

sufficient, the want of means to gratify them will be a restraint—they are obliged to employ their time in their respective callings—hence the substantial yeomanry of the country are more temperate, of better morals and less ambition than the great.²⁴

Such ordinary virtues, Melancton Smith insisted, do not require extraordinary efforts. Rather, they arise organically from the modest conditions of a stable and orderly society. Responsibility, frugality, moderation, and good habits are not necessarily the stuff of epic poems, but they are the virtues most accessible to, and of advantage for, the mass of ordinary people. Embedded in the debate between those who favor the “experts” vs. “common sense,” the contesting claims reflect differing visions of the nature of the social and political order, and the kinds of people it expects to produce. One, characteristically, favors “the few”; the other, “the many.”

A social and political order that gives preference to “the wisdom of the many” does not eliminate the need for expertise—within its proper boundaries—or more broadly for an “elite.” Such a social and political order positively requires that those best positioned to support a stable social and political order, and the virtues of the *demos*, are enjoined to lend their energies to this main purpose. A virtuous people can only be maintained through the energies and efforts of a virtuous elite, and a virtuous elite must be oriented to supporting the basic decencies of ordinary people. These sentiments, and this older system, took their inspiration—even if implicitly—from a long-standing tradition in the West: the ideal of the “mixed constitution,” to which we now turn.

5

The Mixed Constitution

In a conservative order, culture largely arises from “the bottom up,” the generational inheritance of learned practices born of local circumstances, accumulated experience, form, and ritual that are most richly expressed at the intersection of human nature and our natural inclination to develop conventions to mark and celebrate human rites of passage, the rhythms of nature, and reverence for the divine. Culture is a concrete form of “the wisdom of the people,” the ongoing and living treasury that is at once authoritative yet profoundly egalitarian and democratic. Yet, even as the authority of a conservative order rests in a deference to “the many,” a vital and essential role is played by elites who are charged particularly as the trustees, defenders, and protectors of culture, tradition, and of a long-standing way of life.

This key insight—that an elite can and should be a defender of the cultural traditions that are mostly a development of bottom-up practices—points to how democracy and a proper aristocracy are not contradictory, but, in fact, ought to be mutually supportive and beneficial. This key insight was well understood by classical thinkers, ranging from Aristotle to Polybius, from Aquinas to Machiavelli, from John Adams to Alexis de Tocqueville. Most shared a common insight: distinct virtues of the two respective classes ought ideally to correct the

vices inherent to its opposite. The “ordinary virtues” of the many—including the embodiment of “common sense” in a society’s cultural practices—could and ought to restrain the overweening ambitions of the few. And, the privileges typically available to the few—including liberal education and leisure—were to benefit those less fortunate and elevate the potential debasement of the many. The prospects for a successful “mixing” of the classes rested on a political order dedicated to stability, not churning change; continuity, not “progress”; and balance, not the ascendancy of one class over the other.

The Mixed Constitution in the Classical Tradition

Within the classical tradition there was disagreement. Some thinkers—beginning with Aristotle—argued that “the many” and “the few” should be blended into an entirely new form, a “middling” class that exemplified political moderation. A later defense of “mixed constitution,” often associated first with Polybius and later with Machiavelli, argued that the classes would always be distinct, and the aim was not a “blending,” but a balancing of distinct forces.

Thus, there were two senses of mixing when speaking of “mixed constitution.” One form of mixing occurs when the ingredients blend completely together, forming a new substance in which the ingredients are no longer distinguishable. The other form of mixing leaves the various elements still distinguishable, if tossed together in an appetizing new blend. For the first, we might conjure the image of a smoothie in which a mix of various ingredients are no longer separable or distinct. Reflecting the second, a tossed salad still leaves the various constitutive elements distinct if nevertheless combined.

The first great articulator of the ideal of the “mixed constitution” was Aristotle, who argued that a well-blended political order—what he

called “polity”—must be more like a bread dough or a smoothie, though in the messy world of reality, it will likely be lumpy and not as smooth as the recipe might ideally call for. In the most fortunate circumstances, however, a well-mixed regime would be so completely blended that the distinct classes would be barely discernible, and instead a “middling” class would emerge, one marked by moderation and internal harmony.

Aristotle argued that polity can only emerge through an artful mixture of oligarchy and democracy—or, the wealthy few and the many poor. If mixed well, he argued, observers of such a regime would be able at the same time to claim that it is *both* a democracy and an oligarchy, but also *neither*. It becomes something altogether new, neither rule for or by the benefit of the few nor of the many. Moreover, he wrote, “it should be preserved through itself”—that is, its citizens should seek to perpetuate the mixed form not because each side is merely biding its time until it can dominate the other side, but because “none of the parts of the city generally would wish to have another regime.”¹

Far from seeking to institute a mere arrangement of “checks and balances,” however, Aristotle went further, insisting that such institutional practices would—it might be hoped—eventually deeply shape the ethos of “polity,” giving rise to a wholly new and distinct regime rather than simply leaving intact the distinct and mistrustful elements of each. Polity shapes the souls of the citizenry, in particular, by drawing them away from the self-interested constitutive components of oligarchy and democracy, and cultivating instead a disposition of trust, concern for common good, and even “an element of affection.” This is achieved, Aristotle wrote, by a weakening of the conditions that lead either to oligarchy or democracy—namely, the concentration of wealth, on the one hand, or widespread poverty, on the other—and instead through cultivation of a dominant “middling” element in the society.

Aristotle recognized that extremes of wealth and poverty give rise to a host of vices (as extremes are just as likely to do within the individual soul). The wealthy are likely to become “arrogant and base,” accustomed

to having their way. Because their wealth and position leads to a belief in their own self-sufficiency and often induces deference in those around them, they neither wish to be ruled, nor do they “know how to be ruled.” This unruly disposition is cultivated from the youngest age, a corruption of luxury and indulgence. They are marked by contempt toward those who do not share their wealth and advantages.

The poor, in turn, are likely to be malicious and base in petty ways. They are consumed by envy and resentment. Aristotle suggested that when it comes to rule, they are “too humble.” While they might seek domination were they given the opportunity, Aristotle’s critique of their excess humility points to the likely consequences of constant subjugation and humiliation by the few, which can lead the *demos* to internalize a lack of worth, resulting in an underestimation in their abilities and capacities. They combine too little confidence with too much hostility in relation to the wealthy, leading to a toxic combination that makes them at once unlikely to ascend to good and decent rule, but when given the chance, likely to rule capriciously and out of resentment and vengeance.

Polity involves the cultivation of citizens who transcend the constitutive elements of “the many and the few,” of democracy and oligarchy. Driven neither by arrogance and contemptuous wealth, nor the resentment and envy of poverty, a dominant “middling” element is marked by a readiness “to obey reason,” and, by extension, to be law abiding. Those of great wealth and poverty are challenged to “obey reason,” given their self-interest instead to obey only their own advantage. A polity is dominated by people who are, generally speaking, “equal and similar,” and thus more capable of extending their interests beyond themselves to the swath of citizens who share similar prospects and experience. Because this regime minimizes both resentments and contempt, relations between citizens are marked by “affection” and harmony, a willingness to consider the good of others that is not too distinct from the benefits to oneself. Aristotle stressed that this regime ceases to be composed of the two elements, but becomes its own distinct, “mixed” regime. Thus,

class-based factions are absent in a well-blended polity; rather, absent the few wealthy and the many poor, the citizenry in such cities “most particularly preserve themselves” as a middling class.² “Polity” must become a wholly new regime, not just a combination of two distinct regimes. If achieved, its citizens seek to “preserve it themselves”—they value and treasure the distinct regime of which they are a part and share with fellow citizens—rather than bide their time waiting for the opportunity to change the regime for their own distinct class advantage.

HOWEVER, there is another sense of “mixing” within the classical tradition that held that such blending was impossible, and, instead, argued that the main elements of any regime would remain distinct and opposed. Polybius, a second-century Hellenic historian of Rome, believed that the Roman example offered a different model: a form of mixing that leaves intact and identifiable the classes that compose it. Rome was more akin to a salad in which the different vegetables are still identifiable and distinct, but their artful combination produces a superior taste than when eaten separately. Polybius believed that the course of history proved that this latter form of mixing was more successful and practicable.

Polybius famously argued that all good regimes eventually decay into their opposite: the good monarchy is eventually succeeded by a tyranny; a noble aristocracy is corrupted by money, becoming an oligarchy; and a virtuous democracy devolves into a self-serving form of mob rule. Polybius concludes that all good regimes contain the seeds of their own self-destruction, as rust destroys iron or cancer overwhelms healthy cells. In his view, these corrosions are internal to the regimes, not due to contingent external circumstances such as invasion or natural disaster. The cycle of regimes is inevitable, in his view, because, subject to their own logic, nothing can arrest the internal decay of each good regime. All regimes in their “pure” form are doomed to decay and decomposition.

However, Polybius praised Rome for fashioning a solution that forestalled this internal decay, one first discovered by the art and prudence of one of Sparta's founders, Lycurgus. Lycurgus "bundled together all the merits and distinctive characteristics of the best systems of government, in order to prevent any of them growing beyond the point where it would degenerate into its congenital vice."³ By designing a *mixed constitution* that would give official powers to each regime type within a single government, the virtues of kingship, aristocracy, and democracy could be preserved, while the descent of each into its vicious form could be prevented. Lycurgus first, and later the Romans, "wanted the potency of each system to be counteracted by the others, so that nowhere would any of them tip the scales or outweigh the others for any length of time; [they] wanted the system to last forever, maintained in a high degree of balance and equilibrium by the principle of reciprocity."⁴ What Lycurgus designed by reason, the Romans adopted through experience and constant adjustment. The benefits of kingship were manifested in the unitary rule of the emperor, but the tendency of the monarch to become overbearing and tyrannical was restrained by the political power of the common citizens. They in turn were ennobled by the aristocracy—gathered in the Senate—who in turn were balanced by the other elements of the government. With each distinct political form governing for the common good, the greatest beneficiary would be the entire people, especially undergirding the values and mores that were central to democracy. The characteristic feature of democracy, in the view of Polybius, is not majority rule (a feature that it shared with mob rule), but, rather, a form of governance that "retains the traditional values of piety toward the gods, care of parents, respect for elders, and obedience to the laws."⁵

Polybius commended a form of mixing that retained the distinct contours and qualities of each form of government—recommending the "salad" form of mixing over a blend of ingredients. "The common good" is best secured by inclusion of each ruling form within a single

government—the one, the few, and the many. Such a government is thus able to protect and enhance the respective advantages endemic to each class of society—the unitary and decisive rule of one; the wisdom and prudence of the few; the common sense and conservative virtues of the populace that, if artfully combined, would prevent each class's devolution into its antithesis. In the view of Polybius, political and social balance is the aim, and once achieved, it should become the main object of the people *beyond their interests as a class* to sustain this balance and prevent the ascendancy of one regime not only at the expense of the others, but to prevent the descent into the decay of regimes and ultimately barbarism.

THE DISTINCT, if related, arguments by Aristotle and Polybius were wed in the High Middle Ages by Thomas Aquinas, who deeply admired both thinkers. Like most classical thinkers, Aquinas echoed the likes of Plato and Aristotle, who favored monarchy *in theory*; however, in everyday practice, he favored a form of mixed constitution that was fundamentally a conservative mixing of the classes. Like Polybius, he viewed "the people" as forming the base of a moral order, and elites responsible for protecting and deepening the core virtues of "the many" embedded in a culture of common sense. A "mixing" came about as the result of a leadership class that saw its primary role as the defender of bottom-up custom as the ground condition for human flourishing, rather than—as in the case of modern liberalism—as the class responsible for its uprooting and dismantling in the name of progress and liberation.

While Aquinas was generally of the view that law must be the intentional promulgation of legislation born of rational and conscious deliberation—the result of the "reason and will of the legislator"—he also recognized that there can be a functional equivalent of law that emanates in a different manner from the community at large. Aquinas pointed to the emergence of "repeated actions" in a community that can

“reveal internal motives of the will and concepts of the reason”—what he called “custom.” Custom can act in place of law, or as another form of law altogether: “Custom has the power of law, it abolishes law, and it acts as the interpreter of law.”⁶

Custom can arise in two ways. In a free community—a community ruled at large by the people—custom arises from “the consent of the whole community which is demonstrated by its customary observation.” Aware of the limitations of the explicit and codified form of law one finds in a juridical regime, Aquinas commended widely accepted norms that govern in place of law. Because of their widespread acceptance, custom is “worth more than the authority of the ruler who does not have the power to make the law except as the representative of the people.” Because “the whole people” make customary law, it has far greater force and is more readily observed than the rule by one or a few people. And because custom develops over a long period of time—Aquinas noted—it can undergo alteration through generalized assent over time, and as a result, such gradually altered custom is far more likely to have more legitimacy and acceptance. Notice that through “custom” we arrive at a preliberal conception of “consent”—the consent of a community to govern itself through the slow accumulation and sedimentation of norms and practices over time. Such “consent” is, at its core, fundamentally distinct from the individualistic, deracinated, and rationalistic theory of consent found in the liberal social contract tradition.

The second form of rule by custom is more consonant with governance by elites, so long as they are respectful of the dominant role of custom, and do not seek its disruption or dismantling. Aquinas argued that rule by custom can be extensive even where there are rulers appointed or selected to make law, inasmuch as rulers can tacitly assent to the governance of custom simply by tolerating its existence. “If the community does not have the right to make its own laws to abrogate a law made by a superior authority, a custom which becomes established acquires the force of law if it is tolerated by those whose responsibility it

is to make law for the community, since in this way they seem to approve what custom has established.”⁷

If, according to Aquinas, “democracy” in its pure form tends to internal division, and hence results in an inferior kind of regime, Aquinas here describes a form of self-governance that is effectively democratic and can coexist extensively with rule by various elites—whether a monarch or aristocracy. Such elites, he further suggests, would be wise to “tolerate” beneficial existing customs that function as law, at least insofar as for Aquinas, a true law is “nothing else than an ordination of reason for the common good promulgated by the one who is in charge of the community.”⁸ Aquinas thus describes the formation of a virtuous mixed regime in which “the many” are apt to govern themselves in accordance with good custom that functions as law, while selecting leaders who are apt to “tolerate” good custom in accordance with the common good. The “mixed constitution” by Aquinas’s telling is a beneficial symbiotic relationship between the many and the few, in which the many largely develop the capacity to govern themselves in their daily affairs through the development of “custom,” while an elite—acceptable and even chosen by the many—governs with considerable deference to the settled customs of the people.

The Modern Mixed Constitution

Aquinas anticipated the idea of a “mixed constitution” that would be articulated by conservative thinkers in later centuries. Conservatism as a self-conscious modern political theory was born when a different kind of elite emerged: progressive elites. Liberalism justified the emergence of an elite whose primary self-assigned role was to prevent the masses from forestalling progress, either as revolutionaries who would be tempted to interfere in a capitalist economy, or as progressives who sought the overturning of traditional culture. This new elite sought to

circumvent the inclination of the *demos* to preserve a way of life—balance, order, and continuity that were the necessary preconditions for a mixed constitution—in the name of progress, liberation, and innovation. The economic revolution of capitalism and thereafter the social and political upheaval of the French Revolution were the watershed world historical events that at once gave birth to a new elite of the anti-culture, as well as a self-conscious conservatism that, perhaps for the first time, fully recognized that a bottom-up culture needed explicit and self-conscious defense by a cultured elite that previously had not recognized the extent to which it was—or should be—aligned with the broad popular sentiments of the people.

Both the revolutionary movements of anti-culture, as well as conservatism's defense of culture, rested upon an essential role played by elites who laid claim to the support of "the people." Revolutionary movements—whether the French Revolution, Marxist-inspired revolutions, or contemporary activism by activist progressive groups such as Antifa—all claim to speak in the name of "the people" against an elite that seeks to oppress and circumvent the popular will. At the same time, historically, Marxist strains sought to deny their reliance upon elites, while conservatism was frank in its call for an alignment of the few and the many. The explicit call for elites has been used as evidence by the left in long-standing and strident critiques of the elitism of conservatives. Conservatives have been generally unwilling to make explicit the claim that such an alignment is necessary for support of the stability and support for "the many," the "commoners" who rely upon elite support for a "common sense" that undergirds a way of life.

A dominant narrative among left intellectuals—particularly those influenced by currents of Marxism, but that has seeped from academe into the popular mind—is that conservatism is the ideology of the elite, aligned with those who seek to preserve the wealth, status, and power of the upper classes against the egalitarian longings of the people. This narrative has gained widespread purchase in the wider intellectual world

and has been successfully advanced as a main condemnation of conservatism in an age committed to egalitarianism. Conservatism, it is alleged, was born in reaction against the efforts of ordinary people to gain some degree of political influence, economic justice, and social dignity against the brutal and inhumane oppression of the aristocratic classes. By the telling of one of these chroniclers of this inegalitarian ideology—Corey Robin, in his book *The Reactionary Mind*—"conservatism is the theoretical voice of this animus against the agency of the subordinate classes. It provides the most consistent and profound argument as to why the lower orders should not be allowed to exercise their independent will, why they should not be allowed to govern themselves or the polity. Submission is their first duty, and agency the prerogative of the elite." Per Robin, conservatism is the default ideology of those who seek to *conserve* the status and privileges of the elite.

Marxist-tinged thinkers like Robin regard early conservatism's alignment with the old aristocracy as damning. Pointing to nascent conservatism's alignment with the aristocracy, in the view of such critics it has sufficed to dismiss conservative philosophy as inegalitarian, all the while overlooking Marxism's unswerving embrace of a revolutionary ruling elite that was supposedly only necessary until political conditions have ripened. Conservatism's historically explicit support of an aristocratic element in society is damning, while the ineluctable presence of a Marxist revolutionary vanguard is dismissed as a temporary and accidental feature of an otherwise egalitarian philosophy.

The premise of this charge is patently false and misleading. The proper debate between Marxists and conservatives is not over which approach is genuinely egalitarian (since neither is), but to what popular end an elite will inevitably govern. Marxism justifies a revolutionary elite that will give way to a classless society, albeit only after the transformation and even outright elimination of nearly all existing institutions—not only economic, but social, including family, schools, churches, and the civil order. Incipient conservatism's defense of the *ancien régime*

was—at its most insightful and prophetic—not an obtuse, reactionary call to defend the existing elite or a call to oppress the people, but a recognition that a self-consciously *conservative* elite was needed to protect the people against the destabilizing threat of a new capitalist oligarchy and a class of social revolutionaries that were emerging at the same time. At its origins, conservatism arose in defense of the way of life of ordinary people against the destabilizing ambitions of progressivism in both its economic and social guises.

Historically, this meant a defense of the old aristocracy against the two most dangerous forms of progressive elitism. The first and most obvious threat for the authors who articulated the earliest modern arguments of conservatism was the revolutionaries seeking to overturn the entire existing order—the revolutionaries in France or those inspired by them. While architects of the French Revolution claimed in speeches and pamphlets that a revolution would result in a truly egalitarian political and social outcome (much like Marx and later Marxists), early conservatives recognized that the most radical and destabilizing element in a revolutionary movement was led by a small cadre of elites who were, in fact, hostile to the interests and ways of life of ordinary people. Thinkers like Edmund Burke recognized that the decimation of a long-standing way of life in the name of a wholesale reordering would fall heaviest and most punitively on the very working-class people on whose behalf the revolutionaries claimed to act.

The second group of progressive elites that posed a threat to a conservative society, and required resistance by a countervailing conservative elite, was the rising business class—not arising from the turmoil of the French Revolution, but the staid and otherwise settled way of life in a nation such as England. It was this latter elite that was perhaps even more dangerous to an otherwise traditional society, given that its progressivism was shrouded in the mantle of conservative values, and arose from the heart of a stable society such as Britain (or the United States).

If Marx could sound like Burke in his criticism of the dislocating effects of modern progress, Burke sounded like Marx in his condemnation of the rising class of wealthy capitalists whose main aim was personal enrichment while subverting the settled ways of life of ordinary people. Echoing Marx and Engels's recognition that a new order would displace all ancient settlements, Burke lamented the replacement of a nation of "men of honor and cavaliers" not with revolutionaries—much as he condemned them—but "sophisters, economists, and calculators."¹⁰ Burke viewed this less obviously revolutionary class aligned ultimately with the spirit of modern social progressivism, seeking to uproot and transform settled folkways in the name of advancing economic and social progress. Burke's was a broadside that not only excoriated the social upheavals effected by the French revolutionaries and (by extension) commended by Marx, but the continual economic and social instability prized by modern liberal economic philosophy and practice. Against a new class of elites—mainly, an alliance between ideological progressive theorists and a rising financial oligarchy—Burke urged protection of the stability, tradition, and social continuities vital for the flourishing of ordinary people.

Burke condemned the progressive spirit that was producing a new economic oligarchy. Recognizing even then the predilection of modern oligarchs to *liquefy* property, transforming property (in all its forms) into readily tradable assets, he offered a prescient warning about how such a new monied oligarchy would divorce economic activity from place, history, and culture. This new oligarchy, he argued, sought to transform the nation into "one great playable" populated entirely by "gamesters." Not satisfied to take risk on their own, rather, risk would be socialized, with the aim of making "speculation as extensive as life; to mix it with all its concerns and to divert the whole of the hopes and fears of the people from their usual channels into the impulses, passions, and superstitions of those who live on chances."¹¹ The result, Burke anticipated—almost prophesying the 2008 economic catastrophe

wrought by “gamesters”—was punitive consequences on the steady habits of more rural, less sophisticated, working-class people:

The truly melancholy part of the policy of systematically making a nation of gamesters is this, that though all are forced to play, few can understand the game; and fewer still are in a condition to avail themselves of the knowledge. *The many must be the dupes of the few* who conduct the machine of these speculations. What effect it must have on the country people is visible. The townsman [i.e., urbanites] can calculate from day to day, [but] not so the inhabitant of the country. . . . The whole of the power obtained by this revolution will settle in the towns among the burghers and the monied directors who lead them. The landed gentleman, the yeoman, and the peasant have, none of them, habits or inclinations or experience which can lead them to any share in this the sole source of power.¹²

As Burke discerned, a revolutionary age would be driven not simply by episodic political spasms of disruptive revolutionary fervor, but would be fed above all by the steady transformations wrought on the political and social order through economic arrangements that would favor the urban and global over the rural and local. The same aims pervaded both the anti-capitalist Marxists and the basic interests of a financier class: a revolutionary establishment, an elite culture dominated by the interests of a society of the constantly unsettled, favoring those best able to negotiate intentional economic and social instability.

The necessity of developing and backing an elite for the people and against a progressive elite was taken up by Burke’s nineteenth-century heir, Benjamin Disraeli. While Burke is often regarded as the “father of conservatism,” he did not, in fact, describe himself as a conservative, or even develop a political philosophy explicitly under the title of conservatism. His writings against the French Revolution were written as a

self-identified liberal, though a liberalism of a very different dispensation than the philosophical liberalism that developed through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For Burke, to be a liberal was to be connected to the classical tradition of liberty as interpreted and commended largely through the living legacy of Christianity—namely, the liberty of self-rule, self-command, and self-sacrifice. Writing in a pre-ideological age, to be liberal was simply to partake in the civilized inheritance of the Christian West.

By contrast, Disraeli was among the first clear-eyed critics of liberalism in its modern, ideological incarnation, and explicitly proposed and described a substantive conservatism as liberalism’s rightful opponent. Drawing on Burke’s main lines of critique of the revolutionary disposition, which by the mid-nineteenth century had crystalized into an identifiable ideology of liberalism, Disraeli outlined a self-conscious conservative alternative that was more than merely a slower form of liberalism, but a genuinely distinct political philosophy to that of liberalism.

Disraeli perceived deep philosophic, social, and economic trends that were already transforming the English political landscape, and alternatively addressed them both in political speeches on behalf of the Tories, as well as through imaginative literature in the “Young England” novels—in particular, *Sybil*, or *The Two Nations*. At base, he perceived a growing power in the modern world that aligned philosophical radicalism and a new form of commerce that combined large-scale production with powerful financial institutions aimed at fragmenting the institutions of organic society and replacing them with an increasingly centralized government. These interests—broadly, in his view, “liberal”—were directly hostile to three main entities: the working class, the aristocracy, and the Church, along with the institutional forms in which those orders of society were embedded and embodied. Disraeli saw the need both for a philosophical and political realignment: where the Whigs had historically been the party of the people, and the Tories,

the party of the aristocracy, instead he proposed a form of “Tory democracy”—one-nation conservatism that combined the shared dedication of the working class and the aristocracy in a nation defined by cultural continuity, economic stability, the thick presence of relationships through a web of organic, mediating institutions.

Disraeli’s conservatism was housed and preserved above all by the working class, which he regarded as the natural home of ordinary virtue and common sense. He was explicit in connecting the language of conservatism with the working class, rather—in contrast to the historic alignment of the Tory Party—with the aristocracy. In his Crystal Palace speech, he declared: “When I say ‘Conservative,’ I use the word in its purest and loftiest sense. I mean that the people of England, and especially the working classes of England, are proud of belonging to a great country.”¹³ The main institutions of British society were, in Disraeli’s view, distillations of working-class experience and values. In the words of one Disraeli scholar, he recognized that “the working-class stream is but a large tributary of the main national river.” To extend the image, the main currents of this national river originated in and were renewed by the values of the working class, and those waters, in turn, fed the main British institutions beyond the working class—particularly the aristocracy and the Church. To the extent that the river was healthy and regularly fed, all British institutions were effectively the creation of the people—not by the theoretical consent of liberalism, but the actual grounded practices of a people in places and over time and safeguarded by the institutions of the powerful.

In his commentary on the dangerous revolutionary progressivism of the Whigs, Disraeli advanced a Burkean idea of national origins at odds with liberal “state of nature” theory, arguing that a nation’s institutions and practices were the living embodiment of the collective activity of previous generations. Disraeli argued that “the blended influences of nature and fortune” form the national character. Institutions and practices are built from the bottom up, through time and

experience, but shaped by both nature and particular circumstance (“fortune”). This character is largely unexamined, and, in many ways, most healthy when it is simply lived and not “theorized.” Echoing Burke, too much theory is likely to introduce a radical and even violent discontent with inherited institutions, but some degree of reflection and reform is inevitable and desirable. In particular, as he argued in his sustained examination of the English Constitution, there are

great crises in the fortunes of an ancient people which impel them to examine the nature of the institutions which have *gradually* sprung up among them. In this great national review, duly and wisely separating the essential character of their history from that which is purely adventitious, they discover certain principles of ancestral conduct, which they acknowledge as the causes that these institutions have flourished and descended to them; and in their future career, and all changes, reforms, and alterations, that they may deem expedient, they resolve that these principles shall be their guides and instructors.¹⁴

Discerning these essential principles is the “greatest amount of theory that ever enters into those political institutions.” It becomes the role of the philosophical statesman—generally a member of the “elite”—to articulate these principles that are discerned and understood to be drawn from the broad practice and institutions of the people. The effort to displace or overturn those institutions—even if undertaken in the name of the people—is effectively to commit a form of national suicide by poisoning the wellspring of the nation. Any effort to impose new institutions from above is the very opposite of constituting a nation, but a false and unjust imposition of raw power by an illegitimate elite.

What Disraeli observed already in the nineteenth century was that the two forces of modern liberalism—the economic libertarian and social revolutionary wings—were combining as a single party, a progressive

Whig Party. Disraeli perceived by the nineteenth century that the Whigs were becoming a revolutionary party, in particular, aligning those of a liberal philosophical bent ("dissenters") with the monied interests of London ("utilitarians"). He observed that these two seemingly opposite forces combined to advance the destruction of mediating institutions of church, estate, guild, and local power, and ultimately had its aim at the nation itself: "The Whigs are an anti-national party. In order to accomplish their object of establishing an oligarchical republic, and of concentrating the government of the State in the hands of a few great families, the Whigs are compelled to declare war against all those great national institutions, the power and influence of which . . . make us a nation."¹⁵ Disraeli perceived that the Whig Party was at once the party of individualistic laissez-faire and a deracinated socialism that rejected the basic forms of human sociality, seeking to disaggregate the organic institutions of British society into a pot of "liberated," loosely connected individual actors who could then be used as a deracinated labor pool by a financier class who had no real loyalty to the British nation or its traditions. He viewed this party as embodying the ethos of liberalism, a "disintegrating" force based upon "cosmopolitan, rational, commercial, utilitarian and Jacobin" commitments.¹⁶

Disraeli viewed these two seeming opposites—what came in the United States to be regarded as "conservative" (libertarian) and "liberal" (progressive)—as in fact working in tandem to destroy the very institutional forms and traditional bases that supported the working class. Disraeli offered an alternative to these equally destructive forces especially in his thinly fictionalized novel of social commentary, *Sybil*—particularly through the character of Gerard, a stout member of the working class. Gerard yearns for a restoration of the effective dominion by the lower classes of British society, reflected in its main institutions of guild, township, and church. The Church, especially, was a democratic and democratizing institution, open and caring equally for all members, regardless of rank. More importantly, the ethos of the Church

pervaded British society, emphasizing the social and communal nature of society, rejecting an image of society based on competition and individual achievement (or failure), and emphasizing beauty and the transcendent over the utilitarian and banal. The working classes in some senses were to direct the governance by the elites charged with rule, forced from below to govern out of a dedication to preserve and fortify the traditional rhythms and institutions that connected the ordinary and the elite, the inherited traditions, and bottom-up decencies of the common people. Those in the working classes seek the provisions necessary for physical, moral, and spiritual flourishing, and rely especially on an aristocracy, motivated out of "noblesse oblige," to afford "access to the humanizing arts of civilization."¹⁷ Gerard reflects Disraeli's belief that the working classes were not instinctively, nor in principle, a revolutionary class. They were, rather, deeply *conservative*, seeking more to preserve and pass on a heritage than to disrupt and overthrow traditions, and relied especially upon an elite that would protect them from other aspirants to political, social, and economic rule whose aim was to damage and even destroy the traditional and organic society that they viewed as an obstacle to progress.

For this reason, Disraeli sought to redefine the Tory Party as the party not only of a certain traditional set of elites, but one whose traditionalism aligned with the deepest commitments and needs of the working classes. It was a certain vision of the aristocracy who *protected* England's long-standing institutions—ones built by the contributions of countless generations of ordinary people—that Disraeli believed could stand in alignment with the larger mass of society that had not been traditionally part of the Tory Party. Disraeli described the Tory Party—traditionally, the party of "the few"—to be "the really democratic party of England."¹⁸ The Tory Party would heal the divide now widening in England, forging instead "one nation." To achieve this end, Disraeli understood that the Tory Party must become explicitly committed to policy reforms that were beneficial to and supportive of the working

classes, especially as they faced hardships from the costs of “progress.” These included social welfare policies as well as greater openness to suffrage. But more fundamentally, “Tory democracy” adopted many of the positions associated with an older form of British socialism—a position described by scholar Tony Judge as “Tory socialism.” Eschewing the radicalism of Marxism, Tory socialism—and Disraeli’s “Tory democracy”—instead defended traditional British culture, valued and even idealized the inheritance of the past, favored the pastoral and craft traditions of a more traditional economy, commended “common sense” and everyday wisdom over a fetishization of expertise in the service of forms of progress destructive of traditional ways of life, and emphasized the alignment of the aristocracy and the people against the rise of progressive philosophies and political movements.¹⁹ Through a traditionalist alignment that was also open to an expansive use of state power to improve and support the lives of the working class, Disraeli believed that the Tory Party would unite England into “one nation,” because the party would draw support from the elements of “the many” and “the few.” “The rest of the nation—that is to say, nine-tenths of the people of England—formed the Tory party, the landed proprietors and peasantry of the kingdom, headed by a spirited and popular Church, and looking to the kingly power in the abstract, though not to the reigning King, as their only protection from an impending oligarchy.”²⁰

In the American tradition, there was no aristocracy that might serve as the natural class to resist the innovators and elevate the masses, but functional equivalents have long been noted. The professional classes were regarded by many early commentators as bearing this “conservative” responsibility. Perhaps most notably, Alexis de Tocqueville regarded lawyers as playing the role of conservator and the link between an aristocratic and democratic ethos within an otherwise democratic society. Law—as understood, studied, and practiced in Tocqueville’s time—fostered a traditionalist mindset and cultivated a strong link between the guiding spirit of the past and its continuity into the future.

Describing this cultivated disposition of lawyers, Tocqueville wrote that “men who have made the laws their special study have drawn from their work the habits of order, a certain taste for forms, a sort of instinctive love for the regular sequence of ideas, which naturally render them strongly opposed to the revolutionary spirit and unreflective passions of democracy.”²¹ Concerned that the masses could be drawn into the “revolutionary spirit” of a progressive class, Tocqueville praised this professional class for its “superstitious respect for what is old . . . , their taste for forms . . . , [and] their habit of proceeding slowly.”²²

Tocqueville might well have drawn out these similar elements in various professions that would have exhibited many similar features at the time—clergy, medical, professorial, even local business leaders. While Tocqueville claimed to be skeptical of the idea of a truly “mixed constitution”—at one point describing it as a “chimera”—in his praise for the role played by the professions such as lawyers, he pointed to the way that key features of a mixed constitution could nevertheless even be manifest in an otherwise democratic regime. He described lawyers as “a natural liason” between “the people” and “the aristocracy,” regarding these custodians of the legal tradition as “the sole aristocratic element that can be mixed without effort into the natural elements of democracy and be combined in a happy and lasting manner with them.”²³ As the profession likely to “occupy most public offices,” lawyers would act as a “lone counterweight” to what Tocqueville feared might be more revolutionary or innovative temptations within democratic societies.²⁴

Such professions as a kind of “American aristocracy” can be fruitfully contrasted to the other likely aristocracy that Tocqueville believed would eventually arise on American soil—an “industrial” aristocracy, or what we would today point to as an oligarchic, commercial, managerial class. With remarkable foresight, Tocqueville prophesied the rise of an economic class that would live and think wholly apart from the working class. Rather than living among the working class like those of the professions whom he hoped would form the leadership class of a

modern form of “mixed constitution,” this “new” aristocracy instead would enjoy the fruits of its status while commending “public charity” to the workers. Tocqueville contrasted the noblesse oblige that at least reigned in theory in “territorial aristocracy,” which, he stated, “was obliged by law or believed itself to be obliged by mores to come to the aid of its servants and to relieve their miseries.” By contrast, the “manufacturing aristocracy that we see rising before our eyes is one of the hardest that has appeared on earth”—not because of its oppressiveness and cruelty, but precisely because of its separation and indifference. Tocqueville feared that the functional equivalent of an “aristocracy” comprised of the professions, effectively forming the leadership of a de facto mixed constitution, would be replaced in a distinctly “unmixed” constitution by a new, managerial aristocracy that separated itself from the working class and farmed out its concerns to the ministerial functions of the state. He rightly suspected that this would lead to a hardening of both classes toward each other, and a politics that could no longer be called, in a real sense, a “democracy.”

Conclusion

What has passed as “conservatism” in the United States for the past half century is today exposed as a movement that was never capable of, nor fundamentally committed to, conservation in any fundamental sense. All along, it was a species of “liberalism” that rejected the core tenets of an original conservatism, originally a common-good tradition that predated the progressive revolutions. In response to the rise of liberalism, a common-good conservatism instead stressed the priority of culture, the wisdom of the people, and the necessity of a “mixed constitution” that especially gave pride of place to preserving the commonplace traditions of a polity. The political shocks of the past several years have been, to a considerable extent, not only an expected repudiation

of the revolutionary social projects of progressive liberalism, but a bottom-up rejection of a false “conservatism” bankrolled by oligarchs that was all along a form of liberalism. Instead, around the world there has been a rise of popular and populist movements aimed at jettisoning the liberal priorities of the ruling class in both its “conservative” and “progressive” forms. A fundamental realignment has taken place in which the contest at hand will be decided when either the elites are reformed or replaced, or the people are bridled and broken. Common-good conservatism today vocally seeks the former.

Yet, to constitute a political and social order worth conserving, something revolutionary must first take place: the priority of the liberal progressive agenda must be displaced for one that seeks stability, order, and continuity. In order to reset the political conditions in which conservation can be a suitable aim, the current ruling order must be fundamentally changed. The prospects for a renewal of culture, the ascendancy of common sense, and a reimagined form of a mixed constitution rest upon the success of a confrontational stance of the people toward the elites—namely, the effort to force the vanguards of progress to work instead on behalf of the aims of ordinary people in preserving stability and continuity. In order to conserve a social order, there must first be fundamental upheaval of its current revolutionary form. The project at hand is the combination of two seeming opposites—a better aristocracy brought about by a muscular populism, and then, in turn, an elevation of the people by a better aristocracy. What is needed, for want of a better term, is a new combination of two long-standing opponents: “aristopopulism.”

Aristopopulism

No tyranny lasts forever. Despotic regimes can persist for a time, always too long and against reason, but all despotisms eventually fall due to some combination of corruption and internal or external opposition, and often all of the above. While the current rise of a “soft,” pervasive, and invasive progressive tyranny seems genuinely new and virtually insurmountable, recent events have shown it to be susceptible to that oldest form of resistance: an opposing political force. In response to classical liberal, progressive liberal, and Marxist ideologies increasingly combining as a single power elite, its opposite has arisen in a nascent political form, largely percolating from the bottom up in the discontents of a recalcitrant working class. Arising outside of the official corridors of power, this largely unguided movement has been indifferent to the scornful disdain of both right and left liberals. While spurred by populist rejection of progressivism, nevertheless it has arisen without elite guidance from “Conservatism, Inc.”—numerous think tanks in Washington, DC, the official keepers of political party orthodoxy, the countless programs that have sought to shape young conservative elites to embrace the “fusionism” that defined top-down conservatism for a generation. The outlines of a “common-good conservatism” is a

new political force that has surfaced to contend with the anti-cultural mandarins, the gentry liberals, and the laptop class. The rise of this unplanned populist opposition to elite rule marks the return of a political force that is predicted in classical theory: the mixed constitution, a fruitful mixing of “the many” and “the few.”

This movement from below is untutored and ill led. Its nominal champion in the United States was a deeply flawed narcissist who at once appealed to the intuitions of the populace, but without offering clarifying articulation of their grievances and transforming their resentments into sustained policy and the development of a capable leadership class. While the political galvanization of the working class may yet wax or wane, what is needful for the genuine advance of the alternative of a “mixed constitution” is the conscious and intentional development of a new elite. Where necessary, those who currently occupy positions of economic, cultural, and political power must be constrained and disciplined by the assertion of popular power. However, merely limiting the power elite is insufficient. Instead, the creation of a new elite is essential—not just the “meritocrats” whose claim to rule is based upon credentialing at institutions that shroud their status in the thin veil of egalitarianism, but self-conscious *aristoi* who understand that their main role and purpose in the social order is to secure the foundational goods that make possible human flourishing for ordinary people: the central goods of family, community, good work, an equitable social safety net supportive of these goods, constraints upon corporate power, a culture that preserves and encourages order and continuity, and support for religious belief and institutions.

Thus, a new elite can only arise with the support of insistent political power exerted by an increasingly multiracial, multiethnic working-class party. Only such a new elite, in turn, can begin to use political power to alter, transform, or uproot an otherwise hostile anti-culture that is today dominated by the progressives on both the right and the left within modern liberalism. While political power is necessary to begin the pro-

cess of cultural transformation, only through the full development of a distinct and new elite, attuned to the requirements of the common good, can a virtuous cycle be created that will reinforce the mutually improving relation of the many and the few.

What is needed is a mixing of the high and the low, the few and the many, in which the few consciously take on the role of *aristoi*—a class of people who, through supporting and elevating the common good that undergirds human flourishing, are worthy of emulation and, in turn, elevates the lives, aspirations, and vision of ordinary people. What is needed is a political form that might be labeled “aristopopulism.”

The Decline of Nobility

We live in a peculiar moment in human history, in which “elite” is a bad word, while every political figure invokes the imprimatur of “the people” as the deepest source of legitimacy. In the long history of ordinary usage in the West until very recent times, most words used to describe the upper class had positive connotations, while those used to describe the people generally carried deeply negative overtones. Think, for example, of the word “aristocracy,” meaning “rule by *aristoi*”—not just “few,” but “the excellent” or “the best,” people of distinctively good quality. Or, consider the word “patrician,” derived from the word for father (*pater*), a name sometimes conferred upon those of noble birth, such as Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. Another signifier is the word “dignity” itself, the root of the word “dignitaries,” people of worth, distinction, character.¹ In a similar vein, consider the word “nobility,” derived from the Latin *nobilis* and used widely throughout Europe to describe the upper classes, meaning not only “highborn,” but—as today—something “noble,” which then and now means “excellence,” “dignity,” “grace,” “greatness,” as distinguished from “base,” “common,” or “ordinary.” The terms “gentleman” and “gentlewoman” have their root in a

word meaning “highborn” or “of a good family,” with connotations of “courageous, valiant; fine, good, fair,” according to its etymology.² Many of the words we use to distinguish fine from base, superior from inferior, excellent from deficient, draw on this long-standing and implicit set of high expectations and praise for those in positions of leadership and distinction in earlier societies.

By contrast, the words used to describe “the people” have more typically derogatory and critical connotations. After all, “common” is a word used to describe something “ordinary” or “not distinguished,” in contrast to something “excellent.” Other words used to describe “commoners” have been “plebeians,” or “plebes,” “mob” (or its Greek original, *okhlos* as in “ochlocracy,” or “rule by the mob”), “peasants,” “multitude,” “crowd,” and “mass.” Even the somewhat neutral term that I’ve used in these pages, “the people,” shares a common root with the word on everyone’s lips today, “populism” (from the Latin *populus*), a word with generally negative connotations, then as now.

What is striking especially today is the reversal of this long-standing set of positive and negative associations with words distinguishing the high from the low. The word “people” is regularly invoked as an almost divine entity by political leaders, especially in that almost mystical incantation of the phrase “the American people.” The word “democracy” is everywhere embraced as the gold standard for political legitimacy today, in sharp contrast to the long-standing view throughout Western tradition that ranked democracy as among the worst forms of government of all the possible options from antiquity until fairly recent times, including by our Founding Fathers who explicitly argued that they were founding a republic, and not a democracy.³

Of course, not only has the word “democracy” seen a dramatic reversal in its fortunes—beginning already in the nineteenth century, when it went from being viewed largely in a negative light to becoming seen as the only legitimate form of government—but we have witnessed the corresponding rise of negative connotations with any word denoting

the upper class. Almost no one today—outside of a few deposed nobility in Europe—would seek to claim the designation of being an aristocrat, a member of the nobility, a “patrician.” What’s even more striking is that *we do not have a positive word to describe someone of today’s upper class*. There is no positive word used by members of the upper class to describe themselves—indeed, it is frequently observed that no matter one’s status and position in American society today, all claim to be a part of the “middle class.” The one word that is regularly used to describe such people today is “elites,” and it’s not a word used *by* members of the elite to describe themselves, but rather as an implicit *critique* and denunciation. Rather, most members of today’s ruling class readily embrace the labels of egalitarianism, and considerable energy is exercised by their most vocal leaders to root out any vestiges of “privilege” or “elitism.”

This form of politics in fact masks what is an age-old contestation between mass and elite in which the elite is generally advantaged by power and wealth, but called either by a portion of its own, or forced by the populace, to act *on behalf of the common good*—in both senses, a good that is both shared as well as especially necessary to “commoners.” The elites today, instead, veil their status—even, and especially, to themselves—through efforts to eradicate privilege, engaging in a *stupendous effort of self-deception about the nature of their position*.

In earlier ages, most efforts to cultivate certain excellences among the elite arose from a philosophic element within the elite itself. Arguably, the oldest “self-help” literature was focused on cultivating the desired virtues of the elites, recognizing that they set the tone and example for the society as a whole. Works such as Aristotle’s *Ethics* were aimed at the education of a “gentleman” (*kaloskagathos*, literally “beautiful good person”), the people who were expected to lead the political and social order. During the Renaissance, a genre known as “Mirror of Princes” was aimed at the education of the aristocratic class, often focusing on the formation of aristocratic virtue through habituation at a very young

age and counsel on the prudent exercise of power. What is consistent within this literary tradition, in spite of many changes in emphasis and aspirational virtues over several centuries, is a singular focus upon the education of an elite qua elite, with firm awareness of its distinct and important duties and responsibilities in the order of society.

That element today—to the extent that it exists—tends to be most vocal in denunciation of “privilege” and elitism. Precisely because the main institutions in which the elite is formed are insistently organized to deny their own status, there is correspondingly no effort to ennoble the “nobility,” to foster excellence among the “*aristoi*,” and, in turn, efforts to ennoble the masses and elevate the polity as a whole. In an earlier age, John Adams could write without hesitation of the essential need for those with privilege and advantage to elevate their less fortunate fellow countrymen, writing in his treatise *Thoughts on Government*, “Laws for the liberal education of youth, especially of the lower class of people, are so extremely wise and useful, that, to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant.”⁴ Today’s elite instead scorns those they deem backward, an animosity that is returned in equal measure by those who are the objects of their scorn, the “populists.”

Due to a combination of economic dislocation and cultural breakdown, a distinctly populist working-class party has coalesced in opposition to a party that has benefited from the libertarianism in both economic arrangements and social norms. A significant realignment is underway in the advanced postindustrial nations, with formerly left-leaning native working-class citizens aligning against an educated, credentialed elite, largely in the industries that have flourished in an increasingly virtual, global economy, and drawing broader electoral support from recent immigrants.⁵

There is no better proof of the extent of this realignment than post-mortems of the 2020 US election. The electorate was divided increasingly between a dominantly credentialed professional class, on the one

hand, and an increasingly multiracial, multiethnic working class, on the other. One particularly revealing study grouped 2020 presidential election *donations* by profession—not merely voters, but those dedicated enough to open their wallets. A striking contrast emerged. Those largely engaged in trades, small business, or caring for children at home didn’t merely vote for, but donated money to, incumbent President Donald Trump. These donors were largely noncollege credentialed, hourly or self-employed, private-sector rank-and-file union members, and generally working class. Those supporting the eventual winner of the election, President Joe Biden, were dominated by members of the credentialed professional class—with most more likely to be salaried and working at home during COVID-tide. In a separate graph, the specific companies or organizations that showed the largest percentage of donations to Joe Biden were employees at the largest technology companies (Google, Apple, Facebook), universities (particularly elite universities such as Harvard, Columbia, and the University of Chicago), and public-sector unions (for teachers, employees of the federal government). Very few employees of large organizations donated predominantly to Donald Trump, but among them were the US Marines and the New York City Police Department. By and large, Trump donors included people likely to be self-employed or wage workers, such as carpenters, contractors, truck drivers, electricians, and small business owners. Notably, the demographic with the highest percentage of donations to Trump, relative to Biden, was homemakers.⁶

The divide was professional, geographic, educational, and reputational. Those more likely to be in the “professions” that relied on a globalized economic system supported Biden; those likely to be in the trades supported Trump. Traditionally “masculine” professions donated more to Trump, along with stay-at-home moms, while more female-dominated professions such as teachers and nurses donated to Biden. There was a divide reflecting levels of religious observance, with Trump voters more likely to be religious, and Biden’s supporters more likely to identify as

secular.⁷ But above all, those who populate and control the main cultural institutions of American society donated (and presumably voted) in the interest of the professional class, while those who exercise little power in the cultural sphere donated (and presumably voted) for Trump.

This realignment along class lines increasingly moves the West away from its effort to obscure such distinctions by dividing the polity between proponents of Lockean economic progress and Millian social progress, and instead toward one in which the division is between the party of progress and the party of conservatism. While the various members of the party of progress aspire to a return to the divide that debated means over ends—such as market vs. state as the best means of achieving the same liberal end of equal individual liberty—it is far more likely that the growing class divide will come to define and reorder Western politics to an altered form in which the shared progressivism of liberalism will become a *party* rather than a *system*. As such, the liberal contest that pitted an economic elite against a progressive elite will fade as those two coalesce into one party, and taking its place will be a divide that will more closely resemble the political division described by all ancient political philosophers as inescapable and fundamental: the few against the many, or *oligarchy* vs. *demos*. In such a condition, the foreseeable future is one in which the mass and elite remain locked in a prolonged adversarial contest.

The American constitutional order was not actually designed with this classical model in mind. It represented the Founders' belief in a "new science of politics," specifically, a system in which a designated elite would govern with an aim to advancing an ideal of progress while rendering tractable any recalcitrant popular resistance. While the constitutional design was originally created to allow the ascendance of an economic elite while keeping at bay the potential inegalitarian discontents of the economically less successful, constitutional and political developments since the Progressive Era were especially aimed to give greater dominance to an educated and credentialed elite that would order

the nation toward moral progress achieved by an emphasis on social liberation. Strikingly, today the resistance to the elite is directed at both these elements—financial and social elites, economic and cultural libertarianism. It opposes simultaneously the "openness" of libertarian economics and the "openness" of libertarian social policy. While America was not designed to be a classically "mixed constitution," conditions today dictate that the nation learn anew the lessons of classical political philosophy if it will avoid an outright civil war, whether hot or cold.

However, is a "mixed constitution" even possible? I have suggested throughout that classical theory is superior to modern practice, but perhaps that is finally because modern theory recognized what ancient theory did not: no regime can be "mixed," or divided against itself. "A house divided against itself cannot stand," Lincoln famously said, arguing that finally the United States must be all one thing or all another—slave or free. While the divide today is not so morally clear as the choice in the mid-nineteenth century, the nation appears just as riven and irreconcilable. Can one have a nation in which half the nation is fundamentally opposed to the other—a progressive, wealthier, and more powerful elite against a less powerful, less wealthy, but potentially more numerous party of conservatism?

Given the trajectory of contemporary Western politics, two options appear most likely: either domination of elites over the working classes, manipulated through complete control of the main institutions of society and even outright suppression of opposing views through control of mainstream media, educational institutions, the bureaucracy, and social media corporations; or, less likely, a decisive uprising from below, likely led by a demagogue, creating a dictatorship of the proletariat in ways that Marx did not anticipate or intend. Either of these prospects, in fact, follows the predictions of classical theory: a deeply divided regime is likely to give rise to tyranny of one part over another part, or anarchy for all.

However, classical theory suggests a third option: while difficult,

nevertheless not only is a further alternative possible, but essential if tyranny is to be avoided. The genuinely “mixed constitution” becomes a “blending” of the various parts, no longer discernible as internally divided because it has achieved an internal harmony. That harmony must come about by aligning the sympathies and interests of the powerful few to the needs and interests of ordinary citizens to live in a stable and balanced order. To become blended, there must first be mixing.

In this sense, Tocqueville is actually in agreement with the classical tradition: one political form will come to predominate. A “chimera” is not possible—the melding of different animals into a single body.⁸ Such a creature arises from feverish imaginations, or, if attempted in reality, would quickly perish. Yet, as Tocqueville himself argued throughout *Democracy in America*, the best outcome is a polity that is united through a sympathetic relationship between the elites and the many, the great and the ordinary. Tocqueville thus does not envision that an elite will disappear, even in a democracy; rather, one of his predominant concerns is whether the elite that will inevitably exist within a democracy will support and ennoble, or—developing deep mutual hostility—will instead degrade the lives of ordinary citizens. A well-mixed regime is no longer a “chimera”—the mythical beast made of many parts—but one thing composed of sympathetic and compatible elements. The elite must govern for the benefit of the many, while the many must restrain the dangerous temptations of the elite.

Tocqueville’s warning applies not only to those who believe that one of today’s two contesting parties should simply dominate the other, but to fruitful contemporary arguments that we should aim at achieving a kind of “mixed constitution” that leaves intact the two parties, and instead aims at a productive stalemate. This is, in effect, the suggestion of Michael Lind in his otherwise superb study *The New Class War*—an outcome he calls “democratic pluralism.”⁹ Such pluralism, in his view, echoes the teachings of the Founding Fathers, seeking to foster a relatively equal power differential between the elite and the many,

and thereby allowing even the less powerful and wealthy populace to extract concessions from the powerful. For Lind, the thriving conditions of the 1950s working class—achieved through the power of unions and the robust social institutions of the lower middle class, such as churches and civic associations—is a model that should be emulated today. Yet, while I would not dispute this aim, I think Lind finally misunderstands the dynamics of that era, which were more Tocquevillian than Madisonian.

Lind asserts that the managerial elite has a vested self-interest in protecting its position indefinitely. Only fear will make this elite face political reality, and force it once again to concede some wealth, power, and status to the lower and working classes. Fear of losing their positions to populist replacements, Lind believes, is the only plausible motivation that could force members of today’s ruling class to change course on a number of policy fronts, such as: limiting low-skill immigration, narrowing the economic divide, and expressing grudging respect for the traditional and religious beliefs of the working class. His greatest worry is a prolonged battle in which the elites refuse to cede some power, prosperity, and position, leading either to outright “illiberal liberalism”—in an intensification of what we are already witnessing in their treatment toward the working class and religious believers—or the rise of a demagogic populism that takes America down the route of many nations in Central and South America. His book is aimed as an appeal to his fellow elites to compromise now, or bear the lion’s share of responsibility for losing the republic.

Lind is correct that fear is a powerful motivator, but I am skeptical that fear will suffice in this case.¹⁰ The ruling class of every age has a long historical record of successfully co-opting populist uprisings, and while some are occasionally successful, the record suggests oligarchs have a good reason to wager on maintaining power at whatever cost. In the American tradition, the subversion of populism has succeeded more through co-option or patient outlasting of intense but brief bursts

of populist anger and resentment, rather than outright violent suppression (though the history of violent oppression of organized labor should not be forgotten). America's earliest populist uprising led to the Constitutional Convention, and a new political settlement that its opponents predicted would lead to a centralized government, an economic oligarchy, and would leave ordinary citizens feeling relatively politically impotent and voiceless. The eponymous Populist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while politically potent for the span of a decade, was eventually bled of its reformist energy by the more technocratic, upper-class, and elitist Progressive Era movement. And, in a similar trend, the working-class gains of the 1950s—due to the unique circumstance of total military mobilization and the existential threat faced by liberalism—were largely disassembled within the span of thirty years, many through the machinations of so-called “conservatives” who assumed that label to shroud their libertarianism. Lind's belief that fear will motivate today's woke capitalists to provide anything more than flimsy Band-Aids to the working class seems belied by the evidence.

Rather, by Lind's own telling, the high-water mark of the 1950s was not merely the result of concessions from an otherwise neoliberal ruling class; rather, *the ethos of the ruling class itself was broadly in line with the values and ethos of a broad working and middle class*. It wasn't merely the power of labor unions, local politicians, and religious congregations that forced the managerial elite to respect their demands; rather, a more pervasive influence of the values embodied in what Lind describes as the organizations of “guild, ward, and congregation” reflected a very different governing philosophy than that informing the self-congratulatory individualistic meritocratic calculus of today's managerial elite. The sorts of communal organizations that drew on, and cultivated, broadly corporatist and even Catholic values of solidarity and subsidiarity were not merely restricted to dominantly Catholic working classes but informed the ethos of mass and elite alike. There was an

alignment of values between corporations, small business, and Main Street. Hollywood produced and lionized such films as *The Song of Bernadette*, *Boys Town*, and *It's a Wonderful Life*. Religious figures like Fulton Sheen, Billy Graham, and Reinhold Niebuhr were widely admired, regardless of class. The ruling class were not secretly neoliberals who grudgingly made concessions to the rubes in flyover country—they were “Midwestern” in their broader ethos, themselves steeped in the mid-century values of guild, ward, and congregation that had been advanced and fortified by earlier waves of Catholic immigrants.

Lind finally does not draw the correct conclusion from his own analysis. What's needed is not “democratic pluralism” in which the ruling class remains a neoliberal, managerial elite who, purely out of fear, grudgingly, if only temporarily, concedes some wealth and status to its inferiors. Instead, the entrenched conditions of a dominant economic and cultural elite require a fundamental *displacement* of the ruling class ethos by a *common-good conservatism*, one that directs both economic goals and social values toward broadly shared material and social capital that will prove supportive especially of stability and security in economic, family, and community life. We need not libertarian overlords who buy off the working class with schemes for universal basic income or free internet in favelas;¹¹ not a federal government that doles out occasional stimulus checks while a deeply inegalitarian economy proceeds undisturbed; and not credentialed secularists who grudgingly grant some shrinking private space to religious believers. Rather, of paramount importance today is the development of a ruling class that is itself informed by the very values that Lind believes were once regnant *as the price of admission to elite status itself*. Only the fear of *not conforming* to the regnant ethos will sufficiently move and shape elites—just as it does today to an elite that enforces a progressivist worldview, one that has proved so damaging to the prospects of flourishing for ordinary people.

This means, contra Lind, what is not needed is the creation of “the

functional equivalent” of guild, ward, and congregation to which the working class belongs: what is needed is for all of these forms, and their dominant ethos of solidarity and subsidiarity, to guide and inspire the ruling elite as well. Lind too quickly dismisses the idea that a revival of the working class through a revival of older forms, such as union, ward, and church, is a bridge too far. Yet the decline of these organizational forms has been intentionally advanced by an opposing individualist, materialist, and secular ethos embraced by today’s managerial elite.¹² If these institutions declined due to sustained efforts by the managerial elite, their renewal lies in part in the displacement of that elite with a different one informed by a common-good conservative ethos. The power sought is not merely to *balance* the current elite, but to *replace* it. If fear is to have a salutary effect, those who seek to remain in the ruling class must be forced to adopt a fundamentally different ethos. In the end, there is no “functional equivalent” of solidarity and subsidiarity; only a leadership and working class steeped in such values will restore the republic.

What is first needed is a “mixing” that shatters the blindered consensus of the elite, a mixing that must begin with the raw assertion of political power by a new generation of political actors inspired by an ethos of common-good conservatism. In order to achieve this end, control and effective application of political power will have to be directed especially at changing or at least circumventing current cultural as well as economic institutions from which progressive parties exercise their considerable power. Otherwise, those institutions will be utilized to circumvent and obstruct the only avenue to redress available to the “many”: demotic power. The aim should not be to achieve “balance” or a form of “democratic pluralism” that imagines a successful regime comprised of checks and balances, but rather, the creation of a new elite that is aligned with the values and needs of ordinary working people.

While Aristotelian “blending” should be the aim, Lind commends a necessary means to that further end. These means, as well as the com-

mendation of *realpolitik*, were originally detailed by that “evil” genius of practical political theorizing, Niccolò Machiavelli. Like the classical thinkers he otherwise criticized, Machiavelli believed that the clash between these two main elements of society—the *grandi* and *popolo* (or, nobility and the plebes)—was inevitable and unavoidable. Machiavelli held the view that it was, in fact, the very dissensus and clash between the two classes—the “elite” and the populace—that had provided the condition of liberty that in turn fueled Rome’s rise from a republican city-state to a world-straddling empire. Machiavelli excoriated critics (and, implicitly, older authorities like Aristotle and Aquinas) for their disapproval of the discord and division that was a characteristic feature of Roman political life. In fact, he viewed such discord as a sign of Rome’s political health, and, in particular, evidence of a vital resistance among the populace to the greater ability of the “nobility” to suppress the popular party. Machiavelli dismissed the “attacks” that “criticize[d] the clashes between the nobility and the populace,” which in his view were “the primary factor making for Rome’s continuing freedom.”¹³ This form of discord was evidence of the vitality of the populace to gain concessions from the elites that not only ended up resisting oppression and protecting the freedom of the populace, but ultimately protecting Roman freedom and extending Roman power as a whole. In a description that was doubtless written to invoke laughter, yet is likely to strike us as remarkably contemporary, he described some of these forms of resistance as follows:

If someone were to argue the methods employed were extralegal and almost bestial—the people in a mob shouting abuse at the senate, the senate replying in kind, mobs running through the streets, shops boarded up, the entire populace of Rome leaving the city—I would reply such things only frighten those who read about them.

Machiavelli goes on to point out concessions that the people were able to extract from the elite, either through demonstration or by refusing to serve in the military. He concludes, "The demands of a free people are rarely harmful to the cause of liberty, for they are a response either to oppression or to the prospect of oppression."¹⁴

In resisting this new manifestation of an ancient form of tyranny, we can valuably turn to those ancient lessons that today have new resonance and can be brought creatively up to date. While one main aim of populism of the left is the redistribution of wealth—particularly in its Marxist variant—such efforts have proved evanescent to the end of shaping a very different ruling ethos. More often than not, such efforts have led to extensive damage to the broader economic order while leaving in place the institutions and attitudes that divide the elite from the people. What is needed, rather, is not an economics that purportedly seeks the equalization of outcome through the actual or effective elimination of private property, but an economic order embedded within a broader context of the common good that especially seeks conditions for the flourishing of people of all classes, particularly a balancing of change and order that allows for strong families and encourages strong social and civic forms. This will require the development of national economic policies that will displace the primacy of economic wealth creation for a small number of elites and replace it with a concern for the national distribution of productive work, the expectation of a family-supportive wage for at least one member of a family, and the redistribution of social capital. Such policies will view with deep suspicion the egalitarian claims of today's elites as nothing more than forms of class self-interest, particularly as an effort to retain exclusive possession of the relative social health that sustains their oligarchic status. This does not preclude efforts to create an economy grounded in solidarity and aiming toward greater equality, but such material approaches will prove insufficient to the task if progressive elites continue to advance a project that undermines the social conditions that are essential for the

flourishing of the foundational social institutions of society: family, neighborhood, civil associations, and religious institutions. To revise a famous mantra: *It's the economy and the social order, stupid.*

The current political power of populism should be directed at the creation of a *mixed constitution*, breaking up the monopoly not only of economic power, but the social power that today reserves social well-being only to those with sufficient status and wealth. It should not require wealth to achieve social stability, nor should broad social instability be the acceptable consequence of concentrated economic prosperity. Rather, a stable and healthy civic society can afford prospects for flourishing even for those in average economic circumstances. What is needed is the application of *Machiavellian means to achieve Aristotelian ends*—the use of powerful political resistance by the populace against the natural advantages of the elite to create a mixed constitution not ultimately of the sort imagined by Machiavelli, but in which genuine common good is the result. The aim should not be a mixing of hostile elements, but a genuine blending of the classes in which the elites, under pressure from the people, actually take on features of *aristoi* and nobility—excellence, virtue, magnanimity, and a concern for the common good—and by means of which the people are elevated as a result.

Mixed Up (and Down)

Rather than thinking in a piecemeal fashion, a fuller program is needed to secure a "mixed constitution." As Tocqueville understood, this mixing cannot merely be focused upon reforms of official mechanisms of government, but must pervade society more widely. While working toward a genuine mixed government is essential, more important is that "mixing" occur throughout the social order. To the extent that elites govern especially through the main cultural institutions, those must be internally transformed ultimately toward the end of blending them

with the needs and sentiments of the people. Such efforts to “mix” should be willing to alter the way that the professional classes (including, but not limited to, Tocqueville’s focus on those in the law profession) view their work, the locus of political activity to more local levels, efforts to moralize the economy and social order alike, and pursue a healthy combination of what Tocqueville described as “the spirit of religion and the spirit of liberty.” While political mixing should certainly be pursued, a far more fundamental effort at “mixing” the classes should be undertaken.

In pursuing “Machiavellian means to Aristotelian ends,” the exercise of political power to increase the voice, status, prestige, and resources of the *popolo* should be unstinting. A main impetus should be the “mixing” of the classes, with a particular focus on putting elites into greater contact with, and developing sympathies for, the values and commitments of “the many.” But these efforts should be understood as necessary, but not sufficient, to the further goal of “blending” the classes, fostering a deep and sympathetic alliance between the many and the few, the working and laptop classes. Initial efforts to this end should be focused on decreasing the power and influence of progressivism—whether in the form of right or left liberalism—in the main institutions of the West, and in turn, elevating the power and status of those concerns and commitments that are currently underrepresented in those domains.

Various ways of increasing the “mixing” of ordinary and elite in our political lives should be considered. On the political front, we could turn to some lessons of the original “populists,” the anti-federalists, who feared that the Constitution’s design would lead to the rule of an oligarchy concentrated in the nation’s capital. They insisted that the people be given a stronger presence and voice in the national government, particularly by ensuring relative proximity between representatives and the represented. They called for small districts and potentially many representatives in the House, and James Madison, fearing that

the Constitution would be scuttled by their demands, introduced an amendment along with those we count as the “Bill of Rights” that would limit the size of congressional districts to 50,000 people—in contrast to an average of 800,000 people living in districts today. The Congressional Apportionment Amendment passed the First Congress and was approved by eleven states without a deadline, meaning that it would need twenty-seven more states for ratification. Passage of this amendment would require an increase of approximately 5,500 representatives, for a House of about 6,000. A main effect of such a major change would be to amplify the voices of ordinary citizens among their representatives and help repair the divide that grows between the capital and its citizens.

Of course, such an exponential growth would be radical and difficult to digest (not to mention the challenge of gathering that number of people in any chamber in Washington, DC), but a substantial growth of “the People’s House” well short of that proposal would be both more feasible and palatable. One recommendation, proffered twenty years ago by George Will, was to raise the number of representatives in the House to 1,000. Such an increase would ensure a more “representative” House of Representatives, and would significantly lessen the distance between representative and constituents. A major advantage, Will acknowledged, would be the possibility of a return of more “retail” politics, lessening the influence of money and media that is a source of bipartisan (as well as civic) aggravation.

Candidates could campaign as candidates did in the pre-broadcasting era, with more retail than wholesale politicking, door to door, meeting by meeting. Hence there would be less need for money, most of which now buys television time. So enlarging the House can be justified in terms of the goal that nowadays trumps all others among “progressive” thinkers—campaign finance reform.¹⁵

Such an expansion would have the further advantage of increasing the numbers of people who are able to participate in the nation's governance, while decreasing the need for either wealth or fame as a requirement for office. Expansion could increase the number of "regular people" who might hold office, and decrease the presence of a professional political class. A relatively large House, and small districts, was seen as a desideratum of previously mentioned anti-federalist Melancton Smith, who, in his notable engagements with Alexander Hamilton during the New York ratification debate, stated his hope that the House would not be the stronghold of "speculative men"—an older term for "Anywhere" people—hoping instead for a House composed of people extensively informed by "local knowledge": a common and shared stockpile of accumulated wisdom that is derived from the lived experience of people in the places they lived and knew and loved. Smith stated:

The idea that naturally suggests itself to our minds, when we speak of representatives, is that they resemble those they represent; they should be a true picture of the people; possess the knowledge of their circumstances and their wants; sympathize in all their distresses, and be disposed to seek their true interests. The knowledge necessary for the representatives of a free people, not only comprehends extensive political and commercial information, such as is acquired by men of refined education, who have leisure to attain to high degrees of improvement, but it should also comprehend that kind of acquaintance with the *common concerns* and occupations of the people, which men of the middling class of life are in general much better competent to, than those of a superior class. To understand the true commercial interests of a country, not only requires just ideas of the general commerce of the world, but also, and *principally*, a knowledge of the productions of your own country and their value, what your soil is capable of producing, the nature of your manufactures . . .

[and] more than an acquaintance with the abstruse parts of the system of finance.¹⁶

In this same spirit, we might consider additional ways to "mix" the classes within the federal government suggested by the later populists of the late nineteenth century. Of particular concern was not just an increase in overall representation, but what an earlier generation might have called representation of "estates"—important institutions and professions. The populists recognized that the wealthy and prominent actors in an increasingly financialized and industrial American economy would gain access to corridors of power with relative ease. Those in less wealthy or influential professions—but still signally important, such as farmers—would be disadvantaged. In order to forestall a de facto oligarchy, an earlier generation of populists recommended ways to gain representation of various estates. At the time of the creation of the Federal Reserve, for instance, populist legislators inspired by William Jennings Bryan's political success called for the inclusion of a farmer, a wage earner, and a small businessman on the Federal Reserve Board, suspecting that the Fed composed entirely of bankers would naturally favor the financiers.¹⁷ In a different context, German companies practice a form of representation of "estates" through the legally required participation of employees in *Betriebsrat*—"workers' councils"—in corporate and business decisions. More than simply strengthening labor unions—itself a worthy undertaking—such an arrangement officially lodges representation of workers within the business organization, rather than as an oppositional force that must attempt to exert influence from outside the institution. Greater representation of *individuals* will almost always redound to the wealthy and influential; representation of "estates," in both the public and commercial domains, is more likely to achieve the ends of "mixing."

A further, if even more radical, way of mixing would be to "break up" Washington, DC, itself. As Ross Douthat has written, "We should

treat liberal cities the way liberals treat corporate monopolies—not as growth-enhancing assets, but as trusts that concentrate wealth and power and conspire against the public good. And instead of trying to make them a little more egalitarian with looser zoning rules and more affordable housing, we should make like Teddy Roosevelt and try to break them up.”¹⁸ It is obscene that the nation’s capital has become the center of such wealth, with the nation’s largest concentration of what Charles Murray calls “Super Zips,” where those with a combination of elite education and prosperity congregate.¹⁹ If there was a good reason to have a geographic concentration of government departments and agencies at the time of the expansion of the federal government, before not only the advent of the telephone, but of the widespread adoption of online meetings during the COVID pandemic, the only reason today is the continuing self-interest of a wealthy and powerful bipartisan elite that perpetuates itself increasingly at the expense of the rest of the country (even counties farther flung, to where those who cannot afford housing must commute every day). Across the nation there are many affordable if struggling cities with beautiful, if deteriorating, buildings that would greatly benefit from the redistribution of jobs, an educated workforce, and a morale boost. Better still, those who circulate only with other denizens of DC would now work alongside people from other walks of life and would unavoidably encounter those with very different life circumstances. This is the kind of “mixing” that is needed for a renewal of “mixed constitution.”

It is also high time to revisit the question of national service. An earlier generation regarded military service as a requirement for good citizenship, but the last president to serve in the military, George H. W. Bush—indeed, one who enlisted before he was legally of age—and the ethos of his generation have passed away. The infantry today is composed increasingly of people from parts of the country that are never encountered by those living in “Super Zips.” Indeed, fewer Americans today than at any time personally know someone serving in the military, either

through family acquaintances, or community connections. According to a 2011 Pew survey, only 33 percent of people eighteen to twenty-nine have had a family member serving in the military, as compared with nearly 80 percent among those age fifty to sixty-four.²⁰ Given contemporary trends, in which only 1 percent of the population now serves in the military, a widening military-civilian divide has likely only increased in the intervening decade.²¹

Here again, long-standing republican theory—echoed by the anti-federalists at the time of the American founding—offers a cautionary note about such a divide. Republican theorists consistently warned that a divide between those who would decide *whether to fight*, and those who would be *required to fight*, was a mortal threat to any republic. Machiavelli warned against the reliance upon mercenaries who fought for reasons of financial gain or necessity, urging instead the overwhelming presence of citizen armies in which the broadest representation of the nation was present in the armed forces.²² Critics of the proposed American Constitution warned against the perils of a standing army, particularly the temptation of political leaders to engage in wars that were desired by a political class—whether for personal glory, cynical political reasons, or imperial temptations—who would suffer no consequences in the prosecution of such wars.²³ More recently still, some called for the reintroduction of mandatory national military service in the lead-up to the war in Iraq, rightly suspecting that the eagerness of the ruling class to engage in war in the Middle East was unbalanced by concern for the lives of their own children.²⁴ Echoing this long tradition, military historian Andrew Bacevich has argued: “As Americans forfeit personal direct responsibility for contributing to the nation’s defense—abandoning the tradition of the citizen-soldier—then the state gains ownership of the military. The army becomes Washington’s army, not our army. And Washington has demonstrated a penchant for using the army recklessly.”²⁵

It may be, as our generals would quickly tell us, that there is no

great need or demand for a large conscript army, but it would be a matter of political will to insist that it is in the civic interest that more Americans engage in military service, reviving ancient claims that a standing army is always a threat to the self-government of a republic. Still, differential forms of service could easily be instituted, with arguably greater need for a large civilian army to address the extensive need for repairs to our infrastructure and an even greater need for repair to our civic culture, especially through the mingling of people from a variety of walks of life.²⁶ A service requirement should be compulsory for all Americans—especially if we were to move to greater social benefits in areas of health care and education. During a time when young people are burdened with unconscionable levels of debt, a service requirement would be one just avenue to debt forgiveness, or a way of gaining a stake that could be devoted to education or a first home. Not only should there be an accompanying requirement to contribute to the commonweal in exchange for such benefits, but a universal requirement of a year's service to the nation would afford the invaluable benefit of mandating opportunities for interaction with people outside one's bubble.

Such forms of mixing should be a major priority in rethinking the role of elite universities in America today. These places are well-tuned sifting machines, separating economic wheat from chaff, and perpetuating a class divide that they purport to condemn. Already some especially wealthy institutions have had taxes imposed on endowments (proportionate to the numbers of undergraduate students), but this is a blunt instrument that does not adequately alter their behavior. President Trump's relatively fleeting and unfocused efforts at withholding federal funding to institutions that do not ensure free speech, or that train students in ideologically tainted critical race theory, were also examples of Machiavellian means, but these efforts, too, were largely symbolic impositions that left intact the structures of the meritocracy. Instead, both taxes on endowments and threats to federal funding should be used as inducements to wealthy and elite institutions to pursue genuine

socioeconomic variety in order to foster *genuine* diversity of the student body at main campuses, as well as opening satellite campuses in less prosperous locations, attracting (at significantly reduced cost) local students who might well both desire a Harvard degree and not have the means or inclination to move to Cambridge (either before or after graduation). Also, rather than simply forgiving student debt (which perversely leaves in place bad incentives at these institutions), educational institutions should be required to assume a significant degree of responsibility for the indebtedness of students where those burdens are extensive and worsening. Public funding of public schools should be increased, albeit tied to expectations that faculty and administrators at public institutions respect the social and political commitments of the broader public that funds these institutions. Greater influence and oversight by elected political leaders over public educational institutions to ensure their commitment to the common good is essential—if necessary, including opposing faculty and administrative resistance—for instance, by the appointment of more activist trustees dedicated to fostering a “mixed constitution.”

Further, creative ways of encouraging graduates from elite institutions to pursue atypical livelihoods should be explored. One possibility would be to provide incentives to the wealthiest institutions to repay or forgive loans of those students who pursue careers outside the areas of finance, consulting, and high-powered law firms, instead pursuing lower-paid vocations as teachers, soldiers, public servants in local and regional settings, religious vocations, and so forth. Even years spent as small-town professionals outside the corridors of power might be encouraged. Today these institutions are using both direct federal funds and indirect state and federal tax advantages to perpetuate an oligarchy, while shrouding these results with claims of woke equality. They should be forced through creative means into participation in a new regime of “mixed government.”

But more importantly, the relative importance and centrality of

these institutions should decrease in modern American society. Colleges are now engaged in what has been described as the "overproduction of elites," an over-credentialed and underemployed generation saddled with extensive debt and justified resentment.²⁷ Whatever commendation liberal education possessed for John Adams has long been eclipsed by the role of liberal arts colleges in advancing a narrow progressive ideology that shrouds oligarchic status maintenance while such institutions work assiduously to produce and sustain an elite. A vast number of students would benefit from more strenuous secondary education, steeped in the liberal arts for reasons commended by John Adams, and then directed at more focused vocational preparation than is currently available in the typical collegiate or university setting. A better model would be that of the German education system, which does not automatically privilege attendance at an academic university, and instead provides extensive options for various forms of vocational preparation. Apprenticeships and training in trades in a variety of professions is the norm.

University education could be substantially reduced, particularly for the eighteen-to-twenty-two-year-old demographic, and the public largesse now expended in expectation that most high school graduates will enroll in college in order to enter the professional class could instead be redirected to equally advantage other vocational options, as well as opening university education to an older population that is less likely to view it as a "hoop" and a subsidized four-year landlocked cruise excursion. Vocational schools or tracks ought to be supplemented by required introductory courses in a university-level general education, keeping open a potential track to university education for those who are genuinely inspired by and drawn to these studies, and redirecting the oversupply of PhDs from a shrinking collegiate job market into contact with the working class. Requirements in civic education at more vocational institutions would correct the potential for narrowness that can accompany a focus on work. Movement toward a genuine "mixed

constitution" would seek to end the default norm of college education as synonymous with professional success, and with it, a significant redirection of public funds going toward support of a higher education industry that has increasingly become a highly partisan and ideological program at odds with the requirements of supporting a genuinely mixed constitution.

A great deal more expenditure and approbation should be expended on education in trades. Many parts of the country are experiencing a shortage in skilled trade workers. As much of the built environment of the previous century begins to decay, there is a growing need for skilled masons, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and a host of trades. The elimination of "shop class" from high schools across the country signaled a form of official disapprobation; this trend should be reversed, and the study of trades should be reintroduced in secondary schools.²⁸ Public support for people studying the trades should be comparable to both financial and adulatory support that has long existed for university educations. At the same time, university students should be required to take at least a "trade" course—an introductory course in how to repair various systems in a typical household, for instance. My experience over the past quarter century in higher education suggests that a decreasing number of students have had any real encounter with "how things work," a consequence of members of the professional class losing touch with such skills that were prevalent in an earlier generation, and typically handed down from parents or grandparents to children. Today's universities are centers of "gnostic" indoctrination, or the near-complete disassociation of mind-work from the work of hands and the physical laws of reality. Even a passing acquaintance with the work of electricians, plumbers, farmers, and carpenters could help correct the dominant ethos that all of reality is manipulable and human nature itself is malleable.

Similar efforts should be undertaken to break up or limit the power of monopolistic economic organizations, reviving the long-standing

populist suspicion toward and fear of the disfiguring effects of concentrated economic power. Such efforts have the potential of drawing support from corporate critics on both the right and the left, and revitalizing the trust-busting tradition that was a legacy of the populist and progressive traditions alike. The recent economic threats and political interference in states and localities such as Indiana, Arizona, Arkansas, and North Carolina should not be brooked. Any economic institution with sufficient power to bring financial ruin upon a sovereign political entity should be severely curtailed in the name of the common good. This should be true also of those semiprivate institutions, such as the NCAA, which use their privileged positions, accorded significant legal protections, to circumvent the political will of "Somewhere" people. Political leaders whose position is owed to such people should dispel any nostalgic views about free enterprise, instead recognizing that such economic institutions are seeking to shape a social order that is amenable to an oligarchic ruling class. A Machiavellian assertion of popular tumult should be directed at either preventing such abuses of financial power, or dismantling such institutions.

Strenuous efforts to encourage and support manufacturing industries should once again be a central and vigorous role of the federal government. Alexander Hamilton rightly regarded a strong manufacturing base as a basic feature of national security, stability, and prosperity, a view that has been forgotten especially by today's libertarian cheerleaders of free-market globalism who claim to revere "the Founders." Hamilton emphasized especially the role played by manufacturing in achieving national independence, and the corresponding freedom from the debasement and servitude that inevitably accompany economic reliance upon foreign powers. He also stressed the necessity of developing a middle-class workforce essential to a self-governing society, with financially secure and independent workers serving as a microcosm of the same independence necessary at the national level.²⁹ A society of producers was preferred to a society of consumers—the very reverse of

today's economic ordering, in which consumption, debt, and waste are prized as main economic activities of many Americans.

Domestic manufacturing in certain sectors should simply be mandated. Various shortages at the start of the COVID pandemic, and continuing with supply chain shortages for several years after the pandemic, reveal that national security hangs in the balance. A secure supply of medicines, basic building supplies, food, and energy are essential. These kinds of manufactured goods, like military equipment, cannot be outsourced without compromising national security. No nation can be secure without the basic provision of these goods, and national policy should mandate that domestic sources of these and other basic goods always be readily available, even by blocking or at least minimizing their importation from other nations.

Hamilton called for the imposition of tariffs to secure necessary advantages against more developed foreign industries, a policy that was recently brought back to prominence under the presidency of Donald Trump. Tariffs, however, are generally crude instruments, often used as much or more for domestic political advantage than true enhancements to national competitiveness. Where necessary, tariffs can prevent dumping and counteract advantages that foreign manufacturers receive from public funding. However, they should generally be a policy of last resort, focused especially on protecting national manufacture of essential goods such as pharmaceuticals and basic materials. Instead, America (and any nation) should seek to improve its competitiveness and productivity by supporting several vital sectors that in turn are vital to a vibrant manufacturing base: infrastructure, manufacturing and R&D innovation, and related forms of education.³⁰ In each case, the use of public funds and support can enhance the position of private actors, countering similar forms of industrial support that exist in nearly every other advanced nation.

Debates over immigration should be reframed as yet another way that the elite class perpetuates its position, suppressing the income of

working classes while ensuring an affordable service class, the new peasantry who replace yesteryear's indentured servant class.³¹ Rather than attacking immigrants, however—which is too often rightly perceived as cast in racist overtones—the efforts should be directed at those who employ illegal immigrants, a tactic not unlike that of the pro-life movement that focuses not on the despair of pregnant women, but the greed of those who would profit from their misfortune. High-profile arrests and prosecutions of employers who break the law should become regular features of national reporting, and would act as a powerful deterrent that would in turn have far greater impact than any wall is likely to have. Reminders should be given that such efforts to restrict illegal immigration in the effort to support the working class were the positions of renowned civil rights leaders such as former Notre Dame president Fr. Theodore Hesburgh. As head of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy that was convened by President Jimmy Carter in the late 1970s, Hesburgh viewed restrictions to illegal immigration as a means of reducing the “pernicious effects” of competition “from this source of inexpensive labor,” and as a means of combatting generalized “lawlessness” perpetrated by those who flouted immigration laws, the effects of both of which were more likely to be felt by members of the working class.³²

Renewed efforts to enforce a moral media should be pursued. Here, Charles Murray's observation that elites do not “preach” what they practice should be emphasized. Programming that lionizes various forms of transgression and libertinism—sexual, drugs, and mockery of religious belief—should be denounced for perpetuating the class advantage of the elite, a form of propaganda that seeks to suppress the life prospects of the lower working class for whom “transgression” is not the safe play of sophomores on a college campus, but the difference between life and death. Pornography should be extensively controlled and even banned for obvious reasons: it is degrading and corrupting to both participants and viewers, and inescapably involves exploitation especially of poor

women.³³ Where necessary, further forms of legislation that promote public morality, and forbid its intentional corruption, should be considered. Such legislation was long regarded as an essential feature for the inculcation of civic virtue required among a republican citizenry—and efforts to develop jurisprudence and judges who will respect the original “police powers” of states and even, where possible, the nation should be encouraged.³⁴ Those with a megaphone should not only emphasize the immorality of a large swath of contemporary popular culture, but its elitism, an implicit effort to destroy the lives of the less fortunate. To do so, of course, is to point out its degradation to the moral character of citizens, but in a way that ought to shame and correct rather than embolden the shameless.

Many other efforts at “mixing” should be considered. A change to our electoral process, one favoring caucuses over primaries, would shift power from opinion makers in the media and the sheer force of money in advertising to the living rooms of citizens, who should be afforded the opportunity to exercise political self-government. Efforts to impose the actual costs associated with suburbs and commuting, and the massive costs of a transportation system that favors placelessness, should be more directly borne by those who would live as “Anywhere” people.

Following the counsel of Tim Carney in his book *Alienated America*, one of the best ways to ensure the “redistribution of social capital” is strengthening the institutions of civil society. There needs to be a more frank assessment of the role of both concentrated political and economic power in the destruction of social institutions whose benefits—a flourishing family and community life—ought to be more equally available to every citizen in our nation. A common-good conservatism, moreover, rejects the right-liberal stance that a healthy civil society can result both from encouragement and the shrinking of government. Government, both local and national, can serve as a counterweight to the destructive forces of a destabilizing economic order. A focus on new policies in which the public realm fosters and supports a healthy civil

society should become a conservative priority.³⁵ “Localism” is easily destroyed in a globalized system but can flourish if protected under an umbrella of public policy devoted to breaking up concentrations of economic power.

Public efforts to support and shore up marriage and family must be a foremost commitment. A Cabinet-level position, whether in the Cabinet or an equivalent to the national security advisor, should be a priority of a future administration that aims to develop a common-good conservatism at the heart of a “mixed constitution.” Policies rewarding marriage and family formation should be given pride of place.³⁶ A “family czar” should look not only to promising proposals and examples in the United States, but adapt comparable efforts abroad, such as those undertaken by Hungary’s Ministry of Family Affairs. This ministry has pursued an array of creative policies, under the rubric “Family Protection Action Plan,” that seek to increase family formation and birth rates in Hungary, including paid leave policies for parents and grandparents, financial incentives for families producing three or more children—including a generous grant for families with multiple children—and even relief from all future income taxes for working mothers of four children or more. Families with children are extended substantial support for housing and other costs.³⁷ Over 6 percent of Hungary’s GDP is now devoted to policies that support family formation, amid efforts more broadly to support a distinct Hungarian culture. While Hungary predictably is the object of condemnation from Western progressive elites, it has charted a distinct path from that of progressive liberal democracies whose future looks more likely to be that of internal cold civil wars to movement toward a genuinely “mixed constitution.”

Most importantly, aristopulism will advance in the Western nations through forthright acknowledgment and renewal of the Christian roots of our civilization. The emaciated liberalism that marks today’s elite—valuing the deracinated freedom of the individual and the purported merit of economically successful lives—has led to governance

by a deeply corrupt oligarchic class. The legacy of Christianity called for service and sacrifice by the advantaged on behalf of the poor and forgotten—moreover, it understood such actions were the truest acts of nobility and generosity. Public acknowledgment and celebration of these Christian roots are essential to the creation of an ethos of genuine service by elites on behalf of those who do not share their advantages. Right-liberal and left-liberal progressives effectively combine to undermine the waning presence of this Christian ethos that, according to authors like Lind, once guided a more solidaristic economic and social order as recently as the 1950s. “Christian democracy” was thought by many leading intellectuals and political figures in the post-World War II era to be the necessary corrective to the cruel left and right ideologies that dominated the world at the time. That hope has largely been abandoned, in both Europe and the United States, crowded out by the ideology of liberalism and its devotion to economic inequality and social libertinism. The revival of forthright and strenuous efforts to reinstitute the ethos and the kinds of policies once pursued by Christian Democrats is vital to efforts to achieve “Aristotelian ends.”

Recently, a number of thinkers have pointed in the direction of such a revival, calling for the revitalization of a public Christian culture. Journalist Sohrab Ahmari, theologian C. C. Pecknold, and political theorist Gladden Pappin have argued that only a Christian culture can recharge the West’s potential for law and culture that undergird flourishing for ordinary people who are otherwise drowned in the overwhelming tides of liberal “progress.” In an essay published in the journal *The American Conservative*, they wrote:

Christian nations take care of the sick and the poor, preserve life from conception until natural death, incarnate their faith in holidays and festivals, and inspire public life with hope for eternity. Because of that, traditional Christianity stands to regain importance whenever and wherever liberalism falters.

This Christianity remains latent but palpable, a vestigial structure whose importance cannot be overlooked. . . . Like the quiet country shrines still visited by the faithful, these vestigial practices could become functional parts of Christian politics once again.³⁸

Such a politics infused with the West's Christian inheritance will combine religious and working-class calls for days of rest; holidays (a word meaning "holy days") that allow families to gather, free of the distractions and demands of commerce; public opportunities for prayers of hope, comfort, and mourning; public support for schools and charities that care for the young and the sick and the frail not out of lucre, but inspired by Christian charity; and a revitalization of our public spaces to reflect a deeper belief that we are called to erect imitations of the beauty that awaits us in another Kingdom.

These and other broad policy proposals are no doubt subject to the manifold criticisms of unintended consequences but would shift fundamental priorities and corrupt arrangements. Many, some, or few may ultimately prove both feasible and likely to advance the aims of forming a new elite, while others that are yet to be recommended might prove to be wildly successful in the aim of fostering a common-good conservatism. Most important is that policies in this spirit be developed, encouraged, and pursued in an effort to foster a different kind of elite, one aligned with the requirements and needs of the working classes. Political leaders seeking to use the power of the state to foster a different kind of elite should cease thinking within the worn-out ruts of liberal ideology—one that is generally content with the fiction that all citizens can eventually become members of the laptop class while abandoning all semblance of cultural inheritance. Instead, creative and experimental efforts to foster a new, distinct, genuinely *noble* elite should be a main aim of a successor political form to the decaying progressivism of an exhausted liberalism.

The task of a renewed political movement seeking to repair and move beyond the divide of our nation and globe ought to pose real threats to the continued advantages of the current elite. But the deeper aim ought not to be its destruction—for, as we know from history, those who replace the elites simply become the new elites, and are often harsher and more brutal. Rather, using Machiavellian means to Aristotelian ends, efforts aimed at genuine forms of "mixing" should be undertaken with the aim that today's elites—for lack of a better word, the oligarchs—instead become (again, for lack of a better word), or are replaced by, genuine aristocrats. Such "aristocrats" are commended not in that contemporary, negative meaning of a word describing a person possessing a superior position who has not earned or deserved that state, but in the classical sense: someone of virtue, excellence, and, above all, who regards that status as a kind of gift and obligation to be put in the service of those of less advantage and power—in other words, the common good. Today, with the elite adopting the banner of "democracy" and egalitarianism as cover for the further advancement of their status, it is safe to conclude that an ennobling of our elite will not come about from goodwill, but rather through the force of a threat from the *popolo*. In days yet to come, it might be hoped, through a kind of Aristotelian habituation in virtue, a genuine *aristoi* might arise, ironically through the efforts of an energized, forceful, and demanding populace. In turn, such *aristoi* ought to work to improve the lives, prospects, and fate of the people, cultivating in turn the kind of people who themselves take on the qualities of genuine *aristoi*. Through a kind of genuine mixing of the excellences possible to a noble nobility, and the decent hopes of a grounded people of common sense demanding better from those with advantages, we might actually come to witness a kind of regime change—the flowering of a mixed constitution, a kind of "aristopopulism" that might deserve the name Republic.

Toward Integration

If “Machiavellian means” may be necessary to disrupt the credentialing monopoly, the promotion of anti-culture, and geographic separation of the ruling class from those who are falling behind, the more fundamental aim must be “Aristotelian ends.” As Aristotle envisioned, the aim of a “mixed regime” is not the “checks and balances” between the classes, but their eventual melding into an entirely different regime—what he called “polity,” or, simply, a “constitution.” More than “mixing-as-balancing,” what is ultimately needful is “mixing-as-blending.” For this to occur, a successor regime must eschew liberalism’s core value of *separation*, and instead seek a deeper and more fundamental and pervasive form of *integration*.

The ideal of “integration” has been variously defined over the decades, including racial, economic, and the creation of new transnational identities. While the word is well worn, a new situation requires a new way of thinking about the political possibilities of “integration.” To overcome the *disintegration* that is so central to liberalism, what is needed is a pervasive form of *postliberal integration*.

The integration needed is less subject specific than previous forms (such as aspirations to economic or racial integration) aimed instead at the overcoming of the *disintegration* of most forms of relationality that

is a major aim and realization of the liberal order. From the mundane—the *disintegration* of how we live, passing our lives in wholly separate spheres of commerce, schooling, domesticity, and the religious; to the political—seeking to reintegrate the aims and ends of the leadership class with ordinary people; to the ontological—overcoming the narrow ideals of progress that animate human beings in favor of the shared goal of *flourishing*—the alternative to a liberal order rests far less on systemic political arrangements, and more on a different way of understanding the human creature in relation to other humans and with the world and cosmos. Ideals and ends of integration must confront and defeat liberal *disintegration*.

The Problem of Disintegration

The French political philosopher Pierre Manent has stressed that the most “distinctive” trait of liberal democracy is its “organization of separations.”¹ He regards both the success and the perils of liberal democracy as arising from its tendency to generate an increasing number of “separations” in every domain of life. Among those separations he lists as most distinctive and pervasive are these six:

1. Separation of professions; or division of labor
2. Separation of powers
3. Separation of church and state
4. Separation of civil society and the state
5. Separation between represented and representative
6. Separation of facts and values, or science and life²

The foundational “separation” of liberal democracy is the “division of labor,” famously described by Adam Smith as the subdivision of work into increasingly specific and discrete activities. This “separation”

gives rise to greater productivity as each worker is responsible for one distinct part of the production, though it limits each worker’s knowledge about the full nature of the product as well as shrinks the interactions among workers. While its impact in the economic sphere is celebrated and well known, Manent rightly notes that this form of separation is far more extensive and implicates many more aspects of life than merely the economic domain.

Manent argues that these and countless other forms of separation are hallmarks of the liberal order: “These separations *must* be put into effect, and thereafter they *must* be preserved. Why? Because these separations are necessary for liberty. Better yet, they define liberty as the moderns understand it. Modern liberty is founded on an organization of separations.”³ A main separation that has been the subject of this book is that between the ethos of the ruling class and those it governs. This separation has both been required for, and been worsened by, the “progress” that today has led liberalism to a loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the governed, and an increasing imposition by the ruling class of liberal policies and ends to advance its advantages while rendering tractable the governed. Its solution lies not simply in the political imposition of “Machiavellian means” aimed at “mixing,” but overcoming the very basis of the “organization of separations” toward the end of a more pervasive “organization of integration.” In the remaining pages, I will address how the potential “integration” that combats “the organization of separations” would begin to move us to a time “after liberalism.” In particular, I will sketch out aspirations toward “integration” in several critical spheres that currently reflect societal “*disintegration*”:

1. Overcoming “Meritocracy”
2. Combatting Racism
3. Moving Beyond Progress
4. Situating the Nation
5. Integrating Religion

Overcoming “Meritocracy”

Perhaps the most fundamental “separation” that defines liberalism is the distinction between winner and loser, or, to echo Locke’s words, the “industrious and rational” in distinction to the “quarrelsome and contentious.” The liberal economic and social order rests on winnowing those who flourish under its unbounded anti-culture from those who either lack the requisite economic skills or refuse to be caught up in the “race to the top,” or both. A number of recent authors have explored the political, social, and economic pathologies that have accompanied the increasingly stark divide between those who win and lose the meritocratic sweepstakes, noting in particular that the political tumultuousness and instability of recent years arises as a direct consequence of the growing domination of meritocrats as a ruling class. In his important book *The Tyranny of Merit*, Harvard political theorist Michael Sandel has diagnosed some of the deepest sources of today’s political discontents arising from the “toxic brew of hubris and resentment,” inevitable consequences that result from the pervasive belief in “self-making.”⁴

Under meritocracy, the belief that one’s status and position has been wholly earned and deserved becomes widespread, leading to internalization of self-congratulation among the successful for their achievements and corresponding condescension toward the unfortunate, while those who fail to make the cut simultaneously are likely to blame themselves as well as develop deep reservoirs of resentment toward the successful. The divide between society’s winners and losers comes to be seen as rational and justified. Larry Summers—an economic advisor to Barack Obama as well as former president of Harvard University—expressed the inevitable inequality of a meritocracy as an accurate if somewhat regrettable measure of justifiable personal worth: “One of the challenges in our society is that the truth is kind of a dis-equalizer. One of the reasons that inequality has probably gone up in

our society is that people are being treated closer to the way that they’re supposed to be treated.”⁵

Sandel concludes his study by suggesting that one way to redress especially the self-congratulatory ethos that directly arises from meritocratic achievement would be to introduce an element of chance and luck into the mix—specifically, a “lottery of the qualified.” Under such a scheme, admission to the top-tier “sorting machines” of the meritocracy—Harvard, Yale, Princeton, etc.—would be the result of both selectivity and randomness. Once applicants had been determined to be qualified, any further selection would be the result of a purely randomized lottery. A main result, Sandel argues, would be to “deflate meritocratic hubris, by making clear what is true in any case, that those who land on top do not make it on their own but owe their good fortune to family circumstance and native gifts that are morally akin to the luck of the draw.”⁶

Yet, under this slightly altered meritocratic arrangement, the greater likelihood is that the winners would continue to have ample cause to congratulate themselves. The introduction of more obvious forms of randomness would be as minimally influential as current forms of luck; instead, what would continue to exert the greatest influence in the minds of both “winners” and “losers” is the fact that those who rise to the top were among “the qualified.” The “organization of separations” would remain intact, and under that regime, the tendency to self-congratulation (and self-blame) would continue to dominate. Sandel—like so many of those who command the meritocratic heights—accepts the fundamental legitimacy of a deeper “organization of separations.”

Liberalism typically seeks to keep intact the separation between “merit” and equality. Classical liberals stress the necessity of merit, while pressing for true equality of opportunity. Progressive liberals, like John Rawls, seek to close the economic gap between winners and losers while nevertheless keeping intact the system of merit. All of these

proposals are forms of “disintegration”: keeping separate what rather needs to be joined.

The “meritocratic” system established by liberalism is especially susceptible to the *political* divisions that arise from the “organization of separations.” The purpose of the political order is to separate the wheat from the chaff—Jefferson’s “natural aristocracy”—encouraging those with prized abilities to pursue their own success while relying upon impersonal mechanisms of the market or the state to afford some secondary benefits to those who are not similarly blessed. The battle among elites in the liberal order is fought over which depersonalized mechanism is the best means of benefiting the unfortunate while the successful are liberated from any actual obligations to their fellow citizens. “Classical” and “progressive” liberalism are two sides of the same coin, and eventually, those who are ill served by *both* depersonalized mechanisms will turn against the partisans of the false divide. That is one main feature of our contemporary political tumult: a reaction against both guises of the meritocracy.

The conclusion by some is that the American tradition was established explicitly to reject any notion of solidarity: we were conceived as a nation of self-making, striving individuals. Sandel, among others, notes that the more individualistic and achievement-based ethos of the American meritocracy contributes to a significant extent to the relative weakness of American social welfare and an economic safety net. While the sense of solidarity has waxed and waned during American history, it could well be argued that America’s deepest ethos was born of the Lockean belief in individual self-fashioning and the resulting earned status and position of individuals in American society and economic order. At its base, belief in the legitimacy of rewards accrued from individual striving constitutes a main feature of “the American Dream.”

By contrast, postliberal integration would take the following form: inequality based upon differences in talent, interest, and achievement is

not a marker of individual “merit,” but, rather, a sign of our deeper solidarity, a window into our mutual need and insufficiency. Inequality is a window into our deeper equality, demanding not the flattening of our differences, but recognition of our mutual obligations.

One way of exemplifying the difference is to underscore how the two worldviews differ in regard to the relationship of difference and commonality. Classical liberalism sees unity in a secondary relationship to our differences: as stated in the Declaration of Independence, in order to secure our individual rights, we establish something common—our nation. Thus, that which is *common* (the nation) serves our *differences* (our rights). What we share in common supports, and even accelerates, an ever more pervasive system of inequality.

By contrast, there is a competing conception of the American order that predates this understanding, and has exercised countervailing influence. By this alternate understanding, our differences “serve” (or direct us toward) our commonality. What appears private, individual, and “mine” is actually understood to be more fundamentally in the domain of the public, common, and “ours.”

Notwithstanding the unstinting efforts of “right liberals” to define America exclusively in Lockean, individualistic terms, this latter conception of how to understand our differences was articulated especially through the Christian tradition that was carried to these shores by European settlers and coexisted with and tempered liberalism until recent American history. Confronting the same challenge of how to reconcile difference to commonality, Christianity approached the challenge through an opposite perspective to that of the liberal: the Christian is called to understand natural differences in light of a deeper unity. This is the insistent appeal of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12–13, a call upon the squabbling Christians of Corinth to understand that their gifts were bestowed not for the glory of any particular person or class of people, but for the benefit and flourishing of the body of the people as a whole.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. . . . But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. . . . As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable.⁷

Keenly aware of how the diversity of gifts was dividing the community of Corinth—as it tends to divide all human communities that lack a strong ethos of solidarity—Paul sought to call to mind an *integrated* understanding of how different gifts were bestowed not to the individual glory or benefit of any particular individual, but instead for the benefit of the whole community. "That there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."⁸

America was settled in this tradition before it was America. The Puritan John Winthrop echoed this teaching in his oft-quoted but seldom-read sermon aboard the ship *Arbella*: "A Model of Christian Charity." From this sermon is drawn the inspiring phrase "we shall be as a city on a hill"—a line that has been invoked by countless political figures, though almost always to ends completely opposite to those intended by Winthrop. It was Ronald Reagan who so often and reverently invoked that phrase, but without conveying or perhaps even knowing its original context: the new colony should be a model of "charity" based in shared obligations, duties, and care toward all of the members of the community.

Winthrop began his speech with the observation that people have in all times and places been born or placed into low and high stations. This pervasive and even permanent differentiation, however, was not permitted and ordained for the purpose of the degradation of the former and glory of the latter—as "meritocracy" encourages its winners to believe—but for the greater glory of God, expressed in particular through a predominant understanding that one's talents are gifts bestowed to individuals so that they might in turn be contributions for the benefit of the whole community. Rather than fragmented individuals who consider themselves owners of their own talents and its rewards, rather, we are all stewards of gifts that are intended for the benefit of one's fellows. Winthrop stressed that the "fact of difference" should be understood to reveal a deeper unity.

Echoing Paul's passages in Corinthians (as well as "the counsel of Micah" of the Old Testament), Winthrop limns an image of community in which the various forms of diversity are offered as common gifts as a means to greater unity:

We must be knit together in this work as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection; we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities; we must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together: always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body.⁹

For Winthrop—in profound contrast to Reagan's later condemnation of the solidaristic dimension of government and his elevation of individual liberty—the political order was duly constituted as a necessary tutor in requisite public-spiritedness, especially with a focus on

restraining the temptations of the high, mighty, and wealthy to unjustly and selfishly benefit from their gifts. Under “a due form of government,” he stated, “the care of the public must overshadow all private respects by which not only conscience but mere civil policy doth bind us; for it is a true rule that particular estates cannot subsist in the ruin of the public.”¹⁰ While public-spiritedness was rightly to be encouraged in the private, familial, and civil spheres, it required as well the force of law, particularly to restrain the self-serving temptations of the strong and direct them to support of the weak in their communities. Law directed to fostering solidarity thereby reinforced the greater majesty and priority of the public over the private. If the new colony was successful in this effort, the “city upon a hill” would deserve the admiring gaze of the world. This was the original aspiration of the aspirational exceptionalism of the first European settlers—before there was an America.

This ethos coexisted with, and often combatted against, the privatism and *disintegration* of liberalism, yet in recent years especially lost ground to these forces. Still, this nonliberal understanding of the *public* responsibility entailed by the very fact of our *differences* is not only an *American* tradition, but one that arrived here before the founding of a liberal nation, and which has its deepest roots in the premodern inheritance originating in Christian wellsprings.

This nonliberal tradition of public-spiritedness and communal responsibility was noted and even lauded by Tocqueville as the source of the active civic engagement and social equality manifested in the “spirit of the township” in the New England states that he visited. The citizens of New England, he wrote, are habituated to self-government through a mutual and ongoing participation in public life that cultivates “a taste for order,” “the harmony of powers,” “the forms without which freedom proceeds only through revolutions,” and “the nature of his duties as well as the extent of his rights.”¹¹ More than a utilitarian venue where policy is pursued, the constant reminder of the mutual public obliga-

tions of strong and weak alike constituted a form of ongoing education: “The institutions of a township are to freedom what primary schools are to science; they put it within reach of the people; they make them taste its peaceful employ and habituate them to making use of it.”¹² While aboard the *Arbella*, Winthrop acknowledged the permanence of distinct classes; nevertheless, what struck Tocqueville about life in the New England townships was a pervasive experience of equality: “In New England, division of ranks does not even exist in memory; there is, therefore, no portion of the township that is tempted to oppress the other.”¹³

The pattern of civic life in the township was established by pervasive acceptance of what Tocqueville describes earlier as a “beautiful definition of freedom” that was articulated by one of New England’s Puritan founders. Contrasting what the Puritans held to be a “corrupt” version of liberty, which held that people should do as they “list” (“wish”), Tocqueville’s Puritan source offered instead a “beautiful definition of freedom”: “There is a civil, a moral, a federal *liberty*, which is the proper end and object of *authority*; it is a *liberty* for that only which is *just* and *good*; for this *liberty* you are to stand with the hazard of your very *lives*.”¹⁴ The source of this “beautiful definition of freedom”? John Winthrop.

This older and foundational understanding of liberty arising from the shared duties and call to a contribution of various gifts to one’s community remains in our collective DNA. While liberals relentlessly claim that the essence of America is an understanding of liberty entailing the freedom of individuals to “do as they list”—whether in the economic or social domains—Tocqueville noted that any prospect for the flourishing of democracy in America rested on a premodern understanding of liberty, one that predated the arrival of its corrupt liberal form not only historically, but even arriving first on the shores of America. There is no deeper American corrective to the disintegrating form of liberty that exacerbates our divisions than the predecessor

understanding of liberty that would obligate the strong to the weak and encourage every citizen to understand their gifts in light of our public weal.

Today, a renewal of this “beautiful definition” would entail the integration of a working-class ethos of social solidarity, family, community, church, and nation, with the supportive requisite virtues of those blessed by privilege. Rather than winners and losers in the meritocracy, a more generalized pursuit of flourishing can be made widely available to a people, no matter their station in life. This requires special duties and responsibilities on the part of the elites—those who must “abridge themselves of their superfluities”—and whose main pursuit must become not individual self-fashioning and achievement, but support for a social, economic, and political order that supports the flourishing of all.

Combatting Racism

During the pandemic year of 2020, America renewed a wrenching and necessary self-examination of its legacy of racial inequality. Emotions have run exceedingly high amid a backdrop of disease, death, lockdowns, economic crisis, political violence, and profound partisan division. The prospects of achieving sufficient national solidarity and goodwill over the long-standing and pervasive fact of racism—while ever more pressing—nevertheless in this historical moment seems inauspicious. But even more challenging is the obdurate fact that the issue of racism has remained trapped in the dominant paradigm of “separations,” tracking with the same logic as the social disintegrating forces in economics, education, social life, and family life.

Ironically, a long-dominant approach to racial inequality was labeled as “integration.” One of its most inspiring articulations is found in an oft-quoted passage in Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, delivered on August 28, 1963, from the steps of the Lincoln Me-

morial. King eloquently declared, “I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” In this dream of “integration,” differences of race melt away, and only the natural distinctions of merit—“the content of one’s character”—remain. King linked this call to the phrases of the Declaration of Independence and, by extension, its roots in Lockean philosophy. To this day, King’s evocation of a color-blind meritocratic society remains a powerful attraction to classical liberals, and is invoked not only on behalf of equal opportunity for blacks, but also by groups who today experience unjust exclusion from open access to the meritocracy, such as Hispanics and Asian Americans.

If this was a goal, a profound political disagreement over means has persisted to the current day. While classical liberals have typically held that meritocratic criteria should apply in a wholly race-blind manner, progressive liberals have insisted that a color-blind approach to inclusion unjustly assumes a relatively comparable starting point in the race of life. Because of historic injustices that have collectively penalized African Americans—a legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and ongoing forms of both explicit and implicit racism—a degree of equalization needs to be achieved through preferential admissions, hiring, and other forms of affirmative action. Implicitly, the end remains the same: a world in which there will eventually be rough equality of opportunity for all the races, in which meritocratic criteria can be applied in a wholly color-blind manner. This was the stated hope, for instance, of Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, who supported some forms of preferential admission to historically disadvantaged groups, but only as a temporary measure that, she hoped, would no longer be necessary with enough passage of time. In her majority opinion in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), she wrote that “race-conscious admissions policies must be limited in time,” predicting that “twenty-five years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today.”¹⁵

Yet, such aspiration to “integration” seeks universal, equal inclusion in the “organization of separations,” into a social order of *disintegration*. A reigning presumption has been that *inclusion* in America is achieved especially through an ever-perfected sifting of the talented from the below average, with the benefits of progress advanced by meritocratic winners indirectly benefiting those who are outside the charmed circle. In place of separation by race, the implicit aim was the universal racial inclusion that would be achieved by separating individuals by talent and achievement.

Recently, that aim has been challenged from an anti-liberal left, grounded in arguments of “critical race theory.” Rather than seeing racism as a temporary *departure* from liberal aims and norms, critical race theory holds that the very basis of the Western liberal order is deeply, pervasively, and systemically racist. Definitions of “excellence,” “achievement,” and “merit” are informed by the assumptions of white descendants of Europeans, ones that are fundamentally designed permanently to hold nonwhites in a subservient position. Forms of enacted “whiteness” are discovered in the treatment of all nonwhites, women and transgendered, nonheterosexuals, non-Christians. According to a theory called “intersectionality,” all nonwhite, nonmale, nonheterosexual, non-Christian peoples are comparably maltreated and aligned in their resistance to the oppressiveness of dominant white European civilization. At every turn, its proponents denounce “white privilege.”¹⁶

This theory proposes a different form of “separation”: white from black, men from nonmen, nonheterosexuals from heterosexuals, Christians from non-Christians. The implicit claim is that only the effective elimination of whiteness—if not wholesale extirpation, the replacement of whites in elite positions and institutions by those of “intersectional” identities, and, presumably, those of unacceptable identity who approve and applaud antiracism (i.e., progressive whites)—will give rise to a genuinely just society. These theories originated first in various “iden-

tity” disciplines on university campuses—black studies, women’s studies, gay studies, etc.—they have now become increasingly mainstream in the operations of corporations, bureaucracies, and a host of major organizations. The presumption seems to be that the only true path to human reconciliation is through the effective elimination of the sole oppressor class in existence—white, heterosexual Christian men (and anyone sympathizing with them). It is not accidental that this theory acknowledges influences of Marxist theory, which—like Marxism—identifies an oppressor class that must be overthrown by an uprising of an oppressed class, after which there is a vaguely sketched utopian future in which old divisions have been overcome and a perfected solidarity is achieved.

Yet this vision has been thoroughly pervaded with the liberationist ethos of progressive liberalism, particularly a vision of liberation from all traditionalist norms, the overthrowing of custom as a main conduit of tyranny, and a pervasive ethos of sexual liberation. With only the slightest alteration, this new articulation of a progressivist Marxism identifies the great barrier to liberation as racism, rather than merely capitalism (indeed, capitalism is increasingly defined as one form of racism). It is a new iteration of a revolutionary vision that stands to advantage especially the intellectual and professional classes. “Intersectionality” proposes the equation of the experience of African Americans with all oppressed groups—women, gays, transsexuals, Muslims—that, together, will overthrow the dominant class and introduce a new dawn in human history.

Yet even beneath the umbrella of “intersectionality,” this imagined future seems no less likely to usher in a utopian future than its Marxist precursor. Already, the various groups within the intersectional fold jockey for position in the future dominance over their current allies, arguing over which marginalized group is most oppressed.

Given the likely continued positioning for victimhood status among identity groups, it appears unlikely that there will be a quick and easy

conclusion for who counts as *most* or *especially* oppressed—particularly as plum positions available for installation of approved identities decrease. The likely outcome of successful implementation of “critical race theory” will not only lead to marginalization of whatever identity is deemed inherently unjust, but a growing effort to define various “intersectional” identities as *more* or *less* oppressed than others. An intensification of the “organization of separations” is inevitable.

Rarely mentioned in rarified academic circles is that this theory has arisen with remarkable coincidence with the worsening circumstances of white working-class Americans and members of the native working class throughout the Western world. Over roughly the time frame examined by Charles Murray—1960–2000, when, around the 1990s, the fortunes of well-credentialed white Americans began to significantly diverge from the fortunes of less-educated white Americans—once-dominant hopes and efforts for “integration” began a decades-long loss of traction in favor of arguments for the *inherent* and *systemic* racism of all white people. That is, *just as the conditions for working-class solidarity across racial lines became increasingly possible*, the ruling class changed the narrative. As the system of meritocratic sorting became more politically tenuous, losing support and legitimacy particularly among the working class *regardless of race*, the institutions charged with maintenance of the “organization of separations” moved from a narrative of racial affirmative action to charges of *systemic racism*, regardless of one’s economic and social status. Wealthy, well-educated blacks were to be understood to be as oppressed as those in the black working class, while those in the declining white working class enjoyed “privilege.” The titanic effort to make this the new, dominant narrative about race in America (and, increasingly, across the Western world) reflected a deep, vested interest of the ruling class in maintaining its position by dividing the shared condition of the working class between a “privileged” and “oppressed” class drawn along racial lines. Michael

Lind has perceptively identified this international trend, and, by implication, the growing attractiveness of “critical race theory”: “The pattern of politics in today’s Western democracies is best described as a struggle with three sides—the overclass and two segments of a divided working class. Working-class immigrants and some native minority group members whose personal conditions are improving compete with many members of the native working class, mostly but not exclusively white, who find their economic status, political power, and cultural dignity under threat from below as well as from above. *The only winners are a third group: the mostly native, mostly white overclass elites who benefit from the division of the working class.*”¹⁷

Thus, we have witnessed three dominant proposals for improvement of the condition especially of African Americans, all reflecting a progressivist slant that keeps intact the current elite structures of modern liberal orders: 1. “integration” through inclusion in the meritocracy (classical liberal); 2. “integration” through inclusion in the meritocracy through preferences and affirmative action (progressive liberal); and 3. a proposal to replace the current ruling class that, it turns out, in fact strengthens the position of the current ruling class by adopting a revolutionary project that damages the life prospects of the working class it claims to defend (Marxist). All of these approaches propose to keep intact the “organization of separations,” in particular, holding at bay the efforts of “the many” to restrain the tyrannical impulses of “the few,” even as they are branded as the inegalitarians. The outcome is already visible as a not-so-cold civil war.

A different tack would seek “integration” first through a realignment in pursuit of common interests of a multiracial, multiethnic working class, a more confrontational form of multiracial “aristopopulism” that seeks to constrain elite power while “mixing” the classes, and then a deeper integration of the ennobling ethe of both classes to foster a new ruling and governing ethos. Only through a more genuine aspiration of

“integration” aligning the activities of society’s elites with the requirements of flourishing for ordinary citizens is there any prospect of overcoming the worsening racial divide in the United States.

Arguments for the integration of a working-class ethos with the ruling virtues of the elite are quickly accused of—and dismissed for—racism. The accusation of racism is especially powerful, and, once leveled, puts the accused in a position of permanent defensiveness. The defender of “traditional culture” is immediately accused of wanting to preserve the order that advantaged a white upper class, a patina of cultural conservatism shrouding a deeper and more pervasive racism. This accusation is powerful because it has often been true, particularly invoked to defend the practices of “Jim Crow”—both legal and informal practices of racism that for too long marred America’s history. Claims that the plight of the underclass is just as evident in the social declines of large numbers of the white working class, as reflected in the statistics amassed by Charles Murray, are plausibly characterized as concern for the downtrodden only when it comes to the effect on the white population, and deemed likely to result in responses that benefit only white Americans. It is arguably one of the great tragedies of the American tradition not only that slavery and racism marred its history, but that defenses of traditional institutions and practices too often were bound up with defenses of racial injustice. Today, the very power of that accusation is now extended to accusations of those who defend such institutions as family defined as a man and woman; the desirability of children born in conjugal marriage; orthodox biblical religious beliefs; and against those who seek limitations on sexual licentiousness, such as pornography.

However, the same arguments that are marshaled to improve and promote the conditions of the working class in relation to today’s elites apply just as thoroughly to redressing the sins of racism as the declining fortunes of the broader white working class. A main consequence of the enslavement of Africans was the generational destruction of the same

long-standing cultural forms—family, communal forms of solidarity, religion—that are today being decimated in a less direct but extensive way among people of every race living within advanced liberal society. The direct destruction of the slave’s family bond—in the wholly legal and brutal separation of husband and wife, parents and children—continues to impact the African American community to this day. While African slaves came to embrace Christianity—indeed, developed deep and distinct forms of gospel spirituality, often centered on the Old Testament themes of bondage, deliverance, and emancipation—those cultural practices have declined precipitously over the past several decades, tracking with similar declines in the religiosity of nearly every other race and denomination.¹⁸

Today, the focus of liberals is upon political and economic approaches to equal justice, particularly focused on policing and the possibility of reparations. There can be no gainsaying that equal justice of law and economic stability are basic requirements for racial and broader social justice. But, today, largely unsaid and increasingly unsayable is that even if legal inequalities and unequal access to economic opportunities could be largely eliminated, such approaches would not fundamentally redress the disadvantages arising from the multigenerational devastation arising from familial and social decay. A generation ago, it was more common and acceptable for thinkers on both the political right and left to raise cultural questions and explore ways that the public order could support cultural improvements in seeking to redress persistent racism. In particular, the difficulties faced by black families was a theme discussed by prominent liberals (of a more centrist sort) such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and conservatives like Nathan Glazer.¹⁹ Today, those arguments are condemned as insufficient at best, racist at worst.

More recent interventions into these waters were offered by then senator and presidential nominee Barack Obama, who, notably during a campaign speech on Father’s Day in 2008, encouraged black fathers to be present for their children: “Too many fathers are MIA, too many

fathers are AWOL, missing from too many lives and too many homes. . . . And the foundations of our families are weaker because of it.”²⁰ It was a theme he repeated several times during his presidency, including during a commencement address at HBCU Morehouse College in 2013. And, it was on the occasion of these and similar speeches that progressive liberal intelligentsia criticized President Obama perhaps more harshly than at any other moment of his presidency. Ta-Nehisi Coates was severe in his judgment, charging that President Obama was “singularly the scold of ‘black America.’”²¹ More recently still, academic critics have folded their criticisms of Obama into general critiques of traditional norms. In a 2020 essay, Gabby Yearwood of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Pittsburgh criticized Obama’s 2008 speech in these terms: “He over-privileges the nuclear family as the standard, as well as the heterosexual privilege that only men are fathers and they can only be so in a state-recognized marriage.”²² As President Obama prepared to leave office in 2017, Mychal Denzel Smith devoted a *Washington Post* column to criticizing this one aspect of his presidency, noting that the president had downplayed, if not entirely ignored, institutionalized and systemic racism.²³ A recurring theme throughout these and other critiques insisted that calls to personal and communal responsibility are largely obviated by the systemic nature of racism, rendering those who make them effectively racist in their avoidance of addressing the institutional sources of cultural devastation. Those who make them are “scolds,” blaming the victims.

A distinct narrative has begun to dominate the mainstream liberal discourse on the scourge of racism. On the one hand, it is insisted that the source of racism against African Americans is *systemic*, and can only be redressed by system-wide changes, including massive efforts to increase inclusion in elite institutions and shift resources to the descendants of slaves in the form of reparations. However, the white working class, increasingly hostile to the meritocratic class that (among other things) advances these views, are accused of the personal moral failing

of racism. They should be excluded from exercising any significant voice in American public life, treated as people who have failed in the economic and social sweepstakes that can be won by those who try. They are the bitter and resentful, and their political responses are driven mainly by recidivist racism. Though the conditions of working-class blacks and whites increasingly resemble each other, in one case—that of African Americans—the cause is *systemic*, a condition over which its victims exercise little agency; in the other—the white working class—their plight is a *moral failure* (racism) for which merely *purported* victims are personally culpable.

This dominant narrative seems well designed with one object in mind: reinforcing the structures that sift economic and social winners from losers. Since the woeful conditions of African Americans are systemic, the system can largely be adjusted to advance “diversity and inclusion” initiatives. But because the white working class is irredeemably racist, the breakdowns of social and economic conditions can largely be waved off as personal failures.²⁴ In both cases, liberal elites are justified in ignoring or even condemning any efforts to support, reinforce, or create in new forms the social (and even economic) conditions for the flourishing of ordinary, working-class people of *any and all races*. The fact that liberal elites in every Western nation have adopted slogans and arguments from racial movement activism suggests that the issue affords a powerful means of maintaining existing class structures, even in places where the distinct historical race dynamics of America are wholly absent (such as Black Lives Matter protests throughout Europe during the summer of 2020).

Further, by using charges of racism and other intersectional “-isms” to stain efforts to support the conditions for social flourishing for people of all and any race and background—calling especially for state-based remediation of racial injustice, but disdain and dismissiveness toward the downward mobility of the white working class—a political benefit redounds to the governing elite by dividing the racially diverse

working class on the basis of race, and short-circuiting discernment of the deeper similarities and common sources of their plights. A beneficial political result is the formation of an alliance of upper-class educated (dominantly) white professionals and a large percentage of the African American electorate that is often more traditional, religious, socially conservative, and rooted. While rarely acknowledged by the ruling class, the growing similarity of the situation and concerns of white and black working classes was obvious enough to be brought into entertaining relief in a 2016 *Saturday Night Live* sketch titled “Black Jeopardy.” The sketch comically portrayed the deeper class similarities between working-class African Americans and a character played by a disheveled Tom Hanks wearing a red “MAGA” baseball hat and speaking with a Southern drawl. The competitors begin the contest assuming that they have nothing in common, but increasingly realize that similarities arising from their downward mobility and lower-class status are more fundamental than racial differences.

Once we recognize that there may be a class interest in perpetuating the racial divide, a question from a different perspective arises: What if the deteriorating conditions of working classes of all races are systemic in a different form, namely, the result of the “organization of separations” required by a liberal order? What if the challenging conditions for the working classes—“the many”—are directly the consequence of a liberalism that systemically destroys the ecology for the flourishing in the social and cultural spheres, contributing in turn to the destruction of stability and order in the economic realm? The very *systemic* nature of the undermining of social forms that contribute to human flourishing leads as well to demonizing charges against more “traditional” forms of life—charges that are now increasingly shrouded in the mantle of “racism,” even as such defenses ought to be embraced by a multiethnic working class. Liberalism as the most pervasive “system” thus creates a deep incentive to wholly attribute the deep economic and social disadvantages suffered by African Americans to “systemic racism”

rather than “systemic liberalism” and thus exclude considerations of the deeper interaction between economic and social mores. At the same time, “systemic liberalism” in turn attributes to the white working class the base and personal motive of racism that arises from its particular social mores, the elimination of which requires systemic focus. In both cases, arguments for strengthening, maintaining, and fostering robust traditional cultural practices within a moralized economic order, toward the joint end of cultivating human flourishing, are nonstarters for both classical and progressive liberals—the first in the name of economic liberty, the second in the name of personal liberation.

Much less noticed in Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech are several sentences that eschewed the more liberal “dream” of the equal opportunity to become individually unequal, and rather that intentionally appealed back to a more classical, Christian, and Pauline form of solidarity.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

These phrases are rarely, if ever, noted for their direct echo of Winthrop’s call to solidarity in “A Model of Christian Charity”—almost word for word. The next sentences put these evocations expressly into the context of the “other” American founding, its primary documents not of Lockean descent, but biblical: “This will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with new meaning: ‘My country, ’tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died,

land of the pilgrims' pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring." While King's message has often been read as an endorsement of the "organization of separations," he saw more deeply still that the ultimate aim must be a deeper "integration." Today's dominant approaches to the racial divide will only engender new and deepening divisions. America's "other" founding offers a different path, one that King himself recognized and commended, even if most of his admirers, then and now, did not recognize his deeper teaching.

Moving Beyond Progress

The demise of "mixed constitution" theory resulted from the rise and eventual dominance of the philosophy of *progress*. The aspiration for "mixed constitution" rests on an ideal of relative stability and balance, undergirded by a social order that is wary of upsetting the hard-won equilibrium of otherwise divisive forces in society. The philosophy of progress inevitably unleashes these divisions in a particularly destabilizing form, leading inevitably and directly to the civilization-threatening political enmity that exists throughout the Western world today.

Liberalism was the modernist political philosophy that at once embraced the Enlightenment faith in progress and rejected the long-standing endorsement of "mixed" constitutions. Classical liberalism stressed the paramount goal of economic progress, the aim of which John Locke described as "indolency of the body"—material comforts such as "the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like," which, it was hoped, would eclipse spiritual, cultural, or transcendent aspirations. Progressive liberalism retained classical liberalism's endorsement of material comfort, but added a belief in *moral* progress that accompanied humanity's material advance. As Richard Rorty described modern, liberal democratic humanity, because of both material and moral advance, "they have more being."²⁵

The separation of the progressed from the recidivist became an essential feature of the modern liberal regime: progress can only advance by recognizing, distinguishing, and promoting the elements of society that most ensure the forward progress of history. The ascendant elite is selected for its *distinction from the perceived backward elements of society, and not for any exemplary virtue that should be widely shared and emulated*. The ruling class and those who must be ruled come to be perceived as different classes of humans, a foreboding that haunts some of our popular imagination in such fictive renderings as *Gattaca*, *Elysium*, or Margaret Atwood's less famous but superior dystopia *Oryx and Crake*. Liberals differ over who should be ascendant, but agree that the masses must be restrained from interfering with the trajectory of progress. Classical liberals point to the increase in wealth and material comfort as the aims of modern society; progressive liberals point to an "arc" of history that bends toward enlightened forms of social justice—especially racial equality and sexual liberation. Progress is at once the desired outcome, but also the inevitable trajectory of human civilization. A fundamental division is introduced into society that gives rise to a foundational partisan divide: those on the side of progress, and those who stand against the faith in a better future. Today's politics reflect the growing divide between the party of progress and those who stand on "the wrong side of history." This division is inevitable and only worsens, with the ruling class claiming ever more dictatorial power over the backward in the name of an ideology of progress.

Our current political divisions thus arise from a deeper separation: the fragmentation of time. The ideology of progress—one that underlies the modern political philosophy of liberalism and neo-Marxism—asserts that time is divided between an era of darkness and light, and that portions of humanity make their home on one side of the divide or the other. Modern political philosophy was reconstituted as a battle between those either advancing or in tune with progress, on the one hand, and the recalcitrant remnant who either refuse to catch up, resist progress,

or, worse, actively fight to preserve a present (or past) that is morally indefensible. The regimes arising from the political philosophies of modernity thus pit an enlightened ruling class against a backward, unprogressed element in the population. In practice, this results in the elimination of a “mixed constitution” in favor of a ruling class that governs in the name of progress, visibly and measurably at the expense of the flourishing of the large swath of the population that is—justifiably, in the view of the elite—“left behind.”

At an elemental level, a “mixed constitution” must propose an integration of *time*, above all by replacing the ideology of *progress* with the lived experience of *continuity*. Where the ideal of progress necessarily generates a division between past, present, and future, above all by fostering a dismissiveness toward the past, discontent with the present, and optimism toward the future, a politics of *continuity* weaves together past, present, and future in a relationship of mutual influence and correction. The integration of time forefronts the importance of memory toward the past, gratitude in the present, and a wary cautiousness toward unintended consequences resulting from an overly optimistic view of the future. A politics of continuity eschews nostalgia, which too often can be an inversion of progressivism, locating an ideal in the past instead of the future; yet, at the same time, it fosters appreciation toward inheritance and the achievements of the past, recognizing that we are all shaped by our times, by their assumptions, and by the inescapable imperfection and frailties of humanity.

Our experience of time must negotiate between two equally dangerous proclivities, both ably captured by the bioethicist William May. Responding to an invitation to reflect on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s story “The Birthmark”—which portrays the efforts of a scientist to eliminate a small blemish on his wife’s face, leading to her simultaneous perfection and demise—May contrasted the imperatives of “transformation” and “acceptance.”²⁶ Describing the two impulses as especially visible in the relation of parents toward children, May notes that it is at once a

deeply interpersonal tension as well as one that defines the very nature of a society more broadly. The impulse of transformation results in encouragement—sometimes overbearing, but always necessary—for the child to improve herself, to strive to realize her inherent potential, talents, and gifts. If such encouragement is deficient, the child will likely fall far short of her potential; if excessive, the pressure and unrealistic expectations can overwhelm, disillusion, and devolve into resentment and disappointment.

The second impulse—acceptance—is expressed as love for the child as she is, a gift that does not require some fundamental change to be the object of love and acceptance. If such acceptance is deficient, any child will despair for absence of unconditional love; if excessive, the result is likely to be a kind of quiescence that can too easily shade into indifference. Just as both must be present in the parent’s relation to the child, so too must this be our human relationship to our place in time, in our society, in our tradition: an imperfect and always challenging negotiation and relationship between the impulse to transform and accept. The modern world has embraced the imperative of *transformation* at the expense of the *acceptance*, and—just as the transformative impulse can destroy the child—it has imperiled the prospect for our civilization.

A political, social, and economic order based upon *progress* necessarily embraces *transformation* at the expense of *acceptance*. Such a society measures achievement by rate of change and evident achievements of science, technology, and economic prosperity. But—as the writer Wendell Berry often notes—it loses the ability to “subtract,” to recognize how what it counts as achievements also generate mounting losses. In our time, those losses—whether in the form of fair and decent economic prospects; social stability; family and communal membership and belonging; and the prospect of passing on a legacy to the next generation, whether material or memorial—fall far more heavily upon the lower classes of our society. Because they are not sufficiently “progressed,” their worsening condition is generally, *if sotto voce*, regarded as justly deserved.

These unequal costs of progress were explored a generation ago with particular force by intellectual historian Christopher Lasch. Lasch also turned to Hawthorne as a source of skepticism toward the modern and American ideology of progress, entitling the final book published during his lifetime *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*. The title was drawn from a passage in Hawthorne's allegorical story "The Celestial Railroad," a skeptical retelling of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* for a time when already Americans were beginning to think of their nation as ushering in the Kingdom of Heaven. Those on the "celestial railroad" were inclined to believe that the city of "Vanity Fair"—our present world—was "the True and Only Heaven," leading people to abandon their striving for "the Celestial City." In his magisterial account of the American (and British) development of faith in progress, Lasch struck upon a valuable contrast that highlighted how belief in progress fragmented time, and instead proposed a different set of dispositions that might move toward the reconnection of past, present, and future.

Lasch contrasted the characteristic beliefs of a society arrayed around faith in progress, and hence experiencing time as fragmented and disconnected, in place of a society for which time was continuous and related. In a progressive society, most people were likely to see the future through the lens of optimism; those who opposed the progressive view were nevertheless just as likely to experience a fragmented time, and instead were given over to nostalgia, placing the best times in the past rather than the future. For the optimist, there is an unjustified faith in the predictable outworking of history, and hence a kind of moral lassitude, an incapacity to sacrifice in the present out of reliance on history's work on our behalf, and, perhaps above all, an inability to see the costs of purported progress. On the other hand, the nostalgic sees the past "outside of time, frozen in unchanging perfection."²⁷ Both are unrealistic utopians, willfully ignoring the limitations that all times impose upon all people.

Each exists in a hostile relationship toward one element of time. For the nostalgic, the future is one of inevitable corruption and decline. The only recourse is a restoration of the past—an impossibility in any place and time. Permanent discontent, bitterness, and regret are their lot. The progressive optimist regards the past as a record of benighted backwardness. The past is a time of darkness that is better not remembered. Indeed, the contemporary undertaking to erase the past—most visible in the destruction of monuments and the erasure of names of buildings, but more subtly in the way that the past is taught today as a record of injustice that has been overcome by the children of light—makes us strangers to our forebears and to the constitutive elements that compose the whole of what we are today.

Both lack the opposite dispositions that mark those who experience the continuity of time: hope and memory. Lasch perceptively differentiated hope from optimism—echoing a long theological tradition that identified hope as one of the three Christian virtues—noting that hope expected justice based on a "deep-seated trust in life." This trust arose not from an expectation of future improvement so much as "confidence . . . in the past," in which "the experience of order and contentment was so intense that subsequent disillusionments cannot dislodge it." Hope is based in a melding of realism and idealism that is laced through all human time, properly experienced, one in which "trust is never completely misplaced, even though it is never completely justified."²⁸

For Lasch, it was the fragmentation of time that led to the deep and inescapable divide between the classes. The elites—powerfully condemned in his prophetic essay "The Revolt of the Elites"—regard ordinary people as backward, too enmeshed in the past and present, not sufficiently advanced through the trajectory of history. This withering dismissiveness led, in turn, to some envy but, even more, resentment by the lower classes toward the putative leaders of society. Only a society in which all classes and people in different walks of life were informed by the disposition of *hope without optimism* and *memory without nostalgia*

might expect to achieve what Lasch described as the “spiritual discipline against resentment,” to which might as well be added the *spiritual discipline against condescension*.²⁹ Echoing Winthrop, Lasch called for the capacity to see ourselves bound together in a shared condition of limited and imperfectible humanity.³⁰ Lasch wrote admiringly about populism as the antidote to the liberal tendency toward fragmentation, intuiting the ideal of mixed constitution in which a proud and accomplished working class sets a tone for the vigor and decencies of a society. He stressed the need for a producer economy over one dedicated to consumption, tapping a long British and American tradition that stressed virtues of craft, thrift, the discipline of work, and a preference for local economy within a national system of over-extended supply lines that left a people dependent on those who might wish them ill. Yet, he praised “interdependence” of a tactile, interpersonal sort, the tutoring of mutual need that Winthrop also believed was at the heart of the mutual work of a community.

Rejection of the modern ideology of “progress” does not entail rejection of reform and improvement. But the reintegration of time—the weaving together of past, present, and future—introduces a missing element of humility from considerations of progress. An ideological belief in progress is marked both by unwarranted optimism about the future and self-satisfaction about the superiority of the present against the past. The dogmatic faith in progress—one shared by all the dominant political parties, and even defining the political outlook of the classical liberal stance that is widely labeled “conservative”—is dispositionally incapable of recognizing unintended consequences. Further, progressivism as an ideology is incapable of discerning how accumulating “costs” of progress can easily be redescribed as at least a mixed legacy, if not outright failures. The blinders necessitated by ideological commitment to progress render us socially and politically incapable of deliberation about social changes that can be, and ought to be, legitimately debated—particularly to the extent that their impact will dispropor-

tionately result in dislocation and instability for the lower classes. The ideology of progress tends especially to benefit the contemporary leadership class who are generally insulated from the deleterious consequences of “progress.” Further, the fealty to the orthodoxy of progress insulates this class from critique and challenge, encouraging a self-confident belief in their presence on the “right side of history,” while fostering contempt toward challenges from people deemed backward and “clinging” to antiquated beliefs and practices.

Many of the economic, social, and political challenges we face today arise from the very success of “progress.” To name only a few, some of our most significant civilizational challenges arise from past achievements considered as unambiguous milestones in human progress. Challenges such as climate change; soil exhaustion and erosion; species extinction; the depletion of natural resources; hypoxic zones; and massive areas of oceanic pollution arise directly from industrial progress. Meanwhile, on the social and political side, breakdown in family stability, deaths of despair and a recent reduction in years of life expectancy, declining levels of participation in civic institutions, increased loneliness, waning experience of friendship, the domination of wealth and money in our electoral system, and the rise of divisive and even internecine forms of political partisanship can be traced to aspects of social and technological “progress.” Under the ideology of progress, we tend to treat each of these challenges as discrete problems that suddenly confront humanity as if out of nowhere—often requiring new advances and applications of progress to “solve.” We are constantly seeking to repair the damage caused by our blind adherence to progress without being able to balance the costs in our ledger.

The main parties of the right and left exhibit particular pathologies of this faith. The party of the left decries the consequences of industrial and economic “progress,” particularly environmental degradation. The party of the right laments the outcome of social “progress,” particularly the breakdown of familial and civic life. Yet, they laud the respective

consequence of progress that the other condemns, seeing in their results a desired outcome of progress. Neither recognizes how the two kinds of “progress” proceed together and become mutually reinforcing, with economic progress undermining family and social stability, and social instability a helpmeet to economic individualism that in turn feeds short-term considerations about the environment. In the main, each in turn proposes *more progress* as the best means of redressing the deleterious consequences of past progress. Technological fixes are the main path to reducing environmental degradation; while an education in the hot new careers is the answer to declining social capital.

Human society will always change, but change driven by the ideology of progress renders us supine to unintended consequences and leads inevitably to overestimation of purported benefits. We don temporal blinkers that force us to confront the accumulating costs of progress in fragmentary and reactive ways. Our capacity to deliberate together over the less obvious but often severe costs of changes, and a presumptive effort to protect the most vulnerable from ongoing transformations, would result from the *integration of time*. Only through such integration can there in fact be a political community, and not merely a collection of individuals seeking their individual, personal ends. By connecting the present to past and past to future, we repair the narrow social contract of liberalism to include “those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.” Only through a repair of time can we move toward a repair of the nation.

Situating the Nation

Praise for the nation today is seen almost exclusively as a hallmark of conservatism. Supporters of Donald Trump identify as nationalists, an identification regarded by the legions of Trump opponents as dispositive proof of its malevolence. A number of prominent conservatives

have written works in defense of a strong identification with the nation, including Israeli political philosopher Yoram Hazony’s much-discussed book *The Virtue of Nationalism*; *National Review* editor Rich Lowry’s *The Case for Nationalism*; and *First Things* editor R. R. Reno’s *Return of the Strong Gods*.³¹ Current forms of political populism are powerfully associated with strong assertions of national sovereignty, whether an emphasis upon limiting immigration, increasing childbirth rates of the native population, or resisting the characteristic globalist tendencies of international organizations such as the European Union or the United Nations.

In the heat generated by contemporary divides, it is unsurprising that the liberal origins and progressive commitments to nationalism have been altogether forgotten or suppressed by the various parties. The nation—born of the effort to settle the so-called wars of religion, notably through the resolution achieved by the Peace of Westphalia—was considered to be the means of resolving the long-standing tension within Christendom between the sovereignty of the Church and the sovereignty of the secular ruler. What had previously been at least *in principle*, and to varying degrees *in fact*, a supranational Christian order under which various political governors acted as the political arm of Christendom was displaced by the unitary sovereignty of a national political ruler, one of whose main powers was to declare the religious belief within the boundaries of his own political territory. As determined at the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, “*cuius regio eius religio*”: “Whose realm, their religion.”

The architects of liberalism were explicit that the nation required absolute sovereignty of the political ruler. Undiluted sovereignty entailed the power to command public conformity to the national religion—and, thus, the power to command any perceived disruptive sect or community within the national boundaries—as well as the resistance to any transnational claim to sovereignty, particularly the threat of papal claims upon Catholic citizens. Even as the liberal order eventually abandoned

its initial insistence upon an official civil religion, the basic principle of national sovereignty over religion remained. As historian Brad Gregory has noted, arguments for liberal toleration—such as those found in Locke’s “Letter Concerning Toleration”—even while allowing for diverse religious expression and belief, nevertheless established the same principle as the national “civil religion” demanded by Hobbes—or early Locke, for that matter.³² In both cases, the political sovereign was ultimately responsible, and wielded sole authority, to determine acceptable and unacceptable forms of religious practice and expression. Even today, religious believers of liberal democracies implicitly recognize this liberal principle of exclusive national sovereignty over religious belief when they appeal to the nation’s political and court systems for recognition of rights of religious liberty.

Thus, the nation represented a unification of belief (even if in the form of belief in liberal toleration) within national boundaries, but fragmentation of belief between nations. Citizens were expected to become more liberal, and more devoted to the liberal nation, to the exclusion of other loyalties both smaller and larger than the nation. Over the intervening half millennium, the nation would achieve political prominence through two prongs: solidifying internal cohesion while denying any claims to external sovereignty. This effort is often told as the story of blood and persecution, both in the form of militarized nationalism that sought to establish national boundaries and identity, as well as the internal effort to achieve domestic cohesion. But the effort to solidify the status of the nation was also achieved perhaps most effectively and lastingly through the transference of loyalties, at once away from any more local form of identification (cultural, tribal, local, or regional), as well as away from any potential transnational identification that could pose a threat to the claim of exclusive national sovereignty (especially in the case of Catholics, a religion that Locke explicitly denied toleration because of its “supra-national” dimension). “Nationalism,” as a pri-

mary and defining form of membership and identity, was originally a key aspect of the liberal political project.

For all the differences between “classical” and “progressive” liberalism, liberalism’s architects deeply shared the aspiration to create and strengthen national sovereignty that would prove to be a new unifying force, thereby replacing the imperial structures of Christendom in the West. Once liberalism abandoned its initial effort of achieving national cohesion through an established religion (although remnants of national religious establishments persist in some European nations), internal cohesion was instead achieved through less direct methods. War and commerce proved the most effective tools in this effort, breaking down the onetime solidarity of subnational communities as well as effectively limiting transnational religious or ethnic allegiances. National military mobilization and the required mobility of a national economy combined to effect a powerful transference of allegiances to the nation. Today, modern Americans are no more likely to identify primarily as citizens of their respective states—much less their localities—than American Catholics are to view the Pope as their rightful sovereign.³³

The rise of nationalism in the United States was especially pronounced during the Progressive Era, during which the likes of Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt rose to prominence. The embrace and rise of nationalism in America was not the project of “conservatives,” but promoted especially by the self-described progressive liberals. This project was particularly aimed at the weakening of more local and regional forms of identity and identification that had been a hallmark of the American political experience, not uncoincidentally gaining prominence in the decades after the Civil War. Theodore Roosevelt—whose name is today often invoked as a guiding light of a new “national conservatism”—stated in his important 1910 speech “The New Nationalism” that “the New Nationalism puts the national need before sectional or personal advantage.” This is a refrain that was found throughout

the writings of the progressives, the need to move the loyalties and identities of Americans from their local places and people to a more abstract devotion to the nation and its ideals. Indeed, historian Daniel Immerwahr notes that it was during this exact historical period when the word “America” began to be used as a self-description, replacing what had been the main name for the nation: the United States, followed by the grammatically correct plural “are,” not the singular “is.”³⁴ This transference was to an increasingly abstract entity of the nation, now thought of as embodying an “idea” or a providential destiny. Allegiance moved from the more concrete to the more theoretical—local to national—while also from less universal to the more “particular,” particularly in how the nation began to occupy the devotional space once held by religion.

This two-pronged move toward abstraction and particularism was especially present in thinkers during the Progressive Era, who were at once suspicious of local particularisms and transnational universalism. Such thinkers were especially suspicious of the more immediate and, in their view, limiting and parochial identities of people as members of towns, communities, states, and regions. In this regard, they were at least to this extent inheritors of the views of at least some of our Founding Fathers, especially Alexander Hamilton (whose name was often positively invoked by progressives), who was explicit in *The Federalist Papers* about his hopes that people would ultimately transfer their allegiance from their localities and states to the nation, and identify far more with the political entity that made it possible for them to enjoy their natural rights.³⁵ Progressives such as Herbert Croly, in his 1909 book, *The Promise of American Life*, were explicit in this praise and embrace of Hamilton’s vision of a more uniform America.³⁶

At the same time, the nation would come to embody quasi-religious aspirations, “containing” the transcendent within the national boundary and making it an object of simultaneous religious and political devotions. The realization of the American nation would lead, Croly hoped, to a more enlightened consciousness, an actual evolution of

human nature, toward a perfected humanity that would be brought about by the new nationalism.³⁷ Influenced by Auguste Comte, Croly envisioned the replacement of old sectarian faiths with a national “Religion of Humanity” whose first churches would be through a new and purified form of national identity.³⁸ It was around this same time, in 1892, that the Christian socialist Francis Bellamy published “The Pledge of Allegiance,” with the hope and aim of aligning people’s loyalties and commitments to the nation and away from the parochial identities that had previously defined the identity of the citizens of the United States, and instead inaugurated the new “creed” of a new national church.³⁹

The aspiration for a kind of civic-religious devotion necessarily required, and led inevitably to, the weakening of an array of subnational civic associations and practices in which most people practiced “the arts of association,” as described by Tocqueville. In order to see oneself primarily as a member of the new national order, other affiliations had to recede in centrality and importance, replaced instead by an increasingly fungible identity of individual self. The trajectory from a perception of oneself as a subject of God, to one’s identity as membership in a nation, and finally to one’s essence as *self* has been documented by a number of prominent thinkers—among them historian Andrew Delbanco and political theorist Jean Bethke Elshtain—who stressed how the requirement for a national identity weakened the local, civil, and religious forms of attachment as it expanded one’s view of “self” and accelerated the tendency toward individualism.⁴⁰ The first trajectory of liberalism was toward a kind of national solidarity that required the weakening of local forms of attachment, and that tended in turn to strong assertions of national superiority. It was not uncoincidental that the rise of progressive nationalism coincided with the spread of nationalist imperialism—with America’s imperialist foray coming at the height of progressive nationalism—the belief that one’s political form and beliefs were superior and ought to be enforced elsewhere.

This limiting, “chauvinistic” form of nationalism has led to its

repudiation by the heirs of the progressive tradition—though for reasons entirely consistent with liberalism, which came to reject as too confining the national container it once embraced. One can discern the course of this trajectory in the changing motto of Princeton University, the institution that has played an outsize role in initiating the American nation in its gradual movement toward globalism. James Madison—“the Father of the Constitution,” and Princeton graduate—and Woodrow Wilson, later a president of Princeton, represent the figures at the peaks of classical and progressive liberalism, both of whom saw the American nation as the container of progress. As if underlining the Madisonian roots of America, Princeton’s unofficial motto was introduced in 1896 by Woodrow Wilson as: “In the Nation’s Service.” The university and its graduates were to see their highest calling to be in the service of the consolidated nation. A century later this unofficial motto was subsequently augmented by a later president, Harold Shapiro, to read: “Princeton in the Nation’s Service and in the Service of all Nations.” The nation was increasingly too confining, its devotions too narrow. More recently still, it was altered again in 2016 by Princeton president Christopher Eisgruber to its current incarnation: “In the Nation’s Service and the Service of Humanity.” Identification as a member of any nation was finally too confining: one’s service needed to be unbounded by any national identification, and one wonders whether “humanity” will eventually be too confining as well.

Because of its abstraction, particularly its detachment from concrete identities in specific locations, the nationalist impulse ultimately required transcending the bonds of the nation. Today’s progressives regard nationalism with horror, not because they have abandoned its logic, but because they have now gravitated to its next logical form: an identification with a globalized liberal humanity. The nation itself is now seen as too particularistic, requiring the same disintegrating logic of yesterday’s nationalism. Yesterday’s liberal nationalism is today’s progressive globalism, requiring the same soft and hard mechanisms

of disaffiliation that are evinced in the pervasive individualism, disengagement, and even loneliness of modern peoples. The ultimate logic is a globalized *disintegration*, the weakening and outright elimination of all cultural, geographic, traditional forms of membership in favor of what Pico Iyer has deftly called “the global soul.”²⁴¹

Unsurprisingly, it is today’s “conservatives” who have risen to defend the nation as the proper object of their devotions. In the wake of severely weakened, if altogether nonexistent, local and cultural identities, the largely abstract form of the modern nation appears to today’s conservatives as the only “particularistic” identity that still plausibly remains as a membership that resists the individualism of the liberated self, on the one hand, and the deracinated “global soul” on the other. Having successfully eliminated the plausibility of identities that are simultaneously both *local* and *transnational*, a truncated conservatism finds itself taking up the banner of yesterday’s liberals. It is especially in light of the recent efforts of today’s progressives—the heirs of the nationalism of Wilson, Roosevelt, and Croly—to transcend the nation, to aspire to membership in a cosmopolis—that it seems natural for conservatives to rally around the ideal of the national community. But such conservatives seem altogether unaware that they today occupy the space recently vacated by progressives.

Liberalism today proposes a globalized form of *disintegration*, a false universalism that dismantles all embodied and situated forms of human membership. It must be opposed not by assuming the previous stage of this process and simply embracing “national conservatism”—which, uncoincidentally, carries with it its historical lineage of liberalism—but through a *new form of integration of local, national, and international*.

Practices of membership and belonging are learned first in the smallest society: the family. In ideal settings, communities are an assemblage of families, mutually concerned with the upbringing and formation of the next generation, providing the private, social, and public spaces for their children. Hillary Clinton was not wrong to embrace the

mantra “It takes a village.” The problem with her understanding of that appeal lay in the progressivist ideology that has always in fact been hostile to the authoritative claims of the village.

Yet, such membership always does, can, and should point outward as well. We prepare young people for life beyond the village not by shutting out the world, but by preparing our young to bring the values and truths learned in their families and communities into the nation and the wider world—and, we hope, infusing those places with an ethos of care and commitment that transcends generations. As Pope Francis has written in his commentary on this layered experience of “membership” that spans the local and the transnational, “Just as there can be no dialogue with ‘others’ without a sense of our own identity, so there can be no openness between peoples except on the basis of love for one’s own land, one’s own people, one’s own cultural roots. I cannot truly encounter another unless I stand on firm foundations, for it is on the basis of these that I can accept the gift the other brings and in turn offer an authentic gift of my own.”⁴²

As Francis acknowledges, an openness to a wider sphere beyond our local circumstance is itself a *part* of that identity, and to the extent it is experienced as a form of exclusion, our loyalties and identities too easily become stunted and deformed. Similarly, liberalism’s hostility to these kinds of local identities has had the effect of creating its own deformations—the barren wasteland of globalist homogeneity. The ideal of membership in a more universal human kinship does not mean, Francis writes, a world that is “bland, uniform, and standardized based on a single prevailing cultural model, for this will ultimately lead to the loss of a rich palette of shades and colors, and result in utter monotony.”⁴³ The deforming “universalism” of globalism is ultimately hostile to all particular cultures, whether local or national. Instead, just as a nation ought to be conceived as a “community of communities,” the whole of humanity should be understood as a “community of nations,” with the word “international” (which retains the notion of particular

nations that are in relationship with each other) replacing the ideological label “global” (which suggests the erasure of the particular). The first recognizes the distinctiveness of nations, and, by implication, the uniqueness of the local places that form nations; the second reflects an effort to efface the distinctiveness of smaller societies ranging from the family to massive human forms such as nations. “Nationalism” as a *liberal project* was initially the first step of this effort of effacement, and should be rejected both by embracing, fostering, and protecting not only the nation but that which is both smaller and larger than the nation.

Integrating Religion

What can replace the *disintegrating logic of liberalism*? The ultimate aspiration of liberal “globalism” seeks to erect a universal umbrella over the ethos of effectual indifference. Its underlying assumption is that there is no objective “Good” to which humans can agree in any time and in any place, so the only defensible political form is one in which every individual pursues his, her, or his or her’s idea of individual good, and the *global cosmopolitan order* ensures the backdrop of sufficient peace and prosperity leaving everyone largely undisturbed. In theory, most elites today regard this vision as both potentially imminent and truly utopian. In practice—as the argument of this book has sought to lay out—the result is a deeply destabilizing outcome of winners and losers in which our purported “nonjudgmentalism”—our indifference—becomes a subtle justification to blame the unsuccessful.

The only genuine alternative to liberalism’s commitment to a world of *globalized indifference* is *one of common good* that is secured with the assistance and support of our shared common order—the political order.

Of course, the first response of the liberal is to claim there *is no such thing* as the common good, since the liberal assumption is that any public good is merely whatever consensual agreement arises from

autonomous individuals. There can be no determining in advance what constitutes “the common good,” since public opinion on this question changes. Liberalism is a denial that there can be any objective good for humans that is not simply the aggregation of individual opinion. Liberalism claims that any justification based upon “the common good” is ultimately nothing more than a preference disguised as a universal ideal.

However, what we instead see arise is not a regime of toleration, nonjudgment, and “agreement to disagree,” but the inevitable appearance of a new ordering principle that takes on all the features of a religion. What is often called the rise of “wokeism,” or “illiberal liberalism,” is, unavoidably, the result of the elimination of considerations of an objective “good” from political life. What takes the place of a public order toward the *good* becomes the concerted effort to eliminate every last vestige of any claim to an objective good. Instead, the political order becomes devoted—with white-hot fervor—to the eradication of any law, custom, or tradition that has as its premise that there are objective conditions of *good* that require public support. Instead, the whole of the social, economic, political, and even metaphysical order must be re-founded on the basis that individual *preference* must always prevail. Anyone who resists this commitment must eventually be forced to conform, whether through the force of opinion, “private” power of employment and other regulations, or, ultimately, the force of law.

Ironically, this totalitarian undertaking that we witness unfolding daily and even constantly accelerating is the consequence of the most fateful and fundamental “separation”: the so-called separation of church and state. As countless studies of this claim underscore, this “separation” was never complete, and can never be complete, since every political order rests on certain theological assumptions. The unseen theological foundations of liberalism were originally Christian: the dignity of every human life; the supreme value of a liberty as a choice for what is *good*; a constitution of limited government that prevents both

tyranny and anarchy but establishes and protects a society in good order, peace, and abundance.

Liberalism’s logic, premised on the complete liberation of the individual from any limiting claims of an objective good, eventually turns on these inherited commitments, and in their name becomes the *opposite* and yet *fulfillment* of what liberalism claims to be. The “dignity” of every life is sacrificed on the altar of the rule of the strong (economically or socially) over the weak; liberty is defined not as self-government, but a liberation from constraint to do as I wish; and in the name of tearing down every vestige of an antecedent order, the liberal state and social order becomes totalizing.

Many today believe that liberalism can be restored to its “better” form simply by recombining certain preliberal, often religious commitments in the form of leavening private and civil institutions. “Right” liberals wish (as they say) to retain the classical liberal “baby” while tossing out the illiberal “bathwater,” urging a renewal of liberal nations by means of strengthening civic and private institutions while leaving intact the basic principle that the *good* must be a matter of *private* or subpolitical civic concern.⁴⁴ The very liberal indifferentism that led to the evisceration of the institutions that are supposed to save us—whether by the forces of the market, its absorption through a pervasive anti-culture, or enforcement through the power of law—is to be retained, while claiming that a civil society that restrains the worst effects of our public indifference can ensure that all will be well. In other words, they propose to retain the basic liberal principle that has led to the baby being submerged in a corrosive bath of acid, and then suggest that the baby will be fine if we dump out the acid just before all its life functions have ceased.

There is no avoiding questions of the *good*. Common-good conservatism is not an effort to *preserve* a now-superseded version of liberalism that is based in a self-deceptive nostalgia for a largely theoretical,

not-yet-achieved form of liberalism. It is instead an aspiration to move beyond the failed project of liberalism as it now exists on the ground, and must unavoidably embrace a new effort to articulate and foster a common good. But rather than beginning with high-level debates over the nature of the good—ones attractive to academic philosophers who largely enjoy conditions of private flourishing—it instead begins with inquiring about, and properly understanding, what is common.

I've previously underscored that the word "common" has two equally dominant meanings, and that the two meanings contained in the same word are not merely coincidental. To be "common" means that which is shared as well as that which is ordinary. While we can easily think of occasions where we intend only one of these meanings when using the word "common," in its deepest and most essential form, the word contains these two meanings because they are connected by reality itself. To be shared in the most extensive way is to include, and to become, "ordinary." Contained in the word's etymological sources is this inescapable connection. The word "common" derives from the Proto-Indo-European *Ko-moin-I*, appearing later in the Latin *communis* and eventually in the French word *comun*, meaning: "common, general, free, open, public" but also "shared by all or many, familiar, not pretentious."⁴⁵

Combined with the word "good," we can see that a common good consists in those needs and concerns that are identified in the everyday requirements of ordinary people. The common good is the sum of the needs that arise from the bottom up, and that can be more or less supplied, encouraged, and fortified from the top down. In a good society, the goods that are "common" are daily reinforced by the habits and practices of ordinary people. Those habits and practices form the common culture, such as through the virtues of thrift, honesty, and long memory, which in turn foster gratitude and a widespread sense of mutual obligation. However, once such a common culture is weakened or destroyed, the only hope is a renewal and reinvigoration by a responsi-

ble governing class. A politics of the common good makes a good life more likely, even the default, for commoners.

Thus, the common good is always either served or undermined by a political order—there is no neutrality on the matter. Emphasizing this point in his indispensable book *Prayer as a Political Problem*, Jean Daniélou, SJ, wrote: "Politics ought to have the care of the common good, that is to say, the duty of creating an order in which personal fulfillment is possible, where man might be able to completely fulfill his destiny."⁴⁶

Daniélou pointed to the duty of those charged with leading the political order not to deprive ordinary people of the ability both to participate in and realize the essential goods of human life. It is not enough to ensure their freedom to pursue such goods; rather, it is the duty of the political order to positively guide them to, and provide the conditions for the enjoyment of, the goods of human life. "Religious liberty," "academic freedom," "free markets," "checks and balances," etc. are no substitutes for piety, truth, equitable prosperity, and just government. The liberal order in its foundational form maintains that the absence of constraint in these and all other domains is the sufficient condition for people to attain fulfillment. The liberal sovereign treats all people equally, assuming that radically free human beings are equally capable of achieving the goods of human life. It is the liberal equivalent of the astute Anatole France quip: "The law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread."

What we should notice is that it is ordinary people—the "working class," citizens in "flyover country," "the Physicals," "essential workers"—who are increasingly those who enjoy theoretical liberty but few of the substantive goods that are supposed to flow from their individual choices. As a political order, we have provided them "the pursuit of happiness," but deprived them of happiness. Indeed, a main feature of the working class is rising levels of "deaths of despair." Those who seek to advance the common good should attend especially to the profound ordinariness of

the concept—how it can be tested especially by reference to an answer to the question “How are ‘commoners’ doing today?” The answer is: not good.

Even before the onset of coronavirus, reams of data attested to the economic and social devastation wrought upon less-educated, less upwardly mobile working-class people. Economic globalization had deprived many in these communities of the sources of prosperity and stability that made flourishing lives possible. Attacks on social norms of family, faith, and tradition, in addition to these economic challenges, have contributed to the breakdown of family and communal supports, leading in turn to broken lives of crime, unemployment, and deaths of despair. Elite responses to the pandemic only increased the advantages of the laptop class and the worsening conditions of the tactile class.⁴⁷

Those in positions of power and influence have vilified and demonized these fellow citizens as backward, racist, recidivist, even too lazy to get up and move. This has been the consistent message of an elite class that transcends political categories, and it is today the hallmark of the liberal gentry that runs the major institutions of modern liberal democracies.

What elites call “populism” is a reaction by the immune system of the body politic, but it is not the cure for our political disease. The cure lies in the development of a new elite who are forthright in defending not merely the freedom to pursue the good—and who then shrug their shoulders when ordinary people drown amid a world without boundaries or life vests—but instead is dedicated to the promotion and construction of a society that assists ordinary fellow citizens in achieving lives of flourishing.

Daniélou provides a helpful starting point. His question was: In the pursuit of the common good—the good life that is not “extraordinary,” but common, generalizable, widely achievable by most humans in a generally decent society—how do we order a society that protects and supports the life of prayer among ordinary people?

Daniélou posited that prayer is a central practice of a flourishing

human life, one in which we are cognizant of a horizon beyond our time and place, aware of our neediness, humbled by our dependence, and called to think and pray for others. Yet, he noted that so many aspects of the modern age increasingly make a genuine life of prayer—and these attendant virtues—exceedingly difficult. Daniélou understood that encouragement to personal piety in a world of constant distraction, technological acceleration, and consumerism was not sufficient to the task. The “freedom to pray” in a world inimical to the habit of prayer was functionally equivalent to its outright deprivation.

A recent republication of Daniélou’s classic book wisely chose for its cover the painting *The Angelus* by Jean-François Millet. The painting portrays what appear to be a husband and wife reciting the Angelus prayer (a prayer commemorating the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will bear the Messiah), likely around dusk at 6 p.m. They seem to be simple farmers, but at this moment all the farming implements and potatoes have been dropped and lie scattered at their feet as they pray together. Rising above the horizon in the distance we can discern a church tower, distant but presumably near enough that the couple can hear its bells. It is a picture of simple but profound piety, and it captures a culture that points us beyond commerce and individual desire toward a wider and transcendent horizon.

Speaking of his best-known and most popular painting, Millet would later relate:

The idea for *The Angelus* came to me because I remembered that my grandmother, hearing the church bell ringing while we were working in the fields, always made us stop work to say the Angelus prayer for the poor departed, very religiously and with cap in hand.⁴⁸

Millet and Daniélou both emphasize the democratic aspect of the practice of prayer in such a society: its goods are widely shared, not

requiring advanced degrees at elite institutions or special language of inclusion and exclusion in order to participate and flourish. Today's church towers are overshadowed by the skyscrapers of high finance, and their bells rendered silent in preference to auto horns, the cacophony of construction, and earbuds playing noise produced by a music industry. Public goods widely available have been overwhelmed by private privations.

We can extend Daniélou's analysis to nearly every aspect of life today. We have the freedom to marry, but fewer people wed. We have the freedom to have children, but birth rates plummet. We have the freedom to practice religion, but people abandon the faiths of their fathers and mothers. We have the freedom to learn of our tradition, to partake in our culture, to pass on the teachings of the old to the young—but we give only debt to the decreasing number of children who will share the burden of supporting a growing number of elderly. In a world hostile to all these potentially “democratic” goods (and not just the freedom to enjoy them, or not), we have eviscerated their actual achievement in the name of theoretical liberty, but in reality increasing thralldom to addictions afforded by big tech, big finance, big porn, big weed, big pharma, and an impending artificial Meta world that will assuage the miseries of an increasingly unbearable world we have actually built.

Daniélou understood that flourishing required more than individual choice in a world that resembled the Wild West. Achieving the life of prayer could be made easier or nearly impossible, depending on the ambient conditions fostered by the public and social order. He lamented the loss of what had once been a “democratized” life of prayer—represented well in Millet's *The Angelus*—now replaced by a kind of elitist sequestration of leisure and contemplation:

I might mention that monks . . . create for themselves the environment in which they can pray effectively. It is this last consideration that brings us to the heart of our problem. If monks

feel the need to create an environment in which they will find prayer possible, if they think that prayer is not possible without certain conditions of silence, solitude, and rule, what are we to say of the mass of mankind? Should prayer be the privilege of a small spiritual aristocracy, and should the bulk of the Christian people be excluded from it?⁴⁹

Liberalism offered to humanity a false illusion of the blessings of liberty at the price of social solidarity. It turns out that this promise was yet another tactic employed by an oligarchic order to strip away anything of value from the weak. Daniélou denounced the elitism that deprived ordinary people of a vital horizon of hope:

We must react against any view that makes spiritual life the privilege of a small number of individuals; for such a view betrays the essential point of a message which is not only Christian, but religious, that a life of prayer is an absolutely universal human vocation.⁵⁰

We should similarly lament the deprivation of prospects for sound marriage, happy children, a multiplicity of siblings and cousins, multi-generational families, a cultural inheritance, the rhythms and comforts of a religious life assisted by the fortifying presence of its holy men and women, of cemeteries and the memory of the dead in our midst as reminders of what we owe and what we should pass on—of a public and political culture in which the ordinary goods were commonly found.

So, too, the fortifying forms of family, community, church, and a cultural inheritance are a “political problem” in need of political redress. The offer of mere freedom is not enough. The formative conditions in which to act well upon one's freedom make possible genuine “blessings of liberty,” which paradoxically but nevertheless logically can only be supplied through the force of mutually reinforcing custom and law.

Growing evidence suggests that a social order that is publicly *indifferent* to religious belief and practice becomes especially punitive for the “commoners,” or those in the most economically and socially tenuous situation in today’s world. Confirming Daniélou’s concerns, one recent study seeking to understand the cause of rising “deaths of despair” among working-class Americans, particularly those without a college degree, discovered a strong correlation between the decline of religious belief and practice and the rise of suicides, opiate overdoses, and alcohol-related diseases.⁵¹ Moreover, the study discovered that these deaths were not simply correlated to *individual* loss of faith, but the *public manifestation of religious indifference*. Its authors found that the dramatic rise of “deaths of despair” was strongly correlated to the *public repeal of blue laws and a day of rest on the Sabbath*. The expansion of liberal indifferentism toward one of the essential goods that make for a flourishing life—the good of leisure linked to a positive encouragement to prayer—has had a disproportionate, and even deadly, effect on the least among us. Yet, both “conservative” and “progressive” liberals—the first who care about religious liberty, the second who profess to care about the poor—are silent on the question of whether our achieved public indifference is *good* for the *commons*.

It is not merely coincidence that the word “common” has so often been combined with other concepts and words that reflect the imperative to protect and support the conditions for flourishing among ordinary people: common law, common sense, common good. Promotion and protection of the common good begins with a concern for the *ordinary* and everyday, fostering especially the conditions for flourishing that do not rely upon moving out, learning to code, abandoning one’s traditions, or promoting public indifference. While a concern for the *common* will entail a fundamental rethinking of the priorities that a progressive world has embraced, a simple first step would be to publicly promote and protect a life of prayer. To quote again from Daniélou: “We shall be speaking, therefore, of the prayer of man involved in social

life. It is in this sense that prayer belongs not to the strictly interior life of man—with which politics has nothing to do—but to the political sphere.”⁵² Protecting and supporting a life of prayer, recognizing the transcendent, acknowledging the frailty and temptations of lives threatened by a madding world—all point not just to “prayer as a political problem,” but politics as a place for prayer, since politics is how we together seek to realize the good that is common.

We are inexorably entering *the time after liberalism*. Liberalism has exhausted both the material and moral inheritance it could not create, and, in the course of its depletions, offered the appearance of a sound and permanent ideological order—the “end of history.” History, however, has begun again with a vengeance, now driven forward by an exhausted Western civilization, *an emboldened Russia, and a rising China*. Many have invested titanic sums in shoring up the project of liberalism, doubling down either on progressive claims of identity politics or right-liberal hopes for a renewed “fusionism” of capitalism and privatized Christian morality.

Instead, the depths of our own tradition and living memory provide an alternative resource: *the common-good conservative tradition that was developed in distinction from liberalism itself, stressing common good and common sense, shared culture, and a governing ideal of mixed constitution*. The day is late, but a lighted shelter can be discerned amid the gloam. It is time to abandon the ruins we have made, seek refreshment, and then build anew.