

# For the Love of Life!

By

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Renewable energy, especially from solar and wind, has become the fastest growing and cheapest energy in the world. In their new book *Abundance*, Ezra Klien and Derick Thompson explain this trend by summarizing a recent study.

In a thrilling paper with the very un-thrilling title “Empirically Grounded Technology Forecasts and the Energy Transition,” a team of researchers found that the price of oil, gas, and coal, after adjusting for inflation, is about what it was 140 years ago. But renewable energy keeps crushing expectations. The authors looked at 2,905 projections for solar costs made by the most popular forecasting models and found that solar costs were expected to fall by 2.6 percent a year and never by more than 6 percent. In reality, they fell by 15 percent per year, year after year. In 2022, the US Energy Information Administration released a report estimating life-cycle costs for new energy installations in the coming decades. Solar was already cheaper than natural gas. Wind was a dollar more. Both were about half the price of coal.<sup>1</sup>

A world powered by renewable energy is barreling toward us like a solar powered freight train and will be here before we know it, despite the nay sayers and neanderthals standing on the tracks hoping to stop progress. In *The Singularity is Nearer*, Ray Kurzweil says, “As a result of these ongoing cost reductions, the overall amount of energy obtained from renewable sources—solar, wind, geothermal, tidal, and biofuels—is also growing exponentially.”<sup>2</sup> Globally, the cost reductions of solar energy, in particular, is doubling much faster than other renewable sources, “just under every twenty-eight months from 1983 to 2021.”<sup>3</sup> Doing the math, Kurzweil says, “From 3.6 percent in 2021, it would take only about 4.8 doublings to reach 100 percent, which would put us at 2032 to meet all of our energy needs from solar alone.”<sup>4</sup>

That’s an astonishing statement, especially if you’re only looking at solar from a US perspective, where it is being resisted by those currently in power with evangelical passion. A 2023 report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) says, “While the increases in renewable capacity in Europe, the United States and Brazil hit all-time highs, China’s acceleration was extraordinary. In 2023, China commissioned as much solar PV as the entire world did in 2022, while its wind additions also grew by 66% year-on-year. Globally, solar PV alone accounted for three-quarters of renewable capacity additions worldwide.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite all the US’s fearmongering about China, the “sleeping giant” has awakened and hit the ground running. In addition to having more than 23,000 miles of high-speed rail (compared to zero in the US), almost 65 percent of the world’s electric cars<sup>6</sup> (compared to 1 percent in the US), AI embodied robots, and drones that can deliver your lunch or a cup of coffee from the sky, China, not the US or any other western nation, is the world’s leader in combating climate change. In fact, if it weren’t for China, solar power wouldn’t be affordable for anyone anywhere right now. Despite the US having invented the technology in the 1950s, it is China that’s made it an affordable market. As Klien and Thompson explain, “In 2000, China had barely enough solar energy to power a small town. By 2020, the nation was making 70 percent of the world’s photovoltaic panels. As China

ramped up manufacturing, the cost of solar panels in the last fifteen years has declined by about 90 percent.”<sup>7</sup>

I agree with the line from a John Denver song, “Who’s to say you have to lose for someone else to win.” China is not leaving the US in its dust; the US is leaving itself in China’s dust. Just this past week, in his reckless and shortsighted efforts to “make America great again,” Donald Trump ordered the Environmental Protection Agency to stop regulating greenhouse gas emissions—in other words, to stop doing its job. Trump wants to make the US dependent on coal, oil, and gas again, even as the rest of the world is passing us by, along with all the new green energy jobs other countries, especially China, have access to. According to that IEA report, 30 million clean energy jobs will be gained by the end of this decade, compared to only 5 million lost from the deadly and dying fossil fuel industry.<sup>8</sup> If the US continues down the path of nationalism and isolationism, it is unlikely it will enjoy any of the benefits of this booming industry.

I’ve begun by discussing renewable energy to such an extent because it is a very real and cogent example of the choice we are facing today between life or death. Solar, wind, and water are the energies of life, while coal, oil, and gas are destructive energies made from the buried remains of dead animals. In 2017, Noam Chomsky, professor emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, drew a lot of heat for claiming the Republican Party is the most “dangerous organization in human history.”<sup>9</sup> He argued this is mostly so because of its refusal to do anything or let anyone else do anything to address global warming—the worst existential threat humanity has ever faced. “I agree, that’s a very outrageous statement,” Chomsky told journalist Amy Goodman. “So, I therefore simply suggest that you take a look at the facts and see if it has any merit, or if it should just be bitterly condemned ... Has there ever been an organization in human history that is dedicated, with such commitment, to the destruction of organized human life on Earth?”<sup>10</sup>

Of course, the Grand Old Party likes to portray itself as the “prolife” party because of its concern for unborn people, which, given its otherwise dismal antilife record, can only be understood as a form of denial and deflection (or reaction formation?). Just this past week there was another mass shooting involving a US civilian using a military style assault weapon. At the same time, NBC reported on a new drone system that uses pepper spray and other non-lethal tools to track down and incapacitate school shooters. “That’s great,” I initially thought, but then wondered why we have to depend on such technology to begin with, when, like any other country, we could simply ban civilians from owning these unnecessary weapons? We can’t because here in the US our society has mostly chosen death over life.

Unabated global warming may be the worst example of this, and the mass shootings the most horrific, but there are many others. The US is the only industrialized country in the world that doesn’t provide adequate healthcare to its citizens, including all those unborn babies before and after their births. During the height of the Covid pandemic the GOP resisted sheltering at home and wearing masks in public to prevent its deadly spread; and has since worked to cast false doubts on the safety and efficacy all vaccines, resulting in new outbreaks of diseases we had previously

defeated, like polio and the measles. In recent months, weeks, and even days, the Republican administration has continued to diminish and end environmental agencies and protections; and has happily discontinued domestic and foreign aid programs to those most in need in the US and around the world. It's also backing away from offering disaster relief for the almost constant barrage of hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and fires caused by the climate change it still refuses to acknowledge is even happening.

Instead of compassionately addressing the growing housing shortage that's putting working Americans out on our streets, the Trump administration's solution is to simply "remove them," to where, we do not know—perhaps to some foreign gulag. Instead of treating immigrants with respect and dignity, everyone who even looks like they might be from a foreign country must now fear for themselves and their families. Only a couple of days ago, perhaps in response to *South Park* recently ridiculing his own ... male prowess ... Trump has sent two nuclear submarines—talk about phallic symbols—to threaten Russia, rather than working to deescalate the possibility of the nuclear war he promised would occur if he *wasn't* elected. And let's add making paper straws illegal just to be mean; and outlawing cultivated meats that would eliminate the suffering of animals, to this unsavory list of destructive actions. However else we might define these behaviors, they cannot be considered the actions of a party or a nation that is "prolife," but of a people, organization, society, or what have you, that, as Noam Chomsky says is, at the very least, among the most dangerous organizations in human history.

This is not to say that all republicans nor all who have voted for republicans have a necrophilous orientation. To assume I've said otherwise is to commit the informal *fallacy of division*; confusing qualities attributed to the whole with those of its individual members. Nor am I implying that everyone who votes for democrats in the US have a life-directed (biophilous) orientation. Some of the most loathsome people I know are democrats. Necrophilia is rooted the failure of some individuals to fully emerge from their original narcissism, the experience of ourselves as the entire world, which should dissipate if and as we differentiate ourselves from our mothers. If, for some reason, we cannot let go of the original feeling of oneness, we find a surrogate mother, be it a person, a group, a religion, a nationality, or the like.

I've discussed how this is manifesting on the right. On the left, it has manifested as cancel culture, wokeness, political correctness, or whatever you call it, and is characterized by losing oneself in one's sense of identity or in reverence for the identities of others. As with one's looks, body, or wealth, defining oneself by one's identity rather than one's creativity and accomplishments, especially those that make a positive difference in the world, is narcissistic. It becomes malignant narcissism as soon as it ventures into authoritarianism by demanding that everyone else recognize and revere our identity as much as we do, effectively making oneself the whole world again. To require everyone in the world to use language or to see things exactly as we do, or to claim that we've been harmed when we hear things we disagree with, is extremely narcissistic.

So, if you think I've been too hard on republicans, let me state explicitly that this is precisely what I believe has become of many liberal institutions, including segments of the Democratic Party, and has completely overtaken our very religion, Unitarian Universalism, which now attacks the character and livelihoods of anyone who resists and disagrees with it. Just a couple of weeks ago the UU Association disfellowshipped yet another minister, one who had served for the better part of three decades, accusing her of being an "abusive bully." Between 1961 and 2020, the UUA had permanently removed only eight ministers from fellowship, seven for sexual misconduct, and one for financial malfeasance (rightly so). Since 2020, when I became the first minister disfellowshipped for being a "noncooperation" and abusive bullying," they have disfellowshipped seven others for the same or similar reasons, essentially for saying something somebody at the UUA disagrees with. That's as many removed in the past five years as were removed in the previous six decades. Bottom line, to disregard the freedoms of others in order to sustain one's narcissistic wish to be the whole world is antilife and it exists on both the left and the right.

That this is so of both extremes should not be surprising given that the choice between necrophilia and biophilia is a common human dilemma regardless of our politics, identities, or any other differences. Nor is it a decision we make once, but every day, every vote, every action. As social psychologist Erich Fromm says, "Every second is a moment of decision, for the better or the worse."<sup>11</sup> Fortunately, he also says that our primary orientation is toward life, not death, which makes sense given that the drive to live is the primary instinct of all living things. Again, it is only when we fail to fully differentiate ourselves from the world and to fully unfold as individuals that our narcissism leads to necrophilia, characterized by authoritarianism, destruction, and decay, if not death itself.

What is true of the individual, as we have seen, becomes true of society if it is widespread enough to put malignant narcissists into power, leading to the sorts of consequences I've already outlined. In addition to oppressive and destructive behaviors, this orientation is unable to create or advance. For it is life that is defined by birth and growth, not death. But a necrophilous society doesn't sit still. Unable to progress, it has no choice but to regress. Fromm says, "if it does not grow, it decays; if it does not transcend the status quo for the better, it changes for the worse ... The moment we stand still, we begin to decay."<sup>12</sup> This is evidenced, for example, by the underfunded and outdated public schools across the US, as well as its unkept and failing national infrastructures like roadways, highways, and bridges, along with its inability to build advanced infrastructures like the high-speed rails I mentioned earlier. We cannot make anything great by simply dismantling government, brandishing chainsaws, and shouting "cut, cut, cut," at every turn. We must also create, create, create! "Life that stagnates tends to die," Fromm says. "If the stagnation is complete, death has occurred."<sup>13</sup>

As necessary as it is to discuss the negative consequences of the death orientation in order to understand what we're up against, I hope you have also taken note of three very positive points I've already made. First, the energy that has always created and sustained life, is winning! Despite all that the GOP and now Trump are doing to stop the green energy revolution, they are failing and

will, at most, only succeed in putting the US even further behind the times on its continued path towards insignificance, sad a thought as it is. Two, the choice between life and death, between biophilia and necrophilia, is always before us, every second, meaning just because we've made bad choices in the past doesn't mean we are condemned to repeat them in the future. Once we recognize its qualities, we can choose life. Thirdly, choosing life is our primary instinct, meaning it is the natural choice for us to make. In short, life is winning and most of us want it to win!

What, then, are the qualities that define this biophilous orientation? To answer this, I'll begin with a full paragraph from Fromm's, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*:

Biophilia is the passionate love of life and all that it's alive; It is the wish to further growth, whether in a person, a plant, an idea, or a social group. The biophilous person prefers to construct rather than to retain. He wants to be more rather than to have more. He is capable of wondering, and he prefers to see something new rather than to find confirmation of the old. He loves the adventure of living more than he does certainty. He sees the whole rather than only the parts, structures rather than summations. He wants to mold and to influence by love, reason, and example; not by force, by cutting things apart, by the bureaucratic manner of administrating people as if they were things. Because he enjoys life. And all its manifestations.<sup>14</sup>

In this description we find the very opposite of the authoritarian, destructive, unproductive necrophilous orientation. The love of life promotes freedom, creativity, and progress for the individual and society. Elsewhere, Fromm defines love as "the sense of responsibility, care, respect, knowledge"<sup>15</sup> of that which we love. Hence, he describes "*Biophilic Ethics*" to mean, "Good is all that serves life; Evil is all that serves death. Good is reverence for life, All that enhances life, growth, unfolding. Evil is all that stifles life, narrows it down, cuts it into pieces."<sup>16</sup>

Today we are seeing the consequences of our necrophilous choices in pronounced, frightening, and destructive ways. But the choice is still before us, every second, giving us another opportunity to choose for the better rather than for the worse. So, rather than fearing the future by stifling progress and stifling life itself, we have the chance to create a life affirming future for the whole world. Let's choose a world in which we recycle our swords by turning them into plowshares, and our nuclear submarines into vessels that clean our polluted oceans, and let's replace the guns on our streets with enough food, housing, healthcare, and modern schoolhouses to nourish, nurture, and unlock the full potential of every boy and girl.

Instead of investing trillions in the war machine while begrudging what few dollars are spent on any public service, let's happily invest in the wellbeing of our citizens no matter who they are or where they are from. Instead of pretending we care for humanity by saving the unborn, let's care for freedom, safety, and wellbeing of all people no matter where they were born. Instead of fearing, hating, demonizing, and ruining those we disagree with, let's, at the very least, live and let live, until, by living peacefully together, we come to recognize our common humanity and discover our love for one another. Rather than being left even further behind, let's choose to become real leaders in the world by becoming good partners who are helping to advance clean energy so that we can all begin healing our planet.

The slogan, “Choose Life” cannot be limited only to those who don’t exist yet, or only for those who look, think, and act like us. It is the choice that is always before all of us, every second, to make things better, not worse, for the lives and the world that is already here, before us, needing our love. Did I say love? I meant, needing our responsibility, care, respect, and knowledge, because that’s what the Love of Life is; choosing freedom, creativity, and growth by making a positive difference in the lives of other people, other creatures, and the Earth itself, the living mother of us all, which truly is our whole world.

<sup>1</sup> Klein, Ezra; Thompson, Derek. *Abundance* (p. 65). Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Kurzweil, Ray. *The Singularity Is Nearer: When We Merge with AI* (p. 154). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.iea.org/reports/renewables-2023/executive-summary>

<sup>6</sup> <https://rmi.org/electric-vehicles-are-key-to-winning-the-climate-fight/>

<sup>7</sup> Klein, Ezra; Thompson, Derek. *Abundance* (p. 181). Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster. Kindle Edition.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.iea.org/reports/renewables-2023/executive-summary>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/noam-chomsky-republican-party-most-dangerous-organisation-human-history-us-politics-mit-linguist-a7706026.html>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Fromm, Erich. *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology*. Open Road Media. Kindle Edition.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Fromm, Erich, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, CT, 1973, p. 406

<sup>15</sup> Fromm, Erich, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics*, An Owl Book, Henry Holt & Company, Inc., New York, NY, 1947, pp. 42-43.

<sup>16</sup> Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, *ibid.*