



Comprehensive Global Perspective: An Illuminating Worldview

Book Seven of the Earth Manifesto

A PREAMBLE IN WHICH THE AUTHOR OFFERS HER SERVICES AS AN INTERPRETER, COMPETENT ASSESSOR, GUIDE, VISIONARY AND FIGURATIVE SEDUCTRESS, AND SUMMARIZES THE BROAD TOPICS CONTAINED IN THIS EPISTLE: LIFE AND DEATH, HOPE AND LOVE, FAITH AND DOUBT, INDOMITABLE SPIRIT, LYRIC STORIES, PARABLES AND PROPHECIES, PREDICAMENTS, MYSTERIES, VAULTING TRIUMPH AND SHAME-FACED IGNOMINY, INTRIGUE, AMBITION, THE ADVENTURES AND MISADVENTURES OF POLITICIANS AND CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY, VILLAINOUS TREACHERY, VAINGLORY, THIRST FOR POWER, THE FOLLIES OF PREEMPTIVE WAR, PERVERSIONS OF JUSTICE, FEAR OF GOD AND THE SNARES OF THE DEVIL, DENIERS OF EVOLUTION, CURIOSITIES AND CONUNDRUMS, SMOKE AND MIRRORS, SLINGS AND ARROWS, MUSINGS AND AMUSEMENT, ABSURDITY AND LAUGHTER, SESQUIPEDALIAN SPECULATIONS, INDULGENCE AND ABANDON. **

An Introductory Ode.

Oh, Muses of divine Inspiration, your evocative powers are summonsed
Nine daughters of all-powerful Zeus, the supreme ruler of the Greek heavens,
And of fair and reasonable Mnemosyne, the graceful Titan goddess of Memory
Please provide us with clear Insight, and all the best understandings we can deduce.

Let heart-felt and passionate ideas ring forth --- ones that address the basic question
Of how our societies can balance today's needs with tomorrow's health and well-being
For it is quite crucial that we accomplish this vitally important and salubrious goal
So that we can achieve salvation, true security, clearer perspective and sane-seeing.

An integral new morality is needed to allow humanity to prosper and survive;
A natural reverence for the health and vitality of individuals, communities and ecosystems
And a cooperative respect for fair balance between competing interests, bound by a bold movement
Towards democratic fairness, ecological sanity, international peace, and other essential wisdoms.

"I am the Poem of the Earth, said the voice of the rain,"
Whispering wistfully to us of our connectedness to the elements,
To the wild animals, to the birds singing, to ourselves, and to each other
Bringing our attention to the wonders of life, and to our joys and laments.

At this current juncture in time, open-mindedness and receptive versatility are needed
As ever-changing conditions favor nimbleness and adaptability, and far-sightedness
And conservatives' support of the status quo proves to be inadequate to cope with rapid change
Making it necessary that we explore and embrace new ideas with courage and boldness.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

August 21, 2023, updated from August 2016, and first begun in 2005.

Published Update #14

This *Earth Manifesto* manuscript contains understandings that have been evolving for many years. Feedback is currently welcomed and encouraged at savetruffulatrees@hotmail.com

** A big Thank You acknowledgment to Brazil's foremost novelist Jorge Amado for the idea of the stylistic introductory device in this Preamble.

Note that most of the content of this Book Seven of the Earth Manifesto was written before the year 2012. I long considered this *Comprehensive Global Perspective* to be the magnum opus of my writings, long before *Common Sense Revival* evolved and I began assembling the online Earth Manifesto into twelve books to be self-published through the on-demand publisher Lulu Press. The latest updates to this document bring current day politics into this document to an extent, but the most current political perspectives on things like the onslaught of political abuses of authority, the severe ramifications of having so many following the Authoritarian Playbook, and the sensational skullduggery involved in the Supreme Court Capture Scheme are contained in essays included in *Entertaining Illumination Unleashed: Book Two of the Earth Manifesto* -- and in *See Clearly: Sanity During Insane Times: Book Twelve of The Earth Manifesto*.

Comprehensive Global Perspective: An Illuminating Worldview

Book Seven of the Earth Manifesto

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NOTE: The Titles of the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto (available from Lulu Press):

Common Sense Revival	Book One of the Earth Manifesto
Entertaining Illumination Unleashed	Book Two of the Earth Manifesto
Existential Enlightenment	Book Three of the E.M. (Version 1)
Love in the Time of Choleric	Book Three of the E.M. (Version 2)
Imaginative Perspectives and Ecopsychological Insights	Book Four of the Earth Manifesto
Healthy Recipes and Provocative Worldviews	Book Five of the Earth Manifesto
Incisive Global Perspectives	Book Six of the Earth Manifesto
<i>Comprehensive Global Perspective: An Illuminating Worldview</i>	Book Seven of the Earth Manifesto
Big Picture Perspectives, and A Pursuit of Social Activism	Book Eight of the Earth Manifesto
The Original Earth Manifesto	Book Nine of the Earth Manifesto
A Marvelous Miscellany of Musings & Evolutionary Understandings	Book Ten of the Earth Manifesto
The Rather Ridiculous Ruses that Fuel Revolutionary Unrest	Book Eleven of the Earth Manifesto
<i>See Clearly: Sanity During Insane Times</i>	Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto



Comprehensive Global Perspective: An Illuminating Worldview

Introduction

This manuscript consists of 121 Chapters, roughly organized as follows:

Introductory Thoughts and Declaration of Interdependence (Chapter #1)

The Astonishing Parable of Nauru (Chapter #2)

Understandings of a Big Picture Nature (Chapters #3-36)

Primary Principles and the 'Bet Situation' (Chapters #37-38)

Insight, Ideas, Opinions and the Search for Wisdom in America (Chapters #39-43)

Economics, Capitalism and Politics (Chapters #44-66)

Energy Considerations, Peak Oil, Neoconservatism and Corruption in Politics (Chapters #67-94)

Philosophical Perspectives on values, women, healthy societies, sex, astrophysics, beliefs, philosophy, extinction, creativity and reason (Chapters #95-114).

Insights into Religion and Culture (Chapters #115-121)

AUTHOR NOTE:

My aspiration in writing this manuscript has been to create a modern-day version of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, an extraordinarily influential pamphlet that advocated independence from the power-abusing monarchy of the British Empire back in the year 1776. To readers, men and women, I submit the same caveats as Thomas Paine:

"In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense: and have no other preliminaries to settle with the reader, than that he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves ... and generously enlarge his views beyond the present day."

And to paraphrase Thomas Paine: "Who the Author of this Production is, is wholly unnecessary to the Public, as the important thing is the IDEAS THEMSELVES, and not the author. Yet it may be necessary to say, that she is unconnected with any Party, and under no sort of influence, public or private, other than the influence of reason and principle."

Detailed distillations of the ideas, policy prescriptions and recommended initiatives that are included throughout this manuscript can be found summarized in *Common Sense Revival: Book One of the Earth Manifesto*, and in Part Four online.

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Chapter #1 - A Declaration of Interdependence.

The overarching drive that has sparked the writing of this manuscript is a vivid and passionate belief that we could collectively create a much fairer, safer, and saner world. As an American who cares deeply about the future health and well-being of our communities and children, and our country, and the biological health of life on planet Earth, it is my strong conviction that a dramatic transformation in our societies should be undertaken that will give greater respect to longer-term considerations.

There is a profound interconnectedness and interdependence of our fates with all other forms of life on Earth. Natural ecosystems are astonishingly resilient because all species of life have survived by adapting to existing and changing conditions and their natural surroundings, but living things are vulnerable to rapid alterations in habitats, increasing temperatures, shifting patterns and intensity of storms and precipitation, competitive influences, excessive harvesting and introduced pollutants.

The survival of a species involves, by definition, indefinitely sustained biological existence. The human race needs to clearly recognize and respect the fact that we cannot continue to consume much more than can be supplied by natural resources, regeneration, and healthy ecosystems. The carrying capacity of damaged ecosystems is less than that of healthy ones, so it is an overarching necessity for us to act to prevent harms to habitats that will disrupt ecosystems services and upset the providential balance in nature that serves as the foundation of our flourishing and survival.

Chief Seattle, a Native American leader in the Pacific Northwest in the 1850s, warned the U.S. government against misuse of the land, rivers, lakes and animal life. He reputedly said the following words, which have cogent meaning to us today: "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."

We should honor this wisdom, and the sagacity of other far-sighted philosophers who have gone before us. Jacques-Yves Cousteau was a great French ecologist, researcher, explorer, inventor and filmmaker who summarized our basic obligations best when he said:

"Each generation, sharing in the heritage of the Earth, has a duty as trustee for future generations to prevent irreversible and irreparable harm to life on Earth, and to human freedom and dignity."

In the course of satisfying our basic needs for food, water and energy, we are inexorably depleting natural resources. Rapid population growth and stimulated consumerism and mindless greed generally make this dilemma worse. Aggressive resource exploitation tends to damage and alter ecosystems, and to contribute to heightened international conflicts over resources, with critically detrimental environmental impacts. It is becoming increasingly crucial for us to recognize and acknowledge that we are completely dependent on a healthy balance in natural ecosystems, and with this greater awareness, we should begin to find good ways to mitigate the most damaging of our activities.

Theodore Roszak provided a valuable perspective in 2001 in his profound book, *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology*. He wrote:

"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."

We clearly need to adopt a new trajectory of ecological concern. We should restructure economic incentives and our political system to change the unsustainable mega-trends in human affairs. Our public policies are fundamentally flawed by their excessively heavy emphasis on economic drives, to the exclusion of adequately satisfying vital social and ecological needs. We should strive to see the shortcomings and follies of our current systems in a clear light, and to heedfully invest in plans that are more socially just, fiscally sound, and environmentally sane.

The purpose of my creating this manuscript has been to advance perspectives that are practical, progressive, fair-minded and far-sighted. Fresh and comprehensive Big Picture insights into complex issues could help create a powerful impetus for positive change. An expansive awareness of the challenges we face, in all of their complexity, is a valuable precondition for energizing us into making salubrious changes in our governments, institutions and our habits. Valid and expansive knowledge serves society better than ignorance and misconceptions.

Another purpose of all Earth Manifesto writings is to capture and express a positive perspective that broadly expresses a true understanding of the state of the world today. With an all-encompassing sense of best practices and comprehensive understandings of issues, and a better comprehension of the lessons of history, we should be able to confidently debunk the misleading ideas and inaccurate orthodox beliefs that are promoted by vested interest groups, partisans in think tanks, scheming politicians, economic fundamentalists, demagogic talk show hosts and religious conservatives in our male-dominated patriarchal system.

This would be a good step toward making the world a significantly better place for all, and would help ensure a greater probability of our leaving a fairer legacy to those in posterity.

"Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you."

--- Jane Austin

For those who seek concrete and detailed ideas right now about how we could be making constructive and pragmatic changes in our national policies to significantly improve our societies, see the proposals in *Common Sense Revival*, or in Part Four of the Earth Manifesto online.

The bottom line is that public policies are wrong-headed when they are designed to benefit the few in the short-term rather than the many, both now and in the long run. Social inequities are made worse by national policies that cause income and wealth inequalities to increase, and such policies make the majority of people less secure. This tends to motivate the powers-that-be to impose more strict control in order to maintain the anti-democratic injustice of prevailing conditions. When disparities between the rich and the poor are mercilessly increased to an excessive extreme, it makes our societies less safe for everyone. As a result, it becomes even more difficult to achieve true justice, societal stability, cooperation in problem solving, peaceable coexistence and sustainable living.

Let's be honest with ourselves, and learn as much as we can, and develop accurate understandings. This will help us create a revolution of economic and cultural ideas,, which would provide a spark that enables vitally needed reform and social progress. When we take into account the root causes of problems, we are better poised to be able to formulate good solutions that are more holistic and comprehensive.

And let's not only strive to be more perceptively aware: let's also get better organized!

Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin founded the first Earth Day in April 1970. He referred to it as a "battle to restore a proper relationship between man and his environment". Nelson wisely noted that this struggle requires a political, moral, ethical and financial commitment that is long and sustained, and that is far beyond any efforts yet being made.

The number of human beings alive on Earth has more than doubled, from 3.7 billion to 8 billion people since the first annual Earth Day 53 years ago. Environmental problems have become starkly worse during this time, and the evidence of potentially catastrophic human population overshoot is growing conclusive. Particularly stunning is the Living Planet Report 2022 that reveals a decline of almost 70% in the number of mammals, reptiles, birds, amphibians and fishes in the past half century alone. Despite this shocking situation, the voices of those who deny the damaging impacts we are having on our home planet are still overly influential. These people are basically denying our collective responsibility for the mitigation of these damages. Entrenched interest groups generally strive to perpetuate the unsustainable exploitation of people and resources, and to facilitate profit making no matter how undesirable the impacts this has on the common good.

During the eight years of George W. Bush's presidency, the proverbial pendulum swung sharply toward expanded corporate and presidential power and conservative ideologies, and the Supreme Court shifted from a 5-4 majority of liberal-minded Justices to a 5-4 majority of "conservative" pro-corporate Justices. Since then, three Federalist Society-chosen judges were appointed between 2017 and 2020, skewing the Supreme Court far to the right. This makes the proverbial writing on the wall even clearer: positive changes are needed and smart reforms should be put into effect and we should act to cause the pendulum to swing back toward greater reason, fair-mindedness, progressive politics, sensible regulation, better accountability, and more ethical judges on the Supreme Court and other federal and state courts. We should also give stronger support to women's health and family planning programs, and ecologically sane plans and long-term goals.

"It always seems impossible until it's done."

--- Nelson Mandela

The election of Barack Obama in November 2008 promised hope of a potential dramatic shift in the political landscape toward fairer and smarter ways forward. His tenure in office proved how difficult it is to achieve auspicious change in our sadly dysfunctional and divisively oppositional political system. The need for sensible change, meanwhile, continues inexorably to grow.

Let's be honest with ourselves about the scope of our task: the average "ecological footprint" of most Americans has been growing larger for decades. Never in history have there been more people on the planet, and never have these people -- us! -- been consuming more resources on an average per-person basis, or in total. Think about your own individual footprint, and correlated impacts. For most people today, it is larger now than it has ever been in their life. And the average longevity of people worldwide has been on a dramatic long-term upward trend (until interrupted by the pandemic).

A tipping point of ecological awareness seems to be gaining strength. At the same time, we are also teetering on an ominous tipping point of accelerating change that portends irreversible resource depletion, destabilizing climate disruption, encroaching overpopulation, and intensified conflicts. We would be wise to have the foresight to lend our support to a far-reaching reorientation and restructuring of our societies to make them fairer, more sustainable, and more conservation-oriented.

"Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."

--- English writer H.G. Wells

People around the planet have been marching lockstep down a path that invites cyclical instability and risks ecological collapse. We are leaving a sad legacy to our descendants that will be significantly less propitious, in general, than the legacy we collectively inherited from our parents. This makes it imperative that we demand our representatives begin to exhibit an overarching concern for the greater good. More honest leaders are needed who will guide us toward smarter national policies and be more committed to rectifying this state of affairs.

A Bill of Rights for Future Generations that contains specifics similar to those proposed in this manifesto should be ratified in nations worldwide to provide good guidance.

Let's boldly embrace the serendipitous idea of beginning to "pay forward" good deeds to people in future generations by making revolutionary changes in the way we structure our economies and incentivize activities, both individually and collectively. Sticking with the status quo of constantly BORROWING from people in the future will almost certainly prove to be woefully ill-advised. Small changes and minor reforms are simply not adequate. We can no longer afford to allow misguided people to implement wrongheaded priorities.

Naomi Klein offers a modern caution in her book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. She explores the transcendent problem of why the climate crisis challenges us to abandon the core "free market" ideology of our time, and to restructure the global economy and remake our political systems. "In short, either we embrace radical change ourselves or radical changes will be visited upon our physical world. The status quo is no longer an option."

"We have not been borrowing, we have been stealing the future of our children ..."

--- Jane Goodall

The way we perceive things has a profound affect on the way we live and act in the world. One of the freshest and most entertainingly provocative books I've read in recent years is *Spontaneous Evolution - Our Positive Future (and a Way to Get There from Here)*. The authors of this book give readers surprising insights into how we interpret our perceptions of the world, and of the nature of our brain waves in various frequencies that range from sleepy Delta to meditative Theta to dreamy Alpha to attentive Beta to intently-focused Gamma. They point out how strongly our individual and collective behaviors are influenced by behavioral conditioning and programming, and by commercial advertising and ideological propaganda. They also provide great hope for meaningful changes through cooperative problem solving and proper understanding, enlightened education and a more knowledgeable body politic.

"In a shrinking world that could use a good shrink,
We don't need another theory of evolution.
What we need is a better practice of evolution."

--- Swami Beyondananda, *Spontaneous Evolution*

I particularly love the second chapter in *Spontaneous Evolution*, "Act Locally ... Evolve Globally". It contains a discussion concerning the four principal paradigms of perception that have pervaded the conscious awareness of humanity since ancient times: Animism, Polytheism, Monotheism and Scientific Materialism. I look forward to re-reading this book, and to thinking further about its concepts, so that more of its insights and humor can be incorporated into Earth Manifesto essays.

Many people know the concept of someone being an undesirable '*persona non grata*'. What the world needs now is a contrasting and more valuable type of person: a '*persona grata*', a good person, a

decent sort, an honest person, an honorable mensch. Millions of people like this are needed to lead us to pay forward some sensible and fair-minded deeds. To harvest good outcomes, we have a real need for leaders who understand and communicate clearly the existential obligation for us to champion fairer and more ecological sane public policies, and to sow justice and other sensible seeds.

These insights are dedicated to the great American author and humorist, Samuel Clemens, aka Mark Twain. The 187th anniversary of his birth was commemorated on November 30, 2022, and the 112th anniversary of the day he died took place on April 21, 2022. In addition to having written marvelous novels like the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain involved himself in trying to beneficially influence the foreign policies of the United States to stop American imperial involvements in wars and occupations of Cuba and the Philippines. Mark Twain cleverly lampooned the distinctive foibles and absurd behaviors of the human race, and provided us with keen insights into the true nature of political power, corruption, greed and human folly.

Wallace Stevens once poetically opined: "Perhaps the truth depends on a walk around a lake". Before continuing, let's take a break, think about things, and wait a moment for guidance. Let's dare to anticipate -- aha! -- some epiphanies. Breathe in slowly and deeply, and as you exhale, calmly, imagine making a spiritually purificatory and Nature-respecting circumambulation around a body of fresh water. Do some invigorating and mildly exhausting outdoors exercise, or soak for a while in a tub of hot water; whatever! Breathe deep, and let go; then focus! Let the paradigm shift begin!

Thanks for joining me on this odyssey of philosophy. "Entertain your brain!" Let us seek inspiration that springs from the lovely Greek Muse *Calliope*, the feminine muse of eloquence and epic poetry, a goddess who was regarded as the eldest and most distinguished of the nine divine Muses.

Chapter #2 - The Astonishing Parable of Nauru.

The true story of the history of the island republic of Nauru provides us with a compelling parable and valuable cautionary tale. A careful consideration of this story illuminates dilemmas associated with a lack of foresight and the shortcomings of short-term oriented planning in human affairs.

The Republic of Nauru is a small oval-shaped island in Micronesia that lies northeast of Australia and New Guinea in the South Pacific, and just south of the equator. It is the smallest island nation in the world, and the smallest independent republic.

The island of Nauru once had rich resources of phosphates. These mineral deposits were mined for about 100 years for use as fertilizers, because phosphate is one of the three primary nutrients that plants require for growth. Nauru's non-renewable phosphate resources have basically been completely depleted, and more than three-quarters of the island has been turned into a barren wasteland with a jagged central plateau that is like a moonscape of deep pits and tall remnant rock pillars. Most of the extracted phosphate was exported to Australia to enrich agricultural soils there.

When Nauru gained independence from Australia in 1968, the native inhabitants began to receive most of the financial benefits of phosphate mining for the first time. They became relatively rich virtually overnight, and gained one of the world's highest per capita incomes. A kind of generous welfare state was implemented soon thereafter.

The government of Nauru took much of the income from phosphate profits and invested it in secretive trust funds. Some of the investments went awry and failed, and others suffered heavy losses due to bad investing and financial mismanagement and corruption. Nauru today has a high rate of unemployment and is heavily dependent on external economic stimulus, and its outlook for the

future is dreary due to the republic's dwindling assets, its few sources of income, and the environmental devastation of its home island.

Nauru's history provides a compelling and illustrative, but decidedly non-illustrious example of the colossal folly of dominant forces of greedy shortsightedness in human endeavors. This story makes us viscerally aware of the reasons we should soon begin a radical redesign of our own economic and political systems. One of my pet theories is that the most effective and freedom-honoring way to undertake a revolutionary modification of our aggregate habits is through the effective use of intelligently targeted incentives and disincentives.

Nauru's experience sends a potent message to business leaders and politicians in America: we should not be so closely mimicking the policies that Nauru followed. We should NOT be so aggressively exploiting and depleting non-renewable resources. We should not be consuming unsustainably, causing excessive environmental degradation, or investing unwisely and allowing corruption in government and business. We should reject shortsighted leadership, and be disciplined in creating fair and affordable entitlements, and prevent the wealthiest 1% from avoiding paying taxes and getting harsh austerity measures imposed.

All the nations of the world are acting in similarly ill-advised manners, but on a far grander scale, a global one. The example of Nauru serves as a "canary-in-a-coal-mine" warning to all nations that we should be acting in less myopically exploitive and impetuously improvident ways. The resources that we are currently depleting on Earth are not limited to oil, natural gas, coal and fresh water. Many minerals are also being depleted to critical extents worldwide, and one of the most essential for food production is phosphorous. Yes, the very same resource that has been basically exhausted in Nauru!

The depletion of phosphorus is not an isolated incident. It has been called a part of "the gravest natural resource shortage you've never hear of." Supplies of this critical component in fertilizers are being used profligately worldwide, and this could eventually lead to severe food shortages. The availability of mined phosphorus, which plays so crucial a role in plant growth, could peak by as early as the year 2030. This would lead to falling yields of crops, and within 50 years, the severity of this crisis could result in large increases in food prices -- and possibly widespread famines and extremes of social and political turmoil. It seems like it should be imperative that we reduce usage and begin to recycle this indispensable macronutrient, and that we should start to reclaim it to decrease the need for mined phosphorous to fertilize crops.

The century of exploitative mining on Nauru harmed the native people's culture and traditional way of life, and it also took a curious physical toll on the islanders themselves. The people of Nauru have been forced to import nearly all their food because of the island's lack of soil, vegetation and crops. As a result of eating processed fatty foods like potato chips and canned meats, and of drinking alcohol, there has been an increase in high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. These problems have reduced the average life expectancy of islanders to only about 64 years. This compares to 85 years in Japan, on average, and 76 years in the United States. Nauru thus ranks 169th in the world on this measure of well-being, and the U.S. sadly ranks below 45 other countries.

It is interesting to note that the source of phosphates in Nauru's 8-square mile landmass is not fossiliferous sediments formed on seafloors, as with most phosphate deposits that are being mined in the world today. Nauru's phosphate consisted, instead, of a deep accumulation of decayed bird guano. Yow, Mc Now! -- This cautionary ecological tale has a messy poetic irony, indeed!

Another fascinating aspect of Nauru is its early history. Seafaring Polynesian and Micronesian explorers first settled on the island in small clans. They believed in a spirit land, Buitani, which was also an island, and they believed in a female divinity named Eijebong -- and they traced their family descent on the female side. The rest of the world would arguably be much better off to believe in a female divinity, and to fervently and protectively worship her -- like Gaia, a Mother Earth deity, for example! And females in families should be shown greater respect than they currently are in our patriarchal societies. Honestly!

Stories, myths, legends, and 'holy book' tales are provocative because they invoke our imagination and feelings and touch us in universal ways. They evoke human needs and timeless themes that are a part of the collective human inheritance. They often contain valuable lessons, or "morals to the story", just as folk tales or wisdom tales do. In the mythology of ancient Greece, Athena was the Goddess of Wisdom, known for thinking clearly and monitoring events and noting effects and wisely changing a course of action when it became unproductive. Athena's wisdom counsels us to use our wits resourcefully and to act perceptively to save ourselves, much like Hansel and Gretel did in the fairy tale that tells of children having been abandoned in the forest.

We need not act like tortured souls to be able to give careful consideration to the lessons of Nauru and other prudent understandings. Optimism and hope are valuable traits, so readers are encouraged to maintain positive perspectives and attitudes of Olympian detachment while they read these words.

"A healthy and wholesome cheerfulness is not necessarily impossible to any occupation."

--- Mark Twain

Another tale with an urgent and sobering message for our times is found in the story of Easter Island in remote southeastern Polynesia. Monumental iconic stone statues carved from quarried volcanic rock there reveal a story that is compelling. Remember in reading this: *perspective* literally means *clear seeing!* We would be well-advised to strive to see more clearly!

To fully comprehend this cautionary tale, one must know the human history of Rapa Nui. The original inhabitants of the island had arrived by canoe from other Polynesian islands somewhere between 1,600 and 1,200 years ago. Over the course of the next millennium they created a complex civilization of cultivated crops and an artistic culture and rule by chiefdoms. The Rapanui people were so isolated from other islands that they chose to channel their energies into monumental efforts to create giant platforms near the sea, carving and transporting and erecting gigantic stone statues on these platforms. Whereas other Polynesian islanders had devoted their energies and resources to inter-island exploration and trading and raiding and colonization and emigration, the isolation of the Easter Islanders eliminated such competing outlets for their ambitions. The gigantic volcanic stone statues are the apparent result.

The island had been covered with a large variety of native trees when the first people arrived, including a species of palm trees that exceeded in size any other ever known in the world. The island also teemed with many kinds of land birds and sea-going birds. The indigenous forests were used for many purposes, including as fuel for cooking and warmth, and in the construction of houses, fishing canoes and funeral pyres to cremate the remains of the dead. The enormous palm trees were likely best for being used to construct tracks on which hundreds of imposing stone statues, some weighing as much as 80 tons, were hauled from the volcanic quarries of the Rano Raraku crater, where they had been carved, to positions as far as 10 miles away around the perimeter of the island.

By the 1600's, the human population had grown to more than 10,000 people, and the pressure of all these people on available resources finally caused the total decimation of native forests. The civilization of the Rapanui was completely dependent on these trees, so as people devastated them, their society began to fall apart. The harvesting of the trees severely damaged the island's ecosystems, and soil erosion led to crop failures, famine, intense conflicts and sickness and death. By the mid-19th century, the population had crashed from more than 10,000 people to less than 120.

The parallels of our human trajectory today, on a global scale, are scary. We should adopt visionary precautionary principles, and stop going down a similar path to the one that had such catastrophic consequences for the Rapanui. Professor Jared Diamond emphasizes this point in his insightful book, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. He indicates that the inability to think sensibly and plan ahead wisely, and to be flexibly adaptable, is a form of ecological insanity that will likely have calamitous consequences for us and the marvelous biotic diversity of our home planet. Chapter 2 of this book is an insightful perspective that tells this story of ecological calamity on Easter Island.

Auspicious *Live Earth* concerts took place on 7/7/07, and a great Concert for Hurricane Sandy Relief was held on 12/12/12, both featuring amazing lineups. These events and other similar ones give humanity hope and belief that musicians, artists and activists among us can help launch a spirit of collaboration and renewal that will yield positive efforts in finding better ways of getting along, and of respecting others, and of improving our societies, and of better managing crucial resources, and of healing the ecosystems of our home planet.

"Rebel against something, because everything ain't right!"

--- A message seen on a green T-shirt at a Blues concert

Chapter #3a: The Surpassing Merit of Democracy and Democratic Fairness

Essay Interruption: This chapter is introduced here due to the urgent threat posed by extremist authoritarian-inclined politicians to all the aspirational observations and recommendations contained in *Comprehensive Global Perspective*.

A strong democracy is vitally important to the general welfare, and fair representation of all voters is necessary to help guarantee more broadly equitable policies, and to ensure the health, security and best interests of the people.

Additionally, a strong democracy is highly desirable for securing the Blessings of Liberty for people, and to assure those in Posterity that we will leave them a just society and a habitable planet. Freedom is like humankind's magnetic true north, and treasured liberties should, of course, not only be protected but also properly understood and respected within an expansive concept of Golden Rule reciprocity towards others.

A strong democracy is needed to create a more perfect Union, to establish justice, to insure national security, to cultivate domestic Tranquility, and to promote the general welfare. Our policies should all be more inclusive and socially responsible, and less economic elitist.

Strengthening our democracy and giving fair representation to all citizens is, honestly, how to really MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN.

For significantly more expansive explanations and assessment of this BIG issue, see my essay online, *Democracy, and the Problematic and Pathological Perils of "Electoral Autocracies"*.

MAGA Republicans have been cynically, deviously and treacherously indulging in what amounts to a "vast degradation of democracy", suppressing votes, purging voter rolls, egregiously gerrymandering, and threatening prosecutors and judges and those who oppose their abuses of power. They are pushing an extremist agenda that violates the spirit, intent and purposes of the U.S. Constitution, as articulated in its great Preamble. MAGA Republicans are doing this shamefully -- shamelessly -- in order to grab more power for their fringe minority faction of fomented angry partisans (and billionaires happy for the diversion and enabled tax breaks).

Since democracy and democratic fairness are critical for the overall well-being of the people, it is deeply disturbing that Donald Trump is trying to claw his way back into power in the upcoming 2024 national elections -- and that his agenda is to concentrate more power in his own hands if he manages to win the presidency, thereby upsetting the balance of power between the executive branch and Congress and the judiciary.

Trump presents an existentially dire threat to American people due to his self-centered drive to again grab power and impose new forms of despotic rule on the citizenry. Details about this were revealed by Jonathan Swan, Charlie Savage and Maggie Haberman of the New York Times on July 17, 2023 in their article *Trump and His Allies Forge Plans to Increase Presidential Power in 2025 – representing an extraordinarily grave threat to our democracy.*

"Donald J. Trump and his allies are planning a sweeping expansion of presidential power over the machinery of government if voters return him to the White House in 2025, reshaping the structure of the executive branch to concentrate far greater authority directly in his hands."

These plans sound like a vengeful disaster. "The former president and his backers aim to strengthen the power of the White House and limit the independence of federal agencies." In particular, it is his objective to gain power to try to get the Justice Department to cease attempting to hold him accountable, and to pardon himself for the legal jeopardy he is in, which is highly likely merit prison sentences. He wants to get off the hook of conviction for some if not most of 91 felony counts in four serious indictments against him.

Trump Republicans also, dauntingly, state: "Neutralizing the media's power to expose his well-documented corruption would be one of his top priorities."

Historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat, a scholar on fascism and authoritarian leaders, wrote two days after this New York Times story that "Trump's plans to reshape the federal government to give himself vast personal powers if he returns to the White House in 2025 would make the United States similar to authoritarian systems in which the executive branch wields outsized power with respect to the judiciary and legislature."

Those plans "are consistent with a 21st century playbook for authoritarians: Tell the public how you will set up an authoritarian state well before you get into office. Frame your intended expansion of executive powers as a mere streamlining of government. Don't forget to repeatedly praise dictators as 'brilliant' and 'top of the line' people so there'll be no surprises when you act in a similar manner. And whet your followers' appetites for destruction of existing norms by advertising how you will purge 'the sick political class that hates our country' from government."

"Many Americans have become habituated to Republicans normalizing exceptional events -- the violent Jan. 6, 2021 coup attempt being a glaring example. Even so, as a scholar of authoritarianism," wrote Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "I was chilled by Trump associates' casual descriptions in the Times' report of how he

and they intend to destroy the independence of democratic institutions and make them serve Republican, and more specifically Trumpian, ends. The destruction of democracy is being marketed to Americans as a kind of equalizer, a 'correction' of a system currently skewed to liberal priorities."

"The plan is for Trump to finish the devastating work he started during his first term of rooting out any civil servant attached to professional ethics. To take the State Department as an example, retired Ambassador Nancy McEldowney likened what already happened there under Trump's tenure to a 'hostile takeover and occupation,' with nearly half of career ministers retiring or pushed out in just the first two years of his presidency."

"Remember the executive order that implemented a travel ban from Muslim-majority countries? It was part of a planned blitzkrieg on our democratic system. 'Get used to it. @POTUS is a man of action and impact ... Shock to the system,' Trump advisor Kellyanne Conway tweeted a week after his inauguration in January 2017. 'And he's just getting started.'"

"As for how they might accomplish this takeover, given that Trump has talked about terminating the Constitution -- and incited an insurrection to stay in power illegally -- nothing is off the table. There's a reason that the Protecting Our Democracy Act, passed by the House in 2021, would have limited 'abuses of presidential power,' including misuse of states of emergency. At the very least, stripping employment protections for potentially tens of thousands of civil servants, who could be replaced with Trump ideologues, offers a quick way to remake the profile of the federal bureaucracy."

The New York Times report contained these added insights about Trump's (and his allies') plans for a sweeping expansion of presidential power over the machinery of government.

"Their plans to centralize more power in the Oval Office stretch far beyond the former president's recent remarks that he would order a criminal investigation into his political rival, President Biden, signaling his intent to end the post-Watergate norm of Justice Department independence from White House political control."

"Mr. Trump and his associates have a broader goal: to alter the balance of power by increasing the president's authority over every part of the federal government that now operates, by either law or tradition, with any measure of independence from political interference by the White House, according to a review of his campaign policy proposals and interviews with people close to him."

"He intends to strip employment protections from tens of thousands of career civil servants, making it easier to replace them with loyalists if they are deemed obstacles to his agenda. These government employees are supposed to be nonpartisan professionals and experts with protections against being fired for political reasons."

"He views the civil service as a den of 'deep staters' who were tried to thwart him at every turn when he was in office, including by raising legal or pragmatic objections to his immigration policies, among many other examples."

And the Trump cabal "plans to scour the intelligence agencies, the State Department and the defense bureaucracies to remove officials he has vilified as 'the sick political class that hates our country.'"

"Peter L. Strauss, professor emeritus of law at Columbia University and a critic of the strong version of the unitary executive theory, argued that it is constitutional and desirable for Congress, in creating and empowering an agency to perform some task, to also include some checks on the president's control over officials 'because we don't want autocracy' and to prevent abuses."

"The regrettable fact is that the judiciary at the moment seems inclined to recognize that the president does have this kind of authority," he said. "They are clawing away agency independence in ways that I find quite unfortunate and disrespectful of congressional choice."

Trump has also vowed to revive the practice of "impounding" funds, or refuse to spend money appropriated by Congress for programs he doesn't like. "After Nixon used the practice to aggressively block agency spending he was opposed to, on water pollution control, housing construction and other issues, Congress banned the tactic."

"Mr. Trump intends to bring independent agencies -- like the Federal Communications Commission, which makes and enforces rules for television and internet companies, and the Federal Trade Commission, which enforces various antitrust and other consumer protection rules against businesses -- under direct presidential control."

"Mr. Trump and his advisers are making no secret of their intentions -- proclaiming them in rallies and on his campaign website, describing them in white papers and openly discussing them."

"Some elements of the plans had been floated when Mr. Trump was in office but were impeded by internal concerns that they would be unworkable and could lead to setbacks. And for some veterans of Mr. Trump's turbulent White House who came to question his fitness for leadership, the prospect of removing guardrails and centralizing even greater power over government directly in his hands sounded like a recipe for mayhem."

A recipe for mayhem is definitely not a good thing. "It would be chaotic," said John F. Kelly, Trump's second White House chief of staff. "It just simply would be chaotic, because he'd continually be trying to exceed his authority but the sycophants would go along with it. It would be a nonstop gunfight with the Congress and the courts."

"The agenda being pursued has deep roots in the decades-long effort by conservative legal thinkers to undercut what has become known as the administrative state -- agencies that enact regulations aimed at keeping the air and water clean and food, drugs and consumer products safe, but that cut into business profits."

At a recent rally in Michigan, Trump declared, "We will demolish the deep state. We will expel the warmongers from our government. We will drive out the globalists. We will cast out the communists, Marxists and fascists. And we will throw off the sick political class that hates our country."

This rhetoric is maniacal spin, for there are remarkably few communists and Marxists in positions of authority in the U.S., and as for fascists, they actually support Trump and his plans to abuse authority, rather than being proponents of more sensible, fair and honorable liberal policies.

Electing Trump again would not only promote chaos, but also likely enable dictatorial tyranny against the people. Republican support for Trump, and their whitewashing of his violations of the law, and their eagerness to impose their own minority rule on the American people, are a black mark on history.

Chapter #3b - The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

"Humans' Basic Needs Destroying Planet Rapidly"

--- A March 2005 headline in a national newspaper

This sobering piece of news was astonishingly found buried far from the front page of the newspaper, more than a dozen pages back in the front section. Such critically important information was ostensibly deemed, remarkably enough, to be unworthy of more prominent coverage.

The headline concerned a study called the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. More than a thousand experts in 95 countries had spent four years compiling its findings. This makes the report one of the most extensively researched understandings in the history of humankind. The Assessment concluded that the human race is unsustainably consuming natural resources and significantly degrading the ecosystems upon which we depend. It basically warned that we need to develop new methods of economic activity so that in the course of living our lives we will simultaneously better protect the vitality of our environment and the future prospects of life on Earth.

These findings profoundly concern each and every one of us. Yet the news barely made a splash. It seems to have practically disappeared from the radar of public attention, like a skipping stone sinking suddenly in the turbulent ripples of a river.

"The first rule of intelligent tinkering," noted Aldo Leopold in the *Sand County Almanac*, "is to save all the parts." Save all the parts! One way to do this in the grand scope of human affairs would be to develop a better appreciation of synergistic relationships between the health of natural ecosystems and the well-being of human societies -- and to respectfully plan and act accordingly.

Either ecologists "are wrong about the human need for other species and for the well-being of Planet Earth as a life-support system; or our species is intent on suicide; or there is something we are overlooking. Our life-endangering and habitat-destroying ways are like "a kind of failure in some fundamental dimension of human existence, an irrationality beyond mistakenness, a kind of madness."

--- Deep ecologist Paul Shepard

The Earth's biological support systems consist of a vast network of interdependent life forms that live in a variety of habitats, ranges and ecological niches. We rely on this biodiversity and these natural ecosystems for our well-being and survival. In particular, we depend on the bounty of fertile soils, forests, oceans, wetlands, rivers and aquifers for our food, nutrients, fresh water, building materials, flood protection, and even the oxygen in the air we breathe. As the Nature Conservancy succinctly notes, "Human well-being is derived directly from the health of natural systems."

According to *Genesis 1:26* in the Bible, God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." (Who the heck was 'He' talking to? Gaea, Cronos, the Titans and the Olympians, perhaps?)

About two thousand years have elapsed since Biblical times, and we seem to have gained little more respect for all the 'creeping things'. But it is preposterous to suppose that God would be in favor of our striving for 'dominion' without demonstrating a more responsible stewardship of wildlife and resources, and without a more profound caring for the ecological underpinnings of our collective well-being. Buddha, Brahma, Jesus and Mohammed would almost certainly agree, if they were around to pass judgment today on this transcendent issue. Instead of waiting for God to get really angry with us again and bring on another globally devastating Flood like 'He' is said to have done in the Genesis story, I suggest many ways in this manifesto that we should be taking bold actions to help ourselves and to improve the prospects of our descendants.

The overarching guidance of a Bill of Rights for Future Generations would be a very smart start. One primary way to help ourselves and improve the prospects of people in the future would be by moving toward using resources sustainably. This course of action necessarily involves a revolutionary shift from the profligate use of non-renewable resources to a reliance on renewable resources. Such a

transformation would help assure that we will leave a more auspicious legacy to our descendants. It is shortsighted for us to wastefully consume resources, and to inexorably deplete them, just as it is foolish to intentionally or inadvertently damage Earth's vital natural ecosystems.

It is only because of our myopic perspective and the short-term orientation of our economic systems that we can continue to aggressively clear-cut forests, overfish seas, pollute the ecological commons, and incessantly encourage unsustainable development. We can no longer afford to resist adaptive change, and we shouldn't allow the status quo to remain the way it is. We should reject ideological denials of the fact that it is folly to continuously degrade fertile farmlands, damage rivers, destroy wetlands, slaughter wildlife, poison waterways, harm habitats, spew record amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and assault Earth's biological diversity by contributing to the massacre of wildlife and degrading of habitats that is threatening countless species of life with eternal extinction.

It is particularly crazy to continue emitting climate-disrupting greenhouse gases into the skies without bold cooperative international efforts to make deep and decisive cuts in the quantity of emissions. The British government's Stern Review (named after former World Bank chief economist Nicholas Stern) provided a turning point in understandings in 2006. It was asserted in the report that there will be substantial economic costs for doing nothing about the things that contribute to climate change. The report's conclusion stated that the benefits of strong, early action on climate change outweigh the costs by a considerable margin. Billionaire industrialists and giant fossil fuel corporations are spending heavily to sow doubt about this crucial understanding, but deceptive propaganda is contrary to the full truth.

Widespread adversities are being caused by global warming, and much more extensive and costly harm is predicted to occur in the future. These facts are starkly outlined in reports done by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. With strikingly blunt language, the 4th report of the IPCC in November 2007 described climate change as "the defining challenge of our age". It called on the United States and China, the world's biggest emitters, to play a more constructive role in reducing emissions. The report reads like "a final warning to humanity," noted *Time Magazine*. The Panel chairman Dr. Rajendra Pachauri declared: "What we do in the next two to three years will determine our future. This is the defining moment." NOW is the time to act! More than 15 years have passed since the IPCC sounded this clarion call, and yet governments worldwide are continuing to dither on this issue. It is becoming crystal clear that we are not dealing with these challenges in adequate ways. People are continuing to figuratively bury their heads in the sand by using rationalizations, denials, obstruction or proposals for mere baby steps of remedial action. Voluntary efforts at emissions reductions, however, are not enough. We must 'Step It Up' to truly mitigate climate disruptions being caused by a warming atmosphere. It is time for us to act to prevent potentially abrupt and irreversible climate change. Otherwise, risky feedback loops will increase, and this will likely have negative consequences. These issues are discussed below in *The Gaia Understanding* (Chapter #22).

The Paris Accords that were signed by almost every country in the world in December 2015 must be followed by real remedial actions and greater commitments to sustainability.

The sound of the disintegration of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet is providing a scary and audible backdrop for these words, as scientists realize that the melting of this ice sheet has "reached a point of no return". We should take such understandings into account when policies are formulated. We can no longer allow governments and big businesses to suppress valid scientific understandings of on-going developments related to climate disruptions and overpopulation pressures. Effective responses

to gathering threats are unconscionably delayed by such self-serving deceptions. These risks will get worse until we give them our alert attention and devote courageous action to mitigating the severity of the effects of resource depletion and anthropogenic climate disruption.

The ideas of the *Skeptical Environmentalist* Bjorn Lomborg, which are summarized in the film *Cool It*, should be taken into account and thoroughly analyzed in global efforts to intelligently and practically prioritize world problems and determine how we should make bold investments to greener solutions.

Patience, *n.* A minor form of despair, disguised as a virtue.

--- Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Chapter #4 - Overarching Themes.

One theme of this manuscript is that more comprehensive Big Picture perspectives could lead to more responsible collective actions in our societies. To prevent the perceptible ecological degradation of our wonderful home planet, we need to find good ways to reduce the insider influence of short-term thinking, excessive greed, overly ruthless competition, mismanagement, ignorance and hubris.

One of the best ways to change our country for the better would be to shift the focus of our political representatives from tactics that win elections to solutions that benefit society. Citizens should demand that all decision-makers begin to establish fairer priorities, and to heed more enlightened understandings of important issues. We need to make our policies and institutions fairer and more ecologically sound, as well as longer-term oriented. There is nothing high-fallutin' about it!

Unfortunately, the entrenched influence of vested interests dominates our societies. Congress and the executive branch of the government are, to a large extent, owned, operated and directed by rich people and giant corporations in our "political duopoly" system. The primary aim of the federal government has become to advance the interests of large corporations and vested interests, NOT to promote the general good or to ensure greater fairness, and it is certainly not to maximize people's civil liberties or to protect people from abuses of power by wealthy people and big corporations.

Charles Ferguson, who directed the compelling 2010 documentary film *Inside Job* that concerned the 2008 financial crisis, characterized our system of government as a *political duopoly*, in which the wealthiest 1% of Americans is effectively dictating policies, and corporations are tools used to further concentrate wealth and power, and banks, Wall Street entities and other corporations are abusing their power by buying influence from those peddling it.

One fortunate aspect of the necessity for us to make our societies greener is that businesses can often "do well by doing good". They are able to do this especially in arenas such as efficient uses of water, energy and materials in green building construction. But the business-as-usual status quo is primarily concerned with short-term profits and myopic understandings of self-interest, so it strives to keep economic and political systems the way they are, or to change them in retrogressive ways. In doing so, entrenched interest groups impede progress and oppose common-good reforms. They also strive to prevent changes that would be beneficial to the majority of people -- and to posterity. These interest groups lobby successfully for the privatization of profits and the socialization of costs and risks, and always for more corporate perks, privileges and subsidies. And they favor the bottom-line short-term interests of big businesses over the best interests of the people.

Disciples of Milton Friedman and his Chicago school of economics champion privatization as if it is the panacea for all social ills. But it turns out that privatization can create severe problems. Rather than advancing positive and salubrious goals like lower costs, greater efficiency, better management and

social improvements, the outcome of privatization is often a spike in unfair cronyism, costly no-bid contracting, price gouging, cost-externalizing gambits, excessive fees, increased fraud, inadequate regulation and monitoring, and inadequate accountability. The privatization of government functions and the elimination of sensible banking regulations often create big opportunities for corporations to swindle taxpayers. These are not good things!

The outsourcing of government activities to corporations has increased substantially in the last two decades in the U.S. The outcome of this development has generally been detrimental, in distinct contrast to ideological arguments to the contrary. Just consider how the contracting of war services turned out in Iraq. Exorbitant costs resulted, along with a disastrous failure to achieve optimistic reconstruction goals. Billions of dollars disappeared without a trace, and there was way too much misinformation and deception. Accountability was lacking, Iraqi civilians were murdered, women were raped by military contractors, widespread social upheaval took place, sectarian strife spiked, millions of people became refugees from violent conflicts, and many injustices were perpetrated by our occupation forces.

One way that corporate interests gain advantages is by foisting costs of their detrimental social and environmental impacts upon society as a whole. Corporations should not be allowed to indulge in this corrupt expediency of externalizing costs onto society, and these costs should be required to be included in product prices. These costs include living wages, adequate worker protections and benefits, the prevention and mitigation of pollution, the clean-up of toxic wastes, and a well-designed system of carbon emissions green fees that would be effective in reducing the amount of climate-change-causing greenhouse gases being spewed into the atmosphere.

Here is a valuable insight: every one of us partially favors the externalizing of costs onto society. We do this through our demands as consumers for good deals and cheap prices. Millions of Americans also do this through their expectations as owners and shareholders seeking maximum profits. These twin influences make consumer and investor goals paramount in our economy. Our economic and political systems weaken our national focus on *contrasting priorities* that we all want in our roles as good citizens. These good citizen goals include secure communities, greater social fairness, better quality public education, an adequate social safety net, reasonable health care for all, democratic safeguards, environmental justice, healthy ecosystems, clean air and water, and public lands and open spaces that are protected from undesirable development, unwise exploitation and unnecessary damages. It is becoming obvious that we need to establish a better balance between consumer and investor goals and vital good citizen goals, as further explained in my essay *The Common Good, Properly Understood*. The greater-good nature of these overarching goals is being given short shrift by our political representatives.

The fairest way to adjudicate between competing interests is to have fair institutions and fair laws that are fairly applied with the purpose of securing the best interests of the common good over the long term. Entrenched interests, however, strive stubbornly to gain greater power and make bigger profits and expand their perks and privileges. They consequently and consequentially work to prevent us from making reasonable national commitments to good citizen goals. Unfortunately, these interests control our political processes and pervert our national priorities. Instead of advancing true justice, human rights, smart planning and the prospects for healthier societies, the interest groups that dominate our society promote laissez-faire economic policies and stimulated increases in inequality, along with deregulation, more highly leveraged risk-taking, exploitive profiteering, privatization, and the movement of operations overseas to countries with cheaper labor and fewer protections of

workers and the environment. And instead of advancing peaceful coexistence, vested interest groups often favor aggression in international interventions and the enforcement of advantages in our sprawling American economic empire.

Many interest groups strive to take advantage of support by social conservatives and those who evangelize for orthodox and doctrinaire concepts of God, generally in order to help them achieve narrowly self-serving goals. This manipulation of religious people is critically dysfunctional. The outcome of such strategies is generally unfair to the majority of the world's people, and it even threatens the well-being of all life on Earth. Revolutionary change must come!

How can we transcend preconceptions, fixed beliefs and misunderstandings? What is the true nature of reality? How do we really fit into the world? What impacts on the natural world do our activities actually have? How can we lead honorable and meaningful lives in ways that help improve our communities and protect our beautiful home planet and guarantee a better legacy for future generations to come? Can we find ways of living that give greater respect to the well-being of other forms of life on Earth?

Our thinking and philosophizing on such questions and issues is important because future generations depend on the legacy we leave. More than 21 years have passed since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and I feel compelled to express the following point of view: "War is not peace, Camerado!" George Orwell and Walt Whitman would surely have agreed, as would billions of others. If we want a peaceful and sustainable world, then we need greater social justice and fairer foreign policies and effective strategies to emasculate extremism. We do NOT need bigger disparities of wealth in the world or more ruthless aggressiveness in warfare.

To achieve wholesomeness and peace and stability in the world, we should strive to be better friends and neighbors. We should make a transcendental commitment to reducing inequities and preventing wars and avoiding military occupations of other countries. And the United States should use its superpower status more judiciously.

Mark Twain called war "a wanton waste of projectiles." Intrinsic in the sardonic and irreverent wit of this observation is the recognition that war is terribly wasteful. It can also be indiscriminately violent to civilians who suffer "collateral damages". Civilian casualties in our aerial bombings of places like Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan serve to make more people into enemies. This invites blowback retaliation and erodes the moral rectitude of our cause, and undermines our true national security. Such methods are crude, and essentially make our Air Force into a police force and judge, jury and executioner all in one broad stroke. War lacks fairness, moderation, mutual respect and sanity. More of my views on this topic, and of Mark Twain's, are contained in *Reflections on War -- and Peace!* Check it out! And see my essay *The Art of Peace*.

War is the ultimate expression of competition. But we cannot allow competition to become a rogue's economic free-for-all dominated by brute force, unscrupulous profiteering, manipulative marketing, and prerogatives for capital and investors that unduly harm workers or the environment. We cannot allow unbridled competition to take place without accountability or effective oversight. We should sensibly control monopolies and corporate conglomerates, and limit predatory banking practices. We should work to prevent supremacist ideologies from empowering an 'anything-goes-to-get-what-you-want' morality or an 'any-means-is-justified' approach to accomplishing narrow ends.

To create a less dangerous world, competition should be made fairer by regulating it more wisely. We should also eliminate absurd provisions in bureaucratic red tape, and simultaneously ensure that the

rules of our economic and political systems are fairer. These rules should be designed to ensure that our societies more propitiously protect the common good. If we develop and implement enlightened initiatives and farsighted incentives, and support radically broad-minded new ideas, the aggregate choices people make will be channeled into healthier directions that are more likely to be sustainable. New commitments should be made to responsibly address wrong-headedness in government and business planning, and to mitigate conflicts and prevent unjust wars.

"An inglorious peace is better than a dishonorable war."

--- Mark Twain

A more expansive concept of peace should be formulated. It's not nearly enough to consider peace as merely the absence of war. Peace, in more enlightened terms, is a state in which there is a presence of social justice and respectful goodwill. In even larger terms, peace has a meaning similar to the one it has in the Great Lakes region of Africa, where the word for peace is *kindoki*, meaning a harmonious balance between human beings and the rest of the natural world. Peace!

Chapter #5 - Profound Perspective.

We live in an extraordinary time in history. The combination of capitalism, democracy, industrial agriculture, free enterprise, abundant quantities of fossil fuels, and technological innovations in mining and medicine and manufacturing and communications have allowed humanity to feed more than 8 billion people, and to create enormous wealth. We have built increasingly complex civilizations, and dramatically improved literacy, sanitation and public health. Life spans have significantly lengthened and the material quality of life has gotten better for the majority of people. Political freedom had been provided to more people than ever before, until democratic backsliding and the strengthening of authoritarian strongmen began reversing this trend. Hooray for humanity for the accomplishments of positive independence movements of post-colonial years! Yay for us!

The range of human needs and desires has also been substantially enlarged, along with an overly heavy focus on consumer materialism. It is one facet of human nature that when resources are too cheaply available, we tend to lack a proper appreciation of them.

We do not need to look far to see that many of these great accomplishments have come at a high price -- and one that is largely yet-to-be realized. Every living system on Earth is in decline. We have used more natural resources in the last 100 years than in all of previous human history. The planet's rainforests are being rapidly destroyed, and more than 95% of old-growth forests in the continental United States have been logged at some point. Ocean fisheries are being depleted wastefully and unsustainably. Wetlands, grasslands, and coral reefs are being damaged worldwide. Vast areas of wildlife habitat are being altered. Billions of tons of fertile topsoil are lost each year across the planet. More than 20 billion gallons of fresh water from aquifers are being used in excess of the amount replenished annually by rainfall, causing subsidence of lands, and threatening supplies.

In addition, we have burned half of all known reserves of oil, and our demand for this non-renewable resource is increasing wantonly. Billions of tons of greenhouse gases are being spewed into the atmosphere each year, contributing to ominous changes in temperatures and weather patterns around the globe. And the volume of plastics pollution and electronic wastes is growing rapidly. Also, more than 400 nuclear power plants in 25 countries are generating both high-level and low-level nuclear wastes that will be radioactive for thousands of years, and very few good long-range solutions to the problem of storing them safely have been implemented anywhere.

We are essentially living rashly, and "high on the hog". We are profligately wasting resources and recklessly damaging and upsetting the healthy balance of nature. We are engaging in unwise development schemes and causing practically irreversible ecological damages. These conditions are staggeringly unwise. As a result of these and accompanying trends, the number of political, economic, environmental and war refugees in the world will increase significantly in this century, as is happening now in Ukraine, Syria and other places, especially in the Middle East and in Africa.

It is virtually certain that these trends will get worse unless we address the compulsive drive to achieve growth in consumption, and unless we simultaneously find better ways to reduce strong political and religious opposition to any means other than ineffectual sexual abstinence or limiting the rapid growth in the number of human beings on the planet. Our sanest endeavor would be to find comprehensive ways to address the issues that are contributing to our unthinking embrace of risky outcomes and increasing vulnerabilities.

The bottom-line goal of democratic capitalism is to create jobs and wealth by encouraging economic activity and stimulating economic growth. This goal is being pursued no matter how foolish the actual impacts of this growth may be. One driving reason for this state of affairs is that stagnant economic conditions crimp profits and disappoint the influential wealthy. On the other hand, high rates of unemployment and under-employment cause dissatisfaction among workers, and this contributes to social unrest and heightens political risk for incumbent politicians and fortunate elites.

A small number of powerful people pull the strings behind the scenes in societies worldwide. They help ensure that many economic stimulus mechanisms are used to prime the pumps of growth. These mechanisms include tax-cutting, deficit financing, and a variety of subsidies and tax breaks that are given to businesses and investors. Indulgences in pork barrel spending by various government entities often make matters worse. Enormous sums of money are expended on the military and government bureaucracy and federal bailouts, and a strong impetus is given to the depreciation of the dollar by allowing the Federal Reserve to print trillions of dollars in new money. Powerful incentives are created for people to profit through speculation in equities and housing and commercial real estate, and the demand for products is hyped through seductive advertising and sly sales tactics. Meanwhile, wrong-headed public policies encourage suburban sprawl and population growth.

An enlightened perspective of these stimulus mechanisms is needed to provide the motivation for us to change policies and to improve long-term planning. Courageous actions are needed to invest more wisely, and to restore natural ecosystems instead of focusing on activities that harm them while squandering and depleting resources. It is the antithesis of true conservatism for our leaders to support policies that endlessly stimulate consumption and create economic bubbles and facilitate population growth. 'What would Jesus buy?' Read on!

I conclude this chapter with a compelling understanding: the restructuring of the world economy so that economic progress can be sustained indefinitely represents one of the very best investment opportunities ever. Let's invest in farsighted initiatives not just in padding bank accounts of the rich!

Chapter #6 - Macroeconomics and the Value of Incentives.

There are basically two ideas of macro-economics. One is that we should strive to maximize consumption and wealth creation in order to generate a prosperity that will allow us to mitigate the harmfulness of our activities. The other idea is that we should place emphasis on harmonizing our activities with the foundations of our prosperity by acting to ensure the health of natural systems. The latter idea posits that by nurturing, protecting and restoring the health and soundness of natural

ecosystems, a longer-term and more general prosperity will come about that may be sustainable long into the future.

Effective market mechanisms exist that could help us solve many of the daunting challenges facing us. But we lack the will and courage to change policies and establish new incentives that dare disappoint the current beneficiaries of existing policies.

It seems indisputable that we should reform government regulations to eliminate foolish subsidies and cumbersome and costly bureaucratic red tape. In their place, smart and socially beneficial incentives should be enacted that are sustainable by design. The principal way we should distinguish whether regulations and incentives are good or bad, smart or foolish, is to make an objective analyses of their impacts on the common good, and of reasonable probabilities that the long-term consequences are favorable for the greatest number of people over the longest period of time.

The authors of the 1972 book *The Limits to Growth* cautioned readers about the potential for "overshoot" in resource consumption. Now, 50 years later, the indicators are significantly clearer. We are living in unsustainable ways. Limits are beginning to affect us that will pose serious risks to people in future generations. But we are failing to sensibly adjust to limiting factors and changing social, financial and environmental realities. Stop in the name of love! We must not figuratively pave paradise just to put up a whole bunch of spiffy new parking lots and shopping malls and factory outlets. Let us recognize what we've got before it is gone -- and work together to protect it! Let's collaborate in unity, and organize better for the common good!

"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, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way -- 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."

--- Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Chapter #7 - A Vast and Rash Uncontrolled Experiment.

"Let us cease thinking only of ourselves and reasoning only in the short term. Let us assure for the children to come the same rights that have been declared for their parents."

--- Jacques-Yves Cousteau

In times of trouble we need someone to speak cogent words of wisdom to us, with honesty and clarity. Rachael Carson did this when she wrote the impactful book *Silent Spring* in 1962, stirring a great awakening of public environmental consciousness. Her writing taught the world about the basic lack of responsibility that industrialized society demonstrates toward the natural world, and particularly about the dangers of wantonly harmful usages of chemical pesticides like DDT.

The worldwide impacts of human activities have never been as all encompassing as they are today. The course upon which humanity is embarked has many parallels in history, but at the same time it is unprecedented in global scope. Technological and demographic changes are broadly affecting societies and the natural world not only with a broad scope, but also with accelerating speed.

We are all inextricably involved in a rash uncontrolled experiment in (1) industrialization, (2) urbanization, (3) stimulated consumerism, (4) profligate resource use, (5) rapid population growth, (6)

large-scale monoculture agriculture, (7) economic globalization, (8) excessively high levels of deficit spending and national debt, (9) asset speculation, (10) financial and accountability deregulation, (11) divisive political strategies, (12) highly inequitable social policies, (13) status-seeking behaviors, (14) aggressive militarism, (15) extensive habitat modification, and (16) the generation of a myriad of pollutants, toxins, wastes and greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. Almost every other species of life on Earth is affected by this concatenation of activities.

No one knows exactly what the outcome and consequences of this risky experiment will eventually be. One of our worst predicaments is that our cumulative activities in this experiment are causing unintended consequences that are likely to prove to be decidedly negative. We are committing all species of life to impacts caused by our collective activities that are radically unwise. We are doing this instead of acting in ways that are precautionary, ethical, truly conservative or benign. In Chapter #38 of this *Comprehensive Global Perspective*, the *Bet Situation* is examined to clarify the real nature of some of the choices we are making, and incisive insights are provided about fourteen of the most significant and foolish gambles that these choices entail.

Who has the most control over this experiment? There is no doubt about it: rich people and our business and political leaders have outsized and determinative influence. Yet many of these leaders have the hubris to pretend that they are certain that most of the doctrines driving these risky behaviors are right, best, necessary and socially good, even in the face of mounting evidence that this is certainly not the case. Their actions are often oriented toward excessively short-term profiteering, and are frequently narrowly partisan and contrary to the greater good. Deep and extensive conflicts-of-interest abound, and the result is that our national decision-making and public policies lack propriety and wisdom. It is only an illusion that most of our leaders in government have a foremost concern for citizens, and this is even more true with environmentally irresponsible "conservatives" exerting excessive influence over our national priorities. Spike Lee makes this clear in his 2006 HBO documentary, "*When the Levees Broke: A Requiem for New Orleans in Four Acts*".

Oddly and paradoxically, conservatives are the ones who, instead of advising that we proceed with caution, clamor for us to go along, headlong and wholeheartedly, with imprudent extremes in this experiment. It is one of the more supreme ironies in the history of human thought that conservatives are among the most stubborn deniers of scientific understandings about environmental risks, and that they are often prominent and reactionary voices opposed to sensible precautionary actions that would protect the economy from systemic risks -- and the environment from destructive exploitation. This is stunning and pathetic!

Dr. Rajendra Pachauri of the United Nations' IPCC once encouraged the Bush White House and the Environmental Protection Agency to cease their "unprecedented obstructionism" of initiatives that would address the anthropogenic causes of global warming. He said they should come to the table to help solve looming problems related to greenhouse gas emissions. While some progress was achieved under the Obama administration, Donald Trump and his minions reacted with a vengeance to reverse that progress. Now, as the years slide inexorably past, it is becoming an overarching imperative for all of us to come together to more effectively deal with this issue, and vested interest groups should stop their stubborn obstruction.

Times have gotten significantly more complex since Thomas Malthus, an English political economist and demographer (1766 - 1834), proposed a "Principle of Population", which held that humanity faces eventual disaster unless population growth is somehow better controlled. Doubters still debate whether the contentions of Malthus are valid, even though there are now more than 8 times as many

people on Earth as when Malthus was around, and the negative impacts of our growing numbers are becoming more and more apparent. It is becoming ever clearer that we need to begin adopting sensible Precautionary Principles, as discussed in detail in Chapter #14, rather than continuing to endorse policies that ignore gathering threats.

R. Buckminster Fuller once said, "Nature is trying very hard to make us succeed, but nature does not depend on us. We are not the only experiment." We should cultivate a profound understanding of Albert Einstein's meaning when he said: "The release of atom power has changed everything except our way of thinking." In a starkly similar manner, our rash experiment is creating a heavy burden on planetary ecosystems that is overwhelming them, yet we continue to obtusely march down the same path of thinking and acting that has gotten us into these current predicaments.

The stakes are enormous. We risk not only the quality of life for ourselves and every child and all persons in future generations, but ultimately even the very survival of our species. When we see that we are collectively contributing to irreversible climate change, serious environmental damages, widespread extinctions of other species of life, societal instability and intransigent conflicts, we also should clearly understand that new ways of thinking and acting are needed to reduce these risks. Albert Einstein was surely correct when he observed, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

To better manage our economic, social and environmental challenges, we should cultivate new ways of thinking, and behave and act with more broad-minded intention. Strong resistance generally arises in opposition to 'paradigm shifts', but when we are able to understand these challenges in bigger-picture perspectives, the opportunities accelerate for achieving important progress and propitious change. Among the many things we should unflinchingly reform are socially irresponsible aspects of unbridled capitalism and unfair imbalances in globalization. National policies that create speculative bubbles should be scrupulously evaluated to preemptively prevent the need for costly bailouts. We should invest in measures designed to gain independence from fossil fuels. We should make bold commitments to avoiding hawkish nationalism and imperial aggression. Sensible and open-minded attitudes should be adopted toward national policies regarding women's health and family planning and reproductive rights, including contraception and abortion. And our electoral system that obeys Big Money over all other influences should be broadly reformed.

Carved in stone at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in ancient Greece were two wise maxims: "Know Thyself"; and "Nothing in Excess". In ancient times, Delphi was considered the center of the known world, the place where heaven and earth meet. This was the place on earth where mankind was supposed to be closest to the gods. Delphi was the center of worship for the god Apollo, a divine son of Zeus who embodied the virtues of moral discipline and spiritual clarity. A trip to Delphi was, for many centuries, a spiritual experience that offered hope of enlightening revelation.

Know Thyself. Nothing in Excess. These are not just primitive or irrelevant clichés. The goddesses and gods of ancient Greek mythology personified archetypes in human character and behavior. They also contained deep truths underlying the cultural expressions represented by these mythological conceptions. Compare these precepts to the oracles of today, where relentless competition and pervasive advertising have etched in our minds, and practically wired into our bodies, entirely different messages: "Buy More!"; "Go Shopping!"; "Be Cool!"; "Supersize Me!"; and "Get Yours Now!"

Many influences urge us to consume mindlessly, to use wastefully, to borrow heavily, to act in self-centered ways, and to abandon the virtues of moderation and self-discipline. It is no wonder that so

many Americans have become physically obese and intellectually unmindful. Let us strive to achieve a better understanding of ourselves, and to embrace a modicum of moderation -- for our communities, our planet, and ourselves!

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

--- Marcel Proust

When we strive to achieve the clarity of greater awareness and honest realization, we will be better able to shift our understandings, and to resist the potent power of opportunistic exploitation and manipulative persuasion and misguided ambitions. "Don't believe everything you think!"

Bertrand Russell gave us pause for thought when he observed: "The fundamental cause of trouble in the world today is that the stupid are cock-sure, while the intelligent are full of doubt." Whoa! -- Woe is us!

Chapter #8 - A Transformation Is A-Comin'.

Planet Earth speeds through space, traveling more than 66,000 miles per hour in its annual orbit around the Sun. The Moon seemingly stoically and almost magically revolves around us, affecting the ocean tides and evocatively changing moods, its reflected sunlight bearing silent witness to the evolving saga of life on Earth.

Humanity is faced with a critically serious choice: either we can make intelligent and courageous choices to transform our activities into ones that are more fiscally secure, ecologically sound, and mutually safe -- or we can foolishly choose to stick with business-as-usual activities until devastating crises arise that force wrenching changes upon us. There is a natural propensity for us to wait until a crisis arises before taking remedial steps to make course corrections. But procrastination is problematic, so we shouldn't wait for a crisis to provide a clarion call urging us to begin to act more wisely and responsibly.

The cranial capacities of our brains have tripled in size from that of our ancestors a few million years ago. We have evolved big brains, and it is a good time for us to start using them to plan ahead more intelligently. Since the need is so substantial for us to find better ways of protecting the well-being of our societies and life on Earth, we should work overtime to overcome the enormous momentum and ponderous inertia of forces that dominate our decision-making.

A series of crises may be required before we really begin to seriously implement good solutions to the big challenges we face, but it seems foolish to put off making difficult decisions because the mounting challenges will result in severe resource scarcities and disruptions in economic activities and even a possible collapse in natural ecosystems. These outcomes would be accompanied by intense strife, chaotic social change, faltering institutions, environmental dislocations and harsh conflicts. As Henry Kissinger once said, "The absence of alternatives clears the mind marvelously."

Why do we continue to figuratively back ourselves into a corner by waiting until few good alternatives remain? Let's act now! Unfortunately, "disaster capitalism" is hyper-ready to take advantage of collective insecurities and vulnerabilities during times of crisis. Since extraordinary opportunities arise to exploit emergencies and catastrophes for big profits, such adversities become more probable. This is not paranoid speculation or conspiracy theory; it is lucid historical perspective and an awareness of human nature and the predictable outcome of cause and effect.

Wars, economic recessions, military coups, natural disasters and terrorist attacks produce big opportunities that facilitate things like the imposition of austerity policies, privatization initiatives,

costly bailouts, radical reconstruction, the oppression of workers, hard-times swindles, more extreme economic inequities, and repressive rule. During such crises, corporations and governments often capitalize on such moments to advance "shock treatment" therapies.

Milton Friedman's economic doctrines were among the first to advocate taking advantage of such shocks in order to achieve radical change. Friedman went to Chile to advance his theories after General Augusto Pinochet overthrew the government of democratically elected Salvador Allende in a right-wing coup on September 11, 1973. The CIA infamously played a role in this coup.

Naomi Klein, in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, cautions us that we need to recognize what is happening, and why it is happening. She regards this understanding as necessary to protect ourselves against tyrannical abuses of power by authoritarian governments and amoral profit-prepossessed corporations. This book is valuable for sparking dialogue about the curious underlying instigations of periods of financial instability, military coups, wars and other dastardly acts that provoke disequilibrium. An expanded awareness of the causes of such turmoil could help prevent it.

Economic fundamentals severely deteriorated between 2007 and 2010 because of the bursting of the housing bubble and related mortgage and subprime loan problems and financial shenanigans. This economic instability harmed billions of people. Abuses and risks in financial markets became similar to those that characterized the late 1920s, just before the Great Depression, said journalist Robert Kuttner in testimony to the House Financial Services Committee in October 2007.

Financial safeguards enacted during the long Depression of the 1930s have been dismantled in the guise of promoting benefits of free markets. Predatory lending practices and speculative investments have been enabled by this reduction in regulations and oversight. Serious vulnerabilities and volatility in our system have been made worse by record levels of public debt and huge trade deficits. Risks were increased by excessive leveraging, inadequately-collateralized speculative securities, insider conflicts of interest, a lack of transparency, misrepresentations, engineered asset bubbles, and deep fears on the part of investors. Government bailouts of banks have been very costly, and arguably have only delayed a fair reckoning and set up more intractable economic disruptions in the future.

Chapter #9 - Crisis as Dangerous Opportunity.

The Dalai Lama is a perceptive, broadminded, wise, and eminently decent Buddhist spiritual thinker. He once said: "In order to accomplish important goals, we need an appreciation of the sense of urgency." Cool -- think about this! The Dalai Lama is one of the most philosophically calm people on Earth, and yet in the spiritual tranquility of his equanimity, he communicates the fact that it would behoove us to urgently give clearer consideration to cautionary ideas -- and to boldly heed them!

Great challenges present 'dangerous opportunities'. This is the literal meaning of the two Chinese symbols that represent the word for 'crisis'. Danger and opportunities arise in the wake of a crisis, creating a state of flux that can precipitate a re-ordering of our world. Such a restructuring can turn out to be favorable to the common good, or it can prove to be detrimental. It would be distinctly advantageous for us to develop more accurate understandings so that we make smarter and fairer choices that would create healthier communities and better prospects for a safer future.

It is my conviction that radically compelling ideas, intelligently conceived and forcefully conveyed, could make on-going transformations positive ones, both locally and globally. There is a prodigious need for such positive change because the consequences of sticking with the social and economic status quo are too risky. We need to herald the advent of new ideas that will help us courageously

solve the challenges facing us and ensure that our societies will become more sustainable. People should join together to demand non-partisan vision, broader coalitions, fairer initiatives, and stronger management that is much more competent and honest. Our leaders should be held accountable for a dedication to the general welfare, not just to serving the narrow goals of the wealthiest 1% and other special interest groups.

Since forces of opportunism are always ready to take advantage of adversities to alter the world to their own narrow benefit, vigilance is required to head off these impulses. Sweeping positive change could reduce the dysfunction that is being created by our current misguided tax, subsidy and energy policies. Heck, we could even choose to reduce suburban sprawl and bad air quality, and act to mitigate injustices and social conflicts. New policies and better management would contribute to solving these problems.

Hope, optimism and confidence can help us create wiser plans of action. It is beneficial for the psychological well-being of individuals to be proactive, and to believe that positive outcomes can be achieved through right-minded actions. It benefits the common good when people get involved in grassroots efforts to achieve improved outcomes for our communities and countries.

An upbeat movement driven by "blessed unrest" evocatively conjures up an image of a healthy and dynamic transformation inspired by passionate resolve, caring consideration and popular involvement. Paul Hawken's intelligence and vision, as expressed in his book *Blessed Unrest*, gives us hope that changes are underway that will galvanize humanity into sensible actions to improve the prospects of people today and in the future.

I recommend that readers watch the video of Amory Lovins' rousing and hope-inspiring speech, "*Imagine the World ...*". Lovins gave this speech at the 25-year anniversary celebration of his Rocky Mountain Institute. Or check out the ideas contained in the website of the independent nonprofit entrepreneurial Rocky Mountain Institute, at www.rmi.org.

Global problems can be solved, but they should be addressed with determination and boldness. And we should take steps to cope effectively with them SOON. It is distinctly unwise to complacently continue to emulate Emperor Nero by figuratively fiddling while Rome burns. A cogent clarity of understanding and a committed concern for the larger contexts of human flourishing would help ensure that our undertakings are sustainable, and that a better quality of life is maintainable.

The challenges facing us can seem so daunting that they paralyze us and inhibit us from taking remedial actions. Feelings of despair, inconsequentiality and eco-anxiety can be counterproductive and act against effective responses. Our leaders already often overly exploit public fears for their own profit, power and selfish advantage, and have practically created a growth industry in alarmism. The relative dangers of terrorist threats, for instance, have been so exaggerated that Americans have been effectively terrorized, giving us all a "false sense of insecurity". Our brains get all riled up when subjected to fear, and this engenders a behavioral psychiatrist's smorgasbord of glandular secretions like adrenalin and cortisol that can have startling affects on our behaviors. Dorothy Parker would have expressed her wonder with her catch phrase, "What fresh hell is this?"

British child development psychologist John Bowlby developed a well-regarded scientific theory that concerned "childhood attachment" behaviors. He wrote: "All of us, from the cradle to the grave, are happiest when life offers us a series of excursions, long or short, from a secure base." I believe! We all seek personal, financial and emotional security, and by extension national security; but what we really desire most deeply is a personal sense of safety that allows us to relate more confidently, to

relax, to accept ourselves, to make adventurous excursions, to take thrilling risks, to experience ooh-la-la titillating allure, or to open ourselves up to our own unique forms of creative self-expression.

It would be a noble plan to create an orderly and safer civil society with an open structure. This would assure more choices to all individuals on how to live their lives in accordance with their own individual propensities, predilections and positive inner motivations. When leaders exploit fears and intimidate citizens through Big Brother-like authoritarian control ploys, or when they enact policies that contribute to a more pronounced economic insecurity for the vast majority of people, they cause perverse injustices and deplorably detrimental social dysfunction. Forcing people into sheep-like submission to inequitable social policies is anathema to freedom-loving human beings.

Many established religions also use the strategy of playing on people's fears. They do this to gain faithful adherents and to exert control over people for specific ends, both noble and ignoble. They encourage people to fear death and fire-and-brimstone 'Hell' and calamitous 'End Times'. Fear can anesthetize us into feeling hopeless or futile, and it can render us less capable of undertaking needed courses of action. It can also divert our attention from more important values and make us retreat into more constricted pursuits that characterize basic survival, escapism, or faith in the wrong things.

Universal voices speak eloquently and insistently of ecological sanity and social intelligence. They communicate to us of the urgent need for transformation. Carl Sagan, a scientist, educator and humanist, spoke with such a voice. He dedicated his life to building an integrated and positive worldview capable of providing guidance to human beings in the coming decades and centuries. He believed that this was needed because our ancient inherited mythologies are becoming less useful, and more detrimental, as they become outmoded in the face of changing times. As more accurate understandings evolve, we should recognize new truths, even if they are economically or politically inconvenient, and even if they are heretical to orthodox worldviews. We are, after all, in a very profound sense all in this existence together -- interconnected and interdependent!

Chapter #10 - The Embrace of New Ideas.

The American poet Walt Whitman once wrote these evocative words:

"Sail forth --- Steer for the deep water only,
Reckless O Soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves, and all."

Adopting the brave spirit of this poem, let's explore some illuminating ideas. "There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come," wrote the great French novelist, poet and polymath Victor Hugo.

In the past century, ideologies like communism, fascism, neoconservatism, and laissez-faire capitalism have had far-reaching impacts on humanity. But these ideologies have failed us in many ways, and for many reasons. We should now be open to the ascendance of new ideas that could be able to deliver a more salubrious destiny for the human race.

The fundamental economic doctrine in the past 100 years has been that GROWTH is desirable, no matter what the cost. This worldwide obsession with growth was reasonable and practicable as long as there were plenty of available lands, vast forests, seemingly limitless stocks of fish and unlimited amounts of fresh water and unpolluted air, and an undiminished cornucopia of natural resources. Today, however, ecological buffer zones like frontiers, wild lands, rainforests and wetlands are

rapidly disappearing, and places to dump wastes are limited by 'not-in-my-backyard' impulses. Also, the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is increasing ominously, along with inauspicious extremes of record high temperatures and powerful storms. Even the acidity of oceans is increasing due to the absorption by ocean water of the large amounts of carbon dioxide we are spewing into the atmosphere. These daunting developments are making it increasingly important that we redesign our economies so that they honor values that are more wholesome and less destructive than the values championed by unbridled competition, selfishness and materialistic consumerism.

Beneficial new approaches should be adopted to deal squarely with the rapid and accelerating changes that are taking place in the world. This transformation of our behaviors, institutions and systems should be focused on two factors:

- (1) Doing the right things, which is to say, doing things that benefit the greatest number of people over the longest period of time, while causing the least amount of harm; and,
- (2) Doing things right, which is to say doing things reasonably, efficiently, effectively and sensibly, and with greater respect for the biotic health of the natural world.

Governments should not allow businesses to pursue the single-minded purpose of making short-term profits without taking into account social and environmental costs of their activities. The longer we delay in boldly tackling the dilemmas this presents, the more difficult it will be for us to successfully cope with these challenges.

There is indeed a meritocracy of ideas, and it is time for us to truly seek the best ones. We have an increasingly urgent need for common sense, saner ideas, clearer analyses, honest-to-goodness truth, and an improved understanding of consequentialist ethics. Broadmindedness, greater fairness, and more intelligently-designed public policies would help us create healthier societies. National policies are exceedingly ill-advised when they cause increasing numbers of people to be poorer, more desperate, more frustrated and more angry.

For a democracy to work well, citizens need to be educated and well-informed so that they are able to responsibly take part in the democratic process. This is why we need improved and broadened public education, independent media, and transparency in government. We need popular enlightenment!

To achieve better outcomes, plans that are more proactive are required. Shrewd rationalizations for "staying the course" are not acceptable. Politicians should be forced to give social well-being a much higher priority than they give to corporate prerogatives, greedy opportunism, doctrinal partisanship, or aggressive militarism. Instead of championing fairer ideas, however, our leaders often serve up specious arguments, deceptive propaganda, misleading justifications, and reassuring words that are formulated to perpetuate the privileges of those in power. In this regard, our society is sadly lacking in fairness, honesty and "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God".

The best interests of the people, and the greatest benefits for the common good, are completely different than the main characteristics of the entrenched status quo. In summary, our societies today are distinctly and undesirably oriented toward:

- (1) Allowing corporations to make the biggest possible profits by socializing many costs;
- (2) Giving rich people the most extensive benefits they can possibly get;
- (3) Stimulating the economy through the hyper-consumption of goods and resources;
- (4) Relentlessly pursuing activities that are unsustainable;

- (4) Promulgating public policies that are unfair and shortsighted;
- (6) Eagerly using military and CIA interventionism abroad; and,
- (7) Accepting an obsequious attitude of government officials toward the authoritarian right-wing segments of society. (This was particularly true under the administrations of George W. Bush and Donald Trump.)

Our industrial mode of consciousness causes us to feel a disconnection from Mother Nature. Success in exploiting, modifying and controlling nature has been quite extraordinary in recent years, but our hubris in thinking we can continue to dominate nature without respecting our best knowledge of its natural workings is becoming ever more foolish, absurd and dangerous. The value of better protecting natural habitats, ecosystems and biological diversity should no longer be so foolishly ignored. D'oh!

We are effectively daring nature to assault us by continuing to indulge in such unwise activities as building in floodplains, forcing rivers into artificial channels, destroying wetlands, contributing to the devastation of coral reefs, clear-cutting forests, and pouring billions of tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere every year. It's as if we think we can impose our dominion over nature by working against it, rather than recognizing the necessity of working with natural processes. A rapid "greening" of our perspective regarding these activities is needed. Let us boldly act to make a difference, and not merely continue to emulate Don Quixote tilting at windmills in hapless misapprehension.

Hermes, the Messenger God in Greek mythology, was the god of travelers and seafarers, a seeker of meaning, and the guide of souls. O Soul! He was regarded as a god of persuasive communication who had a great love of freedom, an agile mind, and good skills in creative expression and innovation. He was thought to bring intuitive insight and luck, so it is appropriate here to invoke Hermes in our quest for understanding. Let us see clearly, and act responsibly! (Hermes was also the proverbial trickster --- but, Oh well, a good boy and a bad boy no doubt inhabits every man.)

Chapter #11 - The Sustainability Revolution.

Deep in our consciences we know that we need to find better ways of protecting the environment and natural ecosystems. Such understandings are at the core of an incipient sustainability movement, and of the insights of deep ecologists. Let's respect them! Sustainability should become a national security priority.

This Sustainability Revolution should be endorsed and encouraged. We should strive to collectively become much more responsible in the stewardship of natural resources. We can no longer pretend that environmental concerns are a luxury, because in truth *a healthy environment is a fundamental basis for the economic health and well-being of our societies*.

How can we help facilitate this sustainability movement? How can we inspire people to give far-sighted protections to the environmental commons that supports us? Well, it just so happens that many great ideas and strategic initiatives exist that would help contribute to the greater good. Such ideas are explored throughout these writings in such salvos as *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

Eating all the seeds of future crops is a course of action that only the most desperate persons consider. There are many "win-win" situations for people and the planet, but policies that foster wins for rich people and big corporations, while the majority of people become losers, are not acceptable. Neither are short-term "wins" for human beings that are achieved at a calamitous cost to the environment and biological diversity.

To be able to sustain human existence is, of course, an inadequate goal in itself. Beyond the goal of mere survival, we should choose to create societies that do not degrade the ecosystems upon which we depend or disrupt crucial ecosystems services. It would be far more sensible to actually help RESTORE natural areas to a healthy vitality. Heal, not harm!

The concept of our ecological footprint is important. Imagine a continuum that runs from the most needy of the poor to the most extravagant and greedy of the rich. Every one of us falls somewhere on this continuum, and each and every person eats, drinks, and creates wastes every day. We make daily decisions on what to consume, where to go, and what to do. These activities all contribute to the aggregate impacts that our activities are having on planet Earth. Some individuals have exceedingly heavy footprints, and some have much smaller ones -- but all contribute to the total. Thus, all of us are a part of the unsustainable international economy.

Each of us should feel a sense of obligation to help ensure that we forge a path together to the future that can be followed indefinitely. Using this as the principal criterion for guidance in all of our national decision-making, new national policies should be created and implemented that are forward-thinking and flexible. Compromise is needed to satisfy legitimate concerns of opposing viewpoints -- without compromising the essential and more encompassing wisdom of the most auspicious actions.

Both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party have serious shortcomings in our political duopoly system, as do the three primary social institutions that dominate our decision-making: corporations, government entities, and religious establishments. Our economic and political systems should be reformed in order to achieve a sustainable future. The needed Sustainability Revolution requires us to begin placing a much higher priority on ecological values. As Wallace Stegner once wrote: "I believe that eventually, perhaps within a generation or two, they will work out some sort of compromise between what must be done to earn a living, and what must be done to restore health to the earth, air and water."

The time is NOW to embrace new commitments to accomplish this goal. Perhaps it is time that we consider a new concept: a Lifetime Ecological Footprint Total (LEFT). Imagine an omniscient super-computer that could keep track of all the resources that each person consumes during his or her entire lifetime, together with every iota of waste that is produced. That's what LEFT is.

I can think of no greater moral imperative than that we should take what's LEFT into account in all our society's planning decisions. In other words, we should consistently take sensible precautionary measures to ensure that we leave a fair legacy to our descendants. "Our prosperity as a nation will mean little if we leave a world of polluted air, toxic waste, and vanished forests to future generations." This fine rhetoric was contained in a letter dated June 11, 2001 that was sent to me by the White House. The letter was signed by George W. Bush, and was sent in response to concerns I had voiced about damages to the environment. These words were deeply ironic in light of the President's antagonistic actions toward environmental concerns during his years in office!

Soon enough, yea, all too soon for most people, each and every one of us will be dead and gone, every molecule of us dispersed to its next indeterminate destiny. Any ascent through St. Peter's pearly gates of judgment will face a more sophisticated Lord, not one obsessed with other gods, idols or graven images, or jealousy, or glory, or keeping the holy Sabbath day or other commandments; nay, it is my belief that we shall be judged by more relevant and important criteria, ones like the Golden Rule, responsible citizenship, reasonably nurturing parenthood, and 'brotherly love' -- and our personal

contributions to social justice and planetary protections. And by our role in contributing to peace among nations. To me, these propositions sound much more appropriate for a modern day Holy Book!

A memorial dedication plaque placed in a grove of towering *Sequoia sempervirens* redwood trees, the tallest living things, observes:

Remove Nothing from the Forest
 Except Nourishment for the Soul
 Consolation for the Heart
 And Inspiration for the Mind

Wouldn't it be something if we began to treat all of the remaining rapidly dwindling old-growth forests with greater respect?!

Within every country on Earth, people "game" the system, both legally and illegally, to gain more advantages. Powerful developed countries abuse their power to obtain natural resources, cheap labor and access to markets abroad. They are able to do this in economically imperialistic ways because of a lack of fair and enforceable international laws, multinational institutions, and effective constraints.

Future well-being is being negatively affected by our current wrong-headed priorities, so the need is growing for us to find ways to achieve beneficial outcomes by changing the rules and regulations that govern our actions. One of my core beliefs is that the best way to accomplish this would be by creating smart incentives and disincentives that are clearly focused on the greater good.

People's behaviors are powerfully motivated by rewards and recognition. Knowing this, it would be advantageous to restructure our economies in such ways that individual motivations are made more consistent with ecologically sound outcomes. Such a restructuring should involve full-cost pricing, so that all costs incurred in the production of products are included in their prices. These real costs include pollution and toxic waste prevention and cleanup, provisions for worker well-being and healthcare, and a contribution to a Climate Change Impact Fund to offset the harmful effects of greenhouse gas emissions. This plan would automatically contribute to helping solve many problems related to working people and environmental conditions.

Unfortunately, the majority of our representatives have been opposed to any deviations from the status quo of special corporate prerogatives and the subservience of workers' needs to the greed of shareholders and investors. Our political leaders engage in dominance-oriented politics, extreme partisanship, aggressive militarism, and pork barrel spending instead of fairer undertakings, and they have resisted progressive reforms for too long. Politicians seem to prefer to stay the course or give ever-bigger perks to their supporters, who are primarily rich and powerful people. Counterproductive agendas have been advanced that are contrary to the common good because such policies benefit the narrowly-focused constituencies that provide most campaign contributions to elected officials to help them get elected and stay in office.

"A democracy cannot function effectively," stated Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens in his dissent from the conservative majority in the *Citizens United* case back in January 2010, "when its constituent members believe laws are being bought and sold."

This political duopoly system is seriously flawed. Clean Money campaigns are a positive and potentially effective way to reduce the dangerously unfair and damaging influence of Big Money on American domestic and foreign policies. Chapter #49 provides compelling perspective on how Clean Money electoral reform could dramatically help improve decision-making and focus politicians on efforts to

make our societies truly fairer, safer and saner. Also, the need for campaign finance reform has grown radically ever since Supreme Court conservatives made rulings that corrupt our democracy by letting special interest groups contribute unlimited funds, in secrecy, to politicians.

Some say that our industrial culture will NOT voluntarily stop damaging the natural world. They say that poor people will continue to be exploited, and indigenous cultures decimated, and the natural world damaged. They even speculate that those who resist or dissent will continue to be mocked, disenfranchised, put in prison, or even killed. But I am hopeful. There is still time and potential for us to save ourselves by making positive changes to our economic, political and judicial systems.

Chapter #12 - Redefining Progress.

Optimum public planning requires that smarter choices be made that are based on the best possible understandings. The QUALITY of economic growth, for instance, should be given a higher priority than the rate of growth. Economic indicators help express our social values and drive public policy agendas, so they not only measure our performance, but they also influentially help shape it. Insights conveyed by practitioners of the discipline of ecological economics should be better cultivated, as articulated in *Existence, Economics and Ecological Intelligence*.

Established measures of economic activity are gauged by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This monetary measure is misleading because it reflects economic activity as if increased spending is positive even when it occurs for undesirable things like medical cost inflation, bigger government bureaucracy, and larger expenditures for things like wars, military waste, various excessive Homeland Security projects, pollution clean-up, costly efforts to fight a "war on drugs", locking more people up in prisons, and disaster recovery and reconstruction.

In the early stages of the 2009 economic recession, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy moved to begin a 'statistical revolution' to end the political dominance of GDP as a measure of economic health. Sarkozy, a right-of-center politician, asked two left-of-center Nobel-laureate economists, Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen, to lead a commission with a goal of more accurately measuring social progress and economic performance. According to the report: "The time is ripe for our measurement system to *shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being.*"

Progress should be redefined by utilizing more auspicious measures. For instance, a "Genuine Progress Indicator" would be a much better gauge for the actual health of economic activities and truer elements of the quality of life. This Genuine Progress Indicator would take into account factors like the health of communities, general well-being, greater fairness, authentic relationships, fulfilling work, and respect for the natural world. This change in focus would allow us to see a truer picture of our economies, and to accordingly improve our priorities and modify the negative aspects of our activities. This way of redefining progress would give recognition to deeper insights like those elaborated at the website RedefiningProgress.org.

What would it look like if we courageously and proactively CHOSE to reduce our growth to a more sustainable level? Think how salubrious it would be if we were able to embrace understandings of growth that acknowledge the importance of Genuine Progress measures rather than merely adding up all the business-as-usual activities that are measured by GDP. I also believe that it is incumbent upon us to consider the issue of overpopulation as an overarching concern, because of its far-reaching environmental impacts. It seems to me to be a good idea to encourage responsible parenthood and make safe contraception widely available and strongly encouraged. And abortions should be legal.

Good arguments can be made that government methods of measuring things like inflation are seriously distorted. Judging from people's common experience with increasing prices for necessities like food, medical insurance, and rent or home ownership, such contentions have credence and merit much more illuminated analysis.

The small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has the extraordinary idea of measuring well-being by using comprehensive indicators of "Gross National Happiness". Bhutan's Prime Minister Lyonpo Jigmi Y 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 environmental commons, and the establishment of good governance. Kudos to these ideas!

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 fund 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.

Entrepreneurship has been put on a pedestal as the pinnacle of success in our society, and surely small businesses drive a significant amount of job creation in the U.S. But sometimes, large corporations quash entrepreneurial spirit, and too often there is an excess of underhanded opportunism, dishonest profiteering, deceit of consumers, and efforts to milk the public treasury or relentlessly exploit workers or cheat people or damage the commons in a manner that is tragic for the general welfare. Can't we find good ways to do something affirmative about these undesirable things?

Margaret Mead's thought-provoking observation should guide us: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

The compelling cultural phenomenon of storytelling is being conveyed effectively today by means of the compelling imagery and content of documentary films. This medium is helping provide people with an intimate portrait of various issues in our societies as they are coming into being. Such films can positively impact the depth of our understanding. Check out more of them! (A partial list is contained in *Recommended Reading for a Broader Understanding and Appreciation of the World*). And join me in actively supporting positive change NOW, because the need for gentler, fairer and more responsible undertakings is urgent!

Chapter #13 - Intelligent Redesign.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for people to assume individual and collective responsibility for the future of their societies, it becomes self-evident that a powerful conversation must take place around the world that will result in our collectively choosing to alter the institutions and perverse incentives that result in shortsighted outcomes in human affairs.

I love the idea articulated by the brilliantly sensible businessman and author Paul Hawken, who wrote in *The Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability*, "We must design a system ... where

doing good is like falling off a log, where the natural, everyday acts of work and life accumulate into a better world as a matter of course, not a matter of conscious altruism." Think about this great yet revolutionarily simple idea!

Our economies and political systems should be redesigned with the goal of having the aggregate daily choices of all people on Earth result in RESTORATIVE impacts on nature's ecosystems rather than destructive ones. Bold incentives and disincentives that are consistent with freedoms to choose personal courses of action are the fairest way to achieve these goals. Fair-minded assessments of the greater good should be the barometer of what policies should be enacted.

Earth from Above is a book of beautiful photographic images. Every library should obtain this great volume because it also contains a profoundly insightful narrative of heartfelt and philosophic ideas. Written by Yann Arthus-Bertrand, the book makes this vital observation about our home planet:

"Ecologists understand the processes that support life on earth: the fundamental role of photosynthesis, the concept of sustainable yield, the role of nutrient cycles, the hydrological cycle, the sensitive role of climate, and the intricate relationship between the plant and animal kingdoms. They know that the earth's ecosystems supply services as well as goods, and that the former are often more valuable than the latter."

Several years after publishing *Earth from Above*, Yann Arthus-Bertrand produced an extraordinary film titled *Home*. This 90-minute film is a "must-see" for its beautiful aerial images alone! Check it out online on YouTube. A compellingly haunting narrative voiced by Glenn Close accompanies these images. Once we viscerally understand the overarching importance of ecological ideas like those expressed in the film, we will see that it is our duty to give greater protections to natural ecosystems. These ideas are simply common sense. Of course we must protect our children, and the world in which they will live! Will we make greater commitments to do so?

"We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand individual threads, and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results."

--- Herman Melville

Chapter #14 - The Importance of the Precautionary Principle.

It is impossible to foresee exactly what changes will occur in the future, or how they will affect us. Big Picture perspectives and the extrapolation of trends, however, can help us frame probable scenarios. Despite substantial uncertainties about the nature, scope, severity and implications of problems facing us, bold actions targeted toward transforming our societies into more versatile and resilient ones will help us adapt to accelerating changes that are taking place.

Our best strategy would be to follow an honest and reasonable "no regrets" approach that is focused on actions and behaviors consistent with shared prosperity and the common good. This "no regrets" idea is the basis for the precautionary principle, as enunciated in Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in 1992. This principle states that "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."

This principle of precautionary action involves controversy because there is a wide scope of complex uncertainties AND because there is powerful resistance by rich people and Big Business interests to any initiatives that would reduce their profits, power and prerogatives. Multinational energy companies, as an example, are some of the biggest and most profitable industries in the history of the

world, so it is not surprising how large their influence is in dominating our national decision-making. The administration of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, in particular, was ridiculously beholden to the profit obsessed energy industry and vested interest groups that make money from war. And so were the sketchy proposed policies of Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan's presidential campaign in 2012, and all the Republican candidates in 2016, and now Republicans in Congress today.

Businesses strive to minimize costs and avoid paying for pollution clean up and environmental damages they cause, and they seek to minimize the amount of money they must pay their workers, or that they expend on socially beneficial activities. Consumers, in their enthusiasm and congenial disposition to get cheap prices and good deals, as evidenced by the success of such retailers as Costco, Wal-Mart and Home Depot, do not demand that good citizen initiatives be given higher priority. And investors seem to feel that the more profit, the better, and damn the consequences!

Conflicts and paradoxes abound in our policy considerations. But the time has come today to seek strategic alliances to overcome the unfairness and shortsightedness of dominant forces. We can begin to truly solve the dilemmas facing us by cooperating together and using common sense and far-sighted intention. We should strive to ascend above the fray and make reasonable and intelligent judgments in every situation. We need to establish a fairer balance between competing interests, and give honesty, fairness, foresight and longer-term considerations greater force in all policy decisions.

Bicycle race enthusiasts who watch the Tour de France race can see that the winner in this intense competition is generally a part of a committed team that cooperates together and takes advantage of rigorous training and 'drafting' techniques. The temptation may be strong to gain advantages by cheating through the use of illegal steroids or underhanded tactics, but these things are risky and unfair and wrong. Similarly, ultimate success in larger competitive enterprises is best achieved by means of savvy collaboration, wise planning, fair adherence to the rules of the game, and far-sighted preparation. Cheating, deceiving the public, evading regulations, intentionally harming others, and acting illegally are prescriptions for eventual failure and ignominy, and they are unprincipled, to boot.

Voltaire once wrote that history consists only of fictions that contain varying degrees of plausibility. The same can be said of interpretations of current events. Analysis is subjective. History adds a dimension of longer-term perspective, but historical perspective unfortunately offers opportunities for spin and devious historical revisionism. The "truth" can thus be substantially distorted.

Policy-making is generally dominated by large private corporate interests and banks that generally oppose fair competition and objectively honest evaluations. These interest groups often work against sensible regulations, balanced budgets, community and environmental protections, true international justice, and peaceable coexistence with other countries. Many of them strive to subvert renewable resource initiatives and undermine energy efficiency measures, and to prevent resource conservation and suppress innovative competition. They also often oppose affordable housing measures, safe and convenient public transportation, and programs designed to alleviate poverty.

These dominating established interests sabotage smart public planning, and they contribute to social and environmental problems. Stratagems of hyped-up consumerism and fiscal stimulus combine with human population growth to help cause serious damages to Earth's ecosystems. So how can we best distinguish between what is right and what is wrong? Sometimes our reason, and sometimes our faith, is best equipped to determine. Click on the Refresh-Icon function of your brain, and continue reading!

Chapter #15 - Morality and Right Action.

Ambrose Bierce was one of the most influential journalists of the late 19th century. He created a satirical dictionary in which he defined politics as "a strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles." Politics is rarely about noble principles, for it is generally about gaining privileges and power and making money. There are better ways to more fairly balance competing interests, and these involve following fairer democratic and moral principles.

Morality is the vital glue of society. It is concerned with the judgment of what is "good" and "bad" in human action and character. In its origins, morality consists of those things that are essential to the health and preservation of a social group.

Moral right action should not merely be a function of theological dogma, of fear, or of political ideology. Instead, moral right action should be a function of sociology: what is right for society depends on the well-being of the majority AND of people in future generations. What is right and proper is what is best in the long run. It is not right to neglect the interests of our heirs in the future by pandering principally to greedy interests today.

More fair-minded social justice is a moral imperative in the world today. Thomas Piketty's blockbuster economic treatise, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, provides a clear understanding of the driving forces behind increasing inequality. Piketty expresses the opinion that this trend is "terrifying", because it portends increased insecurity of the masses, which could lead to disastrous developments as the world gets more crowded, and as strife and the competition for resources intensifies.

Consider again the astonishingly shortsighted legacy we are leaving to our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. We are degrading the environment by engaging in unsustainable development and allowing polluting activities and the production of huge amounts of wastes, toxins and greenhouse gas emissions. We are recklessly and immoderately depleting non-renewable resources, and doing so at an accelerating rate. We are carelessly contributing to the extinction of many species of life and the diminishing of biological diversity by damaging ecosystems and wildlife habitats in many places around the world. We are making this state of affairs worse by irresponsibly indulging in stimulative deficit spending and saddling people in the future with enormous amounts of debt and interest expenses. We are allowing vested interest groups to make our societies more unfair and inequitable. Many religious organizations and politicians are opposing sex education, contraception, rights to choose to have an abortion, and the empowerment of women, even though progressive initiatives such as these serve to increase responsibility in parenthood and reduce high birth rates and unsustainable population growth.

We are, in summary, ignominiously "fleecing the future" with our actions. This could scarcely be less right! Somehow we have created a world, over 250 years after Voltaire wrote *Candide*, that is becoming less and less the "best of all possible worlds", as proclaimed by the haplessly optimistic character Dr. Pangloss. "The tutor Pangloss taught metaphysico-theolog-cosmologonology. He proved admirably that there is no effect without a cause, and that this is the best of all possible worlds."

In a delightful metaphor of healthy perspective, Voltaire concludes *Candide* with the advice that we must cultivate our own gardens. We would be far better off treating the planet as a sustainable garden, or a revered open space, or even a well-managed and productive farm, rather than a mine to exploit and abandon, or a land of forests to be chopped down -- or a battlefield on which to viciously vanquish various "enemies".

Deep down in our hearts, we all at least suspect that many of the patterns of thought and behavior in our modern societies are shortsighted. Contemplate the perceptive understanding of the Nobel Prize

winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn: "Justice is conscience -- not a personal conscience, but the conscience of the whole of humanity."

I feel strongly that we should establish a socially-just Precautionary Social Principle. This principle would enshrine a fair and bipartisan concern for the common good as one of the highest values and priorities. Perhaps an ethical earthquake is needed to shake up our entrenched, wasteful and inequitable priorities, and to emasculate unfair partisanship, dogmatic doctrine, deceptive propaganda, religious extremism and short-term oriented activities.

Historians Will and Ariel Durant observed in their enlightening book *The Lessons of History* that the concentration of wealth in societies occasionally reaches a critical point where either sensible legislative redistributions of wealth are enacted (like progressive tax reforms), or increased violence or even destructive revolutions take place that generally destroy wealth rather than redistributing it.

A progressive morality would be more auspicious than either an ambitiously repressive one or a meek and yielding one. This new overarching sense of moral rectitude would focus on larger concerns rather than narrow self-righteousness, avarice or self-centeredness.

In *Matthew 25*, those who wrote the Bible talk about God's judgment of nations. They indicate that God will judge us by how we treat the poor, the sick, the hungry, and strangers, and prisoners. While I personally doubt there is a Supreme Being God that judges human beings, or that such a God has some special and unchanging 'infinite justice' criteria that 'He' applies in 'His' judgments, any true moral judgment of leaders and societies and civilizations should take into account considerations about how the most vulnerable members of our society are treated.

"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

--- The Bible: *Mark 8:36*

Ambrose Bierce offers a second satirical definition of *politics*: "The conduct of public affairs for private advantage." There are many ways we could reform our economic and political systems so that they would prevent the most egregious private advantages that tend to harm the greater good. It would behoove us to alter public policies so that clear duties and incentives are established for citizens to act more reasonably and responsibly. The protections included in the Bill of Rights should simultaneously be defended to fairly balance these policies with laws that respect personal freedoms and privacy rights. It may be hard for us to change our habitual ways of doing things, but the consequences will be severe if we fail to recognize the risks of wrong-headed, shortsighted behaviors.

Chapter #16 - Three Basic Considerations.

"Knowledge, above all, is a responsibility for the integrity of what we are, primarily of what we are as ethical creatures."

--- *The Ascent of Man*, J. Bronowski

We see that serious social, economic, political and environmental challenges face us. This makes it important for us to choose long-term strategies that are wise and sensible as guides for our decision-making. Three principal objectives should be treated as indispensable in all of our society's public policy considerations: (1) fairness; (2) sustainability; and (3) peaceful coexistence.

FAIRNESS is the cornerstone of decency and democracy. Because powerful forces of greed and special privilege are dealing significant setbacks today to fairness doctrines in the United States, our economic and political systems need to be redesigned to ensure they are FAIRER. This should include fairness to people alive today as well as to those to be born in the future.

It seems to me that each and every person should assent to -- yea, even demand -- that our social establishment offers fairer opportunities to everyone, and guarantees a basic minimum of healthcare security to all citizens. Everyone is, after all, ultimately in the same boat together; and we are all potentially only a moment away from some tragic accident or catastrophic health adversity.

"Of all the forms of inequality," Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane." Good fortune is a fortuitous thing for which everyone who enjoys it should give thanks, and as a consequence, fortunate people should be willing to give a bit more to society to ensure that others will live in fairer conditions, and on a habitable planet.

All of our laws and institutions should incorporate elements that emphasize goals that are, in the long run, SUSTAINABLE. We must take longer-term considerations into account. Common sense tells us that the ultimate moral good consists of actions that do not hurt human well-being, prosperity and the potentials for health and survival. It is a moral imperative for us to leave a fairer legacy to our children, and theirs, and theirs, and theirs, and theirs, and theirs, not just to the fabled Seventh Generation, but indefinitely.

We should also strive to make certain that PEACEFUL solutions are found to the growing conflicts in the world over diminishing resources and differing ideas. We simply must find better ways to ensure that conflicts are resolved without resorting to military aggression and war. Instead of trying to "fix the intelligence and facts around the policy", as the Bush administration did in selling the invasion of Iraq to the American people (according to the head of British intelligence, as reported in the Downing Street Memo), we should seek consensus and be pragmatic and realistic, and adhere to principles of just war and proportional responses.

Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War, stated in the film *The Fog of War*, when he was 85 years old, that if we cannot persuade other nations that share similar interests and values of the merits of proposed uses of military power, we should not proceed unilaterally, for we are certainly far from infallible or omniscient.

In light of these ideas about fairness, sustainability and peaceful coexistence, the following three principles are proposed to serve as overriding considerations in all public policy-making. These are principles that should always be taken into account in our decision-making, instead of pandering to special privileges for the few, or short-term advantages for elite segments of society, or the maximization of profits by big corporations and investors. These principles are:

(1) The Golden Rule Fairness Principle. This principle holds that there should be a maximum of fairness to all people in our society. A cornerstone of decency in our democracy is a reasonable modicum of fair dealings and egalitarian initiatives.

(2) The Precautionary Principle of Ecological Propriety. This principle should be designed to pay forward actions that are propitious to our heirs. To the extent that our actions cause damage to the environment and are unsustainable, new methods should be developed to guarantee the vitality of natural ecosystems and to protect the future prospects of life on Earth. We cannot continue to plunder the planet without regard for the harmful consequences of our actions.

(3) The Nuremberg Principles of International Law. These principles were designed in the wake of the atrocities of World War II. They identify crimes against peace and crimes against humanity. Peaceful coexistence measures should include stronger international prohibitions against military aggression by any nation. It is crucially important that the superpower U.S. alter its foreign policies

to be more responsible, more affordable, more humble, more peaceable, more inclusive and more just than they have been in recent decades.

Chapter #17 - A Big Perspective.

Jared Diamond is a professor who wrote *Collapse, How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. In this thought-provoking book, Diamond reveals findings made from his study of many civilizations throughout the long course of history. He confirms that the human race must, to survive and prosper, pay particular attention to long-term thinking, and that we should try to successfully embrace anticipatory long-term planning. Diamond further indicates that we must be willing to reconsider core values that once served society well, especially when those values are seen to be becoming outmoded and detrimental due to changing circumstances or deteriorating environmental conditions.

Each moment is a juncture in which we can choose to progress or to regress. We should not cling to outmoded worldviews, or continue to persist in errors of perspective related to essential issues. When people promote anti-environmental dogmas or refuse to examine larger perspectives, or deny the gathering dangers of population overshoot, they are choosing to ignore the vital and viable course of our species' prosperity and survival.

Whether or not one believes that life on Earth has evolved over many millions of years, our social evolution favors the ability of individuals and societies to be flexible in adapting to change. The long-term survival of our species depends on our adaptability -- NOT on our being obstinately inflexible or rigid in clinging to conservatism, customary traditions, narrow doctrines or failing policies. Knowledge and a progressive ability to cope successfully are the mainstream of human evolution; ignorance and denial and intractability are not.

Orthodox ideas tend to entrench themselves in social and political systems long past the point that they are useful, and well into a new era where they become unacceptably costly and harmful. As Mark Twain succinctly noted: "Loyalty to petrified opinion never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul."

It is a poor plan to hunker down and stick with the old, the fearful, the short-term-oriented, the unfair, the regressive, the vested-interest-dominated, the unsustainable, the deceptive, the bullying, the manipulative, the doctrinaire, and the authoritarian. A better plan would be to wisely choose the honest, the intelligent, the fair, the ecumenical, the free-thinking, the sustainable, the hopeful, the compassionate, and the visionary.

Fresh ideas should be given greater sway, ones that are more consistent with greater good goals. The progressive Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota believed that politics should be about much more than power, money and winning at any cost. He made his convictions clear when he said. "Politics is about the improvement of people's lives. It's about advancing the cause of peace and justice in our country and in the world."

Government and established religions, our main traditional institutions, are struggling to keep up with the rapid rate of change in technology, communications, economic developments, cultural mores, medical advances, environmental affairs, and geopolitical realities. What we need now is a public figure who can rise to this historic occasion and communicate the need more honestly and effectively for fair, bold and constructive actions. People need to be inspired and unified in this goal. By using our reason, intelligence and the guidance of compassionate caring, we could act more wisely and plan ahead better. When we give greater respect to nobler intuitions, truer spirituality, and a clearer sense of our interconnectedness and interdependencies, we can gain greater confidence in

comprehensive and progressive ideas. This would help us overcome the obstacles we face, and perhaps diminish the influence of politicians who adhere to shortsighted doctrines, spendthrift actions, and the staunch tenets of political domination.

"In the twenty-first century our global society will flourish or perish according to our ability to find common ground across the world on a set of shared objectives, and on the practical means to achieve them. The pressures of scarce energy resources, growing environmental stresses, a rising global population, legal and illegal mass migration, shifting economic power, and vast inequalities of income are too great to be left to naked market forces and untrammelled geopolitical competition among nations."

--- Jeffrey Sachs, *Common Wealth: Economics for a Small Planet*

Instead of visionary leaders, dedicated civil servants and honorable statesmen, our ships of state are too often influenced by people who are power hungry and greedy, and by those who seem to be con artists and deceitful swindlers who masquerade as upright citizens. Scheming 'robber baron' kingpins of industry and skills for manipulative reactionaries and faithful sycophantic political operatives and "us-good-them-evil" religious ideologues complicate this scenario. How can we change this?

Chapter #18 - The Decline and Fall of Civilizations.

Profound forces are at play in the world, forces of cause and effect, action and reaction, progress and regress, development and decay. Civilizations have historically survived by dealing successfully with big challenges that arise. Civilizations grow when they respond appropriately to such challenges and they enter a period of decline when they fail to cope.

Many instances in history have shown that the energies of a small minority of passionately creative people can contribute to finding revolutionary solutions to existential problems. These solutions re-orient entire societies in the direction of positive adaptation to change, and enhance their abilities to survive.

Throughout history, many civilizations have been seen to grow, climax and decay. Studies of a number of civilizations reveal that DECLINE generally occurs because of a similar combination of causes:

1. Resources have been excessively exploited and squandered and depleted;
2. Political corruption, bureaucracy and mismanagement have become widespread;
3. An unfair plutocracy becomes established that is characterized by an ever-growing disparity between the influence and fortunes of rich people and everyone else;
4. The populace grows complacent and is diverted by materialistic indulgences, lavish forms of entertainment, sports spectacles, and wars;
5. The military, because of a dangerous arrogance of power, becomes bloated, overextended and involved in costly and debilitating foreign wars;
6. The public is divided by inegalitarian domestic policies and becomes effectively disempowered and disenfranchised, so the populace becomes increasingly cynical and apathetic; and,
7. There is a massive influx of people and their customs from abroad that creates divisive tension and disruption.

Think about this. Seven characteristics of the decay of civilization, and people in nations worldwide are channeling them all as if they were some virtuous Holy Grail -- particularly in the United States! The historian Arnold J. Toynbee argued that "Civilizations die from suicide, not by murder."

Some say that the rise and fall of cultures is cyclical. Even Arnold Toynbee, who did not believe in fatalistic determinism, observed: "The historical cycle seems to be: from bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to selfishness; from selfishness to apathy; from apathy to dependency; and from dependency back to bondage once more." Nineteen civilizations are said to have followed this pattern, each one rising and falling over a span of about 200 years.

America's time need not be up; but we should not let selfishness and complacency drive us toward inaction, apathy, or despair. History shows that as empires climax and decay, the ruling elites become increasingly corrupt, anti-democratic and authoritarian in their drives to maintain power. This dynamic certainly seems to be playing out in the U.S. today as many of our wealthiest citizens become ever more staunchly opposed to paying taxes. We should resist trends that drive us in regressive directions, and remain vigilant against all moves that could lead to increased domination by authoritarian leaders. These words were written long before Mr. Trump's hostile foray into politics.

It is not inevitable that our country will be devastated by class warfare, corruption, religious strife, cultural clashes, the radicalization of religious fundamentalists, despotism, or disastrous population overshoot and ecological collapse. But the proverbial bull must be seized by the horns, and open-minded people are needed to step forward to valiantly help solve daunting dilemmas. We cannot allow business leaders and conniving egomaniacal politicians and right wing conservatives and religious extremists to advance their selfish interests and goals of dominating control while the planet slowly orbits toward a combustive calamity of resource depletion and heightened conflict.

Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has dominated international politics with its superpower influence. Imperial empires are generally built by using domineering tactics of economic exploitation and coercive power and control. In the last 100 years, the types of government that have pursued imperialistic foreign policies have included right-wing fascist ones, authoritarian communist ones, harsh dictatorships and reactionary theocracies, as well as inadequately-controlled capitalistic democracies. None of these are desirable forms of government from the standpoint of the best interests of peoples and humanity.

All these types of government tend to treat their citizens with a disregard for their best interests. They utilize ruthless tactics to achieve narrow goals and centralize power in hands of authoritarians. They encourage blind patriotism and belligerent nationalism. They favor state corporatism and expanded privileges for elites. They use deceptive propaganda and cultivated "Big Lies", and often promote pseudoscience and practice secrecy and use mass media to manipulate the populace. They espouse unjust doctrines, disdain human rights and restrict personal freedoms. They suppress dissent and divide people instead of trying to unite them for the common good. They neglect important domestic priorities and stint on valued social goals. They harshly punish crime, scapegoat people and intimidate those who oppose them. They enact laws that oppress workers. They manipulate the judicial system. They often cultivate fear, prejudice and hate. They encourage role rigidity, male domination, sexism, racism, homophobia and the pillorying of gay people. They oppose abortion and intertwine government and religion, and repress artists and intellectuals.

D'oh! My eyes roll; my thoughts wander. So much suffering and harm has been wreaked on people around the globe in the pursuit of power, control, glory and greed. Ideals of freedom, equality and democracy are rent asunder in the process. Authoritarian centralization of control, under either communism or capitalism, has often been gravely detrimental to the majority of the people.

In bygone centuries, European imperialism involved a system of economic mercantilism and colonial occupations. Naval power and strong-arm tactics were used to establish exploitive regimes over peoples in Third World countries. England, Spain, Portugal, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Italy all built far-flung colonial empires. The injustice and disastrous impacts of colonialism eventually led to revolutionary movements for independence in dozens of countries around the world.

A new form of empire building has replaced the colonial imperialism of the 16th to 20th centuries. This new kind of international abuse of power involves economic imperialism that is more subtle and insidious. International banks, multinational corporations and governments use a rigged international banking system and predatory development schemes to enrich giant corporations and investors and elite in-groups. Their goal is to increase profits, and to exploit resources and cheap labor, no matter what the cost to the people (especially in developing countries).

The old forms of colonialism may seem downright vulgar compared to these sophisticated new forms of imperialism. Yet free enterprise is running amok by advancing schemes of privatization, corporate globalization, increased inequality, excessively speculative development, various forms of institutional bribery and fraud, radical social engineering, surges of militarism, and other forms of exploitive 'economic shock therapy'.

Economic inequality is one of the most significant sources of friction in world politics. The industrial revolution has heightened inequalities of wealth and power between developed nations and developing ones. The earliest countries to industrialize colonized and exploited non-industrialized countries. Peripheral societies that have been left behind basically have two strategies to break out of economic and political dependency: (1) by means of revolutionary independence movements, or (2) by imitating the methods of industrialization and using technological innovations and market mechanisms such as currency controls, tariffs and other import barriers. Opposition to the latter methods by nations in the developed world makes intense conflicts more likely. It is clear, however, that fairer and more peaceable strategies are preferable to violent revolutions, so we should make greater efforts to create fairer outcomes for people in less developed nations.

Economic development abroad these days generally relies on those who preach the gospel of progress. Such people unfortunately often ally themselves with forces of domination, repression and austerity in order to advance the interests of investors and those in ruling classes. Powerful people almost invariably abuse their prerogatives, and the world's poor become ever more hapless pawns of the rich.

One percent of the people in the world own almost half of all wealth and assets. Hunger, meanwhile, subversively festers in the urban slums and rural backwaters of the world, posing a serious threat to the future safety of all. One of the primary roots of conflict in human societies is instability that results from the systemic abuse of the poor by economic and political elites.

Chalmers Johnson in his *Nemesis* trilogy provided thought-provoking perspective concerning America and the consequences of efforts to build an imperialistic empire. Gray Brechin writes about similar themes in his book, *Imperial San Francisco*, where he investigates the California Gold Rush and its aftermath, with a focus on the growth of urban power, empire, 'robber barons', ambition and greed, and their correlation with earthly ruin.

While civilizations seem to pass through various stages of genesis, growth, disintegration, breakdown and dissolution, these stages are NOT predestined. We need not be fatalistic, and in fact, one of the best things we could do would be to confidently and courageously join the struggle to transform our societies into fairer and more sustainable ones. By championing resource conservation, recognizing

limits, striving together to achieve peaceable coexistence and making reasonable, intelligent, fair and intrepid changes most likely to usher in a saner future, we would have improved chances of avoiding violent conflicts, disintegration and chaos.

Chapter #19 - Machiavellian Machinations and Their Shortcomings.

The father figures in our society should begin acting in ways that are more reasonable, responsible, responsive and humanitarian, and less authoritarian and unfair. I challenge everyone to read Al Gore's insightful book, *The Assault on Reason*, and come to any other conclusion than that we would be much better off, if we want a safer, fairer and more sane world, with a leadership role model similar to Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama or Joe Biden rather than one like George Bush, Mitt Romney or Donald Trump -- or any of the 2024 Republican candidates for president.

I am personally a strong proponent of giving greater respect and more political power to intelligent and empathetic 'mother figures' in our societies. Today's retrogressive patriarchal politicians are creating too many problems in the world by contributing to increases in economic and environmental injustices, extremes of inequality, ruthless competition, gender discrimination and arrogant hubris.

An acquaintance of mine who lives in the Big Sky Country of Montana is an old man who has been a lifelong Republican. He aptly expressed the feeling of many Americans during the 2008 elections when he said, "I have not left the Republican Party, it has left me!" What a disgrace to our country it was, and what a fiasco, for George W. Bush and Dick Cheney to have abandoned important traditional principles of balanced budgets, limited government, honesty, fairness, integrity, honorable concern for the common good, multilateralism in international affairs, and the right of Americans to protected civil liberties and privacy rights. Republicans since then have gone even more extreme.

Another friend of mine, a woman who had always supported the Republican Party, wrote to me just after the 2008 elections: "I broke with my Republican tradition and have voted Democratic. With the rest of the world looking at us as bullies, the best I figured we could do was to change the face of the country internationally and see if we can rejoin the cool kids in the cafeteria rather than eating alone under the bleachers." In 2024, millions more must break with Republican conformity.

Political consultant and policy advisor Karl Rove was obsessed with power and political victory at-any-cost. This attitude typified a curious creed which holds that unethical and anti-democratic means are justified to accomplish triumphal ends. The best interests of the American people are being trumped by partisan favoritism, and a "culture of corruption" has been running rampant in Washington D.C. for years. Many initiatives that pander to rich people, giant corporations, or male prerogatives have been advanced, while outcomes more favorable to the common good have been undermined. Objectionable outcomes have also come about from widespread pay discrimination against women, the denigration of gay people, and the exploitation of religious people for unchristian purposes.

Karl Rove was ostensibly emulating Lee Atwater, the so-called "boogeyman" of Republican politics, a man who was widely regarded as the first modern political operative to use scandals, dirty tricks and fear to gain power. Atwater had a win-at-any-cost approach and he was a "slime slinger" who tried to fool black people into thinking that the Republican Party really cares about their interests. Atwater developed a brain tumor at age 40 and made introspective deathbed confessions about how wrong-headed his actions were. For illumination, watch the documentary film *Boogie Man: The Lee Atwater Story*. And then in the year 2016, Donald Trump offensively took advantage of similar racial bigotry and the Southern Strategy appeals to white grievances and other divisive ruses to win the presidency.

In any case, back on January 20, 2009, millions of people worldwide felt a great sense of relief to see a helicopter lift off to take George W. Bush out of Washington D.C., and out of power. Despite bone-chilling weather, there was reportedly a remarkable sense of excitement and anticipation in the air, and a growing hope that new leadership in the U.S. would restore a healthier balance to our American values and our communities, our domestic economy, foreign policies, and planetary ecosystems.

Both the George W. Bush and Trump administrations demonstrated with startling clarity the truth in P.J. O'Rourke's cynical observation that "Republicans are the party that says that government doesn't work -- and then gets elected and proves it." Our great experiment in democracy has shown that vigilant commitments to freedom and democratic fairness principles must be coupled with a free press and strong judicial oversight and progressive policies in order to ensure a vibrant society that works best for the majority of people.

In November 2008, I thought, "good riddance to Republican expectations of permanent political dominance!" Curiously, discredited conservative ideas have made a comeback since then, especially among the Tea Party and Freedom Caucus faithful. They have done so by using a "hard-times swindle", according to Thomas Frank, author of *Pity the Billionaire: The Hard-Times Swindle and the Unlikely Comeback of the Right*. Super PAC money and Republican efforts to disenfranchise millions of poor people and minorities are giving conservatives a level of power that their unfair ideas do not merit.

Governments always face corrupting influences. The struggle for fairness is a continuous process because greed and Machiavellian obsessions with power and control persist, and seem to eternally spring anew. International competition is intensifying over control of land, energy resources, minerals and fresh water supplies, and this guarantees that struggles to maintain democratic forms of government will be difficult. It is -- and will remain -- a big challenge for our nation to preserve an adequate semblance of fairness for our own people, and for other people around the planet.

It is a twist of irony that the political left seems to demonstrate a greater concern for the whole of society, and for future generations, and for overall biological well-being than the political right, whose natural traditionalism, conservatism and professed concerns for family values might seem to be a natural platform for fairer protections of families and the environment. But right-wing ideologues and scheming politicians have hijacked the integrity of honest conservatives to advance policies that turn out to be damaging to communities and the environment. They defend anti-egalitarian social inequities and ignorance and the raw authoritarian pursuit of power. They seem to be obsessed mainly with personal gain and self-aggrandizement. As the economist John Kenneth Galbraith once observed:

"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."

Chapter #20 - Historical Developments.

Human history has been profoundly affected by two principal revolutions. The first of these was the Agricultural Revolution that began about 10,000 years ago. Before human beings began to cultivate crops and domesticate animals, they lived semi-nomadic lives and hunted wild animals and gathered plants, herbs and fruits for sustenance. When crop cultivation and animal husbandry were found to be preferable means, it allowed human beings to generate surpluses and settle down in villages and towns that eventually grew into cities and civilizations, and helped human numbers proliferate.

The second great change in human societies was the Industrial Revolution. This was a transformation that kicked into high gear about 200 years ago with advances in mechanical power that began with

steam engines. This revolution was facilitated by great strides in science, technology, mechanization, innovation, mining methods, electrification, more efficient means of exploiting resources, the utilization of fossil fuels, urban infrastructure improvements, advances in hygiene and medicine, and the stimulus of democratic governance. Perspective on the nature and impacts that these transformative changes have had on human societies are discussed at length in later chapters below.

We are now in the incipient stages of a new and equally far-reaching revolution that mandates that we plant the propitious seeds of sustainable activities. The era is ending in which we can make advances simply by more efficiently harvesting the bounty of nature, or by wantonly depleting the cornucopia of resources so providentially available to us.

Our human civilization is becoming increasingly vulnerable. We are creating a house of cards, adding bells and whistles and technological innovations, but simultaneously letting the foundations rot and the superstructure crumble. We are creating a sea of troubles by increasing our national debt and liabilities, encouraging speculative excesses, and extravagantly wasting resources. We are doing this partially because we embrace false values of materialism, undisciplined consumerism and lavish conspicuous consumption. Our government has foolishly involved us in wars to meddle in the affairs of other nations with the main goals of increasing the domineering influence of our imperialistic empire and facilitating profiteering and feeding our addiction to fossil fuels.

Economic policies worldwide need to be redesigned to limit emissions of greenhouse gases and to reduce air pollution like that associated with China's rapid growth and its widespread use of coal. The smog in Chinese cities is pervasive, gray and suffocating on an epic scale.

The very premises of the dominant paradigms of human thought and action threaten our future well-being. The findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment make it clear that we need to begin to question these premises, and to wholeheartedly respect the basic tenets of an ecologically-sound transformation in our economic system and our business and government institutions.

Chapter #21 - Better Plans for Global Security.

The Oxford Research Group published a report in 2006 that had a stark conclusion: sustainable security can be achieved only by addressing the root causes of four main threats to global security. These four threats are: (1) the ruthlessness and unfairness of competition over resources; (2) trends toward stimulated arms sales and global militarization; (3) the risky marginalization of the majority of people in the world through increasing disparities of wealth, power, and economic inequities; and (4) the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions on global climate change. The report cited as unwise our unilateral attempt to control threats through the use of force without honestly dealing with these root causes. Heavy-handed policies often attack only symptoms of problems, rather than effectively and cooperatively attempting to resolve problems by addressing their true causes.

Dr. John Sloboda of the Oxford Research Group wrote: "Preserving the planet for our children and grand children speaks to our deepest aspirations, no matter what culture, religion, or ideology we belong to or espouse. The entire global political system has been fruitlessly distracted for nearly half a decade by 9/11 and its consequences. It is not just that the United States-led 'war on terror' fails to address the real threats facing humanity; the very conduct of that 'war' is exacerbating these threats, and bringing closer the likelihood of their devastating impacts on human and environmental security. If these growing threats are not halted within the next few years, the world could pass a tipping-point which would catapult it into a period of intense and unprecedented conflict."

We should develop a bigger-picture understanding of the "war on terror". This extremely costly conflict has damaged international hopes for peace and justice, and it is distracting us from far more vitally important domestic and international initiatives. The foreign policy of the U.S. has been a major contributing factor in inciting instability and support for terrorist tactics. The 9/11 jet airliner hijackings and assaults on the World Trade Center and Pentagon are just the most horrible example of retaliatory *blowback*. This CIA term refers to one of the unintended consequences of our foreign policies and the dangers of resentments they engender.

The emphasis in our policies on economic domination, ruthless covert operations, aggressive militarism and drone bombings create strong opposition to our hard-line actions. Since terrorism is one of the few weapons available to those who are desperately alienated, terrorist attacks become more likely in response to our hubristic actions. Author Chalmers Johnson actually predicted in the year 2000 that we would suffer retaliatory payback for our policies and actions. In his book *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, he basically predicted an outcome like the 9/11 attacks.

None of the real security challenges we face can be solved through military power; not stateless terror, not nuclear proliferation, not failed states, not mass desperation, not Peak Oil, not resource depletion, not global pandemics, and not climate change. We need new approaches in foreign policy!

Islamic extremists have been terribly effective in spreading fear among Western nations, spiking the cycle of violence and repression. For years, our leaders hyped up this threat to help them exploit the opportunity to advance their short term-oriented agendas. They eroded protections for citizens' rights and reduced the transparency of government activities. While our attention was distracted, politicians and corporate profiteers have distorted our society's priorities to reap enormous benefits at the expense of people and to the sad detriment of peaceful coexistence.

Plato philosophized that societies should be led by their wisest members. It is contradictory to this understanding to allow people to control our government who are ideologically rigid, shortsighted, and narrowly selfish. Good quality public education and fairer opportunities should be courageously supported, and grave injustices should be rejected. Repression, authoritarianism, and religious extremism should be marginalized. Good statesmanship, greater fairness and far-sighted sustainable initiatives should be championed.

We are indeed in need of new paradigms -- of ethics, of ecologically-sound initiatives, of stewardship rather than dominion, of conservation, of moderation in consumption, and of peace-building. We would be wise to develop ways to increase responsible behaviors and Golden Rule fairness. We need to find better methods of cultivating a respectful tolerance of differences. We should demand greater honesty from our leaders. We should implement initiatives that would ensure that we achieve a better quality of life, and make voluntary simplicity more respectable. We should encourage family planning and responsible parenthood, and give priority to the true quality of life. We should empower women instead of depriving them of their personal reproductive rights. And we should not pander so slavishly to entities focused on resource exploitation, opportunism, global racketeering, profiteering, narrow-minded doctrines, religious ideologies, deceptive marketing, and aggressive warfare.

"Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom," said Thomas Jefferson

Philosophers are literally people who love wisdom. The most famous early Western philosophers were Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Socrates was enigmatic and impious, teaching mankind to ask questions so as to elicit truths that he felt were implicit in all rational beings. He courageously challenged the powerful, as Jesus of Nazareth did 400 years later, by criticizing all forms of injustice and

corruption. We could benefit from deeply understanding a belief that Socrates articulated that right insight is necessary for right action.

Plato was one of Socrates' pupils. He believed in lively discourse, so he established the original school of philosophy, the *Academy* in Athens, to explore understandings of the true nature of ideas. Plato's most famous student was Aristotle, one of history's most original and perceptive Big Thinkers. Aristotle was a meticulous organizer of thought and knowledge who wrote extensively on philosophy, logic, natural science, ethics, politics and poetics. He believed in the concept of the "Golden Mean": a good balance between excess and deficiency. He maintained that moderation and balance are necessary for a harmonious and virtuous life. He rationally believed that *eudemonia* (or human flourishing and living well) is the highest good. That is a commendable perspective!

This way of seeing is valuable. Aristotle did, however, have some antiquated and erroneous ideas and serious biases in his points of view. He believed, for example, that slavery was justified, and that women were inferior to men. Slavery is not just. And women are not inferior to men, and certainly should not be treated that way!

The ideas espoused herein plumb philosophy, science, economics, politics, psychology, history, morality and the nature of human motivation, with the purpose of advancing understandings and actions by which our societies can better flourish. By invoking our reason, faith, imagination and creativity, we can discover insights that will lead us to improve our economic and political systems and help us plan for contingencies more wisely, and thus provide for a saner future.

Chapter #22 - The Gaia Understanding.

A valuable shift in perspective can be gained by understanding the modern holistic concept of *Gaia*.

Gaia is the physical totality of the Earth and all its life forms together, intricately interconnected and interdependent. The entire planet and its biotic communities function together as a dynamic and thoroughly interdependent, self-regulating organism. *Gaia* seems to operate with a property similar to "homeostasis". This term describes the process by which the body of a living organism regulates and maintains a delicate internal equilibrium of temperature, water content, blood alkalinity, oxygen supply, nutritional needs and other factors essential to health and vitality.

Gaia manifests über-mechanisms that regulate, maintain and tend to restore a delicate equilibrium in the habitats, ranges and ecosystems of all life forms. A good parallel can be drawn to the social complexity of a hive of bees. No hive of bees can be fully understood in a context of individual bees alone, since there is a complex interdependence between the hive's queen and its drones and worker bees. Similarly, the biotic community of life on Earth cannot be truly understood without at the same time knowing about interconnections and interrelationships between life forms and with natural processes like photosynthesis and the hydrologic cycle of evaporation and precipitation.

Gaia has marvelous capacities for resilience and spontaneous healing, especially when in a healthy state. All species are essentially actors in a co-evolutionary dance of survival that rely on mutualism for continued existence. *Gaia* is balanced, provisioning and beautiful, with oceans, rivers, wetlands, rainforests, coral reefs, the atmosphere and millions of species of life interacting together in ways that are miraculously wondrous.

Feedback loops can contribute to a healthy equilibrium in natural systems. When human activities disrupt such natural balance, feedback loops can also have negative impacts and adversely affect the fabric of biological existence. An example of this can be found in activities that cause deforestation

and make global warming worse, thereby contributing to a faster melting of snowfields, glaciers and ice sheets. Since snow and ice reflect the sun's heat into space, the global warming process speeds up when they disappear. Hotter temperatures increase the number and intensity of catastrophic wildfires, and these events spew enormous amounts of smoke and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year. A collateral effect of such fires is the combustion of living trees, omitting carbon and stopping their photosynthesis that would otherwise remove carbon dioxide from the air.

Global warming also tends to release more methane into the atmosphere from peat bogs and thawing tundra. According to scientists, methane is many times more potent than carbon dioxide in its short-term impacts on atmospheric warming. Once we understand how feedback loops can compound the effects of adverse changes, we gain vital perspective that will theoretically help inform our actions and facilitate our choosing wiser ways of ensuring our own species' flourishing, safety and survival.

Let's forgive ourselves, and forgive others. And let's acknowledge that the resources of the Earth are like natural capital, and that it is radically unwise to mindlessly squander them. No business can exist for long if it continuously spends its capital resources; yet we are exploiting the resources of the Earth with little regard for inexorable depletion. In addition to being the source of a bounty of natural resources, our home planet's ecosystems provide extremely valuable services that are crucial to human well-being.

Some of these ecosystems services are provided by (1) wetlands, which mitigate flooding, purify water and provide rich aquatic nursery habitats; (2) forests, which regulate stream flows, protect topsoil and river fisheries, and provide wood, fiber and "sinks" for carbon dioxide; (3) wild areas that provide vital sustenance to wildlife and support biological diversity; (4) birds, bees and various other insects that pollinate crops and help disperse seeds; (5) natural systems that keep pests and diseases in check; (6) the natural symbiosis and resilience found in the diversity of ecosystems, which helps maintain Gaia's balance; and (7) public lands that offer recreational, aesthetic and spiritual values.

Scientists estimate that ecosystem services contribute about twice as much value, in total, in the international economy every year as the sum of the gross national products of all countries. This understanding makes it clear that it is a grave error to mindlessly mess with Mother Nature by harming her ability to continue providing these services!

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment estimated that 60% of these ecosystem services are being degraded or used unsustainably. SIXTY PERCENT! And that report was almost 20 years ago.

Human activities are both intentionally and inadvertently altering and damaging habitats all around the world. This impoverishing of Earth is taking place at our own distinct peril. "It is an unnerving thought," writes Bill Bryson in *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, "that we may be the living universe's supreme achievement and its worst nightmare simultaneously."

Paul Hawken observed in *Blessed Unrest* that social justice and environmental movements might well be "humanity's immune response to toxins like political corruption, economic disease, and ecological degradation." Consider the nature of our bodies' immune systems. When an individual is inoculated with small doses of pathogens, this exposure gives our bodies immunity to larger-scale attacks by the same pathogens. This is practically a miracle! It is a form of inoculated 'memory' in the immune system. In a similar way, we can consider committed ecological concerns by individuals as immunological protections of Gaia against pathological threats in the form of ecosystem damages, habitat degradation, and other unwise impacts of exploitation. We should collectively heed such concerns, rather than allowing our representatives to expend so much effort undermining them!

The concept of Gaia comes from the primordial personification of the Earth goddess *Gaea* in Greek mythology. It is instructive to go back to this ancient mythology and ponder the genesis of its Creation story. *Gaea* was feminine-gendered Earth. She emerged from Chaos and gave birth to a son, Uranus, who was the primal Greek god that personified the Sky and the heavens. *Gaea* then mated with Uranus to create, among others, the 12 first-generation Titans who were primeval nature powers worshipped in historical Greece. The Titans were an early ruling dynasty of powerful deities during a Golden Age. They were the parents of second-generation Titans like Atlas and Prometheus and the sun god Helios and the moon goddess Selene, and they in turn were the parents and grandparents of the Olympian gods and goddesses.

Uranus was the first patriarchal father figure in Greek mythology. In a classic story, Uranus grew resentful of the children he had parented with *Gaea*, so he kept some of them trapped within her womb. This caused *Gaea* great pain, anguish and anger. Cronus, the youngest Titan, came to help his mother, and he did so by lopping off his father's genitals with a sickle and throwing them into the sea. By such means, he became the most powerful god. He and the Titans then ruled over the universe and gave birth to new deities that represented natural elements like the sun, the moon, rivers, winds, and the rainbow. Others were monsters that personified evil or dangerous entities.

Cronus mated with Rhea, one of his sister Titans, and from their union was born the first-generation Olympians -- Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Hera, Hestia and Demeter. These deities ruled the sky, the sea, the underworld and the affairs of mankind. Zeus was regarded not only as the supreme ruler of the gods, but also as the personification of the laws of nature.

Imagine yourself alive 2,500 years ago in the island nation of Greece. This Creation myth was the dominant cosmological, spiritual and religious explanation of existence at that time in this most advanced civilization in the Western world. A rich and well-developed mythology surrounded these deities, enveloping the Greeks in a mythical connection to their world.

The Creation story of Uranus and Cronus has a patriarchal slant to it, eh? Lots of testosterone! The father's genitals were lopped off by his son!! It makes one yearn for the good old days when the Great Goddess ruled humankind's beliefs -- and when much greater appreciation was given to the health and beneficence of the natural world. In those times, more respect was given to Mother Earth, since people held a more personalized vision of the impersonal powers of cause and effect.

The Great Goddess Mother Earth had been revered in ancient Europe and Asia for thousands of years before barbarian invasions led to the subjugation of these early civilizations by peoples whose deities were dominated by male warrior gods. These invasions fractured and suppressed the prior mother-based religions, and then father-based theologies became dominant. Patriarchal religions not only consigned feminine goddesses to inferior positions in the pantheon of deities, but they profoundly affected the cultures of the peoples in which they germinated and found expression. Women were increasingly oppressed in those societies, and harsh laws like the eye-for-an-eye Hammurabi's Code gained force. The new myths demoted the value of the female life force, with its deep connections to fertility and birth and nature. And the males, like modern-day born-again evangelicals, made sure to relegate females to an inferior status. In many states like Texas and Florida, they are going one step further and mandating that pregnant women give birth to unwanted progeny by strictly limiting access to abortion and even opposing birth control measures and accurate sex education, and the excessive influence of the powerful oil industry is causing rash oil-well-pumping polluting effects on nature.

Our societies are still paying the price for the sometimes subtle and sometimes ruthless subjugation of the divine feminine. Our patriarchal cultures oddly tend to stunt the basic needs of both females and males, and to thereby inhibit personal growth and the fulfillment of human potentials. Cultural constructs compel males to repress their inner anima selves and their emotions and vulnerabilities, and this contributes to a variety of morbid symptoms. And they repress women, and make sure that females earn less pay for equal work, and act to restrict their freedoms and prerogatives.

In larger ecological terms, domineering masculine god conceptions facilitate the rash exploitation of Mother Earth. We should instead give greater appreciation and respect to our home planet by being willing to boldly protect it with commitments that are far-reaching and loyally pursued. Protections of wildlife and habitats should be strengthened! We need to recognize and honor the intrinsic values of Earth's ecosystems to us in a healthy condition, and we should stop pretending with mindless myopia that we will be able to continue exploiting and abusing them indefinitely, or with impunity.

I highly recommend Dr. Leonard Shlain's book *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: the Conflict between Word and Image* for its provocative perspective on the transition of early civilizations from Mother Goddess worship to the worship of male Gods. Dr. Shlain makes a compelling case for deeper causes for this rude transformation. His brilliant insights involve the neurological workings of our brains and a physical shift to the dominance of the left hemisphere of the brain that occurred when analytical literacy became widespread. Lenny asserted that there is a strong correlation between this change and a diminishing of the status and prerogatives of women in ancient societies, and a reduction in levels of respect for them, and far-reaching restrictions on their freedoms and rights.

A study of mythology can provide enlightening insights. Powerful images within us are expressed in story-telling, myths, legends, rituals and the tales in holy books. These stories resemble Rorschach revelations of our inner selves and the drives that affect us. We are all acted upon from within by these universal archetypes that reside in our collective unconscious, such as those richly embodied in the characteristics attributed to the gods and goddesses of Classical Greece. Zeus!

At the same time that archetypes strongly influence our behaviors, we are deeply affected by forces from without, in the form of cultural stereotypes and expectations and acculturated biases. A better understanding of the forces that influence us gives us the power to re-shape our lives in ways that could be more meaningful and fulfilling. Read the intriguing book, *Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women* by Dr. Jean Shinoda Bolen, for a deeper and more personal framework of this topic, and of important ramifications.

Myths and belief systems help us define ourselves. They create identity and a sense of meaning and belonging in our lives. Every culture throughout history has had its own unique creation myth. This surely confirms the strength of human needs for trying to explain existence and feel more secure in the belief that we are important in the world. How could it be otherwise than we are at the center of the universe? Could it be? Isn't it? Surely every child thinks, in any case, "It's all about me!"

Since we seem to have a basic need for a creation myth, there could scarcely be a more solid, fact-supported, adaptive and unifying one than the narrative unfolding through science and understandings of deep ecology. These perspectives reveal a grand saga of an eons-long physical evolution of the universe and our solar system, and of life on our home planet. Within this backdrop, science presents a magnificent conception of the genetic evolution of all life on Earth, including every species of life in a billions-of-years-long epic of "punctuated equilibrium" change along a multifaceted branching of the tree of life. Check out *Revelations of a Modern Prophet* for more elaborate explanation.

It would be salubrious for us all if a reconciling balance could be established between masculine and feminine cosmologies, theologies, worldviews and politics. By yielding some of the drive to dominate, the masculine divine could allow the vital feminine divine and its corollary positive attributes to gain healthier influence in our lives. Women could be empowered and given fairer treatment and greater equality of opportunity. Our societies could even commit to a universal healthcare system that includes medical care for women without sexist double standards or purity pledges, or meddlesome vaginal probes, abortion bans and other such things.

Ayla, the heroine character in Jean Auel's novel *The Clan of the Cave Bear* stimulates our imaginations with images of a world long ago. The story entertains us with a marvelous Ice Age saga, and it simultaneously gives us provocative insights into how different the relationships and cultures of prehistoric peoples may have been. Imagine facing the primordial world that Ayla lived in, with its pre-literate social ties and communication hurdles and cave bears and saber-toothed tigers and woolly mammoths. Try to place yourself in those times and contexts and the worldviews that might have accompanied those times. As descendants of such people, this flight of imagination provides us with a compelling way of looking at our selves, our ancestry, and our relationship with the Earth.

All populations of animals exist in dynamic natural balances. Each species' population is controlled by limiting factors such as the available food supply, predation, disease, and competitive pressures. Humanity is not independent or exempt from these influences. For this reason it is foolhardy for the human race to continue acting in ways that upset natural balances and the current wavering equilibrium of ecological systems.

This understanding should encourage us to refrain from the wholesale destruction of habitats by clear-cutting forests, depleting fisheries, wastefully burning fossil fuels, and degrading the quality of water resources and agricultural lands and wild areas.

Recall this date: April 15, 1912. On this date, the RMS Titanic passenger liner struck an iceberg on its maiden voyage and sank in the North Atlantic Ocean. We should begin to seriously limit emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere instead of emulating the Captain of the Titanic, who in effect said, "Damn the dangers of icebergs, full speed ahead!" -- in treacherous waters. The ship and its passengers and crew suffered the terrible consequences.

Our actions today are creating a dangerous and unsettled situation that will probably be restored to balance only after our human equilibrium-disturbing impacts are ancient history, hundreds or thousands -- or millions, to real optimists -- of years from now.

Life has survived some epic calamities on Earth, such as the Cretaceous Extinction that took place 65 million years ago. This biotic catastrophe has been traced to a meteor impact in the vicinity of the northern part of the Yucatan Peninsula. The fossil record shows that more than half of all species of life on Earth became extinct at that time, including all the numerous species of reptilian dinosaurs.

Other mass extinctions have taken place over the eons-long unfolding of geologic history, but today's increase in the rate of extinctions represents the first time that extinctions have been caused by one species of life (us!), rather than by a geophysical phenomenon. Biologists and other researchers generally agree, according to Edward O. Wilson in *The Future of Life*, that the extinction rate of species today is somewhere between 100 and 10,000 times the average rate that has pertained for tens of millions of years, long before human beings began to impact biological diversity on Earth.

An alarming die-off of honeybees is taking place in the U.S. today. This development can be seen as a proverbial "canary in the coal mine" warning, cautioning us that the dismissive attitude of our culture toward pollution, waste, habitat damages and greenhouse gas emissions is creating risks too big to accept. Similarly, the decline in both the diversity and abundance of mammals, birds, amphibians and other species should serve as a warning against obtusely and obstinately staying our current course.

Change in human societies tends to take place in a kind of punctuated equilibrium, one of gathering energies and tipping points. It is clear that, for our own good, we need to make the hard choices involved in difficult decisions that will define a new epoch in which we act more intelligently to prevent the deterioration of the ecological commons and the widespread extinction of other species of life. We surely should seek better ways to collaborate together to find common ground between economic activities and conservation, so as to protect future generations and prevent a forecast extinction of roughly half of all species of life on Earth in the next 100 years. "Now is the time!"

An Ode to Gaia

Crystal clear water splashes down a verdant canyon
 Laughing a tune of satisfying elemental simplicity.
 Water-loving plants crowd the contours of the riparian watershed,
 Reflecting a state of balanced natural existence and seeming felicity.

High up above, on mountain ridges and peaks,
 Awe-inspiring vistas can be seen that give a person feelings of salubrious sanity,
 Connected, integral, visionary, and susceptible to revelation and epiphany
 Yet miniscule and ephemeral in the face of infinity and eternity.

Drifting along on a stream,
 Narrows and rapids, waterfalls;
 Meandering pools in the meadows,
 Eddies around every bend.

The water has its own influences,
 Its own involvements.
 To it, all events contain
 Equal amounts of pleasure,
 And of sorrow.

The water runs swiftly
 In this stage of its existence,
 Runs with random energy,
 Active and infinitely changing.

And occasionally the water flows into lakes
 Splashing against the beautiful shore
 Or lays deep in calm repose,
 Quite unconcerned that, eventually,
 It again will become rain.

Chapter #23 - Carrying Capacity and Far-Sighted Ecological Perspective.

The concept of a carrying capacity of natural habitats is useful and important. Nature provides a limited carrying capacity for every species of animal, depending on food and water supply and the

density of population. The versatility of human ingenuity has allowed the human race to extensively expand the range of places where we can live, so we have been able to temporarily mask natural limits on our population growth and our consumption activities. Our abilities to make shelter and clothing and tools, and to cultivate and utilize a wide variety of sources of food and energy, have made this expansion possible.

But we are already using up an estimated 40% of the total annual biological productivity of our beautiful water planet. This means that between agriculture, timber harvesting, wildlife hunting, animal husbandry, foraging and fishing, we are taking 40% of the total annual productive bounty of the planet for ourselves.

Imagine the impact we will have as human numbers grow from 8 billion today to 9 billion by the year 2040! In effect, we are simultaneously doing three things:

- (1) Depleting the non-renewable resources upon which we depend;
- (2) Damaging ecosystems through over-utilization, unsustainable development, habitat destruction, resource depletion, topsoil erosion and suburban sprawl; and,
- (3) Increasing our demands on nature with more effective extractive technologies and big increases in our human numbers.

In other words, we are steadily diminishing the carrying capacity of the Earth to support us. This is practically insane. We are assaulting the foundations of healthy existence while simultaneously failing to take meaningful steps to conserve resources, reduce our consumer demands, or stem the tide of our human population growth. The ecological underpinnings of everything we depend on cannot be continuously and unsustainably degraded.

Ecologists note that on an island, where it is easiest to quantify the approximate carrying capacity of a single species like reindeer, there have been instances where reindeer have been introduced and have increased in population beyond the expected level that can be naturally supported. When the number of reindeer exceeds the carrying capacity by a large enough margin, the animals eat all the available food, and a population crash results. Instead of the number of animals declining to a balance in the range predicted as being the actual carrying capacity, devastating starvation occurs and very few survive. This is like the proverbial interplay between rising and falling populations of rabbits and foxes. Being intelligent creatures, can't we choose to control our population and consumption, rather than waiting until impersonal certainties of cause and effect wreak terrible havoc on our species?

Human attentions have been dominated, particularly in the past 100 years, by economic competition, security anxieties, ideological struggles and wars. We should not let such concerns prevent us from developing healthier ecological perspectives. All these issues are inextricably interconnected. It is becoming critical for us to be able to integrate progressive ideas and wholesome understandings into a set of visionary and beneficial plans that will help us better cope with the big challenges facing us.

There is a "call of the wild" within us all, but it is subsumed by our increasingly urban upbringing and the economic needs to which we feel subjected. Our strong desires to belong, and our compliant conformity to seductive consumer and cultural indoctrination, are factors that serve to prevent us from a more profound connectedness to nature. I feel that Henry David Thoreau had a good point when he sagely counseled, "In wildness is the preservation of the world."

"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is necessity; that mountain parks and reservations are

useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."

--- John Muir

"Humanity is exalted not because we are so far above all living creatures, but because knowing them well elevates the very concept of life."

--- Edward O. Wilson

Chapter #24 - Rueful Reflections.

In 1910, President Theodore Roosevelt declared:

"The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value."

By this standard, humanity is behaving remarkably poorly, especially in light of the fact that we are driving many species of life toward extinction. The actions that are contributing to this outcome are undermining the very foundations of our long-term prosperity and well-being.

Some say that we are treating Mother Earth like a prostitute. We are pimping her services at every opportunity. We are objectifying her, selling her virtues, exploiting her wilds, making her gaudy with development, and showing a lack of concern for her well-being. We are desecrating her charms, violating her pristine qualities, and taking advantage of her passivity and vulnerabilities. We are, in summary, figuratively screwing Mother Earth.

Our motto seems to be "EARTH FIRST! --- We can screw the other planets later!" I hope that readers can at least chuckle ruefully at this bumper sticker sentiment, because there is value in humor and light-heartedness, no matter how serious and consequential the topic!

Consider the extent to which our activities today are similar to a Ponzi scheme. This is a type of fraudulent investment scam in which speculators receive abnormally high short-term returns that are paid from funds received from new investors. Such Ponzi scams inevitably collapse because they are unsustainable: there are no earnings to pay investors, so the suckers who come late to the scene are duped by promises of high returns, and eventually lose their money. The strategies involved in many economic ideologies today are predicated on unsustainable growth, so they have distinct parallels to Ponzi schemes. They create big profits in the short run at the expense of activities being sustainable in the long term. We are essentially rewarding investors and speculators and profiteers in the short term by borrowing resources from people in the future, and externalizing costs onto them. So the 'suckers' in this scheme are our children and theirs and theirs, far into the distant future.

A 'spectre' is haunting planet Earth, a spectre of human overconsumption, overpopulation, and the overproduction of wastes, pollutants, toxins and climate-altering greenhouse gases. It is high time that a prophet of sober assessment and hope-inspiring ideals begins to convincingly promote comprehensive perspectives, good ideas and optimum solutions whose implementation will create saner healthier societies. This manuscript is my earnest attempt to provide such propitious understandings.

"It is wiser to find out than to suppose."

--- Mark Twain

Chapter #25 - In Defense of Reason.

Intensely partisan, power-abusing politicians play a big role in our human destiny. Recognizing this, it would be a good idea for us to proactively seek ways to advance far-sighted initiatives that will help remedy this situation. Many of the chapters of these writings are regrettably, but of necessity,

involved with POLITICS. The most direct of these are Chapters #78 and 79; they call cogently for dramatic changes in the priorities of our nation's leaders.

The right-wing political machine portrays conservatism as representing reasonableness and rectitude. It continuously attacks liberals, portraying them as being wishy-washy, clueless, bleeding hearts or lacking in good ideas. But I challenge readers to review the compendium of progressive ideas in the Earth Manifesto and to come to any other conclusion than this: it is actually status-quo conservatism that is the failing political philosophy, and it is retrogressive right-wing politicians and the wealthy conservatives who finance them that are truly shortsighted, unfair, devious, misleading, progress-stymieing, unsustainable and wrongheaded. And for years, Donald Trump has been exploiting these cynically Machiavellian Joseph McCarthy-like tactics, like a wimpy athlete buffing up on steroids.

It seemed like our political leaders in the U.S. during the eight years of the Bush administration were striving to control the American people by dividing them. They preached democracy but at the same time shrewdly sowed seeds of fear, insecurity, inequality, nationalistic fervor, dogmatic certitude, patriotic zealotry, divisive religious intolerance, and cultivated doubt about the consensus findings of scientists. Instead of advocating better plans, they diverted public funds to wars, cut taxes to primarily benefits top earners, and resorted to the ruse of distracting people from domestic problems by engaging in aggression abroad. Such tactics are unconscionably wrong-headed.

Radical right 'conservatives' demonstrate hard-line attitudes that are similar to those of religious fundamentalists and zealous extremists, both Islamic and Christian. They are often enemies of honesty, respectful tolerance, and expansive freedoms because of their rigidly controlling patriarchal stances on women's issues, sexuality, family issues, good public education, secularism and modernity.

The main legitimate source of power in a democracy is the consent of the governed. Yet when such consent is manufactured by means of the control and distortion of information, then the legitimacy of this consent is undermined. When rational understanding is obscured by using tactics that distract people and scare them, the quality of decision-making is diminished. When the federal government ignores and suppresses vital information, and sanitizes reports, and distorts facts, and uses misinformation and secrecy about key issues and government operations, it is unjust and anti-democratic. Many attempts were made by both the Bush and Trump administrations to control information and use misleading statistics, and remove important information concerning health, safety and environmental matters from government websites and the public domain. The manufacture of consent by means of mass persuasion and deceptive spin has essentially made us puppets to propaganda and victims of divisive demagoguery.

British philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon long ago declared: "Knowledge is power." Attempts by governments and think tanks to control, misrepresent, and slant information are forms of power abuse. We need to be aware that our convictions can be illusions. To know something, it is best to be open-minded to contrary information and opinions, and to test convictions against a close scrutiny of the real world, and to strive to correct misapprehensions. "Don't believe everything you think!"

The "God, guns and gays" strategy of using hot button social issues to divide people and sway elections has been used effectively by conservatives to advance their causes. But our energies should be focused on much more serious issues. Instead of being distracted by narrow-mindedness and red herrings, we should find ways to limit the high cost of wars abroad, and mitigate problems of homelessness, poverty and social injustice. And we should strive to staunch the rapid depletion of resources, and restructure our economies to mitigate the damaging impacts of environmental harms.

Conservative politicians in Congress have unfortunately led the way in distracting the public's attention from these important issues. They have repeatedly proposed oppressive legislation to limit women's reproductive rights, deny civil rights to gay people, oppose gender equity, interfere with family planning programs, overturn affordable healthcare legislation, stoke anti-immigrant sentiments, prevent the passage of reasonable gun controls, and intimidate people from expressing dissent.

Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence and the third President of the United States, believed strongly that the powers of the federal government should be vigilantly constrained. He expressed the opinion that we should protect and expand representative democracy and human liberties. He would probably have figuratively turned over in his grave to see the extent to which the Executive Branch usurped power under Republican administrations, and how it bullied Congress and manipulated public opinion and stacked the federal courts.

I imagine Thomas Jefferson speaking to us today, from beyond the grave, about the essential ideals and principles of our Government: "Should we wander from these principles in moments of error or of alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty and safety."

The U.S. Senate spent a lot of time debating a Flag Desecration Amendment in June 2006. This was an electioneering ploy that just barely failed to pass. Republicans used this shrewd ruse to gain patriotic support in the national elections of November 2006, just as they have done in previous elections. Americans should, parenthetically, thank the Senate for defeating this Constitutional amendment, and we should congratulate ourselves for having once again rejected attempts to curtail Free Speech rights that have been guaranteed for over 225 years by the brilliant Bill of Rights. Our democratic freedom to speak out in dissent from government policies is eroded when people are intimidated by government harassment, retributive actions, and coercion.

In truth, we really should honor our core values and Constitutional principles. We should not just be worshipping the flag as a symbol of an America that the radical right debases with their disdain for rules of domestic and international law and fair principles of justice. Attempts by the right-wing to erode the checks and balances in our federal government are distinctly wrong-headed, as are efforts to minimize national commitments to the general welfare and peaceful coexistence among nations.

"I want my students to consider in a historical context the idea that social inequities are neither inevitable nor accidental but reflect the assumptions, beliefs, and policies of certain people who command enormous power; that there are limits to our power as a nation, that no country is exempt from history; that the indispensable strength of America remains the right of dissent, and that few people have cared more deeply about this nation than some of its severest critics; and that we need to be wary of those who in the name of protecting our freedoms would diminish them. History teaches, after all, that it is not the rebels, the iconoclasts, the curious, or the dissidents who endanger a democratic society, but rather the accepting, the unthinking, the unquestioning, the docile, the obedient, the silent, and the indifferent."

--- Eminently popular Professor Leon Litwack

Strategies devised to polarize Americans have been used to advance a retrogressive agenda that benefits a small segment of society at the expense of the greater good. These strategies reduce citizen liberties and individual privacy rights, and they subvert the wisdom of our national planning, damage our democracy, and threaten our fiscal well-being. They also harm the beneficial support

systems of a healthy environment and biological diversity. And they hurt our hopes for peaceful coexistence and better prospects for people in future generations.

Chapter #26 - Political Madness.

I encourage readers to peruse *Reflections on War - and Peace!* because it contains valuable insight into the historical motivations for war and the demagogic methods that have been used many times in history to achieve the goals of leaders who involve their countries in war. The bottom line is that domineering militarism and hawkish U.S. military-apologist dogmas are being discredited in many ways.

Historian Howard Zinn observed during the tenure of the Bush administration that the wrong people were in power, people who had faith in imperial empire, guns, bombs, indoctrination, war propaganda, strict authority, profiteering, and special privilege. Professor Zinn delivered a challenge to the American people when he said, "To be neutral and to be passive is to collaborate with whatever is going on." He defined democracy as "not just a counting-up of votes" but a "counting-up of actions." Having thus proverbially thrown down the gauntlet, the late Professor Zinn encouraged each of us to get involved in some form of constructive social activism.

Charles Schultz' character Snoopy shows us that exasperated existential exclamations of AARGH! are often followed by an aftermath of embarrassed contrition. In light of this funny fact, many people avoid controversy, protest and social action, and lay low. The ruts of tradition and conformity to custom run deep. Politicians often take advantage of the fears people naturally feel, and their embarrassment at taking a stand. They encourage complacency and strive to subdue the outrage of citizens at unfair or excessively punitive actions by their governments. This might logically motivate us to submerge ourselves into our own personal worlds, and to merely intone quiet private mantras of "AH ... AH ... AH ... UH ... UH ... UH". Huh? In any case, I believe that more is demanded of us!

"The wisest men follow their own direction."

--- Euripides, fifth century BCE

Chapter #27 - The Tragedy of the Commons.

How can humanity earn a living and simultaneously protect the Earth and its waters and atmosphere? Let's explore this question.

People fail to act in socially and environmentally responsible ways for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons are rational; and some of these reasons are irrational.

Irrational reasons for disastrous behavior include ideological inflexibility, closed-mindedness, clashes of values, cultivated denial, unreasonable fears, emotional hijacking, ignorance, delusion, confusion and stubborn persistence in error. As societal needs change, rigid resistance to progressive adaptation tends to prevent policies from being implemented that would be most consistent with the greater good. Shared delusions, psychological denial, misunderstanding, "groupthink", and the madness of crowd psychology can also contribute to socially irrational public policy-making.

Author Edward Abbey once astutely and sarcastically observed, "One man alone can be pretty dumb sometimes, but for real bona fide stupidity, there ain't nothin' can beat teamwork." Ha! There are countervailing perspectives like those explored in the book by James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*, which reveal that the aggregation of information from groups of people can result in better decisions. Herein lies the hope in a democracy that the crowd can weigh in on the side of better decision-making. To avoid the failures of crowd intelligence like those in mobs or irrational stock

market bubbles, a diversity of opinion should be encouraged, and people should be empowered to think independently and draw on localized knowledge.

The primary rational reasons for disastrous behavior include ruthlessness in the competition for ascendancy, excessive avarice, obtuse self-centeredness, a failure to properly anticipate logical consequences, and poorly informed decision-making. Small elites who lust for wealth and power often collaborate in rational activities to dominate policy and decision-making. Corporate interests, for example, clash with more broadminded civic interests in their efforts to gain the privilege of being allowed to externalize costs onto society. And in the case of speculative bubbles, it may be eminently rational to participate as long as there are 'greater fools' to perpetuate the scheme a while longer.

Rational behaviors contribute to the phenomenon known as a 'Tragedy of the Commons'. The rational self-interest of people who are competing for benefits from a shared resource often results in collectively irrational damage to that resource. This occurs for a rather simple reason: individuals who are motivated by greedy self-interest want to get immediate benefits from an activity, while the unintended consequences and negative impacts of the exploitation of a common resource are insidious and less immediately apparent, and they are borne by the less-focused entire community.

The Tragedy of the Commons describes what is taking place in many different arenas of resource exploitation. The decimating impact, for instance, on formerly rich fisheries by fishing fleets from many competing nations occurs because unregulated competition results in the over-harvesting of fish stocks. Actions by rational individuals can thus result in outcomes that are utterly insane for the entire group. Such outcomes are tragic when they extensively harm the ecological commons.

It turns out that better cooperation, not less-regulated competition, is necessary to improve the prospects of sustainable resource usages. The only sane way for the whole of society to benefit is by creating a system of far-sighted rules designed to protect common resources from rapid depletion, damages or destructive impacts. This requires the agreement and honest compliance to such rules of all participants. It also requires oversight and effective enforcement.

The parable of the Tragedy of the Commons also applies to the issue of pollution. In this case, rather than the consequences of exploitation being a depleted commons, it is a polluted commons. Rational companies make bigger profits by dumping wastes into the commons, because then the costs are foisted onto everyone.

Widespread resistance to international efforts to limit emissions of greenhouse gases can be clearly understood as an instance of this accumulating tragedy. Some 191 nations ratified the Kyoto Protocol to help mitigate the ecological damages being caused by global warming and related climate change. But the United States refused to comply! Our leaders shortsightedly opposed these accords. China and India have also been unwilling to take adequately effective steps to control greenhouse gas emissions, because they see that the process of industrialization without heed to the global commons has allowed developed countries to benefit economically, and they regard it as an injustice for them to now be required to follow a different, more expensive path involving stricter emissions controls.

The nations of the world are thus failing to boldly act to solve the ominous problems associated with the pouring of billions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year. Making this bad situation worse, we have failed to take sufficient actions to prevent deforestation. Our inaction represents a presumptuous disregard for the well-being of all life on the planet, and it ignores the plight of people living on low-lying islands in the world's oceans and along coastal areas worldwide. It

also represents a refusal to act to mitigate the severity of future droughts, heat waves and other weather-extreme calamities that are being made worse by our inaction.

The United States insists on acting in the myopic self-interest of big corporations instead of making reasonable commitments to cooperate to achieve common good goals. This is done because we have the power to ignore rational and intelligent cooperation, NOT because it is the right thing to do.

Chapter #28 - On Climate Change.

Recent years have been among the warmest in all of recorded weather history. Glaciers worldwide are receding, and the Arctic ice caps and Antarctic ice sheets are melting at an alarming rate. Hurricanes, tornados, floods, and drought are intensifying. With the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere having increased by about 30% in the last 50 years, it is shocking to find that the rate of its accumulation is accelerating. It is becoming increasingly likely that climate changes caused by global warming will contribute in coming years to more destructive storms like Superstorm Sandy that devastated parts of the Northeastern U.S. and the powerful typhoon that struck the Philippines in November 2013. Shifts in weather patterns will also cause increased deaths from record high temperatures, agricultural disruptions, worsening desertification trends in some areas, more intense and frequent wildfires, the spread of diseases, mass migrations of refugees, biological extinctions and other social and environmental catastrophes.

One principal mechanism of climate pattern disruptions is the alternate warming and cooling of the world's oceans, which can contribute to El Niño and La Niña weather patterns that shift the jet stream and cause more extreme wet and dry periods in different locales.

Carbon dioxide emissions were almost 40% higher in 2009 than in 1990, despite efforts made in the Kyoto Protocol to diminish them. Scientists have actually been surprised by the rate of global warming, but one theory holds that, as ocean surfaces warm in general, this causes the natural process of carbon dioxide absorption by oceans to be reduced. The higher rate of increase of carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere implies an earlier and more severe onset of the problems mentioned above. Perhaps the correlated global warming is partially a result of hot air emanations from climate change deniers --- who knows? Perhaps we should ask Senator Inhofe of Oklahoma about that. I personally can't imagine opposing sensible precautionary principles, with resulting harms to billions of people now and in future generations, just to increase the profitability of the oil, coal and natural gas industries (and campaign contributions to political sycophants!).

Scientists have been warning for years about the huge quantities of carbon dioxide that are being spewed into the atmosphere. Almost all scientists agree that the current excess of 35 billion tons of such emissions every year is unequivocally contributing to global warming and climate change. They say that this significantly heightens the risk that trillions of dollars in costs will be incurred during this century alone for climate-change-related disruptions.

Revealingly, the UN World Health Organization reports a five-fold surge in climate and weather-related major disasters in the past 50 years. The agency's *Atlas of Mortality and Economic Losses* reported 11,000 such disasters globally, with just over two million deaths and almost \$4 trillion in losses. More than 90% of the deaths occurred in developing countries, showing how disproportionately vulnerable they are to climate impacts. This reveals extreme climate injustices.

Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, the chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, indicated in a 2007 interview that action against global warming could be successfully undertaken at a modest cost.

"Climate change is not something in the future. It's already here," he said. "The cost of inaction is going to be far higher than the cost of action."

Once again H.G. Wells' observation in 1920 strikes me: "*Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.*" These words are resoundingly relevant today!

Al Gore made it seem that necessary changes are achievable in his compelling film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and that there is good hope that people will realize how serious the stakes are for failing to act. We may be reaching a Tipping Point in awareness and public opinion on climate change. This will hopefully help worldwide efforts to mitigate the effects of global warming. Unfortunately, the UN Climate Change Conference in Cancun in 2010, and the one in South Africa in 2011, and the one in Qatar in 2012, and the one in Poland in 2013, and the one in Lima, Peru in 2014, were all unable to develop agreements on strong protections. The Paris Accords in 2015 hopefully presage a dramatic and effective turning point!

Our Tipping Point in global awareness of threats posed by greenhouse gas emissions is matched against an even more far-reaching Tipping Point -- an ecological one. We are reaching a point where industry, agriculture, animal husbandry and population growth are irreversibly damaging ecosystems and driving many species of life to extinction. This undermines the biological support systems upon which we depend. No one can predict whether our Tipping Point of awareness will arrive soon enough, with enough force, to ensure we will win this race between education and catastrophe.

The national midterm elections in 2010 and 2014 gave climate change deniers increased influence in the House of Representatives and the Senate, so the near term outlook for meaningfully addressing this issue deteriorated. The surprising power of climate change deniers in the Republican Party has made it even more obstinate in its opposition to sensible action.

These are strange days indeed. Here again we seem to be emulating the notorious Captain of the Titanic who threw caution to the wind and ordered full speed ahead in treacherous waters. While progressives envision critically needed changes, they struggle against relentless forces that advocate freedoms to operate without costs being assigned to carbon emissions, and with a minimum of regulations, limitations or social responsibilities. Too many politicians oppose sensible measures that would strengthen our democracy by restricting lobbying, making smart reforms in the financing of political campaigns, and enacting fair-minded restrictions on Super PAC funding.

Senator Mitch McConnell embodies this obstinate opposition to a fairer democratic republic. It is sad for the American people that his pragmatic success in advancing the causes of wealthy people, giant corporations and social conservatives has taken precedence over all other considerations. His role in brokering a compromise on extending the Bush tax breaks in December 2010 is chilling, as is the passage of Trump tax cuts in 2017. After all, future generations will be required to pay interest costs on trillions of dollars we are borrowing to finance some of the lowest tax rates on rich people since the 1920s. In this regard, regressive Republican tax cuts will adversely affect the prospects of our children and their descendants to lead secure lives in a sound economy with adequate resources.

Powerful forces stubbornly strive to stay the course even when the course becomes untenable. Reckless right-leaning leaders have advocated for years that we merely make more studies of problems related to global warming and climate change. They vaguely assert that voluntary limitations on emissions will be adequate, despite extensive evidence to the contrary. It is becoming urgent that we boldly and innovatively deal with the irreversible nature of our predicaments related to climate change, overpopulation and ecosystem destabilization. The Eleventh Hour is upon us!

Gordon Brown, the British Prime Minister in December 2007, indicated that nations who met in Bali that month for 13th Session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference should agree on binding emissions caps for all developed countries. Brown said, "I know this means facing up to hard choices and taking tough decisions. That means governing, not gimmickry." When the Paris Accords on climate action were signed at the end of 2015 to finally take meaningful steps to mitigate global warming, even then binding emissions caps were not included.

Politics is too often about gimmicks rather than real solutions. This perspective was confirmed when a record-late California state budget was passed in 2008. At the time, a preposterous gimmick was proposed to borrow money from lottery profits in future years to reduce near-term budget shortfalls. Smarter ideas and more fair-minded plans need to be enacted, along with more sensible solutions to national and global problems. Americans should demand wiser and more honest leadership.

When Barack Obama was first elected in November 2008, many Americans sincerely hoped and believed that he would be able to lead us in far more intelligent directions than the ones in which we have been proceeding for so long. But the forces of inertia proved to be powerful and the status quo is exceedingly hard to change, so our political system is beginning to appear to be almost incapable of adequately and honestly addressing the big problems we face. Radically different visions and policy prescriptions by conservative and liberal partisans have led to a paralysis of action in Congress.

A Supreme Court decision in April 2007 confirmed that the Environmental Protection Agency has the authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions. This was an important step toward getting our laggard federal government and giant corporations to give climate change disruptions a higher priority. After more than a year passed, the EPA continued to drag its feet rather than acting to mitigate the impending impacts of climate disrupting emissions. The EPA Chief during the Bush administration sided with the White House in opposing the rights of States to set more stringent emissions policies. This thwarted forward-thinking efforts in California and a dozen other states. It was an exceedingly odd federal-trumps-state strategy that bizarrely turned traditional Republican anti-federalism on its head.

Green taxes and sensible regulations are needed. One positive step to deal with this climate dilemma would be to establish a system of emissions caps for companies and an 'emissions trading system'. This plan is a more complex and less effective way to regulate carbon emissions than direct carbon taxes, and its effects are delayed because it does not address the key issue of our risky dependence on fossil fuels and their inexorable depletion. But at least a cap-and-trade emissions system would be a start in dealing with the problem. If that is the route we finally choose as a first step toward reducing carbon emissions, the cap-and-trade system should be designed to discourage complacency, bureaucracy, fraud and mere greenwashing. And some of the proceeds of the assessed cost should be devoted to making a more robust transition to renewable energy alternatives.

The disruptive impacts of climate changes caused by global warming are not unstoppable; we just haven't yet made determined efforts to slow them. The federal government was partly at fault, especially with Republican administrations, for they have had an extensive record of denying and suppressing scientific understandings in order to support the doctrines of business-as-usual, particularly with regard to energy policy and the auto and oil industries. A New York Times article in January 2006 reported a revealing instance of this, when a young Republican political appointee in the NASA public affairs office tried to censor top NASA scientist Dr. James Hansen and suppress scientific findings on global warming. Thereafter, hundreds of documented instances were noted in which Bush era officials interfered with government scientists' global warming work and findings.

Too often our leaders are far more concerned with good press than good results. They have created a culture that discourages people from telling the truth. Shame on our leaders! They should be held more accountable. Inaction on greenhouse gas emissions is becoming a serious liability. Republicans often seem to be of the same mind-set as Donald Rumsfeld, who in a "snowflake memo" to himself once noted that "bumper sticker statements" should be used to rally public support for unpopular wars. I assert that we need wiser understandings, not merely shallow bumper sticker sentiments!

The Bush administration heavily edited testimony to the Senate by Dr. Julie Gerberding, the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, when she addressed the Environment and Public Works Committee in October 2007. Her testimony was related to human impacts on global warming. A former EPA official, Jason Burnett, revealed in July 2008 that Vice President Dick Cheney's office and the Council on Environmental Quality pushed to "remove from the testimony any discussion of the human health consequences of climate change." The Bush administration's efforts to muzzle officials to prevent them from providing valuable information to the American people were a serious disservice to the functioning of our democracy, and to our well-being and national security.

Back in 2006, NASA Administrator Michael Griffin ordered NASA's Mission Statement to be changed to delete from its stated mission the purpose of helping "to understand and protect our home planet". Really?! TV satirist Stephen Colbert got into the spirit of this action by suggesting that, to be consistent with NASA's semantic political-operative strategy, the Environmental Protection Agency should remove from its name the words "environmental" and "protection"! Hall (Woe to us!)

Also in 2006, NASA eliminated funding for some new satellites that would have monitored the Earth's changing climate. Perhaps NASA officials theorized that what we don't know can't hurt us? Michael Griffin created a brouhaha in May 2007 when he suggested in a National Public Radio interview that global warming might be a good thing. He was parroting propaganda pushed by the Greening Earth Society, a coal industry 'think tank' that tries to spin perceptions to facilitate the building of more polluting plants and to continue to allow coal companies to make bigger profits by externalizing costs.

The shrewd but essentially malicious cultivation of doubt about science by Big Oil and its friends in Congress is another example of unconscionable influence peddling in our political system. This gambit allows business to avoid costs that would be incurred by taking precautionary measures to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Big Businesses have been allowed too much influence in taking advantage of uncertainties to thwart changes to the sweet system that allows corporations to profit by externalizing costs of pollution, waste disposal, worker health care, resource depletion, and climate disruption risks onto society.

Never before had the White House been so closely tied to the oil industry as it was when George W. Bush was nominally in charge. In 2001, President Bush, Dick Cheney and Condoleezza Rice and eight cabinet secretaries and thirty-two other high-level political appointees in the federal government had previously been intimately associated with Big Oil, according to Richard Behan in an AlterNet article. Government officials in charge of many agencies, as a consequence, often subverted the missions of their agencies and gave priority to the narrowly focused interests of fossil fuel industries. The people are far too often given lower priority than obsessions for making bigger profits.

Ignorance, denial, opposition to change, and profiteering by entrenched interests are potent forces in our economic and political landscape. The Supreme Court decision referred to above concerning the EPA was made by a vote of 5 to 4, with doctrinal conservatives dissenting. This demonstrated their

adamant opposition, once again, to sensible regulation and intelligent adaptation to change, even in the face of some of the most far-reaching threats to the environment ever known by humankind.

But we must not despair. There are many individual and collective actions that could be taken to reduce global warming and mitigate the impacts of climate change. A sustained common endeavor is necessary. More sophisticated and meaningful public communications and bold initiatives are needed to encourage such things as 'green building', conservation, technological cooperation, the protections of forests and threatened species, risk mitigation, and other "climate-friendly" behaviors. We need to avoid paralysis and find tangible and compelling ways to motivate people to reduce their ecological footprint impacts.

Economic incentives and disincentives are the most effective means of encouraging innovation, fossil fuel alternatives, conservation, energy efficiency, behavioral changes, and structural modifications to our economy. Subsidies to fossil fuel industries should be reduced. A worldwide moratorium on new coal-fired power plants should be implemented until 'carbon dioxide sequestration' technologies or other effective mitigation measures are developed. Sensible alternatives to the burning of fossil fuels should be fast-tracked.

The global economy must somehow be effectively 'decarbonized'. The rapid destruction of tropical rainforests and temperate forests worldwide should be significantly slowed because they act as a sort of reverse 'lungs of the planet' by using up carbon dioxide and producing oxygen through the process of photosynthesis. Rainforests contain about half of all species of life on Earth, so they are a great repository of biological diversity. Our best opportunity for immediate and cost-effective reductions of the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would be through reversing current trends toward rapid tropical deforestation.

One of the best ways to accomplish the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions would be to increase carbon taxes and use the funds for new initiatives aimed at stopping deforestation. Tax increases could be made progressive by partially offsetting them with reductions in payroll taxes. Politically, gas taxes may not yet be feasible, but they are a better plan than cap-and-trade laws.

Meanwhile, the 'population connection' between deforestation and increasing greenhouse gas emissions should be emphasized. Global population stabilization should be achieved by means of education and voluntary family planning programs. Individuals and couples should be enabled to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children. All women should have the information and means to do this without interference, discrimination or coercion. The ability to make these decisions about family size is essential to realizing larger goals, including those of having healthy families and a healthier environment. Family planning programs in nations worldwide give people the tools needed to save lives, reduce illiteracy, mitigate poverty, prevent HIV/AIDS, empower women, conserve resources, protect biodiversity and reduce deforestation and desertification.

Also, an inclusive green movement could create important changes through targeted investments and the politics of hope, optimism and opportunity. The bright promise of a 'green economy' could include, inspire and energize people of all races and classes. A historic coalition could be formed that would make a "green wave" that would lift all boats and unite the best of business and civic leaders, labor unions, environmentalists, social and racial justice activists, students, artists and intellectuals.

The book, *HEAT*, by Monbiot has a compelling conclusion: "The campaign against climate change is an odd one. Unlike almost all the public protests which have preceded it, it is a campaign not for abundance but for austerity. It is a campaign not for more freedom but for less. Strangest of all, it

is a campaign not just against other people, but also against ourselves." Hmmm ... It seems apparent that no one wants to choose any degree of austerity or sacrifice, or to be required to be disciplined -- even if the resulting impact on our lives were to create greater simplicity, less stress, more meaning, improved national security, and more positive prospects for our heirs.

The National Resources Defense Council is one of many organizations committed to trying to establish greater sanity in human affairs. They work with businesses and governments to offset negative impacts of business activities on the environment, and in effect to combat abuses of corporate power and the dysfunction of our economic system and political processes. Like the Environmental Defense Fund, another notably effective nonprofit organization, NRDC promotes initiatives that are designed to improve prospects for beneficial outcomes rather than environmentally damaging ones. The NRDC *Partnership for the Earth* campaign had six vitally important big picture objectives. They are: to curb global warming, save wildlife and wild places, revive the world's oceans, create a cleaner-energy future, stem the tide of toxic chemicals, and accelerate the greening of China.

A sadly funny article on the Internet disclosed that China has discovered an ingenious way to deal with the terrible air pollution it suffers as an outcome of burning huge amounts of coal, and other activities. Even though 250,000 people die from air pollution afflictions every year, and breathing particulates in smog causes a horrible amount of asthma and sick days and hospital visits, Chinese officials decided to merely adjust air pollution standards to reduce the number of pesky health alerts. The Environmental Protection Bureau in Shanghai changed its air pollution standards to reduce the number of health alerts it issues. It decided to issue an alert when the concentration of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter, which is known for being able to penetrate deep into human lungs, falls below 115 micrograms per cubic meter. Previously, the Bureau lifted alerts after this concentration dropped below 75 micrograms per cubic meter. In contrast, the more strict and healthier limit established by the EPA in the U.S. is 35 micrograms per cubic meter.

So, Chinese officials "are still planning to build more coal fired power plants, because, after all, you can't stop progress." They found this new approach that could be regarded from a business point-of-view as a common sense solution -- and one that billionaires like Charles Koch and his ilk would love to bring to America, if we let them.

Smog levels in Shanghai in December 2013 "have been the worst in China's long history. Many residents avoid going outside and many of those who do are wearing masks to try to filter out the dangerous small particulates in the air that came from coal fired power plants." I personally advocate solutions that are more consistent with people's health! Big cities in India, according to the news in May 2014, have even worse air pollution than China, so these challenges are far-reaching.

The Environmental Defense Fund and the NRDC should be applauded for their goals, and for their efforts to get companies to commit to important environmental goals like limiting greenhouse gas emissions. I urge every person to support the efforts of these organizations, and to strive to do your own part to conserve fossil fuels, electricity and fresh water, and to strongly support sensible and far-sighted initiatives both at home and abroad.

Chapter #29 - Earth Advocacy.

Extensive and awe-inspiring natural beauty abounds on our lovely Planet Earth;
Mountains and valleys and meadows and streams existing in dynamic grace
And our home planet provides us with nourishment and spiritual sustenance,
Earning appreciative blessings -- albeit not the adequate respect -- of the human race.

The most profound understanding of ecology is that everything is interconnected
 So every attempt to comprehend our healthy relationship to our sustaining environment
 Naturally involves economics, sociology, philosophy, and alas, political controversy
 But, so be it -- Let us explore important issues fairly, reasonably, and without lament.

The Earth is a beautiful place, as everyone can appreciate who spends time outdoors, away from the often-degrading influences of human activities. Open spaces, public parks and protected lands are inspirational and revitalizing to our spirit. The Trust for Public Lands and public movements that preserve such areas for ourselves and future generations are eminently laudable undertakings.

Protected public lands are crucial to the quality of our lives. A willingness to protect open spaces is an early sign of the type of wisdom that may prove to be crucial in ensuring our long-term survival. I feel strongly that we should continue to value and defend public lands against the powerful forces of development, resource exploitation, and pollution.

Windswept ridges and peaks that project above glaciers and ice fields are called "nunataks". During past ice ages, alpine trees like Lodgepole Pines, Whitebark Pines and other types of plant life survived in nunataks, and were therefore able to re-colonize the lands that had been scraped barren by the ice, once global temperatures warmed and the ice had melted. Nunataks served as genetic storehouses that were able to colonize the land once glaciers had retreated. After the glaciers had melted, lichens built soil bit by bit, using sunlight and water and the process of photosynthesis to dissolve the raw materials of rock. Lichens also left organic compost when they died that is beneficial to succeeding generations of plants.

Lodgepole Pines have winged seeds that allow them to float on the wind to new habitats like those created when glaciers retreat. In contrast, Whitebark Pines have wingless seeds, and their cones do not even open on their own. They rely, instead, on a symbiotic relationship with a species of birds known as Clark's Nutcrackers. These birds collect and bury large quantities of seeds that they intend to retrieve in the winter for food. Studies have shown that these birds do not find about a third of the seeds they bury, and these lost seeds often turn out to be propitiously planted for the germination of trees in new locations. This symbiotic adaptation is one of the many marvels in the processes of biological evolution.

Today's wild lands and wilderness areas are like modern nunataks: they are biological islands in a sea of altered and developed lands. As in the past, these modern nunataks provide irreplaceable genetic storehouses that are capable of replenishing disturbed lands. Today's National Parks and Wilderness Areas and roadless areas in National Forests, and public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, are thus vital islands of hope for the future. We simply must make much more serious commitments to their protection! The Global New Deal for Nature calls for an ambitious target of protecting 30% of the planet by the year 2030. Let's support measures to accomplish this goal.

Many young people today seem to be increasingly suffering from 'nature deficit disorder'. They plug in to cell phones, television, computers and the Internet instead of developing creativity in outdoors exploration and play. This trend does not bode well for their own personal well-being, now or in the future, or for the cultivation of that spirit in us all that is willing to protect the vitality and beauty of creation. Go for a walk in nature, and find a lovely place to free your feet; "your mind will follow!"

The global pressure to figuratively pave everything over is mounting as our human numbers increase. This makes it imperative for us to strengthen our will to protect parks, open spaces, wilderness areas, and the integrity and balance of the natural world.

Bigger commitments are specifically needed to preserving the health of our National Parks because they are beset by serious problems. They are being damaged by heavy traffic, wildlife poaching and air pollution, and are suffering stresses associated with decades of inadequate funding. This shortfall of financial support becomes more visible when facilities are closed, public access is reduced, compromises to visitor safety are made, law enforcement is diminished, or fewer interpretive programs are made available. National Parks also have extensive maintenance backlogs and are reeling from pressures of development and poor management practices.

A fascinating world of extraordinary understandings is available to us if we remain sensitive to the healthy aspects of relationships. By cultivating expansive outlooks and maintaining open minds, we can more effectively respect and appreciate the beauty and wonderful bounty of Mother Nature. These ideas are written as a form of Earth advocacy and human sanity campaign. Join in!

"There is just one hope of repulsing the tyrannical ambition of civilization to conquer every niche on the whole Earth. That hope is the organization of spirited people who will fight for the freedom of the wilderness."

--- Robert Marshall, a founder of the Wilderness Society

Chapter #30 - Reflections on Feminine Perspective.

Consider what could be called a "Tragedy of Assaults on the Common Good". This not uncommon phenomenon has been growing like a malignant cancer in our societies. This tragedy is characterized by a natural self-centeredness that is metastasizing into a high-stakes, winner-takes-all game. Private plunder and public graft have no doubt occurred in all nations throughout history, but nonetheless it is high time for us to find more effective methods to curtail such activities.

Private motivations operating in the public domain have the effect of perverting our priorities and subverting the democratic principles of fairness and equal representation. They do so by creating policies that are inequitable, manipulative, foolishly irresponsible, and short-term oriented. They also tend to contribute to a 'tragedy of the ecological commons' in which top executives, wealthy investors and lobbyists utilize capitalist entities like private banks and large corporations to gain outsized privileges and benefits.

Too many governments around the world are controlled by "conservatives" whose deepest convictions are driven by a strong bias for "strict father" male authority. More than a third of the people in the world belong to Christian or Islamic religions that are distinctly dogmatic, patriarchal, and dominion oriented. These attributes hinder progressive change and contribute to human rights abuses, culture clashes, discrimination and domestic abuses against females, and conflicts that undermine mutual security and threaten world peace.

Are there good ways that we could inspire more cooperation, justice, civility, kindness, loving concern, safety and reasonable commitments to the greater good? Yes! I feel strongly that humanity could better achieve these goals by cultivating 'feminine' virtues of empathetic understanding, constructive communication, peaceful conflict resolution, moderate self-restraint, an earnest willingness to work together for the common good, and a more nurturing caring for other people and for Mother Earth. It would be propitious for humankind to cultivate and empower these more ethical, honorable and compassionate perspectives in our societies. Worldviews that reflect these feminine qualities are needed today more than ever.

"You can't depend on your judgment when your imagination is out of focus."

--- Mark Twain

We should all salute a well-developed *anima* in every man. The *anima* is the Jungian archetype of the feminine in a man's psyche, which is generally repressed. This unconscious feminine aspect of a male allows him to connect with his inner gentleness, emotionality, sentiment, sensibilities and broader spiritual awareness. Hey, macho dudes, get over the strutting, and let's get on with trying to co-exist in peaceful ways. Let's all cooperate better with others, and strive to be more aware and open-minded. Let's try to grow personally, and heal wounds, and live in accordance with Golden Rule ethics.

Women of the world, unite! A united front can accomplish great things. Patriarchal leaders in modern societies strive staunchly to divide people, intimidate them, and prevent them from uniting to assert their civil rights and gain greater control. I'm not trying to out-Marx Karl Marx when I write this, but someone has got to make more committed efforts to get the majority of people to unite for the greater good someday soon. Karl Marx advocated that workers unite against capitalists to change the world. I figure that, though we have certainly not transcended the need for greater fairness to workers, it is incumbent upon us to unite in larger ways by supporting greater equality and fairer treatment of females. By seeking unity and win-win solutions, we will improve our chances for peaceful coexistence, expanded human rights, and the overarching goal of ecological sanity.

Any manifesto worth its salt has a goal, at least tangentially, of "saving the world". My earnest intention in these writings is to help facilitate positive social change and remake the world along more auspicious lines. 'God knows' that there is much to be done to achieve a more sane existence for you, me, and the most vulnerable among us, as well as for our children and grandchildren. Making a positive difference in the world seems like such a noble, practical and meaningful purpose; and it's one that is much more desirable than selfish, ignoble, and socially detrimental motives.

Note that I am just a normal gal, and this manuscript is not about me. These ideas are an honest portrait of our human societies, and only incidentally a kind of reflective self-portrait. The concepts contained herein resonate well with enlightened versions of the truth. They provide understandings that hopefully correspond more accurately than most to reality, and thus offer a counterbalance to the rigidly reactionary points-of-view that dominate and repress human societies.

Powerful forces are channeled here. They demand the expression of evolutionary wisdom from an awareness beyond our ephemeral individual lives, a voice that calls out insistently for deeper perspective and clearer understandings and smarter collective behaviors. My hope is that readers will consider these ideas carefully and objectively, and maybe even discover some "Aha! moments". I hope readers will care about these ideas and consider them carefully, or at least allow them to stimulate thinking and questioning, and perhaps promote greater insights.

These points of view differ distinctly from orthodox and doctrinaire ones. My purpose in setting them forth is to advance ideas and understandings that are honorable, visionary, democratically fair, far-sighted, noble and consistent with America's founding ideals. Among these purposes is to make sure our government is responsive to the rights of citizens, and to greater concerns for the common good. In contrast, the Establishment seems to be primarily concerned with protecting and expanding lopsided privileges for elites and narrow commercial interests. These concerns are ironically similar to those of King George III and the British Empire in 1776. It took a Revolutionary War for Americans to overthrow that particular domineering rule. History shows that bloodshed can be

avoided, and positive change can be achieved, by enacting initiatives that are eminently fairer. The wise Solon would have agreed!

Politicians and others who act as mouthpieces and cheerleaders for special interest groups are often dishonest and disingenuous with regard to their true motivations and intentions. They generally distort the truth and advance policies that are harmful to their societies as a whole. In contrast, the ideas herein are proffered with no other interest than to promote plans that are most likely to make our societies healthier and more sustainable.

Readers of these words will certainly notice my strong affiliation with progressive thoughts and ideas, and even with some radical ones. These understandings seem much more valid to me than narrowly self-interested points of view because they are not driven by ulterior motives. They are based on years of experience, observation, rational judgment, engaging conversations, extensive reading, fair-minded analysis, extrapolated trends, and wide-ranging philosophical thinking. Their motivation is not found in self-interest, and is not grounded in pessimism or superstition or ideology or paranoia.

I feel confident that a greater appreciation of the life-supporting aspects of healthy ecosystems could enable us to move boldly toward the goal of leaving a legacy that is more salubrious for future generations. It could also help assure us and our descendants of a better overall quality of life. Clearer perspectives and more caring values could help unite people in support of common goals and more sensible policies.

If, somehow, a million people read this manuscript, it is my strong conviction that the course of history would be beneficially affected. Please help achieve this goal by reading on, and recommending it to your politically and philosophically inclined friends. (THANKS!)

I paraphrase Walt Whitman, from his poem *So Long*:

From behind the screen where I hid I advance personally solely to you.

Camerado, this is no book, Who touches this, touches a woman ...

As Huck Finn remarked, this ought to "give the bullfrogs something to croak about for days, I bet."

Chapter #31 - Youthful Insights.

High schools, colleges and universities are great laboratories for the ferment of ideas. Young people have a much bigger stake in fairer societies and sustainable activities and a healthy planet than older people, who are relative short-timers. Unfortunately, the interests of young people are being given extremely short shrift in our societies today. Our materialistic culture is inimical to the future well-being of young people due to its emphasis on mindless shopping, profligate consuming, and wasteful uses of resources. Adding insult to injury, we harm the young by polluting, running up the national debt, and allowing narrow special interests to control our politics, priorities and decision-making.

Alert! Reading can sometimes become a kind of route activity. Our eyes often run inattentively along the page as we dutifully intone the words we see while our attention is distracted by a cascade of peripheral thoughts. Our minds can become preoccupied instead of mindfully comprehending the ideas conveyed. Our thoughts may wander while reading to emotions, fantasies, random events and other distractions that percolate subversively through the interstices of our minds.

Right now, *please pay attention!* Read these words alertly and with an open mind. Evaluate the logic and sensibility of these observations, and feel free to disagree -- but only after giving them fair consideration. Think clearly and be skeptical. Critical thinking can help reveal logical fallacies and misrepresentations in words and actions. Remember the motto of the Enlightenment Era:

'*Sapere aude!*' -- Dare to know! -- Have the courage to use your own understanding!

These ideas are the culmination of many years of evolving thought. The urgency of their motivation was stoked in the aftermath of the traumatic terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Those attacks helped allow neoconservative ideologues to hijack our country, and additional authoritarian impetuses will continue to arise as the twenty-first century unfolds. Bold steps consequently need to be taken to strengthen our Constitution and rules of law and an independent and ethical judiciary against attacks on our rights, freedoms and the greater good.

All the sociopolitical observations in these writings have two primary concerns:

- (1) that economic and political initiatives too often adversely affect workers, young people, poor people and the natural world, and are therefore harmful to the future well-being of the human race; and,
- (2) that it is ethically wrong for our government to side primarily with the interests of a small group of privileged people at the expense of the vast majority of Americans.

Reckless and relentless efforts are being made by those on the radical right and their minions in government to shift tax obligations from rich people and corporations to everyone below the upper classes, and to everyone in the future. These efforts are misguided, unfair and foolishly myopic. These gambits constitute a grave risk, because they intensify social status conflicts and increase political instability and environmental calamities. Give us a break!

During my college years, one of my closest friends and I enthusiastically saluted and embraced moments of "Instantaneous Lucidification". We recognized that enlightenment is elusive, but we also saw value in cultivating consensus understandings and questioning authority -- and also in doubting "certainties". We liked this concept, which we had invented in a moment of clarity, spontaneity and inspiration. We realized that there are bigger picture perspectives and more accurate and insightful ways of seeing the world. This gave us hope that some sort of grand unified theory was somewhere out there awaiting to be elucidated. Perhaps it is now coming together!

I attended one of America's great universities in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Back in those really tumultuous days, much intellectual ferment was brewing, and there were idealistic peace movements and anti-war protests and widespread social activism. Peace advocacy actually became a dangerous position. The FBI kept dossiers on peace activists, and John Lennon was hounded by authorities who wanted to deport him, as revealed in the excellent documentary film, *The U.S. vs. John Lennon*.

John Lennon imagined all the people living life in peace. He recognized the danger in advocating peace, so he wrote these lyrics in *The Ballad of John and Yoko*:

 The way things are going ... They're gonna crucify me. 

When I was in my twenties, I spent a year traveling around Europe, North Africa and *Across Asia on the Cheap*, and then several years later I did another year-long excursion around the South Pacific and Southeast Asia and back across the North Pacific. I hiked more than a thousand miles and read hundreds of books during those days, and was exposed to many different cultures, characters, attitudes and broadening perspectives and experiences. Having spent so much time traveling, I imagined myself emulating Plato, who had spent twelve years traveling the world, "imbibing wisdom from every source".

Plato had embarked on his extensive travels at an auspicious time. He had been affiliated with the Athenian aristocracy and therefore represented a threat to the democratic establishment at that time in his native Greece. Athens was ruled in that era alternately by elite oligarchs or democratic factions, and neither form of rule was ideal. The oligarchs had their own selfish interests in mind, so when they were in power they went to great lengths to defend the advantages of the few against the majority of ordinary people. Plato regarded democracy as no better, because the people were easily swayed by the emotional and deceptive rhetoric of ambitious politicians, and they sometimes killed the wealthy in violent revolutions. Disastrous wars, numerous atrocities and terrible injustices often resulted from both types of rule.

Things aren't all that different today, despite revolutionary changes in communications, technology, industrialization and demographics. Things are not all that different because human nature basically doesn't change, so we are still mired in politics that give us forms of governance that are far from ideal. Plato advocated that 'philosopher kings' should rule, but benevolent philosopher kings happen to be exceedingly hard to find! And they would probably never get elected to office, lost in the miasma of election politics, fund-raising and uncompromising self-interested partisanship.

There is an interesting angle here in regard to Christian prophecy. Many faithful religious believers just can't wait for Jesus to come back, but 'by God' Jesus would be ignored or laughed out of town for his simplistic moral teachings about the poor and the dispossessed. He would probably be homeless, and rather than being recognized for his honorable humanistic values, he would as likely as not be thrown in prison or crucified for his challenges to authority.

The need for transformation in our societies is growing greater every day as our materialistic focus and myopic willingness to plunder and destroy the natural world is causing increasingly adverse circumstances. Young people, unite! Remember the words of Thomas Jefferson, who opined: "I believe that the people, when properly armed with the facts, will come to the right conclusion."

I propose that college courses be designed around the Earth Manifesto and dedicated to studying the ideas it contains.

Chapter #32 - Arguments Against Maintaining the Status Quo.

The European Renaissance of the 14th to 17th centuries achieved greatness by embracing freedom of thought and by rejecting the inherently puritan and tyrannical aspects of monotheistic religions and the Dark Ages. Fluid concepts of divinity helped spark great triumphs of science and logic, and this state of affairs was accompanied by advances in technological innovation and artistic creativity, and a greater measure of democratic government was achieved. Similar influences occurred in ancient Greek civilization, and have pertained in the last 200 years in Western civilization.

In modern times, the challenges facing humanity are urgent and more globally consequential than ever before, yet die-hard religious evangelists and recklessly reactionary ideologues are trying to turn back the clock by asserting stronger control over people's thoughts, actions and options. A new renaissance can be achieved only by rebuking and rejecting this trend. We instead should promote more progressive thinking and broad-mindedness, far-sighted perspective, and fair-minded resolve.

Intelligent action is needed. We should reject myopic and regressive thinking that perversely accepts growing inequalities and injustices, unfair special privileges, dogmatic denials, discriminatory bigotry, closed-mindedness, authoritarianism, overly harsh punishments, and fiscally irresponsible governance.

We should seek enlightenment, or at least more visionary common sense, and we should reject a Dark-Ages-like domination of ideas by manipulative Strict Father conservatives.

These are some of many truths that are quite inconvenient to authority figures and the powers-that-be in our societies. Adaptive changes are needed, and we really should refuse to allow our social institutions to become ossified. We should not allow decisions to be made by entrenched corporate interest groups, or by corrupt politicians and government bureaucrats. We cannot allow the greater good to be inexorably harmed by social conservatism, traditionalism, reactionary leaders, or religious fundamentalists who are obsessed with obedience and power and control and domination.

"Family values" is a slogan that has been used by conservatives as a catchphrase to gain support and control. But true family values are being hurt by the self-serving agenda of right wing conservatives who voice this slogan. Women and children are important parts of families, yet their interests are being harmed by conservative influence on social, economic, fiscal and environmental policies.

John Fowles succinctly expressed this idea in his 1970 book, *The Aristos*: "In a world in which many societies and racial blocs are on the verge of growing so large that they will have to exterminate one another in order to survive, and in which the means rapidly to effect such an extermination are at hand, conservatism, the philosophy of unrestricted free enterprise, of self, of preserving the status quo, is obviously the wrong and dangerous one."

When we see the human race wasting, damaging, depleting and polluting rivers, oceans, wetlands, wild lands and forests, we should be motivated to take steps to mitigate the harmful impacts of these activities. At the same time we understand that the world's resources are being wantonly converted to cash, and enormous sums of money are being borrowed to help stimulate the achievement of this dubious goal, we must demand policies that discourage this ridiculously unwise situation.

Business-as-usual practices and ideological doctrines that support them are the most powerful determinants of our national policies. Dogmatic adherence to these forces puts us at an ever larger risk of failing to adapt to rapid changes in our societies and in global human numbers.

Human affairs are strongly influenced by moral concepts, cultural norms, social mores and urges to belong and conform. Powerful counter-urges, on the other hand, motivate many people to conflict with the status quo in individualistic self-expression. Whether traditionalist or bohemian, reactionary or radically liberal, no matter what, it is time for all of us to come together and boldly speak out against all forms of shortsightedness and oppression.

Chapter #33 - Endangering the Tree of Life.

On a clear day, you can easily see the Farallon Islands from Mount Tamalpais in Northern California's Marin County, and from the hills of Point Reyes National Seashore. Wildlife enthusiasts on a whale-watching expedition in 1997 reportedly witnessed an attack by a killer whale just south of the Farallons in which a great white shark was lifted right out of the water. It was an awesome display of the living world's daunting, mysterious and beautiful natural order. This episode makes me think of the emotionally moving documentary *Blackfish*, which portrays how highly intelligent killer whales are, and the nature of their psychosis-inducing captivity for use in sea life entertainment shows.

This great white shark attack was one example of the wondrous and dynamic balance that exists in the living systems of our extraordinary home planet. All forms of life exist in a fragile dance of survival, and "everything eats everything else" with seeming enthusiasm. But life is quite resilient. Human beings are upsetting this marvelous balance of nature with our mindless consumption and

correlated propensities to hunt wildlife, over-harvest biotic resources, clear-cut forests, destroy habitats, introduce invasive species, pollute and degrade the land and rivers and seas, and emit huge quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. We do these things both intentionally and inadvertently, as a matter of habit and compulsion.

Many kinds of large terrestrial mammals lived in North America 12,000 years ago. There were woolly mammoths, elephant-like mastodons, giant camels, dire wolves, American cheetahs, saber-toothed tigers, a stately deer called the stag-moose, and five species of ground sloths, some as big as modern elephants. There were beavers the size of today's black bears. Human beings arrived around that time from Siberia, and their hunting was a significant factor in driving these large mammals to eternal extinction. Some scientists argue that early settlers introduced diseases that may have played a bigger role, as they did in the decimation of natives when European conquerors arrived in previously isolated places like North America, Mexico, South America, Australia, and islands of the Pacific.

In more modern times, millions of American bison were slaughtered in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, driving the species to the verge of extinction. Huge flocks of passenger pigeons and many other species were completely wiped out. The provocative book, *The World Without Us* contains interesting insights into this topic in Chapter 5, 'The Lost Menagerie'.

Imagine, along with John Josselyn, a flock of pigeons that "had neither beginning or ending, length or breadth, and so thick I could see no sun." Sometimes it would take more than an entire day for a flock to fly past. Imagine our ancestors having driven them all to extinction!

Humanity did not understand the role we have played in causing extinctions until the late 1600s, when the large flightless Dodo bird was wiped out on its native island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, as lucidly described in David Quammen's book, *The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions*. Are we ourselves acting like real "dodos"?

Human activities that damage habitats are crowding out more and more species, ominously diminishing biological diversity. We are figuratively sawing off limbs of the tree of life upon which we are ever-more precariously perched. We should take steps to alter this trend with the greatest possible sustained concern. To do this we need not only to protect public lands but entire ecosystems. We should work constructively with farmers, ranchers and other private property owners to enforce the provisions of the Endangered Species Act. Our own well-being, and that of our descendants, depends upon this.

Richard Leakey, one of the world's foremost paleoanthropologists, said in a speech in February 2006: "There is an inevitability to extinction -- but there is no inevitability to the cause of extinction being our own stupidity and failure to act."

In a declaration published in *Nature*, an international weekly journal of science, a group of scientists stated that the Earth is on the verge of a biodiversity catastrophe. The scientists indicated that only a global political initiative would be able to stem the losses. They declared: "There is growing recognition that the diversity of life on earth, including the variety of genes, species and ecosystems, is an irreplaceable natural heritage crucial to human well-being and sustainable development. There is also clear scientific evidence that we are on the verge of a major biodiversity crisis. Virtually all aspects of biodiversity are in steep decline, and a large number of populations and species are likely to become extinct this century."

These scientists further noted: "Despite this evidence, biodiversity is still consistently undervalued and given inadequate weight in both private and public decisions. There is an urgent need to bridge the gap between science and policy by creating an international body of experts on biodiversity."

Almost 70% of the populations of mammals, reptiles, birds, amphibians and fishes have been wiped out in the past 50 years alone, according to the startling findings of the Living Planet Report. And scientists estimate that 12 percent of all bird species, 22 percent of mammals, a quarter of conifers, a third of amphibians, and more than half of all palm tree species are threatened with extinction within a century. Climate change alone could lead to somewhere between 15 and 36 percent of all species being driven out of existence by the year 2100, scientists say. "Because biodiversity loss is essentially irreversible, it poses serious threats to sustainable development and the quality of life of future generations."

Studies of "island biogeography" have revealed that a key variable in the number of species on any given island is the territorial size of the island. It turns out that the number of species on an island tends to be strongly correlated to the size of the island. It is almost as if this fact conforms to a consistent mathematical formula. A rough estimate is that the number of species doubles for every tenfold increase in area. The formula also works in reverse, so that if an island's area containing wild habitats is reduced by 90%, the number of species it can support drops by half.

The implications of this abstruse information are daunting. When we contribute to the fragmentation of ecosystems, it leads directly to a drop in the number of species that can survive in them. This is one reason that the average rate of extinction of species today exceeds the average over the long term by a big factor, and it could increase in the next 100 years by a much larger factor.

About 540 million years have elapsed since the end of the Precambrian Era. The subsequent Eras of the Paleozoic, Mesozoic and Cenozoic are demarcated by mass extinction events. Some scientists say that the Cenozoic is now ending and giving way to a new Anthropozoic Era because of the decimation of species by human activities. This is not something about which to be proud!

Almost all species of life are nearly perfectly adapted to the dynamic balance of conditions in the niches and ranges they occupy. The recognition that the human race is causing extinctions could be considered to be the beginning of a necessary evolution in awareness that could contribute to our making revolutionary changes and turning the tide on the damages we are causing. Let us acknowledge this understanding, and give higher priority to mitigating the adverse impacts we are having on biological systems!

New commitments must be made to finding ways to reduce the destructiveness of our activities. Positive potential solutions abound, as summarized in detail in the "Environmental Priorities" section of the *Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity*. We would be well-advised to free ourselves to pursue these better ideas by marginalizing the powerful forces that are arrayed against such understandings and commitments. Can this be done?

Chapter #34 - A Focus on What Is Really Important.

Another insight that Professor Jared Diamond shares with readers is that social risk is heightened when decision-making elites are insulated from the consequences of their actions. In other words, in societies where elites are insulated from suffering the consequences of their decisions, they are more likely to pursue socially risky and irresponsibly selfish short-term activities. This is highly negative for the best long-term interests of society.

In the United States today, rich people are insulated in many ways from the impacts they have. They live in gated communities, drink bottled water, have good access to health care, send their children to private schools, and are better able than the poor to avoid crime and many types of health risks. Money allows them to be able to afford more security and opportunity and variety. Their children have better opportunities in education and employment, and are far less likely to be forced to risk their lives in dangerous occupations and military service. Most of their children will never be forced to try to make ends meet on minimum wages below the poverty level for full-time work.

When Dante Alighieri wrote his sensational masterpiece *The Divine Comedy* just over 700 years ago, he expressed the provocative opinion that "the hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crises, maintain their neutrality." That's a provocative conjecture! To tell the truth, I don't know a thing about Hell. But there is little question that humanity is facing great moral crises today. And these are NOT merely the gaudy sideshow of controversial hot-button social issues like contraception, abortion, abstinence-only sex education, gay rights and gender dysphoria, or the role of religion in politics, or capital punishment, or the unfortunate nature of harsh and punitive prohibitions like that against the use of marijuana.

Much more serious problems exist. These challenges encompass global risks that are more significant than ever before in the history of civilization. Poverty and malnutrition persist on a massive scale. Conflicts caused by religious extremists are becoming more dangerous and costly. Military violence against civilians is widespread. Vulnerabilities to both natural and man-made disasters are increasing, and the environment is being unnecessarily damaged. Grave social injustices are being perpetrated against the powerless. And wealthy people are acting with hubris at their triumphant status.

These challenges make it crucial for us to re-focus our priorities and energies. We should be boldly assertive in adopting strategic objectives that will help ensure resources are used in more sustainable ways. Renewable sources of energy like wind power, concentrated solar thermal power, solar photovoltaics, and energy from geothermal generating plants should be rapidly developed. Resource conservation measures and stronger environmental protections should be put into place, and should be fairly enforced. And initiatives and institutions that stress peaceful conflict resolution should be empowered to settle all conflicts related to the control of territory, markets and natural resources.

Comprehensive understandings are needed that have an expansive framework. As one example, "comprehensive national energy policy" should actually be comprehensive; it should be sensible, smart and long-term oriented. Today's energy policies are not comprehensive; instead, they are basically -- surprise! -- oriented toward wastefulness, vested interests, entrenched corporations, and profiteers.

Likewise, when legislators talk about "comprehensive immigration reform", they often ignore broader issues. Immigration policies should take into account business needs as well as sensible urban planning, economic globalization problems, international trade challenges, labor and humanitarian issues, human rights, environmental protections, and fairness and truer justice in foreign policies.

Illegal immigrants represent a huge labor 'black market' that operates openly in the U.S. This large pool of low-cost laborers provides big benefits to many industries, including agriculture, construction, retail, hotels and restaurants. If the U.S. were to deport all of the nearly 12 million "illegal aliens" within its borders, the agricultural sector and many other businesses would suffer incalculably. Wages would skyrocket, housing prices would tumble, our economy would falter, and calamitous social instability would afflict Mexico and other countries. This is NOT a good plan! Truly comprehensive solutions to national and global problems are obviously needed.

Think also about our health care system. It is beset by catastrophic unfairness. Michael Moore's 2007 film '*Sicko*' made it maddeningly clear that the unjust and unwieldy healthcare system at the time was failing not only the more than 45 million Americans who had no health insurance, but also many of the 250 million Americans who did have insurance. The companies that sell health insurance make bigger profits by raising premiums, reducing benefits and denying claims, but profit surely shouldn't be the main determinant in health care. The health security of all the people should be given higher priority. We need to tackle this sticky predicament and make good medical care more affordable to all citizens of our nation.

The U.S. has been slipping in international rankings of life expectancy, despite the fact that we spend more money on health care than any other country. According to information on Wikipedia, World Bank Group data ranks the U.S. 58th in the world in life expectancy. Many of the contributing factors are controllable, so we should make greater efforts to improve them. We have one of the highest obesity rates in the world due to over-eating, fast-food eating habits, and inadequate exercise. Inequality is extreme and child mortality is high in the U.S. compared to other industrialized nations. The lack of a good system of universal healthcare is a big contributing factor to these sad statistics.

A letter to the editor some years ago stated: "We saw *Sicko* by Michael Moore and are completely incensed that our country, the wealthiest, mightiest superpower in the world, has plenty of money for bombs and the war machine but can't provide free superior health care for its citizens, veterans, and Ground Zero firefighters and volunteers. This should be a time that we stand together as Democrats, Republicans, Independents and Green Party members to solve the healthcare problem by putting our immense resources to use in taking care of all people regardless of income, age or ethnicity."

Conservatives attacked Michael Moore's film *Sicko* when it was released. They alleged that the film promotes "socialized medicine". Such people do not call police and fire departments socialized, or public schools and libraries, or the military, or public utilities, or government agencies, but they are now striving to confuse the debate about healthcare injustices with the red herring of socialism.

It personally astonishes me that the current system basically forces tens of millions of people who have no health insurance to rely on the most expensive care there is -- emergency room medical services. The cost of this care must be covered by everyone else through artificially high costs for hospital services. This isn't socialism; it is stubborn stupidity in the service of opposition to any changes in the business-as-usual state of capitalism in the USA.

Preventative health care is not only propitious in individual people's lives, but it is the best investment for minimizing healthcare costs, in total.

It is time for us to do something smart and fair-minded about the serious inequities in the arena of medical insurance and health care. We should act to better control escalating costs, and deal more honestly with the problems caused by inadequate coverage, treatment denials, preexisting conditions exclusions, and outlandish profiteering. Dignity in dying and the exorbitant costs of hospitalization in the final months of most people's lives should be given more compassionate consideration.

What we really should have is universal healthcare like every other advanced country. A single-payer system is probably the best idea to insure everyone, for it helps finance care for all who need it, when they need it, at affordable rates.

Michael Moore may be a bit over-the-top in his advocacy, but Bravo! for his attempts to alter the pathetic state of affairs that characterizes the status quo. Doesn't it seem true that the advocacy

of fair, humane and noble causes is much more sensible and necessary than the advocacy of unfair, unhealthy, unjust, narrowly self-serving, myopic or elitist causes?

A clever political cartoon in the *Hannibal Courier-Post* in 2007 showed Michael Moore hanging by his wrists in a jail cell, with Fidel Castro beside him explaining, "This is Cuba, Señor Moore, not America. You can't criticize the government here. But the good news is that you get free health care!" Ha! The truth of this sardonic humor counsels us to use our freedoms to make the world a truly better place, and not just a better one for rich people, insiders, profiteers, war hawks, control-freaks or others that are unduly privileged, outlandishly greedy or ruthlessly narrow-minded.

When we cultivate empathy for others, and admit there are varying extents of economic insecurity in people's lives, we realize a greater degree of sympathy is justified. The more fortunate among us should be generous-hearted enough to support social policies that are designed to mitigate the most glaring inequities in educational and job opportunities, and in healthcare. One of our responsibilities as citizens and human beings should be to support measures that mitigate the worst facets of economic insecurity. Among these are excessively high costs of healthcare coupled with inadequate coverage, a lousy system for dealing with indigent people, and risks of crippling personal bankruptcy caused by healthcare adversities.

Many people spin facts in ways that are contrary to the straight truth. Politicians, for example, often talk about war, or immigration, or taxes, or jobs, or health care, or the environment, in words couched in a linguistic framework that is simplistic, partisan and deceptive. Knowledgeable linguists tell us that issues are generally framed in ways that are prejudicial to the speaker's point of view. The use of an established frame of reference often distorts the way we perceive things in subtle but significant ways. Studies show that our perceptions of the world are deeply colored by our belief systems and our "confirmation biases". And in recent years, conspiracy theories are further distorting people's perceptions of what is reality and truth.

Linguist George Lakoff wrote a compelling book titled *Don't Think of an Elephant*. Try it! The book contains insightful ideas and comprehensive perspectives into the nature of strategic objectives and the word-framed linguistics of political spin. Study anything written by Ann Coulter, the rash, rude and unreasonable darling of extreme conservatives, and see the contrast of how absurd her ranting and raving falls short of Lakoff's reasoned analyses.

Intellectual honesty is severely lacking in politics. Yet honesty and integrity are required today more than ever. Desperately serious consequences lie ahead if we fail to comprehend this. It would be beneficial if someone like the character Warren Beatty played in the film "*Bulworth*" would step forward to convey truths that are more radically honest. Many people got their news perspective for years from the incisive humor of Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*, where a comedic approach to the truth highlights some of the absurdities inherent in our politics and public activities.

Every story can be told in a variety of ways. Consider this idea objectively. The 9/11 attacks, for instance, can be looked at from the point of view of Americans attacked; or from the point of view of the people who planned the attacks; or from the standpoint of demagogues who recognized the great opportunity for partisan advantage that the calamity represented, along with radically improved prospects in the short term for profiting from the stimulus of Keynesian military spending. Or the attacks could be seen from the perspective of objective observers who seek to honestly understand deeper causes, consequences and implications. The same points are true of the violent January 6, 2021 coup attempt.

militarism involves giant risks and extremely high costs. It may stimulate the economy, create lots of jobs in "defense" and war services industries, and facilitate big opportunities for profiteering and cronyism, but it is a bad plan. It is unwise policy because it crowds out domestic spending, adds debt, and allows the U.S. to unethically intervene in the affairs of others for the sake of controlling and dominating them and gaining unfair access to markets and raw materials.

The old guns versus butter argument once again arises, and John Steinbeck once more beckons with his incisive perspective from the Sea of Cortez in 1940: "There is a war now which no one wants to fight, in which no one can see a gain: a zombie war of sleep-walkers which nevertheless goes on out of all control of intelligence. Some time ago a Congress of honest men refused an appropriation of several hundreds of millions of dollars to feed our people. They said, and meant it, that the economic structure of the country would collapse under the pressure of such expenditure. And now the same men, just as honestly, are devoting many billions to the manufacture, transportation, and detonation of explosives to protect the people they would not feed."

To improve our human fates, we need to create more effective forms of cooperation, and always keep greater good goals in mind. The degree of mercilessness and corruption in militaristic competition should be reduced. Instead of fanning flames of religious radicalism, aggressive nationalism and ethnocentric self-righteousness in a world supercharged with tensions over disparities of income, wealth, power and privilege, we need to strive to make international trade fairer and our societies more mutually secure. The best way to reduce conflicts in the world is by reducing inequities and injustices, NOT making them more extreme. Unfairness naturally makes conflicts worse.

Readers might think that some of these ideas are naïve and unrealistic, but I believe that the really insane beliefs are those that are driving us in the wrong directions. We would be wise to be open to understandings that are more enlightened. Just because some activities have become routine, it does not mean they are right, desirable, maintainable, or wise. Propitious changes need to be made to deal with serious problems. We can no longer afford to allow people with goals of obstructing reasonable solutions to be so richly rewarded. The common-sense social good requires such changes, as does the well-being of all people in future generations.

Let's be open to finding enlightenment, and then act in accordance with enlightened understandings. What the heck! -- let's embark together into the Era of Enlightenment II.

Intuitions related to adverse trajectories inherent in Tragedy of the Commons phenomena reveal why our current system is so difficult to reform. Conflicts of interest abound, yet civilized behaviors require big picture fair-minded compromise. We need to begin making revolutionary changes to improve the general welfare. Comprehensive understandings are our best hope for leading to the implementation of affirmative ideas and initiatives like those summarized in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*, and in the *Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity*.

We live in exceptionally interesting times. The pendulum of social change has swung from progressive to regressive in the past four decades, and now it must begin a powerful swing back toward greater reason and more expansive responsibility and better stewardship. Progress has always been rather convoluted and complex, with lots of back eddies, side currents and periods of stagnation. Despite controversy, ambiguity and fervently sown doubt, it is growing increasingly apparent that Republican Party backsliding of recent years must now give way to truer progress and finding better ways to solve problems like those caused by demagoguery, misinformation, immigration and job outsourcing to cheap labor countries like China.

Much more than minor tuning and feeble adjustments are called for. Epochal changes are required. We can cope with rapid change best through new ways of seeing and bold action. The future calls for wisdom, courage and sustained commitment -- perhaps even a generous modicum of evangelical enthusiasm! -- all of it focused on optimizing our adaptation to accelerating change.

Chapter #36 - A Cautionary Tale.

Many species of life have made an evolutionary bargain with the devil. Examples are flightless birds on islands that had no predators for eons, or tuna fish that swim faster than any other fish in the oceans but can never stop swimming because they would die from lack of oxygen without continuous movement through the water. We humans are making our own bargain with the devil by building up civilizations that are wholly dependent on basic foundations that we are damaging and depleting by the very nature of our busy aggregate daily activities.

Goethe implies in *Faust* that we are always in the process of becoming, and that we should rely on our intuition, our resources of character, and the heroic aspects of our true inner being to make the right choices in life. Almost every spiritual tradition honors the proverbial journey of the hero or heroine. Athena, the patron goddess of heroes, was known for whispering advice to her heroes and counseling restraint. The hero symbolizes our ability to control the irrational savage within us, and to use reason to overcome our compulsions and dark passions.

The ultimate aim of a true hero's journey is not merely to achieve conquest of others, or to find self-affirmation, but to serve greater causes. Many Faustian bargains with the devil are a kind of giving in to seductively appealing temptations, but when we cultivate emotional intelligence we find that it is valuable to control our intemperance, gluttony, hubris, pride, vanity and tribalism, and to avoid making choices that are likely to turn out to be ill fated. One choice likely to be particularly ill fated is to trade in our souls with a single-minded intention of gaining power or getting things that are ultimately unimportant, like great quantities of material possessions.

We live in a world where millions of people eat themselves into obesity, thoughtlessly harming their own health, while countless others starve to death. This is obscene. I love the concept of living large -- but NOT through conspicuous consumption and overeating. How fabulous it would be if we could develop healthier ways of achieving self-worth by means other than shopping, owning enormous homes, driving 'sexy' cars or fuel-wasting SUVs, getting plastic surgery, squandering resources, or being triumphant through ruthlessly aggressive competition.

Living well is arguably the best revenge. And a persuasive case can be made that many of the best qualities in life are enjoyed most fully when the crowd is the least. An absence of crowds can often be most conducive to introspection, equanimity, creativity, visionary understanding, true spirituality, simplicity, peace and solitude. There is, after all, solace in open spaces.

Dr. Seuss, who wrote and illustrated more than 50 children's books during his life, published a book in 1971 titled *The Lorax*. It is a cautionary tale of greed and environmental destruction. The character named the Lorax tries to save the Truffula Tree forest and its inhabitants from the Once-ler, who is a cantankerous exploiter. The tale concludes:

The Lorax said nothing. Just gave me a glance ...
 just gave me a very sad, sad backward glance ...
 as he lifted himself by the seat of his pants.
 And I'll never forget the grim look on his face
 when he heisted himself up, and took leave of this place,

through a hole in the smog, without leaving a trace.
 And all that the Lorax left here in this mess
 was a small pile of rocks, with the one word ... "UNLESS." ...
 Whatever that meant, well, I just couldn't guess.
 That was long, long ago.

But each day since that day
 I've sat here and worried, and worried away.
 Through the years, while my buildings have fallen apart,
 I've worried about it, with all of my heart.
 "But now," says the Once-ler,
 "Now that you're here,
 the word of the Lorax seems perfectly clear.

UNLESS someone like you
 cares a whole awful lot,
 nothing is going to get better.
 It's not."

Someone like us must begin to care "a whole awful lot"! We should revolutionarily restructure our economic and political systems to be in greater harmony with the long-term viability of our species' survival, and create societies that are more egalitarian and more truly just. We should strive to protect our sustaining environment, conserve resources, encourage social tolerance, give women's rights greater respect, root out political corruption, and create greater security for all.

During the George W. Bush years, a guy named Doug Goodkin composed *The Grinch Revisited (with thanks to Dr. Seuss)*:

The Whos down in Whoville liked this country a lot,
 But the Grinch in the White House most certainly did not.
 He didn't arrive there by the will of the Whos,
 But stole the election that he really did lose.

Vowed to "rule from the middle," then installed his regime.
 Did this really happen or is it just a bad dream?
 He didn't listen to voters, just his friends he was pleasin'
 Now, please don't ask why, no one quite knows the reason.

It could be his heart wasn't working just right.
 It could be, perhaps, that he wasn't too bright.
 But I think that the most likely reason of all,
 Is that both brain and heart were two sizes too small.

In times of great turmoil, this was bad news,
 To have a government that ignores its Whos.
 But the Whos shrugged their shoulders, went on with their work,
 Their duties as citizens so casually did shirk.

They shopped at the mall and watched their TVs.
 Oblivious to what was going on in D.C.
 And ignoring the threats to democracy.
 They read the same papers that ran the same leads,
 Reporting what only served corporate needs.

(For the policies affecting the lives of all nations
Were made by the giant U. S. Corporations.)
Big business grew fatter, fed by its own greed,
And by people who shopped for the things they didn't need.

But amidst all the apathy came signs of unrest,
The Whos came to see we were fouling our nest.
And the people who cared for the ideals of this nation
Began to discuss and exchange information.

The things they couldn't read in the corporate-owned news
Of FTAA meetings and CIA coups.
They published some books, created Websites
Began to write letters and use their e-mail
(Though Homeland Security might send them to jail!)

What began as a whisper soon grew to a roar,
These things going on they could no longer ignore.
They started to rise up and fight City Hall
Let their voices be heard, they rose to the call,

To vote, to petition, to gather, to dissent,
To question the policies of the President.
As greed gained in power and power knew no shame
The Whos came together, sang "Not in our name!"

One by one from their sleep and their slumber they woke
The old and the young, all kinds of folk,
The black, brown and white, the gay, bi- and straight,
All united to sing, "Feed our hope, not our hate!"

Stop stockpiling weapons and aiming for war!
Stop feeding the rich, start feeding the poor!
Stop storming the deserts to fuel SUVs!
Stop telling us lies on the mainstream TVs!

Stop treating our children as a market to sack!
Stop feeding them Barney, Barbie and Big Mac!
Stop trying to addict them to lifelong consuming,
In a time when severe global warming is looming!

Stop sanctions that are killing the kids in Iraq!
Start dealing with ours that are strung out on crack!
A mighty sound started to rise and to grow,
"The old way of thinking simply must go!"

Enough of God versus Allah, Muslim vs. Jew
With what lies ahead, it simply won't do.
No American dream cares only for wealth
Ignoring the need for community health.

The rivers and forests are demanding their pay,
If we're to survive, we must walk a new way.
No more excessive and mindless consumption
Let's sharpen our minds and garner our gumption.

For the ideas are simple, but the practice is hard,
 And not to be won by a poem on a card.
 It needs the ideas and the acts of each Who,
 So let's get together and plan what to do!

And so they all gathered from all 'round the Earth
 And from it all came a miraculous birth.
 The hearts and the minds of the Whos they did grow,
 Three sizes to fit what they felt and they know.

While the Grinches they shrank from their hate and their greed,
 Bearing the weight of their every foul deed.
 From that day onward the standard of wealth,
 Was whatever fed the Whos spiritual health.

They gathered together to revel and feast,
 For although our story pits Grinches 'gainst Whos,
 The true battle lies in what we daily choose.
 For inside each Grinch is a tiny small Who,
 And inside each Who is a tiny Grinch too.

One thrives on love and one thrives on greed.
 Who will win out? It depends who you feed!

--- Composed in the year 2002, www.douggoodkin.com

Chapter #37 - Primary Principles.

Whether liberal or conservative in political worldviews, most people would agree with certain basic principles. A focus on these principles would help ensure that our societies find better ways to plan ahead and use clearer foresight that is more broad-minded, fairer, and more strategically poised for positive outcomes.

Here is a summary of principles that would help establish better policies and political initiatives:

- (1) We should work together to leave America a better country, and the world a better place.
- (2) NOW is the time to confront the most serious of our national problems. We cannot continue rear guard actions of delay that pass a burning baton to runners in generations to come. We should not wait until a sufficiently calamitous crisis occurs before acting to cope intelligently with the challenges we face. The longer we delay in dealing with a problem, the more intractable it will in all probability become, and the more expensive, painful and insidiously difficult it will be to solve.
- (3) We should embrace a positive, hopeful, and affirmative vision of the future, and strive to act consistently with noble values of fairness and the common good to achieve this vision.
- (4) Abuses of power by corporations or governments should be restricted. More privileges and bigger profits for entrenched vested interests should not be allowed at the expense of people's health or irreversible damages to the environment.
- (5) Pervasive special interest influences should be balanced to make governments function better and ensure that our democracy is fairer. Lobbying should be made more ethical. Clean Money initiatives and Clean Elections could help accomplish this, as detailed in Chapter #49.
- (6) Our problems should be addressed in ways that do not harm the prospects of people in the future.

- (7) Our business and government institutions should be redesigned to be sustainable for the long term in all aspects, including fiscal, economic, and environmental ones.
- (8) Precautionary principles should be heeded that reflect strong concerns for the impacts that human activities are having on the environment. Each person should strive to become a more honorable steward of the Earth.
- (9) Our legislative focus and federal spending should be better prioritized to protect people and biological diversity. The real impacts of public policy decisions on future well-being should be evaluated in all decision-making.
- (10) We should take actions to strengthen and expand the middle class and improve opportunities for social mobility.
- (11) The most crucial problems should receive the most attention and funding. We cannot allow our political leaders to eagerly spend many hundreds of billions of dollars on the military each year while we are being relatively stingy with domestic priorities and vital infrastructure needs, and humanitarian aid and sustainable development assistance around the world.
- (12) Better spending discipline should be instituted, and greater fiscal responsibility should be required. Our leaders cannot be allowed to fleece future generations by borrowing enormous sums of money and creating heavy burdens of debt and interest expense, because such strategies are highly unfair, irresponsible and shortsighted.
- (13) Our federal and state governments should be held to strict standards of accountability, transparency and oversight. Our leaders should be required to do what is in the best interests of the public and of humanity, and to reduce the extent to which they pander to the narrow interests of the rich, of giant corporations, of speculators, of war profiteers and of other entrenched interest groups. Politicians should be held to higher standards of honesty.
- (14) A cleaner energy regime should be hastened by implementing powerful incentives for energy conservation, increased efficiency, and the stimulus of innovative alternatives to usages of fossil fuels. Large subsidies to Big Oil should be eliminated, and new incentives should be created to help make the transition to these important goals. We can no longer afford to adhere to policies that encourage wasteful uses of energy and a continued dependence on non-renewable fossil fuels. The full cost of military interventions in Middle Eastern nations should be pro-rated as a tax on every barrel of oil burned, so that we pay as we go and stop foisting these costs onto future generations.
- (15) We should strive to be flexible and open-minded to better ideas, and willing to support progressive change. We should encourage respectful debate, and take reasonable dissenting views into account, in accordance with an honest assessment of their merits.
- (16) We should insist that our democracy be made fairer and more participatory by supporting good public education and emphasizing people's abilities to think critically and farsightedly.
- (17) We should make broad collaborative commitments to long-term solutions to problems. Our leaders should work together to build the public's trust, and not stubbornly stick to dogmatic doctrines, extreme partisanship, simplistic deceptions, unexamined assumptions, cherry-picked information, or growing disparities in political representation of the interests of the rich compared to the poor.
- (18) We should make our systems of justice fairer for all.

(19) We should rein in the power, wastefulness and intrusiveness of the federal government. Federal spending first exceeded \$1 trillion in 1990, and since 2020 has been more than \$4 trillion every year. The purpose of government should NOT be to create jobs by expanding bureaucracy and the military.

(20) We should transform our economic and foreign policies into ones that are more mutually fair and secure, and limit our ambitions on the international stage to ones that are ethical and legal.

And, (21) We should make sweeping changes in our social investments and environmental policies to make sure that drinking water is safe, ecosystems remain healthy, and that there are adequate protections of public lands, the world's oceans, the atmosphere, and biological diversity.

These are compelling issues that require bold, visionary, honorable, courageous and fair national responses. Almost everyone would agree that the most important purposes of government should be to help establish safe, fair and sustainable societies while allowing a maximum of individual freedoms to all. Our prosperity and our fulfillment of deeper purposes depend on this.

Chapter #38 - The Bet Situation.

A 17th century French scientist named Blaise Pascal formulated an idea that came to be famously known as the "Bet Situation". The Bet Situation is concerned with philosophical debates that have profound practical implications regarding probabilities and the future. We are all confronted with Bet Situations in our lives because (1) there are uncertainties, (2) we are inextricably involved in the game, and (3) it is important to us in our own lives, and in the lives of our fellow human beings, that we make decisions that are more conscious, conscientious, and socially responsible with regard to a variety of important categories of bets we are collectively making.

Both actions and inactions are choices. We make choices whether or not we are consciously aware of them. It is crucial for us, as well as for our descendants, that we begin to make decisions that are more consistent with the wisest and fairest courses of action. We essentially gamble every time we choose one course of action over another, and we obviously should put our wagers on the best outcomes. Those who are smart use common sense, and they bet with the best odds and probabilities.

Here are some of the choices that we are collectively making -- the ones that have the biggest impacts -- because a fair evaluation of them can highlight valuable insights.

For one thing, we can gamble that natural resources on Earth are inexhaustible. Or we can bet that it would be smarter to use them less wastefully, and spare some for future generations.

We can gamble that resource limitations do not matter because technology will find replacements for resources as we use them up. Or we can bet that it is safer to take a "no-regrets" approach by moderating our demands, and commit to conserving and protecting resources like arable lands, ocean fisheries, free-flowing rivers, wetlands, fresh water aquifers, tropical rainforests and what remains of old-growth temperate forests.

We can gamble that we are not assaulting biological diversity in ways that are so injudicious that they threaten our own eventual well-being. Or we can bet that we really are taking great risks by failing to protect biological diversity in the course of our aggregate activities, and consequently commit our societies to policies that protect wildlife habitats and endangered species, and ensure that most other forms of life on Earth will survive this century.

We can gamble that spewing billions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere annually will not contribute to global warming, climate change and severe disruptions of natural ecosystems. Or we can bet that it would be wiser to aggressively adopt more efficient and conservation-oriented energy policies designed to prevent irreversible ecological damages, and that we should speed up development of alternatives to fossil fuels and innovative ways to sequester man-made carbon dioxide emissions.

We can gamble that laissez-faire capitalism, hyper-stimulated economic growth, and ever increasing consumption are best for the robustness and health of the economy. Or we can bet that the best way to achieve a fair and sustainable future would be by redesigning our economies to use smarter policies, powerful incentives and sensible regulations to safeguard our economy while reducing waste, profligate consumption, and destabilizing speculative excesses.

We can continue to gamble that the distorted market mechanisms that currently characterize our sink-or-swim Crony Capitalist system are the best plan for our country, and staunchly defend and protect this system, allowing Big Business to prosper at the expense of small businesses and the environment and society as a whole. Or we can bet that a transformation to Green Capitalism should be facilitated, and begin to enact bold, intelligent initiatives that channel our collective activities into more wholesome directions that help create better societies and a more secure world for ourselves and our children.

We can gamble that the valiant race to produce more and more food to feed inexorably increasing human numbers can be won by continuing to advance industrial agricultural practices that employ crop monocultures, massive mechanization, fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides and the use of antibiotics and hormones in meat and milk production. Or we can bet that Thomas Malthus will inevitably be proved right, and consequently begin to support family planning programs, make contraceptives readily available to women worldwide, legalize abortion, better educate and empower women, and at the same time support crop diversity, local agriculture, organic farming, the conservation of farm lands, and the principles of the Slow Food Movement.

We can gamble that opposition to family planning programs worldwide is a God-prescribed moral imperative and a good idea. Or we can bet that giving generous support to family planning programs is wise, compassionate and necessary, and take actions to stabilize population, beginning with sensible sex education programs and a permanent injunction against the imposition of the U.S. Global Gag Rule, and make a substantial increase in funding to the UN Population Fund, and encourage the use of contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases.

We can gamble that our individual actions are so insignificant that it makes no difference what we do, or whether we vote, and thus that we do not need to devote any attention and energy to the social good. Or we can bet that dramatic change is possible through the aggregation of caring individual choices, and act to make a difference by supporting smart and positive progressive change.

We can gamble that unmitigated social injustices and policies that facilitate the concentration of wealth in the hands of the wealthiest 1% are not a threat to social stability and well-being. Or we can bet that the safest, wisest investments of all are in social justice, equality of opportunity, universal public education, resource conservation and peaceful coexistence -- and act accordingly.

We can gamble that helping the rich to become richer by cutting taxes to the lowest level in generations, while imposing further austerity on the poor and the middle class, will not result in more intense social tensions, heightened insecurity, worse levels of crime, or an increased impetus toward terrorism or violent revolution. Or we can bet that enacting policies that encourage inequalities and

injustices and disparities of wealth might have such consequences, and therefore enact fairer and more humanitarian policies that are most likely to generate a broader overall well-being.

We can continue to gamble that huge amounts of deficit-financed military spending and aggressive militarism are needed to achieve our economic goals and national security. Or we can bet that aggression and preemptive war policies are prohibitively costly, and that it would be wiser to recognize that justice and peace are vitally important in the world, and thus take bold steps toward dedicating more resources to improving our own society and to achieving greater mutual security by means of diplomatic conflict resolution and commitments to wide-ranging social justice.

We can gamble that the Strict Father constellation of beliefs is best, and defend the status quo by following the regressive, power-abusing doctrines of radical conservatism and patriarchal dominion. Or we can bet that a renewed respect for the constellation of Nurturing Parent values would create better balanced public policies, and consequently commit to electing leaders whose philosophies and policies honor more sensible and progressive principles.

We can gamble that there is a life hereafter -- after our personal death -- and fail to maximize our happiness, our potentials in this life, our authenticity and our appreciation of existence and deeper purposes and truer causes. Or we can bet that the Here and Now mandates that we acknowledge the fact that this life alone can be known, that nobody survives death, and that we should wholeheartedly seek to achieve a more noble connectedness to the wholesome and the worthwhile in the Present.

Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light, how so foolish the gambles of our entrenched decision-making are proving to be? As readers might easily surmise, my perspective is that the best bets we can make are oriented around supporting far-sighted ideas that take into account the comprehensive breadth and depth of human knowledge and spiritual understandings. Scientific insights and expert understandings should be honored. And broad-minded initiatives should be undertaken to ensure that the gambles we make are fairer, more reasonable and more sustainable.

As an ironic aside, the gaudy city of Las Vegas, Nevada was until the Great Recession one of the fastest growing cities in the U.S. Yet Las Vegas is pathetically oriented around gambling, alcohol consumption, sexual titillation, non-stop entertainment, lavish shopping, indoors cigarette smoking, insensate hedonism, overeating, and the insidiously risky idea that people can get unearned riches.

Gambling is a compulsive and maladaptive behavior that has many negative impacts on society. A National Gambling Impact Study Commission has revealed that millions of Americans are detrimentally affected by serious social and economic consequences of "problem gambling". Gambling addictions can lead to bankruptcy, crime, divorce, domestic violence, child neglect, child abuse, homelessness and even murder or suicide. The 'gaming' industry and the politicians who advance its goals are too often afflicted by corruption, fraud or racketeering. Perversely, lotteries principally prey on poor people and minorities. Let's find ways to discourage gambling!

Gambling with extremely high stakes, like with the well-being of our children and theirs, is a vice that strikes me as particularly ill advised!

Chapter #39 - Insight into Pyrrhic Victories.

Sustainable existence in the long run calls for actions that reduce injustice and calm tensions in the world. This would allow cuts to military spending worldwide. There is a tendency toward mutually-assured destruction that is implicit in the overkill potential of nuclear-armed nations, which possess thousands of nuclear warheads in total. More subtly, there is a degree of insanity in the resource

misallocation, waste, habitat ravaging, and inadvertent injustice caused by huge levels of debt-financed military spending. While war may be the ultimate expression of competition, it is an outlet that is increasingly unacceptable as the world population grows and competition intensifies for control of territory, fertile soil, mineral resources, fossil fuels, and fresh water.

Might does NOT make right. Calamitous developments loom, and NOW is the time to put in place mechanisms that will be more effective in preventing international conflicts. The "war on terror" was one of the world's most costly conflicts ever, and the priorities it represents are quite clearly distorted. Much better ways of spending trillions of dollars exist -- ways of building peace, ensuring mutual security, marginalizing extremism, creating friends and allies rather than enemies, reducing dire poverty, implementing sustainable development, conserving resources, making concerted efforts to create greener policies, and protecting the health of the environmental commons.

The "war on terror" is a slogan, not a sensible strategy for making America safer. Sure, the U.S. had some 'successes' in this war since 9/11/2001. Hundreds of Al Qaeda operatives, including Osama bin Laden, have been killed or imprisoned. Intelligence activities have significantly disrupted terrorist network communications and financing operations. Terrorist attacks on markets, mosques and innocent civilians have had the effect of eroding some support for terrorist tactics.

Yet, by simplistically treating terrorism as a broad and somewhat indiscriminate war, our strategies have led to serious harm. We have been baited, and with a reactive cowboy mentality we have reacted in extremely costly ways. We have hurt our country and the world in reacting to the 9/11 attacks by perpetrating grave injustices of our own. Our somewhat indiscriminate war on terror has ratcheted up federal debt burdens and created increased probabilities of dangerous retaliatory blowback, and stoked destabilizing extremism in places like Syria and Yemen.

We have inflicted damage on ourselves with our mistakes. We unwisely attacked and occupied Iraq under false pretexts, convulsing that country with terrible social turmoil. We have squandered huge sums of money on warfare, and on wasteful facets of a variety of "homeland security" programs. We have squandered worldwide sympathy in the wake of 9/11, significantly damaging the moral authority America once had. This perspective makes any successes we have had resemble "Pyrrhic victories". The Greeks who won the original Pyrrhic victory, with staggering losses, over Romans in 279 BCE would attest to the veracity of this contention.

In another regard, mankind can ironically be seen to be 'winning' a string of Pyrrhic victories over the natural world. We deny to ourselves the fact that these are NOT real victories. They are actually insidious losses that are acceptable outcomes only in the delusion of an absurdly hubris-swollen point of view, and of a myopic failure to clearly comprehend ecological truths.

The very premise of our civilization is that human beings have the right to do as we like, and to assert dominion over all living things no matter how harmful this may prove to be. We have foolishly ignored the extents to which our actions are unsustainable and jeopardous to future well-being.

Our modern industrial mode of consciousness fails to recognize and respect the primary basis for well-being found in undepleted topsoil and uncontaminated fresh water and a stable climate. It is downright stupid to give inadequate value to the health and integral community of biological systems on Earth, and to congratulate ourselves with pride on our dominion, as if we are the only beings in the world that matter, as if anointed by the gods. Christ!

We are beginning to find out that wrongheaded ways of seeing the world are fatefully inaccurate, and that it is insane for us to allow the impoverishment of natural ecosystems. For our own larger self-interest, we should avoid making societal choices that either fail to address the biggest problems we face or actually make them worse. It is as though we are engraving our names on the tender bark of a young oak tree, not understanding that these wounds will enlarge with time and reveal to posterity the full-grown folly of our detrimental activities.

Chapter #40 - Greatness, or Ignominy?

The United States is a great country. It has been made great by its Constitutional principles, its promise of equal justice and opportunity, its democratic institutions, and the fairness doctrines that are included in the Bill of Rights and subsequent Amendments. Our greatness is reinforced by open-mindedness in embracing creativity and innovation, and by our theoretical commitment to the general welfare and individual liberties. Our rough adherence to fair rules of law, together with the progressive advances made since the Civil War in the realm of human rights, have also contributed to the positive character of our country. Due process, equal treatment under the law, respect for individual dignity, freedom from unreasonable search and seizure, and theoretical guarantees against unwarranted government surveillance of citizens have been included among these characteristics that have made our country great in an era that is one of the most remarkable in all of world history.

"Capitalist assets not all that bad, comrade."

-- Appraisal of a slender mini-skirted female by an appreciative chap in the 1980s

Candidates that want to become President of the U.S. compete for the nomination of their party by striving to strike a balance between the political center and the extremes, so Democrats are center-left and Republicans are center-right. Once a candidate wins the nomination, he or she must compete in national elections, so they both scramble a bit toward the center. That's the theory of it, anyway. Fueled by Super PAC money, which is a blatant form of institutionalized bribery, the Republican Party is managing to brainwash a sizable proportion of the American people into provisionally supporting candidates who compete to be the farthest right they can get. This is due to the influence of far-right candidates who demand an extremely "conservative" agenda.

Presidential candidate Mitt Romney "flip-flopped" toward extreme conservative orthodoxy in 2012 on such issues as contraception, abortion, discrimination against gays, stem cell research, immigration and gun rights. Back in April 2007, a series of Doonesbury comic strips had mocked Romney for such socially retrogressive and hypocritical shifts from principle to doctrine. "Sir, No Sir!"

The worst outcome in Presidential elections, for reasons cited extensively herein, is that citizens elect a center-right politician who gets into power and then pushes a freedom-infringing elitist agenda of the extreme right. George W. Bush had made election promises in the year 2000 that he would be to be honest, trustworthy and compassionate. He boasted of an intention not to involve our country in nation-building by the military. He claimed he would be "a uniter, not a divider". But then he chose to rule in obedience to the harsh, extreme right views of Dick Cheney and the discredited ideas of neoconservatives and economic fundamentalists. A glimpse of much worse outcomes surfaced with Donald Trump's fascist-like tendencies during his chaotic time in office.

The true principles of both democracy and republicanism support liberty and rule by the people, as well as civic virtue practiced by citizens in accordance with a constitution and rules of law. The American people should demand that their representatives respect the Constitution as well as the progressive evolution of established law since 1789. This means that our representatives should

better represent the interests of all Americans, not just insiders and the wealthy few. Ethics reform is needed to stop the federal government and the Supreme Court from acting principally in the best interests of big corporations, rich people, war enthusiasts and religious fundamentalists.

The age-old games will always persist; people and companies will eagerly try to grab a bigger share of the loose public treasury. Not only do we have a political system that facilitates this, we have lots of corruption in addition. Here is an excellent reason why we need to restructure our economic and political institutions, and regulate them better, and manage them more fairly.

"The worst thing about corruption as a system of governance is that it works so well." That is a thought-provoking insight expressed by a character in the epic novel *Shantaram*. Various forms of corruption do seem to work well in many countries of the world -- in the short run. The worst thing about our system of growth-addicted Disaster Capitalism is that it works well for the wealthy, at the expense of everyone else. But exploitive technologies and political corruption and the short-term-orientation of national policies are too often negative and contrary to the common good.

I call on both the Democratic and Republican Parties to revise their national platforms to be more consistent with wise understandings of social justice, and of environmental sanity.

Our national image and well-being were terribly tarnished by the politicians in both the Bush and Trump administrations and their appointees in the Justice Department. They facilitated injustice and shortsightedness by pandering to partisanship and wealthy conservatives. They opposed family planning programs. They tried to dominate and control working people, and other nations, and nature itself. They imposed a pathetic tyranny on our communities -- a tyranny of social regression, fiscal irresponsibility, invasions of privacy, occasional bureaucratic nonsensicality, costly and reprehensible militarism, and ecological myopia. Conservative leaders seem to be staunchly committed to narrow interests, so they aggressively abuse power and promote oligarchic plutocracy (rule by the few, for the wealthy), instead of fairer democratic governance.

Congress has continuously acted with disregard for the common good by increasing the size of the federal government bureaucracy, which is already bloated and too intrusive. It indulges in cronyism, dishonesty, corrupt practices, pork barrel spending, and the encouraging of public land exploitation. It borrows and spends huge amounts of taxpayer money in fiscally foolish ways. Conservatives are especially eager to eviscerate laws that protect the environment and endangered species. Congress has failed to enforce the polluters-pay principle that obligates companies to reduce the pollution they cause, and to pay for damages that such pollution causes to people's health and the environment.

Though George W. Bush claimed during his first presidential campaign to be "a uniter, not a divider", once he was elected, he cynically pursued highly divisive actions. He mercilessly exploited hot-button social issues and stoked fears of terrorism to increase his power. He abused this power by striving to manufacture consent and manipulate Americans into supporting wrong-headed military policies and poorly-prioritized domestic policies. He created more inequality in education and job opportunities, and a bigger disparity in fortunes between rich people and everyone in the working and middle classes.

Republican administrations in the 21st century worked to subvert our democracy in many ways. They evaded oversight by Congress. They demanded loyalty to doctrines that were shrewd, exploitive and shortsighted. They used Karl Rove's dirty politics, political machine ploys and character assassination instead of honest debate. They used smear campaigns, voter suppression and intimidation, restrictive voting measures and other tactics to deprive minorities and poor people of fair representation. The Bush administration overstepped its executive authority with Patriot Act prosecutions, and violated

the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978, and secretly spied on citizens. And, as it turns out, the NSA surveillance schemes were only just beginning, and have been amplified extensively.

George W. Bush aggressively used "signing statements" to avoid complying with more than 1,100 provisions of laws enacted by Congress. An American Bar Association Task Force declared many uses of signing statements to be "contrary to the rule of law and our constitutional system of separation of powers." By misusing signing statements, George Bush asserted a poorly founded right to ignore the will of Congress and the American people. One of the most egregious examples of the use of this ploy took place in January 2008, when Congress passed the annual National Defense Authorization Act. This law included a statute that instructed the Bush administration not to spend taxpayer money "to establish any military installation or base for the purpose of providing for the permanent stationing of United States Armed Forces in Iraq." But the President attached a signing statement to the law that asserted a right of the President to disregard the ban on permanent bases. Another provision of this Act was an accountability measure that would have established an independent and bipartisan 'Commission on Wartime Contracting' to eliminate waste, fraud and law violations by private security companies. President Bush used a signing statement to oppose this, in essence supporting waste, fraud and law violations. This constituted a sad and dishonorable usurpation of power.

George W. Bush sought to amend the Constitution to make society more discriminatory against gay people. He and most Republicans since then sought to limit the reproductive rights of women and their privacy and the freedom to choose the course of their own lives. They try to dominate society and engineer America into molds of prudish, puritanical, misogynistic, intolerant and self-righteous evangelism. These ends were not by any stretch of the imagination consistent with the general welfare.

Missouri Rep. Todd Akin made a big splash in the news back in 2012. A member of the House Committee on Science no less, he uttered some truly bizarre statements about how women can magically shut down getting pregnant, as if they have some sort of effective emotional prophylactic morning-after power. Apparently Todd Akin believes that a woman can be so traumatized by being "legitimately raped", and so alarmed by the sudden influx of a rapist's sperm, that her ovum would resist impregnation. Introduce yourself to the statistics, Todd: 5% of women who are forcibly raped become pregnant. And, reprehensibly, conservative Republicans managed to overturn the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision by the Supreme Court in 2022, and since then have been forcing many raped women to carry pregnancies to term despite the abominably vile offenses against them.

One of the most egregious initiatives when George W. Bush was in power was the risky and dangerous precedent of preemptive warfare. The U.S. invaded Iraq using a variety of changing rationalizations; threats were hyped, costs were ridiculously underestimated and reasonable warnings were ignored. Unrealistic scenarios were advanced and dissenters were intimidated. Many terrible collateral injustices were intensified, and the occupation of Iraq was characterized by corruption, missing weapons, poor governance, squandered money, and ineffective reconstruction efforts. According to the Iraqi Cabinet member Ali Allawi, the U.S. manifested "rank amateurism and swaggering arrogance" and "monumental ignorance" during the military occupation.

These actions created much resentment, anger, suspicion and instability. They strengthened the resolve of those opposing the U.S., and augmented the numbers of recruits to terrorist causes, insurgencies and religious extremism, as evidenced by increasing influence of terrorist organizations in the world for years. This has exacerbated stresses and hostilities, unleashed heightened religious and ethnic conflicts, and contributed to an impetus for civil strife in Islamic countries.

The top 'legal beagle' job in the U.S. is the Attorney General, a position that presides over the Department of Justice. The Mission of this agency is to "ensure fair and impartial administration of justice for all Americans". It is revealing that the first two men to hold this position in the Bush administration were both loyalists to ideology and partisan politics and the President, but NOT to fair and independent enforcement of the law on behalf of the American people. John Ashcroft tried to impose his Christian religious beliefs on the nation, even taking the bizarre step of ordering an \$8,000 drape to cover the exposed breasts of a Lady Justice statue. Yes, I suppose bare breasts are shocking to some (Janet Jackson found this out on national TV when she had a "wardrobe malfunction" during a Super Bowl halftime performance in 2004); but a classic statue?! Prudes!

Irony is an entertainingly incongruous trickster. Consider the circumstance that John Ashcroft actually echoed the actions of a character named Biago da Cessena, an apologist for Pope Paul III in the year 1540. Biago expressed deep offense at naked Biblical figures that Michelangelo portrayed in his magnificent frescoes. So when Michelangelo was commissioned to paint his vision of the biblical *Last Judgment* on a wall of the Sistine Chapel, some 20 years after he had finished his famous work on the ceiling, he responded to Biago's prudish criticisms of his art by depicting Biago in a corner of *The Last Judgment* sporting the ears of an ass.

John Ashcroft was replaced by Alberto Gonzales, who suffered the ignominy of debate on a no-confidence vote in the U.S. Senate in June 2007 and was subsequently forced to resign. The main issue that led to that outcome was the determined effort by Gonzales and members of his staff to politicize the Department of Justice by firing federal prosecutors and replacing them with less qualified but more ideologically loyal Republican lawyers. Partisan considerations were also used to fill lower level non-partisan career legal jobs at the Justice Department. Gonzales had been instrumental in efforts to facilitate methods of harsh prisoner interrogations and torture tactics in violation of the Geneva Conventions, and to diminish civil liberties of American citizens by implementing a warrantless wiretapping program. He and other White House officials stonewalled Congress, claimed memory lapses, gave contradictory testimony, failed to deliver subpoenaed documents, and apparently lied under oath. These shrewd evasions were deeply dishonorable. They are reminiscent of some of the devious activities of Richard Nixon; maybe history does repeat itself!

The third Attorney General under G.W. Bush was Michael Mukasey, who was chosen in November 2007. He received close attention from the Senate for indications of whether he would truly represent the people, or if he would be likely to follow his predecessors in marching lockstep with the administration's abuses of power. One main issue was whether Mukasey considered the cruel practice of "waterboarding" to be torture.

The Bush White House's serious and aggressive efforts to grab greater power for the Executive Branch was informatively analyzed in a video segment "Power of the Presidency" on *Bill Moyers Journal* (google it!). Bill Moyers, thank you for your intelligence, vision, objectivity and honorable commitment to important causes!

Visionary intelligence is needed to guide us toward fairer and more progressive understandings and actions. We should reject ruthless, unjust, controlling, money-obsessed, special-privilege-defending forces of corporatism, neoconservatism and aggressive militarism. A vigorous and independent civil society is needed, not increased government power or authoritarian abuses of power or expanded corporate prerogatives. An echo of Shakespeare's version of Julius Caesar's words reverberates:

Friends, readers, countrymen, lend me your ears.

I come to bury Empire, not to praise it.
 The evil that men do lives after them;
 The good is oft interred with their bones.
 We citizens are being crudely and shrewdly manipulated,
 In deference to plutocratic rule by the few and the wealthy.
 And true democratic and republican principles are being abandoned,
 Giving the fortunate few more power and coin.
 O woeful day! O traitors, villains!
 This is the most unkindest cut of all.
 Ambition and tyranny allied together is a grievous fault,
 And ingratitude and treasonous acts afflict us all.
 O judgment! Thou art fled to brutish beasts,
 And men have lost their heart and reason.
 What private griefs they have, alas, I know not,
 That have made them do this: they are wise and honorable,
 And will, no doubt, with reasons answer you.
 I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
 To stir men's blood: I only speak right on;
 And if I were disposed to stir your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage
 Should I do wrong to these presumed honorable men?
 Mischief, thou art afoot; take thou what course thou wilt!

Chapter #41 - Ideas and Beliefs.

Realism is a doctrine asserting that the external world really exists
 Independent of perception, and that it exists substantially as we perceive
 Yet life and knowledge today are seen to be so complex and bewildering
 That it is often quite difficult for us to know exactly what to actually believe.

Truth generally lies in the coordination of differing and conflicting opinions
 So free, sensible and open-minded discussion is needed to allow us all
 To pick our way through biases, spin, propaganda, and shortsightedness
 To achieve a good understanding of Nature's increasingly cogent call.

The philosophical ideas of the British author John Fowles are illuminating. In his 1970 book, *The Aristos*, he expressed the belief that, in the face of powerful social pressures to conform, we are "one of the most sheep-like ages that has ever existed". Our abilities to think clearly, to consider objectively, and to express opinions freely are important for healthy self-understanding, and they are vital requisites for the proper functioning of democracy. In the Introduction to *The Aristos*, John Fowles stated meaningfully:

"Yet another purpose of this book is to suggest that the main reason dissatisfaction haunts our century (the twentieth), as optimism haunted the eighteenth and complacency the nineteenth, is precisely because we are losing sight of our most fundamental human birthright: to have a self-made opinion on all that concerns us."

More than 50 years have passed since the first edition of *The Aristos*, and influences that confuse and mislead people have significantly multiplied during this interregnum. One pervasive means of this manipulation is found in consumer marketing, which strongly affects our behaviors and makes people feel that they have ever-expanding "needs". Similar kinds of advertising can make us powerless pawns of slickly manufactured demand and opinion.

When people's desires are exploited, this can adversely affect thoughts and emotions. Likewise, when people's fears or drives for status are taken advantage of, adverse effects can result. Right-wing worldviews and fundamentalist economic doctrines are increasingly being used to manipulate our ways of seeing things. So are religious dogmas. Deceptive political spin, along with other influences of mass media and prevailing social prejudices, tend to make us more biased. Only by fostering better education, clearer thinking, and more independent understandings can we overcome these influences.

J. Krishnamurti, a philosopher from India who died in 1986, once gave public talks in such places as an oak grove in Ojai, California. There, he urged people to pay careful and scrupulous attention to their thoughts and feelings. He regarded this as a precondition for self-transformation, and thus a real requisite for positive social change. He denounced authority, dogma, creeds and indeed all organized belief systems, and he urged people to think independently and clearly, and to empty their minds of conditioned thoughts. He advocated heightened awareness and holistic outlooks free from prejudice.

Our perceptions, thoughts and emotions are also strongly influenced by hereditary and conditioned predispositions to adhere to certain beliefs, and to tribalism. When we examine our beliefs and compare them for validity with alternate ideas, we sometimes see broader contexts, deeper perspectives and truer relationships. Better understandings can be gained by embracing an existential clarity of honest assessment of our behaviors and motives and biases.

Like all bold new ideas, the basic ideas of sustainable living will pass through three stages: First, the ideas are ridiculed and violently opposed; Second, they are grudgingly acknowledged, but disparaged as being obvious and insignificant; and third, they are accepted as important and self-evident. As Mark Twain once wrote: "A person with a new idea is a crank, until the idea succeeds."

Similarly, according to the famous Swiss naturalist, Louis Agassiz (1807-1873): "Every great scientific truth goes through three stages. First, people say it conflicts with the Bible. Next they say it had been discovered before. Lastly, they say they always believed it."

It isn't really a bold new idea that we should seriously tackle the daunting problems that face us. Obviously it would be smart to find ways to change the systems and behaviors that are undermining the potential for movement in fairer and more likely sustainable directions. Entrenched forces can be forced to compromise more fairly in our democracy, and we can achieve a transcendent commitment to positive change. Vigilance, clarity of convictions and insightful understandings can help us in this endeavor.

We are being taken for a ride, folks, and it is not just a vast conspiracy or a small subset of rogue business leaders, crooked politicians, greedy people or conniving liars that are responsible. It is the SYSTEM itself that is to blame for allowing dog-eat-dog opportunism to have such overwhelmingly determinative influence. The federal government sometimes operates like a gullible and helpless giant, incapable of frugality or discipline. It is too susceptible to shrewd manipulation, lobbyist influence, profiteering, the propagation of Big Lies, manipulative deceits, and many kinds of chicanery. It has trouble advancing good citizenship goals because it is so busy stumbling all over itself to pander to demands of corporations and investors for bigger profits.

Think of the power of a few million people working together to widen our frames of reference and foster progressive ideas and causes. Please join these people, and lend your voice to positive social, economic, fiscal, political and environmental changes such as those detailed in the 'Overarching Considerations' compendiums found in *Common Sense Revival*, and in Part Four of the online Earth Manifesto.

Chapter #42 - A Thoughtful Digression on Opinion.

Important ideas are contained in the following chapters, and I don't want to distract readers from getting to them, but I digress here to explore some of the profound yet subtle influences that affect our thinking. Innovative research on the structures and functioning of our brains has revealed several fascinating insights into human propensities. For instance, a procedure known as 'functional magnetic resonance imaging' (fMRI) is used to map neural activity in the brain.

In a study done at Emory University, fMRI was used to show that our political predilections are a product of an unconscious phenomenon called 'confirmation bias'. Even when faced with contradictory evidence, people find ways to rationalize agreement with predisposed opinions. In other words, there is a kind of emotive conformity that has its foundations in the actual basic operations of the brain.

Brain imaging has revealed that, rather than using parts of the brain most associated with *reasoning* to arrive at our convictions, the parts of the brain most associated with the processing of *emotions* are the ones that light up when confronted with such things as political spin and religious opinions. No matter what conclusion an independent reading of evidence might support, our brains find ways to interpret evidence in ways that reinforce pre-existing biases. Then, after rationalizing our views, other parts of the brain light up in fMRI imaging that reveal an activation of the reward-and-pleasure centers of the brain. So we basically adopt beliefs and emotionally comfortable conclusions, then cling to them because the conformity makes us feel good. This is wired into our brains! Nonetheless, absurd beliefs like those espoused by QAnon and peddlers of false conspiracies are still absurd -- and dangerous.

Skepticism is perhaps the best antidote to these undesirable 'confirmation biases'. The scientific method is essentially based on skepticism, for it requires premises and observations to be verifiable, and experiments to be repeatably confirmed, to ensure their validity. Science thereby provides more trustworthy understandings than blind beliefs. To be able to correct and integrate previous accurate knowledge is invaluable for giving us clearer understandings.

Scientists using brain imaging have identified the "medial ventral pre-frontal cortex" as the part of the brain where the "laughter zone" is centered. This region of the brain lights up when humor is detected, and leads to the quite delightful outburst we call laughter. For readers' amusement, here is a column from the satirically funny publication, *The Onion*:

"CHICAGO — In a surprising refutation of conventional wisdom on 'opinion entitlement', a study conducted by the University of Chicago's School for Behavioral Science concluded that 38 percent of the U.S. population is neither entitled to, nor qualified, to have opinions."

"On topics from evolution to the environment to gay marriage to immigration reform, we found that many of the opinions expressed were so off-base and ill-informed that they actually hurt society by being voiced," said chief researcher Professor Mark Fultz, who based the findings on hundreds of telephone, office and dinner-party conversations compiled over a three-year period. "While people have long asserted that it takes all kinds, our research shows that American society currently has a drastic oversupply of the kinds who don't have any good or worthwhile thoughts whatsoever. We could actually do just fine without them." (Ha!)

A funny aspect of this story is that almost everyone would probably agree with the story's cynical conclusions; but of course, almost everyone regards the 38% who should not be entitled to have opinions as those OTHERS who disagree with them!

Think of the following quote in this context of modern understandings of the brain, for it gives surprising and enlightening insights into the nature of thought, opinion and beliefs.

"The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion ... draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects or despises -- in order that, by this great and pernicious predetermination, the authority of its former conclusions may remain inviolate."

--- Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 1620

I love Mark Twain's similar sagacious sentiments that he expressed in his famous *Corn-pone Opinions*:

"Morals, religions, and politics get their following from surrounding influences and atmospheres, almost entirely; not from study, not from thinking. A man must and will have his own approval first of all, in each and every moment and circumstance of his life ... but, speaking in general terms, a man's self-approval in the large concerns of life has its source in the approval of the people about him, and not in a searching personal examination of the matter.

Mohammedans are Mohammedans because they are born and reared among that sect, not because they have thought it out and can furnish sound reasons for being Mohammedans; we know why Catholics are Catholics; why Baptists are Baptists, why Mormons are Mormons; why Presbyterians are Presbyterians; why thieves are thieves; why monarchists are monarchists; why Republicans are Republicans and Democrats, Democrats. We know it is a matter of association and sympathy, not reasoning and examination; that hardly a man in the world has an opinion upon morals, politics or religion which he got otherwise than through his associations and sympathies. Broadly speaking, there are none but 'corn-pone opinions'. And broadly speaking, corn-pone stands for self-approval.

Self-approval is acquired mainly from the approval of other people. The result is conformity. Sometimes conformity has a sordid business interest -- the bread-and-butter interest -- but not in most cases, I think. In the majority of cases it is unconscious and not calculated; it is born of the human being's natural yearning to stand well with his fellows and have their inspiring approval and praise -- a yearning which is commonly so strong and so insistent that it cannot be effectually resisted, and must have its way."

"A political emergency brings out the corn-pone opinion in fine force in its two chief varieties -- the pocketbook variety, which has its origin in self-interest, and the bigger variety, the sentimental variety -- the one that can't bear to be outside the pale; can't bear to be in disfavor; can't endure the averted face and the cold shoulder; wants to stand well with his friends, wants to be smiled upon, wants to be welcome, wants to hear the precious words, 'He's on the right track!' Uttered, perhaps by an ass, but still an ass of high degree, an ass whose approval is gold and diamonds to a smaller ass, and confers glory and honor and happiness, and membership in the herd. For these gauds, many a man will dump his life-long principles into the street, and his conscience along with them. We have seen it happen. In some millions of instances."

"Men think they think upon great political questions, and they do; but they think with their party, not independently; they read its literature, but not that of the other side; they arrive at convictions, but they are drawn from a partial view of the matter in hand and are of no particular value. They swarm with their party, they feel with their party, they are happy in their party's approval; and where the party leads they will follow, whether for right and honor, or through blood and dirt and a mush of mutilated morals."

"In our late canvass, half of the nation passionately believed that in silver lay salvation, the other half as passionately believed that that way lay destruction. Do you believe that a tenth part of the people, on either side, had any rational excuse for having an opinion about the matter at all? I studied that mighty question to the bottom -- came out empty. Half of our people passionately believe in high tariff, the other half believe otherwise. Does this mean study and examination, or only feeling? The latter, I think. I have deeply studied that question, too -- and didn't arrive. We all do no end of feeling, and we mistake it for thinking. And out of it we get an aggregation which we consider a boon. Its name is Public Opinion. It is held in reverence. It settles everything. Some think it the Voice of God."

--- Mark Twain, *Corn-Pone Opinions*

"We are discreet sheep; we wait to see how the drove is going, and then go with the drove. We have two opinions: one private, which we are afraid to express; and another one -- the one we use -- which we force ourselves to wear ... until habit makes us comfortable in it, and the custom of defending it presently makes us love it, adore it, and forget how pitifully we came by it. Look at it in politics."

--- Mark Twain's *Autobiography*

Chapter #43 - Searching for Wisdom in America.

A thought-provoking book asks, *What Really Matters?* The book represents a search for wisdom in America through the consideration of many modes of thought and exploration that have been pursued in the past century. Does happiness matter most? Personal connectedness in friendships and love? Physical and psychological health? Authenticity? Integrity? Spiritual enlightenment?

There are many different approaches and modalities of potential understanding in the world. Each and every one has its strengths and weaknesses, its validities and shortcomings. To hold that any one belief system is absolutely right is, essentially, to be demonstrably quite wrong! Reality is much more nuanced than black-and-white interpretations that most disciplines and fundamentalists try to impose upon it. We seek simplicity, and certainty, in our lives; yet, as Voltaire observed in the 18th century, "Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is an absurd one." The seductive allure of certainties, and of beliefs in some form of immortality of the soul, are such strong compulsions that our emoting brains embrace religious doctrines that the reasoning brain can only chuckle at, with astonishment and bemusement -- and a healthy dose of skepticism.

Parody can be healthy for perspective. By poking fun at a topic, parodies draw attention to both pathetic weaknesses and appreciative strengths of the things they lampoon. Parody and satire, as used in TV shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, have given us humorous looks at serious issues of the day. They provide not only entertainment but also a basis for evaluating ideas, and maybe even eventually in helping to motivate positive change.

Albert Einstein made one of the greatest discoveries in the history of human thought when he developed his Theory of Relativity. Energy, matter and time are relative, he found, and they depend on the viewer's frame of reference. In a curious similarity, right and wrong can be seen to be relative, depending on context and circumstances. "Thou shalt not kill" does not fully apply to actions taken in self defense, for instance. Clint Eastwood's thought-provoking film, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, contains a scene in which an American soldier's letter from his mother urges him to "always do what is right because it is right". A Japanese soldier, just as much a pawn in the conflict as the American soldier, observes ruefully that his mother told *him* exactly the same thing.

The truth sometimes transcends what appears to be palpably obvious. Things often are different than they seem. Perceptions that the Sun makes a daily revolution around Earth seemed obvious in ancient times, yet were mistaken. The movement of the Sun across the sky from sunrise in the east to sunset in the west is merely an illusion. In fact, the Earth is a spherical planet that rotates majestically around its axis once every 24 hours, making it only *appear* as if the Sun revolves around us.

I once stood regarding the reflection of some stately villas in an artificial lake. As a gentle breeze ruffled the lake surface, the reflection shimmered and appeared to be like a beautiful Impressionist painting. The reflection was just as real as the direct visual appearance of the villas, yet a curious epistemological realization struck me: sometimes things appear to be real, and sometimes they appear to be illusion, and sometimes the way we interpret our perceptions does not particularly accord with the true situation or the actual nature of reality. Certainty is illusive.

Neuroscientist Richard Burton wrote a book titled *On Being Certain: Believing You Are Right Even When You're Not*. This book contains valuable understandings of brain phenomena like the 'delusional misidentification syndrome'. The biochemical reward centers in our brains make us feel good about 'knowing', but that doesn't particularly make our knowledge correct. I wonder if perhaps our reward centers could shed some light on the certitude, revisionist spin and evangelical tragedy of the Bush and Trump years! LOL.

The world is vastly more complex and diverse than anyone can fully comprehend. There is a wide variety of points of view, and a deep subjectivity in all experience, perception and interpretation. Many different belief systems and worldviews result. All great issues are inextricably intertwined, and subjective uncertainty and misunderstanding and confusion are widespread. Personalities and ideological points of view battle for ascendancy. The nature of free will is debated by philosophers, and so is the character of virtue, civic duty, and ultimate moral responsibility.

I am personally attracted to the humanistic philosophy of 'Positivism' that regards observed facts and scientific knowledge as more accurate and important than mysticism and blind faith. Read the Wikipedia entry for *Positivism*, and see if it doesn't make your head spin a bit! Unfortunately, under the cover of so many uncertainties, self-interested entities find marvelous opportunities to take advantage of people, and they often deceive them and trump Big Picture understandings. Partially as a consequence, policy-making is generally held hostage by those who want to profit from fooled citizens and the public treasury at the expense of the taxpayer and the common good.

Evangelical Christians are one particular subset of self-interested entities that tend to be opposed to progressive understandings. Their leaders exhort people to be faithful and BELIEVE! -- but they seem suspiciously more interested in promoting comforting certainties and manipulating faithful folks than they are interested in having accurate knowledge or clear, logical, fair-minded understandings. An honest frame of reference is hard to achieve without open-minded observation, critical thinking, and insightful perception.

Imagine a leader who advocates fairness, inclusiveness, the common good and peaceful coexistence rather than self-interested ideologies, tax breaks for the rich, increased benefits for corporations, or conservatism on social issues. Sounds good to me!

Attention! I want to emphasize something important. Words can be pregnant with meaning and implication, yet they often fail to clearly communicate the comprehensive depth of the ideas they are intended to convey. Consider the word, "policy." This is a dry kind of word that represents a wonk-

ish and somewhat innocuous-sounding concept. But POLICY can radically affect people's lives. Our foreign policy, for instance, has unnecessarily killed thousands of people. Policies can be extremely unjust when they destroy infrastructure, undermine democratic rule, cause "collateral damage", or engender frustration, anger and retaliatory blowback. Policies can make everyone less safe.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Most of our foreign policy is generally about selfish advantage, control-oriented economic imperialism, easy access to resources, unjust profiteering, and military intimidation. It is NOT generally about bold efforts to make the world economy greener, or to enhance more socially desirable attitudes like good-neighborliness, diplomatic cooperation, fair compromise, or peaceable coexistence.

Another POLICY that harshly and repressively harms millions of people is the drug war and especially the prohibition of marijuana. Such a punitive approach contributes to unnecessary hardships and the incarceration of hundreds of thousands of people every year, negatively impacting many lives.

Or consider the word "regressive". It is fraught with sociopolitical flavor, like frothy foam spreading out from effluent pipes that discharge toxic wastes into a river. REGRESSIVE can be a horrid thing. It can have deeply detrimental impacts that are beyond our comprehension to envision. Regressive policies are lurches away from liberty and justice for all. They are a throwback to antediluvian sensibilities and mean-spirited repression of a nation's citizens. Regressive changes in policy usually represent an abandonment of principles of fairness, and perpetrate and perpetuate unjustifiable, unconscionable and unnecessary miscarriages of justice upon millions of people.

"All generalizations are false, including this one."

--- Mark Twain

It would be wise to open the doors of our perception and enlarge our visions. We should cultivate a conscious awareness that is balanced between greater rationality and more empathetic feeling. We should seek to be more coherent in our reasoning, and more holistic and honest in our spiritual understandings. How can we create more respect for ethical, aesthetic and ecological considerations in our societies?

Chapter #44 - The Nature of the Wealth of Nations.

Adam Smith, a Scottish economist, wrote a veritable manifesto of capitalism, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, in the year 1776. This was the same year that the American Declaration of Independence was proclaimed. Both documents emphasized freedom. Adam Smith strongly advocated free enterprise and unrestrained free trade. He noted 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. His essential argument was that private interests and self-interested behaviors contribute to the good of the whole of society, as if all economic activities are guided by a beneficent "invisible hand".

One of the most significant ironies in the history of ideas is that Adam Smith's book, which became known simply as *The Wealth of Nations*, was basically dedicated to improving the welfare of the common man, not just that of the merchants or the nobility. This book has unfortunately been used by laissez-faire capitalists and the industrialist class as a justification for NOT seeking to remedy the scandalous social ills that have been caused by industrialization and globalization. A figurative 'raspberry' for such perverse attitudes and efforts!

The Industrial Revolution contributed to a rise of Big Business and the expansion of power of large corporations in the nineteenth century. Then in the twentieth century, the growth of marketing and advertising and a consumer economy became paramount. And in the twenty-first century, an export of Western business civilization and privatization to the rest of the world is taking place.

Neoliberalism and globalization are tremendously complex economic forces, with organizational players like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. These powerful institutions have been striving to stimulate free capital flows and international development for decades. Their actions unfortunately have been irresponsible with regard to environmental protections and the genuine needs of the majority of people in developing countries.

Rich developed countries use the international banking system to make money and gain advantages and control resources. Usurious returns are earned from poor countries by the clever expediency of making loans whose proceeds often end up in the pockets of giant multinational companies involved in engineering and construction, and in the accounts of rich people in poor countries. Then when debtor countries fail to make principal and interest payments on loans, austerity measures are imposed by the banks. Loan obligations of poor countries require them to aggressively exploit resources to export them to developed countries. This system allows developed countries to take harsh advantage of poor countries. In the process, social justice and environmental sanity are often sacrificed to perpetuate unfair advantages at the expense of the common good.

"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

More than 20 percent of the World Bank's total lending went to "post-conflict countries" in 2003, up from 16 percent in 1998. This amount is up 800 percent since 1980, according to a study by the Congressional Research Service. Rapid response to wars and natural disasters has traditionally been the domain of United Nations agencies, which work with Non-Governmental Organizations to provide emergency aid and build temporary housing and satisfy other basic needs. But now reconstruction work has become a very lucrative industry, so it is way too important and profitable to be left to 'do-gooders' at the United Nations. As a result, the World Bank today, already devoted to the principle of poverty-alleviation through profit-making, leads the charge.

Economic fundamentalism may be more dangerous than religious fundamentalism in its potential to harm the best interests of humanity's future. Economic fundamentalist doctrines advocate imposing an economic system on the rest of the world that promotes private property ownership rights, privatization, increasing concentrations of wealth, and the shock doctrines of 'disaster capitalism'. In the process, they facilitate the unjust exploitation of workers and the unsustainable use of resources, and generally neglect the best interests of the majority of people. Economic fundamentalists in the U.S. and other powerful countries strive to do this with shrewd intent -- and when legitimate strategies fail, military actions to protect entrenched interests often follow.

One of the tenets of economic fundamentalism is that robust consumerism should be exported to developing countries. In doing this, natural human needs and desires are stoked, increasing demand for goods and services. This strategy contains a strong bias against conservation efforts, discipline, moderation,, greater good goals for communities, sensible planning and sustainability. It is an ideology that works together with religious fundamentalists to oppose limitations on human population growth,

even often opposing sensible contraception. Seen from the frame of reference of a wise path to sustainable existence, economic fundamentalism is shortsighted, retrogressive and wrong-headed.

Facts and truth are inconvenient to those who strive to ruthlessly exploit natural resources or centralize power or gain outlandish wealth by scurrilous means. This is why vested interest groups push so much spin, misinformation, misrepresentation and specious logic in economic and environmental debates. It would be smart to consult Thomas Piketty's blockbuster *CAPITAL in the Twenty-First Century* for better understandings of powerful economic and social dynamics in the world today.

Since poverty afflicts billions of people in the world, and the disparity in wealth between rich people and poor people is growing, social ills are threatening to overwhelm nations as capitalism ignores or denies the urgent need for fairer and more enlightened policies. Salubrious change must come!

Chapter #45 - Capitalism and Democracy.

Incisive insight into the nature of our economic system is valuable. Capitalism is an effective system for utilizing natural human motivations. It satisfies people's needs by utilizing free-market forces of supply and demand. Yet because it facilitates narrowly channeled selfish greed, it is susceptible to abuses of power such as unscrupulous monopoly business practices and the perpetuation of unsafe conditions for workers.

Capitalism can be irresponsibly wasteful in the profligate phenomenon known as 'planned obsolescence'. This is one way capitalist systems fail to make reasonable allowances to help achieve common good goals. Other main ways include the shirking by businesses of healthcare benefits for their employees and the externalizing of costs onto society.

I highly recommend Annie Leonard's online film, *The Story of Stuff*. In it, Annie Leonard neatly summarizes the crisis in our economic system that is being caused by the destructive extraction of resources, the wasteful production and consumption of goods, the unjust system of the distribution of goods, and the production and disposal of huge quantities of garbage, pollutants and toxic wastes. *The Story of Stuff* calls for economic justice and ecological sustainability.

Tapping the public treasury for private gain has long been a hallmark of strategies pursued by many business entities. Encouraging the government to borrow huge sums of money from people in the future to benefit wealthy people today is a nefarious goal that facilitates the exploitation of government largess. Because unusual opportunities arise to make big profits during times of war, reconstruction and recovery from natural disasters, powerful forces militate for war, and taking advantage of adversities. This works against peaceful coexistence and fair and prudent programs.

Corporations are organized for two primary legal purposes: (1) to allow business owners and the shareholders of corporate entities to evade as much liability as possible, and (2) to allow these stakeholders and top management to maximize profits and minimize expenditures for workers and product safety and environmental protections. Make no mistake about this. Workers are paid well only to the extent that it is necessary to retain their services. In the hierarchy of workplaces, only CEOs and executives and key employees are highly valued. The inequalities in the workplace have increased dramatically in the past four decades since the Reagan Revolution began to place an outlandish emphasis on special privileges for the wealthy. Confirming this assertion, the average CEO in 1980 made about 40 times as much as the average worker, and today they make, on average, more than 300 times as much as the average worker!

These characteristics make our capitalist economic system essentially AMORAL. The purpose of business is almost single-mindedly synonymous with earning bigger profits. This motivates business people to evade taxes and costs related to environmental protections. Companies are, after all, competing against others who are also trying to evade the same costs. The 'Tragedy of the Commons' operates in this innate capitalist drive to minimize costs. The result is that workers, consumers, communities, and the environment generally suffer significant harm.

A legal case in 1919 reinforced the legal obligation of corporate entities to put profit making for shareholders over other motives that benefit employees or communities. In the famous legal case, *Dodge vs. Ford Motor Company*, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that a business corporation is organized primarily for the benefit of its shareholders, and therefore it must give overriding consideration to shareholders' interests and dividends. Any other motive, like supporting corporate social responsibility, is constrained by this obligation. In the early years of the automobile industry, Henry Ford, the founder of the Ford Motor Company, believed in paying relatively high wages to his workers so that they would be able to afford to buy the cars they were producing. His attempt to pay generous wages to employees was thwarted by this lawsuit.

One result of this mandate to maximize profits for shareholders is that corporations are not only driven to improve their products and operations, but to cut corners, indulge in unfair competitive practices, circumvent socially responsible regulations, invest heavily in lobbying efforts to gain more tax breaks and subsidies, indulge in schemes to avoid taxes, work to externalize environmental costs onto society, and even to cheat customers and support pork barrel spending and argue for expanded opportunities to profit from wars. These are not good things!

We too often trust that our elected officials will do the right thing. But instead of doing the right thing, many of them generally do the bidding of inadequately regulated and profit-obsessed corporate entities that dominate the law-making and decision-making functions of government. This is the basic nature of our political and economic systems, as currently constituted. But it is often wrong for the people! Public service has, to too large a degree, become an entrenched bureaucratic obedience to political operatives who pander to rich people and narrow corporate agendas.

Capitalism often encourages political corruption, price gouging, wasteful spending, speculation in real estate, disaster opportunism, and damages to public lands. These things are almost invariably detrimental to the common good.

Corporations are frequently staunchly opposed to efforts to regulate them. They resist efforts to make their operations fairer, more socially responsible, and more ecologically sound. They in effect disdain social justice, environmental sanity and democracy itself, due to their obsessive focus on profits over all other values. Simply put, sensible rules and regulations are required to protect people from the growing power of big businesses.

The world is definitely becoming more "flat", in the sense Thomas Friedman discusses in his book, *The World Is Flat, A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. In short, Friedman contends that the world has been figuratively shrinking and 'flattening' due to the rapid convergence of a range of global developments that include technological innovations, the revolutionizing of communications, extensive competitive collaboration, the connectivity of the Internet, the outsourcing of jobs to lower-wage countries, and the productive redesign of evolving businesses.

There are positive aspects of these developments. They are enhancing the prosperity of millions of people in China and India, and enriching the rich in America. But this trend involves the export of capitalist consumerism to billions of people, and where will this lead? Since it feeds into the natural aspirations and stimulated desires

of so many people, it accelerates the trend toward planetary resource depletion and mounting ecological damages -- and it exacerbates climate disruptions and calamitous changes in weather patterns worldwide.

Since China and India are experiencing rapid economic growth, global environmental challenges are becoming significantly more daunting. China is building new coal-fired power plants at an average of one per week, and air pollution in China is already horrible. Chinese cities are crowded, dirty and noisy, and both rural and urban areas have an extreme dichotomy of wealth and poverty. The human race must come to grips with the full implications of these developments.

Thomas Friedman has written about such issues in *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*. This book emphasizes insights into the need for a 'Code Green' greening of our capitalist system and greater respect for biological diversity. The chances for achieving these commendable goals suffered significant setbacks when the Supreme Court ruled in early 2010 to overturn established precedents and give corporations and unions the green light to spend unlimited amounts of money to drown out citizen voices in favor of excessively narrowly-focused priorities.

Chapter #46 - Pathological Aspects of Capitalism.

Capitalism and democracy are, in actual fact, fundamentally opposed to each other, just as impulses for FREEDOM and EQUALITY are essentially opposites. The greater the freedom a society allows, and the fewer the regulations, the more that inequalities naturally multiply. And the rich get richer.

In theory, democracy essentially stands for fairness, equal representation, and government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Inadequately regulated capitalism, in contrast, strives to undermine fairness principles. It not only seeks profits at the expense of workers and the environment, but also is primarily obsessed with special privileges and maximized profits and power.

Human beings are completely dependent upon the natural world, and yet big corporations exploit nature as though it is unlimited and expendable. They show little concern for the consequences of resource depletion or environmental damages, and generally demonstrate an inadequate concern for employees, communities, or a sustainable future. They work almost single-mindedly for profits, short-term advantages and bigger opportunities to get special treatment and subsidies, and they spend large sums of money to influence our representatives to allow them to externalize costs onto society.

Corporations ironically act almost exclusively in ways that, in an individual, would be regarded as pathologically insane. This point is powerfully portrayed in the insightful book, *The Corporation - The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, and also in the fascinating 2003 Canadian film, *The Corporation*, which is based on the book. Check them out for valuable perspective, along with *The New Corporation: The Unfortunately Necessary Sequel*, which was produced in 2020.

This is an excellent reason why legislation should be enacted that strictly limits the interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment to give rights of "personhood" to corporations. Instead of moving in this sensible direction, Supreme Court conservatives made the landmark ruling in the *Citizens United* case to give corporations the unlimited right to "free speech". This narrow decision, made by a 5-to-4 vote, is adversely affecting our democracy!

The Fourteenth Amendment includes important Due Process and Equal Protection clauses. It was enacted after the Civil War to secure rights for former slaves. This Amendment was subsequently interpreted by the Supreme Court to hold that the law provides a guarantee to corporations of the same rights as individuals. This has expanded the power and immunity of large corporations, and enabled them to increase their ability to abuse the power they hold over people and the environment.

How ironic this is! Here was a Constitutional Amendment designed to help black people after slavery was outlawed, yet it has primarily been used to rationalize efforts to disenfranchise minorities and eviscerate their hopes for better health, security and fairer treatment.

A new cynical and insidious method of making bigger profits has arisen in recent years. Monsanto and other biotechnology companies are securing patents on genetically-modified seeds in an effort to create a monopoly on plant and animal life-forms themselves. They have invented and propagated sterile 'Terminator seeds' in a strategy that is right up there with corporate efforts to privatize water as among the most insidious and potentially nefarious of corporate ambitions. Aggressive efforts to create seeds that produce no fertile seed, so that farmers are forced to buy new seeds every year, is morally wrong.

Another vital issue concerns genetically modified crops. The American public is suspicious of genetically modified (GM) foods for several good reasons. There is "Uncertain Peril" in this arena. Corporations like Monsanto and others in the biotechnology industry are on the forefront of creating genetically modified products for which no safety testing or labeling is required by the Food and Drug Administration. The FDA seems to be ideologically committed to a "Don't Look, Don't Find" strategy. Our government does not adequately test for potential environmental or consumer risks of such products. This contrasts distinctly with laws and attitudes in Europe, where consumers in many countries are provided with much more information about GM foods. GM corn, soybeans and wheat pose serious potential threats of crop contamination, and might even cause consequences that alter evolutionary biology, so they could threaten the entire community of life on Earth. We would be wise to remember precautionary principles in our dealings with GM crops!

Monsanto harasses family farmers with law suits to defend their corporate patents on GM crops. By doing so, they enforce absurd provisions of patent law and exploit their supposed rights as "persons". They use the legal system to abuse power, and in the process unethically harm farmers. The film documentary *The Future of Food* reveals this dastardly aspect of Monsanto's operations. Watch it on Netflix. The "FOOD" tab at ConsumersUnion.org, the publishers of *Consumer Reports*, contains many articles and extensive information that confirm these insights about GM foods.

A curious legal case worked its way through the American justice system beginning in May 2004. Steve Kurtz, a professor of art at a state university in Buffalo, New York, was a member of an 'avant-garde' group called the Critical Art Ensemble. Members of this group were exploring the role played by art, technology, corporations and government in modern life. When Steve Kurtz's wife suddenly died, he was arrested and charged with an evolving variety of trumped-up charges. He was doggedly prosecuted by the federal government for four years. At the time of his arrest he was doing work that explored the nature of genetically modified seeds.

The prosecution of Steve Kurtz represented a threat to artistic and scientific freedom for two reasons: (1) the government sought to expand questionable civil charges into much more serious criminal ones, and (2) it tried to intimidate artists, scientists and researchers to prevent them from fulfilling important roles in seeking truth and counterpoints to industry claims, as technologies evolve. All charges against Steve Kurtz were finally dismissed in April 2008 after he had suffered a lot of grief. This outcome was facilitated by a creative documentary, *Strange Culture*, which focused public attention on the case. No apology was made by the government for having caused such detrimental impacts to Steve Kurtz. Such a determined prosecution highlights one of many threats to artists, intellectuals and writers in societies worldwide.

Our legal justice system guarantees people accused of a crime that they will be judged by a jury of their peers. This jury system works by empowering a group of painstakingly-selected citizens to hear a case and reach a verdict. The purpose of a jury is to render the common sense judgment of the community. Jurors hear and evaluate all evidence, and then they deliberate using the parameters of

relevant laws to come to an agreement on whether a defendant is guilty or innocent. Defendants generally claim they are "not guilty, your honor", and true justice turns out to be uneven.

Our leaders, faced with even more complex issues and more extensively-conflicting evidence and special interest pressures, have in recent years tended to decide on a verdict first, based on ideology and entrenched interests and partisan jockeying for power, and then they use clever tricks and mass deception to persuade people to give their consent and taxpayer support to resulting plans. That, in any case, seems to have characterized the Bush administration's approach to the invasion of Iraq, as well as the prosecution of Steve Kurtz.

There is often substantial wrong-headedness and even malfeasance in corporate and government policies relating to industrial crop monoculture practices and animal feedlots, crop subsidies, and copious uses of synthesized nitrogen fertilizers. The odious underbelly of corporate self-interest is revealed in its sometimes mindlessly malicious motives, as typified by the Monsanto legal department's efforts to crush family farmers. Big Businesses sometimes act like giant Goliaths pursuing hapless Davids in the pathological pursuit of power and profit. Corporate public relations departments, like politicians, are far more concerned with good press than the honest truth, and they sometimes work overtime to create misinformation and deceptive spin.

The 2008 Farm Bill was typical of poorly prioritized and misguided government policies. The first Farm Bill was enacted during the Depression in the 1930s to protect farmers against low crop prices and the environmental disaster of the drought-devastating 'Dust Bowl'. But the Farm Bill has evolved, renewed every five years, into a massive subsidy program that extensively benefits big agribusiness companies, even at a time of inflating food prices and high profits. It is curious how life preservers thrown to the most vulnerable people in our society often end up as entitlements for the most affluent and the best connected. There is ostensibly no 'women-and-children-first' chivalry here!

Farm Bills should be seriously reformed so that they represent sensible investments in improved childhood nutrition, better public health, and mitigation measures that reduce pollution and harms to the environment. They should emphasize conservation programs and more stable incomes for small farmers. Local sustainable farming and the production of organic fruits and vegetables should be encouraged. The overproduction of corn, cotton and soybeans should be reduced. Absurdly generous subsidies given to giant agribusiness companies should be reduced. Watch the good documentary film *Food Fight* for illuminating perspective!

As with all legislation, Congress generally will not approve a new law unless it offers enough sundry provisions for special interest groups to give their support. Unsurprisingly, the 2008 renewal of the federal Farm Bill was seriously flawed, so it was criticized by people on both sides of the political spectrum. It was estimated to eventually cost a whopping \$290 billion over a 5-year period. "Just because you've rolled horse manure in powdered sugar doesn't mean you have a doughnut", said one observer, because of some of the law's perverse provisions. In election year 2008, representatives in Congress were even less capable than usual of creating fiscally prudent legislation. "Can't we find a way to change this?", I wondered at the time. "Clean Money legislation? Better media coverage of the shortcomings of our contorted and debt-addled decision-making?"

Little did I suspect at that time how the financial crisis would roil the world, or how the Supreme Court would chime in with its wrong-headed rulings on Big Money in politics, or how the Republican Party would be taken over by fervent "conservatives" demonstrating increasingly extreme control-demanding intransigence.

Farm Policy ironically fuels America's obesity problem by promoting the overproduction of crops that are building blocks of calorie-dense but nutrient-poor processed fast foods and junk food. Mindless fast-food consumption results in poor health because fast foods often contain excessive amounts of saturated fat, salt, refined sugars, carbohydrates and preservatives. Fast food also represents an attitude towards eating that ignores the positive values associated with taking the time to enjoy preparing and sharing meals, and the relaxation and socializing associated with such endeavors in our manic world. The laudable Slow Food Movement has vital virtues that include goals of preserving family farms, encouraging organic farming, and educating people about the risks of factory farming and low-diversity monocultures.

Giant factory farms for cattle, pigs, turkeys and chickens generate several times as much waste as our human population produces -- over 800 million tons of manure per year on 25,000 factory farms. This waste contaminates fresh water in streams and lakes, and causes other serious environmental problems. But agribusiness lobbyists, nonetheless, often succeed in foisting harms and sticking taxpayers with costs related to the pesticides they spray and pollution they create.

Another important issue is the preservation of crop diversity. It seems as if we should have learned a cautionary lesson concerning the risks associated with reductions in crop diversity and the over-reliance on crop monocultures from incidents like the potato blight that took place in Ireland in the late 1840s. A million people starved to death during this agricultural and social calamity, and countless others were forced to emigrate to the United States and other countries.

All is certainly NOT well with brutish capitalism and sycophantic governance and the incestuous relationship between them. I call for reforms of our systems of institutionalized bribery, lobbying, and unwise spending on pork barrel projects and earmarks. I also call for the end of the egregious *Free Lunch* that is given to hedge fund managers when they are allowed to make hundreds of millions of dollars a year without paying a fair share of taxes on them. Republicans in particular seem to be curiously incapable of setting aside self-interest and endorsing ultimately fair-minded ideas like these!

Chapter #47 - Particular Problems Associated with Corporatism.

The best policies require a principled balance between freedom and equality, and between protections of the public and unregulated capitalism. Freedom is the "magnetic true north" of humankind --- Yay for political freedom! But freedom is necessarily accompanied by responsibilities. This is the social compact upon which civilizations depend.

The social contract that empowers democratic governance requires that government be subject to reasonable limits, just as individuals must be. Good government should provide a maximum of human rights that are consistent with adequate order, true national security and legal justice. Personal liberties should be balanced with common sense responsibilities of citizens to agree to demonstrate golden-rule fairness toward others.

Freedom should not be merely hollow rhetoric that leaders use with ulterior motives and penchants to abuse power and engage in authoritarian repression and self-serving priorities. We should not allow our leaders to deprive us of the "unalienable rights" asserted in our Declaration of Independence. We should not allow politicians to make us less secure with unjust policies, or socially detrimental profiteering, or fiscally irresponsible initiatives, or military aggression. Freedoms should not be sacrificed to exaggerated fears, police state tactics, illegal intrusions on privacy, hard-line religious fundamentalists or other forms of tyranny, either overt or concealed.

The principal purposes of governments should be to establish order, protect individuals from external dangers, provide needed infrastructure, minimize abuses of power and privilege, and strive to provide fairness of education, opportunity, and legal justice. Vision, courage and civic fair-mindedness are

needed to create policies consistent with these principles. The common good should be the most important thing, and what those with money and power want should be given lower priority.

To be acceptable to human society, capitalism has required sensible rules, regulations and oversight ever since its beginnings. The power of capital is so far-reaching that monumental struggles have been required to mitigate the extent to which it harms workers, communities, children, poor people at home and in other countries, and the fundamental ecological underpinnings of all life.

Natural inequities in capitalist systems sparked labor movements that sprang up after the start of the Industrial Age to secure rights and protections for workers. These movements were historically necessary due to anti-competitive monopoly business practices, unsafe working conditions, harsh child labor, long work hours, gender and racial discrimination, sexual harassment, corrupt management, and the growth of overwhelming power exerted by corporate conglomerates. Other reform movements sprang up at various points in history, such as the muckraking and populist rebellions of the early 20th century and the great initiatives of the New Deal and the expanded civil rights, women's rights and environmental protection movements of the 1960s.

Rich and powerful people, however, love their power and privileges, so they invest heavily to fight such progress. Their bid to gain ascendancy achieved powerful impetus in 1980 when Ronald Reagan was elected President. Since then, laissez-faire crony capitalism has steadily increased its control. Sensible regulations and fairness doctrines have faced intense opposition. Workers have fallen behind as the power of capital has become increasingly domineering. Fraud, political corruption and practices that allow costs to be socialized have inflicted harm on workers, families and communities. The federal government has increased in size, and grown in bureaucratic and privacy-invading intrusiveness. Budget deficits have grown outlandishly, causing the U.S. to go from being the world's biggest creditor country to the biggest debtor.

Principled convictions that are concerned with the public good are needed, and should gain greater force. Ideological initiatives that are merely self-serving are not acceptable. Ronald Reagan and the Bush and Trump families found "supply side" economics to be conveniently convincing. Professor Arthur Laffer posited this ideology, infamously maintaining that tax breaks given to rich people will "trickle down" to the middle class and poor people. Since 1980, the fortunes of the rich have spiked dramatically upwards as a result of regressive tax breaks implemented in accordance with this Laffer dogma. But the vast majority of people have had stagnant, if any, real growth in their incomes and net worth. To have pushed through such tax policies, and coupled them with fiscally irresponsible deficit financing, is social madness. Should we not try "trickle up" policies for a change?

When Barack Obama was elected President, John R. Talbott wrote a book titled *Obamanomics: How Bottom-Up Economic Prosperity Will Replace Trickle-Down Economics*. He expressed the conviction that a healthier economic paradigm should be instituted. Someone must stand up for the little guy, as the astute but disgraced Presidential candidate John Edwards liked to say, citing his own Horatio Alger success story and the opportunities that allowed him to earn and accumulate a substantial fortune. The majority should stop voting for politicians who are eager to take risks to enable themselves and their friends to get money and power, when they do so by cheating, lying, unfairly rigging the system, abusing authority, harming our societies, and getting our nation into wars.

Trends toward greater inequality are reaching inauspicious extremes. One contributing factor is that corporations have abused their influence over the past 60 years by getting the government to reduce their share of America's tax burden. The Congressional Budget Office reported some years ago that

corporations are paying 60% less than the share of federal revenues they paid in 1960. Big businesses have managed to achieve this goal by using the influence of a phalanx of well-paid lobbyists who help enable them to grab a variety of special privileges for themselves and their shareholders. These include tax loopholes, direct subsidies, accelerated depreciation perks, the ability to exploit offshore tax shelters, and the torpedoing of many common good regulations.

Since the *Citizen's United* ruling by the Supreme Court that allowed corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money on elections, these entities have been exerting greater power to choose our elected representatives, so the pressure for unaffordable corporate goals like lower taxes will be difficult to resist in future national decision-making. How will we run our society when the only segments of society that can afford to pay more taxes -- rich people and big corporations -- have too much power to decide who gets elected, and too much influence on determining national policies?

It is clear that we should reduce deficit spending driven by such wrong-headed goals. One of the best ways to achieve this would be to make our tax system more steeply graduated for both individuals and businesses. This would shift the burden of taxation from people who can ill-afford taxes, and all taxpayers in the future, to those who can easily afford it. This plan would ensure that those who prosper most under the current system would help maintain it and assure the greater good of our nation. This would be a smarter and fairer way to finance our civilization than relying so much on property taxes, income and payroll taxes paid by working people, and on borrowing heavily.

In a very real sense, Reaganomics has benefited investors but distorted supply/demand equations by reducing the amount of corporate taxes. I call for bold tax reform to help remedy the current debt-financing expediencies. We need good leaders who have the political will to undertake such reforms. They must become statesmen who effectively communicate the need for policy initiatives designed to be fairer, more honest and more likely to be propitious to the greater good, now and in the future.

Chapter #48 - The Best Political Philosophy.

The best political philosophy would be moderate fiscal conservatism coupled with socially progressive stances. In contrast, it seems almost irrefutable that one of the worst political outcomes would be to have leaders who are fiscally irresponsible and socially regressive. Yet Republicans bizarrely channel the latter propensities, as if these ways of acting represent some sort of God-approved rectitude.

Backward-looking policies are being discredited, and must be rejected. Humanity is engaged in an evolutionary dance of survival in which our human rights and capabilities are increasing, and so are our responsibilities and culpabilities. We can -- and we should -- restructure our economic and political systems to deal more effectively with the challenges facing us.

Free markets are widely assumed to be the best means of fairly and efficiently satisfying the needs of producers and consumers. Some say that free markets are the best way to further prosperity and the common good. But this would be true only if markets are fair and tempered in the public interest. Free market advocates treat laissez-faire capitalism as if it is perfect and infallible, almost like a religion, yet they tend to look the other way when special interests distort or corrupt free markets.

I say, let's try markets that are really free! Let's make markets free from monopoly abuses, free from deceptive practices, free from powerful manipulators who oppose reform and progress, free from unfair domination by vested interest groups, free from grotesquely misleading advertising, free from fraud and bribery, and free from excessive abuses of power. Let's free markets from greed-driven profiteering on wars, and from extravagant earmarks and other overly wasteful appropriations.

Let's free markets from harms caused by giant corporations that cheat the public to make bigger profits instead of improving their products or production methods. Let's free them from corporate welfare and subsidies that perpetuate inefficient, exploitive and polluting industries. Let's free them from tax avoidance schemes like offshore incorporation and tax evasion scams.

The global economic marketplace, as constituted today, allows freedom to the wealthiest people to make as much money as they can, regardless of the impact they have on the underlying health of our communities and supporting ecosystems. Capital is triumphing with obscene one-sidedness in its long-fought struggle with labor, but neither capital nor labor has intrinsic nobility, and a better balance and greater respect for working people should be assured, so that we can achieve greater fairness, justice, broadened prosperity, stability, sanity and wholesomeness in our communities.

Longer work hours allow workers to produce more, but long hours have not proved to be wonderful for workers, who have been squeezed instead of rewarded in the last 40 years while CEOs and investors have made significant gains. A paper published by the Center for Economic and Policy Research indicated that shorter work hours could significantly reduce energy consumption and enrich people's life experiences with greater potential fulfillment. The average American already works about 30% more hours than the average German -- an estimated 500 hours more each year. Overwork often contributes to increased stress and frustration, as well as to over-consumption and increases in pollution. We could devise ways "to kill several birds with one stone" here, methinks!

The profit motive is a powerful driving force in capitalist economies, yet it is simultaneously a serious weakness. Profit-making is swell as a driving motivation, but without proper guidance and regulation it can also be unacceptably irresponsible in social and environmental terms. Profiteering can be ruthlessly undisciplined and amoral, and it encourages selfish shortsightedness in exploiting workers and depleting resources.

Capitalism can also be a powerful creative force that can prove to be outstanding at sparking innovations. But it can also be a dangerous and destructive force. Since the real bottom line of global economic activity is that it must become fairer and more sustainable, fair trade is a better idea than currently constituted "free trade" in international marketplaces.

Capitalism contains the seeds of its own transformation -- and the time has come for us to nurture these seeds. Instead of investing in the 'manure' of oligarchic partisanship and domination, we should be 'composting' our ideas in a powerful ferment of sensible and far-sighted initiatives. Just as a rocket must jettison its booster stages as they run out of fuel, capitalism must jettison the worst of its shortcomings, and begin to move forward to a future cognizant of overarching priorities.

Chapter #49 - Clean Money Campaigns and a Healthier Democracy.

Myriad are the difficulties of effecting positive change and social transformation
 And inadequate is our awareness of the urgency with which they are needed.
 Obstacles are daunting, with powerful forces arrayed against intelligent reform
 But the risks to fairness, justice and civilization will mount until they are heeded.

Special Interests and self-centered motivations drive our society's demands
 And our perspective is rather myopic, with short-term thinking dominantly in vogue
 Yet the need for more far-sighted vision grows greater and greater, day by day
 And business-as-usual for vested interests becomes ever more irresponsibly rogue.

Our political system encourages extreme partisanship in policy-making by giving lobbyists easy access to the inner sanctums of power and allowing them to exert overweening influence once inside these supposed bastions of democracy. As a result, our federal and state governments are not adequately accountable to the people. Government regulation of banks and big businesses has grown pathetically lax in recent years. Our American democracy is being damaged by the proliferation of ethical conflicts, influence peddling, institutional bribery, favoritism for the rich, political extremism, and outright fraud and public corruption. The interests of workers, small businesses, women, children, minorities, and people in future generations are particularly poorly represented.

We should demand that our representatives and leaders act in the best interests of the general well-being, and not so exclusively in the interests of rich people, giant corporations, right-wing extremists and religious fundamentalists.

The great American journalist and political commentator Bill Moyers once succinctly stated an important truth: "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."

There is no doubt that wealthy campaign donors have much more influence in determining public policy than regular citizens. The influence of Big Money harms the integrity and any honorable intentions of our representatives and leaders, and it sidetracks optimal planning and fairness. It forces politicians to spend too much time and energy raising money instead of really listening to all the people they are supposed to be representing.

NOTE THIS: A positive political remedy is available. Politicians can be made to be more responsible to their constituents, and our representatives can be made to better represent government for the people. This can be achieved by providing public financing of election campaigns and implementing FAIR ELECTION legislation and 'clean money initiatives'.

Publicly-financed campaigns increase competitiveness and minority participation, and create greater fairness in contests for state legislatures and governorships. In states including Arizona and Maine, Clean Money initiatives have shown such positive outcomes. Activist Peter Coyote once pointed out, "There is nothing more important to a fully functioning democracy than having the people fund the electoral process."

Public campaign financing would be ultimately far less expensive than our current system of corrupt influence peddling. It is clear why this is so: lobbyists currently gain hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars in subsidies, tax breaks, relaxed regulations and no-bid contracts in return for mere millions of dollars "invested" in campaign contributions. This is a huge bonanza for billionaires and giant corporations and their shareholders, but an extremely poor deal for the general public.

The organization Americans for Campaign Reform once estimated it would cost about \$2 billion in public financing for federal campaigns, compared to the estimated \$100 billion in costs annually that taxpayers incur for subsidies and perks given to corporations and large donor entities. These are some of the compellingly good reasons that Clean Money initiatives should be implemented in all election contests.

We have spent trillions of dollars to allegedly help create democracies in far-off countries like Iraq and Afghanistan. It would make much more sense to invest this money in nation-building at home. As

David Sirota says in *Hostile Takeover: How Big Money and Corruption Conquered Our Government - and How We Take It Back*: "We should at least be willing to invest a fraction of that at home to make sure our own democracy starts working properly."

When large majorities of people feel they have no real voice or power in government, they often disengage from political processes and civic life. This tends to clear the field to connivers who rig the system ever more favorably (nefariously) to their own interests at the expense of the public.

There is a good solution. As explained in a July 9, 2023 article titled *For everyday citizens to save democracy, it'll be expensive*, a small slice of the billions of dollars that are spent on elections and electioneering (like a proposed 5%) should be set aside to be utilized in Democratic Action Funds that support citizens' assemblies empowered to help make policy reforms, inform government decision-making and implement a range of positive democracy innovations.

Chapter #50 - Waste Not, Want Not!

We currently live in a culture of waste. Even more dramatically than we are consumers of goods, we are producers of waste. The average American produces more than 1,600 pounds of garbage each year, and increasing amounts of electronic devices trash, and we produce emissions of carbon dioxide of something like 20 tons annually per person. We use natural resources, fresh water, electricity and fossil fuels in unnecessarily profligate ways. Cities worldwide shine brightly all night long, steadily using up non-renewable energy resources stored for eons in the form of fossil fuels.

It is a false prosperity that relies on wasteful consumption and the production of large quantities of wastes, toxins and greenhouse gas emissions. This is why a rapid greening of business is necessary worldwide. Our actions should become earnest and honest, not just gimmicky pretenses of being a bit greener. A study of "green" products in big box stores has found that almost every single one was marketed with false or misleading claims.

Researchers from an organization named TerraChoice Environmental Marketing called out products for committing the "Six Sins of Greenwashing": (1) a hidden tradeoff (i.e., toxin-loaded electronics touting their energy efficiency); (2) no certifiable verification of green claims; (3) flat-out lying about certification; (4) vagueness (i.e., products that are claimed to be "all natural", but contain hazardous substances that occur naturally); (5) irrelevance (i.e., products claiming to be CFC-free even though CFCs have been banned for years; or (6) a lesser-of-two-evils situation (i.e., organic cigarettes). Let's start the rapid greening soon, and make sure its true!

Better ways to operate organizations are numerous -- ways that are more salubrious for society as a whole in the long run. NOW is the time to begin to advance ideas and means of making businesses and governments more environmentally sound, and -- duh! -- more sustainable!

Real prosperity is not just some narrow, materialistic, profit-producing activity. It is, instead, a wholesome condition that includes physical well-being, healthy connectedness, the common good, positive human relations, personal fulfillment, and deeper spiritual connectedness. Practical and far-sighted initiatives are needed to create a better quality in the lives of the vast majority.

To make our societies fairer, safer and saner, creative individuals are needed who are capable of broadminded and effective responses to new situations -- which is the most authentic kind of adaptive intelligence. And people are needed who have clarity of mind and energy of will -- which are good characteristics that often typify people who are regarded as geniuses.

The generations of people alive today are likely to be the last ones to be able to ignore the constraints of resource scarcities. Food, fresh water, fossil fuels and other vital minerals will become scarcer as the twenty-first century slides past, making it ever more urgently clear that the paradigm of endless growth in consumption and population is not maintainable. Why, even "light pollution" is proliferating, diminishing our experienced well-being by making the night skies invisible to hundreds of millions of people, and "sound pollution" bedevils many increasingly jittery folks.

Gifford Pinchot, who Theodore Roosevelt appointed in 1905 to be the first Director of the newly-created U.S. Forest Service, referred to CONSERVATION as "the greatest good to the greatest number of people for the longest period of time". Supposedly conservative leaders in the U.S. seem to have become power-obsessed fanatics who oppose conservation because they are pandering to special interest groups that want short-term benefits at the expense of the public good, so they are, in effect, opposed to a fairer legacy for future generations. This is surely a pathological perversion of truly conservative ways of being.

"Koyaanisqatsi" is a word that means "life out of balance" in the language of the Hopi tribes of Native Americans in the Southwest. This concept naturally implies that we are called to new ways of living on our precious home planet. Let's find these new ways of living!

Chapter #51 - Clarifying Rational Ends.

Art should beneficially serve society. Artists can sometimes be effective in helping change society, and they are consequently sometimes repressed by those who oppose change. Sad, but true. Musicians in particular have had great positive impact, as they did in 1971, as told in the excellent Apple TV+ docuseries *1971: The Year That Music Changed Everything*.

Poetry sometimes evokes chords of deeper truth, so I will recite two more stanzas of a reflective Ode:

Let us clarify the rational ends that humanity should be pursuing
 And the ethical and moral principles that should govern our choices
 Let us strive to make our societies sustainable, and better places for us all
 Recognizing what is truly important, and boldly lending these priorities our voices.

Please join me in this exploration of provocative thoughts and Big Picture ideas
 And grapple with me in seeking truth and larger perspective in all our concerns.
 Let us understand our societies, our motivations, and our responsibilities in a broad context
 Acknowledging the actions that are best for our well-being and future, as the world turns.

The human race would be much better off if we more passionately promoted good ideas and smart planning, and resource conservation, and much fairer social priorities. To succeed at this, it will be necessary to promote progressive social programs and to moderate consumerism, and to resist the hawks who militate for aggression in warfare.

"I think, therefore I am", said Descartes --- or at least so he thought. Who cares?! Let us apply philosophical understandings to important concerns rather than to absurd epistemological conundrums. Thanks for giving consideration to these ideas. I find provocative merit in Mark Twain's curious and wryly amusing observation: "Nothing so needs reforming as other people's habits." Ha!

Chapter #52 - So Many Choices, and So Hard to Make the Right Ones!

The 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."

Wow! Our ability to freely make choices that are independent of our genetic drives, our hormones, and the influences of our social conditioning is distinctly limited. Hmmm ...

The 18th century Scottish philosopher David Hume called the question of whether we have free will "the most contentious question of metaphysics." A complex web of influences affects the choices each of us makes every day. These influences include our basic human drives and our upbringing, role models, circumstances, social attitudes, personal experiences, peer pressures, advertising-stimulated needs, moods, the enticement of incentives, and the influences of television, talk radio, the Internet, and social media. For all practical purposes, however, it is important for us to act as if each individual has free will. Of course we all crave the right to do as we like --- Yay for freedom! We like to do what we want, and to do so with a minimum of restrictions, inconveniences or discipline. But there is one overarching issue: our actions should take place in a context of wider social responsibility.

The values of 1960s and 1970s bohemian counterculture have been co-opted and merged with values of the bourgeois mainstream. Cultural freedoms have melded with economic and political freedoms in a fascinating hodgepodge, so counterculture idealism seems to have been largely incorporated into mainstream materialism. This has happened without adequate respect for the true ideals of free-thinking existentialism, non-conformity, loving kindness, alternate lifestyles, honest communication, mutual respect, positive connectedness, live-and-let-live tolerance, and spiritual understandings.

San Francisco celebrated the 50th anniversary of its famed Summer of Love in 2017. The utopian idealism of those days seems to belong to a bygone era, a time when people honestly and fervently believed in love and accepting others and live-and-let-live attitudes and the freedom to "do-your-own-thing". Yet an unpopular war and deep disaffection afflicted the American people profoundly in 1967, just as similar influences do again today. A 'Human Be-In' took place in January 1967 that was a coming together of thousands of folks looking for a more meaningful way of life than materialism and anxious conformity. The music of 1967 was highlighted by the Beatles' *Sargeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and by albums by dozens of other rock-and-roll groups who sang about innocence, idealism, urban unrest and the disenfranchisement of youth.

Today, within a context of remarkable philosophical questioning, we are faced with global trends that are converging on potential catastrophe. There is a strong probability of a "long emergency" as we encounter the limits of resource consumption and the restricting parameters of the carrying capacity of the Earth for our proliferating kind. To cope successfully with these challenges, it will be necessary for us to start looking at issues from much more holistic and longer-term perspectives. Once again my prescription holds: we need to act boldly to change our national policies so that they will ensure humanity will enjoy better chances of achieving a more fortuitous fate.

Do not suppose that these words about converging catastrophe are some apocalyptic, Doomsday-oriented, Rapture-mad End Times prophecy of tribulation and disaster. They are not some revelation of anticipated Armageddon or pending nuclear war, or terrorist holocaust, or exaggerated vision of impending pestilence, dangerous zealotry, or the triumph of darkness and evil. And they are not the pessimistic view of a cynic projected onto an optimism-justified world, like a surreal bad dream or perverse revelation of some sort of Cubist art based on bizarre existential Rorschach Inkblot tests.

No, these are cautionary words. We are not ostriches, so we should not be figuratively burying our heads in the sand. We must question our assumptions. We should elect leaders with integrity whose interests are not inimically aligned with the domination of society, and with profit-making at the public expense, with ignoring the best interests of citizens, or with abusing power in unjust and undemocratic ways. To the maximum extent we are able, we need to create new conditions in our societies in which our collective choices result in an aggregate of significantly more responsible and sustainable activities.

Chapter #53 - The Causes of Problems, and Some Solutions.

The principal causes of the intractable problems we face are these:

- (1) businesses and governments work together to compulsively stimulate growth in the consumption of goods without regard for the need to conserve finite reserves of resources;
- (2) vested interests and lobbyists detrimentally dominate law-making and decision-making, advancing policies that are short-term oriented and contrary to better plans;
- (3) capitalism is engaged in extreme ruthlessness of competition and its ultimate expression -- warfare -- to the exclusion of an adequate amount of fair, intelligent and peaceable cooperation; and,
- (4) our dominant institutions exacerbate these problems by opposing family planning and birth control programs, and thus ensure continued population growth that will increase demands on resources and natural ecosystems, and inevitably intensify conflicts over them.

How can we significantly reduce waste and profligate spending and deficit financing? How can we eliminate political mismanagement, corruption, cronyism, short-term-oriented policies, and abuses of power? New legislation should be enacted to make our use of resources more efficient and oriented toward conservation. Bigger investments should be made in infrastructure, urban improvements and public transportation -- in SMART GROWTH. One salubrious means of achieving these goals would be by reducing the detrimental and unfair influence of vested interests in our government by instituting Clean Money initiatives, as discussed in Chapter #49 above.

Heavy ecological footprints should be made lighter. Suburban sprawl should be contained, and limited. Progressively steeper "green taxes" should be levied on large new homes -- for instance, ones that exceed 3,000 square feet in size. Conservation and efficiency of energy and water use should be emphasized for all new and remodeled buildings. Huge "McMansions" and "starter castles" should be subject to luxury taxes that would be used to offset pollution and depletion costs associated with their extravagant usages of natural resources. The proceeds of these taxes should be used to create more affordable housing and robust urban renewal, and to help deal with problems of homelessness.

We should also change water-use habits to address the fresh water crisis that is growing in many nations. Bold water conservation measures should be introduced. Supplies of clean water should be protected by reducing contamination and waste. Aging water infrastructure systems should be better maintained. Conservation of fresh water in household and industrial processes should be strongly incentivized. Water pricing plans should be changed to make them more sensible and conservation oriented. Public water policies should be modified to better manage water resources for urban, rural and agricultural uses. Fresh water for river habitats and other natural ecosystems should be included in this equation. And the unsustainable rate of depletion of aquifers should be reduced.

We should also strive to achieve energy independence from our addiction to the use of fossil fuels. To kick the oil habit we should adopt the Apollo Alliance's "Ten-Point Plan for Good Jobs and Energy

Independence". This plan would be a vast improvement over the business-as-usual of shortsighted policies in our current energy regime. We would achieve collateral benefits by gaining a greater degree of independence from fossil fuels as business opportunities related to global energy modernization and greening would increase. This would enhance our national security.

Another way to champion greater prudence in our collective activities would be to invest more wisely in the future by creating better schools and more universally affordable public education. The curricula in our schools should be designed to be more interesting and engaging, emphasizing critical thinking skills, creative problem solving and flexible thinking. Civics, ethical decision-making and ecological values should be more thoroughly studied and taught. Children should not be left behind by having results be oriented around short-term memorization skills and testing.

Young people should be encouraged to get involved in music, theatre, reading and athletic activities because these pursuits have positive impacts on the confidence and development of participating youth. Athletic competition can teach healthy values that are propitious in the workplace and in personal life -- values like teamwork, leadership, the ability to make decisions under pressure, and shared commitment. Such competition also helps teach discipline, balance, time management, mental toughness and focus.

A bold effort should be made to improve public education by reforming the "No Child Left Behind" law. Some say this law was nothing more than a cynical plan to damage public education, and to make it necessary for people to choose private schools paid for by taxpayer vouchers rather than improved public schools. In any case, investing in better public education and facilities in all school districts is a good idea!

Implementing affirmative actions to improve our lives and our societies is a smart plan. A more extensive outline of such ideas is included in the *Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity*. Let these be the principal principles of a powerful new Sustainability Revolution!

Chapter #54 - The Failings of Congress.

"We have the best government that money can buy."

--- Mark Twain

Under our present system, over 90% of incumbent politicians in the U.S. House of Representatives generally win re-election, and almost as high a rate in the Senate, despite very low public approval ratings for Congress. This fact is assuredly NOT because Congress is doing a good job. It is actually doing a lousy job for the majority of Americans. In many ways, we really do have a "culture of corruption" in our nation's capitol. Our representatives are perpetuating a deep-seated systemic failure to protect people from those who seek unfair privileges, unsustainable benefits, and expanded opportunities to profit from corporate shenanigans, disaster reconstruction, wars and the like.

Congress has basically been misleading and defrauding citizens. New laws frequently benefit big corporations and small elites at the expense of workers, women, children, students, blacks, Latinos, gays, immigrants, poor people, and the vast majority of people abroad, as well as everyone who breathes air, and all people in future generations. A loud raspberry for this -- frankly, I'm disgusted, Representatives and Senators!

Congress all too often advances misguided priorities and retrogressive policies. It has performed badly, and spent money like a drunken sailor, and failed to balance revenues with spending. It has

been unable to move us in the direction of independence from our addiction to fossil fuels. It has allowed dramatic increases in social inequities. It has shown little concern for future generations.

Congress gave its members 8 raises between 1997 and 2006, but it refused to increase the minimum wage during that period. Since 2012, members of Congress have earned an average of \$174,000. The minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour has not been increased in 14 years (since July 2009), and is equivalent of about \$15,000 a year for full time work. This is the longest time the minimum wage has stayed flat since the nation first implemented a minimum wage law during the *Great Depression*. Note that inflation steadily erodes the purchasing power of the minimum wage as the years pass, so the minimum wage has lost more than 25% of its purchasing power since 2009.

So the minimum wage should be increased in 2023, and should be indexed automatically to keep pace with inflation. Full-time work should be rewarded with livable pay! "The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour would give a pay raise to as many as 27 million workers, or one-sixth of the U.S. labor force."

Back in August 2006, Congress tried to pass a first increase in the minimum wage in 10 years, but the Senate defeated a plan that would have raised it because Republicans had outrageously agreed to the action *ONLY* if it were coupled with a major reduction in estate taxes. "A raise in the minimum wage that would have benefited more than 7 million low-income people, at no cost to taxpayers, was thereby rejected on its own merits, and would have been enacted only if the heirs of the richest 7,500 Americans were given a tax break that would have cost an estimated \$750 billion over the following decade."

This stance seems as cynical as hell, goodness knows! It is a sad reflection on Republican political opportunism. The egregiousness of this anti-egalitarian failure was blatant, especially in light of the many gargantuan tax breaks given to rich people while *George W. Bush* was in office. When enough Republicans facing reelection realized the starkly anti-populist import of this pandering to rich people, a modest increase in the minimum wage was finally approved in 2007.

The litany of Congressional shortcomings in our political duopoly is long. Congress has failed to make broad reforms in the basic causes of inflation and unfairness in our healthcare system. It has failed to reform the Social Security system and Medicare to make them more fiscally sound. It has failed to protect people from natural disasters like the levee breaches caused by Hurricane Katrina. And it has failed to invest adequate amounts in schools, roads, bridges, public transportation, water systems, levees, sewage systems, and most facets of the physical infrastructure in the United States. This is why the American Society of Engineers 2013 Report Card for America's Infrastructure gave a "D+" grade. And in its 2021 Report Card, it was still a pathetic C-. NOT GOOD ENOUGH!!!

Congress has also evaded its responsibility of safeguarding public assets and spending taxpayer's money wisely. It is making almost no efforts to reduce the speed at which we are depleting non-renewable resources, and it is failing to adequately protect natural wetlands, National Parks, National Forests, Bureau of Land Management lands, wilderness areas, and wildlife refuges.

Our national representatives also presided over one of the worst diplomatic failures in history by parlaying worldwide sympathy in the wake of the 9/11 attacks into increased injustice, suspicion, fear, hate, anger, religious conflict and warfare with its foreign military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The reason Congress has failed us is largely because -- surprise! -- it is so busy pandering to narrow constituencies. Little lobbying reform has been done and it has generally been "sound and fury" rather than any real change in ethics or pragmatic concern for the common good. Not only is serious lobbying reform needed, but also real reform of Congressional procedures and ethics. The revolving door that launches politicians into extremely lucrative lobbying jobs should be restricted. It is time to find better ways to prevent our system from emphasizing wrong-headed priorities and encouraging Big Money influence, unfair privileges, and an astonishing lack of transparency, accountability, integrity, and commitment to the general welfare of the people.

An Office of Public Integrity should be created to help alter this aspect of the status quo. Another good idea would be to establish federal Civil Grand Juries that would be independent from Congress and the White House, and give them responsibility for identifying good ideas to improve government. And, in addition to changing our political system through initiatives like Clean Money public campaign financing, let's choose to elect more responsible leaders every time we vote!

Jonathan Swift, in *Gulliver's Travels*, provides provocative cause for concern with his witticism: "They (the Lilliputians) look upon fraud as a greater crime than theft, and therefore seldom fail to punish it with death (!); for they allege that care and vigilance, with a very common understanding, may preserve a man's goods from thieves; but honesty has no fence against superior cunning; and since it is necessary that there should be a perpetual intercourse of buying and selling, and dealing upon credit, where fraud is permitted or connived at, or hath no Law to punish it, the honest dealer is always undone and the knave gets the advantage."

Chapter #55 - Advocating a Better World.

Good ideas are needed. Perhaps all breakthroughs in human thinking evolve because a necessity for them becomes so forcefully apparent in society. Dynamic ideas tend to automatically manifest themselves at the necessary time (or soon thereafter). This naturally emboldens action. Eventually, sensible leadership follows -- in a reasonably fair democracy. This is an excellent reason to strongly defend our democracy, and to help prevent the U.S. from becoming a more autocratic country. See my incisive July 2023 essay online, *Democracy, and the Problematic and Pathological Perils of "Electoral Autocracies"*.

A positive larger vision is needed that is broad-minded and widely appealing in order to create a sustainable movement. My hope is that this Manifesto will help enlarge understanding and instigate action to advance sustainable movements focused on fostering the greater good.

As entertaining author Tom Robbins once wrote, "*A better world has gotta start somewhere. Why not with you and me?*" Complacency and apathy play into the hands of those who assertively seek power and control, so it's up to us to act.

This document is partially a portrait in ideas. Serious issues are discussed in the remainder of this epistle, so I should not dally here. But let me quote the cover page of the original *Earth Manifesto* (my October 2004 on-line publication) as a kind of gentle and expansive disclaimer:

"Life can be a rich and miraculously wonderful adventure, and the natural world outdoors can be experienced as a marvelously beautiful place. Note that Odes to this beauty and to the potentially lovely mysteriousness and spiritual wonder of existence are in short supply herein. So are verses celebrating the extensive and extraordinary triumph of human understandings, of exalted accomplishments, of the astonishingly diverse nature of creativity, and of the ineffable heights of

noble feelings. And little is included of the great appreciation the author has for the great good fortune that is enjoyed living in the United States, a country that is still blessed with somewhat wide freedoms of expression and choice, with great opportunities, with rich public lands, and with great amounts of natural resources. These things have largely been left out, principally to provide a sharper focus to the critically important ideas explored in these pages --- but please be well assured that they are hereby emphatically acknowledged as being included in underlying intention."

Chapter #56 - My Simple Dream.

Hope is a powerful force. It is psychologically valuable to look at life from a perspective that the proverbial glass is half-full, rather than being half-empty. Yet it is becoming apparent that there are defects in the glass, and many people are chipping away at the vessel.

It is better for us to err audaciously on the side of hope than in favor of despair
 Though, admittedly, optimism is presumptuous in our current challenging day
 And the stakes of sticking with the Status Quo can be seen to be prohibitively high
 So we should resolutely set our sights on a sustainable future, and boldly enter the fray.

Psychologists tell us that hope and optimism are good for our mental and physical health. A positive attitude is its own reward, yet it is also valuable to be realistic and pragmatic about important issues at the same time. There is great recompense in having positive enthusiasm in life, and a generosity of spirit, and a passionate caring about crucial causes.

I have a Grand Vision. Martin Luther King would have called it a dream. It is an achievable one, but it requires a shift in dominant modes of thinking, an openness to alternate perceptions of reality, and a dedication to positive action and courageous reform. In short, my vision is this: we should strive confidently to make the world a better place for people in our communities, our societies, and our species as a whole. We should act to mitigate the extent to which we harm the hopes of people in future generations to lead healthy and prosperous lives. In these purposes, we could find a sense of positive meaning and more authentic self-gratification, and leave a more humanitarian legacy.

Let's choose a bright world where we build strategic alliances to cope effectively with the challenges that face us, and make sweeping changes in policies that affect social justice, healthier economies, more stable climatic conditions, the mitigation of poverty, and international peace. There is good cause for hope, and there are achievable strategies that could be undertaken to dramatically improve the world. Read on for further insight into these ideas.

We are at the pinnacle of civilization, and we are protagonists on the stage, where: "It's still the same old story, A fight for love and glory" ... as time goes by.

Chapter #57 - Ideals and Reality.

The United States represents marvelous ideals to the rest of the world: ideals of freedom, fairness, Constitutional democracy, expansive opportunities, self-determination and the advocacy of protected human rights. But there are stunning contradictions between these ideals and our actual deeds. As renowned Pulitzer Prize-winning Berkeley history professor Leon Litwack once said, history is messy; many of our Founding Fathers, after all, were slave-owning champions of liberty and equality!

The rhetoric of our political representatives is often betrayed by their actions. Our domestic and foreign policies are beset by distinct foibles in real world practice: injustices are perpetrated and inequalities are stoked, private enterprise is not regulated effectively enough, foreign countries are attacked to achieve questionable goals, and the environment is not adequately protected. We act as a

rogue nation when the "authority juggernaut" of our federal government intervenes aggressively in the affairs of other nations and drops bombs on people. Too many of our national actions are oriented toward building an American empire, even though this is the antithesis of our Founders' ideals. We support harsh dictatorships like the one in Saudi Arabia. We invest heavily in covert spying activities, and sometimes punish prisoners harshly, as when the CIA used extrajudicial "extraordinary renditions" of suspected criminals to other countries where they were tortured during George W. Bush's presidency. On occasion we act as an 'outlaw state', not enough constrained by international law.

Perhaps it is not so surprising that our national policies are characterized by hypocrisy, deception, chicanery, and superpower aggression. After all, greed, heartlessness and selfishness are among the ideological foundations of unfettered capitalism. We should, nonetheless, rightly oppose such blatant contradictions, and begin to seriously reform our system.

Niccolo Machiavelli was an Italian political theorist who advised that rulers should subordinate moral principles to political goals. He famously gave this advice in *The Prince*, a book he wrote in the year 1513. He advised rulers to gain and retain power by using cunning, deceit and ruthlessness. This is good advice for despots and brutal control freaks, but frequently results in detrimental outcomes for the common people. The heart of the matter, the bottom line as it were, is that today we need leaders who are committed to far-sighted constructive goals and noble principles and the advancement of the general good. Success through conniving cleverness and manipulative power-mongering in the service of narrow interests or self-aggrandizement is objectionably anti-democratic.

A "juggernaut" has the figurative sense of blind devotion or merciless sacrifice to some force or power. The original meaning of a Juggernaut was derived from the Hindu deity Krishna whose idol is carried on huge wagons during annual processions in India. Legend has it that the wagon crushed worshippers who threw themselves under it. Knowing that religious fanatics sometimes flagellate themselves with whips makes a legend like this seem quite plausible!

Be that as it may, it is human nature for a crisis to be necessary before an individual opens up to alternative ways of looking at things. Sometimes a crisis is required to precipitates change, like an injurious accident, a disease, a culmination of harmful addictive behaviors, a job loss, or a calamitous 'relationship conflict'. Such a crisis can cause us to broaden and deepen our perspective, and force us to reexamine our lives, beliefs or actions. A crisis can thus become a springboard to making significant behavioral changes. Born again!

We are now collectively facing a "Catch-22" of our own natures with regard to the way we confront change. Disasters like 9/11 or the impacts of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans, or of Superstorm Sandy on the East Coast, or oppressive heat waves that prove fatal, are often needed to provide a catalyst to provoke us into rethinking our ways of acting and behaving, and thus goad us into making remedial changes. The Catch-22 is that the best way to avoid or mitigate such calamitous crises in the first place is to plan ahead with better foresight, and to proactively make smart changes in our business and government institutions and our societies to avoid calamities or mitigate the severity of their potential impacts.

The best way to avoid negative outcomes is to plan ahead, think critically and heed precautionary ideas. We would be wise to look with fresh eyes at causes of conflicts and dysfunctional behaviors and wrong-headed priorities. We should try to gain bigger picture perspectives in understanding what drives problems like poverty and injustices that are at the root of harm-causing revolutionary movements -- and terrorism and suicide bombings.

Above all, we should cultivate better understandings of economic, social, psychological and religious elements that drive aggressive militarism. We need better leadership and more honorable foreign policy, not politicians obsessed with power, authority, domineering control, religious fundamentalism, or Machiavellian mercilessness in the pursuit of self-serving objectives. The following chapters deal with these issues, as does my essay *Reflections on War - and Peace*.

Chapter #58 - Sensible Strategies.

It is essential for us to find better ways to defuse conflicts and reduce antagonisms between peoples. The so-called "war on terror" has been a battle that pits a coalition of political leaders against a relatively small number of extremists. This battle should not be allowed to escalate into an unaffordably costly worldwide conflict between cultures and religions. It also should not be allowed to radically distort proper national priorities.

In the name of national security, the world's powerful nations are undermining human rights and draining resources and attention from more crucial issues that afflict billions of people around the globe. A report released by Amnesty International in 2006 indicated that "Governments collectively and individually paralyzed international institutions and squandered public resources in pursuit of narrow security interests, and sacrificed principles in the name of the 'war on terror', and turned a blind eye to massive human rights abuses."

The Amnesty International report added, "When the powerful are too arrogant to review and reassess their strategies, the heaviest price is paid by the poor and powerless."

Fears, insecurities, and nationalistic impulses tend to distract our attention from bigger picture perspectives. Peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance are critically important goals and values, so we should not allow our energies, money and resources to be diverted away from initiatives designed to prevent war, strife, poverty and humanitarian crises. Strife between competing Christian and Muslim fundamentalists, in particular, should not be allowed to undermine the security, stability, and well-being of civilizations in either the West or the Middle East or Asia. Geopolitics must not be allowed to devolve into a win/lose or lose/lose battle between opposing sides who cry out, "Our-God-Is-Better-Than-Your-God!" Or, "Our God is absolute truth, and yours is false and evil."

"Wrong not, and you will not be wronged."

--- The Quran

The tendency to claim God as an ally for partisan causes is the source of much conflict. Islamic extremism is a threat to international peace and security, and so is far right religious orthodoxy here at home. Both pose significant threats to freedom, democracy, fairness and peace. A rigidly intolerant "Taliban-wing" exists in both Islam and Christianity, and people everywhere should work together to marginalize such extremists.

Chapter #59 - The Conjunction of Idealism and Pragmatism.

Some say it is abundantly clear that the dominant economic and political powers in the world today are working overtime to circumvent initiatives that would help solve world problems. The powers-that-be do this primarily to gain and maintain power, control and supremacy, and to give benefits to rich people and their cronies and enablers by doling out special favors and undeserved privileges.

We should reform our national and international institutions. We CAN change the world. There is no doubt about it. We DO change the world. We have impacts that cause change, either for the better

or for the worse. From my point of view, there is no question that those in power in the United States too frequently act to change things for the worse for the majority of people in the world.

We should curtail the power and greed of business leaders and politicians. Aggressive abuses of power are wrong because they violate fairness principles. Policies should be established that are more independent from doctrinaire interests. Stubbornness does not reflect good judgment, and excessive rigidity is not reasonable. Old paradigms, closed-minded dogmas, abuses of authority, and bitter loyalty to failing doctrines should be abandoned in favor of more reasonable and far-sighted choices.

Positive economic, social and political change must be effected to make the world a safer, saner and more livable place. Let us treat these ideas as a new gospel -- one that establishes a proper balance between honorable statesmanship, idealism, pragmatism, humanism, rationality, incisive understanding, and genuine spirituality.

Chapter #60 - Seductive Sirens.

Siren, n. - Figuratively, any lady of splendid promise, dissembled purpose and disappointing performance. (Ha! -- This is Ambrose Bierce's satirical definition in *The Devil's Dictionary*.)

The Sirens of Homer's *Odyssey* were enchantresses whose honeyed and haunting voices bewitched mariners and lured them to destruction on their Mediterranean island. My fellow Americans, and all inhabitants on Earth, I submit that we must find ways to resist the alluring temptation of modern-day sirens whose beguiling voices lure us with deceptive guile and encourage us to accept wasteful, unfair, fiscally irresponsible, environmentally destructive and myopic ways.

These voices are urging us to oppose progressive change at a time when the most rational long-term understandings clearly support bold actions to transform our societies into ones that are fairer, more likely sustainable, and more conducive to peaceful coexistence. So-called conservatives in our society foolishly support doctrines that promote, rationalize, and defend the misguided status quo, and they oppose change, or even worse, doggedly strive to roll back the progressive accomplishments achieved since the Depression of the 1930s.

Far-sighted planning should be used to address problems while good solutions are still manageable. It is dangerously unwise to allow problems to become extremely adverse by procrastinating, and to fail to understand that delaying remedial actions can cause problems to become critically intractable and exorbitantly costly to remedy. It is prudent to cope with worsening conditions sooner rather than later.

I have a friend who calls himself "The Mole". He has a hysterical sense of humor, and sees the world through eyes with a radically fresh and sometimes heretical perspective. He is a colorful character who is so original that his underground ideas are inherently subversive of established dogmas. He wrote in 2006, referring to the reign of Alfredo Stroessner, former dictator of Paraguay who had just died, "As in Paraguay, we always choose the rascals that step on people in 4-year election cycle increments. It must be the \$\$\$ that have us rise to every fly that lands on the pond, regularly sending our bombers flying off on brazen sorties, and our troops marching faithfully and valiantly off to foreign lands."

All of us have a bit of the Mole in us. My Mole says "keep on digging"! Coherent ideas and clearer understandings, along with a good sense of humor, could help save us from shortsighted dogmas that work contrary to the best interests of the majority, and of future generations.

A politically aroused citizenry should arise and demand policies that are best for our communities and the national good -- and for the human race and the ecosystems that support us, as well. We must decide, commit, and act. As Goethe said, "Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it." Let's roll!

Chapter #61 - Inequality and Its Implications.

Many observers decry the insidious increase in UNFAIRNESS that has been taking place in the U.S. since the 1980s. This state of affairs is contrary to the defining principles of our American republic and democracy. In *The Aristos*, John Fowles provided the insight that inequality in our personal lives can be measured by the competing conceptual states of HAPPINESS and ENVY. Happiness essentially involves a desire to keep things just the way they are. Envy is basically a desire to change them.

Almost all social and political conflicts take place between the 'party of happiness' and the 'party of envy'. Considered from the perspective of evolutionary forces, envy is a powerful impetus toward change, and happiness is a chief obstacle to progress.

The party of happiness rightly maintains that society should allow individuals a maximum of freedom to pursue happiness. The party of envy rightly maintains that society should allow everyone equal access to opportunity and to the chief sources of happiness. The continually shifting balance between these competing interests helps define the course and character of human societies.

Unfortunately, Big Money unfairly affects the political struggle between these two forces. It rashly skews public policy in favor of special privileges for the few, and reinforces the power of the party of happiness to jealously protect their often undeserved privileges. This is a reason why John Kenneth Galbraith observed that conservatives are "engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness."

In the Gilded Age era of the late nineteenth century, Mark Twain decried rapid increases in economic inequality, which had been called the "great barbeque". The outrageous concentration of income and wealth in those days eventually sparked a strong reaction and a vast reform movement. But it was not until the onset of the Great Depression, decades later, that economic collapse and massive social unrest forced the country's political elite to take actions to reduce the extreme disparities in income and wealth between the rich and the poor.

In recent decades, economic inequality has again been rapidly increasing, thanks in large part to the politics of Republican conservatives. Some experts have even blamed increases in inequality and economic insecurity for the greater frequency of mass public shootings like those at Columbine, Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook. Other factors are involved, of course, including heightened stresses, the erosion of community in America, culture wars, and the easy availability of handguns and assault weapons.

Today we are embarked on a neo-Gilded Age that does not appear, as yet, to have any forces powerful enough to put the brakes on the current runaway process of rising inequality. It appears that the power elite is not ready to accept any fairer social compact, despite negative impacts on society and the hardships being borne by blue-collar workers and poor people and many in the middle class.

People who defend the status quo inevitably become further separated from the average person as inequalities increase, so rich people steer government to meet their own interests by whatever means necessary. They buy elections and make efforts to disenfranchise voters, especially poor people and minorities. They buy mass media outlets to expand their control in ideological debates. They also try to erect barriers to oversight and accountability, and to suppress and intimidate opponents. In order

to achieve far-reaching social progress, the State as we know it, with its practically inextricable connections to the upper class, should be resurrected to be more democratically fair.

Economic inequality is one of the most significant sources of friction in world politics. The industrial revolution intensified this inequality of wealth and power, and one result was the colonization and exploitation of non-industrialized nations by those who were first to industrialize. Experts say there are two basic strategies for marginalized nations to break out of economic and political dependency: (1) through war or revolution, or (2) by imitating the means that advanced countries have used, including the adoption of market mechanisms, industrialization technologies, innovations, currency controls, tariffs or import barriers. I believe we should help reduce economic inequalities worldwide by treating people in other countries more fairly. This treatment would have the considerable advantage of mitigating impulses toward trade conflicts or wars or violent revolutions.

Chapter #62 - The Wisdom of the Golden Rule.

The Golden Rule represents the ethical essence of morality and fairness. This wisdom holds that we should treat others the way that we, ourselves, would like to be treated. Golden Rule fairness should be taken into account in formulating all laws. All people in our communities should be given more respect, as well as those in future generations. Every piece of legislation that Congress passes should incorporate greater fairness. Human societies are always unjust, to greater or lesser extents, but steps should be taken to reduce the growing extreme degree of income and wealth inequality. History shows that peace and social stability have been much better served when the disparity between rich people and the majority is not too stark.

It can be the death knell of democracy to allow an ever-increasing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. And yet economic disparities between the rich and the poor keep getting larger. This trend was kicked into high gear by the trickle-down "voodoo economics" of Ronald Reagan, which has caused policy changes that contribute to the gushing up of wealth to the richest Americans. Remember that Ronald Reagan vastly enriched the wealthy by reducing the marginal tax rate on the highest incomes from 70% in 1980 to 28% by 1988.

Tax reform under George W. Bush gave paltry benefits to 98% of Americans while providing huge benefits to the top 2%. These changes in taxation were most generous to the richest 1% of the American people and to the top .1% -- who do not need the money by any stretch of the imagination.

Disparities of net worth between the rich and the poor are even more pronounced than disparities of annual income. One percent of people in the United States own about 40% of all wealth. Republican policies are aimed at continuously increasing this concentration of wealth.

The primary Republican agenda of the Bush years was to achieve the goal of increasing the assets of people who were already exceedingly well-off. Conservatives have in effect sold their souls for power by championing a doctrinal agenda that justifies this anti-social selfish greed.

Wealthy people strive successfully to reduce their share of taxes paid. The top 5% of Americans, for instance, received 75% of the enormous 2003 tax breaks that exempted corporate dividends from individual income taxes. The May 2006 passage of another \$70 billion tax cut gave only \$20 to the average middle-income household, but a whopping average of \$42,000 to those making more than \$1 million per year.

The gradual elimination of Inheritance Taxes between 2003 and 2010 was a strategy targeted to make wealth and special privilege a permanent status for the privileged. Our government is supposed to be a "democracy", so we should be fighting to diminish such unfair disparities, not increase them.

Billionaire Warren Buffett testified before the Senate Finance Committee in November 2007 in defense of the federal estate tax, the nation's only tax on inherited wealth. Buffett invoked the historical roots of the estate tax, which was established in 1916 to put a brake on anti-democratic concentrations of wealth and power.

"Dynastic wealth, the enemy of meritocracy, is on the rise," Buffett told the panel. "Equality of opportunity has been on the decline. A progressive and meaningful estate tax is needed to curb the movement of a democracy toward plutocracy." He added, "Tax-law changes have benefited this super-rich group, including me, in a huge way. During that time the average American went exactly nowhere on the economic scale: he's been on a treadmill while the super-rich have been on a spaceship."

In response, Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa complained that the "death tax" was "fundamentally wrong." Buffett responded that use of the term "death tax" itself was "intellectually dishonest" and "clever, Orwellian and dead wrong." It is, after all, not a tax on dead people, but a tax on the inheritance of rich kids.

What do you think? Let's venture beyond any convenient convictions we may have, and explore what is truly right and wrong. Is it fundamentally wrong to tax a class of people whose incomes and net worth have skyrocketed since Ronald Reagan took office? Or is it more fundamentally wrong to take a bigger chunk out of the meager earnings of people who work hard to get by? Is it the best plan for our society to have the government shift the burden of taxation from financially well-off people to struggling workers and future taxpayers -- and those yet to be born?

Make no mistake about it -- forget anything you think you know about economics: it is virtual madness to allow politicians to spend far beyond our national means and to be so fiscally imprudent as to borrow enormous sums of money year after year, during good economic times and bad, to let the highest income earners pay historically low rates of tax. It is especially crazy to use shortsighted fiscal expediences to facilitate the entry of our nation into preemptive wars, and to use stimulated fears and odd rationalizations to achieve this goal. Understandings that are progressive in nature must gain ascendance, and taxation that is more progressive is a particularly good idea. Regressive policies that give special privileges for small elites must yield to the greater good.

Taxpayers who earned less than \$25,000 in income in 2005 were 6 times more likely to undergo IRS audits than those who reported earnings of \$200,000 or more, according to Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, a public-interest group affiliated with Syracuse University. In further defiance of fairness doctrines, the government planned to eliminate almost half of the 345 lawyers who audited tax returns of those subject to sharing a cut of their estates with the American public upon their deaths, stated the authors of an article in the New York Times. Additionally, IRS audits of large corporations have plummeted in recent years, and offshore tax scams that benefit rich people cost the U.S. Treasury an estimated \$70 billion per year. This is absurd -- and outrageous!

Our economic system is not fair, and it is becoming increasingly unfair. Prevailing policies that result in the borrowing of enormous sums of money in order to give additional benefits to rich people are a form of fiscal and social lunacy. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal reforms enabled the rise of a substantial middle class in the U.S. after World War II. Yet favoritism for the rich has made a comeback in recent decades, and it has diminished the prosperity of the middle class. This trend has

been made much worse by regressively-structured tax cuts. The resultant increase in inequality has increased economic insecurities and directly harmed the well-being of many Americans.

Intense conflicts in economic equality and social status are resulting from these policies. One of the best aspects of our American democracy has been the fluidity of opportunity and social mobility within our society's social stratification. This virtue is diminished by having entrenched inequities. Horatio Alger success stories of upward movements in socioeconomic status are becoming increasingly difficult for most people to achieve. White people, of course, benefit by far the most.

It is contrary to democratic ideals for our leaders to champion policies that ensure such dramatic increases in economic inequalities and inherited privilege. Specious arguments and regressive swindles constitute grounds, in and of themselves, to reject right-wing conservatism. Karl Marx saw all of history as a story of class struggles, and unless we want to bring on a violent revolution, we are best advised NOT to continue exacerbating class inequities. Change must come!

Consider the implications of this observation from Mark Twain: "If you beseech a blessing upon yourself, beware! lest without intent you invoke a curse upon a neighbor at the same time."

The wealthy are grabbing financial blessings for themselves, effectively putting a curse not only upon everybody else, but upon all of our descendants, to boot! The time to fairly reform our economic system is now!!

Chapter #63 - The Selfishness of the Wealthy.

Here is an example of how disparities between the fortunes of the rich and the poor in America are becoming increasingly extreme. Each of the 13,000 American households that are in the top .01% of all Americans earns an average of more than \$7 million per year (not including unrealized capital gains). These 13,000 American families together earn more than the 100,000,000 people who are at the bottom of the economic ladder.

The share of taxes that these super-rich people pay has declined dramatically since 1981, a change that effectively shifts the tax burden to all other taxpayers -- and to people in the future by means of the irresponsible expediency of deficit financing. It's outrageous not to require the super-rich to pay a percentage of their income in taxes that is at least as high as everyone else. Instead, they generally pay lower percentages. Mitt Romney, for instance, paid less than 14% of his \$21 million in income in taxes in 2010, so his overall tax rate was lower than those who made \$40,000 in income.

Economic inequality is leading to a more highly stress-inducing economic insecurity for the vast majority of Americans. It is also causing devastating healthcare inequities. Thousands of people die every year because they lack health insurance and access to care. Profiteering by private insurance companies and HMOs contribute to this unconscionable situation. The legal system and poorly regulated drug company policies have exacerbated these challenges. For better perspective on this and related issues, check out David Sirota's book *Hostile Takeover: How Big Money and Corruption Conquered Our Government --- and How We Can Take It Back*.

About 40 million Americans live in poverty -- almost one in eight Americans! While the productivity of workers has more than doubled in the last 40 years, the average hourly worker's wage has increased only negligibly, when adjusted for inflation, and the minimum wage has effectively decreased substantially. And nearly 39 million people do not have health insurance.

Something like 12 million children live in poverty. Four million people experience homelessness in any given year. Housing was made harder to afford for many under post-9/11 Federal Reserve actions to

stimulate real estate speculation and rapid increases in home prices. These policies created an economic bubble whose 2009 collapse was extremely hard on millions of Americans. In addition, higher education is becoming increasingly difficult to afford. These facts prove that educational and job opportunity (and freedoms) are not equally available to all.

The fortunes of rich people have increased so much in the past several decades because of the constant stream of new policies put into place to primarily benefit the wealthy. Changes to our system of taxation are unfair and regressive when they disproportionately benefit the richest people and place heavy new burdens of debt on future taxpayers. The ever-widening gap between the fortunes and privileges of the "Haves" and the "Have-Nots" is not acceptable in a democracy.

Our national debt increased from \$845 billion in January 1981 when Ronald Reagan took office to more than \$32 trillion in July 2023, an increase of over 3,600%. Our representatives are effectively mortgaging the future to transfer wealth from future generations to rich people in the current day through unwise tax breaks and deficit spending. This hyper-partisan result has arisen because big benefits are given to a small, privilege-abusing segment of society, and this is done at a high cost to the common good. Shortsighted policies like this contribute unnecessarily to bigger risks of national financial instability in the future.

Since rich people have been getting away with this practically treasonous favoritism from politicians, they should now begin to accept and support more equitable policies. Progressive tax changes, after all, have negligible impacts on the quality of the lives of multi-millionaires, while such changes can make dramatically positive differences in the lives of millions of Americans who live hand-to-mouth. This perspective makes it seem downright cruel and cold-hearted for rich people to press their advantages so greedily, so intently, so arrogantly, so self-righteously, and so continuously.

Studies of philanthropic giving consistently show that wealthy people are relatively stingier than others. This fact alone makes it ironic that our economic and political systems are skewed so strongly to give ever-bigger benefits to this class who exhibit such a relative deficiency in generosity. The rich are damned lucky, financially --- and they should be thankful that the lagging middle class and the struggling working class and the destitute poor are not fomenting a revolution to take away their assets! Let's not get mad; let's get even. Let's take back our government from vested interests and the wealthy, and begin enacting fairer, more progressive tax laws.

Mark Twain once remarked: "The offspring of riches: Pride, vanity, ostentation, arrogance and tyranny." This is human nature -- but we need not encourage and reward it so lavishly!

Chapter #64 - To Be or Not To Be.

The sagacious lawmaker Solon has been called "the father of democracy" because he reformed Greek laws in 594 BCE by implementing reforms that made Athenian society fairer. The rich were not happy about it, but eventually they recognized that his reforms were a fair price to pay for them to be allowed to maintain most of their privileges. Solon's initiatives wisely included progressively higher tax rates on higher incomes, with a rate on the highest incomes 12 times as much as the rate paid by the poor.

Here's a good plan for making our nation significantly fairer: Enact a "Social Justice Taxation Act" to make taxation more steeply graduated. This would involve the implementation of fair and Solon-wise Tax Code revisions. Such an Act would assess federal taxes on the highest individual income tax brackets at a rate 12 times the rate of the lowest income tax brackets. The most practical way to do

this would be to revise the Tax Tables so that all taxpayers pay 4% (vs. 10% currently) on the first \$11,000 of Taxable Income. Simultaneously, a new tax bracket should be created that assesses a rate of 48% (vs. 37% currently) on all Taxable Income in excess of \$1,000,000. A progressive sliding scale would determine tax rates for all earning brackets in between \$11,000 and \$1,000,000.

Here is another good plan: Give every taxpayer an increase of \$2,500 in the standard deduction on his or her individual tax return. Such a fair policy could be financed by the higher marginal tax rates assessed on higher incomes, as well as by higher inheritance taxes that should be assessed on the wealthiest 1% of Americans, upon their deaths.

The struggle between envious, underprivileged poor people and jealous rich people who have the most assets and power is a long-standing one. This conflict should be reduced, not expanded continually in our democracy. The fact of the matter is that excessive accumulations of wealth are immoral, a belief that is practically as old as the hills. The Bible, the Quran, and most of mankind's holy books assail abuses of wealth and power. Our governments should therefore refrain from rashly promoting the growth of inequalities!

Fairer tax plans would help reduce social status conflicts between people, and mitigate feelings of despair, disenfranchisement, and antagonisms between rich and poor people, and between privileged and underprivileged people. Fairness is the ultimate requisite of decency. It is one of the most important aspects of moral right action. Yet fairness has been increasingly under assault in recent years, along with values like truth, honesty, decency and reason.

Progressive initiatives like the G.I. Bill, passed in 1944, helped build a large middle class in the U.S. after the Depression of the 1930s. But regressive initiatives implemented since 1980 have undermined the well-being of the middle class. Since current policies have eroded the financial health of middle class people, new programs should be put into effect that are similar to those that contributed to the strengthening of the middle class after the Depression. These programs include expanded educational opportunities, state-subsidized higher education, stronger labor laws, increased investments in the physical infrastructure of the U.S., fairer incentives for home ownership, a more steeply-graduated tax system, and an affordable safety net of national health care and basic retirement benefits.

A citizenry that is well informed makes a democracy more robust. If we galvanize Americans into supporting greater fairness and more intelligent planning, and resist manipulative demagoguery, a radical transformation in our activities and economies will take place, and a more sustainable future will be created.

Let us heed Shakespeare's Hamlet, in his famous Soliloquy:

"To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them."

The best way for us to take arms against the surging sea of troubles facing humankind today is to boldly demand reforms of our economic and political systems. Foresight and fair-mindedness -- not shortsightedness and stubborn inflexibility -- need to be cultivated to help deal with the challenges of the future. We require, in short, a new form of intelligent design!

Chapter #65 - Bubble Economics.

One might suppose that some of our society's policies are truly equitable. Let's pick one of the biggest benefits, and examine it. Let's take the \$100 billion-per-year deduction for home mortgage interest. Who gets that benefit? ... Oh -- I'll be darned; the people with the top 10% of incomes get more than 50% of that subsidy.

The U.S. would be better served by creating benefits for a broader spectrum of Americans, and not mainly those who are already well-to-do. We should, as a pertinent example, establish programs that create more affordable housing, rather than creating conditions favorable to real estate speculators. We should provide incentives to first-time homeowners rather than rewards for people to own multiple homes. Incentives for people to benefit from owning multiple homes should be reduced.

A nonpartisan tax-reform panel concluded in 2005 that provisions like the tax-free exclusion of \$250,000 in real estate capital gains (\$500,000 for married couples) are heavily skewed to benefit high-income taxpayers.

Tax incentives help make real estate a hot commodity, so they contribute to relatively rapid appreciation in housing. As more and more speculative influences were introduced into the market, like these big tax breaks for home ownership and ever-more leveraged financing, real estate was finally ramped up until it became distinctly overpriced in most areas of the country by 2008. Mortgage fraud and the collaboration of ratings agencies also played a factor. The boom in real estate was a powerful engine of growth in consumption, because hundreds of billions of dollars were borrowed every year against increasing home equity until 2008. Remember the obnoxiously repetitive barrage of TV commercials that urged homeowners to borrow money against their home equity? Scurrilous!

When the bubble burst, it caused global financial turmoil and catastrophic hardships for millions of people. These incentives were great for homeowners who benefited from appreciation in their home equity, and they stimulated consumer spending by allowing homeowners to mortgage their homes to the hilt, increasing risks of foreclosures and losses of down payments when the inevitable bust took place. Thanks a lot for the shrewd but ultimately irresponsible fiduciary failure, decision-makers!

This is proving to have been shortsighted in many ways. Surely we could find a safer and fairer means of creating healthier economic growth!

Not only did such policies cause significant instability in domestic and international economies, but also unnecessary damages to the natural environment. Stimulative real estate policies have been bad news for first-time homebuyers who want to own a reasonably-priced place to live. They have also been negative for poor people who cannot afford homes, and for people who have become homeless because of the high costs of housing. And they have contributed to inflating rents, suburban sprawl, obscenely big houses for wealthy people, profligate usages of lumber and other building materials, wasteful usages of water and energy, the lavish ownership of multiple homes by rich people, undesirable speculation and unwise development.

Policies are needed that are more far-sighted, enlightened and sustainable!

Chapter #66 - The Failings of Business and Government.

One ruinous error of the current approach of businesses and government in the U.S. is that economic principles are given a dominating influence while important social principles are ignored and even

denigrated. Even worse, vital ecological principles are neither widely appreciated nor adequately respected.

Conservatives support policies that emphasize the primary importance of protections for capital and private property, while liberals tend to support contrasting policies that emphasize the importance of equitable treatment for all people. Deep ecologists inform us that more enlightened understandings are coming into being (or should be!) in recognition of the fact that the ecological well-being of our home planet is essential to both property and people.

A pathetic deficiency of government has always been found in its slavish willingness to sacrifice the public good to private greed. "Strange as it may seem," said Josiah Quincy in 1774, "what the many, through successive ages, have desired and sought, the few have found means to baffle and defeat."

Consider this: a study by the federal Office of Management and Budget in 2003 sought to evaluate the cost and impact of environmental laws over the 10-year period from 1992 to 2002. The extensive analysis found that the cost to business and government of health and environmental regulations was 5 to 7 times less than the costs to society of dealing with the clean-up of pollution and toxic wastes, and of related healthcare expenses for workers and people in communities nationwide. These findings prove that it is downright dumb for the government to let corporate lobbyists rewrite laws to weaken environmental protections like the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act.

Our econopolitical system is basically broken because it allows rich people and corporations to gain and abuse power at the expense of the health of the people and the environment. Big Oil, as a prime example, generally opposes resource conservation. It does this despite the fact that investments in energy conservation often have a short payback period, and such investments would have collateral benefits such as reduced waste, improved production processes, higher productivity, positive public relations value, and broad benefits of ecosystems in good health. Big Oil and Big Coal are industries that promote obscenely profligate usages of non-renewable fossil fuels, and they compound this sin by using the heavy weight of the influence of their profits to corrupt national policies in their favor.

Experts predicted that the U.S. would soon be awash in oil, thanks to rules that allow Big Oil to frack the hell out of America the Beautiful. Not long thereafter, sure enough, supply and demand caused a 50% decline in the price of oil worldwide. But we cannot afford to exploit this resource with such reckless abandon, and this is true for an interesting and surprising reason. Scientists say that the atmosphere is in effect subjected to a carbon budget that can not be exceeded without causing catastrophic climate change. And at the current pace, the nations of the world will exceed this carbon budget for the next 100 years in less than 25 years. It would be suicidally insane for us not to change course at a faster pace, and to invest in conservation and cleaner alternatives.

At the current rate of growth of carbon dioxide emissions, this threshold will be alarmingly exceeded relatively soon, and by the year 2100, we will be double glazing our home planet. The price of fossil fuels everywhere is already artificially low, due to three factors: no cost is allocated for the depletion of these resources; large costs are being externalized onto society related to unfolding natural disasters related to changing temperature and weather patterns worldwide; and there are many health and ecological damages being caused by spewing tens of billions of tons of greenhouse gases and noxious particulates into the atmosphere year after year after year.

Oddly enough, fossil fuel industries receive more subsidies annually than any other industries in the world, other than agriculture. At least agricultural subsidies make more sense, as some of them help people afford to buy food at what are basically subsidized prices.

Americans should demand that fossil fuel industries support more fuel-efficient vehicles, better gas mileage standards, and a more rapid adoption of fossil fuel alternatives. Protections of consumers and the environment should be given increased weight in our policy considerations, and higher royalties should be assessed for all resources extracted from public lands.

One smart idea was promoted by environmental activist Tom Steyer, who called for an increase in taxes for oil extracted in California. He asserted that Texas assesses charges to oil producers that are "three times what California charges for the privilege of removing its oil from the ground." Texas uses the taxes on extraction of oil from huge pools that lie underground in Texas to benefit public education and other services. Hey, Texas might actually have a few good ideas on rare occasions.

Anyway, business and government are failing us. Again, one big component of problems is a lack of accountability that is being achieved due to the excessive power of Big Money and lobbyists.

I say, "Citizens, Unite!" As with many things, a 3-part solution presents itself, and it is an excellent one. First, the American people should demand legislation to reverse the narrow Supreme Court *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon* rulings by enacting real Campaign Finance Reform and Lobbyist Ethics Reform. Second, we should pass and ratify a Constitutional Amendment as soon as practicable to overturn the privilege of wealthy interests to dictate our national policies in our corrupt political duopoly. And third, we should demand that the Supreme Court look at these issues from a bigger picture perspective and make fairer rulings on issues related to political influence in all future cases.

Chapter #67 - Our American Achilles Heel.

Amory Lovins, the founder of the independent non-profit and nonpartisan Rocky Mountain Institute, once asserted that we have the technological ability to reduce overall energy use by 80%, and at the same time create hundreds of thousands of new jobs in the process. In doing so, we could also reduce air pollution significantly and cut greenhouse gas emissions.

The Rocky Mountain Institute has also estimated that electricity use in the United States could be cut in half at a savings of \$50 billion per year without any reduction in the average standard of living. Such actions would slow the depletion of fossil fuels and the alteration of the gaseous composition of the atmosphere. This should be a no-brainer!

Electricity generation is one of the largest factors contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Fossil fuel-fired power plants produce more than half the electricity used in the U.S., so they are responsible for a significant portion of all carbon dioxide emissions. They also produce large quantities of poisonous mercury, sulfur dioxide and smog-producing nitrogen oxide. Exceptionally polluting coal-fired plants have closed in recent decades, reducing by more than half the amount of electricity generated from 2005 to 2020. Older coal-fired plants were exceptionally polluting because they were granted loopholes in the Clean Air Act that allow them to avoid updating their plants with modern pollution controls. Stricter regulations and the conservation of electricity could beneficially reduce the amount of pollutants generated.

Yet we continue to stick with policies that perpetuate our dependence on oil, coal and natural gas. Some say that our addiction to oil is our "Achilles heel" because it is a reckless dependency that represents a dangerous vulnerability to depletion, supply disruptions and wars. Instead of addressing this risk, the 'Oil guys' in the White House under the Bush administration, and fossil fuel industries since then, have given only lip service to smarter courses of action. They use misinformation and

secrecy to make record profits, and drag their feet in reform, opposing actions to wean our country from our addiction to oil.

National energy policy should include three strategies: (1) to use fossil fuels much more efficiently and conservatively; (2) to modernize electricity generating plants to make them cleaner; and (3) to create powerful incentives that encourage the use of renewable fossil fuel alternatives. We should prevent those in power from allowing domestic oil drilling in areas that are extremely environmentally sensitive. And "blood-for-oil" aggression and deceitful pretexts for warfare should be rejected as national energy strategies.

We are being ridiculously complacent and injudicious in our usages of energy. The world's oil tank stands at half full, and it is headed for empty. We deceive ourselves into thinking that we are not critically compromising the future by allowing the continued profligate use of fossil fuels.

Chapter #68 - The Ramifications of Peak Oil.

Life from birth to death can be a drama, a tragedy, a farce and a comedy. On average, a human being has roughly 2,500 million heartbeats during his or her lifetime, and each day another 100,000 beats of the heart tick away our time alive. There is certainly uncertainty about how many more heartbeats each of us might have, but in one thing there is no doubt: there is no uncertainty that the number is finite.

Similarly, there is no doubt that our daily burning of fossil fuels inexorably moves us toward the day that oil reserves on Earth will be exhausted. A total of about 2.5 trillion barrels of oil have been discovered in the world since the beginning of time, and the human race has already burned up almost half of these oil reserves in the 150 years since we began to use it to replace whale oil for many fuel needs. An estimated total of less than 2 trillion barrels of known oil recoverable reserves are left, and we are currently burning more than 30 billion barrels per year. When one does the math, even with new supplies recovered by using fracking, we see that only about 50 years supply remains at current levels of use. Between now and the time oil is gone, its price will begin to become prohibitively costly, so it will inevitably be used more sparingly.

Our lives and businesses are structured around artificially cheap oil and natural gas. We are acting as if there is no cost of depletion, as if supplies are infinite. But we are inexorably approaching the point at which oil production will begin a long-term decline. This condition, known as Peak Oil, is a dangerous tipping point. Beyond it, we will face unprecedented energy crises, economic shocks and social disruptions -- unless we can find a new energy regime to replace petroleum.

But oil will not be easy to replace. This fossilized energy from the Sun is a convenient and unique high-energy resource. It has helped generate amazing revolutions in industry and agriculture, and it has supported an increase in human numbers just since the year 1930 from two billion to more than EIGHT billion today. It may well prove impossible to sustain our human population once fossil fuels are effectively gone later this century, and as "carbon sinks" become excessively saturated. The implications of these facts are likely to be terribly severe.

One thing is certain: it is foolhardy not to be taking advantage of the last half of the world's oil reserves to help develop and implement a more rapid transition to cleaner, safer renewable energy alternatives. E. F. Schumacher observed in his seminal book *Small Is Beautiful* in 1973 that we should treat fossil fuels as capital resources, not as income, so that we would logically conserve them. He recommended that some of the money obtained by using up these irreplaceable assets be put "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 ...”.

Some of the smartest guys in the room have ironically joined a conspiracy of fools in opposing such understandings. These folks are representing narrowly focused interests, not the greater good. Some of the profits made from depleting the remaining reserves of oil should be invested in far-sighted energy initiatives that will help break our dangerous addiction.

The nearly 335 million people in the U.S. today represent less than 5% of the total world population, and we have less than 5% of the world's oil reserves, and yet we burn about 25% of the total amount of oil used worldwide each year. WE AMERICANS ARE THE ONES who should seize the initiative and make smarter changes in our national policies and consumer habits. The percent of oil we imported more than doubled between 1980 and 2010. Fracking in the U.S. has reversed this trend temporarily, but we should not become complacent. Let's not make the costly error of thinking we've solved the problems posed by our dangerous addiction to oil through the unfolding fracking frenzy!

As we move past Peak Oil, and as the cost of fossil fuels eventually begins a shocking increase as demand goes up and supplies are depleted, this will force a far-reaching restructuring in agricultural practices, transportation, efficiency and conservation. Our economies will shift toward SMART and sustainable activities, and away from shortsighted and unsustainable ones. The “endgame” of cheap oil will be expensive oil, and possibly a return to more local and smaller scale activities.

We face a new age of austerity if we do not find better ways to conserve energy resources and create much cleaner, greener and renewable substitutes for fossil fuels. Our current energy policies put us in increasing jeopardy of extreme economic instability and social upheaval, intensified resource wars, and environmental calamity. To avoid this, let's support bold remedial actions!

Heat waves broke recorded high temperatures in numerous place around the globe in July 2023, and the city of Phoenix broke its previous record of having had 15 straight days exceeding 110 degrees highs — and was forecast to continue experiencing that extreme level of heat for a total of almost 30 days. Seeing these goings on, former vice president Al Gore spoke stark words that resonate like a shimmering mirage of refracted rays of light in the air above burning hot tarmac: “Every night on the TV news is like taking a nature hike through the Book of Revelation.”

Al Gore also expressed hope, though. He indicated, “We know how to fix this”. Despite the apocalyptic weather news, “Clean energy is cheaper than ever, and electric vehicle sales are surging, turbocharged by government subsidies. Put that all together, and Gore thinks developed economies could draw down their emissions with surprising speed.” Greater speed is needed, and entrenched fossil fuel interests should join together in common cause with the people, and not just shareholders wanting to share in the bounty of cashing in on fossil fuels.

Chapter #69 - Other Addictive Behaviors.

Our addiction to oil is a corollary to a far more consequential and dangerous addiction. Our economy is addicted to war and militarism, as discussed in depth in *Reflections on War - and Peace!* This habit represents an overarching wrong-headedness. The enormous amounts of money and resources that are devoted to the military may stimulate our economy and give our societies a sense of duty, purpose, righteousness and necessity, but these are risky gambits. They are filled with unethical inhumanity, and they are made extremely dangerous by hubris and ignorance in their pursuit.

Militarism acts like a powerful gyroscope that fixes our course in directions that are aggressive, wasteful, inflexible, uncompromising, exploitative, unfair and unjust. Besides, bloated overextended militaries have often been a major contributing factor to declines in civilizations.

War is never overly popular with the majority of people, so our leaders in business and government tend to exploit people's fears and insecurities and nationalistic pride to push for war. Americans are in denial to suppose that our addiction to militarism does not have dangerously unjust aspects.

The shrewd use of the expediency of deficit spending facilitates this mainlining of wasteful military spending and war profiteering. We delude ourselves to pretend that we can obtain things by using borrowed money without significantly increasing the eventual costs. The truth is that deficit spending is merely a way of deferring costs, while also increasing them substantially. Even if the borrowed principal is never repaid -- such a deal! -- every dollar borrowed costs 100% of the amount borrowed every 24 years or so (assuming a 3% long-term average rate of interest). This burden obligates people in the future to pay for amounts borrowed over and over and over again. This is fiscal sin, a severely irresponsible and unsustainably unwise strategy.

Republicans have shrewdly made "tax" a dirty word, necessitating record levels of borrowing. But mortgaging the future for short-term benefits is stupidly shortsighted. It is a risky gambit that leaves us less flexible in the face of factors that will significantly worsen budget deficits, including costs related to Baby Boomer retirement programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Borrowing is particularly foolish when it is used as an expediency to stimulate demand for goods and services. People in the future will bear the burden and be forced to pay the consequences. Ballooning debt and interest payment obligations represent an undisciplined failure to operate with our means. This expedient indulgence is a form of trying "to have our cake and eat it too" -- something that the mad monk Rasputin found to be terminally ill advised; and so may we, too!

John Maynard Keynes was a British economist during the Depression and the Second World War who studied macroeconomic ideas and advocated deficit spending by the government during recessions to stimulate economic activity and employment. But he also advocated running budget surpluses during economic booms in order to tame inflation and pay off some of the debt incurred during hard times. We have been overly indulging in huge amounts of deficit spending to stimulate the economy and enrich the rich ever since Ronald Reagan took office. This is a foolishly risky course of action.

Our leaders have been recklessly indulging in "Military Keynesianism", which is deficit spending all the time on the military. This strategy is almost certain to prove to be a fatefully poor plan. Allowing deficit spending merely delays the necessity for us to face difficult decisions. I call for a powerful commitment to a balanced federal budget. This could be achieved by giving a strong motivation to the primary deciders in our system: rich people and big corporations. Here is one possible way to achieve it; let's call it the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2024.

Here's how it would work: After the end of the U.S. fiscal year that runs from October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024, the I.R.S. should assess 25% of any budget deficit for the year to rich people and Big Businesses. Half of this obligation should be assessed to individuals with taxable incomes above \$250,000. The other half should be assessed to businesses that earn more than \$2 million in net income. Both assessments should be made on a sliding scale that is progressively graduated, with higher percentages for higher incomes. In the following fiscal year, 50% of any deficits should be assessed, using the same methodology. In the year after that, 100% of deficits should be assessed.

The result? This mechanism would create a firestorm of political pressure to balance the budget. Soon, we would see budget deficits dramatically decrease. And this could not be achieved only by slashing spending, because that would cripple the economy. Nope. It would be achieved by ending the criminally corrupt practice of giving rich people the lowest tax rates on the highest levels of their earnings in generations. Tax reforms will need to be instituted like those set forth in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

Historically low tax rates on high incomes would be increased, and make-work projects, government waste, pork barrel spending, and bureaucracy would be swiftly reformed. The many advantages of zero-base budgeting would soon come into play. This mechanism would seriously focus the attention of our representatives on making more sensible choices in all spending decisions. It could reasonably re-balance government and private enterprise. Market-driven entrepreneurial activities result in better outcomes than government-created jobs in many areas, but a better balance would evolve.

It is easy to rail against taxes; who wants to pay even a penny? But taxes are a measure of the difficult decisions made to finance the military, social programs, government, infrastructure investments and other goals. National budgets define not just our fiscal priorities but our moral ones, too. They reflect trade-offs that we make for keeping order, promoting prosperity, ensuring the proper functioning of our society, and facilitating other national goals.

My hope is that these understandings will serve as a kind of addiction intervention, and set us on a new path of more wholesome, equitable, and farsighted human activities.

Chapter #70 - Global Warming.

Our economic addiction to oil is partially due to our glorification of growth no matter what the cost. Resource conservation is almost outright stigmatized, instead of being encouraged and rewarded.

American automakers have for decades aggressively marketed large SUVs. These large and fuel-inefficient vehicles came into popularity partially because they were classified as light trucks that were exempt from fuel efficiency standards and emissions regulations. Poor policy once again can be seen to create undesirable outcomes. Advertising has turned automobiles and light trucks into status symbols, and created a formidable challenge to the prospects of achieving sustainable uses of energy. Our lawmakers are so obedient to the expectations of big industry that they refused to increase Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards for decades.

An energy bill that mandated an increase in fuel economy standards from 27 to 35 miles per gallon by the year 2020 was finally signed into law in December 2007. Sensible provisions included in the House version of the energy bill were jettisoned by the Senate. This included renewable electricity standards and a tax package that would have moved large subsidies out of the pockets of Big Oil and into the hands of the renewable energy industry. Once again, fossil fuel industry and utility lobbyists had their way, even as the automobile industry gave in to overdue reforms.

One reason smart energy bills have become so important is that the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has been steadily increasing, due mainly to the burning of fossil fuels, and deforestation around the planet has made this situation worse. Carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere have increased significantly in the last 50 years. And the RATE at which they are being produced is increasing. This fact is confirmed by measurements that have been taken continuously since 1958 at the Mauna Loa Observatory atop the Big Island of Hawaii.

Carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas that has the effect of trapping heat in Earth's atmosphere. This contributes to global warming that is destabilizing the world's weather patterns and causing more severe flooding in some areas and drought in others. Freshwater shortages are being made worse by these trends, and natural fresh water storage systems are being disrupted. Mountain snow packs and glaciers are melting faster than they are being replenished by snowfall. Billions of people will likely be adversely affected by these climate change impacts in coming decades.

Scientists predict that the intensity and power of hurricanes and tornados is likely to increase as a consequence of the worsening greenhouse effect. Hotter summers and more widespread wildfires will inevitably occur. Deserts will likely expand. These developments are taking place right now, and they will get worse as we continue our heedless ways. Related warming trends of ocean waters could disrupt ocean currents like the Gulf Stream and even eventually, ironically, cause extreme cold during European winters. The probability is increasing that such changes will cause havoc in global food production, and consequently there will be more severe famines. Outbreaks of infectious diseases will likely worsen as the resistance of natural systems is weakened, while at the same time viruses will proliferate and microbes continue to adapt quickly to our injudicious use of antibiotics and pesticides.

Wow, how prescient the Bible may have been in making apocalyptic prophesies! How little, however, the LORD apparently suspected at the time "He" was inspiring a bunch of old men to write the Holy Bible, that the agent of this cataclysm would be mankind's shortsighted folly itself! The sins of mankind turn out NOT to be tasting the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, or "taking the name of the LORD thy God in vain", or working on Sundays, or impertinence to parents and authorities, or committing adultery, or lying and bearing false witness, or coveting the neighbor's house, wife, maidservant or ass. Lo! No!! The sin, as it may be turning out, will be in our myopic and socially irresponsible propensity to foist harms onto persons in future generations, and steal from them, and worship materialistic idols, and to fail to show adequate consideration for the ecological foundations upon which our collective well-being ultimately rests!

The U.S. Department of Defense has studied the potential consequences of "abrupt climate change" and concluded that it poses grave threats to our national security. There is unequivocal scientific evidence that Earth's climate has changed abruptly in the past. To recognize this, and yet to nonetheless continue contributing to the potential for a new onslaught of severe changes due to human activities is unconscionable.

Scientists have found that Greenland ice sheets and both Arctic and Antarctic ice caps are melting much faster than they expected only a few years ago. Despite the dangers of sea level rise that this represents, world leaders continue to resist taking actions to mitigate such risks and the feedback loops they engender. "Catastrophic climate 'doom loop' could start in just 15 years, new study warns in June 2023." The time to begin dealing more assertively with these problems is NOW! The longer we wait, the more difficult it will be to avoid harmful impacts. We must begin to honestly honor precautionary principles!

The Military Advisory Board, which consists of eleven retired Generals and Admirals, reported in April 2007 that climate change will likely act as a "threat multiplier in some of the most volatile regions of the world." The Board further warned that climate change will cause "widespread political instability and the likelihood of failed states" due to the spread of deserts in places like sub-Saharan Africa, and to predicted sea-level rises that will cause widespread damages in places like low-lying island nations and Bangladesh and Florida and other coastal areas and river deltas. This will result in chaos that could be "an incubator of civil strife, genocide and the growth of terrorism." We should

be more pro-active in addressing such looming problems instead of focusing our priorities on wrongheaded goals and political subterfuge and short-term urgencies.

The increasing concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is also leading to an increase in the absorption of carbon dioxide by the world's oceans. This physical development makes sea water more acidic and, along with sea temperature increases, contributes to the bleaching and killing of coral reef communities. This devastating harm to the wonderful variety of colorful life forms found in coral reefs is very sad and ominously ill-advised. Runoff of oil pollution and industrial farm-animal wastes and nitrogen-based fertilizers are causing harmful impacts in rivers and oceans, creating dead zones and red tides. Warmer waters and increased acidity are exacerbating these impacts.

The "Environmental Priorities" section of the *Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity* lists many ways to cope with problems such as these. One of the best ideas, I reiterate, is to fully include all costs of production in every product, including allocations for the costs of pollution, proper waste disposal, related adverse healthcare impacts, environmental damages, resource depletion and offsets for greenhouse gas emissions. We should 'Pay as we go!' Free markets and consumer choices are distorted when we fail to include all true costs in the prices of products and services. Allowing costs of production to be externalized increases risks like those caused by climate change. Let's begin to think outside the box to find good ways to solve these challenges!

Chapter #71 - Intelligent Energy Policy.

An ability and willingness to "think outside the box" could help us solve many of the challenges we face. Incentives are better methods of modifying people's behavior than the use of prohibitions, because carrots simply turn out to be fairer and thus ultimately more effective motivators than sticks. Incentives are preferable because they involve self-actuating solutions rather than heavy-handed regulations or inadequately effective moral mandates.

Consider the role of taxes. They affect people's behavior by encouraging or discouraging activities. We currently levy taxes on income and payroll, because it's convenient for the government. But these are things we want to encourage, not discourage. It would be smarter to reduce taxes on income and payroll, and increase taxes on undesirable things like polluting activities, non-renewable resource uses, fast foods, giant homes, luxury items, fuel-inefficient vehicles, guns and military weaponry.

Immediate increases in taxes on gasoline would accelerate the process of weaning our economy from polluting oil. Our national security would be well-served by such a bold action. If we imposed an additional \$1 per gallon tax on gasoline, there would be an immediate market-driven motivation to conserve fuel and use energy more efficiently. Businesses and consumers would use energy more conservatively in response to its higher cost. The longer-term impacts would be more substantial as innovations are spurred and greater investments are made in efficiency of energy usages and basic research and development for cleaner and safer alternatives.

To the extent that such green taxes would have a regressive impact that disproportionately affects poor people, an offset should be instituted by reducing payroll taxes or income taxes. In conjunction with this new initiative, subsidies to the oil industry should be eliminated. After all, oil companies for decades have been making some of the bigger profits of any businesses in world history.

Chapter #72 - The Problems with Misguided Subsidies.

Trillions of dollars of subsidies are given worldwide for various purposes each year. These are often shortsighted mechanisms that have deleterious effects, including misallocations of resources, the

degradation of the environment, increased toxic pollution, and the hindering of better innovative alternatives. Vested interests naturally defend their prerogatives aggressively and cause a variety of socially undesirable impacts.

Imagine how different the situation would be in the world today if the U.S. government had had the foresight decades ago to give subsidies to the development of decentralized sources of power like solar energy instead of lavishing subsidies on oil drilling, fracking, coal use and nuclear power.

Subsidies and tax loopholes most often benefit established industries at the expense of innovative companies that are struggling to compete successfully, offering improved products and services. This acts to all-too-effectively hamper new technologies and more efficient production methods.

We are suffering a collective delusion to deny the growing evidence of these facts. Our leaders continue to mislead us, failing to address the risks we are taking. They deceive us into supporting business-as-usual activities. They make inequalities worse. They contribute to an ever-more fragile and risky bubble of human consumerism and population growth. And they are directing our attention away from more important issues. This bodes ill for the well-being of our descendants, so once again we see an excellent reason to demand that our leaders champion more farsighted understandings!

Chapter #73 - Introspection into Government.

One of the most significant aspects of our government is its tendency to grow in size and increase its power. Government entities do a poor job of controlling spending, balancing budgets, or planning well and fairly. Government programs are often characterized by poor prioritization and excessive waste and shortsighted initiatives and irresponsibly incurred debt. Our representatives in the federal government are much too easily influenced by entrenched interests that "game the system" by exploiting public lands, plundering public assets, and obtaining no-bid contracts.

Budgets are moral documents that should reflect the aggregate priorities of our society. It is wrong to let spending decisions be dictated by narrow special interests striving to gain ever-bigger shares of the bounty of government largesse.

Our federal government is like a voluptuous, alluring and gullible country girl, easily influenced and susceptible to men taking advantage of her. An endless array of suitors competes for her favors with lustful intent. Most seek to seduce her with money, glib talk, and assertive wiles. Some pressure her and try to trick her to take advantage of her weaknesses. Others are so smitten by her assets that they grab her and try to rape her.

An enormous amount of taxpayer money is spent on government employee payrolls. There are currently more than two million civilian federal employees, as of 2021, at an average annual salary of just over \$90,000. Too many government employees may work on bureaucratic, redundant or expendable tasks. They often work seven-hour days and get 11 paid holidays and 20 paid vacation days or more per year, depending on years of service. They generally enjoy remarkable job security and get generous retirement pay at up to 80 percent of their annual salaries. These are rather wonderful opportunities for them -- but costly for taxpayers!

This could be a good place to start balancing the budget; let's reduce the size of government, freeze wages and retirement benefits for a year, cut boondoggle jobs, and eliminate unnecessary red tape.

Any reasonable accountant could give a straight-forward idea of one of the best ways to judge the performance of the government. Like in a business, an unqualified audit of financial statements is needed to provide shareholders with vital information on bottom-line results. All publicly-held

companies are required to provide audited financial statements to prove their creditworthiness and financial standing and an accurate picture of the status of their operations.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office is responsible for auditing the financial statements of the federal government. I think it's still true that in ALL the years since 1997 during which this auditing requirement has been in force, the GAO has noted that "certain material weaknesses in internal control and in selected accounting and reporting practices resulted in conditions that continued to prevent us from being able to provide Congress and American citizens an opinion as to whether the consolidated financial statements of the federal government are fairly stated."

Yikes -- government financial statements are not even reliable! Poor internal controls over financial reporting extend to the safeguarding of assets, so we are no doubt being ripped off, to boot. The GAO states that "material deficiencies in the federal government's systems, record-keeping, documentation, and financial reporting" is due in large part to serious financial management problems at the Department of Defense. This is really good for facilitating private profiteering from war and war readiness, but it is a pathetic way to organize our country.

Harry Truman denounced war profiteering as "treason", and this is a legitimate way of seeing it. Better accounting might help curb war profiteering, and maybe higher taxes on excessive profits made on weapons and war services industries would help. Such initiatives could reduce the strong support for war by greedy profiteers who help get us into wars. Even if such taxes were not particularly successful at this, the proceeds from taxes on profits from war services would help finance our expensive military machine, instead of allowing huge costs to be foisted onto taxpayers and people in the future.

One of the best ways to combat corruption would be by creating effective mechanisms that assure us that the federal government will be subjected to greater financial transparency and clearer accountability. Better management and oversight is needed, for otherwise the endless number of suitors seeking to take advantage of government profligacy will continue to expand.

Chapter #74 - Power and Corruption.

Breathe deep and let go. Feel free to take the time to review these ideas in your mind, and to explore your own thoughts, perceptions and beliefs. A good Transcendental Meditation practitioner would recommend: Breathe in, alert to your breath, mindful of expansive intention; and breathe out, slowly, calming your body.

The compulsive drive for profit, privilege and power, and institutionalized influence peddling, are the biggest contributors to corruption in our political system. Just look how it has corrupted the Republican Party. The "Grand Old Party" of yesteryear once stood for good citizenship, pragmatism, fiscal responsibility, balanced budgets, limited government, spending discipline, decency, civic virtue, and commitments to fairness and integrity. I picture Republicans in the "good old days" as honoring family values that included trust, honesty, simple churchly faith, tolerance, empathy, respect for diversity, social responsibility, and a generosity of spirit.

Power corrupts, as the old adage goes, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Having one political party control both Congress and the White House from 2001 to 2006, for the first time since the days of President Eisenhower, turned out to be almost obscenely detrimental. The Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw had a different perspective: he noted "Power does not corrupt men. Fools, however, if they get into a position of power, corrupt power." Fools and knaves, perhaps!

The highest goal of the Republican Party is to entrench itself in power, no matter what impacts this has on people and the world. This end is used to rationalize a wide range of actions that can be seen to be terribly unfair, divisive, dishonest, irresponsible, fiscally unsound, anti-democratic, and harmful to the environment. Pathetic, guys! And, as it turns out, this is quite a fiasco!

Once again, there seems to be a lot of ironic truth in P.J. O'Rourke's observation: "The Republicans are the party that says that government doesn't work -- and then gets elected and proves it."

Republicans gain unwarranted power by using a "hard-times swindle", writes Thomas Frank in his astute analysis in *Pity the Billionaire: The Hard-Times Swindle and the Unlikely Comeback of the Right* (2012). They also indulge in economic sabotage strategies and stoke the fervor of inflammatory far right culture war demagogues and employ emotion-hijacking tactics. They have taken considerable advantage of the Supreme Court's decision to allow unlimited spending by rich people and corporations to influence elections. Their latest strategy, as if they hate democracy itself, is to work assiduously to disenfranchise millions of voters in states nationwide by restricting voting and gerrymandering Congressional districts and other such ploys.

These are, in a sense, the good old days of tomorrow. No one knows what the future will bring. All of us have our personal struggles; let's help each other through hard times, such as they may be.

Chapter #75 - More Thinking Outside the Box.

Here is another good idea: we should either limit advertising for products that harm society, or impose significantly higher fees on them. It is clear, for instance, that advertising for cigarette smoking and tobacco products contributes to health adversities for millions of people who suffer from addictions to nicotine and harms related to inhaling carcinogenic smoke. Increased taxes on tobacco products, along with restrictions on cigarette advertising, have contributed to significant declines in the percent of Americans that smoke, and to correlated reductions in lung cancer rates.

In light of these facts, we should "think outside the box" regarding advertising by such entities as the drug industry, the oil industry, the coal industry, and the automobile industry. Advertising by the drug industry essentially 'pushes' drugs by marketing prescription drugs and over-the-counter drugs directly to consumers. Highly negative side effects of this effort result, and should be more widely understood. Restricting such advertising could help reduce growing addictions to prescription drugs. I feel strongly that doctors should provide nutrition and fitness advice as well as helping push drugs.

Likewise, aggressive advertising by the automobile industry has created high demand for large trucks and SUVs, and for those God-awful Hummers for a while. Auto advertising uses suggestive images of macho power, social status, sexual allure, fun, envy, and 'belonging' to promote these gas guzzlers. This, in turn, indirectly contributes to planned obsolescence, air pollution, global warming, dependency on fossil fuels, and impulses for wars-for-oil and desperate drilling and fracking frenzies. If advertising restrictions reduced these negative impacts, this would serve society well.

In an article evocatively titled *The Caveman Dilemma: Why We Take Such Lousy Care of Ourselves and the Planet*, Greg Hanscom makes the cogent point that we often need help making choices that are in our own true self-interest. "We did it with cigarettes, right? It used to be that half of America -- 50 percent of adults in America -- smoked. And, through public service announcements and relatively modest changes in the law, we've got that down to about 20 percent."

The clear implication is that we should use targeted collective action to achieve greater good goals. We need to have the government on the side of people's best interests, not on the side of the

corporations that are "out there doping us, and poisoning us, and making money off of our instincts." We as a society need to help encourage people to do what's right. "That means changing the default setting. That means building public transportation so that it's cheaper and easier for people to take public transportation to work than it is for them to drive to work. That means reengineering our cities. And that requires collective action, and that requires, well, politicians. The obesity epidemic was caused by political decisions to a large extent, or by political inaction. And I would argue that the climate crisis that we are facing is of the same ilk."

Listen. Understand this. There are many ways in which unbridled opportunism and dog-eat-dog competition and aggressive marketing are ultimately unhealthy for society. Businesses manipulate our desires and stimulate demand by using seductive advertising and sly sales tactics that utilize slick demonstrations, persuasive testimonials, sexy user imagery or amusing parody. They often appeal to base instincts for dominance over others, or sensual titillation, or obsequious conformity. And they rarely appeal to people's higher and more virtuous instincts.

It is foolishly shortsighted for us to let such persuasion stoke wasteful consumerism because this threatens the future well-being of life on Earth. This is especially true in light of mindless resource depletion and stimulated population growth. Our societies would be better off, in the long run, if we invested more money in well-rounded critical-thinking education, fairer opportunities, social justice, family planning programs, conservation efforts, and a safer national infrastructure. Instead of doing this, we squander taxpayer funds and borrow money from the future to give enormous tax breaks to rich people, and to increase "entitlements", and ramp up spending on military weapons, warfare, foreign occupations, and war and disaster reconstruction. This system stinks, methinks.

The federal government under George W. Bush crashed against the limits of military power as a primary instrument of foreign policy. We were purportedly trying to craft a culture of freedom for other peoples, but our motives were corrupted by a rapacious thirst for petroleum, powerful profiteering motives, and drives for economic dominance. Our vision is sadly blurred by a pronounced ignorance of complexity of local cultures. And our national presumption was bizarrely exaggerated by the effrontery of George W. Bush's claims to the wisdom of God.

The longer we delay in boldly and fairly dealing with global problems, the more we lose the ability to deal effectively with them. Let's get serious, and start now!

Chapter #76 - The Consequences of Corruption.

The U.S. has a "pay-to-play" political system. Lobbyists have succeeded in giving Big Money a primary say in almost all legislation enacted by Congress. Rather than being principally concerned with the health, safety and best interests of the public, new laws almost invariably have an overriding concern for the profitability of some narrow vested interest like the banking industry, the oil industry, the pharmaceutical industry, the tobacco industry, the chemical industry, the auto industry, the timber industry, mining industries, insurance industries, or the gun, defense and war services industries.

What are the main concerns of the food, drug and healthcare industries? They are concerned with profits, even more than with the health and well-being of the public. The missions of government agencies responsible for protecting the public interest are too often undermined by vested interest groups, lobbyists and political appointees. This happened in particular during George W. Bush's and Trump's tenures in the White House -- in the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Health and Human Services. These agencies often violated

their own charters and the best interests of the public under Republican leadership -- in order to give the goals of industry larger emphasis. Real nice, guys!

Think about how ridiculous this state of affairs is. The government is in charge of deciding how to spend the public's hard-earned taxpayer dollars, and instead of having our interests in the forefront of their consideration, political leaders are mainly focused on satisfying the interests of giant corporations and rich people. Lobbyists for these interests succeed wildly in skewing all policies and law-making in favor of Big Business. Regulations are minimized that would otherwise protect the health and safety of workers and the public. Loopholes and subsidies are perpetuated that are principally concerned with the profitability of narrow constituencies at the expense of the people.

Another subversion of the public interest has taken place when Republicans appointees outnumber Democrats on the Consumer Product Safety Commission. "Conservative" political appointees often try to reduce the staff and budget of the Commission, as if consumer safety is of diminishing concern, despite huge volumes of imports from China, where unregulated capitalism has created a long list of product export problems including toxic toys, tainted pet food, counterfeit toothpaste, defective tires, contaminated seafood and the like.

The 'culture of corruption' in our federal government has been strongly correlated to the number of lobbyists registered to do business in Washington, D.C.. This number has grown immensely in the past decade. These lobbyists spend many billions of dollars every year on seducing politicians to their partisan causes. It is no wonder that there is so much dysfunction in our government. It is pathetic that our political system involves legislators who pass new laws only when proposed bills have enough bells and whistles to gain the support of "conservative" representatives, and enough crumbs to bribe more progressive-minded ones into joining in to give the laws a slim majority voting "Yea".

I call on Congress to create simple, straight-forward, smart, honest, effective and equitable laws that are concerned with the common good. We need less complicated, less wasteful and less deceptive laws, and less institutionalized graft. Let's shrink corporate welfare, government bureaucracy, military expenditures, and deficit spending. Serious campaign finance reform in the form of Clean Money public financing, as discussed in Chapter #49, may be the crucial key to effect these changes.

Mark Twain once satirically made this statement, which contains a disturbing kernel of truth: "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class, except Congress."

Chapter #77 - On Improving People's Lives.

Paul Hawken, in his insightful book *The Ecology of Commerce*, provocatively states, "We have the capacity and ability to create a remarkably different economy, one that can restore ecosystems and protect the environment, while bringing forth innovation, meaningful work, and true security."

It is clear that it would be a much better plan to create a fairer economic system rather than to let unbridled capitalism, economic fundamentalism, ruthless conservatism, greedy selfishness, corrupt practices, aggressive militarism, and stupid shortsightedness rule from sea to shining sea. Let us stand up and demand fairness, reason, and intelligent redesign of our economic and political systems.

The trust of American citizens is being undermined by vested interests' assaults on scientific findings and critical thinking. The Executive Branch under George W. Bush and Donald Trump, as salient examples, violated rules of law, international treaties and even the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. President Bush betrayed the public by using secrecy and record numbers of "signing statements" that

allowed him to ignore parts of more than 1,100 laws passed by Congress. Almost every honorable virtue or principle has been subverted by the Republican Party since 2001 -- even loyalty.

Loyalty became orthodoxy, tribal conformity, obedience, "patriotic" blind faith and attachment to doctrine. It became a Karl Rovian dirty-trick kind of loyalty instead of a noble loyalty to ethical behavior or liberty and justice for all. As George Orwell wrote long ago in his great novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "Orthodoxy means not thinking, not needing to think." This book was Orwell's famous warning against totalitarianism

The U.S. Constitution was designed to prevent abuses of power by the federal government. Our Founding Fathers were very concerned about tyranny, having suffered the slings and arrows of imperial colonialism by the British. We sure should not now allow the President or Congress -- or the Supreme Court -- to similarly abuse power and act contrary to the common good.

Chapter #78 - The Need for Progressive Reform --- and Revolutionary Change!

The purpose of government is to manage the populace and resources of a state or a country in ways that are beneficial. The challenge of this purpose is to accomplish this goal with legitimacy and fairness, and to balance freedom and order without being overly repressive. This challenge should ensure that the ruling class does not receive excessive advantages at the expense of the majority.

The proper roles of government should be (1) to act as an equitable referee between private and unequal interests, guaranteeing a reasonable modicum of fairness of justice and opportunity, (2) to protect those who cannot protect themselves (including future generations) with a comprehensive understanding of, and concern for, the true components of security and well-being, and (3) to defend individual freedoms, civil rights and national security while avoiding overly intrusive interference in people's lives. Governments, in other words, should strive to provide conditions under which their citizens are reasonably free, secure, happy, prosperous and socially responsible.

Governments throughout history have been led by a ruling class that is selected through heredity (as in aristocracies), or by religious authorities (as in theocracies), or by military repression (as in dictatorships), or by Big Money (as in oligarchies and capitalist democracies). Ruling regimes generally operate in ways that are narrowly favorable to wealth and special privilege, and that often exploit people, act myopically, or are carelessly hedonistic. And too often, they act irresponsibly with regard to the best interests of the majority.

The U.S. government is afflicted by insider influence -- cronyism! -- and influence peddling, misguided priorities, wasteful spending, bureaucratic inefficiency, and incompetence. Many accounting frauds have occurred in the past two decades, including ones by the corporations WorldCom and Enron. Widespread lobbying scandals, institutionalized bribery and corporate malfeasance have taken place. Legislation like the Medicare Prescription Drug Act of 2003 has proved to be not only complicated and costly, but improperly designed because of the untoward influence of the pharmaceutical industry, whose compulsion to make bigger profits resulted in denying the federal government the power to negotiate volume discounts on Medicare drug prices. Corroboration of this assertion is found in the fact that conservatives in the U.S. Senate in 2003 repeatedly blocked a provision to seek more competitive procurement of drugs for Medicare patients. The majority of Americans has ever since been forced to pay high prices for prescription drugs to stimulate Big Pharma profiteering.

The Medicare Prescription Drug Act gave this industry, which has been described as "the most profitable industry in the world", the ability to continue charging excessively high prices for its

products. By decreeing that the federal government cannot negotiate with drug companies for lower prices, this Act allowed Big Pharma to shift the high costs of drugs to American taxpayers via Medicare. Within three years, \$41 billion in taxpayer dollars went to underwriting this drug 'benefit', and the share of the total prescription drug costs paid by Medicare in the U.S. had leaped from 2 percent to 18 percent. This reveals a deep contempt and disregard for the public interest! Real reform is required!

The Medicare Prescription Drug Act can accurately be understood as a new entitlement program that was written by Republicans and corporate lobbyists, and that was designed to transfer the high cost of drugs from the elderly to a younger generation of Americans through increased government debt to finance this program.

Another piece of legislation that was a gift to corporations was the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005. In this instance, generosity was rashly given to credit card companies and student loan companies. This law was a hardship for people who cannot afford usurious interest rates for credit card debt or high over-limit and late fees. The majority of people who have been affected, and who face bankruptcy, are those who have fallen on hard times because of expenses related to catastrophic illness, divorce or the loss of a job. It is unconscionable to allow our government to side with such changes in our national laws in favor of corporations instead of people who are in personally devastating life-altering circumstances.

Many of our leaders pathologically deceive us as to their true intentions and ulterior motives. They want us to believe they are trying to do the right thing. They speak of ideals and principles, morality and God. But the facts show that our national values are being perverted into a grotesque caricature of propriety -- one that only pretends to be concerned with fairness, or fiscal discipline, or honest leadership, or wise planning, or the health of our communities, or concern for the downtrodden, or peaceful coexistence, or religious tolerance, or true civic responsibility.

A particularly shortsighted and disturbing trend is the eagerness to aggressively exploit public lands for private profit. The Hurricane Katrina disaster revealed an extensive mismanagement of public resources. 'Premeditated ignorance' seems to have characterized many government policies, like when toxic trailers were provided by FEMA in Katrina's aftermath. The foolish ignoring of environmental harm caused by Army Corps of Engineers policies, and the oil industry, and dredging in the Mississippi River delta, are significantly to blame for this costliest disaster in U.S. history.

Many other abuses of power took place during the Bush administration. Outlandishly costly wars of aggression were launched using deceptive manipulations. Revelations concerning harsh treatment of suspects and prisoners by the CIA were no doubt just the tip of the iceberg related to clandestine activities, 'extraordinary rendition' abductions, and secret prisons and prisoner torture in countries like Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Uzbekistan. An investigation into the connections between the secret covert operations of the CIA and the global drug trade and money laundering is also disturbing. I encourage readers to check out the facts adduced in the radical but compelling book by Michael C. Ruppert, *Crossing the Rubicon - The Decline of the American Empire at the End of the Age of Oil*.

The Declaration of Independence states: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. --- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to

alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

In other words, when the government becomes the problem, it is the right of the people to alter that government. The reason for this concern was that the British government of King George III had acted as a tyrannical power toward the people in the American Colonies. It has become clear to many people today that our government has infringed on the unalienable rights of many of its citizens, so we should join together and demand changes wherever they are needed in our federal government and the states!

Almost without exception, legislation passed during the Bush and Trump administrations was focused on giving greater privileges to big corporations and a small minority of wealthy people. This fact alone makes it urgent that we reform our economic and political systems to reduce the influence of Big Money. We should demand fairer priorities from the federal government, and begin to pass laws that benefit the majority of Americans, not just narrowly focused special interest groups.

Chapter #79 - A Call for Political Change.

Lee Iacocca, at the age of 82, spoke out courageously and passionately to demand better leadership in America in his book titled *Where Have All the Leaders Gone?* In this book, he analyzed the qualities of good leadership that he had learned during his long and distinguished career. He pointed out the serious shortcomings of the Bush administration in his "Nine C's of Leadership": those leaders just did not show good character, honest communication, open-minded creativity, adequate courage, competence, fair convictions, properly used charisma, or common sense.

The Bush administration refused to accept responsibility for the incompetence and mistakes involved in wrong-headed priorities, excessive spending, enormous trade deficits, increased inequalities, lack of preparedness for emergencies in natural disasters, unjust military aggression, corporate fraud, FEMA scams, an emergency-room healthcare crisis, and a wide variety of shortsighted initiatives designed to facilitate resource exploitation at a high cost to the health of ecological systems.

The qualities that made America great have been significantly damaged by this arrogantly ambitious abuse of federal government power, in both domestic and international arenas. On the international front, during the Bush years provisions related to a ban on the use of landmines and the trade in small arms and guns like AK-47's were rejected or weakened. The nuclear test ban treaty was undermined, as were the anti-ballistic missile treaty, the chemical warfare treaty, the nonproliferation treaty, the biological warfare treaty, the International Criminal Court, the Nuremburg Principles and the great Geneva Conventions. How could our leaders have acted so obliviously, so unfairly, and with such unilateral hubris?

Let's demand that our elected representatives recognize the need for fairer and more progressive reforms. If we ever again have an administration that abuses its powers like the Bush administration did, remember that impeachment is the mechanism established by our Constitution to allow the American people to hold their government accountable. When our nation is hijacked by power-obsessed men who are not being held accountable for their actions, and who have usurped executive power to use harsh Gestapo-like "enhanced interrogation" techniques on prisoners, to use secrecy and shrewdly deceptive rationalizations in misleading the American people into supporting invasions of foreign countries, and to violate international laws and treaties, these actions should be seen as "high crimes and misdemeanors". Yes, these are the Constitutional grounds for impeachment. Later, Trump

was properly impeached for his abuses of power, and our system is seen to be too weak with hyper politicized partisans in the Senate having effectively sided with unconstitutional abuses of power.

Democrats are generally more fair-minded than Republicans on issues that affect the majority of Americans, but they do not yet truly represent the ecologically sound, fiscally responsible, truly peace-embracing, long-term-oriented, intelligent planning policies that are so desperately required. To improve the outcomes being imposed on us by our political duopoly, America needs a progressive transformation that will extensively alter BOTH political parties!

Governing well would be the 'best revenge' for the success of the next administration, I opined in 2009: "Let us all come together in hoping that Barack Obama will succeed in digging America out of the deep hole in which we find ourselves!"

As I was making some updates to this epistle, Ted Cruz was clamoring for President Obama to be impeached. Ted Cruz, the junior Republican Senator from Texas, likes to grandstand for attention, as he did to force the federal government to shut down in October 2013. In early May 2014, Ted Cruz made outraged (and outrageous) claims that President Obama was abusing his powers in ways that were comparable to the abuses of power King George III had committed in provoking the American colonists to declare independence in 1776. Those who wrote the Declaration of Independence had adduced 27 specific categories of "repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States." So Ted Cruz concocted a list of 76 instances of lawlessness and other abuses of power that he claims Barack Obama committed against the American people. A reading of these alleged abuses of power by Barack Obama -- compared to King George III's -- makes Ted Cruz sound like a complete idiot. And a real hypocrite, considering the many more expansive precedents of Executive Privilege claimed by George W. Bush during his eight years as president - and by Trump in his chaotic four years of criminality. DO NOT VOTE FOR EXTREME CONSERVATIVES!

Chapter #80 - Negative Nabobs of Neoconservatism.

The thoughts in this chapter obsessed me when the Bush administration was in power. I was thinking about Neoconservatism, a political philosophy that was promoted by the organization "Project for a New American Century". The organization's website asserted it is "dedicated to a few fundamental propositions: that American leadership is good both for America and for the world; and that such leadership requires military strength, diplomatic energy and commitment to moral principle."

Sounds good, right?! This moral declaration presupposes, however, that American leaders can be trusted to be honest statesmen who have clear vision and a commitment to ethical actions and a primary concern with the best interests of America and the world. The evidence seems to be overwhelming that this is NOT the case. It will never be the case as long as our economic and political system is dominated by wealthy people, powerful corporations, religious fundamentalists, and partisan politicians committed to winning at any cost.

It is even questionable whether our country can truly represent moral principles. Money and the drive for power and control almost always have stronger sway than the often gaudy pretenses of moral principles. The depth, breadth and variety of motivations and points of view in the world are all but beyond our clear comprehension, but let's try to cultivate honest bigger picture perspectives.

Most people have a hard time really understanding other cultures and how they see the world. Most barely seem to care what the best interests of others may actually be. Many have a frame of

reference that is one-sided, and distorted by an overriding self-centeredness, a subjective obtuseness, a cultural arrogance, an often hyped-up and myopic sense of nationalistic patriotism, and an "empathy deficiency" that makes it challenging to achieve fair understandings of other people. Stunted senses of empathy are often correlated with exploitive attitudes toward others, and to self-justifying preconceptions and indifference or hostility toward the hardships and suffering of others.

The doctrines of far right political ideologues pretend certainty, and deny these perspectives. History, insight and experience reveal that we should be wary of those who claim certainty, and who categorically and self-righteously denounce opinions that differ from theirs. We should be suspicious of those who portray others in terms of absolute good and evil. Likewise we should be wary of leaders who strive for ever-bigger privileges for the few at the expense of the many. We should oppose those who advocate militarism, war and personal agendas that are severely at odds with the common good.

In any given creed, acceptance of dogma is a chief proof of faith. Heresies against such creeds, and clarion voices in opposition, are often dealt with harshly. Inquisition! Unfortunately, stubborn adherence to any dogma, in the context of rapid change, can lead to a stultifying, myopic petrification and obstruction of adaptive initiatives.

The doctrines of extreme conservatism are contrary to the principles of democracy, in actual practice. Conservatism as a natural temperament is somewhat honorable; but it has been hijacked, betrayed and hoodwinked by movement conservatism as a radical ideology. These are predatory doctrines, and dangerous ideologies, not truly "conservative" philosophies. The use of such ideologies in ways that harm others or create undue hardship is anathema to liberty, fairness and democracy.

Extreme conservatism is concerned with gaining and wielding power, not with truth, morality or right action. It is obsessed with getting, maintaining and extending control, no matter how harmful this may be to Americans, or to other peoples, or to other species of life on Earth.

A compelling observation was made by conservative Patrick Buchanan in a national newspaper in 2008: "The GOP needs to confront the truth: The failure of the Bush presidency lies not in a failed execution of policy but in the policies themselves and the neoconservative ideology that informed them. Yet the party remains in denial, refusing to come to terms with the causes of its misfortune. One expects they will be given the time and opportunity for reflection soon. <The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars but in ourselves.>"

The GOP managed to adjust quickly to its then-new minority role in 2009. It embraced stubborn obstructionism with a vengeance. Opposition parties should play a constructive balancing role in our two-party system, but it should be an honestly constructive role with fair compromises, rather than one that involves nay saying, partisan intransigence, distorting arguments, ideological bullheadedness and insistence on supremacy at every turn. "Listen up, Rush Limbaugh!", I wrote years ago.

The greatest success of neoconservative ideology was to fool a significant proportion of Americans into thinking that the policies of the radical right are proper, fair and good - while at the same time they advanced an agenda that undermines democratic ideals, harms peaceful coexistence, is subversive of sustainable resource uses and contradictory to true justice, as well as being inimical to national security and inconsistent with fair-minded rational action. Hell of a job on the spin and propaganda, guys!

Right-wing spin has been surprisingly effective in co-opting the power of humanitarian caring for others by claiming there is an honest shred of compassion in conservatism. But the true province of empathy and compassion naturally lies with more liberal attitudes, not with rigid judgments, control drives, inflexible doctrines and narrow-minded certitudes. Extreme conservatism has a very ugly underbelly: a severe lack of compassion and willingness to harm millions of people to achieve its ends.

Being kind, thoughtful and respectful is a winning way in personal interactions with others. This implies there should be some way to translate positive-feedback-loop behaviors into the larger scope of human affairs. It is exceedingly curious that so many people deny the broad recognition that life has evolved over the eons, and that these people are generally absurdly unimaginative in their adherence to antiquated mythological conceptions of creation -- and that they are often the ones who, in the very act of clinging to faith in parochial ideas, give support to elements of society that oppose fairness, religious tolerance, ecological wisdom and other vitally important social impulses for overall well-being.

The importance of sustainable, fair and positive endeavors will increase as we crowd more and more people onto a planet already visibly being damaged by people exhibiting anthropocentric hubris, socially moronic rationalizations, and propensities to pollute and engage in wars.

Jesus stood for love, compassion and helping the downtrodden. He courageously criticized all forms of injustice and abuse of power by authorities. He surely would not have favored giving more and more benefits to the rich and powerful while letting poor people and working people and middle class people be deprived of fair opportunities to share in the benefits of their economic contributions.

Women and children are disproportionately overrepresented in poor segments of society. It seems unchristian to condemn so many of these vulnerable members of society to poverty in order to defend the status quo. "So dark the con of Man" -- and, in contrast, so potentially illuminating and liberating the clarity of reason and fair-mindedness. Let's seek salvation in this!

Chapter #81 - The Wide Continuum of Political Perceptions.

Man is a political being. As the size of the electorate grows, each person becomes a smaller cog in the body politic. This fact is contributing to an atrophying civic sense in many citizens. Voter turnout in American elections is significantly lower than it is in many other democracies around the world, despite the serious ramifications that politics and partisan policies have on people's lives.

The asphyxiating smog of opinions voiced in our societies can tend to reduce our independence of judgment. We are conditioned to have distinct predispositions for certain worldviews. Picture the political continuum that runs from the radical extreme left to the reactionary extreme right. About one-third of Americans seem to be naturally inclined toward liberal views and what linguist George Lakoff describes as values embodied by the empathetic and progressive *Nurturant Parent* outlook. Another one-third of people seem to be inclined toward conservative points of view and what Lakoff describes as values embodied by the male authoritarian, sternly disciplined and unempathetic *Strict Father* outlook. The rest of people fall between these two camps, and tend to be more open-minded and independent-thinking, so they give more intelligent consideration to issues relative to their actual merits. Or perhaps they are just befuddled by the confusing complexity of problems, or are cynical of the deceptions and corruption of politicians on both sides.

Overly permissive attitudes can lead to unruly behavior and delinquency in children and adults. On the other hand, overly repressive treatment can lead to even more seriously dysfunctional behaviors. A

consistent, healthy balance is the best plan in child rearing, as well as in politics and national planning. Yet the political right wing viciously attacks and demonizes people who hold liberal beliefs. They cast Democrat politicians as being "bleeding hearts" who are irresponsible in "tax and spend" propensities.

Once conservatives achieve positions of political dominance, they cynically prove to be much more irresponsible in their policies and priorities. They use the insidiously short-term-oriented expediency of borrowing to spend profligately on misguided goals. They cut taxes and increase spending, and borrow heavily to make up the difference. This provides economic stimulus in the short-run, but does so at a colossal future cost. Such misuses of public funds to enrich cronies, investors, profiteers and elite segments of society are a way of fleecing folks in the future. Radically ramping up military expenditures, and exploiting people's fears -- and misleading them to achieve this goal -- are gambits that do not respect fairness, honesty, conscience, statesmanship or responsible leadership.

George W. Bush, in his January 2002 State of the Union address, stated that "our budget will run a deficit that will be small and short term." Really? Either he was lying to the American people about his intentions, or he presided over the most colossally-inept fiscal management in modern history. The national debt grew to record high levels since then, and now represents a growing risk to our nation's financial health. The stimulative effect of deficit spending has created a bubble of debt, rash speculation, materialistic consumerism, irresponsible development and resource depletion.

No matter how predisposed some people are to social conservatism, and no matter how fervently they are committed to trusting leaders who claim to represent righteousness and God, the moral truth becomes ever-more starkly clear. Extreme conservatism is deficient, corrupt and immoral; and its doctrines are more akin to fascism than to Constitutional democracy. In fact, conservative doctrines closely channel the "14 Defining Characteristics of Fascism", as reported in a study by Dr. Lawrence Britt (Google this, for perspective).

The twentieth century was terribly affected by an any-means-justify-the-ends fascist attitude of Adolf Hitler. His dictatorial, anti-Semitic, militaristic ends are now widely regarded as the ultimate in reprehensible ideology and ambition. Americans should look closely at the ways that Dick Cheney and George ("I am the Decider") Bush invoked enemies to create secret prisons and help implement police-state-like Big Brother policies. Egregious provisions of the Patriot Act and of government violations of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 appeared to be wrong for the American people. Many people were hurt by the collecting of privacy-violating domestic telephone call database records by the National Security Agency, and the NSA has only gotten more intrusive as the years have gone along. Whistleblower Edward Snowden disclosed highly classified information about the NSA in 2013, single-handedly reigniting a global debate about government surveillance and our most fundamental rights as individuals. In December 2013, a federal judge vindicated Snowden's actions by declaring unconstitutional the NSA's spying program, labeling it "Orwellian" -- adding that James Madison would be "aghast." The documentary film *Citizenfour* reveals a nuanced perspective of Snowden that makes him appear much more virtuous than the "traitor" conservatives cast him to be.

Our government's abrogation of the Geneva Conventions and the Nuremberg Principles under George W. Bush was a dangerous precedent. It was suspiciously indefensible for the FBI to use "national security letters" in an improper manner, as it has done. The provision of the Patriot Act that allows these letters was, in fact, deemed unconstitutional by a U.S. District Court in 2007.

By January 2009, with a disastrous turn of economic events, Bush's approval rating fell to almost the lowest ever recorded for a President of the United States. The negative impacts of his launch of

unnecessary wars, together with the substantial inequities he encouraged, were made much worse by the economic meltdown that occurred in 2008, so it became obvious to billions of people globally that unhinged government and rash and inadequately regulated speculation, and ideological inflexibility are all bad for people and the planet.

The bottom line is that the pursuit of disastrously shortsighted policies should yield to better and fairer ideas. By failing to adjust to changing realities, inflexible ideologies become anathema to sensible policies and progress in our democracy.

Recognizing these developments, we should take bold steps to prevent tyranny and injustices that are disturbingly similar to the beginnings of the fascist world-domination gambits that led to World War II. Historian Sean Wilentz wrote a convincing article about why some people say George W. Bush might go down as "the worst president in history". An April 2008 survey of professional historians found that 98% believed that Bush's presidency was a failure, and 61% said that George W. Bush is the worst president in American history. Today, most honest historians are likely to say that Donald Trump is even worse in many respects due to the threats he poses to our democratic republic.

Today we need less doctrinal orthodoxy, and more honest assessment. We need less mismanagement, corruption, inequality, violence and military aggression. Instead, we need greater commitments to liberty and true justice for all. I am not a believer in reincarnation and bad karma, but sometimes there is poetic justice; and leaders that abuse privileges and discriminate unfairly against people, and harm the environment, and deceive voters for highly partisan purposes may eventually be forced to pay the piper. This is not much of a consolation, for the payments to the piper are much bigger in aggregate for hundreds of millions of people who were adversely affected by the narrow unfairness of 'Bushwhacked' policies than they have proved to be personally for George W. Bush and Dick Cheney.

Hope sprang anew for our nation with the election of Barack Obama. On Election Day in 2008, Obama spoke with a strong echo of Franklin Roosevelt's first inaugural speech when he said, "I will always be honest with you about the challenges we face. I will listen to you, especially when we disagree." After eight years of a Republican administration whose hallmarks had been secrecy and disinclination to listen to any voice outside its own inner circle, this promise of candor and fair communication was probably the most important policy statement that Barack Obama could have made as president-elect.

Some years after these words were written, the bloom was off the rose, and Barack Obama's performance had been seriously hobbled by Republican obstructionism. I personally judge President Obama and President Biden much more favorably than George W. Bush or Donald Trump.

Chapter #82 - Is Fascism Encroaching on America?

The following several chapters focus on our national need to strike a reasonable balance between individual liberties and national security. This emphasis is forceful because most of it was written in the throes of the days when the Bush administration was making serious inroads against liberty and rules of law and the U.S. Constitution. We should cultivate a better memory of the lessons of history, because they reveal that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

The epoch-defining political and economic struggle that is taking place between the competing forces of conservatism and progressivism was hijacked by conservatives in 2001, and it has always seemed clear to me that ideologues like them have effectively used people's feelings of fear, insecurity and nationalistic patriotism to facilitate highly partisan goals that are contrary to the common good.

A number of historical circumstances have generally prevailed when periods of extreme conservatism have come to dominate a nation. They include economic volatility, social unrest, hyped-up fears of anarchy, and widespread feelings of insecurity. These things make people yearn for stability and order. Demagogues were happy to oblige and exploit these feelings in the years from 2000 to 2008. Developments in U.S. politics during and since this era were reminiscent of trends that led to fascist dictatorships: there was deceptive propaganda, belligerent nationalism, pandering to corporate goals, a centralization of authoritarian power, control of the media by big corporations, much disdain for human rights, neglect of domestic priorities, the oppression of workers, a blaming of liberalism, the cultivation of fear, prejudice and hate, harsh punishments, politicization of the judiciary, rigidity of gender roles, sexism, male domination, racism, opposition to abortion, homophobia, anti-gay legislation, and the suppression of artists, intellectuals, writers, academia, and opposition forces. The need to reject all such trends is substantial.

Fascist leaders like Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Franco and Suharto demanded free enterprise, but they were actually either spokesmen or facilitators for vested interest privileges and more power for corporations and prerogatives for the wealthy. These ruthless leaders gained and maintained power and control by using tactics that were frighteningly echoed by Republicans in recent years: divide-to-conquer politics, crusading against unions, undermining good public education, reducing worker security and retirement benefits, outsourcing jobs, oppressing the average person exploiting insecurities, ratcheting up national debt, criminalizing protest, aggressively expanding prisons, and so on.

Republican TV commercials in the weeks before the November 2004 elections were particularly scary. One emotionally affective political ad evoked the visceral imagery of nightmarish fears of wolves threatening us in the forest. Similar forces and fears led to Adolf Hitler gaining power in the 1930s. Germans of that era were like frogs sitting in a pot of water that was slowly being brought to a boil. They watched and even saluted as right-wing fascism was insidiously imposed on them. Slowly, but surely, fanned fears of dangers from abroad and the clamor for order joined with a distorted sense of patriotism and feelings of national humiliation at the heavy reparations owed from the First World War. Manipulative scapegoating of Communists and others contributed to this rise of fascist control, and helped advance the ambitions of the Nazi regime for supremacy.

The concluding paragraph of "Fishy Tale" in the original *Earth Manifesto* is pertinent: "In times of great uncertainty, we seek the solace of certitude, of faith in leaders who promise to assuage our anxieties with strength, order and discipline; who give our lives meaning by striving for dominance, who project certainty of conviction, of moral goodness, of self-righteousness; who divert our attention from economic and social problems with aggressive military adventurism; who inspire nationalism and patriotism and ascendancy over others. Is this not what Adolf Hitler did? Shall we choose to learn, and not follow in the footsteps of that dangerous and genocidal demagogue?"

Evaluate the following insight that was contained in a sermon by Reverend Davidson Loehr: "It is both accurate and helpful for us to understand fundamentalism as religious fascism, and fascism as political fundamentalism. Both come from very primitive parts of us that have always been the default setting of our species: amity toward our in-group, enmity toward out-groups, hierarchical deference to alpha-male figures, a powerful identification with our territory, and so forth. It is this brutal default setting that all civilizations have tried to raise us above; but it is always a fragile thing, civilization, and has to be achieved over and over and over again."

Maybe this partially explains the astonishing hostility of the Radical Right to liberal-minded people and progressives. Bill Clinton was a very intelligent and charismatic president, but the effectiveness

of his administration in dealing with critically serious issues like health care, fairness between classes and genders, environmental sanity, and sustainable economic transformation was crippled by ferocious right-wing assaults on him; oh, horror, he LIED about sexual dalliances with Monica Lewinski! Likewise, Barack Obama is one of the most intelligent presidents we've ever had, yet his progressive instincts have been rudely stymied by a morphing "vast right wing conspiracy."

These same people on the Radical Right were curiously and hypocritically complacent in regard to the devastating deceptions of relative dummy George W. Bush and cronies relating to much more serious and dangerous issues, like dishonesty about the motives for preemptive wars and military occupations. It is nearly impossible to create peace and a sustainable future in a society dominated by right-wing self-righteousness, intolerance, deceit, antagonized culture wars, and hostility toward people trying to improve the world.

Sinclair Lewis wrote a novel in 1935, *It Can't Happen Here*, about "Buzz" Windrip, a southern politician who campaigned on family values, patriotism and defending the flag. Buzz Windrip portrayed anyone concerned with individual rights and freedoms as being anti-American. He basically advocated a form of totalitarianism. And, yes, it could happen here. It actually got much closer to happening here under George W. Bush and Donald Trump.

As Sinclair Lewis might have warned, and Huey Long might have cautioned us: "When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag, carrying the cross."

Yikes -- Jesus would have been astounded! The intertwining of government with religion has been a hallmark of oppressive regimes throughout history, and "catapulting of the propaganda" has been used mercilessly to manipulate people and affect public opinion. It is bizarre to see religious authorities support government actions that completely contradict the major tenets of moral goodness and right action that are contained in many religious scriptures and sermons.

A plot to blow up airplanes with liquid explosives was discovered in London in August 2006. President Bush declared that the plot was "a stark reminder that this nation is at war with Islamic fascists." This is an inflammatory characterization, slandering an entire religion. It begs the question: are Muslim fanatics who are prosecuting jihad warfare truly "fascists"? Or was this merely election-year sloganeering, a red herring, a name-calling subterfuge that springs from subconscious motives that are unaware of their own extreme-right propensities?

Marc Ash wrote to President Bush in a blog at truthout.com, "One might wonder if you are troubled by the specter of fascism in your inner thoughts when you cast the accusation wildly into the public discourse." He noted that "One of Karl Rove's favorite tactics is to charge opponents with whatever it is you're guilty of yourself." This is both subconscious psychological projection and dishonorable deception. And Trump Republican developments in recent years make such ruses worse.

Blowing up an airplane full of passengers is certainly an act of barbaric terrorism, no matter what the objective of the act. But it barely resembles the real definition of fascism in the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*: "A philosophy or system of government that advocates or exercises a dictatorship by the extreme right, typically through the merging of state and business leadership, together with an ideology of belligerent nationalism."

From this definition, it seems that President Bush actually tried, with some success, to move America in the direction of a fascist state. He fortunately failed to implement policies to move America as far

right as his neoconservative backers would have liked, but this is thanks only to robust resistance of more liberal-minded and Libertarian Americans and the safeguards in our Constitution.

"A dictatorship would be a heck of a lot easier," George W. Bush, said on July 27, 2001, "there's no question about it." It is a significant modern-day challenge to prevent right-wing political doctrines from dominating decision-making in the U.S. It is difficult to resist the beginnings of such trends. Much apathy, complacency and uncertainty exists about the ends to which these insidious beginnings are leading. But once right-wing leaders become firmly entrenched, it becomes exceedingly difficult to dislodge them, no matter what damage they do to democracy, fairness, citizen rights, individual freedoms, statesmanship, diplomacy, true prosperity, financial accountability, or hopes for justice and peace in the world.

To save the United States from repressive government by the right wing and rich people and corporations, we need to elect moderates and liberals, not control-freak reactionaries and centrist conservatives who have moved far to the right to get the energized support of the fervor-driven Republican political base. To prevent unwarranted influence by obstructionist Republicans and "conservative" authoritarians, we need to be vigilant, courageous, and clear in our understandings. We should make revolutionary commitments to fair-minded social action and political progressivism.

Those who portray themselves as caring conservatives seem generally to be the ones who are most susceptible to stubborn ideological arguments put forth by right-wing politicians and patriarchal authority figures. Manipulative demagogues strive to suppress knowledge and right understanding by calling on father-like male gods and exploiting absurd mythological concepts of a obedience-demanding Creator in order to engender support for initiatives that hypocritically obstruct true justice, oppose common good reforms -- and stimulate the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few.

Outrage at our misbegotten national priorities finally reached the stage where the populace demanded change, as it had done in Australia in November 2007 when conservative Prime Minister John Howard was thrown out of office. A similar scenario played out in the national elections of November 2008, resulting in the election of Barack Obama.

Our close call with greater authoritarianism was thus thwarted until Trump grabbed control in 2016. But the federal government and the Federal Reserve became much more involved in the economy for purposes like keeping international banks from collapsing. Public frustration often shifts to nagging and valid concerns about high unemployment, retirement insecurity, Congressional gridlock, extreme political partisanship, record levels of national debt, economic instability, and "too big to fail" banks and their being bailed out. These things contribute to voter anger. Since the Supreme Court's January 2010 ruling that overturned limits on corporate spending on elections, the crystal ball has become clouded, and it is hard to predict how increased corporate influence will affect people's privacy and their individual security and ability to resist the tyranny of those eager to abuse power.

Chapter #83 - Speaking Truth to Amoral Power.

Neoconservatism dominated our politics from 2001 to 2008. Neoconservatives took shrewd advantage of the calamity of 9/11, and used it as a Pearl-Harbor-like justification for a global 'war on terror', and for an egregious expansion of Executive powers. A wide range of unfair domestic and foreign policies were implemented, and the fears and insecurities of Americans were exploited to divide and alienate people, and to advance a self-serving elitist agenda, and to gain support for war against 'enemies' we have helped create.

Neoconservatism is a radical political philosophy that employed bullying tactics and worked to destroy opposition and eliminate dissent. It used deceptive pretenses, misleading propaganda, simplistic slogans and shallow sound bites to manipulate the populace. It put U.S. troops in harm's way using false pretexts. In action, it condoned prisoner torture and renditions. It sowed distrust and hatred toward other nations who object to our supremacist ambitions. It eagerly used deceitful rhetoric to fool the public into believing that its actions were consistent with its words. It gave government funds to "faith-based initiatives" and exploited religion in hypocritical ways, and used taxpayer funds to promote religious discrimination. And it distorted scientific knowledge and denied convincing evidence of things like the anthropogenic causes of climate disruptions in order to accomplish narrow political ends.

"The good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it."

--- Neil deGrasse Tyson

The Manichean dogma of black-and-white "moral absolutism" has been used to strengthen right-leaning political positions. This dogma holds that there are moral absolutes of good and evil. This idea is used to paint a false dichotomy between us, the "good guys", and others, the evil ones. I have traveled extensively, and found that there are plenty of good people everywhere. Every person has both positive and negative impulses, and the blurred and indistinct line between good and evil does not run between us and "them", or between our country and other countries; in truth, this line runs right through each and every one of us.

There are no absolute rights or wrongs. Subjectivity envelops all circumstances. There is, however, relativity, and there are greater or lesser likelihoods that certain perspectives correspond more accurately to evidence, facts and deeper truths. It is my strong conviction that the ideas you are reading here are perceptive interpretations that are more accurate than those peddled by partisan politicians, corporate apologists or religious fundamentalists. Voice your editorial opinion -- I am open to it, and will make Wikipedia-like modifications of anything in the Earth Manifesto, in accordance with more perceptive understandings.

True patriotism is found in speaking truth to amoral power. We should question authority and oppose abuses of power that characterize extreme ideologies.

Chapter #84 - Neoconservatism and Right-Wing Think Tanks.

Neoconservatism is a movement that advocates "benevolent global hegemony", along with big increases in military spending. It thus effectively supports aggressive militarism, and also tends to facilitate graft at the public trough and corrupt benevolence into selfish greed. Conservatives have allied themselves with the interests of giant corporations by advancing doctrines of laissez-faire capitalism, voodoo 'trickle-down' economics, and regressive changes in taxation. They oppose most regulations on businesses. Neoconservatism thrives on cronyism, and thereby encourages irresponsible leadership. It champions privatization and limits on corporate liabilities, no matter how detrimental the outcome this has for the majority of people. It welcomes subcontracting of government functions to the private sector, and the outsourcing of jobs, and the weakening of civil service rights. It harms society by opposing social programs like adequate funding for public education, universal health care, livable minimum wages, and employment opportunities for the underprivileged.

The Republican Party was successful in dominating politics from 2001 until 2009 despite the fact that its doctrines were retrogressive and anti-populist. As we have seen, they succeeded in part by taking advantage of anger and fear generated by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. They capitalized on Big Money

given to conservative causes and politicians by rich people and vested interest groups. They used the skills and corrupt tactics of people like Jack Abramoff and Rep. Tom DeLay, the dishonorable Texas "Hammer". They stoked hot-button social issues to gain the support of social conservatives, and then betrayed many of the cherished convictions that are important to honorable conservatism. And they organized effectively and commanded strict loyalty to their party and doctrines.

Neoconservatives and their later ideological spawn rose to ascendance in part by investing heavily in dozens of right-wing think tanks that had the purpose of influencing public opinion and the media. Organizations like the Federalist Society, the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute frame issues in favor of less-regulated capitalism, dogmatic propaganda, fundamentalist economic theories, right-leaning ideologies and self-serving worldviews. They provide their partisan points of view to legislators, lobbyists, judges, journalists and the press. In the process, analysts and operatives in these think tanks seriously skew our democracy toward unfair and anti-democratic doctrines.

The American news media has to a large extent gone along with this effort to influence and distort public opinion. They willingly swallowed and regurgitated the Bush administration's talking points and propaganda in the run-up to wars abroad. By doing so, the media abdicated impartiality and the integrity of ethical journalism, and failed to deliver in their important roles of investigative reporting, counterpoint analysis and watchdog scrutiny. Why has this come to pass?

One reason is that there has been a dramatic consolidation in media companies. They are all now owned by some of the largest corporations in the country. General Electric owns NBC. Viacom owns CBS. Disney owns ABC. AOL Time Warner owns CNN. And Fox News is owned by arch-conservative Rupert Murdoch. Republican policies are favorable to the profitability of these big companies, and to their ability to abuse corporate privileges and power.

Rupert Murdoch has been called "the global king of media". Murdoch, according to one observer, has had an extraordinarily degrading impact upon our media and political culture. His tabloid approach to news, his fixation on celebrity news, and his overt right-wing political bias on Fox News has combined with deceptive journalism and a lack of integrity to help turn American and British politics into a realm of unthinking polarization, sensationalism, manufactured controversy and wrongdoing.

Rupert Murdoch is a conservative ideologue who controls the very biased Fox Network. In Robert Greenwald's film *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism*, it was revealed that 67% of Fox News viewers believed that the U.S. had "found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al Qaeda terrorist organization". In contrast, only 16% of Public Broadcasting System viewers believed this. It has been proved, of course, that this "evidence" did not exist, and that al Qaeda had not operated in Iraq before the U.S. invaded the country.

Our military intervention in Iraq not only brought that nation severe economic dislocation but also millions of people displaced from their homes and widespread sectarian violence and suicide bombings, and a radical increase in the barbaric influence of al Qaeda and then an Islamic State in Iraq. Fox News did a terrible job of honestly explaining the real story behind this big picture understanding.

Fox News is not fair and balanced, and not accurate or truthful. It often presents partisan viewpoints that are heavily skewed toward conservative Republican propaganda and what sometimes turns out to be "big lies". A report by the Union of Concerned Scientists in 2014 found that when Fox News discusses climate science, only 28 percent of its coverage is accurate. This kind of news is downright dangerous to our collective well-being!

And Fox gave broad support to Trump during his time in office, and to his Big Lie about widespread election fraud that led to the January 6, 2021 insurrection.

An early twentieth century editor and publisher of a small town newspaper gave his staff a directive to "always do what is right for the community." This is appropriate and laudable! In contrast, media tycoon Rupert Murdoch's apparent motives are to make the biggest possible profit while maintaining his personal commitment to fundamentalist economic doctrines and far right social conservatism. He is committed to controlling, dominating and advancing his personal propaganda and protecting the privileges of the powerful. How pathetic a contrast this is, in comparison to more honorable people who champion the common good!

Another conglomerate, Clear Channel Communications (which slyly changed its name in September 2014 to iHeartMedia), owns more than 850 full-power AM and FM radio stations in the U.S. that reach an estimated 245 million listeners every month. It was founded by supporters of the conservative establishment. It actively censored anything that was critical of the Bush Presidency or the war in Iraq. It even banned more than 200 songs related to peace in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, including John Lennon's great song "Imagine". Imagine that! Then, in November 2007, Clear Channel discouraged all of its affiliates from playing songs from "*Magic*", the then-latest album by Bruce Springsteen, because of war-related lyrics it contained, even though the album was No. 1 on the *Billboard* charts. It is not healthy for our democracy to have progressive views stifled, or to have our culture dumbed down and trivialized.

The "Big Lie" is a term first coined by Adolf Hitler in his 1925 autobiography *Mein Kampf*. This term was made famous by Josef Goebbels, the minister of propaganda for the German Third Reich from 1933 to 1945. The idea was simple: if you tell a 'big lie' often enough, most people will come to accept it as the truth. As Goebbels himself said, "'If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the state can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. The truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the state.'" Yikes!

To protect ourselves from overweening domination by the state, we need to find the most accurate understandings of the truth, and then disseminate them more widely. The U.S. Office of Strategic Services (predecessor of the CIA) described the methodologies used by the Nazis to propagate their Big Lies: "Their primary rules were: never allow the public to cool off; never admit a fault or wrong; never concede that there may be some good in your enemy; never leave room for alternatives; never accept blame; concentrate on one enemy at a time and blame him for everything that goes wrong; people will believe a big lie sooner than a little one; and if you repeat it frequently enough people will sooner or later believe it."

One of the most pernicious examples of a Big Lie sold to the American public was that the 'War on Terror' is an undertaking designed to make us safer. The 'War on Terror' was a 'mega-lie', a deception about the true intentions of the Bush administration in its preemptive wars of aggression. And Trump's shameless avalanche of false and misleading claims led to his Big Lie about his 2020 election loss, which in turn led to a dangerous existential threat to the independence of our democracy.

Another glaring instance of official deception relates to global warming and climate change. In the Oscar-winning film by Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth*, it was revealed that there is overwhelming scientific consensus that mankind is contributing to a rapid increase in carbon dioxide in Earth's atmosphere. Ninety-seven percent of climate scientists admit the impact of human activities on climate change, yet with media complicity, about half of all Americans indicate that they either doubt that global warming is occurring or that human activities are contributing to climate change.

Another reason that a free press and truly fair, balanced and truthful media are important is that decision-making in a democracy relies on having its citizens be well-informed. Our democratic system doesn't work well when voters are misinformed, deceived, deluded and emotionally hijacked.

Most of U.S. history shows that social change has tended over the long run to evolve in the direction of more progressive initiatives. By contrast, the entire worldview and ideology of conservatism has generally opposed progress. Conservative prejudices and frames of reference have yielded, but only in fits and starts, to ideas that are more fair and true to our nation's founding ideals. Consider these instances: Conservatives supported slavery and supported the segregation, discrimination and oppression encompassed in 'Jim Crow' laws. They opposed giving women the right to vote and the Equal Rights Amendment. They opposed anti-trust laws and the limitation of the work week to 40 hours and initiatives to mitigate the harms inherent in child labor. They supported Prohibition and demagogic McCarthyism. They opposed the New Deal and Social Security. They oppose increases in the minimum wage and food stamp programs and universal healthcare. They gave only tepid support to environmental laws like the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act. They support right-wing dictatorships in many countries, and they supported the Vietnam War. They support regressive tax breaks that shift the tax burden to workers and away from the rich. In short, almost all major advancements of freedom and justice in U.S. history have been opposed by conservatives.

This trend has been made much worse by radical conservatives, who have even forsaken many of the fundamental underpinnings of conservative ideals, such as sensibly limiting the size of government and implementing fiscally responsible balanced budgets, and protecting citizens from intrusiveness by the government and invasions of privacy, and defending a sensible and fair "wall of separation" between the Church and State.

The American people are being brainwashed. Our economic and political duopoly system has allowed our great nation to be driven toward financial bankruptcy, as well as social and ecological calamity. Let's demand a peaceful revolution to change this state of affairs!

Chapter #85 - The Foolish Toad.

We need public policies that are SMART, not merely shrewd. Gaming the system to gain benefits at the public expense is shrewd. Giving lobbyists the power to write laws is shrewd. Deceiving people to accomplish overly narrowly-focused goals is shrewd. Using fear and the name of God to advance military goals is shrewd. Smearing opponents is shrewd. Giving debt-financed tax breaks to rich people is shrewd.

Redesigning our economy to be more sustainable is smart. Enacting incentives and disincentives that are designed to achieve environmentally and socially beneficial goals is smart. Acting to limit destructive exploitation of people and natural resources and public lands is smart. Adopting far-sighted and broadminded points of view is smart. Sound policies that are consistent with the health of natural ecosystems are smart. Investing in positive outcomes for the common good is smart.

Truly constructive decision-making involves critical thinking, honest assessment, and giving respectful consideration to opposing viewpoints. Local government decision-making can provide us with valuable insights due to the fact that many conflicts of interest take place in various domains of local and regional government. Different users of parks and open spaces, for example, want the freedom to use these areas without restriction, and hikers, mountain bike riders, horseback riders, dog owners and wildlife all have somewhat different interests. These desires often conflict, especially when public areas become heavily used. Decisions regarding such issues are best made after objectively

listening to all competing interests, and fairly evaluating perspectives and grievances, and then finding a resolution that is fairest to the largest number of users.

It is a bad long-term strategy to steamroll dissent, deceive the public, and unfairly pander to vested interests. These detrimental activities increase the probabilities that our government and society will not fairly solve problems. This in turn contributes to making these problems become more and more expensive to remedy, and increasingly difficult to fix or ameliorate.

Mario Cuomo noted in his 1995 book *Reason to Believe* that the conservative agenda "is a new Harshness that will make our problems worse, while stirring our meanest instincts and trampling upon our best impulses." In the interregnum since it was published, almost 30 years ago, the truth of this contention has become glaringly evident.

Right-wing conservatives imitate the foolish Toad in Kenneth Grahame's wonderful book, *The Wind in the Willows*. Toad is so conceited about his cleverness that he commits the most astonishing and compulsive of follies. This delightful story-telling is excellent to read aloud to children, and it is also an enjoyable "read" for adults. It provides a highly entertaining allegory of sensibility, wisdom, folly, recklessness, and the positivity of faithful caring friendships. The Mole, the Water Rat and Badger are fabulous characters; I heartily recommend the pleasure of reading about them!

Chapter #86 - The Hero Archetype vs. Wisdom.

The "Hero archetype" could be said to have been activated by the traumatic events of 9/11. But a hero's strength is not necessarily balanced with wisdom of action. The biggest risks related to leaders pretending to act as heroes are their loss of contact with people's actual hardships and vulnerabilities and their failure to clearly see the consequences of actions. Soon after 9/11, George W. Bush began acting out a quasi-religious enthusiasm that is characteristic of the unconscious "Savior archetype". He claimed he would save the American people from evil. Taking advantage of people's fears and heightened senses of vulnerability, he initiated a barrage of emotionally-charged judgments and black-and-white assessments of 'terrorists' and Islamic peoples. By polarizing and manipulating Americans into supporting ill-advised and extremely costly military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, he seriously undermined our financial and social well-being and the integrity of our principles.

It is an axiom that the more we make others look evil, the more evil we appear to them. When we look at something from only one point of view, or from only one part of ourselves, as psychologists say, we have difficulty seeing any other. When George W. Bush embraced an absolutist Manichean worldview that says 'we are good' and 'they are evil', he turned a blind eye to vitally important alternate ways of seeing things. He surrounded himself with loyalists and sycophants, and purged his inner circle of people who had differing perspectives. These actions effectively drowned out the aspects of wrongdoing in aggressive militarism. As time passed, many began to realize that opposing points of view have been overlooked, and that this has put us in greater danger.

A secret to a good relationship is to maintain respect for the other person. As Clyde Prestowitz says in his book *Rogue Nation*, "Nations are very much like individuals. More than desire for material gain or fear or love, they are driven by a craving for dignity and respect." He adds, "The rest of the world has its own traditions, ways, and values for which it wants respect." When we bully others, and don't listen to them, or place our nation above the law, or use coercion to advance the interests of the influential, or act with an attitude of superiority and oblivious insensitivity to other cultures, we cause resentment that has dangerous ramifications for our true national security. Policies that disregard the dignity of others, in living as well as in dying, are particularly despicable -- and wrong.

Psychologists Hal Stone and Sidra Stone wrote the following, in articles about the "Dance of Selves in Relationship" in a February 2003 "Open Letter to President George W. Bush": "One of the strongest indications of a mature personality is the ability to stand between the opposite viewpoints in conflict situations and to be able to hold both, when making decisions. This doesn't mean that we become passive in the way we conduct our life. This doesn't mean that we don't have an ethical or moral sense! It means we are able to feel the two sides of a situation. We must still ultimately make a decision about the situation. But the decisions we make are not made on 'automatic pilot', the decisions we make come from a deeper and wiser place within. ... This is the reason -- at least theoretically the reason -- why executives have a board of directors and an advisory board. The idea is to get a broad range of differing (often intensely opposing) input from people. Then, after assimilating this information, the executive is better prepared to act and make the best decision possible."

I say, let's begin to act with greater social intelligence in our attitudes towards others! And let's demand that our leaders begin to make better decisions that facilitate the common good!

Chapter #87 - The Truth.

Sir Winston Churchill once said: "Men stumble over the truth from time to time, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened." That's rather ironically funny!

Consider this truth: Cyclical swings in politics occur throughout history. America swung too far to the right during the Bush and Trump administrations. The tenets of conservatism and Trumpism and politicians who supported these doctrines deserve to be rebuked. We should never again elect politicians who march in ideological lockstep with the far right. The wisdom of this assertion has been cogently confirmed by seeing how misguided Republican undertakings have been in the past decade.

There are basically only three ways that the trajectory of our lives can be changed for better or for worse: (1) through random chance and circumstantial change, (2) as the result of a crisis, or (3) by making conscious choices. Let us courageously choose to make the world a better place.

As the Jewish grandmother Buddhist, Sylvia Boorstein once said, "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 positive attitudes -- and for the wisdom in finesse!

Philosophic folks sometimes debate whether the glass is half full or half empty. Life can be beautiful, ecstatic, wonderful, fulfilling and lovely; it can also be miserable, painful, unhappy, frustrating and degraded. The Dalai Lama would say that we can, to an extent, choose how we live our lives, and the attitudes we maintain. He would acknowledge that the practices we undertake can effectively accentuate the positive and minimize the negative. Even though we have a limited control over the circumstances that befall us, we do have a range of choices on how to live more meaningful and responsible lives.

The Serenity Prayer offers a cliché perhaps, but a valuable one:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
the courage to change the things I can;
and the wisdom to know the difference.

The distinct human capacity for reflection and intentional choice carries a corresponding moral responsibility to care about others. Indeed, our deepest desire is arguably to live in loving or at least

respectful relationships with one another. The hunger for friendships and loving families and caring communities is a powerful but latent unifying force in our civilizations.

To accomplish positive goals, it is best to have focus and confidence in our abilities to attract what we seek. This is *"The Secret"*, according to the pop book and film by the same name. Consider the Earth Manifesto as a Vision Board for humanity, and visualize these ideas as being a new form of positive thinking and collaboration that could provide better understanding and potentials in our lives.

If our societies strived to make people feel safer, and truly left no child behind, and gave effective encouragement to everyone to achieve their goals, and helped every person to see themselves in a light that was in harmony with the most authentic part of their souls, we could create conditions in which everyone would be more likely to achieve a purposeful life and actualize his or her highest potential. This would be a fortuitous plan, and perhaps even a potential foundation for a winning political coalition!

Discontent and frustration are discouraging, but they also can have curiously positive social aspects, for they contain great motivating and driving energies. "Blessed unrest" is a force that helps foster grassroots efforts to make creative choices to change our societies and institutions. This is the heart of authenticity, and doggone if we don't need to get real!

Let's work to prevent the hemorrhaging of our souls that comes from harsh selfishness, ruthless opportunism, and a pathetic disconnectedness from nature. Perhaps meditative equanimity and empathy and the kind of balanced philosophical outlook found in Buddhism are just what we need.

One of the most basic insights of Buddhist philosophy is that life is ephemeral. Pain and death are inevitable, but suffering is optional. These aspects of the human condition enrich our existences by training our attention to the Here and Now, and make us aware that we should appreciate life and try to live mindfully and appreciatively. Life certainly has its indignities, more for some than for others, but it is best not to worry or despair. Hallelujah for positive perspectives!

It should be our responsibility, however, all of us together, to help create societies that really do mitigate the needs for people to be concerned about their general welfare. Social concern is potently valuable as a motivator; impotent worry is not. "Don't worry, be happy." *Namaste*, as they say: "I salute, honor and respect the divine within you"!

"What a drag it is gettin' old," Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones sings. But hey, stuff happens. Our own individual deaths are one of the few certainties in life. Because of the ephemeral nature of our individual existences, and because we are an integral part of a larger social whole, the legacy we choose to leave, intentionally or inadvertently, is something we should take into account with much greater care and seriousness. Let's not be so hell-bent on achieving a 'nineteenth nervous breakdown', or 'turning your back on treating people kind'. Thanks, Mick!

"Hey, hey! You, you! Get off of my cloud!" Can't we all just get along? Remember, guys, it may NOT actually be a good idea to try to have women "under your thumb" all the time; things would work out better for men AND women if males were to make more concerted efforts to give females a greater modicum of respect. "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometime, you just might find you get what you need!" There is definite lyrical wisdom in these Rolling Stones lyrics!

Chapter #88 - Misguided Priorities.

Human motivations are driven by needs and desires that largely determine our behaviors and actions. We have physiological needs for food, water and sleep, and basic needs for safety and security.

Beyond these needs, we have social impulses for bonding and belonging, and for self-esteem and a need for the approval and respect of others. At the highest level, the noblest of human strivings relate to self-actualization desires, ethical actions and helping others. The American psychologist Abraham Maslow identified this hierarchy of human needs.

Our societies would benefit by efforts to lift all people up above the level of their basic needs. The political right wing is arguably on the wrong side of this intention with their zealous enthusiasm for giving special perks to the rich and privileged segments of society. Their stingy antagonism toward domestic programs that benefit poor people, the middle class, women, children, and the less fortunate members of society compound the problems that result from such an agenda.

Bill Moyers criticized the sad state of our democracy in a speech just five weeks after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, saying this: "Our business and political class owes us better than this. After all, it was they who declared class war twenty years ago, and it was they who have won. They're on top. If ever they were going to practice the magnanimity of winners, this was the moment. To hide now behind the flag while ripping off a country in crisis fatally -- fatally! -- separates them from the common course of American life."

Consider this closely. Not only is it not magnanimous, but it is essentially immoral for our leaders to create ever-increasing inequalities of privilege, opportunity, income, wealth, security, and access to healthcare. It is unfair and mean-spirited to push economic policies that benefit the few and increase already glaring social inequities.

The staunch defense of this unfair state of affairs is an outrage against our democratic founding principles. Divisive strategies, corrupt cronyism, regressive laws, harsh punishments, repressive tactics, Big Brother domination, uncompromising partisanship and hyper-unfair initiatives are affronts to the ideals upon which our country was founded.

The misguided priorities of conservative politicians are a staggering tragedy for millions. Shame on them for using diversionary tactics to wage extremely costly wars on drugs and terrorism. These priorities ignore much more serious threats to the public's safety and sanity. They ignore our pressing need to deal courageously with such issues as properly maintaining our nation's infrastructure and preventing environmental damages, and acting responsibly to reduce greenhouse-gas-exacerbated global warming that is destabilizing the climate and driving extreme calamitous weather events.

Revelations in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina highlighted our vulnerabilities and the risks of our current course of activities. The radical right and entrenched interests hijacked national concerns for Katrina victims to further advance their doctrines and pet projects by reducing environmental regulations, suspending the Davis/Bacon Act that required fair wages to be paid to relief workers, cutting programs that benefited the poor, creating private school vouchers, and giving generous 'no-bid contracts' to corporations like Halliburton. Not long after the Katrina calamity, Congress again reduced taxes on the wealthy. Some of the most conservative Representatives in Congress at the time, like Richard Pombo, intensified their efforts to emasculate the Endangered Species Act. They tried to accelerate the logging of national forests and the mining of natural resources on public lands. In the meantime, the Congressional majority opposed bold conservation measures and green taxes and viable alternatives to the use of fossil fuels. This was all but unbelievable!

Republicans call for selling off millions of acres of public lands. Such plans are myopic, irresponsible, undisciplined, and cynically wrong-headed. Our elected representatives owe us better; let's demand greater responsibility and more strict accountability, and let's throw the bad actor rascals out

Chapter #89 - The Federal Budget Is a Moral Document.

Politics is at the center of the storm where all competing interests clash and struggle for ascendancy. Politics involves personalities, posturing, rhetoric, deception and slick marketing. But beneath all these distractions, a battle rages for wealth, power and privilege. It is a struggle between forces that advocate unrestricted freedom to "game" the system and opposing forces that are concerned with greater propriety and fairness.

The conflict between honorable principles and vested interests was especially apparent in the rosy rhetoric of the 2007 State of the Union message, which was followed within days by a federal budget that reflected blatant contradictions and different priorities than the disingenuous words. For instance, here was a real irony: President Bush finally admitted a fact in one of his annual State of the Union messages that experts have been warning us about for decades: "America is addicted to oil." Then he followed this admission up with a policy prescription: "The best way to break this addiction is through technology." Anyone who thought about it for a few seconds might conclude that, to the contrary, the best way to break our addiction to oil would be to find more immediate and effective ways to REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF OIL WE USE!

Nonetheless, Bush and his Cabinet set out after the speech to barnstorm the country to deflect attention from fact that the proposed budget actually reduced funding for conservation programs of the Department of Energy by more than \$100 million, and further cut the energy-saving Weatherization Assistance Program by one third. The President's first stop was the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Colorado. One observer puts it this way: "But then -- and don't you hate it when this happens? -- the day after the State of the Union, the Department of Energy announced that \$28 million in budget cuts will mean the layoff of 32 alternative energy researchers, many of them specializing in wind and biomass, exactly the technologies that Bush had touted in his speech." A few quick phone calls were made to improve the optics of the situation, and \$5 million was taken out of someone else's budget and given back to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory to hire back, at least temporarily, the laid-off researchers, just in time for Bush's road trip speech."

The Energy Department's proposed budget in 2007 reduced energy efficiency programs by about 16%. This equates to spending 30% less on energy efficiency than in 2002, when adjusted for inflation, according to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. That was STUPID!

My ridicule and cynicism are not idle criticism. Federal budgets are in effect moral documents. They identify the actual priorities of our leaders, not the merely rhetorical ones. When politicians say one thing, but authorize another, it is an offense against the truth -- and it is also an outrage against important principles of integrity, democratic fairness and proper priorities. It is, foremost, a serious error of intention that distorts wise planning.

Chapter #90 - Considering Deeper Causes and Consequences.

Tough Love conservatism is characterized by a distinct deficit of compassion. It panders to attitudes that lack empathy and encourage injustices. It represents an attitude of "I've got mine; too bad that you don't have yours; you obviously must not deserve it." Conservatism is generally compassionate only as a narrative of fiction. Some say that 'compassionate conservatives' often act like ruthless reactionaries because they demonstrate a blatant lack of conscience. Their supremacist worldviews resemble a type of knee-jerk masquerade of heartless opportunism whose main goal is to support special privileges for the few.

Tough Love conservatism is associated with an entire constellation of Strict Father beliefs, as defined by the famous linguist George Lakoff. The highest goal of these worldviews is to gain and maintain power and control. Strict Father conservatism is almost evangelical in its drives to make society conform to its harsh views. It acts as if any means is justified to achieve selfish ends.

Right-wing politicians have gained power in part by pandering to individuals who identify with socially conservative stances. But they generally abuse the power they gain by such gambits. They ostensibly want to engineer society into molds that satisfy doctrinaire and often puritanical beliefs. They exploit people's instinctive drives for self-sufficiency, individualism and personal freedom, and twist them into uncompassionate unfairness, domineering male prerogative, and self-righteous intolerance.

"Conservatives are not necessarily stupid, but most stupid people are conservative."

--- John Stuart Mill

This may be an insult to people in relatively poor 'red states'. In any case, the crowd that professes Tough Love often conveniently overlooks and fails to respect the fact that the worst consequences of environmental degradation are visited upon the bodies, families and neighborhoods of poor people, both within the U.S. and abroad. This is a sad fact of widespread environmental injustice. Poor people are disproportionately vulnerable to toxic substance exposure at work and in their homes and neighborhoods. They are statistically more frequent victims of diseases caused by environmental factors. They are more likely to be victims of violence, and to suffer from heat waves and other natural disasters. And since tens of millions of people do not have health insurance, those who are least able to afford it must often deal with setbacks without any assurance of medical care security.

These are serious social problems, not just individual tough luck stories. The number of people who are uninsured increased by about 9 million under George Bush's watch. It is one thing to be stingy and hard-hearted about wealth and possessions, or even about education and opportunities. It is quite another to be complacent and uncaring about the glaring healthcare inequities in America today.

An efficient and fair system of universal healthcare should be our national goal. About 25% of the more than \$2 trillion dollars that Americans spend annually on healthcare is spent on unnecessary procedures, red tape, administration, and profits for insurance companies. Absurd! If we had a sensible national health insurance program, it could be largely paid for by reducing these costs.

It is unconscionable that healthcare insurance premiums increased an average almost 100% in the 8 year period from 2001 to 2009 while wage increases were much smaller. Meanwhile, profits of insurance companies increased by well over 1,000%. This is obscene! Individuals and businesses are being adversely affected by these trends. Making profits at the expense of people's health and well-being, whether in the field of insurance, prescription drugs or military affairs is practically criminally wrong, so it should be better regulated.

George W. Bush twice vetoed proposed increases in the State Children's Health Insurance Program. This program helps the most vulnerable of children. No Children Left Behind? Early proposals by the Bush administration to help contain rapid increases in healthcare costs involved the expansion of so-called "health-savings accounts". But healthy people and the wealthy -- surprise! -- are the main beneficiaries of such plans. Health-savings accounts have, in fact, been described as the "mother of all tax shelters". A loud raspberry for these initiatives, guys!

There are better solutions to the challenges of our health care system, as there are with most of the problems facing us. But as usual, tenacious entrenched interests strive to perpetuate their privileges

and defend the status quo, while increasing their profits. They thereby impede progress and contribute to unnecessary hurdles to achieving good solutions.

Once again the realization steals into my awareness: we need to fairly address the causes and consequences of problems rather than just declaring war on their symptoms and throwing money at the special interest groups that want to profit from the dilemma. This observation applies in particular to the misguided "war on drugs" and the mishandled "war on terror". The medicine can be much worse and more costly than the affliction!

The use of certain drugs like caffeine, nicotine and alcohol are somewhat conducive to the drudgery of many jobs and the puritan work ethic, so these substances are condoned and accepted by society, despite the fact that they have harmful effects on users. Tobacco smoking contributes to more than 400,000 deaths a year, and alcohol kills tens of thousands of people, yet they are legal to buy and use, and are promoted promiscuously.

Other types of drugs like marijuana, however, are severely suppressed, despite the fact that they are much less harmful. Perhaps this is because they are judged to be subversive of the established order, and of dutiful social conformity. Marijuana has never been known to kill a single person through overdose, and it does not cause lung cancer. Yet the government represses it harshly and ruthlessly, at a very high cost to millions of people whose lives have been devastated by arrests under laws that prohibit the growing, sale and smoking of marijuana. Prisons are overcrowded with people who have used marijuana or tried to supplement their income or make a living by selling it. These laws are ridiculously unfair and probably even more counterproductive than the Prohibition laws in the 1920s. Draconian drug laws are the politics of failure; they are heartless and hapless, and whether mean-spirited or well-intentioned, they are extraordinarily damaging and costly.

Congress should reclassify cannabis from a Schedule I drug under the Federal Controlled Substances Act of 1970 to a Schedule II drug, in recognition of the fact that marijuana has accepted medical uses like other Schedule II drugs such as morphine and opium. The improper classification of cannabis preposterously implies that marijuana has a higher potential for abuse than more powerful and addictive drugs. This erroneous classification has led to absurd conflicts between federal and state drug laws. It also prevents the proper regulation of prescriptions, and creates a bizarre system of distribution channels of marijuana through "pot club" dispensaries rather than pharmacies.

Marijuana's Schedule I status breeds widespread injustice and disrespect for laws, and forces the Drug Enforcement Administration to waste resources on things like raiding the homes of people with medical afflictions. The wrong-headed status also prevents reasonable research and testing to see which maladies benefit from marijuana use. The stigma of federal illegality deters some sick people from seeking help from a drug that could help them feel better and suffer less pain.

There is indeed a kind of "reefer madness" like the alarmist 1936 movie alleged, but this phenomenon is one that is in the brains of those who believe that punitive, costly and misguided public policies are sensible, not in the brains of those who smoke marijuana. More than 20 million Americans have been arrested for marijuana since 1990, mostly for simple possession. Worst of all, this madness even denies the use of cannabis to those who benefit from pain relief and other valid medical uses. Mercy!

Of course there are drawbacks and behavioral risks associated with getting high, but overly severe laws are the wrong way to deal with them. Our societies would likely be better off if we treated the use of marijuana as a sacrament rather than a crime!

Our criminal justice system is, in general, in desperate need of reform. Instead of retributive laws, we should as a society seek more appropriate priorities. Instead of criminalizing things people do to themselves in private and meting out harsh punishments, better ways should be found to help prevent crimes that have actual victims, and to cope with the causes of true addictions and the often stress-induced heightened need for escapist behaviors. Better ways should also be found to integrate people back into society once they are released from prison, and to reduce recidivism. Public safety should be enhanced, and taxpayer dollars saved, by implementing "restorative justice" programs. Under such initiatives, those who violate the law would be required to take responsibility for their actions and try to repair the harm they've done by righting their wrongs. They would also be helped to avoid prison and a downward spiral in their lives. We should make it a higher priority to improve opportunities, strengthen communities, and reduce poverty and homelessness, instead of financing more and more prisons.

The tough-on-crime crowd apparently believes that the criminal justice system should be about punishment and retribution rather than rehabilitation. But the reality is that it is foolish to put people with problems in a place that makes them worse off and more prone to violence, and to then turn them loose on society without any resources. After all, this tends to dramatically increase the chances that those persons will become repeat offenders. Only 10% of people who have participated in 'restorative justice' programs end up committing another crime, compared to about 70% of those who go through the traditional criminal justice system. When we deal with crime in retrogressive ways, it guarantees many more future victims, and thus makes our societies less safe.

Efforts to privatize prisons basically put incentives in the wrong place, because they make prisons into growth industries rather than contributing to effectively reducing prison populations.

People who are wrongly convicted of crimes and are later exonerated through DNA evidence should be provided with cleared records and public assistance to integrate them back into society. People who have been wrongfully imprisoned are currently given even less help when they are released than criminals who have served their time. We need progressive ideas and sensible solutions to address such unjust, dysfunctional policies.

The world would be a far better place if reasonable businessmen, objectively fair-minded people, or spiritual leaders like the Dalai Lama had greater influence -- and if Big Business, corrupt politicians, right-wing conservatives and religious fundamentalists had less influence. That's my opinion!

Americans generally seem opposed to sacrifice and discipline of any sort. Yet a new modicum of self-discipline would be very valuable in our societies, a balanced discipline that would involve constructive qualities such as accepting responsibility; having the foresight and willingness to delay gratification to achieve more noble and desirable goals; dedicating ourselves to the truth; being willing to moderate our consumption; and finding effective ways to limit the wastefulness of our uses of resources. We should encourage such commitments, and use smart incentives to make them more attractive.

Attitudes are important, so let's cultivate more sensible and fair-minded attitudes. And let's not be like John Steinbeck's Irish grandmother, who he describes in his great novel *East of Eden* as "a tight hard little woman, humor-less as a chicken" who had "a dour Presbyterian mind and a code of morals that pinned down and beat the brains out of nearly everything that was pleasant to do." Tough love?

Shalom! Let's strive for a healthier balance of yin and yang forces. As an old Chinese proverb says, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." Let this document represent a match that has been lighted to help lead the way!

Chapter #91 - Constitutional Principles.

Twelve score and seven years ago, in the year 1776, our fathers brought forth upon the American continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Let's again contemplate the Founding Principles of the United States. They were: fairness for all; equal rights for all citizens under the law; the promoting of the General Welfare; checks and balances within government to limit abuses of power; limitations on the power of the federal government; and the establishment of rules of law that create reasonable justice and protect the freedom of individuals to live their lives in fair hopes of pursuing happiness.

We hold these rights to be self-evident and inalienable: that citizens are guaranteed certain civil rights and liberties, including the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion, and that there should be strict limitations on the ability of the government to interfere with our individual liberties and our reasonable pursuit of happiness.

The Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights together form a brilliant and visionary system of principles and laws that is strong, fair, flexible, and forward thinking. These documents were far ahead of their time in terms of American society being able to fully embrace the promises they made. In fact, it took almost 80 years, and a Civil War, before black slaves were freed and given equal rights under the law, with the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868. And then it took another 52 years after that, before women won the same right to vote as men, with the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. It took longer still before a social security safety net was written into law, and greater civil rights were given to women and to Blacks, and racial segregation was outlawed, and protections of the environment were established.

The amendments to the U.S. Constitution embodied in the Bill of Rights were intelligently designed to guarantee everyone equal rights for two principal reasons: First, to protect the majority of people from the unreasonable tyranny of the minority in power. This gives recognition to the fact that most forms of government do a poor job of protecting the rights of individual citizens, particularly those without money and thus without a fair say in politics. This is especially true of dictatorships, monarchies, aristocracies and plutocratic oligarchies. And second, to protect the rights of minorities from the tyranny of the majority. Fascist governments and theocracies have been especially pathetic by disrespecting the rights of minorities.

The remarkable success of the United States has been a product of its rich heritage of natural resources, its innovative spirit, its open-mindedness, its system of checks and balances in democratic government, and its progressive evolution of citizen rights and protections. We should not now let "conservatism" turn back the clock on these commendable characteristics. And we should not let increasing inequalities undermine the greater good -- or create "terrifying" prospects of increasingly desperate need and Tough Love jealous greed.

Chapter #92 - Liberty and Justice for All.

Our national Pledge of Allegiance concludes with the words, "one Nation, under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all." Republicans, led by Karl Rove, effectively gained advantage in the 2000 election by using the divisive expediency of hot button social issues and giving special advantages to the well-connected. When Republicans gained the power of the presidency in 2001, and again in 2016, they gave giant helpings of liberty, justice and opportunity to wealthy people -- but meager rations to all others. They used the name of God and self-serving worldviews with incredible presumption, sadistic certitude and villainous hypocrisy, and didn't really seem to give a damn about fairness or true

justice. At the same time, they tried to take away some of people's civil liberties to consolidate their power and control.

A significant measure of social justice in a society can be found in the quality and equality of job opportunities and educational opportunities given to its citizens. American society became less egalitarian since 2001 as a result of political pandering to the already privileged. This is the reason we need to establish more effective institutions to advance the causes of fairness. Our goal should be to encourage a maximum of personal freedoms for all people to pursue fulfillment, without losing sight of the need to create a secure and wholesome structure of reasonably just laws and institutions that maximize fairness for everyone.

The privilege-defending power elite have tried to redefine "justice" to mean the meting out of harsh retribution -- not of supporting equality or fairness. Most people would agree that the Founding Fathers were a more progressive and visionary lot!

In recent decades, there has been a growing furor against immigrants by many people. Some folks in conservative circles advocate a "send-the-Negroes-back-to-Africa" mentality and rationalize discriminatory policies, instead of being concerned with fairness, empathy and plans like sharing the profits of productivity gains with the workers that help produce them, or investing in the future with realistic goals of "lifting all boats", or helping countries like Mexico and those in Central America achieve sustainable development.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) had the immediate effect of flooding Mexico with subsidized U.S. agricultural products. This trade agreement displaced millions of farmers in Mexico, and contributed to high unemployment there, contributing to the impetus for farm workers to head north to seek work and help feed their families. Now North Americans, led by conservatives and far right agitators, are clamoring for something to be done about problems associated with the estimated 12 to 16 million undocumented immigrants that live in the States, and once again, conservatives want to address the symptoms of problems, but not the causes.

Political leaders have the responsibility of contributing to a healthier and fairer society. But those in power almost always seek to create circumstances favorable to themselves and their supporters, no matter how adverse the impacts of their actions may be to the majority. Conservatives in America generally strive to reverse social progress, and to erode the great forward strides that have been achieved for groups like minorities, women and gay people. We should rightly strive to protect progressive gains, and to reject retrogressive reactions.

Chapter #93 - Progressive Principles.

Since the 'Reagan Revolution' began in 1981, our American economic and political systems have been fostering an increasingly unfair and overly-generous favoritism of rich people and Big Business, and a heartlessness toward the downtrodden. Americans have basically been accepting the idea that short-term profits and special privileges are more important than people or progressive improvements or our heirs in future generations.

Mark my words. We need to boldly fight back. We should insist on healthy values and positive change. The very future of hope lies in broad-mindedness, intelligent foresight and wise planning. We need honesty and clear understanding. We should strive for mutual security, truer justice, peaceful conflict resolution, and more empathetic social policies. We should make our federal spending more

fiscally responsible. Our activities must become more likely to be sustainable. We should embrace ecological sanity, and commit ourselves to caring about future generations.

New ways need to be found to restructure our societies by investing more in better education, fairness of opportunity, and public well-being. And above all, we should take more responsibility for the stewardship of natural systems, resource conservation and reducing wasteful consumption.

Social programs should be made more generous, not more stingy. Discrimination should not be allowed in rules of law related to women's rights or the rights of gay people. It is a tragedy that conservative politicians continue to aggressively exploit religious intolerance of gay people, even as civil rights for gays have become more accepted in the mainstream of life in America.

The Human Rights Commission reported in 2006 that over 50% of the largest public companies in the U.S. offer health coverage to domestic partners of gay and lesbian employees. Only 15 years earlier, not a single Fortune 500 company offered such benefits. More than 90% of Fortune 500 companies have anti-discrimination policies that protect gay people, and yet it is still shamefully legal under state law in about half the states to fire someone solely on the basis of their sexual orientation. Public attitudes are shifting, and laws must be revised to keep up, as they have been for slavery, race discrimination, interracial marriage, cohabitation of unmarried couples, and reproductive choice.

Gay men and women are human beings, and most of the ones I know personally are fine human beings. Religious dogmas that condemn them, or anyone else, for their creed, color of their skin or their sexual orientation should be rejected. I know, I know, I know: thinking about what gay men do with each other during sex makes many people very uncomfortable. What do lesbians do with each other sexually? Ooh, la la! That question is more provocative and titillating for most people, evoking a more accepting curiosity. That's a fascinating and amusing aspect of human nature. *Barbie*, 2023!

But no matter; none of these things is our business! Our great Constitution and the progressive evolution of Amendments and laws since it was ratified have served to more truly guarantee greater fairness to citizens, and we certainly should not reverse course now and allow discrimination against people because of their sexual orientation.

Our culture at large is adjusting to the idea that families don't all look the same, and that private sexual morality is not the business of the government. But reactionary people who control the right-wing of our political parties and churches decry promiscuity and adults living together out of wedlock, and divorce, interracial relationships, homosexuality and gay marriage. They claim God tells them these things, but honestly, they're making this stuff up! In reality, these social attitudes are merely a weak-willed inability to control their domineering impulses and backward beliefs.

Astonishingly enough, it was illegal several decades ago in every state for heterosexual lovers to live together without being married. While such laws have been revoked in most states, it is still illegal in two states: Michigan and Mississippi. Shame on these states for such silly laws! North Carolina had a 201 year-old ban on cohabitation until 2006, but then the North Carolina State Superior Court finally ruled it unconstitutional. Florida only finally repealed its 1858 law against unmarried cohabitation in 2016. Let's clamor for the last two states to change their atavistic laws!

Conservatives claim they defend people's civil liberties, but when segments of society actually choose to live freely, it scares them. This insight was made clear in an hour-long documentary included in the DVD of the film *Easy Rider*. Peter Fonda, a producer and star of *Easy Rider*, expressed amazement in the film that the film was chosen for preservation by the National Film Registry of the Library of

Congress as one of the best portrayals of American history in the 1960s. In the film, motorcycle-riding freedom, renegade spirit, improvisation and marijuana smoking sparked violent reactions by redneck Texans and bigoted Southerners who seem disposed to hate.

The American Civil Liberties Union is a great civic organization, not a heretical association. Its mission is to preserve individual protections guaranteed in the Bill of Rights, and to extend these rights to segments of the population that have been traditionally denied fair rights. How people can rationally or morally oppose such ideas is beyond me!

Significant policy changes come about as our worldviews shift with changing times. When reigning paradigms in our societies provide rationalizations for actions and behaviors that are too detrimental to honorable fairness to be allowed to continue, we need to intelligently and sensibly change these policies. In summary, our mission to be accomplished must be to create healthier and more secure societies through dedication to greater fairness for all, broader education, balanced discipline, sustainable development, reasonable environmental protections and committed peace-building.

Chapter #94 - The Politicization of Science.

"Regardless of different personal views about science, no credible understanding of the natural world or our human existence ... can ignore the basic insights of theories as key as evolution, relativity, and quantum mechanics."

--- The Dalai Lama

Republicans abolished the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment in 1994. This was a truly bizarre development. Think about this. Members of Congress make many decisions about science and technology, even though few members of Congress have any background in science. This elimination of the independent organization that had been giving Congress competent advice on science and technology meant that our representatives just didn't want to know the facts and inconvenient truths.

"Science is more than a body of knowledge. It is a way of thinking; a way of skeptically interrogating the universe with a fine understanding of human fallibility. If we are not able to ask skeptical questions, to interrogate those who tell us that something is true, to be skeptical of those in authority, then we are up for grabs for the next charlatan (political or religious) who comes rambling along."

--- Carl Sagan

In the last interview Charlie Rose did with Carl Sagan, the noted scientist said: "it's not that pseudoscience and superstition and fundamentalist zealotry are something new. They've been with us for as long as we've been human. But we live in an age based upon science and technology with formidable technological powers."

This is why it should have been disturbing when the Republican-controlled Congress abolished its own Office of Technology Assessment. This action reflected an absurd politicizing of science that tends to disrupt communication channels between credible experts and policy-makers. Evasions, distortions, specious arguments and extremely biased 'expert testimony' represent a corruption of knowledge that is being used to manipulate policy-making. Our system of democratic governance is damaged as a result. Members of Congress and Congressional committees should receive testimony from technical government employees without censorship.

Our leaders have in many ways contributed to ecological predicaments. It is becoming increasingly crucial for us to mitigate risks associated with Peak Oil, global warming and environmental damages,

yet right-leaning leaders have acted as cheerleaders for special privileges of vested interests and the short-term profitability of irresponsible corporations at big costs to the environmental commons.

The Bush administration tried to hide many truths. For instance, they spent more than \$1.5 billion to promote abstinence-only "sex education" programs, even though such programs are not effective because of the inaccurate and distorted information they provide. The administration censored voices like those of the Surgeon General and people in organizations like the Environmental Protection Agency and NASA. It even forced people out of office who were trying to enforce environmental laws, like Mary Gade, a top EPA administrator in the Midwest who was forced to resign in 2008 due to her efforts to get Dow Chemical to clean up dioxin pollution of the Saginaw River and Lake Huron.

Accurate scientific understandings are crucial to our future. Integrity is the foundation of a search for objective truth, as embodied by the scientific method. Yet many Republicans have effectively declared war on science by ignoring scientific understandings and creating misleading spin about them, and 'cherry-picking' parts of such understandings. Republican politicians catering to big donors apparently prefer ideologically-driven pseudoscience to legitimate scientific knowledge. The suppression and misrepresentation of scientific findings is done to pander to special interests like Big Oil, or in the case of Creationism, to pander to the religious right.

In 2006, George W. Bush stated that "... we need to set aside whether or not greenhouse gases have been caused by mankind or because of natural effects ..." Wow! Let's consider the facts. More than 30 billion barrels of oil are burned annually around the planet, and billions of tons of coal. Every ton of fossil fuels that is burned creates more than two tons of carbon dioxide emissions. Landfills and animal husbandry also generate enormous quantities of methane and other greenhouse gases. There is NO DOUBT WHATSOEVER whether human beings create greenhouse gases; even our respiration is a process that uses oxygen and gives off carbon dioxide! D'oh!

Plants, on the other hand, absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen in the photosynthetic process. Forests are beautiful concentrations of trees that many Republicans stalwartly strive to allow loggers to chop down; but forests are primary among the life forms that act as beneficial 'sinks' for carbon dioxide, and thus help to offset part of the build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Clarity of public understanding is sometimes obscured by minutia and too much information, and, sometimes understandings are distorted by misrepresentations of facts, and by cultivated doubt about scientific understandings. Giant corporations like ExxonMobil try to deceive the public by spinning facts. Politicians try to convince us that their economic and social doctrines are absolutely right, even when there is extensive evidence to the contrary. Advertisers promote their products endlessly to increase consumption, market share and profits. Economic drives are powerful, and they frequently are opposed to sensible conservation of resources, and to public health, moderation, wisdom, peaceful coexistence, ecological integrity, and fairer public policies.

The Bush and Trump years witnessed a disturbing increase in the politicization of federal agencies. Political operatives often advanced ideological initiatives rather than supporting the charter purposes of the agencies for which they worked. Government agencies saw extensive partisan campaign and electoral activities on federal government property during the Bush reign -- and again even more blatantly under Trump -- in violation of prohibitions of the 1939 Hatch Act. Let's insist that all future presidents break with such wrong-headed activities!

Chapter #95 - The Dalai Lama and Wholesome Values.

I personally feel fortunate to be young at heart, and healthy in body and spirit. I am a sensitive soul, aware of the potentially wonderful richness of experience and the beauties and value of Nature. I hope all people share in this appreciation, because deep in our psyches there is a profound connection of the human spirit with the natural world.

I am intrigued by the practice of yoga, though I am not good at carving out the time for it. Varieties of the 'real' traditional yoga have been practiced for thousands of years on the Indian subcontinent, reputedly pointing the way toward self-realization. Yoga practitioners are supposedly better able to see past ego identification to a consciousness more integrated with that of humanity and nature. That's a great bonus to yoga's healthy benefits of good exercise, balance, stretching, breathing consciously, boosting energy and mood, managing stress and relaxing.

It is valuable to understand that people who have fought to protect parks, open spaces, and public lands have often been close to nature in their youth. As the world becomes more urbanized and people tend to lose contact with nature, it might prove difficult to continue to gain support for such important protections. One purpose of these writings is to evoke transcendent ideas that inspire others to want to protect wild areas from unthinking and unfeeling assaults.

The famous author Henry Miller once wrote: "I believe! I believe! I believe because not to believe is to become as lead, to lie prone and rigid, forever inert, to waste away ...". Well, thank god, I myself strongly believe! My own belief is that better understandings are essential, and that we can help make the world a better place by speaking out against shortsighted actions and speaking up in support of social justice and environmental protections.

The Dalai Lama is a great man, and a truly spiritual person. He is cool, and wise, and down-to-earth. He does not adhere to closed-minded dogmas. He helped write a book entitled *The Art of Happiness*, which had a central contention that we can identify factors that lead to happiness, and other factors that lead to suffering. Having become aware of these things, he says: "with a certain inner discipline, we can undergo a transformation of our attitude, our entire outlook and approach to living", and we can "gradually eliminate those factors which lead to suffering, and cultivate those which lead to happiness." ... "That is the way", says the Dalai Lama, to achieve true happiness. And so it may be!

The main psychological determinants of happiness are arguably non-material. They include good family relationships, friendships, community connectedness, meaningful work, the positivity of affirmation and recognition, life-long education, leisure time undertakings, creative and artistic pursuits, sharing meals together, cultivating physical and mental health, participating in sports, enjoying reading, living simply, sharing intimacy, coexisting peacefully, following spiritual practices and appreciating nature.

Psychologists say that humans have a built-in ethical sense, and that we all inherit a strong bias for kindness, compassion, cooperation, love and nurture, especially toward those in need. Contrary impulses toward selfishness, anger, jealousy, envy, rudeness, hostility, aggression and violence are made worse by dysfunctional upbringings and increasing stress in our societies. To the extent that there are social means whereby positive impulses can be encouraged and negative ones discouraged, we would be well served to pursue these means and invest in healthier outcomes.

What the Dalai Lama has said about individual happiness may provide us with good perspective on how we should be improving the well-being of our societies. Most people fail to recognize that their psychological and physical health are more important than money. If we look closely at what truly provides satisfaction in our lives, we find out that what we need most is a more wholesome approach to relationships and our possessions. Balanced perspective can lead us to discover that material

things can come to possess us. And possessions can distract us from healthier, happier, more just, more expansive, and more reasonably disciplined ways of being.

The average person struggles to achieve fulfillment and happiness and positive purpose. Think about this struggle. Serious social problems abound, and a growing segment in societies worldwide seems to be afflicted by mental health problems, crime, poverty, violence, unemployment, homelessness, urban slum conditions or adversely affected by gangs. Conflicts abound, and collective behaviors seem to be increasingly pathological. People are becoming more defensive and prone to anger. Could this be because materialism is hollow, and a lousy guide in driving people's behaviors?

Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm's work culminated in his 1976 book, *To Have or To Be*. In it, Erich Fromm provides a thought provoking contrast between the impact of a modern consumer culture built on a 'having mode' and a healthier society that is more oriented toward a 'being mode.' In the 'having mode', people are most strongly affected by acquisitiveness, greed, possessiveness, aggression, deception, control impulses and alienation from their authentic selves, and from others, and from the natural world. In the more joyful 'being mode', people are more connected to others through the act of loving, sharing, discovering and being authentic, and they are more aware of their inner selves and the importance of their relationships with the natural world.

Erich Fromm's penetrating social criticism highlighted the alienating effects of the dominance of the 'having mode' in our societies, and the correlated increase in mental depression. Today, feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness seem to be multiplying. A subtle type of social taboo against being unhappy ironically makes it more challenging for people to cope. As a consequence, antidepressant medications have become the most commonly prescribed drugs in our society.

In addition to economic causes, these conditions have social causes. Political moderates in the United States seem to be disappearing, and echo chamber polarization is proliferating. Gerrymandering has been a significant cause of this, for it has the highly negative impact of making Congress more polarized and more politically extreme on both side of the aisle. Partially as a consequence, the well-being of people in the middle class and lower classes is being eroded. Liberals have been taunted and somewhat disenfranchised by social conservatives and religious anti-progressives. These attitudes ironically foster impulses that are antithetical to the integrity and ethical responsibility of religious traditions.

Here is a pertinent and important observation from the Introduction to *Common Sense Revival*:

Extensive surveys of public opinion have found that people are happier, as gauged by a wide range of measures, when they earn \$50,000 to \$75,000 per year than when they make less money. They are happier in every category that affects the quality of life, including job satisfaction, emotional sense of security, personal health, relationships, community involvements, and spiritual life. In contrast, the same studies have found that people who make more than \$75,000 per year are NOT particularly happier than those who earn this much. Research on the "economics of happiness" reveals that, once people can easily afford the basic necessities of life, money takes on a less central role in their well-being. (And too much money, indeed, can seriously mess one up!)

The key understanding here is that, when prosperity is more widely shared, it results in improved outcomes and security for all. This is a powerful argument for resisting the corrupting influence of high-income earners to abuse the power of their moneyed influence to get low tax rates on the highest levels of their incomes. It turns out that public policies designed to ensure a broader distribution of wealth dovetail nicely with another great promise of democratic governance, which

our Founders strived to create -- to wit, that governments should be designed to achieve goals of preventing despotic abuses of power and political influence by any one person or faction of society.

Sing Glory Be to God that we know how to make our country much fairer, and thus happier and more secure! We just need to prevent giant corporations and wealthy people from abusing the influence of their overweening power to rig the system ever more distinctly to their narrow advantages.

Honesty, egalitarian policies, limited government, fiscal discipline, and respect for others seem to have diminished in recent years. Television and radio talk shows have become dominated by right-wing personalities and argumentative grandstanders like Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Michael Savage and Glenn Beck. Decency and honest debate and civility in public discourse seem to be disappearing. Moderate factions in established religions have allowed their voices to be drowned out by fundamentalist radicals like Pat Robertson and Osama bin Laden. Well, bin Laden is dead now, but you get the point.

Well-being is arguably a function of living life in healthy ways and cultivating good relationships, and eating nutritious foods instead of junk food, and getting balanced exercise, and going for walks outdoors. We should simultaneously find ways to relax, to slow down and to wise up -- and to be conscious of our impacts on the planet and its community of life. Let's read more, watch documentary films, educate ourselves, reuse, recycle, avoid littering, and simplify our plans occasionally to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide we produce and the size of our ecological footprint. And let's make efforts to ensure greater humaneness and fairness in our societies. Let's be audacious, and maintain attitudes that are hopeful and helpful, and begin to act in ways that are more likely to achieve outcomes that match our highest aspirations.

Chapter #96 - True Values.

Advertising on television and radio, and online, and in newspapers and magazines, tends to indoctrinate us with false values. It effectively enshrines the gods of materialism on the highest pedestal of our imaginations. The message of advertising seems to be that happiness is found above all in possessing things. Marketing subtly preaches that you should not be happy with what you have, and that you should get all you can for yourself, and that you should get it all as quickly as possible. It champions shopping, variety, pleasure seeking, indulgence, luxury, and avoiding boredom. Shopping and owning things have become central ways for us to make ourselves feel "cool", special, and more worthy.

Advertising has been described as "the manufacture of discontent". Its role in our shopping-seduced consumer culture is causing us to fail to appreciate truer values. We have supersized our meals, our houses and our automobiles, but these "gains" have come at a high social and environmental cost, and they are diminishing the true quality of our lives. I have faith in the potentiality of people to develop richer lives without at the same time impoverishing the planet and harming others.

Product promotion, changing fashions, planned obsolescence, perceived obsolescence, and the designed easy disposability of goods have negative effects of wasting resources and undermining conservation. They do this by creating increased demand for unnecessary products and encouraging unnecessarily profligate usages.

Advertising and the media generally do not contribute to wholesome values. They help condition people to envy and to be envied. They glamorize youth, and use sex and celebrity to sell products. They divert people's attention from vitally important things by using sensationalism in the news along

with shallow distractions and preoccupations with scandal, intrigue and violence. They obsess over sports spectacles and the vaunted glory of victory and agony of defeat. A sinister side-effect of these influences is to encourage winning at any cost.

Slick marketing contributes to making shopping a ritual oriented toward ego satisfaction. But it also contributes to a loss of awareness of positive values like responsible thrift, healthy moderation, genuine connectedness, gratitude, generosity of spirit, integrity of character, thoughtfulness, peace of mind, good communication, and civic responsibility.

Another aspect of the gross commercialization of our societies is the manipulation of children for marketing purposes. Advertisers shrewdly use the "Nag Factor" to take insidious advantage of the credulity and vulnerability of children, and to manipulate them into nagging their parents to buy things. Especially harmful is the marketing of unhealthy junk foods to children, including sugary cereals, candy, soda pop and fast food. This contributes to a national childhood obesity epidemic and diabetes and other health problems. Fast-food chains spend millions of dollars every week to promote toys that children will nag their parents to get. Saturation marketing by the toy industry additionally affects young minds by diminishing the imagination of children through corporate tie-in toys that narrow play activities. These trends condition children into being good consumers rather than being good citizens or virtuous human beings.

Americans are suffering a greater susceptibility to depression, possibly associated with the "Have a Happy Day" syndrome. More than 20 million adults are prescribed anti-depressive drugs today -- a full 10% of everyone from age 6 and up. Depression is a leading cause of disability in the United States, and an accompanying inability to sleep well further harms people's health, and may contribute to outbreaks of rudeness and rage.

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Mild austerity can actually be a tonic for the character, whereas wild riches often prove corrosive. ("There but for the grace of God go I." --- Ha!) The economic hard times of the Depression in the 1930s and World War II forced people to ride bikes, plant gardens, mend clothes, recycle, reuse, and spend more time in cooperative endeavors with neighbors. It also helped create many bonds of friendship. This is a good reason to adopt attitudes of "Moderation in everything"!

The conservative Pope Benedict XVI railed against "rampant materialism". Worldly goods, money and power are transitory, and ultimately not deeply fulfilling. The philosopher and influential Roman consul Boethius made a similar argument in his book *Consolation of Philosophy*, which was the most widely-copied work of secular literature in Europe for many centuries. Treachery had reduced Boethius from a position of power and wealth to that of a condemned prisoner in 524 CE. A vision of Lady Philosophy came to him, embodying true wisdom and compassion. Lady Philosophy provided consolation to Boethius, and he realized that happiness comes from within.

Boethius observed: "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."

Let's think and act 'right', and NOT in strict accordance with materialistic urgings or conformity or laissez-faire right-wing doctrines! Let's boldly support positive change!

Chapter #97 - Healthy Societies.

"Be careless in your dress if you must, but keep a tidy soul."

--- Mark Twain

People may disagree as to how to best achieve the goal of creating healthy societies. On the one hand, some feel we should pursue success through trust in laissez-faire capitalism, tax cutting, unregulated free markets, economic stimulus through deficit spending, generous subsidies for big corporations, materialistic consumerism, an extremely strong and aggressive military, sink-or-swim economic and political policies, mercilessly harsh punishments for wrongdoing, repressive policies, uncompromising and unilateral foreign policy, obedience to doctrine, unyielding convictions, strict discipline and the supremacy of father figure authority and patriarchal strength.

Others feel that safe and healthy societies can best be achieved by emphasizing understanding, empathy, true fairness of opportunity, respect for others, and peace-building initiatives. People like this tend to think we should support reasonable workers' rights, protect consumers, strive to make our activities sustainable, prevent excessive pollution of the natural environment, work together to build consensus, act with honesty and fiscal responsibility, cooperate internationally, seek mutual trust, build healthier communities, communicate better, moderate consumption, encourage responsible parenthood, allow women fairer representation in business and government, and give a maximum of civil liberties to people in a context of a minimum of obstacles for pursuing happiness.

The healthiest communities are those that respect traditional values yet are open-minded enough, and flexible enough, to adapt to changing circumstances. Social health is the best where individuals are respected and a strong sense of family, community and social cohesion is fostered.

Self-interest is one of the most powerful of human motivations. But self-interest is NOT identical to our own individual selfish interests, for true self-interest is inextricably linked to the common good.

It would be salubrious for us to collectively support the development of institutions and programs that help people cope when they suffer terrible misfortunes or highly adverse circumstances in their lives. Luck, in both inheritance and circumstance, plays a big role in each of our lives. Calamity and adversity can befall anyone at any time, so it behooves us to create a truly compassionate society in which an adequate safety net is provided for those who fall through the cracks. We cannot honorably allow the poor, the disenfranchised and the underprivileged to be neglected or taken advantage of when they are down. Besides, no one knows who the next person will be to fall through the cracks!

This is another reason why it makes good sense for us to seek our best and fairest understandings for a saner and healthier society.

The late George Carlin once wrote: "The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings but shorter tempers, wider freeways but narrower viewpoints. We spend more, but have less, we buy more, but enjoy less. We have bigger houses and smaller families, more conveniences, but less time. We have more degrees but less sense, more knowledge but less judgment, more experts yet more problems, more medicine but less wellness.

"We drink too much, smoke too much, spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get too angry, stay up too late, get up too tired, read too little, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often. We've learned how to make a living, but not a life. We've added years to life not life to years. We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet a new neighbor. We conquered outer space but not inner space. We've done larger things, but not better things."

"We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul. We've conquered the atom, but not our prejudice. We write more, but learn less. We plan more, but accomplish less. We've learned to rush, but not to wait. We build more computers to hold more information, to produce more copies than ever, but we communicate less and less."

"These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion, big men and small character, steep profits and shallow relationships. These are the days of two incomes but more divorce, fancier houses but broken homes. These are days of quick trips, disposable diapers, throwaway morality, one night stands, overweight bodies, and pills that do everything from cheer, to quiet, to kill."

Carlin recommended love, kindness, hugs, forgiveness, listening, sharing, and cherishing the moment. Yes! But is this enough? Shall we not somehow contribute to a movement that revolutionarily alters our economic, social and political institutions in ways that re-orient our values in more salubrious and meaningful directions? Give me a hug!

Chapter #98 - Beliefs, Convictions, and Philosophies.

Beliefs provide human beings with powerful motivations. They have been the impulse behind some of the greatest of humanity's ideas, architecture, literature, music, poems, paintings, sculptures, and other creative accomplishments. Beliefs ground us, sustain us, inspire us, and give us purpose and meaning in our lives.

But beliefs can also be severe limitations. They can render us intolerant and closed-minded to the richness of possibility and true understanding. Stubborn convictions and supremacist faith have been the cause of some of the worst persecutions and villainies of all time by contributing to harsh discrimination, repression, violence, genocide, pogroms, torture, wars, the burning of women at the stake, and countless other terrible atrocities throughout history.

Faith is susceptible to unyielding denial of realistic understandings. It is not amenable at times to course corrections that would be in the best interests of society. Faith in erroneous beliefs and ideas can be quite dangerous. As an example, faith in the notorious cult leader Jim Jones resulted in the suicide/murder of more than 900 people in Jonestown, Guyana in 1978. Inflamed passions and beliefs detached from reason have today become foolishly partisan, divisive, emotionally hijacked, confused and conflicted, so they threaten the well-being of millions of people.

Most people, curiously, do not live by any particular philosophy. As John Fowles wrote, "At most there are occasions when we act more or less in accordance with some philosophy with which we approve. Much more than we let philosophies guide our lives, we allow obsessions to drive them; and there is no doubt which has been the great driving obsession of the last one hundred and fifty years. It is money." ... "Having, not being, governs our time."

John Steinbeck was thinking similarly when he wrote the following words about a character in his novel *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."

There are profound complexities in the world, and a wide diversity of opinions. But diversity should be a source of strength, and we should not allow our societies to be devastated by intolerance, divisive discrimination, deceptive propaganda, distorted perspectives, half truths, greedy compulsions, stimulated materialism, maliciousness, or self-righteous drives for dominance. We should reject fundamentalism and war-mongering, and seek radically clearer understandings.

Mysteries abound in the universe. Uncertainties persist, and they always will. The truth is elusive. One might wonder why so many people believe in UFOs, supernatural miracles, preposterous superstitions, absurd literal interpretations of religious myths, paranoid delusions, anthropocentric projections, astrology, numerology, urban legends, old wives tales, and all manner of dogmas. My guess is that many beliefs arise from indoctrination, insecurity, errors in perception, and ignorance. As an instance, despite common sense appearances, primitive beliefs are now known to be erroneous that contended the Earth is flat, and that the Sun revolves around the Earth, and that the Universe was created by a divine being who made us humans in His own image.

Investigate another question in your mind: Why are people so susceptible to believing in conspiracy theories? My guess is that we have a deep-seated emotional need to try to make sense of terrible national traumas like

the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, or the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, or the 9/11 attacks. We often seek the solace of simple explanations in the wake of traumatic events.

The "official story" is rarely the whole truth, and the truth is often stranger than fiction. Many people have suspected the possibility that Franklin Roosevelt knew in advance about the impending Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and that he choose to ignore the danger in order to involve our nation in the war against Japan and fascist axis powers overrunning Europe. Many wonder about various motives that may have existed to assassinate President John F. Kennedy, and whether a conspiracy was behind it. And the whole story that surrounds the Bush administration's ignoring of gathering threats of terrorist attacks on the U.S. in the months before 9/11 is strangely suspicious.

There are many 9/11 mysteries. Why did the Bush administration studiously ignore the threats of al Qaeda terrorists from the time it assumed power in January 2001 until 9/11? Why did officials refuse to meet with counterterrorism czar Richard Clarke, who was becoming increasingly concerned about intelligence information that warned of a potential for attacks by Osama bin Laden's terrorist organization? Why did the Bush administration incuriously ignore the CIA Presidential Daily Brief of August 6, 2001 that was, after all, titled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S."? This CIA briefing mentioned the possibility of airplanes being hijacked; it stated that "FBI information ... indicates patterns of suspicious activity in this country consistent with preparations for hijackings." Could we have ignored these threats in order to justify the invasion of countries in the oil-rich Middle East?

Was intentional demolition involved in the collapse of Building 7 of the World Trade Center site? This 47-story building fell into its own footprint, exactly like it would have done in a controlled demolition, even though no airplane hit it. Building 7 collapsed a full 7 hours after the two 110-story towers had fallen. Uncanny! It is bizarre to contemplate even a possibility that any of our leaders would be capable of acting in ways so colossally villainous and harmful to the safety of its citizens. Such suspicions are partially a reflection of a lack of trust in our public officials due to our feelings - and knowledge - that they have often deceived us in the past.

The 9/11 attacks provide cause for suspicion because of a strong motive: the Neoconservative manifesto, the 1997 "Project for the New American Century", advocated large increases in military spending despite the end of the Cold War. This document noted wistfully that it would unfortunately be politically infeasible to achieve the goals of the doctrine ("may not be fashionable today") unless and until a *new calamity* took place similar to the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. The 9/11 attacks were as powerful a pretext for war as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The modern enemy is, however, much more nebulous. Even amateur detectives know that considerations of motives and means and opportunities are important in determining the prime suspects in a crime! "Follow the money!"

Chapter #99 - Good Fortune and Generosity of Being.

Let's wise up! Apropos of nothing, here's the perspective of W.C. Fields: "A man's gotta believe in something, and I believe I'll have another drink!"

As a congenial Midwesterner, I love life and nurturing relationships. I love enthusiastic socializing, engaging conversations, respectful interactions, and fulfilling rapport. I love satisfying food and pleasing beverages, and compelling music and good books, and philosophical understandings, and imaginative creativity, and spiritual expansiveness.

I have had marvelously good fortune in my life. Good fortune, it seems to me, should naturally be a cause for being generous in spirit and demonstrating friendship and empathy towards others. It should inspire us to act with greater humanitarian caring. It should make us more open to supporting social fairness. It should make us strongly supportive of people and institutions that help provide for those who are less fortunate, or in desperate need.

Good fortune and wealth should lead us toward expansive attitudes and greater senses of civic responsibility. It should not be a self-congratulatory springboard into greater selfishness, stinginess, jealous ill will,

intolerance, rigidity, hate, or more aggressive efforts to take advantage of others. Fair opportunities to lead decent lives should be encouraged in our society. 'Jawboning' does not work well in politics, and it might be naïve to suppose that words can influence and modify human nature. But Baron Edward George Bulwer-Lytton once said that "the pen is mightier than the sword", and on the off chance that he was correct, I will continue with hopefulness to set forth my understandings!

Wealth can be earned from hard work or ingenuity or talent or creative pursuits. It can also be accumulated as a consequence of some other admirable behavior like smart investing or good timing in risk-taking or thrifty resolve. Wealth can come from inheritances or other fortuitous circumstances. Riches can also be gained through dishonesty, predatory conduct toward others, political cronyism, or the unfair exploitation of people, systems or resources. Whatever the source of wealth, it should be used in ways that are at least minimally responsible to society. Rich people should be required to contribute more to the greater good. Incentives and regulations should be maintained that at least ensure that the costs of adverse environmental impacts of business activities are offset.

Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Philosophers debate about this, but it's my strong feeling that good understanding is enriched by knowledge and awareness, and that the worth of our lives is enhanced by being better informed. Lifelong learning is a good thing for personal growth. Wise words were contained in the ancient Temple of Apollo at Delphi; its engraved wise maxims indicated it is a good idea to "Know Thyself", and to practice the desirable condition of doing or consuming "Nothing in Excess." Let us IMAGINE a better world together -- "It's easy if you try", as John Lennon sang. And let's strive to help create this better world!

Chapter #100 - Personal Universal Point of View.

Here is a clear frame of reference of my personal cosmological beliefs. All of our sense perceptions are received deep in the mysterious interstices of our brains, and our interpretations of experiences percolate up in our thoughts and emotions from the subconscious into our conscious awareness. Our synapses fire to record observations and sensations, but what can we really know? Bumper sticker wisdom cautions us not to believe everything we think.

The Universe is a marvelous place. It features matter and light energetically hurtling through space. Physics professor James Trefil once expressed the opinion that matter in solar systems and galaxies might be nothing more than a lower energy state of a previously more energetic universe. In this theory, *nothingness* is the highest state of energy, and once the energy wound down through the dissipating tendency for 'entropy' to increase, a point was reached in which all matter burst forth into the cosmos, with a Big Bang. Energy, after all, is equivalent to matter, according to the most famous equation of all time, $E = MC^2$ (Energy = Mass times the Speed of Light squared). Why, pray tell (one might wonder), would Albert Einstein have been right to declare that matter and energy in the physical universe are equivalent to each other -- and related by a factor equal to 186,000 miles per second SQUARED? Whatever!

The Universe has an unfathomably long history and an incomprehensibly infinite scope. It consists of many billions of galaxies, each containing many billions of stars. We call the closest star the Sun. It has four rocky terrestrial inner planets: Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars. It has four 'gas giants' further out: Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune, and Uranus. The planets of our solar system, in turn, have 268 identified moons that orbit around them. Beyond the planets lies an enormous zone known as the Kuiper Belt that has dwarf planets like Pluto and many other icy objects. Far beyond that is a collection of matter that is wonderfully named the Oort Cloud. Orbiting around just our Sun alone, in other words, is a vast array of planets, asteroids, comets and other matter. Cool!

When we look at the night sky we essentially see in every moment a snapshot of an entire tapestry of the history of the Universe. Light arriving at every instant comes from trillions of different sources. Each and every extraterrestrial source of light has a point of origin that is a different distance from the Earth. Given

that it takes time for light to travel across space, we are essentially seeing each and every star at a different time in the history of the Universe.

Light travels at 186,000 miles per second, so the distances across the Universe are incomprehensibly vast. When we see the Moon in its orbit around the Earth, we see light reflected from the moon's surface that left the Sun, 93 million miles distant, just over 8 minutes ago. Light arriving from the closest star to our solar system left its source about 4 years ago. The most distant light the human race has yet detected, using the most sensitive optical instruments ever invented, emanated from its source almost 14 billion years ago. Peering into the night sky, we see mute testament to the practically eternal continuity of the Universe's physical reality. It's like we are seeing an elaborate timeline written across the heavens. Supernovas may long ago have destroyed millions of the stars that we see, but the light travels for years or millennia or eons before it reaches us, so such events will not become visible until the light emitted during that event arrives.

One can find a corroborating echo of this illuminating insight related to the continuity of passing time and the arrival in the here and now of speeding light from trillions of sources. This is seen every place in the natural world: overlapping generations of all terrestrial life forms provide a confirmation of an uninterrupted continuity of living things on our home planet. Majestic specimens of tall redwoods, and ancient gnarled bristlecone pines, and fecund varieties of animal life all provide mute testimony to this simple certainty in the continuity of the passage of time. Continuous change occurs in every instant, and it takes place at every level from the microscopic to the macrocosmic.

The fact that continuous change takes place in the context of apparently unchanging physical laws throughout the Universe provokes awe and thoughtful introspection. Here is a reason that humankind has always marveled at the seemingly miraculous nature of existence; here is why our most ancient religious and spiritual traditions ascribe a biocentric, indeed an anthropocentric, intentionality to the Universe. An intelligent and all-powerful being simply must have created everything, right? Right? Right? Could there be any other explanation?

Scientists, of course, have found far-reaching and sophisticated explanations for the physical evolution of the universe, ones that are far more compelling than all the simplistic and naive creation myths put together that mankind has ever conjured up in his vivid imagination.

The biologist J.B.S. Haldane once wrote: "The universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose." One of the queerest things about the universe is that almost every galaxy seems to be moving away from the Milky Way. The further a galaxy is from the Milky Way, the faster it is moving away. One might wonder if there is something special about our place in the universe that makes us a center of cosmic repulsion! Ha! "LOL."

But, no. Astrophysicists tell us this fact is merely evidence of an expanding Universe. The distance between all galaxies in the universe seems to be getting bigger as time passes, similar to how the distance increases between any two points on a balloon being inflated as the balloon gets larger. An observer in **ANY** galaxy, not just our own, would see all other galaxies traveling away. What a concept!

Stretch your mind around this. If you imagine a creation that began with a Big Bang in one central place, with all matter flinging away from it ever since, for almost 14 billion years, you might expect galaxies in our vicinity to be going in roughly the same direction and at similar speeds. It was the famous astronomer Edwin Hubble, a Missouri native, who changed our view of the Universe. In 1929 Hubble showed that galaxies are moving away from us with a speed proportional to their distance. He discovered this by measuring the 'Doppler shift of their light.' Just as the sound of an approaching vehicle with a siren blaring is higher pitched as it approaches us and then becomes lower as it passes, so the light from a galaxy receding away from us appears to have a lower frequency, and thus appears redder. Our ears can hear the change of pitch of the siren in this example, but our eyes cannot detect this tiny red-shift of the light. A sensitive spectrograph, however, enabled the clever Edwin Hubble to determine the red-shift of light from distant galaxies, and it was this that proved the Universe is expanding. "Simple!"

The 'Big Bang', incidentally was a pejorative term used to describe this scientific creation theory when it first began to be articulated. Many people are prone to apply pejoratives to new ideas. In this case, the evocative term stuck as scientists developed the theory with more elaborate studies and speculations and discoveries. However, this beginning cannot really be thought of accurately as a loud 'bang', because it began in a 'singularity' before space existed, and sound cannot travel through an airless vacuum. What 'banged'? Why did it 'bang'? These are things we likely will never know.

Science, in any case, proves that the Universe had been in energetic existence for more than nine billion years before our solar system formed. Every molecule on Earth was forged in stars far away in space, and in time. Every atom in our bodies is literally stardust.

Billions of years have passed since planet Earth formed. Billions more will come before the Sun finally burns out. These realizations, together with modern understandings of astronomy, geology and physics, and extensive evidence of biological evolution, provide us with factual proof that the Universe is unfathomably ancient. It is not young as the Bible and other holy books are said to reveal.

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 meaningful and positive purposes, rather than for ignorance-embracing and suppressive purposes, or even worse, for divisive, destructive or conflict-fomenting purposes.

The laws of nature apparently do not change. One of the unchanging laws of nature is that change is continuous. Subatomic particles and atoms and molecules are all in constant motion; this is why gases, when heated, create greater pressure in a sealed container. At the cosmic end of the spectrum, all planets and solar systems and galaxies are in continuous motion. For instance, the Earth makes a 584 million mile orbit around the Sun every year. Thus we are traveling at over 66,000 miles per hour relative to the Sun. Our spiral galaxy meanwhile whirls around a galactic center-of-gravity at an estimated speed ten times faster than our orbital speed around the Sun. And the Milky Way galaxy, relative to other galaxies in our 'Local Group', is traveling at an even higher rate of speed. It is amazing, really. It's no wonder that we cling to simplistic explanations and beliefs; it is just so nearly impossible to fathom the ineffably extensive compass of the whole shebang!

A telescopic study of stars reveals that beyond the Local Group of galaxies, there is a lot of empty space before we find the next clump of galaxies, the Virgo Cluster. So much can be known, studied or contemplated! It's marvelous. For example, consider the photograph that was voted the best picture ever taken by the Hubble Space telescope. It is a photo of the so-called Sombrero Galaxy, which is estimated to be 50,000 light years across and to contain 800 billion stars. It looks like an ethereally illuminated cosmic Frisbee. Google the photo of the Sombrero Galaxy, and contemplate it. As you look at this beautiful photo, think about whether it is plausible to believe evolutionary change has NOT taken place in the universe over countless eons of time.

To understand the natural world, it helps to understand the nature of change. Make no mistake about it: time slips slowly, but surely, past. Change and motion are continuous, and they are effectively eternal and infinite. Change generally takes place in imperceptible and gentle increments, like a breeze ruffling tall grasses on a languid late Spring afternoon. But sometimes change takes place with sudden and dramatic exclamation, like a bolt of lightning sundering a sultry sky full of fleeting 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 suppose that evolutionary change is guided is to make a mistake of misunderstanding the nature of randomness and cause-and-effect in galactic, geological, and biological change.

The fact that continuous geophysical change has been occurring throughout eons of geologic time is revealed by the science of geology. This is the study of the physical reality of the Earth. The most profound insight of geology is this: we exist at a moment in time that is only an infinitesimal portion of an incomprehensibly long saga of the planet's existence. During the formation of our solar system, the Earth and other planets and their moons were formed by a process of material conglobulation caused by gravitational attraction. Check out the pock-marked surface of the moon through a telescope, and you can imagine how huge masses of materials came

together in no doubt fascinating impacts. Since Earth's formative years, the planet has been bombarded by an on-going barrage of 'shooting star' accumulations of cosmic materials, with occasional 'punctuated equilibrium' occurrences in which larger meteorites streak through the atmosphere and strike the Earth's surface.

Marvelous geological processes have been occurring throughout Earth's long history. Tectonic plate movements of the planet's crust have caused continents to move around imperceptibly. New ocean crust has continuously formed at 'spreading centers'. Sedimentary and metamorphic rocks have formed; volcanic activity has taken place; and mountain building, erosion, weathering and glaciations have occurred. Our understandings of plate tectonics and the causes of volcanoes and earthquakes are relatively new -- but 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 opposed by countervailing forces of erosion that wear them down. While mountains appear to be permanent from a perspective of the span of a 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. Places like Yosemite Valley and Zion Canyon and the ancient Cedar Mesa sandstone formations of Natural Bridges National Monument provide mute but beautiful and awe-inspiring testament to such forces.

Geophysical changes in the Earth's crust that occur in dramatic spurts are much more obvious to us than continuous gradual ones. We witness these forces with awe. Floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, landslides, rock falls, hurricanes and tornadoes shock us with their enormous impersonal power. Scientists characterize this natural aspect of the physical evolution of our home planet as a "punctuated equilibrium". This simply means that in addition to barely perceptible continuous change, extraordinary geophysical events occasionally take place. Superstitious folks say these startling events are the result of angry gods who are forsaking or punishing people for various sins; but these are just such ridiculously absurd explanations!

The science of geology tells us that earthquakes are sudden ruptures that take place when tension is released in the Earth's crust. Stresses build up as tectonic plates collide in exceedingly slow motion with other plates, or move past them. Rather than having a well-lubricated motion, friction causes the plates to get stuck until they finally snap in energy-releasing earthquake shocks. People in California wonder when there will be another "Big One" along the San Andreas Fault, like there was in 1906 when the Pacific Plate jolted more than 15 feet northward. This fault zone roughly defines the border between the Pacific Plate and the North American Plate, and the Pacific Plate is moving an average of about two inches a year to the north, relative to the North American Plate.

Californians wonder if, and when, there will be another Big One, but they can rest assured not only that one will inevitably occur somewhat soon, but in fact there will be more than 100,000 'Big Ones' in the next 15 million years. The beautiful Point Reyes peninsula that lies north of San Francisco will become an island in less than a million years, and the area where Los Angeles is now, on the Pacific Plate, will move to be eventually north of San Francisco, which is on the western edge of the North American Plate, within 15 million years. Unimaginable? Check out the science!

Chapter #101 - The Evolution of Life.

"The sun's energy, stored by plants, keeps us alive moment by moment, heartbeat by heartbeat, thought by thought. Our bodies are stardust; our lives are sunlight."

--- Oliver Morton, *Eating the Sun, How Plants Power the Planet*

Just as the geological evolution of Earth has taken place in a kind of punctuated equilibrium, so has biological evolution. There is extensive and awe-engendering evidence that life has been evolving for billions of years on Earth. In addition to the compelling fossil evidence of millions of extinct species and the DNA evidence of relatedness in molecular biology within each living organism, it is apparent that right now all existing forms of life are nearly perfectly adapted to current climatic, soil and atmospheric conditions. The processes of

adaptation to changing conditions through mutation and natural selection are occurring right now. This is most apparent in prolific organisms such as insects and microbes and viruses.

As organisms reproduce, mutations can occur during the replication of genes. These are genetic alterations that are generally disadvantageous, but they can sometimes be favorable for the organism by allowing it to adapt to changes in physical conditions, competition, predation or climate. Much more rapid spurts of change also take place, as during selective survival during mass extinction events.

Scientists have discovered that, before more complex organisms evolved, life existed on Earth for about 3 billion years in the form of single-celled organisms. Fossil evidence shows that a relatively sudden proliferation of life forms took place about 540 million years ago. During a relatively short span of time during this 'Cambrian explosion', almost all of the taxonomic phyla of zoological life forms that exist today came into existence. This was the beginning of the so-called Paleozoic (ancient life) Era. One author cites extensive and convincing evidence that the genesis of this rapid change was selective pressure exerted on marine animal species by the evolution of primitive forms of vision in various marine organisms. Too bad we can't consult the trilobites!

"History is my religion, and it starts in Africa." Long before the cradles of civilization flourished in the river valleys of the Nile in Egypt, the Tigris and Euphrates in present-day Iraq, and the Yellow River in China, humanity evolved from ancestors who radiated out from Africa. It is ironic today that humanity's problems seem to be about the worst anywhere on the great continent of Africa.

Consider the fact that mankind has been domesticating animals for around ten thousand years. Our ancestors bred dogs from wild wolves, and the dogs are generally docile and loyal and enthusiastic. Our ancestors bred cows, pigs and sheep that grow bigger and fatter faster. Our ancestors actively selected plants for millennia by means of seed selection, cross pollination and transplantation. And they cultivated vegetables, grains and fruits that are more productive or nutritious or sweet. They created big showy flowers that are more beautiful to us -- irises, tulips, roses and others that are like bodybuilders on steroids. In recent years, scientists have even deciphered the genetic code of life in DNA, and learned to alter plants and animals directly by splicing genes from one life form into the cells of another, thereby modifying their genetic character.

Humankind has been artificially changing the inherited characteristics of plants and animals through selective breeding for many millennia. We rely on fossil fuels for energy that were formed from plants that lived many millions of years ago and exist today as fossil relics of ancient eras. Nonetheless, practically inexplicably, some people manage to accept dogmatic belief systems that deny this awe-inspiring awareness of biological evolution. In fact, something like 40% of Americans indicate that they DO NOT believe in evolution. Really?

Evolution is a scientific fact. The scientific theory of evolution explains overwhelmingly extensive evidence. The story of life's evolution is one of both continuity and change, a history that runs coherently through many hundreds of millions of years. Fossil evidence reveals this, as exposed in the billion-years-old strata 'layer cake' of time that can be seen in the rock layers of 'the world's greatest geological gash', the Grand Canyon. Erosion of the Colorado Plateau has revealed an extraordinarily beautiful sequence of layers of mudstone, siltstone, sandstone, limestone and petrified sand dunes that have been formed over the eons, particularly in the Mesozoic and Cenozoic Eras. This rock has been uplifted and carved into colorful canyons, mesas, buttes, hoodoos, breaks, sills, dykes, slot canyons, natural arches and stone bridges. I highly recommend checking out these amazing areas by visiting and appreciating the beautiful National Parks and public lands of southern Utah, western Colorado and northern Arizona. (Make your travels carbon-neutral, by offsetting your emissions!)

The exact nature of biological evolution is hard to fully fathom because we have difficulty grasping the incredible span of time involved in the process. "At least three million known species of living things run, hop, creep, slither, skitter, flitter, flap, flop, swim, or entwine their roots in seemingly infinitely varied habitats from mountain top to ocean deep -- and they are only one percent of all the species that have ever lived." (This quote comes from *Thread of Life: The Smithsonian Looks at Evolution*, published by Roger Lewin in 1982.)

Imagining the evolution of life is not much more difficult than conceiving of the geophysical evolution of sedimentary rock and mountain ranges. Think about Mt. Everest. The visible stripes exposed on its awe-

inspiring face are made up of marine limestone. Yes, it is solid rock that was formed by the biological precipitation of marine creatures with calcium-carbonate shells onto the bottom of the Indian Ocean over the eons. These materials were subsequently compressed and lithified into rock. Then, as the formerly island subcontinent of India began to crumple into Tibet as the Indo-Australian tectonic plate collided with the Eurasian plate, beginning about 50 million years ago, the sub-seafloor rock was driven skyward, earthquake by earthquake, eventually creating the highest mountains on Earth in the immense Himalaya Range. An earthquake in the mountains of Pakistan in October 2005 killed 70,000 people; it was just one in a very, very, very long string of such events that has occurred as these mountains were uplifted.

The idea of descent from common ancestors follows naturally from our knowledge that all animals come from parents, who came from previous parents, who came from their predecessors in an uninterrupted line of descent that can be traced far back along the tree of life into the murky recesses of evolutionary history. All multi-celled organisms ever in existence (the earliest ones date to about 540 million years ago) are descended from single-celled organisms that had existed for 3 billion years before natural selection figured out a way to proliferate in complexity and specialization.

Check out the insights into evolution contained in Richard Dawkins' book, *The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution*. Many thought-provoking insights into evolutionary processes are contained in this book, and Dawkins has immeasurably improved on the archaic Genesis story and the genealogies of the "there were giants in the earth in those days" fables of the Bible. Dawkins' approach traces our ancestors back to the beginning of time, using modern evidence provided by fossils and DNA evidence, as they are interpreted through the scientific disciplines of genetics and molecular biology. The Earth Manifesto story *Tall Tales, Provocative Parables, Luminous Clarity, and Evocative Truths: A Modern Log from the Sea of Cortez* provides further perspective on Dawkins' compelling ideas.

The disciplines of molecular biology and molecular genetics have established correlations of relatedness between species that chart how long ago in evolutionary history any two species shared common genetic ancestry, as measured by the degree of similarities of their DNA. Organisms are classified on the tree of life accordingly. *Homo sapiens* (genus, species), for instance, are classified in the family of Hominidae in the order of Primates in the class Mammalia in the phylum of Chordata in the subphylum of Vertebrata in the kingdom Anamalia. We're animals, folks!

Evolution has culminated, from our anthropocentric point of view, in our species at the apex of the Animal Kingdom at this particular point in time. To more accurately understanding evolution is to see that there are many millions of 'interim ends' in existence today in the form of all currently surviving species of life. We humans are unique among all species of life ever in existence on Earth because of our ability to contemplate insights like these about the Universe, and to imagine the past, and to create probable scenarios about the future. As to whether we are the crown of Creation, that is questionable, and the chance of us being its very purpose are vanishingly slight!

Science is strengthened by being flexible and self-correcting because it utilizes observation and reliably repeated experimentation, so it evolves by degrees toward explanations of the mysteries of nature that are increasingly accurate. All other doctrines and dogmas, in contrast to science, suffer from being much more inflexible and rigid. They provide explanations that can become outmoded in the bright light of better understandings of evidence, and thus foolhardy to cling to.

We should be careful to note that science can be manipulated by political, economic and social ideologies, and that scientific discoveries can be used for harmful purposes as well as helpful ones. Just as dogmatic understandings should become more flexible, science should be tempered with ethical considerations and broadmindedness in perspective. Ideological conceptions need to be open to modification when, and if, a better interpretation of evidence arises. "This is not rocket science!"

The process of evolution should not be confused with Creationist dogmas. Creationism is neither a logical scientific theory nor a plausible explanation of reality. It is torturously codified superstition and moral code.

To imagine that hurricanes, earthquakes or tsunamis are 'punishments by God', for instance, is laughably absurd. These are natural events that we regard as disasters when they cause us harm.

More of us, incidentally, seem to be in harm's way these days. As our population increases from 8 billion today to 9 billion in less than 20 years, this problem will get much worse, and simultaneously our failure to take effective steps to mitigate climate change is certain to make conditions worse. This will include oppressive heat waves, severe floods, epic droughts, powerful hurricanes and tornados, intense wildfires, ocean temperature spikes, and losses of topsoil on agricultural lands. To help adapt, support plans like creating a progressively financed Rainy Day Fund NOW!

We would be well advised to be extremely skeptical about ideological arguments promoted by climate change deniers. Don't believe a single thing that political advertising claims if it is funded by pollution apologists and low wage advocates like the billionaire Koch brothers and their ilk who want to continue socializing many costs onto society.

Diseases too are a result of natural processes, not a vindictive God. Many diseases are caused by organisms like bacteria, viruses, fungi or protozoan parasites. We combat many diseases with antibiotic drugs that kill or inhibit the growth of such microorganisms. Since such forms of life replicate much faster than larger and more complex life forms, they adapt more quickly and can develop resistance to antibiotics or overcome protections afforded by vaccines. This biological capability will present humanity and our medical experts with enormous challenges in the future, whether we sensibly believe in evolution or insensibly choose to deny this scientific fact.

Our human perceptions and beliefs struggle to imagine the full context of our existence. We try to fathom the uninterrupted span of evolution through which our species, and all others currently alive, have miraculously survived through an eons-long succession of challenges and closing doors. Our minds are scarcely capable of such expansive understandings, so many folks tend to cling to primitive explanations and simplistic myths and parochial beliefs and emotionally satisfying stories. We vaguely adhere to dogmas that embody our hopes and our deepest fears. Most people today seem to believe there is an all-powerful God who curiously has anthropomorphic and father-like characteristics, and who is capable of intervening in our unknowable destinies.

The tidy genealogy set forth in the Bible implies a creation by God followed by fewer than 300 generations of descendants from Adam and Eve to the present day. Scientists now know that there have been more than 10,000 generations of human beings stretching back to ancient prehistory, and millions of generations before that of previous ancestor species in a never-interrupted line of descent from progenitor species and earlier ancestral species back along the evolutionary tree of life. It seems to me to be a funny kind of failure of the imagination to cling to Biblical literalism as being the whole and true story of life. The genealogies of *Genesis* make a marvelous tale, but they pale in comparison to the far more elaborate, profound and awe-inspiring facts of the matter. Again, check out Richard Dawkins' compelling book about this subject, *The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution*. Wikipedia provides a good synopsis and details about the book.

Anyway, what is, is. There is some truth in all religions, but there is no absolute truth; this is why we should foster acceptance for the beliefs of others, rather than goading others with intolerance. The best hope for humanity is that our intelligence and our reasoning abilities give us potential advantages over the millions of other forms of life that have become extinct over the long sweep of geological history. We are able to think, and to learn. We are theoretically capable of great flexibility. We can choose to adapt. Our adaptive abilities have allowed us to construct shelters, make clothing, grow food, raise animals, and use "technology" to improve our ability to survive and prosper. And we can transmit our knowledge to people in the future. This gives us the capability, to a certain extent, to shape our own destinies.

Since we are animals at the top of the food chain, we are vulnerable to damages to the biological support systems upon which we rely. Our marvelous reproductive success is threatening to overwhelm the natural world and undermine the foundations of our survival. If we insist on multiplying like rabbits, we risk dying like rabbits, consistent with the impersonal certainties of cause and effect.

Science ironically gives us an enhanced ability to save ourselves at the same time that it provides an ever-growing panoply of techniques and capabilities for destroying ourselves. The race is on! Our aggregate impacts on essential life support systems are rapidly approaching dangerous overload. The carrying capacity of the Earth seems unlikely to prove adequate to support the 10 billion people that will otherwise inhabit the planet in the next 50 years or so. We really do need to more clearly and widely understand the *Population Connection* to future well-being.

In our myopic human hubris, we continue to fight our daily skirmishes and our culture wars -- and military conflicts -- yet we are failing to see the forest for the trees. Most people make shopping, entertainment, diversion and pleasure *raison d'être*, and overlook the fact that to prosper as a species we must choose to radically transform the ways we collectively act. We are in a kind of denial of the fact that we are essentially altering the ability of the planet to support us. It is foolish not to take action to preserve wildlife habitats, seek smart renewable energy solutions, conserve fossil fuels, use resources in sustainable ways, protect wetlands, reduce greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, and safeguard the planet's biodiversity. It is madness for "conservatives" to impose bans on abortions and even oppose contraception and other safe birth control methods that would help us control population growth. (I know: yada, yada, yada!)

Our fate is in our own hands to a large extent; no other species has ever had such potential control. If we want our species to survive another century, another millennium, another 10 thousand years, another 100 thousand years, or a million years - mere blips in geological time - we must begin to work together, rather than to ruthlessly compete and aggressively conflict. Intelligent long-term-oriented policy-making and progressive-minded ideas simply must gain ascendancy over shortsighted and reactionary conservatism, money-obsessed triumphalism, and short-term oriented ideologies.

Chapter #102 - Ecological Revolution.

Ecological understandings herald a new age of great truths. Ecology tells us that everything is interconnected and interdependent. Ecological wisdom recognizes that continuing to give economic and social policies more importance than ecological principles is an irrationality beyond mistakenness -- a kind of psychopathological insanity.

Ecological insights reveal the folly of sawing off the limbs and roots of the tree of life upon which we depend. The destruction of the healthy balance of nature simply must be prevented -- for our own sakes. This is why our leaders should be prevented from pandering so exclusively to rich people, giant corporations and religious fundamentalists. Avarice, gluttony, lust, jealousy, pride, arrogance, vanity, orthodoxy and stubbornness can no longer be allowed to damage the vital basics of life.

There are many circumstances in life over which we have little control. So we try to make the best of whatever comes our way. Our attitudes are important because our collective destiny is one best chosen with a positive attitude and keen awareness. Let us honor the idea that we should "Make the most of all that comes, and the least of all that goes."

Vigilance and awareness can help us clearly recognize that all of us have individual responsibilities. Better choices need to be made by thinking individuals, citizens, business owners, employees, leaders, followers, communities, and all of humanity.

Together, using clarity of reason and faith as guides, we can join together to assure we achieve a far-reaching Ecological Revolution. "Let's roll!"

Chapter #103 - Only Reason Can Save Us.

"The further the spiritual evolution of mankind advances, the more certain it seems to me that the path to genuine religiosity does not lie through the fear of life, and the fear of death, and blind faith, but through striving after rational knowledge."

--- Albert Einstein

Every individual seeks sources of purpose, inspiration, identification and validation in their lives. By seeing deeper into our souls, we can find healthier outlets for our energies. Let us listen more closely to our reason, our intuition, and our consciences.

The Bible says that in the beginning God created "the heaven" and the earth, and night and day. It says that 'He' judged the whole shebang to be good. He put Adam and Eve in a garden of paradise and innocence, saying "thou shalt not eat" from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil". Surely God knew that he had made human beings naturally curious and easily tempted, and often with poor discipline and little will power, and he must have known that forbidden fruit is the most alluring and enticing kind! Nonetheless, he prohibited Adam and Eve from tasting the fruit of this one tree. Attention: the moral code was then about to materialize, in all its "sublapsarian" splendor.

A talking serpent cajoled the woman into eating the fruit of this tree, according to this truly tall tale, and the serpent was condemned and the woman was blamed, and God was so angered that He cursed all future generations of humankind to pay for this 'original sin' with hardship, suffering, maternal pain in childbirth, and death. Females were thereafter relegated to roles that were subservient to male authority. God offered only a slight hope of redemption, and this glimmer of hope for salvation was only for those who believed, hook-line-and-sinker, in this whole legendary patriarchal story.

This is how humans happened to gain the "Moral Sense", and the knowledge of good and evil, wrote Mark Twain in *Letters from the Earth*. And how to do bad things, and to have sex. He notes, "The Church still prizes the Moral Sense as man's noblest asset today, although the Church knows God had a distinctly poor opinion of it and did what he could in his clumsy way to keep his happy Children of the Garden from acquiring it." LOL!

This early example of infinite injustice in the Garden of Eden was augmented by an image of a prophet of mercy nailed to a cross for our sins. This primitive myth has certainly endured, and profoundly affected civilization, as we strut and fret our hour upon the stage. Jesus was probably nailed to the cross, if true, actually for his revolutionary challenges to Roman authority and the Temple priesthood in the Holy Land, not for anyone else's sins, so it is interesting to see how a story can get contorted into all manner of manipulative interpretations as time goes by.

"It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me," declared Mark Twain, "it is the parts that I do understand."

One has to chuckle ruefully to realize how good that old Garden of Eden story is, to have set up a sublapsarian narrative of good, evil and sin so that religious authorities can condemn bad behaviors, and believers can avoid damnation and get forgiveness in a quest for salvation and redemption. This is how established religions gain the power to suppress sexual expression, and dominate the faithful and command obedience. This is their moralizing master plan. This is how they get people to embrace blind beliefs in biblical certitudes! (And to give money to their churches, mosques or synagogue.)

Entertaining comedian Bill Maher once said, "I would like people who think more like me to understand that it is okay to stand up and say, 'We're not the crazy ones. The crazy ones are the people with the talking snake.'" That's downright *Religulous!*

Vivid imagery has evocative and persuasive power. This is one reason that independent films like those shown in hundreds of film festivals around the world can provide such profoundly valuable insights into important issues, and into other cultures and alternative points of view and the human condition.

Images of death, it should be noted, have particularly deep psychological impacts on us. Almost everyone fears his or her own demise and the pain and indignities likely to be involved between now and then. Images of death such as a bloodied Christ on a cross serve to terrify us, and yet oddly to reassure us at the same time in some sort of shared-fate belonging kind of way. Such representations of death help us identify with those whose beliefs are in accord with our own. They can also serve to encourage people to support churches, and give money, and make other sacrifices in their lives in order to be saved. Hmmm ...

I say, let us have faith in more wholesome things! Let us honor civilized virtues like generosity, peace, moderation, mindfulness of others, integrity, kindness, friendship, humility, prudence, patience, love, and sympathy without prejudice. Let us resist the temptations of vices like hostile jealousy, bitter envy, over-indulgent gluttony, greedy avarice, self-glorifying vanity, uncontrolled anger, immoderate indulgence, and arrogant selfishness. And let us restructure our economies and societies in ways that encourage such virtues -- and discourage such vices.

Without behavioral constraints, mankind is lost in a world without compass. Without financial limitations, people consume extravagantly and profligately. When we fail to understand that it is very beneficial to conserve, we are motivated to consume wastefully. Without knowledge, people ignorantly accept indoctrination and are easily manipulated. Without healthy role models and authentic values, people are adrift in a sea without moorings.

There is an old parable that became a religious joke about reason and faith. It goes like this:

It had been raining for days and days, and a terrible flood came over the land. The waters rose so high that one man was forced to climb onto the roof of his house. As the waters rose higher and higher, a man in a rowboat appeared, and told him to get in. "No," replied the man on the roof. "I have faith in the Lord; the Lord will save me." So the man in the rowboat went away. The man on the roof prayed for God to save him.

The waters rose higher and higher, and suddenly a speedboat appeared. "Climb in!" shouted a man in the boat. "No," replied the man on the roof. "I have faith in the Lord; the Lord will save me." So the man in the speedboat went away. The man on the roof continued to pray for God to save him.

The waters rose further. A helicopter appeared and over a loudspeaker, the pilot announced he would lower a rope to the man on the roof. "No," replied the man. "I have faith in the Lord; the Lord will save me." So the helicopter went away. The man on the roof prayed for God to save him.

The waters rose higher and higher, and eventually they rose so high that the man on the roof was swept away, and alas, he drowned. Upon arriving in heaven, the man marched straight over to God. "Heavenly Father," he said, "I had faith in you, I prayed to you to save me, and yet you did nothing. Why?" God gave him a puzzled look, and replied "I sent you two boats and a helicopter, what more did you expect?"

The moral of the story? No matter how fervent our wishful thinking, and no matter how hopeful our prayers, it is our ability to reason that will save us; NOT blind faith. As the astronomer and philosopher Galileo Galilei stated: "I do not feel obligated to believe that the same god who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use."

In actual modern day experience, God does not miraculously intervene in the physical world; no, in reality, it is human activities that directly affect each and every one of us. Here is where we must make committed strides to creating a fairer, safer and saner world. No deity will save us; we would be wise to act to save ourselves by putting our trust and energies into more sensible, intelligent and likely auspicious undertakings.

Chapter #104 - The Importance of a Positive Attitude.

Imagine a better world. It's easy if you try. Hope, confidence, optimism, positive dreams, spiritual caring and nobility of intention provide a healthy starting point. Positive attitudes can help us achieve important objectives. If we apply our awareness, ingenuity, imagination, creativity, enthusiasm and faith, we are more likely to solve the challenges facing the human race in more salubrious ways.

Wishful thinking alone, however, is inadequate. Critical thinking, clear reasoning, freethinking and fair-mindedness are crucial to a propitious future.

Natural impulses profoundly affect aggregate human behaviors. Drives for security, belonging and sexual prowess help define our senses of meaning and self-importance. As John Fowles noted in *The Aristos*: "We are all psychological dwarfs, and we have the complexes and psychological traits characteristic of dwarfs: feelings of inferiority, with compensatory cunning and malice." Yikes!

Psychologists say that people seek personal senses of security either by conforming or by conflicting. We all want to be regarded as "somebody", or to create some sort of lasting legacy. People conform by striving to obtain the status symbols that society defines as successful. For instance, many people consume conspicuously (Bling!), or obsess over money, or seek identity in uniforms of belonging.

Alternatively, to gain attention or a sense of self-importance, many people choose to conflict. They find meaning in striving to be unique, to embrace countercultural ideals, to oppose the conventional, to be cool or 'bad', to seek liberation, to escape by using alcohol or recreational drugs to alter their consciousness -- or expand their horizons -- or to indulge in the allures of the forbidden.

When we understand the psychological motivations that underlie our actions, we can be clearer in our dedication to more noble causes and things that really matter. The restructuring of our societies to give people more wholesome purposes and potentialities would be advantageous. It could help create better communities, and motivate us to give greater respect to the biotic well-being of life on Earth.

The fundamental underpinnings of our collective attitudes imply that it will take a revolutionary sea change in our understandings and behaviors to make the world more mutually secure. The U.S. should find ways to transcend its righteous superpower mentality. We should inoculate ourselves against the misguided influences of corporate domination, and of manipulative demagoguery. We should seek ways of overcoming our collective psychological insecurities that are socially beneficial. John Fowles may have a valid point that we all in a sense resemble "cunning 'dwarfs'", manifesting feelings of insecurity, inadequacy and anger. These emotions sometimes drive us to act with compensatory attitudes of superiority or malice.

Chapter #105 - Women of the World, Unite!

Writer Anais Nin once observed: "There were always, in me, two women at least, one woman desperate and bewildered, who felt she was drowning, and another who only wanted to bring beauty, grace and aliveness to people."

I advocate figuratively tossing a life vest to women in need, and to helping the most vulnerable people in our societies, especially including children. Psychologist John Bowlby would heartily agree with this sentiment.

Americans are lucky to live in a culture that allows a relative freedom of expression. Good for us! I aim to continue to take advantage of this freedom, and focus here on issues crucial to females. One of the loveliest female characters in all of literature is Jorge Amado's *Gabriela*. Readers get to know her in the great novel *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon*. *Gabriela* is simple, affectionate, free-spirited, tenderhearted and happy, and she loves to go barefoot, and has a beautiful soul. I implore beautiful *Gabriela* to be my Muse for this chapter, because I need all the help possible to untangle the mysteries of feminine virtues in our overly male-dominated cultures.

Women have progressed far beyond the stage where men can expect them to remain barefoot and pregnant and subservient. Sure, men like to see us in high heels and diaphanous blouses and slit skirts. Hey, they are even fun to wear, if you are fortunate enough to look good in them! But there is more to life than fleeting sexiness. We women are people who have rights, too. We are not, after all, living in a modern day *Animal Farm* of George Orwell's imagination where "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

Wait! Actually, the sad truth is that some animals ARE treated much, much "more equal" than others in America. But this current excessive degree of inequality cannot be allowed to persist, and we sure shouldn't let wealth continue to be inexorably concentrated in the hands of the few, while tighter austerity measures are imposed on the masses. Thomas Piketty tells us that this course of action risks "terrible consequences". It will eventually be proven to have been best to mitigate such risk with social insurance policies that make our societies significantly fairer.

Our Constitution and the Golden Rule, and a true realization of the fairness principles at the heart of our democracy, deny official sanction to extreme unfairness in our country.

Mark Twain in his Notebook in 1895 wrote these words: "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."

Chapter #106 - A Call for the Education and Empowerment of Women.

Men and women do a fascinating 'dance of selves in relationship'. Someone once observed that men play at love for sex, and women play at sex for love. Some curious behavioral truisms are revealed in this generalization!

An age-old struggle takes place between males, who are jealously protective of their prerogatives and power, and females, who seek respect and fair rights and their own kind of emotional power over men. This struggle is sometimes characterized by inequities, sex discrimination, repression, resentment, hypocrisy, psychological abuse, hostility and even physical abuse, violence and rape. Part of the male predicament of our time is that gender roles have undergone significant changes since the 1950s, and this has created a great amount of anxiety and insecurity among men. I am certainly not entering virgin territory in suggesting that male supremacy and cowboy-mentality rhetoric and quests for male heroes and saviors are all symbolic of male traditionalism, as are stories of fantastic rescues of females who are in peril or captivity.

Intense struggles are taking place in the world today over the growing need for fairer and more enlightened roles of men and women in relationship. From a feminist perspective, American society is far too testosterone-filled, empathy-deficient, discriminatory, violence-prone and obsessed with the "sins" of others. Our culture is unfairly influenced by evangelical religious fundamentalists who are driven more by power and control than by true and honorable spiritual feelings.

Good God! Such things as the Global Gag Rule are contrary to the best interests of hundreds of millions of women. So are an ever-so-long litany of patriarchal dominion gambits, sexual harassment, social program cuts, and political appointments of uncompromising conservatives and ideologically-driven operatives. Thank God that President Obama was a somewhat progressive Democrat, for he inspired hope for positive change and fair-mindedness! His speech in December 2013 about inequality and declining social mobility was a sensational one that may be highly regarded in history.

I feel strongly that the single most important initiative that should be undertaken worldwide to improve human societies would be to support programs that educate and empower girls and women. Much poverty, inequity and suffering is caused by discrimination against females, and by the rigid stratification of gender roles.

Microcredit and microinsurance programs for microenterprises have been shown to be one of the fastest ways to improve the welfare of women and children among the 3 billion people around the world who subsist on less than \$2 a day. Americans should strongly support such programs, like the Village Banking Campaign of the Foundation for International Community Assistance organization.

It is this simple: women should have equal rights to men. Sex discrimination should be minimized. Women should earn the same amount of pay as men for comparable jobs. This is the face of fairness.

Chapter #107 - Proactive Initiatives for Women.

One good way to create more equality in our societies would be by establishing an international school lunch program. George McGovern and Bob Dole advocated such a program for years. Free school lunches would encourage school attendance, enhance lives with more inclusive education, and simultaneously reduce hunger and poverty. Such a program would also help create goodwill for those who generously finance it, which should be the relatively rich in Western countries.

Since girls represent two-thirds of the 100 million children who do not attend school worldwide, this program would be an effective and beneficial way of helping educate and empower girls and women. This, in turn, would provide many families with better opportunities. This initiative would be eminently fair, and it would make a big

contribution to gender equality, social cohesion, empathetic understanding, better communication, healthier societies, and even reproductive responsibility.

As an aside, it is stupid policy to condemn sex workers and refuse to help them. The world's oldest profession could use some forward-thinking attitudes that would help protect women from violence and disease, and provide assistance in finding them other opportunities in life.

Chapter #108 - Preventative Medicine.

Dr. Andrew Weil wrote in *Spontaneous Healing* about the role our minds play in health and illness. He says, "At every level of biological organization, from DNA up, mechanisms of self-diagnosis, self-repair, and regeneration exist in us, always ready to become active when the need arises." Optimum health is achieved by providing the best conditions for these innate mechanisms to operate. These conditions include good nutrition, moderate consumption, physical exercise and balanced stresses, positivity of attitude, and a healthy connectedness to friends, family, community and nature.

The medical establishment unfortunately places too much emphasis on prescription drugs and surgery. It largely ignores the role that good nutrition, positive attitudes, and reduced stress play in wellness and good health. Yet some illnesses are psychosomatic (literally, "mind/body"). Many afflictions are caused or made worse by stress, partially due to the negative effects stress has on immune systems. Hope, fortitude and positive thinking can have measurably positive impacts on our health. Negative thoughts and mental depression have unhealthy effects, and are statistically correlated to poorer health and less favorable outcomes after surgery or trauma.

Antidepressant drugs work by acting on neurotransmitters in our bodies. This is how they regulate people's moods and are used to treat conditions like bipolar disorder. Singer and songwriter Stevie Nicks relates a sad story about the terrible side-effects of Valium-like drugs that a psychiatrist prescribed for her to fight her addiction to cocaine in the mid-1980s. "You can detox off heroin in 12 days," she points out. "Cocaine is just a mental addiction detox. But tranquilizers -- they are really dangerous!" She was given the tranquilizer Klonopin, which she says led to six very hard years in her life. She finally ended up in the hospital for 47 days to detox from this drug. It is bizarre that anti-anxiety drugs can create such dreadful effects and severe, long-lasting cognitive impairments. The over reliance on such prescription drugs is truly something to cause anxiety!! (On the other hand, promoted drug-taking is quite good for the profitability of the Big Pharma industry.)

Dr. Burton Goldberg, "the Voice of Alternative Medicine", once said we need more holistic guidance to provide us with powerful alternative approaches to wellness. Boosting the immune system for instance helps fight infections, afflictions and maybe even diseases like cancer. Dr. Goldberg wrote 18 books about effective alternative ways to combat addiction, depression, anxiety, stress and afflictions like heart disease and alcoholism. He wrote: "Dopamine D2 is a chemical messenger that stimulates the brain's reward circuits. Increasing the level of dopamine D2 may protect people from developing alcoholism." It turns out that children of alcoholics have a heightened vulnerability to becoming alcoholic, due to emotional and environmental factors as well as chemical ones. Higher levels of inherited dopamine D2 receptors in the brain may make it harder for alcoholics to cope. From my personal point of view, it's sad that people become alcoholics, because this prevents them from enjoying the social pleasure that moderate use of wine, beer or occasional cocktails can provide.

In healthcare matters, disease prevention is preferable to a later need for medical treatment. It is also less expensive than waiting for health problems to develop and then treating the symptoms. For instance, hundreds of thousands of people die every year from lung cancer, but many of them would avoid getting lung cancer altogether if they understood and heeded the risks and causative impacts of inhaling cigarette smoke. Proactive initiatives are smarter than reactive ones.

This is instructive. We see that desires, compulsions, stresses and addictions can lead to adverse health outcomes. Prevention is a far better strategy than waiting until drugs or surgery are needed. In a similar way, prevention of pregnancy is a much better strategy than forcing women to deal with the emotional turmoil of

choosing to have an abortion, or with the negative consequences of having unwanted children, or of having children when they are unable to take care of them.

One of the goals of society should be to reduce unintended pregnancies through sex education and expanded services for women's health and family planning. Thanks to such programs, the average woman in Mexico today is having an average of fewer than 3 children, compared to a generation or two ago when the average was 7 children. Abstinence-only 'education' has been proven in the U.S. to be a dishonest, ineffective and inadequate way to prevent unintended pregnancies.

All women should have access to basic healthcare and affordable birth control measures. The use of contraceptives is an important means of preventing unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. As Melinda Gates said at the 16th International AIDS Conference in Toronto in 2006, "Some people believe that condoms encourage sexual activity, so they want to make them less available. But withholding condoms does not mean fewer people have sex; it means fewer people have safe sex, and more people die."

Healthcare plans should provide coverage for contraceptives, because of the fact that they help prevent both unwanted pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases. It is unconscionable for health care plans to cover drugs like Viagra, which effectively encourage unwanted pregnancies, but not provide coverage for contraceptives and emergency contraception.

The suppression of birth-control practices is, in one regard, a puritanical attempt to repress private sexuality, regardless of how it affects people's lives. Are social conservatives just inalterably opposed to sex on the off chance that it will be pleasurable, tantalizing or promiscuous? Exactly WHY are they so interested in controlling the sex lives of others? Don't tell me God is a prude!

Sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) have become an unprecedented problem in epidemic proportions among American teenagers. A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that 26% of adolescent girls have some type of STD. Twenty-six percent! This is alarming and pathetic! We need effective prevention strategies and smarter public health priorities. We cannot go back to the Bush-era days of head-in-the-sand abstinence-only sex education and opposition to contraception. It is sad to abandon our teenage daughters to the ideological dictates of social conservatives!

Appeals to logic, ethical fairness, science and reason do not influence the masses as much as blood-and-guts emotionality. Anti-choice activists rabidly oppose abortions, but many of them also oppose measures that would help prevent unwanted pregnancies and STDs, like the use of condoms and birth-control pills for teens and others. This bias is insane as a basis for social policy!

A late-term abortion of a fetus has been given a lurid terminology of "partial-birth abortion". This procedure involves a fetus that is on the margin of viability, usually weighing less than one pound. The decision to have an abortion at this late stage is uncommon and extremely complex and difficult, often involving a threat to the mother's life or a recognition that the fetus has serious medical deficiencies. To frame this procedure as a 'partial-birth abortion' is to judge and stigmatize it. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists strongly opposes a legislative ban on 'partial-birth abortions'. This group noted that "the intervention of legislative bodies into medical decision-making is inappropriate, ill-advised and dangerous." The government should get out of our bedrooms and doctor's offices, and leave reproductive and medical decisions to the women, men, families and physicians involved!

Chapter #109 - Sex is Natural.

Mark Twain once perceptively observed, "Of the delights of this world, man cares most for sexual intercourse, yet he has left it out of his heaven."

Sex. Sex!! Let's be frank and honest: sexual drives are natural. They are among the most powerful of all biological urges. Sexual intercourse can be a beautiful act of passion, intimacy, communication, rapport, mutual pleasure, love and respect. A healthy sexuality is one that is not repressed, one that is not perverse or severely inhibited. It can even be characterized by a wide variety of enjoyable sexual fantasies. Ooh la la!

"Putting more women into orbit in a week than NASA has in a lifetime."

-- Advertisement for the "Pocket Rocket", a *Toys in Babeland* 'mini massager'

The sex act should not be morally regarded as having only a reproductive function. Sex, according to enlightened Tantric texts, has three distinct and separate purposes: procreation, pleasure and liberation. Western Tantra practices involve intimate physical activities as a means of respectful communication and affirmation, and even ecstasy and cosmic consciousness. There is a profound value to honoring our bodies in spiritually uplifting ways. Tantra offers people in Western societies an avenue to approach attitudes about sex in less conflicted or repressive ways.

A national policy of "Just Say No" to sex, as reflected in the controlling hubris of the abstinence-only agenda, is counterproductive and ineffective. It is ridiculous as a broad-brush strategy of dealing with this powerful drive. Contraceptive methods have moved beyond the rhythm method, folks -- and it is ethically wrong to try to prevent women from using contraceptives to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.

All kinds of contraceptives should be made freely available to women worldwide, as well as "morning-after" Plan B emergency contraception. Emergency contraception in the form of Plan B is a good way to choose to prevent pregnancy. There are many reasons that a woman might want to choose Plan B. For instance, when a woman is raped by a man (outrageous!), or when a woman is seduced under the influence of intoxicants or other forms of heavy persuasion; or when a woman chooses to have sex with a man that she definitely doesn't want to have a child with. Prudes decamp: Plan B should be available to any woman who wants it!

And as a final resort, women should be guaranteed the right to have access to a safe and legal abortion. The decision to have an abortion is traumatic and generally involves a considerable amount of consternation, so our social institutions should be supportive of women who make this hard choice.

The Supreme Court, newly packed with conservatives in April 2007 (John Roberts and Samuel Alito), chose to criminalize late-term abortions in a ruling. Little consideration was given for the health of the mother, or for any prerogative that she might deserve to have to make personal choices in her life. This was an appalling development. It was no doubt greeted with triumphant approbation by those who strongly believe that God cares more about embryos and fetuses than women already alive, and by those who are complacent with the patriarchal domination of women by men in our societies. But it is wrong-headed policy. Perhaps Dee Dee Myers' book, *Why Women Should Rule the World*, I once speculated, could help provide the impetus for our society to move beyond the domineering control impulses of social conservatives!

And then after Trump appointed three anti-abortion Justices to the high court, they overturned almost 50 years of precedent and federally guaranteed rights of women to have an abortion by overturning the *Roe v. Wade* decision in June 2022. My observations about this unpopular religious-based action are set forth in detail in my online essay *Women's Rights: Let Freedom Ring -Honestly!*

The world does not need unwanted children, and women should not be forced to reproduce if they do not want to. If men were the ones who got pregnant, abortion would be regarded as a sacred right, rather than a sin, one can be sure!

Chapter #110 - Perspective on Abortion.

More than 70 million induced abortions take place around the world each year. This number could be significantly reduced with a broadminded three-fold approach: (1) by supporting healthy sex education programs, making contraceptives more widely available, and creating more effective programs to prevent teen pregnancies and unwanted pregnancies of all kinds. (2) by investing in good women's health clinics around the world, and (3) by expanding opportunities and education for women taking effective steps to improve maternal and childhood mortality survival rates. Such initiatives should be generously supported.

The war over abortion rights and the consequences of anti-choice activities cost billions of dollars a year. Millions of unwanted pregnancies occur annually, with devastating consequences for women and for our societies,

and ultimately for the environment. Private, personal decisions about women's health care and reproductive choices should be made by women involved and their families and doctors -- NOT BY POLITICIANS. Social conservatives should not be allowed to undermine the health and safety of women.

We are basically involved in a costly and highly divisive religious war over the question of whether we should force unwilling pregnant women into having a baby -- or yet another one. Shall we honor every pregnant woman's rights, needs, desires and choices? That would be much fairer than prohibiting them from having the option to choose NOT to become a mother.

Simply put, a ceasefire should be agreed to in the war against abortion. We have a multitude of more pressing problems. We cannot afford to divert so much attention, energy, time and resources into efforts to force women to bear unwanted children. Republicans in red states, relent!

Religious fundamentalism and evangelical moralizing are the main forces opposing a woman's freedom to choose whether or not to keep a fertilized embryo, however conceived, until it becomes a viable fetus. Women should not be treated as subordinate beings; their sole purpose is not to be subservient to men's desires and dictates.

The rate of teen pregnancy in the United States was higher than the rate in 80 other countries of the world during George W. Bush's tenure in office. Nice going, abstinence-only folks! We would be wise to take fair and smart measures to further reduce unwanted teen pregnancies -- measures that are courageous and enlightened rather than ineffective and puritanical.

A global study in 2007 concluded that "abortion rates are similar in countries where it is legal and those where it is not, suggesting that outlawing the procedure does little to deter women seeking it." While rates of abortion are about the same in countries worldwide, the safety of the procedure varies widely. The study found that "abortion was a very safe procedure for women in countries where it is legal, but extremely dangerous for women in countries where it is outlawed and performed underground." Yikes!! Those who oppose abortions essentially support unforgiving, harsh, controlling, punitive and harm-engendering treatment of women who become pregnant, no matter what their circumstances may be. Damnation!

The government should not interfere with a woman's right to choose to terminate a pregnancy. Judges should not be approved for life-long terms on the Supreme Court if they are ideological extremists who oppose the fair-minded precedent of *Roe vs. Wade*. Likewise, the influence of tax-exempt churches and religious fundamentalist brethren who oppose the freedom of women to control their own lives and bodies, and their destinies, should not be given domineering influence in national decision-making.

Chapter #111 - Absurdities of Inflexible Religious Dogma.

Almost all of the holy books and sacred scriptures of the world's major religions were written by men between 1,400 BCE and 700 CE. In other words, they were written long ago, when our cultures and challenges were much different.

Such doctrinal writings are being interpreted today by authorities in religious establishments that are distinctly biased toward conservative male supremacist worldviews. Organized religions seem to be almost invariably patriarchal, male-dominated, anti-egalitarian and anti-democratic.

Pope Benedict XVI was chosen in April 2005 by fewer than 120 people -- all of them old men (Catholic cardinals). Prior to becoming Pope his name was Joseph Ratzinger and his position in the Church was to defend doctrine "by putting the smackdown on heresy". Heresy is an opinion that differs from established religious dogma, which could alternately be seen as a healthy perspective from the standpoint of honest debate and the needs for better understandings.

Cardinal Ratzinger had been the head of the Church's conservative 'Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith'. This office began centuries ago as the so-called Sacred Congregation of the Universal Inquisition. Yes, the same Inquisition whose authorities were responsible for the terrible crimes involved in burning thousands of

women at the stake! The horrible Inquisition represents a terribly tragic, extremely cruel, and drastically inglorious episode in world history.

Some official Vatican doctrines are simply too antiquated for the modern world. The Catholic Church basically forbids many women to have children who WANT to bear them, but are not able to, by officially opposing artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilization and surrogate motherhood. And the Church makes having children mandatory for many who are able to conceive, but DON'T WANT to, by telling women that the use of contraceptives and the practice of abortion are against God's will.

WHAT?!!! Read that paragraph again, and think about it. This is ridiculous -- surely God is not so illogical and cold-hearted!! He loves us, doesn't 'He'?

This is a political control issue. Women should be given greater influence in this stodgy old church. As Mark Twain pointed out, *"The church is always trying to get other people to reform; it might not be a bad idea to reform itself a little, by way of example."* Good call, Mark Twain!

What's next? Will the Church declare sperm and eggs sacrosanct and proclaim that ejaculation and ovulation are immoral means of destroying potential human lives? Will the Religious Right contend that God will smite men who sinfully indulge in masturbation because it leads to the futile discharge of valiant sperm? Will they advocate abstinence education to prevent that activity? Will Texas reinstitute its laws against the sale of vibrators? "The Shadow wants to know!"

The Catholic Church must evolve to show more concern for fairness, goodwill and human rights. Pope Francis surprised people worldwide with some of his fairer perspectives, and I call on him to lead the Church to a saner set of evolving doctrines. Christian churches should honestly help people in nations around the globe to cope more sensibly with economic, social and environmental ills. They must shift their energies more boldly into making the world a better place, and devote less energies to controlling society and defending authoritarian hierarchy. Churches should not be so inflexible, and they should not perpetuate prejudices that sometimes result in violence. They must refrain from adhering to women-oppressing doctrines and biases that say God regards gay people as abominations.

During a trip that Pope Benedict XVI made to Latin America in May 2007, he ignited a firestorm of criticism by declaring that the "evangelization" of the New World during the colonial era did not represent "the imposition of a foreign culture" upon indigenous peoples. What twisted revisionism! What insensitivity! This 'evangelization' was accompanied by a ruthless and heartless conquest that systematically exploited indigenous peoples and destroyed many native cultures. Great treasures were stolen, and millions of people were massacred or enslaved, or died from introduced diseases.

Many of the expeditions of the Age of Exploration in the new world were accompanied by priests who were eager to "explain hell to the savages" -- as one of the "quaint chroniclers of the time" phrased it. (Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi*.) Thanks for the memories, guys!

Each human culture is uniquely rooted in the particular place where it has evolved. Such cultural diversity was vitally important because it fostered sustainable living in different environs. Today cultural diversity and the languages of indigenous peoples are as endangered as tropical forests -- and for the same reasons: cultures and resources are being exploited for short-term profit, and homogenizing processes are taking place.

Economic globalization is challenged by ethical considerations involving fairness. The dignity and the ecological wisdom embedded in diverse cultures should not be ignored. The Bible explains a diversity of cultures and languages with the story of the Tower of Babel, in which God decided to confound humanity for some inscrutable reason; but that story seems as implausible of being literal fact as the six-day Creation, the worldwide Flood, and the virgin birth of a divine Jesus.

It is curious that Western religions seem to be so focused on controlling people, while Eastern spiritual disciplines are more focused on liberation. Hmmm ... I'm ready to pass judgment!

The biblical notion that mankind must "be fruitful and multiply" is a religious anachronism. It is an idea that reflects outmoded, anthropocentric, Church-centered moral preaching. This notion demands conformity to religious establishments that seek to spawn more impressionable children in order to indoctrinate them with churchly catechisms and mandates for faith. It's just so difficult to actually convert any adult into being a believer, because it is assuredly damned hard to convince new converts that outlandish myths and archaic holy books represent absolute truths.

Pronatalism is the encouragement of fruitful multiplying; it is a practice that conflicts with modern realities that resources are limited and human overpopulation is one of the biggest threats to the future well-being of our species. To protect the integrity of ecosystem health and biological diversity on planet Earth, we need to accept modern understandings of the desirability of encouraging people to have smaller families. We are reaching a tipping point in which it is becoming a big liability, not an asset, to have human numbers grow rapidly. Those increases vastly complicate and seriously intensify social and environmental problems and conundrums.

We fancy ourselves the pinnacle of Creation, and yet we are becoming the scourge of most other living things on the planet. The well-being of many life forms is being endangered by habitat destruction, suburban sprawl, and economic addiction to consumerism. Religious fundamentalists interpret their holy books, like the Quran and the Bible, as if they are veritable manifestos for righteous prejudice and religious discrimination. More enlightened perspectives need to be adopted. Primitive superstitious concepts must give way to more salubrious, open and adaptive ways of seeing.

"Man is a credulous animal, and must believe something; in the absence of good grounds for belief, he will be satisfied with bad ones."

--- Bertrand Russell, saying it like it is.

Chapter #112 - The Need for a New Feminism.

Ecopsychology is a relatively new discipline that operates on the assumption that at the deepest level our psyches are tied to Mother Earth. Ecopsychology seeks to heal and develop the psychological dimensions of the relationship between humans and nature. This discipline contrasts to a more materialistic anthropocentrism in which the world is regarded as being merely a thing for humans to use, as if other species have no intrinsic value.

Ecopsychology emphasizes a mature and responsible approach to living that is not detrimental to the Earth and its habitats, or to the fellow human and non-human beings that we share the planet with. I repeat my belief that humanity should cultivate the "feminine" virtues of earnest cooperation, peaceful conflict resolution, constructive communication, compassionate understanding, moderate self-restraint, and a nurturing caring for other people and the health of natural ecosystems. We should resurrect the high regard of the Mother goddess and her vital sacred qualities, which have been severely suppressed by our patriarchal societies for several millennia.

An invigorated ecological feminist movement would help unite people in affirming true values and goals. These are words of passionate hope, channeled from a dispassionate observer beyond individual minds, and beyond the psychic numbing of reinforced fears, beyond our graves ... far beyond ... from somewhere deep in the well of our collective awareness that the world could be a much better place, one featuring empathy, love and peace, with greater social justice and fairness, and one that is much more secure in its framework, constitution and sustainable trajectory.

Language is a complex biological adaptation that evolved from early periods of prehistory when human communication was done by more rudimentary means like gestures, sign language, grunts or other vocalizations. The ability to speak had advantages over other kinds of communication because it freed people's hands, and it could be done in the dark. The ability to communicate verbally helped early humans in their vital roles of hunting and gathering. Language also helped establish lasting social relationships and pair bonds that were

necessary as big brain size led to the birth of young that were dependent on parents for much longer periods of time than the young of other mammals.

The evolution of language accompanied, and likely stimulated, the rapid expansion in brain size that took place as the success of our ancestors' survival came to increasingly depend on thinking and on understanding the world, and on clever planning and accurate remembering. As language developed, the human voice box and flexible tongue and mind capacity evolved to make this ability easier. Our future survival arguably may be dependent on our use of our big brains to plan ahead even better, and to cooperate to use foresight for more propitious purposes.

Chapter #113 - More Noble Motivations.

The Beatles' lyrics sing out the praises of generous-heartedness:

"All you need is love, love,
Love is all you need!"

Love and compassion are great guides for our understanding. They are much better guiding forces than fear, jealousy, resentment, hostility or hatred. We should follow our hearts more frequently. The spirit of love and generosity should pervade our societies and infuse and guide each of us.

Dwell with me for a moment on our deep-seated desire to love and to be loved. Love is often a needy thing, but it requires nurture, not domination. Love can be a noble feeling that could help ensure that we pursue higher aspirations. Let believers of all religious faiths accept the love-inspired Golden Rule spirit of the credo, "live and let live". Jesus, Mohammed and the Buddha would have concurred!

Insecurity and frustration at not being valued can lead to compensatory anger and attitudes of overweening pride and retaliatory fervor. These feelings can harm relationships and lead to emotional hijackings and actions that hurt others. Can we identify and develop some means of strengthening self-esteem and respect for others? Can we find some new social mechanisms that lead to more wholesome ways of being? Can we work together with peoples in other countries to mitigate extreme poverty that contributes to instability and breeds terrorism?

For 40 days and 40 nights and more, I have wandered in the wilderness, contemplating reality and the clarity of high places and expansive spaces. Revelations have come to me. A "Google Earth" kind of perspective formed, zooming in from far above the maelstrom of busy daily activities to an intense focus on existence. My attention oscillated from high above the bubble of conventional wisdom in one moment to an immersion in a fog of clashing assertions the next. My frame of reference expanded to the Universal and contracted to the immediate. I evaluated the macroscopic and examined the microscopic, and climbed the heights of the sublime, and descended to the surface of the mundane.

The realization dawned on me that making a positive difference in the world is among the best that one can do. Everyone could benefit from finding motivation in a caring concern for a healthier planet, in nobler visions of the future, and in a spirit of dedication to the greater good.

Here's what I experienced in the wilderness: fascinating visions came to me like vivid dreams. The grand sweep of human history mystically appeared like an elaborate timeline written across the heavens. Evolving religious and philosophic ideas from the beginning of recorded time marched resolutely across the sky, like a ticker tape gone wild. Snippets of Heraclitus tumbled in, mixed with the arcane philosophy of Lao Tzu. For a while, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle debated together in Limbo on the stage of an ancient Greek theatre. Jesus, Buddha, and Mohammed sat side-by-side in meditation. Voltaire, Freud, Darwin and Michael Pollan sat discussing the inexplicable intricacies of existence and gardening. Some theories of quantum physics and spacetime fused together with Buddhist meditations. The objective merged with the subjective, and the eternal past morphed into the present moment. A time-lapse vision formed, each frame containing its own infinite concatenation of simultaneous events. Each frame succeeded the previous in a wondrous procession of lapsing time.

Visions precipitated and dissolved. Awesome mountain clouds at sunrise gave way to crystal clear blue skies, and later to the surreal colors of suffused clarity at sunset. I found myself imagining an ascent to the top of Angel's Landing in Zion National Park after having descended along the Virgin River through the incredible Narrows of Sinawava. The climb itself was an indelibly awe-inspiring experience, hiking up past a multitude of ancient layers of eroding red sandstone, from the oldest layers below to the relatively more recent ones nearer the broad summit. Each layer represented a bygone era that had a far longer duration than the scope of time comprising our species' entire existence.

The day shone brilliantly. I felt like Zorba the Greek. The higher I went, the more my spirit soared and became purged and exalted. Once again I felt the influence on the soul of pure air, wholesome breathing and a vast horizon. As I climbed, I felt as if I were clambering over ranges of the mind within me, passing from base and petty cares to nobler ones, from the comfortable truths of the valley below to precipitous conceptions above. "Here," said Zorba, "a gentle, sober spirit could cultivate a religious exaltation that would match the stature of men. Neither a precipitous, superhuman peak, nor a lazy, voluptuous plain, but what is needed, and no more, for the soul to be elevated without losing its human tenderness."

Chapter #114 - Striving Not to Be Nobody.

John Fowles elaborated on a concept that he called "the nemo". Consider this closely. Sigmund Freud had formulated profound insights into the human psyche by positing three aspects of the mind: (1) the ego, which represents the province of conscious desires; (2) the id, which represents the more obscure province of the myriad motivations that reside in the subconscious; and (3) the superego, which governs the emotional intelligence that strives to balance, control or repress these two powerful mental forces.

John Fowles insightfully realized that there is also a more subtle force that is growing deep in the modern soul. This is the 'nemo', which represents the psychic force that motivates us to try to be somebody, to be remembered, and to thwart our profound fear of being an insignificant nobody. The nemo is strengthened by the knowledge that there are myriad inequalities in life, and by such haunting anxieties as feelings of psychological emptiness, ephemerality, futility and insignificance.

Why did Mark David Chapman, the man who murdered John Lennon, kill the man he so admired? The nemo! Chapman was a pathetic nobody, tormented by inner demons, and yet his baneful name will be remembered forever in conjunction with the great Beatles' singer, songwriter, lyricist, and champion of peace. (Imagine the irony --- "All we need is love"!).

The nemo of extreme conservatives, who are referenced in Chapters #80-84, is arguably driving humankind headlong in the direction of calamity. Conservative convictions of God-sanctioned self-righteousness are driving us down an ignominious path that supports unfair special privilege and authoritarian dominion and conflicts of civilizations. Western religious fanaticism is leading us to support social repression, white supremacy, misogynistic male authoritarianism, economic austerity policies, puritanical domestic policies, and theocratic Christian hegemony. By allying itself with right-wing politicians, the Religious Right is also strengthening impulses toward military aggression and irresponsible profiteering, and unfettered laissez-faire capitalistic oligarchy. Surrender, you rascals, and let America return to sanity -- and the world to better hopes of fairness and peace!

The reason John Fowles recognized that people are powerfully motivated to see themselves as 'somebody' is no doubt because of his terrible accompanying realization: "Man is an everlack -- an infinite withoutness -- afloat on an apparently endless ocean of apparently endless indifference to individual things." Ouch!

Chapter #115 - Insights on Religion and Culture.

I was brought up in a small town with solid values where I learned the importance of respect toward others. Yes, Bob Dylan, the times they are a-changin'. My father liked to relate a story about a man who told him, "Cheer up, things could be worse." "So I cheered up", he'd say, "and sure enough, things got worse." Ha!

Remember to SMILE. Try this: grin as broadly as you are able for a few moments as you read this. Feel the pull at the corners of your mouth. Try to think nothing at all. Close your eyes and breathe in deeply, and slowly exhale. Hold this smile. Psychologists report that our facial expressions, even if artificially mimicked, trigger within our brains the feelings we display. This exercise could prove to be a personally positive means of attitudinal healing. Smile more often!

"Don't sweat the small stuff -- and it's all small stuff!"

A self-styled 'Commissioner of Pep' believes that somewhat effective techniques exist for liberating our chatterbox minds from their headlong clattering confusion. There is considerable value in breathing exercises, meditation practices, singing, praying, focusing attention 'in the flow', being mindful, making effortless effort, walking in nature, and engaging in physical activities that exhaust the body and relax the mind; these are states in which our conscious minds can receive revelations like dreams from our subconscious selves.

I was very shy as a youngster, and susceptible to conforming to parental, teacher and peer group expectations. Conformity is the 'contemporary Procrustean bed' that either cuts people off from parts of themselves that don't fit when they feel compelled to conform, or stretches them out in ways that are inconsistent with their true selves. But frankly, some things must be transcended.

Conventional wisdom says we should not talk about politics and religion. But today we need to have frank and civil discussions about these things more than ever before. The reason for this is that politics, government and the doctrines of established religions are interfering more and more in people's lives. Much rides on our ability to be flexible, decent, open to embracing positive change, and willing to support smarter plans for the future.

Religious establishments and fundamentalist believers all too often side with social conservatives in opposing progressive understandings. The U.S. has a long tradition of separating church and state, but there is an equally powerful propensity for people to mix religion with politics. Throughout our nation's history, great political and social movements have drawn upon the progressive aspects of religious institutions for moral authority, liberal leadership and organizational muscle. This laudably helped get slavery abolished, and gave women the right to vote, and was instrumental in establishing fairer human rights, civil rights and environmental protections.

Today religious conservatism is having opposite impacts. It opposes progressive ideas, and has become active in trying to impose its traditionalism upon society by supporting conservatives in partisan politics. Religious moderates and progressives have been yielding to these more adamantly controlling retrogressive factions of their creeds. Come around!

To the extent that religious establishments support right-wing politicians and ideologies, and undermine more ecumenical and far-sighted understandings, they pose a danger to our democracy, and to the general welfare, and to peaceful coexistence. This bodes ill for our success in coping with converging threats of economic, geopolitical and ecological disasters. The religious right must reintegrate itself into the mainstream of life, and abandon dogmas that impede progress, and lend stronger support to open-minded adaptive intelligence that will help us advance the interests of the greater good.

"Give me that old time religion, It is good enough for me," goes the old song. Old-time religion sure was vastly more respectable than today's hyper political extreme right-wing evangelical fundamentalism.

Psychologists say that people cope through either "approach" strategies or "avoidance" strategies; I believe that in ecological matters, it is becoming increasingly clear that avoidance and denial are transcendently foolish! Since Virgil was wise in observing that "We make our destinies by the gods we choose", it would be smart for us to somehow begin to choose more intelligently!

Chapter #116 - The Dangers of Fundamentalism.

Scriptures, n. -- The sacred books of our holy religion, as distinguished from the false and profane writings on which all other faiths are based.

--- Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

God is not dead. Everyone should feel free to believe whatever they like. Remember that the First Amendment in our Bill of Rights specifically guarantees free exercise of religion. But our government should not side with any one particular religion, or even religious people over agnostics or atheists.

Ethnocentricity is a natural tendency to regard one's own cultures as superior, desirable, moral and worthy, and to regard the culture of other peoples as inferior, ridiculous, immoral or unworthy. This is especially true of religious attitudes. Believers tend to regard their own religion as the only true, revealed and moral faith, and to regard all others as deluded and false. Since the world is becoming figuratively smaller in many ways, and the competition for resources is heating up, one thing is becoming perfectly clear: the costs of remaining parochial and ethnocentric are unacceptably high.

Every culture in the course of history seems to have had its story telling, superstitions, legends, creation stories, myths and religious beliefs. Evidence of this is found by the discoveries of early Mother figurines, clay and stone representations of deities, cave paintings, and oral traditions and rituals and ceremonies. More recently, cultures have expressed themselves in the written word and visual and electronic media.

Anthropologists have found extensive evidence in primitive cultures of Nature worship, animism, polytheism, idolatry and fetishism. The gods and goddesses of the Greek spiritual pantheon were very real to people back in the ancient days of yore. We now call them mythological, and recognize that these deities were projections of powerful subconscious mental images and constructs upon the Universe. Jung called them archetypes in our shared collective unconscious. These projections are reflections of hero figures and villains, and human aspirations, hopes and fears. Today we fancy that Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Aphrodite, Poseidon, Dionysus and all the rest were not real, and regard them as mere figments of the imagination.

These polytheistic 'many-god' conceptions eventually evolved into a more sophisticated "one-god" understanding. Aha! Eureka!! One God!!!

All deities that have ever been revered, however, arguably have had a genesis in the imagination that is similar to that of the Greek gods and goddesses. The pantheon of Greek deities together, male and female, continue to exist as archetypes in us all. Jean Shinoda Bolen makes this clear in her fascinating books on this subject -- *Goddesses in Everywoman*, and *Gods in Everyman*. These books are edifying with regard to both inner archetypes and outer stereotypical forces that influence each of us personally.

Some lines of thought evolved into more philosophical ideas like those in Buddhism. Scientific inquiry, using observable hypothesis, open-minded inquiry and skeptical scrutiny developed realistic, world-wise, self-correcting, factually astonishing and awe-inspiring worldviews.

Religion has been used throughout history as a kind of numbing opiate for the masses, a reassuring propaganda that begins its indoctrination with innocents and catechizes susceptible children at the height of their vulnerable credulousness with stories of mythical beings, fables, parables and the genealogies of ancient ancestors. The persistence of these prehistoric ideas is impressive and disconcerting. It astonishes me that about 40% of all Americans say they don't believe in the fundamental feature of our existence: biological evolution. This stubborn denial of reality is incredible, and can be largely traced to the propagation of manipulative fictions, ignorance and dogma by religious fundamentalists.

The popular book *Into Thin Air* was written by perceptive Jon Krakauer, who also wrote an insightful book about the Mormon religion titled *Under the Banner of Heaven*. In this book, he observes: "There are some 10,000 extant religious sects -- each with its own cosmology, each with its own answer for the meaning of life and death. Most of them assert that the other 9,999 not only have it completely wrong, but are instruments of evil, besides."

The dangers here are obvious. When religious establishments exert excessively powerful influence over government and societies, they are prone to becoming contributors to antagonisms, conflicts and repressive despotism. The dark side of fundamentalism is that many times in history it has motivated and justified

terrible acts of inhumanity, cruelty, intolerance, violence and genocide. Hate often ironically masquerades as love.

"With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion."

--- Physicist Steven Weinberg, quoted in the *New York Times*, April 20, 1999

Chapter #117 - The Importance of the Separation of Church and State.

Any traveler to Muslim countries marvels at the cultural differences found there. Women's roles and acceptable codes of dress are very different than they are in the West. Loudspeakers on minarets on the periphery of Islamic mosques blare out eerie, wailing entreaties five times a day that call the faithful to prayer. It is presumptuous to suppose that we in the West should engage in a clash of cultures to repress such imposing and somewhat incomprehensibly different traditions.

Religious orthodoxy channels the human spirit into reason-denying faith and unyielding doctrines. Religious establishments tend to foster ignorance and harbor convictions that are discriminatory and ethnocentric. This unfortunately plays into the hands of society's power-hungry, authoritarian, reactionary and often mean-spirited Radical Right. This is one reason we need to strongly support the separation of Church and State: in order to ensure more secure, fair, rational and hopeful societies.

Chapter #118 - Spiritual Understandings.

Religions provide billions of people with purpose, meaning and consolation. Religion offers believers a powerful and comforting sense of certitude and self-centered righteousness. Living in a dangerous, insecure and uncertain world, humankind has likely always felt hope and fear and a need to understand and explain existence and the Universe. We are often superstitious, hoping somehow to placate incomprehensible forces and give thanksgiving for nourishment and life and good fortune. And we desperately desire some sense of immortality, because most people fear the finality of death.

An undesirable aspect of religions institutions lies in their tendency to take advantage of the natural hopes and fears people feel in order to control and dominate them. Efforts to impose conservative mores and strict prohibitions on the reigning culture can create negative outcomes in addition to positive ones. Religious establishments contribute to social directives that militate for prohibitions like the ones that create the terribly costly 'war on drugs', as discussed in Chapter #90. This is one example of how religious establishments collaborate with political leaders to manipulate faithful followers into obediently supporting the sometimes ignoble doctrines of those in power. Outdated creation myths, superstitions and church dogmas thus ironically can contribute to keeping people in thrall to uncompassionate, discriminatory, harmful, cruel, anti-democratic and sometimes racist and sexist doctrines.

Religious fundamentalists try to put religious stories and dogmas into science classrooms by teaching "intelligent design". Such undertakings are blatant attempts to indoctrinate children, and even deprive them of freely-chosen religious liberty by injecting religious brainwashing into our public schools. The documentary film *Jesus Camp* gives viewers a disturbing feeling that there are significant dangers to humanity in allowing our children to be instilled with exaggerated fears of "sins" and the devil.

The political right wing has pandered to established religions and anti-progressive evangelicals in recent decades to gain their support. The surprising means by which conservatives have succeeded in this quest are exposed in the book, *What's the Matter with Kansas?* Once social conservatives gain power, they have often abused it and betrayed the people by harming their better interests. They act with hypocrisy by rationalizing unchristian initiatives, aggression in war, widespread gun ownership, and privileges for the rich at the expense of the poor. This manipulation increases inequalities and inequities by helping get taxes reduced on the rich, and stinting on social programs for the working class and the poor, and by eroding the well-being of the middle class. This is a bizarre inversion of biblical ideals to serve the powerful instead of the underprivileged. Bah, humbug!

Chapter #119 - Religion and Drugs.

Most of the world's religions curiously have a formative affiliation with the use of psychoactive plants or fungi, including fermented grapes, peyote cactus, psilocybin mushrooms, cannabis or opiates. The ecstasy of religious exaltation seems to share an ironic affinity with effects of uses of psychoactive drugs. Similar functions of the brain and its 'reward centers' may be stimulated by both religious exaltation and drugs, and may be activated by other things like sexual arousal, prayer, and even deep breathing exercises, yoga, meditation, fasting -- or the consumption of chocolate. Why is this?

Our brains are astounding networks of synaptic neural circuitry that utilize complex chemical neurotransmitters to interpret sensations and perceptions. Brain research reveals that brain cells communicate between themselves, and with other cells, through the use of "neurotransmitters". These are organic compounds synthesized in the central nervous system. Neurotransmitters include amino acids, peptides and monoamines that act to relay, amplify and modulate electrical signals between neurons and other cells. Networks of neurons utilize 'receptors' that receive and respond to electrochemical messages. These messages are conveyed by neurotransmitters like serotonin, dopamine, endorphins and cannabinoids.

Various parts of our brains are involved in remembering and in controlling moods. Our inscrutable subconscious awareness generates a web of thoughts that bubbles up like a miraculous "impression creator". Our minds, hearts and souls spring into consciousness in mysterious ways. Many of our behaviors are significantly determined by neurochemical keys. Hormones such as testosterone and estrogen, oxytocin and adrenalin affect behaviors like sexual aggression, arousal, lust, bonding, love, caregiving and the fight-or-flight response.

Raw aggression has a ripple effect through the endocrine systems of entire social groups of mammals. Under stress, adrenal glands release cortisol, a hormone that contributes to states of hyper vigilance. Repeated exposure to fears can cause cortisol overload and create a state of over-reactivity, as evidenced in people who have been severely traumatized by abuse, rape, violence or war. Post-traumatic stress disorder, which afflicts many soldiers returning from military conflicts, is an example of this serious psychosomatic problem.

Dopamine is a neurohormone chemical that is biosynthesized by the body. It is involved in intense pleasures experienced in activities like sexual arousal, addictive gambling and recreational drug use. Oxytocin is a hormone associated with impulses toward tenderness and attachment, like that of warm affections that suffuse women and men after sexual intercourse. (Have a cigarette? Just say NO!)

One of the neural networks of particular interest is the cannabinoid network, which contains "endogenous cannabinoids" called anandamides, a name that means "inner bliss" in Sanskrit. These natural organic substances appear to be involved in balancing the body's biochemical systems, and in influencing appetite and sleep cycles, and in regulating important processes that help with pain relief. They somehow help us to both remember and to FORGET. The latter process blissfully facilitates purges of the overload of sensory stimuli that bombards us every day. The cannabinoid network may even be involved in the process by which our brains translate objective reality into subjective emotions during the day, and during our dreams.

The introduction of plant cannabinoids that occurs when cannabis is smoked (or in a healthier manner, vaporized or consumed in edibles) sends a surge dose of cannabinoids to the receptors in the brain. This has fascinating effects. It seems to be conducive to introspection into our normal modes of consciousness. It can provide a feeling of transcendence, a freshness of perception, and even a reenchantment with relationships and the natural world. Such affects can make the use of cannabis worthwhile. Marijuana will not improve your memory, and may have some distinctly detrimental affects with excessive use, but it can also enrich life experiences in a number of ways. When someone smokes too frequently, the receptor connections seem to become satiated or corroded, causing detectable, sometimes detrimental long-term behavioral changes. Moderation in everything!

The harsh suppression of marijuana use, however, is harmful and extremely costly to people and society. Punitive drug laws have ruinous impacts on the lives of millions. We should re-evaluate the stigma of marijuana use, particularly for those who seek pain relief. Michael Pollan's book, *The Botany of Desire -- A Plant's Eye View of the World* provides valuable perspective on this topic.

As this epistle approaches conclusion, I want to mention one other important issue that religious dogmas have taken on: the right to die. Dr. Jack Kevorkian was considered an angel of compassion to some, and an angel of death to others. He championed the right for terminal patients to choose when to die. He spent almost 8 years in prison for helping people terminate their lives when they were afflicted by terminal diseases and severe pain. He was finally released from jail in June 2007 (and died at 93 in 2011).. Thank you, Jack, in memoriam, for having strived to raise public awareness on the importance of our inherent right to die when we become brain dead or terminally ill. When will society recognize a right for people to die once they are afflicted with terminal indignities and insufferable pain with no hope of any recourse but deadening drugs and pathetic waiting for death?

I was personally cynical about "grandstanding" by conservatives that took place in 2005 to keep a brain-dead woman named Terri Schiavo alive in a 15-year-long 'persistent vegetative state'. This case made it clear that we need to keep the government out of decisions between individuals, their families and doctors with regard to when we die. The role of government is to orchestrate some order from chaos. The government's role should never be to interfere unnecessarily in our personal lives.

Dr. Kevorkian, we get it! We need to demand that our government stop opposing sensible laws concerning the end of our lives. All states in the Union should pass laws like Oregon's in this regard.

Statistics tell us that a disproportionate share of medical resources is devoted to the elderly, and that a large portion of a person's lifetime medical expenses are incurred in the last year of life. At a time when we are failing to invest in the health of young people, it seems like a socially crazy thing to spend so much money keeping old people alive, especially in circumstances where pain and indignity make them NOT want to prolong their lives. I feel strongly that we need to accept a new ethical perspective on dying, and allow people to choose to die in dignity when they are ready to go. "Physician-assisted suicide" may be a *de facto* situation in many cases, but religious authorities and conservatives tend to oppose freedoms to make such ultimate personal decisions. Relent and repent!

Chapter #120 - We Need a New Religion!

It becomes increasingly clear, year after year, that societies should create conditions in which the positive elements of religions flourish and the negative elements are curtailed. We need more progressive spiritual doctrines -- or a new religion that is more inclusive.

Such a modified belief system would utilize the great fonts of faith, mystery and spirituality in new ways -- ways that emphasize inspiration, positive connections, rationality, fairer outcomes, and a respectful tolerance of differences. One of the main meaningful purposes of this new religion would be to improve peace, fairness and security in the world.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. preached, "Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and not concerned about the city government that damns the soul, the economic conditions that corrupt the soul, the slum conditions, the social evils that cripple the soul, is a dry, dead, do-nothing religion in need of new blood." He also wrote, "Too often the church talked about a future good 'over yonder', totally forgetting the present evil over here."

Enormous energies are poured into religious beliefs, ethnic supremacy, racial bigotry and efforts to keep women and minorities in roles as second-class citizens. Imagine the positive outcomes that could be achieved if these formidable energies were redirected into more wholesome channels. A fresh and unifying reverence for life is needed. It would be a much better idea to foster far-sighted doctrines that are more responsible toward other people, those in future generations, and other forms of life.

We would be wise to seek a new spiritual awareness that respects all of Creation, not just true believers, and not just humankind. This new awareness should be immune to being hijacked into jihad terrorism against innocent civilians, and it should be less susceptible to being used as a justification for oppression or

"preemptive" warfare. It should diminish violence, hate, brutality, mercilessness, arrogance, cruelty, reactionary politics, sexism, discrimination, homophobia, and intolerant convictions of ethnocentric superiority.

Religious freedom should be guaranteed in all countries, and people should be free from persecution for their religious beliefs. We should support both the Golden Rule and a strong separation between Church and State. This new credo should coincide with an enlightened ethos that is similar to the philosophy of secular scientific humanism.

Fantastic tales from the Bible come to me in the night, perplexing me, and making me wonder what gambits the LORD is up to now, in modern times. Consider the chapters of the Bible in *Exodus*, for instance. The LORD hardened the heart of the Egyptian ruler, Pharaoh, in some grand strategy to satisfy the LORD's apparent compulsive craving for recognition, worship, flattery and glory.

Here's how Exodus chapters go: the Israelites worshipped the LORD because they heard He was concerned about their plight of bondage in Egypt. The Pharaoh was opposed to letting the slaves get away from their work for a few days to worship the LORD in the desert wilderness, as God supposedly wanted, so Pharaoh restricted them even more, and made them work harder, and had them beaten, and accused them of being lazy. The LORD's gambit was to use "miraculous signs" and "mighty acts of judgment" to convince the Egyptians that He, not the ruler Pharaoh, was God. The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh repeatedly through many successive plagues, which caused locally horrible hardships, tribulations and ruin to the Egyptians.

The first nine plagues visited upon Egypt: the Nile River was changed into blood, killing the fish and making the water undrinkable; a plague of frogs was visited upon the land, then successive plagues of gnats, clouds of flies, a horrible sickness of the livestock, then bothersome boils on men and animals, followed by a devastating hailstorm that rained down and ruined the fields, and a plague of locusts, and darkness fell over all of Egypt -- except the districts of the children of Israel. Amazing. (Just think, parenthetically, how calamitous the collateral environmental damages must have been!)

Pharaoh deceitfully agreed a time or two to let the people go, but then reneged on his word. The LORD again hardened the heart of the unyielding fool Pharaoh, until finally the LORD decreed that a tenth plague would be visited upon the Egyptians. Witness: "Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, to the firstborn son of the slave girl who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt ...".

Now, being a progressive-minded gal, you can imagine how horrified I am at this harsh treatment of the poor Egyptian people -- and of the cows, to boot! To conflate innocents with despotic rulers is inimitably unjust. People living in poverty always seem to suffer the worst hardships, in both good times and in bad, so perhaps this injustice should come as no great surprise.

The LORD providentially made a provision to "Pass Over" the houses of the Israelites during the massacre of the firstborn. By this means, God was able to spare the firstborn of Israelites. 'He' did this by letting Israelites know in advance that they should mark their homes with the blood of year-old male lambs, so that 'He' would know whom to smite and whom to spare. (Poor slaughtered lambs!)

Completely astonishingly, though quite fortunately for the Israelites, the LORD made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the Israelites after all the plagues, so when Pharaoh finally did let the people go, the Egyptian neighbors gave them articles of silver and gold, and the Israelites were able to plunder the Egyptians. Rejoice!?!

My perspective on all of this: the world has become too small for us to escape to some other "land of milk and honey". Other lands are already occupied; they belong to someone else. We need to work within the system to effect beneficial change. People should rightly demand that all rulers be more fair-minded and far-sighted. The Golden Rule allowing people to "Live and Let Live" must become an overriding ethical commandment that is encapsulated in all of our laws. The right to worship freely without interference by governments, as guaranteed in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, should be accepted as a condition in human societies worldwide.

End Time Rapture fanatics today are using stories from the Bible to inspire latter-day believers to accept hardships and looming calamities that include poverty, starvation, injustice, intolerance, discrimination, discord, environmental degradation, and horrible diseases like AIDS. Religious dogmas are infinitely unjust when they condemn billions of people to suffering and eternal Hell just because they don't believe in a particular Holy Book, or are not living their lives in accordance with its dictates. Billions of people around the world don't have a clue what the Bible says or represents, to be sure, so to condemn them is infinitely unjust.

Christ-cloaked bigotry has become a booming industry, as evidenced by mega-churches and diatribes of the late Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, or James Dobson. No wonder there is a bumper sticker that says, "I Support a Separation of Church and Hate."

Religious fanatics are essentially acting like reckless 21st century Captains of the Titanic, stubbornly staying the course despite dangerous seas. Instead of embracing precautionary principles, It is full speed ahead in treacherous waters. Religious extremism is making conflicts worse between people around the planet. Vulnerabilities are growing, with figurative icebergs looming that portend increased cultural conflicts, violence, wastefulness and ecological devastation. These conditions endanger all life on our beautiful Water Planet. We must begin to better protect 'Creation'!

A 2009 notation here read: "Progressive ideas must gain ascendancy over the hard-hearted, harsh-minded, obstinate, aggressive, control-obsessed, unsustainably shortsighted, male authoritarianism of leaders like Dick Cheney and their carefully-crafted, folksy self-effacing but arrogant poster-boy cheerleader, George W. Bush."

I was thankful that we finally elected a more progressive leader in Barack Obama, and had been quite hopeful that that his intelligence, progressive instincts, and considerable energies would be able to dramatically improve our nation. Though disappointed in the substantial roadblocks to reform in our politics, and to the fundamental corruption in our political duopoly system and the stubborn obstructionism of conservative opposition, I still strongly believe that Barack Obama represented a far better choice to lead our nation than either John McCain or Mitt Romney would have been! And Donald Trump and more extreme politicians should not have a chance in hell of winning in 2024!

Too many people are overly obsessed with special privileges, dominating control, intolerant attitudes, and repressive and oppressive policies. People pushing these stances are often excessively narrow-minded, and those who support them are gullible in their willingness to support policies that are detrimental to their own best interests and the common good. Having so many people adhere to narrow conceptions of the world even threatens our survival. We need to refute wrongheadedness and support progressive politicians and far-sighted understandings. Dominant worldviews must change by incorporating more wholesome, hopeful, sustainable, and auspicious goals than the myopic ones driving us to ruin.

There has not been a single verifiable instance of God's intervention in human affairs in my lifetime. But some powerful force seems to have hardened the heart of the Republican politicians to oppress people and act deceitfully toward them. Perhaps we are not worshiping properly, and that is why the people cannot be freed, or treated fairly, or allowed to reasonably pursue happiness. Let us pray.

It is a disturbing mythical story that the God of Genesis despised the "wickedness" of mankind, whom 'He' had created, and was sorry that 'He' had made man on the earth, and was angry that man had committed the sin of disobeying 'His' authority, and that 'He' therefore decided to bring a great Flood onto the earth to destroy all living things. (Except, naturally, the fish and amphibians!). It is not much of a consolation that the LORD gave a magnanimous reprieve to two of every kind of creature on an ark that 'He' supposedly instructed a 600-year-old man named Noah to build.

The Twelve Apostles were disciples of Jesus who were sent to towns in Galilee to preach the gospel and heal the sick, drive out demons, raise the dead, and convert the heathens. Their supposedly love-inspired purpose was to heal the sick in spirit, and drive away wicked behavior, which was in good supply in those days, I reckon -- just as it seems to be today.

The Apostles journeyed with nothing more than a staff, the clothes on their backs, and sandals. They apparently took with them no bread, no bag, and no money. (A staff is like a walking stick, which on rare occasions was put to such useful purposes as parting the Red Sea.) The Apostles appear to have had a lot in common with earlier "false prophets", and with later grandiose hucksters, snake oil salesmen, charismatic charlatans, pseudo-scientific phrenologists, inveterate liars, shyster lawyers, and unregulated druggists like J.B. Brown and Company in Hannibal, Missouri that sold elixirs, miracle cures, quack medicines, purgatives and addictive drugs in the 1860s and 1870s. Yo!

One of the earliest of the Greek philosophers, Protagoras, was asked whether he believed in the Greek gods. He answered "The question is complex, and life is short." Ah, agnosticism! A recent study reveals that 91% of Americans believe in God. Think about it. "God." What ideas arise when you think about God? What "idols" do we maintain in our minds? Are not all the concepts we have about God completely anthropocentric? The attributes attributed to God are surely all distinctly human characteristics that we have projected into the 'heavens' -- grace, love, mercy, intelligence, omniscience, justice, jealousy, judgmentality, anger, and motives that reflect cravings for adulation and praise. God only knows. Strange days, indeed!

Who, or What, then is God? God obeys the physical laws of Nature with a scrupulously strict adherence. He/She/It does not take sides in sporting contests or wars. He/She/It does not directly intervene in human affairs any more than the Greek goddesses and gods intervened in events in ancient times. God is a relentlessly impersonal force, and one that is indistinguishable from Nature as far as the eye can see. Mankind arguably invented all the many deities that have been worshipped throughout history in the rich and fertile imagination of our species.

Our beliefs in God can have positive effects as well as negative ones, and the metaphors in all mythological and religious texts can be valuable. But to the extent beliefs contribute to persecutions, genocide, wars and hate instead of love, neighborly good will, cooperation and mutually fair treatment, they are dangerous and socially unacceptable.

The Ten Commandments are supposed to have been written by God on two tablets of stone and given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The first four commandments are suspiciously self-promoting. They threaten believers as follows:

I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Wow, that's heavy duty! Why? Fairness doctrines ostensibly do not spring from the divine!

Then there is the fifth Commandment -- honor your father and your mother. Yay for that!! And of course we should discourage people from killing other people in our societies, and from stealing, and from bearing false witness against neighbors. As to how bad adultery actually may be, that depends on an infinite variety of personal situations and individual circumstances and cultural contexts. And what's with the commandment prohibiting the coveting of the neighbor's house, his wife, his male and female slaves, his ox or his donkey?! Perhaps we need Bible Police to be sent after those who promote covetous envy in our society -- Advertisers beware!

I myself prefer the Bill of Rights to these antiquated Commandments. I strongly believe that the rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights are crucially important, and that they should be protected from all infringements and distortions being sought by extreme social conservatives, Churches, corporations and both extreme right-wing and extreme left-wing organizations.

A pop-culture guru once curiously noted: "Life is eternal. But even if it isn't and I made it up, I like it! I mean as long as you're going to make it up (the way that REALITY IS), you might as well make it up the way you like it." Let's choose beliefs that we like, but only if they are not inimically dangerous to our well-being -- and that

of others. Let's interpret reality in ways that are modern and accurate. Let's choose to see reality in ways that are most strongly in accord with spiritually nobility AND vital human values.

Judgment Day is metaphorically upon us. But this is not a judgment of the living and the dead by God incarnate as was prophesied in the Bible. It is a judgment in the reflection of future generations looking back on the economic, political, social and ecological ethos of today, and judging that we have been acting with obtuse selfishness, astonishing shortsightedness, and threatening ignorance.

Jesus is said to have suffered and died for the sins of mankind. Today, we see that all people in the future will be the ones to do the suffering, and in this case we will be the ones perpetuating sins of selfishness and obtusely inadequate concern. Unless we repent soon, will we suffer punishment in a speculative afterlife of eternal Hell for our wrong-doing? Or will it actually be our descendants who will be the ones to pay, and to pay an exceedingly heavy price? Let us seek redemption and salvation by choosing to act in ways that are more balanced, fair and responsible, while we are still able. Let's pay forward some goodwill, and let's honestly exhibit greater precautionary environmental concerns!

Chapter #121 - Literate Ideas.

I love the thought-provoking book, *Zorba the Greek*, in which the narrator noted, "Once more there sounded within me, together with the crane's cry, the terrible warning that there is only one life for all men, that there is no other, and that all that can be enjoyed must be enjoyed here. In eternity, no other chance will be given to us."

This quote gives pause for consideration of the importance of each moment in our lives. Blaise Pascal in his *Bet Situation* encouraged people to bet on eternal bliss in a life after this one, but in *Zorba the Greek*, the author effectively cautions us about the desperate risks of such gambles. Let us make a commitment to living our lives positively, appreciatively, alertly -- and responsibly!

We are all in the springtime of our existences, and will eventually join the unknown void after our own individual deaths. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Our attitude in life is important. I've always admired a Robert Louis Stevenson quote etched in a polished granite tablet in the form of an open book that was placed in May 1911 by a local women's historical society at a site on the flanks of Mt. St. Helena, just above the north end of Napa Valley. This tribute to Robert Louis Stevenson is located a mile from the nearest paved road on a site where the writer and his bride lived while he was composing *The Silverado Squatters* in 1880. 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.

I find myself thinking in poetic parallel:

Destined to know not eternal life, only ephemeral existence
Billions of human beings tread the bounteous Earth, blithely for a while
Taking their fill of pleasure and enjoyment, eating and drinking and being merry
Lavishly, incautiously and unthinkingly consuming the planet's finite resources
Being born, and striving to live as well as possible, and eventually dying,
And appreciating the rich experience, and yet kvetching about it too.

Apropos of Something: An Ode to Nature and Existence

Fated to know the lovely spring and balmy summers too,
 And the gentle autumn and blustery winters, as well
 A being trod the richly green hills of April, blithely for a while,
 Appreciating the natural rhythm of the cyclical seasons.
 Took her measure of pleasure immersed in natural surroundings,
 And enjoyed many satisfactions of life's sublime moments,
 Loving music, good films, delicious food and pleasing beverages
 And the joy and vital importance of incisive thought and far-seeing.
 She sought the satisfaction of fulfilling rapport in relationships
 Like a Greek goddess who found meaning through her involvements
 And also enjoyed the intrinsically rewarding fulfillment found in autonomy and solitude.
 She came, and stayed, and went, and tried always to remember to smile.

Ancestors in every human culture have been telling stories from time immemorial. They do this to make sense of the world, to pass on knowledge, to teach morals and history, to entertain, and to honor the mysterious. The written word, and more recently radio, TV, film and YouTube, etc., have taken storytelling to entirely new dimensions. A good story unfolds slowly and has evocative elements that bond the storyteller and the audience, creating a sense of identity, community and enveloping interest.

The compelling Australian film *Ten Canoes* tells an elemental story of Aboriginal culture in a time long ago. The film opens with a grand aerial swoop over a remote Arafura swamp region of Arnhem Land in northeastern Australia. The voice of a Storyteller solemnly intones: "Once upon a time in a land far, far away ..." But then the voice breaks into laughter at the fairytale stereotype of these opening words, and the spell is broken with a capricious tone as the narrator declares in his drawling Australian accent, "I'm only joking." The Storyteller goes on to develop a provocative story about the indigenous people of the ancient Australian continent. It's powerfully insightful to imagine!

Another fabulous story is told in the highly entertaining book *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, written by Greg Matthews in 1983. Here are some intriguing excerpts from it:

"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 it that warn't the one you read I best tell what happened at the end of the story ..."

"Pretty soon I get to the edge of town and I take myself off into the woods and flop under a tree like a rag doll. There's a cool shade on my face and it feels good, but at the selfsame time it makes me want to cry. How can you figure behavior like that?"

"So I'm sitting there flopped under the tree and the shade moves across the ground nice and slow, and I'm staring at it while it moves, and thinking nothing at all -- which is possible I can tell you. 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. It slithers over my foot, curious-like, and comes up to take a closer look at me. I never budged. I never sweated a drop, just looked him square in his slitty eyes, and when his tongue flickers in and out rapid, I done the same, returning the compliment. We stayed like that flickering our tongues at each other for some considerable time, then up comes my arm real slow, and my hand come to a stop a couple inches away from the puff adder's head. I offer him the back of my hand to bite. He ducks his head sideways and back again, back and forth like a dance, and I keep my eyes on his. Then he stops bobbing side to side and turns and slithers away. It was a perfeckly good hand he could of bit but never did. He slithers off into the leaves and then he's gone. ... I knowed right off it's a sign, but the meaning of it was a mystery."

I invoke this passage as a sign, a good omen, a fortuitous indication that perhaps the time is right for *Earth Manifesto* understandings to be received as comprehensively convincing observations that embody valuable perspectives and desirable goals. Let these insights help galvanize humanity into integrating smart and progressive ideas into propitious private behaviors and public policies.

Many are the mysteries of life, and I hope readers have gained from this exploration of ideas that could become important to the future of life on Earth. This epistle has certainly become a distinct *pleonasm*, as Ambrose Bierce satirically defines this word:

Pleonasm, *n.* An army of words escorting a corporal of thought. (Ha!)

It's fascinating to contemplate the influences that have inspired humanity over the ages. In early Greek mythology, the original Muses were Aoide ("song" or "voice"), Mneme ("memory"), and Melete ("contemplation"). Hmmm ...

In ancient Delphi, there were also three muses: Nete, Mesi and Hypate. These muses were thought of as represented by the three chords of the lyre, an ancient stringed musical instrument. The haunting and expressively beautiful music created on this instrument accompanied storytellers, singers and poets, and the first known song ever written was played on a lyre-like stringed instrument.

Ah, the fertility of the human imagination! As artistic creativity evolved to greater complexity, the muses took on more specialized areas of inspiration. In later Greek mythology, nine fine Muses were born, and they were considered the source of all knowledge. The Muses were mysterious daughters of Zeus, the ruler of the heavens, and of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. They were:

Calliope, the chief of the Muses and the muse of epic poetry

Clio, the muse of history and the stories of heroes

Erato, the muse of lyric poetry and love stories

Polyhymnia, the muse of sacred song and rhetoric

Terpsichore, the muse of dance and choral singing

Euterpe, the muse of lyric song

Melpomene, the muse of tragedy

Thalia, the muse of comedy

Urania, the muse of astronomy

One could muse over the nature of inspiration to one's heart's content, or even for mere amusement. See *Inspiration, Imagination, and the Deep Well of Human Impulses* for an extensive elaboration on this thought. Such musings would be a little like using *Roget's Thesaurus* in the manner that many people have used it over the past 150 years: "Thousands have used *Roget's* as a browsing book, a book that stimulates thought and exploration because it uniquely collects great semantic 'domains' under large conceptual headings, and shows by the manner of organization the tracks the mind may take as it ranges about in a given territory." Crazy to contemplate!

"The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter -- it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightening."

--- Mark Twain

A thesaurus maps the totality of concepts available to the human mind, and the relations among these concepts. Curiously, such concepts are more-or-less universal, regardless of what language is used to express them. Consider the fact that there are more than 7,000 languages in the world, a veritable Tower of Babel of tongues.

"Whatever the world's linguistic diversity, it is steadily declining as local forms of speech increasingly become moribund before the advance of the major languages of world civilization."

Our concepts are arguably becoming more expansive as time passes, and as the number of words in a thesaurus expands; on the other hand, the diversity of ways of seeing things may contrastingly be becoming lesser with

the homogenizing influences of media and the Internet and advertising, and with the advance of communication technologies.

I conclude these writings with some elegant quotes that have personal resonance for me. Jack London, one of California's greatest writers, wrote in *Martin Eden*:

"... the more he knew, the more passionately he admired the Universe, and life, and his own life in the midst of it all."

"And then, in splendor and glory, came the great idea. He would write. He would be one of the eyes through which the world saw, one of the ears through which it heard, one of the hearts through which it felt."

"He wanted to glorify the leaders of forlorn hopes, the mad lovers, the giants that fought under stress and strain, amid terror and tragedy, making life crackle with the strength of their endeavor."

"What he sought was an impassioned realism, shot through with human aspiration and faith."

The original *Earth Manifesto* was first published online in October 2004 (it is now Part Seven on the Home Page). It consists of 121 Soliloquies, and all of them were originally created as noble expressions of the human condition using colorful calligraphy pens. It was later augmented by 32 'Evolutionary Understandings' (now Part Six on the *Earth Manifesto* Home Page), and then by this evolving *Comprehensive Global Perspective*.

Subsequently, things have really taken off, and all the essays found in other parts of the Home Page have been written. All of them are now organized into *The Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto*, and are available from the on-demand publisher Lulu Press. The titles of each of the Twelve Books can be found on Page 2 of this Book Seven.

My hope is that these ideas will turn out to be regarded as some of the most broadly elaborated and valuable ideas ever set forth, even if they do meander considerably and encompass too much redundancy. I'd like to think that these writings are a distillation of many of the most farsighted ideas and all-embracing understandings in existence today. And with the evolution of things like *Common Sense Revival*, I am hoping the *Earth Manifesto* will contribute powerful impetus to our making wide-ranging reforms in our economic and political systems that will assure us our societies will be made fairer and our environmental protection policies will be strengthened.

"Masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice."

--- Virginia Woolf

On the cover page of the original *Earth Manifesto*, in what is essentially Soliloquy One, I expressed thanks to every person whose ideas are quoted, paraphrased or plagiarized in it. As a wise-ass wit once said, if you steal from one person it's plagiarizing, but if you borrow from a bunch of people, it's research! Thanks all!

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

--- T.S. Eliot

The following brazen and valiantly hopeful sentiment appears on the cover page of the original *Earth Manifesto*:

Ideally, the Earth Manifesto is destined to become the most influential manuscript of the 21st Century.

What if it did?!

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

August 21, 2023, updated from August 2016, and first begun in 2005.

Thanks for reading! Feedback? SaveTruffulaTrees@hotmail.com

Postscript - The Author Offers an Aside

Readers will no doubt note the redundancy of many observations in these Earth Manifesto writings. I have long admired poet David Whyte and his remarkable voice and effective use of repetition in his powerful and evocative readings of poetry. Earth Manifesto essays, however, tend to be repetitive for a different reason. The most cogent ideas keep recurring due to the passionate conviction with which I perceive them, as the manifesto evolves, and as the swirling course of events repeatedly reveals their relevance and evokes their truths anew.

The End
