



A Fusillade of Philosophy

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
Initial version: June 2018, latest revision April 1, 2023

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

--- Mark Twain

Welcome to the Earth Manifesto. Let's all emerge from our echo chambers and "Don't Believe Everything You Think" -- and strive to see clearly. And let's undertake trying to understand comprehensively and expansively, and remember to feel with our hearts, not just think with our easily emotionally-hijacked brains.

The great philosopher Plato lived in Athens from 424 BCE to 348 BCE in the times of Classical Greece. A wise man, he was an aristocrat who became disillusioned with politics. He did not particularly like democracy, because it was periodically prone to violent revolution against injustices. Plato also saw that oligarchic rule by wealthy elites often became excessively unjust, and rich people generally demonstrate a propensity to jealously protect their wealth, privileges and power, and harshly control and repress perceived threats to their dominance.

Plato reckoned that the best situation for human societies would be to have rule by a benevolent philosopher king. This is a great idea! Unfortunately, fair-minded philosopher kings are exceedingly hard to find among the ranks of aspirants who seek money, power, glory and satisfaction of their ambitions through "public service". Yep, that sure would be better than having self-serving demagogues who tell manipulative lies to the people about the purposes and desirability of their radically ruthless agenda and authoritarian priorities and scheming activities.

Plato established an extraordinary Academy in Athens in ancient times, and dedicated it to Athena, Greek Goddess of Wisdom. Located in a large grove of olive trees, the Academy was founded to educate people and direct their minds toward a knowledge of true goodness and virtue. Plato asserted in his Socratic dialogues in *The Republic* that truly just dealings are the most important thing for a government in its rule.

This ideal underlies our own Enlightenment Era aspirations. In light of this ideal, how have we allowed ourselves to be subjected to governance by politicians whose actions, objectively measured, are detrimental to most Americans? Our leaders certainly seem drastically more selfish or even greedily malicious than auspiciously beneficent. We must rise up as one, and honor our colonial ancestors' honorable opposition to despotism, and declare we want our representatives to honestly and effectively represent the greater good. If we had fairer representation, then the rich and CEOs and rewarded investors would not be able to prevail so triumphantly over workers and the general public at every turn.

Remember the wry rascal Mark Twain's satirical observation that we have the best government money can buy, and see that it behooves us to look closely at the implications of this sly assertion, for we are paying a high price for our government every year, and it sure seems like the majority of Americans are getting a Bad Deal in return.

It is a tautological truth that everybody will do better only when everybody does better. We should demand that our representatives honestly create a fairer society that is characterized by a more broadly inclusive prosperity and public safety in these perilous times. It is a wrong approach to put top priority on further enriching the already rich while imposing increasing hardships on the many, just as it is undesirable to wantonly deplete resources and rain

havoc down on the ecological commons.

The right thing for us to do collectively would be to "pay forward" a more auspicious legacy to our heirs in the future by contributing to leaving a stronger democracy and better protections of people's rights, expansively assured. And to leave an economy that works better for the vast majority of the people, not just the wealthy, and responsibly prevent politicians from burdening all taxpayers in the future with excessive amounts of public debt, corruptly incurred. And surely, we should strive to collectively leave a more sustainable natural world.

Most people validly see how harsh it is for our leaders to push policies that make economic inequalities ever more extreme, and that rig the tax system more and more favorably for the few. Most people also see the ominous writing on the wall related to unleashed capitalist predations, and to externalized liabilities for medical care and costs of pollution, toxins, exacerbated weather extremes, insidious sea level rise, ocean acidification and the devastation of the richest biotic habitats on Earth found in tropical rainforests and coral reef communities around our beautiful home planet. Let's act to protect Mother Earth!

A Moral Evaluation

The United States of America is a great nation, as seen through such disparate things as top-notch universities and the establishment of many beautiful National Parks and protected Wilderness Areas. It's a marvelous place of opportunity and ingenuity that produces a remarkable cornucopia of material goods, and it is a colossal historic success in democratic governance, assuring liberties to the people and championing a reasonable respect for human rights. But our democracy has been seriously "backsliding" in recent years, and our American liberties and egalitarian ideals are under furious and unrelenting assault by the top dogs in our society, who stubbornly refuse to compromise and pay more tax. This makes their dominating hegemony illegitimate.

Here we find ourselves, a little more than 2,000 years after the Lord was supposedly born in a lowly manger in Bethlehem in fulfillment of an Old Testament prophesy, and many faithful folks in the USA are in effect collaborating with the government to impose strict moralizing control over the people. Authorities of the Religious Right are complicit with the right-wing in Republican politics in efforts to impose reactionary control. They are crudely contorting the deeply humanitarian message that Jesus Christ preached, thereby taking his name in vain by rationalizing actions taken by abusers of authority who are treacherously violating the compassion Jesus preached. Jesus was a poor peasant who notably became a social revolutionary in the Holy Land, and spoke out in favor of poor people and the marginalized, and against Roman abusers of power and the shenanigans that went on with moneychangers in Herod's Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus was opposed to religious authorities in the Temple who collaborated with ruthless Romans and their oppressive tax collectors and idolatrous religion. Today, the true spirituality of America's current *Zeitgeist* has been deeply distorted by the politicization of religious establishments by conservatives, and our national priorities are being perverted by dishonestly deceitful propaganda, elitist abuses of authority and wasteful materialism.

Issues like this are contentious and confusing, but clarity of understanding should motivate us to come together in solidarity with common cause. Let's adopt a philosophic attitude. Breathe deep, and let go. Visualize again the great political cartoon by David Sipress that was widely shared as the tumultuous Trumpian tenure in office began, in which a woman is saying to a man, "My desire to be well-informed is currently at odds with my desire to remain sane." Seeing things the way they are, in reality, from a well-informed and comprehensive perspective, and supporting the right causes, are among our most important responsibilities as citizens.

The true moral good encompasses virtue and rightness in intentions, decisions or actions. In essence, the moral good is like the Golden Rule, best for human social groups as a whole. Things that are most propitious for human flourishing and survival are thus the ultimate moral good. The status of social cohesion is a good gauge for evaluating the moral good, for it helps us see beyond the confusing fray of contested concepts of it.

Right and wrong are somewhat relative. The best way to judge the rightness or wrongness of any action is to accurately assess the overall consequences the action has on other people -- and how beneficial or harmful it is.

This line of thought is reminiscent of a provocative understanding John Steinbeck expressed in *Cannery Row*: "It has always seemed strange to me -- the things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty,

understanding and feeling, are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest -- sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest -- are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second."

The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution outlines the primary goals for which the Constitution was ordained and established. These noble purposes were informed by Enlightenment Era principles, and include striving to form a more perfect union, establishing justice, insuring domestic tranquility, providing for the common defense, promoting the general welfare, and securing the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

Mark Twain would have guffawed with wry and sardonic amusement at the onward trajectory from his astute observation that "we have the best government that money can buy." Charles Ferguson succinctly noted, "Unless America reverses course, things will end badly, at least for the bottom 90% of Americans, and possibly for the wealthy who consider themselves safe." The proverbial pitchforks will eventually come out if we fail to enact smart and far-reaching fair-minded reforms. Let's take smart steps to fix this -- and sooner rather than later!

We should invest more money in what are, in reality, reasonably priced propitious social insurance policies like those that involve improved healthcare, better schools, more affordable medical insurance, less costly prescription drugs, and stronger protections of forests, wetlands, farmlands, public lands, coral reefs, ocean habitats, a stable climate and a safe gaseous composition of Earth's atmosphere. This is why there were many good ideas in "Build Back Better" plans that the Biden administration proposed, and Republicans staunchly opposed, during the early stages of the global pandemic.

Consider the current state of the large-scale decline in democracy that has been taking place in all-too-many countries around the globe over the course of the past decade. This backsliding is an ethically bankrupt and sadly retrograde trajectory, following as it does many marvelous years of colonial independence movements and the advance of Enlightenment Era ideals. Think of the amazing and laudatory forward strides that have been made since 1776 toward more fairly representative governance of peoples in fortunate nations whose leaders acted more honorably than those in despotic colonial regimes or harsh dictatorships, authoritarian religious-ruled theocracies, regimes led by tyrannical demagogic Strong Man types, or corporatocratic oligarchies.

A Commanding View from On High

There is great wisdom in the proverbial saying, "moderation in all things". This adage suggests a justly balanced way of living. It is an essential thought that was found in the work of the Greek poet Hesiod 2,700 years ago. He recommended, "observe due measure; moderation is best in all things." The edifice of the temple of Apollo at Delphi bore a similar inscription, translated as "Nothing in excess". Public policy should embrace such wisdom.

Professor Garrett Hardin insightfully wrote about the *Tragedy of the Commons* in 1968, and this tragedy has morphed into a global catastrophe of assaults against public health and safety, the environment and the common good today. This terrible imbalance involves rich people and giant corporate entities exerting a destructive and excessively domineering hegemony of rapacious control over people in communities worldwide. This is a socially unacceptable imbalance that features not only dangerous extremes of inequality, but also a sad state of spiritual affairs in which established religions form an unholy alliance with economic elites by supporting abusers of authority who all too often engage in divisive and discriminatory drives for dominion at the expense of fairness, peaceable coexistence and greater good goals.

I appeal to all evangelicals with respect to proper stewardship of creation, which is a consequentially crucial obligation of our kind. I applaud the evangelical organization Interfaith Power and Light for representing Right Action and Right Understanding with regard to energy efficiency, resource conservation, and addressing climate change. They importantly say the same thing as Pope Francis: that caring for creation is a basic human duty.

As in many arenas, conservative fundamentalists in evangelizing religions are too fanatic to be allowed to grab and abuse power. This is why the revelatory 5-part Netflix documentary series *The Family* is so scary and ominous in implication. Released in 2019, it tells the story of a secretive initiative by Christians who, in the name of Jesus, insinuate themselves into the halls of power and exert insidious influence and domineering, often unjust control over the populace. These fundamentalists may seem like innocent acolytes of Jesus, but they were led for decades

by Douglas Coe, "the stealth Billy Graham." They have gained insider access in the halls of power and exerted outsized influence with powerful political leaders in the U.S. government, and in countries around the world. In this intrigue, powerful men exhibit missionary-like zeal to wield overarching power over the fates of billions of people, sometimes for good purposes but just as often to take unfair advantage of people and undermine democratic fairness, betraying people's trust in fair-minded governance.

These fundamentalists have been siding with the rich and powerful on economic issues, to the detriment of the poor and downtrodden, despite the Bible saying Jesus loved such people. It is supremely ironic that devotees of Jesus are spreading a gospel so at odds with conventional understandings of Jesus, and that "The Family" so zealously supports officials like Donald Trump and Mitch McConnell, who take advantage of faithful religious folks by pushing a corrupt agenda that involves dividing people and perpetuating abuses of power and acting in bad faith on a wide range of crucial issues. (Kudos to filmmaker Jesse Moss for his skill in telling this story.)

Writer Jeff Sharlet criticizes the theology of The Family in his book *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. He says this "elite fundamentalism" fetishizes political power and wealth, and opposes labor movements in the U.S. and abroad. The Family essentially teaches that laissez-faire deregulatory economic policy is "God's will." Sharlet also criticized their theology that gave instant forgiveness to powerful men who commit sins, as many of them happen to do, pointing out that this leniency conveniently excuses elites who commit misdeeds or crimes, and allows them to avoid being held accountable for their actions.

Sharlet's book *The Family*, with its revelations about secret fundamentalism, was published in 2008. Just a year later, sensational news stories broke about sex scandals involving prominent members of the Family. The Nevada Senator John Ensign (at the time) and South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford, thrust the odd secretive organization into the national spotlight. Accusations were made that the Family was illegally subsidizing the rent of members of Congress on C Street in Washington D.C. -- and the Family was involved in trying to get an Anti-Homosexuality Bill passed in Uganda, which would have imposed a death penalty for homosexual acts there.

These evangelicals have used the annual National Prayer Breakfast since the days of Dwight Eisenhower for much more than a religious gathering. The National Prayer Breakfast, which involves a series of meetings, luncheons and dinners, has taken place every year since 1953, and is typically attended by something like 3,500 guests that include invitees from over 100 countries. These "prayer meetings" are designed to be a forum for political, social and business elites to assemble and peddle influence. As such, these shrewd schemers insert religion into politics and offer foreign leaders and lobbyists opportunities to "pay to play" in the USA. That's the lowdown. This is corruption incarnate. Jesus would likely have advised taking a higher road.

What's Happening Here Ought to Be Increasingly Clear

Look what's happening here. Great wealth is being generated in the world today through business activities that emphasize the maximum achievable exploitation of natural resources and working people. The benefits of these cash cow activities should be shared much more broadly, in the interest of promoting the general welfare and the common good and more inclusive well-being. We simply must drastically alter the rules and policy priorities that are the basic enabling characteristics of *Thirteen Main Methods Used to Increasingly Concentrate Wealth and Power*. See that essay linked to the Earth Manifesto website in Part One, essay (31).

Look what else is happening here. We are pumping more and more money into profit-propagating pursuits like a lavishly wastefully military, and into police forces, the FBI, the CIA, incarcerations in a costly prison system, and immigrant internment camps for families and children seeking economic opportunity, refuge or asylum from dangers. We're running up risky levels of national debt to pay for these things, and we are idiotically borrowing more money due to the 2017 Republican Tax Cuts Act to give most of the benefits to the richest Americans.

Increasingly exacerbated social inequities are ultimately bad for everyone. Refer to the story about the lawgiver Solon back in the city-state of Athens during ancient times, more than 2,500 years ago -- a story told repeatedly throughout this manifesto. The eminently wise Solon succeeded in forging reasonable and responsible compromises between elite factions and the masses during a tumultuous time in ancient Greece, thereby saving the republic from revolution. Surely, it would be best even for rich people to not push their luck so hard, due to the real risks

of adversities, revolutionary unrest and violent conflicts caused by unbelievable extremes of inequality, unconscionable overreach and outrageous abuses of money, influence and power.

Here's a basic problem with this whole deal. As David Klion pointed out in an incisive article titled *Russiagate Is Far Wider Than Trump and His Inner Circle* (in July 2018), Russia interfered in U.S. elections to help Donald Trump grab power, and this "isn't just the narrow story of a few corrupt officials, or even the story of a corrupt president. It's the story of a corrupt political party, the one (that was) currently holding all the levers of power in Washington." The malfeasance in Washington D.C. made the "culture of corruption" surreally wrong.

Self-dealing is among the worst forms of political corruption. This is why a large majority of Americans told pollsters that they regard it as "serious" or "very serious" that more than 50 Republicans in Congress would "get an average tax cut of over \$200,000 each from a single loophole" that was sneakily added to the December 2017 tax bill at the last minute, just before passing it without a single vote from the opposition political party. Revelatory investigative books intrigue the imagination, with titles telling the story, like *It's Even Worse Than You Think*, by the brilliant tax expert David Cay Johnston.

A laser focus on the Trump regime's corruption, and on Republican rash schemes in general, rightly helped give a powerful boost to Democrats in gaining a majority in the House of Representatives during the 2018 midterm elections. Honestly patriotic citizens voted to help make this happen. Support progressives!

We can no longer afford to allow Dividers to grab power and rule so ruthlessly. The trickle-down Big Lie has become too successful a con job. Complicit in this state of affairs, Fox News beams brainwashing broadcasts to the populace, serving as a misguiding corporate State Propaganda Machine that helped perpetuate distorted understandings and enable corrupt dealings by MAGA Republicans. Fox also stokes antagonism and creates harshly harmful divisions and fears and hatred of others. Check out *The Brainwashing of My Dad*, Jen Senko's documentary, to better understand how Fox News can negatively affect people, as it did when it transformed Jen Senko's father from being a nonpolitical life-long Democrat to a fanatically angry and intolerant old man.

Let's stop kowtowing to Dividers, and come together to propitiously promote the greater common good. Let's actualize a vastly improved general welfare. This will help us improve fairness and social cohesion.

We the People are losing faith in our dominant institutions -- governmental, corporate and religious -- and for good reasons. First, the government is increasingly corrupted by wealthy super-elites who are eager to impose an inimical agenda on a freedom-loving people, as can be understood in detail throughout *See Clearly - Sanity During Insane Times*. Second, corporations are acting like psychopaths, as made clear by Joel Bakan in *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*. Joel Bakan gauges this as defined in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. And third, authorities in established religions are often incestuously siding with reactionary authority-abusing politicians, and too many are compounding this sin by molesting children or acting in ways that foment conflict, intolerance and violence.

A Big Picture Perspective

Throughout the incomprehensibly long sweep of geologic history, big changes in the natural environment have subjected many species to conditions of existential stress. Many have perished, and at rapid rates during some impressive mass extinction events, like the Permian Extinction 250 million years ago, and the Cretaceous Extinction 65 million years ago. Today, mass extinctions are tragically happening again, during the unfolding Anthropocene Extinction. The individuals and groups best suited to adapt are the ones that survive to reproduce. Whatever animal could adapt best is able to continue on. This is natural selection, in a nutshell.

Charles Darwin once observed: "In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too), those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed." He also said, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."

We are at a juncture in world history where flexibility in adapting is a key to our survival. For 10,000 years, humans have been parlaying subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry into today's astonishingly successful global civilization. Our population has increased from maybe 300 million at the time of Jesus to one billion in the year 1800 -- to over 8 billion now. But the writing is on the wall. The damages that our huge and growing population

is inflicting on our beautiful home planet are surpassingly foolish, and they are without a shred of doubt unsustainable. Precautionary principles counsel wiser decision-making, smarter planning and fairer courses of action. See the link to *Intelligent Precautionary Principles Enunciated - Holy Cow!*, on the Home Page of the Earth Manifesto to gain a fuller understanding of these ideas.

We have built amazing economies to provide an extraordinary array of food and consumer products through advancements in exploitive technologies. This has been coupled with a bizarre overarching lack of mindfulness, so we find that our activities in aggregate are insidiously destroying the natural world. The main propulsive force for this folly is to satisfy a zealous preoccupation with monetary wealth and social status. This is a shortsightedness that is putting the health of our home planet's biosphere at risk, as well as its ability to sustain life for all of its creatures -- ominously including ourselves.

What we humans need to survive here in the 21st century is greater adaptive ability. We need to honestly face the problems troubling our planet and our species, and create real, lasting and auspicious solutions, aimed both locally for our families and friends and communities, and globally for all of humanity and life on Earth.

Pope Francis has called for urgent collective action to repair the planet. He gave his blessing to activist "citizen pressure groups" to organize ahead of a Global Climate Action Summit that took place in San Francisco in 2018, when thousands of people came together for the largest climate march the West Coast had ever seen. In advance, activists stated: "We will demand Governor Jerry Brown and other California leaders take bold action on climate change and commit to a Fossil Free world."

Republican politicians seem to be strongly opposed to efforts to leave a more secure and auspicious legacy to our children and grandchildren, judging from their scurrilous political activities. The League of Conservation Voters sounded an alarm in July 2018, revealing that Republican leaders in Congress had just "moved to backdoor a series of anti-environment provisions into law. Their plan included a policy to weaken protections of public lands without public review or input." These schemers pushed for expansions of mining operations, and tried to gut the Endangered Species Act and undermine protections for wolves, whales and other mammals. They added these provisions to the National Defense Authorization Act bill, a must-pass military bill that rightly shouldn't include riders that reduce environmental protections. And they failed to reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund for many months, despite the fact that it is a smart program that uses a small portion of fees paid by companies drilling offshore for oil and gas for the good purpose of acquiring and protecting lands for all Americans.

A petition at change.org opposed Republican efforts to go to almost any length to maintain their narrow majority power. They even try to ban books and distort history to preserve domineering power. The petition read, "The Michigan State Board of Education is considering revisions to K-12 social studies standards that endanger not only our past, but our future. By altering the standards for teaching history in Michigan, they cut many people out of history — and silence the work of those who have worked to fulfill the American promise of liberty and justice for all. The changes would severely cut references to the movement for civil rights, the women's movement, and the movement for LGBT equality. They would eliminate references to climate change, and remove discussion of America's core democratic values." This was a rogue undertaking.

Let's emerge from behind our tribal barricades, my fellow Americans, and viscerally recognize and acknowledge the profoundly pernicious threat that Republican abuses of influence represent for current and future well-being, and to the general welfare of the citizenry. Another reason why it is pathological for "conservatives" to wield excessive power and broadly abuse this authority is because, in the process, they oppose fairer representation in our democracy and sabotage core values that democracy represents. Let's repudiate Machiavellian masters of manipulative misguidance and scandalous malfeasance, and don't let them get away with their schemes by believing all the obfuscating fusillades of mass distraction on Facebook and Twitter.

Passions have been running high in the past seven years, and with propulsive reason. The naked immorality of the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" family separation policies and anti-immigrant actions caused mass protests to break out during the summer of 2018. Almost 600 protesters were arrested on Capitol Hill on June 28, and then more than 700 protests were held on June 30, taking place in all 50 states in opposition to Trump's empathy-deficient border policies. We should not need to engage in such mass protests against authority-abusing men who

are pushing a regressive and repressive agenda that is antithetical to the liberties, overall well-being and true security of the people. Sadly, numbness to outrage gives exploiters advantages.

Here we stand, hands on our hips, elbows akimbo, with a quizzical expression on our faces. In 2019, powerful images and disturbing sound recordings came to light of terrified children and their anguished parents in detention facilities near the border with Mexico. Authorities in government were attempting to prevent these affective images from surfacing, knowing that outraged protests intensify when the dire dimensions of these heartless happenings become more viscerally clear.

This unfortunately was only the tip of the iceberg of a multitude of nefarious actions that were perpetrated by authority-abusing conservatives in the Homeland. These acts exacerbate social inequities, oppress Blacks and others in racial minorities, undermine the common good, cause social cohesion to fray, rashly erode the liberties of freedom-loving people, and discriminate against almost everyone that is not a white male. Meanwhile, these cunning folks are insensibly wreaking tragic damages on the providential commons, upon which all of humanity relies for sustenance and survival.

During many protest marches around the United States in recent years, crowds almost good-naturedly revealed their simmering outrage, with some chanting "No Trump, no KKK, no fascist USA!" A swelling number of courageous resisters stood up and in effect declared that the emperor has no clothes, that Trump's rule was corrupt, that his emotion-exploiting blame-shifting tactics are immoral, that Republicans are making accomplices and fools of their supporters, that the wrongdoing of their debt-financed Tax Cuts scam is woefully fiscally irresponsible, and that their anti-environmental policies are treacherous to everyone in the future -- and to most forms of life on Earth. In this, they are profoundly betraying truly honest pro-life stances.

The biggest street protests in U.S. history broke out after a video of white police officers killing George Floyd, a black man, went viral at the end of May 2020. In incredible contrast to this public outrage, the Trump base stayed in a reactive crouch, pretending their leader was as innocent as the driven snow in all matters. The demagogue was so intent on cozying up to authoritarians abroad that he didn't seem have been bothered by this "total fabrication" stuff. Many Republicans are Trump loyalists who tell pollsters they support him despite his big lies, invective, wrongdoing, sins and his inciting of political violence, and despite the danger he created by allying himself with a new Axis of dictator-types in countries around the world who treat their people terribly. At the same time, Trump tried to undermine our NATO allies who defend democracy and personal liberties.

The former self-proclaimed Party of the Moral Majority has astonishingly abdicated its moral compass, and done so for the sake of naked expediency. These folks are triumphantly pleased to finally get some respect -- POWER! Never mind that this power was illicitly obtained and was abused with discriminatory disgrace and authoritarian zeal. They want us to ignore the long litany of illegitimate means that were used to grab power and achieve this domineering end in the first place, as set forth in detail in *Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy: Is the Pen Mightier than Illegitimate Authority?*

The esteem-worthy President Obama promised young Dreamers who were brought to the U.S. as children that they would be protected, for they know no other home. But cunning MAGA Republicans are using these vulnerable young people as another bargaining chip to help them impose their hard-right agenda on the populace.

What a fate! Let's laugh ruefully -- and come together to champion broadly fairer and better governance. The eminently respect-worthy Dalai Lama delivered a compelling observation during the 2009 Vancouver Peace Summit, asserting that, "The world will be saved by the western woman." With the election of a record number of Democratic women in November 2018, the prospects for this seemed to have dramatically improved. Let it be! Positive change must come. John Lennon and Paul McCartney sang their inspiring lyrics, recommending the idea, "Come together right now, over me." -- "One thing I can tell you is you got to be free."

The Titanic Struggle between Liberals and Conservatives

In *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, the insightful linguist George Lakoff explains how the competing influences of Strict Father worldviews contrast to the worldviews of Nurturant Parents (especially of good mothers). Whole constellations of propensities are associated with the conflicting political camps of those

who adhere to Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models. Sensible parents see that being too permissive can ruin a child, but that excessive discipline and harshness in Strict Father ideologies may be worse for the family and the child, and society as a whole. Lakoff points out that the politics of both conservatives and liberals are deeply influenced by different ideas of the family, and that these two contrasting models of the family "give rise to different moral systems and different discourse forms, that is, different choices of words and different modes of reasoning." And they involve starkly contrasting levels of compulsion to impose control.

One important thing to understand is that propensities of conservative folks just happen to be favorable to authoritarians who like to assert dominating control and abuse the power of ill-begotten authority. Conservative worldviews lionize discipline, self-control and loyalty, so they tend to attract what Bob Altemeyer calls "authoritarian followers". Altemeyer, a now-retired Associate Professor at the Department of Psychology at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, once wrote that these folks tend to be loyal to tribal allegiances that can get in the way of the desires of freedom-cherishing Americans to properly balance individual liberties and the greater social good. In so doing, they prevent true greater good goals from coming to fruition. Authoritarian followers submit too much to authoritarian leaders, and trust them too much, and give them too much leeway to do whatever they want -- "which often is something undemocratic, tyrannical and brutal."

Both despotic demagogues and submissive authoritarian followers that abjectly kowtow to them are revealing an excessive fervor for dictating an absolutist morality onto society, condemning gay people and judging women harshly for wanting to have the right to get a legal and safe abortion during the first trimester of a pregnancy.

Republicans win many election contests not by proposing effective plans to improve the common good of the American people, but by scaring people, stoking cultural resentments, hijacking people's emotions, twisting the truth, demonizing others, fostering division, promoting deceptive ideological dogmas, using negative attack ads, exploiting hot-button wedge issues and cultural biases, using microtargeted fake news and conspiracies on social media, and raising huge sums of contributions from rich conservatives and Big Oil, Big Coal and giant corporations that seek lower taxes, fewer regulations and more opportunities to foist the costs of pollution, healthcare, natural disasters and environmental damages onto the public. It is a deplorable fact that conservative politicians exert excessive influence in government only because they gain this overbearing position by seizing power through this litany of illegitimate means. And they critically abuse this power.

It is exceedingly odd how willing conservatives seem to be, despite being generally averse to change, to go along with extreme risk-taking in national policies. This is the case with their opposition to democracy-enhancing reforms, as well as in many other issues like denying the apocalyptic risks of the climate crisis, allowing building in flood plains, promoting profligate depletionary uses of natural resources, supporting policies that sacrifice the greater good, and depriving tens of millions of people of healthcare in order to reduce taxes on rich people. Tens of millions of them voted for a leader who is a smugly duplicitous plutocrat who abuses privilege, violates trust and is dangerously self-centered and reactively vitriolic -- and who even risks revolutionary conflict by facilitating the predations of wealthy elites who keep driving inequality and inequities to worse extremes.

In *Strangers in Their Own Land*, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild tells the story of five years she spent in arch-conservative Louisiana bayou country, where she listened to Tea Party folks to find out why they support policies that seem to liberals to be so cantankerously contrary to the common good. She found that people in red states have been indoctrinated to feel it is government, not giant corporations, which has been responsible for their woes, because they perceive government as having helped people like immigrants, refugees, women, gay people and others to cut ahead of them in line in their hopes of achieving the American Dream.

We need a much healthier two-party system. Severe imbalances like those that existed after Trump and Pence came to power are not only unhealthy, but exceedingly dangerous to the general welfare and the national security and peaceful coexistence. Trump has played his supporters as suckers, and has played to a "T" the role of being a divisive emotion-manipulating deceiving demagogic dictator-wannabe male chauvinist who plunged the world into unknown but not wholly uncharted paths. Let's stand up, oppose tyranny, and not go along!

Here's a better idea: Let's compromise on a whole raft of win-win solutions to problems. There are plenty to choose from. For some of the best, see *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

Smart Strategic Initiatives

Linguist George Lakoff wrote about "strategic initiatives" in his enlightening book *Don't Think of an Elephant*. He pointed out how ideological conservatives use such strategies in which changes in one issue have automatic effects over many other issues. For example, tax cuts leave less money for social programs that conservatives disapprove of anyway. Or think about legal tort reforms designed to limit future lawsuits that enforce environmental regulations, thus rewarding business cronies with bigger profits while depriving lawyers who tend to support progressive politicians of money and reducing campaign funding for Democratic politicians.

Note that there are contrasting good examples of strategic initiatives that advance progressive causes. The Endangered Species Act, for instance. Or legislative requirements that environmental impact reports must be completed before real estate developments are approved, so as to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how all stakeholders will be affected. One such truly transcendent plan would be to make a sane overarching commitment to a Bill of Rights for Future Generations. This farsighted initiative would serve to reduce inter-generational treachery and protect the prospects of people in the future from valuable resources being foolishly squandered at the fastest possible pace, and from the predatory behaviors of wealthy people who are abusing their ill-gotten power and driving up the national debt by means of a public borrowing/tax cut swindle.

There is one clear distinction between strategic initiatives promoted by conservatives and those advocated by liberals. Conservatives have a primary goal of maximizing profits and getting and wielding power and control, so their strategies are oriented toward pandering to rich people who push a selfish right-wing agenda, while strategic initiatives promoted by liberals tend to more honestly reflect greater concerns for the common good.

Another of the main strategic initiatives employed by Republicans is to hyper-stimulate military spending. This is a spending arena that is notoriously hard to control, or even to properly account for, because national urgency and secrecy provide a good cover for hiding waste and fraud. Such profligate spending serves to inject a big shot of adrenaline into the bloodstream of profiteers. It is easy to get people to go along with this plan by scaring them with repeated assertions of threats from abroad. This strategy allows a government to shift resources from domestic spending priorities into profit-engendering preparations for war. Similarly, parallel efforts are made to build up domestic police forces, prisons and detention facilities that may prove to be necessary to be used against the people when revolutionary turmoil arises against power-abusing authorities and the malfeasance they are perpetrating against the masses. These deceptions and deceivers distracted the public's attention from cascading scandals during Trump's time in office, making it easier for Republicans to eviscerate regulatory agencies that should protect people against financial chicanery and corporate abuses of influence and cost externalizing schemes that harm people's health and despoil the environment.

Military Keynesian ideological arguments are easy to peddle to the people, as made clear by Herman Goering, the head of Adolf Hitler's storm troopers and later of the German Air Force during World War II. Goering told a psychologist after the war, during the Nuremberg War Crime trials, that a nation's people can always be manipulated by their leaders into supporting and fighting wars, famously declaring, "Naturally the common people don't want war. But after all, it is the leaders of a country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag people along, whether it is a democracy or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. This is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and for exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country."

Proof that this is a top Republican strategic initiative can be seen by a look at the "hard-power budgets" pushed during the Trump administration. Sure enough, they contained huge increases in military spending, combined with draconian cuts to funding for regulatory agencies and State Department diplomacy. These budgets not only stimulated spending on the military and Homeland Security, but also slashed funding for conservation, oversight of federal regulatory agencies and the Executive Branch, and enforcement of accountability.

Think more deeply about the nature of these Crony Capitalist scams. First, we allow moneyed interests to have undue influence in determining our national policies and priorities, with the result that top tax rates on the highest incomes are reduced to unaffordably low levels. This contributes to spiking increases in inequality, which are

stoking deep discord in the USA today, especially as the pandemic has caused horrific hardships for millions of people. Second, we allow huge corporate entities to maximize profits by squeezing employees, refusing to pay employees for overtime or sick leave, and often foisting costs of their medical care onto taxpayers. We also allow big corporations to prevent American workers from gaining any meaningful portion of increases in their productivity that have been realized in the economy since 1980. And we finance these swindles in an inter-generational debt scam that is far reaching in its unjust, unethical and risk-laden impacts. All considered, this is a consequentially serious fraud. Revealingly, this scam is facilitated by shrewd corporate executives and politicians and spinmeisters who propagate devious rationalizations and ideological dogma.

These scams constitute a betrayal of the people by the top dogs in our society, and especially by the top 1% of Americans who excessively monopolize the spoils of resource extraction and the exploitation of working people. And these swindles have an even more deplorable angle. Vested interest groups indulge in the rash ruse of cost externalizing, or "the socializing of costs". The rigged rules that govern corporate entities allow Big Businesses to foist a variety of costs onto society, with the overriding goal of artificially boosting profits. These externalized costs include polluted air and water, respiratory afflictions and other negative impacts on human health, environmental damages and destabilizing effects of greenhouse gas emissions on the global climate.

More than two-thirds of the capital gains that result from these corporate scams are received, tellingly, by the top 1%. And guess what! -- these folks pay really low capital gains tax rates on these ill-begotten profits. And even more outrageously, their heirs may pay zero percent tax on these gains after a rich person dies, because the "cost basis" of all investments is revised to their actual value at the date of death, allowing these gains to be transmitted indefinitely forward to every person who inherits any of these investments.

In the course of these swindles, humankind is brutally hacking away, dangerously and irresponsibly, at the trunk and many branches of the tree of life, severely pruning its limbs by obtusely failing to take global action to protect wildlife habitats. Sensationally, the World Wildlife Fund's *Living Planet Report 2022* revealed that the population sizes of 10,000 representative species of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and fish have seen an alarming average decrease of almost 70% since 1970. Some 84% of populations of freshwater species have astoundingly been lost in this short period of time, along with something like 40% of the populations of both marine species and terrestrial species. The main factors that have contributed to this dire development are mankind's reckless damaging of vital habitats in connection with our voracious exploitation of natural resources and inadequate commitment to preserving the health of natural ecosystems.

An earlier *Living Planet Report*, which is updated every two years, stated: "Our current global situation is that since the 1970s, humanity has been in ecological overshoot, with annual demand on resources exceeding what Earth can regenerate each year. It now takes the Earth one year and six months to regenerate what we use in a year. We maintain this overshoot by liquidating the Earth's resources." We must come together and say, "Enough is enough." As Utah Phillips once declared, "The Earth is not dying, it is being killed, and those who are killing it have names and addresses."

An Aside on the Supreme Court

A provocative political cartoon by the Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist Tom Toles showed an imposing facade of the GOP SUPREME COURT with a democratic rabble in front hoisting an indignant protest sign reading NO TO TRUMP TAKEOVER OF U.S. DEMOCRACY. A protestor remarks, TRUMP GOT HIS WALL. In small editorial print at the bottom, Toles pointedly observed: EVERYBODY IS GOING TO PAY FOR THIS.

The Supreme Court failed to take a stand against the far-reaching structural corruption inherent in extreme gerrymandering when it sided, in effect, with manipulative Big Money interests near the end of their 2018-2019 term. The court system should rightly provide stronger checks and balances against abuses of power perpetrated by state legislatures and the executive branch of government. Instead, the high court ducked this difficult issue on technical grounds and let red states create grotesquely unfair maps. In addition, the final rulings of the Supreme Court before the "swing vote" Justice Anthony Kennedy retired at the end of June 2018 were decisions to uphold the Trump travel ban, and to deal major blows to labor unions and women's reproductive rights. These were narrow 5-4 rulings that made it clear there are serious implications for our civil liberties to have the

Supreme Court dominated by a narrow majority of ideologically conservative partisan judges. Congress must rightly pass new rules against partisan gerrymandering and the Big Money domination of politics.

Mitch McConnell and his Republican co-conspirators in the U.S. Senate wielded the illegitimate power-abusing tactic of denying President Obama's choice to replace Antonin Scalia with the eminently qualified Merrick Garland in 2016. They instead managed a year later to get the far right judge Neil Gorsuch appointed to a lifelong position of judicial power. The organization EarthJustice observed that the Trump administration, "through its agenda of corporate greed, its divisive and hateful rhetoric, and its inhumane policies ... has made it crystal clear that it seeks to undo the very rights and liberties we've fought so hard to achieve and defend."

When it came to replacing Anthony Kennedy on the Supreme Court, New Jersey Senator Cory Booker set the tone for elected Democrats by saying outright that Trump was the subject of a criminal investigation and had conflicts of interest in choosing a new Supreme Court Justice. A new Justice should not have been chosen until after the investigation was concluded, said Booker, for the high court will be involved in issues deciding the power of the Executive Branch with respect to subpoenas, presidential pardons and other aspects of suspected collaboration by members of the Trump campaign with Russian operatives interfering in our elections, and other matters of financial malfeasance, election misdeeds, insurrectionary coup, and environmental treachery.

Anthony Kennedy was a conservative, but in some cases he sided with more liberal justices to check the zeal of social conservatives. When he retired, an already right-leaning Supreme Court was then "poised to become the most conservative institution in the entire history of America's government." That was bad news! The legitimacy of the Supreme Court is now up in the air with Trump having marched lockstep with reactionary social conservatives to cement in place extreme right-wing judicial rulings for generations. Trump nominees outside the mainstream will likely "lead to a Supreme Court that sacrifices the rights of the most marginalized people in favor of the wealthiest and most powerful Americans. Of the greatest concern are the implications for workers and consumers, a woman's right to choose, and the LGBTQ community's right to marry and live freely."

A Blue Wave in the 2018 midterm elections was a first necessary step in efforts to help curb despotic abuses of power that Trump's instincts told him he could get away with, because he had an adequate number of unprincipled loyalists and legislative and judicial collaborators to help enable his authoritarian agenda. Hearteningly, a majority of voters demonstrated in November 2018 that they prefer Congress to be a check on Trump rather than a booster for his policy priorities, and only about a third said they believed Trump deserved to be re-elected, according to polls taken before the midterm elections in Arizona, Florida and Ohio by NBC News and Marist College. "In Arizona, 52 percent of registered voters say they'll use their vote to send a message that the country needs more Democrats to serve as a check on Trump, while 36 percent said the nation needs more Republicans to pass his agenda." This was good cause for hope.

Lincoln Project Republicans forcefully advocated the defeat of Trump and Trumpism in the 2020 elections, due to the fact that they pose "a clear and present danger to the Constitution and our Republic. Only defeating so polarizing a character as Trump will allow the country to heal its political and psychological wounds and allow for a new, better path forward for all Americans." The Lincoln Project is supported by respectable Republicans like Steve Schmidt, George Conway and Rick Wilson, whose powerful voices are dedicated to protecting democracy and holding accountable those who violate their oaths to the Constitution.

Another Big Picture Perspective

In 1949, the English novelist and political philosopher George Orwell famously imagined a dystopian future in London in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In this epic novel, a repulsive and pervasively controlling authority-abusing Big Brother government ruled ruthlessly by brainwashing, deceiving, misinforming, exploiting and repressing the people. Fast forward to 2017 through 2021, and who would have guessed we would have an oppressive 21st century form of Big Brother government in the USA, and that it would have been led by a greedily self-serving and empathy-deficient con man Strict Father bad dad. Compounding this brutal indignity is the fact that this demagogue was a diabolically cunning master manipulator of people's emotions -- for power, money and self-aggrandizement.

Trump has made desperate efforts to distract people from the misdeeds of his self-dealing and the widespread corruption and foreign intrigue manifest during his administration. In John Bolton's book *The Room Where It*

Happened, Bolton makes clear how nakedly transactional Trump's actions were, behind closed doors, and he adduced two instances of treachery in particular that involved the autocratic leaders of Turkey and China.

Trump can be seen as a manipulative charlatan who spins the news with a bizarre plethora of exorbitant lies, preposterous propaganda, diversionary claims and scandalous behaviors. He foments anger at reporters and journalists, especially on TV and social media, and during his zealous demagogic political rallies, where he blatantly tries to discredit a tremendous amount of factual reporting by repetitiously claiming that all criticisms are "fake news", and that they are promoted by a media that is "the enemy of the people." This is exactly wrong! Repetition may reinforce the "illusory truth effect", but does not make falsehoods true!

John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan both saw freedom and the welcoming of immigrants and refugees to the U.S. as core American values. They both expressed admiration for John Winthrop, a Puritan who led the first large wave of immigrants from England to North America in 1630. Winthrop referred to the first American colonies in biblical terms as being like "a city on a hill". As President-elect in 1961, JFK declared "we shall be as a city upon a hill -- the eyes of all people are upon us. ... For, of those to whom much is given, much is required ...".

And Ronald Reagan said in his farewell speech to the nation in 1989, "I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still." A great image!

Then along came Trump, and his MAGA spawn, who cunningly realized that they could gain personal power and influence -- and money! -- by acting as fear-mongering white nationalists who could ruthlessly exploit divisive strategies by blaming immigrants for our problems and using them as scapegoats.

We the People, in honesty, understand that this power-abusing narcissist seized the reins of power through an unbelievable litany of illegitimate means, and that he imposed upon us his own bizarrely selfish form of oppressive, outrage-engendering Big Brother authoritarian governance. This self-dealing authority figure is being propped up by rich people and a cowardly phalanx of self-serving and devious sycophants in Congress who collaborate with the hair-trigger anger, emotion-exploiting despot to take advantage of people's passions by provoking their hostility, fear, feelings of grievance and stoked resentments, and demonizing and scapegoating vulnerable asylum seekers, migrants, refugees and Muslims. Moreover, his agenda discriminated against women, children, the poor and most Americans in non-white racial minorities. In a pathologically grandiose irony, the leader of this Big Brother government was a crass celebrity who is impulsive and has a long history of being promiscuous, and who has generally treated women shabbily, to boot.

I fancy these words as representing plain truths and *Common Sense*. See the plethora of fair-minded assessments of eminent common sense contained in *Common Sense Revival, Book One of the Earth Manifesto*.

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
April 1, 2023