



Earth Manifesto

Tyrants and Damsels and Associated Incisive Insights

An Earth Manifesto essay by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

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Zen masters and ecological philosophers agree with alert observers who see that everything on Earth is marvelously and inextricably interconnected and interdependent. Everything is hitched together in infinitely intricate ways. The implications of this most fundamental of all understandings about the biotic underpinnings of our existence run so deep that they defy our full comprehension.

In the province of ideas, any one organism, idea or issue is ultimately hitched to all the rest, so any place provides a legitimate point of entry into everything else. Therefore, HERE is as salubrious a place as any to begin an exploration of important ideas that affect the human race. Let us consider, for instance, the controversy surrounding the story of Tyrant fungi and Damsel algae.

I love this tale, which concerns "lichen symbiosis". Biologists once heatedly debated the nature of this evolutionary phenomenon. To understand it clearly, it helps to know that there are, for all practical purposes, three Kingdoms in the classification of all forms of life on Earth: Animals, Plants and Fungi. About 72,000 identified species of fungi exist in the world, and this narrative deals with the subset of fungi known as lichens. There are about 17,000 species of these kinds of life. They generally live on rocks and trees, and are either crusty or leafy. Their structure consists of a tough drought-resistant outer fungal layer, called a cortex, and inner algal partner cells that are protected by the fungal cortex. These algal cells provide sustenance for the whole lichen by producing nutrients through the almost miraculously providential biological process of photosynthesis.

Long ago, far back in evolutionary history, these fungi and algae were independent life forms. Algae are plant species that love moisture and are able to use energy from the sun to transform water and carbon dioxide and minerals into food energy. Fungi and algae have co-evolved together into distinct genetically united species in a symbiotic relationship that functions as a cooperative win/win adaptation of the formerly separate species. Lichens formed through this evolutionary marriage are a mutually beneficial combination of the descendants of the former fungi and algae species. In the natural world, it is instructive to note, there are no absolute moralities, and there are no laws, cultural taboos or strict constitutional amendments against such bonding relationships.

For many decades, scientists had a spirited debate about the nature of this particular genetically intimate relationship. A prominent English naturalist called it an "unnatural union" and a "sensational Romance of Lichenology". Freddie Fungus and Alice Algae took a lichen to each other, as some aspiring aficionado of alliterations put it. A vigorous debate took place that was centered on an impressively anthropomorphic theory: the tough protective fungus acts as a Tyrant master that is holding the Damsel algae captive. This theory held that the fungus was exploiting the vulnerable and productive propensities of the alluringly productive algae. I suppose that scientists have not actually been able to assign sexes to the fungi and algae, and the various processes by which lichens reproduce are no doubt significantly less interesting than those that pertain between a handsome dude and some eager and comely young lass. (Just sayin!).

This, however, is neither here nor there. This story gives us insights into the anthropocentric nature of scientific debate and philosophical speculation. It also provides us with an enlightening perspective related to one of many awe-inspiring 'survival strategies' that have been manifested throughout the long history of the evolution of life on

Earth. Books like Richard Dawkins' *Ancestor's Tale* flesh out this fascinating story, for those whose inquisitive minds drive them to learn more and better understand.

Solipsism and Anthropocentrism

This story of Tyrants and Damsels reveals that human beings tend to see the world in ways that distort its true nature. This is natural for us because our frame of reference is a product of how our minds perceive and interpret sensations and experiences. Our self-referential perceptions and our systems of belief create worldviews that are naturally human-centered. We project our feelings and beliefs, superstitions and moral conceptions onto the real world. The downside of this propensity is that we often fail to see fuller, more complex and more accurate perspectives.

Such projections powerfully affect how we live in the world, and the roles we play in it. People from time immemorial have projected anthropocentric archetypes and stereotypes onto deities they have imagined into existence. This is why gods and goddesses of every culture exhibit human appearances, motivations, behaviors, emotions, activities and control drives. These projections all have their genesis in human nature, and are a creative reflection of the human imagination. Our species also tends to attribute human qualities, sensibilities and feelings to animals, and to forces of nature like lightning and thunder, and even to inanimate objects. This process of attributing human characteristics to non-human entities is called anthropomorphizing.

A classic form of the anthropomorphization of animals is embodied in Aesop's Fables. These stories are ones in which human traits and feelings are projected onto animals. The purpose of these fables is to illustrate simple moral lessons so that people are able to more easily understand and remember them. But is the lion really noble? Is the coyote wily? Are owls wise? Are asses indeed intransigently stubborn? Our mental projections can cause us to perceive and interpret the world in ways that we believe our projections accurately represent reality. When a violent storm harms people, we may see it as vicious or malevolent. But is it really?

Caring for Real Life Damsels

The purpose of this exploration of ideas is to shed more light on the most important issues that face humanity. As we launch into these issues, let's remember that the most effective way to solve our problems is to begin by developing clearer understandings of their real causes. We should avoid confusion and delusion about the true nature of problems or their significance, or else we may end up merely addressing symptoms instead of causes. When we fail to understand the actual nature of problems, our efforts to solve them can be misdirected, wrongly resolved, poorly prioritized, and woefully inadequate.

Consider, for instance, the next generation of American damsels-to-be: the 12 million teenage girls between the ages of 14 and 19. A study done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2008 found that an estimated 26% of teenage American girls had contracted some form of sexually transmitted disease. Twenty-six percent! This is an unprecedented and extremely serious public health problem. Protecting our children, especially our daughters, should be one of the highest priorities of our families, communities and nation.

We should design social policies to ensure that the physical and psychological health of our children are given high priority. We should NOT make young people losers in our socioeconomic and political systems, or pawns in hot-button ideological conflicts, nor should we allow misinformation to misdirect public policy. Our kids are, after all, vulnerable and impressionable young females and males!

To prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, many of the people who control our government and churches say we must focus on sexual abstinence. Social conservatives are often ideologically opposed to teaching sex education in schools, or to encouraging the use of contraceptives by people who are sexually active. This is patently wrongheaded. These are doctrinaire extremists who apparently believe that sex -- one of the most powerful of all natural biological urges -- can be effectively discouraged by telling boys and girls, and men and women, to "just say no".

Yet our entire culture is obsessed with sex and sexiness. Images of slender nubile young girls are so pervasively pimped by advertisers that it is impossible to open a magazine or turn on television or log onto the Internet without being bombarded by alluring, revealing and sexually suggestive messages. Ooh la la! Boys and men are

subject to these enticing stimuli, and this form of cultural conditioning stokes already strong biological urges and peer pressures. These influences encourage males to "score", and to get girls to "put out", or give in, or even just "hook up" to satisfy sexual impulses. It is obscene to allow the radical right to control our social teachings and deny important education to young people when the consequences of ignorance can have far-reaching effects and implications.

More than 400,000 teenage girls aged 15 to 19 years gave birth in 2009, and more than 80% of these teenage pregnancies were unplanned, and a large proportion were unwanted.

Curiously, there is a remarkably simple reason that social conservatives and religious fundamentalists advocate the abstinence-only method of birth control. It is an obvious yet astonishing reason: *it doesn't work!* This is not just opinion, it is a statistical fact. And why might these folks promote a policy that doesn't work well, given that *non-abstinence* is one of the most powerful motivations in relationships between sex-obsessed males and fending-off females? Again, it's simple and obvious. One reason these folks don't want the approach to work is because pregnancies produce more children that can be indoctrinated into religious faith, or into materialistic consumerism and future profits.

The Struggle Within: Strict Father vs. Nurturant Parent

Consider for a moment the way we think about the basic nature of tyrants and damsels. Tyrants are ruthless rogues. Damsels are a bit dainty and need a hero to save them when they are in distress. Language experts can help us clarify our thinking and allow us to extrapolate our concepts into a valuable framework of human understanding. The famous linguist George Lakoff uses psychological underpinnings of family development philosophies to provide insights into the sometimes contradictory nature of human motivations. He concludes that there are two broad contrasting central metaphors about the relationship of the state to its citizens, and characterizes these two central metaphors as 'Strict Father' values and 'Nurturant Parent' values.

People who hew to Strict Father constellations of beliefs are known as 'conservatives'. Conservatism is characterized by a moral conception that respects strength, toughness, self-reliance, tradition and male authority. It is associated with values that revolve around duty, orthodoxy, self-discipline, sacrifice and puritanism as being proper and right. Conservatives consequently advocate a powerful military and harsh punishment for wrong-doing; they support the death penalty; they believe in the rightness of laissez-faire sink-or-swim economic doctrines, and a minimum of regulations and rules; they demand what are basically regressive changes in taxation that emphasize big tax cuts for the wealthy; they want social program spending to be reduced; they prefer private education to social investments in public education; they advocate gun ownership by private citizens with a minimum of restrictions; they are susceptible to authoritarianism and dogmatism; they oddly oppose dignity in dying; they are often sexually puritanical, so fundamentalists among them adamantly and intolerantly oppose pre-marital sex, sex education, contraception, freedom of choice, safe legal abortions under any circumstances, and civil rights for lesbian women and gay men; and they effectively believe in a rigidity of roles for males and females in which men deserve more control, power, privileges and pay than women.

People who tend toward a Nurturant Mother constellation of beliefs are known as 'liberals'. Liberalism is characterized by moral conceptions that respect empathetic understanding, nurturance and fair dealings. It is associated with values that revolve around social justice, basic human rights, helping others, having compassion, and demonstrating progressive attitudes. Liberals tend to champion strong protections for people and the environment against harm, exploitation and unscrupulous business activities; they advocate actions and policies that are consistent with the greater good, like fairness doctrines, progressive tax reform, tightly controlled military spending, peaceful conflict resolution, a reasonable safety net of affordable social programs and intelligent environmental regulations; they support true justice rather than retributive punishment, and programs designed to reduce criminal recidivism; they oppose draconian punishments for drug use and harsh incarcerations and the death penalty; they advocate sensible regulation of businesses to mitigate the social ills associated with industrialization and poorly regulated capitalism; they want greater safety of firearms and a ban on ownership of mega-clip rapid-fire assault weapons; they believe in public investments in good education and affordable public schools; they are tolerant of others' privacy rights and freedoms to choose how to lead their own lives; and they

effectively believe in equal rights in the relationship between females and males. They believe strongly that future generations should be protected from current day practices and policies that are shortsighted and destructive.

The best course for society to follow would be to choose a healthy, smart and fair balance between conservatism and liberalism. This balance should be characterized by individual responsibility and empathetic Golden Rule consideration for others, and for the greater good. Moderate points of view are critical in public policy decision-making, and excessive extremism is generally contrary to the best interests of almost everyone.

The Continuum of Political Ideologies

There are no absolute rights and wrongs, so it is impossible to make objective judgments about whether one moral system is definitively "better" than another. However, conservatives are generally much more interested in achieving and perpetuating their own narrow ends, regardless of how unfair their means may be. Political and cultural conservatives are therefore much more willing to have people suffer harm in order for them to dominate and control public policy. In a dangerous world, hypocritical self-righteousness and arrogant supremacism are real risky attitudes, and can be highly counterproductive to the formulation of fair and far-sighted public policies.

The proportion of Americans who believed that our nation was headed in the right direction fell to an all-time low of 14% in 2009, according to a CBS poll, while 81% said the country was on the wrong track. Not many people at the time were Pollyanna-ish about the wisdom of preemptive military interventions, or inegalitarian economic and social policies, or the irresponsible use of huge amounts of deficit spending by the government. Most people were starting to suspect that the deregulation of banks is seriously misguided, and that bubble economics, scheming fine print provisions in international trade agreements, the squandering of natural resources, and activities that harm the environment are bad ideas. Only the ignorant, the gullible and those who are blind believers in spin, propaganda and orthodoxy still stuck to the opinion that everything was going quite well.

The severe economic crisis that began unfolding in the autumn of 2008 contributed to this historic gloomy outlook. Rasmussen Reports in May 2012 reported that the proportion of likely U.S. voters who said the country was heading in the right direction had recovered to 30%, and it has stagnated in that vicinity with 28% being similarly optimistic in May 2016, and 24% in October 2017. Since the time President Obama was first inaugurated, this proportion has ranged from a low of 14% to a high of 42%. That's the current pulse of perception in our nation.

Liberals are still being mercilessly belittled by conservatives and people in right-wing think tanks, and these groups tend to have the biggest megaphones for trying to sway public opinion to their essentially anti-populist propaganda. As a consequence, most liberals shy away from the label of being liberal and instead prefer to say they are progressives. In any case, these people look forward, not backward; they welcome new ideas without rigid reactions; they care about the general welfare, and emphasize it instead of the prerogatives of the privileged few; they are concerned about people's health, good public schools, meaningful jobs, fair civil rights, citizen privacy, universal health care, fair housing policies, smart investments in needed infrastructure, protected women's rights, sane environmental policies, and better balanced foreign policies.

The domination of our nation by Neoconservatives during the period from 2000 to 2008 was not good for our nation or the world. Neoconservatism is a reckless right-wing ideology that ironically had its roots in a kind of intellectual utopian idealism. It basically held a simplistic idea: after the Cold War had come to an end, the best and safest situation was regarded as one in which the 'good guys' -- that's US! -- ruled the world. We would rule nobly, and make the world safe for freedom and free trade and democracy and laissez-faire capitalism.

We Americans tend to see ourselves as freedom-loving, honorable, God-approved, morally righteous people. This perspective has unfortunately contributed to involving our nation in aggressive global police-action roles and excessively unilateral foreign policies, and this has led to grave injustices and significantly exacerbated social inequalities. This is an outlook that has served to perpetuate unjust, exploitive, and oppressive American hegemony over other nations in realms of military involvements, surveillance, intelligence gathering, and international economic activities.

Neoconservative policies have been extremely costly in money, blood, military overstretch and stoked opposition and risks related to blowback retaliation. The outcome of these unfolding miscalculations is clear: we rely too much on "hard power", and pathetically fail in diplomacy and good faith. We are consequently faced with economic

adversities, immoderate geopolitical risk and circumstances that are described as moral quagmire, along with environmental calamities and detrimentally wrongheaded priorities. Neoconservatism, it turns out, is not a conservative philosophy, but a deceptive right-wing rationalization for corporatism, irresponsible profiteering, hubris-filled American economic and military supremacy, expanding inequalities and inequities, short-term-oriented public policies, armed interventions, repression and political corruption.

Setting Goals and Improving Our Societies

There is, of course, a degree of tyrant and vulnerable damsel within each of us. To achieve a healthy balance in our societies, we need to moderate impulses toward either unjust domination or cowering acquiescence. We would be wise to mitigate extremes of Strict Father discipline or Nurturant Parent permissiveness. I strongly believe that our societies should encourage the freedom and capability of people to actualize the best within themselves, while also striving to create optimum outcomes for the greater good.

The devil is often in the details. There are many people on both the left and the right of the political spectrum who believe in "social engineering". So the question is, how can we best decide what directions are most desirable? What changes should we support, and which things should we actively discourage? How can we reach a fair consensus on which priorities are the most important? How can we unite people to focus on common goals, and restructure our societies accordingly, so that our national policies are more honorable, fair, farsighted and sustainable? And how can we get people to collectively agree on the best ways of accomplishing positive change?

The first step is to find better ways of reaching consensus on the common good goals that we regard as most important. This must involve broad-minded debate, clear thinking, reasonable compromises, and a passionate commitment to finding win/win solutions. Once we have formulated a smarter master plan, then it will be easier to stay on track to reform our corrupt system and restructure our legislative priorities over the long run. This would help us prevent competing interest groups from selfishly subverting greater good goals. We can be most effective and fair in implementing a more promising master plan by creating powerful incentives and disincentives to affect the behaviors and activities of the entire populace.

Come to think of it, the best first step to take would probably be to prevent moneyed interests from using blaring megaphones to persuade people to support misguided national priorities, and to *Move to Amend* the U.S. Constitution as soon as possible to reduce the misguiding influence of wealthy people and large corporations in determining our laws and national priorities.

We would be wise to integrate the best of libertarian principles and conservative principles and liberal principles into our societies, and streamline the government to work better. We should more reasonably balance competing interests, and do a better job of resisting the influence of entrenched interest groups that have so successfully distorted our national priorities and subverted fairness and stimulated inequality and undermined fiscal responsibility and encouraged military aggression. We should minimize interference of federal and state governments in people's lives when it comes to privacy issues and civil liberties and freedoms of choice. And we should simultaneously ensure that all people are treated fairly in educational and job opportunities, workplace safety, legal justice and national security.

Peaceful Coexistence, Anyone?

Choosing more intelligent and far-sighted priorities is vital. Almost no one would argue, in retrospect, that the best way to have improved the world and made it fairer and safer in the wake of 9/11, given a multi-trillion dollar budget, would have been by attacking and occupying Middle Eastern countries and thus causing social, economic, and political turmoil. George W. Bush had contended, when he was a candidate for president, that the U.S. should be a humble nation, not an arrogant one. In his campaign rhetoric, he appealed for voters to support him and said we should be judicious in the use of military force around the world. As it turned out, his administration seems to have been radically and recklessly injudicious.

At half the price of our invasion and occupation of Iraq, we could have created a more vibrant and ecologically sane economy, reduced world tensions and instability, upheld our moral standing in the world, made the United States more equitable and the world more just, avoided much hostility and recrimination, mitigated serious blowback risks, invested in independence from our addiction to fossil fuels, reduced deficit spending, helped strengthen Muslim

nations against radicalism, saved the lives of thousands of our troops and hundreds of thousands of people in the Middle East, and prevented an incalculable amount of suffering and an untold number of debilitating injuries.

It would have been much less expensive to implement a positive program like the Marshall Plan that helped Europe recover from World War II in the years between 1948 and 1952. Our goal in that plan was to use financial aid to rebuild war-devastated countries and forestall hunger, desperation, poverty and potential chaos. Our preemptive wars in the Middle East have contributed to outcomes that are the opposite. They have made refugees of millions of people, increased instability and caused a horrifying number of people to feel less secure and more desperate, humiliated, angry and hateful, thus providing powerful new impetuses for terrorist groups and their suicidal attacks, and Islamic State barbarity.

When we followed our invasion of Afghanistan by a bait-and-switch tactic of attacking and occupying Iraq, this action proved to be a colossally costly miscalculation. One underlying reason for the launch of the Iraq war was to forcefully gain control of diminishing international oil reserves. This strategy was critically misguided and foolish from the perspective of opportunity costs and adverse unintended consequences associated with this decision. Have we really in any way meaningfully accomplished a noble or rational mission?

Let this outcome inform all future war debates. Join me in being an early adopter of *opposition to the next war*, already.

The Despicability of Despotism

Tyranny is about control and domination, and it can be severely unjust. Human civilizations have been ruled from time immemorial by real despots who exploit damsels as well as men and children. These rulers are pathetic, in contrast to the real heroes who save damsels in distress like the chivalrous heroes often appearing as protagonists in myths, legends, novels, melodramas, comic books and movies.

In any case, fungi are not tyrants. There have, of course, been plenty of tyrannical human beings in the long span of human history, and in the course of countless human relationships. Our societies have many times been afflicted by despotism, arrogance and ruthlessness on the part of those in power. The abuse of privileges is carried to such merciless extremes that it is easy to believe that capitalism and our oligarchic political system are fundamentally predicated upon this propensity to take unfair advantage of others. Capitalize! It is as if our business and political leaders believe in a divine right that entitles them to the prerogative of abusing power, externalizing costs, and enriching themselves and their "friends", often in a corrupt, harsh or pathetically paternalistic manner.

Consequentialist ethics would say that despotism is deplorable in degrees, depending on the number of people that a tyrant adversely affects, and the severity of the oppression, and the exact nature of the injustices perpetrated. The tyrannies imposed by Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung, Pol Pot, Augusto Pinochet and Saddam Hussein are among the most notorious and lethal in history.

During the years of the Bush administration, some say that government officials were guilty of an especially cunning tyranny due to their clever marketing, deceptive motives, manipulative propaganda, dishonest spin, and Machiavellian exploitation of public fears, patriotic emotions and nationalistic impulses. These people point to the imperialistic initiatives of Republicans and their aggression in preemptive warfare, ethics violations, usurpation of executive power, pandering to the wrongheaded right wing, anti-environmentalism, and absurdly disingenuous claims of God's approval. It is difficult to reconcile the high-minded words of those in the Bush administration with the unfair quandaries their policies created. At the time, there seemed to be ironic truth in Albert Einstein's observation that "Force always attracts men of low morality". Years later, Trump, in spades, has arisen.

Another form of uncompromising fundamentalism that is adversely affecting the greater good in the world today is market fundamentalism. There are three primary planks in market fundamentalist ideologies that generally view any measure that imposes costs or limits on business activities as having the effect of "killing jobs" and as therefore being a bad thing. This is a false dichotomy between the economy and the environment that has become a "new-right orthodoxy". The first plank holds that environmental protections are always bad for the economy, so they should be adamantly opposed. The second plank in anti-environmental orthodoxy is uncompromising antipathy to all regulation. The third plank is a misguided obsession with absolute private property rights that features relentless opposition to public land ownership, zoning rules and environmental regulations. Author Frederic Rich

expansively explores these ideas in his thought-provoking book, *Getting to Green*, which has a subtitle, *Saving Nature: A Bipartisan Solution*.

Authority, Tyranny and Blind Belief

We should not allow our leaders to be tyrants who treat us as damsels to be exploited. High up in the hierarchy of real tyrants among us are ruthless followers of control-freak demagogues and those who zealously promote unrestrained corporatism and take advantage of the darker expressions of human nature. Joining these tyrannical individuals are ideological supporters of the Radical Right and of Manichean fire-and-brimstone preachers who exploit people's fears. These tyrants manipulate people and hijack our societies for power and profit, as if satisfying an ego-driven lust for domination. They abuse their positions to advance narrow agendas that are often detrimental to the greater good.

When people blindly believe demagogues and follow authority figures, they become more vulnerable to negative outcomes. Some of the most manipulative leaders who have gained influence over others by playing on public prejudices, anxieties, ignorance and gullibility are:

(1) Adolf Hitler, who was responsible for killing millions of Jews in service of his demagogic assertion that Aryan peoples are superior to all others;

(2) Wisconsin Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy, who red-baited liberals, intimidated intellectuals and artists, and hyped people's fears of communism in the 1950s to gain power and notoriety;

(3) Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, who in the wake of the 9/11 attacks blamed "the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians" and organizations like the ACLU for making God angry and thus supposedly making us vulnerable to the 9/11 attacks;

(4) George W. Bush and his right-wing supporters who took advantage of the anxieties and anger that were generated by the 9/11 attacks to wage a global 'war on terror' that has cost trillions of dollars worldwide and wreaked terrible injustices on millions of people. These policies skewed our national priorities into a wrongheaded agenda of dominion-oriented hegemony, endless war, interventionist nation-building, record levels of deficit spending, and irresponsible inegalitarianism;

(5) David Miscavige, leader of the Church of Scientology, who is portrayed by former members of the cult-like Church in the documentary film *Going Clear* as a hyper-manipulative authoritarian demagogue who abuses his power to indoctrinate believers, control adherents, and both shame and punish those who try to escape the psychologically and apparently sometimes physically abusive practices of the Church. He also exploits the tax-exempt status of the Church of Scientology to amass wealth. And,

(6) The televangelist megachurch pastor in Texas, John Hagee, who claimed that Hurricane Katrina was an act of divine retribution by God to punish New Orleans for its allegedly sinful ways. Hagee harangues people with his fire-and-brimstone preaching to bring attention to his Religious Right gospel. His goal is to get people to support his politically extreme ideas regarding social issues and End Time prophecies and Israel. Presidential candidate John McCain said in 2008 that he was "proud" and "pleased" to have John Hagee's support. Real nice! Hagee strongly advocated that the U.S. or Israel should preemptively bomb Iran. He denounces abortion and speaks out against lesbians and gay men. He claims that Biblical scriptures, as interpreted by fundamentalists like him, are absolutely right and should have overriding authority in our society. In 2016, Hagee endorsed Donald Trump and opposed Hillary Clinton.

The tax-exempt status of religious organizations should be revoked when they are headed by bigots and demagogic leaders like Hagee who interfere in politics, especially when they use their pulpits to gain power and advance reactionary political goals. John McCain should have been more honest, and refrained from pandering to zealots like Hagee for purposes so transparently self-serving and contrary to fairer understandings of the greater good. The American people should recognize the risks and logical absurdities of allowing our nation to be ruled by those who pander to religious fanatics and extreme right-wing ideologies and authoritarians.

"It is of the utmost danger to society to make religion a party in political disputes."

--- Thomas Paine

Earthquakes and Their Philosophical Aftershocks

A destructive earthquake struck Lisbon, Portugal on November 1, 1755. In an epic irony, the strong quake took place at the height of religious masses during All Saints' Day, a Catholic holiday that is a commemoration of martyrs and righteous people. Tens of thousands of people died as a result of this quake, many of them while attending religious services in more than 30 churches that ironically tumbled down on the faithful. Divine trick or treat?!

This powerful tremor had its epicenter deep off the coast of Portugal, and it generated a destructive series of huge tsunami waves that killed many more people in Lisbon and coastal areas in the region soon after the quaking had subsided. Fires also broke out that wreaked further devastation on people in the region.

Theologians of the time tried to take advantage of the Lisbon calamity. Various Christians claimed that God caused the deadly earthquake, and that God was wrathfully punishing evil and sin in Lisbon, which was one of the largest, richest and most opulent cities in Europe at the time. Stupidly simplistic explanations like this were another form of manipulative propaganda designed to strengthen the Church's power over gullible followers.

Philosophers like Voltaire and Rousseau debated the dominant philosophy of the day, which was that of 'philosophical optimism' and the conviction that 'all is good'. In 1759, Voltaire wrote *Candide*, one of the most famous short stories in history, in response to controversies spawned by the earthquake. The optimistic tutor Dr. Pangloss in *Candide* repeatedly assures innocent Candide that this is "the best of all possible worlds", despite calamity after calamity after calamity that befall him.

Another influence on Voltaire's philosophical understanding was the savage absurdity of the Seven Years' War that ravaged Europe from 1756 to 1763. Far-flung colonies of European nations were all affected, including those in America and India, and more than one million people died in this conflict. Voltaire lampooned extreme credulousness and simplicity of belief in this great short story.

It is vitally important for us to consider the dangers of being credulous and having blind faith in shrewdly manipulative rhetoric and authority figures. Every time a natural disaster occurs, religious opportunists rush to blame people whom they hate or can gain power by demonizing. When they allege that God is wrathfully punishing the victims of such calamities for their supposed 'sins', we should all snap to attention and reject these biased, reactionary, ignorant and manipulative claims. I urge everyone to embrace more modern and realistic understandings of cause and effect in the natural world. We would be wise to transcend ignorance, superstition and prejudice, and strive to make our world a fairer and safer place.

Mark my words: Religious fundamentalists are already preparing their explanations of how God will have struck 'sinful' San Francisco after the next big earthquake in Northern California. The debate will rage on for a while, as if there is some suspicious probability that such an explanation could be true. Right-wing bigots will probably claim God is punishing San Francisco because it is an epicenter for regional tolerant attitudes toward gay people, or on account of a 2008 decision by the California Supreme Court that two laws barring same-sex marriages were unconstitutional, or other such things. It will be similar to the hypocrisy and hot-button prejudices of certain Religious Right ideologues in blaming lesbians and gays for 9/11, and for damages done by Hurricane Katrina.

Earthquakes, like storms and volcanic eruptions, are natural phenomena. They are NOT an expression of the wrath of some angry Supreme Being who causes natural disasters to punish 'sinners'!

Some of the most powerful earthquakes ever to occur in the U.S. took place in Missouri, of all places, when a series of tremors struck the New Madrid Seismic Zone between December 1811 and March 1812. Let's harken back to these events. These earthquakes caused epic ruptures in the land, and the mighty Mississippi River even flowed backwards for a period of time. Superstitious people thought that the devil had come, and imagined that the end of the world was near. A geographer and geologist named Henry Schoolcraft was so moved by the calamitous nature of the New Madrid earthquakes that he expressed his emotions in poetry:

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

Every person should feel free to pray for their souls, and the activity apparently even has positive effects on one's

health like some miraculous tonic or placebo, but no one should make the absurd mistake of thinking that God is going to stop the eons-long movement of tectonic plates to accommodate their pleading personal concerns!

This New Madrid fault zone is still active, and strong earthquakes will eventually happen there again, sooner or later. Thus, preparedness is a bona fide good idea. And it will be preposterous to blame God for inadequate seismic protections in the building codes! Just ask the 5 million people in China's Sichuan province who became homeless in the immediate aftermath of a devastating earthquake that took place in May 2008. Many shoddily constructed homes, businesses and schools simply pancaked down onto their occupants.

When the next quake inevitably hits the Midwest, preachers will need to be creative and dig deep to come up with an adequate explanation for why God is punishing innocent, well-meaning and righteous Midwesterners. After all, in August 2004, voters in Missouri approved an amendment to the State constitution that banned same-sex marriages, and many socially conservative Missourians still righteously oppose allowing gay people to have any fair civil rights or domestic partnership rights.

Albert Einstein, who was named Time Magazine's 'Person of the Century' at the end of 1999, once said: "I do not believe in the God of theology who rewards good and punishes evil. My God created physical laws that take care of that. His universe is not ruled by wishful thinking, but by immutable laws." Our thinking and our human laws should likewise not be driven by prejudices or discriminatory biases, or intellectual dishonesty that rationalizes extreme inequities. Nor should our laws be formulated in ignorance, or in accordance with fatalistic beliefs in supernatural causes of natural disasters.

Projections of belief and doctrine and myth and fable provide a provocative context for us to question whether our anthropocentric deities are really the way we picture them. Does God really get jealous or angry? Does God crave recognition, adulation, worship and glory? Is God really an all-knowing, all-powerful, and loving entity? Could God really exist as imagined?

There are positive aspects of anthropocentric convictions that a divine being exists, just as there are positive aspects of stories told in Greek mythology. The Jungian psychologist Jean Shinoda Bolen salubriously summarizes such perspectives in *Goddesses in Everywoman* and *Gods in Everyman*. There is also affective power in the symbolism contained in religious legends, morality tales and other kinds of metaphorical conceptions and beliefs.

Problems arise in the large subset of situations where such beliefs are used for harmful purposes, as they have so often been throughout history. It is revealing to examine the nature of the things we believe in, and the biases that are expressed in the narratives we create. Consider, again, the lichen. Some lichen species live on trees, but are not parasitic on them and do not harm their host trees. Mistletoe, on the other hand, is a parasitic life form that grows on trees, saps their essence, and can eventually kill them. An anthropocentric biologist might judge that lichens are nobler than mistletoe, because in human interactions we generally regard those who make their living off others without harming them as being better and more ethical than those who bring harm to those they exploit. Think about it! (This whole story, incidentally, casts a curious new light on the tradition of a male deserving the privilege to kiss a female under a sprig of mistletoe during Christmas holidays!)

Here in the 21st century, in any case, we could use visionary and farsighted clarity of understanding to properly prioritize our collective efforts to cope well with arising challenges. We need to seek unity and consensus instead of focusing on divisive attitudes, supremacy gambits, absolutist opposition, rash exploitation or other counterproductive ways of achieving narrow-minded goals.

Honorable Accolades, and a Furious Fusillade Against Tyranny

Hypatia of Alexandria has been referred to as the "Lady Philosopher" of Classical antiquity. She was one of the first renowned female experts on the subject of mathematics and scientific rationalism. When she was born around 370 CE, the city of Alexandria in Egypt was a cosmopolitan center where scholars from many civilized countries gathered to exchange ideas. Hypatia's father, Theon, was a distinguished mathematician and astronomer at the famed Alexandrian Museum, so Hypatia grew up in an atmosphere of learning and exploration. Her father was an unusually open-minded person at a time when men dominated the intellectual world, so he encouraged his gifted daughter to develop her mind and understanding, and thus helped her achieve academically what no woman previously had. Theon supervised Hypatia's education and tutored her, passing on his own love of the awe-inspiring

beauty and logic of science to her. In addition to her training in mathematics and science, Hypatia also received a thorough education in the arts, literature and philosophy.

Hypatia's father instructed her not to let any rigid system of religion take possession of her life and exclude the discovery of more accurate scientific truths. Theon told her to "reserve your right to think, for even to think wrongly is better than not to think at all."

As a part of her extensive education, she had traveled to Italy and Athens, where she spent time as a student at the school of Plutarch the Younger. When she returned to Alexandria, Hypatia became a highly respected teacher of mathematics, astronomy and philosophy. Scholars, students and admirers from around the world converged on Alexandria to attend her public talks.

Hypatia gained a reputation of dignity and virtue, and she was appreciated and popular because of her intellectual accomplishments, but she was still vulnerable to a religious and political struggle that was raging in Alexandria. Because she was a proponent of Greek scientific rationalism, she made enemies who hated things like open-mindedness, female empowerment and non-Christian ways of understanding the world, and these qualities may have eventually become factors in her being assassinated in 415 CE.

Alexandria had been founded by Alexander the Great in 331 BCE, and within a century it became the largest city in the world, "and for some centuries more, was second only to Rome." In its early years, it became the main Greek city of Egypt, and was also home to the largest Jewish community in the world. The Roman Empire had gained control of Alexandria in the first century BCE, leading to some intriguing episodes and escapades involving Julius Caesar and Cleopatra and Mark Antony. More than three centuries later, during Hypatia's lifetime, many Romans were converting to Christianity, but Hypatia refused to convert because Christians were hostile to what they condemned as pagan ideas, and they even alleged that these expansive beliefs caused a gradual weakening of Roman character.

One reason that many Christians disliked Hypatia is because she expressed convictions like this: "All formal dogmatic religions are fallacious and must never be accepted by self-respecting persons as final."

Alexandria in those days was beset by intense conflicts between authorities in the civil sphere and religious authorities. The religious bishop Cyril of Alexandria became the powerful Patriarch of the Church in the city in 412 CE, and began a program of oppression against anyone he believed to pose a challenge to Christian authority. After some escalating incidents, he expelled Novatian Christians and Jews from the city, and confiscated their assets in an early example of extreme anti-Semitism. Thus Cyril came in conflict with the civil administration of Alexandria by championing Christian orthodoxy and rigid hegemony with zealous single-mindedness of purpose.

Cyril considered the widely admired Hypatia not only a dangerous pagan but also an enemy because she had considerable moral authority and extensive influence in Alexandria, and she had sided with Orestes, the Roman governor of the province of Egypt. She opposed everything that is implied by tyrannical control of Egypt by the Church. Orestes struggled against Cyril's domineering influence, and he "steadfastly resisted Cyril's agenda of ecclesiastical encroachment onto secular prerogatives".

The conflict intensified, and in March of 415 CE, a mob of Christian zealots formed that was led by Peter the Reader, a minor cleric and major fanatic. A frenzied mob seized Hypatia and dragged her into the cathedral of Alexandria, then stripped her naked and proceeded to dismember her and burn parts of her corpse. Hypatia's violent death made her a martyr for her beliefs, and the vile murder has come to be regarded as the end of Classical antiquity and the downfall of Alexandrian intellectual life.

Cyril was later given the title *Pillar of Faith* and was anointed Saint Cyril. He was regarded as a saint because of his obstinate devotion to political intrigues that strengthened the early Christian faith, but when one thinks of the word "saint", usually you think of a person with much more admirable humanitarian virtues than the ruthless Cyril. Interestingly, not all people admired Cyril's harsh ways, and in fact, according to Wikipedia, the Nestorian bishops at the Council of Ephesus declared him a heretic and labeled him as a "monster, born and educated for the destruction of the church." A monster and a saint?

"Reserve your right to think, for even to think wrongly is better than not to think at all."

Ecological Introspection

Chief Seattle, an American Indian chief of the Suquamish tribe in the Pacific Northwest, once warned the U.S. government against the misuse of land, water, air, and animal life. In 1844 he reputedly said, "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."

Try to imagine this idea from the perspective of another species, like polar bears. The intention of the Endangered Species Act was to protect biological diversity and safeguard the health of biotic habitats, and to ensure that human actions do not cause a risk-laden unraveling of the web of life. The Clean Air Act stipulated that the Environmental Protection Agency, when faced with uncertainty, must choose standards "requisite to protect the public health ... with an adequate margin of safety."

With an adequate margin of safety! The Bush administration so politicized the EPA that the agency regularly sided with Big Business and strived to protect corporate profitability with a *negative* margin of concern for the health of citizens or the environment -- or for other species of life on Earth, like polar bears. In the eight years of the Obama administration, Republicans showed adamant hostility to the EPA and the protection of endangered species. And once Trump Republicans seized control, they have reprehensibly reversed numerous protections of the environment in order to allow polluting industries to spew more toxins into the biosphere and maximize short-term profits.

The EPA is supposedly an independent watchdog agency concerned with the health of people and the environment. But its administrator under George W. Bush was Stephen Johnson, a man who acted like a political operative at the behest of the White House with a different mission. He basically opposed all efforts to ensure protections of the environment from greenhouse gas emissions created as fossil fuels are burned. He did this despite an April 2007 Supreme Court decision, which held that the EPA has the authority to regulate such emissions. Polar bears, threatened with extinction, if they were able to comprehend the big picture of human hubris, greed and political shenanigans, would be very cynical about this. As cynical as a polar bear can be, anyway. They would probably think that human beings are obtuse, inimically self-centered and evil tyrants!

To me, far-sighted and realistic ideas are important. It is vital that we collectively begin to live our lives in ways that are consistent with the greater good over the long run. At the same time, it would be quite propitious for us to be true to the better parts of our authentic inner selves. The ideas in the Earth Manifesto have been set forth primarily to suggest ways that we can accomplish important goals in this context.

The primary themes of all Earth Manifesto writings are ecological sanity, principles of Golden Rule fairness, the well-being of our communities, strategies for peace, win/win solutions to problems, the advancement of personal freedoms, respect for human dignity, and an overarching responsibility for the common good. Wide-ranging points of view have been assembled from an extensive diversity of sources to explore ideas aimed at helping achieve an epoch-defining transition to a fairer and more sustainable existence. My goal in articulating these thoughts is to broaden understandings in general, with the hope that this will contribute to a more salubrious destiny for people alive today, and for those to be born in the future.

Our Great American Hero Mark Twain Weighs In

Mark Twain was fascinated by our race's place in the universe, and especially by the absurdities of religious myths and dogmas. He wrote much of his witty satire, *Letters from the Earth*, in the final years of his life. It was published posthumously in 1962, more than 50 years after he died. This book gives readers entertaining insights and perspective into the absurd nature of orthodoxy and inflexible dogmas of established religions. It is an incisive book that ridicules absurd contentions contained in 'holy books'. Scriptures are, after all, as Ambrose Bierce defines them in his *Devil's Dictionary*, "The sacred books of our holy religion, as distinguished from the false and profane writings on which all other faiths are based." That is a witty way of seeing!

"It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts

that I do understand."

--- Mark Twain

More than 100 years have passed since Mark Twain wrote *Letters from the Earth*. We can now see that ridicule has proved to be inadequate to mitigate the harm that religious fanaticism is causing in the world. Perhaps Mark Twain was wrong in his contention that "Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand."

Sectarian strife is intense today in many Islamic nations like Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya. While sectarian rhetoric that dehumanizes the "other" is centuries old, this cycle of demonization is getting worse throughout the Muslim world. The two most powerful Middle Eastern countries fall on opposite sides of this sectarian divide, with Iran being predominately Shia and Saudi Arabia being mostly a form of Sunni. Many experts are concerned that Islam's divide will lead to escalating violence and a growing threat to international peace and security. People in the Western world struggle to combat the rise of Islamic extremism and the brutality that is being committed in the name of religion.

Islamic terrorism is partially a reactive response to economic, social and military injustices, and to the underlying strife involved with supremacist gambits of established Western religions. This tactic is making the world increasingly dangerous by threatening attacks on Western nations and provoking a costly and violent military/security apparatus reaction. The huge cost of our military interventions and global standing armed forces is threatening to bankrupt the U.S., an outcome that would create an even more unstable world and an incalculable amount of widespread hardship.

Mark Twain has been described as "North America's greatest Renaissance Man." He "traveled the planet, observed and assessed with insight and precision. Nothing he wrote is obscure and little of his work is outdated." I aspire to leave equally significant writings, utilizing Mark Twain's genius and making use of many of his salient ideas, along with those of dozens of other eminent thinkers. The Earth Manifesto is creative in its organization and the thoroughness of its attempt to assemble productive ideas. Its interpretation of history uses extensive portions of the wide body of human thought and philosophy, and some of humanity's most visionary understandings, to clarify issues.

Mother Earth Weighs In

The original Earth Manifesto was first published online in October 2004. It can still be found linked to Part Seven on the Earth Manifesto Home Page (Book Nine, *The Original Earth Manifesto*, is right now available from Lulu Publishing). It was scanned in online as a PDF file so that it could include some of the emphatic calligraphy that was typical of early versions of these ideas that arose before they were put online. This first version of this manifesto on the Internet consisted of 121 one-page Soliloquies. Soliloquy #5 had a long elliptical circle at the top with the title in it: *Letters from the Earth*. A rotund page-encircling dark blue circle appeared below it, containing a three-paragraph communiqué, signed at the lower right by "Mother Earth". Here is what Mother Earth told us in this Soliloquy:

"Lovely to have you human beings around! Life has finally achieved a self-reflective state of consciousness after so many eons, meaning great recognition for yours truly Mother Earth -- for my awesome beauty, and for the extraordinary context of existence in the Universe. As a part of physical Nature, I am naturally utterly indifferent to judging or favoring any particular circumstance or changes, but I must make one thing perfectly clear: My Gaia aspect -- the sum total of all my living systems -- loves itself. I love my beautifully balanced ecosystems, teeming with life in infinite niches, my topography of magnificent mountains and vibrant valleys and superb seas. Please don't ruin everything by hunting all the animals to extinction, by poisoning my life-supporting waterways and atmosphere, and by myopically modifying and destroying my habitats."

"My living systems are fabulous sources of materials for your prosperity and sustenance, like food, fish and timber -- but they are also vitally valuable in a healthy state for the services they provide to the human race. Forests help provide clean water and flood management, erosion control, water storage, regeneration of the atmosphere, and buffering against weather extremes. Likewise, wetlands, rain forests, wilderness areas, riparian habitats, coral reefs, symbiotic communities and other healthy ecosystems are critical for your

survival, so I recommend that humanity whole-heartedly embraces the ideas expressed by Tiffany Twain, and begins to move boldly towards sustainable and restorative activities."

"Listen up, humanity, your home planet speaks! You would be wise to rediscover your native reverence for Planet Earth, the respect and appreciation that were once so germane to your awareness, your hearts, and your souls. You must, for your own good, begin a dramatic Ecological Revolution, and enact positive environmental, economic and social changes worldwide. Commit yourselves to a transformation of human activities consistent with both your own long-term well-being and that of the Earth; and also strive to develop more effective international institutions to help ensure peaceful coexistence amongst all your peoples and nations."

--- Mother Earth

Seeking a New Renaissance

The Renaissance was a cultural movement in Europe during the 14th to 17th centuries. It entailed a dynamic flourishing of artistic, social, intellectual, scientific and educational innovation. The great Renaissance followed the Dark Ages, a five-centuries-long period in which medieval Christianity and the Church dominated "thought" in the Western world through coercive dogmas, the suppression of "heresy", terrible Inquisitions, and a general antagonism to free thinking.

The Renaissance achieved its greatness by embracing the freedom of thought, and by rejecting the inherently puritanical and tyrannical aspects of monotheistic religious establishments. Fluid concepts of divinity helped spark important scientific triumphs of logic and science. This facilitated advances in medicine, technological innovation, artistic creativity, and even the impetus toward revolutionary measures of democratic governance.

Today we would be wise to be open to a new renaissance in thinking so as to cope more successfully with cultural and environmental challenges that are unprecedented in their global scope. Progress is an adaptive force, but it is staunchly resisted by change-averse elements of society. Those who stubbornly oppose change are often backward looking, precisely at a time when we clearly need to be more open-minded and forward-looking. Seeking common ground and good will may be the key.

The need for adaptive flexibility grows greater with every year that passes. We can no longer afford to stubbornly stay the course. We cannot allow our leaders to cling to traditionalism, orthodoxy and strict conformity, nor to engage in extreme entrenched partisanship and opposition to needed change. All is relative, of course, and there are no absolute rights and wrongs, but surely there are ways of being that would be more socially intelligent and collectively propitious. These better ways of being rarely coincide with reactionary opposition to sensible, fair-minded reform. Whatever circumstances come our way, we should strive to make the best of them for the whole of society.

Politics and the Curious Continuum of Differing Perspectives

Every nation's culture has its own competing worldviews and continuum of political propensities. Rather than our country being composed of clearly delineated "red states" and "blue states", there is within every community a broad spectrum of perspectives.

Think about people you know in the context of the political continuum that runs from the radical and freewheeling far left to the atavistic and reactionary far right. Don't people seem to arrive at their personal beliefs less by rational thinking and sensible reasoning than by their upbringing, cultural conditioning, peer influences, tribal identity affiliations and a kind of knee-jerk emotionality? Doesn't there seem to be some sort of mysterious well-spring of belief systems and personality that appears to be practically inborn? Recent studies have found a "startle reflex" that curiously correlates people's political perspectives to complex genetically-inherited propensities of temperament. And the evidence of the impacts of echo chamber propaganda and social media microtargeting of fake news and conspiracy theories and negative attack ads gives proof through the fight that profound influences are afoot. Both nature and nurture are involved in the genesis of people's beliefs.

It is rare to see people shift their attitudes dramatically along the political continuum. When people do change, they traditionally tend to become more set in their ways. In general, the more money that people make, the more they are swayed to the right, where selfish and jealous motives are ensconced in the doctrines of protected

privilege and stubborn defenses of the status quo. I heartily applaud those who are fair-minded and versatile enough to buck this trend and become more empathetic, philanthropic and civic-oriented as they get older, or as they become wealthier.

An Evaluation of Political Performance

A valuable understanding of the foibles of politicians was provided by columnist Dan Milbank in *Homo Politicus*, a book published in 2007. Milbank describes status-conscious politicians and the influence of money and power and scandalous activities from the point of view of an anthropologist, analyzing characters in 'Potomac Land' (Washington D.C.), and appropriately skewers members of both political parties for their ethical lapses, scandalous behaviors and corrupt political activities. Power abuse and hypocrisy and wrongdoing are definitely not strictly confined to one party or the other!

The real scandal in Washington D.C. is not what's illegal, it's what is *legal* for politicians. Super PAC funding, institutional bribery, political slush funds, travel and golf junkets, lavish travel expenses and personal costs foisted onto taxpayers, and a wide variety of ethics code violations are the stuff of legend -- and of entire books like Mark Leibovich's *This Town: Two Parties and a Funeral - Plus, Plenty of Valet Parking!* - in *America's Gilded Capital*, and Peter Schweizer's book, *Extortion: How Politicians Extract Your Money, Buy Votes, and Line Their Own Pockets*.

The wryly witty Sam Clemens, trenchant in his Twainian humorous perspective, observes:

"It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native criminal class, except Congress."

Since 'conservatives' were dominant in power for the first eight years of the twenty-first century, and have been staunchly oppositional during the Obama years, and are now wreaking havoc on norms of propriety, scrutiny of unprincipled conservatism deserves closer attention. Uncompromising stances fervently taken by badly misdirected Tea Party folks make them complicit in undermining greater good goals. Honest conservatives have had their honorable principles and sensibilities exploited and betrayed by politicians who call themselves conservatives. What treachery this is! Sensibly honest conservatives should be outraged and embarrassed.

Voters rejected a "third term" when John McCain lost the 2008 election, denying Republicans the ability to continue policies similar to those of the George W. Bush years. Recall again the nature of policies that were enacted then, under the rubric of 'conservatism': highly regressive changes were made in the system of taxation; the federal government was made bigger, more bureaucratic and much more intrusive in people's lives; ideological initiatives were implemented that exacerbated social status conflicts and increased inequalities; the U.S. acted with arrogance, unjust unilateralism and militaristic hubris on the international stage, harming our nation's moral standing; very irresponsible economic and fiscal policies were pursued; shortsighted initiatives were enacted that seriously perverted our national priorities and made them into a pathetic phantasm of responsible propriety; and our leaders stuck their heads in the sand on environmental issues so as to perpetuate advantages for short-term-oriented profiteers. Instead of dealing with hard choices, leaders chose to exploit the debt-be-damned expediency of deficit spending every year since President Clinton ran a budget surplus, and they failed to establish fairer and more intelligent priorities. It is a pathetic record!

Most of our leaders have been unwilling to tell people what they need to hear, or to be honest and courageous in acting in accordance with what would truly constitute the greater good. What the American people need to hear and know is this: that the government must become more fiscally responsible, less bureaucratic, more fair in its actions, less deceptive, more truthful, less secretive, more oriented toward the common good, less racist, less sexist, and more socially and fiscally and ecologically responsible. The Trump years are providing to be sadly and harshly antithetic to this smarter direction.

Political leaders have given big business more power by failing to enact sensible campaign finance reform, and by facilitating the unethical efforts of pay-to-play lobbyists and no-need-to-pay-as-we-go budgetary policies. Both the Bush and Trump administrations in particular have jumped wantonly into bed with Big Oil, Big Pharmaceuticals, Big Brother, polluters, climate change deniers, the National Rifle Association, corporate Big Media and the enormous Military/Industrial complex. And Republican leaders in particular have pandered too egregiously to fundamentalists of the 'Taliban wing' of established religions on divisive hot-button social issues. Do they not know

that Nemesis, the Greek goddess of divine justice and vengeance, nips at the heels of hubris, and is likely to exact revenge on those who are heedless?

The Ironic Influence of the Religious Right on the Republican Party

The fascinating book *What's the Matter with Kansas* provides a cogent understanding of politics in the heartland of America. Kansas was once liberal, for good economic reasons, and fought valiantly for the interests of farmers and workers. But in recent decades the state of Kansas has rejected the economic self-interest of its people, and this radical about-face seems to have taken place in response to the triumphant tactics of scheming strategists who have seen the light of political opportunism as being found in exploiting wedge issues and pandering to the religious right and the Wichita Koch billionaires.

The Republican Party has sided with socially reactionary extremists on the religious right for years. The Party was ironically almost taken over by fundamentalist religious candidates in the presidential primaries in 2008 when Mike Huckabee made a strong showing in his efforts to capture the Republican nomination. Then in 2012, the religious right showed even greater sway when the self-righteous triumvirate of Michelle Bachmann, Rick Perry and Rick Santorum briefly dominated those entertainingly confused and conflicted Republican primaries. And in 2016, Ted Cruz did ridiculously well in the internecine contest for the Republican nomination for the presidency. These developments have a ring of poetic justice to them. Imagine the headlines: "Republicans pandered promiscuously but insincerely to evangelicals, but then their party was co-opted by faithful believers!" Many of our representatives in Congress today are stubbornly uncompromising Tea Party politicians.

In 2008, Republicans chose to pass the mantle of their presidential aspirations to the supposed "maverick" John McCain, whose lobbyist-managed campaign championed the absurdity of endless war, continued unilateral war-for-oil aggression, discriminatory free-market economics in health insurance, and such things as expanded oil drilling off the nation's coasts and even a gimmicky and unwise "gas tax holiday". McCain basically professed stay-the-course policies and retrogressive proposals that would perpetuate war, and disingenuous influence-peddling corporatism and inequities in health care and the ascendancy of reckless right-wing evangelical religious authority.

Pragmatists like former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger created shock waves in the Republican Party in 2007 when he warned the GOP that their Party was in danger of "dying at the box office" by failing to appeal to a wider spectrum of Americans. They haven't improved since, waging a war against women's rights and failing to work together with Democrats to enact comprehensive immigration legislation. Donald Trump has brashly exacerbated this problem, and his rude brand of politics is exploiting the frustrations and anger of millions of Americans in a bizarre swindle to abuse domineering power by sowing division and hate in the world.

Efforts to merely re-brand or re-shape the image of Republicans are inadequate. Republicans need to be more honest, fair-minded, fiscally responsible, peace embracing, and oriented toward sensible environmental protections. Substantive changes in our national priorities are required, and more clever marketing just will NOT suffice! Dark money is promoting narrow causes, but in distinctly unconstructive ways. Republican Rep. Tom Davis of Virginia said in 2008 that the GOP had become such damaged goods that "if we were a dog food, they would take us off the shelf". And since January 21, 2017, things have gotten worse. Republicans should stop pandering so exclusively to anti-progressive attitudes and corporate prerogatives and inegalitarian social policies and ideological partisanship!

I feel strongly that American citizens should not vote for Republicans until they develop a fairer platform that is more consistent with the greater good. We should demand that both our Democratic and Republican representatives institute Clean Election initiatives and serious reforms of our campaign financing system. The corrupting influence of Big Money in our politics is becoming more blatant every year as Super PACs contribute to the corruption of our political and judicial systems. The billionaire Koch brothers continue to lead the way, and this form of reprehensible institutional bribery is manifesting extremely negative effects on our national politics.

Mere rhetoric, window dressing, and cowardly baby steps are not adequate to fix the Big-Money-rules system that dominates our politics and rigs the system against the people.

Can Art Serve Society?

Passion and inspiration are valuable characteristics in getting things accomplished. Jack London, one of America's greatest writers, wrote compellingly of inspiration. In *Martin Eden*, a novel that is semi-autobiographical, London's protagonist Martin became infatuated with Ruth Morse, a young woman who inspired him with passionate intensity. Martin threw himself into trying to improve himself by reading books, educating himself and trying to make himself worthy of Ruth. Intimidated by her alluring presence, Martin was "like a navigator adrift on a strange sea without chart or compass."

But 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." Passionate inspiration like this can be the source of much hope in the world, partially because such influences can be the catalyst for positive changes. Everyone is a bit lost, in the widest of senses, and these words and ideas are issuing forth to help provide a chart and compass by which we can better see and more wisely navigate.

"Ah, that gives me an idea!", as Jack London's father had a charming habit of saying, just before he proceeded "to elaborate a beautiful truth or what appeared to be a fact in nature heretofore overlooked." Far better societies are within our reach. It is high time people demanded them and helped to actualize them. It seems as though humanity, given a comprehensive and perceptive perspective of existence, might be able to use insights like those contained in this manifesto to transform our cultures and societies into fairer, more sane and more sustainable ones. Such ideas are found throughout these writings and are summarized in detailed plans in *Common Sense Revival - Book One of the Earth Manifesto*, and in Part Four online; see *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*, and the *Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity*.

Let us have healthy and honest debates about these ideas, and seek a more unified consensus on how we should all strive to get along better and improve the prospects of well-being for everyone on Planet Earth, not forgetting all our heirs in future generations. There will be plenty of challenges for the human race in the years and decades and centuries ahead without us acting in ways that create and exacerbate conflicts. We must come together to seek common ground, and honor fair-minded Golden Rule principles. We can't afford to continue to misunderstand others and fight violently over our differences. Even without adversarial goading, our explosive planetary population growth and the ways we are depleting resources and competitive natures are sure to continue to contribute to the impetus for resource wars and desperate struggles for supremacy.

The Value of Humor and Satire

Ambrose Bierce, in *The Devil's Dictionary*, provides a cleverly insightful definition that is quite appropriate to failed neoconservatism:

"Conservative, n. A statesman who is enamored of existing evils, as distinguished from the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others."

Ha --- Such satire! Let's act to honestly replace existing evils with other things, but let's replace them with productive, fair and farsighted national policies! While I have my *Devil's Dictionary* out, and am pondering tyranny, here is another definition to think about:

"Dictator, n. The chief of a nation that prefers the pestilence of despotism to the plague of anarchy." Balance, I say.

Good satire has a constructive purpose: to criticize with humor and wit, with the goal of stimulating an improvement in human institutions or undertakings or activities. Satire seeks not to tear down but "to inspire a remodeling". Few can deny that our nation and world are in critical need of a big measure of smart remodeling!

"Humor must not professedly teach, and it must not professedly preach, but it must do both if it would live forever."

--- Mark Twain

A Balance of Security and Liberty!

Three days before Dwight Eisenhower yielded the responsibilities of the Presidency in 1961, he made a haunting speech about the unwarranted influence of the military-industrial complex, stating:

"Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together."

Well put, Ike! We should always remember that a fair-minded balance between personal liberties and national security should be a cornerstone of our national purposes.

On Competition and Cooperation

Competition is a curious thing. Free-market competition is a marvelous mechanism for creating wealth and jobs, and for compelling people to work harder. Economists and investors love productivity gains! But our economic and political systems are set up primarily to benefit wealthy people and the investor class, so they are unfairly rigged to give a small minority of people the preponderance of benefits gained through increasing productivity. The buying power of the average worker's wages has been diminishing ever since the days Ronald Reagan embraced economic elitism and began to dismantle the New Deal initiatives that helped build a strong and vibrant middle class in America. At the same time, the costs of living have increased significantly, particularly for essentials like food, housing, heating, gasoline and healthcare.

Unintended consequences result from all policy actions. In our late-arriving efforts to become a little less dependent on fossil fuels, for instance, we have given large subsidies to producers of corn and other grains that can be used in making biofuels like ethanol. This policy has contributed to a spike in demand that has driven up prices for grains, and it has stimulated speculation and creating growing hardships and hunger for millions of people.

Inflation in the costs of many basic necessities dramatically diminishes the economic security of tens of millions of men, women and children. Personal economic insecurity is, on the other hand, of little practical concern for the wealthy. These trends of inequality should not only be bemoaned, they should be reversed. Farsighted progressive policies are needed. We must find better ways to prevent shortsighted and regressive policies from being entrenched.

In an even larger consideration, cutthroat competition can be seen to be one of the causes of the deterioration of the global environmental commons. Collaboration and cooperation are what is most needed to protect the commons. We must reconcile competing interests and start to better manage resources, farmlands, fisheries, and old growth forests. We must give greater protections to fresh water resources, lakes, rivers, wetlands, coral reefs, oceans and the atmosphere. We must do this to ensure future generations that they will have reasonable prospects for enjoying prosperous and healthy lives. We must, above all, leave a legacy likely to be propitious for the survival of our species.

To maintain sustainable fisheries, for instance, sensible quotas should be established and enforced. Likewise, to practice sustainable forestry, we should manage forests better and protect old growth stands and make sure that more trees are planted than are harvested. Also, as the production of greenhouse gases begins to have calamitous impacts through extreme weather events around the globe, we must take bold steps to reduce emissions and to mitigate the damages caused by an ominous build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. We must translate "hot air talk" into action. After the Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997 to limit greenhouse gas emissions, it was ratified by 191 nations, but the United States was not one of them. We have refused to lead in precautionary environmental matters, until President Obama began serious climate change initiatives in his second term and the historic Paris Accords were signed by almost every country on Earth. The Pandering-Puppet-in-Chief has declared that the USA will withdraw from the Paris Accords, so things are going to get worse before we turn the corner on this epic challenge. Partially as a result of opposition to sensible climate action, emissions have continued to increase worldwide, and trends are not encouraging. Check out the online Sustainability Index!

We are very fortunate to be living at a time in history when there is still such a great cornucopia of resources on Planet Earth. There are so many marvelous resources to enjoy, so many delicious animals to eat, and so many yummy crops to consume or to feed to the animals we keep for meat or milk or companionship. But we cannot assume that this cornucopia is unlimited, because it is not, and the signs of this are increasingly clear.

The issue of Peak Oil is always near the heart of understandings about the urgent need for changes in our national policies and collective behaviors. There are less than 1.5 trillion barrels of identified crude oil reserves left in the

Earth. We are still producing oil in quantities that allow hundreds of millions of people to fly around the planet on airplanes in record numbers each year. It is rather preposterous, however, to presume that we can continue to stimulate our ravenous demands for this vital but exceedingly dirty resource without inevitably depleting it. We are, after all, burning up more than 35 billion barrels of oil each year. A quick calculation reveals that 1.5 trillion barrels of oil will be used up, at a rate of 30 billion barrels per year, within 50 years. Even if we drill in wildlife refuges and national parks and in risky offshore sites and maybe find another 50 years worth, it is a dirty fuel that is causing extremely negative and costly environmental impacts. Even if we frack the hell out of the rocks underground, it would be a precautionary better plan to wean ourselves from our addiction to fossil fuels by choice, rather than waiting until we are desperately forced to develop alternatives.

Our entire global civilization is built on fossil fuels, and yet we are fiddling while we profligately use them up. Programs to wean ourselves from this dependency should be accelerated, and most of the recoverable reserves of fossil fuels should be left in the ground to prevent disastrous impacts of climate change. Bold conservation efforts, much greater efficiency of use, and wise investments in the development of renewable clean energy alternatives should be given urgent priority!

Historical perspective is valuable. We are living in an era that has curious parallels to the speculative and imprudent Roaring Twenties, just before the Great Depression of the 1930s. That decade-long event wasn't all that 'great' for people! President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the architect of many new economic and social policies that have served America well. He created the New Deal to save the capitalist economic system from itself by infusing it with sensible safeguards, and creating more fairness and a social safety net.

The New Deal involved reasonable regulations, economic recovery programs, and a social security program that made the capitalist system more responsible to the people. The safety net was fragile for many reasons, and many influential conservatives have strived to dismantle it since 1980. This backlash against progressive programs began in earnest with Ronald Reagan, and it has accelerated as rich people, corporations, market fundamentalists and dangerous demagogues have gained more power.

The Social Security program itself has become increasingly unsustainable because it was based on a transfer-of-wealth plan rather than an honest savings retirement plan. Today, basic economics and demographics are catching up with the program, highlighting its flaws and vulnerabilities. It is an absurdly shortsighted expediency to have spent the Social Security 'surpluses' year after year after year. Now that more and more people in the Baby Boom generation are beginning to retire and collect benefits, this financial problem is becoming increasingly serious.

Shortsighted myopia likewise afflicts entitlement programs like Medicare and Medicaid. One good solution would be to completely divorce healthcare insurance from work by creating a new system in which ALL citizens would be covered by insurance. The cost of such a system could be covered by reducing the red-tape bureaucracy that costs an estimated 25% of the more than \$3 trillion spent annually in the U.S. on medical care and insurance. Another idea would be to enact a single-payer plan and alter the insurance industry with its focus on bigger profits every year and its denials of medical coverage. Some form of tax on business could replace the current employer-paid system, which pathetically leaves tens of millions of Americans without normal medical coverage. We need to somehow fix our unfair healthcare system, and provide universal coverage.

Deficit spending is a form of accounting gimmickry that could make all social security programs inadequate as the years roll by. Check out the documentary film, *In Debt We Trust*, to learn about how sadly misplaced our trust in debt really is. Debt and hyped-up materialism are a form of bondage. The use of credit cards has been heavily promoted until it is a thriving industry, but it has become characterized by excessive fees and usurious interest rates. The bankruptcy law passed in 2005 benefitted lenders, but was detrimental to thousands who suffer medical calamities and job losses.

Unsupportable debt is imprudent. Some 30% of Americans have a negligible or negative net worth. Every man, woman and child in the U.S. also basically owes a proportional allocation of the national debt, which comes to almost \$65,000 per person (simply calculated: \$21 trillion in April 2018 divided by 325 million people). The tax and spending policies that have led to this state of affairs need to be balanced and intelligently reformed.

As a teenager, I greatly respected my grandaunt, who had the lovely name Aura. She had a dry and sharp sense of humor and a wonderfully indomitable character. She was wise and thoughtful, and she could articulate an idea so clearly that you nodded your head in recognition and agreement. She had traveled widely and led a quite colorful life and was exceptionally open-minded for her age. The Great Depression of the 1930s had strongly affected her young adult years, so she was very frugal and never extravagant or wasteful, even long after her financial circumstances had become comfortable. Everyone in more recent generations could learn valuable lessons from such a fiscally responsible attitude!

"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

Prudent fiscal precautionary principles would include planning ahead for "rainy days". It would eschew wildly dishonest and short-term-oriented gimmicks. Former Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger floated a proposal in 2008 to fix California's big budget shortfall by borrowing from future lottery earnings, and by promoting the lottery to make its revenues grow. Since lotteries primarily appeal to people without much money, this shortsighted expediency was particularly regressive. It was just one in a long string of short-term-oriented gimmicks designed to appease the populace and avoid making hard choices required to balance budgets.

Californians, like the federal government, need to compromise to progressively raise taxes and cut spending to more nearly balance annual revenues and spending. Ouch! When such courses of action are taken, they should be formulated in smart ways, and fair ways that are reasonable from a long-term perspective. We could stop incarcerating so many marijuana users, and eliminate "three-strikes-you're-out" sentencing, and reform the extremely costly prison system, and while we're at it, reduce the racist underpinnings of the U.S. judicial system.

Citizens and their representatives need to prioritize fairly and intelligently. We can no longer afford to avoid making difficult decisions! Extrapolating California's lesson to the national scene, it appears obvious that an even worse plan would be to increase federal spending and budget deficits while cutting taxes. This tactic may stimulate the economy in the short run, but it increases the potentials for economic hard times. And it is SO irresponsible to people in the future.

The Relativity of Recompense

There are many ways of evaluating ideas, and none of them are absolutely right or wrong. Truth is elusive. When you think about it, simplicity is desirable, but overly simplistic ideas that ignore real and important facts are undesirable. "Everything is relative," to be sure. Albert Einstein proved this as a scientific fact in the physical world. One particularly evocative illustration of the relativity of perception is contained in *Zorba the Greek*, the great book by Nikos Kazantzakis:

"It all depends on the way you look at it ... Look, one day I had gone to a little village. An old grandfather of ninety was busy planting an almond tree. 'What, granddad!' I exclaimed. 'Planting an almond tree?' And he, bent as he was, turned round and said: 'My son, I carry on as if I should never die.' I replied: 'And I carry on as if I was going to die any minute.' Which of us was right, boss?"

Zorba looked at me triumphantly and said: 'That's where I've got you!'

I kept silent. Two equally steep and bold paths may lead to the same peak. To act as if death did not exist, or to act thinking every minute of death, is perhaps the same thing."

During a recent day of lovely, gentle rain, it seemed to me that there is something about falling rain and rushing water that accords happily with the soul. Drought is a threat that affects communities in many places, and this makes falling rain a boon and an almost sublime affirmation of life. Yet if one were a tourist visiting from abroad, the rain might seem like a bothersome inconvenience. And if one were homeless, then rain and wind and cold could be quite miserable. A fierce rainstorm with violent winds can lash out and seem to be malevolent in destructive potentiality. Too much rain can cause devastating flooding -- just ask Texans after another episode of torrential

rains or Iowans and Missourians and others in southern states after one of the periodic rampages of the Mississippi River!

Consider the relativity of perspective in geology, the science that studies physical aspects of the Earth. Geologists tell us that earthquakes are sudden ruptures that occur when tension is released after years of building up as tectonic plates of the Earth's crust move past other plates, or subduct under them. Friction prevents movement between the rocks of the plates, and there are no sharp, well-lubricated boundaries between the plates, so they get 'stuck' until finally they snap. The tremors we call earthquakes are the result.

Californians wonder if there will be another "Big One" along the San Andreas Fault. This fault zone is the contact area between the Pacific Plate and the North American Plate as they move laterally against each other. Many people wonder this, even though extensive evidence shows that there have been thousands of periodic Big Ones over the eons as the San Andreas Fault opened up the Gulf of California, and tore the volcanic Pinnacles in half and moved the western part 200 miles north, and moved Point Reyes far up the coast from the position it occupied millions of years ago. It is basically a certainty that there will be many more Big Ones in the next one million years, during which period the beautiful Point Reyes peninsula will become an island. And within 15 million years, the area where Los Angeles is now, on the Pacific Plate, will move north of San Francisco, which sits on the western edge of the North American Plate. Unimaginable? Incomprehensible? Check the science!

Visualize the Pacific Ocean drained of water and seen from high above in an orbiting space capsule. A long line of more than 80 colossal 10,000-foot to 33,000-foot tall conical volcanic mountains stretch in a long line all the way across the Pacific from the formative Hawaiian hot spot to the deep Aleutian Trench, where the seamounts subduct on the seafloor down beneath the North American plate. In 50 million years, the Hawaiian Islands will be underwater seamounts, themselves approaching this fate. The oldest mountain in this chain is the Meiji Seamount, which is about 80 million years old and lies some 3,600 miles northwest of its formative place above the Hawaiian hot spot in Earth's mantle.

These earth movements will occur independent of whether mankind survives during this eons-long interregnum. In other words, this natural process will continue to take place whether or not 'sinful' human beings survive to live in the lovely geophysical setting of San Francisco's Golden Gate.

Geologic time provides us with a provocative and awe-inspiring perspective: time is practically eternal. In contrast, time seems to rush headlong past us in our daily lives, and we are driven collectively by myopic perspectives and short-term planning. We are particularly shortsighted with regard to our undisciplined consumer activities and collective lack of willingness to make much of any "sacrifice" to invest in protecting the environment that sustains us.

In human affairs, change is accelerating as our numbers continue to rapidly increase. We are depleting resources at an unprecedented rate, essentially blundering into the future. Our planning timeframe barely envisions next year or five years from now, and certainly not 100 years from now. It makes me think to myself: "Self, why do people choose to do so little objective good?"

There is so much we should and could be doing, but NO!, the same old strategies remain dominant. The Establishment consists of vested interest groups that set all-important aspects of our national agenda. A powerful resistance to changing the rules of the game prevents us from setting smarter priorities and goals. Because progress is impeded, risks mount. Conflict escalation is inevitable as long as we continue to cling desperately and half insantly to the same old thinking and policies that we've been stubbornly pretending are right and optimum for so many years.

A spectre is haunting Planet Earth -- the spectre not only of ideologies that promote narrow interests and an excessively inegalitarian status, but a spectre of obstacles that appear nearly insurmountable. Limits loom ever more ominously. We are in the desperate final throes of allowing old ways of acting and thinking to dominate. We still let the powers-that-be jealously protect and expand their great advantages and narrow prerogatives. We allow the international 'corporatocracy' to perpetuate short-term-oriented activities and resist fair-minded reforms and often hinder technological innovations like clean energy projects that could lead us toward a healthier and more sustainable future.

Many people were concerned when the United States entered a recession in 2008. The Federal Reserve and the White House and Congress moved quickly to forestall a slowdown in growth by using huge bailouts and hyper-stimulative spending and tax cuts. As certain as it is that strong earthquakes will rock California again in the future, there will assuredly be economic recessions and depressions again, and they will be international in scope.

To forestall such eventualities, it would have been smartest in recent years to invest in America's human capital with an improved system of higher education, and to invest in the maintenance of our national infrastructure. We should have made bolder investments in innovations designed to achieve independence from our risky dependence on fossil fuels. Instead, we have indulged in huge amounts of deficit spending, created large trade imbalances, squandered trillions of dollars on wars, and clung stubbornly to extremely inegalitarian 'trickle-down' economic ideologies. And we have given huge tax breaks to rich people, and unsustainably stimulated housing bubbles and stock market profiteering, and let financial markets be deregulated, and allowed fraud and abuses of power to take place.

We have also failed to demand strict good governance measures. We have let our leaders circumvent rules and regulations that would have made government more transparent and accountable, and our representatives have made inadequate efforts to limit interpretations of the Fourteenth Amendment, which some people claim gives rights of "personhood" to corporations, even though many of the prerogatives associated with such interpretations involve detrimental socio-environmental impacts.

Here is one very good reason to choose future Supreme Court justices who have less "conservative" ideological biases. It is also a good argument to change the Constitution to limit the tenures of Supreme Court justices, rather than having them appointed for lifetime terms. We need to be able to get rid of anti-adaptive ideological conservatives ("bad apples as they over-ripen").

We are failing to formulate ways to ensure that good citizen goals are achieved. We are apparently incapable of instituting adequate discipline to check excessive impulses of consumers, investors, speculators, corporations and dogmatic conservatives. Check out the valuable perspectives of Robert Reich in his book *Supercapitalism* to better understand how our society has chosen to emphasize consumer and investor goals instead of more important, sensible, honorable and sustainable good citizen goals. A summary of Robert Reich's understandings are contained in Earth Manifesto essays like *Optimizing Change Through Clarity of Awareness and Right Action*.

If just 10% of the specific recommendations in *Common Sense Revival* (and Part Four of this manifesto online) were implemented, our nation and the world would be in much better shape.

In his novel *Sweet Thursday*, John Steinbeck wrote the following about his female character Fauna: "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."

Ah, sad but true! We humans often struggle to figure out who we are, and why we do what we do, and what we should really be doing to achieve greater happiness and to better connect with our authentic inner selves. In times of introspection, we wonder 'What Really Matters'? Well, I believe that larger concerns must gain traction, and that we can and should make a heroic Apollo-Program-like effort to solve the challenges we face. This, ultimately, is what really matters. It is my hope that the rambling thoughts expressed herein will contribute to the larger discourse, and make a positive difference in the world!

We strut and fret our hour upon the stage of life, as William Shakespeare so evocatively put it. Our lives pass, slowly but surely, no matter how well or poorly we do. We can only conclude that good or bad, right or wrong, worthwhile or useless, certain or uncertain, meaningful or meaningless, it is incumbent upon us to abide by the implicit conditions of our flourishing and survival, and to honorably leave the stage in decent enough shape to those who will follow us that they will have a fair opportunity for prospering and pursuing their own hopes of achieving happiness in their lives.

To paraphrase the *Common Sense* pamphleteer Thomas Paine from the revolutionary days of our nation's founding, "These are the times that try people's souls". The decisions we make today will be like words engraved with a penknife on the tender bark of a young oak tree; the wounds will enlarge as the tree grows, and posterity will read

them writ large as definitive testaments to our forethought and intelligence, or alternatively as proof of our overly selfish and foolish shortsightedness. Let's choose to carve a more commendable history!

Yours Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

July 2008 (modified occasionally in 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018)

Thanks for reading!

Germinating Addendum in April 2018 seeking inclusion somewhere in this manifesto

The Founders of our great experiment in democratic governance were united in their opposition to despotism and oppressive rule. In the great U.S. Constitution, these Founders honorably declared that a primary purpose of creating a new form of democratic republic was to promote the general Welfare. To promote the general Welfare! Today, the fact of the matter is that the general welfare of the people of United States, considered in the Big Picture of all 325 million Americans, is in excessively poor and unnecessarily disreputable condition.

Politicians who engage in corrupt influence peddling and deviously self-serving betrayals of the common good are brazenly undermining the general welfare. The American people deserve more fair-minded public servants in Washington D.C. who are focused on making the lives of citizens better, and not merely on enriching themselves.

Now this is a simple thing. Many wise persons over the ages have declared that "United we stand, divided we fall."

To honestly promote the general welfare, we need to place a higher priority on improving conditions for the masses, not just the people at the top. To achieve vastly greater cause for peace, mutual security and hope in our world today, we indisputably need a greater measure of unity and honorable collaboration, and this should be centered around egalitarian justice and ecological sanity. What we really need is progressive policies that are more expansive and inclusive, and much more farsighted. Ones like those articulated by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain throughout the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto. A new dawn lies ahead, crystal clear.

The wrong thing, of course, is to let "conservatives" continue to divide us, and to let them give gigantic amoral corporate entities more power and prerogatives to deplete resources, pollute the commons and create excessively opprobrious working conditions for tens of millions of working people. It is wrong from the standpoint of the greater human good to fail to throw off the rashly rude and harsh hegemony of power-abusing politicians who favor expanded largess for the wealthy through tax cuts rigged to be amazingly generous to those at the top, because such tax cuts come at the expense of taxpayers and citizens who face increased austerity and cuts in funding for public schools, affordable healthcare, social safety net programs, protections of the environment and dozens of other hallmarks of a civilized society. It is fiscally wrong to let our duplicitous representatives facilitate the catastrophically serious scam of allowing taxpayers to be ripped off through mortgaging schemes that add to the already dangerously large \$21 trillion national debt.

Capitalists are pushing their luck in the age-old struggle against working people, in a risk-laden and treacherous case of brazen and dangerous overreach. Corporations are run by capitalist CEOs and persons in top management who strive to maximize profits in many ways that are socially damaging. Their efforts to take excessively unfair advantage of working people are their most disastrous activities, along with their efforts to foist externalized costs onto the masses, who see firsthand how insidiously these corruption-enabled expediencies wreak tragedy-of-the-commons harms.

We must remember that we are inextricably involved in a Bet Situation about the future, and it is incumbent upon us to begin leaving a fairer legacy to the young, and to all those countless numbers of human beings to come in future generations. We simply must give much higher priority to ecologically sane plans and policies. And it is wrong, from points of view of those who understand that investing in mutual security is wise, that slashing budgets for State Department diplomatic solutions to global problems will require more money to be spent on the Pentagon and military readiness and wars.

Donald Trump wants to reduce the State Department budget by more than 30%, hobbling diplomatic efforts, while significantly increasing Pentagon spending. This is foolish, for peace, justice, mutual security and reasonable compromise are existentially important values. Even the hawkish Secretary of Defense James Mattis has argued that, "If you don't fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition ultimately."

President Dwight Eisenhower warned the world in his farewell address in 1961 about the military-industrial complex, "Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals so that security and liberty may prosper together."

Adm. Michael Mullen, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said that the excessive U.S. national debt has become perhaps our top national security threat. Acknowledging the kernel of truth in this perspective, we can definitively declare that out-of-control military spending is dangerous to future well-being.

Dwight Eisenhower spoke at an annual Republican Women's National Conference in March 1956, and made the incisive remark that he felt "the most deep conviction that a political party can be called such only if its whole purposes are soundly based in some moral and spiritual values." He added, "The women of this nation are more concerned in their day by day work, I think, than are men with these values. They have the job of rearing our young, those youngsters who are so dear to all our hearts, and they want them to grow up with the right kind of values imbedded in them so that as they meet the problems of life they will always have a certain kind of principle, or doctrine, or belief to fall back on that will help guide them through the rough spots."

Eisenhower then concluded, "that if a political party does not have its foundation in the determination to advance a cause that is right and that is moral, then it is not a political party; it is merely a conspiracy to seize power." We have had enough with conspiratorial collusion to seize and abuse power, and must now DEMAND better representation of the common good!