

Trump and Truth

By Joseph Arant



“The end result of this though is that our opponents, the media, and the whole world will soon see as we begin to take further actions that the powers of the president to protect our country are very substantial and will not be questioned...”

This quote was lifted from a larger interview senior White House advisor Stephen Miller had with MSNBC over (in his words) the overreach of the judicial branch in lifting Trump’s controversial immigration order. The content and context of this quote, among others from related Stephen Miller interviews, [was discussed](#) in a syndicated morning panel on MSNBC by flabbergasted hosts. Words such as “king” and “dictator” were used to describe the office of President Trump, and each member in turn rightly pointed out that these types of statements are the antithesis of true American government.

Now, some may argue that when staff members make appearances on morning talk shows, their words are merely meant to bolster the president’s position, and can easily be exaggerated, or taken out of context. However, instead of voicing any correction to Stephen Miller’s words concerning his unquestionable power as POTUS, President Trump instead [praised](#) Miller,

stating, "Congratulations Stephen Miller- on representing me this morning on the various Sunday morning shows. Great job!"

As an American, this worries me. As a Christian, this worries me even more.

-When Truth Is Subverted-

In Acts 14, we read of Paul and Barnabas going to the cities of Lycaonia, and there healing a cripple. Beginning in verse 11, we see the [subsequent interchange](#):

"And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!' Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, **they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out**, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them'."

Paul and Barnabas knew by whose power they had done that miracle, and rather than creating a self-serving scenario where they were to be worshipped as gods, they rapidly worked to suppress any confusion, [proclaiming the truth](#), and giving rightful glory to God. If Christ had appeared in that moment to Paul and Barnabas, they could have rightfully pointed out "Hey, they're saying it, not us." But this is the point- when you are placed in a position of authority, and you hold your tongue when the truth is subverted, you are not only complicit with it, you are of a higher guilt. As James [rightly points out](#) in chapter 3 of this book, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be **judged with greater strictness**."

Some may feel I am being overdramatic here, and the importance I am ascribing to this whole interchange is dwarfed by the fact that President Trump is out there "getting stuff done, unlike his predecessor". However, it is enough to say that "getting stuff done" confers the right to such power plays? Is this how our government was created to function?

-Government Is Meant for Wicked People-

When writing in 1887 to Archbishop Mandell Creighton concerning his willingness to gloss over the critical nature through which we must critique figures in authority, Baron John Dalberg-Acton [was pointed in saying](#),

"I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men, with a favourable presumption that they did no wrong. If there is any presumption it is the other way

against holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility [that is, the later judgment of historians] has to make up for the want of legal responsibility [that is, legal consequences during the rulers' lifetimes]. Power tends to corrupt and **absolute power corrupts absolutely**. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority.”

The greater purpose of government is to legislate wicked people, but inasmuch as government is also comprised of wicked people, it becomes necessary to set up a system where necessary checks and balances are set in place within a government to insure that a situation resulting in a tyrant or dictator cannot occur. In order to prevent the type of men Baron John Dalberg-Acton was undoubtedly referring to, our forefathers drafted legislation for a federal government that was both small and limited in its power.

Reflecting further on the impetus our forefathers had in drafting our form of government, we are aided by one who in turn inspired many of the governing concepts found therein, the 17th century English philosopher John Locke. Locke, along with other political thinkers of his time, [worked to compose the basis for the necessity of government](#), namely, in a society where everyone is equally an egoist, someone or something needs to protect people from each other, as viewpoint can, and will, differ. In the negative sense, John Locke would argue that government is necessary to protect people from each other. In the positive sense, Locke would state that “people have rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and property.” Locke would argue that these rights have “a foundation independent of the laws of any particular society, [however that government becomes legitimized] as the result of a social contract where people in the state of nature conditionally transfer some of their rights to the government in order to better ensure the stable, comfortable enjoyment of their lives, liberty, and property.”

In desperation to shake British imperialism, we see this concept of the natural rights inherent to mankind, and the social contract of a governing body, to be found in the formalized Declaration of Independence, a [unanimous declaration](#) of the original thirteen colonies of the United States,

“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that **all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights**, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.— That **to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...**”

Governing bodies work to protect the freedom and inherent rights of their citizens, but in doing so, by necessity, work to set boundaries, insuring that the rights of the one will not infringe on

the rights of the other. When the rights of the one infringe on the rights of the other in such a way where both parties have legitimacy in opposing claims, government steps in to arbitrate, [working to maximize the rights of both individuals](#). While one party may find satisfaction to a lesser degree in verdicts, being part of this governed society necessitates a social contract where some rights are voluntarily ceded in order to maintain harmony within the given society.

The founders, it should be noted, were not naive when it came to human nature, and understood the potential power being handed to those in governing authority. Consider, for a moment, the tools afforded to a governing body when placed in authority over its citizens. The same tools necessary to enact order and arbitration can (and indeed, will) lead to corruption. At its most basal level, this is human nature at work, and the founders understood that we are altogether safer when we limit and diversify the tools given to government (i.e. checks and balances).

Writing in the *The Federalist* NO. 51, James Madison [sums up](#) these concepts well,

“The great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department, the necessary constitutional means, and personal motives, to resist encroachments of the others. The provision for defence must in this, as in all other cases, be made commensurate to the danger of attack. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man, must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. **But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.**”

Perhaps at this point, you have a feeling that something is being left out, that there is another role to government that simply maximizing individual liberty. Maybe it's more of a gnawing feeling, something that is difficult to put your finger on. Before we dive into what this role may be, we must first understand where we have come in relation to the concept of truth.

-How Truth Has Changed-

The gospel of John, in the 8th chapter, there is a record of an interchange between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus is, in essence, “put in the docks” by the Pharisees, who challenge the legitimacy of his teachings, as well as his sanity. This discourse shows that Jesus is acutely desirous of those who are listening to know the truth, namely, that he has been sent by God,

and is indeed God incarnate. At the chapter's conclusion, Jesus makes one of his boldest, and for his Jewish listeners, most controversial statements, namely, "'Very truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!'" (John 8:58) This truth was so heretical to the Pharisees that they immediately looked to stone Jesus, who was required to hide himself to avoid their actions.

Jesus came to speak truth irrespective of social preconception, and as is demonstrated in the passage above, irrespective to his own personal safety. Truth is paramount to Jesus because truth is the essence of Christ, and the antithesis of sin. Truth is the great revealer, for it shows us God, it shows us God's person, and it shows us God's will for his creation. This is why knowledge of the truth is so vital for a Christian, and as Jesus observes, the way to truth is abiding in His Word, otherwise, one can become a slave to the antithesis of truth, which is sin:

"As he was saying these things, many believed in him. So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, **'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'** They answered him, 'We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?' Jesus answered them, **'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed'.**" (John 8:30–36)

As we seek to be disciples of Christ, we must bind ourselves to God's Word. We must study it, we must prayerfully consider what it is saying to us, and we must act on the instruction therein. In this, we plead with God's Holy Spirit to work in our hearts to bring us to the full revelation of the truth in God's Word, for "when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). The Apostle Paul instructs us to live in this truth:

"So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:17-24)

And again, putting off our old self and being made new through the truth will lead us to holy living, for we see that the writer of Hebrews encourages us to "make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14)

It is important, however, to understand how we receive and process truth, for inasmuch as we have been made new in Christ, we have yet to receive the renewal of our body for which Paul

states we inwardly “groan” (Romans 8:23). Our body and mind are still under the influence of our sinful nature, our sinful world, and the devil himself. Our understanding of truth must come with the consideration that our mind is affected by these outside forces, and introspection becomes a paramount practice. This, coupled with the prayerful guidance of the Holy Spirit, will bear fruit.

As we see with the Pharisees, their conception of truth hinges on their understanding of God as He was revealed in the Torah, as well as the strong backbone of tradition and their standing as sons of Abraham. These “blindnesses” focused their preconception of truth, and made it very difficult to accept the teachings of Christ, although through the working of the Holy Spirit, some did. Moving to our present age, while we may not be affected in a similar fashion as the Pharisees, our conception of truth is not without “blindnesses”. A small detour is necessary in order to examine how Western thought has shaped our preconceptions regarding truth.

To fully understand how culture and ideology have shaped the lens through which we see truth, it becomes necessary to revisit the guiding forces which have shaped our thinking.

To begin this investigation, we must travel back in time, to 1610, to a speech given by James I of England to parliament concerning the divine rights of the monarchy. In his speech, James I [proclaims](#), “The state of monarchy is the supremest (sic) thing upon earth, for kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods.” This concept of a king sacred before God was not necessarily a new concept, but nonetheless a concept which was ripe for abuse. As James I goes on to say in the same speech,

“I conclude then this point touching the power of kings with this axiom of divinity, that as to dispute what God may do is blasphemy . . . so is it sedition in subjects to dispute what a king may do in the height of his power. But just kings will ever be willing to declare what they will do, if they will not incur the curse of God. I will not be content that my power be disputed upon, but I shall ever be willing to make the reason appear of all my doings, and rule my actions according to my laws...”

To usurp the will and rule of the king, in James' eyes, was tantamount to blaspheming God Himself. This placed those beneath the king in a uniquely difficult situation, for disobedience to the king was disobedience to God. God's truth had become, in essence, the king's truth.

To be fair, history is replete with examples of divine authority. Both the Catholic church and (post-Henry VIII) the church of England had held sway over the hearts and minds of their nation's respective citizens and governing aristocracies for centuries before James I's proclamation. Indeed, papal proclamations and dogma were seen as equal to the truth of Scripture, and much like their state counterpart, the power of the church to dictate truth was accomplished at the expense of the people, a practice which in turn gave a foothold to the revolutionary ideologies on the horizon.

Philosopher Immanuel Kant [defined](#) the Age of Enlightenment (circa 1620s-1780s) as “man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance.” For Kant, the Age of Enlightenment was an age where men “grew up” and “learned to reason for themselves.” On a wide scale, it was a response to the institutionalized authority of the church and the state, which had finally pushed to breaking points. Social and political thought began to adopt the paradigm that reason and science could be used to draw inferences concerning reality (and by extension, truth). For example, science questioned geocentrism, and political theory questioned divine right versus man's consent to be governed under natural law. The church and the state remained strong through this transition, but their power of unquestioned influence on the hearts and minds of their citizens was diminishing.

This age, however, was not without detractors. The push of high reason in the Enlightenment did not sit well with many, and Romanticism was born out of that the desire of many to allow freedom of emotional expression, specifically in the arts and literature, but also in social theory. Concerning German Romanticism, Fritz Novotny [writes](#) in his book ‘Painting and Sculpture in Europe 1780-1880’ that historical Romanticism is “the predominance of feeling over reason.” Indeed, quoting German landscape painter Caspar David Friedrich, the spirit of Romanticism shines forth as “the artist's feeling is his law.”

The mindset of progress within the Age of Enlightenment, as it was related to a natural process of reason and science, granted energy to social consequence, the most famous of which being the French Revolution in the late 1700s. While the drive of revolution was to depose those ruling classes who were deemed tyrannical and/or solely self-interested, the goal was never to disavow governing bodies, but always to replace the despot with a better version of government, namely, one which championed democracy and social equality. Bolstered by a fledgling Industrial Age and mass production, humanity was moving towards the ultimate expressions of humanism, a sufficiency from which meaning was extracted and truth was dictated; truth, its understanding and dissemination, was being placed into the hands of the people.

Britain's imperialism, beginning circa 1815, saw the rise of Christianity as the pervasive, influential religion throughout the Westernizing world. As English nationalism spread, so too did Christianity. The rise of industry during this time came along with the rise of the middle class. Values inherent to the middle class, largely that of family and/or community, grew in strength. Foundations of truth were ingrained via the instruction of one's father or mother. The family structure bled over into cultural ideology, where one's birth would determine where they were placed in the “social ladder”. Coupled with the ideals of the Victorian era, certainty of place and one's role to play in the order of God's creation, and adherence to Biblical morality, became the dominant social theme.

However, a new age of uncertainty was on the horizon.

The year was 1830, and Sir Charles Lyell saw the publication of his book *Principles of Geology*. In this book, Lyell put forth the radical viewpoint that, unlike the common biblical interpretation, the age of the earth was millions, and perhaps even billions of years old. The new age of geology had begun, and along with it, the rise of the Modern age, whose foundations shook tradition Christian views of God to their core. Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850) [speaks](#) to the heart of those grappling with this new reality:

“Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life...
I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's alter-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God”

Alfred, Lord Tennyson's uncertainty in relation to the reconciliation of “God and Nature” proved to be simply the beginning. The year 1859 saw the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, where humans were not created in the image of God, but devalued to the position of the animal kingdom. The year 1867 saw the publication of Marx's *Das Kapital*, and in 1900, Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams*, both of which were seminal works in promotion of the concepts of ideology and the subconscious. Marx argued that humans held less power over their own destiny, and were moreso under the influence of those holding the authority of the state. Freud contended that primal instincts and motives of the mind ruled a person's will.

Yet perhaps the coup d'état of the modernist mindset can be found in Fredrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* (1882), with his immortal words, “God is dead.” David Scott Kastan, editor of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*, [notes of these words](#),

“This deliberately provocative statement comes as the culmination of a long and complicated argument, and does not mean simply that Nietzsche was an atheist...what Nietzsche means to suggest is that an traditional religion had been discredited by advances in the physical sciences...and as religion (“God”) disappeared, so logically must all moral and ethical systems that depend on such faith for their force likewise fade away.”

Sociologist and philosopher Daniel Little [notes](#) that “the pre-modern world of direct, face-to-face social relations, powerful religious beliefs, traditional regulation of village society, and very low levels of mobility for the individual” were each upended by the rise of modernism. Concerning modernism, Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle [lamented](#), “God's absolute Laws, sanctioned by an eternal Heaven and an eternal Hell, have become Moral Philosophies, sanctioned by able computations of Profit and Loss, by weak considerations of Pleasures of Virtue and the Moral Sublime.”

Whatever positive sense of human advancement left within the uncertainty of new modernist mindset was soon met with the realities of WWI and II, leading to a new form of modernism. The machines that hailed the age of modern advancement were now tools of warfare. Culture, art, and literature began to show signs of the ever growing theme, [highlighted](#) by Leo Braudy, a USC professor of English, namely, “the world is going to get worse rather than better.” Speaking of both the arts, by extension, culture, journalist Reed Johnson [notes](#),

“From the fiction of Hemingway, Virginia Woolf and John Dos Passos to the savagely critical paintings and etchings of George Grosz and Otto Dix, World War I reshaped the notion of what art is, just as it forever altered the perception of what war is. Although World War II racked up more catastrophic losses in blood and treasure, World War I remains the paradigmatic conflict of the modern age, not only politically but also culturally.”

This grim and altogether bleak outlook slowly bled into culture, as Reed [quotes](#) Ernest Hemingway’s ‘A Farewell to Arms’, where referring to his time in the Italian campaign, Hemingway pointing to terms such as “glory, honor, courage, or hallow” became “obscene” when placed beside the realities of the present situation.

Through all of this, the grander narratives of humanity and advancement slowly began to erode, being replaced altogether by a new concept, an avant-garde, that of post-modernism. Philosopher Jean-François Lyotard [defines](#) postmodernism as “incredulity toward meta-narratives [where] disciplines develop without connection to old epistemic traditions, especially philosophy.” For the postmodern, reality is established and affixed by the individual as opposed to being fixed to general human understanding. Meaning for one individual may differ from meaning ascribed by another individual. For Lyotard,

“Lamenting the ‘loss of meaning’ in postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative [instead] aesthetic judgment is the appropriate model for the problem of justice in postmodern experience because **we are confronted with a plurality of games and rules without a concept under which to unify them.** Judgment must therefore be reflective rather than determining.”

Post-modern art is the prime example of this mindset, where the battle over what can be considered “true art” is left so entirely up to the whim of the artist, that anything can be called “art”. Art moved beyond unifying concepts, and in turn, moved towards the aesthetic judgment of the individual. Examples of this may include the works of Jackson Polluck, Barnett Newman, Robert Rauschenberg, or Andy Warhol.

So where does this leave us in the present time?

While still in its comparative infancy, the age of our present 21st century is rather hard to define. While the shadow of post-modernism still looms heavily over our minds and hearts, the advent

of the digital (now more specifically, the social/collective media) age has brought with it an age of knowledge. We have, at our fingertips, more accumulated knowledge than at any other time in history, but how much of this knowledge translates as truth?

Novelist Bruce Sterling gave a lecture in Berlin's 2010 *Transmediale* festival entitled "Atemporality for the Creative Artist". In it, Sterling [quips](#),

"There is 'collective intelligence'. Or, if you don't want to dignify it with that term, you can just call it 'internet meme ooze'. But it's all over the place, just termite mounds of poorly organized and extremely potent knowledge, quantifiable, interchangeable data with newly networked relations. We cannot get rid of this stuff. It is our new burden, it is there as a fact on the ground, it is a fait accompli. There are new asynchronous communication forms that are globalized and offshored, and there is the loss of a canon and a record. **There is no single authoritative voice of history.** Instead we get wildly empowered cranks, lunatics, and every kind of long-tail intellectual market appearing in network culture. Everything from brilliant insight to scurrilous rumor. This really changes the narrative, and the organized presentations of history in a way that history cannot recover from. This is the source of our gnawing discontent. It means the end of post-modernism."

Sterling indicates that there is a type of agnosticism that has crept into the 21st century mindset. As our knowledge is formatted and processed through an ever-growing digital network of algorithms and search engine results, the claims being made within that system are showing us "potential-truth" on a continuum with infinitesimal increments, where "actual-truth" is becoming more and more indiscernible, and as some would argue, not possessing the capacity to be actualized. Any authority is lost in the sea of one's and zero's.

This agnosticism is potent, for it creates a society where individuals are less concerned with a knowable truth, and more concerned with whatever works to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. A culture of consumerism has grown from this condition, where individuals take bits and pieces of individual ideology and values, and tailor them to fit their worldview. We anticipate the arrival of the next iPhone model, yet when it arrives, we immediately move to the anticipation of future models. We are never satisfied.

As we conclude this summary, we see how greatly the mindset of the Western world has shifted over the course of 400 years. Absolute truth is replaced with the concept of "truth" being an untenable concept. Grand narratives have been replaced with the narrative of self-interest. And the most worrisome, we see how the truth of God is being ever marginalized throughout this progression.

Now watch how the abandonment of truth and the replacing narrative of self-interest destroys the Constitution.

-We Are Free Because We Know the Truth-

For the following research and argumentation, I am indebted to the work of Craig A. Stern, a law professor at Regent University. His paper entitled "[The Founders on: 'Does the Constitution Work'?](#)" was nothing short of revelatory for me, and I will borrow heavily from it in what follows. I am also indebted to Gordon S. Wood, Professor of History Emeritus at Brown University, and the author of the book "[The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States](#)".

The first question we must ask is what is the effectual nature of the Constitution? To be sure, it is the framework of codified law, giving substance to the formation of government in the United States, but how does it aim to be effective in achieving the desired results put forth in its words and pages?

As a start, we should define our terms, those being "liberalism" and "republicanism". Now, at this point some may find it egregious that I am necessitating instruction on the partisan nature of politics. Bear with me. When the term "liberalism" is used, it has nothing to do with "liberal" in the modern sense, but in the sense our founders would have used it, namely, allowing individual liberty in its broadest sense to every citizen. Furthermore, in the same vein, "republicanism" is to be understood as the necessary arrangement of every citizen to pursue public virtue, as well as their civic responsibility towards the commonwealth, by taking up public office to create and adjudicate prescribed law and policy, whilst representing their constituents, and working towards the preservation of the tenants found within the Constitution.

To give a simplified representation of this, we see that the effectual nature of the Constitution is:

- to secure individual liberty, broadly understood (liberalism)
- to mediate among competing interests and so allow each party the broadest mutual sway (liberalism)
- to foster virtue in citizens (republicanism)
- to set, as the chief objective, the effectual political ordering of public virtue via citizen representation in government (republicanism)

Again, forming the basis of our Constitution, "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.— That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed..."

Writing on the topic of republicanism and liberalism, classically understood, professor Steven M. Dworetz [notes](#) "we should begin by calling a truce in the war between republicanism and liberalism. The antithesis between these two traditions is neither historically nor theoretically sound...American republicanism in the Revolutionary years was a distinctively liberal republicanism...republicanism and liberalism coexisted at the founding..."

So why didn't this marriage between republicanism and liberalism work? Or more importantly, is it working? To answer this question, we must first understand that republicanism requires something difficult, something antithetical to the narrative of self interest- **that of sacrifice**.

Professor Gordon Wood writes that "public virtue (the hallmark of republicanism) was **the sacrifice of private desires and interest for the public good**. It was a devotion to the commonwealth." Speaking of the government system our founders aimed to emulate, Wood notes that "the power of the ancient Roman republic had flowed from the freedom of its citizens to govern themselves. But as Rome's fate showed, republics required a high degree of civic virtue...and thus they were very fragile polities, extremely liable to corruption." Speaking on the difference between monarchies and republics, Woods remarks, "monarchies relied on blood, family, kinship, patronage, and- ultimately- fear...[unlike republics, which] in their purest form...[have] no adhesives, no bonds holding themselves together, except their citizens' voluntary patriotism and willingness to obey public authority. **Without virtue and self-sacrifice, republics would fall apart.**"

Adding to these concepts, professor Craig A. Stern makes the bold claim that "**the Constitution is not chiefly to maximize individual freedom, as if freedom were its own end and all freedoms were equally worth promoting.**" In other words, pure liberalism is antithetical to virtue, antithetical to the public good, and antithetical to the creation of a healthy republic, and indeed antithetical to truth itself.

However, a healthy republic is also one that protects and promotes individual liberty. How then does the Constitution achieve this delicate balance? Pointing again to our forefathers, Stern gives us the answer. He quotes John Adams, writing in 1798 to the Officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts,

"While our country remains untainted with the principles and manners which are now producing desolation in so many parts of the world; while she continues sincere, and incapable of insidious and impious policy, we shall have the strongest reason to rejoice in the local destination assigned us by Providence. But should the people of America once become capable of that deep simulation towards one another, and towards foreign nations, which assumes the language of justice and moderation while it is practising iniquity and extravagance, and displays in the most captivating manner the charming pictures of candor, frankness, and sincerity, while it is rioting in rapine and insolence, this country will be the most miserable habitation in the world; because we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. **Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.**"

These words should hit the reader hard. In effect, John Adams is saying that our Constitution presupposes a moral and religious people. Again Stern hits hard with Adams, writing a letter to Zabdiel Adams, a minister, in 1776,

“Statesmen my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for Liberty, but **it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand** The only foundation of a free Constitution, is pure Virtue, and if this cannot be inspired into our People, in a greater Measure, than they have it now, They may change their Rulers, and the forms of Government, but they will not obtain a lasting Liberty. They will only exchange Tyrants and Tyrannies. You cannot therefore be more pleasantly, or usefully employed than in the Way of your Profession, pulling down the Strong Holds of Satan.”

Stern notes a similar vein from George Washington’s farewell address of September 17, 1796,

“**Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports.** In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labour to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? **And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.** ‘Tis substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of free Government. Who that is a sincere friend to it, can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric.”

Pointing to the summation of these words, Stern highlights Alexis de Tocqueville’s words, from his book *Democracy in America* (1850), which observe,

“Up till now no one in the United States has dared to profess the maxim that everything is allowed in the interests of society, an impious maxim apparently invented in an age of freedom in order to legitimize every future tyrant. **Thus, while the law allows the American people to do everything, there are things which religion prevents them from imagining and forbids them to dare. Religion, which never intervenes directly in the government of American society, should therefore be considered as the first of their political institutions, for although it did not give them the taste for liberty, it singularly facilitates their use thereof.** The inhabitants of the United States themselves consider religious beliefs from this angle. I do not know if all Americans have faith in their religion—for who can read the secrets of the heart?—but I am sure that they think it necessary to the maintenance of republican institutions.”

Here we come to the crux of the issue. When the grand narrative of self-interest reigns supreme, the effectual nature of the Constitution is maimed, even destroyed. Virtue is pushed aside in exchange for a liberal interpretation of the Constitution. And yet the required virtue necessary for an effectual Constitution requires more than just a selective adjustment of values; it requires one to be moral, and indeed, even religious. It requires men to hold to truths higher than those of the interests of self, these truths being self-evident and endowed by our Creator. Truth must be evident! Truth must be required! Otherwise, nothing is out of bounds.

As the Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians, “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.” Here is the perfect expression of the goal of government in the United States. Because we are virtuous, we may have freedom, for our virtue guides our freedom. On what does our virtue rest? On truth, which in turn guides us in moral living. On what is this truth most clearly defined? Noah Webster, in 1836, replying to a letter from David McClure, writes,

“The Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children under a free government ought to be instructed. **No truth is more evident than that the Christian religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people.**”

-Concluding Thoughts-

I do not know the heart of Donald Trump, that is left to God alone. I am furthermore called to submit to his authority and be subject to him, as Paul calls all Christian to do in [Romans 13](#). However, this does not mean that I cannot plead with him to tread carefully with the authority he has now been granted. He must understand the importance of limited power, which protects from corruption. He must understand that we must allow freedom, yet seek virtue, and in doing so, preserve the effectual nature of the Constitution. And most importantly, he must understand the gravity of truth. Without truth, we go the way of Rome.

God help us, perhaps we are already there.