

The One Party Planet

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The Joy of Pamphlets	2
Introduction	3
The Neoliberal Heart and Soul	10
Fashions in Global Power	12
Financial Might	15
Concentration of Power	16
Active Political Projects	19
In Their Own Words	23
The Logic Within	29
Facing Ourselves	33
Where Hope Exists	37

The Joy of Pamphlets

Pamphlets have a long and distinguished history of spreading ideas that might not be well liked in the corridors, taverns and tents of power. The alarming "[THE KINGS MAIESTIES ALARUM FOR OPEN WAR, Declared by His setting up His Standard at Dunsmore-Heath](#)" published in 1642 was the first to play a truly important historic role; it helped kick off the English civil war. Thomas Paine's "[Common Sense](#)" (1776) declared that, "these are times that try men's souls" and thus helped start the American Revolution. And the French went pamphlet mad in the run up to the French Revolution of 1789, with everyone from the King's Ministers to philosophers to revolutionaries churning out tens of thousands of fiery pages. In August 1789 the National Assembly declared that 'all citizens can speak, write and print freely' and the whole system of state censorship began to break down. Pamphlets helped spread anti-slavery ideas in America and such as the gratingly-titled, "[The Happy Negro: a true Account of an extraordinary Negro in North America, and of an interesting Conversation he had with a very respectable Gentleman from England](#)" (1810). The heyday of the pamphlet drew to a close once radio and the cinema hit. We think they might be due a comeback, for the digital age.

Unlike books, pamphlets capture a particular type of detailed and often personal political argument, without stretching to hundreds of pages; a relief for author and reader alike. Unlike YouTube videos or anything you might find on TV, they tap a power that only the written word can tap. Unlike most newspaper articles, they can get into the depths of an issue with passionate and heartfelt voice without worrying about the need to fit into the narrow band of topics considered acceptable or commercially newsworthy. And unlike TED talks, you can mention wealth inequality and things that criticise rich folk. But best of all, they are practically free to produce and distribute, so anyone can do it.

We hope you find reading *The One Party Planet* stimulating. If you have any feedback you'd rather not put on [our Facebook](#) page; would like to contribute between 10 000 and 30 000 words or would be kind enough to help us translate them into French, Spanish, Arabic, Kiswahili, Portuguese or any other language, email pamphlets@therules.org. If we think it says something interesting we'll design it up and push it through /The Rules' global network. If it gets a response, we'll let you know. No promises about how well it might be taken up; this is an experiment, after all. You don't have to agree with us or be on the same side of whatever political aisle you think we inhabit. All you need to be is interesting, informed and have something powerful to say about global politics, especially as it relates to inequality and poverty.

Introduction

So just who *is* in charge of this planet? Is it a small group of people with one plan? A large group of people with lots of competing plans? Several groups of people? Does it even make sense to think of 'control' in these terms at all?

This short pamphlet is an attempt to answer this question. The case I make is, yes, it not only makes sense to think of control in these terms, but it is essential. Those of us who believe in the potential for vastly less inequality and poverty, and a richer, more stable natural environment must do so because the few thousand people that are in control don't share the view that anything is profoundly wrong; they are most certainly conscious of their power and are busy doing what they can to extend it; and they would like the rest of us to leave them to it.

This is not the story of a conspiracy in the dramatic Hollywood meaning of the word. There are no dark, smoky control rooms where a group of shady individuals are plotting together to spread mayhem and misery purely for their own enjoyment or profit. It's not a simple story of good vs. evil, or heroes vs. villains. There are plans, there is profiteering a-plenty and there is a surfeit of selfish and villainous behavior, to be sure, but it would be unhelpfully simplistic to characterise it as a conspiracy because that invites us to ignore some of the important ways in which the whole seething system works; its internal logic. It doesn't need that sort of active plotting to do its thing, and to a certain extent there are no people alive who are as powerful as they'd need to be to orchestrate control in that way. We're in a system, and, to thrive, it just needs internal logical consistency, enough alignment of motives, and a degree of misunderstanding amongst those who would change it.

The road to hell is paved with the good intentions of those who misunderstand how complex systems work. And what we're talking about here is the mother-system for all the many complex systems on our planet.

The purpose of writing this pamphlet, then, is to try to define some of what makes the system operate in the way it does, and therefore help stimulate discussion, and hopefully some new ideas on how change might be induced. I will start by looking inwards, at our cognitive capacities. The world we see around us today is a reflection of human consciousness; we long since passed the point where we could say, "it wasn't us". So whatever challenges we face – climate change, rampant inequality, endless violent conflict or vast impoverishment – are challenges, first and foremost, of

and for the human mind. It helps therefore, to spend a small amount of time reflecting on what we know about its character (*How True is True?*).

Then we will turn for the bulk for the essay to what might be more familiar territory: power theories, systems and players. This will break down into six parts; *The Neoliberal Heart and Soul*; *Fashions in Global Power*; *Financial Might*; *Concentration of Corporate Power*; *Active Political Projects*; and *In their Own Words*. And finally, a few thoughts on perhaps the most important and yet least considered element in this broad mix, the system's internal logic; that alignment of forces that mean none of this was really planned and no one is to blame. This is looked at in *The Logic Within*, and then I conclude with the most human considerations in *Facing Ourselves* and *Where Hope Lies*.

How True is True?

Given the reach and force of human power, it's sobering to think how little we operate on objective, let alone absolute truth. Regardless of whether we are deciding where to go on holiday or negotiating a global trade deal, we work our reasoning through layers upon layers of assumptions, associations, emotions and experiences, and pass it all through [cognitive biases](#) that have a lot to do with confirming what we already believe. This is important for what follows because it puts in context what we should expect of ourselves, both as a species acting in the way that we are, and as individuals responding to what we see.

We must be gentle and understanding with ourselves, but only inasmuch as we marry that compassion with humility. Starting with a basic acknowledgement that none of us is particularly rational, and none of us has anywhere near enough insight to truly understand everything we need to make reliably good decisions, we need to embrace humility as a way to make sure that the decisions we do make are only ever similar in scale and reach to the insight we have about their likely impact. This is very rarely, if ever possible in an absolute sense, of course, because of chaos effects but being conscious of the tension this ideal creates is a cooling, humbling balm. And a reminder of our in-built limitations and subjectivity is especially important when considering ideas that are as grand as those that follow.

Unfortunately, in the face of limitations and fear, or when caught in the thrall of power, hubris and psychopathy, not humility, are often what takes over. When fear is the driver, our minds enter fight

vs. flight mode, and everything is pared to its simplest form. We cut out ambiguity in favour of yes/no decisions in order to do whatever is needed to survive. This includes becoming more materialistic, more in-group oriented and more short-term in our thinking. This is one of the reasons why it is never a good idea to try and motivate people to complex change through fear; Something the environmental movement is learning now, after struggling for many years to motivate people with doomsday scenarios.

Because power is what psychologists call [an extrinsic value](#), it requires constant stimulation from the outside. In other words, you need more and more of it to reach or maintain the original positive psychological response; much like any addict needing a constant fix. So power creates a desire for power. Once we are in this state, one of two things usually happens; we either become so entranced by it that it fades or kills-off our inherent instinct and ability to connect to the needs and feelings of those others upon whom our power impacts, or we succumb to psychopathy. The symptoms of both are almost indistinguishable, except in degree, as both are characterised by an inability to sufficiently consider others; a failure of empathy, in other words. The former can happen to anyone, which is what gives truth the old maxim that all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Psychopaths, on the other hand, are born not made. That's not to say that everyone born with psychopathic tendencies succumbs to them, but you can't be made psychopathic, any more than you can be made gay if you're straight, or black if you're white.

The problem we have is that our economic and political system needs ever-more psychopathic behavior in its leaders. People who can make the 'tough decisions' in business have always, to some extent, been rewarded, as have those who can trample over others as they scramble up the greasy pole to political success. It was this insight that led Plato to say, "Those who seek power are not worthy of that power." But as organisations – particularly mega-corporations – have metastasized to their current global manifestations, so has the degree to which their leaders have to be comfortable with not understanding the impacts of their actions on other people. Their concern for themselves and their own success has self-evidently not changed, but the lack of concern – you might, if you were feeling charitable, call it willful blindness - about the full ramifications of their decisions on the lives of others has had to grow exponentially. At the extreme end of this, you have the likes of the big tobacco firms, whose bosses must have deep-seated psychopathy to profit as they do from directly causing the deaths of hundreds of millions of people. But all mega-corporations act in ways that cause vast suffering; you cannot swing a hammer that size around without knocking off some heads. Being able to tone down caring about such things enough to

focus on their own profit and economic growth to such a degree as obscures or even seemingly justifies their holding such unknowable power in the first place, is essential for anyone at the top of organisations. The psychological strain on anyone not endowed with a degree of psychopathy would be too much to bear. You can't help but wonder how Plato would have judged those who seek to wield the power invested in the office of the CEO of ExxonMobil, Apple or Barclays Bank, and who then happily obey the laws of that office and grows the organisation and its power some more. So, far from Plato's insight being a bland truism that we read and shrug off –with the sort of “all power corrupts but someone has to govern” quips we see everywhere - we would be better off treating it as a something to take extremely seriously and try to respond to with the sort of social constraints we routinely deploy to control such behavior in people who do not hold immense wealth or power.

We'd need a whole other pamphlet to properly dissect this psychology of power but suffice to say that if psychological wellbeing is defined by an ability to achieve self-actualisation – a state that Maslow defined as requiring, among other things, social compassion, comfortable acceptance of self, others and nature, and efficient perceptions of reality - then excess power is without question psychologically and neurologically damaging.

This is all true at a societal level as much as it is at the individual. The hive mind of a society is just as susceptible to hubris and psychopathy as any single power-crazed leader. The symptom we have seen time and time again throughout history as hubris and psychopathy take hold is the building of systems that cannot be controlled, or even maintained. Mayan growth, for example, had a lot to do with innovations in agriculture and the construction of phenomenally complex irrigation systems that ended up needing more water than the environment could reliably provide year after year; a problem the engineers that built it had no ability to correct. In good years, everything was fine. But when a series of droughts strained the system beyond the point where it could keep the population fed, the resultant social, economic and political stress contributed significantly to the destabilisation and final implosion of the civilisation. In other words, their ability to build the system far exceeded their ability to sustain it.

The Romans, on the other hand, grew their empire mostly through continual conquest and good administration. They therefore had ever-longer borders to protect against inevitably hostile neighbours, and in an eloquent demonstration of the second law of thermodynamics they stretched the order they brought with administration beyond the point where it – or they - could generate

the energy needed to maintain its integrity and resist the forces of chaos and entropy. And we all know what happened then.

At this point in our civilization, we are taught to glorify and aspire to power over nature and each other (what else is competition?), and we have no real place for humility as an essential and praise-worthy value. To give this point due weight, it is worth taking a short look at how we have become what think we are.

In 1976, the Evolutionary Biologist Richard Dawkins hypothesised that ideas, opinions, and, collectively, culture evolve, just as physical organisms do. He coined the term “memes” to describe the individual units and since then the basic concept has been validated to the point where it is now pretty widely accepted scientific theory.

One consequence of this new conceptual framework is that it has helped us acknowledge just how profoundly our thoughts - memes - and reality – in its conventional meaning – ‘create’ each other. It’s not overstating the fact to say that our memes *are* our reality. How we conceive of and then perceive the world is inseparable for the concepts, memes and even individual words that we use. From there, it is a comfortably small step to recognise how language is the scaffolding that holds our reality together and gives it shape. And from there, it is another short step to the full acknowledgment of what profoundly subjective creatures we are, and how dependent our reality is on the context within which we find ourselves, including the linguistic context.

Furthermore, our reality is defined by ancient biological ‘wetware’, i.e. our living brain. We evolved over millions of years to survive and reproduce, and, as a species, flourish in our natural environment, and so our neurobiology and associated cognitive processes evolved serving that practical need, rather than any requirement to handle the sort of perspectives and reasoning needed to orchestrate the infinitely complex workings of all the economic, political, technological, social and cultural systems that contribute to the wellbeing of the whole planet for the long term, or create conditions for all seven and a half billion of us to flourish.

Not only that, but our sense of morality - the biological driver of empathy, conscience and broad concern for others is much the same as that of our prehistoric ancestors. As the evolutionary anthropologist [Christopher Boehm](#) puts it, “The first fully modern humans . . . of 45 000 years ago . . . are basically the end point for moral evolution in the biological sense. Today, even though we live in cities and write and read books about morality, our actual morals are little more than a

continuation of theirs.”

In these terms, we are close inheritors of the very same instincts and limitations as the Mayans and the Romans. Only we have taken system-building beyond their wildest imagination. Whereas their systems had comparatively limited geographical and physical boundaries, ours have only planetary. Our modern era –i.e. the last three hundred years – has been the era of truly global systems and power, fuelled by our astonishing technological progress. We now routinely create impacts on a global scale, and yet, in evolutionary terms, we still reason and judge with ‘wetware’ fit for what we would now call hyper-local and small group problems. .

It’s widely accepted amongst neuroscientists that approximately [98% of our cognitive activity](#) is subconscious. In other words, most of what we think, we don’t know we think. Our subconscious’ are constantly filtering and processing their way though an infinite number of existing ideas and concepts and fresh inputs, largely through the use of metaphor (i.e. combining one basic fact or concept with another fact or concept to produce a more complex concept) to produce meaning. A lot of work has been done in the last thirty years to understand how these processes work but even so, the deep foundations of each of our personal attitudes and beliefs are impossible to know because they are locked away in the subconscious; a realm to which we have no direct access. We can only triangulate and speculate, and call on psychiatrists and psychiatric theory to provide equally subjective validation to our suspicions. And so from each of our unique, largely subjective and always unknowably complex subconscious realms arise our opinions and ideas. It’s not quite as random as that may sound as we are all bound by each other’s subconscious realms, and by our contact with tangible or empirically verifiable reality.

Furthermore, most ideas contribute to the evolution of our opinion quite slowly, in neurological terms, and are thus held in smooth and constant tension with other opinions and verifiable fact, but it is certainly true that we are much less connected to anything that might be called absolute truth, and much less oriented to long term understanding and planning than we either might want to believe, and certainly less than we would need in order to successfully manage the complex and powerful systems we create.

The upshot is that Isaac Newton undersold things slightly when he said we stand on the shoulders of giants. It turns out that our entire sense of reality is an inheritance we received, and is something, once we’ve added our own special insights and flavour, we will pass on to future generations. Our minds are truly not our own in the way commonly believed. We are not sole,

rational actors in a neutral world; we are seven and a half billion tiny human points in a vast web of interconnectivity. Our ideas and opinions are the product of those people within our circle of family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances; the knowledge and assumptions of our predecessors and ancestors; the artists and thinkers whose work informs us; the environment we live in and its effect on our bodies and brains; the advertising executives, entertainers, designers and architects whose creativity affects us; our teachers and, of course, our leaders. Indeed, the fabric of our reality is this interconnection, this web of received wisdom that is at best only partially informed by objective truth. Any attempt to stretch our ideas in a different direction, especially one seen to challenge harmony, brings tension to the web, and we feel it in our minds and bodies; we feel different, out of step, maybe stressed and even ostracized. We are called disruptive, radical, extreme, and even dangerous. But knowing how we reason and why should help keep our minds as clear and open as they can be, and keep us humble in the face of any sense of 'truth'.

Occasionally, a new idea will arrive that disrupts our reality, or perhaps articulates something we were almost able to articulate ourselves and puts the seal on it in a way that changes something quite deep about how we see the world. In other words, new ideas can very literally alter our reality. The world and its core operating logic – the whys, hows, and therefore for things as we see them – can change in the blink of an eye. In the same way that adding a final connection to an electrical circuit can make it come alive, or tilting a hologram an inch can change the picture completely, so adding a single thought or set of words can alter, or bring alive, new and deep logic. This is one reason why the Occupy 1%-99% frame spread so quickly round the world in 2011 – it put the final piece on a puzzle most people had already mostly constructed in their own heads. So when they heard or saw the Occupy frame, there was a sense of deep recognition; a “yes” arrived almost immediately in the heads.

Again, this early detour into the way we 'do' reality is important because it is the context for what we can expect of each other and ourselves; it speaks to the ultimate mutability of reality and its attendant logic, and the seminal importance of perception over 'fact'.

My job here, then, is to convince you that this analysis and alignment of ideas is valid enough to either give you a disruptive jolt, or put a seal on something you are very close to knowing already, so that you come to see the logic of our world differently, even if it challenges a few of your other truths. Of course, you may well have joined these sorts of dots in this way already, and there is nothing in these next few pages that you haven't already concluded yourself. If that's the case, I'm

extremely grateful for the company.

With all that in your mind let me cut to the chase: a global *coup d'état* has taken place such that governments no longer govern the world, or even their little bits of it. The nation state – yes, even America and China – has been usurped as the pre-eminent unit of power. Save for extreme outliers like North Korea, all governments now share power in a shaky but so far relatively steady balance with the largest of the multinational corporations. No one has asked us, the public whether we approve of this new arrangement; it happened while we were busy shopping.

The question then, is who are these people, and what are they doing now?

The Neoliberal Heart and Soul

These days, it's fashionable to use the term 'ideology' as a pejorative; to be ideological is to be unreasonable, rigid, caught in thrall to a belief system and untethered from rationality. Political opponents are ideological, we're not. But that's a sloppy use of language; ideology, within normal parameters, has no moral standing in itself, it is merely a term for the system of ideas and ideals we all must hold to operate in the world. To suggest that being ideological undermines an otherwise inherent objectivity is to overplay the human ability to be objective in the first place. [Slavoj Zizek](#) is right when he says, 'In everyday life, ideology is at work especially in the apparently innocent reference to pure utility'. It is always a background condition whether we recognise it in ourselves or not. So I have nothing against ideology.

What I do have something against, however, is the uniform dominance of one ideology over all others, and that is what we are now living under. The ideology in question has variously been called neoliberalism, the Washington Consensus, corporate capitalism, and 'free market' fundamentalism.

These terms all mean slightly different things but at heart they share three deep beliefs: firstly, that survival of the fittest through eternal competition between self-interested parties is, practically speaking, the only law upon which human society can realistically be ordered; secondly, that, in the moral hierarchy, financial wealth equates with life success which equates with virtue; and thirdly that man [sic] is, if not an island, then, at most, a part of an archipelago of islands of shared interests, answerable only to himself, his peers and, possibly, his God, in that order.

This is not the usual way neoliberalism (the term I will use as the umbrella) is described. Like its progenies, Thatcherism and Reaganism, it is usually defined in economic terms; a neoliberal believes in small government; low taxes; the sanctity of private property and private industries; 'free' markets, particularly in labour, all of which feed the double headed hydra of profit and economic growth. But to understand it only in economic terms and not connect it to the three underlying beliefs is to miss the point. [Mrs. Thatcher herself put it well](#) when she said, two years into her first term, "... it isn't that I set out on economic policies; it's that I set out really to change the approach, and changing the economics is the means of changing that approach. If you change the approach you really are after the heart and soul of the nation. Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul."

So, neoliberalism is moral philosophy first, economics second. It believes humanity is best understood through the lens of its three core beliefs and it gives them form and control through a strict economic doctrine. To accept the doctrine is to accept the beliefs, which is to accept the definition of human purpose and identity. To question the doctrine is to question the beliefs and question our purpose and identity. This elegant, circular and hermetically sealed logic is one of its most potent weapons; it makes challenging the economic doctrine feel visceral, even insulting, a social taboo.

On which point, a brief clarifying statement is needed here: I firmly believe capitalism has been at least partially responsible for some of the incredible achievements of the last three hundred years. I must make this point here for two reasons: firstly, because it is self-evidently true so to ignore or deny it would be churlish. The explosion of innovation and discovery interwoven with capitalist regimes and the resources they unleashed has seen life spans increased, lifestyles improved; knowledge shared; minority freedoms secured; and backbreaking, stomach-churning poverty alleviated. For a minority of the world, for sure, and often at the expense of the majority, but for those millions upon millions of people, of which I am one, the truth is undeniable. And secondly, the analysis that follows might otherwise be too easily dismissed as the ravings of an anti-capitalist zealot. My anti-neoliberalism crystallized in my thirties from relatively centrist beginnings but I am not categorically anti-capitalist – it's a somewhat meaningless term, in my view; certainly too broad to be useful - and I flatter myself to think I am no raving zealot. Everything I describe is well documented and verifiable through major academic or media sources, and I have been careful to cite the most mainstream outlets I can.

Fashions in Global Power

If you look at today's constellation of power, you see a seething mass of bodies, the majority of which are under private control. This mass of power is largely operating in a state of harmony, although that is rarely how it's told. Rather, we are encouraged to focus on the level of competitive conflict that comfortably and naturally exists within an overall condition of cooperation. Conflict titillates us; we demand the vicarious thrill of the voyeur and so are easily spoon-fed a steady diet every day by the mainstream media. But whilst we are occupied with the soap opera squabbles of daily electoral politics and reality TV, a small, governing herd is busily finessing new power structures. Like the colonial powers of the 18th and 19th centuries, they are parcelling up the world into new power blocs and getting down to the nitty-gritty of who has say over what.

You might well ask what the real problem is, then. If it is all accord and harmony in the corridors of power, shouldn't we be pleased? Isn't a different ordering of responsibilities a small price to pay? The answer is a categorical no. I will come onto more of the facts and figures to support all this a bit later but in essence, this body of power is causing untold and unnecessary suffering, while telling you that more of what caused the suffering is going to make it better soon, and anyway, suffering is a natural part of life. It's pressing down hard on the accelerator of fossil fuel driven growth even though it is a near mathematical certainty that this strategy is causing chaotic climate change to bear down on us ever faster and with more force. On this one, when the seething mass of power tells you anything, it's that you give them credit for a few shiny tactics but beyond that, its strategy passes for saying it's trying as hard as it can but being fatally held back because 'we just can't change on our own,' as if there were someone else. But perhaps most importantly, it is going unchallenged. And power should never be left unchallenged for long. That is one of the central principles of democracy. It's why we have more than one political party and a free press. Without them, we live in a plutocracy of one mind. A One Party Planet.

So, fashions in global power have changed. Out of fashion are global frameworks agreed between nation states and ideas of universal justice, and in are public-private partnerships and regional agreements of the willing. Out goes dialogue between competing ideologies, and in are 'multi-stakeholder' processes with the invisible ideology already baked in. None of this is secret, by the way; it's all in publically available documents, as I shall show. We're just not really paying it much attention. And that means we're not asking many questions. Such as, how is it possible that Russian

oligarchs can sit comfortably with American Presidents; Chinese Party Barons can break bread with Australian steel moguls; and NGO bosses hitch rides in corporate jets with CEOs?

What yolk of common purpose binds them? The answer is a worldview, which is another way of saying an ideology. They are all in the same basic business of codifying the three neoliberal beliefs into practice and law; of making a reality that reflects and honours them; and of constructing the physical and conceptual structures that count for global governance and thereby shape all of our lives.

This may sound esoteric and ephemeral, but it is so easily seen in everyday life that we no longer see it. We are the fish who cannot understand water. We are Neo in the matrix before he takes the blue pill.

Consider just two things. First, the assumption that all material growth is good. This sits at the heart of all global economic activity and is the pinnacle of the neoliberal pyramid of purpose. The received wisdom is that in order to develop, we must grow our stock of material possessions and wealth. "We", countries, "we", businesses, "we", individuals. For countries it is enshrined in the idea of Gross Domestic Product (GDP); the measure of all progress. So central is it to our political and economic reality that it is practically unchallengeable in the mainstream. Even in the face of absurdity, it thrives. Such is the power of exponential growth such that we now need to produce \$2.7 trillion in new products and services in 2014 on top of the GDP of 2013 just to stay afloat in standard economic terms. The IMF says adding this 3.6% to Global GDP in 2014 constitutes, [strengthened recovery](#); positive language if ever there was any. That's reproducing the size of the [entire global economy in 1969](#), just in growth, just in one year. Couple that with that fact that production of goods is essentially a process of turning raw, mostly finite natural materials into products for sale, and the suicidal nature of the beast becomes apparent. But there's another layer of absurdity still. GDP measures economic activity, so anything that churns money around is counted as positive. It passed with little mention, but recently the UK government decided to [include the estimated \\$5 billion of economic activity](#) associated with drug trafficking and prostitution in its GDP calculations. That added a nice, if deeply cynical boost to the government's narrative of recovery, but it speaks more to the nonsense that we can call positive in economic terms things that the law bans. Even all this, however, cannot pierce the orthodoxy that economic growth is the most important indicator of progress.

There is a large and growing field of economic theory dedicated to the idea of “steady state” or “no growth” economics, with economists like [Tim Jackson](#) and [Charles Eisenstein](#), and institutions, like the [New Economics Foundation](#) promoting highly credible and important work. If the idea of economics without growth sounds like an oxymoron to you, however, that’s the power of the orthodoxy in your mind. But there is, in fact, very little reason to require constant and undifferentiated growth.

Secondly, the idea that competition between self-interested parties is the only realistic way of ordering society. More on the evidence ridiculing this idea later, but for now it’s worth considering just how deeply this assumption goes in our governance and economic structures. It is the touchstone of everything from GDP to league tables in education to consumer advertising. Everything is geared towards promoting and validating the idea that we must be better than each other in as many material ways as possible. To remove competition from dominant ideas of progress would leave them entirely hollowed out, and all the more so since the neoliberal assumption of power in rich countries in the 1980s. The fact that it stands in stark contrast to our long history, and so much of what science is telling us about what makes humans thrive, is beside the point. Science and evidence are no match for ideology.

Ideas of economic growth and competition both existed long before neoliberals, of course, but only since the ascendancy of the warped logic of human nature triggered by the Industrial revolution have they been seen as our Prime Directive. Through deregulation, privatization, lower taxes on corporations and the rich, constant downward pressure on social services and workers wages, they have championed the idea that growth – particularly *their* growth – and competition – particularly when the rules are rigged in *their* favor – are untouchable moral virtues.

So strongly is this creed believed in, exhorted and embodied by those with true global power, and so extreme, particular and separated from what were once standard views on human purpose and progress, that it’s fair to say that, to all intents and purposes, they are all members of the same political party.

You might point to the Balkans, or cyber warfare, or the failure to reach a global climate change deal as evidence of ideological fault lines. I say terrible events like those in the Balkans, and the growing menace of cyber warfare are merely competitive turf wars, the sort we love to watch, between rival constituencies within the same party. Anyone who has ever been involved in party politics will know that the sharpest knives are reserved for colleagues, not the opposition. As for

climate change, the failure to agree a global deal is proof positive that they share a belief that is deeper than politics, that is philosophical and moral, and that has economic growth through the perpetual competition of the self-interested as the unchallenged priority. Simply put, a global deal requiring action from all would introduce a prohibitively unstable element into a system that is carefully balancing on a foundation of savage competitiveness. It requires thinking beyond economic self-interest, so can get no purchase in a system that recognises only economic value and lionises self-interest. No one in the One Party either can, wants to, or knows how to challenge the Prime Directive, and so our attentions are focused on the next level down. We are led to believe that there is deep conflict where in truth there is deep agreement.

Perhaps this all sounds over the top, a bit of shrill dystopian hyperbole. Time, then, to trade prose for facts. Each of the following sets of facts look at the situation from a different perspective, so as to give you as close to a full picture as can be done in these few words. What we are looking for is the distribution of global economic and political power, through four lenses: financial might; concentration of power; current political maneuverings; and finally, in their own words.

Financial Might

First, brute finance: In 2011, [110](#) of the [175](#) largest economic entities on earth were corporations, with the corporate sector representing a clear majority (over 60 percent) over countries. The revenues of mega-corporations such as Royal Dutch Shell, Exxon Mobil and Wal-Mart were larger than the GDP of 110 national economies, or more than half the world's countries. The revenues of Royal Dutch Shell, for instance, were on par with the GDP of Norway and dwarfed that of Thailand, Denmark or Venezuela. These figures could be somewhat misconstrued as they are not entirely comparable but they serve to show orders of magnitude of economic power, and the fact that more is in private hands than public.

Disturbing though that may look on the surface, however, not every aspect of it is exactly new; [private wealth](#) has far exceeded public in most countries for centuries now. What makes it new is the degree to which it is organised globally, and the degree to which it has infiltrated political power structures. In many countries it is practically impossible to know where one ends and the other begins.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the United States, where so much corporate power is based, where it is now fully legal for private interests to channel unlimited amounts of money into politics. Even before the [Citizens United](#) and [McCutcheon](#) decisions, American politics was heavily influenced by money. The most in depth analysis came from an investment-research firm called [Strategas](#) whose work led [The Economist](#) to conclude, “it seems remarkable that companies would do anything but lobby”. Strategas themselves say, “it is almost in the statistically hard-to-believe category”. You can understand why, given that, as an investment, lobbying has outperformed the Standard and Poor’s Index by 11% for ten years straight, and by 30% in 2012. We will have to wait and see what the return rate will be now in the post-*McCutcheon* world but it’s very hard to believe it will be less.

This is the definition of capital influencing politics in favor of those with capital, to a stunning – one might say, reading Strategas’ literature, shameless - degree and it is one form of corruption of the democratic process in the world’s only superpower but there is barely a government on Earth that is not beholden to the beliefs and practices of these mega-corporations. Of the major world powers, Russia and China, perhaps, stand in a slightly different class, but not one where the corruption is any less evident, merely one where it takes a different form. In both, the lines between private wealth and public power are even less well defined.

Concentration of Power

Competition certainly ain’t what it used to be. In a recent study of 43 000 transnational companies, the [Swiss Federal Institute of Technology](#) found that, “transnational corporations form a giant bow-tie structure and [...] a large portion of control flows to a small tightly-knit core of financial institutions.” The central 147 companies control 40 percent of the network’s wealth, while just 737 control 80 percent. That’ll be the 1% of the 1% you could say, or the 0.01 %.

Furthermore, by peeking through boardroom windows, it’s easy to see that even those 147 are run by the same basic gang; people, mostly white and Asian men, who, once they get to the top, assume power and control across multiple fronts, thereby ensuring – by accident or design – that the club is kept small and accessible only to the like-minded. Mike Ashley, for example, one of eight Board members at [Barclays](#), the biggest of the 147 and the Bank responsible for the [LIBOR scandal](#), sits on the UK Government’s powerful Treasury Audit Committee and is Vice-Chair of the European Financial Reporting Advisory Group. His board colleague, Simon Fraser, is a Director of Fidelity

European and Fidelity Japanese Values PLC, Chairman of both the Foreign and Colonial Investment Trust PLC and The Merchants Trust PLC and Non-executive Director of Ashmore Group PLC. The financial sector is by no means exceptional. Around the boardroom table at [IBM](#), for example, sit the CEOs of American Express, Dow Chemicals, Boeing, Caterpillar, UPS and Warburg Pincus. And it's not just the practice in America and Europe: on the [Sony](#) Board sit the CEOs of Toyota, Mitsubishi, Fuji Xerox and the Berlitz Corporation. In fact, a snapshot of the top [five public companies](#) in the world (Apple, Exxon-Mobil, Google, Microsoft, Berkshire Hathaway) shows that 60% of board members are current or former CEO or Chairpersons, mostly of other large multinationals, and each sits on an average of four boards. At least, they are right now.

The oil industry deserves special mention, for three reasons. Firstly, they account for seven of the top ten biggest corporations, so are at the very top of the list of powerful and influential economic entities. What they do matters. Secondly, they are particularly important to our future, for obvious reasons. Thirdly, they are particularly wedded to the neoliberal creed. Along with perhaps the banking and finance industry, they have the most to lose from a move away from neoliberalism. And so they have been responsible for creating, sustaining and then, of course, satisfying demand for fossil fuels; they are all truly global in reach and power, and are intertwined with the fate of nations; and they have a long history of using every trick in the book to ensure the status quo is maintained by discrediting both critics and [the science of climate change](#). But let's just focus on the concentration of power for now; [a 2013 study](#) by the Climate Accountability Institute in Colorado used historical data to trace the source of carbon emissions from 1854 to 2010. They found that just 90 entities – either private or state owned – accounted for 63% of all global carbon emissions. That may sound quite a lot but, as the author of the study, Richard Heede said in an interview with [The Guardian](#), "There are thousands of oil, gas and coal producers in the world. But the decision makers, the CEOs, or the ministers of coal and oil if you narrow it down to just one person, they could all fit on a Greyhound bus or two."

Add another couple of busses and you could probably account for the leadership of a good number of the world's largest corporations. Just take a look at how the leadership of the oil industry stretches across the corporate world. On [the board of Exxonmobil](#), for example, are the Chairman of the Board of Nestle, Chairwoman and CEO of Xerox, Chairwoman and CEO of Holsman International, Chairman, President and CEO of Merck and former Chairmen of the Boards of General Motors, AT&T, Johnson & Johnson and IBM. Also, current board members of Oracle, Nestle, L'Oreal, Credit Suisse Group, American Express (x3), The Carlyle Group, Goldman Sachs, JP

Morgan Chase, General Motors, Marriot and Walmart. And, to round it all off, they are also quite pally with their competitors. To take just one example, Edward J Whitacre Jr., who is on the Board of ExxonMobil also sits on the Board of the [Peterson Institute For International Economics](#), the Vice Chairman of which is [George David](#), a Director of BP. ExxonMobil is the second largest corporation in the world, BP is the fourth. And the Exxon Board are the people who sanctioned the release of a report, on the very same day as the latest IPCC report outlining the clear and present danger of climate change, [saying](#), "“The risk of climate change is clear and the risk warrants action.” and then, half a page later, “All of ExxonMobil’s current hydrocarbon reserves will be needed, along with substantial future industry investments, to address global energy needs”. In other words, action is definitely needed, but we’re planning to burn every last drop of oil we can find. [Stephen Katzner](#), Executive Director of Oil Change International put it most pithily: “If you haven’t yet had the pleasure of reading these reports, let me offer you a shorter version: Exxon to World: Drop Dead.”

And that’s just the business people; politicians float about in the same stagnant pond. Once the theatre of party politics is behind them, they happily rub shoulders with opponents. Bill Clinton, for example, shares the boardroom of both the [US Fund for UNICEF and AT&T](#) with George HW Bush. Clinton’s Vice President, [Al Gore](#) is a senior adviser to Google and sits on Apple’s board. Even those considered progressive champions, like President [Inacio Lula de Silva](#) of Brazil are in the club. After leaving office, Lula became a paid advisor to Brazil’s top construction company, [Odebrecht](#), despite already facing [allegations](#) of having given them preferential treatment during his presidency. Lula’s son, Fabio Luis Lula da Silva, meanwhile, is one of the owners of JBS, the world’s largest beef producer. Before his father was elected Brazil’s president, Lulinha worked as an intern in a zoo.

Less surprising, perhaps, is Tony Blair, who must surely be one of the busiest 0.01%-ers around. He runs his own Faith Foundation, Sports Foundation and business consultancy, makes a lucrative career selling his speaking time for upwards of a million US dollars a pop, has served as a paid advisor to [Zurich Insurance Group](#) and is now a senior advisor to [JP Morgan Chase](#), the world’s largest financial holding company. Meanwhile, his brother, William Blair QC sits on the [European Securities and Market Authority](#), which supervises financial services in the EU. William Blair also, rather worryingly, used to be chairman of the UK Financial Services and Markets Tribunal, the body that adjudicated decisions made by the now defunct UK Financial Services Authority, which was largely blamed, in the UK at least, for not foreseeing and stopping the 2008 financial crisis.

The knot is as tight as the list is exclusive and it leads to intellectual stagnation, biased patronage, and ever more centralised wealth and power. Take, for example, the fact that, as average wages in developed countries dropped 0.5% since 2007, the pay of Directors in [Standard and Poor's 500 Index](#) has increased 15%, and CEO pay by an average of 33%. And this was continuing a very long trend in America – often the canary in the coalmine of such trends globally - that has seen average CEO: average worker ratio [balloon by over 1000%](#) in the last few decades, from 20:1 in 1950 to 204:1 in 2012.

At the very top, things have lost almost all connection with logic and reason. According to the [GMI Rating](#) of CEO pay, top of the pack of appointed executives was Gregory Maffei who, as CEO of not one but two companies, was compensated to the tune of [\\$319 million](#) in 2012. That's 6380 times what the average American worker is paid, and 17 722 times the average global worker, when adjusted for purchasing power parity. Next was Melvin "Mel" Karmazin, then CEO of Sirius XM Radio who pulled in \$255 million, up an astonishing 245% on the year before despite his company [dropping 11%](#) on its 6-year return. This didn't stop him saying to [Forbes magazine](#) in April 2012, "I think I am one of the most underpaid executives in the history of executive payment". Perhaps his rise from the gutter had something to do with the fact that [chairman of the board for Sirius XM Radio](#) is none other than Gregory Maffei. The biggest single pay packet, however, at least among working CEOs, belongs to Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, who pocketed an obscene [\\$2.7 billion](#) in 2012. At these heights, the utility of money matters far less than comparisons, one-upmanship and naked greed, which is what makes them so ugly. And it is this corruption of the idea of individual value, based upon the three tenets of the Neoliberal Party, which causes and then demands that we all celebrate and aspire to such gross and needless material gluttony.

Active Political Projects

There are any number of political initiatives currently underway to extend the control and ideology of the neoliberal elites across all aspects of the system. I will look at just three that I think articulate just how deep and widespread the larger trend is; the trade deals known as the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP); the UNs post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) process; and the G8s New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa (G8NA).

Right now, the most far reaching trade deals in history are being negotiated behind closed doors – closed even to Parliaments the world over; open to only Executive branches of governments and [six hundred corporate lawyers](#) – that will transfer important, *de facto* legislative power from national governments to corporations. One is the [TPP](#), which will take care of, as the name suggests, the countries of the Pacific Basin. The other is the [TTIP](#), which does the same for the US and Europe. The Americas are already taken care of, courtesy of [NAFTA](#), which has proved anywhere from meaningless to disastrous for everyone but large US corporations, and from which many of the principles of the TPP and TTIP have been lifted. And then supercharged.

These pacts deal with everything from intellectual property rights to the environment to financial regulations. To take just one of those areas: the so-called [investor-state dispute tribunals](#). These are adjudication bodies that will be staffed by three corporate lawyers, are closed to the public, and their decisions are to be final and binding. Under these tribunals, multinational corporations will be able to sue national government for lost *future* revenues if national law and standards negatively impact their ability to maximise profit. In other words, the ability of corporations to grow profit and increase their competitive advantage in the future can trump the democratic will of sovereign governments in the present.

This is not fanciful or theoretical, it's been happening for more than fifteen years. The first of such cases was brought by [Metaclad Corp in 1997 using NAFTA](#) rules. Metaclad sued the Mexican government for denying them permission to operate a waste-disposal site. The Mexican authorities acted after a geological survey found that the waste would contaminate the local water supply. The investor-state panel ruled in favor of Metaclad and they were awarded US\$16.9 million. The local governor then declared the site part of a 600,000-acre ecological zone. Metaclad claimed that this constituted an act of expropriation and sought US\$90 million in compensation. That was the first NAFTA case; there have been many more since. In other words, these trade deals give unchallengeable power to unelected corporate lawyers to impose enormous financial penalties on democratically elected authorities if they oppose a corporation's ability to turn a profit. This is the neoliberal dogma of "economic growth at all costs" in practice.

Less aggressive but just as indicative of the direction of travel is the UN's "post-2015" process. Once the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expire in 2015 (all unreached, once you remove China to whom they didn't apply but who is still counted in official figures), they will be replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is a dizzying array of meetings, summits,

consultations and even officially sanctioned '[popular movements](#)' being created as part of the visible process to decide on these things. But look closely and you'll see that, in contrast to the MDG process, there are a large number of corporate voices in the mix, and they are being given priority status.

For example, the biggest official meeting this year, the [International Symposium on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Agenda](#), is taking place in Australia in November. On the powerful four person advisory board are not, as we might expect, world renowned experts in the phenomenally complex task of human development but Dr. Aitun Rahman, Governor of the Central Bank of Bangladesh and former chairman of Janataa Bank, and Dr. John Hewson, Chairman of both [Shartu Capital](#), a "boutique investment and advisory firm" and [Laurus Energy](#), along with two officials from the UNs corporate partnership initiative, the Global Compact (see below). Laurus energy sells itself on the strength of a patented form of one hundred year-old "Underground Coal Gasification" technology that it claims produces green energy, despite it using a form of highly controversial fracking technology and having a history of [contaminating water supplies](#). Not only that, but the [Bulletin of Atomic Sciences](#) sees a problem with the basic method, saying that if the world's reserves of coal were accessed this way, "carbon dioxide levels would quadruple resulting in a global mean temperature increase of between 5 and 10 degrees Celsius." These are the people who are advising on the future of global development. What, but more of the same can possibly ensue?

And then there's the [G8s New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa](#) (G8NA). According to the official literature, its purpose is "to increase responsible domestic and foreign investment in African agriculture, take innovations that can enhance agricultural productivity to scale, and reduce risks borne by vulnerable economies and communities." All sounds great. They even have impressive targets, like "lifting 50 million people out of poverty by 2020". According to the [Global Policy Forum](#), however, it "is a political process designed to reserve corporate actors a seat at the table. Business is not only attributed a specific role in the enactment of politically decided programs, but it becomes an actor almost equal to governments". Further, GPF makes the point that "The G8NA serves as an excellent example of a form of governance that is increasingly gaining importance on a global scale", by which they mean the public-private form of government we have seen taking over the UN. Like all of these initiatives, it is cloaked in progressive sounding rhetoric and has managed to get its hooks into the leadership of some of the largest NGOs, but the core methodology looks and sounds suspiciously like a corporate power-grab.

The way it is structured, the G8NA locks African governments into providing what they term “business enabling environments”. In this context, ‘business’ doesn’t mean the Mom and Pop local business as much as corporate business. So they are to “refine policies in order to improve investment opportunities”, and, at the time of writing, 13 countries had already made 213 reforms to that end. These have included providing access to their markets to help the Monsanto’s of this world sell GMO seeds and the fertilizers that they must, by design, be protected by. It means reforming land laws to make it easier for foreign investors to buy up large tracts of land. We know from long experience that this is very often exactly the cover provided for ignoring customary land titles and displacing smallholder farmers and other indigenous peoples. We’ve seen exactly that happen, under the shroud of exactly the sort of positive rhetoric that covers the G8NA, in [Ethiopia](#), [The Philippines](#), [Nicaragua](#), [Guatemala](#), [Sierra Leone](#) and many other countries. Sometimes, it is the World Bank using its Doing Business rankings, here we see it from the G8. In all instances, it is the same model, which is hardly surprising given that they are all advising each other. As GPF says, “The G8NA can be understood as a “bracket” and even an enforcing mechanism that binds these mechanisms together”.

As usual, the vital question is, what do the people in control believe is best for the world? It is unquestionably the case that the people putting together the G8NA believe in the three core tenets of the neoliberal philosophy. They see business as, if not necessarily an entirely benign force, then at least one that we should believe can be benign, in the right hands (i.e. theirs), to the point of being a solution. And they can do this because they see no prohibitive tension between serving a profit motive driven by and dependent on the extrinsic values of power and status (even if, as we saw above competition isn’t quite what they would have you think it is any more), and achieving maximal equity and wellbeing for all, which draws on the entirely opposite set of intrinsic values, i.e. universalism and benevolence. To them, the lack of public accountability within corporate structures is of vastly secondary importance to the good intentions, or at least the warm words, of the people they sit alongside in more and more meeting rooms. And all the evidence from the cognitive sciences, the social sciences, anthropology, systems theory, to name just a few disciplines, not to mention the voices of countless social movements and oppressed people around the world, are easily ignorable because they don’t align with their essential beliefs. They don’t feel like “common sense” to someone who believes in neoliberalism, so can be effortlessly discounted. This is what the hubris that brought down the Mayans and the Romans looks like in the 21st Century.

And it has got to the point where the logic is so well accepted in so many places, and the dangers and contradictions so denied or misunderstood, that they can proudly and publicly make plans for no less than the full redesign of all global governance, without triggering much of a backlash.

In Their Own Words

The one place where the 0.01% and their hangers-on all routinely gather, in relatively clear view of the public, is the World Economic Forum in Davos every February. CEOs, Heads of State, Ministers, celebrities, and NGO chiefs all mix and mingle. It's not the elite gathering it once was but it still attracts enough power players to matter.

This grouping has a plan called the [Global Redesign Initiative](#) in which they affirm that nation states are no longer “the overwhelmingly dominant actors on the world stage” and that “the time has come for a new stakeholder paradigm of international governance.” These few words, buried within 468 pages of dense jargon, contain a profound and shocking intent to replace democratic governance, flawed though it is, with a hybrid form of public-private government made up of the 0.01%. It is as if the authors had opened their eyes in 2012 and assumed that everyone who has power deserves power – one of the three central tenets of neoliberal ideology - and the only question is how to make it tidier. Only by laboring under such an assumption could they so blithely write that we need to, “Redefine the international system as constituting a wider, multifaceted system of global cooperation in which intergovernmental legal frameworks and institutions are embedded as a core, but not the sole *and sometimes not the most crucial*, component” [italics added]. Leaving aside the obligatory niceties paid to civil society, it's clear from the rest of the document that ‘multifaceted’ in this context is a euphemism for part-corporate. And corporations are, by definition, not democratic. All popular democracy needs to be, in this brave new world, is a theoretical core. Not even crucial.

Their plan includes a fully reconceived United Nations that is not only run along public-private lines but is further reduced by the fact that some issues - and they cite the example of world hunger - would be taken out of the UN system altogether and instead be addressed by “plurilateral, often multi-stakeholder, coalitions of the willing and able.” And incase you thought this was just a plan, be aware that a high level public-private partnerships initiative, called [the Global Compact](#), is well underway, spearheaded by no less than the Secretary General, and with the willing and able help of

a new Assistant Secretary General, the first in history to be appointed unilaterally, without General Assembly approval, and [paid for by Bill Gates](#).

You may find yourself again reasoning that this could all be a good thing - partnerships are good, let's all pull together, business must be a part of the solution, and it's a sign of maturity and progress that everyone can get along in this New World Order. Within limits, that's all fine, but before you let your guards down I would urge you to think for a moment about the term 'legitimate power'. The two most sacred political principles upon which we have strived to contain otherwise unfettered power, for at least the last hundred years are democracy and the rule of law. What happens to democracy when democratically elected leaders are merely one voice among many? What happens to government 'for the people, by the people' when decisions are made as much by CEOs as any Head of State? More importantly, how do we challenge power in that scenario?

As for the rule of law, well, we've already seen how that performs in contest with economic power: who can forget the fact that the institutions that caused the financial crisis are almost all bigger now than when they were first deemed too big to fail and had to be bailed out, and not a single person has been charged, let alone jailed, for the chaos and misery still being felt.

This is business as usual for mega-corporations. Financial crime is rife but it doesn't stop there. Royal Dutch Shell has been [officially exonerated](#) for 40 years of contamination in the Niger Delta, to the horror of everyone from local farmers to [Amnesty International](#). [DuPont](#) was fined just \$16.5 million for two decades worth of covering up company studies that showed it was polluting drinking water with an indestructible chemical that causes cancer and birth defects. [Haliburton](#), [Ford](#), [Roche](#), [KPMG](#), [Nestle](#), [Enron](#), [Nike](#), [Syngenta](#), [Clear Channel Communications](#), [Blackwater International](#), [General Electric](#), [Barclays](#), [HSBC](#), [Exxon Mobil](#), [BP](#), [Hyundai](#), [Pfizer](#), [Korean Airlines](#), [Coors](#), [all the major Tobacco companies](#) . . . the list of cases we know about where mega-corporations subvert or operate outside the law are endless; far too many to brush aside as a few bad apples, or even make it reasonable to entirely blame any individual corporation for individual occurrences. The "if we didn't someone else would" argument can be perversely valid. The only reasonable explanation is that something bigger than all of them, the purpose they serve - maximising profit and growth - creates an environment so entirely defined by competition that they are practically required to continually test boundaries to keep their edge. In the real world, that means tipping over into illegality as a matter of course. You could say it is a common and inevitable symptom of a chronic disease of their collective making.

What's more, in America, where a majority of the mega-corporations are based, they enjoy the legal rights of personhood. This affords them access to double jeopardy laws, and a long list of case law precedents stretching [back to 1819](#) that 'protect' them against regulation under the [First, Fourth and Fifth](#) Amendments, as well as the granddaddy of them all, the [Fourteenth Amendment](#) – but few of the liabilities. As of this year, they are even deemed [able to hold religious views](#) and deny employees health benefits that displease them. The irony is truly painful: the owners of a corporation are shielded from prosecution for financial failings or other activities considered crimes if committed by a flesh and blood person, but can step out and deploy the full financial and legal weight of the corporate body to impose their very human opinions on employees and the wider community, such as how people plan a family. As one pithy US judge put it, "Justice is open to everybody in the same way as the Ritz Hotel".

Remarkably, America is held up as a [beacon of corporate accountability](#) because by 2011 – that is, in 238 years – the US legal system had completed prosecution of a grand total of 275 cases. According to the [Yale Law Journal](#), "From a comparative perspective, such liability marks the United States as relatively unique [sic]. Few other Western countries impose entity liability, and those that do impose it comparatively infrequently and under the threat of far less serious punitive consequences. In countries like France and Germany, for example, the principle of *societas delinquere non potest* – "a legal entity cannot be blameworthy" – long prevented imposition of entity criminal liability at all. More recently, France and several other European nations have cautiously experimented with corporate criminal liability. Germany has held fast in refusing to punish criminally corporations for the acts of their individual directors or employees."

Of course, in America, the trying times for the 0.01% may be over; things are definitely swinging in their favor since *Citizens United* case gave them the right to spray limitless amounts of money around to influence politics - which goes a long way to explaining why almost US\$20billion was spent on the 2012 presidential election – and the 2014 decision by the Supreme Court in *McCutcheon vs. the Federal Election Commission* that removed all caps to aggregate individual donations to political candidates. It is said loudly and proudly by [serious people](#), including a 5-4 majority of the Supreme Court, that money equals free speech, and therefore those with more money get more speech. The 0.01% can thus speak loudest of all.

Also consider the fact that when it comes to contributing to societies from which they draw profit, mega-corporations are now so in control that they can practically write their own corporate tax

law, as evidenced by the fact that a quarter of the [Fortune 500 paid zero corporation tax](#) in the US in 2011, against an official rate of 35%. Thirty of them, including giants like General Electric, Boeing, Verizon, Wells Fargo and DuPont actually had a negative tax bill. GE, for example, received US\$4.7 billion from the taxpayer while registering a US \$10billion profit. In the UK, meanwhile, [one in four](#) of the biggest companies paid no corporation tax in 2012, including Rolls Royce, Vodaphone, Tate and Lyle and British American Tobacco.

And that's just in the west. Fair taxation the world over is a game of two sides: the 0.01% and the mega-corporations vs. the small business and the average taxpayer, with the rules rigged increasingly in favor of the former, as befits the neoliberal philosophy. Servicing it all is the growing web of more than eighty tax havens, up from forty in 1999. These secrecy jurisdictions keep a third of all privately held wealth – [at least US\\$26 trillion](#) – out of reach of the taxman and ensure that it is, to borrow a phrase Lord Turner, the ex-Chairman of the UK Financial Services Authority used to describe much of the business of the City of London, the *de facto* tax haven capital of the world, [“socially useless”](#). This includes, and using [only conservative estimates](#), US\$1 trillion lost to taxpayers in the developing world *each year*, including US\$191 billion from Russian and US\$158 billion from China.

Don't be fooled by anything governments say on this; for every apparently juicy morsel doled out to an increasingly weary public, there are a host of closed room deals to bolster and spread the practice of tax theft. Over the last decade, flows of illicit capital have grown, on average, an astonishing [10% a year](#), outpacing even Chinese GDP growth. So when leaders like David Cameron make high profile statements that garner the praises of some of the world's biggest charities by supposedly tackling tax havens when his turn comes to chair the G8, as it did last year, we should always look behind him, because we will inevitably see, as we did in 2013, finance ministers like George Osborne putting real power to work [supporting and strengthening the system](#), relaxing the laws around corporate tax compliance and overseeing, in Osborne's case, a [US\\$1bn rise](#) in tax avoidance in the UK in the year of the G8, and as part of a far larger project to turn the UK into [“a tax haven for multinationals”](#). All in service of the neoliberal creed of self-interested competitive advantage and perpetual economic growth.

And even if democracy and the rule of law *could* survive in the rarefied air of the 0.01%, and we could elect or recall CEOs, jail the guilty Directors or shut down the guiltiest of corporations, we would still be screwed because right now there's only one party from which to choose their

replacements: the Neoliberal Party. There is no meaningful opposition. There is no plurality of ideas, no testing of mettle in the grand forums of public debate. No one at the top tables is seriously questioning the myopic lust for perpetual growth, providing paradigm-shifting leadership on climate change, or taking a meaningful stand against the acceptability of greed, because the system (see below) will not reward, or even allow, such innovation. And anyway, everyone at that level subscribes to the neoliberal creed that keeps it metastasizing. That's how they got there.

What each of these lenses show is that wealth and power work for those with wealth and power, and at the very top the 0.01% are promoting a single economic and political ideology. You might say 'twas ever thus; private capital, at least since the Industrial revolution took off, has almost always exceeded public and the rich have always pulled strings to look after themselves. That may be factually correct but as an argument against radical change it fails on three fronts. Firstly, and at the heart of this case is the fact that power is now operated globally, whereas until relatively recently it was predominantly a national concern. Exceptions like the [East India Company](#) (EIC), which officially ran parts of the British Empire between the 17th and 19th Centuries, are just that, exceptions. But if you'd like to go there, the EIC, and its [Dutch equivalent](#), were models of private rule for and by the rich, complete with slave trading, private armies and Royal Charters. Just the sort of thing democracy supposedly did away with. No, what makes things different now is that the dominance of this ideology over all of humanity is near complete.

Secondly, on a technical level, we have the ability to do so much better. We long since passed the point where the only thing standing in the way of a more equal, just and sustainable society in which more people flourish is the will to build it.

And thirdly and most importantly, unless we believe that there is a natural inevitability and justice in the current state of affairs – which is essentially what the three neoliberal beliefs would have you believe – that argument is just plain defeatist. People have always died from cancer too and we use that as a reason to work ever harder to find the cure, not accept the disease.

We live in a world where the richest 85 people have the same wealth as the bottom [3.5 billion combined](#), a fact [Time magazine](#) called, "One stat to destroy your faith in humanity". If those 3.5 billion had the wherewithal to survive and live full and complete lives of opportunity and freedom, and if we could set aside all the evidence about how corrosive inequality is to basic social cohesion (see below), there might be no problem worth fixing. But those 3.5 billion people tend to live lives characterised by deprivation. They have access to poor, if any, education and poor, if any

healthcare, which means that their options – their freedoms - are severely limited. Meanwhile, the 85 have wealth beyond all utility and reason, and see the awesome power it puts in their hands not just as an asset they are morally entitled to wield but as something they could possibly wield safely.

To find another frame for wealth and power, you must look to the extremely rare exceptions like President [Jose Mujica](#) of Uruguay who shuns the usual trappings of power and [who calls for, and exemplifies, materially modest living](#) in the service of others. His government rejected the neoliberal policies of the World Bank and the IMF who, to listen to government ministers, stepped back from their usual role as dictators of neoliberal economic policy when Mujica's government came to power in 2004, having accepted the failure of their policies after the economy crashed in 2002. Since then, [Mujica's government](#) has reduced poverty from 32% to 12% in 9 years; increased access to water from 81% to 95%; grown national income per capita every year; and has set up a national office for cooperatives to promote different economic models. He personally donates 90% of his income to charity, refuses to live in the grand Presidential Palace and drives around in an old VW Beetle. But there are no Mujica's to choose at or near the top of the neoliberal pyramid. They could never get there.

Furthermore, there is no accountability. Not just to us, the tired, hungry masses, but in any meaningful sense. There is nothing above the 0.01%; no laws or international organisations to check them, and very little regulation impinges on their ability to extract wealth from the environment and from people and ladle it into their own pockets. If a country has laws that require them to contribute to the society from which they profited, they simply move their profits to countries that don't. If democratic institutions decide that their business is too damaging to the environment to continue, or that they want their workers to have ILO standards of rights, they can sue that government into submission.

At the crux of this is the fact that finance and business have globalised but popular politics have not. Another way of saying that is that the competition-based, profit-above-all Neoliberal creed that guides business has risen to dominate almost all global forums, while ideas of justice and equity most commonly kept alive via popular democracy and politics, have stayed chained, increasingly unable to breath, below. In this way, the Neoliberal creed has come to define human purpose and progress, and realigned power structures to serve this new, emaciated definition. The best we can hope for is that neoliberals discover a powerful urge to being to put systemic limits upon that which they most love; their own power, wealth and control. Certainly, the idea of voluntary regulation of

this sort is the most they seem [willing to countenance](#). Hands up who trusts them to do that?

The Logic Within

The real kicker to all this is that at the deepest, most important level, no one planned it and no one is to blame. This is not a binary, satisfying battle between good and evil. It's almost certainly untrue and it's definitely unhelpful and intellectually lazy to suggest that the 0.01% are bad people. Yes, I'm saying the Davos set have this elaborate plan, and I'm readily name-checking high-profile powerbrokers but I nonetheless do not believe that they are entirely accountable. Collectively, the 0.01% may be doing nothing to meaningful to challenge it, and pretty much everything they can think of to profit from it, but that's not the same as being the architects. It's not even the same as being wholly intentional in how they perpetuate it. To put it very simply, what existed before any of today's lot were in power fostered the conditions within which people with their resources (be they intellectual, educational, physical and/or financial) and characteristics can thrive. Without the causes and conditions, the thriving cannot happen; with them in place, those who naturally align with the motives and drivers of the system will inevitably rise to the top and hence perpetuate it. And it rolls back thus through time.

What we are really seeing is a stage in the evolution of a complex adaptive system. The forces inherent within it are orders of magnitude more powerful than any group, corporation or state. The current set-up is largely the result of human decision making, for sure, but to try and pick the decisions apart and attribute blame to any single grouping is to misunderstand the nature of complex systems. The most the 0.01% can do is ride the waves, quash or divert any significant mutations of resistance, and maybe, occasionally, affect the direction of the evolution by a degree or two.

For anyone to truly shake things up, they would need to alter the logic of the system itself. They would need to change its pattern, what systems theorists calls its attractor, which includes changing the incentives and drivers pulling it along. System and complexity theorists talk about "bifurcation points", a point of instability at which the system can change abruptly and new forms of order suddenly appear. This is what we need to be looking and fighting for. Which leads to a quick word of caution on traditional approaches to "policy".

We have a strong and dominant paradigm for what good policy analysis is, and what sort of policy change it leads to. Pick up and report from a political party, think tank or NGO and you will see a list

of recommendations for legislative or public policy changes they want to see implemented. It will, in almost all cases, be made up of a data set, a 'common sense' analysis of the environment, and what seems a reasonable set of practical steps. These may be perfectly logical when taken in isolation but they tend to emerge from people who have been trained to view the world – as we all have – as a Cartesian machine, in which change is linear and one thing follows inevitably and predictably from the last, rather than people trained to see it as a system – that is, with non-linear feedback patterns, attractors, self-organising principles and the like. Because it is still a new science (the first theories were postulated back in the early 20th Century but it really only started to be studied in serious scientific arenas in the 1970s) very little if any of the powerful lessons of systems thinking have made it into places where public policy is studied, and even less into the corridors of power. But we should recognize this and take it upon ourselves to learn, rather than wait for it to gradually seep into the walls around us. The potential we could unleash if we do so is truly staggering.

In as few words as possible: The word system derives from the Greek *syn + histani* which literally means, 'to place together'. As Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi say in their remarkable book, *The Systems View of Life*, "systems thinking does not concentrate on the basic building blocks but rather on the basic principles of organization. Systems thinking is "contextual" which is the opposite of analytical thinking. Analysis means taking something apart in order to understand it; systems thinking means putting it into the context of the larger whole". It is sometimes thought of as just another scientific perspective, but that's a deep, almost funny irony. It is more accurate to think of systems thinking as a paradigm, or a way of thinking, rather than a scientific discipline, and to contrast it with other paradigms, most notably Cartesian and Newtonian 'mechanistic' or 'reductive' paradigms. The latter see the world as a machine with rigid hierarchies and individual and separable working parts – as in Descartes's famous clock metaphor, which he extended as far as to describe the human body as 'an earthen machine' – whereas systems thinking sees networks, patterns and connections.

It is Einstein's quantum theory and probabilities to Newton's physical absolute and mathematical certainty. And daunting as this may at first appear, it is actually anything but. It is the essence of finding meaningful and understandable – if not entirely predictable – order in chaos, and truth in complexity. It may be a slightly heavy intellectual lift to shift your thinking into this new paradigm if you are heavily grounded in the traditional analytical mode, but it's no more challenging, ultimately, than any other area of basic study and the rewards are more than worth it. There are plenty of good ideas emerging to study, as more and more people move into this space. There are some great

books, from Donatella Meadows' *Thinking in Systems*, to *Synch* by Steven Strogatz, to the newly released and wonderfully rich and comprehensive *The Systems View of Life* by Capra and Luisi.

Systems thinking also opens up pathways to connect the material with the spiritual, which is a gift we have only just begun to grapple with. But that's another pamphlet altogether. There are organisations to learn from, from the Santa Fe Institute, to the Earth Policy Institute, to the Third World Networks to the Tellus Institute, with their powerful Great Transition Initiative.

Unfortunately, this is all threatening to many exceptionally well-meaning, well-credentialed and powerfully positioned experts because it seems, at first glance, to challenge their expertise and thereby reduce their usefulness and supremacy. Appealing to systems thinking can trigger a whole battery of defensiveness. But it's not an either/or, or, at least not entirely. It is simply a broader and more sophisticated way of looking at the organization of things and finding the important patterns. Each, in the long run, has its place – we need the seamstress just as much as we need the designer – but right now, in most theatres of social change, we are almost completely focused on one and ignorant of the other. Until we rebalance in favour of systems thinking, we will be stumbling along, three-quarters blind, and we will have little idea whether we are really doing lasting good, temporary and isolated good, or more harm than good. As stated previously, the road to hell is paved with the good intentions of people who do not understand how complex systems work.

In looking for the best practical changes to fight for, then, we need to first embrace systems thinking, or at least listen intently to those who have. The sort of starting question guiding us should be, 'where and/or what is the bifurcation point we are looking for?' rather than, for example, how much money will it cost to deliver better healthcare? This is what is needed to help focus our energies down in the most efficient and effective way to trigger the deep change required. We need to study and work with the dynamic energy of the system, and not push against it.

All of this can be done. Even the most outrageously grand-sounding idea, like reordering our social values and taking competition down a notch, is conceivable, if we embrace the right knowledge. And, importantly, it is not going against our nature, as many traditionalists and the feint-hearted reflexively like to claim; it is re-aligning ourselves with our true natures. There is plenty of evidence from anthropology, psychology and the cognitive sciences that humanity has ample potential to thrive in far less competitively-ordered societies. Indeed, without diving too deeply into the anthropological evidence, it is clear that for the vast majority of our history, humans have ordered societies on [egalitarian principles](#). No one, least of all me, is suggesting we go back to being hunter-

gatherers –an absurd idea if ever there was one - but if what we need is evidence that empathy and equity can be held in far better, more just balance with greed and competition, we have ninety thousand years of social ordering to give us inspiration and hope. Exactly what this will look like for the 21st century, in a globalized, interdependent world of nine billion people is an intriguing question that will need the ingenuity and courage of far more people than me. But nothing other than the defeatist logic of the lazy, cynical, greedy or chronically unimaginative has ever suggested to me that it is the stuff of baseless idealism.

But it will require a widespread igniting of the popular imagination to demand a profound change in how structures of power recognise, define and value life. They have been bent so hard, for so long, to value only economic value and competitive power that we will, in effect, need to re-write their operating protocols, so that they see their purpose differently. Calls for reform of parts of the system, like Thomas Piketty's for a global wealth tax, are enticing in theory but for any individual good policy to stick, some of the most basic elements of global culture will need to be wholly reconceived. Perhaps a global wealth tax is an efficient vehicle for that, but in his book there is no sense that he arrived at it by studying the system's overall dynamic forces.

What seems certain, though, is that the almighty, two-headed god of profit and economic growth will need to be relegated to secondary importance, in favor of measures of progress of a wholly different, more human, holistic, sort. The byzantine beast of GDP must die an ignoble death. Though I cannot say changing this would constitute a bifurcation point, it would seem an essential component of any lasting change.

In the same way, we also need to look at money. Unless, as an expression of our values, democratically accountable institutions take back the mandate to create money from private banks - if you didn't know, it's currently private banks, not government mints, that are responsible for creating 97% of the money in the system, as the [Bank of England](#) recently went to some trouble to explain - and reassume control of the money supply. This is an idea that is rapidly finding mainstream support, including in hallowed pages of [The Financial Times](#). Then, given how the current money system is now built entirely on debt held ultimately by private banks, and in extreme cases debt is being used to suck the political spirit out of populations, as is the case with American students who are loaded up with so much debt before their careers even start that their inclination to do anything other than find the best paying job and keep their heads down is snuffed out by the need to feed the insatiable monkey of debt on their backs – debt, outrageously, that is

uniquely exempt from bankruptcy laws - we need to turn money back into the unit of intrinsic positive value, rather than the free-floating expression of debt and obligation, otherwise we will not have truly dealt with anything.

Size must also be put on the table, of corporations, certainly, but also of governments. A simple principle – albeit not an easy one to implement – would be that no privately controlled corporation has more than 10-15% of a market, or exceeds a certain percentage of the average GDP in the global economy (GDP being only one measure amongst many to be used, but a handy way to describe the principle here). That way, the ordering of power would remain locked, with democratic institutions forever at the top of the pyramid. Governments are even more fraught but as long as the size of a government's control exceeds a certain population size, there will be a permanent and powerful drag towards inequality and minority oppression.

This is a hard point for many on the left to navigate because we believe in equality so strongly that we default to measuring everyone by the same yardstick, which pulls all systems, including governance, towards single, mammoth entities. We have been boxed into a corner where we must defend the role of government in providing for its population's needs, no matter its size, because the right has managed to own the frame of "small government". This has meant that for far too long, any nuanced or mature debate on what the ideal size of government to head of population should be has been squeezed out of the mainstream, save for in a small number of countries that ride a nationalistic wave like Scotland. But an unchallenged acceptance that bigger is better is deeply unwise, if only because the greater the concentration of power, the greater the chance of systemic corruption and unintended consequences. We long since passed the point where the 0.01% power could truly map or understand the ramifications of their actions, and look where that's got us.

Facing Ourselves

Most importantly, though, there must be something of a philosophical and spiritual reckoning. The destructive force of our power is such that we are now creating problems on a planetary scale and at the level of the human species. Climate change is the most urgent and the one where the utter folly of the neoliberal creed is shown up most starkly. We just need one fact to know how badly it is failing us: Since world leaders first took note of climate change at the Rio Earth Summit in 1990, the amount of CO₂ we pump into the atmosphere each year has [increased 61%](#). Despite all the

meetings and summits, the technological advances, the research, the Kyoto agreement, the CSR initiatives, the grand rhetoric and the headlines, we have not only not reduced the chances of catastrophic climate change, we have, lemming-like, been picking up pace as we run towards the cliff-edge. What more evidence do we really need that the One Party we have is profoundly and disastrously unfit to govern?

But climate change is not the only threat. With the technological, military and financial wealth gathered as it is in such a small number of hands, the chances of catastrophic events that could impact the whole species are higher than ever. And these are only the potential sudden onset events. The psychological rot spreading through developed countries is all too evident and it is increasingly being seen in developing countries as they become more and more aligned with neoliberal norms. British psychologist Oliver James coined the term [Affluenza](#) in his 2007 book of the same name, and others have since backed up his original case with [more research](#). Put very simply, the modern, Western, affluent, individualistic, unequal society is making us psychologically ill. Developmental psychologist Niobe Way from New York University, through her research on how we raise boys calls what is happening in America particularly as a '[crisis of connection](#)'.

The most complete global evidence comes from Kate Pickett and Richard Wilson's 2009 study of wealth inequality within and between nations: [The Spirit Level](#). Pick an indicator of social wellbeing and inequality makes it worse. Higher homicide rates, teenage pregnancy, incarceration levels, obesity and child mortality, and lower educational attainment are all correlated with rising inequality. [Studies since the publication](#) of the book have reinforced everything it said, and added a few impacts for good measure: rising inequality also fuels consumerism, adds to personal debt, and even increases levels of narcissism (i.e. the individualism prized by the Neoliberal creed, on steroids). In other words, an unequal society is an unhealthy society. Neoliberalism creates unequal societies; in its current construction it self-evidently cannot do anything else.

In most countries, we tend to either flinch from language that might be deemed spiritual in public political debate, or confuse it with an exclusive form of religion, and that's to our great cost. Because these are not challenges that can be fixed only with technical or political responses; they speak to our nature, our purpose and our potential as human beings. For most of our history, we have not been beholden to ideas of perpetual material growth. The ideas at the heart of our current system come from the likes of Adam Smith and David Hume at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. They have long since been overtaken by science, and they have always been distrusted,

to say the least, by spiritual and philosophical traditions. A fact often glossed over by the right is that Adam Smith himself went to great pains, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, to explain how humanity's natural inclination towards self-interest must be tempered by society. I think I stand on pretty solid ground when I say he would look extremely unfavorably on a global political economy, like ours, that preaches self-interest from every billboard and TV advert, every boardroom, cabinet table and presidential office.

Even Adam Smith, though, pales next to the exquisite chorus of voices we have for too long relegated to the sidelines. I'm talking about the true giants of philosophy, spirituality and morality; people who have given voice to our full humanity. From Confucius, Lao Tze, Socrates and Buddha Shakyamuni, through Marcus Aurelius, Jesus Christ, and the Prophet Mohammed all the way through to beacons of our own time, Mary Woolstonecraft, Mary Seacole, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela and even young Malala. They all teach the opposite of the neoliberal creed of permanent competition, of valuing life by a person's financial wealth, and of isolated protectionism. They all taught humility above pride, compassion above self-interest and relationships with each other based on empathy, not competition. They taught that these are the truest qualities of humanity, the ones we should work hardest to develop, because these are the key not only to individual happiness but also to social harmony. Not metaphorically, not rhetorically, not just on Fridays or Sundays, at weddings and funerals, and most importantly not in a limited or exclusive way, but truly. Held up against this simple wisdom, neoliberalism is exposed as the anemic and ugly mutation it is.

Ignore the fact that the Neoliberal creed has sucked dry ideas of love, empathy and compassion and left their cellophane-wrapped husks to be rolled out as if they were any other product to be bought and sold, or ridiculed as naïve or sentimental; such things are not for the office, let alone the boardroom. Ignore all the [psychological evidence](#) that shows that intrinsic values are in truth more powerful, more sustainable, more rewarding than those that lead us to chase money, power and status. Ignore [all the literature](#) that shows how we are born more empathetic than we commonly now recognize, and despite the endless screech and hammer of advertising and demands for more, it remains – it *survives* – as one of our most potent and pleasurable values. Ignore, even, the perverse fashion in modern politics that has seen 'conservatives' the world over be so consumed by Neoliberal ideology that they have been convinced to turn their backs on the most profound conservation of all: the conservation of our very planet. Ignore all that and listen instead, for just a moment, to what Gandhi called your 'still, small voice of conscience.' It may be scoffed at and

ignored by the titans of neoliberalism, but it is the truest, clearest and most powerful point of reference you have. What does it have to say to you about all that you are - that we all are - being understood as the Neoliberal Party understands you with its three core beliefs, and all our progress directed toward and described by a need for more Gross Domestic Product?

How can all of us together, with our contradictions and desires, our souls and our minds, possibly be well represented by a single, insatiable quest for more material growth? How healthy can we be if our environments are shaped to serve that one paltry goal? And yet that is how it works today. Every Head of State, every CEO worth noting, is on a permanent quest for growth of profit and GDP. It is a betrayal of the best in our common humanity.

The changes I'm pointing towards have been envisioned many times in popular culture: the most popular of all being Star Trek in which [Captain Picard](#) can be found saying things like, "The acquisition of wealth is no longer the driving force of our lives. We work to better ourselves and the rest of humanity." Unfortunately, that is fantasy, and too fantastical to hope for as long as the current hegemony exists.

No, it's sadly apparent that in the absence of the sort of tectonic changes described above, the global Neoliberal Party will go on consolidating its grip on power, and quietly laying the principles of democracy to rest. So long and thanks for all the cash! What else would you do if you had access to all the earthly spoils you could imagine and the rules were rigged in your favor?

Nothing close to business as usual can change things. In fact, as Thomas Piketty argues so fastidiously in *Capital in the 21st Century*, business as usual is most likely leading us into a prolonged period of low economic growth, which is the best climate of all for the consolidation of inequalities in wealth and power. We are very probably returning to a state not unlike the aristocracies of old, where wealth and power are hereditary, held within tight circles, and kept out of reach of the populous. Even the phenomenal diffusion of knowledge heralded by the Internet is unlikely to prove forceful enough to change the direction of travel if our imaginations cannot stretch beyond the limits the Neoliberal Party has set for us. The future looks pretty well set.

But for two things. One inevitable, unpredictable and terrifying; one improbable, unpredictable and epically inspiring.

Where Hope Exists

The first is climate change. All the best evidence is saying we are heading for somewhere between a [2.4° and 6.4° Celsius rise](#) in global temperatures this century. 2.4° spells catastrophe for many and is above the point the conservative IPCC says we must not pass. Anything above 4° and our very survival is in question. Terms like “tipping point” and “Earth’s sixth mass extinction event” (an event in which at least [75% of species](#) on the planet are killed off) start to appear in the models at around 3°. What seems certain is that, with a speed that we can barely imagine, forests will become deserts, ancient rivers will dry up, and violent weather patterns will intensify all around and on top of us. A form of chaos, in other words, will arrive. The 0.01% know it; no one in their right mind doubts the basic science. They may dance the dance of false intentions publicly and politically but they know it’s coming. And, if only out of an understandable instinct for personal survival, they may prepare with all their wealth and might, but the forces of humanity that change on this scale will unleash are fully and completely unpredictable. Nothing can be prepared that is guaranteed to protect the current ordering of wealth and power. If suppressed until people can only respond with the violent panic of survival, it could be bloody and terrible. [In some parts of the world it already is.](#)

It sounds dramatic. Maybe even so much that you find yourself mentally recoiling. That’s natural; our minds, like our bodies, flinch instinctively away from pain. But it doesn’t change anything.

There are some people who believe that the technological gifts they think neoliberalism has bestowed on us will head off the worst impacts of climate change. I am not one of them. That’s not to say that there hasn’t been some promising progress – 14% of all the energy consumed in the [European Union](#) in 2012 came from renewable sources, up from just 8% less than a decade ago, and emergent concepts from [“plastic to oil” machines](#) all the way up to [the singularity](#) suggest extraordinary, mind bending things are not too far over the horizon – but two basic facts render this a forlorn hope. First, as mentioned above, whatever progress is being made in places like Europe is being cancelled out many times over by the rise in greenhouse gas emissions from elsewhere thanks to the explosion of consumerism, particularly in Asia, where overall consumption is expected to increase by a [full 100% in the next ten years](#). More importantly, though, is the time-lag effect. We have already pumped enough greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere to indicate a 3° Celsius rise in global mean temperatures. Unless something comes along in the next two or three years that can suck the carbon out of the atmosphere *and* stop us pumping out more, we’ve pretty much made our 3° bed and we will be sleeping in it. If anyone has that sort of technology in the pipeline, they’re doing a remarkably good job of keeping it to themselves.

The second hope is a popular global uprising. It has to be global to match the scale of the force and the structures it must challenge. Beyond that, it's difficult to know what it might look like because practically the only thing that is likely is something very unlikely, something that doesn't look like anything that has come before. I say this because there are countless smart people working every day to change things with tactics and organizational structures of the past and they are getting, to all meaningful intents and purposes, nowhere. I'm talking about the many thousands of NGOs who are permanently campaigning and lobbying for incremental policy change within the system. Even the newer forms of online global organizing like Avaaz.org, with its 35 million email addresses, generally pedal within the lines of predictable, and therefore manageable, acceptability.

What limits all of these models is that they have confused tactics with strategy. They have found a tactic – the sort of light and polite rallying of public support that doesn't threaten their access to power- but do not see beyond it to any vision, let alone practical action, that could conceivably be called a strategy to challenge the roots causes of the problems they say they want to fix. Thus, they are defined and contained within a box far smaller than their rhetoric and advertising suggests. They speak in de-politicized tones, require almost no investment in their causes, cannot challenge the fundamentals of power and so in no universe can come close to doing what they promise. Nothing on the scale of popular uprising ever even enters the frame.

Popular uprising is the storming of the Bastille. It's Gezi Park, Tahrir Square, the street protests in Rio and Occupy Wall Street rolled into one. Popular uprisings are power-shaking, heart-pounding, reality-shifting things. They operate on the outer edge of what is and they carve into the frontier of what could be. They reframe ideas that were thought immutable until the change happens. They are unknowable in advance to power structures; they must be in order to daze them and slip past the apparatus that protects the status quo. Popular uprisings are the extraordinary swarming of people behind a common, if often ill-defined purpose. They are the expression of discontent so deep it is often uncatchable in language but so common that people can see it in each other's eyes. They can appear to come from nowhere, although they almost never do. But the appearance is cast by the fact that they are unusual, difficult to grasp, and they catch people unaware. And they can dissipate just as quickly but are no less glorious for that.

So the thing to do now is organize. Build hope. Stretch imaginations. Find and join others who see the world as it is, not as we are told it is. Be elegant with what we do know and humble about what we don't. Be unafraid to live in that space between knowledge and ignorance, because that is the most dynamic place of innovation and discovery. Ignore the cynics who will demand, out of a paucity of their own imagination, that we produce a blueprint for the future. Change on this scale never happens according to a plan, only according to values, and to see jealousy in arguments like this is the modern day equivalent of "let them eat cake". And anyway, cynics are always cynical and they never do anything of their own, so let them carp from the sidelines if it makes them feel more important.

We must be unafraid to fail, ever mindful of the moment and faithful to the idea that from bright and popular beginnings, a sustainable global opposition to the Neoliberal Party can emerge. We must love ourselves and our opponents enough to be compassionate, understanding and non-violent. The Occupy Wall Street's, the Indignados, the Project for the Advancement of our Common Humanity, the Zapatistas and the Ekta Parishads are the soil from which the imagination and then the form of what is possible will grow. They will be fuelled a small army of studious minds, often to be found in the background, behind all the rowdy park-grabbing masses, but now routinely turning out highly credible thinking in books like Samir Amin's *The Liberal Virus*, Christopher Boehm's *Moral Origins: The evolution of virtue, altruism and shame*, Naomi Klein's *No Logo*, Stanley Cohen's *States of Denial*, Eric Beinhoffer's *The Origin of Wealth*, the collection of inspiring essays edited by David Bollier and Silke Helfrich in *The Wealth of the Commons: A World beyond Market and State*, David Graeber's *Debt; the first 5000 years*, Charles Eisenstein's *Sacred Economics* and even Thomas Piketty's weighty and mainstream *Capital in the 21st Century*. There are organisations like The New Economics Foundation, Positive Money, Strike Debt and The Institute for New Economic Thinking building the research base and pushing public understanding of where the boundaries of economic hegemony exist, and who puts them there. They are all feeding this growing number of experiments in how to bring about a revival of popular democracy, infused with the youthful, hopeful spirit of Occupy. Groups like the Five Star Party in Italy, The Coalition the Immokalee Workers in Florida, the students of the Chilean Winter and Kenyans for Tax Justice in Nairobi that currently exist on the edge, thinking big and risking failure to find a way through The Neoliberal Party's defenses. I would go as far as saying that something like a cohesive movement is taking shape. And there are surely millions, billions more people in houses and huts all around the world who would respond if the right note were sounded.

That note must be one of polemic opposition to the status quo. Never be fooled by the false virtue of “working from within” or handholding incrementalism. This is not the time. The hope of real change is betrayed every time an Elizabeth Warren [hints at what could be](#) by asking the simple questions we all have to the big banks in US Senate Committees, and then throws her political chips in with Hilary Clinton, an quintessential insider, for President. We need to create the sort of tension in the debate that can only be created between opposing poles, to spark the brightest minds to what can be. It is only when genuine tension exists that true progress is made. So we need something of a polar opposite to neoliberalism to take hold in the public imagination and be seen as credible, hopeful and, frankly, more logical.

I don't mean just taking the policies of neoliberalism and inverting them; everything private becomes everything public; low taxes become high taxes; 'free markets' [sic] become un-free. I mean something that, first and foremost, expresses a moral philosophy that honors our common humanity and looks to build on the good we have inside and around us rather than simply rejecting all forms of capitalism and modernity in favor of some old state of being. Something that strives to focus on human development in all its magnificent, vibrant, unknowable complexity. Something that, through it's simple existence exposes neoliberalism for the extreme, one-dimensional relic that it is. We need an opposition that has the courage to accept the fact that for most of our history, the acquisition of wealth has not been our driving concern. We must unshackle society from that and only that objective or any new governance will continue to deny everything that makes life worth living. If we stake out these bold foundations imaginatively and clearly enough, selecting a policy platform – or, in all likelihood, many different policy platforms – will be the easy bit.

Right now, we have the extraordinary gift of being able to see, hear and speak with each other freely through the Internet. We can listen to the hive mind of humanity as it processes thought and conjures up new ideas. We can trace the flows of memetic energy, from the grandest to the most granular, as they move through societies. We can know ourselves like never before. But for how long? We are in a war between unaccountable, probably hereditary power and popular democracy. As a top priority, we must protect the free Internet and not let it be hijacked by the Neoliberal Party. And then beyond that, if enough of us, the 99.9% can recognise the hope and potential in each other, take just a bit more responsibility for our common future and that of our children, then democracy, and the best of humanity need not be lost to the One Party Planet.