

## The Permanent Lie, Our Deadliest Threat

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The most ominous danger we face does not come from the eradication of free speech through the obliteration of net neutrality or through Google algorithms that steer people away from dissident, left-wing, progressive or anti-war sites. It does not come from a tax bill that abandons all pretense of fiscal responsibility to enrich corporations and oligarchs and prepares the way to dismantle programs such as Social Security. It does not come from the opening of public land to the mining and fossil fuel industry, the acceleration of ecocide by demolishing environmental regulations, or the destruction of public education.

It does not come from the squandering of federal dollars on a bloated military as the country collapses or the use of the systems of domestic security to criminalize dissent. The most ominous danger we face comes from the marginalization and destruction of institutions, including the courts, academia, legislative bodies, cultural organizations and the press, that once ensured that civil discourse was rooted in reality and fact, helped us distinguish lies from truth and facilitated justice.

Donald Trump and today's Republican Party represent the last stage in the emergence of corporate totalitarianism. Pillage and oppression are justified by the permanent lie. The permanent lie is different from the falsehoods and half-truths uttered by politicians such as Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. The common political lie these politicians employed was not designed to cancel out reality. It was a form of manipulation. Clinton, when he signed into law the North American Free Trade Agreement, promised "NAFTA means jobs, American jobs and good-paying American jobs." George W. Bush justified the invasion of Iraq because Saddam Hussein supposedly possessed weapons of mass destruction. But Clinton did not continue to pretend that NAFTA was beneficial to the working class when reality proved otherwise. Bush did not pretend that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction once none were found.

The permanent lie is not circumscribed by reality. It is perpetuated even in the face of overwhelming evidence that discredits it. It is irrational. Those who speak in the language of truth and fact are attacked as liars, traitors and purveyors of "fake news." They are banished from the public sphere once totalitarian elites accrue sufficient power, a power now granted to them with the revoking of [net neutrality](#). The iron refusal by those who engage in the permanent lie to acknowledge reality, no matter how transparent reality becomes, creates a collective psychosis.

"The result of a consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth is not that the lie will now be accepted as truth and truth be defamed as a lie, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world—and the category of truth versus falsehood is among the mental means to this end—is being destroyed," Hannah Arendt wrote in "The Origins of Totalitarianism."

The permanent lie turns political discourse into absurdist theater. Donald Trump, who lies about the size of his inauguration crowd despite [photographic evidence](#), insists that in regard to his personal finances he is "going to get killed" by a tax bill that actually will save him and his heirs over [\\$1 billion](#). Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin claims he has a report that proves that the tax cuts will

pay for themselves and will not increase the deficit—only there [never was a report](#). Sen. John Cornyn assures us, countering all factual evidence, that “this is not a bill that is designed primarily to benefit the wealthy and the large businesses.”

Two million acres of public land, meanwhile, are [handed over](#) to the mining and fossil fuel industry as Trump insists the transfer means that “public lands will once again be for public use.” When environmentalists denounce the transfer as a theft, Rep. Rob Bishop calls their criticism “a false narrative.”

FCC Chairman Ajit Pai, after ending net neutrality, effectively killing free speech on the internet, says, “[T]hose who’ve said the internet as we know it is about to end have been proven wrong. ... We have a free internet going forward.” And at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, phrases such as “evidence-based” and “science-based” are [banned](#).

The permanent lie is the apotheosis of totalitarianism. It no longer matters what is true. It matters only what is “correct.” Federal courts are being stacked with imbecilic and incompetent judges who serve the “correct” ideology of corporatism and the rigid social mores of the Christian right. They hold reality, including science and the rule of law, in contempt. They seek to banish those who live in a reality-based world defined by intellectual and moral autonomy. Totalitarian rule always elevates the brutal and the stupid. These reigning idiots have no genuine political philosophy or goals. They use clichés and slogans, most of which are absurd and contradictory, to justify their greed and lust for power. This is as true on the Christian right, which is filling the ideological vacuum of the Trump administration, as it is for the corporatists that preach neoliberalism and globalization. The merger of the corporatists with the Christian right is the marrying of Godzilla to Frankenstein.

“The venal political figures need not even comprehend the social and political consequences of their behavior,” psychiatrist Joost A.M. Meerloo wrote in “The Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide, and Brainwashing.” “They are compelled not by ideological belief, no matter how much they may rationalize to convince themselves they are, but by the distortions of their own personalities. They are not motivated by their advertised urge to serve their country or mankind, but rather by an overwhelming need and compulsion to satisfy the cravings of their own pathological character structures. The ideologies they spout are not real goals; they are the cynical devices by which these sick men hope to achieve some personal sense of worth and power. Subtle inner lies seduce them into going from bad to worse. Defensive self-deception, arrested insight, evasion of emotional identification with others, degradation of empathy—the mind has many defense mechanisms with which to blind the conscience.”

When reality is replaced by the whims of opinion and expediency, what is true one day often becomes false the next. Consistency is discarded. Complexity, nuance, depth and profundity are replaced with the simpleton’s belief in threats and force. This is why the Trump administration disdains diplomacy and is dynamiting the State Department. Totalitarianism, wrote novelist and social critic Thomas Mann, is at its core the desire for a simple folktale. Once this folktale replaces reality, morality and ethics are abolished.

“Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities,” Voltaire warned.

The corporate elites, who even in the best of times stacked the deck against people of color, the poor and the working class, no longer play by any rules. Their lobbyists, bought-and-paid-for politicians, pliant academics, corrupt judges and television news celebrities run a kleptocratic state defined by legalized bribery and unchecked exploitation. The corporate elites write laws, regulations and bills to expand corporate looting and plunder while imposing a crippling debt peonage on the public,

including college graduates burdened by huge loans. They ram through austerity measures that dismantle state and municipal services, often forcing them to be sold off to corporations, and slash social programs, including public education and health care. They insist, however, that when we have grievances we rely on the institutions they have debased and corrupted. They ask us to invest our energy and time in fixed political campaigns, petition elected representatives or appeal to the courts. They seek to lure us into their schizophrenic world, where rational discourse is pitted against gibberish. They demand we seek justice in a system designed to perpetuate injustice. It is a game we can never win.

“Thus all our dignity consist in thought,” wrote Pascal. “It is on thought that we must depend for our recovery, not on space and time, which we could never fill. Let us then strive to think well; that is the basic principle of morality.”

We must pit power against power. We must build parallel institutions and organizations that protect us from corporate assault and resist corporate domination. We must sever ourselves as much as possible from the vampire state. The more we can create self-contained communities, with our own currencies and infrastructures, the more we can starve and cripple the corporate beast. This means establishing worker-run cooperatives, local systems of food supply based on a vegan diet and independent artistic, cultural and political organizations. It means obstructing in every way possible the corporate assault, including the blocking of pipelines and fracking sites, and taking to the streets in sustained acts of civil disobedience against censorship and the attack on civil liberties. And it means creating [sanctuary cities](#). All of this will have to be done the way it has always been done, by building personal, face-to-face relationships. We may not ultimately save ourselves, especially with the refusal by the elites to address the ravages of climate change, but we can create pods of resistance where truth, beauty, empathy and justice endure.

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