

# Swan Song: Death and Creativity

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By ancient belief, a swan sings a song just before death. It is a sad but beautiful image of grace and music, fitting for a certain nostalgia about swans, diverting our thoughts from their blaring honks, messes on the grass, and nipping with beaks. The phrase has a larger meaning as a final accomplishment of a composer, performer, civilization, or culture.

For me, this swan song is a unique chance to say something to my peers about some big ideas about death and creativity on the occasion of my retirement after 37 years and two quarters of teaching at California State University, Hayward. We know how to commemorate great life events with christenings, graduations, weddings, and funerals, but we lack adequate traditions for retirement. It is an ending, and thus like a funeral, only better, because I get to attend and even say something, which will be more difficult at my funeral.

I have quite a few things to say; we will start off with some philosophical perspectives on death and creativity, then talk about tribalism and religious fundamentalism as challenges to creativity. I will discuss the roles of the nation, the corporation, and the metro-region as three forces overcoming tribalism, but also with problems of their own, and how the US has become the odd man out among developed democracies. The success of these forces has led to a new crisis of sustainability, the most important aspect of which is global warming. The fearful American response to 9/11 has allowed a recrudescence of tribalism and fundamentalism in the neocon policies of the Bush administration. At home and abroad the US is reversing progress in international cooperation, social progress, and environmental reform. I conclude with a challenge to myself and others of like mind to forge a more persuasive rhetoric that respects the deep causes of tribalism and allows us to use our creativity to move our evolution forward.

## **Death**

Death is a shadow of unknown nothingness that hangs over our lives. Our species seems to have a greater conscious,

explicit awareness of death than any other. For many of us, science has removed the comfort of superstitious beliefs about an afterlife, or, for that matter, of a supernatural God outside of creation itself. Science can not tell us what to value, but it can frame what is probably true about creation. Even with science, or perhaps because of science as it probes farther into what is real, the ultimate meaning of creation becomes an ever deeper mystery. We progress from Galileo, Newton, and others to Einstein and special and general relativity, to the cosmological constant, and from there to string theory and discussions about extra dimensions.

Evidently, the universe started 13.7 billion years ago, more or less. Astronomers tell us the universe is expanding due to the repulsive force of dark energy, which makes up 75 percent of the universe. Observations by NASA from its Chandra X-ray satellite suggest the universe is expanding a little faster than previously thought. However, there is also a chance, although less of a chance, that dark energy is weakening, leading to a big crunch, because tiny differences in quantification produce very different results over very long periods of time. Either way, our individual deaths are insignificant compared to that of the universe, which is expected in 100 billion years, give or take.

### **Creativity**

Death can be countered by creativity, at least for a few tens of billions of years. The human species, so aware of death, is also full of creativity. Our brains, our senses, our opposable thumbs supported the development of culture, language, technology and, recently, science itself. We think about the creativity of the individual in society because that is what we can naturally understand and, thus, value. Individually, we ponder the mysteries that existence exists, that we are part of a creation, and that we can sense transcendent meaning for our lives, whether expressed in secular or religious terms.

Creativity, like death, can also be seen in terms of a larger creation, from a stance less centered in one life. We experience

consciousness and free will, so it is hard to see ourselves as temporary products of a continuous history. Our physical being gives rise to the experience of individuality but our individual creativity is part of a longer experiment in life itself, connecting us and rooting us in a continual unbroken physical and chemical link to the past, back to all life. Our bodies are amazing but temporary assemblages of organic chemicals and culture capable of reproduction, reproduction that ties us back to our parents and grandparents in what is at first a broadening of our family tree, but, going further back, converging on fewer and fewer ancestors, back to some tribes coming out of Africa. Those ancestors had non-human ancestors before them, going back further to the prehuman species from which we evolved, and with which we now co-evolve.

We live apparently by the life and death of separate organisms, but, at the microscale, we are part of a chemically unbroken chain of continually replicating genetic material using a multitude of diverse but temporary organisms to keep itself going. We share this with other humans and all living organisms, all part of one long march of molecules. Our bodies have the same old chemicals; we are just further along in a single chemical reaction. Language and culture and socialization of large organisms happened to be useful to relatively tiny amounts of DNA, intertwining the physical with the more abstract but equally essential and continuous social overlay.

How can we use our individual creativity in the larger historical process of chemicals and culture? How can we understand ourselves as products of the DNA within, and see ourselves as part of a creative process transcending our brief and limited individual lives? My hypothesis is that the creativity that can overcome death depends on overcoming much of our tribal heritage.

### **DNA and tribal origins**

Once a barely surviving native species, humans have become the most dangerous of introduced species, bringing ourselves and the species which serve us to remote corners of the

earth, at the expense of much of the life that happened to be there. Since the neolithic revolution we have played favorites among other species, killing off some, nurturing others, as wood or flowers, as pets or as food.

Our heritage is, essentially, tribal. It is based on territory and alpha males controlling small groups of hunters and gatherers numbering 150 or fewer humans. The tribe defends its territory and tries to expand it. The dominant alpha male and his lieutenants define the rules and enforce them, with women's roles well-defined and subordinate to men. Women raise the children, there are rituals for boys becoming men, and marriages are arranged. Deviants may be tolerated but also may be executed or expelled. These patterns are typical of all social species with males physically stronger than females. The defining phrase is "sexually dimorphous territorial animals."

### **Religious fundamentalism**

The negative aspects of tribalism are evident in religious fundamentalism. The greatness of the world's great religions is how they transcend tribalism, how they teach tolerance and inclusion of other tribes in a more loving and creation-centered society. Fundamentalism distorts these transcendent teachings back into tribalism, back into narrow dogmas of belief, restrictive rules, and social control. Belief by the brain displaces the faith of the heart, and the human spirit withers.

All fundamentalisms share five characteristics rooted in tribalism.

1. Fundamentalists insist on an exclusive monopoly on truth, requiring control of all people in all areas of life. Church and state must be one; nor is there separation of the private from the public, nor separation of thought and ideas from action and behavior. In fundamentalism, there is not much distance from Pat Robertson to Osama bin Laden, from Falwell to Khomeini, from religious right fundamentalism to the Taliban, from Islamic Jihad to Israeli settlers, or from Fox News to al-Jazeera.

2. Men rule women by right, enforced by strength. The leading men set the rules for other men and for women, for whom a narrow biology is destiny: women get to serve the men, raise the children, and take care of the house. Fundamentalists hate liberated women, women who decide for themselves whether to marry, whom to marry, if and when to have children, to get an education, to work outside the home, and to dress as they choose. And homosexuals are even worse.
3. Fundamentalists know what the holy books mean so there is no need for discussion, only indoctrination. There is one and only one right set of beliefs, only one set of roles, and only one holy writ. The only purpose of education is to perpetuate narrow beliefs. Freedom of speech and other rights can not be permitted.
4. Fundamentalists look backward to a golden age when they imagine society functioned as it should. While they accept some technologies, fundamentalists reject much modernism as corrupting of right behavior, as allowing youth and ideas to get out of control. Thus the role of the state, its military, police and educational systems, is to enforce right thought and right behavior, the ideology of religious fascism. Robertson, for example, repeatedly asserts that democracy works only if run by his kind of fundamentalists, that the president should put his hand on the constitution and swear to uphold the Bible. He does not mean the second commandment of the New Testament, something about loving one's neighbors; his Bible is about controlling personal behavior.
5. Fundamentalists place their beliefs above truth, so history and fact and science must be denied and reinvented. There is no integrity of thought, no room for debate outside the top circle, only self-referential solipsism. By contrast, from a non-fundamentalist point of view, we understand the Bible better when we take a scientific approach to understand a pre-scientific age, to see how history and culture shape and change the intent of original teachings. We can

separate the deeper, more important meaning from the idiosyncratic overlay of a particular time and place. Paul, for example, wrote some of the most beautiful language in the New Testament; but he also wrote rants based on his sexual hang-ups. Like the swan of the swan song, there was beauty and there was honking. The beauty helped us transcend our divisions; the honking perpetuated tribalism. Fundamentalists, by contrast, read the Bible without insight in order to use, selectively, what fits their agenda.

These five points do not come from me, but from The Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences of 1988 to 1993, involving over 100 scholars from many nations. The many papers on specific fundamentalisms began to cohere around common themes. They concluded that the characteristics discussed above are shared by all fundamentalisms, which speaks to something deep in our culture and goes back in time, something embedded in our DNA and our tribalism. Humans need more certainty than the evidence permits.

Fundamentalism takes many forms, including the American religious right. Please don't call it Christian; it gives Christianity a bad name. Fundamentalism also includes the Islamist extremists and more secular forms such as extreme anti-communism and its new step-child, extreme anti-terrorism. Insight into fundamentalism helps us understand human conflict in general, such as that between Palestinian extremists and Zionist extremists.

In our larger human history, tribalistic fundamentalism has become the path to death, an evolutionary dead end. Overcoming tribalism is the path to creativity, to a more meaningful new kind of evolution. Our millennial tribal heritage threatens in the new global society to destroy us. Just as the worse aspects of tribalism will destroy us, the better aspects can save us. The world historical challenge is to use our human brains created by evolution to change some of the inclinations built deeply into our DNA, to use our DNA and culture to save our DNA and culture from self-destruction. We must shift from a

narrow competitive tribalism insensitive to the cultures of other tribes to a broader more cooperative tribalism based on common values, religious values, that transcend narrow tribal religions. Our species needs to reinvent itself, to shift our weight from the divisive to the common, to expand the tribe to all tribes, to expand our local territory to the whole earth. This creativity is more than individual; it roots us in the physicality of our ancient tribal descendance and yet changes who we are. No other species faces such a challenge.

### **Overcoming tribalism: the nation**

In the transition to the modern world, three organizational forms or forces have dramatically altered the nature of tribalism, mostly overcoming it, sometimes succumbing to it. These are the nation, the corporation, and the metro-region.

The lesson of the development of nations has been one of overcoming primitive tribalism and, in modern times, ethnically-based nationalism. Modern nations generally created new identities diminishing tribal and small village identities. Their biggest danger has been when they become tribalistic, asserting an ethnic superiority and aggressing against other nations.

### **Beyond nationalism**

Now, nations more and more recognize that national identity must transcend ethnic identity and language. The US has a long history of ethnic and racial conflict evolving towards tolerance. The European Union after World War II has followed the same pattern, moving toward a multi-national, multi-ethnic European identity. The defeats of Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union removed dangerous tribal nationalisms, leaving smaller hot spots of ethnic cleansing by Serbs, Albanians, Arab Sudanese, Hutus, and Israeli Zionists.

Of these old nationalisms, Zionism is the most dangerous for the world today because it is embraced by the US government and both US political parties. Most Americans have virtually no understanding of the plight of the average Palestin-

ian, and through their indifference allow excessive influence by a relatively small force within American politics. While many Jews and others try to overcome this influence, they are a much smaller domestic political force than the Zionists.

On this issue there is an odd kind of cultural blindness in American politics, which focuses on Palestinian terrorism while ignoring Zionist settlement on Palestinian lands, human rights abuses, and terrible suffering perpetrated by the Israeli occupation. Israeli imperialism is possible only because of American support and it makes us hated, for good reason, in the Arab world. Israel can become secure only by abandoning imperialism, becoming a nation, and making peace with its neighbors, for in the long run the Arabs will become more educated, more productive, more democratic, and more powerful, and they will be able to do what they want. The people and governments of the EU seem to understand this, one of many major differences between the EU and the US. Europeans respect Israel's right to exist, but condemn the military occupation and seizure of Palestinian lands as immoral and dangerous.

### **US: tribal odd-nation-out among developed democracies**

The development of multi-ethnic nations is now leading logically to a multi-national world through the United Nations. The many nations of the world are participating in this process, even the US, but our participation is weak, haphazard, reluctant, and undermining our self-interest. There are many treaties and obligations that all other developed democracies fully support and which we oppose. I want to give you a long and even tedious list to drive home the point of American unilateralism and exceptionalism, the tribalistic influence on our nationalism. Unilateralism is taking action on our own or with a few supporters outside the context of international law. Exceptionalism is advocacy of rules enforced on others but refusal to allow the same enforcement on the US, on the assumption that the US is fair but enforcement against us would be biased. The US government labels some governments as

“rogue states” because they disobey treaties, and does so without any admission of US treaty violations. The people of the world see hypocrisy.

1. The US has been persistently delinquent in paying UN dues and peace-keeping costs required by treaties we have signed.
2. The US refuses to support the International Criminal Court even though our position weakens protections for American citizens abroad.
3. The US refuses to support the Ottawa Anti-Personnel Land Mine Ban Convention despite the lack of real military need and the mayhem that continues from landmines.
4. The US does not support the Convention on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons despite their role in violence in failed states and the voluntary nature of the convention.
5. The US continues to train and equip militaries in non-democratic countries, with no comparable effort to support democracy.
6. The US has refused to support the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, without which it will be difficult or impossible to stop the spread of nuclear weapons to rogue states.
7. The US has abandoned our historic support for Strategic Arms Reductions Treaties and instead signed with Russia in 2002 a three page public relations exercise which made a mockery of all previous treaties and was designed to hide a destabilizing escalation of the nuclear arms race by the US.
8. In June 2002 the US abrogated our participation in the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty in order to pursue development of a costly, technically difficult, and easily countered Ballistic Missile Defense missile system, which would be more dangerous were it not so ineffective.
9. The US has opposed effective enforcement of the Biological Weapons Convention of 1972, which requires inspections that US companies fear could lead to loss of trade

- secrets, leaving the US more vulnerable to bioweapon attack due to lack of inspection.
10. US military spending is more than the ten next highest spending nations combined, and is by far the largest discretionary item in the federal budget. The amount of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) spent on the military exceeds all other developed democracies. World military expenditures, the price of tribalism, rose to \$956 billion in 2003, nearly one trillion dollars, of which 47 percent was by the US alone. The US has 725 military bases in 130 nations costing \$400 billion per year.
  11. The US without UN or NATO support invaded Iraq with small contingents of “coalition” forces, based on false “intelligence” and in violation of international law as understood by most experts. The invasion failed to meet the requirement of imminent threat required by the doctrine of preemption. Over 1,000 Americans and many more Iraqis have died and more will die as Iraqis resist occupation and anti-American militias dominate large urban areas. The cost of upwards of \$5 billion per month, combined with tax cuts, job losses, and a weak economy, is leading to a US fiscal crisis.
  12. The US has refused to support UN resolutions relating to Palestine and Israel.
  13. Ignoring many UN resolutions, the US has embargoed Cuba, bolstering the Castro regime it purports to oppose and lowering the standard of living of average Cubans.
  14. The US supports repressive regimes in Latin American countries exporting illegal drugs to the US, overlooking human rights abuses to pursue a foreign war on drugs we are not willing to wage at home.
  15. The US has repudiated the Kyoto Protocol, made global warming worse, and offered nothing except pseudo-science and platitudes.
  16. The US has failed to ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity, in the face of the largest extinction event since the end of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago.

17. The US has undermined the Biosafety Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity, by blocking even minimal constraints on trade, jeopardizing biodiversity and human health.
18. The US has failed to ratify the Desertification Treaty, which would reduce over-grazing, over-cultivation, and deforestation now degrading 2.2 billion acres of arid lands throughout the world, affecting hundreds of millions of people.
19. The US has refused to ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, despite its meeting all US objections. The treaty entered into force without the US. The US is now barred from membership in the Tribunal and other forums established by the treaty.
20. The US has refused to ratify the Basel Convention on the export of hazardous wastes.
21. The US has been resisting EU efforts to get a meaningful UN Convention Against Corruption.
22. The US has refused to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which bans female genital mutilation, sex trafficking, and domestic abuse, and supports female inheritance, other property rights, and political participation.
23. The US has a “gag rule” preventing federal assistance to groups providing comprehensive family planning abroad even though it is legal in the US. The US refuses to support the UN Population Fund.
24. The US refuses to support The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which would prohibit military training of children and sending them into combat, as well as other rights to help the health, education, and safety of all children, because we support the right of states to execute children for murder.
25. The US refuses to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, one of two treaties implementing Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

26. The US does not support The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the other treaty implementing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
27. The US gives a smaller portion of its gross domestic product for foreign economic assistance than any other country in the world, even less when the major recipient, Israel, is deducted.

America, thus, has made progress toward multi-cultural nationalism domestically, but, internationally, in the 1980s and 1990s, has drifted away from cooperation. Our business and political leadership is generally ignorant of the social forces underlying world affairs. Narrow domestic political interests control key foreign policy areas; the media propagandizes more than it educates; and most people are even more ignorant than our leaders. As our military and economic power increased we emerged as the only world superpower, but the knowledge we need to act responsibly has not grown commensurately. The government is therefore vulnerable to ideologically-based extremes. Since World War II the government has been vulnerable to anti-communist hysteria, and more recently to anti-terrorist imperialism.

9/11 has made things worse. 9/11 unleashed a psychological earthquake shifting the tectonic plates of American politics, moving them significantly toward destructive tribalism. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century we have allowed 16<sup>th</sup> century fanatics to move us back a century in our capacity for rational action. The US necessarily has problems due to its global preeminence, but we have made matters worse many times over due to neo-conservative unilateralism, the new American tribalism.

Our misuse of power has created a vacuum. The European Union is emerging, haltingly and with at best a small awareness of its new role as the moral and ethical leader of the world. It is a messy, convoluted process, with no conscious assumption of some mantle of leadership. The old world is trying to figure out how to come to the rescue of the new

world within living memory of when the new world came to the rescue of the old.

### **Overcoming tribalism: the corporation**

The nation is not the only force overcoming tribalism, yet vulnerable to its own versions of it. The corporation has become the preeminent organizational power driving economic change. Corporations, like nations, are not going to go away, and are not inherently good or bad. Large corporations can be good and bad at the same time, just like swans, religions, and nations. It is the job of the passionate middle to engage in the details of balancing judgments among competing values, to sort out what is good and what is bad about corporations. While the media and the political debate stress hopelessly simplified and polarized pro- and anti-corporate ideologies, both corporate leaders and reformers are, in very different ways, reshaping how corporations work.

Abuses of corporate power first emerged in the industrial capitalism and financial capitalism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their excesses were moderated by the Progressives, the New Deal, and various movements since World War II. In recent decades, corporations are changing from within. Some corporate leaders are forging new models of flat organization, cross-departmental working relationships, culture-driven creative work, and even managers chosen by their employees. New standards for social accountability are gaining ground, and concern for sustainability and best practices motivate many managers to raise standards, and not just for the bottom line. Spates of scandals over the last 20 years involved few corporations in comparison to the whole. Corporations are too big and important to condemn wholesale; they reflect human nature.

Citizen reformers of corporations are also effectively changing them, but only when they publicize specific abuses rather than attack corporations in general. Like the Fabians of England, research and advocacy links outrage to clearly identified evils of labor exploitation and environmental degradation. Citizen groups seek specific legislation, regulations, court de-

cisions, and corporate policies to effectuate change. And there are hybrid efforts, such as socially-screened mutual funds and stock-holder actions, helping investors to do a little good while trying to do a little better.

In general, the corporation and its multitudinous junior partner, small business, have produced a far higher standard of living than any tribalism or centralized state ownership ever could. The corporation mobilizes science and technology, talent and capital, organization and resources, in a competitive environment to meet consumer demand. Economic freedom is as important as social and political freedom for creativity.

Corporations do have systemic problems. Corporate leaders' understanding of short term threats and opportunities for their businesses is greater than their grasp of larger, longer term trends. Corporation leaders bias elections, where their money is a megaphone drowning out the citizen interest and manipulating citizens through commercials vetted by focus groups. The bias is not that of a coherent elite, but of a multitude of special interests each seeking a tax break here, or regulatory relief there, or maybe a specific subsidy or a contract. The corruption is not old-fashioned bribery, but a mutual shakedown between business and political leaders, policies implicitly traded for campaign funds.

Campaign finance reform as pioneered by Arizona and Maine show how this corruption can be overcome, saving taxpayers far more than the public cost of the campaigns.

### **Overcoming tribalism: the metro-region**

After the nation and the corporation, the third organizing force overcoming narrow tribalism has been the metro-region. Once we could call them cities, but now they are too big and too transformed from the compact, transit-based city that prevailed to the mid-1920s. Modernization has swept people off the farm and into urban areas which now produce most goods and services. Geographic concentration of a multiplicity of factors of production has proven itself efficient and produc-

tive. World competition is not just of nations and corporations, but of metro-regions.

The metro-region is the primary geographic location for the action of national and corporate forces. The census defines 362 Metropolitan Statistical Areas, ranging from Carson City, Nevada, with 52,000 population to New York with 18,323,000. MSAs contain 83 percent of the US population. The metro-region is where most of the interaction is, among families, businesses, commerce, governments, education, health care, social services, religion, associations, media, political parties—all the complex institutions of modern life. In modern metro-regions, the conflicts of tribalism diminish in the pursuit of affluence. Ethnicity can be a source of identity and pride without being a cause of conflict.

### **Sustainability: the new contest between death and creativity**

As nations, corporations, and metro-regions overcome tribalism and religious fundamentalism, the totally new problem of environmental sustainability has emerged. The economies that have lifted the quality of life now threaten to destroy the new world they have created, a money world isolated from nature.

Environmentalism deals with many serious issues: population growth, public lands and preservation vs. resource extraction, protection of species and biodiversity, pollution and recycling, forestry and grazing, agriculture, the ocean and fisheries, open space, urbanization, highways vs. transit, and so on. Over the last twenty years, however, a new problem has emerged which dwarfs previous issues. Global warming is by far the biggest threat now facing humanity.

Humanity evolved with carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the range of 200 to 300 parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere. In fact, for the last 400,000 years, going way back before human evolution, CO<sub>2</sub> rarely rose above 300 ppm. Since the dawn of the industrial revolution, CO<sub>2</sub> levels are up exponentially, from a base of about 280 ppm in 1800, to over 370 parts per



million today. Global average temperatures are up exponentially, directly following carbon dioxide trends. On a graph with a geological time scale, or even just the last 1000 years, large recent increases in warming gases and in temperatures are concurrent, nearly vertical, and higher than all previous human existence.

Global warming has already radically transformed world climate. Global warming has caused incredible changes in polar ice, the Greenland ice sheets, all glaciers on all continents, and huge areas of permafrost and tundra. Ocean temperatures are rising and ocean currents are changing. Sea levels and storm surges are rising; rainfall patterns are changing. Spring is coming sooner and fall later, and the weather is changing. Plants and animals, including disease vectors, are on the move globally, by altitude, season, and geography. Global warming adds to already extreme problems of over-grazing, over-cultivation, conversion of land to urban uses, use of fossil fuels to grow food, and loss of species.

The money economy doesn't care. Our global economy, whose accounting system is divorced from the environmental reality that sustains it, has driven off a cliff, is in free fall, and does not realize it. Our accounting system fails to consider indirect costs of environmental degradation and external costs to persons.

Just as old narrow tribalisms threaten death, so now does the new reality of environmental overshoot of the earth's carrying capacity. We need creativity to confront the new challenge. We can dismiss projections of catastrophe if we wish, they have often been wrong. But the evidence already of massive environmental decline is overwhelming, and there is always the case of Easter Island, whose pre-scientific society destroyed itself by growing beyond the carrying capacity of the island. Science, a human process, is not perfect, but it produces the best knowledge we have, ignored at our peril.

The nation, the corporation, and the metro-region are equally relevant for tackling environmental problems, including global warming. The political pattern which is overcoming

social injustice is relevant for environmental reform. The campaign for social justice involves political action to put a price on inequities, usually through regulation and use of the police power, and sometimes through economic incentives. The "free" market is not, ultimately, free or value-neutral, but structured to reflect the power of the elite and the myths and values of the participant public. Slavery is no longer acceptable, but environmental abuse still is.

Concerning the environment, if there is some protection of wilderness and endangered species, it is not because of their market value as bananas or carrots. It is because, like expanding the tribe, we place a value on creation apart from narrow economic needs, because our lives become larger by respecting life as a whole, an expansion of the tribe to all life. The calculation is not a monetary one, but part of a balancing of values that frame markets.

### **The nation and sustainability**

Unquestionably, national governments play the lead role in constraining corporations to protect the environment, just as they act to protect investors, workers, and consumers. A major national debate in this respect has occurred over Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards for motor vehicles, a regulatory approach to energy conservation now also relevant for global warming. CAFE has by and large failed, and its period of evident success is better explained by the high oil prices that prevailed from 1972 to 1985. CAFE always had a political bias against foreign auto-makers. CAFE did nothing about people driving more because of cheap oil. CAFE tried to dictate by regulation a specific solution when hundreds of other changes could be more cost-effective.

I think a more creative approach is not regulation of corporations for a mandated solution, but economic incentives aimed at all of us to find a multitude of solutions. It is politically easier to blame corporations, but the problem is us.

We need, for global warming, a carbon tax based on the carbon content of coal, oil, and natural gas, and that tax needs

to be balanced by the lowering of another tax such as the sales tax. This idea is called a Pigovian tax; it incorporates into the market price previously externalized costs. The tax changes price relationships without creating a windfall gain for government. It costs the average family nothing; the increase of the carbon tax is offset by the decrease in another tax. People are not familiar with this idea and tend not to believe it; it seems too slick. But it would work.

A carbon tax would need continual adjustment: Too small, and nothing happens; too big, and it is too disruptive. At a moderate level the tax influences decisions across the board and makes the economy more productive. The tax lowers fossil fuel use, which then lowers the revenue from the tax. The tax can then be raised, and eventually can reach a point of causing a decline in carbon emissions consistent with the survival of humanity and other life as we know it. The criteria for adjusting the tax is simple, to attain a long term decline in carbon emissions.

While a carbon tax is not yet on the political agenda, a related issue, “peak oil,” is now very much in debate. The peak oil problem is that we are running out of oil, with demand growing faster than reserves. Crude oil prices are over \$40 per barrel. Higher prices will spur conservation and alternatives, but if use of other fossil fuels increases, especially coal, it will continue to cause global warming. The carbon tax idea is but one example of a larger concept of getting the money economy to consider the earth on which it depends.

Besides pricing reform, we also need to measure things properly. For example, the balance sheet for logging on private land considers the reduction of the asset of standing timber. Double entry bookkeeping assures that the increase in income from the sale of the logs is balanced by a reduction in the related asset. Logging on public land, however, records no loss of asset value. The GDP includes a value for rent imputed to owner-occupied housing, but no value for homemaker labor. The cost of crime raises GDP; a low crime rate has a value not clearly reflected.

It was not easy to develop national accounts and input-output matrices for the economy, and it will not be easy to incorporate non-monetized values. In many cases it may be impossible. For example, the work I do as a citizen has no value for the GDP, and probably can't be valued. How do we place a value on stopping a freeway or saving open space? Still, more realistic research is being done to value non-monetized costs. Redefining Progress, a think tank, has developed the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), which does not make conventional money-oriented economists happy, but has a kind of common sense to it. It starts from GDP, but then adds estimates of value for non-monetized activities and subtracts things like the cost of crime that increase GDP but do not make us better off. In recent years GPI has stabilized and declined as our GDP continues to go up.

### **The corporation and sustainability**

The modern environmental movement has had a profound impact on corporations. It may be difficult to give corporations credit given what needs to be done and the destructive practices of certain industries, but the pressures of law, public opinion, and conscience have impelled technological revolutions. The redesign of industrial processes to value energy, resources, and pollution has not only dramatically reduced environmental impacts but also improved the bottom line. Technology has been the joker in the deck, foiling some projections of gloom and doom. Tail pipe add-ons, for example, are costly and one measure of environmental spending, but the real gains are from comprehensive technology changes.

The political pattern of social reform also applies environmentally. Environmental values have been incorporated into many board rooms. The Social Accountability industry standard, SA8000, promoted by Social Accountability International, educates and rewards better environmental performance. Environmental best practices are developed, debated, and publicized. Socially-screened mutual funds have been successful. Share holder actions have an impact not usually

shown in votes but often influence subsequent management decisions.

The downside is still there and important. Corporations engage in green-scramming: public relations efforts to magnify a bit of environmental good and to hide a lot of bad. Agricultural, mining, oil, chemical, motor vehicle, and electric power industries pose particular problems, well documented by the Worldwatch Institute. Excessive political influence often prevails over science and environmental values.

One reaction is to reject modern technologies, and there are indeed many chemicals—persistent organic pollutants, some pesticides, heavy metals—that we evolved without and can still do without. However, potentially commercial technologies could dramatically reduce environmental impacts, as detailed in the writings of Paul Hawkin, Amory Lovins, Hunter Lovins, and Lester Brown. Most recently, Princeton researchers (*Science*, ~Aug. 10, 2004) describe numerous existing technologies that can dramatically reduce carbon emissions. The primary impetus needed is a market incentive, which can be provided by reformed prices such as the carbon tax.

### **The metro-region and sustainability**

For many years I have been interested in metro-region sustainability. Metro-regions have become auto-dependent and dispersed, and continued suburbanization is not sustainable. Land is running out, oil is running out, resource wars are killing people, and the world climate can't take it. Yet regional leaders emphasize the need to compete with other regions with ever-more economic and suburban development. They do not recognize that population growth and economic growth are not correlated. Some regions are expanding in population with little gain in income; others have more stable populations and are increasing their incomes: "growth without growth," the mantra of sustainability.

Regions continue to honor broken accounting systems, ignoring important costs in the pursuit of false progress. The

problem is not only sprawl, but also imbalances between job locations and housing locations. Successful cities in a region attract job concentrations, and up to a point their agglomeration economies—increased productivity from the geographic proximity of factors of production—contribute to the economy. The winning cities do not, however, have to provide enough housing and can externalize that cost to other cities. The winning corporations and cities benefit, but there are six costs not accounted for in the regional product:

1. The cost of housing soars because the winning city restricts supply in order to improve its fiscal balance. Housing costs more money to serve than it generates in taxes, so housing which the market could supply is stopped by zoning regulation.
2. Commute distances and durations and congestion get worse because employees must travel from housing that is further away.
3. Air pollution gets worse because of longer and congested commutes.
4. Low-wage workers live in crowded housing so they can afford high rents.
5. Cities with housing surpluses have fiscal stress because their tax and service bases are unbalanced.
6. Long-distance commuters and their families suffer stress due to extra time on the road.

These costs can be called "job location externalities," and they are not adequately considered by the money economy.

Another major problem has been subsidies and indirect pricing of auto use, which promotes sprawl and excessive road construction. Without artificially low prices for auto use, sprawl would not be possible. The land use pattern does not cause auto dependency; auto subsidies created the land use and the dependency.

In 1978 I started the Hayward Area Planning Association (HAPA), with big challenges to save open space and to stop a freeway. In June 2004 we mostly completed our efforts to save open space on Walpert Ridge, the undeveloped hills southeast

of the campus of California State University, Hayward. The Blue Rock project will have 412 acres of housing and golf course and 1,732 acres in open space, or 76 percent of the whole property. We settled of litigation in exchange for \$1,512,000 to buy additional open space in Union City. Earlier HAPA efforts on Bailey Ranch, which is next to Blue Rock, won dedication of 87 percent of the development to East Bay Parks. HAPA also played an important role in acquiring the Meincke property, all of which is leading to a significant expansion of Garin and Dry Creek Parks. Given local politics, in which golf courses have more political value than habitat, HAPA has been fairly successful.

In 1978 HAPA also started a long fight against the Foothill Freeway, which would have gone through five miles of existing housing and across the face of the East Bay hills. Finally, in spring 2004, the state appellate court denied an appeal by Caltrans, ending Caltrans' effort to take money voters approved for one project and spend it on another. Meanwhile, the City of Hayward got permission from the voters in 2002 to do something else. The city initially proposed an overwidening of Mission Blvd. that would have taken almost two miles of developed commercial frontage on the east side to make eight lanes of road width. Expanding pavement, however, has fewer benefits than claimed because of induced demand, which is the increased traffic due to more free road capacity. Build it and they will come, at least to a significant extent. HAPA in June 2004 helped stop the Mission overwidening, but a widening proposal still threatens downtown Hayward.

In these open space and freeway issues, it has been frustrating for me that the more sophisticated arguments about habitat, auto pricing reform, urban systems, and sustainability do not have much traction. HAPA's success seems based more on a popular gut-level desire for open space and against more pavement.

Sustainability requires that car transportation become more of a private good and less of a public good. People need to pay directly for the real costs of their behavior, or they cannot

make responsible and economically productive choices in the market place. Sustainability also requires that environmentalists pay much more attention to economics and that economists pay much more attention to the environment—not to deny the role of markets, but to make them work more economically.

To sum up a bit, we can see the role of nation, corporation, and metro-region in overcoming tribalism, but at the same time they are still vulnerable to tribalism and other problems. We see their success creating new problems of environmental sustainability, particularly global warming. The challenge to human creativity is for the brain and culture created by evolution to overcome the biases built-in by evolution, to prevent overshooting the carrying capacity of the earth.

### **American politics**

I have mentioned above a number of foreign relations problems of this nation. From largely successful leadership by both parties at the international level from World War II to the end of the Cold War, US foreign policy has degenerated over the last twenty years, accentuated by 9/11. Those problems are caused by the whole political system, but some parts more than others. As of 2004 the worst parts of the national problem are the right wing Republican Congress, the neocons, and the administration of President George W. Bush, who show a recrudescence of fundamentalism and are a threat to sustainability. The other parts of the political system include most of the rest of the Republican Party and many Democrats who have gone along with Bush policies; citizens who fail to be interested and knowledgeable; a media passive to manipulation by elected officials or cheering them on; the corruption of democracy by private financing of campaigns; and the ineffectiveness of my fellow informed moderates, including myself.

I will focus on the worst parts, but first mention the victims of neocon ideology. There is a class of Americans in the middle and lower middle classes, neither poor nor affluent, who vote but have limited knowledge or interest in politics,

especially above the local level, but who feel a great sense of loyalty to the nation. They have been coopted by the neocons. They respond to the rhetoric of patriotism, leadership, and strength independent of the content of the policies behind the rhetoric. Globalism is protecting investors and corporations, but not the environment and workers. Tax policy is benefitting the affluent, especially those whose income comes from investments. Along with the benefits of freer trade comes costs, many not just a result of free markets, but of policies and unfair competition. As this social class gets squeezed it is forced into unemployment, jobs that don't pay as well, or precarious or part time work, and they join the military or national guard as an attractive opportunity for training, work experience, and future employability.

Bush resisted efforts to get to the bottom of 9/11, apparently fearing criticism. He opposed a commission to study it; then changed his mind. He denied the Kean Commission adequate funding, then changed his mind. He refused to provide the commission with critical documents, then changed his mind. He opposed extending its deadline, then changed his mind. He refused to allow access to prisoners linked to the attack. He stopped his National Security Advisor from talking to the commission, then changed his mind. He refused to testify under oath. Everyone observing American politics could see this vacillation, but it was not seen by the coopted class, who responded instead to Bush claims of strong leadership.

In 1992 and 1993 I could see the neocon rush to war—the disinformation, exaggeration, misuse of intelligence, and media propaganda. I could see that the war, while short, was wrong; the aftermath would be difficult; and it would undermine the war on terrorism. The people of this class, however, believe in WMD, in some link to Al Qaeda, in the evil of the neocons' former friend, Saddam, and, thus, in invading and occupying Iraq. I would have refused to serve in the military rather than undermine US security. They, however, were willing to die, and hundreds have died, because they thought it would help US security. The learning process during Vietnam

took many years at the time, but this social class mostly did live through it, did not learn much from it, and did not study it afterwards. I feel sorry for these people. Perhaps I am an over-educated intellectual patronizing them, but the problem is that their votes threaten my security as well as theirs.

### **The Neocon Counter-Revolution**

I turn, now, from the chorus to the main actors. The neocon revolution, which is really a counter-revolution against historic progressive trends, has taken over the US government with the support of a partisan Congress, an inept media, and an uninformed citizenry. Right-wing Republicans have embraced religious fundamentalism, betraying the concept of religious tolerance and secular government on which this country was founded. Decades after the Scopes trial and Roe v. Wade, and independent of majority public opinion, the issues of school prayer, creationism, a woman's right to choose, and human rights for homosexuals influence millions of votes. These Republicans have embraced large corporations, at the expense of fair play in the market place and fair taxation. They have embraced big government in the name of opposing it and abandoned fiscal responsibility to fight wars and to subsidize the upper class. They have turned their back on science, the environment, women, and the disadvantaged of all ethnicities.

### **Iraq**

In previous eras, faced with far worse dangers abroad, both political parties pursued, generally successfully, a policy of aggressive rhetoric and prudent containment. No one complained that containment left brutal dictators in power; few wanted to invade the Soviet Union. George W. Bush had not planned on conquering Iraq when he took office. Like most Republicans, he had criticized Clinton for "nation-building" in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, and had called for a humble foreign policy. Once in office, however, a far right network of

advocates of unilateral use of US military power captured his imagination.

Similar to the credibility the Johnson administration had prior to the Tet offensive of 1968, the Bush regime managed to wage a war of aggression on false pretenses. The doctrine of preemptive war was not itself to blame, but it requires imminent threat, and there was none. Most non-ideological observers around the world believed there was none; no credible intelligence supported imminent threat; and any doubts were eliminated by extensive inspections prior to the invasion.

There was no nuclear program; there was no yellow cake from Niger. The aluminum tubes were for artillery mortars, not centrifuges, as the Iraqi nuclear program had moved beyond that method for refining uranium. There were no mobile bioweapon labs; only two trailers sold by the British to fill helium balloons. There was no missile threat; any warhead in the missile reduced its range to a permitted distance. Iraqi military capabilities had been hugely damaged in the Gulf War, and inspections after the invasion found what those before had found, essentially no Weapons of Mass Destruction. It seems clear the neocons really believed there were such WMD, but that was a result of a paranoid bias in the use of intelligence so that no matter what Saddam did, he was about to kill us. Most neocons did not believe there were links between al Qaeda and Saddam; that was only for a cynical manipulation of a credulous media and public. There were some things going on in back alley rooms, but no real threats.

The neocons also set up their own "intelligence" unit in the Pentagon and a shadow National Security Council under Cheney, as their lack of control over the State Dept. and the CIA prevented them from getting the alarming assessments they wanted. They embraced Ahmad Chalabi, an Iraqi exile and con man who evidently embezzled his bank in Jordan, fled to London, got Bush support, and more recently gave American military secrets to Iran. It is less clear why so many others were taken in by the drumbeat for war; it seems to be part of the tribal fall-out from 9/11.

Colin Powell's contribution to American military doctrine had been to use overwhelming power and to have an exit strategy. The military invasion part of the Iraq exercise did use such power, but the occupation has too few troops in relation to their mission. The exit strategy, if there was one, was totally unrealistic, based on neocon myths about Iraqi society. Media concentration on violence makes it difficult to assess the current situation. Many parts of Iraq are now working better and some military commanders have developed political skills in working with local Iraqis.

On the whole, however, the occupation has been poorly managed. The occupation blundered by preventing non-ideological professionals forced by Saddam to be Baathists from helping create a new government. It erred by too slowly creating a regular Iraqi army and police which could have been purged and mobilized to control settled areas. It conducted heavy-handed interventions in populated areas that should have been done by Iraqis. It has too small a force spread out too far to allow full surveillance against guerrilla incursions in urban areas, along critical roads, and against pipelines. The human rights violations at Abu Ghraib prison, based on techniques developed by the CIA, were foreshadowed by earlier abuses—CIA "research" which started in the 1950s, Pentagon indifference, and neocon legal briefs defending torture. The question is not whether our enemies will live by the rule of law; the question is whether we will.

I want to present a news story about Iraqi culture that suggests how hard it is for us to occupy a country so different from our own. The son of Ali Sayadan al-Obeidi of Baghdad was kidnapped for ransom on April 9, 2003. Little Farouk answered a knock at the door and was snatched. The police were powerless and advised paying the ransom. Three days later a note was dropped at al-Obeidi's door with a cell phone number: the kidnapers wanted \$30,000. He told them he didn't have it; they would have to ask for less; and he hung up. Both sides knew the kidnapers would have to deliver another note with another number to call. Al-Obeidi pulled out his Kalash-

nikov and waited a few days. Finally, at 4 a.m. three men drove by and dropped off a note. Al-Obeidi ran after the car and fired. The speeding car got a flat tire and the men tried to escape on foot. Al-Obeidi and his neighbors caught one of them. Al-Obeidi pointed his rifle at the man and demanded to know where his son was.

The man—a 34 year old career criminal—led him to a house, from which al-Obeidi and his relatives quickly retrieved Farouk. Al-Obeidi did not turn the man over to the police, because he knew the Americans would let him loose, leading to tribal enmities between the al-Obeidi clan and the kidnapper's tribe, the al-Hayali, based in the city of Balad. He demanded \$120,000 of them because the rules allowed him to multiply the first sum by four. I am not making this up, and I hope the newspaper did not either. Al-Obeidi detained the kidnapper at a relative's house for six weeks waiting for the al-Hayali to do the right thing.

Finally, on May 23, the elders of both clans met under a tent near al-Obeidi's house, wearing tribal costumes. The newspaper reporter in attendance reported, "Tea and sweets were served." There was a long discussion. In the end, al-Obeidi agreed to give up the kidnapper in exchange for an apology from the al-Hayali. Why? Al-Obeidi said, "it would be shameful for us to take any money that came about as a result of criminal activity," and expressed some sympathy for the plight of the other tribe. His philosophy: "the head of the family considers his family the most precious thing he has in his life. And he's ready to sacrifice his own life for their safety. Indeed, that would be a very cheap price to save his family." He has his son back, the tribes are at peace, and honor has been served.

Would not Americans consider it honorable to fight a foreign army on US soil? If so, what are the odds of an American occupation with a few hundred thousand troops succeeding in a society of millions of Iraqis?

Eisenhower warned of the unwarranted influence of the military-industrial complex. Neocon republicans embrace the

military-industrial complex to further unrealistic ideological goals that undermine our security. We cannot object to ending imminent threats from Weapons of Mass Destruction, to overthrowing a brutal dictator, or to bringing democracy to Arab nations. We can object to nearly unilateral aggression against other nations when there is no imminent threat and the distortion of intelligence to propagandize the American people to support such aggression. We can object to justifying the violation of international law and human rights regarding the treatment of prisoners, the failure to use adequate military force to achieve the objectives of occupation, the resulting death and chaos on a scale worse than the regime we displaced, the lack of an exit strategy, and the disregard of the opinions of most governments and peoples of the world. America's once high and stable image has since 2000 plummeted by 53 percentage points in Germany, 43 in Italy, 35 in the UK, 36 in Poland, 40 in Turkey. In June 2003 only 30 percent of Europeans approved of Bush's foreign policy.

### **Iraq and the war on terror**

The War on Terror has been side-tracked. The neocons and the oil men decided Saudi Arabia was unreliable or becoming unstable, which required the US military to take Iraq for American oil interests. Neocons now excuse the pervasive misuse of intelligence to justify aggression as an excess of enthusiasm short of lying. They ignore world opinion, the success of the weapons inspectors, and the lack of WMD. They repeat anecdotes about Saddam's brutality, manipulating American compassion for the oppressed. The neocons rebel against binding the US to international order, so now no nation need bind itself. They have reduced our security by a reckless and arrogant contempt for multilateral international institutions to control the use of force.

Aggression against Iraq necessarily diverted attention and resources away from Afghanistan, where Al Qaeda, Taliban, warlords, and poppies keep their grip outside of Kabul and in Northwest Pakistan. Neocon allegations of links between

sworn enemies, Al Qaeda and Iraqi Baathists, were a sham that continues to deceive large numbers of Americans. After the War for Oil undercut the War on Terror, the neocons asked our allies for help in Iraq while freezing them out of contracts to rebuild. We continue to pursue policies offensive to Muslims, contributing to a pool of alienated youth ripe for recruitment to extremism.

At home, Homeland Security makes some progress but critical threats are ignored. Firearms go almost unregulated. A ban on private ownership of military assault weapons, weak to begin with, was allowed to lapse. Our borders are poorly patrolled. Within days of the capture of Saddam, the Bush administration announced the gravest terror threat since 9/11 and encouraged all of us to enjoy the holidays.

### **The sweep of the counter-revolution**

Preoccupation with 9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq have distracted attention from other neocon initiatives across a wide range of other foreign and domestic policies. When the Cold War ended in 1989-1991, the world breathed a sigh of relief. Now, despite a continuing danger from nuclear proliferation, the Bush administration has rejected the test ban treaty and is escalating the nuclear arms race with new nuclear weapons, another source of tension with Europe.

The Bush administration has launched an assault on Constitutional rights. Who thought that due process of law could evaporate so fast? Bush has locked up American citizens in military custody uncharged with a specific crime, denied lawyers, denied access to the evidence against them, denied trial, and held incommunicado. Private papers may be seized without probable cause or reasonable suspicion. Up to July 2004 Bush held 660 prisoners of war in Guantanamo beyond reach of any lawyers or courts, not entitled to any rights, and has only changed course, slightly, under orders of the US Supreme Court. In 2002 US officials arrested a Canadian citizen and turned him over to Syria for a year of imprisonment and torture, from which he was released in November 2003—without

charge. Military officers are upset over US violations of the Geneva Convention for the treatment of prisoners, knowing that US behavior will justify even worse behavior against our personnel by our enemies. Meanwhile, the neocons are trying to tear down the International Criminal Court, an emerging pillar of global justice with more safeguards and openness than the military commissions they propose for the POWs. Yet the neocons hold up American democracy as a model for the world.

### **Science**

Neocon foreign policy has distracted media attention from its assault on science and the environment. The Bush administration has launched a wide ranging attack on science at the behest of its client corporations. The neocons attack the strong scientific consensus with pseudo-science, covering all issues on their agenda. Ideologically motivated misuse of science is corrupting the federal government.

Almost 50 Nobel laureates, 11 National Medal of Science winners and 5,000 more scientists from both parties have accused the Bush administration of politicizing science. The Union of Concerned Scientists, in language unprecedented in its history, states “The administration has misrepresented scientific information to the American public, censored and distorted scientific research and analysis, muzzled researchers, stacked and even disbanded scientific advisory panels, and otherwise abused the scientific process. On global warming, nuclear weapons, reproductive health, and air pollution, scientific findings have been censored, manipulated, and ignored for political gain.” (I removed some formatting from the original.) Other science issues include mining damage in Appalachia, endangered salmon, lead poisoning, atrazine, power plant mercury emissions, bioethics, emergency contraception safety, Florida panther habitat, bull trout in the Pacific Northwest, Rocky Mountain trumpeter swans. Many statistical series on the environment have been cancelled.



## Environment

The attack on the science of global warming is prolonging our dependence on foreign oil and thus damaging our national security. US global warming gases are the major cause of global warming, but the energy industry—gas, oil, coal, electrical power—now has political influence unprecedented in American history, with the President, Vice-President, and numerous top level appointees from the oil industry. Conflict over climate change is a major source of friction with the European Union.

Bush, always skeptical about warming and hostile to Kyoto, promised in his campaign to reduce emissions from new coal-fired electrical plants, but abandoned even that pledge early in his administration, squelching an initiative by his EPA Administrator. Then, when the White House edited an EPA report too severely, the EPA simply dropped the whole warming section from the report rather than go against the scientific consensus.

The neocons want to expand use of coal for electricity and of oil for cars. There is too little oil on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to matter, but they want to break the protections for wildlife there, and then to drill off-shore and in national parks. The neocons removed federal wildlife maps from the web and fired the offending cartographer; they removed the poetry from a Smithsonian photo exhibit on Alaska and moved the exhibit to the basement. The Kyoto Treaty, a faltering, fragile international effort, is greatly weakened by US hostility and unilateralism.

Linked to global warming, yet with a vastness all its own, is the ocean. The Pew Oceans Commission and the Commission on Ocean Policy in 2004 reported in depth on the ocean crisis. The large fish—swordfish, tuna, sharks, marlin—have declined 90 percent in fifty years. Once gigantic fisheries have collapsed through the magic of the marketplace, the political influence of fishing interests, and the tragedy of the commons. (The tragedy of the commons occurs when a public resource is uncontrolled, such as the commons of a village which become over-grazed because there is no control over how many cows

it can have.) Trawlers haul heavy nets across ocean floors, scraping up five tons of ocean life, including endangered sea turtles, for each ton of shrimp while destroying habitat. Cruise ships dump raw sewage into the ocean. Bush supported weakening the Marine Mammal Protection Act, including allowing exposure of marine mammals to high levels of sonar noise and crippling the “dolphin safe” program. He has removed protections for the waters of Bristol Bay in Alaska and recommenced weakening the Coastal Zone Management Act while the commissions recommend strengthening it.

In other environmental areas, Bush has supported self-policing by polluting industries, stopped enforcement of pollution laws, and announced dozens of roll-backs of environmental protections (timed to avoid news coverage). The administration has sought litigation from industry and then avoided defending the law in those court cases in order to get rulings adverse to the environment. In this way, Yates Petroleum was able to junk an environmental monitoring program required by the Clinton administration on drilling close to Teton National Park. Biologists believe hundreds of new gas wells will threaten antelope and other wildlife in the area, and air quality has already declined.

Bush has allowed snowmobiles in Yellowstone Park, permitted the collapse of fisheries, and opened a vast area of public land—244,000,000 acres, ten percent of the area of the nation—to increased exploitation. The neocons are trying to repeal the Roadless Area Conservation Rule which bans building roads in 60 million pristine areas. The rule was developed during several years of the Clinton administration, which held 600 public hearings and collected a record of over two million public comments, almost all in favor of protecting the land. Bypassing Congress, neocons are allowing avoidance of environmental reviews of logging projects and of new-source review of power plants. The Forest Service builds logging roads at greater cost to the taxpayers than the income it receives for the logs.

From 1982 under Reagan to 2002 the EPA cleaned up more toxic waste dumps than it discovered. By 2003 the number of cleaned up Superfund sites shrank 75 percent, the number of new dumps identified grew larger than starts on cleaning up old ones, and the Superfund ran out of money. The neocons tried to allow more arsenic in drinking water, removed “hazardous” from mercury regulations, quadrupled allowable mercury emissions into the air, and reclassified “high level” nuclear waste to “incidental.” They call waste from strip coal mining “fill,” allowing burial of hundreds of miles of streams. From 1973 to 2003 EPA reported that waterways were becoming cleaner; in 2003 it reported they were getting dirtier. CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations) produce 740 million tons of feces and urine every day with no sewage treatment; the waste is sprayed on fields, stored in leaky ponds, or piled up. The EPA is deregulating CAFOs and other polluters by cutting enforcement personnel 20 percent, reducing fines by 67 percent, allowing 60 percent of regulated facilities to violate their permits

In 2002 excessive federal water diversions from the Klamath River, against the advice of fishery biologists, caused two massive fish kills—over 200,000 juvenile salmon coming down, then about 70,000 adult salmon coming up—as well as poor reproduction by the survivors, with serious impacts on native, sport, and commercial fisheries and on species survival. The neocons have stopped enforcing the Endangered Species Act; the Fish and Wildlife Service admits that 117 species need protection and are not getting it. Many anti-environmental initiatives are illegal and stopped by the courts, as in the recent Bush effort to gut rules for dolphin-safe fishing of tuna. The League of Conservation Voters gave Bush the first presidential “F” in its history.

### **Social and fiscal policy**

The situation for social policy is equally dire. The neocon tax policy redistributes income to the affluent. They do not want to shrink all government, only that part which helps peo-

ple. Bush talked about supporting education, part of compassionate conservatism and bi-partisanship. Bush, however, never fully walks the talk. He promised billions for education; he has not delivered. He attacked Head Start, one of the most successful programs in US history, trying to lower its standards, reduce its funding, and turn it over to the states. Bush promised billions to New York after 9/11; most of it was not delivered. He promised a huge program to deal with AIDS in Africa, but tied it to the global gag rule, emphasized abstinence, and cut the funding.

With support from the religious right, the Bush administration has undercut the status of women. Uneducated women especially tend to be controlled by men, to have limited economic opportunity, and to have high birth rates, which in turn are a major cause of the world labor glut driving down wages and destroying the environment. The neocon alliance with the religious right slashed \$34 million promised to the UN Population Fund, based on allegations known to be false. Anti-abortion hysteria takes a high toll in infant and maternal mortality; by one estimate, 77,000 children per year die due to staffing cuts and clinic closures. Bush keeps nominating anti-choice judges to take women’s rights away.

Bush’s religious commitments are not fundamentalist; his basic faith is ecumenical and not dogmatic. He did well to praise Islam in the aftermath of 9/11, to make positive references to mosques, and to commemorate Jewish holidays. However, he does not talk about the need for the rich to help the poor nor about discrimination against women and gays. He cites religious motives for the AIDs program in Africa, then undercuts its effectiveness by refusing to fund policies that work. He feels compassion for seniors, but the drug benefit enriches the pharmaceutical companies. He winds up supporting many policies of fundamentalists even though he does not have their hard-edged theology.

Neocon opposition to big government is limited to social spending; they have expanded government by cutting taxes on the wealthy, waging war, and burdening future generations

with debt. Not all of the budget deficit is Bush's fault; the recession would have caused budget problems. Bush policies, however, have made the deficit much worse. He has been helped by a Republican Congress which has no commitment to fiscal conservatism. Bush took Clinton's on-budget surplus of 2 percent of GDP and made it a 5 percent deficit in just three years. The national debt has not been so high since 1952. The tax cuts have not boosted employment, but gone into overseas investment and upper-income consumption. A productivity-based recovery has shed millions of jobs and has continuing high unemployment. The economy is down 1.1 million jobs over four years.

A fiscal crisis unprecedented in American history looms as baby boomers retire and the federal government, which can't even cover its current expenditure, must repay huge loans back to the social security trust fund. The fiscal 2004 deficit was a record \$422 billion, one of the biggest in 50 years. It is projected to go to \$2.3 trillion in ten years, unless tax cuts are made permanent, in which case it goes to \$4.6 trillion.

Politically-connected corporations are the major influence on policy. Neocon tax cuts on upper income people have brought personal income taxes to 50 year lows and corporate taxes to their lowest since the 1930s, with huge off-shore tax sheltering. Many businesses, taking advantage of tax loopholes, choose profit over country. The neocons support contradictory policies of protectionism and free trade, trying to please corporations on both sides of the trade issue.

Federal spending is at an all-time high, for pork barrel projects and for war. Bush's National Energy Policy benefits the gas, oil, coal, and nuclear power industries. Unlike other industries, they now drill for gas without having to control air pollution with the best available technology. The BLM rushed drilling permits out the door and skimmed on environmental analysis. New drilling has caused serious air pollution problems in several areas of the Rocky Mountains. The hydrogen car initiative gives \$38 billion in subsidies to energy industries. The Medicare drug benefit helps the pharmaceutical

companies. The "Healthy Forests" Act benefits the timber cutters with clear cuts. Bush plans to triple the rate of logging in the Sierras, ignoring the science in the Sierra Framework Plan. The "Clear Skies" Act helps the polluters. The transportation act benefits the highway builders. The agricultural bill helps agribusiness at the expense of poor farmers at home and abroad. The Iraq occupation and energy policies benefit Cheney's business associates at Halliburton. Campaign contributions to the Bush campaign from benefitted corporations are breaking world historical records--the exuberant, uninhibited, self-confident triumph of crony capitalism, an apotheosis of legalized corruption.

### **The challenge to progressives**

The neocons are about power: power to benefit client corporations and power to control other nations, using a dangerous language of moral absolutism. 9/11 made public opinion susceptible to a self-righteous unilateralism and tribalistic fear-mongering. The neocons assume the ends justify the means: aggression to stop aggression, imprisonment without habeas corpus to ensure the rule of law, manipulation of evidence to claim intelligence of threat. In their view, everybody should play by the rules, except the US, and they can say anything to advance their goals.

For progressives, politics is part of life. For neocons and other fundamentalists, life is a part of politics. Since politics is so total and narrow and desperate, the ends tend to justify the means. Winning is everything. Empathy for another person's point of view is impossible because the other person is wrong, in fact, probably evil, or an evil-sympathizer, or at least dangerously naive. Threats and rhetoric quickly escalate without any reasoning process; the tribe, identity, life itself is threatened by the other tribe.

Progressives are up against formidable money and jingoism. The Republic is in peril, but the solution is not to attack tribalism directly, quite the opposite. The solution is use the rhetoric of tribalism for purposes of expanding the tribe. We

need a tribalism detection meter for ourselves, to understand why we feel alienated from religious fundamentalists and neocons, to understand that secularism can be a kind of religion itself, one that cuts itself off from the power of religious language, and which fails to understand that such language can be used to expand the tribe.

There is an important difference between a universal religious language and religious sectarianism, and more broadly between inclusive language speaking to fundamental human values and divisive language that dehumanizes enemies. Great religions born in pre-scientific cultures have difficult words that inspire some while alienating others, yet can have deeper meanings. God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind and says, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" God carries on in this vein for many verses, with beautiful images of nature. "Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars?" Does it matter whether this is literally true or not? It could be the literal truth and be ignored. But it can be an inspiring poetic truth far more important than a literal truth, celebrating a joyous humility in the face of a larger creation.

The passionate middle is a balancing act between contradictions. We must find a way to be intolerant in a tolerant way of intolerance, to be militant but not militaristic against military threats, to suppress undemocratically those who would destroy democracy, to hate—in a loving way—hatred, to oppress those who would oppress others. We must use the rule of law, a long set of arguments and procedures, to work out these balances. I feel anger and contempt for the neocons, the exact opposite of the intelligent moderation I am trying to achieve, and expressing my feelings is not persuasive to anyone. How do I critique neocon policies with substantive arguments, without getting personal about the policy-makers? Am I deceiving myself to think I am being analytical when I may just be confusing analysis with bias? If I do have some insight, it will hopefully click with your thinking.

The Howard Dean campaign of fall 2003 expressed directly the view of the tribe opposed to the neocons, but it

could not reach the anxieties of middling Americans more concerned about security than democracy. The John Kerry campaign, by contrast, has embraced the military. He argues not for peace against war, but that he would be more competent at war. In doing so he addresses directly the tribal fears of many Americans and thus stands a better chance of winning. His campaign is close to the DNA and tribal fears that may determine the outcome of the election.

### Conclusion

I hope this lecture has been more swan song than honking. We are creatures of evolution, created by DNA to keep the DNA going, necessarily servants of what we cannot see built into us. We can experience an odd consciousness of our own dependency on our DNA, and can understand how culture and intelligence improved our ability to survive and proliferate. Now we face the peculiar dilemma of how to redefine ourselves, using the resources supplied by our past but rejecting the destructive tribalism and religious fundamentalism which are a part of it. Without unduly risking our security, we must redefine our species to enlarge the tribe to all tribes and to all life. We can hope that DNA may support creativity of intellect and culture to avoid death and evolve anew. Somehow those of us who understand the challenge need to reach those who do not, to sustain the creativity of the larger human experiment.

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Of interest:

Davidson Loehr, "The Fundamentalist Agenda," *UU World*, January/February 2004 pp. 34-38

Michael Lerner, *Healing Israel/Palestine*, Tikkun Books, 2003

After the election I wrote the following Christmas essay:

## **The Renewal of Religion and Democracy in America**

Religion, particularly Christianity, has been under attack by the right for several years. Similarly, democracy has been weakened by the failure of enough citizens to be knowledgeable about policy and by failures of the political system. These two crises are closely linked.

Given the perception that the religious right is religious, it might be more accurate to say that one kind of religion is being attacked by another. Religiosity has always been a threat to a broader, more tolerant, intelligent, and understanding kind of religion. The founders of the nation were men of the Enlightenment which—however incomplete as to wealth, sex, and race—embraced Deism, a handy way to deal with God while using science. In Deism, God kicks things off and retires to the sidelines while humans—at that time, some men—exercise free will. Deism was part of a larger effort, building on the example of Rhode Island, to create an informal civic religion to allow many otherwise intolerant religions to live together and build a nation.

The Catholic-Protestant-Jew amalgam took a long time to work, and can blur into a religiosity that enables imperialistic nationalism. The important point, however, is that the American system has never been secular. Church and state may be institutionally separate, but informally they are necessarily and intrinsically intermixed. The real questions have always been, what kind of religion and what kind of state? The great hope has been that a truer understanding of religion would lead to better politics.

An intolerant religiosity now threatens not secularism, but the kind of religion that can transform the world. It is difficult to define such a broader religion; perhaps I mean a broad, vague, “civic” religion supported by specific “religious” religions. It could even include secularism, which is itself a kind of religious belief. It does not matter too much if God is the creation within time, or is some entity outside it, if there is

faith in the goodness of creation and love for each other. Getting more specific could be a problem, as debate could get in the way of finding common ground. Such a religion would support democracy as its political consequence.

The new religiosity is similar to some revivals of the past, but complex. Creationism is clearly anti-scientific, but “intelligent design” can be seen as not against science, but more about how some feel about what science is describing. Many problems, which also overlap into popular culture, need to be overcome. Abortion rights have been a long-running issue, with homophobia against gay couples arriving more recently. “Christian” support for Jewish settlement of Palestinian lands is not only non-Biblical and wrong, it is bizarre. Anti-environmentalist fundamentalists hoping the rapture will carry them to heaven need to read Revelations 11:18: God should “destroy those who destroy the earth.” Support for the Iraq war—based on flimsy pretexts for aggression, causing tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths, and in violation of international law—is clearly against any religion of love and peace. Fear defeats faith.

On many issues the religious right must be distinguished from the Christianity it purports to embrace. While the media can’t see them, millions of religiously committed people are appalled by the new religiosity and trying to do something about it. Their moral values are a democracy of meaningful elections, international cooperation, economic freedom, environmental quality, and social compassion.

As the religious spills into the political, I struggle to explain the reelection of Bush. I can’t help but think a major reason was the poor information and understanding of policy by average citizens, based on lack of education and interest in politics. As a result, poor coverage by the mass media and self-selective exposure to propagandistic media create perceptions wholly at odds with reality.

Perhaps the most prominent of these false perceptions is the notion that Iraq had something to do with terrorism. It didn’t then, but it does now, because of how the invasion

strengthened the terrorists. Justifications for war which seemed to me and many others as completely fallacious at the time have proven to be fallacious over and over again since then. (If your enemy is in the mountains of Pakistan, don't attack Baghdad.) Yet Bush was able to use the blow-back he created to justify his policies. Colin Powell, a victim of power and group think if there ever was one, can redeem himself only by becoming the McNamara of the Iraq war. He knew enough facts. He knew the importance of enough force to achieve the mission and of an exit strategy. Somehow the lessons he claimed to have learned from Vietnam did not stick.

The Daily Show, America's most popular fake news, nailed the media problem [from FAIR, *Extra!* 17:6, December 2004 p. 8]:

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The media's refusal to call a distortion a distortion or to question a source's credibility has received little criticism from most journalists, and a spirited defense from some. However, criticism has sprung up in some prominent non-journalist circles. Reacting to the media's "he said/she said" reporting in the Swift Boat Veterans episode, **Comedy Central's Daily Show** (8/23/04) ran a parody of the coverage with anchor Jon Stewart grilling "reporter" Rob Corddry:

**Stewart:** Here's what puzzles me most, Rob. John Kerry's record in Vietnam is pretty much right there in the official records of the U.S. military, and hasn't been disputed for 35 years.

**Corddry:** That's right, Jon, and that's certainly the spin you'll be hearing coming from the Kerry campaign over the next few days.

**Stewart:** That's not a spin thing, that's a fact. That's established.

**Corddry:** Exactly. Jon, and that established, incontrovertible fact is one side of the story.

**Stewart:** But isn't that the end of the story? I mean, you've seen the records, haven't you? What's your opinion?

**Corddry:** I'm sorry, "my opinion"? I don't have opinions. I'm a reporter, Jon, and my job is to spend half the time repeating what one side says, and half the time repeating the other. Little thing called "objectivity"—might want to look it up some day.

**Stewart:** Doesn't objectivity mean objectively weighing the evidence, and calling out what's credible and what isn't?

**Corddry:** Whoa-ho! Sounds like someone wants the media to act as a filter! Listen, buddy: Not my job to stand between the people talking to me and the people listening to me.

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Here's a summary of the best ideas I've found for the debacle: Polls show that most voters were traumatized by 9/11 and thought the country was now safer. 49 percent trusted only Bush to handle terrorism, and voted for him. Bush increased his support among married white women and non-college-educated whites fearful about terrorism. Bush could sound good only to people lacking enough facts, a triumph of style over substance. Iraq at 27 percent topped voter concerns; then economy, 14 percent; and moral values (particularly gay marriage), 9 percent. The intensity of these issues edged out low opinions of Bush, closeness to Democrats on other issues, and an effective Democratic ground campaign.

There was a huge increase in turnout, jumping from 51 percent in 2000 to 61 percent. In Florida, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, Kerry won most urban and suburban counties while Bush won exurban and rural votes. Frequent church-goers increased their turnout a bit, but non-goers increased even more, actually reducing the importance of the "religious" vote. Kerry improved support for Democrats from young voters, professionals/post-graduate education, college educated women, single women, and other blue state constituencies. Kerry failed to respond quickly and aggressively to Bush attacks, failed to attack Bush strongly and consistently, and failed to articulate his policies in a way more average voters could understand. He often ran behind other Democrats in key states. In Colorado Ken Salazar's defeat of Coors showed that a Democrat with a rural message can win. In sum, Bush's revi-

talization of the Reagan coalition produced only a narrow winning margin—in Ohio, for example, about 2 percent.

The America people are now implicated in Bush policies: a quagmire in Iraq; reduced national security in the name of increasing it; decreased and still decreasing taxation for those already most benefitting from the economy; crippling fiscal deficits with increasing debt burdens on future generations, a decline of the dollar, and a shift to the Euro as a reserve currency; military waste; a rampant, comprehensive anti-environmentalism; a contempt for international cooperation, science, human rights, civil liberties, and the rights of women; unprecedented secrecy; and squeezing down on domestic policies that help those most disadvantaged. There is nothing conservative about these policies. The American people lack the sophistication voters in a super power should have, to elect a government consistent with the values they claim to have.

If there is any silver lining, it is that Bush, the neocons, the religious right, certain corporations, the Heritage/Cato message machine, and the Republicans will have to deal with the mess they have made. Their influence will wane as problems get worse and moderate Republicans in Congress come under pressure from constituents. How do you wage war with collapsing National Guard recruitment and ballooning deficits? The US would not be the first empire to overextend itself and go into eclipse. Countervailing power will assert itself over time: a network led probably by the European Union with support from other areas, the UN system, and American progressives—including progressive business.

The fact that Bush won on security issues should not obscure the fact that progressives mobilized as never before in my lifetime, with an explosive use of the internet and Republican-level fund-raising, creating a base for influence that can help turn the tide. Eleanor and I went to Reno to campaign for Kerry. I doubt we did much good, but it was exciting to see the people and the energy at the headquarters.

While it is essential for citizens to be more knowledgeable about policy, renewal also requires dealing with failures of the

political system. Over the decades until about 1970 America was becoming more democratic, but since then institutional reform has stagnated. Voting does not conform to international standards. Candidates are often elected by pluralities, not majorities. Campaign finance by the rich, when combined with voter ignorance about policy, distorts elections to favor specialized interests.

The reforms needed are simple: fair balloting, instant runoff voting, public finance of campaigns. The balloting in Ohio and elsewhere, while perhaps not enough to change the outcome, was unfair; the details being debated as I write. (In Ohio the state official in charge of the election was also state chair of the Bush campaign, echoing the Florida problem four years ago.). We need same-day registration, adequate supplies of ballots, a paper trail, better training of poll workers, and civil rights enforcement. San Francisco recently implemented instant run-off, elected candidates by majority vote, and avoided an expensive, low-turn-out run-off election. Arizona and Maine have successful “clean money” campaign finance sharply reducing the role of special interests and empowering candidates to spend time with voters, not raising money. These polices could revitalize democracy and even lead to the next big reform, one person one vote.

A progressive conservatism requires civic education, less over-reliance on the military, more cooperation with other nations, vertical and horizontal tax equity, balancing the budget in times of economic growth, internalizing external costs, conservation for a sustainable economy and the quality of life, reducing US oil dependency, tough love social policies, more realistic education reform, universal health care, and protecting income security in old age. It requires bringing Christianity to the “Christians.” The energy for reform must spring from religious commitment—increased citizen interest in the public interest and caring about the nation beyond a self-interested or sectarian perspective. That commitment supports a progressive conservatism. It could be called liberalism.

Sherman Lewis, January 5, 2005