

# Going Silent (for Just a Little While)



By Steven Yates

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## *Sometimes a hiatus just feels right*

Due to recent circumstances, including a health issue requiring my immediate attention (what I think of as a major wake-up call!), and events – items just come my way, learning materials just encountered which I’m still processing – I’ve decided to take a short hiatus from article writing. Another way of putting it: I need to go silent for a short time. I’ll definitely return, no later than late January.

But not before sharing some recent reads. Caitlin Johnstone (recommendation: go to [her Substack](#) and subscribe right now; I’ll wait) has become one of my favorite online writers. While I don’t agree with everything she says, her perspective on the passing show merits a place at the table. For example, [she recently connected these dots](#):

**It’s so hard to live as an authentic human being in a civilization whose every molecule is wrapped around something as vapid and soulless as corporate profit.**

**It’s what most of us pour most of our life force into. Most people work all day generating corporate profits to pay bills that go toward corporate profits and pay off loans from giant banks for their corporate profits or rent from real estate giants for their corporate profits. Then they come home, eat**

some products from giant megacorporations that they purchased at a supermarket chain, and unwind by watching entertainment created by corporations to draw as many eyeballs as possible or scrolling through social media platforms designed by corporations to be as addictive as possible. We do this while being surrounded all day by advertising designed to pull us into generating more corporate profits.

Corporate profits are our life. Corporate profits are our religion. Most of us pour more of our energy into generating corporate profits throughout our lives than the most pious monk pours into worshipping any deity. Not because we want to, but because we have to. We were born into this bizarre civilization where everything revolves around corporate profits instead of love, relationships, connection, thriving, purpose, or personal depth.

Is it any wonder then that so many of us are suffering from addictions and depression and anxiety?

Well, is it? Has she not just peered inside a “hustle culture” which measures *success* by how much is in your bank account (stock portfolio, real estate holdings, other investments, “side hustles,” etc., etc.)? He who dies with the most toys wins, right?

Are we, or are we not, servile to a relative handful of global corporations in just the above sense, if not as employees than as consumers? Even more so than we are slaves of the tax man? Are they or are they not making matters steadily worse via technology with built-in obsolescence, and steady moves towards a subscription business model heralding a dystopian future “in which you’ll own nothing, have no privacy, but be happy [or the beatings will continue]”?

We’ve been encouraged, almost from childhood, to make *money* our *real* religion, and for some “hustle culture” participants, it is just that. They measure their worth as persons by what’s

in their bank accounts and portfolios and 401(k)'s. Those who don't worship at the altar of dollar signs are still committed because of industrial (and post-industrial) civilization's ever-present encirclements: make enough money or know someone who does or end up homeless (or worse).

There are people out there who will respond to such sentiments with: "You must be broke!" Or even, "You're some kind of closet socialist!" I'm neither, and I would attribute such emotional responses to the collapse of critical thinking skills in the West. Those with real power, as George Carlin observed in [his best routine](#), do not want a population of critical thinkers, and never did. Such a population would neither make *them* money nor serve their *other* interests in maintaining narrative control. Money is one more narrative, after all; and believe it or not, there are cultures that have prospered without making it their center of gravity.

Speaking of narratives, Caitlin also recently [dropped these insights](#):

**The more inner work you do and the more awareness you bring to your own inner processes, the more you understand how thoroughly human consciousness is dominated by mental narrative. And the more you understand how thoroughly human consciousness is dominated by mental narrative, the more acutely aware you become of how much power someone could gain over other humans by controlling those narratives.**

**Those who haven't done a lot of inner work tend to hold the assumption that everyone is basically perceiving reality as it actually is, and is then either forming good worldviews or bad worldviews about reality based on how good or bad they are as human beings – with "good" of course defined as "closely aligned with my own worldview" and "bad" defined as "distant from my own worldview".**

**But the more inner work you do the more untenable you find**

this position. After a while you start to understand that *nobody* is seeing reality as it actually is – including you. Instead, what we’re actually perceiving is a bunch of mental stories we’ve formed about the world based on information we’ve taken in through highly distorted perceptual filters based on our conditioning, biases and cognitive habits.

What ensues is a discussion of how we humans aren’t “rational animals” as Aristotle believed. We are emotional beings. I hesitate over a few details of how Caitlin frames this, but her main point is one I’ve made, and would extend: the *capacity* for reason is part of our default setting, but not its *use*, which must be learned about, motivated, cultivated, directed, and then focused so that it *solves identifiable problems* – and this, too, is key: without the assumption of its *being a philosopher’s stone that will solve all conceivable problems, everywhere, including how to build Utopia for everyone (and then corral them into it either at gunpoint or by threatening noncompliance with starvation!)*.

At present I’d say we’re not doing too well with this capacity.

For most of the past year I’ve been participating in a program put together by a friend of mine called [Philosophy of Responsible Freedom](#). He has [his own Substack](#), as are more and more thinkers who aspire to such ideals. It is also worth more than a mere passing glance. You’ll find a huge archive of materials for that program, which rely heavily on superbly done [Academy of Ideas](#) videos.

And just recently (less than two weeks ago!), I discovered [The Grow Network](#), whose intent is similar (to be freeing) if involving very different subject matter and methods, and whose online materials I’ve begun perusing with the hope of getting involved.

Because it's one thing to sit at my computer and *intellectualize* about freedom; it's quite another to *do something* to bring it about, for myself and for others.

It's *one thing* to talk about narrative control; it's *another* to find ways of shattering that control.

It's more than watching a film such as *The Matrix* (though that's hardly a waste of your time; everyone should watch it at least once – don't worry about its mostly execrable successors!)

***What does it mean to be responsibly free?*** A working answer might be useful if you're going to answer the faceless forces of corporate-state globalism; and if you have a working answer you might want to teach it to others – why I got involved in Philosophy of Responsible Freedom in the first place.

What it means to *me* at present is not simply having abstract principles I've memorized and claim to live by, though again, formulating basic core values is useful. One of the biggest mistakes of Western philosophy, though, is its need to reduce everything and everyone to abstractions, usually dichotomized: Plato's "essential" vs "inessential"; René Descartes's "mind" vs "body"; Immanuel Kant's "noumena" vs "phenomena"; behaviorism's distinction between "free will" and "determinism." These are pivotal figures and modes of thought in the Western history of ideas which shaped modernity, sometimes at its worst: *scientism* (worship of The Science), *technocracy* (worship of "the experts"), *materialism* (a worldview, not a conclusion of any actual science), *corporatism* (dominance of the global landscape by the "values" of money and power, and by those wielding them), and the belief that we're making *progress* and haven't been going backwards, educationally, culturally, psychologically, and spiritually!

I submit that we either escape from this "matrix," or our

civilization follows Rome into the dustbin of history no matter who wins the next election (“fair and square” or not), and whatever may be true about the climate.

I consulted The Grow Network videos on the true meaning of wealth. Turns out, *it has nothing to do with money*, and surprisingly, *can be applied directly to the responsible freedom question*.

Put in my own words: *real wealth* is a mindset borne of harmonious integration of oneself into one’s environment as it is (not as some narrative conceives it).

This integration is *physical, biological, psychological, and spiritual*, operating at levels of *personal health, family, community, meaningful work, and purpose*. It involves *having* your health; being surrounded by a strong and supportive *family*; being part of a great *community* with positive, life-affirming values; *personally meaningful work* that is also of value to others in that community; and *purpose* deriving from a sense of connection to the larger universe (and the Power behind it). It also involves *perspective* so that you don’t “sweat the small stuff” by raging at other vehicles in traffic, gritting your teeth standing in line in stores, etc.

You can be wealthy without being a billionaire!

Is that good news or what?

(Likewise, you can have tons of money courtesy of “hustle culture,” but if your frenetic “wealth-producing” actions wreck your marriage, alienate your kids, ruin your health, and threaten to send you to an early grave, are you really *wealthy* or are you playing a substanceless game?)

Each of these could be an article in itself, so I will expand on just the first and the last.

*Health* is not mere *absence of illness*. It is *the capacity of*

*your body systems, working together, to either repel, or absorb, self-modify, and gain strength from, the variety of sources of potential disruption out there, toxins as well as viruses.*

Note that this definition doesn't apply just to humans but to systems of all kinds: we can speak of the health of a family, a business, a community, an economy, or a society, and we can say many of the same things about the need to repel, or absorb and make use of, possible sources of disruption. (Those seeking a deeper dive into systems thinking and health can find it [here](#).)

*Purpose* (the fifth item listed above): a sense of *not merely existing but having some reason for doing so, found outside oneself*. Found where? Plenty of people with this sense have not found it from intellectualizing but from *living, acting in the world outside their heads*.

It involves consistently solving problems for oneself and others – being able to take care of oneself and loved ones in one's environment, which increasingly might mean being able to grow or cultivate most of one's own food. Keep in mind that the nutritional content of corporate-manufactured and grocery store food has been dropping for years, while its level of toxicity has been going up: meat from factory-farmed animals loaded with bovine growth hormones; frozen "foods" laced with preservatives and flavor enhancers; GMO "food"; etc., *ad nauseum*.

Keep in mind, too, that [Bill Gates](#) (who isn't a farmer any more than he is a scientist) isn't buying up all that farmland for no reason at all, so the window of opportunity for gaining this kind of independence might be starting to close!

*Finally*, many of us have found purpose through identification with the Creator of our [privileged planet](#). I don't know what to tell the materialist who sincerely believes that The

Science made God obsolete, except to note that this mindset has thrown us all to the wolves, ethically speaking. Nietzsche was the first major philosopher to figure out that the “death of God” changed everything, because it meant the death of everything (historically, culturally, psychologically) to which God’s existence made meaningful, including ethics as it had understood itself for well over two millennia.

*Summation:* as corporate elites increase their level of money and power at the expense of the rest of us, wars (e.g., Ukraine) threaten to go nuclear courtesy of the idiots and psychopaths at the helm of the U.S. war machine, the debt bomb threatens to ignite and send everyone dependent on a monthly paycheck to the poorhouse, and the planet itself grows ever more toxic outside the systems we create for ourselves, the clock is ticking.

Events are about to happen, and processes are in motion, that are worth watching. Next month, Argentiniens hold an election offering them an opportunity to reject over two decades of Peronista hard-leftism that has left that country in a shambles. Javier Milei, a self-declared “libertarian liberal,” promises to dismantle the Argentinian deep state. He likes Trump, which has led some to favor him and others to denounce him as another “right wing populist” (narratives again, as predictable as night following day).

A Milei victory in Argentina is a necessary step in the right direction, but not sufficient for recovering true societal health (and wealth, which Argentina once enjoyed, in spades!).

For as Patrick Deneen has argued at length in a recent magnificent book (*Why Liberalism Failed*, 2018), *liberalism* in whatever form is not enough. Because, again, *responsible* freedom is not the *absolute* freedom of the individual to make all his own choices and lay out all his own rules, answering to no one except himself (herself).



Why not?

Because eventually, a society which tries to live out this ideal will embrace more and more policies that undermine its own founding principles, eventually eliminating (because they aren't "marketable") civic virtues that must be in place for civilized living to sustain itself at all.

Finally, liberalism at its *apotheosis* (the individual becomes his own god) *rejects laws of nature themselves* (e.g., the fact, for fact it is, that aside from very rare chromosomal abnormalities there are two and only two biological sexes, they aren't interchangeable because there are things each sex does better than the other, and that one can't be turned into the other through some magical invocation such as "gender affirming care").

Sir Francis Bacon had the right idea when he said that "nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed."

A society that instead declares *de facto* war against nature will learn the hard way (as the West is having to learn) that *nature wins every time*.

*Freedom* in the absence of an adequate worldview, is not *responsible*, as it will never be enough; and eventually it will cause its possessor(s) to self-destruct.

I know not what will happen on the home front, except that I think we can expect (1) the narrative war between Trump and his base of support versus the (corporate-state, and moneyed) Establishment will continue, and that (2) nearly everything the latter says will be a lie.

I sense a lot of dread over what might be coming, much of it focused on the next election, some of it a more generalized sense of a world gradually unraveling as more and more people lose control over their lives. (Any day now, AI is likely to start serving up the biggest storm of technological

unemployment in history!)

When I return, I hope to have some constructive suggestions for mitigating all this dread. They will involve disengagement from processes none of us can do anything about, in favor of focusing on what we can control.

That will be enough. Going silent now. But before I do, I invite you, readers, to keep in mind (a teaser of things to come, perchance): *when you have your health, when you are surrounded by strong and supportive family, when you are involved in a stable community with sound values, doing work that is both personally meaningful and of value to others – when your purpose includes a sense of participating in, not opposing, the works of the Creator – and you have perspective so that you “don’t sweat the small stuff” (from traffic jams to elections!) – you are truly wealthy and living abundantly.*

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In 2021 I published my book [What Should Philosophy Do? A Theory](#). Here, in three parts, are reasons you should think about reading the book if you’ve interest in the role *worldviews* play in civilization, and in shaping our lives:

[Part I.](#) [Part II.](#) [Part III.](#)