

Energy Enigma

The Carboniferous Period of the Paleozoic Era extended from 345 million years ago to 280 million years ago. Sunlight, photosynthesized by plants, was fossilized and stored under sea and rock in extensive beds of what became coal and oil. This is the source of all fossil fuels.

The industrial world seems intent on releasing the vast quantities of carbon locked up in this process into the atmosphere, rushing lemming-like towards a precipitous exhaustion of oil supplies within the next 100 years.

The Overview provided by President Bush for a National Energy Policy indicates that in the next 20 years, the consumption of oil in the U.S. will increase by 33%, natural gas consumption by 50%, and demand for electricity by 45%.

In extraordinary contrast, Amory Lovins of the Rocky Mountain Institute indicates that we have the technological ability to reduce overall energy use by 80%, creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs in the process, dramatically reducing our dependence on imported oil, improving our national security, and significantly reducing negative impacts on the environment. The Rocky Mountain Institute also estimates that electricity use in the U.S. could be cut in half at a savings of \$50 billion per year without any reduction in our standard of living.

The Rocky Mountain Institute is an independent, non-profit, entrepreneurial, non-adversarial, trans-ideological organization that fosters the efficient and restorative use of resources to create a more secure, prosperous, and life-sustaining world.

The National Energy Policy proposed by Republicans was written by self-interested oil industry executives. (Vice President Cheney refuses to identify those who wrote this shortsighted plan.) The plan appears to be primarily designed to more aggressively consume non-renewable resources in order to maximize the profitability of oil, coal, and nuclear corporations that make enormous political contributions to influence public policy.

Who should we trust? Think about it!

The United States Senate in May 2002 once again gave in to Big Auto and Big Oil industries in rejecting better mileage standards for vehicles. In other words, powerful Special Interests once more triumphed over common sense: that is, against the understanding that we must take steps to use the limited resource of petroleum more efficiently, and less wastefully, producing less pollution --- and we must wean ourselves from our subsidized addiction to the profligate consumption of this vitally useful, valuable, versatile, dirty, non-renewable resource.

"What kind of car would Jesus drive?"

No War for Oil!

The Vulnerability of Achilles

Achilles was the swift and nearly invincible hero of the Trojan War, as related in Homer's Iliad. He was the son of the nymph Thetis, according to Greek mythology, who had dipped him as an infant into the River Styx, and thus made every part of his body invulnerable --- except the heel by which she had held him. He was killed on the Trojan battlefield by an arrow in the heel. **America has its own Achilles heel, a dangerous vulnerability created by an ironic combination of causes. Our Achilles heel arises from the following:**

Firstly, we are addicted to the subsidized squandering of vital non-renewable resources, especially of fossil fuels. We allow our addiction to grow, becoming increasingly dependent upon foreign sources of oil and natural gas, rather than taking steps to reduce our dependence through measures emphasizing efficiency, conservation, and innovations for alternatives.

Secondly, we adhere complacently to a corrupt economic system, which fails to take into account the depletion of resources and the poisoning and destruction of the ecological foundations upon which our fate depends. Rather than incorporating the full costs of the wasteful use of fossil fuels into the price of products, we allow the petrochemical and automobile industries to foist costs of pollution, global warming, and potential cataclysmic human-caused climate change onto society and the world.

And thirdly --- equally absurdly --- we allow the political expediency of saddling the future with enormous debt. This represents a greedy, self-centered and very shortsighted fiscal irresponsibility. We risk financial turmoil and social instability, rather than more fairly facing up to the problems of today by requiring all spending to be financed by balanced budgets.

We compound this concatenation of failings with righteous, aggressive militarism, in the misguided attempt to arrogantly tilt the tables more in our favor and to defend our wrong-headed policies. This is our mortal weakness. Our vain and selfish struggle for supremacy is being achieved at a great monetary cost, as well as an enormous social cost at home and abroad. This threatens our national security. We would be better advised to pursue the resolution of conflicts through respectful, cooperative, courageous, and committed striving for peace.

How can we possibly reduce the danger of these vulnerabilities? Think about this as you drive on a freeway with gas-guzzling vehicles speeding past in great numbers, or crawling along in a maddening traffic jam. Wow! ~~~ Eureka!! ~~~ We could address ALL of our addictive failings simultaneously!! It would be simple: Begin to tax gasoline more heavily, establishing annual increases in federal fuel taxes. Use 50% of the revenues generated by this tax to mitigate the regressive impact of these taxes on poor people and small businesses, in the form of tax breaks to offset the higher energy costs. Use the other 50% of the revenues to promote convenient and safe public transportation in urban areas, to pay for the adverse impacts of air pollution, to help auto manufacturers retool to create more efficient vehicles, to facilitate emissions trading programs to reduce global warming, and to reduce budget deficits. What a concept! The millions of people who are continuously using oil on our roads will thus help finance the solution to the problems they are causing, instead of wasting the resources our descendents will need and leaving future generations with greater weather extremes, reduced biodiversity, intensified conflicts and increasing debt.

The Achilles Heel of Humanity

The human race compounds the Achilles heel vulnerability of America, as elaborated in the prior page, with additional unnecessary risk factors. These international problems are:

- (1) We compete increasingly aggressively to speed up the pace at which economic growth uses up limited resources, sheepishly acquiescing to unbridled consumerism, unwilling to moderate our consumption or more aggressively protect resources --- and we ignobly ignore the imperatives of ecological sustainability.
- (2) We choose not to create bold programs to educate and empower girls and women worldwide, and we allow reactive elements of society to oppose women's reproductive health care programs, sex education, and family planning programs and the use of contraceptives --- thus ensuring continued rapid population growth.
- (3) We fail to cooperatively create, support, and fund international institutions capable of dealing with inequities, injustices, conflicts and war. And,
- (4) We allow dictators, ideological political extremists, and fundamentalist religious leaders to gain power, and fail to keep war hawks, the right wing and small minorities from power --- resulting in harsh, regressive, repressive and militaristic control of the affairs of many nations.

Complexity beyond comprehension characterizes our choices, both conscious and inadvertent. There are always two sides to every story, and it behooves us to try and understand the side opposed to our convictions. The unintended consequences of our actions create risks to our future well-being, so it seems wise that we convene and empower bipartisan, independent thinkers to determine how to best choose more intelligent, rational, sensible, and sane courses of action. AND, we should further try to find much more effective ways to allow ideas to be widely debated, and then to better implement the ones that are superior.

**"I am not saying, as Marx did, that capitalism contains the seeds of its own destruction; but that it contains the seed of its own transformation.
And that it is high time it started to nurture those seeds."**

--- The Aristos, John Fowles

**"The crisis consists chiefly in that the old is dying
And the new is struggling to be born."**

The current economic, political and social systems of humanity are simply NOT the best that we can do to optimally govern, to create meaningful work, to manage people's needs, and to protect people and the environment from unnecessary harm. Let us seriously undertake corrective actions, keeping principles of fairness and sustainability firmly focused in our decision making and policy formulation!

"A radical is a man with both feet firmly planted in the air. A conservative is a man with two perfectly good legs who, however, has never learned to walk. A reactionary is a somnambulist walking backward."

--- Franklin D. Roosevelt

Uncompassionate Conservatism

A nation's culture is a complex battleground of ideas and influences. The acceleration of change in the last 50 years makes it ever more important that we find new responses to change. We need new adaptations and a moving forward to facilitate coping with the unprecedented challenges the world faces. This social and cultural evolution must exhibit a willingness to seriously address new developments. Inflexibility and rigidity are counterproductive.

Conservatism is by definition "a disposition to maintain the existing order, and to resist or oppose change or innovation." Conservatism today is characterized by a specious persuasiveness that appeals to resolute steadfastness, using rhetoric that is very cleverly deceptive. It pretends compassion, co-opting the energy of empathy towards fellow beings, in order to manipulate behavior to achieve its ideological ends. But compassion truly resides in a more caring, "put-your-money-where-your-mouth-is" concern for others.

The new Conservatism righteously espouses moral values that unfortunately seem to be ultimately socially irresponsible in many ways. Conservative doctrine, in practice, vigorously opposes many helpful social programs, sensible environmental regulations, limitations to special privileges, equal rights for women, sex education, contraception, fair progressive taxation, common sense gun safety and automatic weapons legislation, the legalization of medical marijuana use, dignity in dying, peaceful respect for the autonomy of foreign nations, and open-mindedness in general.

Simultaneous with claiming the moral high ground, Conservatism embraces the distinctly ruthless and uncompassionate doctrines and principles of the right wing, pandering to the interests of elite minorities and religious fundamentalists. They often subordinate reason to faith and conviction. In order to advance its Stern Father agenda, current conservatives in the government often discredit or disregard unbiased scientific evidence, formulating policy that is influenced by biased industry representatives and lobbyists, extremely partisan "think tanks", and inflexible dogmatic beliefs.

The resolute, stern "tough love" of the distinctly uncompassionate conservatives is reminiscent of the repressiveness of the Prohibition Era (1920-1933), when the Establishment tried to stop society from drinking alcohol by making alcoholic beverage production illegal, enforcing the ban on "moonshine" with very harsh penalties. Just as Prohibition was spectacularly unsuccessful in dealing with social problems caused by alcohol, the War on Drugs is proving to be a great failure in its high costs, proliferation of demand, harsh penalties, exacerbation of criminal activities, and the arrogant militarism of interdiction efforts. Fundamentalism seem fundamentally flawed to me!

There is a pendulum effect to politics, as there is with parenting: when discipline is emphasized, the next generation rebels in favor of freedom, which results in a longing for structure. We currently risk authoritarian tyranny and even fascism, arising from a need for security in the wake of 9/11 attacks --- and our American nationalism has become more belligerent; conformity seems to have become more compulsory, and dissent has been treated as if traitorous, while Conservatism has become more stubbornly insistent on dominance. Our ruling Conservatives must moderate the extremism of their positions, and American voters must elect candidates who are more broadminded and fair.

To Think or Not To Think

Advertising, media manipulation, propaganda, right-wing “think tanks”, and fundamentalists of various religions all conspire effectively to bend the perceptions and motivations of the public to their purposes. This is true whether it is to convince us to buy their products, to give them more money or increased power, to follow their often-misguided vested interest agendas, or to support their dogmas. Inadequate recognition is given to the effects of these influences. Consequently, there is a tendency for us to fail to see clearly, to interpret correctly, or to value honesty, integrity, understanding, healthy perspective, moderation, simplicity, balance, peace, and respect for vital natural systems.

There are over 300 Industry-funded organizations that work to help Big Business and the Wealthy convert their vast economic and market power into political influence. They have neither the neutrality nor the more impartial expertise of the academic think tanks after which they are fashioned. They are distinctly in ideological lockstep with Corporate interests, and with the doctrinal conviction, despite evidence to the contrary for society as a whole, that government regulations and environmental protections are bad.

Conservative propaganda, rhetoric, harangue, and controversy fills television programming and radio talk shows. Corporate-backed organizations like the Brookings Institution, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute, Citizens for a Sound Economy, the Young America’s Foundation, and the Federalist Society powerfully influence public opinion, the media, politicians, and judges. There is a relentless barrage of contentious “No Spin Zone” and “Savage Nation” programming and confrontational Conservative personalities on the airwaves. Some claim to be Fair and Balanced. Some see them as blatantly partisan. The 2004 film, “Outfoxed”, makes clear the extent of such bias in our media, and the amazingly distorting effect it has on public perceptions.

Conservative talk radio dominates the airwaves. Good entertainment? Arguably, it is. Valuable perspective? Arguably not!! It often represents a harsh, antagonistic, simplistic, unsympathetic crusade against progressive thinking, pandering to the public’s most ignoble instincts and basest sensibilities. It seemingly strives to goad us on to ever-greater depths of selfish, intolerant, ethnocentric, and uncompassionate feeling and action. You know, such things as aggression, vindictiveness, spitefulness, self-righteousness, and a pronounced lack of empathy and charity for others.

How can we ferret out the truth? We are like the proverbial frog in the pot of water slowly being brought to a boil. Help!! Our democracy is diminished by misinformation, by a lack of basic balanced ethical journalism, by the conservative Corporate control of television programming and radio, and by a correlated lack of critical thinking.

Let us not be Blinded by the Right! Demand that competition not be stifled and that the media is not allowed to be further concentrated in the hands of a few. Archconservative Rupert Murdoch, and dominant radio mogul Clear Channel Communications, already have too much influence! Support more generous public funding for independent public broadcasting like that on PBS television stations and NPR radio stations.

Sagacity, Perspicacity, and Practicality

“There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the heart.”
--- Henry David Thoreau

“Justice is conscience --- not a personal conscience, but the conscience of the whole of humanity.”
--- Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Tiffany Twain suggests that it would be far wiser to focus our efforts, energies and resources on addressing the causes and consequences of problems, rather than declaring war on the symptoms. In the last 25 years, the United States has been on the biggest binge of prison building in the history of civilization. The reason for this is to punish criminals for their crimes by taking away their freedom, which is our American individualistic “magnetic true north”. This logical penalty is both deterrent and retribution, but unfortunately addresses only the results of social problems, for the most part, and not the causes and contributing factors of crime.

Consider the War on Drugs, for instance. The illegal use of drugs has negative consequences for many people, including users, families and crime victims. But harsh penalties and draconian drug laws contribute to the overcrowding of U.S. prisons, and the financial and social cost of the punishment far exceeds what would be incurred by legalizing drugs, taxing them heavily, and using the revenues generated to address and mitigate the societal and individual costs associated with drug use.

A small-time drug dealer selling marijuana may have few alternatives in a neighborhood with very high unemployment, and is actually manifesting a classic characteristic of capitalism --- taking advantage of an opportunity with enterprising initiative.

Conservative doctrine is enthusiastic about protecting society by enacting harsh laws, assessing harsh penalties, and putting those who break the law in prison. But it is ironically and inequitably strongly opposed to spending money on any social programs that deal with the lack of safe childhoods for poor people, or for educational opportunities and productive employment for the disadvantaged.

And consider the War on Terrorism. It is extremely expensive and aggressive, and almost certain to create considerable injustices, very likely strengthening terrorist movements. No consideration seems to be given to the causes of terrorism, which are embedded in our unjust and unfair economic policies, our arrogant foreign policies, our heavy-handed interferences in the affairs of other nations, and our doctrinal propensity towards military domination.

Let us begin the long process of solving problems in the world, instead of just exacerbating them! We create a society of glaring inequities, of inequality of opportunity, of extremes of privilege and powerlessness; then we defend the system with authority, rigidity, moral self-righteousness, stinginess, repressiveness, and intolerance. It seems like a very unfair and counterproductive strategy to me!

The Potential for Progressivism

Institutions in every country on Earth are failing to act responsibly from the viewpoint of fairness, sustainable resource usage, ecological health, and protection of biodiversity. We must reform and redesign our economic systems to protect the world from social instability and ecological collapse. Every government and every society is faced with the need to try and manage and control its people, its resources and its finances. The de facto social engineering that is done in every country would optimally recognize paramount goals of being tolerant, fair, and democratic --- and should embrace basic humanitarian freedoms.

We need a new political party in the United States --- The Progressive Party. Let the Earth Manifesto represent its founding tenets! It shall be a party that strives for peace, a visionary party that is not beholden to the Vested Interests of today's Republican and Democratic Parties, and is therefore able to pursue policies that are in the best interests of the majority, of concern for ecological sanity and future generations, and of our long-term prosperity.

The representative government of our American democracy has many foibles that need to be corrected. These include:

- (1) Ideological wars, culture clashes, and game-playing strategies defer or neglect honest problem-solving that citizens need, creating gridlock at a time where accelerating change confronts us --- a juncture in history where we need more efficient, more accountable, more fair, more responsible, and less intrusive government.
- (2) Partisanship trumps practicality, leading to an ossified Two-Party System where elite groups grab control and work to confuse issues, to overly simplify them, to encourage divisive "we're Good, they're Evil" convictions, to use fear and orthodoxy to manipulate voters, and to conduct sweeping attacks on anyone who threatens the elite's power by seeking real positive change.
- (3) The nature of the financing of campaigns lead to vast corruption, "like legalized bribery meeting legalized extortion."
- (4) Lobbyists and Special Interest groups coerce politicians into decisions that work against public well-being and the common good.
- (5) Minorities and smaller political parties are locked out of power, and their interests are hopelessly underrepresented.
- (6) Collaboration and cooperation between the two dominant political parties is diminishing due to contorted voter district gerrymandering, and to the bullying of doctrinal leadership.
- (7) The Federal Government is too intrusive in its citizen's lives, ignoring or drowning out the best ideas for solving problems, enacting requirements without funding for States and localities, indulging in irresponsible "financial trickery", passing laws that are unconstitutional, and enacting stealth legislation through last-minute riders, overly complex provisions, and crisis-inspired attacks on civil liberties.

In a grand irony, the Conservatives, who would be expected to be the party of fiscal discipline and responsibility, are dominated by anti-change Vested Interests, who demand more for themselves. Liberals have been assaulted by vituperative pundits and right-wing think tanks, eliminating their effectiveness in creating positive change. In effect, we have a One-Party System dominated by Big Money, which is causing Planet Earth to be ravaged at an increasingly rapid rate. Social instability is increasing, rather than security and stability. The ideas of the Progressive Party must be embraced to improve our prospects for the future.

The Adaptive Value of Versatility

Human societies are in a profound flux, as change accelerates in technological, economic, environmental, social and political arenas worldwide. Changes are taking place so rapidly that our institutions are not keeping pace. All of the really important problems facing humanity are more and more global in nature, and it is becoming increasingly necessary to develop and support international institutions and laws capable of dealing effectively with these problems.

The ballast of tradition, customs, conservatism, and religious thought acts as a stabilizing force to mitigate the risks of radical change occurring in our societies --- and yet there is also great risk in failing to adapt to changing circumstances. It seems clear that we must begin to err on the side of progressive adaptation, rather than on the side of stubborn Conservatism.

There is a seemingly unconscionable wrong-headedness to the many policies implemented in the last few years that create greater hardships for people, that favor the already privileged at the expense of the underprivileged, that effectively divide our society and erode its fairness, that create distinct injustices and greater inequities, that prioritize spending to far too great a degree on authoritarian initiatives, and that consequently make everyone less secure.

The brightest future is one where sovereign countries deal with each other flexibly, and diplomatically, negotiating, making political settlements, avoiding war, using respectful dialogue, and working together to find common ground. We must be creative, open and versatile in accepting new ideas, ones that have greater utility than the old ones that change has rendered dysfunctional. We must keep our vision attuned to the long-term consequences of our actions, and to the common good.

The clash of fundamentalisms is distinctly endangering the world here in the early 21st Century. Building bridges with other nations of the world and with peoples of differing religious beliefs, not burning them becomes increasingly important in the international arena. We must begin to embrace an era of cooperative problem solving, rather than intensifying the struggle for supremacy and control.

It is today an essentially ignored, age-old understanding that we must respect Mother Earth and fellow creatures on the planet, and that this respect includes a healthy appreciation for Nature's ruthlessness towards those who violate her simple certainties. The Gaia perspective gives us the insight that the Earth functions in the manner of a self-adjusting organism, with adaptive abilities similar to those of a metabolic system: efficient, impersonal, and crushingly powerful. Gaia manifests a creative, impartial and overriding evolutionary determination to survive and thrive, through its biological variety, and its processes of competition, adaptability, cooperation and the symbiosis of its various life forms.

We cannot continue to intensify our assault on nature. Mark my words! We must boldly act to mitigate our destabilizing damage to natural systems, achieving a more harmonious rapport with Gaia and its community of life.

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
If I am only for myself, who am I?
And if not now, when?"

--- Rabbi Hillel, a contemporary of Jesus

Politics and Preposterousness

Eleven score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a new era of warfare on an international stage, strutting and fretting, driven by post 9/11 outrage and insecurities, by neoconservative ideologies, and by mercenary influences.

Americans tend to distrust their government's size, bureaucracy, wastefulness, misguided directions, chicanery, and intrusiveness in times of peace --- but to trust their federal government during times of war and external threat. It is unfortunately true that our leaders betray our trust during times of war, as private plunder and profiteering at the public's expense insidiously intensifies.

It is very curious that the United States is now involved in a War Against Terrorism that will be more endless than the Cold War, one with giant private contracts for security and reconstruction --- one that involves fundamental, growing injustices and inequalities, a war that is clearly self-perpetuating in its cycles of aggression and reaction, and one that is frighteningly Orwellian in its "doublethink", its authoritarian self-justification, and the nebulousness of the enemy.

It is a fact, not just cynicism, that the government of the United States today is one of Special Interests, by Special Interests, and for Special Interests. It is no secret that giant corporations in America with insider ties to the government are benefiting enormously from war. It is thus not a surprise that the clamor for war is almost always much more influential than the pressure for peace.

Yet it is peace that the world must achieve. Americans must not allow vested interests and pro-war propaganda to sway them and their elected representatives into support for war on other countries. Let's give peace a chance! Let's renounce the Bush Doctrine of "preemptive warfare" on other nations. Let's cut military spending significantly, and invest the savings in a Palestinian homeland, and in programs that mitigate injustices in the world, that promote sustainable development, that educate and empower women worldwide, and that improve relations with other peoples. We cannot accept the lurch of humanity towards acceptance of war as a means of conflict resolution, ethnocentric supremacy, or economic dominion.

Tiffany Twain
November 19, 2003

"The modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness."

--- John Kenneth Galbraith, economist

Peace and Potentials

Human beings killed more than 100 million other human beings during the 20th Century. It is probable that the 21st Century will see more wars and killing than this. For one, there are a lot more people --- the 20th Century began with fewer than 2 billion people, and now there are more than 6 billion. Secondly, the competition for resources, fuel, food, land and control becomes greater as limited resources are used up and the human population continues to grow. Thirdly, the disparity between the desperate poor and the greedy wealthy is greater today than it has been at almost any time in history. This growing social injustice is a danger to peace and security for all. Throughout history, it is seen that the concentration of wealth is periodically alleviated, either by wise peaceable partial redistributions, or by violent revolution.

Injustices also spawn terrorism, an effective tool of the weak against the strong, which creates fear and insecurity, reinforcing militarism instead of peace.

The world has spent \$40 trillion --- that's an incomprehensible 40,000 billion dollars --- on military forces and weapons, since World War II. In the same period, less than 2% of this amount has been spent on peace building. Global arms sales feed a vicious cycle of violence and exploitation and debt, and invariably cause far greater suffering and destruction than the economic gain derived from the sales.

“In environmental affairs, in health care, and in other issues, there is a growing recognition that ‘an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure’. The same generally holds true for peace and war. Full-cost accounting, long overdue, would make it abundantly clear that ‘national security’ through ever-increasing military prowess carries a prohibitive price tag.”

State of the World, Worldwatch Institute, 1995

The military sector absorbs enormous resources that could help reduce the potential for violent conflict if, instead of being dedicated to militarism, they were used to invest in human security -- in health, education, affordable housing, public transportation safety, poverty eradication, social justice, and environmental sustainability. In addition to the direct costs of militarism and war campaigns, there are very high costs of war-related deaths and injuries, disabilities, post-conflict reconstruction, economic and social disruption, residual antagonisms, retaliation, escalation, refugee repatriation, and munitions and land mine clearing in war zones.

Money spent on peace building is money very well invested, cost effective, empathetic, safe, sound, sane, humane. We would be most wise to shift spending from military activities to establishing better international relationships, to peace building, to demilitarization. True security is in peace, not war, not militarism, not in a police state. We must strive to be better neighbors, to help others help themselves, and to respect the sovereignty of other nations. We must commit ourselves to sustainable development, to peace, to demobilization, to mutual security, to education and poverty eradication, to striving to make the world safer and more just!

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

*On the true price of honor, glory and patriotism, as explained by “His messenger”,
The War Prayer, Mark Twain*