

The Rule of the Uber-Rich Means Tyranny or Revolution

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At the age of 10 I was sent as a scholarship student to a boarding school for the uber-rich in Massachusetts. I lived among the wealthiest Americans for the next eight years. I listened to their prejudices and saw their cloying sense of entitlement. They insisted they were privileged and wealthy because they were smarter and more talented. They had a sneering disdain for those ranked below them in material and social status, even the merely rich. Most of the uber-rich lacked the capacity for empathy and compassion. They formed elite cliques that hazed, bullied and taunted any nonconformist who defied or did not fit into their self-adulatory universe.

It was impossible to build a friendship with most of the sons of the uber-rich. Friendship for them was defined by “what’s in it for me?” They were surrounded from the moment they came out of the womb by people catering to their desires and needs. They were incapable of reaching out to others in distress—whatever petty whim or problem they had at the moment dominated their universe and took precedence over the suffering of others, even those within their own families. They knew only how to take. They could not give. They were deformed and deeply unhappy people in the grip of an unquenchable narcissism.

It is essential to understand the pathologies of the uber-rich. They have seized total political power. These pathologies inform Donald Trump, his children, the Brett Kavanaugh, and the billionaires who run his administration. The uber-rich cannot see the world from anyone’s perspective but their own. People around them, including the women whom entitled men prey upon, are objects designed to gratify momentary lusts or be manipulated. The uber-rich are almost always amoral. Right. Wrong. Truth. Lies. Justice. Injustice. These concepts are beyond them. Whatever benefits or pleases them is good. What does not must be destroyed.

The pathology of the uber-rich is what permits Trump and his callow son-in-law, Jared Kushner, to conspire with de facto Saudi ruler Mohammed bin Salman, another product of unrestrained entitlement and nepotism, to cover up the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi, whom I worked with in the Middle East. The uber-rich spend their lives protected by their inherited wealth, the power it wields and an army of enablers, including other members of the fraternity of the uber-rich, along with their lawyers and publicists. There are almost never any consequences for their failures, abuses, mistreatment of others and crimes. This is why the Saudi crown prince and Kushner have bonded. They are the *homunculi* the uber-rich routinely spawn.

The rule of the uber-rich, for this reason, is terrifying. They know no limits. They have never

abided by the norms of society and never will. We pay taxes—they don't. We work hard to get into an elite university or get a job—they don't. We have to pay for our failures—they don't. We are prosecuted for our crimes—they are not.

The uber-rich live in an artificial bubble, a land called Richistan, a place of Frankenmansions and private jets, cut off from our reality. Wealth, I saw, not only perpetuates itself but is used to monopolize the new opportunities for wealth creation. Social mobility for the poor and the working class is largely a myth. The uber-rich practice the ultimate form of affirmative action, catapulting white, male mediocrities like Trump, Kushner and George W. Bush into elite schools that groom the plutocracy for positions of power. The uber-rich are never forced to grow up. They are often infantilized for life, squalling for what they want and almost always getting it. And this makes them very, very dangerous.

Political theorists, from Aristotle and Karl Marx to [Sheldon Wolin](#), have warned against the rule of the uber-rich. Once the uber-rich take over, Aristotle writes, the only options are tyranny and revolution. They do not know how to nurture or build. They know only how to feed their bottomless greed. It's a funny thing about the uber-rich: No matter how many billions they possess, they never have enough. They are the [Hungry Ghosts of Buddhism](#). They seek, through the accumulation of power, money and objects, an unachievable happiness. This life of endless desire often ends badly, with the uber-rich estranged from their spouses and children, bereft of genuine friends. And when they are gone, as Charles Dickens wrote in "A Christmas Carol," most people are glad to be rid of them.

C. Wright Mills in "[The Power Elite](#)," one of the finest studies of the pathologies of the uber-rich, wrote:

They exploited national resources, waged economic wars among themselves, entered into combinations, made private capital out of the public domain, and used any and every method to achieve their ends. They made agreements with railroads for rebates; they purchased newspapers and bought editors; they killed off competing and independent businesses and employed lawyers of skill and statesmen of repute to sustain their rights and secure their privileges. There is something demonic about these lords of creation; it is not merely rhetoric to call them robber barons.

Corporate capitalism, which has destroyed our democracy, has given unchecked power to the uber-rich. And once we understand the pathologies of these oligarchic elites, it is easy to chart our future. The state apparatus the uber-rich controls now exclusively serves their interests. They are deaf to the cries of the dispossessed. They empower those institutions that keep us oppressed—the security and surveillance systems of domestic control, militarized police, Homeland Security and the military—and gut or degrade those institutions or programs that blunt social, economic and political inequality, among them public education, health care, welfare, Social Security, an equitable tax system, food stamps, public transportation and infrastructure, and the courts. The uber-rich extract greater and greater sums of money from those they steadily impoverish. And when citizens object or resist, they crush or kill them.

The uber-rich care inordinately about their image. They are obsessed with looking at themselves. They are the center of their own universe. They go to great lengths and expense to create fictional personas replete with nonexistent virtues and attributes. This is

why the uber-rich carry out acts of well-publicized philanthropy. Philanthropy allows the uber-rich to engage in moral fragmentation. They ignore the moral squalor of their lives, often defined by the kind of degeneracy and debauchery the uber-rich insist is the curse of the poor, to present themselves through small acts of charity as caring and beneficent. Those who puncture this image, as Khashoggi did with Salman, are especially despised. And this is why Trump, like all the uber-rich, sees a critical press as the enemy. It is why Trump's and Kushner's eagerness to [conspire to help cover up](#) Khashoggi's murder is ominous. Trump's incitements to his supporters, who see in him the omnipotence they lack and yearn to achieve, to carry out acts of violence against his critics are only a few steps removed from the crown prince's thugs dismembering Khashoggi with a [bone saw](#). And if you think Trump is joking when he suggests the press should be dealt with violently you understand nothing about the uber-rich. He will do what he can get away with, even murder. He, like most of the uber-rich, is devoid of a conscience.

The more enlightened uber-rich, the East Hamptons and Upper East Side uber-rich, a realm in which Ivanka and Jared once cavorted, look at the president as gauche and vulgar. But this distinction is one of style, not substance. Donald Trump may be an embarrassment to the well-heeled Harvard and Princeton graduates at Goldman Sachs, but he serves the uber-rich as assiduously as Barack Obama and the Democratic Party do. This is why the Obamas, like the Clintons, have been inducted into the pantheon of the uber-rich. It is why [Chelsea Clinton and Ivanka Trump](#) were close friends. They come from the same caste.

There is no force within ruling institutions that will halt the pillage by the uber-rich of the nation and the ecosystem. The uber-rich have nothing to fear from the corporate-controlled media, the elected officials they bankroll or the judicial system they have seized. The universities are pathetic corporation appendages. They silence or banish intellectual critics who upset major donors by challenging the reigning ideology of [neoliberalism](#), which was formulated by the uber-rich to restore class power. The uber-rich have destroyed popular movements, including labor unions, along with democratic mechanisms for reform that once allowed working people to pit power against power. The world is now their playground.

In "The Postmodern Condition" the philosopher [Jean-François Lyotard](#) painted a picture of the future neoliberal order as one in which "the temporary contract" supplants "permanent institutions in the professional, emotional, sexual, cultural, family and international domains, as well as in political affairs." This temporal relationship to people, things, institutions and the natural world ensures collective self-annihilation. Nothing for the uber-rich has an intrinsic value. Human beings, social institutions and the natural world are commodities to exploit for personal gain until exhaustion or collapse. The common good, like the consent of the governed, is a dead concept. This temporal relationship embodies the fundamental pathology of the uber-rich.

The uber-rich, as [Karl Polanyi](#) wrote, celebrate the worst kind of freedom—the freedom "to exploit one's fellows, or the freedom to make inordinate gains without commensurable service to the community, the freedom to keep technological inventions from being used for public benefit, or the freedom to profit from public calamities secretly engineered for private advantage." At the same time, as Polanyi noted, the uber-rich make war on the "freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of meeting, freedom of association, freedom to choose one's own job."

The dark pathologies of the uber-rich, lionized by mass culture and mass media, have become our own. We have ingested their poison. We have been taught by the uber-rich to

celebrate the bad freedoms and denigrate the good ones. Look at any Trump rally. Watch any reality television show. Examine the state of our planet. We will repudiate these pathologies and organize to force the uber-rich from power or they will transform us into what they already consider us to be—the help.

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