

Beware the Agents of Chaos

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"It is possible to live only as long as life intoxicates us; once we are sober we cannot help seeing that it is all a delusion, a stupid delusion." Leo Tolstoy

Not a day passes without Americans witnessing another debacle in the nation's domestic and foreign policies that further grind down the last remaining threads of a sustainable, coherent and functioning nation. Instead of actual progress, we hear competing incantations of nonsense to "make America great again" and to "build back better." Both mantras represent opposite sides of the aisle's affirmation that the nation is in serious disarray and degenerating rapidly. For Democrats it means throwing more money at the problems that too much money already spent has created. "Seize the opportunity," declares Biden, "meet this moment in history and build the future we need." Or, "we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity," according to Elizabeth Warren, "to build back better and create a more equitable, inclusive and prosperous future for all Americans." And then there are the other voices in the echo chamber to make America great again. There are Mitch McConnell's sobs to "rebuild our military" and Ted Cruz's "promoting American exceptionalism" around the globe. This is all lunacy because there are no longer any adults or wise elders in the room to turn this political voodoo into a functioning reality.

The German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt saw totalitarian leaders as agents of chaos who intentionally undermine the stability of society to destroy the foundations of democracy by creating fear and uncertainty. What is notably disturbing is the current administration's obsession with deceiving themselves as a benevolent force for progress. Yet any sane person can glance at the decline in authentic, sustainable progress made in American culture for at least the past three decades and realize the nation has one foot in hospice.

So, the question is: how has all this rubbing of the **Build Back Better and Make America Great Again genie lamps worked for you?** Are you feeling these mantras' magic? Has the descent of optimism and hope alighting upon the crown of your head yet? Or maybe you have that high of genuine happiness and authentic well being oozing forth from your pores?

How does your bank account look like? Have your savings built back better so it is great again?

Are you feeling Nancy Pelosi's fuzzy warm assurance that "as Democrats... every American has the opportunity to succeed, that every voice is heard and that our country remains a beacon of hope and progress for generations to come"?

Or, was that a misquote from Republican neocon Nikki Haley to assure us that "America remains a shining beacon of freedom and democracy." Platitudes, blue and red, all sound the same because such clichés have been repeated incessantly for decades. And putting aside the so-called progress made in easier access to anti-anxiety and depression medications, and better suicide hotlines, how is the mental health of American youth fairing? Therefore, where has any genuine progress been achieved to improve the quality of human life?

Surely paying heed to Tolstoy's above words are long overdue. We need to wake up and realize that to continue this imbecilic ritual of rubbing counterfeit lamps of feel-good propaganda is only making the public more delusional and stupid. It is high time we realize there are no longer any adults in the Oval Office and boardrooms of Washington, Wall Street and Silicon Valley. **The agents of chaos govern us.** Our culture of absolutism breeds the very conditions for violence and conflict that air nightly on the news. The detractors of absolutism's tyrannies are perceived as enemies.

The firm belief in absolutes is a condition leading people to justify egregious actions in the name of a greater good without considering the consequences. Does this not accurately describe today's cancel culture and the most militant wings of the LGBTQ community, critical theory racists, institutionalized atheist Skepticism and medical determinism?

Whether it is blind faith in the absolutism of Fauci's "science", Marjorie Taylor Green's messianic return of Trump, Biden's proclamation that "Transgender Americans shape our Nation's soul," Janice Yellin's incoherent gibberish before a Congressional committee to account for the country's economic malaise, or the neocons' hysterical obsession in the State Department and Pentagon to throw away hundreds of billions of dollars and weapons into the ever-devouring black hole of Zelensky's Ukraine, there are no signs of a return to stability. And this list of misadventures, inept decision-making and reckless blundering can be multiplied a hundred-fold. Together, all roads now lead towards a dire picture of America's inevitable collapse. The US continues to sink in the murky, toxic waters in the middle of the Rubicon. Sadly, America has forgotten how to swim and is no longer capable of swimming back to shore.

The hard, cold facts are that American exceptionalism only exists in the dream-like hallucinations of our politicians.

The US's global hegemonic military strength wanes daily.

Reaching diversity quotas trumps talent and professional expertise. Colleges and universities have degenerated to Napoleonic era lunatic asylums that reward self-centered, hedonic individualism and manic rebellion. Remarkably, the mobs in the street are little more than bland reflections, a Jungian shadow, of the instability and disorder created by the agents of chaos who sit in the seats of power. "Just as the individual has a shadow," wrote Jung, "so does society at large. And just as the individual must come to terms with his

shadow so too must society if it is to be healthy and whole.”

The rising confusion among our youth over their self-identity, gender, moral alienation and a lack of existential purpose in this technological driven materialistic society has reduced our youth to sentient robots screaming for self-expression. This is one cause for today’s groupthink of social and political unrest and its destructive outcomes. Nobel laureate Bertrand Russell warned that “collective passions” have a penchant to inflame “hatred and rivalry directed towards other groups.” He was also acutely aware that “science is no substitute for virtue; the heart is as necessary for the good life as the head.”

Most Americans have now become so desensitized, so disconnected from perceiving reality, that they are incapable of realizing how the government adversely impacts every nick and cranny in their lives. Instead of running away from crises, we do everything to the contrary to magnify the problems. So if the environmental and social crises continue to spiral out of control, understand it is because America is only exceptionally pathetic. The nation has quenched its illusions and stupor far too long on Aldous Huxley’s soma. Now its intoxicating effects are giving rise to an explosion of hatred, rage and self-serving narcissism in the streets, classrooms, corporate boardrooms, and the sitcoms staged in Congressional chambers.

Unfortunately, unless we identify the defining characteristics of American culture at this historical moment and its causes, the pathway to widespread social collapse will accelerate.

Since the time of the Italian philosopher and jurist Giambattista Vico in the early 18th century, anthropologists, historians and philosophers have made efforts to discover patterns whereby nations and cultures undergo cycles of growth, decay and rebirth. Vico called these cyclic patterns in human history “ricorso” or stages of “recurrence” that are observed in histories of individual cultures and civilizations. Other important individuals who have attempted to map these historical and generational cycles and to identify their characteristics and causes include the Swiss anthropologist Johan Bachofen (d. 1887), Oswald Spenger (d. 1936), the historian Arnold Toynbee (d. 1975), Carroll Quigley (d. 1977), Strauss and Howe, Peter Turchin among others. However, perhaps most notable and long forgotten are the cyclic patterns leading to a cultural collapse articulated by Pitirim Sorokin.

Sorokin was a Russian-American intellectual and social visionary who co-founded Harvard University’s Sociology Department in 1931. Born and educated in Russia, Sorokin was arrested by the Soviet authorities for holding critical views of the Communist regime, but was released and fled to the US. Years later in 1929, he was kidnapped by Soviet agents in Paris. He was sentenced to a gulag labor camp but was again released and forced into permanent exile. Sorokin’s 1937 magnum opus *Social and Cultural Dynamics* was the culmination of twenty years research to identify the cycles nations and cultures undergo that eventually lead to critical crises and their ultimate collapse.

By today’s college standards, Sorokin would never land a professorship at an American college or university. His theories have been almost categorically ignored by academia and criticized for being pessimistic. He upheld values that many today would call conservative and traditional, especially on his emphasizing higher moral and spiritual values. Consequently, Sorokin is out of step with today’s neoliberal intelligentsia and Critical Theory’s wokeism. Oddly his modern admirers happen to be the left-leaning transpersonal psychologist Richard Tarnas, ecologist Wendell Berry and political philosopher Charles

Taylor. What they all share in common is a deep appreciation for the pivotal importance of higher moral and spiritual values in order to sustain a functioning and life-affirming culture wherein citizens can thrive.

If we take a panoramic view of America in 2023, Sorokin's warnings of Western societies' inevitable collapse are in plain sight. "The current crisis," Sorokin wrote in his *The Crisis of Our Age*, "has been created by a false concept of progress, which identifies material growth with true progress and overlooks the fact that there is no real progress without spiritual and moral development." While we may pride ourselves in our culture's technological ingenuity in artificial intelligence, virtual reality, robotics and pending transhumanism, for Sorokin, a society that only develops technologically is a "half-society" because humans are then simply reduced to "cogs in a vast machine, whose only purpose is to produce and consume goods." For those throwing curses back and forth across the ideological political divide, both sides blindly serve more powerful interests who are eager to exploit them as a means to an end. Those who get caught up in this American charade reduce themselves to halfwits unwillingly creating a technocratic society based upon conformity and uniformity. True diversity and authentic individuality, which are motivated by higher principles, are technocratic tyranny's obstacles that must be overcome and destroyed.

According to Sorokin, who died in 1968, the US had reached its "sensate" stage of its social cycle. Clearly we have now reached the hyper-sensate level immediately before a rapid dissolution. In *The Crisis of Our Age*, all the signs in the nation for what he termed the "cataclysm of the sensate culture" were rapidly being assembled to culminate in the not too distant future: rampant consumerism and materialism, domination of individualism, self-gratification and indulgence, hedonism, moral weakness, the decay of traditional social bonds, and a collective social emptiness. The sensate stage's climax is chaos, the breakdown of social order and national institutions. Sorokin's chaotic stage is characterized by disorder, confusion, mental disorientation, a rise in crime and social unrest, and political instability. Redeeming moral values reach rock bottom. Only after this chaotic phase reaches its nadir does a new cultural synthesis emerge as people seek new ways to reestablish order and meaning in both their personal lives and collectively within the society.

But Sorokin had another poignant insight. A predominant sensate culture is vulnerable to external threats, especially economic crises, conflicts and wars and even natural disasters.

This so well describes today's America now that its global economic and military hegemony is a growl with no bite. American foreign diplomacy is deplorable as we watch nation after nation turning their backs on the US-led West for more amicable and neighborly partners such as China, Russia and India. The reason for America's fragility is that the nation has appallingly betrayed its moral and spiritual resources and therefore is unable to cope with adversity—internal and external—to meet and overcome its challenges. Neither is America internally resilient nor therefore it is unfit to adapt to the necessary changes underway to preserve its survival. When all the causes and conditions for a final collapse are assembled, a nation's fate is no longer negotiable. Only the time gap can be slowed or accelerated.

Despite the original values of American liberalism, which were brought forth during the Age of Reason and the Renaissance's flame of non-dogmatic rational inquiry, today's liberals have perverted its own legacy and become unthinking adolescents that are every bit as intolerant and wrong-headed as the most zealous religious fundamentalist on the Right. Across woke culture - old and young - there is a plague of childish behavior to censor and

ban any speech or thought that is contrary to their false illusions about themselves and their fragile self-identity.

This “exclusivist humanism,” as the prominent cultural philosopher Charles Taylor has termed it, is a faux universalism. With myopic obeisance relies on the secular power structure in government that in turn acts on their behalf to marginalize and at times demonize alternative belief systems that do not embrace a secular universalism. Hence the new radical left, and even federal agencies, no longer tolerate diversity of traditional beliefs and worldviews.

The FBI’s illegal surveillance activities on Twitter and the agency’s harassment of peaceful anti-abortion Catholics are just minor examples. More alarming is the murder of three children and three school staff in Nashville by a mentally disturbed person with gender dysphoria who is being eulogized without a woke tear wept for the victims. Rather than read the works of history’s intellectual and literary giants, it is better to wipe away or rewrite the past altogether in order to please the neuroses of the most vocal and belligerent masses. However, Taylor offers an alternative — “open humanism” - a more inclusive, pluralistic, values-driven dialogue and mutual respect towards the wide scope of human experiences. The debate is whether or not American society has already passed the tipping point of a fateful demise. As events worsen America’s delirium escalates, we fear it has.

And still the majority of the American citizenry willingly participates in and contributes to this Mummies’ charade in the halls of power. Our defining culture has succumbed to irrational hostility, collective emotional hysteria, or what Sorokin called “cultural schizophrenia,” which is when individuals in a grossly materialistic society cling desperately to a false sense of individuality that is completely divorced from any deeper purpose in life. The result is social fragmentation, conflict and widespread confusion. At this moment, we witness both sides of the left-right political divide screaming about their victimhood while actively participating in society’s destruction. And yet there are no massive mobilized protests against the most destructive elements in our culture as if they are unimportant. Renewable energy, access to healthy foods, banning toxic chemicals in everyday household products that are otherwise forbidden in other countries, government-sanctioned censorship, an illegal surveillance state, a justice system that indentures the poor, fifty million Americans living in poverty and a thoroughly corrupt medical system — none of these seem important enough to warrant millions to march on Washington. Even humanity’s survival is inconsequential.

Today, American media is incapable of reporting on the true state of the country’s domestic culture. The media can no longer create a believable story that reflects the actual economic and social conditions of average Americans because it has been unable to move beyond the harsh social divisions fuelled by animosity and distrust. Very earlier, Sorokin observed the media’s adverse trajectory. As early as 1941, he was warning about the consequences of the media’s sensationalism and entertainment, its focus on negative news that would breed social anxiety and fear. Sorokin also shared his deep concern about the media’s emphasis on materialism and consumerism and its impact on the social and mental development of young people. It is difficult to disagree with him now that both conservative and liberal media have neutered the intellects of their most loyal viewers. The right suffers from pre-rational superstition and anti-intellectualism. The left suffers from a highbrow intellect and moral impoverishment. Neither is capable of serving as a revolutionary force to relieve suffering and fight on behalf of individual freedoms, peace and human rights outside of cultic groupthink. Moreover, our corporate media has succeeded in turning the US into a

laughing stock among the vast majority of other countries. Rather a functional media would be honestly responsible for a balanced and meaningful view of the world, one that focuses on the positive as well as the negative and at the same time emphasizes constructive moral values.

Unfortunately, American media is now beyond redemption. For those who have retained a thread of philosophical and spiritual inquiry and values, there can be no support for the psychobabble of those who would drown out the voices of reason and human decency. It is left to those of us who have been cancelled and excluded from the national dialogue about our country's deterioration to continue to probe more deeply into our own lives and build community with like-minded people.

Finally we might take to heart the words of one of Tolstoy's great admirers.

"Nothing in all the world is more dangerous," wrote Martin Luther King, "than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity."

It is our deep ignorance about not knowing ourselves and appreciating our intrinsic interconnection with each other and the environment that perpetuates the suffering around us. Our true enemies are irrational, dogmatic beliefs and faux liberal values, which equally keep us enslaved to a system that only serves its own interests and dehumanizes us to collateral damage to the system's failings. All imperial civilizations ultimately collapse. Despite the US's rapid decline, it remains within each person's means to not be a helpless victim when it sinks completely. After the inferno completes its course, cools and simmers, we will then be most needed to rise from its ashes to return sanity, decency and the values of equanimity and selfless compassion to the severely emotionally wounded who participated or contributed to the conflagration.

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