

Necessary Preconditions

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When I write about the “spiritual babies” who are in charge and determining how human civilization operates, I’m referring to people whose primary concern is what’s good for them (and the limited number of others they regard as “us”) in the most immediate and palpable ways. That’s what shapes their perceptions, assessments, decisions, strategies, and tactics. They are, to be blunt, the enemies of the planet — climate criminals, money criminals, and war criminals. They don’t actually care much about the past — they neither study it nor learn from it — and they don’t care at all about the future, except as they can imagine it for themselves tomorrow. That’s not what they say, of course, but it’s what they’re really doing.

In essence, these people are pathological narcissists, wrapped up in a cocoon of self-importance. Although their activities may give the appearance of interest, concern, or involvement with our collective experience and the unfolding drama of human existence for everyone, that’s just an illusion. The world is their oyster, and they’re in it for whatever they can get. They may appear to be motivated by giving — by making a contribution — but they’re not. Giving is only a practical means to get more for themselves. They use their power and whatever agency they have simply to feather their own nests. And yet, they invariably present themselves as dutiful servants, responsible representatives, and leaders who act in service to society, to us, and to the greater good.

To varying degrees, we (meaning the public) are fooled by their on-stage performing. They make their sales pitches, chock full of lies and false promises, and too many of us buy their snake oil. But seduction leads inevitably to betrayal, and — time after time — we end up shafted.

Am I suggesting that everyone in a position of power and/or authority is corrupt? No. In my estimation, tens of millions of human beings are sincerely motivated by the wish to contribute positively to life on this planet. They can be found everywhere — in every walk of life, in every country, state, and town, and within nearly every group, organization, and institution throughout society. But they tend not to be the ones in charge who rise to the top of the food chain. They aren’t driven by the compulsive ambition to wield raw power, and — unlike narcissists, who have no humility — they’re aware of their very human failings.

Part of why the babies are in charge has to do with the nature of problem-solving. The dilemmas in society and civilization for which we seek solutions are simultaneously too simple and too complex in their origins and causes. They're both obvious and subtle. Thoughtful and considerate people (i.e., those among us who are most mature) realize this and struggle to come up with solutions that are viable, can actually be implemented, and might work. By contrast, the babies in charge are quick to offer reasons for our problems and "solutions" to fix them that are crudely simplistic and can't possibly work, but which are emotionally resonant for certain demographic segments of the population. They talk about jobs, growing the economy, and who's to blame.

Because the public has such a short memory and is so easily fooled or sold a bill of goods, these fake solutions, which always backfire and lead to more problems, are usually never corrected. The data that tracks outcomes is either fudged or just tossed down the memory hole, clearing the way for another, newer fake solution. And so we move from one failure to the next, with the people in charge continually rewarded and called upon time and again to lead us ever further down the primrose path. *"Them that has, gets..."*

Another issue is that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Even the most righteous among us — those tens of millions I mentioned above who want to do good for us all — are vulnerable to being seduced and corrupted by power.

A candidate for high public office may say, *"Send me to Washington (or the state capitol), and I promise to serve two terms and then step aside."* Once in office, however, that promise typically vanishes. The elected representative, no matter how well-meaning, becomes part of the institutional machinery of power. He or she encounters all the difficulties of getting anything done to effectively change the status quo, as well as enjoying the many perks that come with the job. Rationalized justifications kick in: *"I need more time to fulfill my mission."* The original plan to hand the baton to a fresh runner gets shelved, and two terms in office become three, then four, then five. The Young Turk morphs into the Old Guard, de facto defender of the status quo, with principles compromised by too much down-and-dirty horse trading.

We no longer have time for any of this business-as-usual. So, let me offer two changes to our Consciousness — one collective and one individual — that are required if we are to have more than a snowball's chance in hell of surviving the disasters that are barreling down the pike and are already overtaking us.

First, we need to recognize collectively that our leaders have failed us, whether they are narcissistic babies or well-intentioned adults. This process of losing faith in institutions and leadership has been underway in America for at least the past ten years and is reaching record depths of mistrust. While not everyone admits it (for various reasons), anyone who is the least bit awake knows that something is very wrong with the world we've created. This is not a minority position. We may

differ on our assessments of what's wrong and how to fix it, often vehemently, but one thing is clear as a bell: We need to hold our leaders accountable, and stop giving them a free pass. Cults of personality and hero-worship of some presumed human savior are recipes for disaster.

Correction of our leadership problem requires nothing less than collectively taking to the streets. Some people suggest that voting out the Old Guard is the answer, but that's not even close to enough. I've become convinced that we need much more individual responsibility through direct action to grab the attention of our leaders — whoever they are at any given time — and hold their feet to the fire. We must keep constant and unremitting pressure on the people in charge. So, this isn't a one-time protest rally. It's an ongoing necessity. If there's to be a new normal, let it be masses of people in the streets all the time making their voices heard. Posting on social media won't cut it. We have to put our bodies on the line.

In the spirit of honesty and full disclosure, I won't be doing this. I'm too old and far too damaged to march in the streets. At this point, I'm nearly house-bound, and, given my declining physical health, that's unlikely to change. I will, however, encourage and enthusiastically cheerlead for all those who are able to take to the streets, most especially the younger generations.

Then second, we need to reconsider our individual positions in society. While a case can be made for the wisdom of age in leadership, some of us need to think about standing aside and letting younger and more vital hearts and minds come forward. Yeah, I know, youth is often impulsive, immature, and over-the-top. But we've tried the wisdom of age thing for quite awhile, and it just hasn't worked. Plus, we've sold out all future generations to come. We need to give the young ones a chance to have some influence over what happens.

Conversely, any of us older folks who have previously never stood up need to do so now — not tomorrow, not next year, but NOW. Most people reading this commentary are unlikely to be in that category, but it's important nonetheless. Don't be silent any longer. Going along to get along is over as a respectable strategy. Make your voice heard however you can. Tell us what you see in yourself and the world around you, and how you think and feel about it. Obviously, I hope you do that in the most mature way you can, as thoughtfully as possible, but do it regardless.

I don't offer these suggestions as end-all, be-all solutions. Truth be told, they're not solutions at all. They're simply necessary preconditions for the revolution that must happen if we are to survive. Currently, we are at war with ourselves about what kind of revolution to foment, and the systems I use to look at the future suggest that our disagreements will continue to burn red-hot, certainly for the next 3-4 years, and probably until the 2030s. We will never agree, but we can reach a working accommodation that will pass for consensus.

In the meantime, our in-fighting is likely be messy, often foolish, potentially violent, and sometimes tragic. But there's no easy path to reach a new and viable consensus. The old consensus was based far too often on falsehoods — mythic beliefs and fairy tales that didn't stand up to the scrutiny of hard reality. To get to the other side and forge a more reliable and valid consensus, we have to run this terrible gauntlet of mistrust and hatred.

The greatest likelihood, I'd imagine, is that our reconciliation — if it occurs — will come not from peacemaking efforts among ourselves, but from a collective response to the wrath of Mother Nature. Not that Nature is out to get us. She's not. Nature is simply adapting to the conditions that we humans forced on her. If we're lucky, the disasters ahead will cause us to come together and change how we live. How many of us will survive is anyone's guess.

I'm not sure that democracy or personal freedom will weather this transition. Whether we succumb to totalitarian dictatorship or a new and more equitable social contract is as yet unknown. In either outcome, however, we'll have to give up many of our sacred cows and cherished ideals. The hopes and dreams of humanity over the past three centuries are up for a major overhaul, and letting go of old yearnings is never easy. But we really have no other choice.

No matter how effectively (and peacefully) we adapt to an uncertain and difficult future, serious mistakes will be made along the way. Human frailty guarantees that. We aren't remotely close to having sufficient wisdom — collectively or individually — to prevent harm. Some people will be in the wrong place at the wrong time and suffer grievously, sometimes unfairly and through no fault of their own. But life on earth never has and never will offer any assurances of safety or security.

I will be gone before much of this is worked out, but I hope that those who come after me are able to get their heads screwed on straighter than my generation and all the previous ones did.