

Three Existential Threats to Civilization at the End of 2024, Part 2



By Steven Yates

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Public immiseration and the path to violence; thwarted aspiring elites and dissidents become counter-elites; the danger of the narrative war is state breakdown.

[Author's note (I): although the opinions and conclusions expressed here are research-based, they are my own and should not be attributed to the NewsWithViews.com editorial staff or any other NewsWithViews.com writers.]

Author's note (II): due both to the approach of Christmas and family issues outside my control, this article, now expanded so as to require *four* parts, will be my final work of 2024. I am grateful to my subscribers, and any others who find their way onto this site and see benefit to what I am doing.

Praying that all my readers will have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

The Luigi Mangione Saga.

Somewhere in our account of Peter Turchin's public immiseration there needs to be a brief account of Luigi Mangione, 26, accused of first degree murder of United HealthCare's CEO Brian Thompson, 50, in New York City on

December 4.

Since details of this case are all over mainstream media, I'll go straight to what makes it worth our attention here: his 3-page "manifesto" expressing what corporate media euphemistically described as "ill will towards corporate America," how responses to the Thompson shooting across social media reveal the depth of resentment against the health insurance industry (another of the most lucrative in the country), and whether this shooting exemplifies looming instability brought about by economic inequality combined with the sense that the *haves* are cheating.

What Mangione's "manifesto" said (this is the most quoted passage): "I do apologize for any strife and trauma, but it had to be done. Frankly, these parasites simply had it coming."

The document goes on to note that the U.S. has the most expensive healthcare in the world but is #42 in life expectancy (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation).

Regarding social media commentary, I archived the following:

"Thoughts and deductibles to the family. Unfortunately my condolences are out-of-network."

"Sympathy denied. Greed is considered a pre-existing condition."

"My only question is did the CEO of United Healthcare die quickly or over several months waiting to find out if his insurance would cover his treatment for the fatal gunshot wound?"

"Today, we mourn the death of United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson, gunned down.... Wait, I'm sorry – today we mourn the deaths of the 68,000 Americans who die needlessly each year so that insurance company execs like Brian Thompson can become

multimillionaires.”

In fairness, we also saw comments like this one:

“The seemingly widespread online celebration of the assassination of the UnitedHealthcare CEO makes me feel despair for humanity. I get that healthcare is broken, but these reactions are truly sick.”

Like everything else, the cost of health care in the U.S. has skyrocketed. Premiums and deductibles have skyrocketed. Emergencies, and nasty after-the-fact discoveries that a given procedure *wasn't* covered, are now a leading cause of bankruptcy.

People *are* suffering and sometimes dying from treatable conditions because treatments that would save them are refused coverage. Frustration is rampant among those trying to navigate the thickets of jargon and impenetrable corporate bureaucracy and find out if a given procedure is covered.

Whether anyone likes it or not, this plays into the hands of the Luigi Mangiones who decide to take matters into their own hands. This is why he's become something of a folk hero in the social media ecosphere.

Among the details that have emerged: he had a condition called spondylolisthesis, characterized by a vertebra in one's spinal column slipping forward and pressing against the spine. Symptoms can include numbness and chronic lower back pain spreading to thighs that gets worse when standing or walking for long periods.

Mangione looks to have hurt his back in a surfing accident while in Hawaii and had surgery for it. I have no details on whether he filed a claim and was denied, but this wouldn't surprise me. He'd posted something suggestive on Reddit:

When my spondy went bad on me last year it was completely

devastating as a young athletic person. Seemingly all I could read on the Internet was that I was destined to chronic pain and a desk job for the rest of my life. That representation was terrifying, inaccurate, and completely destroyed me until I realized the silent majority of fusions are highly successful.

But is the procedure covered?

Repeating: does this case, and the reaction to it, exemplify the increasing rage felt against the *haves* in a Second Gilded Age, especially when the *haves'* systems are borderline dysfunctional?

But wait a minute. Mangione comes from a prominent Maryland family and was far from poor. His crime was carefully planned, as was his escape from New York City. These bespeak of intelligence, as do his Ivy League computer engineering degrees.

When recognized in Pennsylvania from online surveillance, however, he still had the illegal gun with him, fake IDs, the "manifesto," and a notebook which outlined his plans for the crime.

He *wanted* to be caught, to get validation as a *man with a mission*.

It's bothersome that the only convincing commentary I've seen on this is coming from the liberal-left. Liberal pundit Briahna Joy Gray told British journalist Piers Morgan, re the kinds of comments was saw above:

Luigi is just a vessel through which people are expressing their deep frustrations with the American healthcare system.... So the question is, if you don't want murders like this to be happening – assassinations to be happening like this in the street – I'm someone who does not believe in the death penalty and don't condone these kinds of vigilante instances of

violence in either case ... you have to get to the root of why there is this deep well of tragedy, despair, and outrage in the United States of America.

Morgan was dismissive, demanding to know if she really felt “joy” at the assassination of a man with a wife and two teenage sons – not an unreasonable response but doesn’t go to the heart of the matter.

The issue is how healthcare is to be paid for, during an era of rising costs and stagnate wages, with the superrich clearly getting richer by working the systems they’ve built during the neoliberal era. United Healthcare is facing a class action lawsuit over antitrust violations and using AI-powered algorithms to decide claims. In this writer’s humble opinion, the latter exemplifies something worse than cheating: immorally reducing lives to “decisions” made by something nonliving, not conscious, and *not* intelligent despite the hype.

The motivations for using AI instead of human workers in this context are simple: AI doesn’t ask to be paid! That means higher profits!

Will any of the heated discussion lead to reforms in an industry that clearly does place profits ahead of lives, livelihoods, and human well-being?

Time will tell.

An Aside: Primary Prevention and Public Health.

What would fix our broken healthcare system? is a valid question. The answer: [primary prevention](#).

Primary prevention is everything you can do to *avoid* illness, acute or chronic.

This includes eating nutritious food instead of processed “food,” having an exercise regimen, getting quality sleep,

managing stress.

It includes not smoking, not drinking excessively, cutting sugar and HFCS, limiting sodium intake, and avoiding other risky behaviors.

A society in which primary prevention was practiced as a matter of course would have less need for doctors, hospitals, pharmaceuticals, and borderline-unaffordable health insurance policies. While there would still be the occasional *acute* condition to be *healed*, there would be far fewer *chronic* conditions to be managed for profit.

Primary prevention thus flies in the face of neoliberal economics.

Need I say more about why no one in the corporate Establishment is interested in it, and why there isn't a school in the country, public or private, that teaches it? Alas, not even conservatives are interested in it. Most conservatives won't criticize corporations for fear of being demonized as turncoats or accused of being closet socialists (or something).

(Primary prevention has nothing to do with the array of fad diets out there, although these may have a good suggestion or two.)

End of aside. Returning to Peter Turchin....

Peter Turchin on Elite Overproduction.

By **elite** Turchin means anyone well-educated (credentialed), ambitious, and riding on the expectations likely created in their psyches while growing up, or during their credentialing process. The Mangione family qualifies as elite in this sense. They were a known quantity in Maryland.

Many of us Boomers who earned advanced degrees in our fields became *aspiring elites*.

But as we attempted to enter professions, especially if it was after the 1970s, a good many of us hit brick walls.

There weren't enough positions – jobs – in education, government, or industry – to absorb all applicants. The collapse of the job market in academia during the 1970s is one illustration of this, although with a few specific causes of its own such as the [Powell Memo](#) which led to the defunding of universities who turned to corporate sponsors and began hiking tuition.

“Elite overproduction,” explains Turchin, “can be likened to a game of musical chairs – except the number of chairs stays constant, while the number of players is allowed to increase. As the game progresses, it creates more and more angry losers.”

Not all thwarted aspiring elites go quietly into the night. Some ask questions. They do their own research. If they're convinced that the “winners” cheated, this darkens their mood still more.

They may become – gasp! – conspiratorial. (Just to note, Turchin claims to be empirical, not conspiratorial; see pp. 126-29 of *End Times*.)

[The most articulate of those outside the Big Club will eventually question dominant narratives, such as the American Dream.](#)

In some cases they'll figure out how to use Americans' addiction to entertainment to do it.

Some go rogue and become aspiring **counter-elites**.

Counter-Elites.

Turchin writes as if Trump is an elite, because he's a billionaire. I disagree with this.

I think Trump became a counter-elite [the night Barack Obama ridiculed him openly at the White House Correspondents Dinner back in 2011](#) – because he'd questioned if the then-president was born in the U.S.

Trump became the quintessential American political counter-elite able to channel the anger of globalized neoliberalism's "losers." This is the only explanation for how he was able to win the nomination of a major political party and take the presidency from someone the *superelite* (those in the upper layers of the .01 percent) had already anointed as the First Woman President, someone who had the backing of all *elite* media and all of inside-the-Big-Club Asylum on the Potomac denizens.

Three quintessential media counter-elites are Tucker Carlson, Steve Bannon, and Joe Rogan. The first landed on his feet following his firing from Fox News: clearly a political decision. The second endured a four-month prison sentence following his refusal to bow before the January 6 Committee over its narratives. The third is probably the most watched podcaster in America, major spokesman for the "manosphere" (a phenomenon generated by systems rigged to favor women and emasculate men).

Elon Musk has certainly been acting like a counter-elite, with his support for Trump, while much of the rest of the billionaire class supported Kamala Harris.

Luigi Mangione becomes a wild card in this ecosphere: elite but not a billionaire, and without visibility, he takes direct action.

The *narrative war* is the battle between counter-elites and elites.

Between leaders of [Those Who Wish To Be Left Alone versus Those Who Push People Around](#).

The former, when they consider the matter, think of themselves as “truth-tellers.”

Marks of the latter include waxing endlessly about “misinformation,” “conspiracy theories,” “threats to democracy,” “extremism,” “racism,” “hate speech,” “transphobia,” etc.

Authors such as [Patrick Deneen](#) now suggest that *liberalism* in whatever form has failed: it empowers individuals in all the wrong ways and slowly undermines conditions for civilizational stability. Liberalism’s advocates arrogantly assume that its results are a natural state of affairs and not the product of a distinctive ideology holding that people are essentially self-interested economic actors (or should be).

Others point to indicators such as supposed “gender” fluidity and associated preoccupations (e.g., pronouns, bathrooms) that overwhelm public discourse while people have trouble keeping a roof over their heads and food on their tables.

Liberalism only works, minimally, if its participants can have rational conversations where they disagree. It begins to fail when one side is told that disagreement is based on hate, finds intellectual discomfort traumatizing, and seeks safe spaces.

It also places a primacy on trust in institutions, which can only be maintained if those in institutions *tell the truth*.

Counter-elites contend that those atop the elite pyramid simply *lie* about how the economy is doing splendidly (by pointing to the Dow when only a small percentage of Americans own stock), about how their favored leaders did splendidly (think: Joe Biden, who was clearly in cognitive decline before he entered office in 2021), how the Western war machine is doing splendidly when it has become is a sponge soaking up moneys urgently needed domestically (think: Ukraine).

Unresolved public conflict between elite and counter-elite narratives brings about **state breakdown**, the third element in civilizational unraveling Turchin and his team unearthed.

State Breakdown.

State breakdown occurs once enough of the general public stops trusting the institutions they've relied on for news, information, education, etc., to reach a tipping point. It's not as if those outside the Big Club are in agreement about what to believe, or if they necessarily believe anything specific. Twentieth century philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906 – 1975) may have given the best description of what happens, as well as its biggest danger:

This constant lying is not aimed at making the people believe a lie, but at ensuring that no one believes anything anymore. A people that can no longer distinguish between truth and lies cannot distinguish between right and wrong. And such a people, deprived of the power to think and judge, is, without knowing and willing it, completely subjected to the rule of lies. With such a people, you can do whatever you want.

You can lock them indoors for months on end, for example, having scared the majority to death about a virus with 24/7 doom coverage. You can force them to take poorly-tested shots passed off as “safe and effective vaccines,” memory-holing the fact that real vaccines take *years* of testing and clinical trials. You can force them to relinquish their freedoms to have a sense of superelite-supplied “safety.”

It didn't work, of course, if the goal was to suppress counter-elite narratives. There are probably more aspiring counter-elites today than ever before!

A situation in which half of society's members seem to inhabit one world based on one set of narratives while the other half seems to inhabit a different world based on different narratives is dangerous to any stable body politic. This

presages the battle for control over institutions we are likely to see once Trump takes office.

The real danger of state breakdown is that it ends with the most unscrupulous figure or group seizing power and ruling as he/they see fit while continuing to call the country a democracy.

I don't think Trump is that figure. The superelites still have a tremendous reservoir of resources. But as a counter-elite he's been a huge beneficiary of the narrative wars. He's promised to alleviate public immiseration with tariffs to incentivize domestic production and create jobs. He's ready to hand the existing upper echelons elites their rear ends, by appointing fellow counter-elites such as RFK Jr. atop major federal agencies, or people widely regarded as jokes (e.g., Linda McMahon) at the helm of agencies such as the Department of Education as if planning on that misbegotten waste of taxpayer dollars unraveling under her watch.

The counter-elites would prefer to oust the elites and avoid state breakdown by assuming control over institutions, although some are making efforts to start new ones and build up their own networks (the [University of Austin](#) is an example).

Bottom line running through this discussion and its [predecessor](#): economic inequality beyond what may be expected from Pareto distributions, combined with the sense that those in the Big Club have cheated to get where they are, is fundamentally destabilizing. As recent events may have shown, it eventually provokes violence against elites. I hope it is clear that nothing here is intended to *condone* Mangione's actions. But they have a straightforward *explanation*.

There's a bigger problem on the horizon, however, and it could play into the hands of the elites. To the best of my knowledge, neither Trump nor his critics have said anything

about it or indicated they are significantly aware of it. (I hope I'm wrong about this and will be happy to be *shown* that I'm wrong.)

Part 3 in a couple more days.

[Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#),

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Steven Yates is a (recovering) ex-academic with a PhD in Philosophy. He taught for more than 15 years total at several universities in the Southeastern U.S. He authored three books, more than 20 articles, numerous book reviews, and review essays in academic journals and anthologies. Refused tenure and unable to obtain full-time academic employment (and with an increasing number of very fundamental philosophical essays refused publication in journals), he turned to alternative platforms and heretical notions, including about academia itself.

In 2012 he moved to Chile. He married a Chilean national in 2014. Among his discoveries in South America: the problems of the U.S. are problems everywhere, because human nature is the same everywhere. The problems are problems of Western civilization as a whole.

As to whether he'll *stay* in Chile ... stay tuned!

He has a Patreon.com page. Donate [here](#) and become a Patron if you benefit from his work and believe it merits being sustained financially.

Steven Yates's book *Four Cardinal Errors: Reasons for the Decline of the American Republic* (2011) can be ordered [here](#).

His philosophical work *What Should Philosophy Do? A Theory* (2021) can be obtained [here](#) or [here](#).

His paranormal horror novel *The Shadow Over Sarnath* (2023) can be gotten [here](#).

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