

The Psychopathology of Power & The Decline of Democracy in America

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Abstract

An endemic psychopathology is eroding freedom and the ability to live freely in a society of freedom. To see and understand it, we must look to both the largest order, a nation, and the smallest, an individual, and how the two orders interpenetrate each other. They come together in a singular way in the President of the United States. President Trump and his closest staff illustrate the nature of the psychopathology that threatens American democracy; the pathology reveals itself in both how he gains and maintains public support and how he operates in office. This essay uses the President to illustrate the disease and reveal its symptoms, show the cultural forces that foster it, and indicate the cultural forces that can resist and heal it. The object of the study is not to “psychoanalyze” the President; that task would require intimate knowledge of his life. The object here is to examine the nature and workings of a pathology that he publicly exposes and openly reveals before our eyes. Donald Trump is a means for understanding the concept; the concept is a tool for understanding his Presidency.

Keywords

Trump, Musk, Political Power, Will, Orwell, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Adam Smith, Liberalism, Putin, *The Apprentice*, Tariffs, Presidency, Political Psychopathology Democracy, Equality, Tyranny

1. Introduction: The Psychopathology of Power

Political scientists, politicians, reporters in particular and the public in general have long regarded and treated politics as a struggle for power. But few have recognized the nature of the power that motivates politicians. Consequently, we have been unable to perceive, let alone understand, its pathological form. We witness its disastrous effects but remain confused about what is responsible for them and

about how to avoid them. Most see that decisions made by political leaders in Washington today are incompetent and bad and that there is something wrong in the minds of those who are making them. Speculation over what is going on has offered no adequate explanation.

The pathology of power afflicts President Trump, his team, and Republicans in Congress in differing degrees. We will not see the pathology if we fail to understand the nature of the power they seek. The goal of too many candidates is not to serve an office but to exercise power, the power of deciding. Making decisions attracts them less than the power they experience *in* making them. The goal of the mind-afflicted is not to wield the material power of an office but to experience the strength of their *will* power. Psychologically, power is will. The psychopathology of power is a pathology of will.

In a sound mind, our will operates in life as a *means* to a good. Any other idea makes no sense. Our will gets radically disordered when it does not follow a sense of good outside of itself. What is normally a means, becomes an end. This reversal is pathology of will. What would motivate us to seek to express our will simply to express, it is the crucial factor in understanding the disorder. The deepest pleasure in experiencing willpower is that it transforms the person, changing them from being a weak nobody to being a strong somebody.

Writing in the dark shadow of World War II, George Orwell, exposed the true nature of the struggle for power when it has no goal except power itself. O'Brien, a powerful leader in Oceanic society, reveals the nature of power to his victim Winston Smith. Winston lies bound like a patient while O'Brien talks as a psychiatrist who induces increasingly severe electrical shocks to the body of his patient to elicit the answers he wants from him and finally attaches electrodes to Winston's head to shock his brain so severely that his mind stops working and he can see the opposite of what he first saw; after the shock he sees what O'Brien orders him to see. Before this, O'Brien had hypnotically explained the nature of power and of the system of government, it establishes: "We are the priests of power... God is power." (Orwell, 1983: p. 217) Power is not material, physical, or emotional force. Power is spiritual and not just spiritual but a supreme divine spirit. O'Brien proclaims that he experiences this power in the ability to replace Winston's will with his and that this is what he showed Winston: shock "therapy" removed the presence of any inner standard of truth that might be an obstacle to his will. He is saying, "We don't want you to obey, we want you to *want* to obey." O'Brien continues, "How does one man assert his power over another, Winston?" Winston thought, "By making him suffer." O'Brien explains, "Exactly. By making him suffer. Obedience is not enough. Unless he is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will and not his own?" (Orwell, 1983: pp. 219-220) Orwell ends the novel in "room 101" where he induces Winston to suppress his heart out of guilt for betraying his beloved Julia and not just his head.

Of the two great inner obstacles to the liberation of will, one is of head and the other is of heart. The first involves thinking. Reasoning about facts leads to con-

clusions and conclusions limit and dominate will. Therefore, will must master reason. Consequently, the afflicted must be willfully ignorant. The liberated will must choose without thinking. The method of the clever and liberated must be willful ignorance.

But how can we choose on the basis of will alone? Our mind must operate to discriminate among alternatives. Yes, but it can discriminate without *thinking* and without *knowledge*. It can work the way it works when we look at a range of images offered and spontaneously home in on the one that appears greatest whether it is the fantasy image of a huge golf course, a towering building, or Palestine turned into a resort. No judgment is needed; will is then, in Nietzsche's words, beyond good and evil (Nietzsche, 2014: Chapter I). Selection is on the basis of "liking", and liking is a function of will, not understanding. When he sees a "great" thing, Trump calls it "beautiful." The designation is not aesthetic; it expresses spirited ecstasy in seeing something great. A piece of chocolate cake is "so beautiful". His daughter, "what a beauty." The fantasy image of a post-Palestinian Palestine is beautiful. Tariffs are a beautiful idea and portend a beautiful future.

The greatest inner resistance to the liberation of will from any good, however, comes from the human heart. A great deed is likely to find resistances such as fear there. Resistance of the heart is more intractable than doubts in the mind. However, you can regard the heart's resistance as a challenge to will and so facing and overcoming it makes you stronger. Then instead of avoiding resistance, you welcome it. Thus, the strong-willed leader not only does not avoid such resistance but incites it. Moreover, if governmental power is power not just over self but also over others, and power over others is in replacing their will with yours, then the only way you can be sure that your will is reversing their will is through their resistance. Your decisions as a leader must induce resistance of heart in the society over which you rule. The public must suffer from your policies since then they will resist. As O'Brien points out, only then can their subsequent will to accept your policies be yours. You must get them to willingly accept what their will has rejected. When the human heart witnesses human suffering, the human will is repelled and responds with succor. Leaders of great willpower generate resistance within both their own hearts and the hearts of those over whom they rule in order to manifest the freest and greatest will possible. They must awaken the heart's resistance only to suppress it. Both leader and led must render themselves heartless. The loveless heart is a heart of darkness.

Consequently, policies such as eliminating immigrants and reducing immigration must be cruel, must be infused with brutality, and must induce great physical distress and mental anxiety. The implementation of tariffs must be cruel, brutal, and destructive, harmful to world order and to your own people. When the human heart resists and the human mind demands to know for what great good the suffering is to be undertaken, there is none to speak of. The leader's response to his own mind as well as to his people is that we all must harden our hearts and sustain our will with no good in sight for only then will we be strong-willed. The way we

harden our hearts against the suffering of immigrants brutalized by ski-masked troopers is by dehumanizing them. Human hearts extend compassion to living humans. Thus, we must see foreign peoples who suffer from the destruction of the international order as a defined category, “rip-off artists” who worked the old order. Those brutally arrested as “immigrants” are not humans, they are aliens, rapists, dog-eaters; seize them, strip them, shave their heads, and fly them off to oblivion. The will to induce suffering is not simply the hardness of heart of uncaring money idolators, it is heartlessness toward fellow human beings generated by seeing them, not as they are but through the fantasy image of their being non-human. Those leaders who liberate their will from all restraints are not only incompetent; they are malevolent. The slogan of athletes, “no pain, no gain” becomes “the more the pain, the more the gain”.

The title of Lena Riefenstahl’s celebrated 1935 Nazi film ascribes the pathological condition to Hitler’s rise; she calls it: “Triumph of Will.” It proclaims that Hitler’s victory or triumph or what made him a winner was that he replaced the will of the public with his own. Nothing could be a better description of Donald Trump’s popularity than that it was a triumph of his will, a triumph that turned the will of so many to him. His power was not in imposing what he wanted upon an otherwise resisting electorate but in changing its will away from whatever good they wanted—not to any other good but to his will. Trump’s followers who raged against inflation must accept it willingly. It is important to state this point clearly: the afflicted do not *choose* dreadful things; they choose nothing. Their will is drawn toward destruction and suffering without their making any choice. Tyranny of will is infinitely more dangerous than the will to tyranny.

2. Signs of the Psychopathology of Power

It is important to explore a sampling of the ways the psychopathology of power manifests itself in the reality of Trump’s Presidency.

1) First, consider what Trump says about himself. He proclaims that he is a “winner”; not that he always wins in the sense of reaching the goal of a contest but that winning is a characteristic of his being, of who he is. When he lost the election to Biden, he did not say “I am a loser.” He denied that he lost though would admit that Biden took over the presidency—fraudulently. The “fraud” was not factual, but that did not matter because he was speaking the language of *will*, not the language of reason. The qualities that mark “being a winner” are two: never give up and never admit defeat. In the language of will, never giving up means never yielding your *will*, and never admitting defeat means you never let in or admit to your *will* that you have lost. It does not forbid you to admit to others the fact that another candidate got more votes than you, but if you do so, you see fraud in the vote counting or Congressional tallying process. To an afflicted mind, un-factual claims are not lies but are ways of sustaining the “truth” of *being* ever a winner; they support the sense of *being* powerful. The lies are honest because they represent the winner” and the winner’s “truth”. Thus, to the disordered mind, lies be-

come truth, truth becomes lies, and the truthful victor becomes a liar. Reality is transformed and the liar feels he is and is felt by followers to be deeply honest. That others accept these lies supports the illusory truth they sustain.

Should the idea that you are a winner even when you lose challenge common sense, consider an athlete, a football player, for example. He, too, may refer to himself and certain other players as “being winners” based, not on their winning games but on how they manifested the will to play. Sometimes a player will fail regularly but we still consider him “a winner” because of his heart or will: “He gives it all he has.” We often honor a competitor for “courage” or “having heart”, even more than for games won. The real winners, we say along with Trump are those that never admit defeat and never give up—however often they lose.

2) For those afflicted with the psychopathology of will, the primary pleasure comes in controlling not the *behavior* but the *will* of others. Such control is, consequently, the primary goal in interactions. Recall Trump’s unforgettable words in the Billy Bush “Access Hollywood” tape of September 2005: “And when you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything.” ([The New York Times, 2016](#)) His power is not in what he does but in his effect on the victim’s will: “they let you do it.” He imagines that his *being* powerful, not his *act* of power, changes their will. Sexual assault is not the goal; it is the pleasure of power over not the body but the will of the victim. Trump experiences being powerful not in his touching but in the yielding of his victim’s will.

3) When he comes upon others who display true courage in accepting harmful consequences while standing up for what they believe right, Trump becomes anxious. This is because the image of their manifest courage threatens his illusion of being courageous. Courage is not simply willpower but the strength of will that it takes to serve a good. To preserve his delusion, he avoids visiting the injured in V.A. hospitals because they are living representatives of the courage or willingness to risk great bodily harm for the sake of a good cause. He will say he prefers live heroes to dead ones because in death, their courage is more undeniable. Those he cannot avoid he “destroys” by mockery. He mocks veterans like John McCain, a man of heroic courage who accepted the price of courage as a prisoner of war. He demeans them. He also mocks, persecutes, and would prosecute one of the few courageous members of Congress, Lynn Cheney. He tries to publicly humiliate a national hero—the George Washington of his country, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The press tries to account for the unaccountable but remains dumbfounded: what can he be after in humiliating Zelenskyy? That he has no goal but sustaining his self-delusion of being powerful in getting those of courage to yield their will to his. Mockery and humiliation, we must understand, are not part of a strategy for achieving policy goals but are necessary to sustain the illusion of his greatness, his great strength of will, and to prevent it from fading in the brilliant light of those whose existence testifies to his fakery.

4) Media analysts point out that Trump is “transactional” both in business and in government relations; he expresses pride in mastering his “art (or artfulness)

of the deal”. For his closest ally, Musk, too, any deal that government makes that is not a transaction is stupid. Aiding the poor and afflicted in other nations without getting something in return is “a rip-off”. A government agency that gives away aid must be eliminated. Aid given to an ally to resist an act of unprovoked aggression against it must stop and the impoverished ally must pay a price for past aid and get no more without repaying with concessions for “peace” with the invader. Weak-willed previous Presidents who gave aid without getting anything tangible in return must be mocked as fools or traitors whose stupidity only underscores the will power of the new, vastly more intelligent leaders. The notion that such aid generates a great return, the *good* will of the beneficiary, is considered absurd. It only interferes with the transactional nature of human relations. In any transaction (including those entered into by government), those who are smart know the art of the deal; it is to get more value in the transaction than you gave. Doing that means you get others to accept your will, to replace their will with your own. Thus, the pathological will identifies a “great” deal as one that talks the loser into willingness to accept a bad deal. Selling is the art of deceitfully getting “the better” of others.

The “deep state” is disturbing partly because it does not function on the basis of transactions. To the transactional mind, it is composed of people who do no transactions. They are useless bureaucrats who do nothing but sit at their computers between trips to the water cooler and create complex regulations that clog rather than facilitate the transactional activities of leaders. They only design complex, red tape-bound Ponzi schemes such as social security. Worst of all, functionaries of the deep state rely on expertise, on reason. Their knowledge of how things work would limit the leader’s liberty of will. Whether they are experts in public health, international trade and diplomatic relations, environmental protection, and especially education, it is all the same. Remove them. Render them ineffective. They are obstacles to liberated will.

5) Trump does have goals in his relations with countries upon which he seeks to impose his will. He has not been secretive. His stated goal with regard to relations with Canada is too absurd for anyone to take it seriously. His fantasy is to make Canada give up its independence and join America. To put this more precisely, he wants not to compel Canada to join America but to transform Canadian will from unwilling to willing. He does not want Canadians to submit to his will but to change their will and join America voluntarily or “freely”. The tariff he imposed is a tactic to make Canada suffer so much from independence that Canadians will want to join America in order to participate in its national system of “free trade”. Such a goal does not have to be practical and may even be absurd; for him, it is a fantasy-imagined possibility (it could happen; who knows?) that is highly improbable. An improbable or impossible dream is the dream of the will to power. The function of the goal is not achieving it; instead, it is the excuse for the leader’s experiencing great strength of will and thus being a man of strength.

Policies such as absorbing Canada appear irrational but are instead non-ra-

tional. They are not the product of thinking but by being smitten by a fantasy image or a fantasy idea. Trump does not think about things; he perceives them as ready-made ideals. He makes decisions on the basis of how something—an idea or an image, “looks”. He was said to have decided during his first term to suspend the abusive treatment of caged immigrant children not because it was wrong or bad but because He did “not like the way it looks”. He temporarily suspended extreme tariff plans, not because he decided they were bad but because he did not like the way the bond market looked. His judgment is non-rational and based on liking. Again, liking involves no thought; it is an act of will. Non-rational or anti-rational judgment allows those whose minds are disordered to conclude that they are more brilliant than anybody; all others must think about decisions, the brilliant mind knows without having to think.

In sum, Trump openly manifests the psychopathology of power in what he says of himself. He also does so in the Presidential decisions he makes or orders he signs that confuse observers because they serve no perceivable good and often harm people and the functioning of government institutions. They are incomprehensible unless looked at from the perspective of this disease. Inwardly, the condition is one of hollow emptiness that the afflicted seek to fill. How it took so complete a hold on him is beyond our scope here, but we can look into the social and cultural forces that would lead into it. Examining these forces, however briefly, may well enable us to understand why they are so ubiquitousness and why so vast an array of voters chose Trump because of them, as well as what is to be done to forestall others like him from being elected to high public office.

3. Cultural & Social Origins of the Pathology of Power

1) One most obvious social form that nurtures the pathology is competition. Competitive social organizations foster competitiveness, and competitiveness is the essential characteristic of those afflicted with the disorder.

Competitiveness means being motivated not by goals or material objectives but by the desire to be powerful. We can easily see this in competitive games. They are set up as competitions where opposing individuals or groups struggle against each other to achieve an arbitrary objective. The goal is never anything important but is chosen exactly because it is trivial; that is what makes it “play”, not real life. What motivates competitors is not the object of the game, but the competitive quality of the play. Competitive players are those who focus on the goal without being motivated by it. The most intense games occur when opposition makes the goal, while it is not in itself of great value, hard to reach. Competitiveness refers to the strength of will that competitors put forth to achieve it.

The highest compliment that you can pay players is they are great competitors. It means the player shows strong will or has a “brave heart”. In a game like football being a great competitor means throwing all fears into the wind, swept away on the winds of will, only to become a blind, irresistible, and unyielding force of nature. From the times of Roman Gladiatorial games to the game of football, it has

always been the same. The “thumbs up” goes to the defeated when they have shown great will. Playing games trains the soul in the will to willpower.

Those who design games usually recognize the danger of competitiveness—of how players in the “heat” of the game tend to be swept up and lose consciousness of restraints. Consequently, games have rules to protect players from themselves and other players, and if these no longer restrain their will, they face penalties. Precisely because, in the game, will obliterates all internalized controls or rules, the most will-demanding games require referees, an *outer* source to monitor the action, though competitive players often find rules and referees oppressive to their will and so develop strategies to violate the rules without getting caught. Those trained to be competitive inside a game can carry competition beyond the game. When rules persist there and the law supervises them, the tactic of real-life competitors is similar—break the rules without being caught or use lawyers to appear before court referees when caught and through rhetoric, distort the truth of violations. Fans often applaud rule-breaking competitors and may rejoice when they are not caught.

For most game players, competitiveness—striving for a goal on the wings of pure will, remains in the game; for them, both laws and morals restrain their will in the real world. However, it gets hard to resist the competitive urge; it may be transported into work life when the structure of work life is like a competitive game. Something happened to social forms in recent history that led to the abandonment of rules in the conduct of social life and liberated will from their restraint.

2) Societal forms generated by novel social views conducive to the psychopathology of power came into prominence in the west during the 19th century. Theories of liberty generated them. One of the most prominent was economic “Liberalism”. Philosophers fostered the notion that society did not need rules to maintain right behavior and that, liberated from them, life would prosper. Worldly philosophers such as Adam Smith in England, David Ricardo, and Jean Baptiste Say in France developed the doctrine that the wealth of all nations would increase, and prosperity would come to them if governments would let the workings of “the economy” alone. The French slogan was “laissez-faire”. Proponents of this new idea in England pressed particularly hard against the restrictions on international trade imposed by the “corn laws” or tariffs on grain. In international commerce, as in domestic commerce, “laissez-faire” meant “free” trade” or trade liberated from government regulation.

It is essential to remember that unrestrained liberty destroys itself. Liberty is a question of power. Successful liberation movements always mean that power shifts from the previously powerful to the hands of the newly liberated. Whenever power has been concentrated in the hands of a king and the many take it, they are liberated. In a striking reversal of the idea of liberty, when he concentrated power in himself by imposing high tariffs, Trump designated the occasion Liberation Day. He saw the broadest controls on trade ever imposed as liberating. In this case,

liberation meant a shift of power from the rule of the established international economic order and from Congressional control to the will of the President of the United States. This is a clear instance of how under the will to power, ideas are inverted: the imposition of rules gets defined as liberation from rules: oppression is liberty.

Even Adam Smith did not reject all rules governing commercial activity. In the *Wealth of Nations* (Smith 2013) (if read carefully), but more in his other writings such as *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith 2018) he indicated that restraint on the liberated would come from moral standards. If it ever existed, this subsequent facilitated its removal. Partly because of a misapplication of Charles Darwin's shaky idea of how human betterment occurs through "natural selection" as well as ascendant philosophies of political liberty, readers concluded that societies did not need moral rules to advance; some even turned the notion of natural selection into the sociological notion of "survival of the fittest". Peoples educated to these views concluded that as they did not need God (that is, they needed no *spiritual* standard of heart and head) for physiological human development, so they did not need spiritual standards to guide them to act in ways beneficial to themselves and society. They could act on the basis of whatever pleased them materially and emotionally.

3) Wherever it came from, however (and there are surely sources other than these), the result was that liberalism led people to live increasingly liberated from the rules of church as well as of government. This eliminated traditional guidance for individual will. The young, less and less educated to any transcendent standard over the years, found no replacement. As the condition of liberation took hold, Nietzsche celebrated the consequence: "God is Dead." (Nietzsche, 1974) All had been liberated from spiritual rules. He proclaimed that there no longer is a standard of good or truth beyond human will (Nietzsche, 1967).

From a different side came a voice warning of the adverse consequences that followed the liberation from God. Dostoyevsky in 19th century Russia, a nation that had suffered greatly because of the rise of political liberalism in France and the inevitable annihilation of liberty that was Napoleon, focused all his most powerful novels on the dilemma of liberty to the individual and on the devastating consequence of the suppression of rules, political and moral, to society. The characters in his novels suffered in their liberation since they could find no ground for their will in either their inner or social lives. Flailing about while trying to live on the bases of divisive material interests and conflicting feelings, they went aground. They psychologically collapsed and rent aside all bonds of human relations. Dostoyevsky reported increasing psychological disintegration and a parallel disintegration of social relations. While liberal economies were degenerating into rule by captains of industry, the human soul was degenerating into rule by impulses. The strongest impulse for the newly empowered was the anti-god god of power or, to use Nietzsche's expression "the anti-Christ" who asserts his own will against the will of the Father (Nietzsche, 2017).

Nietzsche praised the liberating glories of the death of God. Dostoyevsky saw the horrors of godlessness. Godlessness for Dostoyevsky did not mean those whose will was ruled by the desire for money. He considered them not godless but idolators: they have a god, the god of money, but it is a false or demonic god that would lead to evil. The endless struggle to acquire wealth distorts minds and fragments society. For Dostoyevsky, the godless are those whose will has no idol; The idolatry of wealth may be bad, but it is not horrifying; godlessness alone forces us to face the abyss of meaninglessness (Dostoyevsky, 2004).

4) 19th century liberalism found support from another source. liberal psychologies and especially the psychology of Freud. It posited a natural guide for human will. Freud called it “the pleasure principle”. He considered the human psyche to be founded on this single general impulse that could move the soul in any direction. In his expanded version of it, the principle encompassed the pleasures of both the senses and of ego-identity (Freud, 1962). However, it is a mistake to think that pleasure provides direction to and control over will. Pleasure is not opposed to will. It is one of the forms that will takes. What pleases you is whatever you *like*. Choosing what you like means choosing according to whatever you will.

The pleasure principle was also the dark side of the liberal movement of the 1960s. The bright side included opposition to the wrongs of segregation as well as opposition to the war in Vietnam when it was stirred by compassion for the suffering Vietnamese people who were the war’s victims. The dark side of the 1960s is reflected in a prevailing slogan of the times. It concerned not what we should oppose but what we should choose: “if it feels good, do it!” This aspect of the liberation of will also spread to consumption (buy what you like) and to voting behavior (vote for whomever you please). It is not unreasonable to think that a young man like Trump in the 1960’s might be influenced by the dark side of the era’s culture.

Today, Vladimir Putin calls liberal democracies fascist. That is what he called Zelinsky’s liberal regime. He claimed he had to go to war to save Ukraine from fascism. He views all liberal democracies as fascistic, not because they are in fact but because they inevitably end in fascism. In Russian history, the liberalism of the French revolution turned the chaos of liberty into the militaristic power of Napoleon’s invasion. It took the liberal Weimar Republic only 15 years to turn into the Nazi state. In both these cases, Russia was the victim of devastating military campaigns and the world the victim of war. The rise of Donald Trump only verifies the lesson of history: liberal democracies inevitably get mired in competitive deadlock and turn to tyrannical government to impose order. Putin appears to believe that only he provides a viable alternative to fascism. It is a return to the archaic anti-liberal Russian model of government: autocracy that enforces church established moral rules such as those forbidding same-sex love affair or same-sex marriage. Might he not be right and, if so, how do we stop the rise of fascism? Is his regressive autocracy the only alternative to outright tyranny?

The ascendancy of Trump to the Presidency must give us pause. History seems

to teach what Putin appears to believe: that liberal democracies disintegrate—though at various rates, until they end in tyranny and war. Indeed historically, some have fallen but some have survived bouts of fascism and others have resisted its rise. We need to reflect on what has rendered them, especially American democracy, resilient in the past. But first, we need to understand not only the mental condition that drives Trump and its source in culture and society but, more importantly the forces that impelled him into the White House: what accounts for the public’s supporting someone afflicted with so dangerous a condition. Here, we will examine two of these forces, the lack of either of which would have rendered him a failure.

4. How the Afflicted Get Elected

Trump’s starring role in “*The Apprentice*” appears to be one of the factors that finally prompted him to run for the office of the Presidency. The show interested audiences as a game, one where contestants competed to be chosen for jobs. The first thing to note about the show is that Trump was not a competitor; he was the judge of the competition. He determined the winner on the assumption that he was an expert businessman who knew what characteristics in candidates qualified them for a job. He seems to have learned from this how to position himself in the contest for public office: not as a contestant or competitor but as one who has been so successful at a game so as to be seen as already “a winner”, someone qualified by experience to judge others. He is *assumed* to have good judgment. The closest analogy for his campaign might be that of Dwight Eisenhower who also presented himself as already the chosen based on past performance. Voters had just to look at his life to know that he was their leader and endorse his ascent to office. Where Eisenhower had *shown* himself a leader by heading up the military alliance of World War II, Trump merely projected a fantasy game-show image of being a great leader, an image that was contrary to the facts. He told voters about “what I *will* do on day one”, not about what he *would* do if elected.

A second thing about the show was that Trump conferred victory on contestants who were often clearly less competent than others. Producers of the show worried that viewers would scoff at Trump’s judgment and lose interest in the show. The reverse happened. They took his poor judgment as proof of the superiority of his knowledge. Because he was *presumed* to be of good judgment, his decisions must be right. Anyone who disagreed with him (including viewers themselves) was presumed to be wrong. Thus, by being wrong but standing against the judgment of “experts” or even common sense, he proved himself more qualified than any who could claim, on the evidence, to be more competent.

However, the most important thing about his success on *The Apprentice* is key to understanding how he rallied voters to his support in the 2024 election. It was how he manifested liberation of will from all standards of truth. He demonstrated in his choices a will that is unbound by any factual evidence. This is what he brought to voters in the election: that they should base their decisions not on as-

assessments of the truth of his words nor on a rational assessment of the value of the policies he advocated. Voters could and should vote for whomever and whatever they pleased—that is, whatever they willed. If they wanted to see immigrants as subhumans who ate pet dogs, then they could and should see them that way. If they wanted to hate immigrants, they could and should without guilt. If they wanted to get rid of immigrants, they must be willing to do whatever it takes to sweep them out as quickly and as efficiently as possible, including ways that fail to respect their humanity and legal rights. Thus, he stirred in them the pathological condition that was his, a will that is liberated from the bonds of reason that would otherwise lead to conclusions that restrained the power of will. His was a triumph of willful ignorance.

Such a candidate for public office—one afflicted by the disorder of will, is destined to foster ill-will and kill goodwill in an unhappy electorate.

Putin may be right that societies founded on liberalism eventually turn to fascism, though history surely shows him wrong about thinking that authoritarian regimes can be stable and that their form is the destiny of the world. History also shows him wrong about the resilience of American liberal democracy. It has endured. This is because America's founding principle was never liberalism. America was conceived in liberty and directed toward liberty but not constituted by it. The founding or constituting principle of America as a democracy is presented in the Declaration of Independence. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..." This expresses the founding truth of America and of the Constitution. The basis of the declaration of separation from Britain was the claim of a universal and universally knowable principle: equality. From this *one* principle the other truths concerning rights are derived: the universal rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (as well as others) are derived *from* the self-evident truth of equality. America claims the right to liberty to be self-evident, but that right descends from and is limited by the principle of equality. By contrast, the liberalism of the French revolution made liberty a stand-alone principle, independent from others and so unrestrainable in its pursuit. That produced a self-defeating force, ending in the militaristic autocracy of the Emperor Napoleon. America was never constituted as and has never been simply a liberal nation but one holding to liberty through the primary truth of equality. That is why legal slavery would divide the house and almost destroy the nation. Even those that defended slavery did so by still appealing spuriously to universal equality, an equality, they said, that demanded unequal treatment of Africans since they were "ignorant" or "like children" who require special care.

Nineteenth century political and economic liberalism eroded consciousness of the centrality of equality in America by releasing the will to power from its restraints. Un-monitored liberty does lead inevitably to a struggle for power that ends with one or a few ruling and the rest being ruled. So, too, unrestrained by the recollection of equality in economic and political life, liberalism destroys liberty by removing from the will the restraint of self-evident truths. This, just as Putin

sees, inevitably leads to the concentration of power in the hands of the power crazed. A tyrannical majority power in legislatures or a tyrannical plurality in elections is tyranny. The only solution to the slide into tyranny is the self-evident principle of universal equality. If it is recollected to guide the Supreme Court, to monitor Presidential orders, to suffuse discourse in Congressional legislation, and to illuminate the minds of voters at the polls, liberty is saved, and America reaffirms its exceptional status as a new order in the world.

Presidents, candidates for the Presidency, as well as candidates for Congress and the policies Congressmen advocate must be judged by the degree to which they respect or are consistent with the spiritual principle of equality. This principle is universal and self-evident to all peoples, and all people respond to it. Should policies such as that of immigration be put to the test of universal equality (we need to respect the *universal* claim to liberty and the pursuit of happiness that is every human's right), the vast majority of Americans would reject brutality and heartlessness in immigration policies. A candidate for the Presidency will be widely abandoned when he denies universal equality and instead proclaims hostile discrimination among nationalities, cultures, and races.

All struggles against the power of liberated will are struggles of darkness and light. The psychopathology of power is the rejection of all truths: For the afflicted, there is no truth. There is only liberated will. Those that oppose the darkness must come equipped with an irresistible force, not the dim light of reason but the light of timeless truths.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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