



Populism and the Fate of Civic Friendship

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The theme of this conference invites a virtue-focused response to the crises of liberal democracy evident in radical populist movements on both sides of the Atlantic. It does so in the context of a year of similarly themed conferences, all reflecting a sense of crisis engendered by recent elections, the descent of public discourse and cooperation into epistemic sabotage and tribal warfare, and the demise of 25 democracies in this new millennium in which history was supposed to end with the everlasting triumph of democracy and capitalism – an indivisible package of mutually supporting freedoms, or so it was assumed (Luce 2017). In the meantime, diagnoses of what has gone wrong have been shaped by the extensive research on radical right populism that has accumulated in recent years. In the European context, the terms “populist” and “demagogue” are used interchangeably with reference to leadership style, and scholarship on populism sometimes reflects this by invoking classical Greek understandings of demagoguery and the associated descent of democracies into tyranny. So understood, populism invites an abandonment of democracy in the name of democracy – an abandonment of the constitutional protections of individual rights and division of authority essential to democracy as we know it. It is no coincidence that it is also a vicious and demoralizing style of leadership masked by a highly moralized and divisive vision of society – a style of leadership that divides, enfeebles, and corrupts in ways that undermine a public’s ability to live well together.

Wide civic friendship is a virtue essential to public's well-being, and one that is both essential to institutions functioning well and more prevalent in the presence of good institutions. As I understand it, civic friendship is simply the goodwill one should have toward the members of the communities to which one belongs and the friendly feeling one should normally exhibit in face-to-face encounters within those communities (Curren 2000: 131-39). It is a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral disposition to affirm the value and act for the good of the members of one's communities, in the policies one favors and in face-to-face encounters, together with a tendency to experience the successes, failures, and afflictions of the community as one's own. It involves a feeling of positive relatedness or membership in a civic world where one belongs and it is a central feature of the appropriate responsiveness to the value of one's society that would constitute civic virtue (Curren & Dorn 2018).

The goodwill and friendly feeling characteristic of civic friendship in face-to-face encounters are not properly limited to compatriots and they are manifested in ways that exhibit a variety of allied virtues that are essential to the cooperative social worlds that people need, seek, and create. These virtues of social cooperation are more frequently exhibited in settings shaped by good institutions, and a measure of good leadership is that it exhibits and facilitates a flourishing of these virtues.

People "share a common desire . . . for moral order," writes Michael Ignatieff, and by and large they create such order through ordinary virtues of tolerance, kindness, trust, hospitality, honesty, respect, forbearance, forgiveness, reconciliation, cooperation, non-violence, resilience, vigilance, and endurance (Ignatieff 2017: 69, 202). Nevertheless, "we are living a genuine crisis of the universal amidst a return to the sovereign," as everywhere states push back against obligations of international justice, "whether it be the refugee convention, the laws of war, or the

human rights covenants” (216). A lesson of Ignatieff’s global field work on virtues and rights is that states should instead do everything in their power to dispense justice without discrimination in employment, housing, policing, and government accountability. They must vigorously defend the liberal institutions and norms of justice that are threatened by nationalist and authoritarian movements, while providing the security and opportunity essential to persuading their citizens that they are not threatened by immigrants. “The core problem of modern politics” is to control globalization “so that it creates jobs rather than killing them, sustains communities instead of wiping them out, protects the environment instead of wrecking it,” writes Ignatieff (70-71). His case studies in Brazil, Bosnia, and South Africa illustrate the ways in which liberal democratic constitutions can be corrupted by cultures of entitlement and self-dealing, involving government collusion in oligopolistic domination of markets, historic animosities, and the replication of autocratic patterns of governance by the victors in liberation struggles. From New York and Los Angeles to Rio and Pretoria, he also documents the toxic effects of brutally discriminatory policing, as well as the role of good policing in enabling neighborhoods to rebuild a sense of community.

If Ignatieff is right, then civic friendship and related virtues of public life will not flourish through educational efforts alone. They are most likely to flourish in contexts shaped by the cooperative norms of “liberal democracy” and related “liberal institutions” that provide reliable common sources of information, fair access to educational and employment opportunities, and the like. By “liberal democracy,” I mean forms of government that grant equal citizenship, political voice, and protection of the law to each class or sector of the public through institutional arrangements descending from the “mixed constitutions” of Greek and Roman antiquity. Liberal democracies are constitutional systems designed to protect the interests of every member of the

society, and – accordingly – to ensure that no one is above the law. A mixed constitution incorporates a variety of forms of participation and representation in governing to ensure that no class of citizens is without political influence, and Aristotle’s view of such constitutions was that they are most stable and successful in enabling the members of a society to flourish when they are also “middle constitutions,” or dominated by a large middle class (Curren 2000: 75, 103-104). Friendship is only possible among those who perceive each other as equals, he holds, and a society polarized by wealth and poverty is not one in which citizens can perceive themselves as sharing a common good, or believe in impartial justice, or cooperate in governing. “Nothing can be more fatal to friendship” in societies than this, he writes (*Pol.* IV.11 1295b14-24). Yet, political societies are properly partnerships in living well, characterized by voluntary cooperation, mutual advantage, and civic friendship, according to Aristotle (Curren 2000, 2013).

Populism is a polarizing form of politics that plays a pure, deserving, hard-working “people” off against corrupt “elites,” and Ignatieff’s analysis and those of many political sociologists and observers suggests that it unlikely to gain much following in the absence of prior institutional failures (Adida, et al. 2016; Gest 2016; Goodhart 2017; Ignatieff 2017; Judis 2016; Laurence 2012; Luce 2017; Mudde 2017; Müller 2016; Saunders 2012; Social Mobility Commission 2017; The Economist 2017; Vigdor 2011). In its most troubling forms, populism invokes a mythology of a homogenous and morally pure “people” given voice by an authoritarian strong leader who must vanquish the corrupt elites, expel those who are not the true people, and sweep aside the institutions of a constitutional system that limit the leader’s ability to exert his will allegedly on his people’s behalf. It delegitimizes opposition and all but precludes wide civic friendship.

Those of us who are employed by universities should have no illusions about the seriousness of our civic obligations at this moment and the hazard entailed by a populist and reactionary narrative that identifies all institutions of public knowledge, from professional journalism and universities to national intelligence services and academies of science as ‘enemies of the people.’ As I acknowledge the importance of Michael Ignatieff’s work today, the Central European University in Budapest that he leads as President and Rector is threatened with dissolution in Victor Orban’s Hungary. The aim of populist attacks on universities, the press, and independent courts is to silence opposition and consolidate power, but if the attacks on universities are resonating more widely now than in the past it is because the global expansion of educational systems has made the difference between having and lacking a college degree economically and culturally fundamental to an extent it never was in the past and is barely recognized (Curren 2017c; Curren & Metzger 2017). David Goodhart comes close to acknowledging this in his diagnosis of the Brexit vote as exposing a cleavage between the mobile “Anywheres” who begin or end up in global cities, which offer the best educational and employment opportunities, and the immobile “Somewheres” who begin and remain in rural areas, towns, and smaller cities that are in economic decline, displaced from the center of national life, and increasingly unrecognizable (Goodhart 2017). Those who begin in global cities or migrate to them acquire the cosmopolitan sensibilities and virtues that enable the multicultural social worlds of London, New York, and other such cities to function remarkably well without common bonds of nationality or religion, but this is facilitated by a sufficiency of opportunity that no longer exists elsewhere. “Opportunity is a promise that simply must be kept,” if the ordinary virtues of tolerance, hospitality, and trust are to endure (Ignatieff 2017: 46), and it has

not been kept in the towns of Britain and the U.S. where the “smart people” who control everything are resented even more than immigrants.

I will develop these themes in what follows, by identifying the patterns of populist leadership and contrasting them with leadership that exhibits virtues favorable to civic friendship and the flourishing of a society and its members. I take civic friendship to be a bundle of acquired attributes essential to an admirable fulfilment of human social potential in the spheres of public life. It is a form of goodwill or friendly willingness to act for the good of others in face-to-face civic transactions and the enactment and application of laws and policies. It engenders civility, social cooperation, and respectful engagement in public reason, especially in conditions favorable to widespread willingness to act for the good of others throughout the civic sphere in question. Demonstrated mutuality of such goodwill throughout a civic sphere would characterize a social and political condition of civic friendship – a condition in which attributes of civic virtue are not simply widespread in a population but actively shape the political culture. It would be manifested in widespread trust, civility, cooperation, and belief in a common good and impartial justice.

I will endorse the Aristotelian claim that civic friendship requires certain forms of equality and justice, hence a “middle constitution” (i.e., a strong middle class and policies favorable to the preservation of one) as well as a “mixed constitution.” I will similarly endorse the Aristotelian view that the polarizing rhetorical styles that have become so prevalent are manifestations or precursors of authoritarianism, and I will affirm the value of unifying leadership for social well-being. I will illustrate the latter through excerpts from the May 23,

2017 speech by New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, justifying the removal of monuments to racial apartheid in the American South. I will also provide background essential to understanding the significance of such monuments and the contentions surrounding them for civic friendship in the U.S.

Populism in the Age of Trump

Radical right populism is defined by Cas Mudde as having three core features (Mudde 2017a: 4-5). The first is *nativism*, a combination of nationalism and xenophobia, which sees citizenship and residence as properly limited to members of a native or national group and sees non-natives as a threat. The second feature is *authoritarianism* or desire for strictly enforced hierarchical authority, and the third is *populism*, which conceives society as divided into a “pure people” and a “corrupt elite” and holds that politics should express “the will of the people.” Mudde holds that “the populist radical right is democratic, in that it accepts popular sovereignty and majority rule,” but that “tensions exist between the populist radical right and liberal democracy, in particular arising from the constitutional protection of minorities” (5). These elements of radical right populism more or less define populism, as it is characterized by Jan-Werner Müller, though Müller argues that true populism is so much in tension with liberal democracy as to be antidemocratic (Müller 2016). Populism is a distinctive form of authoritarian and anti-pluralist leadership, he writes. Populist movements and leaders present themselves as the singular voice of a morally pure unitary people, contrasting this true people with elites and institutions that are portrayed as corrupt and unjustly catering to others who are not “the” (true) people.

This moralization of political conflict is deeply polarizing, and it cultivates an expectation of apocalyptic confrontation. It incites the “true” people to support the “strong” leader in delegitimizing any voice but his own and consolidating authoritarian power in his own hands. Liberal institutions that would be regarded as essential checks on executive power in another era, such as independent courts and a free press, are attacked as undemocratic “enemies of the people.” The patterns identified by Müller were evident in Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and the early months of his presidency, inspiring sharply opposing reactions from his political base and from defenders of the U.S. liberal democratic constitutional tradition. That said, the factors Müller and Mudde identify are pivotal in the current bitterly partisan political landscape.

The period since the 2008 financial collapse has witnessed a polarization of economic fortunes that had been playing out for decades but has only recently resulted in an endemic crisis of downward mobility for those without a college education. Housing, college, and health care would already have been out of reach for much of the U.S. middle class if not for an unsustainable growth of debt that came crashing down in 2008 and 2009. As regional and residential segregation by college attainment has grown and the number of people who see themselves as belonging to the middle class has declined, so too has belief in the justice of liberal-democratic systems that have done too little to prevent this from happening (Luce 2017). Resentment toward the “smart people” who control everything has emerged as a potent political force together with skepticism about the claims of experts and belief in conspiracies. Authoritarian attitudes are associated with perceiving threats to one’s culture or society (Stenner 2005), and the rising preference for authoritarian “strong” leaders in the U.S. and much of

Europe seems to be primarily associated with economic, political, and social marginalization (Gest 2016; Taub 2016; Luce 2017; Müller 2016).

Apart from the cities where privilege is concentrated, the communities of these societies are dying for lack of economic opportunities and political voice, while the members of these communities who dominated the culture of the society as a whole are experiencing a “profound sense of social displacement – a shift to the periphery” (Gest 2016: 187). The integration of Muslim immigrants is meanwhile uneven and strongly influenced by barriers to integration, including prejudice and exclusionary employment, housing, and education policies (Vigdor 2011; Laurence 2012; Saunders 2012; Adida, Laitin & Valfort 2016; Gest 2016). These rooted and immigrant populations are similar in being more inclined to embrace extremist movements and actions if they experience political and other forms of marginalization, though the majority of both groups remain “peaceful, adaptive, and tolerant” (Gest 2016: 186). Those who are older, more affluent, and more educated are more uniformly inclined to embrace democratic processes and ideals of inclusion.

Müller argues that “The danger to democracies today . . . is populism – a degraded form of democracy that promises to make good on democracy’s highest ideals. (“Let the people rule!”)” (Müller 2016: 6). His book *What is Populism?* reads like a prediction of the early months of Trump’s presidency, beginning with Trump’s tweet on and about the day of his inauguration: “January 20th, 2017 will be remembered as the day the people became the rulers of this nation again” (Estrepa 2017). This embodies the fiction that the populist leader is the one true voice of “the people.” “The claim to exclusive representation is not an empirical one; it is always distinctly *moral*,” notes Müller (2016: 3). That is, it assumes a singular popular will and public good that is not an aggregation of the wishes or good of all the actual members of the

society determined through democratic procedures, and this singular will and good are inevitably those of a moral “true people” or their “substance” or “true identity” (20-32). Populism is thus *antipluralist* and a form of *identity politics* that contrasts a “true people” with those who do not belong. “Populists do not claim ‘We are the 99 percent.’ What they imply is ‘We are the 100 percent’,” writes Müller (3).

The logic of this is consistent with Trump’s statement that, “The only important thing is the unification of the people – because the other people don’t mean anything” (CBS Weekend News 2016). It allowed him to identify his presidential inauguration as the moment “the people became the rulers of this nation again,” glossing over the fact that 54.1% of voters preferred other candidates. Confronted with the news that he had received almost 3 million fewer votes than Hilary Clinton, he insisted without evidence that he had won the majority of votes cast by bona fide Americans and later defied the judgment of election officials across the country by appointing a commission to investigate the massive voter fraud he alleged.

In the moral imagination of populism, there can be no legitimate opposition. The populist candidate is the one true voice of the “pure, innocent, always hardworking people,” betrayed by a corrupt elite, who are portrayed by right wing populists as unjustly favoring groups that “do not really work and live like parasites off the work of others” (Müller 2016: 23). A system controlled by this corrupt elite could thus be condemned as “rigged,” allowing candidate Trump to threaten Clinton with imprisonment if he won the election and to suggest that he would only accept the outcome of the election if he won (Landler and Parker 2016). The same logic allowed him to attack “so called judges” who blocked his ban of immigrants from Muslim countries, to violate constitutional norms by demanding personal loyalty from others whose government positions are designed to ensure independence, and to unrelentingly impugn the

character and professionalism of serious journalists, condemning them as “enemies of the people” and dismissing documentation of his failings and corruption as “fake news” (Cole 2017; Grynbaum 2017). Conspiracy theories “are rooted in and emerge from the very logic of populism itself,” writes Müller (2016: 32).

Populist leaders are inclined to open direct channels of communication with their followers, to control the message and to “provide a sense of a direct connection” or “direct representation,” as Trump has with his Twitter feed, Victor Orbán has with his weekly radio interviews in Hungary, and Beppe Grillo has with the blog he used as a platform for launching his Five Star Movement in Italy (34-35). And just as Trump made his way largely outside any established political party, populist leaders’ claims to exclusive and direct representation are more easily reconciled with a “movement” or “front,” as in the case of Jean-Marie and Marine Le Pen’s Front National in France, Geert Wilders’s Party for Freedom in the Netherlands (a party whose two members are Wilders and a foundation of which he is the sole member), and Beppe Grillo’s movement in Italy (36-38; Mudde 2017b: 428).

Populists are enemies of institutions and mechanisms of representation “that fail to vindicate their claim to exclusive moral representation” (39). Like the demagogues condemned by Aristotle and other proponents of “mixed” constitutions that divide power and protect the fundamental rights of all members of the society, populists present the consolidation of power in their own hands as conducive to the public interest (Lukacs 2005: 10-11, 24). Yet, not all are as successful in attaining office and disabling or colonizing institutional structures as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Hungary’s populist leader Victor Orbán have been. “Colonizing” or “occupying” the state is an aspect of populist governance that may be manifested in curtailing the independence of courts and placing loyalists in ostensibly

nonpartisan bureaus, as Orbán did with the Hungarian civil service and Trump has done by appointing opponents of the missions of agencies of the federal government as their heads. A second common feature of populist leaders in power is mass “clientelism” or corrupt exchanges of favors and support, and a third is harassment and suppression of NGOs that put up resistance. Several of these aspects of populist leadership imply a passive form of citizenship, beginning with the weakness or absence of mediating institutions, such as parties, through which citizens can participate and contribute.

If the supporters of populist governments are little more than spectators, however, they may be cheered by the affirmation of their identity and prospect of their country becoming “great again.” An aspect of this on both sides of the Atlantic is support for “national sovereignty.” In the U.S. this has been focused on an assortment of international institutions and trade agreements. In the European context it has been associated with perceptions of the EU as corrupt and as a homogenizing force that interferes in countries’ internal affairs, threatening their national character and traditions – their identity, in a word (Betz and Johnson 2017: 76). Hence the campaign message of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, in the September 2017 elections that gave it 100 seats in the German parliament: “We will take our country back” (Cohen 2017). Cas Mudde argues that these radical right populist sentiments are simply a more radical version of widely held nativist and anti-establishment sentiments, with a greater prevalence of the latter in the U.S. being explained by evangelical Christianity having much greater influence there (Mudde 2017b: 430). The majority of Europeans are proud to be members of their nation-state, feel that further growth of minority groups would be a problem, and view the EU as a corrupt bureaucracy (430-432).

Nationalists take the nation-state to be a natural and desirable arrangement, affording the “self-determination of peoples” recognized in the United Nations Charter, while liberal democrats have no obvious principled basis for saying how inclusive or exclusive membership in a polity should be (Mudde 2017b: 429; Müller 2016: 80), apart from treaty and humanitarian obligations to accept a manageable number of refugees and members of separated families. So while populists may unjustly preempt what is properly a matter for democratic debate, it is impossible to say in the abstract that a widely held view that one’s society is struggling to accommodate a large influx of immigrants is objectionably nationalistic. It *could* be consistent with a form of patriotism along the lines of the Irish Constitution’s expressed “firm will of the Irish Nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions” (Mudde 2017b: 429). What is characteristic of radical right populism is the apocalyptic vision of traditional societies being destroyed from within by non-natives who will not become French, or Dutch, or truly American. Reactionary politics takes this to be a *fait accompli* awaiting a counterrevolution.

An aspect of this that deserves further comment is the decline in social well-being of the U.S. middle class since the 1960s. There is an undeniable reality behind the politics of economic nostalgia and resentment in the U.S. and Europe, and studies of electoral results make it clear that this has played a large role in the rise of populism since the 2008 financial collapse (Judis 2016; Gest 2016; Luce 2017). “The West is suffering from acute polarization,” manifested in two-tier economies, residential and regional segregation of those with and without college education, and a collapse of equal opportunity that is so obvious that 50 to 65 percent of Americans now say that opportunity is hereditary (Luce 2017: 41, 44). It is in this context that, “The populist right only began to do really well at the ballot box after they began to steal the

left's clothes. In each case, including Donald Trump, populists broke with centre-right orthodoxy to argue in favour of a government safety net" (101). Luce argues that populists were also the first to grasp that citizens whose insecure employment made them most dependent on that safety net were also most distressed by the erosion of benefits in the same period that immigration was surging and putting demands on the system by newcomers who had not been paying into it (101-102). Trump promised not only a restoration of manufacturing jobs but increased public spending on Social Security and health care (103). Of the Republican voters, his were the most negative about the state of the economy, most skeptical about the fairness of the economy, most convinced that trade agreements hurt U.S. workers, most opposed to reductions in Social Security, and most convinced that immigrants imposed burdens on the country (Judis 2016: 76-77).

The U.S. South's White Supremacist "Lost Cause"

An important aspect of the polarization of politics in the U.S. is its relationship to the legacy of the Civil War, the influence of the south in national politics, and the South as "the region most caught up in manifest destiny and covenanted relationships with God" (Phillips 2006: 125). In the aftermath of the Confederacy's defeat, southern church leaders promoted a resurrection narrative predicated on the assertion that the South and its white supremacist politicians had kept the covenant with God (130). A movement took root to promote the South's white supremacist "Lost Cause" as noble and the subsequent rise to national prominence of southern politicians and organizations was instrumental in establishing the system of Jim Crow racial apartheid that took root in the early decades of the twentieth century (Woodward 1974; Landrieu 2017; Staples 2017). Although monuments to "heroes" of the Confederacy had been erected within a few

years of the South's defeat, it was largely through the efforts of the United Daughters of the Confederacy that stained glass windows honoring Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson were installed with accompanying words of praise in the National Cathedral in the U.S. capital in 1953. Explaining the decision to remove these memorials in September 2017, a cathedral spokesperson explained that, "The problem is that they are shown as saints" (Boorstein 2017). As saints and as patriots, presumably, for the National Cathedral is a monument to the civil religion of sanctified patriots and heroic deeds with which public schools in the U.S. were long imbued (Curren & Dorn 2018). From any perspective but the myth of a racial covenant violated by the North, Lee and Jackson were the farthest thing from patriots, having led an armed rebellion against their own country in which 620,000 soldiers and 50,000 civilians perished.

The southern sense of "biblical nationhood bathed in blood and tribulation" remains today a divisive influence in the contested landscape of American identity (Phillips 2006: 130-131). The "real America" is the "Great Anglo-Saxon Southland," insisted George Wallace, in the 1963 inaugural address in which he denounced the Kennedy administration's steps toward racial equality as "tyranny" and pledged himself to the preservation of racial segregation "in the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth" (Müller 2016: 21). The "real" Americans he called upon as "brothers with us in our fight" began with "native sons and daughters of old New England's rock-ribbed patriotism" and included "sturdy natives of the great mid-West" and the descendants of pioneers of the far West (21). "Real" Americans are White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPS), in other words, and Wallace marks himself as a populist with his pretense of being the true voice of this "native" true people, protecting them from the betrayal of liberal elites who would grant full citizenship to non-natives at their

expense. Americans of African descent had been granted full citizenship by the Reconstruction Amendments passed after the Civil War, but these rights remained a dead letter.

The significance of this for understanding the significance of the removal of Confederate monuments for civic friendship in the U.S. is that a racially focused form of southern regional resentment has survived as a national phenomenon, in part through a theology of the covenant. Research on populism in the era of Brexit and Trump identifies the economic conditions on both sides of the Atlantic since the 2008 financial collapse as pivotal in the rise of populist movements and candidates. This consensus notwithstanding, there are obvious manifestations of nativist racial resentment in the proliferation of white supremacist, white identity, neo-Confederate, neo-Nazi, anti-Muslim, and antigovernment “Patriot” groups during the eight years of the Obama administration (Potock 2017). Further evidence of such resentment would include the groundless questioning of Obama’s right to be president, celebratory hate incidents immediately following Trump’s election, and subsequent confrontations over the removal of Confederate monuments and protesting of police killings of black Americans during the singing of the national anthem at football games (Potock 2017; Coates 2017; Landrieu 2017; Leonhardt 2017). The “anti-establishment vitriol” of Trump’s campaign rallies drew extremists in such numbers that the sponsorship of rallies by established hate groups declined over the course of the election, even as the number of such groups held steady (Potock 2017: 38).

Emboldened by Trump’s election and his choice of senior advisors and cabinet appointees, including the self-declared Leninist Steve Bannon (Luce 2017: 148), white nationalist or “alt-right” groups established a more visible presence in American public life (SPLC 2017). Within days of Trump’s January 2018 inauguration, his administration announced plans to rename the “Countering Violent Extremism” program the “Countering Islamic

Extremism” or “Countering Radical Islamic Extremism” program and to narrow its focus so that it no longer targets extremist violence of the radical right. The white supremacist Andrew Anglin wrote in response that, “Donald Trump is setting us free” (SPLC 2017: 19). Days later the GOP-dominated U.S. Senate confirmed the appointment of an attorney general, the country’s top law enforcement official, with “strong ties” to anti-Muslim extremist groups, further signaling a retreat from equitable enforcement of civil rights protections (19). Given these and related developments, it should have been no surprise that members of white supremacist, neo-Nazi, and other radical right hate groups rallied against the removal of Confederate monuments in August 2018 in Charlottesville, Virginia, wielding torches and semiautomatic weapons, and drove a speeding car into counter-demonstrators, killing one and injuring 19. Nor should it have been any surprise when Trump resorted to “blaming both sides for the deadly violence . . . and at one point questioned whether the movement to pull down Confederate statues would lead to the desecration of memorials to George Washington” (Shear and Haberman 2017: A1). Although much of the leadership of Trump’s party “was in shock,” many of his supporters were “ecstatic as they watched their president fume against the ‘violent’ left [to which no deaths have been attributed] and declare that ‘very fine people’ were being besmirched for their involvement in the right wing demonstration” (Peters, Martin, and Healy 2017: A1).

The counterpoint to this politics of division and the South’s Lost Cause has also been widely evident, in pushback from leaders of both major political parties, leaders of the business community, sports figures, and the wider public. Months before the events in Charlottesville, the mayor of New Orleans, Mitch Landrieu, eloquently evoked the inclusive civic mindedness and patriotism to which the majority of Americans surely still aspire. Speaking as Confederate monuments in New Orleans were being removed, he noted that, “These monuments purposefully

celebrate a fictional, sanitized Confederacy, ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement and the terror that it actually stood for.” He called upon his audience to find a “straighter path toward a better city and a more perfect union” and thereby demonstrate “that we as a city and as a people are able to acknowledge, understand, reconcile and most importantly, choose a better future for ourselves, making straight what has been crooked and making right what was wrong. Otherwise, we will continue to pay a price with discord, with division and, yes, with violence” (Landrieu 2017).

The Fate of Civic Friendship

The economic factors in populists’ recent electoral successes suggest that the plutocratic element in Trump’s pluto-populism must be subdued and the polarizing inequality in the West reversed if democracy is to be secured against the threats it now faces. The institutions of the mixed constitutional system we call democracy have exerted some resistance to Trump’s autocratic instincts and colonizing of the U.S. federal bureaucracy, but there is no counting on this in the long run without policies to reduce inequality and overcome the social divisions that threaten to make the country ungovernable. The constitutional system that Aristotle championed as the best that could be widely achieved was not just a *mixed constitution* that gave all sectors of society a political voice and legal protections. It was also a *middle constitution*, by which he meant a society that is politically shaped and moderated by a large middle class. Without this, he perceived a constant threat of oligarchies arising and being toppled and democracies descending into tyranny as demagogues (literally, leaders of the poor) unleash resentment against the rich. The truth in the present populist moment is that the rich and powerful *have* created an unjust

economic system, and that reducing inequality will be essential to restoring the belief in a common good and common justice on which a viable liberal democracy or mixed constitutional system depends. People must grasp that the system is one in which their concerns will be addressed, if not in this election then the next one. They must be and perceive themselves as a politically viable percentage of the whole and not be convinced that they must delegitimize other political voices in order to have one themselves.

Only on this basis of relative economic and political security is the ideal of wide civic friendship devoted to the whole of a country's good and to wider cooperation in the world possible. Civic friendship of this kind would be grounded in recognition of the inherent value of all the people comprising the society, as well as their opportunities to live well and necessities for living well – including the qualities of the land itself, a just constitutional structure, opportunity-sustaining institutions, and practices and traditions that contribute to flourishing lives (Curren & Dorn 2018). It would avoid destructive racialized responses to perceived threats and it would face challenges with courage, moderation, and endurance.

Even as numerous political leaders have set bad examples for what could constitute civic virtue, other leaders and members of the public have displayed this more admirable form of patriotism. They have displayed virtues of civic friendship and intelligence, stood for justice, served their communities, defended the integrity of science, worked tirelessly to protect the land on which opportunities to live well depend, sought peace, and devoted themselves to the global cooperation on which the fate of civilization depends.

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