, replacing such policies with those encouraging marriage, work, motherhood, fatherhood, and nuclear families."

On families: "Families comprised of a married mother, father, and their children are the foundation of a well-ordered nation and healthy society … The male-female dyad is essential to human nature and … every child has a right to a mother and father."

And it has several highly publicized recommendations on abortion and women's rights that are an effort to return to America of the 1950s. "We won't go back", chant those who honorably and courageously oppose the oppressive Republican plans.

"I cannot state it strongly enough: Project 2025, with Donald Trump at the helm, is the greatest existential threat to American democracy in recent history. And make no mistake, should Trump win in November, he will usher in many if not most of the project's recommendations."

Project 2025 can be understood as Big Money corruption incarnate, and it threatens to permanently overthrow the reasonable rule of law and the U.S. Constitution, depriving the people of the protections they provide.

The rule of law is vital to ensuring stability, justice, and equality in society. It guarantees that all individuals, regardless of power or status, are subject to the same laws, thereby preventing arbitrary governance and abuses of power. It creates predictability and reliability in legal proceedings, which fosters trust among citizens and encourages economic development by safeguarding property rights and enforcing contracts. Furthermore, the rule of law protects individual freedoms and human rights, as it limits the power of the state and provides mechanisms for accountability. Without the rule of law, society risks descending into chaos, where power rather than justice dictates outcomes, undermining democracy and equality. Chaos is bad.

The Supreme Court has already been taken over by a supermajority of right-wing extremists, and they are overturning precedents at an alarming pace, and in drastically consequential ways. They are ruling imperiously on issues in ways that diminish people's freedoms and undermine public health and safety. For insightful clarity on this rogue state of judicial affairs, see Sheldon Whitehouse's many speeches about "The Scheme" -- and my incisive essay *Calamitous Consequences of Success of a Secret Conspiratorial Scheme to Capture the Courts.*

The Project 2025 plotters are now trying to further upset the great balance of power that protects *We the People* from attempts like this to give the executive branch vastly increased power, and allow Republicans to impose imperious control over federal agencies and their expertise and independence. This takeover attempt is a despotic threat that is severely detrimental to common good goals and honorable values and the greater good.

The prospects of having Republicans be able to appoint even more extremist partisans to the Supreme Court in the next four consequential years are a compelling reason to vote for Kamala Harris and Democrats in the Senate, and against Trump and Republicans in Congress.

The legislative branch has already been too critically influenced by the extremism inherent in unconstitutionally unfair and egregiously discriminatory gerrymandering, which makes our politics undesirably polarized, and subversive of collaborative decision-making. This adversely affects Congress and our hopes for succeeding in achieving good solutions to problems. It makes it unnecessarily difficult to cope effectively and properly with the grave challenges that confront overburdened societies in the world today.

<u>Incisive Assessment</u>

It is vastly preferable for the people to have a fairly representative democracy governed by the rule of law and a Constitution designed with a separation of powers between executive, legislative and judicial branches of a federal government, and checks and balances to safeguard governance from abuses of power, and enforced accountability provisions, and a strong separation of Church and State.

For the people, constitutional democracy with free and fair elections and a healthy balance of power is much better than heavy-handed autocracy or dictatorial rule that corruptly does the bidding of wealthy elites and amoral profit-repossessed corporations, and scheming loyalists in a crony capitalist system, and religious extremists.

Americans cherish the blessings of liberty and personal freedoms, and deserve leaders who honestly try to unify *We the People* around common good goals by promoting the general welfare and creating truer justice and working to make the citizenry more secure, and trying to improve vital social cohesion and domestic tranquility.

All responsible and patriotic citizens in our democracy should support free and fair elections, and the integrity of the voting process. And it should be clear that our elections are NOT fair in the USA today.

One big factor in this is extremely unfair gerrymandering that causes increasing polarization and facilitates extremism in politics. In North Carolina, state lawmakers created such contortedly gerrymandered district maps that a panel of three judges in 2019 threw out the maps, writing that the partisan maps had been drawn with

"surgical precision" that gave decidedly unfair advantage to Republicans. This violated the state's constitutional protections of free elections, free speech and assembly, and equal protection under the law, according to the judges in a 357-page ruling "that reads as a stinging condemnation of partisan gerrymandering."

And Republicans have stacked the Supreme Court with political partisans that outrageously fail to protect *We the People* from extreme gerrymanders like this, and from harmful Big Money influence peddling.

The competition for fair representation is seriously compromised by having many scheming Republican billionaires like Charles Koch and Elon Musk contribute huge amounts of money to finance the campaigns of MAGA extremists.

Red-state Republicans are putting their dirty hands on the scale of Justice by passing an alarming number of new voter suppression laws, and using devious tactics like poll closures and purges of voter rolls, and by intimidating voters at polling places, and by shrewdly making partisan power grabs of election administration offices, with a goal of undermining the proper certification of the voters' will.

Republicans already cheat and lie to win elections by promoting misinformation and disinformation, and using Trump's big lie about voter fraud to stoke discord and incite distrust, anger and violence. This undermines public trust in the electoral process and democratic institutions. By sowing doubts about the legitimacy of election outcomes, a dangerous precedent is created where losing candidates may refuse to concede, further destabilizing the peaceful transfer of power and undermining one of the fundamental tenets of democracy.

Republicans also take advantage of undemocratic provisions in the U.S. Constitution to gain undeserved power, such as these four things:

1) The Electoral College allows the loser of the popular vote to win the presidency.

2) The Constitution gives every state two U.S. Senators, so it allows equal influence in the most powerful chamber of Congress. This is the case even though small states, like Wyoming that has the smallest population of the 50 states, with less than 600,000 people, has equal say to California, the largest, which has almost 39 million people.

3) Washington D.C. has almost 700,000 people, and yet its citizens are not represented in the U.S. Senate or the House. The residents of D.C. pay more in federal income taxes than the residents of 22 states, so this is an outrageous injustice of taxation without representation.

4) The Constitution is deliberately challenging to amend, requiring a two-thirds majority in both chambers of Congress and ratification by three-fourths of the states. This makes it very difficult for the Constitution to evolve and adapt in response to changing democratic needs and societal values and ecological realities.

These 4 undemocratic aspects of the Constitution allow Republicans to gain an unwarranted amount of undeserved power. And they are helped in this ability by grotesquely biased conservative media platforms like Fox News, One America News Network, Newsmax, Breitbart and The Epoch Times. And by social media echo chambers that stoke people's fear and push emotion-manipulating content on right-wing platforms like Elon Musk's Twitter — now X — which opposes content moderation in order to propagate propaganda favorable to rule by "conservatives" who do the bidding of wealthy people and giant corporations and immoral Christian fundamentalists.

Once they illegitimately gain power, partisan Republicans broadly abuse this power, especially in red states, in order to unfairly discriminate against their political opponents and torpedo the common good, for selfish political advantages -- and money.

"The Project 2025 agenda is already taking root in many states such as Texas, Florida, Idaho, Missouri, and more. Taking freedom away from individuals and giving more to corporations; ripping reproductive rights away from women; endangering worker safety; outlawing local living wage minimums or the ability for businesses to voluntarily recognize unions; centralizing power away from the people; fomenting retributive political violence; prosecuting librarians over books radical extremists have deemed obscene or dangerous: This is the future the extreme far right wants for all Americans -- and it has already succeeded in making it a reality for many."

For deeper and valuable perspective, see my essay *The Common Good, Properly Understood.* For a much more expansive understanding see *Common Sense Revival – Book One of the Earth Manifesto*. It contains the insightful

One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies.

And understand these three relevant essays: (1) *Core Values of Democracy - and How to Thwart Conspiratorial Threats Against These Values;* and *2) Demagoguery and The Dangers of the Demise of Democracy; and Thirteen Main Methods Used to Increasingly Concentrate Wealth and Power.*

And properly be aware of the insights in *Women's Rights - Let Freedom Ring – Honestly!* The understandings in these essays are broadly expanded upon in many other essays in the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto, which are all available right now from the on-demand publisher Lulu Press. All of these essays can be found online, linked to my Home Page at EarthManifesto.com.

Concluding Words on the Threats Posed by the Far Right

Trump/Vance and Elon Musk and the right-wing media are poisoning the minds and consciousness of the American people. And they are on an authoritarian offensive, as revealed by Trump claiming that immigrants are "poisoning the blood of our country." That Trumpian assertion virtually quotes Adolf Hitler, who wrote in *Mein Kampf* that "All great cultures of the past perished only because the originally creative race died out from blood poisoning."

The dictator wannabe Trumpster recently said, "The bigger problem is the enemy from within. … We have some very bad people, sick people, radical left lunatics, and I think it should be very easily handled by, if necessary by National Guard, or if really necessary by the Military, because they can't let that happen."

This is a demented and dastardly threat to our freedoms and sanity. And the most serious threat posed to most Americans is this cult leader-like retribution-obsessed vindictive demagogue who is acting like a real enemy from within to tens of millions of Americans.

When Trump talks about the greatest threats to our nation, he doesn't talk about Russia, or Iran, or North Korea testing long range missiles, or an increasingly expansionist China. He talks about the people who would dare to stand up to him at home, in the United States.

"This man is a fascist, through and through. We've seen his like before. He uses the same rhetoric, sometimes the same exact words and phrases, as men like Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. And at this point, it's fair to say that he shares many of their goals."

For additional incisive insights on the grave undesirability of fascist governance, see my essay *He Said, She Said: The Much Greater Desirability of Democratic Fairness Over Dictator-like Despotism.*

I urge readers to be real patriots, and stand up for more responsible, honest and honorable leaders, and more democratic goals!

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

Appendix: The Titanic Tax Cut Swindle

Inequalities in income and wealth are extreme in the USA today due to tax policies enacted to primarily benefit the well-to-do. And tax policy is one of the most politically determined and highly corrupt aspects of our political system, due to the ways in which it can be influenced by special interests, exploited for loopholes, and structured to benefit the wealthy and powerful to the detriment of broader public interests.

The biggest factor in this: During the administration of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, the top marginal tax rate was slashed from 70% to 28%, so rich people reaped enormous gains, and federal tax revenues were significantly reduced, irresponsibly driving up the national debt.

Another big factor in causing inequality to increase is the corporate tax cuts enacted in 2017. Taxes on corporate entities ranged from 40% to 52% from World War II until 1986, and were then reduced to 34% to 35% from 1988 through 2017. Then Trump Republicans slashed them in their partisan 2017 tax law from 35% to 21%, again giving enormous benefits to the top 1%, due to the fact that the persons in this small group receive about 70% of all dividends and capital gains on equities.

Corporations once paid about one third of the total tax revenues that finance the federal government, but due to abuses of influence by corporations and rich people, this total has been reduced to less than 10%.

Other important considerations are that taxes on long-term capital gains have been kept low, at a maximum of 20%, and estate tax provisions allow the cost basis of appreciated equities to be reassessed when anyone dies, "stepping it up" to the fair market value at the time of the owner's death, thereby allowing huge amounts of money to be inherited without paying any tax on them.

These tax cut policies have foolishly contributed to gigantic increases in the national debt and the annual interest expense cost on these obligations. In fact, the federal government spent $658 billion on net interest costs on the national debt in fiscal 2023, a shocking 38% increase from fiscal 2022. This is the largest amount ever spent on interest expenses, and the Congressional Budget Office projects they will spike to over $950 billion in 2025.

Consider this: In 1980, when Ronald Reagan was elected, the national debt stood below $1 trillion, and the top 1% of Americans had an estimated $3 trillion in net worth. Today, the national debt has surged to more than $35 trillion, while the total net worth of the top 1% has increased to something like $45 trillion. This means that, in a sense, we have borrowed over $34 trillion and given it to rich people by allowing them to get away with not paying their fair share in taxes.

All of these factors together constitute unaffordable and unacceptably generous benefits to the wealthy at the expense of everyone else.

Influence peddling is a form of legalized institutional bribery that involves billions of dollars spent on elections and lobbying to influence laws, and especially tax laws. This absurdly includes like creating rules that allow the rich to shelter profits offshore to minimize their tax liabilities.

Also, tax codes are notoriously complicated and filled with intricate rules and exceptions. This complexity benefits those with access to legal and financial expertise, and allows them to take advantage of loopholes. One of the most outrageous of these loopholes is the "carried interest" provision that allows hedge fund managers and private equity investors to pay low tax rates on huge profits.

In addition, there is inadequate transparency and accountability for forms of public corruption like this. Making matters worse, Republicans always push to cut funding for the IRS to reduce its audit and enforcement capacities, helping big tax evaders and tax cheaters get away with their shenanigans. Studies indicate that the public treasury is deprived of over $500 billion in revenues every year by failing to close the "tax gap" -- the difference between what is legally owed and the taxes paid. This foolishly helps drive up the dangerously large national debt.

Accurate understandings of issues point the way toward sensible reforms. Vote for Kamala Harris, and strongly encourage her as president to focus on reducing inequality and unfairness by fixing these problems and enacting common good reforms.

He Said, She Said: The Much Greater Desirability of Democratic Fairness Over Dictatorial Despotism

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
October 27, 2024

Donald Trump has accused Kamala Harris of being a "fascist" on many occasions. But that is an absurd instance of devious psychological projection of his own scheming propensities. In truth, Trump "a fascist to the core", as Gen. Mark Milley once stated. Milley was Trump's own chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 2019 thru 2023.

Knowledgeable historians and scholars tell us what the main facets of fascism have been throughout recorded history, and they here are their 14 main characteristics. Think about these main common traits of fascist authoritarian regimes like Joseph Stalin's, Benito Mussolini's and Adolph Hitler's, and consider whether or not they accurately describe Trump or Harris.

Fascism, and a Vividly Illuminating Assessment of its 14 Main Characteristics

1) Obsession with Crime and Punishment. Fascist regimes put strict law-and-order policies in place, and police powers are expanded, often leading to abuses by police forces. Secret police organizations or ruthless paramilitary groups are often formed to enforce rigid control and help the oppressive government intimidate citizens. Severe punishments are used to maintain order and control, and coercive and punitive interrogations and torture of prisoners is allowed, and there are long incarcerations of prisoners, and harsh capital punishment is embraced.

2) Identification of Enemies and Scapegoating. Minorities or other groups are blamed for societal problems to rally followers around fear. The people are rallied into a patriotic frenzy over the need to overcome a perceived common threat or foe. Racial, ethnic or religious minorities and liberals, communists, socialists, progressives, terrorists or other groups are blamed. Trump has vowed to deport millions of hard-working immigrants, and to bring back internment camps using the Alien Enemies Act -- the law that was used to lock up more than 120,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans during World War II. This agenda particularly targets Blacks, Muslims and other people in racial or ethnic minorities.

3) Dissent is Not Tolerated. Protesters, dissenters and people in the political opposition are marginalized, treated as criminals, or accused of being threats to social stability and national security -- or of being traitors. Intimidation, retribution and violence are used to silence opposition and stifle efforts to hold abusers of power accountable. Fascist leaders pathologically foster a climate of fear, repression and manipulation, and exert authoritarian control while rejecting democratic fairness and honorable values.

4) The Judiciary is Undermined. Fascist governments typically politicize courts to consolidate power and eliminate checks on executive authority, rather than serving as a guardian of justice or civil liberties. They stack courts with politically partisan judges who will serve the interests of the ruling regime. And they reject judicial independence. They tend to subordinate the courts to the regime's political will, using them to legitimize authoritarian actions and support the state's ideology in order to maintain rigid control. Political opponents, activists and people in minority groups are often prosecuted under fabricated charges or unjust laws. Fascist regimes introduce laws and legal frameworks that restrict freedoms such as speech, assembly and association, all under the guise of maintaining public order or national security.

5) Mass Media is Repressively Controlled. The media is either directly controlled by the government or is indirectly controlled by government regulation or conservative ownership by right-wing media executives and spokespeople. Honest journalists are denounced, with a goal of making the press serve those in power rather than the public. Media outlets are censored or manipulated to align with the ruling regime's propaganda, especially in wartime, and relentless political spin, misinformation and disinformation are used, as well as deceptive attack ads and smear campaign tactics and excessive secrecy. The regime leaders tend to use *Divide-to-Conquer Roguery* to capitalize on stoked fears, alienation, anger and hate.

6) Extreme Nationalism is Promoted. Fascist regimes tend to cultivate a sense of extreme national pride, often glorifying the nation as superior to others. They demand loyalty, patriotism and conformity. They make constant use of patriotic mottos, slogans, symbols, songs, and other propaganda and paraphernalia. Flags and flag symbols are seen everywhere on clothing and in public displays. As Sinclair Lewis warned in his 1835 novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, "When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag, carrying the cross."

Autocratic governments have one "final, most essential command" — to "reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. This directive by the controlling and dictating authoritarian Party in George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984* encapsulates the totalitarian nature of the ruling regime, where truth is not based on objective reality but is dictated by Big Brother authorities and state media.

7) Corporate Power is Protected. Business interests are intertwined with political leadership, and the industrial and business elites of a fascist nation are often the ones who put the government leaders into power. This creates a mutually beneficial relationship between business and government, and a power elite that consequentially ignores the common good. Glaringly, billionaires like Elon Musk are allowed excessive influence in order to gain power and promote an extreme anti-democratic agenda. (And maximize and monopolize corporate profits!)

8) Rampant Cronyism and Corruption Proliferates. Leadership surrounds itself with loyal supporters, who often engage in cronyism and public corruption, and disfavored businesses or individuals are discriminated against. Fascist regimes are almost always governed by groups of associates and cronies who appoint each other to government positions and use governmental power and authority to protect their friends from accountability. It is common in fascist regimes for fraud to occur, and even for national resources to be appropriated or outright stolen by government leaders. Environmental sanity consequentially takes a big hit.

9) Labor Power is Suppressed. Labor unions and collective bargaining are weakened or abolished in order to neutralize worker opposition, because the organizing power of unions and workers is seen as a significant threat to authoritarian governments.

10) Rampant Sexism. The governments of fascist nations are almost exclusively male-dominated, and under fascist regimes, traditional gender roles are made more rigid. Discriminatory gender roles are enforced, with a focus on patriarchal control. Disdain is shown for women's rights and human rights for LGBTQ individuals, and civil rights are dismissed or restricted when they conflict with regime goals. Opposition to abortion is high, as is homophobia and anti-gay legislation in national and state policies.

11) Religion and Government are Intertwined. Governments in fascist nations tend to use the most common religion in the country as a tool to manipulate public opinion. Religion is used to justify the regime's actions by claiming moral authority. Religious rhetoric and terminology is commonly spouted by government leaders, even when their policies or actions are diametrically opposed to the actual major moral tenets of their favored religion. In 2024, the terrifying Project 2025 has been created and promoted by Trump allies and plotting Christian Nationalists.

12) Fraudulent Elections. Sometimes elections are held in fascist nations, but they are generally just a sham. Such elections are often manipulated by emotional appeals and smear campaigns against opposition candidates. Legislation or fraudulent schemes may be used to control voting numbers or political district boundaries, and to manipulate the media. Opposition candidates are sometimes outlawed or jailed in authority-abusing countries. Basic methods of election cheating are indulged to facilitate power grabs, and to ensure the regime remains in power. This is real election fraud. Trump has actually said that he's going to "fix" the government to the point where we won't have another election.

13) Supremacy of the Military and Obsession with National Security. Fears of real, exaggerated and imaginary threats are stoked to maintain control over the people. And the military forces are given an absurdly large fraction of total discretionary government spending. Military brass, soldiers and military service hold powerful roles, and warfare is often glorified. Military interventions distract the public from widespread domestic problems, and vital domestic agenda items are neglected and underfunded.

14) Disdain for Intellectuals and the Arts. Fascist nations tend to promote and tolerate open hostility toward higher education and academia, and liberals, intellectuals, scientific understandings and artists are disdained and repressed. Independent thought is discouraged, and intellectuals and artists are viewed with suspicion in addition to outright hostility. Professors and other academics are censored or even arrested. Free expression in the arts is openly attacked, and ruthless governments generally want to slash funding to the arts.

Seeing how fascist regimes abuse power, I urge all voters to vote for Kamala Harris, and Democrats in Congress, and to choose leaders who credibly promise to protect the people from abuses of power. Women in particular need to be protected from having their rights stripped and being deprived of their agency, liberty and dignity by a cabal of religious fanatics, hypocrites and abusive men led by an adjudicated rapist who is bizarrely worshipped as an instrument of God by his fooled followers.

In conclusion, it is a shared moral duty to uphold liberty and true justice for all, and cultivate democratic fairness, and defend civil rights and personal freedoms, while supporting leaders who promote the general welfare, foster social cohesion and domestic tranquility, and honestly try to ensure unity around these values.

Illuminated Aside

See Clearly that mothers are crucially important to the well-being of children and families, and they should not be forced to have unwanted children and bear the heavy economic burdens associated with parenthood against their will. They should also not be disadvantaged, discriminated against, undervalued, underpaid, disrespected, trivialized, sexualized, symbolically annihilated", or otherwise disdained.

Authoritarian male-dominated governance often claims to be "pro-life". But no one is genuinely and honestly "pro-life" if they oppose the Equal Rights Amendment, which is designed to guarantee gender equality and greater fairness under the law across the United States. The ERA simply states, "*Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.*"

The societal costs of having anti-choice reactionaries abuse power are colossal, and make harmful extreme inequality much worse. By significantly increasing the costs of social safety net programs that must help wronged women and poor women, the national debt is undesirably driven up.

To understand even more clearly, and find some good proposals for sensible solutions, see my essay *Vastly Positive Common Sense 2025 Proposals vs. Authoritarian Project 2025 Plans,* which can be read from my Home Page at EarthManifesto.com. Its previous title is explanatory: *Project 2025 and the Most Egregious Wrongs that Right-Wing Extremists Are Planning, Together with Contrasting More Propitious Common Sense 2025 Proposals.*

Women of the World, Unite! And American women, VOTE for honorable politicians who care about YOU more than themselves and their power, control and political donations. We voters have the opportunity to choose revolutionarily vast positive change, guided by these Common Sense 2025 Proposals.

Fascism and Its Discontents

The American Heritage Dictionary defines "fascism" as "A philosophy or system of government that that advocates or exercises a dictatorship of the extreme right, typically through the merging of state and business leadership, together with an ideology of belligerent nationalism." Another dictionary definition is "A populist political philosophy, movement … that exalts nation and often race above the individual, that is associated with a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, and that is characterized by severe economic and social regimentation and by forcible suppression of opposition."

It is clearly Trump, not Harris, who acts in fascist ways. He is a rabble-rousing demagogue and false populist who pretends to care about the "forgotten man" while pushing an agenda dramatically favorable to rich people and giant

corporations.

He panders to white male supremacists and Christian nationalists and right-wing extremists. He vows to weaponize the federal government against political opponents and those who have tried to hold him accountable for violating the rule of law and the Constitution, even declaring that he would use military force against them. Calling them "enemies from within", he threatens retribution against Constitution-respecting representatives, critics, protesters, social justice advocates and dissenters. While in office, he made sustained and blatantly illegal attempts to interfere in investigations and obstruct justice.

He calls for internment camps and mass deportations of millions of undocumented immigrants. He has leveraged a cult of personality and refused to distance himself from paramilitary groups like the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and Three Percenters, and he publicly promises to pardon people convicted of crimes related to the government overthrow attempt on January 6, 2021. He persistently evokes and even glorifies violence, and curries favor with dictators like Vladimir Putin, while showing disrespect to our allies.

He pushes the Big Lie that the 2020 election was marred by widespread voter fraud and that he did not lose the election. He outrageously incited his followers to attack the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in a desperate attempt to prevent the peaceful transfer of power. This injured more than 140 law enforcement officers, and caused mayhem -- and millions of dollars of property damage.

He lies like a sociopath, and has a long and objectionable history of sexual conquest, adultery, sexual harassment, sexual assault and clumsy grabbing of attractive women. He has engaged in financial fraud and tax evasion, and used the office of the presidency to enrich himself, his family and his cronies.

He promotes chaos in governance and poses an existential threat to our democracy and norms of democratic fairness. Trump and his Republican sycophantish political allies want to topple our democracy and impose a draconian right-wing agenda on the people, onerously diminishing the rights and freedoms of women and people in racial and ethnic minority groups.

Trump is a fighter … Yes, he fights to avoid things like debates, interviews, facts, accountability and being sent to prison for felonies he has committed. He has fought concertedly to avoid paying for services rendered throughout his career, and he fought being drafted during the Vietnam War.

Trump/Vance are strongly affiliated with Project 2025 and authoritarian ideologies it promotes. This master plan would drastically expand executive power and concentrate authority in the president's hands, undermining democratic checks and balances and providing unlimited opportunities for harmful abuses of power. The "Mandate" not only calls for mass deportations, but also severe restrictions on women's reproductive rights, privacy rights and healthcare, and rollbacks of protections for LGBTQ+ individuals. The plan also advocates for suppressing classroom discussions on systemic racism and gender issues, and banning books, and defunding schools that do not align with conservative agendas. This understandably raises concerns about censorship and attacks on free speech.

The *Mandate* resembles aspects of fascist governance by facilitating the misuse of executive power to promote one political agenda at the expense of minority rights and democratic freedoms. It recommends increased government involvement to enforce conservative social policies, such as banning pornography and punishing educators deemed to promote it. This shift toward using state power to enforce specific ideological values departs from earlier conservative ideals of limiting government intervention. Authoritarian state power has an overriding goal of reshaping society along white male religious nationalist lines. NOT GOOD.

<u>Authoritarianism 101</u>

According to historian Heather Cox Richardson, "Trump's behavior is Authoritarianism 101. In a 1951 book called *The True Believer*, political philosopher Eric Hoffer noted that demagogues appeal to a disaffected population whose members feel they have lost the power they previously held, that they have been displaced either religiously, economically, culturally or politically. Such people are willing to follow a leader who promises to return them to their former positions of prominence and thus to make the nation great again."

"But to cement their loyalty, the leader has to give them someone to hate. Who that is doesn't really matter: the

group simply has to be blamed for all the troubles the leader's supporters are suffering. Trump has kept his base firmly behind him by demonizing immigrants, the media, and, increasingly, Democrats, deflecting his own shortcomings by blaming these groups for undermining him. "

"According to Hoffer, there's a psychological trick to the way this rhetoric works that makes loyalty to such a leader get stronger as that leader's behavior deteriorates. People who sign on to the idea that they are standing with their leader against an enemy begin to attack their opponents, and in order to justify their attacks, they have to convince themselves that that enemy is not good-intentioned -- as they are -- but evil. And the worse they behave, the more they have to believe their enemies deserve to be treated badly."

"According to Hoffer, so long as they are unified against an enemy, true believers will support their leader no matter how outrageous his behavior gets. Indeed, their loyalty will only grow stronger as his behavior becomes more and more extreme. Turning against him would force them to own their own part in his attacks on those former enemies they would now have to recognize as ordinary human beings like themselves."

A Conspiratorial Offensive

MAGA politicians are making a brazen power grab. In his new biography of Mitch McConnell, AP's Michael Tackett reports that McConnell privately described Trump as "stupid as well as being ill-tempered," a "despicable human being" and a "narcissist." McConnell's public response to this revelation was to confess against himself and other prominent Republicans: "Whatever I may have said about President Trump pales in comparison to what JD Vance, Lindsey Graham, and others have said about him," McConnell said in a statement last week, "but we are all on the same team now." To be specific, Vance said Trump might be "America's Hitler," and Graham called him a "race-baiting, xenophobic, religious bigot." That's the team they chose to join.

What a grotesque lack of principles! And all because they are intent on grabbing power and control no matter what, even if it means wantonly betraying the common good and imposing onerous chaotic instability and repression on the populace.

In reality, this extremist Republican team is a conspiratorial cabal of politicians intent on getting power by whatever means is required, with the obvious plan of extensively abusing it.

Trump's recent appearances "seem to confirm that the 2024 October surprise is the increasingly obvious mental incapacity of the Republican candidate for president", wrote historian Heather Cox Richardson on October 19th.

"It seems clear that a vote for Trump is really a vote for his running mate, Ohio senator J.D. Vance, who if he becomes president will be the youngest American president in our history. At 40 years old, he is two years younger than Theodore Roosevelt was when he took office in 1901 at 42. Vance would also be one of the least experienced presidents ever."

And J.D. Vance poses an existential threat to American democracy with his strong ties to Project 2025. He has shown himself to be an extraordinarily naked opportunist, for he has allied himself with a deranged old man who he once accurately saw as "America's Hitler".

A Nightmare to Prevent

Former Republican strategist Steve Schmidt wrote in an episode of his *Warning* that there will be "No reprieve if the American people choose a nightmare for their future."

"The United States faces a national emergency because a presidential candidate and former president has attacked the cornerstones of the American way of life, and is trying to topple them for the purposes of taking political power. He is a world-class liar and manipulator who sought to destroy the American government, which he betrayed by rejecting the results of the election he lost and the oath of office he took. He is surrounded by a rogues' gallery of weirdos, criminals, cranks, conspiracy theorists, sexual predators, and moral deviants of all persuasions. MAGA is a safe haven for militia members, neo-Nazis and their propagandists, who are lawless, violent, corrupt and dangerous. The threat to our way of life is immense. There is catastrophe ahead if Trump wins. He is unstable, incoherent and very angry. Trump will be manipulated by our enemies, and will give his allies free rein to abuse the American people for their gain, so long as they stay politically loyal."

I urge all voters to choose Country over Party by voting for Kamala Harris so that she will be able to set our nation on a more same, safe, sustainable, reasonable and future protecting course.

Why These Things Matter So Much to All Americans

Here is a valuable perspective that reveals the disturbing reasons that Trump Republicans have such a good chance at gaining imperious control over the USA in the imminent elections.

In a bizarre and tragic turn of affairs, studies reveal that Republicans express more fear of the consequences of Trump losing the 2024 presidential election than Democrats feel at the really dire prospects of Harris losing.

This is shocking because Democrats have very valid reasons for being afraid that power-abusing Republicans will win, because Trump has gone "full fascist" with rhetoric about immigrants "poisoning the blood" of the country, and his opponents being like "vermin", and he has angrily accused Democrats of being an "enemy within". Anyone who dares oppose Trump's demoniacal bid for power is especially vulnerable, like courageously outspoken critics of public corruption and malfeasance, and any person who honorably tries to hold the scheming demagogue and grifter accountable for serious abuses of power and violations of the rule of law, the Constitution and the presidential oath of office -- which pledges to "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Yet, exceedingly oddly, Republicans are the ones who feel most fearful of Democrats winning, despite the fact that Democrats face the most grave threats from an unhinged Trumpster who seeks unchecked power, and who vows to act vindictively to wreak vengeance upon his "enemies."

Media outlets, particularly those aligned with conservative plans, frequently amplify people's fears by exaggerating the dangers of crime, immigrants, and losing on cultural war issues. When people are primed to fear, they are more likely to accept authoritarian solutions -- such as expanded executive powers or restrictions on civil liberties -- because they prioritize safety and control over freedom.

The reasons for Trump supporters to feel so much fear is because they have been conditioned to fear by Trump and influencers in the right-wing media echo chambers. To fear immigrants. To fear losing cultural dominance, as taught by the conspiratorial "great replacement theory", and the understanding that white males will not be able to indefinitely exert domineering power. To fear demographic changes, for the proportion of whites in the population will become less than 50% in the U.S. within 20 years or so, down from nearly 90% in 1960. To fear and loathe gay people, and women being able to exert their free choices in their lives and family planning. To fear that the government will take their guns away. To fear government regulation, even that which is in the best interests of the vast majority of the people. To fear that action to save the planet from destructive climate change would disadvantage them. To fear that expanded healthcare options would benefit others and not themselves. To distrust institutions because Republicans have convinced them that they are corrupt, even when they act in the public interest and are eminently democratically fair. To fear reforms that would diminish conservative influence and power, such as changes to the Electoral College system or voting laws or discriminatory gerrymandering that favors conservatives and Republicans. These fears align with broader frustrations that arise due to the current state of U.S. politics, marked by intense polarization and anger and mistrust.

There IS actually "an enemy within", and it is NOT Adam Schiff or Nancy Pelosi, as Trump claims, or the Special Counsel Jack Smith. It is authoritarian politicians like Trump and his far right Christian nationalist allies and "conservative" billionaire corporatocratic supporters who are trying to actualize a totalitarian takeover of the federal government. These schemers are deceive people into supporting their scurrilous crusade to elect Trump and support his every whim, and to suppress opposition with maliciously unjustified prosecutions of critics and political opponents, and to mercilessly impose repressive rule on the populace.

The "fourth estate" of press and news media has failed us, instead of acting as a strong independent force that helps hold power accountable, especially due to echo chambers of the conservative media complex that promotes conservative political ideas and shapes narratives favoring right-wing ideologies. These factions of mass media have joined forces with "the enemy within" to normalize and rationalize Trump and his extremist supporters, in order to ease their way into taking over federal and state governments and being able to rule imperiously.

One glaring instance of this, as observers note, is that Trump has tended to get far more favorable coverage than he deserves due to his mental slips, open embrace of Nazi racism, fantastical lies, criminal indictments, and violations of norms, laws, the Constitution and his Oath of Office.

Another major instance of failings of the press, as historian Heather Cox Richardson wrote in a piece on October 10, is that five major newspapers -- the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post* -- produced nearly four times as many articles about Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton's email server in 2016, in the week after then-FBI director James Comey announced new developments in the story, than they did about the recent unsealing of a serious new filing in Trump's federal criminal indictment for alleged crimes related to the January 6 insurrection.

"None of the papers ran even half as many Trump indictment stories as they did on Clinton's server," observed Matt Gertz of the media watchdog *Media Matters*. "Indeed, every paper ran more front-page stories that mentioned Clinton's server than they did total stories that referenced Trump's indictment. The former president continues to benefit from news outlets grading him on a massive curve, resulting in relatively muted coverage for his nakedly authoritarian, unfathomably racist, and allegedly criminal behavior."

Another surprising factor in Trump supporters being overly fearful is found in revelations about "the Startle Reflex". Researchers have found that there is an apparently genetic component to the way we see and feel the world. In a study done in Nebraska, a surprisingly strong correlation was found between the degrees that a person is susceptible to fear upon hearing sudden noises, and how strongly they hold political opinions. It turns out that conservatives tend to be much more easily frightened than liberals. This means there may actually be a basic *biological component* of political beliefs. This is one reason that actuating people's fears is such an effective way to manipulate them and gain support for policies, even when they are very contrary to the common good. This is one reason that micro-targeted advertising on social media outlets like Facebook was so effective in allowing Republicans to win election contests in 2016 by employing fake news and pushing bizarre conspiracy theories and using character assassination tactics. And this is why Trump and his loyalist allies are still polling well just before the 2024 elections despite posing unprecedented threats to our democracy and democratic fairness and women's reproductive rights and voting rights and accurate understanding and fiscal responsibility and environmental sanity.

Studies show that conservatives tend to display greater sensitivity to threats, both biological and psychological. This sensitivity helps explain their propensity to prefer policies that emphasize law and order, national security, and rigid hierarchies, and are susceptible to authoritarianism. Fear triggers a desire for order, predictability, and structure. As a result, individuals who are more prone to fear are often drawn to conservative ideologies that promise stability through strict rules, strong leaders, and clear hierarchies. This helps explain why conservatism often aligns with policies supporting tough policing, immigration restrictions, and traditional social norms.

It is becoming increasingly important for us to honestly examine our beliefs and the things we are told by the media and our leaders, and to make better public policy decisions in light of these better understandings. We should base our decisions on the broadest range of relevant facts and information, and on fairer and more clearly established priorities. Unfortunately, our public decision-making is profoundly affected by culture war conflicts, fomented antagonisms, racial biases, selfish ideologies and undue influence of narrowly focused vested interests.

Research on the "Startle Reflex" was reported in the September 2008 issue of the prestigious journal *Science,* in an article titled *Political Attitudes Vary with Physiological Traits*. The researchers found a strong correlation between political views and unconscious reactions to immediate threats. Subjects had been tested for strongly-felt attitudes related to issues like foreign aid, military spending, gun control, the death penalty, the Iraq war, warrantless searches, the Patriot Act, torture of political prisoners, women's rights, premarital sex, school prayer, gay marriage and immigration policies.

The researchers explored this so-called 'Startle Reflex" and found that people tend to react either strongly or more calmly to a sudden threat. Watch out! Those who had the most significant physical reaction to stimuli tended to have conservative attitudes on political issues, and those who had calmer responses tended to have liberal attitudes toward these issues.

So people not only have rational reasons for philosophical differences on issues and deeply ingrained socially-conditioned biases, but even biological predispositions that affect what they believe. When we recognize this, we can see that it's important for us to communicate better and debate more honestly, and be more willing to compromise on finding the best plans for public policies. While it would be advantageous for us to reduce the institutionalized bribery in our dysfunctional political system so that rich people and lobbyists do not dominate it so excessively, we also need to find ways to facilitate constructive public debate so that we can find the fairest compromises between all competing interests. To do so, we need to keep in mind the greater good, as it is most reasonably assessed in light of the long-term best interests of society as a whole. A focus on long-term goals is sometimes even a good way to make better things happen in the short run.

While fear is a natural response, when it has excessive influence, it may foster subservience to authoritarian leaders, reducing openness to alternative ideas, common sense proposals and democratic principles.

Let's embrace hope and positivity, and choose to elect honest and honorable Democrats who will work together with moderate Republicans to solve problems and address the biggest challenges facing us, and strengthen democracy, and improve the prospects for the future.

A Warning

Journalist Greg Sargent did an interview recently with veteran analyst Michael Podhorzer and writes in *Obama's Brutal New Trump Takedown Reveals an Awful Truth* that the analyst argues we are "sleepwalking our way to fascism", and that a small subset of voters who don't believe Trump's threats could be decisive. It would be a colossal mistake for voters to so choose; we must not sleepwalk to fascism.

The Sunday Opinion section of *The New York Times* on October 27 has a full page cover in large print that says: DONALD TRUMP SAYS HE WILL PROSECUTE HIS ENEMIES, ORDER MASS DEPORTATIONS, USE SOLDIERS AGAINST CITIZENS, ABANDON ALLIES, PLAY POLITICS WITH DISASTERS. BELIEVE HIM.

In an inside Editorial, *The New York Times* warns titled TAKE TRUMP AT HIS WORD. And columnist Jamelle Bouie warns that the threats Trump is making must be taken seriously, cautioning us in his article viscerally titled *The Guardrails Failed. Now It's Down to Us.* He points out that the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley, and Trump's chief of staff John Kelly, and his secretary of defense Mark Esper are three high-ranking officials during the Trump administration who all have intimate knowledge of Trump's impulses and private behavior, and they all warn "that their former boss is a would-be autocrat who will, if given the chance, plunge this country into the darkness of authoritarianism."

The British economist John Kenneth Galbraith once made the incisive observation, "The modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness."

Now, in 2024, the modern conservative has been emotionally hijacked by extremists who threaten to end our great 248-year-long American experiment in democratic government "of the people, by the people and for the people", and replace it with a repressive regime that would have catastrophic impacts on Americans and people around the world, and everyone for many generations to come. Fascism, the War Department explained during World War II in an *Army Talks* pamphlet for U.S. Army personnel, "is government by the few and for the few. The objective is seizure and control of the economic, political, social, and cultural life of the state." That is NOT GOOD! "Fascism thrives on indifference and ignorance," *Army Talks* warned. Freedom requires "being alert and on guard against the infringement not only of our own freedom but the freedom of every American. If we permit discrimination, prejudice or hate to rob *anyone* of his democratic rights, our own freedom and all democracy is threatened."

We must choose instead to elect Kamala Harris and Democrats in the Senate and House, and safeguard democracy instead of destroying it.

The Overarching Importance of Democratic Institutions

Checks and balances in government are critically important for the well-being of citizens because they prevent any one branch of government, or faction or individual from gaining unchecked power, which could lead to harsh abuses

of power, oppressive policies, repressive authoritarianism and the erosion of citizens' rights and freedoms.

Here are good reasons why checks and balances are essential, and why unchecked power is dangerous.

Foremost, a robust system of checks and balances ensures that leaders and officials must follow the same laws as ordinary citizens, preventing crony favoritism and the potentials for tyrannical rule. Checks and balances encourage accountability by sensibly distributing power, forcing leaders to responsibly obey laws. They also foster transparency and help prevent public corruption.

Dividing government power between different branches (executive, legislative, and judicial) ensures that no single entity has complete control. Each branch has the authority to limit or "check" the others, reducing the likelihood of authority-abusing rule, so checks and balances help prevent the concentration of power that often in history has infringed on people's rights such as free speech, due process, and equal protection under the law.

Without constraints, leaders or governments can enact policies that erode civil liberties, suppress opposition, put down civil protests, eliminate free press, and reduce the ability of citizens to challenge government decisions. So check and balances serve to prevent further centralization of power that has taken place in historical examples like Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy.

With unchecked power, democratic institutions such as courts, legislatures, or the media may be co-opted, leaving no mechanism for preventing those in power from harmfully abusing it. Without adequate oversight, political corruption can spread and officials may exploit power for personal or political gain, creating environments where fraud, embezzlement, and favoritism thrive.

Maintaining checks and balances is vital for democratic resilience and the long-term well-being of society. The U.S. Constitution exemplifies checks and balances by assigning specific roles to each branch -- Congress makes laws, the president enforces them, and the courts interpret them. This separation is designed to prevent despotic rule by ensuring power is not centralized in one person or institution.

However, history shows that when checks and balances are decimated, freedoms can quickly be curtailed, especially by means of undermining judicial independence, significantly expanding executive powers, co-opting legislators through bribery or coercion, politicizing the police and military, manipulating laws, crushing opposition parties, encouraging loyalty over merit, cheating in elections, dismissing political norms, censoring criticism and free speech, suppressing free media, spreading disinformation, and expanding surveillance to monitor citizens and stifle dissent.

Two Revealing Experiments

Two extraordinary educational experiments were done in Palo Alto, California over 50 years ago that are viscerally revealing about the disturbing potential for abuses of power by ordinary individuals when they are placed in positions of authority. Both of these experiments mirror the dynamics of authoritarian regimes and the potentials for unchecked power to cause people to engage in harsh activities. Compelling films have been made about both of these studies to communicate what happened in these landmark experiments.

The first experiment was called *The Third Wave*. It was a social experiment conducted in 1967 by Ron Jones, a history teacher at Cubberley High School in Palo Alto, in an attempt to demonstrate how easily people could be drawn into authoritarian movements, giving rise to fascist governance, even in democratic societies.

Jones created a simulated authoritarian environment, teaching students strict discipline and unity. Soon, however, the experiment spiraled out of control as students embraced the movement, becoming aggressive toward dissenters and developing a cult-like loyalty.

The experiment was intended to help students understand how ordinary citizens in Nazi Germany became complicit in the atrocities of fascism. It became disturbingly real when students zealously embraced authoritarian dynamics within a very short period of time. It showed how quickly people could surrender individual freedoms in favor of a collective identity, rigid rules, hierarchical ranks, strict control, harsh discipline, and loyalty to authority.

The experiment had to be stopped after five days because it began to dangerously mirror real-world fascist movements, and raised serious concerns about the emotional well-being of the students.

Ron Jones ended the experiment abruptly when he realized the students were fully buying into authoritarian power, and feared that the situation was becoming too intense and could have serious psychological consequences. The growing hostility and submission within the classroom echoed the oppressive behavior seen in real-world fascist regimes, which was the very lesson he sought to convey -- but the impact proved more profound and dangerous than intended. Ron Jones later reflected on the experiment as an unsettling example of how susceptible individuals are to authoritarianism, even in environments where democracy and freedom are valued.

The experiment was later adapted into a 1981 television movie titled *The Wave*, which dramatized the events and highlighted the dangers of authoritarianism. A German film, *Die Welle* (2008), also explored similar themes, shifting the setting to modern-day Germany to show the universal relevance of such social dynamics.

The second experiment is known as the Stanford Prison Experiment. It was conducted by the psychology professor Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University in 1971 to explore the potential for overarching abuses of power associated with people being given authority and misusing it by exerting severe rule.

The Stanford Prison Experiment revealed the disturbing potential for abuses of power when individuals are placed in positions of authority, as happens in authoritarian regimes. This experiment demonstrated how ordinary people, when given unchecked power and minimal accountability, can quickly engage in oppressive behavior, even to the point of inflicting psychological harm and the potential for real widespread physical harm and violent repression.

The experiment randomly divided volunteer paid participants into two groups -- guards and prisoners -- and simulated a prison environment. Within days, the guards began to exhibit authoritarian and sadistic behavior, abusing their power over the prisoners. The prisoners, in turn, became submissive, experiencing emotional breakdowns and adopting the identity of helpless victims. This experiment showed how systems of power can encourage both dominant behavior from those in control and also helplessness and obedience from those being intimidated and controlled -- similar to what happens under dictatorial regimes.

The rapid breakdown of empathy between the guards and prisoners highlights how systems of power may dehumanize both the oppressors and the oppressed, a pattern seen in totalitarian states. The swift escalation of mistreatment forced Zimbardo to end the study early after only six days, despite it being planned to be two weeks.

After the study ended, participants who acted as guards distanced themselves from personal responsibility, justifying their abusive actions as part of their role. This echoes historical abuses under regimes with authoritarian leader, where dutiful obedience to heinous policies and state-sanctioned violence is normalized.

This experiment suggests that authoritarian environments, even when artificial, can foster brutal behavior. It offers a stark warning about the dangers of concentrated power and the ease with which individuals, if given unchecked control, can drift into tyranny and cruelty. These findings parallel the ways that demagogues in dictatorships take advantage of people's fears, submission, and institutions to maintain domination over citizens.

The implications of these two experiments remain relevant today, providing insights into the psychology of power, systemic oppression, and the dynamics of authoritarian rule. Critics of dictatorial regimes often point to similar dynamics of coercion, dehumanization, and erosion of personal responsibility in states that perpetuate control.

These two experiments both demonstrated the risks posed by authoritarian rule and unchecked power, and they have ominous implications if a phalanx of highly partisan loyalists manage to seize power through demagogic fear-mongering blame-shifting and repetitive deceitful attack ads, propaganda and misinformation in the November 5 elections. And that is exactly what could happen due to the recruitment of thousands of loyalists by Project 2025 schemers. That insidious master plan has been created by control-prepossessed reactionary Republican politicians and wealthy "conservatives" and Christian nationalist extremists, and it is focused on imposing authoritarian control over the American people. These loyalists would not be a random selection of people involved in authority and subordination, but people already predisposed to rationalize domineering rule over the populace.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain October 27, 2024

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Project 2025 and the Nefarious Ruses at the Root of the Rigged Status Quo

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
Sept. 27, 2024

Many Americans feel a sense of deep discontent due to extreme inequities in the economic status quo, as well as to societal and political factors. This sorry state of affairs features stagnant wages despite big increases in productivity, inflating costs, job insecurity, fewer unionized jobs providing stable positions with good pay and benefits, rising credit card debt and student debt for millions of families, unaffordable healthcare, very high costs of housing and childcare, and in general more difficulty in achieving social mobility. These challenges are made more difficult due to increasing political division and partisanship that create growing distrust in the ability of government to address the needs of the populace. It is certain that, for the common good, we need to reform the economic policies that have contributed to this unnecessarily dire situation.

All of these factors together have made the economic environment more challenging for modern families, and caused it to be hard for millions to achieve the same standard of living that was possible for previous generations.

Income inequality has become extreme in the past 50 years, leaving many feeling left behind, and the "wealth gap" between the rich and the poor has widened drastically. As a result, many Americans are feeling *The Grapes of Wrath,* similar to what poor people experienced who had to struggle mightily during the Great Depression, as depicted by John Steinbeck in his 1939 novel. It is important to understand the main causes of this.

Research published by the RAND Corporation in 2020 revealed that, since Ronald Reagan came to power in 1980, the top 1% of earners have accumulated more than a staggering $50 trillion in wealth at the expense of the bottom 90% of workers. "That is how much the upward redistribution of income has cost American workers over the past several decades," according to the respectable entrepreneur Nick Hanauer in his Sept. 2020 article *The Top 1% of Americans Have Taken $50 Trillion From the Bottom 90% — And That's Made the U.S. Less Secure.*

Many people see parallels between the economic hardships and social injustices of the Depression era and the situation today. The injustice of having a system so radically rigged against ordinary people understandably creates a similar sense of frustration, grievances and anger. And many people see that politicians have failed them by implementing policies that have favored the wealthy and corporations over the average worker, exacerbating feelings of being poorly represented, disenfranchised and disrespected.

The RAND Corporation findings attributed growing inequities to "neoliberal economic policies", including tax cuts for the wealthy, deregulation, reduced bargaining power for workers, and other factors that proportionately benefit the rich. An accompanying erosion of community and increased social isolation can lead to feelings of alienation and hopelessness, and both media and social media tend to amplify feelings of discontent and anger.

According to the RAND Corporation report, the current extremes of economic inequality are not an inevitable result of technological or global economic trends but are largely driven by policy choices. The report provides a stark illustration of growing income inequality and its long-term effects on workers' earnings, and calls for a reevaluation of economic policies to promote a fairer distribution of income. These findings underscore a need for significant policy changes to address wealth disparities and support economic equity.

Let's Fix This State of Affairs

The stakes in the 2024 elections are higher than ever before in American history. The future of our republic is at stake, along with democratic fairness, the general welfare of the people, good governance, sane leadership and the blessings of liberty. So are the stakes for social and environmental justice, and the health and sustainability of the environmental commons and biological diversity that helps support us. Also, it is becoming ever more important that we take positive steps to protect the stability of the global climate to ensure better hopes of saving ourselves and our descendants from the accelerating ravages of "climate hell". And yet one Party -- the Republican Party -- opposes making effective remedial efforts, in its zeal to pander to the fossil fuel industry, which buys its loyalty.

To voters, pocketbook issues are the most important economic matters. Unfortunately, there is much confusion, misunderstanding, deception and devious blame-shifting in our world today about pocketbook issues and the role politics plays in them. There are seriously unfair causes and consequences of how the economy is structured, and our national policies and priorities are dramatically askew in social issues, as well as economic ones.

Tens of millions of Americans are justifiably angry about the decline of their economic and security prospects over the last few decades -- and they have valid grievances due to the following seven compelling and woe-filled reasons:

Reason #1. Working people have been subjected to the colossal swindle mentioned above, in which working people have been deprived of over $50 trillion in what can be understood as a massive on-going heist. Most American families could afford a home, two cars, education and healthcare with one breadwinner in the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies -- with bigger families -- but due to this swindle, it is difficult to do so today with two parents working.

Reason #2. The federal tax system has been made too regressive, rationalized by the big lie that says low tax rates on the rich will trickle-down to everyone. This started with Ronald Reagan slashing the top marginal tax rate from 70% to 28% while in office, which had the sordid effect of shifting a heavy burden of taxes and interest expense obligations onto all taxpayers in future years who are part of the 99%, in favor of those in the top 1%. And the Republican Project 2025 revealingly vows to make a further huge shift in the burden of taxation from the top 1% to everyone else. This wrongly and egregiously would make income and wealth inequalities even more extreme than they already are.

Reason #3. Tax cutting policies are part of a public borrowing mega swindle. The colossal national debt has increased by over $34 trillion since 1980, at the same time that the net worth of people in the top 1% has gone up to almost $50 trillion. Regressive Republican tax cuts are a main culprit in this extremely inequitable increase in the concentration of wealth, which has made it easier for rich people to abuse power and wield malign influence.

Reason #4. Union representation has been greatly reduced in the USA, declining from a peak of 35% of the work force in 1955 to only 10% today. This deprives tens of millions of working people of bargaining power and better pay and benefits. The excess power and influence of giant corporations over our political representatives and policy-making is to blame. This is a reflection of deep-seated corruption in our business and politics.

Reason #6. Influence peddling and political misrepresentation allow abuses of power, poor governance and harmful schemes that allow many costs to be externalized onto individuals in society who suffer severe consequences.

Reason #6. Corporations have moved millions of jobs abroad. This "offshoring" has hollowed out many regions where manufacturing takes place, like in the Rust Belt of the Midwest, with drastically negative impacts on many people's lives. Offshoring persists in a larger context of globalization and automation, and these forces have led to job displacement and wage pressure in many industries, reducing job security and wage growth for many workers.

Reason #7. Devious propaganda and spin have been very successful in enabling corporate America and anti-empathetic political factions to blame liberals who want to fix these problems, and to divert attention from the real culprits in these scams, the richest 1% and their far-right apologists. Deceitful blame-shifting is a central aspect of MAGA-mania. Trump maniacally uses cunning demagoguery to blame liberals and "communists, Marxists, fascists, and the radical left thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country." The real fascists, of course, zealously support Trump and MAGA Republicans and Christian nationalists. And if they manage to grab power in the 2024 elections, they plan on imposing Project 2025 dictates that would be calamitously onerous.

True comprehensive big picture understandings are needed to improve the lot of the vast majority of people, and

thus to achieve our collective salvation. We can no longer afford to misunderstand all we see. So don't fall for devious rationalizations for selfishness and the blinding blizzard of misinformation, political propaganda, ideological spin, big lies, pernicious us-vs.-them polarization, manipulative emotion hijacking, fear mongering, the scapegoating of immigrants, and culture war offensives that prevent people from seeing clearly and understanding accurately.

The American people are victims of what can be accurately characterized as "mansplaining" by conservative billionaires, who push a self-serving and treacherously inequitable agenda. These wealthy individuals in our patriarchal American society use disingenuous arguments to explain complex issues in a way that benefits their own interests, often at the expense of broader societal equity. Their explanations downplay or ignore the negative impacts that their policies and actions have on people in less privileged groups, while promoting an agenda that primarily serves to maintain or enhance their own wealth and power.

This mansplaining isn't just a matter of providing disingenuous explanations. It involves deliberately deceitful justifications. Conniving factions conspire to torpedo reasoned deliberations, civic dialogue, collaborative solutions, and the common good. In doing this, they undercut those propitious endeavors using emotion-hijacking strategies and diabolical efforts to stoke culture war conflicts, gender inequities and class warfare.

These dynamics create a climate where divisiveness and conflict corrosively trump cooperation and mutual understanding. They discourage open-minded discussions and promote an environment where winning an argument or vilifying opposition forces takes precedence over finding solutions that benefit society as a whole. To counter these challenges, it is essential that we form a more perfect Union and promote desirable social cohesion by encouraging respectful dialogue and creating spaces where diverse voices can be heard and respected. Let's honestly seek win-win outcomes!

The best plan: vote for Kamala Harris and her middle class championing VP choice Tim Walz and their team!

Despotic Bid for One Party Rule

Republicans have already illicitly captured the Supreme Court with a politically partisan supermajority for the foreseeable future, and they have an extremely narrow majority in the House. They also have a fair chance of winning the presidency and control of the Senate in upcoming elections. That would be harmful to the majority of people, and damaging to Earth's ecosystems and biodiversity, and the safer relative stability of the global climate.

In these circumstances, the USA is teetering on the verge of despotic rule unlike any ever experienced since before the American colonists declared independence from the British monarchy in 1776. Enemies from within are in striking distance of succeeding where foreign enemies have never been able to in our nation's history.

The MAGA Republican Party threw down the gauntlet when it called for unity at its fervent Republic National Convention in Minneapolis. But the deeply perverse unity it demands is dark and dystopian, for it is unity behind One Party Rule by far-right extremists, as set forth in the chilling Project 2025 plans. And they cynically and ominously promise that this takeover "will remain bloodless if the left allows it to be."

See Clearly. The contours of this One Party Rule are contained in the Republican 920-page "Guide to Snuffing Out American Democracy", as the Sierra Club characterizes it. "Project 2025 is the far-right's playbook for an authoritarian administration the likes of which have never been seen in America before. It would open the door to corruption and make it even harder for the American people to have a say in our government and its policies. This dangerous plot would threaten our democratic institutions and freedoms, and give corporate polluters the keys to our government, allowing them to rewrite our laws, bypass Congress, and undermine the will of the people."

Project 2025 is the most brazen and baldly stated declaration of corrupt intent in American history. And many state legislatures in Republican-controlled red states are already implementing an odious variety of the wrong-headed provisions advocated in this dangerous document. Salient instances of this are in abortion bans in red states, and in plans to cut funding for public schools in favor of private school voucher programs and charter schools, which divert educational resources to benefit the haves to the detriment of the have-nots.

The unprincipled main persons and organizations pushing for this domineering One Party Rule are fundamentalist Christian nationalists, scheming influence-peddling politicians, giant corporate entities, wealthy "conservatives",

American oligarchs, anti-immigrant demagogues, right-wing extremists, fascistic authoritarians, and a Supreme Court composed of an illegitimately constituted and politically partisan supermajority of Trump-favoring Republican Justices acting as politicians in robes. And all of these conspiring factions would be united behind the Trojan horse Donald Trump and his confederates, who are acting as irresponsible, insidiously pernicious and threatening treacherous plotters against democratic fairness and the vital protections provided by the rule of law and the U.S. Constitution. Shame on those who are sycophantic loyalists in support of this cabal of traitorous factions.

Constitutional democracies have robust balances of power to protect people from abuses of authority by ensuring that government operates within a framework of principles and laws that safeguard individual rights and freedoms and make people more secure. These socially advantageous protections include ones against arbitrary rule, unfair treatment, and the infringement of fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, religion, assembly, and the press. A healthy separation of powers is one of the key provisions in constitutional democracies, for it helps prevent tyranny by upholding the rule of law. This protective structural feature of checks and balances is strengthened by good accountability provisions, and the great value of a properly independent, impartial judiciary.

Knowing this, it was a shock to see the six Republican Justices on the Supreme Court corruptly make an absurdly expansive ruling relating to presidential immunity on the last day of its 2023-2024 term. This decision flung the Country's doors open to coldly-calculating politicians, and was highly unethical because it made *We the People* much more vulnerable to exploitive divide-to-conquer schemers and aspiring abusers of authority, and those eager to skirt the rule of law and defy the Constitution.

This ruling was a model of how NOT to create new judicial precedents, because it created broad ambiguities in what the president can legally do in office. The ruling is like a gilded invitation to various rogues and grifters, and coup plotters and insurrectionists, and to any future despotic dictator wannabes to be able to do whatever they want in office, no matter how undemocratic or socially detrimental or immoral or contrary to the greater good.

This decision is like leaving a million loaded guns lying around that have defective safety catches, or planting indiscriminately deadly landmines. It would be an existential danger to allow, by hook or by crook, the executive and judicial and legislative branches of government to be dominated by MAGA extremists who demonstrate loyalty to one hubris-filled man who seeks to be corruptly superempowered, rather to our Country and the greater good.

In their immunity ruling, in what columnist Jamelle Bouie describes as a "bid for infamy", the Supreme Court's Chief Justice John Roberts and his Republican colleagues have imposed new meaning on the Constitution according to what they want it to say, rather than what it says. This is a stunning case of judicial activism that is at bizarre and duplicitous odds with conservative Justices' usual preoccupation with history and Constitutional originalism.

"We don't know how this opinion will play out," writes Jamelle Bouie in the *New York Times*. "If Trump wins a second term, there is a real chance that it will empower presidential lawlessness of a kind that no living American has experienced, at least in this country. *Trump v. United States* would become, in short order, one of the worst opinions ever issued by the Supreme Court." The proverbial guardrails might not withstand the chaotic onslaught.

Demand that our representatives pass the proposed No Kings Act to remedy this situation!

<u>Corrupt Intent</u>

Big Money corruption of our elections and national priorities and lobbyist-determined policies is so starkly clear that it makes the Supreme Court's claims about the influence of moneyed interests absurd, resembling a Big Lie. Conservative Justices actually wrote in the 2010 *Citizens United* ruling that because Super PAC funds were not being spent in coordination with a specific candidate's political campaign, they "do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption." More than 14 years have passed since this wrongful decision, and the evidence is overwhelming that huge amounts of Big Money are grievously corrupting our national priorities and policies, and governance. As victims of the Parkland High School mass shooting in Florida once declared, "We call BS."

With their absurd ruling on presidential immunity to favor unethical Trumpists, the Republican Justices on the Supreme Court are rewriting the Constitution to place the president above the law. It is a terrible time in history for this to happen, because Trump has demonstrated more perhaps than any American politician in history that he

cares more for himself than the Country. He cares only about factions loyal to him, not to all. And he poses a grave threat to those who criticize him, oppose him, or honorably try to hold him accountable for violating the rule of law. He also threatens the general welfare, democratic fairness, women's well-being, and the common good.

Trump wants to gut the federal workforce and replace them with MAGA loyalists who will do whatever he wants. One main criteria for tens of thousands of public servants to be hired in a second Trump administration would be a highly unprincipled one: that every prospective civil servant would be expected to be zealously willing to bend the knee to Trump by obeying his every impulse and parroting the big lie that the demagogic con man actually won the 2020 election he lost.

The great novelist and philosopher Mark Twain communicates wisdom to us from more than 100 years ago, telling us that loyalty to one's country is the real thing, not blind allegiance to its institutions or officeholders. Today, the King/dictator wannabe Trump demands loyalty to himself over principled loyalty to Country and the Constitution.

The Project 2025 plans for the civil service would focus on choosing opportunists and ideological extremists and assorted grifters to be part of a new regime who would treacherously defy their Oath of Office in order to do Trump's imperious bidding. And proponents of the 2025 plan are assembling thousands of such loyalists right now.

Also, Trump wants to use to military to deport millions of immigrants, and to crush dissent. He is ruefully eager to weaponize the Justice Department and use government power to investigate, harass and punish anyone he views as a threat to his power. He also wants to pardon convicted criminals who stormed the Capitol on January 6, 2021. He basically wants to trash the Constitution and get away with circumventing the rule of law.

Shortly before Trump spoke on the last day of the cultish hubris-engorged Republican National Convention in Minneapolis, former professional wrestler Hulk Hogan took the stage and bellowed this refrain: "Let Trumpamania run wild!" Laugh out loud at the weird and ominous antics of these "clowns". Trumpamania would have terrible consequences for most Americans, and be contrary to the best interests of billions of people around the world.

The crucially important 2024 elections aren't just about the choice between two extraordinarily different old men to be president (before Joe Biden decided not to continue his run for reelection and anointed Vice President Kamala Harris as his successor). "It is much bigger than that. It is, in fact, about the choice between two different futures. In one future, where Biden's leadership continues, we can organize to expand our rights, protect our communities, and use the power of the federal government to advance climate justice, economic justice, racial justice, and more. Under a Trump presidency, we'll be back to the daily chaos and the struggle of stopping the worst of his attempts to divide us, further dismantle democratic norms, and roll back our rights and freedoms."

Think about this. "In a time of dictators, Trump tried to overthrow the results of the 2020 presidential election and install himself in power against the wishes of the people. President Joe Biden voluntarily turned away from reelection in order to give the people a better shot at preserving our democracy." So said the admirably insightful historian Heather Cox Richardson on July 21, adding, "He demonstrated what it means to put the country first."

There is far-reaching truth in the understanding that "personnel is policy", and while the Biden administration has fought for the integrity of our federal civil servants, Trump wants to fire tens of thousands of them and replace responsible public servants with thousands of loyalists and people who worked on the nefarious anti-democratic Project 2025 plan. So the writing is on the wall, and is scrawled in a big ugly ominous offensive script.

Trump, seeing the glaringly bad optics and unpopularity of Project 2025, has tried to distance himself from the scheming plans, writing on his lie-promoting "Truth Social" social media platform, "I know nothing about Project 2025. I have no idea who is behind it. I disagree with some of the things they're saying and some of the things they're saying are absolutely ridiculous and abysmal. Anything they do, I wish them luck, but I have nothing to do with them."

What effete deceit! That is an inconsistent set of rhetorical assertions that is bizarre in its consequential deception. It was, in fact, at Trump's posh Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach that a hundred extreme conservatives gathered in April 2022 to raise money for the Center for Renewing America, "a conservative policy shop whose most recent annual report emphasized a 'commitment to end woke and weaponized government'. Its founder, Russell

Vought, a former head of the Office of Management and Budget under Trump, and a leading candidate to be the White House chief of staff in a second Trump term, was in attendance. His group is a kind of ivory tower for far-right Republicans, issuing white papers with titles such as *The Great Replacement in Theory and Practice.* In 2021, he wrote an op-ed for Newsweek that asked, *"Is There Actually Anything Wrong with Christian Nationalism?"*

That quote comes from a "Letter from Washington" article in the July 22, 2024 issue of *The New Yorker,* titled INSIDE THE TRUMP PLAN FOR 2025. The Center for Renewing America "is one of roughly two dozen right-wing groups that have emerged in Washington since Trump left office. What unites them is a wealthy network based on Capitol Hill called the Conservative Partnership Institute, which many in Washington regard as the next Trump Administration in waiting. Its list of personnel and affiliates includes some of Trump's most fervent backers." That includes the rogues Mark Meadows, Stephen Miller and Jeffrey Clark.

It is exceedingly foolhardy to go along with Trump and his cronies. It is crazy to blindly trust in Trump, for he is one of the most deviously dishonest and manipulative men in history, and among the least trustworthy. It is dangerously dumb and socially harmful to have so many loyalists bowing down to an exceedingly flawed and dangerous man, who is angrily vindictive and doesn't give a damn about the general welfare of all the people, or women and their reproductive rights, or expansive blessings of liberty and justice for all.

It is wrong to abandon *We the People* to a Constitution-abrogating and rule-of-law-violating abuser of authority who is an increasingly unhinged cult leader that wants to move our government toward totalitarian One Party Rule.

Trump gloatingly relishes running roughshod with an iron heel over the common good. He loves to intimidate and bully people, and seems to relish humiliating people, especially anyone who opposes him or objects to his grifting or malfeasance by taking a principled stand against his lawlessness and his naked bid for tyrannical rule -- or anyone who tries to hold him accountable. And in his greed and malignant narcissism, he demands absolute loyalty to himself, and cares vastly more about himself and his ego, power and money than he cares about the future of the Country. Don't believe his countless lies or his deceitful emotion-hijacking rhetoric!

Trump lasciviously peddles falsehoods and pushes misinformation and twists the truth about almost everything, and does so in an orgy of Orwellian manipulation, deceptive spin, and devious rhetoric and propaganda. He is trying to torpedo democratic fairness and social cohesion to gain the benefits that result from *Divide-to-Conquer Roguery.* He lacks honor, integrity, decency, and moral compass in his corruptly transactional world. And he and his acolytes often encourage political violence, which is having terrible impacts on our Country and its people.

These malicious character flaws threaten the well-being of millions of people. The man Trump chose to be his vice president, J.D. Vance, once compared Trump to Hitler, and it is noteworthy that Trump reportedly praised Adolf Hitler in 2018 while on a trip to Europe with his chief of staff John Kelly. Trump shares similar shockingly serious weaknesses and failings with the murderous warmongering and genocidal German dictator (as well as with Vladimir Putin). These flaws include being manipulative, ruthless, self-serving, violence-prone, grandiose, megalomaniacally ambitious, racially prejudiced, and nefariously inclined to belittle others, demonize them and humiliate them. In addition, he demonstrates fanaticism, intolerance, paranoia, devious dishonesty, and reactionary totalitarian opposition to criticism, dissent and efforts to hold him accountable for misdeeds and malfeasance.

Voters: Let's "fight, fight, fight" -- and rightly fight for ethical and moral right, NOT for rich people, corporate CEOs and the dominion-demanding far right and their dangerous plans, which are driven by unchristian Christian nationalism rather than by laudable Enlightenment era principles and values. These factions are anti-immigrant, anti-women, anti-gay, anti-lesbian, anti-inclusive, anti-fairness, anti-common good, and diabolically anti-democracy.

MAGA Republicans are indulging in noxious treachery and zealously imperious demands to overthrow the separation of Church and state, and upset the crucially important balance of powers in the Constitution that protects *We the People* from despotism. Let's come together to reject extremism!

In the New York Times Sunday Opinion section on July 14, 2024, the Editorial Board wrote a cover story about Trump: "He failed the tests of leadership and betrayed America. Voters must reject him in November. Donald Trump is unfit to lead."

Apparently only voters can save us, and we need the help of principled voices in the "Fourth Estate" of press and news media. This realm has been bifurcated into responsible voices of those who stand up against corruption, and in favor of principled Right Action, on the one hand, and into many echo chambers like those of Fox News and MAGA-leaning social media sites in which the mainstream media is regarded as "the enemy of the people".

The socioeconomic state of affairs that is reflected in J.D. Vance's depiction of "hillbilly" Appalachia, as well as in struggling Rust Belt cities and inner city urban areas, is a stark contrast to the gated communities of the superrich, revealing a deeply entrenched divide in American society and a woefully deplorable degree of inequality.

This deeply inequitable divide manifests in vastly different life experiences and opportunities, and a status quo of extremes of poverty and privilege. While communities in places like Appalachia and other disadvantaged areas struggle with economic decline and social malaise, and with limited access to quality education, and with an epidemic of opioid use and social instability, the superrich enjoy insulated lives with abundant resources and far too much unmerited influence. They, of course, make sure our national policies and priorities favor their interests over everyone else. This disparity underscores the need for making systemic changes to address big problems and create a more equitable and secure society. This would be the road to social cohesion and desirable greater unity!

Our state and national politics has been egregiously corrupted by emotion-hijacking, sanity-defying, grotesquely irresponsible factions who oppose the common good and the general welfare in their fervor for power, money and dominating influence. Their plans would torpedo true justice, eviscerate women's reproductive rights and universal healthcare, and exacerbate gun violence by preventing gun safety reforms. And it would devastate protections of the environment and damage the providential health and safety provided by a stable global climate. It would also terminally harm the inclusiveness of the cohesive blessings of liberty for ourselves and our heirs in posterity.

Thanks to Joe Biden

President Joe Biden has led a historically effective administration, especially in light of concerted efforts by Republicans to stymie his Build Back Better plans during the pandemic, and because of the darkly cynical opposition by MAGA extremists to having him accomplish anything on immigration, border security, healthcare, employment, infrastructure improvement, climate change, or protections of the environment. They seem to be unwilling to honestly defend democracy or protect voting rights, or to try to prevent discriminatory and polarizing gerrymandering from making representation more grotesquely unfair. In great contrast, Joe Biden honorably decided to step down to help save the republic.

MAGA Republicans have been making unhinged and brutally malevolent and relentless demagogic attacks against immigrants for years, trying to shift blame onto them for social ills, stoking anger and fear in their right-wing "populist" political base in order to gain power.

At Trump's urging, for treacherous political purposes, Republicans shot down the first comprehensive border control and immigration bill in 30 years, which was designed to deal with spiking numbers of immigrants coming to the U.S. at the southern border. This Trumpian sabotage of the negotiated bipartisan deal to secure the border is "the most cynical, awful type of politics", in which Trump just tries to use the issue for his own narrow personal political purposes, instead of trying to actually solve the problem.

Senator James Lankford, a conservative Republican from Oklahoma, was one of the three main persons involved in writing the Border Act of 2024, along with Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat from Connecticut, and Krysten Sinema, an Independent from Arizona. Lankford strongly advocated that this border security bill be passed in early 2024, but Trump wants this issue to remain hot and propulsive, so he cunningly directed Republicans in Congress to scuttle the bill.

With immigration having surged in the past decade, the "status quo is untenable", says Senator Lankford. But Trump has hyper politicized immigration issues, and puts the Country at greater risk, disgracefully doing so for the self-centered political benefit he perceives in sabotaging remedial action.

In a Proclamation on Securing the Border in early June 2024, the Biden administration provided context: "There are more people around the world who are displaced from their homes today than at any point in time since World

War II. Many factors have contributed to this problem. Failing regimes and dire economic conditions afflict many countries, including several in the Western Hemisphere. Violence linked to transnational criminal organizations has displaced substantial numbers of people in Latin America. The global COVID-19 pandemic upended societies around the globe. Natural disasters have forced people from their homes."

"As a result of these global conditions, we have been experiencing substantial levels of migration throughout the Western Hemisphere, including at our southwest land border." And many people like refugees who are fleeing the desperate conditions in Venezuela are trying to escape oppressive and corruptly despotic rule. The more appropriate and honorable thing for our representatives to do would have been to pass the 2024 Border Act.

Journalist Catherine Rampell wrote an article in May 2024 titled *The reward for Republicans who try to solve problems: humiliation*. She observed, "the GOP's inability to get behind their own border security bill just keeps getting more embarrassing. Pity poor Sen. James Lankford (R-Okla.), who on Thursday was humiliated into voting against his own border security bill."

"Last fall, you might recall, Republican lawmakers refused to pass funding for Ukraine and Israel unless Democrats agreed to 'tough' border security measures. Lankford, one of the Senate's more conservative members, negotiated on the GOP conference's behalf, and he drove a hard bargain."

"Lankford got President Biden and Democrats to agree to revive a version of the controversial Title 42 border expulsion policy, which would shut down much of the asylum system without even the fig leaf of needing a 'public health emergency.' It also included more personnel for Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (one reason the major Border Patrol union endorsed it), and a stricter, faster process for adjudicating asylum claims. Progressives decried many of the asylum measures as inhumane."

The Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas issued the following statement on the Senate vote on the Bipartisan Border Security Agreement: "The bipartisan border security legislation would deliver the strongest border enforcement tools in thirty years. It would make significant changes to our broken immigration system, greatly accelerating the federal government's ability to remove more quickly individuals who have illegally entered the United States and do not have a legal right to stay. It would also equip the federal government with the resources to provide humanitarian relief more quickly to those who qualify for it under the law."

"The bipartisan border security legislation would provide resources for more than 1,500 additional U.S. Customs and Border Protection personnel, more than 1,200 additional Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel, more than 4,300 additional asylum officers, and 100 additional immigration judges. The broken immigration system would be significantly repaired, cases would move more quickly, and the staggering immigration court backlog would be addressed." And, "Importantly, as a result of the strong border enforcement tools that the bipartisan border security legislation would deliver, fewer migrants would attempt the journey to the southern border in the first place. The consequences of illegal entry would be delivered more quickly, and it is proven that the swift delivery of consequences under the law deters irregular migration to our southern border."

"The bipartisan security legislation is the result of months of hard work by both Republican and Democratic Senators and members of the Biden-Harris Administration. Everyone agrees that our immigration system is fundamentally broken and has been for decades. This legislation would significantly fix it and provide the heroic workforce of the Department of Homeland Security the tools and resources they need and deserve to do their jobs and advance the safety and security of the American people."

"Only Congress can fix our broken immigration system. I urge Congress to do so. In the meantime, we will continue to enforce the law with full force with the limited resources we have. Our personnel have done so remarkably. Over the past twelve months alone, we have removed or returned more than 720,000 migrants who did not have a legal basis to stay in the United States, more than in any year since 2011." … "The American people deserve an immigration system that works, that enhances our security and delivers the humanitarian relief that a functioning asylum system is designed to provide. The bipartisan border security legislation does just that."

<u>More Important Insight on Weird J.D. Vance</u>

In a resurrected controversy, video has come to light of J.D. Vance talking with Tucker Carlson in a Fox News interview in 2021, when Vance was running for the U.S. Senate seat in Ohio. He stated: "We're effectively run in this country -- via the Democrats, via our corporate oligarchs -- by a bunch of childless cat ladies who are miserable at their own lives and the choices that they've made, and so they want to make the rest of the country miserable too." Vance, who has a wife and three children, asked Carlson. "How does it make any sense that we've turned our country over to people who don't really have a direct stake in it?"

By asserting that Democratic females who do not have children are "a bunch of childless cat ladies, who are miserable at their own lives", Vance shows a deep disdain of women who have not given birth, and is being "completely out of line and disrespectful", according to one observer, who added that this is "coming from a Republican man who wants to police how women make choices about having children in the first place."

Republican commentator Meghan McCain noted that Vance's "comments are activating women across all sides, including my most conservative Trump supporting friends. These comments have caused real pain and are just innately unchristian."

Actor Jennifer Aniston, who tends to stay out of politics, posted: "I truly can't believe this is coming from a potential VP of The United States." Vance had called out Harris by name in those 2021 comments on Fox, and Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff's ex-wife Kerstin Emhoff took to social media to defend Harris from Vance's attacks on her as "childless," calling Kamala "a co-parent with Doug and I. She is loving, nurturing, fiercely protective and always present. I love our blended family and am grateful to have her in it." Harris's stepdaughter chimed in: "I love my three parents."

"Vance also ties the Republican ticket firmly to Project 2025. The Trump camp has worked to distance itself from Project 2025 -- not convincingly, since the two are obviously closely tied, but it turns out that Vance wrote the introduction for a forthcoming book by Heritage Foundation president Kevin Roberts, who was the lead author of Project 2025." The book tries to popularize that plan, right down to its threatening claim that "we are in the process of the second American Revolution, which will remain bloodless if the left allows it to be."

Ohio Senator J.D. Vance deserves particular scorn, writes Trump's niece Mary Trump of her uncle's running mate in the 2024 race. "By adding J.D. Vance to the Republican ticket, Donald has increased the level of creepy weirdness exponentially, and the Harris campaign and its allies are taking every opportunity to capitalize on it."

Not only has Vance expressed contempt for women who choose not to not have kids, but he isn't the only Republican who does this; "In fact, it seems to be the attitude of the whole Party." Especially in red states.

Hark back to the "quiet revolution" that took place in women's roles in American society beginning in the late Sixties. This revolution "greatly expanded women's life choices, allowing many to pursue careers as well as or instead of traditional paths. Indeed, almost three-quarters of women ages 25 to 54 were in the work force by the end of the Reagan administration, close to the proportion today."

This transformation in women's rights and prerogatives was significantly aided by the *Roe v. Wade* decision that established a legal right for woman to choose to have an abortion. It was also helped by the Title IX federal civil rights law that prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity that received federal financial assistance. Women in sports saw vast improvements in opportunities.

The American people cannot now allow Republican leaders and the illegitimate supermajority of conservative Justices on the Supreme Court to drive us backwards to a time before women were assured a modicum more rights in our excessively patriarchal society. "We're not going back," chants the majority.

Trump made a contentious appearance at the National Association of Black Journalists annual conference in Chicago on July 31, where he argued with moderators and baselessly accused his opponent Vice President Kamala Harris of only recently identifying as Black.

Trump, who has grown accustomed to softball questions from right-wing reporters like those on Fox News, etc., was clearly not up to the task at the event, attacking the questioners and calling ABC a fake news network, among many controversial assertions. The Harris campaign pounced soon after the event concluded, with a spokesperson

observing, "Today's tirade is simply a taste of the chaos and division that has been a hallmark of Trump's MAGA rallies this entire campaign." Chaos in governance is NOT desirable for almost anyone.

The toxic discourse surrounding Kamala Harris is often recycling earlier falsehoods about her, said Nina Jankowicz, chief executive of the American Sunlight Project, a nonprofit studying disinformation. "So many of the narratives that we saw back in 2020 are being repeated," she said. "It's part and parcel of the violent rhetoric plaguing our political discourse, and unless politicians on both sides of the aisle stop engaging in it and call it out, it's only going to get worse." Let's take bold and honorable steps forward! Elect Democrats to the White House and Congress!

Researchers about disinformation say that normalization of racist and misogynistic language has become an inexorable byproduct of an inadequately effective media and an online ecosystem run with weak oversight and powered by a hunger for engagement. Clickbait! Retweeting!!

In conclusion, the stakes are higher in the 2024 elections than ever before for the future of our democracy and the planet, due to the extremist agenda pushed by Trump and Vance, and MAGA Republicans, and the coalition of right-wing groups that helped the Heritage Foundation concoct its abysmal and deadly serious Project 2025 plans. In contrast, Democrats propose to defend democracy and fundamental freedoms, including voting rights, women's rights, the general welfare of working people, and basic rights of young immigrant Dreamers. And they fight for improvements in pocketbook issues for the vast majority of Americans. They also respectably call for equitable treatment for all, and responsible public service, and fair trade, and bold climate action, and social and environmental justice, and protections of the environmental commons, and fiscal responsibility, and honesty and reasoned deliberation, and Right Action on dozens of other crucially important issues.

We would be wise to remember the "Contract with America". Back in 1994, Republicans pushed a legislative agenda that they touted as the Contract with America, but which critics saw as a Contract ON America. Many of the policy ideas in the Contract originated at the same dang conservative think tank and policy shop, the Heritage Foundation. The provisions of the Contract with America represented the view of many conservative Republicans on the issues of reducing the size of government, cutting taxes, and reforming both welfare programs and tort law.

Today in 2024, "it's Déjà vu all over again", but vastly worse, because of the Project 2025 agenda that the Heritage Foundation and far right factions of the Republican Party are pushing. This extremist plans should more accurately and honestly be called the Contract AGAINST America. It is, after all, an offensive initiative that reads like a blueprint for a fascist takeover of the government that would devastate democratic fairness and turn the federal government into a threat to the health, well-being and security of tens of millions of Americans.

The same Heritage Foundation that wrote the 1994 Contract with American has written this aggressive effort to transform the USA into what sounds an awful lot like an authoritarian dictatorship. The Heritage Foundation is now operated by many of Trump's current and former political allies. Its president, Kevin Roberts, is a Christian nationalist who once said the project's main goals are "institutionalizing Trumpism" and getting rid of unelected bureaucrats who he believes wield too much political influence. J.D. Vance tellingly wrote a glowing foreword to Roberts' upcoming book about Project 2025.

The Project 2025 agenda is called a "Mandate for Leadership", and the devil is in the far-reaching phalanx of frightening details. It is ironic that conservatives tend to oppose mandates in many matters, claiming they encroach on people's personal freedoms and autonomy. But the mandates included in the dangerous Project 2025 plans would impose an unbelievable litany of oppressive, repressive and offensive mandates on Americans that would be vastly worse than mandates like wearing a mask or getting vaccinated that were imposed during the global pandemic to prevent the spread of the contagious disease, and save lives, and protect oneself and others.

"When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross." This statement is widely attributed to Sinclair Lewis, although there is no definitive evidence that he actually wrote it or said it. The prescient quote captures the idea that fascism in the United States would likely take advantage of religious fundamentalism and disguise itself with patriotic and religious symbolism in order to gain and wield dominating power. And so it could potentially come to pass, unless votes are vigilant and act as true patriots.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
Sept. 27, 2024

Appendix – Summary of the Worst Aspects of Project 2025

The Republican Project 2025 agenda is an alarmingly anti-democratic hard-right plan for the takeover of the U.S. government by partisan conservatives. The alarming blueprint, which favors plutocratic rich people and corporate entities and Christian religious extremists, is particularly offensive for the following planks:

1) It would impose a regressive tax plan that would onerously shift the burden of taxation from the top 1% to everyone else, wrongly and egregiously making income and wealth inequalities even more extreme than they already are.

2) It would subjugate women to the heinous hegemony of anti-abortion extremists, contemptuously misogynistic control freaks and Christian nationalists by forcing women who do not want a child, or another child, to remain pregnant for 9 months and deliver an unwanted baby, AND also it would restrict access to contraception, try to outlaw or restrict in vitro fertilization, implement a new regime of invasive abortion data tracking, and misuse the 1873 Comstock Act as a backdoor means of banning abortion in every state in the country by criminally prosecuting anyone who mails medication abortion drugs. "It's a detailed roadmap to rip away a woman's right to choose in every single state in America -- and they don't even need Congress to try to do it! Americans need to understand that abortion rights are on the ballot this November, in every single state."

3) Project 2025 aggressively promotes plans to benefit religious schools and private schools at the expense of improved public education for the vast majority of young people, and it also would prevent relief for tens of millions of borrowers saddled with mounting and often crushing levels of student debt.

4) It promotes arrogant and irresponsible stances on fossil fuel use and refuses to deal with the horrible legacy such policies will have on all people in the future by making "climate hell" worse than it would alternately be with fairer and more farsighted policies. The agenda would slash regulations, exacerbate pollution, stoke climate injustices and gut the Inflation Reduction Act, "the Biden administration's wide-ranging law that would generate some 10 million climate-friendly jobs over the next 10 years. The policy agenda also advises eviscerating greenhouse gas regulations and clean energy programs."

5) It would undermine good governance by firing tens of thousands of public servants and replacing them with treacherous loyalists to MAGA Trumpism against more responsible patriotic propriety. It would dangerously further concentrate power in the presidency, with a goal of giving Trump (if he wins) and his appointees more power over the executive branch relative to nonpartisan civil service professionals (who are disparaged as the so-called "deep state"). This would obviously lead to abuses of power and more opportunities for political malfeasance. Such policies would help impose repressive rule on *We the People* that would be "of corporate entities and the rich, by corporations and the rich, and for the rich and rightwing extremists."

6) It plans to allow the president to weaponize the Department of Justice against political opponents, including those who protest against abuses of authority.

7) It would wage an offensive against responsibility, transparency and accountability of elected officials in favor of political corruption and Trumpian malfeasance. It would carry out these nefarious plans via recommendations for key White House staff, cabinet positions, Congress, federal agencies and commissions, in addition to civil servants.

8) Project 2025 plans would give states the ability to impose work requirements on Medicaid, which would reduce benefits that help cover medical costs for low-income people, and in general to reduce federal spending on the social safety net and the poor, while achieving another longtime conservative priority -- ramping up military spending and facilitating private profiteering.

9) It pushes anti-democratic plans against having free and fair elections and fair representation, through efforts to restrict voting and suppress voter turnout by people most likely to be opposed to their fascistic plans. Also, they plan to prevent the proper certification of votes that express the popular will, using the cunningly deceitful tactic of falsely claiming that there is widespread voting fraud in our elections, thereby perpetrating massive

fraud against the vast majority of the people.

10) It would ramp up assaults on LGBTQ rights and wipe out certain federal protections for queer Americans, which would facilitate an increase in the current avalanche of anti-LGBTQ legislation being introduced in Republican-led statehouses, and it would make the "epidemic of violence" much worse against these groups that is encouraged by extremist rhetoric.

11) The Project 2025 agenda on guns would favor profit making by gun manufacturers to the detriment of gun safety and a more secure citizenry.

12) The right-wing blueprint contains rhetoric claiming that the biggest problem in America today is "anti-white racism", in furtherance of their efforts to deny the anti-black racism that persists in the USA today, and to permanently cement white supremacy in the status quo by abolishing affirmation action programs, among other things. One goal of this is to ignore the onerous racism against people of color and "to erode 1960s-era policies that have nourished economic opportunities for Black Americans, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion programs that have flowered since the 2020 murder of George Floyd."

13) Project 2025 pushes decidedly anti-immigrant plans like deporting millions of immigrants, circumventing Congress and the courts, and terminating the legal status of hundreds of thousands of young Dreamers.

<u>Conclusions about Project 2025</u>

Republicans are trying to fool the people and sell them down the river to harsher fates with their Project 2025 plans, doubling down on their demagogic use of tactics scapegoating immigrants and trying to shift blame that they deserve onto moderates and liberals.

As The New Republic notes, Project 2025 is "a remarkably detailed guide to turning the United States into a fascist's paradise." The primary document of Project 2025, the magazine explains, lays out what is essentially a "Christian nationalist vision of the United States, one in which married heterosexuality is the only valid form of sexual expression and identity; all pregnancies would be carried to term, even if that requires coercion or death; and transgender and gender-nonconforming people do not exist."

"It's a terrifying vision of what American life could look like, but what's most concerning about Project 2025 is its playbook of the for the first 180 days of a hypothetical second Trump term. Much of the 180-Day Playbook reads like a cult's recruiting pamphlet, explaining how department and agency heads should be vetting potential candidates" -- and preparing to follow the Dictator's Playbook into infamy.

PRESS RELEASE

Revolutionary Earth Manifesto Published – Speaking Truth to Power

HANNIBAL, MO. --- Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

Humanity faces a sea of troubles. The tree of life is under aggravated assault as our human numbers approach eight billion needy people -- and way too many excessively greedy ones. It is of overarching importance for us to come together to honestly, honorably, mindfully, responsibly and effectively address the titanic challenges that confront us. Our prosperity and ultimately our survival depend on this. We should choose to no longer "suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," as William Shakespeare put it in his famous tragic soliloquy, for it is a vastly better plan to take arms against our sea of troubles, "and by opposing end them." Let's do it! Let's pay forward more providential outcomes.

Good solutions abound to our existential problems, and dozens of them are set forth in Dr. Tiffany B. Twain's elaborate Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto, which are all available right now from the on demand publisher Lulu Press. All of these ideas can also be found online on the Earth Manifesto website, with solutions summarized in *PART FOUR: Overarching Considerations – Transformational Ideas and Enlightened Proposals*.

It makes me as mad as a moose, ruefully reports Tiffany Twain, to see humanity mindlessly sacrificing the natural world and adversely impacting biological ecosystems and heedlessly diminishing their carrying capacity for our kind. My passionate umbrage is particularly acute because much more equitable and sane solutions to economic, environmental and social problems would measurably mitigate the harmful impacts we are leaving as a lousy legacy to our heirs in the future. These solutions should be informed by precautionary principles, and they should be facilitated through reasonable compromises that give overarching respect to utilitarian understandings like those articulated by Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, back in 1905: "Where conflicting interests must be reconciled, the question shall always be answered from the standpoint of the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run."

Today's "conservatives" present a deeply dishonorable contrast to farsighted understandings and fair-minded stances, for they clearly want to run roughshod over everyone who opposes their narrow agenda, and they seem to be committed to the greatest good for the Few, and only in the short term -- at a terrible price to the Many. It would be immeasurably less costly in the long run for us to take responsible steps to prevent economic crises, revolutionary discord, the rash depletion of resources, climate disruption, and tragedy-of-the-commons ruin.

Jane Goodall, the commendable primatologist, anthropologist and world's foremost expert on chimpanzees, shares her wisdom with people worldwide, and expresses this provocative insight: "We haven't inherited this planet from our parents, we've borrowed it from our children. We have not borrowed our children's future -- we have stolen it, and we're still stealing it now, and it's time we get together, whatever our religion, whatever our culture, get together and start changing the way" we are living, to ensure that we can leave a better legacy for our children. When she was 86 years old in the spring of 2020, Jane indicated that the power people currently have to "leave a better world for our children" involves making ethical decisions. "You, as an individual, just have to remember that in your life, you matter, you have a role to play, and that every single day you live, you make some impact and you get a choice as to what kind of impact you're going to make."

It is deeply wrong to trash the planet while borrowing it from our children, and theirs forevermore. This is a real sacrilege against the common good, and it is made much worse by having leaders who leverage the harms being done by borrowing trillions of dollars to stimulate the economy and try to gain political advantages through this expedient plan. It is becoming vitally important for us to take stronger steps to safeguard the environmental commons. It is unacceptable for us to collectively continue to sacrifice the resources, habitats, fresh water and living conditions of life on Earth to satisfy the domineering greed of irresponsibly profiteering corporations and their beneficiaries. And it is preposterously unethical from the biggest picture perspective to fulfill the short term needs of people living right now without giving greater consideration and respect to future needs.

This Press Release delves into exactly how the Few are able to achieve this consequentially harmful concatenation of negative impacts against the Many. It also seeks to set forth the best ideas for creating healthier outcomes in the world today. This requires that *We the People* succeed in choosing more responsible leaders who will seek to actualize Solon-wise compromise, and help peacefully overthrow the anti-social and harmful hegemony of the rich over the masses. We need to throw anti-environmental politicians out of office and emasculate power-abusing facilitators of anti-democratic and anti-humanitarian policies. ATTENTION HERE NOW.

The cogent words of the respect-worthy journalist Bill Moyers resonate in the interstices of my brain. Moyers noted some years ago that when he reads the news about all the things humanity is doing in the world, he concludes that it is not as if "Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do." As he looks at photos on his desk of his five grandchildren, he observes: "We do know what we are doing. We are stealing their future. Betraying their trust. Despoiling their world."

> John Steinbeck and 'Doc' Ed Ricketts had debated and articulated valuably holistic worldviews during their famous voyage on the Sea of Cortez in 1940. One conclusion they reached was that seeing things clearly and with keen insight is a prerequisite to "breaking through" to understandings that are fuller and more holistic. John Steinbeck saw humankind as "a creature of earth, not a heaven-bound pilgrim", so he believed it was vitally important to see things whole, and to work purposefully to change the way things are, for the better.
>
> --- *Huckleberry Finn, the Forty-Niner Gold Rush, and Sensational Related Reflections*

The best way to achieve existentially important objectives and propitious priorities would be to demand that leaders in every nation honestly champion greater good goals, and give fairer representation to all people's voices. In this, a special emphasis should properly be given to the best long-term interests of young people, who have the longest-term stake in a healthy and sustainable world. For good guidance, we need to foster more enlightened understandings, and ratify and respect the provisions of a visionary Bill of Rights for Future Generations. A sharpened focus and more elaborate perspective on these issues is conveyed in *See Clearly: Sanity During Insane Times*. View this Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto at www.EarthManifesto.com!

There are plenty of good win-win solutions that would be favorable to the vast majority of people. One main obstacle stands in the way: our corrupted representatives and the wealthy few. "Ay, there's the rub!" If we strive to be better organized, and dedicated to much fairer purposes, positive progress could be made to help us adapt during the long emergency of converging catastrophes in an increasingly tumultuous future.

Buddhists believe in a Noble Eightfold Path, and a crucial practice along that path is Right Understanding. Most unfortunately, contrary far-right understandings afflict societies worldwide, and they do so in ways that are proving to be exceedingly harmful. Huge amounts of ill-gotten money are used to promote twisted worldviews and virulent strains of ideological propaganda, emotion-manipulating pursuits of dominating power, excessive greed and irresponsible consumerism. A better balance is needed in human affairs!

Karl Marx famously counseled "Workers of the World, Unite!" He recommended this for excellent reasons, considering that working people need a reasonable modicum of collective bargaining power to get a better deal in the face of the dominating power of giant corporations and the domineering influence of profit-maximizing capitalists and influence-abusing wealthy people. Tiffany Twain recommends an additional good idea: "Women of the World, Unite!" This is also good advice, for every woman knows about discriminatory laws and anti-choice initiatives in our patriarchal world that compound the insult of the status quo in which females earn 20% less pay,

on average, than males for the same work. For illuminating understanding, see *A Feminine Vision of an Achievable Better World – Anima Should Reign!*

Today, we should also say "Young People of the World, Unite!" That priority would be a good way to overthrow the overweening influence of greedy conservatives and system-rigging politicians and older people. With such unifying strategies, we would be able to create much fairer, safer and healthier societies that will be sustainable for a longer period of time. More fairly shared prosperity may be the key to a more auspicious future, and this requires government policies that help ensure that more people will share in the benefits of economic activities, rather than having profits maximized for the few. And we should stop mortgaging the country to give huge tax cuts that mainly go to those at the top, at the expense of all taxpayers in every future year.

The value of honestly sensible compromise can be seen by understanding the role the wise Athenian statesman Solon played in Athens more than 2,500 years ago. At the time, disparities of wealth between the rich and the poor created risk-laden tinderbox conditions. One faction favored democracy, while another favored oligarchic rule by the wealthy few, and a third preferred a mixed form of rule with a strong constitution. Clan rivalry and many regional conflicts also played a role in the strife of Athens in the 6th century BCE. According to Will and Ariel Durant in *The Lessons of History,* the historian Plutarch wrote that, in the Athens of 594 BCE, "the disparity of fortune between the rich and the poor had reached its height, so that the city seemed to be in a dangerous condition, and no other means for freeing it from disturbances … seemed possible but despotic power." The poor found that their status got worse every year because the government was controlled by elite factions, and the courts were corrupt, deciding too many issues against the masses. Talk of violent revolt reverberated throughout the Athenian city-state. The jealous rich were outraged at the brazen challenge to their privileges and property and power, so they prepared to defend themselves by force.

As these conflicts escalated between various factions vying for perks, privileges, power and control, many Greeks recognized the need for a transformative leader who would find fair compromises between competing groups, and would do so in an equitable, just and peaceable manner. Somehow good sense prevailed, and moderate elements secured the selection of Solon, who became an effective lawmaker because he was able to demonstrate the wisdom to fairly mediate between concerned parties. Solon was given extraordinary legislative powers by his fellow citizens to negotiate fair compromises. He made a number of revolutionarily fair reforms of the political system and economy that saved Athens from destructive conflict. He laudably also addressed a broad agenda of consequential moral issues like slavery, debt bondage, and abuses of the system of inheritance. The most important reform he made was the creation of a steeply graduated tax plan that made wealthy people pay taxes at a rate twelve times as much as the poor. This idea forms the basis for farsighted sensible proposals to reform the U.S. tax code by making it more steeply graduated. As a consequence of the eminently fair-minded nature of the reforms Solon put into effect, he is known as "the father of democracy."

The respect-worthy billionaire Nick Hanauer warned in his *Memo to My Fellow Zillionaires* that the pitchforks are going to come out for wealthy people unless reasonable steps are soon taken to reverse trends of rising and accelerating inequality. He asserted that inaction (and wrongheaded action) "would inevitably lead to some sort of populist revolt", and he cautioned that any society which allows itself to become radically and indefensibly unequal eventually faces either an uprising or a police state -- or both." His original ideas are contained in his valuable and sensational 2014 article *The Pitchforks Are Coming … for Us Plutocrats.*

In July 2017, Nick Hanauer wrote another compelling article, this one titled *To My Fellow Plutocrats: You Can Cure Trumpism.* Listen in: "The real threat to our republic is an alarming breakdown in social cohesion, and the cause of this breakdown is obvious: radical, rising economic inequality, and the anger and anxiety it engenders. The truth is that over the span of decades, American lawmakers (at the behest of economic elites like us!) have enacted policies that have depressed wages, stoked economic insecurity and exacerbated cultural angst and social dislocation. At the same time, a tiny minority of mostly urban elite (again, us!) have benefitted obscenely from our growing economic, political and legal power."

Hanauer provocatively continued: "Our lives of ostentatious luxury might be forgiven if all boats were rising as fast as our 200-foot yachts. But they're not. In fact, as we few continue to capture the benefits of *almost all* of our

nation's economic growth via a trillion dollar a year transfer of wealth from wages to profits, millions of American families are sinking out of the middle class. It is this winner-take-all economy, and the indefensible and obvious injustice it represents, that creates the justifiable anger that threatens our civility, our national cohesion and our democracy itself. A century ago, as communism and fascism threatened to overrun Europe, our nation struck a grand bargain: We plutocrats would continue to be tolerated -- even celebrated -- as long as broadly rising incomes meant that each new generation of Americans continued to do better than the last. But through the policies we championed in the corridors of power and through the longstanding social norms we violated in the corporate boardroom, *we broke our end of that bargain*. And now the pitchforks are coming for us, my friends, from both the right and the left."

Unfortunately, Donald Trump beat Bernie Sanders in the populist revolt, and the bell has been ominously tolling for the American people ever since. Revealingly, the future that Bernie Sanders had committed to, in the most progressive platform ever articulated in the USA, would have been vastly better for humanity than what we now are experiencing due to the reactionary and corrupt arch-villains Attorney General Bill Barr, Senator Mitch McConnell, EPA rogue Andrew Wheeler and the self-serving Deceiver-in-Chief. Jonathan Chait takes a harsh swipe at the Emperor with No Clothes in the April 2 issue of New York magazine. The cover story features a close-up photo of Trump's face with a pig's snout projecting from his nose, and the title reverberates provocatively in the imagination: *Not Collusion … Not Incompetence … Not Cruelty … It's the Corruption, Stupid! — Why His Self-Dealing is His Biggest Political Liability.*

The moral good consists of those things consistent with the common good, properly understood. The Canadian-born economist John Kenneth Galbraith once declared, "The modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness." In a similar manner, religious conservatives suspiciously push for freedoms for them to discriminate against others, and rationalize this by claiming they occupy the high moral ground, even though they are promoting injustice-infused intolerance of others. In recent years, conservatives have been demanding religious liberty to give them what is in effect an open license to discriminate. And, sadly, they use this as a wedge issue to gain control and impose their selfish social and economic agenda on the masses.

Note that Tiffany Twain imagines herself to be a Doctor of Philosophy who is a modern day philosophic soul mate and valiantly illegitimate great-granddaughter of the highly esteemed and irreverent writer, lecturer, humorist and philosopher Mark Twain. That eminent writer, who once bragged late in his life that, as Mark Twain, he had become "the most conspicuous person on the planet", viewed imperialism from on high and sensationally wrote the following in 1901, in his essay *To the Person Sitting in Darkness:* "Extending the Blessings of Civilization to our Brother who Sits in Darkness has been a good trade and has paid well, on the whole; and there is money in it yet, if carefully worked -- but not enough, in my judgment, to make any considerable risk advisable."

Risks are mounting in the world today, and the scope of their adverse impacts is unprecedented in global import. George W. Bush revealed an insidious aspect of the ideological plan that is contributing to this sad state of affairs when he said, "See, in my line of work you got to keep repeating things over and over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of *catapult the propaganda*." It takes a lot of catapulting propaganda to succeed in pushing a superior moral justification for greed, blatant abuses of power, the undermining of democratically fair representation, betrayals of the common good, and ripping off the public treasury through fraudulent "trickle-down" public-debt-financed regressive tax cut schemes.

A 30 second TV ad featuring Ron Reagan proudly proclaiming his atheist views originally aired in 2014, but CBS, NBC, ABC and Discovery Channel had refused to air it. The ad was provocatively run on the Rachel Maddow Show on Good Friday 2018. Listen in to a powerful point made by Ronald Reagan's son: "Hi, I'm Ron Reagan, an unabashed atheist, and I'm alarmed by the intrusions of religion into our secular government. That's why I'm asking you to support the Freedom from Religion Foundation, the nation's largest and most effective association of atheists and agnostics, working to keep state and church separate, just like our Founding Fathers intended." Ron then gives a wry smile, signing off with the words, "Ron Reagan, lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in hell."

An incidental and inimical side effect of the intrusion by established religions into politics is that they often help

support politicians that damage Creation, destroy habitats, detrimentally compromise the incalculably valuable services provided by natural ecosystems, and riskily diminish the carrying capacity of our home planet to provide for humankind. The prospects for sustainable survival are diminishing as we continue our aggregate onslaught against the health of biotic habitats and Earth's natural ecosystems. Those who rationalize and facilitate these stark harms to the prospects of our heirs in the future are excessively and treacherously greedy, and their absolutist refusals to compromise are immoral. Let's change course, and do Mother Earth justice!

A sensible and peaceful revolution in our collective worldviews is needed to achieve Right Action, and great plans are set forth in *Common Sense Revival – Book One of the Earth Manifesto* that would dramatically improve the fate of humanity and life on Earth. Progressive plans! And what a colossal contrast these good plans are to the ones being imposed by current "leadership" in the USA, where treacherous sycophants abuse the privileges of their positions and power, as if they are royal eminences who deserve their right to act as despots and con men, and to jealously protect their freedoms to be cantankerous exploiters. We need new, more honest and more honorable leaders who are not beholden to polluting, climate altering, politically corrupt "rent-seeking" corporate entities intimately involved in perverting our national priorities and decision making.

Republicans are still crowing about the beneficial economic effects of their December 2017 tax cut scam, despite the folly of it being financed by more than $1.5 trillion in borrowed money. These recklessly regressive debt-financed tax cuts will primarily give benefits to rich people and corporations, thereby making inequality consequentially worse in our society. This is stupid, because increases in inequality and associated heightening injustices are among the biggest threats to most people's current and future well-being in the USA, and around the world, today. The demagogic Twitterer-in-Chief even has the arrogant temerity to tout stock market highs, setting up a classic comeuppance when the riskily irresponsible fiscal policies and protectionist trade tariffs that he is pushing result in another bubble-bursting global economic calamity.

There is plenty of culpability to go around in our political duopoly system. One glaring example of this is the $1.3 trillion spending bill that was signed into law in March 2018, without anyone in Congress having read it before approving it and having its more than 2,000 pages of spending provisions codified into law. To better understand the really pathological nature of our political duopoly system, read Charles Ferguson's incisive insights in his book *Predator Nation: Corporate Criminals, Political Corruption and the Hijacking of America*.

How, pray tell, one might wonder, have we ended up with such retrograde national priorities and policies, and such a deleteriously divided populace? A main factor is that Fox News has become a State propaganda machine that is propagating disinformation as if under a totalitarian regime. Fox News speaks directly to puppet Trump, who then gullibly goes along with the whole demagogic shtick, and nefariously sends out immediate barrages of toxic tweets that contain manipulative deceit, innumerable falsehoods, odd misspellings, and bizarre distractions from his growing scandals. Surely the Trumpster deserves an Academy Award for diabolical brilliance in a leading role as a demagogue, con man and fool in his Apprentice President Reality Show. Now it's time for him and his Vice-President, and the Majority Leader of the Senate, to exit the stage and leave us with a brighter and more progressive Twainain future. They must go because the figurative Emperor has no clothes, and those who blindly fail to see are acting with treachery toward you and me.

A strategic analyst for Fox News, Lt. Col. Ralph Peters, resigned from his gig at Fox News in 2018, saying the network had become "a mere propaganda machine for a destructive and ethically ruinous administration" that is "fostering corrosive and unjustified paranoia among viewers." Jen Senko tells this story from a fascinating and compelling personal angle in her documentary film, *The Brainwashing of My Dad.* And Brian Stelter reveals damning details of the "incestouous reationship" between Trump and Fox in his book *Hoax: Donald Trump, Fox News, and the Dangerous Distortion of Truth.*

Fox News contributors pretend to be principled, but the highest goal of the Strict Father constellation of values they represent is to gain power and control, and to impose discipline and austerity on the masses, no matter what means are required, and despite the harms that will be associated with their facilitating of authoritarian control. A much more responsible approach would be to honestly understand true discipline as a matter of respec and empathetic compassion, and not of strict obedience to overweening authority.

Another nefarious corporate actor is Sinclair Broadcasting, the largest TV broadcaster in the U.S., which owns almost 200 television stations. Sinclair has been requiring its local television stations to broadcast pro-Trump propaganda with eerily similar versions of a Trump-like speech about fake news from dozens of news anchors across the country, some of whom appeared like hostages on terrorist videos. Sinclair's propaganda was nakedly revealed in a Deadspin video that went viral over Easter weekend in 2018 that featured local TV news anchors from coast to coast, edited together reciting the same script. And Sinclair tried to increase its manipulative monopoly power by taking over Tribune Media, one of the most influential media companies in the country, in a move that would have given them ownership over 42 more stations in key markets that include New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington D.C. "And that's not the only way that Sinclair is using its power to advance a radical agenda. The New York Times has reported that the company sends its stations 'must-run' news segments that are full of fear-mongering and pro-Trump rhetoric." This threatens our democracy.

Some say that we live in a "post-truth" world. The editors at Oxford Dictionaries anointed "post-truth" as the 2016 international Word of the Year, defining it as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." We do live in echo chamber amplified pods in which many twisted untruths are told, and there are lots of distorted partial truths and microtargeted fake news and conspiracies. And there is much fear mongering, and efforts to arouse hate, for Christ's sake! We should begin to head in the right direction, instead of following leaders who fool the people and, in reality, make many of the things in our sea of trouble drastically worse.

Our best possible investments right now would be ones made on conservation measures and the development of renewable and cleaner sources of energy. This would be a smarter plan to pursue than to continue to go along with power-abusing executives of fossil fuel industries who righteously champion greed and rashly deplete resources and pollute the skies and wreak havoc on biotic habitats. One thing is certain: it is foolhardy not to be taking advantage of the last 50% of the world's oil reserves to help develop and implement the transition to cleaner and safer renewable energy alternatives. In 1973, E. F. Schumacher made a persuasive observation in his book *Small Is Beautiful,* sensibly suggesting that we should treat fossil fuels as capital resources rather than as income. The logical conclusion of such an intelligent and intuitively reasonable treatment would be that we would conserve these convenient high-energy fuels, and put some of the profits obtained from burning these irreplaceable assets "into a special fund to be devoted exclusively to the evolution of production methods and patterns of living which do not depend on fossil fuels." Let's start bhow with a markedly egalitarian carbon fee-and-dividend plan! For similar great ideas, see *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Make America Great Again.*

Capitalist corporatism is often antithetical to democratic fairness. Corporations are highly hierarchal, and not at all fairly representative, and they are prepossessed with the pursuit of profit, so they lobby to be allowed to externalize costs at the expense of workers and communities, and to the detriment of the health of the environment that supports us. CEOs rigidly control costs of employee compensation and benefits, and limit headcount and job security, and they get their own pay raised to ever more ungodly multiples of the earnings of the average worker. The resulting inequalities significantly undermine the well-being of the people.

Average compensation for working people has been largely stagnant since 1980, while CEO pay has skyrocketed and the huge benefits of increasing worker productivity have been greedily monopolized by the top dogs. Populist dissatisfactions at the harsh impacts of this sad state of affairs in the USA have allowed far-right authoritarian politicians to gain domineering influence, and a manipulative demagogue and his apologist facilitators have seized power in a triumph of skullduggery over the common good. Wedges have been driven between people to keep them from uniting in common cause to honestly improve this situation, and anti-immigrant sentiments and racial biases and fundamentalist religious fervor are being used to help the donor class thwart the greater good.

Uncompassionate conservatives use nefarious tactics to gain power and over-representation of their extreme agenda. They take ruthless advantage of people who are vulnerable and powerless, cunningly exploiting people's emotions, fears, grievances, resentments and racial prejudices. They stoke tribal antagonisms by vilifying others and blaming and scapegoating immigrants. They make shrewd use of social media outlets like Facebook, engaging in "psychographic profiling" to microtarget potential supporters with a barrage of divisive propaganda, fake news, conspiracy theories, behavioral manipulation and ratcheted-up anger toward others over hot button social issues.

They act in unethical ways to stimulate profiteering by buying politicians to do their bidding. And in the process, these treacherously self-serving sycophants betray the people they should be fairly representing.

The Republican bag of dirty tricks is brimming with such ruses. They scare people and push policies that make working people increasingly insecure. These tactics allow domineering politicians to get away with imposing repressive measures and austerity budgets on the populace. They allow the NRA to use its money and powerful influence to bribe and intimidate our representatives and prevent the passage of even the most common sense measures to help prevent gun violence and ensure improved public safety. And they employ demagoguery and simplistic, deceitful tweets and ideological diatribes to sway people into supporting them with money and votes.

These strategies are in addition to their favorite traditional ruses of gerrymandering congressional districts to give conservative politicians unwarranted power and striving to prevent millions of people from voting who are likely to be opposed to their mean-spirited agenda. And they make concerted efforts to stack courts with enablers for resource exploiting harm-engendering businesses, unethical profiteers and Christian supremacists.

The Trump cabal tried to augment these tactics by pushing to have a citizenship question asked in the 2020 Census -- and then to move up the Census completion date. These were alarming attempts to prevent an accurate census count in order to benefit conservative politicians and their retrogressive causes. Conservatives thus deliberately tried to compromise the integrity of the Census to achieve partisan political advantages. It's as if these politicians and the justices they appoint to the Supreme Court are not aware that corporations are abusing the power of their excessive influence to satisfy the compulsive drives of CEOs and shareholders to maximize profits, regardless of how dire the impacts will be that these swindles have on the vast majority of the people.

A gauge of how extremely anti-democratic the current administration is acting can be found in the fact that Trump's first Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke ignored 99% of the nearly 3 million public comments made with regard to maintaining strong protections for National Monuments. Instead, he sided with far right politicians like Senator Orrin Hatch and private interests, polluters and corporate entities that favor opening up our public lands to industrial extractive uses, including drilling for fossil fuels, mining of radioactive uranium, and destructive commercial fishing in three marine national monuments in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Scientists say we should leave 80% of known reserves of fossil fuels in the ground to prevent disastrous changes in global temperature, storm and precipitation patterns and sea level rises, but Republican operatives like Zinke have rejected such precautionary direction to benefit short-term-oriented profiteers.

Corporate entities corrupt our national decision making to benefit climate-disrupting fossil fuel corporations at terribly high costs to people today and in the future. And to benefit drug profiteers at the expense of opioid drug overdose victims. And to benefit gun manufacturers at a terrible cost to victims of gun violence and their families. And to benefit social media companies who exploit our privacy to make money off our profiles, even when this is demonstrably detrimental because it allows scheming politicians to betray the common good and give excessive influence to maniacally power-abusing politicians. Big Brother? Gadzooks!

Yes, corruption incarnate haunts the land of the free, dangerously undermining our individual and collective well-being, our security and our liberties themselves. This corruption comes in several salient forms. First, there are the slimy sycophantish swamp-monster facilitators of corporate hegemony over the people, led by the self-centered, self-serving Puppet-in-Chief, who is in league with master politicians like the dissembling Mitch McConnell and Mike Pence, God's own aspirant to the position of Master-Manipulator-In-Chief, with his look of vacuous adoration for the megalomaniac Trump. This is like a bad movie with slick performances by "bad actors" who pretend to care about regular folks while blatantly swindling them and betraying their kids and grandkids.

Another main type of corruption incarnate in the supposed land of the free and home of the brave is in the form of politically partisan Supreme Court Justices who are appointed by Republicans for their partisan zeal in turning a blind eye to the corrupting influence of Big Money in politics. These narrowly-focused corporate apologists pretend they cannot see how billionaires like the Koch network corrupt our national decision making when they spend huge sums of money on anti-worker and anti-environmental initiatives, or when the NRA spends tens of millions of dollars to buy the allegiance of politicians who put a much higher priority on profiteering by gun

manufacturers than on public safety or the lives of tens of thousands of people who die every year in the USA due to incidents of gun violence and mass shootings.

It is as if these unjust "conservatives" cannot see how risky it is to give domineering influence to giant fossil fuel corporations that compulsively want to pump every last drop of oil out of the land and the sea, and every possible ton of "beautiful clean coal" out of mountains blasted to smithereens, and every possible amount of natural gas that can be fracked from public lands, no matter how damaging these activities prove to be, on account of the harmful impacts of air pollution, oil spills, contaminated water supplies and climate-altering emissions of greenhouse gases. It's as if they can't see the adverse impacts on people's lives of offensive advertising by huge drug makers that repetitively market their products directly to a gullible populace -- and charge sky-high prices for drugs that are sometimes so addictive that tens of thousands of Americans die every year using them. The opioid crisis alone is estimated to have had an economic cost of a stunning $500 billion annually in recent years, in addition to countless numbers of tragic stories about the lives of the addicted and their families and friends.

Right-wing populism that helps empower authoritarian regimes is gaining influence abroad, undesirably setting back long-term trends in the post-colonial era toward democratic governance. The vast majority of people in the USA, Russia, China, India, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and dozens of other countries around the world are experiencing the negative effects of having the basic tenets of democracy come under concerted attack, with consequential assaults against guarantees of free and fair elections, the freedom of the press, the rule of law, and such things as rights of minorities, women's reproductive choices and environmental protections.

This anti-democratic trend faces its most serious crisis in decades, reported the 2017 Freedom in the World report that ranks nations according to levels of civil liberties and political rights enjoyed by their citizens. This report is done by Freedom House, a nonpartisan organization that judges countries according to a range of relevant criteria, and then assigns a total score that places each nation in one of three categories: "Free", "Partly free", and "Not free". The overall picture is discouraging. "Seventy-one countries suffered net declines in political rights and civil liberties, with only 35 registering gains. This marked the 12th consecutive year of decline in global freedom. The U.S. retreated from its traditional role as both a champion and an exemplar of democracy amid an accelerating decline in American political rights and civil liberties." LET'S REVERSE COURSE!

To improve the fate of humanity and life on Earth, we need fairer national policies that champion democratic governance, honest openness, truer justice, genuine freedom, fair-minded representation, peaceful coexistence, sensible moderation and smarter ecological sanity. Faith in reason must prevail, and we should make a passionate commitment to greater good goals. This faith must be informed by more intelligent priorities, Solon-wise compromise, empathetic understandings, good neighborliness and proportional responses to threats.

Such observations -- and many, many more far-ranging ideas -- are explored in this lengthy manifesto. Readers are urged to think for themselves about the ideas it contains, and to do their own part to contribute in some way to the improvement of conditions in the world. We can, indeed must, do better!! As Dr. Seuss' Lorax said, 'UNLESS someone like us cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not!'

---------- The End ----------