



Love in the Time of Choleric

February 1, 2023

A PREAMBLE IN WHICH THE AUTHOR OFFERS HER SERVICES AS A GUIDE, INTERPRETER, VISIONARY, COMPETENT ASSESSOR AND FIGURATIVE SEDUCTRESS, AND SUMMARIZES THE BROAD TOPICS CONTAINED IN THIS EPISTLE: LIFE AND DEATH, VIRAL CONTAGIONS, LOVE AND HOPE, DOUBT AND FAITH, PROVOCATIVE PARABLES, SURREAL EPISODES OF ASTONISHING FOLLY, PERVERSIONS OF JUSTICE, THE THIRST FOR POWER, UNNECESSARILY DIRE PREDICAMENTS, SHAME-FACED IGNOMINY, MASS DELUSION, OFFENSIVE AUTHORITARIAN ANTICS, VILLAINLOUS TREACHERY, THE ADVENTURES AND MISADVENTURES OF POLITICIANS AND CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY, TRIUMPHANT VAINGLORY, ANTAGONISMS AND ANGER, INTRIGUING PROPHECIES, CURIOSITIES AND CONUNDRUMS, MUSINGS AND AMUSEMENT, SLINGS AND ARROWS, SESQUIPEDALIAN SPECULATIONS, ABSURDITY AND LAUGHTER.

Thousands of poems and song lyrics have been penned passionately extolling the virtues of love. The Beatles sang, "Love, love, love ... All you need is love." I love this sentiment, but am not naïve. There are a remarkable number of countervailing forces that sabotage love, most of them undergirded by selfish greed, overweening ambition and a paucity of empathy, compassion, moral character, mindfulness and a fair commitment to social justice. Love is most genuinely expressed, it seems to me, in honestly caring for the health, well-being and happiness of another, and of others -- and not in phony scheming dominion-demanding conservative ideologies and abuses of power.

As Antoine de Saint-Exupery heartfully puts it in *The Little Prince*, "Here is my secret. It is very simple: one sees well only with the heart. The essential is invisible to the eyes."

Jonas Salk, who invented a vaccine to protect the public against polio, once said a simple and extraordinarily moral, necessary thing: "Our greatest responsibility is to be good ancestors." Jonas Salk was exceptional in his degree of altruism, famously having told journalist Edward Murrow that he didn't seek a patent for the polio vaccine because he equated the thought to patenting the sun. While polio was a devastating worldwide affliction in the early 1950s, today there are only two countries in which the disease still persists -- Afghanistan and Pakistan.

What, one might wonder, do plain facts indicate about the likelihood we will be regarded as good ancestors? There is no doubt. We are leaving a legacy of a destabilized global climate, depleted resources, toxic wastes, polluted waters and skies, a pathetically divided populace, record levels of public debt, societies afflicted by extreme inequalities, and jealous rich people imposing a harshly rigged economic system and corrupted governance on the people. And there is a manifest inability for our representatives to deal effectively and intelligently with these overarching problems. Meanwhile we are driving a million species of life toward eternal extinction, threatening the well-being and survival of the human race.

The philosophic teacher Buddha insightfully indicated that everything is interconnected, meaning any story can be understood starting from any place. Let's start here, right now, as the worst pandemic since 1918 is ravaging the global populace. Let's start by seeing clearly that a positive resurrection of our own informed choosing must arrive.

Right Understanding is a solid foundation for all attempts to formulate plans for Right Action. National policies, when sensibly designed, are consistent with the common good. They should not ignore common good values -- or the fates of our descendants in future generations. This is why the most important plank in the far-reaching proposals set forth in this manifesto is the guidance contained in a *Bill of Rights for Future Generations*.

Republican President Theodore Roosevelt was an outspoken proponent of universal health insurance. He reasoned

that, "no country could be strong whose people were sick and poor." In the United States, we are now seeing the unbelievably costly and deadly folly of a for-profit healthcare system that strives to maximize profits by forsaking tens of millions of people because they are poor, or are not paid living wages, and are thereby relegated to being unable to afford healthcare. When they fall through the cracks, and a pandemic virus haunts the land, it is emergency room costly, and physically endangers all.

Knowledge can save lives, and ignorance and denial can kill. Experts in public health and the transmission of viral diseases told us during the early stages of the on-going pandemic, in no uncertain terms, that responsible wearing of masks and social distancing saves many lives. By "flattening the curve" of the spread of a contagious pathogen, the pace of spread will not overwhelm doctors, nurses and hospitals, or outpace the production of crucial medical supplies. These measures allow heroic first responders and doctors and other caregivers to be able to cope with manageable caseloads of afflicted patients. In the current coronavirus contagion, the U.S. had a dearth of testing ability and quick results for way, way too long, and the Trump administration fostered misinformation and culture war conflicts that have led to the U.S. being the worst country in the world in the number of people contracting the disease, and of dying from it.

Fortunately, effective vaccines were developed to minimize serious afflictions and deaths, and vaccination rates approached a level where disease transmission is inhibited and approached protections afforded by "herd immunity". Health precautions are being relaxed after several severe waves of the virus. Hallelujah! But more easily transmitted variants of the virus have evolved and spread, and people have been told that vaccines may be more dangerous than the lethal disease, and "anti-vaxxers" and others are standing in the way of safer times.

It has nearly three grueling years since the pandemic began, and more than 100 million people in the U.S. have been infected, and more than 1.1 million have died as of Feb. 1, 2023. States have relaxed precautionary measures, though more than 500 people are still dying every day, making the affliction still more severe than the flu. As we emerge from this crisis, there is a powerful pull "to return to normal", but that would be a mistake.

One of the most important lessons of the pandemic was that "normal" was not working that well for most people. Many dysfunctional aspects of our society were thrown into sharper relief, such as the inequities of our health care system, the institutional racism, the exploitive nature and extreme inequality of the economy, the corruption of certain politicians, and the inadequacies of our social support structures, along with the ongoing destabilization of the global climate and the foolishness of our destructive actions on planetary ecosystems and habitats.

"Normal is, to quote MacBeth, 'the way to dusty death.' We must not go back to normal, to mindless consumerism, to political complacency, to business as usual, to endless distractions, to amusing ourselves to death," wrote one observer in a letter to the editor of a newspaper. "Our many challenges will only be solved by an aware and engaged citizenry. We are in a crisis, but every crisis contains both dangers and opportunities. The stakes are no less than everything we hold dear. There is no time to waste. Don't go back to sleep."

An Aside on Dante Alighieri (1265 - 1321), and His Classic Interpretation of Love

Love is a central animating force in human nature. Dante, the great Italian poet, had suffered terrible privations in his personal life after being permanently exiled from his home and family in his native Firenze, and he felt himself entering a dark woods. Inspired by an unrequited love from afar for the Florentine woman Beatrice, he channeled his passion and profound chagrin into writing *The Divine Comedy*. In this epic poem, Dante imagined making a journey through hell, then purgatory, then heaven. In *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, he is guided by Virgil, the Roman poet of the first century BCE, who was widely regarded as the ancient embodiment of the voice of reason.

Love is a main theme of Dante's story. As he conceived it, there was pure love for God, and subsidiary kinds of love for family and romantic love for another, along with many kinds of excessive or deficient forms of love. Dante envisioned *Inferno* as a place unrepentant sinners go after death, and *Purgatorio* as a place sinners would go who sought forgiveness and strived to become free of their sins so they could ascend into *Paradiso*.

Dante put hubris-swollen Pride in the very first of the seven terraces of *Purgatorio*. This is where he relegated persons for having demonstrated too much self-love. Overbearing pride had long been regarded as the original and most lethal of the "seven deadly sins", because those guilty of this form of perverted love were willing to harm

others to satisfy their selfish needs and desires. Moreover, prideful narcissists tend to display choleric dispositions and use their anger to manipulate people, and exert control over them, and diabolically exploit them.

Ruling Class Wrongs

See clearly. Important lessons were learned from the terrible Depression of the 1930s. John Maynard Keynes was the foremost economist who studied the problem of how to prevent future similar economic and social calamities, and his understandings have been remarkably valuable in helping the world ever since.

Today, look at what the reform opposing and democracy undermining ruling class is doing. They are still trying to shred the New Deal social safety net that was enacted to address the social ills caused by capitalist predations and boom-and-bust cycles and the excessive speculation of the 1920s. They are jealously defending their wealth, status and privileges, and stand like a towering stone wall athwart positive change. And they're being shockingly successful in buying the favors of "conservative" politicians, and get them to cut their taxes and reduce spending on sensible social safety net programs. They are getting away with this, though they see the writing on the wall that the well-to-do must soon be required to pay higher amounts of tax because of today's crisis needs and wanton profligacy and the debt swindles enacted by Ronald Reagan and the Bushes and Donald Trump.

Economist John Kenneth Galbraith analyzed such circumstances and stated, in effect, that ruling class orthodoxy is merely an expression of efforts to rationalize greed, saying: "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."

When leaders kowtow to corporate interests, the outcomes are often detrimental to real people. Corporations are organizational tools created for narrow purposes -- to maximize the generation of wealth and facilitate the monopolizing of these profits by indemnified management and shareholders. So they are not good citizens that support greater good goals. And they definitely should not be laissez-faire unleashed to act as they want.

The coronavirus is a public health crisis, and shouldn't be treated as a big opportunity for Big Businesses and Big Pharma to get rich at the expense of the people. Coronavirus testing, treatment and drugs should be free or affordable to everyone. It appears that domineering capitalists who drive our politics reckon that it would be a shame to abstain from taking advantage of the huge opportunities for organizations like those in Big Pharma to make a profiteering killing off this crisis -- thereby increasing already scandalously and immorally large profits.

What makes these things particularly galling is the truth in words spoken by Dr. Martin Luther King, who astutely said to the Medical Committee for Human Rights in 1966, "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane." The yawning chasm in lived experience between the fortunate and the unfortunate is becoming so gaping as to make greater fairness in recovery efforts morally mandatory -- especially toward disadvantaged Blacks, Latinos and poor whites. Invest in more sensible social insurance policies!

Our current crop of conservative "leaders", it seems to me, have sacrificed public health and preparedness to their own pet projects and ambitions and advantages. The naked opportunism of the current crisis reminded me of Naomi Klein's book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise Of Disaster Capitalism*, so I watched the documentary *The Shock Doctrine* again. The film tells the sensational story about Milton Friedman and his Chicago School of Economics and their free market doctrines, which have been applied, often through force, in countries around the world, starting in Chile in 1973 and then Argentina and other places like Thatcher's Britain and Yeltsin's Russia.

During the emergency of the current pandemic, disaster capitalism and crony favoritism and political corruption have resulted in particularly woeful, costly and tragic outcomes. This is a new facet of what economist Joseph Schumpeter described as a "gale of creative destruction". Schumpeter saw such gales as adaptive mechanisms necessary to winnow out competitors in capitalist economies, but they are a process that is unnecessarily ruthless toward workers when the social safety net is inadequately strong.

Economic free market fundamentalist "shock doctrines" resemble an insidious virus in their opportunism and mindless ability to impose ill effects on a vulnerable public. In these bizarre times, as in every crisis emergency, opportunists circle like sharks! We are seeing what-the-market-can-bear price gouging, and whatever-they-can-get-away-with economic swindles. We are seeing political corruption, propagated misinformation, assaults against the truth, abuses of authority, con man swindles, and vindictive reprisals against anyone who criticizes Trump for

the follies and failures and harms that he and his minions have foisted on us all.

As Huck said in *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, "I seen how it's possible to take things and twist them into whatever shape you want, and see them another way entirely that don't have no resemblance to the truth." It is a moral imperative for us to demand smarter win-win solutions to problems, not bigger opportunities for win-lose opportunism. We should build the foundations of our society on strength, not on weakness, and on values shared in common, not on narrow goals of maximizing profits and allowing wealth to be monopolized.

Carl Sagan wrote evocatively in *The Demon-Haunted World*, "One of the saddest lessons of history is this: If we've been bamboozled long enough, we tend to reject any evidence of the bamboozle. We're no longer interested in finding out the truth. The bamboozle has captured us. It's simply too painful to acknowledge, even to ourselves, that we've been taken. Once you give a charlatan power over you, you almost never get it back."

If we were to evaluate our laws on a continuum of consequentiality, we would better design them to be truly fair and just. With more legitimate laws, all the conspiring gloating self-congratulating corruptly-prospering divide-to-conquer authority abusers in power would be behind bars -- and the nearly 500,000 Americans ruinously and riskily incarcerated in prisons and jails right now on drug charges, at monstrous expense, would be enjoying liberty and a compensatory stipend, AND they would have their right to vote immediately restored.

Insights into the Shock Doctrine

Naomi Klein accurately analyzed the forces at work behind the scenes of societal shocks like the pandemic. Back in 2007, she incisively explored the phenomenon of emergency government actions in her great book *The Shock Doctrine*. She showed how corporate elites worldwide have repeatedly and brutally taken advantage of "the public's disorientation following a collective shock -- wars, coups, terrorist attacks, market crashes or natural disasters -- to push through radical pro-corporate measures." This is the outcome of "the rise of disaster capitalism". Watch the thought-provoking film made about this book!

The 2008 financial collapse vividly illustrated the dynamics Klein had so convincingly described. The Wall Street giants, whose reckless and even criminal behavior ushered in that crisis, ended up after the dust settled even bigger and more powerful than before the crisis began. Congress gave corporations a \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program bailout, authorized in late 2008, which was a "no-strings bailout". This public largess left workers and people on Main Street behind, while their employers reaped huge benefits. Not long after steep stock market declines reached bottoms in 2008, many big Wall Street banks and corporations handed out big bonuses to top managers and employees, or made stock buybacks to increase their company's share prices, instead of helping most employees with the government generosity in its economic stimulus plans, tax cuts and bailouts.

Naomi Klein sees similar "shock doctrine" dynamics resurfacing in the coronavirus crisis. We are witnessing, she noted, "this very predictable process that we see in the midst of every economic crisis, which is extreme corporate opportunism," a "dusting off" of the corporate and Wall Street wish list on everything from cutting and privatizing Social Security -- by undermining its current payroll tax revenue stream -- to a wide variety of ways of enriching corporate entities. Companies favored by Republicans, of course, idiotically include those in influence-abusing climate-altering fossil fuel industries. Cleaner renewable energy? "What, are you a socialist?!"

"What can we do, this crisis time around, to prevent a 'shock doctrine' repeat? We need, for starters, to provide immediate support for those the coronavirus is hitting the hardest: the sick and those who care for them, the workers who lose jobs and income. But we can't afford to stop there. We need, in effect, a shock doctrine in reverse. We need to seize the openings for change the coronavirus creates, and challenge the capacity of our rich and powerful to become ever richer and more powerful at the expense of our greater social well-being."

Journalist Bill Moyers gave an extraordinary speech to the Environmental Grantmakers Association in Minnesota on October 16, 2001. Hear these illuminating words from his keynote address, *AFTER 9/11*: "Those brave firefighters and policemen and Port Authority workers and emergency rescue personnel were public employees all, most of them drawing a modest middle-class income for extremely dangerous work. They have caught our imaginations not only for their heroic deeds but because we know so many people like them, people we took for granted. For once, our TV screens have been filled with the modest declarations of average Americans coming to each other's aid." Just

as public servants were the great American heroes of those days right after the 9/11 attacks, today it is doctors, nurses and healthcare workers in hospitals and nursing homes that are the unbelievably stressed heroes, and they are risking their lives, and those of their families.

Bill Moyers insightfully continued: "I find this thrilling and sobering. It could offer a new beginning, a renewal of civil values that could leave our society stronger and more together than ever, working on common goals for the public good. More than a decade ago, the playwright Tony Kushner wrote: 'There are moments in history when the fabric of everyday life unravels, and there is this unstable dynamism that allows for incredible social change in short periods of time. People and the world they're living in can be transformed, either for the good or the bad, or some mixture of the two.'"

"Alas, it was not to be. There are other sightings to report. It didn't take long for the wartime opportunists -- the mercenaries of Washington, the lobbyists, lawyers and political fundraisers -- to crawl out of their offices on K Street to grab what they can for their clients. While in New York we are still attending memorial services for firemen and police, while everywhere Americans' cheeks are still stained with tears, while the president calls for patriotism, prayers and piety, the predators of Washington are up to their old tricks in the pursuit of private plunder at public expense. In the wake of this awful tragedy wrought by terrorism, they are cashing in."

"If I sound a little bitter about this, I am. The president rightly appeals every day for sacrifice. But to these mercenaries, sacrifice is for suckers. I am angry, yes, but my sadness is greater than the anger. Our business and political class owes us better than this. They're on top. If ever they were going to put patriotism over profits, if ever they were going to practice the magnanimity of winners, this was the moment. To hide now behind the flag while ripping off a country in crisis fatally separates them from the common course of American life."

"They're counting on patriotism to distract you from their plunder. They're counting on you to stand at attention with your hand over your heart, pledging allegiance to the flag, while they pick your pocket!" Villains! Read the entire enlightening text of Bill Moyers' great speech online, as republished on 9/11/2014, the 13th anniversary of 9/11. Search for *After 9/11, The Greatest Sedition Would Be Our Silence*.

Fast forward to the global pandemic, and make no mistake about it: Things like this, on an even bigger scale, are happening again right now, "in spades", as the largest federal relief borrowings ever have been made. So it is a good time to remember that, during World War II, Harry Truman called excessive war profiteering "treason." When he heard rumors of such activities, he got into his Dodge and, during a Congressional recess, drove 30,000 miles to pay unannounced visits to corporate offices and worksites. The Senate committee he chaired launched aggressive investigations into shady wartime business practices and found "waste, inefficiency, mismanagement and profiteering," according to Truman, who called such behavior unpatriotic. Urged on by Truman and others in Congress, President Roosevelt supported broad increases in the corporate income tax and raised the excess-profits tax to 90 percent, and charged the Office of War Mobilization with the task of eliminating illegal profits.

In 2020 and 2021, never before had there been so sudden an opportunity to exploit a calamity, as the medical and economic crisis made it urgently necessary for the federal government to abandon all concerns for the spiking debt, and to fling open the purse strings of the public treasury to provide trillions of dollars in emergency relief.

The Woes Attendant to the Radicalization of the Republican Party

The Republican Party has undergone a radical transformation from a political party with a modicum of honorable principles and integrity when Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan were president to a pathological opportunistic party today that has largely abandoned its principles, and has become deeply anti-democratic. The longtime White House political reporter Jackie Calmes succinctly explains this insidiously perverted trajectory in a June 2021 Op Ed article, *My front row seat to the radicalization of the Republican Party*.

A primary driver of this ruthless GOP opportunism was Newt Gingrich, who pushed hard-line policies and advised his followers in the 1990s to "be nasty". He tried to keep conservatives perpetually angry at Democrats and at government in general, with the help of right-wing media megaphones that had begun after the Fairness Doctrine in public broadcasting was eliminated, thereby facilitating the mobilization of a nationwide network of right-wing talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh that echoed Gingrich's subversive talking points every day.

There "was a straight line from Gingrich's uncompromising, smash-mouth politics to the Tea Party and then to Trump." It was a nationalistic, protectionist, xenophobic, nativist movement of white supremacy that ran deep, and virulently encompassed uncompromising stances on immigrants, abortion, gay people, religion and taxes.

It should be clearly understood that, in addition, our government is made less than fairly democratic because of various provisions in the U.S. Constitution. The way the Electoral College is structured allows a president to win office despite having support of fewer voters than an opponent (as happened with George W. Bush, who got 540,000 fewer votes than Al Gore, and Donald Trump, who got almost 3 million votes fewer than Hillary Clinton in 2016). Also, the U.S. Senate is not democratically representative, for every state has two Senators, despite representing different numbers of constituents. For instance, California has almost 40 million people, while Wyoming has less than 600,000, yet they both have two Senators. This means that less populated states have a relatively larger say in what bills are passed, and in getting partisan candidates appointed to federal courts. Also, the current filibuster rule in the Senate has a 60-vote requirement for any bill to be passed, giving a minority the ability to kill almost any bill, especially when they pursue a top priority of making the other party fail.

Conservatives have managed to capture a 6-to-3 majority of seats on the Supreme Court, allowing political partisans on the high court to make decisions that are contrary to free and fair elections, like the Citizens United ruling that rationalized Big Money in our elections and lobbying, giving more unmerited influence to rich people and giant corporations, and the ruling in 2013 that eviscerated the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the bizarre decision in 2019 that rationalized allowing gerrymandering of congressional districts by state legislatures.

One outcome of the excessive influence grabbed by Republican politicians is found in coldly calculating efforts made by Republicans to turn basic preventative health precautions like social distancing and mask wearing and even getting vaccinated against the coronavirus into culture war conflicts. This has had lethal impacts, and contributed to making the USA the worst nation in the world in its response to the pandemic, as gauged by the total number of cases and deaths. Republicans have even taken to attacking honorable public servants like Dr. Anthony Fauci and Democrats, trying to gain political advantages at the expense of the greater good. This is a lethal form of treachery. And it is getting worse with conspiracy theory-pushing politicians like Marjorie Taylor Greene (R- GA) who promotes baseless QAnon conspiracies and has advocated violence against other lawmakers.

To remedy some of these retrograde challenges, the For The People Act must be passed as a critical first step in establishing fairer elections and making our government more accountable to the people. We have great needs -- desperate needs -- for reforms and preventing corruption and progressive action, and for public service that is fairly focused on improving the general welfare and the prospects for future well-being.

Think About It!

Extreme short-termism has assumed a mantle of being mandatory during the pandemic, even though it means burdening every taxpayer in every future year with a unprecedented spiking of national debt obligations. This expediency will inevitably leave a lousy legacy to our children, and a sad one of urgent rationales and efforts to impose austerity measures on the masses.

Don't doubt for a minute that there are many shenanigans going on in this epic moment of public health emergency, in the profligately cash-flooded swamp in Washington D.C. Where has the huge influx of money come from? Ah, yes, of course, prestidigitation from the public treasury. The floodgates were flung open, saddling every taxpayer forever hereafter with interest expense obligations on the rapidly mounting debt. This action will deprive everyone in the future of federal spending that will be taken up by interest costs rather than social safety net programs or any of the multitude of general welfare things that forced budget constraints will entail.

John Steinbeck penned an extraordinary passage in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*: "Some time ago a Congress of honest men refused an appropriation of several hundreds of millions of dollars to feed our people. They said, and meant it, that the economic structure of the country would collapse under the pressure of such expenditure. And now the same men, just as honestly, are devoting many billions of dollars to the manufacture, transportation, and detonation of explosives to protect the people they would not feed."

In those words, Steinbeck was referring to the Second World War that was then going on, nine months before

Japan attacked Pearl Harbor -- a war "which no one wants to fight, in which no one can see a gain: a zombie war of sleep-walkers which nevertheless goes on out of all control of intelligence." Steinbeck and his close friend, 'Doc' Ed Ricketts wrote these words while embarked on a famous marine biology expedition to the Sea of Cortez in March 1940, on a 77-foot-long chartered fishing vessel named the *Western Flyer*.

Big Picture Perspective

The global pandemic has made it crystal clear that there are intolerable dangers in having divide-to-conquer politicians in control of our national decision-making and priority setting. An intentionally divided populace is easier to exploit than an auspiciously united one. It's easier to take advantage of a citizenry that has been made extremely insecure by shrewd and exceedingly treacherous "conservative" schemers who have torpedoed both universal healthcare and collective bargaining rights for workers who seek a better deal in their jobs.

We see with heightened acuteness how vulnerable it makes everyone to have leaders like Trump who deviously boasted about how good a job he was doing -- despite overwhelming contradictory evidence. Compounding such failings, he played bizarre blame games, and engaged in divisive partisanship, and acted with uncompromising fixity of purpose to politicize emergencies, control the populace, and take advantage of -- and oppress -- the majority of the American people. We see how crazy it is to have leaders who are inflexible in their efforts to perpetuate a highly profitable private medical system that leaves tens of millions of people behind, lacking insurance or access to preventative healthcare, and often unable to afford good medical care. And we see how thin their spin is, as they bombard us with falsehoods, distractions and using wedge issues to manipulating people.

Let's not lose sight of the bigger picture and longer-term considerations right now, at this overwhelming juncture of urgent emergency in which we are enmeshed. With win-win solutions abounding, it is time for all citizens to stand up and insist that our leaders choose propitious plans, rather than allowing scheming Dividers to push for win-lose plans and swindles and betrayals of the public trust. The rashness of these faults means that it is our common obligation to relegate these charlatans to the rejected failure anteroom in the dustbin of history.

Subversive divide-to-conquer politicians have worked overtime to make people believe corporations should have the same legal rights as real people. They try to give people good reason to distrust government. These ruses have allowed iron-heeled corporate executives and their feel-good public relations departments to double-down on their maniacal pursuit of profits over the common good. Privatization? Save the U.S. Postal Service!

Early on during Trump's time in office, Jared Kushner and his team reportedly decided that, because the virus hit blue states hardest, a national plan was unnecessary and would not make sense politically. "The political folks believed that because it was going to be relegated to Democratic states, that they could blame those governors, and that would be an effective political strategy," said the expert. This was an incredibly cold calculation, an Orwellian stand that, "as long as they can make Trump supporters think more Democrats are suffering and dying than Republicans, they'll keep on their present course." "The bottom line is that the Trump Administration sees everything through a partisan political lens. EVERYTHING. As long as they think more Democrats will suffer and die from COVID-19 than Republicans, they'll either avoid doing anything to fight the virus or will do the bare minimum to make it look like they're doing so." The subsequent trend became clear, however, with Republicans most 'hesitant' about getting vaccinated and the mutating evolution of various variants: COVID-19 became more of a Red State problem. For more information, check out the article in Daily Kos *What happens when red states pass blue states in #COVID19 cases per capita? We're about to find out.*

During stay-at-home orders to control the early spread of the virus, essential workers were allowed to continue fulfilling their duties. But what activities, it begged the question, are essential? Republicans wanted to advance their power-abusing agenda by saying gun sales are essential, but getting an abortion is not. Etc. Furthermore, majorities of essential workers are underpaid, and are required to risk their lives in providing services.

It is sad that social distancing became necessary at a time when the need is growing for solidarity, social cohesion, collaboration, honesty and responsibility in governing. Let's come together now, with open minds, and find better solutions to keep people healthier and safer. Let's ponder what is really essential. Instead of putting top priority

on imposing regressive tax cut swindles, our leaders should rightly emphasize better public well-being and safety, and improved public education, greater fairness of opportunity, and broader expressions of liberty.

I love the idealistic idea that "All you need is love". Unfortunately, it turns out that hate can be an even more powerful motivating force. Roger Stone, the treacherously cunning dandy and self-described "dirty trickster" -- and convicted felon in Nov. 2019 -- has made this clear throughout his slimy career. Republicans and manipulative Fox News opinion voices like Tucker Carlson, and Charles Koch and his pathological ilk, have used this perverse insight to help them brainwash people into supporting their grotesquely inequitable and anti-democratic agenda.

Dangers of Authoritarianism

The common reactions of Chinese leaders to crisis -- strict secrecy, media censorship, attempts to protect "stability", "thought police" and adherence to central authority -- were evident during the early period of the coronavirus crisis, according to a detailed insider account published by the China Media Project. On Dec. 30, 2019, this account says, the Wuhan Health Commission "issued an order to hospitals, clinics and other healthcare units strictly prohibiting the release of any information about treatment of this new disease."

Likewise, Republican leaders in the U.S. put public health and safety directly at risk when they suppressed truths about the dangers of the proliferation of the coronavirus pathogen. Like the Chinese government in the early weeks of the virus outbreak, Trump officials downplayed the threats posed by the contagious virus, and even called it a hoax. They suppressed vital information and actively misled the public, and also harmfully failed, early on, to rapidly ramp up testing for the disease to find out where the contagion was spreading.

These efforts were made to lull people into a false sense of security, delaying an effective life-saving response. Then Trump began giving daily Reality Show TV briefings in which he contradicted his own healthcare experts. He even said in late March 2020 that we may be able to resume work and normal activities by Easter Sunday, less than 3 weeks later, before being forced to face reality. Then he got flustered with negative feedback to his quack prescriptions, and began pushing for businesses and schools to reopen earlier than it was safe to do so.

When in doubt, remember what the astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson tells us: "The good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it." An astute observer recalled *Chernobyl*, the HBO television series, after having witnessed governments lying to their people. In this show about the nuclear meltdown disaster in Ukraine in 1986, a man says, "Every lie we tell incurs a debt to the truth. Sooner or later, that debt gets paid."

Leaders around the world tried to seize expanded power under the cover of crisis. New York Times reported: "As the coronavirus pandemic brings the world to a juddering halt and anxious citizens demand action, leaders across the globe are invoking executive powers and seizing virtually dictatorial authority with scant resistance."

Concerned critics of some of the extraordinary measures that were imposed say that many governments "are using the public health crisis as cover to seize new powers that have little to do with the outbreak, with few safeguards to ensure that their new authority will not be abused." Questions immediately arose as to when such emergency measures would ever be relinquished. A United Nations Special Reporter on counterterrorism and human rights summarized the dangers succinctly: "We could have a parallel epidemic of authoritarian and repressive measures following close on the heels of the health epidemic."

Revealingly, early in the pandemic, Trump "said the quiet part out loud" while phoning into "Fox & Friends" to discuss the first federal stimulus bill passed by Congress. He lamented provisions and calls for adequate funding that Democrats had tried to add to the package to make voting easier and safer during times of the pandemic. "The things they had in there were crazy," he said. "They had levels of voting, that if you ever agreed to it you'd never have a Republican elected in this country again." A salutary potentiality, given the circumstances!

Trumpian Intrigue

It is sad that Trump was so focused on his personal interests, and so intent on rewarding his friends and loyalists while punishing his critics and "enemies". It endangered everyone that we couldn't trust either his judgment or his motives. He has always shown he cares more about himself than anyone else, and in power he cared much more about his own political fortunes than he cared about the common good. He is monstrously lacking in compassion for

the health of others harmed by his rigid fixity on underhanded games in politics, healthcare and public safety.

A stubborn adherence to tax cuts for the top 1% as a solution to all problems has been "conservative" orthodoxy since 1981. This is a sickly plan. Demonstrably, what has really been trickling down since the Reagan regime has been more than \$30 trillion in burdensome public debt, along with harm-engendering extreme disparities in health outcomes and general well-being between the fortunate few and the unfortunate many. We also see heightened vulnerabilities, and a hegemony of Wall Street interests over people on Main Street. It's as if these trickle down plans are mean-spirited rather than merely being inadvertent planks in gale-buffed Tough Luck capitalism.

Risk Taking and Culpability

P.J. O'Rourke famously said, "The Republicans are the party that says government doesn't work and then they get elected and prove it." And sure enough, look at the pathetic proof of this observation right now. Republicans grabbed power in 2016 by hijacking people's emotions, exploiting their fears, promoting propaganda, circulating falsehoods on social media, suppressing votes of millions of people, and gerrymandering many congressional districts. Then they began brazenly abusing power by giving corporations more power, eliminating regulations, hollowing out government, evading accountability, cutting budgets for the CDC, etc., and dismissing or driving away scientists and experts at all levels of government. They pursued a perverse agenda that increases the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few while exacerbating health inequities and social inequalities.

Republicans have been trying for a dozen years to repeal the Affordable Care Act, which was signed into law in March 2010. If they had succeeded at this, with their lawsuit that was finally rejected by the Supreme Court in June 2021, then more than 20 million Americans could have lost health insurance coverage -- during a global pandemic! And every person with pre-existing conditions would have been at greater risk of losing medical coverage for their afflictions. In addition, Republican Governors of 14 states inhumanely refused to expand Medicaid coverage for people whose income and resources are insufficient for them to afford health care.

Republicans have three main reasons for having spent years treacherously trying to repeal or sabotage the Affordable Care Act. First, its provisions cost billions of dollars every year, and they were financed by increasing taxes by 3.8% on rich people's net investment incomes. It is clear that wealthy Republican donors like the Koch's, Adelsons, Mercers and their ilk have an uncompromising anti-social aversion to being subjected to paying taxes. Second, the Affordable Care Act was enacted because the smart black man in the White House -- a Democrat! -- had spent great political capital championing its passage, and Donald Trump has a demonstrated vindictive racist chip on his shoulder against all of President Obama's accomplishments. And third, the Act expanded insurance coverage to tens of millions of folks who were second-class-citizen poor people, who as likely as not had been relying on public assistance Medicaid for medical care -- and may have been milking the system by collecting food stamps, even if they did not have a job, "the lazy bums".

Public health insurance is a traditional "automatic stabilizer" that helps cushion economic adversities during times of recession, "and one that seems especially critical during a pandemic." Trump Republicans also worked to shred this part of the safety net by adding red tape and cutting funding. The administration also demanded that states add additional paperwork requirements for enrollment in both Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program, causing eligible families to lose coverage. "Hell of a job, guys."

Trump/McConnell Republicans demonstrate rigid commitments to promoting the ascendancy of rich people and corporate entities over common folk in most of their actions. It is almost impossible to summons enough satirical ridicule to adequately express how weak and pathological their rationalizations are, especially in the glaring spotlight of awareness that everyone becomes more vulnerable during a contagious disease epidemic when large numbers of people do not have access to good medical care and/or cannot afford it.

While Dr. Anthony Fauci is a leading expert on infectious diseases, Trump is a charlatan who struggled to survive the failings of his administration and the treachery of his agenda, and the dangerous inadequacies of his character. He is unfit to cope with the responsibilities the moment called for. Trump assembled a myopic group of reactionaries, cowed Yes Men and slavish praise-offering sycophants in his administration's bizarre corrupt kakistocracy (i.e., government by the least qualified citizens, and/or the most unprincipled.)

"Since the election of Ronald Reagan, America has tended to value individual market choice over collective welfare. This coronavirus calamity has revealed that the fundamental insecurity of American life is a threat to us all." So when the Trump administration sowed seeds for making the pandemic worse through its actions, it came on the heels of them having also rammed through debt-financed Tax Cut swindles to primarily benefit the wealthy. These twin idiocies were already causing the national debt to skyrocket even before our representatives desperately began enacting unprecedentedly costly remedial stimulus measures and bailouts.

This rash Tax Cut scam was forcing budget cuts for most of the hallmarks of a civilized society, including cuts from state department diplomacy, foreign assistance, social safety net programs, environmental protections, public broadcasting, and a whole host of other vitally important things. Simultaneously, Republicans were jacking up spending on the military and immigration enforcement, and making the government into a threat to the unity, freedoms, domestic tranquility and human rights of the people -- undermining their general welfare and security.

Trump had a big hand in having made America First in the world in the number of cases of COVID-19, and in the total number of people who have died from the disease. In a March 30, 2020 editorial, *A president unfit for a pandemic*, the Boston Globe editorial board wrote that Trump has "blood on his hands" for the way he was handling the pandemic. "Rather than making the expected federal effort to mobilize rapidly to distribute needed gowns, masks and ventilators to ill-equipped hospitals and to the doctors and nurses around the country who are left unprotected treating a burgeoning number of patients, the administration has instead been caught outbidding individual states trying to purchase medical supplies. ... It has left governors and mayors in the lurch, begging for help. The months the administration wasted with prevarication about the threat and its subsequent missteps will amount to exponentially more COVID-19 cases than were necessary."

The Boston Globe editorial stated that what the U.S. needed was a White House that could act "swiftly and competently" to roll out testing, distribute medical supplies and provide consistent messaging. But instead, Trump was "epically outmatched by a global pandemic." It added that the administration made "catastrophic decisions" and "critical errors" that have "doomed" us to "a season of untold suffering." It is not hyperbole to say that Trump and cronies like Republican Governors in Florida, Texas, Oklahoma and Arizona also have blood on their hands, along with Fox News executives like Rupert Murdoch and Sean Hannity and Tucker Carlson for their deceitful treachery. We cannot afford to have rulers supported by a credulous political base that in effect sticks its head in the sand by believing their Party is right, when in fact their Party led the most corrupt administration in American history. Their kowtowing to corporate abusers of influence -- while rashly abusing power -- was an outrage to propriety. We cannot afford to have leaders who play lopsidedly to this political base by exploiting ginned-up antagonisms and using hot button social issues to "own the libs". We cannot continue to allow scheming politicians to cunningly impose their inflexible hegemony of devious, exploitive and oppressive public policies on the masses. Authoritarian followers demonstrate a commitment to ideology that, in effect, is willing to cut their noses off to spite their faces. This is *What's the Matter with Kansas*. It is folly for voters to have blind allegiance to manipulative politicians who push policies antithetical to their own best interests, and to the greater good of the majority right now, and to billions of our heirs in the future. And to life on Earth.

Social distancing and the economic cataclysm are wreaking havoc on billions of individual lives in a surrealistic moment of Salvador Dali-like melting clock chaos, dissipation, confusion and disarray. Tuning out the toxic twisted tales told by idiots on the world stage, we tune in to the reassuringly disturbing explanations of Dr. Fauci, who speaks truth to power with calm, honesty and the knowledge of experience. Let us all give hearty thanks to experts like him, and to courageous first responders, doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

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