



## Salvation and the Further Adventures of Humanity: Grasping Reality and Glimpsing the Fairest of Big Picture Perspectives

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain  
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An Essay Contest in *Vanity Fair* magazine in 2006 concerned a topic that was highlighted by a quote made by a senior advisor in George W. Bush's administration in 2002. The aide said:

"Your judicious study of discernible reality ... is not the way the world really works anymore. We're an empire now. And when we act, we create our own reality."

The *Vanity Fair* contest posed this curious question: "In a nation defined by video games, reality TV and virtual friendships, and with a White House that has perfected the art of politics as public relations, what is reality to Americans today? And did we ever have a grasp of it?"

Here was my response to this Essay Contest.

Lo and Behold --- REALITY. (What a concept!)

The Universe exists, independent of our perception. Matter and light energetically speed through space in an unfathomably long galactic unfolding of physical evolution. Constant motion and continuous change wondrously occur at every level from the subatomic to the macrocosmic, in accordance with apparently unchanging physical laws. This is awe-inspiring!

Consciousness regards itself. Hello in there! Each of us has our own unique personal worldviews. We are all inextricably involved in our own personal lives, swept up in our individual circumstances and perspectives, vanities, joys, sorrows and troubles. We are naturally anthropocentric and profoundly solipsistic, so our worldviews are centered on ourselves. Yet in our hearts we know that larger considerations must ultimately prevail for the good of our communities, and for the whole of society.

Reason is a process of seeking truth and knowledge by inferring these understandings from fact and logic. We all attempt to impose simplistic and generally self-centered interpretations upon reality, but the true nature of existence and perception is complex and infinitely more nuanced. Fact and truth can be difficult to separate from fiction and illusion, so perspective is subjective and everything is relative.

We can grasp reality with better understanding by being more honest in our assessments, and by thinking independently and being open-minded and willing to consider comprehensive understandings.

Clarity of ecological understanding reveals that our fates are intimately tied to Mother Earth. Human well-being is directly dependent on healthy natural systems and biological diversity. Nonetheless, we have been aggressively and myopically depleting the resources of planet Earth, and in the process we have been seriously damaging natural ecosystems rather than respecting and protecting them. Our livelihoods have become disconnected from nature. Money, materialistic consumerism, conformity, status seeking, belonging and easily-offended pride have unfortunately become the strongest of human motivations. This has had distinctly dysfunctional impacts. We are essentially in denial of ancient truths not to see this, and not to care about it.

Survival implicitly implies continued existence for endless generations. This is what survival is. Since survival is continued existence for never-ending generations, the best interests of our children, and theirs, and theirs, and theirs, and theirs, and theirs, intrinsically represent our most significant purpose. It is our greatest moral imperative to ensure that the legacy we leave to these heirs is a planet that is habitable in perpetuity.

Yet we are collectively acting in shortsighted and expedient ways that primarily benefit rich people, corporations, special interest groups, and calculating politicians in a short term time frame. We are evading the need to deal NOW with enormous social, economic and environmental challenges. We are fleecing people in the future by borrowing huge sums of money from them and squandering resources, failing to invest wisely in conservation. We are damaging the environment, destroying wildlife habitats, degrading fresh water resources, creating enormous amounts of wastes, toxins and pollutants, and causing disruptions to global weather and precipitation patterns. And we are simultaneously letting our leaders defend and perpetuate the status quo, and allow people who are economic and religious fundamentalists to unfairly influence our policy-making. And those who oppose women's reproductive rights and sensible family planning programs are hubristically seizing power and abusing authority.

It is a sad state of affairs that *Homo sapiens* are exhibiting such an inadequate degree of sapience that we are ensuring a high probability of dire consequences for our descendants, rather than acting with foresight and making more salubrious plans. We should not continue to be so startlingly negligent. We must act to minimize the amount of hardship and suffering that will be our legacy to an untold number of people in future generations if we leave them a depleted, polluted, overcrowded and strife-torn world.

We must reconcile economic progress with environmental and ecological sanity. Please consider these words carefully. Our personal beliefs strongly influence our understandings and actions, so when we entertain distorted misconceptions, it can lead to wrongheaded and seriously misguided behaviors. Our collective destinies are powerfully affected by the choices we make, so it is essential for us to individually grasp more enlightened versions of reality.

A 'perfect storm' gathers on humanity's horizon. The number of people alive has doubled in the last 40 years, and is on track to increase by about 3 billion more people in the next 50 years. This is causing an unsustainable acceleration in the consumption and depletion of limited non-renewable resources. Fisheries, forests, crucial minerals, fossil fuels, topsoil and fresh water resources are being used up or damaged. Rivers, lakes, oceans, diverse wildlife habitats, and even the atmosphere are being harmfully altered and polluted. And we are foolishly borrowing enormous sums of money from people in every future year to stimulate these activities and outcomes.

The Ecological Footprint calculator at [RedefiningProgress.org](http://RedefiningProgress.org) indicates that humanity is already in an 'overshoot' situation. We are exceeding the annual productive biological capacity of Nature by 40%. (Note: In the more than 14 years since these words were written in April 2008, there has been a net increase in human population of more than 1 billion people, and we now are consuming 70% more resources than planet Earth can regenerate each year, and we would need TWO Earths to sustainably provide for aggregate demands within something like 25 years. It is folly to ignore this reality and to damn our descendants to fates of desperation and insufficiency by over consuming --- AND by forcing women to have unwanted children.

The need to embrace sensible precautionary principles of environmental protection is becoming increasingly important for us in order to prevent ominous and irreversible ecological damages.

More accurate understandings are needed so that we appreciate the benefits provided by ecosystem services. When we see the wisdom in more inclusive, comprehensive and all-encompassing ideas, it will give us a stronger impetus to use resources more rationally, intelligently and conservatively.

Powerful incentives and disincentives should be put in place to motivate people to reduce wasteful usages of resources and the amount of toxins, pollution and garbage that is generated, and to limit damages to Earth's ecosystems.

Humanity is collectively faced with this critically serious choice: we can either proactively make wise decisions to transform our activities into ones that are more socially beneficial, ecologically sound, and mutually secure -- or we

can stay the course, stupidly sticking with business-as-usual activities until devastating crises arise that force change upon us.

The challenges facing humankind will intensify here in the twenty-first century as competition increases for diminishing resources. Earth's population will be NINE BILLION people before the year 2045 ("God willing!"). As the crowds of people grow larger, the urgency increases for us to find more effective, empathetic and emotionally intelligent ways to achieve peaceful coexistence. Increasing injustices are unlikely to create conditions in which peace will flourish. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." We should rightly sow justice to harvest the bounties of peace.

We must ACT, not just worry or be apologists for the status quo. Our best hope lies in far-reaching redesigns of our economic and political systems. If we lend our voices to this cause, and align our activities with overarching progressive goals, we can take an important step in helping bring about a better world. The needs are urgent, and the time to start is NOW. Let's demand holistic change and smarter priorities from our leaders. And let's act to prevent our political representatives from indulging in corrupt practices, particularly incumbent insiders in Washington D.C. and the lobbyists who influence them.

Competing interests abound in our societies, and these interests are generally concerned with gaining advantages and special privileges and power, even when they profess to be concerned mainly with honest principles. The fairest way to adjudicate between competing interests is to have fair institutions and fair laws that are fairly applied with the purpose of securing the best interests of the general welfare and the common good.

Our economic and political systems represent the cumulative expression of an infinite multitude of individual human choices. These systems are being perversely rigged through deplorable influences like stubbornly regressive ideologies, institutionalized bribery, compulsive greed, unethical profiteering, unbridled corporatism, corrupt cronyism, serious incompetence, extreme partisanship, and rash and objectionable abuses of power.

Our capitalist economic system flourishes with freedom, but it fundamentally disdains fairness and equality. It is a system that is extraordinarily effective in utilizing deep-seated aspects of the nature of human motivations, but it is much too short-term oriented in its creating extremes of inequalities and its perilous spurning of ecological exigencies.

Capitalism is an amoral system. It lacks committed concern for the QUALITY of growth, or for the HEALTH of communities. It is addicted to growth in profits, and thus to increasing consumption and a growth in human numbers. It is opposed to conservation. It thrives on opportunities to exploit undisciplined government profligacy, natural disasters, emergency needs, social turmoil and war. To maintain such a system, governments act with undue authoritarianism and use distorting perception management, repression, domestic spying, and increased spending on weapons and the military.

Capitalism also strongly promotes destructive behaviors like allowing unlimited emissions of greenhouse gases that are contributing to a dangerous destabilization of the global climate. By recklessly and wastefully burning oil, coal and natural gas, we are causing average global temperatures to increase, altering climatic conditions to which all forms of life are adapted. The resulting harms are being foisted onto society to maximize corporate profits and investor returns, no matter how costly this may prove to be to our societies and ecological commons. We are gambling with the future as if we're betting on games of chance in Las Vegas!

Mere words can scarcely convey the seriousness of the consequences of our foolishly and harmfully allowing pollution, carbon emissions, resource depletion, worker liabilities and a range of healthcare costs to be externalized onto society. By allowing such costs to be excluded from product prices, demand for products is being artificially increased. Since the primary purpose of business is to maximize profits, corporate entities naturally strive to avoid costs. But this results in socially irresponsible activities that promote the environmentally devastating "Tragedy of the Commons" phenomenon.

The human race is in a classic Bet Situation; but instead of betting wisely and sanely, we are gambling rashly that we can continue to prosper while accelerating through a bubble of profligately wasteful usages of resources, Peak Oil, materialistic consumption, unchecked greenhouse gas emissions, industrial monoculture agriculture, rapid

population growth, increasing social inequities, fiscal hyper-stimulus, ruthless greed, desperate need, species extinctions and the denial of deep ecological truths.

Capitalism aggravates potent age-old struggles. It facilitates the domination of envious poor people by jealous rich ones, thereby increasing inequalities and social injustices. It helps crony capitalists to exploit workers. And it gives the needs, drives and motivating compulsions of wealthy people much more influence than it gives to people who have more reasonable concerns for the general welfare. Government "of the people, by the people, and for the people" has insidiously become government of selfish bureaucrats, by unscrupulous politicians and lobbyists, for rich people and vested interests.

The story of history is filled with such conflicts, and with nations striving to create empires by conquering others. The supremacist empire-building gambit of German fascism was vanquished only after the cataclysmic violence of World War II, a conflict in which more than 50 million people died. Capitalism and communism had their own protracted conflicts in the enormously costly Cold War struggle that harmfully diverted resources and energies from constructive ends for over 40 years.

After the Cold War ended, superpower America took its turn arrogantly strutting and fretting its hour upon the stage, seeming to overreach in a brutal drive to dominate the world. This course of action exalted aggression and ruthlessness, and made global politics increasingly dangerous and unstable. Economic imperialism, military aggression and evangelical Christian religious fundamentalism have had the highly detrimental effect of goading Islamic extremists. Terrorism in response reinforces self-righteous far right Strict Father American Dominionism, which serves to justify preemptive wars and contributes to political suppression and increasing inequities. This is pathetic!

Neoconservatives, 'good old boys' and the Religious Right have worked relentlessly to gain and maintain power and to advance this brazenly rash agenda of control and domination. By strengthening sentiments of anti-American sentiments in countries abroad, these strategies diminish peace, liberty, human rights and true justice. The political right wing is discrediting itself by failing to act in the best interests of humanity and the common good.

Christianity and Islam are the two established religions with the greatest numbers of adherents in the world today. Fundamentalists in both these religions defend their narrow dogmas so strongly that they are willing to do anything to support their belief systems. This is dangerous, because stubborn opposition countersupports what it opposes, and violence begets violence, and hate generates hate. More intense cultural conflicts result, and population pressures mount, and wars become more likely.

Wars are caused by motives similar to those that stimulate competition between individuals: the desire for food, fertile land, fresh water, fossil fuels and other mineral resources, and political control, together with acquisitive drives, egoic ambitions, glory seeking and ethnocentric pride. Governments have the same instincts as individuals, but they have less restraint because they are strong enough, or brazen enough, to defy interference with their will -- and because international laws and institutions are too weak. Overarching moral codes are not adequate to wield an effective deterrent force. Militarism in defense of economic fundamentalism and religious dogmatism leads to heightened international tensions, social instability, internecine conflicts, and increased insecurity for all. These are shortsighted and unsustainable impulses.

Wars are the ultimate expression of competition. Inadequately regulated capitalism consequently undermines peaceful coexistence. While excessive regulatory red tape and inefficient bureaucracy can be wasteful, honest and sensible regulation of commerce is simply a necessity to ensure fair, peaceful and mutually secure societies. Responsible public stewardship must trump private profit in our governing policies.

Military aggression is among the worst of international crimes. It represents an ultimate and terrible form of unfairness and injustice. War allows countries or despotic leaders to use unscrupulous means to accomplish mercenary and supremacist ends, no matter how unjust, violent, destructive, devious or vindictive it may be to achieve these ends. War also facilitates profligate waste and obscene ways to make profits, and causes extensive environmental damages, and it often results in war crimes and horrible casualties. God forbid it!

We have entered a new era of globally interconnected and interdependent realities in which economic, technological, demographic and geopolitical realities are all shifting. These new realities require that we prevent international aggression, and dare instead to defy a thousand precedents by cooperating together to apply Golden Rule fairness to other peoples and nations.

Corporations, as the world's dominant economic institutions, have power so great that they now largely dictate decisions to their supposed overseers in government. Corporations are thus dictating to governments, and governments are acting without adequate discipline or restraint. The dangers here are obvious. All our principal institutions -- corporations, governments and churches -- tend to support a status quo that is foolishly aggressive, self-righteous, conflict-engendering and inadequately committed to the common good.

A shift in our national focus to give greater priority to healthier communities and mutual security and respectful relationships, would pay handsome dividends. Doctrines that are, in contrast, antagonistic and bullying, conflict provoking, disenfranchising and humiliating all have the effect of guaranteeing more intense and costly future conflicts. We would be wise to focus on being better neighbors, and making better friends, rather than creating more enemies. Imagine!

Imagine a world in which evangelical enthusiasm was dedicated to reason, understanding and Golden Rule fairness, rather than to blind faith, intolerant monotheistic self-righteousness, inflexible dogmas and serious inequities. Imagine a world in which people are treated as being more important than profits, and greater good goals are valued more highly than private privilege or short-term oriented prerogatives or my-God-is-absolutely-better-than-your-God strife. "Imagine all the people, Sharing all the world ..."

John Lennon was a musical genius, and a humanitarian artist. Yet the Nixon White House considered him a national threat. Why? Powerful leaders are jealously protective of their power, so they tend to see populist movements, peace advocacy and visionary understandings as threats to their power and control -- and their ability to wage war to satisfy their objectives. This is one reason the American political establishment all too frequently tries to suppress truths, deceive the people, and oppose initiatives that support greater fairness and equality.

Our leaders too often seem more concerned with good press than good results. Many of them distort reality, spin the truth, deny the most accurate scientific understandings, and use self-serving propaganda, misleading rhetoric, big lies, slick public relations initiatives and deceptive misinformation. They generally refuse to admit mistakes or be held accountable for their actions. They strive to make Americans think that hard-nosed and selfishly partisan policies are right and proper. Leaders in Congress and the Executive Branch of government have disdained common folk that they represent, especially under Republican control, and upset the Constitutional checks and balances that were providentially designed by our forefathers to prevent abuses of federal and state power.

These characteristics severely damage our democracy. This situation is made worse by corporate control of television and radio stations. Giant corporations are vested in keeping things the way they are, or changing them for their own narrow self-benefit. Consolidation in the media has led to less diversity in news coverage, and even PBS news broadcasting was found to under-represent public interest groups and women and minorities in favor of Republicans and "stay-the-course" war advocates in recent years. Only with truly fair and balanced reporting and responsible journalistic integrity -- and guaranteed freedom of the press -- can citizens be properly informed, and consequently succeed in making better decisions.

Stunning contradictions exist between American ideals, actualities and deeds. Our identities have always been characterized by a degree of delusion. We delude ourselves to think that our American identity encompasses the highest principles of democracy, justice and peace. This delusion is largely a cynical myth that denies the fact that ruling elites often act in ways that are excessively ruthless, authoritarian, corrupt or anti-democratic as our leaders demonstrate their overarching focus on securing power. Such characteristics have historically pertained during endgame stages of an empire.

Confusions in self-perception are often dramatically amplified through monomaniacal Machiavellian machinations by shrewdly calculating "conservative" political leaders. We definitely shouldn't believe everything we have been indoctrinated to think! The radical right hijacked America in the wake of the shocking tragedy of the 9/11

attacks, and they began scheming to stimulate and exploit people's fears and insecurities. They helped blatantly stoke divisive hot-button social issues, and used highly manipulative tactics to fool Americans into accepting a blizzard of harsh, discriminatory, wrong-headed and regressive strategies.

Serious consequences have resulted. Appalling abuses of power were emboldened, and justifications were advanced for preemptive war, offensive militarism, government intrusiveness, the suppression of dissent, human rights violations, illegal 'extraordinary renditions', and the torture of prisoners. Public resources and taxpayer funds were squandered for pork barrel projects and private benefit. Politicians wrongly engage in fiscally irresponsible expediencies by spending profligately and adding huge amounts of new U.S. national debt, and strongly stimulating disparities in wealth between the rich and poor.

These inequitable, shortsighted and divisive doctrines distort our collective grasp of reality. They divert us from proper courses of action. Recognizing this, we should dedicate ourselves to clearer awareness and visionary reforms. Stubborn adherence to orthodoxy and the status quo must be rejected. New ways should be found to honor truer values that serve to improve our societies. Expansive thinking and long-term planning must become overarching principles in policy considerations.

Bertrand Russell provided a pause for thought when he expressed the opinion, "The fundamental cause of trouble in the world today is that the stupid are cock-sure, while the intelligent are full of doubt." Let us not fall into the tempting narcissistic trap of judgmental moral absolutism, whereby we regard ourselves as good and others as evil. All is not black or white; and we must not treat others as being "either with us or against us". The line between good and evil runs through each and every one of us.

Religious orthodoxy puts mythology, superstition, and unquestioned doctrines and beliefs on a footing above reason and rational coherent thought. Such sloppy thinking and erroneous understanding would be acceptable if the effects of these comforting belief systems were primarily benign -- if, for instance, they mainly created fair-minded outcomes, peaceful coexistence, happiness, cooperation, harmony, positive identity and social benefits. But in the world today, established religions are too often evangelical, self-righteous, intolerant, manipulative and discriminatory. Detrimental impacts result that include propagated ignorance, shortsighted risk-taking, militarism, humiliation, hate and terrorism. This needlessly undermines true justice and peace.

The religious myth of End Times is as absurd as the dogma that holds that the Earth is biblically young rather than being unfathomably old. Unfortunately, calamitous End Times could become a self-fulfilling prophecy to the human race. We have become capable of destroying ourselves, and of taking the majority of other species of life on Earth with us, in a grand extinction event like thermonuclear war or a population collapse caused by ecological overshoot.

The Earth will almost certainly continue to orbit around the Sun for another few billion years, no matter how long humanity survives to bear witness to it. What would the Buddha say? We must attain a more enlightened long view. We can no longer be so naïve as to believe the notion that we will be able to self-servingly squander the astonishingly providential cornucopia of resources found on our home planet without terribly handicapping the prospects of those who will follow us throughout untold generations. Moderation, discipline, and a bold commitment to resource conservation must become ascendant.

Our economic and political systems need to be restructured so that socially and ecologically positive ends take precedence over harmful behaviors. We should renew our national and global purposes by using intelligent foresight to make better choices. Our overarching goal should be to enact positive incentives and reasonable disincentives to motivate people to live more responsible and sustainable lives, and to create societies that are more just and conducive to peaceful coexistence. Live and let live!

Respectful cooperation, consensus seeking and constructive diplomacy should be cultivated. Far-sighted initiatives should be implemented in the U.S., including publicly financed Clean Elections, "greener" laws, smarter energy plans, fairly and rationally prioritized planning, more progressive tax laws, balanced budgets, stronger protections of human rights, more affordable public education and universal healthcare, programs that ensure greater fairness of opportunity, generously supported family planning programs, and true mutual security in foreign policies.

For a road map to a more intelligently planned future, check out the detailed and valuably insightful recommendations contained in the *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*, and in the *Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity* at [www.EarthManifesto.com](http://www.EarthManifesto.com).

Nobel prizes are awarded annually to people who "have conferred the greatest benefit upon mankind". Let's elect leaders who are most likely to nobly confer greater benefits upon all of mankind through statesmanship and positive vision. In particular, let's avoid choosing politicians who deceive us and lead us into crippling conflict or even wars based on wrong-headed ideologies or lies or hidden motives. We should reject leaders who are driven by ruthless avarice, drives for religious dominion and arrogant impulses to abuse power, or who push unfair prerogatives, blind obedience to narrow dogmas, harsh inequities, uncaring injustice and stupid shortsightedness.

Respecting Virgil, the Roman poet of antiquity, we should honor the deepest implications of his observation: "We make our destinies by the gods we choose". We are all dreamers, and we must dream up new paradigms and priorities in our societies to reflect choices that are the wisest and most amenable to an auspicious future. We should begin to make the best of whatever comes our way. Maybe we should consult with the Dalai Lama -- and honor his wise advice!

Ideas are powerful. Accurate perspectives and clear understandings are vital. Reason should rule, and it should be guided by integrity, decency, honorably public service, respectable spirituality, and a constructive and compassionate dedication to Golden Rule fairness. Critical thinking, broad-mindedness, clarity of vision, wisdom, and innovative social action are essential to the flourishing and future well-being of the human race.

Herein lies our hope for true salvation!

Yours Truly,

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