Democracy and Its Discontents

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In October 1990, Charles Krauthammer and I were having lunch and the conversation naturally turned to the dramatic events of the past year. The captive nations of central and eastern Europe had liberated themselves from the Soviet external empire in a political revolution energized by the revolution of conscience that had swept the region in the 1980s. In the Evil Empire itself, the first flowers of democratic resistance were springing up from beneath the frozen carapace of the Leninist system in the Baltic states and Ukraine. Deng Xiaoping’s market-centered authoritarianism had been challenged in massive public demonstrations featuring a Chinese version of the Statue of Liberty. The democratic transitions of the 1980s in Latin America and East Asia seemed to be prospering.

None of this could have been predicted in that talismanic year, 1984, so as we were reveling in what seemed to be history’s vindication of our democratic and anti-communist convictions, Charles asked, half-whimsically, “What are we going to do with the rest of our lives?” The great struggle of our generation—the war between imperfect democracies and pluperfect tyrannies—seemed to have been won by the champions of freedom.

Although I replied that history wasn’t over and there would be plenty for each of us to do, I couldn’t have imagined that, within two decades, the democratic project would be under assault throughout the world—and not only by adversarial regimes like Vladimir Putin’s.
authoritarian kleptocracy in Russia or Xi Jinping’s increasingly repressive and aggressive China, but from within. Yet that is the situation that confronts us today.

In east-central Europe, the notion of “illiberal democracy” — a regime in which one party claiming a monopoly on national identity and tradition maintains itself permanently in power — has become part of the political landscape. There, too, one finds open talk of the “Salazar model” — a relatively benign authoritarianism that uses state power to manage politics, the economy, and the culture in order to insulate the people from the riptides of post-modernity.

Here in the United States, intellectually serious voices assert that ours is an ill-founded republic whose present discontents and dysfunctions are the predictable working-out of fatal flaws in the intellectual and moral-cultural architecture of American democracy.

All over the world, young people — meaning millennials born since 1980 — seem suspicious of democracy and willing to flirt with efficient authoritarianism. The World Values Survey reports that only 32% of American millennials and 43% of European millennials think it “essential” to “live in a country that is governed democratically,” while about 35% of millennials globally think it would be “good” or “very good” to have in their countries a “strong leader” who doesn’t have to “bother with parliament and elections.” These attitudes are not confined to millennials, however. Surveys indicate that one-third of all Americans would favor the authoritarian rule of a leader unconstrained by the checks and balances of our constitutional system (and one in six would like the strongman to wear a military uniform). Similar figures are reported in Germany, and some surveys suggest that half the populations of both Great Britain and France would welcome some version of caudillo rule.

History clearly is not over, and the prospect of the political history of the West taking some nasty turns cannot be precluded. Sorting out this season of democratic disorientation and charting the path of democratic renewal requires a sober assessment of democracy’s present discontents and a refresher course in some basic truths about the nature of the democratic project and the conditions necessary for its flourishing. Those are both vast subjects, so what follows are some program notes for beginning an analytic and prescriptive conversation about 21st-century democracy.
The most visible and politically consequential critics of the contemporary democratic project, here and in Europe, are typically labeled “populists.” It’s not a term I find very useful. How do you find insight, much less precision, in an ideological moniker used to describe both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump? What light is shed on a grassroots political phenomenon when both an elite journal of culture, the *New Criterion*, and a race-to-the-bottom website like Breitbart News describe it as “populist”? What does it mean to call “populist” a smorgasbord that includes statist, ethno-nationalist, and libertarian proposals?

So rather than treat the new populism as a coherent ideology and program, it may be more helpful to think of it by analogy to medical science. Just as a fever in the human body is a signal that something is wrong in that body, so the varied and sometimes-contradictory populist fevers and passions in the trans-Atlantic body politic are signals that the democratic project, far from being perfected in the post-Cold War world, has in fact got some serious problems. Or as historian George Nash puts it, “populism . . . gives a voice to the hitherto voiceless, who often have legitimate grievances that deserve redress.”

What are those grievances? What are these populists upset about? Among the most prominent of the populist grievances, six primary problems can be identified.

First are the economic dislocations caused by globalization and the failure of a globalized economy to lift all boats. First analyzed by Charles Murray’s *Coming Apart* and then poignantly described in J.D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy*, this grievance is more prominent in the United States than Europe, where womb-to-tomb social-welfare systems tend to protect the less-skilled from the churnings of rapid economic change.

Second are widespread fears in Europe of the loss of national sovereignty to distant, unaccountable, and often overbearing transnational bureaucracies—a grievance mirrored in the United States in the concerns of Tea Party and other activists, who worry about the erosion of state and local authority because of the vast reach of the national government into virtually every aspect of our common life.

Third is the skepticism, mockery, scorn, and disdain that is regularly poured over traditional cultural institutions and mores by elites in the arts, the universities, the mainstream media, and the entertainment
industry. This form of cultural authoritarianism not infrequently motivates and sustains the heavy hand of coercive state power in enforcing what elites consider enlightened social arrangements essential to the democratic future—but which many populists regard as policies that erode community cohesion and threaten basic civil rights such as religious freedom.

Fourth is the intuition, ominously similar to what was afoot in certain European circles in the 1920s and 1930s, that democracy is simply incapable of coping with the vast forces of change unleashed by modernity and post-modernity: forces that are, on this view, best harnessed and channeled by authoritarianisms of one sort or another. Here, aggravations with the dysfunction of democratic institutions and democratic politics can too easily bleed over into deep skepticism about, even contempt for, the democratic project itself.

Fifth is the cult of license, which, despite its promises of liberation, does not seem to have added to the sum total of human happiness. A distinguished group of European intellectuals recently connected the dots between this misunderstanding of freedom and the disaffection of some of the young from the democratic project: “For Europe’s younger generations…reality is [not] gilt with gold. Libertine hedonism often leads to boredom and a profound sense of purposelessness….In the roiling sea of sexual liberty, the deep desires of our young people to marry and form families are often frustrated. A liberty that frustrates our heart’s deepest longings becomes a curse.” Yet despite the unhappiness, the cultural tsunami of a freedom-without-measure continues to blast its way across the democratic landscape, leading to severe cultural disorientation and anger among many.

Finally, it should be recognized that it is not just left-dominated elite institutions that have provoked contempt from many people. Populist wrath, especially in the United States, is also directed toward what might be called the conservative establishment. As frustration and dissatisfaction have grown, so has distrust of the intellectual and political leadership that, fairly or unfairly, is deemed responsible for the foreign-policy failures of the George W. Bush administration, the dislocations and worse of the Great Recession, and the inability to forestall two Obama administrations. That this distrust was the driving force behind the rise of Donald Trump in the Republican Party seems obvious, whether one finds the vessel of that discontent worthy or not.
These seem to be some of the principal grievances motivating those labeled “populists.” No doubt there are others, and no doubt some of those other grievances reflect ignoble attitudes and corrosive ideas that are incompatible with the dignity of the human person and thus with the democratic project. Yet it would be a serious mistake to regard the grievances noted here as ignoble or base or irrational. They are not. And to regard them as such is, in a word, undemocratic, for in the sphere of culture they are often expressions of people’s most deeply held and felt religious and moral convictions. If those convictions are ruled out-of-play in the democratic public square, then democracy really is in trouble.

tribal silos

What happens when these grievances interact with those forces in our politics that have been accustomed to defining the boundaries of the argument over public policy?

We see what has been called “tribal epistemology,” which exists at many points along the political spectrum and especially at its hardened edges: an epistemic clannishness that makes it impossible to imagine that someone with a different policy prescription might be honest, well-intentioned—and even right. Daniel Henninger of the Wall Street Journal has another useful label for this—the “politics of them”—and it is most certainly not confined to the far right, or to Trump voters, or in the European context to Brexiteers, supporters of Poland’s Law and Justice Party, or followers of France’s Marine Le Pen. In fact, a good argument could be made that epistemological tribalism in its current form began on the left under the influence of Herbert Marcuse, whose disdain for “repressive tolerance” has re-emerged from the fever swamps of the Sixties and is now making a mockery of free speech and elementary civility on too many American campuses. But whatever its contemporary genealogy, epistemic tribalism and the incapacity to see anything of value in what the “other” thinks or believes is now pandemic across the political landscape of the West. And that tribalism makes the robust encounter of competing ideas, which is essential to the democratic project, very difficult.

Another thing we see is a public space dominated by the loudest, most hysterical voices—the Facebook and Twitter demagogues who practice a political neo-Darwinism that George Will describes as the “survival of the shrillest.” This phenomenon is not limited to the woolier
parts of the blogosphere. At all points along the conventional political spectrum, and even among people who rightly think themselves serious thinkers, the tendency today is to jump straight to DEFCON 1 and let fly with rhetorical nuclear weapons at the first sign of disagreement. Fevered public exchange then leads, in turn, to debased public standards of debate. Or as James Bowman put it, “[D]ecency itself has become partisan — and so . . . is no longer decency in any traditional sense of the word.” The result, as Bowman noted, is that it’s now taken “for granted that politics is war and the enemy is ‘other’ — not subject to reasoned argument but only an object for . . . hatred and contempt.”

In this echo chamber of epithets, the reductio ad Hitlerum tends to be the default position of those most concerned about populism, and the reductio ad diabolum is the default counter-move among the aggrieved: two more signals that the democratic project is in distress. For there can be no democracy without the exercise of reason, and there can be no democracy without that minimum of civility that declines the tiara of infallibility and is willing to acknowledge that the “other” just may have a point.

**FILLING OUT THE PICTURE**

It is therefore imperative that those who would be part of a broad-based movement of democratic renewal in the West acknowledge that these discontents, sometimes dismissed as populism of a deranged or immoral sort, are neither unreal nor imaginary. Rather, they signal distempers and even diseases in the body politic. Recognizing that is the first order of business. But as the great Peggy Lee might put it, the discontents are not all there is. And to several of these discontents and grievances, a cautionary “but” should be added to fill out a realistic portrait of our situation.

Yes, there have been serious dislocations in America because of the globalization of the economy. And yes, too little has been done, by both the private and public sectors, to address this by empowering the dislocated to become productive, participatory members of the modern American economic and political communities. But that recognition should be completed by a parallel recognition of the pathology that J. D. Vance has called “learned helplessness”—a pathology, I might add, that America’s churches have done precious little to address, and that is one root of today’s epidemic of opioid abuse.

It is also true, in the European case, that the European Union bureaucracy is often overbearing, impervious to criticism, dismissive of
traditional national mores, and hostile to religious conviction in the public square. But it is also true that E.U. funds have rebuilt much of the infrastructure of the new democracies of central and eastern Europe. They have helped to recover and restore much of the cultural patrimony in architecture and art that was severely damaged by six years of war and 45 years of communist neglect and worse. Moreover, transnational institutions like NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have preserved the peace after a century in which Europe was twice on the verge of destroying itself—and taking much of the world with it, had the second round had a different outcome. So “transnational” does not always equal “bad.”

Yes, in both the United States and Europe, courts have usurped many of the functions once performed by democratically elected and thus democratically accountable legislatures. And yes, this usurpation is a serious threat to democracy. But it is also true, in the United States, that the federal judiciary got into this position because of legislative failures at the national, state, and local levels to address the injustice of legally enforced racial discrimination. Moreover, the most vital body of legal thought in the late-20th and early-21st centuries has mounted an impressive challenge to judicial authoritarianism, and that challenge is now being worked out in practice in the federal judiciary.

As for Europe, a more complete portrait of the legal terrain would acknowledge that transnational legal institutions have been useful and important in bringing to account genocidal warlords since the breakup of what was once Yugoslavia. And it may be hoped that the grievances being pressed, however clumsily, by various east-central European countries, as well as the fallout from Brexit, may compel some serious rethinking about the relationship between E.U. law and national legal systems.

In surveying the complex, disturbed democratic landscape of the West today, it will be helpful to keep in mind the example of Winston Churchill. Shortly after Nazi Germany unconditionally surrendered and with the defeat of Japan assured, the British people, as Churchill wrote, “immediately dismissed [me] from all further conduct of their affairs” in the 1945 parliamentary election. (Offered the Order of the Garter on his way out of 10 Downing Street, Churchill replied, “Why should I accept the Order of the Garter when the British people have just given me the Order of the Boot?”) Yet after this stinging blow, and as leader of the opposition in the House of Commons, Churchill could still
say, in a parliamentary debate on November 11, 1947, that “democracy is the worst form of Government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”

**RECLAIMING THE TRUTH ABOUT DEMOCRACY**

Democratic renewal in this season of democratic discontent will also require reclaiming some basic truths about the democratic project. Five such basic truths must be reworked into the texture of public life.

The first truth is that, human folly excepted, nothing in history is permanent, including democracy. Democracy is not ordained by history as its final and inevitable end. Democracy is, by its nature, an experiment: an experiment in a people’s capacity for self-government. Democracies can fail, as the example of the Weimar Republic in interwar Germany should remind us.

Weimar Germany had a rationally constructed democratic system, designed in the aftermath of World War I by some very able people, including the great social scientist Max Weber. Yet the system proved incapable of absorbing the shocks of the Great Depression because the cultural foundations of the system were insecure. And the net result was that Weimar democratically produced its own demise, with lethal results.

By the same token, it ought to be remembered that democracies are quite capable of self-renewal. The classic period of the American civil-rights movement is a reminder, within living memory, that robust moral conviction can successfully challenge both entrenched attitudes and prejudices and renew a democracy’s legal system. More recently, the democratic Revolution of 1989 in central and eastern Europe displaced a great tyranny by the power of moral conviction wedded to national tradition, courage, and shrewd politics.

Still, it is imperative that democratic renewal in the 21st century begin with a recognition of the basic truth that there is nothing inevitable about democracy—that democracy must not only be affirmed, but earned, by every generation.

The second truth to be reclaimed is the truth that democracy is not a machine that can run by itself. Or, to use a post-industrial analogy, democracy is not a hardware that can be run by any software.

What we mean by “the democratic project” today is in fact a complex system composed of three interlocking parts. One part of the system is a democratic polity, in which the people govern themselves through
representatives regularly elected; the judiciary is independent of the legislature and the executive; and civil liberties—which define large spheres of life where the state cannot intrude and which buttress that non-state space known as “civil society”—are defined in law. Another part of the system is a market-based economy, which is regulated by law and custom but in which the state is not the chief economic actor. And the third part of the system—the one that is most often ignored, although it is the key to the proper functioning of a free polity and a free economy—is a vibrant public moral culture.

The vitality of the public moral culture is crucial to the democratic project because it takes a certain kind of people, living certain virtues, to make free politics and free economics work so that the net result is genuine human flourishing. *The machinery of democracy and the market cannot produce that flourishing on its own or by itself.* That is the hard lesson of Weimar, and it needs to be pondered by both political scientists of a functionalist cast of mind and economic libertarians today.

In the three interlocking systems of the contemporary democratic project, the moral-cultural system’s vitality is nurtured primarily by the institutions of civil society. Those institutions include both natural associations like the family and voluntary associations such as religious communities, business and labor associations, and civic organizations of various sorts. Among the free institutions of civil society, the family is of immense importance, because stable families are the first schools of freedom rightly understood as freedom for excellence, freedom for nobility, and freedom for solidarity. As Mary Eberstadt has pointed out in a series of brilliant articles, the deconstruction of the family by the sexual revolution is closely correlated to many phenomena that now threaten the democratic project, from crime and substance abuse to aggressive forms of identity politics that seek to shut down public debate. Thus democratic renewal will look carefully to the revitalization of civil society and the family.

The third truth to be reclaimed, or perhaps in this case asserted for the first time since the Sixties, is that liberal-democratic politics and free or liberal economies cannot be sustained by a liberal culture—if by liberal culture one means a culture of expressive individualism and exclusivist secularism. Such a culture is built on the notions that there are no deep truths inscribed in the human person, that there is at best “your truth” and “my truth,” and that the good is what an individual
wills or wants. Such a truth-starved and morally anorexic culture is incapable of sustaining free politics and free economics because it cannot answer the questions “why be civil and tolerant?” and “why accept the electoral choice of the majority?” Nor can the “culture of Me” sustain free economies, because it cannot explain why productive efficiency and shareholder satisfaction are not sufficient measures of an economy that is free in a truly human sense. And at the bottom of the bottom line, the culture of Me is incapable of defending the claim that the democratic project, for all its discontents and flaws, is nonetheless morally superior to the various authoritarianisms on offer in the 21st-century world, because it is itself committed to the authoritarianism of the imperial autonomous Self.

“[S]uccessful democracies require statesmanship and civic virtue,” George Nash reminds us. And there will be little statesmanship of the sort needed in many Western democracies today without a new flourishing of the virtues. For statesmen are made, not born, and statesmanship is not a matter of genetic inheritance but of learning from a culture of virtue and its truths, and living the experience of a culture of virtue with all its disciplines.

This truth has been lost in the West since the Sixties, that decade of unbridled self-absorption in the playpen of expressive individualism. For a while, it seemed as if the effects of that moral-cultural deconstruction were largely confined to Western Europe, where 1968 marked not just a bad year, as here in America, but a cultural rupture that overtly and comprehensively rejected the past and sought to expunge traditional mores and commitments from public life. But it should now be clear that expressive individualism has had a devastating effect on the United States as well, to the point where we are now instructed by the high culture—and may soon be compelled by the law—to believe, or at least act as if we believed, that such givens of the human condition as maleness and femaleness are in fact choices or cultural constructs, to be altered at will.

So democratic renewal in the 21st century will require a serious rebuilding of the culture of what used to be called “republican virtue,” in which the claims of individual rights are once again linked to responsibilities, and the promotion of the common good is once again understood to be everyone’s civic responsibility. And in this process of rebuilding, there will have to be a serious discussion about the limits
and boundaries of pluralism. For in the marriage debate and the now-raging debate over a variety of LGBT issues, it has become clear—or ought to have become clear—that a pluralism without boundaries is in fact a prescription for the use of coercive state power to enforce expressive individualism and moral relativism on all of society, even if doing so means threatening nuns with massive and crippling fines because of their allegedly retrograde convictions.

The fourth truth to be reclaimed involves the free economy. There is a curious symmetry to be pondered here. Both the Bolsheviks and Friedrich Hayek recognized that markets are essential to the democratic project—which is why the Bolsheviks sought to eliminate markets and why Hayek defended economic freedom. For, as Helen Andrews recently put it, Hayek recognized that “[t]he decision to fix prices or plan production does not lead to an unaccountable army of paid snoops and arbitrary bureaucrats, it necessarily implies them, because those are the only possible means of its enforcement” (emphasis in the original). And of course things got worse than that in the Soviet case; as Anne Applebaum has shown, the Gulag system of slave-labor camps for political prisoners was an essential, not aberrant, component of that 20th-century alternative to the democratic project.

The question for democratic renewal, then, is not “yea” or “nay” to markets or capitalism. The question is how to temper and direct markets so that the vast energies let loose by economic freedom contribute to rebuilding the foundations of civic life, rather than eroding those foundations through that form of self-absorption called “consumerism,” in which human worth is measured by what a person has rather than who a person is. This is, obviously, a task for both the political and moral-cultural systems; the former through law and regulation, the latter through the formation of character. There will be—or should be—ample room within the project of democratic renewal for debating how large a role law and regulation should play in the free economy. But those committed to democratic renewal can no longer avoid confronting the challenges posed by the relationship of the political and moral-cultural systems to the free economy when it comes to the question of setting boundaries to public moral life.

In 1971, when Playboy and Penthouse defined the outer limits of the publicly acceptable, Irving Kristol wrote that the modern American “settlement” of this ancient question, a settlement “in which obscenity
and democracy are regarded as equals, is wrong;... it is inherently unsta-
bble; [and]... it will, in the long run, be incompatible with any authentic
concern for the quality of life in our democracy.” That “long run” is now
here, and the question before us is whether the unbridled public access
to materials that appeal to what Kristol described as “the more infantile
and irrational parts” of human desire is so eroding republican virtue as
to erode the democratic project itself.

There are obviously no easy answers here. But unless the question of
the compatibility of unrestrained libido and democratic self-governance
is on the table, the project of democratic renewal will stall, and may fail.

The fifth truth to be reclaimed in the project of democratic renewal
is the truth that serious criticism must be responsible criticism. There
is something disturbingly insouciant about the potshots taken at the
democratic project today by partisans who cannot concede that they ran
a flawed candidate and an inept campaign in 2016, or by intellectuals
who have never confronted the hard tasks of consensus-building and
governance, or by millennials who romanticize pre-modern polities, or
by all those who indulge in an adolescent style of opposition in which
the responsibility to suggest plausible alternatives is routinely ignored.
Irresponsible or insouciant criticism gets us nowhere.

Democracy and the market may self-destruct; as I said earlier, noth-
ing is permanent in history. But at the moment, for those who cherish
the dignity of the human person, the possibility of participation in pub-
lic life, the rule of law, the adventure of entrepreneurial inventiveness,
and the noble task of deliberating in common the best means to achieve
goods imperfectly known and never fully achieved, the democratic
project—understood as the tripartite system of a democratic polity, a
market-centered economy, and a vibrant public moral culture—is the
only serious option. Salazar 2.0 is not an option for those who cherish
these goods. Neither is Xi Jinping authoritarianism, occidental-style.
Neither is a return to benign monarchy. So the task ahead is one of heal-
ing and reforming the democratic project in its three component parts,
a task which is not advanced by indulging in fantasies about implausible
or impossible alternatives.

REDEDICATING TO THE GREAT TASK

Those who wish to take up that task, and who recognize that multi-
culturalism and transnationalism cannot inspire the loyalties that make
democratic solidarity possible, must foster the development of an alternative to ethno-nationalism and xenophobia. That alternative is *civic patriotism* enlivened by republican virtue.

In European contexts, that civic patriotism will involve an embrace of what has long been understood to be “home,” culturally and linguistically, but which now seems threatened by a bland yet smothering multiculturalism and an aggressive transnationalism that seems deaf and blind to legitimate concerns about national cultural integrity. That embrace of “home” can and must be open, rather than crabbed, and it ought not be confused with strident forms of ethno-nationalism that deny to those who are religiously or racially “other” any possibility of finding “home” where the majority religious or ethnic or racial group has long found it. On the other hand, partisans of the utility of the European Union and its satellite and parallel institutions must recognize that national identities forged by centuries of experience have real value, and that the nation-state remains for the overwhelming majority of people in the West the basic unit of political identity.

In America, the development of civic patriotism will take a somewhat different path, given the native plurality of our population. Here, civic patriotism will reflect a renewed commitment to those truths on which the founders staked their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor. Such a commitment would mean that Americans must once again affirm that there are self-evident truths that can be known by reason; that knowing these truths teaches us both our obligations and the limits of the legitimate role of the state in our lives; and that affirming these truths is what makes an “American,” irrespective of anyone’s grandparents’ country of origin.

Radical skepticism about the human capacity to know anything with certainty and the moral relativism that is skepticism’s inevitable byproduct are incompatible with a renewal of republican virtue and with the development of a vibrant civic patriotism. Nor can skepticism and relativism provide effective cultural barriers against a 21st-century drift by democracies old and new into one or another form of authoritarianism—the authoritarianism of “illiberal democracy,” or an authoritarianism characterized by the heavy use of state power to impose the culture of Me on all of society.

Whether that cultural renewal is possible in Europe is an open question, given the collapse of Europe’s traditional religious communities; the
triumph of post-modern nihilism, skepticism, and relativism in Europe’s universities; and the European demographic crisis caused by self-induced infertility. There is more reason to be hopeful about the United States, for history teaches us that American democracy is remarkably resilient, thanks in large part to the vitality of American civil society. But hopes for a renewal of republican virtue and a flourishing of civic patriotism are going to be dashed if religious leaders in America continue to trade their moral authority for the mess of pottage that is proximity to political power, or if men and women who have devoted their lives to cultural excellence continue to make excuses for vulgarity and crudity at the highest levels of government, or if liberty continues to be confused with license across the entire bandwidth of the political spectrum. Which is to say that both conservatives and progressives in these United States need a thorough examination of conscience about their respective responsibilities for our current democratic discontents, which are no longer just a matter of frustration with Washington political dysfunction.

The most urgent challenge at this moment of democratic discontent, then, is the challenge to rebuild a democratic culture marked by respect for basic human rights, a clear understanding that those rights are not mere expressions of personal willfulness, a commitment to live freedom in service to the common good, and a renewal of that solidarity that Jacques Maritain called “civic friendship”—the friendship of citizens united by a common purpose. The challenge of the moment also requires a rebirth of the idea of politics as a vocation, not merely a career, or an exercise in self-expression, or a method of brand-enhancement. The vocation of politics, Max Weber wrote in 1919, requires both an “ethic of moral conviction” and an “ethic of responsibility.” Put another way, statesmanship requires a firm commitment to certain built-in truths about human beings and their communities, and the skills taught by the virtue of prudence in making those truths live in our common life.

So let us measure ourselves, and those who would lead us, by those truths and by that virtue.