

US Democracy in Crisis

Truth Over Deception in Both Religion and Politics

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Introduction and Context

The art of deception has always been one of the most practiced and effective weapons in the arsenal of human resources and especially in the service of religion and politics. It is, one might say, the original sin born of our human condition. So comfortably hand in glove are their mutual objectives of mind control that any attempt to expose its fearful legacy in favor of a more honest and progressive model must begin with a determination of verifiable facts as best they can be perceived and presented.

Underwriting the self serving utility of opposing religious or political “beliefs,” has been the all consuming mission of their proponents for asserting forceful control and power over their faithful followers. With a view to our survival as a species however, such indoctrinated beliefs not founded in historical fact or contradicted by science or reason are never a durable substitute for verifiable truth and inevitably take us nowhere we want to be.

Such is our disastrous on going record to date of willful deceit, conflict, violence and destruction. On this continued track we will no doubt suffer the same fate as other less endowed animal species which have come and gone, unless we reverse course in favor of aspirational values more worthy of our human intellect.

But while false beliefs are undeniably the root cause of human conflict, peaceful coexistence is clearly a more productive and natural state favored by the vast majority, even if denied by their self serving leaders. To quote a famous song writer and poet of our time, “peace will come with tranquility and splendor on the wheels of fire, but will offer no reward when false idols call.”

Compounding that challenge now, is an information ecosystem which allows unprecedented abuse of its power by a high tech, media savvy, billionaire oligarchy, asserting unchecked political and economic control of a government wide open to its influence, and always for a price.

Under Trumps banner of MAGA, the first step in that corrupt mission, is to cause untold disruption, alienation and chaos within the establishment of the US system of government, including an attack on our rule of law and freedom of the press as it perpetuates a culture of fear and retribution. Thereafter following systemic collapse, to take credit for forcefully effecting its rescue, a classic and familiar fascist playbook.

The real and omnipresent threat from the prospect of a sociopathic, renegade president was from the start the primary challenge confronted in the structural design of our democratic model of checks and balances. But without a shared reality or actual verifiable facts the question is, how can its essential foundational underpinnings of faith and trust survive collapse.

Our fragile experiment in self government is struggling to survive, seriously threatened beyond our current means of control owing to the complete failure of one party and its leader to live up to its oath to uphold the Constitution. From inception too, it was always the corruptive power of private money, particularly on the application of the rule of law which established the proverbial

double standard so shamelessly displayed in the Trump era. In free enterprise America where almost any result can be achieved at a price, you get as much protection from the law as you can afford.

Yes indeed, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The practical nature of our free market, capitalist driven economy was however, never inspired or devised on a concept of fairness and will inevitably favor the rich and powerful establishment until compliant consumers stop feeding the beast.

Election outcomes in America are a perfect case in point. In the last election Elon Musk legally contributed more than a quarter of a billion dollars to Trumps campaign along with hundreds of millions from numerous other billionaires hungry for power and seeking influence. Trump himself acknowledged that Elon Musks' money and influence was key to his reelection. At the opposite extreme, 1 in 3 eligible disillusioned voters choose not to even participate in the process. So much for one man, one vote.

If apathy is the current demise of American democracy, it is evidently the lack of public trust in the integrity of self serving politicians and their cohorts which should be held to account as much as any other grievance such as corporate exploitation of cheaper foreign labor, or more essentially common ignorance from lack of education.

So far, the critical institutions of government have barely survived the strain, but if a fish starts to stink, it is from the head down. It remains to be seen what survives of the "advise and consent" role of a Republican Senate under the uncompromising demand for total loyalty to Trump.

The truth is that the long standing pillars of faith of the voting establishment as represented by the achievement of self government, freedom of the press and religion, together with equal justice for all, are today no longer the deposits of trust upon which such aspirations were founded. Corruption in government as exposed by a hungry social media is now almost a daily event.

With faith in the rules and normalcy of governance upended by Trump to deliberately impede, if not abandon legislative progress, he is celebrated by his cult as martyr to the MAGA cause. There is on their part no longer any interest in bipartisanship or the normal process of incremental change.

Yet, the established record shows that the choice between democratic and autocratic models in the service of human affairs has never been so clear. Nations which share the essential democratic value of the rule of law are innovating and prospering at a faster rate in spite of the higher premium it demands for the right to due process - unlike autocracies.

In addition and more critically, democracy promotes and protects our human rights in blunt contrast to autocratic regimes which abandon all the rules for the sake of exclusive power. So why is the choice so difficult. Why do so many drink the sand and not the water? Aspiring autocrats have always fed their cult of followers with false grievance often directed at the opposing party or easy targets such as minorities including blacks and Jews to argue why democracy doesn't really work for those "more entitled."

Human history is indeed replete with recorded cycles of prosperity and decline, (or ultimately collapse), often driven by the public perception of shameless disparity in commensurate compensation. Wealth in its many forms, less we forget, was built on the backs of labor. In more recent times disillusion on the part of working classes who feel cheated economically or betrayed by their “out of touch” party, has been a reliable tipping point. Consider that real wages have not increased in 40 years while corporate profits have soared tax free off shore.

Consequently, a fundamental premise of a functioning Democracy has been abandoned and hence not working equitably for wage earners. It appears to be working better now for those whose self serving mission is to undermine it. Lack of economic mobility, the ever increasing cost of living, especially for housing and healthcare, let alone the growing impact of climate change, are unaddressed issues bringing inequity to a boil. When trust is lost, anger and dissatisfaction is simply expressed by a protest vote for the alternative party, even if conflicted by opposing interests. This is true on both sides of the Atlantic. A vote for the other side to get their attention however, only exacerbates the problem.

For the past forty years our faith in the “market” was a guiding principle driving the national and global economy. But in the last 20 years in allied western states, its growing material success has been overshadowed by untenable results with respect to a living wage, food costs and healthcare especially for working classes as they struggle to keep up with accelerating inflation.

For those able and well vested in the financial gains driven by inflation, it has been quite a different story if not a windfall. A perfect convergence of favorable post WW11 economic markers has for those baby boomers who seized the opportunity, especially for home ownership and other investments supported by favorable long term fixed loans, created an unprecedented generation of American millionaires. Those days are now over as the US has carelessly sunk into a national debt of \$40 trillion and still climbing, with dire consequences for future borrowing costs for both the government and those being governed. The interest payments on that debt now exceed our GDP.

Clearly the “free market” model however successful in principle, was never full proof or equitable without the federal governments essential role in providing corrective measures on behalf of its electorate and this has been sorely missing especially when reelection in the US is so heavily dependent on the financial contributions from those with opposite self serving agendas.

As the evolution of IT and AI challenges established norms, there are credible indicators that this condition will only get worse for the mainstream population, let alone those in the lower economic spectrum who are already struggling. In the business community, their primary issues derive more from the classic conflict between employers and employees who by nature have opposite agendas when it comes to compensation.

Employers complain too about over regulation. Democrats, they like to say, are in practice bureaucrats while republicans are autocrats who know how to get things done. They follow orders whereas democrats get hung up on their own rules when it comes to translating approved funds into the tangible results they need to win elections. They rightly argue that the characteristic bureaucratic approval process simply takes too long to show timely and measurable progress. Patience especially on the part of a disillusioned electorate is not limitless.

The constant pressure by US democrats to expand the welfare state and with it spiraling cost to the tax payer is their other vehement complaint. The respective anger and vote of both factions has thus become easy prey for devious opportunistic spoilers such as Trump who would thereupon seek authoritarian control through lies and misinformation in a false blame game so shamelessly promoted by allied social media platforms driven only by ratings.

The increasing disparities in incomes which have disproportionately favored the vested establishment and more privileged classes of the new economy has only further fueled their feelings of resentment towards a representative democrat party too obsessed with Trumps moral failings, gender issues and less with their economic struggle for survival. For most struggling Americans the notion of democracy is an abstraction whereas the price of eggs is critical.

Identity politics and lofty liberal aspirations embodied in the quest for an equal human playing field are for them unaffordable ideals and less urgent than the immediate economic threat posed by out of control inflation - whatever it's cause. At the low end of the economic spectrum in the US many potential voters have consequently now virtually checked out, thereby playing right into the hands of republicans who would just as soon deny them their vote as a matter of policy.

There is no doubt too that in America fear of minorities on the part of white nationalists has always driven much of the inherited racial divide and this will persist long after many future elections. Minorities have become a growing and more critical element of the voting public without which neither party can win the election. When they too are dissatisfied with broken promises and most of all their economic condition under an inattentive ruling democratic government, they will likewise vote for the alternative party in protest.

Absent experience with authoritarian systems of government, to their detriment most Americans of the modern era cannot fully appreciate the rare privilege of living suppression free in a progressive society. We owe that in large part to the success of our two party system which when functioning as intended will in practice inhibit the destructive power of extremism. The potential remedial affect of a middle of the road third party has so far also proved ineffective in drawing sufficient support. It's introduction is testimony of a failure of the functioning principle of the 2 party system. Taken thus for granted America's truly fragile democracy is now ironically ripe for an opportunistic takeover.

The benefits of our democracy, its endurance and survival thus far, have in the post WWII era, resulted in a national identity synonymous with freedom and a confident "can do" American spirit, in spite of its glaring imperfections. This is no accident, but indeed the earned outcome of a rare national achievement. Alas, American freedom and the common expectation of due process will only be conspicuously missed when it is denied. This is already starting to happen under the Trump administration. Above all, our personal security and freedom is recognized as a permanent threat to those who would usurp power at its expense.

Unchecked greed and insatiable lust for power have however, always been alive and well in America. Over sixty US Billionaires now back Trump, simply because plutocrats are more worried about higher taxes than threats to our democracy and the rule of law. So voter manipulation through grossly over funded misinformation finds fertile territory in successfully presenting the

very enemy of democracy as no less than its savior. How we now get our information and who is paying for it has become key to electoral success.

Historically, it is no secret that unlike Democracy, Autocracy has in one generic form or another, always been the more common system of governance and mostly through the entrenched power of the ruling authority, be it the crown, church or state. All succeeded by exploiting fear, complacency and ignorance, cultivated so effectively by the powers that be. More often it involved the collusion of all three, though each was driven in common by self serving agenda.

Characteristically, few have ever been held to account by their victims while threats of brutal punishment or retribution has deterred any serious or effective opposition. Rarely have the right conditions of location, space and time endured long enough to transform treasonous thoughts of liberation or representative government into action.

But such were the fortuitous prospects of pioneers of the New World which led inevitably to a path of rebellion and war against the military might of the British Crown. On that note let's not forget our own shameful extermination of those indigenous, for which we too have much to answer for. All related events have been thoroughly documented.

In France mass repression led to the subsequent start of the French Revolution in May of 1789. In the new emerging American model of democracy, the right of the many governed to hold their "elected" few leaders to account was the hallmark of a profound change in their new relationship, one which can be traced back to 1215 and the "Magna Carta", the original and revolutionary agreement binding English Sovereignty to the rights and liberties of the English Barons (and the citizenry) to whom they and their King were now accountable.

It subsequently laid the foundation of that Anglo Saxon sense of fair play and decency which survives still today in the make up of the British identity. Henceforth it established the key principles of representative government, impartial justice and above all the rule of law to be equally applied to one and all including the King.

Accordingly, in "the new world" the American Revolution of 1776 delivered first our independence and then the gift of a democratic government in the form of a constitutional federal republic in that same remarkable year of 1789 - or at least its beginnings as a work in progress. The need for separation of the Church from State was a foundational premise. So too was the preeminence of the rule of law and the acceptance of a smooth transition of power based on free and fair elections.

Republican and Democrat parties have since continued to represent the two competing ideals of policy in governance, much like the left and right wing (labor and conservative) parties long established in the motherland. The checks and balances provided for in the American model of the three separate and equal branches of government, was also an additional and critical check on the extraordinary power of the presidency.

So far that model has largely succeeded and insured through the election process, that the good ship US Democracy has sailed progressively forward as alternating left and right wing forces have struck its battered sails. It has above all survived foreign and domestic corruption of government by special interests thanks in no small measure to the indispensable power of the rule of law

and its enforcement to hold all players to account. (ie, Watergate and Richard Nixon). Under an aspiring dictator like Trump the question is, will we continue to be a nation governed by the rule of law?

In spite of its historical scars, glaring imperfections and some obvious contradictions, the meritocracy given birth by the boundless opportunities presented by the New World, also undeniably resulted in the creation of the greatest free nation and economic engine the world has ever seen. "Free market capitalism" like democracy has arguably proven better than all the alternatives for unleashing the power of free enterprise and raising people up at all economic levels. But it too is being corrupted by successful monopolies and plutocrats spearheaded by Trump.

To be an American was to have won the lottery and millions still continue to flee all forms of tyranny to gain freedom, security and opportunity in America. In Roman times happiness was simply expressed as the freedom from war and hunger. In the New world, happiness for any who want to dream of success, can be expressed as "the joy of achievement," whatever the personal goal may be. The notion of the American Dream was a product of our freedom. It is however, not a gift and like any reward has its price in terms of its demands on personal commitment and risk.

By most estimates Democracy continues to outperform autocracy if only as a more powerful economic growth engine. The political and civil rights it also affords its citizens are however, its primary and foundational cause without which it could not have survived so far. They are consequently the current targets of would be autocrats seeking to take over the government and our country, as happened between 1930 - 1945 in Germany, Italy, Spain and Japan, following crises set by war and economic collapse. Clearly that horrific chapter in our shameful history should never be allowed to repeat itself. The NATO alliance was indeed instituted for that purpose. There are ominous signs as noted above that this is indeed what is happening before our very eyes

Americans have common interests across the majority of issues which both concern and unite us. Yet foreign and domestic enemies are profiting from playing us against each other by all means possible.

To our crop of home born enemies, tyranny's appeal at this turbulent point in time is growing once more and on both sides of the Atlantic - even among so called educated and political elites. The reasons for that are obscure and contradictory and need to be understood and addressed if democracy is to survive and fulfill its potential for world peace and prosperity for all.

The following narrative is an attempt to identify some contributing factors in that discussion. Another reality of our two party system of government is that both parties are inclined to overplay their hand when in power, resulting in a retaliatory reaction on the part of the opposition party. Unchecked, this has led to resentment and a less than productive outcome for the governed who simply want to see progress, not constant conflict.

In the Trump era the give and take of politics has been all but abandoned by his party or cult of followers. Instead they threaten our constitution and the rule of law - the foundational premise of its remarkable success. Ironically, fidelity to our venerable constitution was the most conservative of conservative values, now abandoned in the name of a would be dictator, Trump.

Under Trump too, the US is now no longer prepared to underwrite the world order in spite of profiting the most from the economic, political and military stability enjoyed worldwide since the creation of NATO after WW2. In light of the factual reporting on the lawlessness of Trump and his actions, there is no question that we are now firmly entrenched in a constitutional crisis which began when a sitting president incited an insurrection on January 6, 2021 for which he was never held to account. He has now also freed and compensated those were.

Part I: The Crisis in American Democracy

The Status Quo

The alarming state of our current politics and our democracy now raises the question Benjamin Franklin posed at the outset, as to whether its beneficiaries would have what it takes to keep it. The extraordinary nature of this critical moment in Americas history now speaks to that challenge. Trump has made himself the most aptly qualified head of his “grievance” party, comprised of an accumulation of disparate anti-democratic factions who choose to blame the Washington establishment for all our problems.

Whether “we the people” are fully aware or not of the current threat, the survival of the rule of law and the very right to vote itself will be determined at the next ballot box. “Just vote this one time for me” Trump has said prior to the last election “and you will never have to cast another vote.” What more proof do we need to hear to understand his obvious treasonous intentions ? But to no avail. So high are his cult of followers on their addiction.

There is indeed, no doubt that the 2024 election of Trump marked a pivotal point in the story of Americas’ bold and fragile experiment with democracy and more than 235 years of ongoing remarkable progress now threatened by the careless accumulation of so much debt. As was anticipated by its founders, such freedom would inevitably be wide open to abuse by the likes of Trump who is not only a threat to the Republic and our constitution, but even more to its critical role as the indispensable protector of the free world.

Clearly, he has exhibited no crucial understanding or interest in continuing to run the country as a democratic state or to sustain the geopolitical order. His self serving mission is to be Americas dictator in chief at any cost and exclusively for his own personal gain. A year ahead of our next election he was already claiming the 2024 election will be rigged with absolutely no evidence, in order to incite a repeat of the January 6 insurrection for which he has yet to be personally held to account.

Thanks too, to a subservient Republican Party - who have made it abundantly clear they are no longer constitutional conservatives and totally at his service, a now right leaning Supreme Court has also demonstrated that it does not want to apply the law to the extraordinary treasonous and factual nature of what Trump did on January 6 to overthrow a democracy which he and the Supreme Court both swore an oath to defend and protect.

It is noteworthy to recall that King Charles the First of England was the first sovereign to be notoriously judged, sentenced and beheaded for his “tyranny” against his own people for violating that same sacred oath. The Supreme Court are instead deferring their responsibility to a divided congress they certainly know to be deliberately obstructive and effectively dysfunctional. There have been at least four other notable would be dictators in American political history whose missions were ultimately thwarted at the ballot box. However none had the total allegiance of their party, which differentiates Trump from all his failed and less dangerous predecessors.

Absent a governing agenda, obstruction and division has been the predominant underlying ploy of the GOP with a view to winning the next election on the basis of the democrats’ failure to resolve critical issues such as border control. Sabotage has thus become their chosen norm of practice in spite of the fact that this totally destructive tactic plays perfectly into our foreign enemies propaganda claims that democracy doesn’t really work. Nor does a fair election work any longer for a corrupted Republican Party without imagination or conviction in making their conservative case to the American people.

Having long ago abandoned basic principles of fiscal conservatism they now resort to forceful Autocratic means of mind control - fear, deceit and subversion. Trump clearly ran for re-election as an authoritarian, if not a would be dictator. Without a united functioning government with the checks and balances inherent in its design, survival of our country’s democracy will, thanks also to a self serving social media, be decided by a public court of spin and disinformation where “alternative facts” and lies are the common currency of right wing outlets such as Fox News.

It is a tactic noticeably straight out of the fascist playbook and there are clear parallels between Trumps GOP, his enablers and the rise of the Third Reich. To cap it all, Trump regularly still paints “Biden” as the threat to Democracy. Accusing the accuser is indeed a most proven deflection tactic promoted so successfully by indoctrinated fascist and communist faithful alike according to the dictates of the party user manual. Take control and answer to no one is their mantra.

Given the shocking outcome already of the 2016 and 2024 elections and our failure since then to hold Trump accountable and to deal effectively with his insurrection and all manner of on-going election interference, fraud and profiteering, fake news continues to benefit foreign and domestic enemies in accomplishing Trump’s mission to take over our government.

History teaches there will be no turning back if Trump, their self proclaimed dictator in chief, is allowed to succeed by gaming our legal and electoral system. These systems in their current form have now proven to be unable to deal swiftly and decisively with a totally corrupt autocrat or his minions. It took almost three years to hold a few hundred insurrectionists to account while the chief instigator was allowed to stay free to continue to game our legal system as he ran for reelection.

Now back in power he will again seek control of our judges, civil servants and the media in the model of his admired friend Victor Orban of Hungary, the strong man dictator who recently took over all levers of that government. Businesses large and small, insufficiently loyal to him will likewise be systematically harassed, squeezed out of operation and replaced by loyal hacks as

happened in Hungary. He has also made no secret of his admiration for other more ruthless fascist leaders like Hitler, Mussolini, Putin and Kim Jong Un.

So we should have believed what he said he will do in a second term. He has placed old and new unqualified henchmen into key government positions regardless of their fitness. Troubling too are statements from his cult of faithful followers who believe in the indoctrinated notion of a strongman as the most effective remedy for all their grievances. If that were true Putin's Russian State would be at the top not bottom of the pile.

Within the above backdrop of a major crisis in the making, the facts and opinions expressed herein offer a critique of the current political landscape in the United States, focusing primarily on the negative and disastrous impact of Donald Trumps' presidency on the now precarious future of American democracy. It examines some of the causes and the results of the erosion of democratic norms, the rise of white nationalism incited by Trump, and the broader implications for the rule of law, societal division, perverted religion and the poor state of health of the nation's democratic institutions.

The consequences of Trumps actions and his rhetoric before, and now after his first term as president are antithetical to both the principles of our democracy and to sustaining an already fragile world order. What's different about the 2024 election of Trump is that the Republican Party is as already noted, now fully corrupted and beholden to him. They have declined numerous opportunities to hold him to account or even speak out against his proposed treasonous agenda.

Instead they prepare for a new wave of legal attacks on the voting process while stacking their party with lawyers focused on planned election litigation. Enemies of democracy have welcomed his election as much as they are rejoicing in his second term, as evidenced by the alarming amount of fake social media they engaged in that mission.

Most of all Putin is banking on it to cement his invasion of Ukraine as is Xi with his designs on the eventual takeover of Taiwan. Trump has already gone on the record to say he will not continue to fund Ukraines defense, in spite of our recent past agreement to defend Ukraine in exchange for their willing surrender of their own nuclear weapons. So why should any nation henceforth take the word of the USA seriously ever again?

The willful politicization of our national security intelligence has as the record already shows, been gifted to our foreign enemies notably Putin, who Trump has openly befriended as he continues to lash out at NATO. A second term can effectively result in a third addition to the duo of Russia and China, upsetting the established balance of power to form a new and tyrannical world order.

No longer will the US be the indispensable democracy among its western NATO allies who hitherto never had cause to doubt its unflinching support since its formation post WW2 as a deterrent to communist aggression. There would consequently be no stopping any of them from forcefully achieving territorial ambitions. The violent dissolution of long established sovereign identity and independence of neighboring European states, as with Putin and his invasion of Ukraine, will be their model of behavior. Seizure of private assets would be next to follow.

The keynotes as highlighted in the index above identify some of the historical influences, most notably that of lingering religious indoctrination, a politically biased supreme court reacting to conflicted religious beliefs, and societal divisive issues like racism. Above all the wholesale exploitation of social media for disinformation. They have all been complicit in the unfolding betrayal and attack on Americas bold and courageous “Experiment in Democracy”.

If sanity prevails and Trump and his Republican Party are defeated at the next election it should serve as a long overdue wake up call to shore up our outdated defenses against any such future attack on our democracy. If one so demonstrably ignorant and incompetent as Trump can do so much harm, then what might we expect to suffer by another traitor more gifted?

Going forward, along with critical defensive revisions to an outdated constitution and legal system, we must reaffirm democratic values, the rule of law and the importance of truth in political discourse. On that last note the profound threat which abuse of AI imposes should not be underestimated. Trust is an essential premise upon which faith in democracy is embedded. We should also begin by holding politicians to higher standards, and above all renew our commitment to public education and a truthful understanding of the history of our republic. Lies and deception have evidently never proven to be a valid model for enduring success worthy of any progressive human endeavor.

Cause and Effect

Trump’s Rise and Democratic Vulnerability

The election of someone as intellectually unfit as Donald Trump to be the American President and leader of the free world was a profound shock and threat to a progressive world already struggling to maintain a check on the enemies of democracy. So let it not be said that the liberty inherent in our American brand of democracy does not still function with the wide latitude of personal freedom it always intended. The essential individual right to say what you will and believe what you want, true or false is alive and well in America and was duly affirmed in the 2016 and again in the 2024 election of Trump by his cult of followers.

Unfortunately, the license to such untethered freedom is not free, nor does it defend itself. It comes at a high price like all precious gifts. There’s no proverbial free lunch. At this pivotal point in time we must protect it from those such as Trump who would abuse it for personal gain. Constant vigilance must always be the watchdog of our freedom and we the people are its ultimate protectors. There can be no exceptions. “All” violators of our constitution must be held to account according to the rule of law or it will not survive as we are witnessing first hand. Fear of retribution is still as reliable as ever in deterring opposition.

Ukrainians are presently dying on the battlefield for the same cause of their democracy and freedom which we now carelessly take for granted, all be it at our peril. Trump has made it perfectly clear he identifies more with the destructive mission of tyrannical leaders such as Putin

and not that of NATO. In doing so he is willfully reversing all the post war diplomatic gains made in Europe in establishing a mutual defense alliance in the name of defending global democracy and freedom.

Our commitment to those ideals is still now being tested in the form of a repeat attempt by Trump to overturn our democracy with his big lie that the 2020 election was stolen from him. Our success in defeating his current bid to be our dictator in chief will simply come down to the American voter acknowledging the difference between truth and lies - a challenge at odds with all the disinformation and propaganda at the service of the enemies of democracy.

Lincoln's inclusion of the revolutionary proposition "that all men are created equal" which he highlighted in his Gettysburg Address was in truth also a known contradiction if not a lie, given that the booming economy of the "New World" was ironically rooted in slavery. It needed the affirmation by no less than a horrific civil war to validate the spirit, if not the letter of our Declaration of Independence from the tyranny of the British Crown.

Yet the contrast in substance between these two American presidents could not be more starkly opposed. Both are the products of our democracy and the protections guaranteed by its constitution and legal system. By its very nature it has always been a double edge sword. Too many on the far right were, and still are predisposed to claims of white superiority by a masterful conman who continues to play on the fears of aggrieved MAGA voters for whom the civil war did nothing to change ingrained bigotry.

Lincoln's frequent emphasis on the importance of the "Consent of the governed" as the keynote to the validity if not the legitimacy of our democracy must at a minimum include acceptance of majority rule or its bedrock principle crumbles. That was by design the essential goal of the January 6 insurrection orchestrated directly by Trump. Had it succeeded, he has already indicated that he would through his enablers, have become our dictator. Our treasured democracy would over night have transformed into another autocracy and have signaled the end of a relatively stable world order.

Unlike his criticism of the "do nothing congress," Trump's false pre-election claim to being an accomplished businessman was both his biggest lie and his strongest appeal to a gullible and disillusioned electorate as a no nonsense problem solver. The record however, tells a very different story, one of systemic corruption and incompetence. A clever cheat was never the definition of a successful businessman and proven cheats will only continue to prosper at our expense if we let them. Such is his legacy.

That he would fund his own election was yet another effective ploy in his boastful rhetoric designed to distinguish and elevate his candidacy from all the rest of the straw men who quickly and fearfully fell in line. That was another lie for which his faithful fell, hook, line and sinker. But not only does he not self fund his reelection, he is paying his hundreds of millions in personal legal fees for civil and criminal law suits also from election fund contributions.

So the horrifying prospect of the reelection of a convicted ex-president holding office behind bars - was in reality a state of affairs apparently and incredibly allowed within the terms of our jurisprudence. And so entrenched is his cult of followers that they continue to dutifully respond

to his gift of their contributions to fund hundreds of millions for his reelection and legal defense fees. Indeed 65% of republicans continue to be election deniers and claim they will vote for Trump even if he is convicted. Echoes of the rise of Nazi Germany.

It is a tragic state of affairs which defies belief at home, while the rest of the world is dumbfounded by the impotence of our system of jurisprudence to yet hold him to account after more than three years from his act of betrayal. To Europeans he is a disgrace if not a joke at democracy's expense. But they are obliged to respect his title even if they abhor his lack of humanity and intellect on all matters critical to continuing peaceful progress and maintaining the world order.

The appalling lack of good judgement so far of such a significant sample of the American electorate is also baffling to anyone not subject to the constant reinforcement of lies and propaganda spewing from Fox News and other extreme right wing media outlets. Hundreds of millions in punitive fines have done nothing to deter their continued practice of deceit and denial. It is according to their accounting simply a cost of doing their shameless business. In any event the consensus throughout the world is that he is a serious threat to the world order. They are also fearful of a NATO without the inclusion of vital American support which Trump threatens to withdraw.

With all that is now at stake, his proposed fascist agenda if reelected, including incarceration of his political enemies and mass militarized deportations of immigrants, the question is, where did "we the people" a nation of immigrants, who are ultimately responsible for placing him in power go wrong and what is it in the formative makeup of an affluent American culture, or more broadly our species which has throughout history made democracy so illusive an ideal to practice and achieve. We obviously have not learned the lessons of history if we collectively continue to repeat avoidable mistakes. Numerous and diverse forces acting upon our human condition, some noted herein have all been at play.

Constitutional Design and the Two-Party System

More critically, how do we fight this takeover bid of our country by a would be dictator. It's vulnerability to attack was from the inception, always a real and expressed concern given the ambitious revolutionary ideals proposed in our Declaration of Independence and later our constitution, always fearful of the possibility of insurrection, especially following the civil war over slavery.

The following narratives are only a limited personal attempt to identify the critical role of our human nature in all its diverse manifestations in determining the condition of our present national disposition. There is an insightful quote from John Adams which reveals just how ambitious our claim to freedom from the British crown was in light of the persistent and dangerous nature of greed and the lust for power. It is visible throughout history and mostly responsible for repeated failure of the quest for democracy in the past.

Complicit in all such dealings was of course the role of other components of power hungry collaborators, especially theocratic institutions in conditioning the complacent and fearful minds of the faithful to accept the authority and dictates of the self proclaimed powers that be - or

suffer the ultimate fate If only in the hereafter. They will continue to promote and thrive on superstition, ignorance, fear and complacency. Only an educated populace can be expected to resist indoctrination of any stripe. Truth will always be their enemy.

A workable two party political system of government with opposing (if not in truth ultimately complimentary) ideals was the legacy of colonial British rule. In broadly similar forms it took hold dating back to the Greek and Roman eras. Although in modern times there are likewise practical differences between the UK parliamentary and a presidential system of government such as we have seen play out in the US, the governing principle in both is that each side gets to propose policies or values in keeping with its own representative ideals. The seemingly opposite interests of employees and employers have always existed and usually account for respective party affiliation.

Periodic elections insure that neither side remains in power for too long without renewing its mandate at the ballot box. Established rules of engagement naturally control the agreed upon process of elections in determining the fairness and integrity of the election process and its results. When playing by these essential rules fails to win, the only option left to a bad loser unwilling to compromise, is to change the rules or resort to good old fashioned cheating. When that too fails, resort to violence.

Given the inevitable political forces already at play, the rules as contrived by those who authored them were heavily biased in favor of the white ruling establishment and only grudgingly adjusted over the centuries to include; first non land owners, then women, and as late as 1968 the Black vote was reaffirmed legislatively in Johnsons civil rights legislation. Rather than making their case on the real strength and value of valid conservative principles, tactical manipulation of the vote count including gerrymandering and voter suppression has since become the subject of abuse and scrutiny as all minorities have grown larger in number and influence.

A fearful white majority consequently no longer dominates, and cannot win a fair election without compromising their self-serving agenda. This is what they are not willing to do. In other words a vital premise of democracy's model (ie, negotiation and compromise) no longer serves their purpose. Abandoning our democracy and replacing it with an autocracy is the treasonous path the Republican party has willfully chosen under Trumps MAGA banner. What's more they are gaming the freedom permitted within the legal bounds of our juris prudence to appear to be playing by the rules while seeking to in fact avert them.

We are all the beneficiaries of the common welfare that has been achieved at the ultimate cost of so much blood and treasure on behalf of the free world. The economies under both brands of governance have indeed flourished both in the UK and the USA upon their defeat of the Nazi regime including all members of NATO, compared to those of China, Russia, North Korea and all other autocratic states.

The remarkable story of the survival of our democracy cannot be allowed to fall prey to such gross ignorance and complacency as we are witnessing today, not just from our youth who fail to vote, but from older generations who should know better. In any other non democratic society

Trump and his enablers would have been immediately held to account for betrayal of his oath of office and his unmistakable treason.

Given my childhood experience growing up in the aftermath of World War II in London it would not be unreasonable to interpret a liberal bias or point of view in the personal notes which follow. But that would be only half right and miss the larger point of the critical argument of this text. The overriding concern has to do with the erosions of democratic norms and authoritarian tendencies associated with the far right following Trumps election. His refusal to accept defeat at the ballot box and his bid for reelection presents a more serious threat to our democracy, if based only on his promise of revenge and retribution for his political adversaries.

The choice we have is thus not so much between left or right aspirations as it is voting for the very survival of our fragile democracy without which there is no left or right, no meaningful vote or election, only the oppressive will of a sociopath who's role model is Putin. It will mark a resurrection of fascism and the end of any semblance of international order. The end indeed of the hopes of all aspiring democracies.

The nature of our two party system is such that at any point in time there is either a dominant left or right leaning governing authority. This has proven all well and good when both parties play by the rules so that the "pendulum" theory of policy swings and balances maintains a steady progressive course forward. But playing by the rules, they themselves authored in biased favor of the white establishment, no longer serve the goals of one of the two parties because of changing demographics. Unwilling to share control they decided to abandon their own rules.

Given that the House of Representative is sovereign over its own rules and that Republicans presently control congress, the prospect of a rogue leadership in the person of an election denier such as Mike Johnson is not inconceivable. He was a key player in the January 6 insurrection for which he too along with other republican congressmen have not yet been held to account. If election results in a few swing states are close enough to serve their purpose, there will be a repeated attempt to subvert them. The speaker of the House could then contrive control of an autocratic government with Trump as dictator in chief.

This is not as far fetched as it may seem. Indeed anyone such as Mike Johnson, an evangelical Christian who has informed us that his policies are driven totally by a literal interpretation of the Bible (instead of the constitution), is a serious threat to the constitutional democracy which is premised for good reason on the separation of church and state.

Apparently he has no understanding of the underpinnings of our democratic system which gives us all the individual freedom to worship and live according to our own personal heritage or conviction. They want the absolute power of control over our lives which comes only from endorsing and electing a dictator in chief. In their ideology the means justifies the ends because they believe their biblical god is using the likes of Trump as an instrument to achieve his purpose. God works in mysterious ways they argue. Really!

Driven forward by the flow of ideas emanating from both the political left or right, Americas example has been a beacon of hope for all the tired and weary millions seeking refuge from oppression for over two hundred years. It should be no mystery why American democracy has

succeeded in its promotion of individual liberty where theocracies and autocracies continue to rule through the stifling force of mass oppression. American leadership has been the most trusted in a world which would now otherwise fall into oblivion.

The achievement of such a rare democracy grounded in the rule of law which guarantees our freedom and protects us all from tyranny, should never be taken for granted. So how do we insure that this disturbed, narrow minority of white Christian extremists do not send us all back to the dark ages of history? The following narrative is an attempt to identify some of the primary factors, both past and present which must be aired and understood if we are to advance our human condition.

Power, Influence, and Accountability

The USA has become the indispensable bastion and major arsenal for the cause of allied democracies worldwide. Yet at home, it is alarmingly close to losing its own democracy thanks to Trump, his enablers and the resurgence of latent white nationalism they have shamelessly incited. Clearly, Trump intends to supplant our constitutional democracy with a dictatorship and he defiantly ran again for the presidency to fulfill that mission- if not to avoid his on going legal prosecution.

Those emerging democracies largely inspired by Americas leadership and example will, as we have already seen in Europe and South America, also inevitably fall prey to his betrayal of our democracy. Under the Trump presidency established protocol, core democratic principles and policy positions were conspicuously denied. Standard rules of American law and order were either systematically undermined or ignored by over-zealous appointees and no less by a subservient cult of Republican Party faithful, all intent on subverting the judicial system of the worlds oldest surviving democracy. Many have since been indicted as has their leader.

They wanted a strong man who would go after the people they hate and clearly Trump was their man, while his role-model Putin openly played him for the incompetent fool that he is. Trump, an authoritarian narcissist who craves the absolute power of a dictator will no doubt go down in history as a disaster for western democracy, but above all a resounding triumph for Soviet espionage.

Locally regarded as a disreputable developer and sociopath by the banking community, his upscale projects served for decades as a perfect conduit for dark money from a Russian kleptocracy spearheaded by Putin. In the financial chaos following the post Soviet collapse, the unavoidable suspicion is that his questionable dealings with them have inevitably caught him in the classic Soviet “honey trap,” thus obligating him forever to be a subservient puppet totally beholdng to Putin’s subversive plans. Soviet Communists have indeed always faked and attached a background which their targets cannot deny. Trump is but another classic case in point, but never was there a more gullible player.

This same twice impeached ex-president has over an entire lifetime leveraged his inherited wealth only to game a legal system which has to date never succeeded in holding him to account for numerous violations of both civil and criminal law. His unlimited access to appeals granted by our legal system has proven to be beyond the capabilities of the courts to sustain. He has in other

words become an expert in averting the rule of law which effectively gives the devil himself the benefit of the doubt. Even when out of office, and indicted on multiple counts, he continued to grift his likewise gullible donors to menace our democracy with his “big lie,” that the election was stolen from him, in spite of all the overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

This does perhaps regrettably say as much about the disposition if not the character of his faithful as it does about their leader. In deed they want to believe the lies, regardless of the facts or the collapse of their grievances. Some of his cult incredibly argue that Trump is an unusually “honest” politician simply because he is open, if not cavalier about his abuse of normal standards of behavior, the rule of law or indeed the rape of many of his victims.

How such shameless conduct no longer in America renders a presidential candidate unanimously unacceptable will be the subject of many a college thesis. It obviously raises serious new concerns about the vulnerability of our long established model for self government to conspiracy theories, if not the very premise upon which it is based, that a “democratic” society so comprised was ever capable of such a profound responsibility.

His targeted rallying cries to party faithful ultimately culminated in the infamous deadly attack on our Capital on 6 January 2020 by radical right extremists in no less than a failed coup attempt to overthrow Americas constitutional democracy. It was obviously an insurrection televised worldwide in real time and has only emboldened other autocratic adversaries he apparently wants so much to impress or emulate.

So impotent is the endless appeal structure of our judicial system for those who can pay unlimited attorneys fees that not only is he not yet behind bars for such a treasonous act, but he was permitted to run again for president on the same platform which now also includes retribution for all who have opposed him. What’s more, a corrupted Supreme Court is apparently a willing ally. As guardians of our fragile democracy, it is our responsibility to deal decisively with such a treasonous assault on our constitution. If we don’t before it is too late, we deserve to be held to account for our lack of vigilance in allowing Trumps insurrection plans to succeed.

Our constitution lays out the rules of our democracy and Trump clearly broke those rules. Accordingly he should not be eligible to run for “any” office again - let alone the presidency. In no other democratic nation would this be legally possible. Our contaminated crop of Trump loyalists in all branches of government have obviously chosen to ignore history and their oath of office in favor of personal political gain.

Is history about to repeat itself? Is the inevitable consequence of the latest experiment in the exercise of self government and collective free will as embodied in the lofty aspirations of our democracy, its own self destruction? It would not be the first time such a human experiment failed the test of time and endurance. If we haven’t learned the horrific lessons of history are we destined to repeat them in spite of all the easy access to recorded evidence?

Though it anticipated the threat of subversion or insurrection by preemptively providing for the separation of powers in our constitution, understandably its founders did not consider the most unlikely scenario of all three independent branches of government being simultaneously corrupted by a treasonous allied partnership of both foreign and home grown enemies. It was

surely also a reasonable expectation in that era, that mostly accomplished and honorable, (if not also elitist and pretentious men of good standing) would be attracted and elected to such powerful positions.

The caliber of the current leadership is clearly not native to such an esteemed culture. Voters are now prone to elect the leaders they like, based largely on charisma, false imagery and disinformation promoted by a mercenary, self serving social media obsessed only with ratings. Bad taste has however, never been more popular. Once elected, politicians are virtually licensed if not pressured to fall in line with party doctrine or risk loosing the financial support and sponsorship so vital to their reelection. None indeed can be reelected without it. So much for the essential conservative principle of “individual responsibility”. So free, is the American electorate that voting is not mandatory. Indeed it is actively and openly being suppressed by all possible means as a matter of Republican policy.

The overwhelming impact and corrupting influence of captive social media outlets and TV networks such as Fox “News” in harnessing the legacies of fear and hate, were also surely far beyond their realm of imagination. Given also the historical context of the slave trade and the racial violence it generated in those revolutionary times, fear of retaliation was certainly a dominant and driving factor in the creation of an “armed militia” by a new and so entitled slave owning white culture. So much, again, for the notion that America was founded by Christians on Christian principles.

That home grown enslaved enemy, being held hostage against its will, had a much larger than life presence for slave owners whose self righteous claim for independence ironically came from a stated desire for their liberty and freedom from a far less tyrannical master represented by the British Crown who were also profiting shamelessly from the slave trade. That same fear and hate towards minorities of any stripe, has simply reemerged in the overwhelming threat that they now pose at the ballot box.

Presidential and Parliamentary Government

These now familiar and threatening developments must perhaps first call into question the fitness for purpose of our aging American “presidential” model of democracy especially in a new era rife with social media abuse and the alarming rise of artificial intelligence already fully capable of total deception, outright lies and misinformation all in the devoted service of greed and profit on behalf of the donor class.

Indeed to quote the likes of Rupert Murdoch, the owner of Fox “News,” in an unbelievably unguarded statement before the court, “It’s not about Red or Blue - only the green”. Would a “parliamentary” system as adopted by the British Crown, where the party members elect their leader have faired any better? It is so much harder to impeach a President than to end the term of a Prime Minister, if only through a vote of no confidence. Comparisons of the two systems ie. Parliamentary vs Presidential, would of course be folly because of the special role of the British monarchy as the overseer of its government on behalf of its people.

The scandal surrounding Trumps candidacy would have undoubtedly required his immediate letter of resignation by the party or even the Crown. Without such a protector and a complicit republican party which refuses to be responsible for policing violations of constitutional norms, we must rely entirely on the judicial branch of our government to protect the integrity of our constitution. That's their job. But it too has now fallen prey to the corrupt influence of special interests and party politics.

While both are democracies, we are a constitutional republic while the UK is a constitutional monarchy. Both systems have elected representatives to govern on the behalf of the electorate. Our imperfect democratic constitution was always intended to be a work in progress and there are lessons to be learned here. But the power of special interests and the extraordinary amounts of money they can now legitimately bring to bear in support of issues which are not favored by mainstream America has proven to be an Achilles heal. It undermines our democracy at its essential core when the power of overwhelming volumes of donor cash supersede that of the people's voice.

Clearly, a serious flaw in the design and lack of effective and timely management of our enterprise in democracy has been alarmingly revealed. Such an error does not become a fatal mistake however, unless we refuse to correct it. For evil to triumph history teaches it is sufficient that good men do nothing. The vulnerability of our judicial system to the failure of those in congress who knowingly fail to live up to their oath of office and abuse the rule of law has largely contributed to a national sense of betrayal and cynicism reminiscent of the rife political corruption in the latter half of the Roman era and the inevitable consequential collapse of that Empire and so many others which suffered the same fate.

The fact remains that the likes of Trump who have access to all the exhaustive legal appeals our judicial system affords, has never in his lifetime been held to account. Is there equal justice under the law? Are we truly a nation governed by the rule of law, or are we not? There is in America supposed to be one set of laws which apply to all its citizens without exception. The rule of law must always be vindicated and especially here if it is to survive. There can be no compromise especially for anyone who arrogantly presumes to be entitled to the presidency of the worlds most powerful democracy even if he must destroy everything it stands for to succeed.

The strategic goal of a unified global network of independent democratic sovereign states should not be held hostage or allowed to collapse simply because we are failing to address the real practical challenge of governing, most notably the enforcement of our laws. Fringe politicians on the radical right have always calculated it is easier to distract its faithful with conspiracy theories and false pressure points such as Cancel Culture, CRT and WOKE theory, than to simply do the work of governing within the rules and limits of acceptable contest.

Persistent obstruction has also become the hallmark of what amounts to a mindless, zero sum political game plan. The fact is they actually have no governing philosophy. As such they have nothing positive to contribute to a democratic two party system. In fact it is obvious that the GOP in its present makeup does not believe in democracy as an organizing principle of governing.

If no man is above the law- a core principle, then why has Trump and his political co-conspirators not already been held to account after more than 6 years since his insurrection on January 6th 2020? Now clearly more than ever, justice delayed here is justice denied. Indeed Trump still remains unchecked and undeterred in his continued obsession with becoming a de facto US dictator in chief. There is surely no functioning rule of law if there is no accountability.

On that critical note the Republican party has much to answer for. It is the lack of accountability for mounting failures across the board in judicial, political and financial sectors of governance which has so disillusioned the mainstream electorate to the level of such deep cynicism expressed in the support of someone as totally unfit, unqualified and offensive as Trump. Better the devil you know than the one you don't, is the rationale of the faithful. Indeed he must be given credit for being so "honest" with us. "And doesn't God always work in mysterious ways to achieve his ultimate plan?" The lunatics are now truly running the asylum!!

As demonstrated in the last election with all its conspiracy theories, the primitive architecture of Republican politics is designed to objectively deny and obstruct, if not to cheat and lie, all with the undeniable goal of perpetuating divisive culture wars. They show no interest in actually governing. This version of the Republican Party is of course, totally alien to the character or dogma of its past. In this new process, a policy of divide and conquer is shamelessly contrived to undermine the common cause inherent in our democracy and all in accordance with the familiar authoritarian playbook for taking over a government.

Polarization and the Erosion of Democratic Norms

Alexander Hamilton's assertion and fear was that, "Democracy is not a natural state of mankind." His view, and from an abundance of broad personal experience, was that human nature precludes the kind of wisdom necessary for self government. In contrast, coming from a far more privileged and elitist upbringing, Jefferson's vision was more hopeful that an "educated" and virtuous populace would overcome the fear that Hamilton expressed and would thereby succeed in self government. Wishful thinking as it turns out as we have indeed failed to deliver.

An informed electorate was in Jefferson's view a prerequisite for a functioning Democracy, because it is by its very nature counter intuitive. We typically all want our own way. What's more as we have seen, some want it at any cost - even that of our constitution. Its practical success, however, assumes the willingness and goodwill to "compromise," without which it does not survive. Both of these founding fathers however, were by all accounts honorable, accomplished men and honest brokers of their personal beliefs which is a far cry from the shameless deception now being displayed by Trump and his henchmen.

To paraphrase Churchill, democracy is also the worse way to govern until we look at all the alternatives. America's on-going experiment in democracy is thus not only presently dysfunctional. It is by those basic standards in mortal danger. As Lincoln stated so succinctly, all be it in different context, "A house divided cannot stand". Nor does it defend itself. We must be ready to fight to keep it, because the very essence of our democracy makes it vulnerable to those who want to abuse or corrupt it. Democracy is also the only system of government which can legally hold

those people to account but only through the application of the “rule of law” - hence the primary target of would be dictators.

Our constitution was accordingly designed in concept for the mediation of differences, not constant conflict. However that presumes on the notion of honest intent and goodwill. Every incentive in Washington is now designed to make our politics divisive and extreme. The worsening divide between democrats and republicans is paralyzing congress and making the nations problems worse.

In a new political arena now dominated by the pull of special and powerful interests, the unchecked power of self serving media outlets is evidently wide open to continuing abuse. So much so that lies and denial in the service of deliberate conflict has become for one party the order of the day. There is presently no interest in dialogue or shared decision making, let alone in the weight of evidence or data on any issue.

Over the last 30 years a broken social contract highlighted by unfair tax and huge economic disparities has sown a level of distrust in government and its institutions to so polarize the two parties to the point where for one party there is no longer even a pretense to negotiate or compromise. All voting is now consistently split along party lines.

Even worse, it is abundantly clear that democracy’s healthy contest of ideas is being actively and openly sabotaged by prominent republicans in favor of autocratic rule. A regular refusal to raise the debt ceiling without the threat of creating a constitutional crisis is symptomatic of their destructive approach to governing. It is as though the lessons of history and the sacrifice of blood and treasure made in the name of our now long established democratic heritage counts for nothing.

On that treasonous path Republicans are claiming to be no less than the true defenders of our democracy while in fact systematically plotting its destruction. It follows the same path of other wannabe self serving autocracies where truth and the rule of law are the first casualties. Presently more than 60 percent of republicans still believe or claim to believe the election was stolen from Trump. They desperately embrace the make believe world of their indoctrinators because it validates an attitude driven entirely by false grievance.

From being the proud, formidable and vital component of a thriving democracy with proven ideas and ideals, it has devolved through lies, election denials, and conspiracy theories into one which stands for even less than nothing. Thanks to the power and influence of the Federalist Society (and the Electoral College) even the Supreme Court, the pinnacle of our democracy and traditionally respected for their stated independence and neutrality, upon gaining three new Trump appointees has lost much if not all of its credibility as the indispensable, impartial and critical third leg of our government.

In the firm grip of a far to the right wing agenda and the corrupting influence of corporate donors it too now poses an existential threat to the constitutional order. Judicial independence is now very much under assault and to the great detriment of our democratic inheritance and the formidable role it plays in the safeguard of the rule of law and our freedom.

Accusing the accuser has long since been a tactic employed by authoritarian movements. In addition, disinformation, conspiracy theories, voter intimidation, false claims of fraud and even the dismantling of existing election apparatus not under their control, are now the shameless tactics of their open subversion. And to be clear - nothing is more basic to the functioning of our democratic republic than the vote count. Unfavorable results in coming elections will again be declared by their appointees to be fraudulent and therefor null and void.

The Unfinished Promise of Equality

Past attempts to subvert our fragile democracy have so far failed. If Human rights have only slowly and grudgingly expanded in the US it is because of a lingering resistance to fully embrace the binding principles of a truly representative system of government. Indeed from the very start equal rights ran counter to an inherited sense of white superiority, privilege and entitlement manifestly displayed in the legal ownership of slaves - a human condition going all the way back to biblical times when blacks too owned slaves.

Let's not forget that we truly qualified as a representative republic only after 1968 when the black vote was included for the first time following the passage of hard won civil rights legislation. Prior to that it was in all but name a white mans democracy and certainly not multi racial. Even now the electoral college device still succeeds in effectively undermining the popular vote count as do still unchecked voter suppression tactics. So if we wish to be true to the aspirations of its mission statement we must continue striving on an authentic democratic republic path.

We should also dispel any naive smug notion that America could never become another Authoritarian State. Indeed how can a nation which flourished on the backs of slaves ever deny we were not in truth authoritarians to begin with. It took no less than a deadly civil war to stem the tide and stench of that shameful start in the American story. Yes, it was about gaining our freedom, but also about the most fundamental of freedoms we denied in that horrific process to countless millions of innocent victims including those indigenous.

In retrospect rebellion against the English crown in demand for freedom and independence was in reality only a shallow pretext given the self-righteous theocratic make up of those early invaders of the new world - ironically seeking their refuge from the tyranny of the old. Indeed remnants of much of the puritanical baggage which landed with them survives still today disguised in the service of bigoted white nationalist agendas. Clearly, this is not a difficult case to make based on all the chronicled evidence in the public record.

So was liberty and freedom subsequently just an expedient banner? The truth is that from the beginning its binding principle of "equal justice for all," only selectively applied to the white population and not their imported slaves or the indigenous people they displaced so mercilessly - and all in the delusional belief this was fully endorsed by holy scripture and its most compliant self righteous faithful fulfilling no less than "gods" own plan for their ill-gotten gains.

The human capacity for total delusion and denial in the face of such an obvious contradiction even among such scholarly intellectual elites as Jefferson, must surely undermine any faith in the powers that be of any stripe, be they church or state. That is the inherited legacy of our past

misfortune our new constitution was designed to prevent. And yet here we are, collectively none the wiser.

Historically, aspiring democracies have always struggled to survive because much of the dark side of human nature continues to be instinctively cut from the same primeval mold. Right over might has rarely succeeded and only briefly under exceptional conditions. Such were the circumstances and unholy human price paid for the fortuitous deliverance of our nations "Declaration of Independence." There was indeed nothing "right" about the ownership of slaves who were treated as simply chattel.

Its shameful origin and hypocrisy aside, it's ambitious appeal to the superior moral values which it so aspires to, meant it was from its revolutionary beginning vulnerable, nor could it ever be taken for granted. Its survival as a work in progress would always need to be championed and never has the threat to our democratic republic been so hostile as it is now.

Various forces on many levels of harmful endeavor are now conspiring to make the current fragile state of our democracy alarmingly different from similar past conditions. In contrast with recent history there is to begin with, an absolute lack of character, honor and integrity in the common makeup of the so called "Conservative" Party leadership of our government. No wonder the electorate has lost any faith and trust in their government as a whole.

Historically "Politics" has always attracted a broad and all-inclusive spectrum of characters. In this instance birds of a feather have flocked together so conspicuously, to the point that their common stamp is unmistakable. Hence the growing number of independents who see our democracy being shamelessly hijacked. The vital need for compromise and negotiation has clearly been willfully abandoned by one of the two original parties and replaced with unveiled threats of violent sedition, alarmingly much like those which led to America's civil war over slavery, the legacy of which survives in America still today. Yes indeed, our innate human condition insures that our democracy can never be taken for granted.

Was it not John Adams who ominously said: "Democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts and then murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide. It is in vain to say democracy is less vain, less proud, less ambitious, less avaricious than aristocracy or monarchy. It is not true in fact, and nowhere appears in history. Those passions are the same in all men under all systems of simple government and when unchecked produce the same effects of fraud, violence & cruelty."

Given the alarming state of our political discourse, is this the irreversible path we are now on? Has America's democracy finally run its course? John Adams was a scholar of the highest order but even he did not know what he did not or in deed could not know. American democracy in spite of its gross imperfections was about to unleash upon the oppressed world an unprecedented creative force - the insatiable power and imagination of free men able to fulfill their dreams.

So successful over time has the power of liberty's model proven to be in the service of free will, that alas, even corrupt interests are equally served and will thus always be an on going threat to its very survival. The scale and scope of our nations past technological achievements have been a remarkable success story and one beyond even Jefferson's powerful imagination. Information

technology has in our time also set the stage for developments far ahead of our compromised ability to anticipate or much less to control it.

Disinformation, Fear, and Minority Rule

The wholesale exploitation of a new era of social media for disinformation and propaganda purposes in the service of wannabe authoritarians such as Putin or Trump was likewise never anticipated. The “media” is indeed the message as ominously predicted early in its infancy more than fifty years ago. But little did we know that it would be a total game changer. Even now the existential threat it represents to our democracy is not being addressed with the urgency it demands. What upon its introduction appeared just like the invention of the printing press, to be so timely and instrumental in providing a means of vital mass communication, was within a few years turned into a dangerous disinformation network through Facebook, Twitter and other now ubiquitous social media platforms.

The alarming visuals they can with a single click relay to millions of followers on hook, has already provoked enough violent emotion to trigger ugly, if not deadly insurrection. Guns outnumber people in the US by a huge margin. Gun violence too has become an alarming norm in America while the most popular TV station Fox, objectively drives fear, division and victimization in the name of profit. Indeed the shameless radicalization by Fox News of its consumers is plainly visible.

This dangerous human phenomenon was the primary reason why our constitution was designed no less than by seasoned graduates of history to diffuse the power of any single self serving figure such as the president. Historically the assassination of Caesar was the radical manifestation of the threat he posed to democracy by his personal ambition. The founding fathers did not anticipate however, that all three branches of government could be so willfully corrupted in the name of collective power, that the checks and balance they each represented and asserted on each other would likewise collapse.

The urgent mission to correct course now has a visible deadline but only to those knowledgeable of democracy’s historic struggle for survival and who truly understand what’s at stake. There will be no turning back. This is the transcendent point in time and place where the potential for global democracy to overcome autocracy lies precariously in the balance.

Presently extreme right wing mercenary networks driven only by their pathetic ignorance and the power they seek from higher ratings are effectively promoting the proven “divide and conquer strategy” in contaminating minds and hearts at a pace and level far beyond our present capabilities to protect against it. The deception is already so complete that a violent attack on the nations Capital was ironically incited by Trump in the name of “saving our country”.

The question is again, “Why do they drink the sand and not the water?” They no longer know the difference, is the common assessment. Fear, greed, ignorance and hate have indeed always been identified as the enemy of a functioning democracy. As noted by Jefferson, public education is not just the responsibility of government but it’s obligation if democracy is to fulfill its illusive promise. It is the very linchpin of democracy.

So we are now paying the horrific price of our failure to educate our society and to protect it against the familiar enemies of ignorance, greed and corruption. It plays perfectly well into the hands of the no nothing control freaks. It is also no accident that the anti science party has emerged as the wannabe autocrats. Their growing fear of becoming a white minority is being stoked by Trumps autocrats with a view to forcefully retaining its control of government by any means necessary. It was indeed from the start a fear of rebellion from the enslaved and indigenous population that made provision of the second amendment and the right to bear arms so necessary and critical to a white supremest mindset.

The enemy they had created at home motivated the need for an armed "Militia" as much as any threats from across the Atlantic. That same fear of the "enemy within" is still now being stoked in the service of winning elections even though it is the white supremacists who are stoking armed violence. It wholly accounts for the obsession with guns in the American culture even today on the part of that same paranoid element of the population.

We were never one nation or one people. It is why common sense actions like background checks and exclusion of military style weapons required by our government to control gun violence is proving to be so difficult a pill to swallow for a paranoid right wing committed to perpetuating that fear for the sake of sustaining its political power. They also are beholden to the financial support they depend on from the NRA.

It's sworn allegiance to our constitution and honoring the sacrifice of millions of American patriots who paid the ultimate price in its defense, is apparently irrelevant to their present existential cause and no longer serves their purpose. With regard to emigration alone, whites have gone from 90% to 60% of the population as the make up of emigrants vital to sustaining our economy went from almost exclusively European between 1925 and 1965 to a more inclusive geographical mix. A white fearful establishment apparently finds the perceived threat of this growing reality unacceptable on many levels of their false sense of entitlement. It also explains why for minorities of color and women in general equal rights and justice under the law is still an unkept promise.

Yet the growing number of these disaffected minorities is such that general elections cannot be won without their support - a fact with which republicans are unwilling to come to terms. Their openly racist views conflict with the changing dynamics of a pluralistic society which simply demands equal rights and equal pay for equal work under the law. When this happens the record shows we all flourish. In fact the existing establishment benefits the most. So what's the problem?

As such Trumps promotion of fear and hate with no room for compromise has found its easy mark. A preoccupation with voter suppression and the high-jacking of the election apparatus has now become a shameless obsession in their pursuit of power - apparently with or without Trump as president. Another declaration that the vote was "rigged" and therefore invalid, will set the stage for armed conflicts for which the attack on the Capital was just a dry run.

It is a fact too, that based on the popular vote, democrats have won 7 of the 8 last elections but this is not reflected in our out dated electoral college system where state electors are disproportionately assigned to each state. Minority rule is consequently not an uncommon result, which is of course contrary to the functional integrity of our system of government. (eg. both Bush and

Trump) It speaks to the unyielding power of the white majority establishment that this state of affairs has been allowed to perpetuate itself thus far.

The Imminent Threat to Our Democracy

So ironically, the greatest threat to this on-going experiment in democracy is as John Adams anticipated, now coming not from familiar foreign enemies but from those home grown. For the Republican Party, subverting our democracy is the only objective goal they are focused on. An adopted policy of deception has always been easier than honest persuasion for an aspiring autocratic brand intent on usurping power at any cost, not least of which is any long abandoned sense of duty and integrity let alone loyalty to their sworn oath to uphold the constitution. They are effectively “the anti-constitution party.” This can be seen as a profound failure of imagination from GOP party leadership for choosing to harbor and reflect white supremest sentiments, and for being on the wrong side of Americas history, but truth is, they really can’t help themselves.

Democracy’s ship now no longer courses ahead from the forward thrust of opposing forces from left and right but is instead being sunk through a mutinous sabotage. In the shameless process, lust for the political spoils of power and control has overtaken old fashioned notions of honor, equal justice and fair play and with it the essential ethical and moral underpinnings of our democracy. A collective moral deficit has always been a detriment critical to human progress and one on which church and state powers have always relied.

The values and safeguards embodied in our constitution, which of course all republican congressmen swore an oath to uphold and protect, have now been replaced by a culture of loyalty and obedience to Trump. Making the belief that the election was stolen is the new center piece of the Republican Party platform. By denying the results of a free and fair election he is thereby making the rejection of American democracy a major part of what it is to be a Republican.

Trump’s offensive rhetoric too is now a tactic emulated rather than rejected by his cult of followers. Denial is the expedient path of least resistance chosen by all those too weak to live up to their sacred oath of office and the moral values embodied in our constitution. They don’t want to risk the possibility of not being re-elected and losing all the exclusive perks that come with a job for which they obviously don’t by definition deserve or qualify for.

So these Republican congressmen are just being who they choose to be or what they have been from the start - self serving and power hungry. It is simply their nature. Their jobs are more dear to them than their country and its democracy of which they are effectively and ironically the primary beneficiaries. Hypocrisy knows no bounds when it is so brazen and unashamed.

Such behavior has however always been a problematic human condition. Respect for the written, let alone the unwritten rules is not in their playbook. “They cannot be reasoned with. Even recent history teaches it is beyond their reach. It can only be defeated. If not at the ballot box then regrettably on the battlefield.” A quote by Winston Churchill as relevant to our time as it was in

the prewar years of Nazi Germany. After all the full spectrum of what constitutes “human nurture” has not changed.

As such, shared common truths or morals no longer provide a lifeline for saving democracy. The integrity of the election process itself is being systematically and purposely corrupted along with established conservative values. The temptation to cheat a system founded on a premise of fair play is too irresistible for those so predisposed to gaming the process. They are contriving the outdated workings of our democracy to elect an autocracy. That one of our long esteemed parties has fallen from grace would be a gross understatement. A stern reminder that democracy is “never more than one generation away from extinction.”

The only viable line of defense left now was provided for in the creation of our two tier system of government which separates federal and state authority and gives all 50 States the power to act individually in the interest of local rights. Their governors are using State powers to successfully curb the grab for autonomous power and excessive reach of the Trump administration in the courts in spite of their control of all three branches of the Federal Government. Ultimately it will however come down to their removal at the ballot box.

The Seeds of Discontent

Change in the economic welfare of American workers resulting from the export of their jobs rather than their products, accounts for much of the growing grievance and distrust of the political establishment and their perceived complicity in such a betrayal. Because obvious profit motives behind such investments flowing out of the country are detrimental to the interests of American workers, it has placed the essential principle if not the results of the capitalist model under valid scrutiny.

Global economic forces driving change in the marketplace for labor and its products is however, also a fact of life and a consequence of our thirst for material progress. But it has become fashionable for politicians to exploit this opportunity to make their gains even when out of context. The truth is that the West must progressively elevate its skill sets to always stay ahead or we will be out bid by more willing and aspiring global competitors.

In spite of the abundance of positive evidence for its benefits, the recurring contest of ideals as one between Capitalism and Socialism has been fueled by a sense of betrayal and simply regarded as mutually exclusive. But history tells us that for any successful society to flourish socialisms safety net plays a vital role. It would otherwise collapse under its own material success. A humane society provides for those less gifted or handicapped who inevitably get left behind in its wake. However, it's role must be a basic safety net - not an alternative lifestyle for those who want to game the system.

Capitalism too should never be a welfare program for the rich or “donor” class who can legally game the system they have effectively financed. It is currently the root cause of so much disparity

in our tax structure. Underfunding of vital services such as education and healthcare ultimately accrues inevitably to the financial detriment of all dependents from top to bottom of the economic spectrum as demonstrated so alarmingly by Covid. It is not only shortsighted but counterproductive. Equity is thus a clear, practical and material choice not only a moral and ethical contest.

This characterizes the essential difference in the make up and visible split within the Republican Party or indeed between both right and left wing parties. The conservative argument for its cause can be made so much more convincingly simply by acknowledging the truth regarding our human condition. Only feeble minds need to resort to lies which in the end go nowhere we want to be. Just look at the sorry historical saga of the Russian people suffering their pitiful lives under a banner of fear, corruption and all the endless deceptive lies contrived to support it.

The truth is, Socialism has effectively become capitalism's essential partner. The testimony of so much recent human history makes that most clear. Health, education and social security must in a civilized progressive society be accessible to all. It is obviously in our common interest if nothing else, as the last global pandemic demonstrated so tragically. We will all ultimately rise or fall together- now more than ever.

Climate change and pandemics are clearly sufficient fresh evidence of our need to act in the common interest or suffer deadly consequences. Philanthropy is never enough. We are all on some level the beneficiaries of capitalism and have therefore a dutiful obligation to give back in the form of taxation to the very society that sustains us. In doing so we all insure nothing less than our own survival.

The unyielding policies on the part of republicans towards long overdue improvements in social welfare - particularly health care, while recklessly passing excessive tax breaks for the donor class are totally out of step with the demands of our progressive times and the extreme economic divides they have created. They also inevitably lead to severe budget deficits which customarily get blamed on democrats though the record shows quite the opposite. Records also show that for decades the wages of labor in the US have not kept pace with inflation or the rising cost of living. Wages are less in value now than they were in 1973.

Indeed the number of American jobs shipped overseas enticed by cheap labor have soared while taxes on those resulting profits to participating American corporations have also been parked off shore in tax free havens. The net result has been deprived maintenance funding of the social safety net and our vital physical infrastructure, leaving our nations work force increasingly far short of its competitive edge.

With such a one-sided track record of their own making, Republicans know from falling numbers that they cannot win a fair election contest even according to long established rules designed in their favor. So they have conspired to change how the game is to be played by shamelessly committing to a new playbook - one of further rigging the election process itself. This is in spite of a system already contrived in their favor whereby the democrats with a majority of 42 million votes, have only 50 senate seats of 100 total. Constant lying, cheating and obstruction is now their proud policy of choice. They are regrettably no longer the party with powerful, proven, principled ideas to which freedom loving Americans can strongly espouse.

They have also recklessly abandoned any fidelity to our democratic republic or its constitution. Any legitimacy as a trustworthy opposition party serving our democratic institutions is thus all but forfeit. Instead they have become a willing hostage in the corrupted Trump brand of autocracy. So much so that no less than the future of our hard won democratic republic is now at stake. Told their culture has been hijacked, Trump offers them a way to take it back.

The Trump Dilemma

The party of Trump, originally the party of Lincoln has thus been openly transformed in his visibly corrupt image. True to his heritage, Trump has always monetized every opportunity and media event of his own promotion. His faithful are totally on board with his pronouncements regardless of any moral or ethical considerations they violate.

Nor has his criminality ever been of any consequence to them. As such the overly simplistic one word answer to the question of primary causation for current discord in American politics is without any doubt “Trump,” a certifiable narcissistic sociopath as unanimously diagnosed by an esteemed clinical community. If character is the ultimate measure of leadership, clearly Trump is totally lacking.

His devious persona strikes a common cord with those of his cult who would just as soon subvert than comply with the established democratic rules of contest. Trump-ism in all its forms is indeed now bigger than Trump - including his violent reptilian sense of survival and retribution. They have gone along with it, enabled and indeed affirmed it, but it is far from being a new political phenomenon in American history. Other presidents such as Abraham Lincoln and James Buchanan were also polarizing presidents though on opposite extremes on the “greatest presidents” scale. Trump is of course now rated to be the worse of all.

Thousands of books at this time have apparently been written long before and after his first term in office, some with a view to explaining the many reasons for his polarizing impact on the diverse mindset of the mainstream American electorate. However, some critical observations are perfectly clear about his character or lack of it. He is undeniably narcissistic, totally transactional in all his dealings and always to his own personal material benefit - all not uncommon traits of the successful “business man” image he likes to project. However, he is and always has been corrupt. The question is whether his republican party too is also beyond redemption.

The loss of the 2020 election to Biden was so beyond his capacity to accept that he was compelled to say the election had to be fraudulent - a claim he was making even before the election. So fragile was his ego that there was no other explanation for the result. The election was stolen from him. He was the self proclaimed injured party which thus licensed the violence and revenge he set in motion on the part of his faithful cult of followers.

What has always made him so dangerous since entering the political arena is his total lack of any sense of accountability for so many of his moral or ethical failings, let alone the abdication of the

profound responsibility which is assumed by the oath of office. His endorsement of the right wing disinformation network, deflection tactics, election subversion and voter suppression all speak to an opposite and destructive agenda. Indeed his brand of politics is synonymous only with chaos and disruption.

It is also estimated that his income while president was well over 1.5 billion - much of it in total defiance of the emoluments clause. He is a conman to boot who should never have been elected president of the US, thanks in large part to the subversive influence of our long standing autocratic adversaries with whom he strongly identifies.

He stands for everything his party claims not to stand for and attracts supporters for whom defiant authoritarian power is magnetic. Birds of a feather flock together as the expression goes. White minority rule and the inferred “MAGA” claim that the past was better, mostly appealed to the conservative white Christian male’s false sense of loss of both power and privilege which of course he blames on a growing number of minorities.

Playing the role of victim is key to his appeal to a cult of white Nationalists apprehensive about their future status as minorities continue to grow in number in a progressive welfare state. He plays on and fuels their false sense of victimhood to rally support. Strategically MAGA is a slogan designed primarily to fuel their collective fear and license to violence which their likewise radicalized party clearly refuses to condemn. Make no mistake - autocratic rule which promotes violence and white supremacy, as opposed to diversity and the rule of law is nothing but the reawakening of the monster which is fascism.

Trump was both before and after his election to the presidency able to leverage his enormous fake accomplishments as a super successful “businessman” via a popular and complicit social media, notably Fox News, Facebook and Twitter who all jumped on board for the ratings. They also appealed mostly to an aggrieved and racist segment of the American electorate which has long remained deeply entrenched in all levels of American society. His presidency from the start offered them all nothing less than legitimacy and approval at the highest level.

Contrary to boastful assertions, his incompetence and unethical practices are well documented and known to all who have had dealings with Trump -including his vengeful following for whom even the absence of a moral or ethical compass was never a problem. Indeed it would only complicate their treasonous mission to subvert our democracy at any cost. Only his inherited wealth and cunning has allowed him to game a dutiful legal system handicapped by the rules and boundaries of its own juris prudence regardless of the existential threat he surely poses to our democracy and the rule of law. The effective functioning of our institutions rely on compliance not obstruction. With respect to the law his lawyers are constantly engaged in appeals all the way to the supreme courts which delays the process for years. Even four years following his insurrection he is consequently still a free man.

Trump’s rhetoric of victimhood thus served as a catalyst for his cult of like-minded admirers but there is no doubt that they were already ripe for the taking or he could not have succeeded. All victims of a deep state conspiracy to supplant their white majority they are being denied their rightful destiny. This same false sense of victimhood which played so well for the Nazi regime, is

how in tandem with the radicalization of these same Fox News consumers, he was able to defy the behavioral norms and control of the political and legal establishment.

His elitist sense of entitlement and inflated ego which often come from unearned, inherited wealth, has from all reliable accounts of his disturbed upbringing, perverted the standard norms of behavior in all his personal, business and political relationships. An inveterate liar, defiance and non-compliance is for Trump and his enablers a badge of honor! He typically speaks and acts more like a mob boss. Established norms of protocol count for nothing even on the international stage. Most alarming of all is his contempt for the rule of law and lack of any sense of personal accountability which flies in the face of normal and necessary ethical standards we have come to expect from national leaders.

The Republican Party through Trump has however, succeeded on many levels in accomplishing its goals particularly with the new Supreme Court mix now leaning heavily to the right. For this, more than anything else their Faustian deal with the devil they know has paid off handsomely. Roe v Wade was overturned but much to their shock and surprise it cost them the 2020 election including the presidency, the house and the Senate. Don't they know how women who vote feel about this issue? The same is about to happen again in Trumps second term. Not only has he failed on women issues but even more critically on the economy. Inflation and affordability are notably the key issues he ran on.

Moving forward if the party continues to endorse Trumps behavior in spite his 92 indictments and criminal convictions, he will however, be a major detriment to his party as a whole, as exposure of his total complicity in the January 6 coup attempt and interference with the results of the Georgia State election is revealed in scandalous detail and he is finally held to account. At least that is the expectation. The question is will that be enough to ultimately persuade his party membership to abandon Trump and his autocratic aspirations or are they going to stay on that path with or without him as their president even at the cost of our democracy.

An even larger and more consequential question is whether a totally disillusioned population as a whole cares enough any more. So burned out are they by the normalization of subversion and corruption that complacency with the status quo as somehow being normal in politics is fulfilling its goal. Even more self serving, the popular retaliatory retort from the ever loyal right who want to equivocate behavior on both sides of the political divide is now, "but aren't all politicians corrupt". Of course they are not. But a party that won't or can't govern hurts everyone.

Perhaps the most ominous threat to our financially stable democracy is Trumps intellectually void obsession with the threat of higher tariffs on foreign goods as a quick and clever means of job creation and improving the economic welfare of all Americans. This in spite of all evidence to the contrary. With no knowledge or regard for the lessons of history, motivated only by the need for his own personal gain, be it material or political, he was never a worthy or qualified presidential candidate. Crony capitalism driven only by self serving political motives as opposed to sound economic principles will never succeed and inevitably reverse mutual prosperity. We all loose.

Jefferson's fearful prediction made long before women ever had the critical vote, was that given man's insatiable greed, it was only a matter of time before our latest experiment in democracy

would suffer the same fate as those of previous times. This time however, it may well prove to be wrong, if only because Trump's attempt at subversion is proving utterly handicapped by his hand-picked administration's incompetence and indiscriminate violence even toward mothers and their children.

Already twice impeached and found guilty by a jury of peers on numerous criminal counts, he has yet to be held to account thanks only to his reelection by a slim majority of the electorate, including disaffected democrats who felt abandoned by their party. However incompetence may well prove to be the unforgivable sin to a struggling mainstream electorate, particularly independents now exhausted by his boastful false promises on reducing inflation and issues of affordability. Nor has his indiscriminate and brutal handling of immigrants softened his appeal to growing minority populations without whose vote he cannot win.

The Enablers

His lifelong arrogance, sense of entitlement and willingness not to play by the rules while taking full advantage of those who do and without being held to account, has also attracted some of the wealthiest at his calling to bankroll violence and chaos at every turn through the use of openly willing surrogates ultimately committed to a path of sedition.

Groups such as Proud Boys International, Three Percenters, The Oath Keepers, 1st Amendment Praetorians and many other less known domestic terrorists who, waving iconography of hate, have normalized violence across the nation culminating in the planned insurrection of Jan 6th - a product entirely of the "big lie" promoted by Trump's unfounded claims of a rigged election. His party too has continued to deny any responsibility for the attack on the Capital and enable the on-going manufacture of election fraud where none exists - all with a view to undermining the validity of future election results. Most complicit in all of this are a select number of Trump's henchmen in the extreme right wing of the party who have behind the scenes both orchestrated much of the domestic extremism motivated by Trump and the subsequent obstruction of the ensuing investigations.

In the on-going disinformation process, proven facts have become open to opinion and blatant lies labeled "alternative facts" in the standard Trump narrative. In the absence of truth, the faith and trust in democracy's institutions is thus being deliberately and systematically undermined, setting a familiar stage for an era of tyrannical rule. In not resisting the corruption of their party's values, republicans have failed the moral test of our time - a failure which must be held to account if our democracy is to be restored.

Some would say we are only reaping the tragic fallout from the dumbing down of America, for it should be more than obvious that Trump was not in any sense a worthy candidate for the president of any aspiring democratic state - on any level. Such was the level of distrust and disillusionment

with the status quo that “better the devil you know” became the popular excuse for voting in the alternative to Clinton.

In so doing gross ignorance, incompetence and corruption gained preference over intelligence and experience by enough of a margin to win the day. Four disastrous years later, in spite of loosing his bid for re-election, this disgraced, twice impeached ex-president continues to claim the election was stolen - and on that fraudulent note to grift the financial and popular support of his cult of followers to the point where his continued endorsement is still vital to any conservative candidates who fear loosing a primary to an alternative Trump pick if they don't demonstrate total allegiance. It is for them much easier to keep fooling people than to live up to the higher ideals and demands of honest leadership. So, united by their very nature, they collectively go along with their liar in chief.

Just the speculation that he will be a presidential candidate in the next election was sufficient to sustain the on- going solicitation of donors rich and poor alike, for hundreds of millions in funds used as much to subsidize an already lavish personal lifestyle. So dependent is his party membership on these loyalists that they have approved the payment from party coffers of up to one and a half million dollars for his personal legal defense fees for law suits dating back before his presidency.

The only two senators who have dared to speak out against the ex-president particularly for his incitement of the insurrection have been ostracized and shamed out of the party while those spewing hate and racial bigotry have received their total blessing. In fact there is no tolerance for any departure from the party line. Their policy is to continue to sew the seeds of chaos and confusion for the sole purpose of vandalizing our democracy and the earnest efforts of the governing party to defend and sustain it.

Following in that same premeditated path of other notable authoritarian movements, they will in due course offer themselves as our only saviors from the very chaos they are creating. Indeed Trump has already told us from the outset that the free press is the enemy of the people and that “ he alone can fix it.” His true calling has indeed always been that of a dictator.

Enjoined in these focused efforts to subvert our democracy, its foreign enemies, most prominently authoritarian states like Russia, China, North Korea and Iran openly mock and undermine our democratic system at every turn to argue that it obviously does not work. That “Democracy” is too impractical. There are too many opinions and special interests impeding decisive action. Hence the proverbial stalemate. It is indeed a valid argument made more so when the goals are uncompromising and subversive.

Oligarchs of the West have thus made a natural common cause with those of the East in the subversion of a hitherto thriving, functioning and progressive democracy, still the envy of the world in spite of all its shortcomings and imperfections. Together they have engaged in feeding the populist propaganda machine of an opportunistic segment of major social media platforms with Trump inspired lies, to continuously refuel remnants of latent bigotry and hate - evidently still flourishing globally as in far right factions of the conservative West.

In echoing the alarming sounds of now infamous and familiar 20th century autocratic movements in murderous chapters of recent human history, the innocent targets of their blame and hate are once again minorities of religion, race or color. They rally the support of their gullible and aggrieved white faithful, only to unite them in feeding rather than relieving the cause of human misery. Prejudice has always been a most reliable force in the fearful service of tyranny.

As the ultimate bastion of hope for liberty and freedom around the world, the success of Americas experiment in democracy is vital to its survival. Will it go the way of the Greek or Roman experiments or will it live up to its renewed promise? That debate is on-going. So far at least, we have been the fortunate beneficiaries of a democracy which our American pioneering forefathers created against all odds and willingly defended with their lives.

Yet it is easily taken for granted by unknowing and unworthy generations who will only miss it when it is lost and all because we failed our duty as a nation to live up to the inescapable obligations it imposes on its pretenders. The fearful consequences of that failure will reverse if not repeat a familiar and tragic sequence in human history but with no recourse.

Part II: Religion, Belief, and Reason

American Democracy, Religion, and the Rule of Law

To appreciate the true nature and value of our unique brand of American Democracy it is essential to understand what it is in practice and what it is not. Democracy, to be clear is not a carte blanche insurance policy for collective freedom, because it can by its very nature easily be manipulated to serve those who want to game it as we are witnessing first hand with Trump.

There is in fact nothing in our democracy (within reasonable limits), which prevents anyone from spreading self serving disinformation or even complete falsehoods. This is nothing new in American politics. Either we are a free society or not. Our democracy, given all the fundamental freedoms which it allows, can on that point be said to be anti democratic. We are indeed all free to believe whatever we want true or false. This level of freedom is both its strength and its Achilles heal.

To an aggrieved faithful, lies and deception have under Trump's banner become the hallmark of Republican identity. It is a policy far less demanding than actually governing which is what they are elected and paid to do. Arguably Trump is the poster boy, if not a new embodiment of our democracy. He is however, ironically actually exercising his rights under our democracy even when he is seemingly undermining it.

Checks and balances were consequently provided by the framers of our constitution to guard against its abuse by any aspiring autocrat. It is a fact that free speech will always be a double edge sword. Following the civil war it was certainly anticipated that the traitorous spirit would not simply disappear which is why the 14th amendment (notably section 3) came into being. More than a hundred and fifty years later Trump is the 21st century version of such a treasonous threat. He is defiantly choosing to be oblivious to the rule of law, the Bill of Rights and the limitation of powers of the federal government, let alone the separation of powers.

He has more alarmingly demonstrated that he has no concept of an independent judiciary. These are all critical elements for a functioning democracy without which we will forfeit our individual rights and return to tyrannical rule. This is what makes Trump and his cult of followers so dangerous given that there are in America far too many who identify with his self serving

grievance brand of politics and who have no knowledge or regard for the foundational principles of our democracy. So they make perfect targets for his manipulation.

Escape from religious persecution, economic plight or famine is what first attracted the early settlers. The new frontier also provided for its teaming millions, an unprecedented opportunity to realize the American Dream. A dream which, following the example of the French Revolution soon flourished in the desire for self government, untethered to the excesses of a sovereign crown and firmly committed to the principle of separation of church and state in all its affairs.

American democracy has to date thrived and survived far beyond expectations in spite of inevitable human struggles, not least of which was with slavery upon which much of the material wealth on both sides of the Atlantic was shamelessly acquired. Americas democratic model as contradictory as its declaration for freedom and independence was from the start and has against all odds since, made it the most trusted and chosen refuge for all who have fled the misery and failure of ruthless and suppressive autocratic or theistic states obsessed with power.

These emigrants also brought with them the practice of native traditional religious beliefs all of which have had an influence on the political makeup, mindset and morality of the American people at large. None currently more so than self righteous Christian evangelicals, both white and brown who have been more aptly labeled the “Imposter Christianity” for all their violation of foundational principles. One in three evangelicals is now a person of color and their politics is accordingly far more progressive than those of white evangelicals to whom they are in terms of appropriate recognition virtually invisible.

Clearly, white Christian nationalism denies the truth, sanctifies lies and is effectively responsible for spreading, not curbing racism. It is at its core also burdened if not misguided by an inherited belief that our country was founded as a Christian nation, although our constitution never mentions God and enshrines the separation of church and state. Its self-righteous faithful thus twist biblical language to justify violence, sexism and hostility towards people of color even though it does on the surface at least, not always appear to be deliberate or malign in nature.

It stems no doubt from a failure to recognize their own (inherited) prejudice, but there are now millions of black, latino, African and Asian evangelical Christians in America who are evidently the only factor reversing the growing trend toward their otherwise falling numbers. None the less, they are all blindly threatening our larger democratic cause and effectively their own lifeline because whenever the most vital of all democratic institutions, ie, the rule of law, conflicts with the power of religious beliefs, the very nature and life of our fragile democracy is effectively being undermined. Respect for religious freedom does come at a price but it should never be self destruction.

The record also shows that Religions’ hold on personal belief has often been a pawn in that power struggle for mind control and accordingly now conflicts with a basic premise of a viable democratic process. Whenever the law ends (religious) tyranny begins. Separation of church and state is a basic if not vital premise of our democracy.

For a complacent religious “faithful” - by nature most prone to settle for simple minded, comforting solutions as it is indeed indoctrinated to do, it presents an imposed and serious moral dilemma

as for example, on the rights of the unborn, versus a woman's right to choose. (Vis a vis Roe v Wade.) a matter in America of settled law. Yet it has been reversed by a Supreme Court which like other members of vital institutions of our government can no longer claim to be faithful to their oath to guard and protect our constitution.

In the minds of the dutiful faithful such profound moral issues loom so large that they easily fall prey to all the self serving and hostile politics of fear and division so familiar throughout the history of both church and state. The promotion of accessible health care including birth control which emanated from the post Roe versus Wade era has advanced all its related causes by enhancing the value and dignity of human life - most of all for would be mothers and their right to make their own choices.

Neither the federal or state government has any right to interfere with such deeply personal issues. That would violate a fundamental premise embodied in our constitution and is the essential argument in Roe v Wade. This is another fact which has fallen victim to the politics of hollow, self-serving religious beliefs. There will regrettably always be abortions. The question is, will it be safe. From a purely statistical evaluation it would be folly to compare numeric data before and after women's legal right to choose was legislated because we will never know how many innocent victims of back alley abortions fell prey to illicit practices.

The Republican Party while claiming to stand for limited government is practicing the exact opposite while chipping away at civil liberties through draconian legislation. The hollow pretense held by conservatives of caring for the lives of the unborn while continually failing to approve critical legislation to protect the young lives of tens of thousands killed through gun violence each year is yet another example of a misguided party and its religious faithful who share no moral principles. They are pro birth- not pro life. "Faith" is apparently more powerful than facts.

For aspiring autocrats to succeed in dismantling democracy and reversing all it's hard won gains, history also demonstrates how they must first undermine, discredit and usurp the prevailing rule of law. To that end, religious indoctrination will always be an effective tool, because by invoking "gods" name, even superficially, it promises to hold larger than life expectations for all who are "faithful".

Trust in the Lord who loves you is thus equated in their mindset with trust in your fellowship of Christian authority. Hitler of course understood this all too well which is why he was so successful in blindsiding a whole generation of Christians in complicity with the genocidal nature of his hateful mission.

Good and Bad Philosophies

It is self-evident that good and bad philosophies co-exist in all man made doctrines of any religion because many a false premise upon which they are often based will always lead to misguided conclusions and fateful consequences.

Critical thinking is a capability not taught or even encouraged by religious institutions because it is inherently counter productive to their cause. The integrity and sustainability of a constitutional democracy governed by the rule of law is however undermined by faithful followers of any

religion who cannot comply with the foundational premise of our constitution of separation of church and state without which they would all be denied that basic freedom of worship.

Like Religion our brand of Democracy is also very much a “man made” product though evidently not as easy to establish or sustain. As such it comes with no permanent guarantee and is as we have seen, far from self-supporting. Indeed it demands constant vigilance or it will surely perish in spite of all the past sacrifice of innocent blood and treasure shed in its name, and with it the illusive cause of liberty and freedom for one and all in a fair and just society.

Religion on the other hand is quite different, even if it too shares aspirational goals promoted at the expense of blood and treasure. It is, in contrast very much authoritarian by design and nature. It is also unavoidably promoted through the illusionary nature of “make believe” because its foundational credos must presume to know of all gods benevolent plans for mankind’s past, present and future existence.

Also key is, of course, the promise of a heavenly reward for our unquestioning faith in, and compliance with “Gods” rules. A not so unreasonable bargain for its most dutiful faithful - except of course, that it plays right into the opportunistic hands of its many self serving and earthly promoters. Violators on the other hand deserve to no less than gods ultimate penalty of eternal damnation. Such an easy choice and so reassuring.

The God Question

For thoughtful Skeptics who require a more honest and valid premise upon which to deposit their faith, it comes down to the basic, original and enduring if not most contentious question of all, debated from numerous perspectives by our most esteemed scholars both inside and outside the clergy, which is of course, “The god question,” or more specifically, did god create man or man create god? - An open question which “God” clearly chooses not to answer for us directly and unequivocally - unless of course we want to believe the dubious and delusional words (and motives) of self proclaimed prophets together with all their dutiful believers. It is a pivotal question and one which we must answer individually for ourselves unless we want to be the willing pawns of those who assume the role of our lord and master utilizing religion as a proven means to that end.

Why does this matter so much and who are we really accountable to? On earth we must surely be accountable first and foremost to each other here and now. Justice dispensed beyond the grave is of no consequence or consolation to innocent and aggrieved victims. That is unless of course, one is otherwise persuaded by the power of religious indoctrination. All such fallacies are possible and even promoted in the willful mind of “make believe.”

“Reason” and the rule of “secular” law on the other hand, sets a more rational, fitting and worthy expectation in the service of mankind. Democracies unlike autocracies even demand it. In choosing (a luxury only afforded in America by virtue of our hard won freedom to choose)

we can effectively steer toward either a future earthly heaven or a man made hell for ourselves. A matter of our own “free will” as commonly expressed through the ages. So if we are where we are it must be a collective genetic weakness or failing of our species if not fatal flaw in our evolutionary design, one which time and opportunity may still possibly correct. Trump and his enablers are sending us in the reverse direction

At the extremes, life experience is for the many by chance, already as close to hell on earth, while for a privileged few as close to heaven as we can conceive, if indeed heaven ever was valued as a material reward. Truth is, unearned power and privilege only distorts and dulls the senses of even the most conscious of vessels and always to the detriment of all who must pay the price of human delusion and arrogance. If life experience for so many resembles hell on earth that must ultimately be a failing of the rest of us for our lack of humanity. That’s the reality of our human condition for which there is truly no redeeming value to its victims - unless of course we are gods faithful “believers”.

In that sense “religion is in deed the opium of the people.” Such inequities have for them been so cleverly reconciled in the promise of an afterlife that all earthly suffering is willingly endured in a holy transaction. The unearned suffering of its followers is thus rewarded and even identified with higher spiritual aspirations as ultimately embodied in the symbolic crucifix.

In the absence of any credible proof for their declarations, “believers” must always fall back on the shallow emptiness of “faith” to compensate for their unprovable beliefs. To acknowledge that we simply don’t know or rather don’t want to know the truth, is a much harder proposition. That past condition is firmly set in the frozen realm of a permanent childhood existence and surely not one which is in keeping with current consciousness - unless of course we choose to continue to be willing subservients to Religions’ cause and those who want to exploit it.

The Trouble with Beliefs: The Enduring Power of Truth

To more recent and enlightened generations, the growing power of the appeal of honesty, integrity and reason over the “make believe” nature of any religion, has been a profound game changer in the contest of that power struggle for mindful persuasion. Evidently, when people “believe” strongly enough, that, for them creates a firm reality and becomes a personal truth. Non believers too, lean on the power of “faith”, but faith in our common humanity and in the democratic process as guaranteed by the application and enforcement of the rule of law or more precisely “Secular Law.”

So confused if not irrational is the nature of Christian belief that whether vertical authority (directed to God) or horizontal (centered on man) should be its intended focus of worship and obedience, is still being debated at the highest level by its allied apologists. Surely the only

direction of our focus should be inward not upward or sideways. Love thy neighbor as thyself should come readily to mind as the most relevant doctrine governing the essence of our common humanity.

Human History is indeed all but drenched in the blood of innocent victims of all man made religions, and more often in a heavenly gods name. We have come a long way in the evolution of our consciousness as a Gallop pole now indicates 6 out of 10 people would vote for an atheist candidate for president which represents a dramatic change in outlook compared with even 20 years ago.

There has and always will be rich and confused debate on the related topics of politics, religion, morality and life beyond the grave, all of which can suggest a higher calling or purpose for human existence beyond the on-going challenge of mere survival. Unlike other animal species which lack the same capacity for intellectual contemplation, we are certainly more creative and wishful creatures capable of profound deceptions, delusions or even romantic notions about our existence both tangible or abstract.

Arguably however it is to varying degrees the contemplative power of the human conscience which ultimately sets us apart from other species in reconciling honest beliefs with compatible behavior. Human conscience is not however, a uniform attribute. In some it would indeed appear to be non existent. At its highest level on the other hand it can transform rare selfless human beings into powerful modern day prophets such as Gandhi, whose relatively selfless, peaceful approach to resolving conflict on so many levels has by any measure changed the course of human history. At its lowest and regrettably more common level, morally corrupted, self serving men into inhuman monsters. eg. Hitler or Stalin.

For successive generations, handed down religion can provide the stability, order, structure and discipline they need or seek for a meaningful life. But unlike most other topics, our debate on this loaded subject inevitably gets us into conflict with each other's inherited, diverse and often irrational spiritual or religious beliefs. Questions relating to creation for example, have now inevitably become more the province of science which has often rendered religions' explanations totally fictitious if not nonsensical!

Apologists will of course now say that, "of course scripture was never intended to be literal in its meaning." How convenient and so typical of the brand. Tell that to all the victims of so much of its hateful and divisive messaging. Our common humanity is so foundational to any meaningful doctrine and yet only in the more reasoned and philosophically based preachings of Buddhism is that so clearly affirmed. Hence its appeal.

So to begin with, a fair premise to any rational debate on the subject of religion must be, that all human beliefs associated with religion - however much they may claim to be spiritually inspired and with good intentions, are first and foremost man made. Any claim to the contrary must beg credible proof which no one, not even the most esteemed of our religious leaders has ever produced.

The simple fact of the matter is that there is no proof - only an accumulated abundance of misguided, self serving and devious scholarly intellect, of all brands, from Saint Thomas Aquinas

to C. W. Lewis to Richard Dawkins and countless others, which is never quite able to square the circle to meet the challenge - or we would surely be in a very different place in this debate. Even Einsteins esteemed comments or reference to “God” have been interpreted and misinterpreted in and out of context to suit all desired positions.

Another astrophysicist Steven Hawkins arguably a worthy successor to Einstein, left little room for doubt in his faith in the supremacy and power of reason in his comments regarding the human brain which he likened to a computer. “It will stop working one day when one of its critical components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers. That is a fairy tail for people afraid of the dark.” It is a primeval fear which has been exploited by authoritarian rulers throughout history and will continue to do so because fear and punishment is easier to dispense.

It summarily expresses a rational point of view based on the evidence or absence thereof. By any measure Stephen Hawkins’ tragic and yet heroic life was extra-ordinary to say the least. Consider that in spite of loosing control of his entire body he was able only through sheer force of will to focus the power of his exceptional intellect on his passionate pursuit of truth in scientific discovery.

What his life so clearly demonstrated is that the human brain is indeed the consummate repository of all its accumulated thoughts and endeavors. His informed astrophysical view of the cosmos, the searching questions it continues to pose regarding its creation (or its creator) many of which he was so instrumental and insightful in exploring make his thoughtful opinions on so many related questions most valid and certainly more notable over and above those of ordinary men or women.

The brain is indeed a computer which will of course stop working one day, and it’s ashes return back to the universe which gave it birth. The only recorded trace left of its fleeting moment in the sun is what we mortals may in those rare cases choose to treasure, if only to enhance and expand the growing consciousness of the human life experience. Hawkins was such a man.

So what we believe even in good faith must be distinguished from what is “evidently” true. Or at least placed in that context. And the truth is, when there is no evidence - let alone credible proof for either side of the argument for the existence of the common notion of a benevolent “god”, an agnostic position is not an irrational position to take, even when it too leaves us with many unanswered questions - a constant hallmark of our human condition.

We have it would seem, from our earliest primeval beginnings and ultimately at great expense to our vulnerable species been left to our limited or finite resources for collective survival against all natural and man made disasters. So far we have only managed to endure not overcome them and always at a horrific human cost. Evidently, we are even by any recent account, now our own worst enemy as existential threats abound and still go unheeded.

As powerful, abundant and reliable as religious beliefs are, they have by their very nature often proven to be a divisive force, exploitable and ultimately ineffective in resolving human conflict. Indeed historically, the opposite is true. There is apparently, also nothing more creative, flexible, agile or nimble as the human mind when it comes to rationalizing religious, spiritual or even philosophical beliefs.

So much so that they have evolved over time from multiple gods of all imaginings, to singular gods, and currently back to an increasing leaning towards secular humanism as first embodied in the rationalistic, philosophical teachings of Confucius going all the way back to 500BC and earlier to Zoroastrianism (2300-1500 BC) which predates Hinduism (2000BC) and Buddhism (600 BC). We have apparently gone full circle and it has only taken 4,000 years for “reason” to inevitably triumph over “make believe”. How remarkable!

There is of course abundant evidence of significant human existence long before this relatively recent era of recorded history. Primeval instincts for basic survival necessarily prevailed long before any formative speculations on the subjective and appealing notion of the concept of a hereafter. The dominant power of the Sun as a Godlike force was associated with visible life and death cycles throughout nature.

It was as such always recognized and revered as demonstrated in the design and orientation of countless prehistoric archaeological remains on every continent. And yet it was only the dominant one of billions of visible stars in a continuous and cyclical moving cosmos to consume both the subjective and rational contemplation of any primitive or knowledgeable observer.

So, as referenced already it is noteworthy that the growing power of “Reason” and the appeal of relatable earth-bound human truths predated the advent of spiritually appealing religious beliefs and was the hallmark of Buddhism and of those practical teachings of Confucius (551-479 BCE), as opposed to those interceded later in the time line by self proclaimed “prophets” and for equitable guidance and judgement over human affairs.

Reason, however, as applied in the pursuit of verifiable truth had a much more vital appeal to the scientific community than to those of self serving material interests such as religious or sovereign institutions founded on make believe. Science and its uncompromising need for verifiable proof and corroboration is so much more honest, reliable and trustworthy.

The Permanent Value of Reason and Science

A sound product of reason as applied to human behavior, the application of the rule of “law” has long since replaced theocratic rules enforced by fearful threats of punishment now, or worst still, in the interminable “afterlife”. Fear on so many levels is such a pervasive, primeval and forceful sense that clearly nothing less than human survival depended on it. The Intellectual appeal of the rule of law was however a far less common denominator than were the gains in more primitive times derived from submission to fear and punishment. The Humanist movement of the 15th and 16th centuries first in Florence Italy and later in Oxford England was a pivotal turning point in that evolution.

There’s also no reason to think that the evolution of current popular beliefs won’t mark another point in our future history given the rate at which human knowledge and consciousness is evolving and shifting our beliefs and faith away from mythical religious proclamations and more

toward those born of reason and science. We will indeed always be discovering what it is we don't know about the origin and nature of our universe and our extraordinary place in it.

As astrophysicist Laurence Krause points out, we happen to exist in a narrow window of time in the life of our universe when sufficient observable evidence provides us with vital clues as to its true history. The Universe continues to be a dynamic force ever expanding. Within it even our solar system is in a continuous state of flux.

The premise upon which the age of the universe was speculated is now also being questioned based on new telescopic discoveries of galaxies which predate its commonly accepted age. There will come a time as the universe expands beyond measure when what is barely observable will lead to totally erroneous and completely false conclusions. He is also quick to point out that indeed we too may, by the same token of logic be missing key parts of the puzzle which have overtaken our place in time.

What is clear is that the age of the Universe at the present time is in its infancy. So only within that wide, open-minded frame of continuous enquiry can the validity of our current knowledge be appraised at any point in time. Given our continuously evolving state of consciousness there can be no finite conclusions - only informed, qualified and conditional opinions. There's "nothing more stable than change". That is the persistent and reliable nature of our human condition. Every new discovery unveils even more questions. That is the very nature of progressive thinking. The nature of "Consciousness" itself is now the focus of much research as are all the other complex and interactive functions of the human brain. It is suggesting that it is not unlike a "quantum mechanical process" the science of which is still in its infancy.

A case in point is Newton's laws of gravity (latter half of 17th century) which had to be subsequently modified by Einstein's energy equation. It too is now deemed to be less than a complete summation, as we have not at this time determined the origin or nature of two key and recently speculated driving forces in the unseen energy spectrum of the universe ie., the phenomena of dark energy and dark matter which are among the biggest puzzles in the modern universe accounting for 95% of its content. There is now some evidence that dark energy is not the "constant" that ratified Einstein's famous equation. If this turns out to be true it will send all speculation on the Big Bang theory and ultimate destiny of the expanding universe back to square one!

They were until now, identified as missing key determinants in the formation, configuration and structure of our ever expanding universe - if not the driving forces behind it, though the theory was yet to be scientifically proven conclusively. Indeed, current discovery is suggesting the possibility that dark energy is, based on new findings, a component of "sub"-atomic energy and not separate and apart from it as previously understood or speculated. It is also now theorized that black holes may well be comprised of an intense accumulation of dark matter and the related energy this would represent.

Whatever the conclusion of this particular quest turns out to be there is little doubt that our on going path of discovery will resolve a host of profound questions relating to "how" our physical universe came into being even if the ultimate question of "why" will always remain open to debate.

The universe is currently estimated to be 13.8 billion years old and we are sentient beings who have been around for a tiny fraction of that time. We may indeed get to be the species which gets to figure it all out. What cannot be disputed is the fact of our curious existence and the need to sustain it by the best means possible.

Science not mythical beliefs are the proven means to that end. Truth as best we can endeavor to provide it, will always succeed over the dubious service of lies. The more pertinent question is whether we are ready at this point in time to handle the truth. Progress will always be held hostage to the resistance posed by inherited “beliefs”.

Religion's Mixed Legacy

Many epic narratives have sought to connect tangible beliefs with those which are religiously or spiritually inspiring, leading to many diverse mythical interpretations for the purpose of explaining human existence. It is also evident that the unfettered, self righteous power of rival religious beliefs has been the life (and death) blood of the many divisive moral and spiritual movements they have objectively inspired. Clearly, many distinguished and devious scholarly intellects have been zealously engaged in that contest.

In contrast with mythological beliefs, the re-adoption of a philosophical approach based more on the power of reason has proven to be more promising and productive. Science has also explained in quantifiable terms the composition of the cosmos, even its weight and our emergence from it. There is on the other hand no denying that many religions have also inspired and motivated the creation of numerous impressive hallmarks of human achievement in the arts, literature, architecture and even science - especially when it's findings were occasionally compatible with its “holy” scriptures.

The application of sound moral and ethical principles and behavior which their respective missionaries preached far and wide also did much to fill those voids in less progressed cultures where none had existed. The critical role played by dominant religions in imposing acceptable guidelines for human behavior through moral and ethical discipline in an otherwise out of control existence cannot be denied.

The opposite forces of good and evil have indeed always existed, no doubt even in primeval times and long before the power of applied knowledge and reason entered the arena. Unlike the birth of philosophic contemplation which it predates, religion was inevitably soon identified also as a most exploitable device in the service of autocratic control be it of the crown, church or state. The suspicion is unavoidable that it was the inspiration if not the seed of its very creation.

So we have to ask at what horrific cost in human terms were such esteemed assets and converts to religion produced. Would the human toll in blood and treasure not have been far less horrific if made directly in the honest and benevolent cause of humanity, as opposed to the delusional and vain spiritual aspirations achieved at its expense. There is no doubt too that the motivating

forces behind the conspired fusing of both military and religious ethics persist even today. Look no further than the endless conflicts in the Middle East.

There has to humanity's great credit however, always been a notable, intellectually stubborn, but above all thoughtful, courageous and perceptive minority who have resisted the simple minded tribal repression of religious indoctrination and for whom blind faith in desperately contrived, unverifiable miracles and incredible, handed down supernatural beliefs has had no currency. God, in all his goodness and in total contradiction to all such positive man made attributes so assigned, has apparently chosen not to reveal himself unequivocally, as testified by the inevitable seeds of doubt sown by the very nature and existence of so many searching speculations.

For such honest skeptics, only reasoned truth born of solid rational evidence has any lasting and meaningful productive value however limited. Anything less would for them feel more like a betrayal of their illusive search for only the truth - as rewarding and yet so demanding and uncompromising as it will always be. To them must surely belong the collective credit for all the incremental and critical steps made toward our progress, if not ultimately our survival as a species.

The effective exploitation of religion by the respective powers that be, has arguably only proven itself to be nothing more than a self serving and misguided distraction, while those beliefs based on more philosophical models and built upon rational thought will always be a more productive path to truth. More than two thousand "documented" religions or beliefs " have come and gone (though we only hear of those most successful in self promotion) which only testifies to the fact that it has always served to fill a significant human need for a larger than life explanation - if not validation and purpose of mans existence.

As such, it has evidently, and by the same token also created an exploitable means by which self serving, opportunistic enterprise can effectively exercise considerable, if not dominant command of collective human behavior. For if you can control what a man believes (or more often thinks or wants to believe) you can make to order both his earthly fears and heavenly aspirations - which too, are often the product of the proponents of religion. As such the ultimate of all conspiracy theories.

For centuries the power of popular religious beliefs has (without any proof) typically invoked the existence of an all knowing, all good, all merciful, all just and all powerful god, the promise of a life hereafter and no less than the fearful prospect of eternal punishment and damnation for all the rule breakers-whatever those particular club rules happen to be. These beliefs are so full of obvious and not so obvious contradictions and yet incredibly, the faithful not only buy into all of this credo but promote it passionately.

While it has generally served as a superficial check on "bad human behavior", this fear mongering has also aided and abetted the duplicitous agenda of the promoters of many religions and with astonishing success. It brings to mind Voltaire's view that "Religion began when the first scoundrel encountered the first fool", - a statement which some would say reveals a not uncommon level of contempt for religion per se, equal to that for any criminal enterprise. Indeed with regard to the use of fear and deadly punishment it has much in common.

A Turning Point

At this clearly remarkable transitional point in our evolutionary history when so much acquired reasoned knowledge is at our disposal, is it not time to step back and ask some pointed and revealing questions, even if knowing so much we yet acknowledge we know so little. Are we not singular enough in our common struggle as Americans or indeed humans, even if ethnically diverse in our make up to see past the narrow-mindedness of our petty squabbles especially when foreign and domestic threats to our enduring democracy abound?

Why do we continue to be our own worst enemy when it comes to existential threats to our common welfare and survival. And is it not a fact that historically the divisive nature of faith based religion, so exploitable by the powers that be, has been a significant even if not the only factor in that causation?

Ultimately the basis for human morality is not the prerogative or complex derivative of any contrived religious doctrine, but the simple, self-evident and acknowledged truth behind the “golden rule” which everyone can identify with, and which surely must be the guiding principle for the validity of any meaningful human philosophy. Essentially that is the generic ideal of, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

That’s a far reaching and universal philosophy which one and all can understand and get behind without the need for all the devious interpretations accessible to only gifted if not self absorbed intellects, who can tie themselves in religious knots trying in vain to square the circle while never meeting the challenge. The more enlightened cultures certainly know enough today not to be taken in by the self serving interests of any dominant state religion. Some of course continue to find indoctrination useful for perpetuating the mind control of its electorate.

As contrived and misleading as early pronouncements on man’s origin and purpose were in the past, in the absence of knowledge they not only sent humanity in the wrong direction, but sadly lead us all on a path of conflict, false hope and potential disaster. What is clearly true, is that we can neither prove the existence or absence of “God” though we can acknowledge that when it comes to conclusive proof, the absence of evidence is not always evidence of absence.

If the evidence of our universe and everything it reveals within it is so profound, how much more impressive must be that of the “power” which created it. Likewise how much more so is “it’s” creator, and so on - ad Infinitum. In the meantime however, on our struggling planet the mission of our survival will always depend on the on going discovery and implementation of verifiable knowledge based on the scientific approach which demands corroboration and upon which we can continue to rely and build. It is also abundantly clear too that our species is far from united in such worthy aspirations given the regressive primeval forces evidently still at large in the form of purposeful lies and deception.

The New Atheism

To the extent that the new “Atheism” born of the “enlightenment” grew out of a rejection of such blind, simpleminded faith in religious doctrines and in favor of more rational human values and tangible beliefs founded on science and reason, it would not be unfair to say that in that sense, it too is but another religion.

On the other hand (and on a critical point of difference,) it doesn’t seek to fool anyone with false claims or promises of redemption, because as previously noted, however much traditional faith based religion attempts to square the circle on so many critical challenges, it inevitably fails to survive the scrutiny. This fact alone is a profound and defining distinction and it sets old fashion religion diametrically apart from the more “honest” and worthy goals of reasoned discovery embodied in “A”-theism.

The “new” Atheism is of course not so new, but a more recent edition of that originally expounded by the creative intellects of many early Greek philosophers going back to before the 5th century BC as embodied in the ancient Greek word of “Atheos” which is the root origin for our word “without god(s).”

Anaximander was probably the first in “recorded” history to reason the true animal origin, nature and evolution of man, in essence anticipating a primary pillar of Darwins theory of evolution.

Socrates, Aristotle and Plato too, intensely debated human and moral questions thousands of years ago and brought the older more primitive beliefs of the early Greeks into question. Their common hallmark in such a conducive intellectual environment was an ability to think “out of the box” and beyond the inherent practical limitations of their primitive times. Indeed their contemplations of the notion of the human “soul” created a vital link with the hereafter and opened, even if unintended, an opportunistic vehicle for the more earthly material ambitions of now firmly established religions.

The Soul Notion

While it can be said that “belief” in the “notion” of the human “soul” and a “hereafter” was long before the Greeks, already essential to the elitist and self absorbed preoccupation of the Egyptian Pharaohs and their lifelong investment and preparation for an imagined journey beyond the grave, these Greek intellects were among the first known philosophers to introduce and expound on the appealing though subjective, if not spiritually inspired notion of the human “soul”.

The necessary adoption of such an incredibly useful concept played more than a vital role in the establishment of the first monotheistic religion and the later promotion and establishment of those most successful religions still practiced today. Accountability for our earthly existence was

the key link from which flourished a whole industry of those gainfully employed in its support, exploitation and profitability.

First in the historical timeline, the followers of Zoroastrianism and the belief in an “uncreated creator” an “all good supreme god,”- interestingly so characteristic of those which followed. Then came the self proclaimed “prophet” Abraham and his followers of the Old Testament dating back 4000 years and its descendants - the followers of Jesus the prophet and the Christ (New Testament), and not to be left out of the contest, 600 years later the followers of the prophet Muhammad and the Islamic (Koran) faiths.

It is notable that all three acknowledge their origins to the biblical prophet Abraham and that in all three of these familiar religions, without the critical and catalytic man made notion of the human “Soul”, our personal accountability and the promise of salvation or punishment attached to an after-life could not survive beyond mortality, and thus absent an essential post mortem link to the hereafter, upon which the underpinnings of those religious beliefs relied so heavily for their credibility.

The Philosophical Track

Too bad that the most promising intellectual and indeed rational path contemplated by Confucius (500 BC), Aristotle (400 BC) and other early proponents of basic human rights, democratic ideals and most of all, the rule of law, which have now become so essential to the promise of progressive secular cultures, did not survive or flourish long enough at that time to save humanity from the relatively fearful, primitive and misguided imposition and abuses of such enduring religious myths and oppressive dogmas promoted by all their false prophets.

Religions have mostly flourished on that self serving and ultimately destructive mythological path even today. False hope embodied in the proposition of a “leap of faith” has proven to be all but a dead end or it would have long since saved us from ourselves. The lessons of History teach that Religious doctrines for all their proven appeal will never be a valid substitute for the Rule of (secular) Law.

Critical thinking was historically a limited commodity shared only by an insufficient and privileged few for such a progressive movement to take root. Religion was by its very nature of “make believe” far easier to dispense and control as discovered by old and new wannabe autocrats. Aside from all their good deeds, in practice these religions proved above all to be among other things an undeniably effective self serving power grab and most proven means of both mind and behavior control seized by church, state and sovereign alike, wide open to their excesses and indeed that of their “faithful.”

So much so that religion continues to be exploited effectively by pious, self promoting “conmen” in the self righteous promotion of many a brand of religion world wide. For Right wing American politics in particular, church and state are far from separated. Just try to debate any of the serious

issues of our time with the typical self righteous right wing membership and you will immediately discover just how totally brainwashed their faithful are all the way up to the Supreme Court.

It is also fair to say that based on historical record, those religions are effectively top driven - and of course not so much by any desire to promote lofty altruistic human ideals such as those of the Greek philosophers, but more by the fierce competition for raw material, political or military power, whether it be church or state. For an easily manipulated, fearful, if not gullible, uneducated populous, faith based religion continues to be a far simpler package to disguise and promote as compared to the more honest, esoteric and intellectually demanding philosophical model. Religion has thus inevitably proven to be a divisive dead end leading only to human conflict.

There is a basic inherent credibility problem with the existence of so many "faith" based competing religious factions which are by their nature diverse and mythical in origin. Some even claim without any evidence to be truly anointed. In reality the record shows that whatever the religion, it mostly serves the practical purposes of both church and state as an effective means of mind and behavior control of the faithful without which there is only chaos. It also undeniably served as a relatable storyline upon which to explain the gift of human existence as stemming from a natural order ordained by god for his chosen faithful. Hence its human appeal.

In times of military conflict - a common fact of life throughout human history, it was also a larger than life rallying cry. This exploitable and divisive aspect of religion has all on its own inevitably created unhealthy, competitive and deadly human conflict. It is still more than ever the cause of conflict as between Christians and Muslims or Jews and Palestinians.

A pound of false hope however, is never a substitute for even an ounce of truth in the common cause of human welfare. Good versus evil on any scale are self evident and will always be an easier yardstick by which to measure the merits of any human conflict as opposed to those in the service of indoctrinated "religious" beliefs.

Part III: The Enlightenment and the Rule of Law

The Enlightenment: Love Thy Neighbor

Born out of reason as opposed to make believe, Atheism's new appeal was arguably a byproduct of the "Age of Enlightenment", giving new and vital enterprise to a hitherto suppressed pursuit of scientific theory and knowledge without fear or favor. Proven facts born of science and reason had increasingly exposed the fallacies of fictional bible story telling - some inspired no doubt by handed down actual events in recorded human history such as evidence of the great flood resulting from the ice melt more than 12,000 years ago, but many others like the Garden of Eden and the Creation, the product of pure fantasy and willful imagination.

There is no doubt too, that such earthly and often violent biblical fables promoted not just good, but also bad and even hateful philosophy - if only to be judged on the premium universal value and sanctity of human life, apparently so cheap in the depiction of numerous promotions of violent human transactions. If we all shared a benevolent common creator, he apparently also liked to play favorites.

The unearned suffering of innocent minorities at the hand of the prevailing religious faithful - of all stripes, also did nothing to promote the essential premise to the primary human doctrine they all ironically still claim to share in common, of, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you". Or more simply put, love thy neighbor as thy self. Even more simply put - no less than by followers of witchcraft, "harm none"

Indeed, their incredible biblical portrayal and depiction of such a pathetically insecure, contradictory and vengeful god who demands such blind and exclusive attention and who apparently takes no responsibility for the known fate (all knowing is said to be just one of Gods many qualities) of the flawed products of his own creation, further undermined its authenticity as the self- acclaimed "true word of God," - unless of course god was possibly evil in nature, which would run totally counter to all the assigned or rather preferred, more congenial attributes of an all loving, all knowing, all powerful and merciful god, so basic to popular religious dogma.

Given all the fallacies upon which religious beliefs are founded, it's failure to unite as opposed to divide humanity was anything but predictable. The power of reason was always intellectually far more persuasive than the fear and punishment associated with make believe. It was was also harder to sell where religious indoctrination saturated an uneducated faithful.

A Reckoning with the Establishment

So, when such a contradictory, self serving theocratic or sovereign power and its attendant culture is accordingly challenged, it retaliates, often with a fake self righteous vengeance, thus inviting the likes of “true human prophets” such as India’s Gandhi, Africa’s Mandela and America’s Martin Luther King and even more recently John Louis.

Although they were all inspired in their youth by inherited spiritual, biblical or “religious” beliefs, they drew the real strength and power of their practical, moral and political convictions of freedom and “equal justice for all”, from permanent human values as embodied in our American constitution and the foundation of the “secular rule of law” - the spark for which had its humble early origins in the objective and pragmatically inspired Magna Carta (1215), an expedient, practical game changing product of Anglo heritage establishing the rules (bound by law) holding the crown accountable to the government and its people and which later became so embedded in the dominant aspirational themes and canons of the US constitution.

Its revolutionary proposition was that no one was above the law, that all men are created equal, and that certain truths are indeed self evident as the opening statement and in fact the very premise upon which the “declaration of our independence” was based. It was also a profound contradiction of the actual prevailing state of human affairs in the new world shamelessly embodied in slavery. It was thus undeniably the height of hypocrisy given that the general status of the framers of the Declaration of Independence and later their proposed constitution was that of a mostly self righteous, shameless bunch of privileged and elitist slave owners who demanded far more than mere taxes from their enslaved captives.

Indeed 8 of the first US 12 presidents were also slave owners. Washington, America’s first president and Jefferson the third American president and primary author of the Declaration were some of the largest slave owners at that time. Madison, the architect of the constitution also held slaves. Patrick Henry of ” Give me liberty or give me death” fame, was also a slave owner. It is estimated that the market value of the enslaved population in America far exceeded that of all other assets combined.

So the trafficking and trade in human cargo was by far the main commercial event at that time. The rest was a byproduct of their sweat and tears. Ownership of slaves rapidly became the common currency in which the personal wealth of their masters was boasted and expressed in spread sheets listing them among other “property” assets.

The fateful legacy of that classic hypocrisy is no doubt the nagging flaw and profound contradiction in our American constitution.

If the “Declaration of Independence” escaped outright ridicule from those to whom it was directed, perhaps that is because this new brand of slavery was profiting all players on both sides of the Atlantic including the Crown. Their pretentious, holier than thou demand for liberty and freedom from a sovereign King who required from them only the payment of (excessive) taxes, does surely fly in the face of the stark reality of that legacy of slavery in all its forms even today. It also

accounts for the lasting effects of racial bigotry as still reflected in the uneven and violent posture of our law enforcement toward minorities of color.

Any claim that our nation was founded by Christians on white Christian principles is thus baseless if not laughable and as far from the truth then, as it is now. Indeed I can think of nothing more anti Christian than the appalling state of affairs we are witnessing in current American law enforcement and brazen right wing politics.

Racism has always been a most reliable and powerful political utility when it comes to harnessing hate in the service of mind and indeed behavior control. Clearly Trump appeals to the insecurities stemming from a newer generation of white supremest with their disturbed sense of privilege and entitlement and certainly not to the strength of his “non existing” policies. They are interested only in the power and control which comes from “winning”.

He has no personal convictions - only an obsession with self promotion. Accordingly, he attacks the people they choose to hate, undermines regulation critical to the common good when it serves his purpose, and legitimizes false grievances often of their own making. These are all well established, and proven tactics of aspiring autocrats - apparently no less effective in todays America than it was in Nazi Germany. The difference is that we defeated the Nazis and at horrific costs in terms of blood and treasure. We are indeed supposed to be the enlightened generation - the beneficiaries of that unholy sacrifice, since recorded in countless books and films. Will we allow ourselves to be duped yet again? Must history keep repeating itself?

The Struggles of Science, Reason, and the Rule of Law

Objective truth as in scientific discovery must be distinguished from inherited mystical beliefs whether they be personal, religious or political. Science, reason and the application of the Rule of Law have also challenged the critical notions of the foremost proponents of those popular religions which anointed themselves, together with their sovereign lords as the true and rightful representatives of god on earth and who thus laid claim to total dominion over the fate of their faithful followers. They were the law and the law was what they said it was. Control of their law abiding “faithful” was always the name of the game in which the powers that be were all complicit.

This was a foundational premise cleverly embodied in devious man made biblical testaments affirming their rightful, god given control as the appointed arbiters of good and evil, reward or punishment, - but above all, their claim to the supreme, god given authority to dispense “justice”- and always expediently in “his” name as the one true god.

For the newly “enlightened” therefore, outright rejection of all threats of punishment, the fake mythology surrounding traditional religious beliefs and the wholesale ridicule of such a sancti-

monious and elitist class of authoritarian rule, created an inevitable and profound paradigm shift, if not a backlash toward a less distasteful and more honest and believable model.

Escaping the fearful hold imposed by religion's taboos on freedom of thought was and is still an ongoing challenge to the indoctrinated mindset of the faithful. Insatiable greed, cruelty and hypocrisy on the part of its perpetrators had become religions fateful trademark and ultimately the twisted path to its inevitable demise.

Only the more humane, thoughtfully reasoned, (hence its appeal to current generations) and philosophically based "Buddhism" dating back 600 years BC and therefore a precursor of Christianity, successfully preached a reverence for our common humanity and in that spirit a genuine respect for all faiths and their believers.

This remarkable fact represents a striking difference in human values between East and West which is still reflected so noticeably in their contrasting cultures. Eastern teachings as noted have historically had a greater intellectual preoccupation with enhancement of inward philosophical reflection as opposed to those of the more extravert material origins and aspirations of the west. It probably also accounts for an unearned superiority complex often asserted by the west.

If in deed the west was "materially" more successful, it was often achieved at the horrific human expense of brute force, annihilation, slavery and denial of freedom to countless victims of colonialism perpetuated across global empires - yet another legacy of a more recent era, the latent ill effects of which we will still be recovering from for many decades if not centuries to come. Old habits and that inherited sense of entitlement do indeed die hard, especially with a self perpetuating elitist class who are finally being held to account. One has only to look at the inevitable decline of the British Empire for reference, but it is a familiar pattern throughout global history.

Science and reason were never a threat to or incompatible with the older non theistic philosophy embodied in the moral and ethical discipline of Buddhism's non violent teachings and its true reverence for positive human values. It flourished for that reason far ahead of the promotion of fictional, self serving religious beliefs. Rational thinking was after all incompatible with the essence of blind faith and make believe.

Indeed, tragically much of the highly esteemed literature and consequential scientific knowledge to that date was destroyed by the imperial Romans under Caesar and others who followed. Our progress as a species was thereby halted or rather delayed, in the fiery destruction of the great library of Alexandria, Egypt in 283 BC. It held an estimate of over half a million documents from all corners of the civilized world including Greece, Persia, Assyria, Egypt and India. It was without question the repository of early scientific discovery and the intellectual capital of the known world. The profound loss to the vital progress of humanity is incalculable.

It was also a place of study for more than a hundred resident scholars and philosophers. Various theories abound with regard to the motives behind the destruction but so many religious beliefs were then already contradicted by known scientific discovery that unavoidable suspicion can only fall on the most threatened by such consequential and invaluable holdings.

Certainly by that measure fraudulent promoters of any prevalent religion fit the charge. Their common traits such as zealous passion, violent aggression and raw ambition were already a signature trademark. They were no different in their lust for power from their sovereign lords with whom they were often allied. “Faith” based religious belief simply requires passive acceptance and compliance from its believers. In contrast personal philosophical pursuits stem from a more demanding and inquisitive frame of mind. One appeals to ignorance and complacency - the other responds to the natural appeal of reasoned discovery. It’s legacy persist today and can be seen most notably in a denial of scientific advances in preference of mystical beliefs relating for example, to the blind indoctrinated faith in the human body’s natural resistance to disease and infection. Hence the resistance to the Covid vaccines most prevalent among the evangelical right for whom the human body is held to be a perfect god made temple.

In contrast with religious “beliefs” the power of “Reason” and “rational” thinking as embodied in Buddhism made early scientific discovery possible and was thus mercilessly blocked by such competing forces at every turn rather than encouraged, simply because it challenged their authority.

Higher Ideals

So to be clear, there is an objective difference in motivation and purpose between those religions founded on the self serving indoctrination of a god-fearing faithful, and those born out of a philosophical model which found a greater purchase and stronger grip on the honest intellects of those who demanded a more worthy foundation and purpose for their reasoned beliefs.

The former were mostly preoccupied with the fearful self serving power of mind control with a view to harnessing the passive obedience of a complacent and compliant faithful, while the latter simply rejected the need for such a hierarchy, their motives, fake origin, unflattering history and the obsolete dogmas of traditional religion - in favor of those more in keeping with the higher ideals and aspirations of an expanding and progressive human consciousness, finally freed from the self serving conspiracies of both church and state.

Accordingly they demanded a more honest and trustworthy cause, based on proven, even if limited evidence as opposed to creative, man made imaginings which comprise the “holy scriptures” - however instructional their parables. There has after all, always been higher ideals than those motivated out of the basic primitive fear of punishment to which religion has an undeniable and long established popular appeal.

As such, the higher ideals promoted by this democratic, openminded and more meaningful “secular” cause of the new atheist, marked a radical departure from the rigid mindset driven by autocratic control of the church and its faithful. For many, the new enlightenment inspired fearless pursuit of the unknown and acceptance of honest skepticism - even the “divinity of doubt” itself, as the essence and driving force embodied in the progressive mindset of atheism. The honest

admission that we simply don't know, but that we have been endowed with the intellect for discovery, was by far superior a doctrine to that of an outdated if not naive acceptance of mindless popular make-believe.

The Enlightenment's Legacy: The Path to Truth

Science and reason certainly provided a more honest and credible path to truth and human enlightenment, if not the better prospect for the very survival of our continuously threatened species. Indeed new revelations have through the vehicle of scientific exploration generated more cause for hope, awe and wonder in the on-going, eye opening discoveries of the complex workings of our universe than all the fake miracles and wild imaginings portrayed in even the most fantastic of biblical tales. Unlike the Black Death of the Middle Ages which wiped out half of the existing population, we will mostly survive the global pandemic of COVID thanks to science.

Given their profound differences in motive and aspiration, it is perhaps folly to make undue and contrasting comparisons, but that aside, the usual criticism levied at "Atheism" has been with respect to the absence of its role as a valid social and moral discipline. Atheism in spite of its honesty of purpose or because of it, does not claim to change or even address the basic underlying dilemma posed by mans arguably self destructive nature and those persistent forces of good and evil which can drive human behavior.

That lingering realm of infringement on personal freedom of thought and action assumed by religion, now clearly belongs more to a past condition - at least in "progressive" cultures which now embrace secular canons of belief. Arguably, traditional religion by definition will always have a corner in that submissive, handed down, regressive, and still most appealing and popular market of wannabe believers.

Atheism however, in not seeking to be solicitous, manipulative or judgmental. In contrast it elevates itself over the shallow, self serving workings and objectives of past theistic models by acknowledging the truth. That characteristic judgmental role so essential to the power of religion has been replaced with the secular rule of law, now freed in practice from the self serving agenda of religion - at least until Trump and his appointees to the Supreme Court arrived.

It is perhaps the most significant legacy and enduring benefit derived from the progress of human reasoning and another pivotal byproduct of the enlightenment. Clearly it should be most apparent now more than ever, that our ability to apply the forces of reason and science will ultimately determine the very health, survival or fate of our species, not make believe.

There is evidence too that only 6 % of the original human gene pool presently survives, from which one can draw many dire conclusions regarding the precarious nature of mans past and future battle for survival of his species. Numerous others have come and gone. Given our past

trajectory nothing has changed significantly enough to suggest that our fate will be any different. Our ability to reason differentiates us from lesser species but only if it is directed to serve the common good.

The doctrine that man is born of original sin and is essentially a self destructive force has also served the purpose of its promoters most well. It certainly invites the appealing prospect of redemption and even better - salvation. The general conclusion that human history is all about horrific conflict, also misses the point that from the start, there had to have been predominant periods of calm progress when humanity thrived -especially when favorable environmental conditions allowed, based upon mutual respect, creative sharing and cooperation. If this was not evidently so, our species could not have prevailed thus far against all the competing forces of nature - and our current condition and outlook as precarious as it will always be, would be far less promising. We have in fact been too successful of late as a species but at the expense of our planets natural ability to cope with our massive impact in such a short space of time.

Catastrophic events in human history have in contrast proven to be the greatest threat to our continued progress as a specie and the driving force behind forceful, deadly and destructive invasions of neighboring territories. Current climate change is such an event and is today's existential threat which we have so far ignored at our peril. We are only in the early stages of increasingly extreme weather events which will soon result in the shaping of huge global population shifts and the likely extinction of many of its helpless victims animal and human.

The underlying spirit embodied in Atheism is above all searching and thoughtful. It is committed to seeking knowledge and especially the science of progressive human behavior - but refreshingly only for the sake of understanding and improving its condition - as opposed to devious mind control of the "faithful" using smoke and mirrors.

For the three most "successful" religions the play on this useful conflict between good and evil and the notion of personal guilt and of absolution and earned salvation was a consistent theme in its preaching. It was also foundational to that primary purpose of mind control of the faithful and was by definition founded on the acceptance of human frailty and the obligation of humanity to rise above it -or suffer no less than eternal damnation. It is a useful model which also played on the guilt inherent in the selfish gene we all have in common out of self interest or promotion, if not survival.

The Rule of Law: The Backbone of Our Democracy

Unlike most religions, Atheism is not judgmental or punitive, nor does it pretend to control or even arbitrate the excesses of human behavior, good or bad. That burden is now squarely for the independent arm of the "secular" law to decide and rightly so. And relief from it, is to a large

extent what can set humanity free from familiar past abuses of theism and all its excesses. It is no accident that the creation of our constitutional democracy came into existence at a point in time and place where the self serving control and involvement of both church and crown was expressly rejected in Jeffersons revolutionary language of the “Declaration of Independence”.

For that reason and to stay true to its cause, the independence and integrity of the rule of law in the application of equal justice for all is paramount. Accordingly it should never be used to promote any church or state agenda. That is the slippery slope which leads to the beginning of the end of a democracy. It will always be a work in progress and constantly under attack because it alone guarantees our liberty and freedom by taking the control over our individual lives away from any self serving political “donor class” who want to subvert it. Conflicts represented by the dueling forces of left and right leaning agendas testify to the human toll of that contest.

The independence and integrity of our Supreme Court has however, rarely lived up to its ideals and has historically been openly compromised by the corrupting influence and financial clout of big business. The pretentious claim that it’s elite membership is guided exclusively by the exacting dictates of our juris prudence is evidently only aspirational not factual. Personal philosophy of all stripes along with the pressure of external material influences, let alone the exploitation of fake news, have always been at play on the frailties of our human condition and at all levels of endeavor with no exceptions. Trump has thus made the Supreme Court the target of his control by appointing three new judges in his term. It is now recognized very much as an uneven split along partisan lines.

The power and influence of our American democracy evolved slowly but improved significantly prior to Trump over the last 250 years effectively beginning with the long suppressed movement toward a one man, one vote platform. It only recently more fully succeeded with inclusion of the black vote in spite of all the political maneuvers of the white establishment. Succeeded to the point where now they don’t like the way the game they created is being played and have given up on changing the rules to meet their ends.

Their betrayal of our constitutional democracy in favor of autocratic rule has exposed lack of faith in true conservative values which they have now totally abandoned. A stubborn failure of imagination leaves them with only one perceived and desperate option - to replace our democracy with brute force. Representation and accountability, the hallmark of our democracy will now be replaced with an autocratic rule

The appealing but shortsighted device of “Gerrymandering” goes all the way back to 19th century Boston and the earliest implementation of our democratic system of governing. This was an arena which religious authorities have historically (and shamelessly) avoided and for good reason. Indeed expediency, mutual benefit and above all their instinct for survival, required that they always played perfectly into the hands of the prevailing ruling classes.

The workings of religion have thus always been cleverly fused with those of the state and its need to assert its own authority and thereby its control over behavior. When compared with traditional theistic religions there is, on that critical count perhaps an unacceptable deficit inherent in the

rebellious and independent nature of Atheism which runs counter to their key mutual interest and goal of mind control.

The more reasoned, intellectually demanding and independent philosophy embodied in the very notion of Atheism will always lack the inherited simpleminded appeal favored by a more docile, fearful and complacent populous. Its more qualitative and enduring appeal is, however, firmly established in its honesty and credibility - superior moral values alien and anathema to the primitive mindset and material aspirations of faith based religion. It too is faith based, but faith in the superior cause of our common humanity and the power of science and reason to lead us to lasting truth as opposed to the self serving, false and passive acceptance of misleading and destructive lies.

“The Truth Will Set You Free”

“You will know the truth and the truth will set you free”(John 8:32), thus has a more profound meaning in the context of Atheism. It is certainly more appealing to a growing number of younger, more informed, knowledgeable generation of free thinkers who have little time or use for religious structures or ritual, and who by definition can call themselves A-theists or even Agnostics whether they want to acknowledge their standing or not.

There have always been forces of good and evil, but nothing intrinsically moral about being a believer or a nonbeliever. Ultimately one can only be true to what is within the grasp of ones own intellect, honest belief, disbelief or skepticism.

There are still however, always those self professed “believers” who in the name of one man-made god or another have sanctioned even the most extreme violence in an act of mindless, self righteous obedience to church or state authority - and accordingly with not a shred of human conscience. Recall that the Nazi movement started by a charismatic leader, flourished over a twelve year timeframe to become executors of the worst conceivable atrocities in human experience.

They were ironically, predominantly Christians (Catholics and Lutherans) who claimed they either had no knowledge of what was going on in concentration camps or were just following orders. They were without cause willingly indoctrinated to blame the innocent Jews for the self inflicted tragedy of World War 2 when in truth the Jews were made a convenient target of their hate only because they were so successful and in all spheres of human endeavor whether in the arts, sciences, medicine, jurisprudence and especially commerce. Indeed there is no other culture which can lay claim to such impressive contributions to the cause of human welfare throughout the course of history even today.

Clearly, human nature in its worst form has been a fairly reliable and exploitable constant over time. In deed the ability to inflict untold suffering and destruction seems to have only reached new atomic heights through the seemingly unlimited power of our elevated knowledge. History will perhaps continue to repeat itself, until we reach a future tipping point where collective wisdom

becomes the norm through the promise of a peaceful global “democratic process,” governed by the rule of law. We know too that if we do not remember history, we are doomed to repeat it. Such has been the tragic story of our species to date.

On this score and as already noted, all three of the prevalent religions have inevitably failed disastrously- even in the most basic cause of human rights such as personal liberty and freedom let alone the larger cause of world peace which stems from our common humanity. Indeed, how could they possibly succeed in the long term when freedom of thought must be denied as a right of passage. Given that the motive and essence of the authoritative power of religious assertion lies in the indoctrination of its believers, this should be no surprise. On the contrary it is a predictable and consequential outcome.

So far, on the global stage, positive change in the human condition, has been relatively slight though not insignificant. There has definitely been a profound paradigm shift resulting from our growing enlightenment as it struggles against the formidable inertia and world wide resistance of an entrenched religious establishment particularly where religion continues to assert itself forcefully.

Part IV: Power, Moral Leadership, and Reconciliation

Oligarchs of the East and West

A declaration we can certainly make today with some exceptions is that the oligarchs of the west have made natural common cause with those of the east. In the west and where ever the primary material goals of capitalism have thrived, the excessive greed and inhumanity of the rich and powerful few is still a dominant and more often a destructive force steering the subservient course and fate of the many. It is a recognizable path as old as the hills which apparently derives more from the primeval depths of mans darker human nature than from his shallow religious beliefs which often support it.

The extraordinary monetary means of big business and the often excessive, corrupting influence of its lobbyists has by all accounts successfully conspired to effectively replace the old guard of the church or state. More recently it is threatening our fragile democracy itself by playing on the common vulnerabilities of a consumer driven society across the global economic spectrum and even among the so called educated.

So all consuming and alluring is the human struggle that for the majority aspiring beyond the challenge of survival is far beyond reach. Trust in false information and promises has also too often fallen to betrayal. This will only get worse with the application of “AI” or artificial intelligence. Indeed by any measure it poses an existential threat to our very survival if left unchecked.

Our failure as a nation to prioritize through public education a knowledge and appreciation of past and current American history, means that we will continue to be vulnerable to a hostile takeover of our democratic government - especially in light of the success of the social media’s propaganda machines in subverting the truth - and all in the service of the donor class who now finance it. For them the ultimate goal is all about the power their money can buy.

It remains to be seen which of the two opposing forces will ultimately prevail in the current round of the competition between truth and lies, before history repeats itself yet again and with even more tragic human consequences. Some would say the die is already cast and the battle all but lost in sustaining our unique American brand of freedom. If so the victors will be those who

stand to lose the most. In essence, misguided rebels without cause. It is also not so remarkable to observe how “faithful” Christians are by definition the most predisposed to conspiracy theories and indeed their own demise.

Too bad that only a few volunteers among us are paying the price on behalf of each generation, fighting for the benefits of our fragile democracy, or we would have a greater appreciation for its value. The truth is that too many apparently have no knowledge of or fidelity to American democracy, its cost to our nation in terms of blood and treasure or the precious ideals it still represents which ironically allows the very freedom they carelessly abuse at their own peril.

One redeeming observation of the current status in our affairs is that the corporate donor class has unavoidably come to realize that undermining even the spirit of our democracy and the process which supports it, is counter productive to our common economic prosperity of which they are the primary beneficiaries, because the ultimate power of control is in practice not theirs, but rather in the hands of the consumers of their products.

In deed the nature of our consumer driven economy means that boycott of the products upon which the shareholder profits depend has the potential for striking at the very core of their existence. The realization that ultimately it is the “people or consumers” not the producer or donor who is in control of the values we represent as a free society, will perhaps serve to vouch safe the American experiment in government of the people, by the people and for the people. That potent fear on the part of any autocracy be it church or state or corporate is what drives an obsession with mind control in what ever past or present form available.

Moral Leadership

Certainly in the more relevant global fight for democratic values, human rights and personal freedom, the West and US in particular has more recently under Trump lost all claim to moral leadership, no thanks in large part as always to the ignorance and hypocrisy of a misguided and gullible faithful.

True to their rich heritage of mindless herd mentality, collective obedience, sense of entitlement, wishful and pretentious thinking - let alone bigotry and hypocrisy, they have abandoned all reason and every true measure of personal character assessment in anointing a morally and ethically bankrupt con-artist whose narcissism and non existent values all track a lifelong personal record of litigation and deception, the very antithesis of true leadership.

Rejected as incompetent by local banks, his dependence on dark sources of money, set him up for the classic “honey trap,” long perfected by his Soviet masters, but especially after the collapse of the Russian criminal enterprise and the need of Putin’s henchmen to expatriate the sovereign wealth of the kleptocracy they now represented.

That suspicion is beyond unavoidable and would wholly account for the inexplicable subservience of his behavior toward Putin in and out of public view. His empty shameless persona has in his own image become the party of no policy, no facts, no truth and no shame. If this fish stinks it is truly from the head down.

What is remarkable is that without the critical endorsement of the evangelical right, and the Faustian deal they struck with a twisted conman, Trump and “Trumpism” could not have succeeded in the on-going subversion of the very democratic institutions and freedoms which define and support our constitution and made possible the hard won progressive human agenda embraced at its core.

The 200 plus year old experiment in self government is again under attack and by its own elected ex-president who of course swore an oath to be its protector. That, all on its own should disqualify him from ever running for any office, but so damaged by lies and deceit is the national moral compass - let alone a lagging complacent absence of our juris prudence, that the good ship democracy with all sides on board is sailing mindlessly into the depths of oblivion and with it humanity’s final quest for its own redemption.

He was long before his unlikely planting, the familiar voice of hate speech cultivated from the deep rooted ground swell of an aggrieved, disillusioned and gullible crop of white Nationalists. With a classic superiority complex and misguided sense of entitlement they have effectively made common cause with the goals of our foreign enemies to subvert our democracy. The desperate need of extreme right wing media to perpetuate a growing manifesto of lies in that service is autocracy in the making.

The outcome of the election after the current presidential term will determine the extent to which we can heal the festering wounds inflicted upon the norms and foundational structure of our body politic and most of all the rule of law, and whether our system of government can recover from the prior excesses of what can only be described as a totally corrupt and far reaching criminal enterprise under Trump.

A Self-Serving Agenda

There was in spite of all claims to the contrary no positive GOP policy agenda. Only a dangerous and total obsession with and addiction to power and what it was going to take to get it. All who climbed on board ship were infected and inevitably at the shameless expense of any personal dignity. Apparently, anything is worthy of surrender for the proximity to power and it’s dubious rewards.

It’s what drives the empty cause of the Trumps, Murdoch, Mc Connell, Pence, Murphy and all the other obsessive autocrats who are clearly incapable of any sense of responsibility to the constitution they swore to uphold or the price paid in terms of blood and treasure for the reckless havoc and destruction they leave in their wake. It is also hard to imagine a reversal of the regressive

trends they represent without first addressing our apparent failure to safeguard against these blatant assaults on our democracy.

Even the separation of powers was not a sufficient deterrent or safeguard. In their defense it would seem the framers of our constitution could not have envisioned the depth of outright corruption embodied in the personage of such a pathetic president and his power hungry entourage - even less the collusion of two of the three checks and balances falling under his singular control together in addition with that of "his" traitorous Attorney General.

The power of the new social media's complicit role in facilitating this state of affairs by means of the blatant subjugation of the truth and the propagation of lies in the mass indoctrination of its tribal membership is also not new, but much in the classic tradition of the rise of authoritarianism. Indeed this much at least it has in common with the historical making of religion itself. Nor is the popular appeal and tactics of a morally corrupt and charismatic leader a new phenomenon.

For subjugation to succeed, all the accepted norms and laws upon which a functioning and lawful society depends must first be systematically undermined if not eliminated together with the unwavering complicity of the party faithful - all fearful of losing the vital support of its leader and the hold he has over his base and thus their own re-election. In the subversion process truth has thus been willfully and progressively high-jacked and replaced with lies in service of a corrupt and authoritarian agenda.

The willingness of law makers to abandon their oath of office to uphold and protect the constitution is another unanticipated failing which must be addressed and which first calls into question the mindset and morality of the culture who support and endorse them. It was not however the intent or expectation of our founding fathers to attract career minded self serving ambitious autocrats. Quite the opposite.

Without exception the founders of our constitution in addition to being ambitious products and beneficiaries of their revolutionary times, were seasoned, accomplished and often scholarly symbols of success who did in deed take material pride too, in being slave owners. They knew who they were and what values they stood for and felt compelled to further the ideals of their cause for liberty and freedom from "king and country" and their self interest through service to their newly established community of pioneers and the new world they all represented. Our current crop of law makers are rarely the product of such an arguably worthy make up. Even a superficial knowledge of world history, let alone that of the US would surely have raised the alarm.

Half of our voting population has apparently fallen for all the lies out of ignorance. The great con could only succeed by telling misguided people what they wanted to hear to feed their grievances. This was true with the rise of the nazis in Germany just 80 years ago and which apparently still resonates in the 21st century with bewildering success. They believe what they want to believe and so the results are a current and consistent reflection of who we are or have become. Culture begets the politics -not the other way around. And by that measure our collective ignorance and naïveté leaves much to be desired in terms who we have become as an American society.

Trump was after all originally elected by an accepted (even if dubious) majority. Some would go so far to say it's who we have always been - an insular, racist, self serving materialistic society,

fly-wheeling on a heritage of genocide and slavery. On the other hand we evolved to become the only force standing against autocracies like the Nazis, and now China and Russia who are threatening territorial expansion into neighboring democratic states. Trump however, is clearly no defender of democracy. His all consuming addiction to power and refusal to accept bone fide election results demand that he must destroy it by any means necessary. Never has the personal agenda of an elected American president been so completely corrupt.

The Need for Reconciliation

Such a conflicted culture must surely first come to terms with its dark history before it presumes it has any moral authority to preach the virtues of American democracy. It must first accept the responsibility for the inhumanity of its past actions and then honestly commit to making long overdue amends. There is indeed irony in the fact that we are so outraged by the violent attack on Ukraine's democracy but so complacent about the same state of affairs long in the making right here at home. Unlike the Ukrainians however, we spoiled Americans now take our democracy much for granted.

The "Black Lives Matter" movement is a glaring manifestation of that condition. Prejudice and bigotry are clearly the result of gross ignorance - often inherited. Why is it even necessary for a nation which boasts its origins were founded on resistance to oppression and honest "Christian" values, to even make such a statement. Is it not a sad indictment of a profound lack of our common humanity that such a statement requires affirmation. Of course all human lives matter. So too are the lives of all the animal creatures cohabiting our planet.

Surely in "Gods" natural order "thou shalt not enslave your fellow man" should have been most fittingly the first of the commandments. But of course it was by no means god but rather a self proclaimed prophet who delivered the ten commandments on a profound mission to lead his people ironically out of bondage. Confronted with insurrection he had to rise to the challenge by claiming-exclusive access to the super natural like all self proclaimed prophets who followed suit.

Revealing "Gods" 10 commandments apparently served his purpose, even if they were selected and purposely contrived in the narrow context of an era which played on fear and punishment at a time when human bondage was common place.

That was then, but fear and punishment continued to be the weapons of choice in all theocratic forms until the emergence of the enlightenment and the democratic ideals it espoused. To sustain those values the immediate challenge we now face, however, is primarily one of fully restoring our institutions and the normal election processes of our democracy without which it can not survive.

To that end these have been subverted and severely wounded by long standing enemies both beyond our shores and those within, using all the new high tech resources at their disposal. We no longer have a functional, balanced two party system each committed to democracy. What we

evidently have is a divided electorate who are equally split between those who believe in the virtues and value of our singular brand of democracy and those who, fueled by their obsession with power and for its own sake, are ready to discount all the past sacrifices of American blood and treasure in the hard won cause of our 200 year struggle on what has been a painfully slow, but progressive democratic path still teeming with dreamers who have made the US the envy of the world.

The choice is now between a Democratic Party and one which clearly has no ideas or policy agenda and who, to quote Steve Schmidt have become “an organized conspiracy for the maintenance of power of self interest and that of their donor class”. Recent history is replete with such ruinous non productive agendas.

In the process advocates of free market capitalism have made “socialism” their sworn enemy for political purposes, when in truth history has demonstrated that the two are interdependent and complimentary forces. US history is full of the shameful results of the excesses and abuses of free market capitalism in the absence of equitable standards of safety and compensation. That is the most essential role of a representative government.

Clearly, unleashed, the collateral wounds created by the blunt, self driving forces of capitalism as it forges obsessively forward, will always need to be held to account by the people who it ultimately serves. This is particularly true of emerging high tech media monopolies where obsession with profit at the expense of public welfare is undermining the essential needs of a functioning democracy not least of which is truth and transparency!

It is, ironically, also a testament to the level of freedom we currently enjoy that we take it so much for granted even if it still discriminates so much in who gets to benefit most. In addition it inevitably provides a monied platform for those who want to subvert it. This was always a possibility, if not predictable as cautioned by Benjamin Franklin himself when he was asked what kind of government he had so perilously delivered to a newly created independent nation. His simple reply was, “A democracy- if you can keep it”.

A profound predictor of the inevitable attacks this delicate experiment in government of the people, by the people and for the people would certainly have to endure and survive if it was to succeed in self government - the first experiment of its kind in human history if we can discount those of the fateful early Greek and Roman civilizations

It was also President Ulysses S. Grant who more recently made the astute prediction that the next American civil war would not be across North and South of the Mason Dixon line but between the forces of ignorance and superstition on one side versus intelligence and patriotism on the other. How right he was if current conditions prevail.

As an infant growing up in the aftermath of WW2 and playing in the broken brick ruins of scattered bomb sites across east London, the current stakes are more than vivid in the worried old mind of this American dreamer. I also remember asking myself why the American lifestyle portrayed in local movie theaters was so enviable. It had to be the abundance of natural resources we so lacked in England as evidenced by the post war ration books we used then for basic nutrition.

Yes, that had to be it as my learned friends concurred at that time. But as I learned upon my first visit to the US, the truth was not that simple. As a consequence of WW2 Great Britain was bankrupt to the tune of 15 Billion and literally starving. Thanks to the generosity of its American Ally - the only solvent country to survive the war, we managed to endure on a loan of 5 Billion to be repaid over 15 years at 3 percent interest.

WW1 was bad enough for Britain but for the second time in less than 30 years WW2 spelled total bankruptcy and the beginning of the end of its Global Empire as one by one all Colonial nations abandoned the mother ship. This is what happens to world powers which historically succumb to the seductive force of their own coveted military superiority and the economic power of world dominance which comes with it.

America did indeed rescue its old friend but in a process as much about self interest on America's part and the submissive signing of the Bretton Woods Accord by a "Not so Great Britain," it no longer played second fiddle to its imperialist ally as the green back became the gold standard replacing the pound sterling.

In like manner will China eventually replace opportunist America in that recent scenario. That remains to be seen, but the similarities are unmistakable with one critical point of difference. Democracy and autocracy are now on the opposite sides of the equation. Betrayed, corrupted and compromised in blatant subservience to the fateful goals of its home grown authoritarian enemies, will our American Democracy be its unintended victim? Will the strategy of divide and conquer by the republicans play out in favor of its primary competitor who will now only see our failing democracy as its own worst enemy and certainly not the shining example it promised to be.

Undeniably the inherent efficiency of Authoritarian rule in China only validates their anti west propaganda. The contrast is clearer than ever. Communism's flirtation with Capitalism has turned this unlikely duet into the marriage of the new century in terms of material success. But like most marriages which are not founded on a solid foundation of honest beliefs it will not survive the uncompromising test of time. At some point those nagging foundational flaws will threaten that false sense of stability as we have witnessed too in the US.

Yes indeed, America has abundant material resources but without that spirit of individual enterprise and our collective freedom of will to transform it, all the resources in the world goes nowhere. Case in point- look no further than the Soviet Union. China on the other hand is precariously experimenting with that dubious oil and water mix of capitalism and communism. One best to motivate highest productivity, while the other painfully smoothes its critical path by crushing any outcries or declarations for freedom in any form which may threaten the stability needed to sustain it.

So far on the surface at least , they appear to be succeeding, but of course only at the horrific cost to human freedom which autocracies forcefully deny at their peril. Freed from the healthy constraints which a democratic process imposes, their license to forge ahead full speed is reminiscent of the 19th and 20th century industrial revolution era which flourished on both sides of the Atlantic. Will they too become victims of their own struggle for success?

History teaches that all cultures ultimately push back on willful oppression. Always the the resulting forfeiture in terms of innocent lives lost and sovereign wealth destroyed is devastating and irreversible. It also makes a mockery of human endeavor, its aspirations and legacy. Looking back a hundred years from now, how will we be rated as custodians of our democracy or indeed our planet. The existential threat posed by climate change alone and our continuing inability to respond on a global level speaks to a collective failure across political boundaries to rise to the challenge.

Scientifically based predictions regarding threats posed by climate change and pandemic have long been denied or ignored by right wing special interest who are materially vested in maintenance of the status quo in spite of related death tolls world wide. With each incremental increase in temperature-rise extreme weather events proliferate across the planet and reduce it's habitability. We are the first generation to experience climate change and the last that can do anything about it.

Yet we continue to pay only lip service to these dire threats which cut across all geographic boundaries and ideologies. If the last election was about getting Trump out, the next election is about saving our fragile democracy and indeed our planet from the existential threat posed by home grown and foreign enemies alike. The choices could not be more clearly drawn.

There are no fascist solutions to the national problems we have been experiencing since our declaration of independence. As brilliantly described by acclaimed author Toni Morrison the link between racism and fascism is one of a number of recognizable incremental steps on its way. Many of the others relating to lies in control of mind and emotion have been the subject matter of this narrative.

Coda: Ukraine and the Global Stakes for Democracy

As if to validate its primary message Trumps soul mate and bosom buddy Putin has not only invaded Ukraine, a sovereign nation, but has vowed to embark its military on a vain mission of total annihilation if necessary to accomplish his misguided will. Ukrainians have for centuries shared a common Slavic history when their territory provided Russia with a vital sea link to the Mediterranean. It was also a vital bread basket for the Empire of Russia until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ukraine was therefore a very proud piece of the Russian identity.

A brief taste of the fruits of their new found democracy starting just 30 years ago freed them from the tyranny of communism when they finally broke away from the soviet block along with other captive bordering nations like Poland, Hungary Slovenia, Rumania and the Baltic States. They abandoned the communist imposed Warsaw Pact and embraced a return to Democracy. For all of them there is now no turning back. Freedom or death is their familiar and passionate cry heard loud and clear around the world.

The location of these new Democratic sovereign states also serves as a valuable strategic buffer zone between a prosperous multi national Europe and Russia, a pathetic inferior “one dimensional military power”, whose only export aside from tyranny is oil and gas driven mostly by American technology. One after the other they became members of NATO eager to share in a mutual defense pact which critically included the USA. Still currently out of the EU, Ukraine was in the process of qualifying for its own membership into the club of free democratic nations, but the timing of recent political events, more notably the unlikely and ominous arrival of Trumps America was not on its side.

Timing as history demonstrates so clearly, is always on the side of those who want to seize its advantage and in this case it belonged to Putin for whom this was a contrived, unprovoked attack, long in the works and one he fully expected to get away with. His perceived disarray and chaos among the NATO members on both sides of the Atlantic, including his hard earned prize of Brexit was a condition which he had orchestrated and promoted behind the scenes for decades culminating with the creation of a useful American idiot in the persona of Trump.

A miscalculation as it turns out which will doom his ill-conceived and Ill-executed military campaign, if not seal his own fate as the author of the biggest blunder in Russian history as opposed to the one he fantasized would cement and back stop his proud personal legacy as one of

Russias greatest leaders in the mold of Ivan the Terrible or Catherine the Great. His self imposed isolation from his henchmen due to Covid also played fatefully into his delusions.

As in Afghanistan, though outnumbered, Ukrainians can ultimately be victorious over their demoralized Russian invaders especially when up against a well armed US trained resistance force, impassioned leadership and the overwhelming moral authority and unyielding defiance provoked in enraged wives, mothers and their infants who have been made the deliberate targets of Russian missiles by an increasingly desperate enemy. Europe and the US must however, unite in their determined will to stand firmly behind their ally with all financial and military means necessary if they are to succeed. If they don't the lessons of history will be repeated yet again.

This barbaric if not pivotal turn of events in human history is now generally framed as one directly pitting Democracy against Autocracy as any other lesser contest of wills. Right verses might would also be a universal assessment and one which has so outraged all of humanity that major corporate entities are now pressured to react and be on the right side of history or loose a market which only civilized consumers will sustain. Complacency in the democratic leaning west is no longer an acceptable posture as familiar battle lines come to the surface.

That includes the ambitious economic power house of China potentially poised to overtake the USA, and whose leader must likewise decide if his own vain ambitions of territorial expansion in Taiwan are worth suffering the damage from global condemnation. Indeed, persecution of minorities at home and their indirect support of Russias barbaric aggression towards its neighbors can only result in more future sanctions as consumer power asserts itself as the most effective final arbiter of acceptable human behavior.

Presently there is no support from China in curbing Russian aggression. It's conflicted dependence on both Russian energy supplies and vital American consumers for sustainability has presented a challenge for Chinese diplomacy in light of the threat of sanctions already proving so effective in taking down the Russian economy.

So, the other great underestimation by this savage aggressor was perhaps more than any other, the level of disgust and outrage among civilized nations whose leaders have long since graduated from the primitive mindset of authoritarian Russian kleptocrats - the living dinosaurs in the life line of human progress.

The genocidal language used to frame his mission in belligerent terms like "we will wipe Ukraine off the map" also galvanized old European memories of Hitler and his fascist agenda. Likewise his false claim that Ukraine was never a nation state plays heavily into the patriotic resolve to forever affirm in blood their sovereign rights and unyielding passion for love of country.

Their determined resistance has already far exceeded all expectations and stiffened, if not reawakened the resolve of other European survivors of 20th century fascist aggression whose offspring have long since taken their own democracy for granted. More critically however, it has also shocked an isolated Putin, the perfect product of the KGB nihilistic culture which abides by no conscious limits in perpetuating tactics of extreme fear and punishment upon its own citizens - let alone those it falsely labels as enemies to justify an unprovoked, illegal invasion and forced acquisition of another sovereign state.

The level of resistance by a well trained and supported Ukrainian army was indeed clearly a gross miscalculation made by an autonomous absolute dictator totally isolated from the reality of mainstream thought and behavior even on a basic practical level. After all what will he ultimately gain if he is militarily successful as his overwhelming force would suggest? He may win the battle, but an installed puppet government will never hold a people passionately committed to its overthrow.

A growing contempt and hatred for their enemy will thus accrue only to the detriment of Russia and its now already shattered economy while the sacrifice of each and every fallen Ukrainian patriot will for ever endure in the enshrined memory of generations to come. They will resist to the last as the rubble remnants of their once vibrant cities serve as hallowed battlefields for the protracted guerrilla warfare which will surely follow.

For the Kremlin it proposes to be yet another useless trophy of death and destruction as with Syria, befitting the impotent aspirations of their on-going criminal enterprise, apparently endorsed by a zombified Russian electorate who wrongly believe they are fighting for "their" freedom from fascism. Fascists, as has been pointed out, are for Russians a collective and galvanizing label for anyone who is not Russian.

Putin has successfully convinced an admiring nation that the West is gunning for them and only a strong man like himself can protect them. This belief is the center piece of the indoctrination platform upon which the communist doctrine is promoted and one which Trump, a wannabe autocrat has adopted in his claim that he alone can fix our problem - the very one in fact that he has contrived!

For the west the Ukrainian war has reawakened minds and hearts to the threat it poses to our democracy world wide. Our complacency needs to be replaced with pro-action and the realization that appeasement is never enough to satisfy the dictators' insatiable appetite for power. As the expression goes "power corrupts- absolute power corrupts absolutely"

So for lies in the service of autocratic ambitions we need look no further than current events on both sides of the Atlantic. In Russia, dominant State control of its media disinformation network, while in the US, Trump and his allies at Fox News continue to fulfill the same propaganda objectives. Putin's game plan to subvert western democracy through most willing, mindless and totally corruptible surrogates like the Trumps in the US and indeed other aspiring autocrats in the EU such as Le Pen, could not have been more handsomely rewarded and beyond all expectations.

All protest in Russia has of course been shut down and those who could, have already fled the country. "The Russian people have always been able to distinguish true patriots from scum and traitors" - is the line from the Kremlin as Navalny suffers in jail like a voice in the wilderness. So lies in the service of mind control continue to play reliably well especially in communist states like Russia and indeed China, through the proven tactics of fear and punishment for those who resist, while truth struggles desperately to reveal itself as it falls mostly on deaf ears.

The underlying truth which inspired Churchills idea behind the formation of the Common Market and later the EU, was that nations trading in favor of mutual prosperity will be much more inclined to seek stable, peaceful and cooperative relationships with each other rather than confrontation.

Therein also lies the key to world peace given the rise of China's powerful economy and what it will take in terms of a common global philosophy to sustain it.

Against those dictatorships who seek confrontation as a means to an end such as the Kremlin, only our solidarity in economic, financial and trade sanctions can have any effect. Clearly they must also be forcefully exercised to include the laundering of expatriated assets by its unlawful club of kleptocrats. When democracies stand together, authoritarians take note and more importantly so do their electorates. Only they have the power to effect necessary regime change.

The challenge for the West is one of communication and how to break through the edifice of lies which underpin the Kremlins existence. The truth about Putin's murderous regime will eventually prevail as it did with past Russian dictators like Stalin, but at the horrific cost of millions of its victims. The war in Ukraine promises to accelerate that process by its proximity to the Russian border and the blood ties which flow across.

Body bags by the thousands of misguided young Russian patriots fighting for their country are speaking louder than words as their numbers reach unprecedented levels and speak to the incompetence and foul ambitions of their complicit generals. It is reported however that the bodies of many fallen Russian patriots fighting "fascist aggressors" will never be sent home, for that only raises uncomfortable questions. So out of sight, out of mind - at least in the critical short term.

In desperation Putin, with an inherited paranoid view of the world shared by his countrymen, has resorted to the indiscriminate killing of civilians including women and children to terrorize their Ukrainian neighbors into surrender. By all accounts it is having the opposite effect in terms of stiffening resistance. So far the Russian military has demonstrated nothing but incompetence at both strategic and basic tactical levels of command and management. As their desperation increases so does the level of punishment inflicted.

The logistical support of a long protracted war was evidently not planned for. Nor were Russian troops mentally prepared for the fight they encountered. They were told they would be welcomed with open arms by their grateful neighbors. This was supposed to be more like a training exercise - display of overwhelming force not its full engagement.

Ultimately the sky rocketing cost of reparations to the Ukrainian people by the Kremlin will for ever cement its inevitable demise as a totally corrupted and failed state. As the truth penetrates the fog of war through to the ever complacent Russian people, for centuries conditioned to hardship and standards of mere survival, they will yet again have to come to terms with their grim reality.

From a historical perspective, Russias fate from the beginning was inevitable given the level of power hungry corruption which emerged from the open voids created by the Russian Revolution and the practical challenges presented across eleven time zones and the disparate cultures coexisting within its borders.

Murderous dictators like Putin are driven only by an insatiable obsession with ruthless power. But it is note worthy that even in the disturbed mindset of such an extreme sociopath there is apparently a contrived delusional rationale drawing on a pretentious spiritual conviction about Russias destiny. It is after all the planets largest land mass and must demand respect if for no

other reason. According to close observers he deems his actions still justified and defensible even though they constitute numerous crimes against humanity - to the point of genocide in much the same mould of Hitler and Stalin.

There can be no better testament to the delusional nature and power of “lies” and “make believe” in the service of state or religious institutions and the role it has played throughout history in subverting the honest cause of “reasoned” belief. Even Ukrainian priests are outraged by the Russian Orthodox Church echoing the rhetoric of the Kremlin in support of the war in Ukraine. Yet the status quo persists. This is however no surprise, but a familiar pattern of behavior for the Christian Church now, as in WW2.

Survival at any cost is the name of the game. Obviscation is another familiar policy applied to serious moral issues especially when even high ranking clergy have inevitably been exposed by their victims - disguised no less as dutiful “shepherds of the flock”. Expediency, not accountability will always be the modus operandi of false credos founded on a bedrock of make believe. How can it be otherwise.

How this pitiful war ends without becoming a wider conflict is the on going question as leaders on both sides of the Atlantic unite and gather in protest to determine the next phase of sanctions against Russia. It has already exposed the inadequacy of the NATO charter of 1945 which in theory at least was designed to prevent the very conflict it is now confronted with. It’s limited powers need now to be expanded in the common interest - not stifled by the Veto power of self serving nations like Russia and China.

Clearly the survival of Ukraine’s democracy is inexorably linked to the future of our own which is why it has received the overwhelming support of the European community. Even Sweden and Finland too, are now members of NATO. Yet another of Putin’s gross miscalculations. To invoke Winston Churchill once again, “You can never reason with a tyrant. You must defeat him. So in war defiance. In resistance resolve. In triumph magnanimity. In peace goodwill.”