

PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICA'S 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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We are now only ten days from the presidential election. For many of us, this is the most important election of our lifetime. Not only are the political visions of President Donald Trump and former Vice-President Joe Biden diametrically opposed, but the very foundations of American democracy are being threatened.

Similarly, American politics have become so polarized between Republicans and Democrats that Congress can barely pass significant legislation for the benefit of the American people. Our nation's political psyche has unfortunately regressed and fragmented into an inflexible gridlock of identity politics, "My tribe versus your tribe." This is in contrast to the historical capacity of our political parties to enter the gray zone of ambivalence, compromise and agree upon policies that have made America the greatest country in the world. Extreme polarization is undermining the nation's economy, health, and ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender-based cohesiveness, resulting in a dystopian climate of suspicion, paranoia, social violence and a pervasive fear of death. America is now widely disrespected and even pitied by other nations for having the world's worst record of controlling the pandemic. With 4% of the world's population, we have 25% of COVID infections. As of October 22nd, the daily rate of new COVID infections is a startling new peak of 83,000 and rates keep spiking throughout the country with many states reporting their highest numbers ever.

How did we get here, and what can we do about it?

First, let's clarify what is meant by a psychoanalytic perspective. This involves analyzing the unconscious psychodynamics that motivate political events and the behavior of politicians. The manifest content of the election includes political activity reported in the media about such issues as presidential leadership and Covid-19; authoritarianism vs. democracy; racism vs. multiethnic/culturalism; narcissism vs. empathy; conspiracy theories vs. science; capitalism vs. socialism, etc. Although psychoanalysis is only one among many scholarly lenses through which political

processes can be investigated, such as social psychology, political science, history, sociology, anthropology, economics, journalism, etc., a psychoanalytic viewpoint provides a unique depth of psychological understanding that is rarely found in media discussions. I strongly urge analysts and psychoanalytically oriented professionals to join the political fray by writing op-ed pieces, journal blogs and participating in public forums to deepen the political dialogue.

Our series will make every effort to encourage empathy toward “the other,” i.e., those with whom you disagree while providing the opportunity to express your own political opinions in our Town Halls. As mental health providers, the most of us probably identify with a liberal, democratic tribe and are likely to be hostile toward President Trump and Republicans. It is much harder to find comparable fault with Joe Biden and the Democratic Party. An objective psychodynamic analysis is unavoidably influenced by our subjectivity and limited by the complexity of each topic. Being non-partisan has certainly been challenging for me. But even if I side with one political party over another, when applying a psychoanalytic perspective, it is essential for me to be objective and neutral while speculating about unconscious motivations and processes.

I’m urging all of us to employ our clinically honed capacity for empathy, to put ourselves in the shoes of our Republican and conservative sisters and brothers. The same applies to the Republicans among us who have difficulty understanding why Democrats would support Joe Biden and the prevailing Democratic ideology. Devoid of empathic understanding, we will remain gridlocked in an extremely frustrating impasse without respect or appreciation for one another. This is certainly the main problem of our political parties who find it virtually impossible to compromise.

My discussion is an overview of major election issues, but there are too many to cover all of them. To explore how we got here, we need to go back to the founding of our country. America began as part of a colonial empire under the hegemony of an absolute monarch, King George III of England. American colonists became increasingly enraged at being treated like second-class citizens. They were forced to pay exorbitant taxes without a representative voice in the English parliament, which was reflected in their 1773 Boston Tea party protest, “No taxation without representation.” George Washington and Thomas Jefferson expressed humiliation and outrage at being treated like slaves. This

was ironic since they owned slaves, and historical records indicate they were aware of their hypocrisy. How could they own slaves when their revolution was a symbolic fight against slavery? Thomas Jefferson denounced slavery an “assemblage of horrors” and “execrable commerce.” But he and George Washington ignored their moral qualms and exploited slavery to make their plantations commercially successful. Their personal greed and self-serving desires for wealth and power triumphed over their conscience. This tragic irony may be a major factor contributing to the phenomenal success of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s musical, *Hamilton*, in which these white founding fathers are portrayed by blacks, an implicitly powerful protest against America’s traditional racism.

The American Revolution against the English monarchy was difficult for the colonists because they were rebelling against their homeland upon which they had depended all their lives. They weren’t sure they could make it on their own. Psychologically, their revolution represented a rebellion against King George III, the father of their country, to achieve independence. But unlike a teenage rebellion against paternal domination, they were rebelling to establish their own independent country through a violent revolution. The American ideal of freedom from tyranny, and a fear of being controlled by a powerful autocrat, like a monarch or a president, was a central focus of the 1788 Federalist Papers written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay. The Federalist Papers explained the structural basis of our democracy and the thinking behind the Constitution. In fact, if George Washington had not resisted the mounting public pressure to become King, the founding fathers might have emulated their homeland and made America a monarchy instead of a democracy.

The Constitution recognized the vital need for a strong, popularly elected president to initiate, validate and direct governmental policies but whose power, unlike a monarch, would be limited by the will of the people through checks and balances. The latter were executed through an independent popularly elected bicameral legislature and an independent Supreme Court. Justices of the Supreme Court were appointed for life for the purpose of immunizing them from political influences. Unfortunately, this has failed. Not only President Trump, but also previous presidents have tried to stack the court in their political favor. The ratio between conservatives and liberals has depended on the political power of the presidents who nominated them and the senators who confirmed

their nominations. And now, with the last minute nomination of Justice Amy Coney Barratt, Republicans are fearful that Democrats will retaliate by adding more liberal supreme court justices if they win the presidency and the senate.

From its inception, the primary psychodynamic of American politics can be construed as an unconscious psychological conflict between dependency and autonomy that exists within each of us. The battle between Democratic liberals and Republican conservatives represents distinctive object relational *imagos* that Americans have projected into their political parties and identify with as their political tribe, whether psychologically derived from family identifications or other influences. Because of the universality of this internal human conflict, it isn't surprising to find antipathy between liberal and conservative political parties in virtually every country in the world.

How do our parties reflect this? In 2000, just after George W. Bush defeated Al Gore through the decision of the Supreme Court, extreme congressional gridlock prevailed with a 50-50 split between Republicans and Democrats. On November 26th, I published an op-ed piece about this in the Los Angeles Times. And I quote:

“Broadly speaking, in the American psyche, the Democratic Party’s vision of government is roughly equivalent to a nurturing mother figure caring for the needy and downtrodden. By contrast, the Republican ideal embodies a strong father figure who rewards people for taking responsibility for their own lives and who supports independent initiative. The Democratic “breast-mother” government satisfies the basic human need to be taken care of by a loving, tolerant parent: the Republican father figure fills the need to break away from parental domination, to have control over one’s own life and pursue one’s own fortune.”

“Psychologically, the basic human need for maternal nurturance often conflicts with the need for autonomy. During adolescence, this conflict plays out. Children struggle to liberate themselves from their need for parental care by rebelling against parental authority and trying to assume personal responsibility for their lives. However, even after the adolescent has attained adulthood and becomes more self-reliant, the psychological need to being taken care of persists to varying degrees and remains in conflict with the need for separation and autonomy. In the political arena, Americans try

to resolve this personal conflict by voting for the political party that represents their strongest internal need.

“Americans who have traditionally been more in need of help or care- women, the working class, the aged, the disabled, immigrants, certain racial and religious minorities, gays, etc.-and Americans who support them, are more likely to vote Democratic. For these voters, liberal means the generosity of a nurturing governing structure. In contrast, they view Republicans as uncaring, hardhearted and greedy, a party of the rich and powerful, demanding that government support their aggressive, self-serving, often entrepreneurial needs.

“For liberal Democrats, conservative is often equated with depriving the hungry and poor of government support through tax dodges, paying employees the lowest wages and benefits they can get away with, exploiting “mother earth” for profit, and risking gun violence for the macho preference to hunt. They view the Republican stance against abortion as a willingness to ruin a woman’s life, in favor of the right of a fetus to live, supporting the rights of a child against a “murderous” maternal authority.”

Republican ideology rails against dependency on a maternal government (What they call the “nanny” government). Dependency on mother is construed as infantilizing and killing one’s manly strivings to be an independent, self-reliant adult. Thus, abortion, apart from being immoral since God treasures all human life, psychologically represents the maternal destruction of a child’s right to exist because of a mother’s narcissistic entitlement to do what she wants with her own body. The social conservatives’ anger about maternal domination is arguably projected into women who fight for Roe v. Wade and whom they contemptuously accuse of infanticide. The crucial question is when does a fetus have the justification to live regardless of what a mother chooses to do with her body.

From another excerpt:

“. Americans who live according to an ethic of self-reliance and subscribe to the right of an individual to control his own life, money and property, with minimal interference, are more likely to vote for a paternal Republican government. For these voters, government represents a powerful, controlling parental figure, a necessary evil that potentially threatens individual autonomy by “stealing” earned money through

excessive taxes. The ideal Republican government does not spoil or infantilize the people with nurturing protective handouts but requires them to be responsible for themselves and supports individual initiative through tax breaks.”

Consequently, Republicans, in support of their autonomy, want the federal government to be as weak and small as possible while delegating most power to states and cities, local governance over which they can exert more direct control and with which they can more easily identify.

“The U.S. will inevitably be divisive because of the inherent unconscious conflict between the need to be taken care of, as represented by the Democrats, and the desire for autonomy and control, embodied by the Republicans. It is the dynamic struggle between these two competing psychological needs that serves as a major catalyst for human growth, both individually and politically.”

In the past, America has often been able to integrate dependency and autonomy with positive results. For example, northerners John Adams and Alexander Hamilton desired a strong federal government while southern slave owners like Jefferson and Madison supported states rights. But Hamilton and Jefferson were able to compromise for their mutual benefit. Hamilton wanted the national treasury to pay off northern war debts from the revolution. In the Compromise of 1790, Jefferson and Madison agreed to do this in exchange for moving the U.S. Capitol from Philadelphia, a northern city, to the southern swamplands of Maryland and Virginia to create Washington D.C. Their compromise resulted in financial prosperity during Jefferson’s presidency that enabled him to afford the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. Ironically, Jefferson, a states rights advocate, became America’s strongest federalist President until that time, not only with the Louisiana Purchase, but also with his establishment of a US navy to protect American commerce against pirates and aggression from other nations.

Unfortunately, since the election of George W. Bush in 2000, political gridlock has worsened to the point where many believe that America’s checks and balances are in jeopardy from an authoritarian president. We now desperately need an integrated democracy in which both political parties work together to solve our declining economic condition as well as stop the Coronavirus. Many experts have agreed that we cannot stabilize our economy until we defeat COVID. Since the major outbreak of the virus last

April, President Trump has failed to provide the national leadership to achieve this when compared with other nations, like Taiwan and Denmark, that have virtually eliminated it. In fact, Taiwan never had to close its economy by testing and tracing, enforcing quarantines, wearing masks and social distancing.

Unlike Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War or FDR during the Great Depression and World War II, why did President Trump, a populist authoritarian, refuse to exert his considerable federal power by mandating national guidelines to conquer this plague? Instead, he claimed he was not responsible and delegated his authority to state governors and city mayors? And why, after initially calling COVID a hoax, would he suggest that it would magically disappear when he knew from the start that it was extremely contagious and deadly? Why did he reject the CDC recommended procedures necessary for controlling it, like wearing masks and social distancing? Why would he recommend untested vaccines, like hydroxychloroquine that have known adverse side effects, even bleach?

Trump explained that he acted as if there was nothing to be afraid of because he didn't want to panic people. Even after he had been hospitalized for COVID, he acted upbeat and vibrant as if the virus had helped him regain his youthful vitality. Close associates have revealed that he considers being sick as weak, and wanted to project a strong, positive image.

As a child and into his teens, Trump attended the Marble Collegiate Church in Manhattan and could listen endlessly to his favorite pastor, Norman Vincent Peale, who wrote the bestseller: *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Peale's main message was that if you wished strongly and positively enough for something to happen, your dreams would come true. And that you didn't have to feel shame or remorse if you avidly pursued your desires. Thus, if you thought positively about COVID, it would just go away, which is a form of magical thinking. Trump repeated this in his last debate on October 22nd, "we've rounded the corner and it will just go away."

We know that psychologically denial is an extremely important defense mechanism, which protects people from unrealistic anxieties that might undermine their ability to cope with problems. But denial becomes self-destructive when it blinds us to a dangerous and deadly reality. The president, as the leader of our country, needed to warn

Americans of its dangers and provide the necessary protective guidance to contain and stop it. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, FDR was forthright in describing the attack, but told the American people, “You have nothing to fear except fear itself.” Similarly, Nancy Pelosi said, we should acknowledge the danger of COVID, but not be afraid. Thus, awareness of the danger will help to courageously cope with it.

Trump’s punting the responsibility to governors and mayors might have been ideologically motivated by the Republican belief in states’ rights and its aversion to federal control. From this perspective, a national mandate to wear masks and socially distance would be considered tyrannical and possibly provoke Republicans to defy it as an abuse of power. Such defiance in its extreme was violently enacted by members of the Wolverine Watchmen militia in Michigan who were caught by the FBI planning to kidnap, try and execute governor, Gretchen Whitmer, as punishment for her protective mandates. One of them wanted to kill her for prohibiting him from using his gym. At the time of their arrest, President Trump attacked her as a tyrant and exhorted Michigan citizens to free themselves from her domination and open the state. In the presidential debate a few days ago, he continued to rail against her instead of expressing empathy for the danger she was in. He has fueled domestic terrorism, which is now a greater threat than foreign terrorism.

Trump’s railing against governmental authority may also reflect his narcissistic hostility toward authority figures. He has demonstrated this by rejecting the advice of his scientists, generals and closest advisors, relying exclusively upon himself. He has bragged that he has superior knowledge and therefore doesn’t need to depend on anyone. The belief in his omniscience is a symptom of a narcissistic personality disorder. Other symptoms include his lack of empathy for others and reacting to any situation primarily in terms of how it affects him. You don’t have to be a psychoanalyst to know that Trump suffers from extreme ego-centricism.

Pragmatically, in a national crisis, like COVID, a strong presidential executive is needed to protect the nation as a whole instead of reinforcing the autonomy of the states or the individual. Americans need to be sensitized to the fact that they cannot do whatever they want, like refusing to wear masks or socially distance, which can result in infecting and killing others. Trump’s decentralized strategy has led to each locality going

its own way, like herding cats, resulting in massive and continuously spiking infections and over 224,000 deaths. A recent Columbia research report concluded that if Trump had instituted federal safeguards at the outset, 130,000 to 210, 000 lives could have been saved.

President Trump's refusal to wear masks appears to be an expression of defensive masculine bravado against his fear that it makes him look weak. He devalues Americans who wear masks, like Joe Biden and the Democrats, suggesting that they are "wussy" children needing the protection of a "Nanny government." On FOX news, I watched conservative pundits expressing the same contempt for following COVID guidelines and applauding President Trump for his courageous, masculine defiance. For Republicans, he seems to represent their patriarchal tradition of rugged individualism. The clarion call of his bravado has rippled throughout the country on college campuses and especially in red state areas that opened their bars, restaurants and businesses prematurely. Unfortunately, COVID has spiked rampantly through these areas. President Trump, the First Lady, and a number of his Republican entourage, like former Governor Chris Christie, Senator Mike Lee and Kellyanne Conway tested positive for Covid after sitting closely together without masks in the Rose Garden celebration of Justice Barratt's nomination to the Supreme Court. The White House became a petri dish for Covid, and Trump's son, Baron, also caught it.

Another possible reason for Trump's Covid failure is his sense of inadequacy. Since he chooses not to rely on medical and scientific advisors, he might have felt like a deer in the headlights and delegated the responsibility to others to avoid looking like an incompetent loser.

According to polls, Trump's poor handling of COVID has probably hurt him most in the election. Biden, who is attacking Trump's failed pandemic leadership, is substantially ahead. In contrast to Trump who makes fun of him, Biden usually wears masks and empathically commiserates with the American families whose members have become infected and died. Trump has yet to express empathy for victims of COVID as a central focus of his campaign.

Speaking of no empathy, Trump's most recent approach appears to be herd immunity, the Great Barrington Declaration, supported by his new COVID expert,

radiologist, Dr. Scott Atlas who has never treated a COVID patient. Research indicates that herd immunity, allowing younger people to get infected and sheltering the physically vulnerable and aged, will cause innumerable deaths without any substantial proof that herd immunity works. In fact, a Nevada man recently contracted COVID a second time and became sicker, and evidence indicates that COVID infections do not produce reliable antibodies to immunize against re-infection. This unfortunately illustrates Trump's mindless macho bravado and un-empathic willingness to let many more Americans die.

Yet liberals can also lack empathy for victims of COVID as illustrated by Democratic Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi's rejection of Trump's financial relief package of 1.8 trillion dollars compared to her demand for 2.2 trillion. When questioned by CNN commentator, Wolf Blitzer, about why she wouldn't compromise and accept a proposal that would be helpful to so many people, she attacked him as ignorant and uncaring for asking the question, and justified her rejection, by exclaiming that Trump doesn't share her values. This showcased her Democratic tribalism.

So, let's backtrack. What led to the popularity of a narcissistic, authoritarian president who supports white supremacy, often acts as if he's above the law and might be re-elected?

On August 9, 2017 after the frightening outbreak of racial violence in Charlottesville, I published a blog for the Huffington Post, called: America's "White-Lash" and the Degradation of reason" in which I said:

"I believe the regression in America's politics was caused mainly by an insidious, xenophobic reaction to the expanding multicultural complexion of American society. So long as white, Christian, heterosexual male culture was the American majority, the "otherness" of minorities could be varyingly tolerated. But when blacks, Mexicans, Asians, Muslims, etc. became increasingly evident in our population along with the traumatic effects of 9/11 and the Arab terrorist attacks against our country, a self-protective "white-lash" festered and surged. The election of President Barack Hussain Obama, was arguably, the last straw, auguring the death knell for white, male hegemony, along with Hillary Clinton's presidential nomination.

"In my opinion, this existential threat to white male hegemony precipitated a regression from a more mature political intercourse to hateful tribal gridlock. President

Trump vicariously expressed the seething nativist longing to make America “white” again. When your tribe is threatened, emotional loyalty triumphs over reason and morality. It’s “My family right or wrong,” not “Let’s understand each other and work out our differences.” Identity politics reigns and “the other” becomes the enemy.

“The fear of “the other” is endemic in the human psyche from birth. According to Sigmund Freud, the baby begins life in a state of primary narcissism in which it experiences everything as part of its self. The first experience of “otherness” is aversive and threatens the baby’s psychic survival. This happens when the baby is thrust from the womb’s protective refuge and is bombarded by external stimuli. Gradually, the baby senses its vital dependency on mother, its first human “other,” and through its experience of her protective caretaking, identifies with her and other family members. But strangers then become the threatening “other” until the baby comes to know and empathize with them. And this fear and defensive hatred of “others” has a ripple effect, extending to people of other neighborhoods, religions, races, nations and political persuasions.

As an aside, from a Kleinian perspective, the baby’s paranoid schizoid relationship to the breast is precipitated by the enraged frustration of the baby’s wishes for omnipotent possession, in other words, the frustrating autonomy of the part object breast, and its subsequent projected fear of retaliation. The autonomous “otherness” of the breast is what triggers the paranoid-schizoid response; that is the projection of oral rage resulting in paranoia and the schizoid protective retreat from being attacked or consumed.

Continuing the piece:

“When one’s survival feels threatened by people with different appearances, languages and mores, one can unconsciously regress to the primitive fear of “the other” and self-protective rage. President Trump expresses this rage at his rallies, having called Mexicans criminals and rapists, and blacks as coming from “shithole countries.”

“...His white male tribes voted for a lying, misogynistic, racist businessman/salesman who exploitatively molded his political agenda to please them.”

Thus, with the collapse and fragmentation of the American self-structure as manifested by extreme political polarization and gridlock, under the pressure of a violent white-lash against the increasing multicultural, multi-ethnic multi gendered complexion

of American society, it is no wonder that in 2016, America coped with its self-fragmentation and rage by electing a narcissistic authoritarian president with a grandiose aura of omnipotent control. His mantra was “Let’s make America Great Again” by retreating from dependency on others such as our allies and our international trade agreements to self-supporting isolationism and trade wars. This was motivated by the narcissistic mentality that it’s a dog eat dog predatory world and you must attack and exploit others before they attack and exploit you. He supported law and order when it came to defending police brutality against minorities, but not when it came to his own self interests. With all the lawsuits against Donald Trump for illegal and corrupt behavior, he may be the only presidential candidate in American history that needs to be re-elected president to avoid criminal prosecution.

For liberal democrats, it is inconceivable that President Trump still receives overwhelming support from Republicans in this election. They continue to view him as a narcissistic, lying, misogynistic, racist, xenophobic, inhumane, anti-scientific, tax cheating businessman/con man, who acts above the law for self-serving, exploitative purposes, a terrible leader- especially concerning the Coronavirus, who appoints cronies like Attorney General Barr, advisors, cabinet members and department chiefs who obsequiously serve him. Many of his closest and highest-ranking appointees have been imprisoned for fraud and/or corruption. Former cabinet appointees, including prominent generals and businessmen have called him a moron, an idiot and four-star General Mattis warned that he was a danger to the security of our country. Since his 400 million dollar plus financial debts have been revealed, this makes him a target for blackmail. And he has been impeached.

His proposal of injecting bleach as a cure for the Coronavirus and other examples of shockingly poor judgment, reinforce the liberals’ apprehension and exasperation. They see President Trump violating the checks and balances of American democracy and believe he wants to become a dictator, as he expresses admiration for such autocrats like Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un, Tayyip Erdogan and Rodrigo Duterte.

In light of this horrific record, why would Republicans still favor him? The answer remains largely the same as it did in 2016.

Certainly blue collar Rust Belt and rural workers will vote for him to bring their jobs back and for his stance against outsourcing, his anti-immigration policies, his tacit support of white supremacy and his outsider rage against an elitist political establishment that has forsaken them.

Trump's working class base hates Democrats for becoming upper-middle class, elitist, Wall Street oriented and supporting outsourcing, like NAFTA, that cost them their jobs. In stark contrast, Trump, with his angry populist rhetoric, was the only candidate whom they believed understood them. He promised to penalize companies for outsourcing and to bring their manufacturing jobs back. He appealed to their fears of being replaced by immigrants and minorities and their inclination to scapegoat "the other" for their misfortunes. The palpable lack of empathy for blue-collar workers has been a monumental failure of the Democratic Party and was probably what cost it to lose the 2016 election in the Electoral College. Ironically, narcissistic Trump turned out to be the most empathic of all the 2016 presidential aspirants, for working class Americans.

He became their populist savior, the apotheosis of the self-made American businessman, their ego-ideal. Like a protective father figure, he represented the American dream. He implied that they could be successful like him. That his father gave him \$60 million dollars in his teens and \$413 million dollars over his lifetime, that his businesses largely failed, that he owed millions of dollars to creditors, that he probably cheated on his taxes and even failed to bring their manufacturing jobs back didn't matter because they desperately needed a strong leader to believe in and inspire their hope for the future. At his massive rallies, they chant his slogans, like "lock her up," laugh at his jokes, worship, adore and emulate his refusal to wear masks or socially distance himself as they huddle together risking COVID infections and death. He appeals to their desire to be free to return to their normal lives rather than guilt trip them into protecting themselves and defeating COVID.

Authoritarian hero-worship is evident among residents of Falco County, Florida, whose population largely consists of seniors over the age of 65. In 2016, they voted for Trump by a margin of 21% over Hillary Clinton. I watched a TV show a few months ago on CNN in which reporters returned to Falco to see how they would vote today. After polling the residents, they selected a woman who represented the general consensus.

When asked whom she would vote for, she smiled and said, “Trump, of course.” The reporter asked which of his policies she preferred. “I don’t know any of his policies,” she said. “Then why would you vote for him,” the reporter asked. “Because he makes me feel secure.” Trump emotionally represented the strong authoritarian leader she needed to protect her. Thomas Hobbes, the political philosopher, in his theory of the social contract, reasoned that a despotic ruler provides security for the masses in exchange for their liberty, especially when they feel helpless, and endangered. Many Americans feel endangered today by the chaos in our society and would prefer an authoritarian president who exhibits strength and confidence. Trump enacts this kind of heroic leader while never admitting that he is wrong. He proclaims to know more than anyone about everything the public needs. And he is admired and idealized for this.

In addition to his base, Trump’s tribal support also includes, albeit ambivalently, Republican moderates, libertarian conservatives, right wing extremists, Christian evangelicals and Catholics. Many conservatives, for example, can’t stand his egocentric reprehensible character and his “bromance” with Communist dictator Putin but value him as the best conservative president since Ronald Reagan. Trump has done everything favorable for their businesses through his cabinet appointments, use of executive privilege and the conservative legislation he has signed. He has lowered taxes and deregulated environmental protections, He supports law and order, the National Rifle Association, strengthened the military, withdrawn from the Iran nuclear deal, the International Paris Climate Accords and the TransPacific Partnership. He has reduced the size of the federal bureaucracy by restricting support for environmental protection, the arts, sciences and public school education. And prior to COVID-19, the American economy thrived under his leadership. According to recent polls, the public still prefers him to Biden on the economy.

In addition to Trump’s base and white-collar Republicans, evangelicals and Catholics will vote for him for appointing socially conservative federal judges. He has appointed over 200 anti-abortion federal judges as well as Supreme Court Justices Gorsuch, Kavanaugh and probably Justice Barratt. For religious institutions, this is a transactional narcissistic choice that supports their greatest self-interest. His immoral character is clearly less important than his support of the right to life and his fight to

destroy Obamacare, which they regard as a big government expenditure and socialized medicine.

The late Dr. Leo Rangell, President Emeritus of the International Psychoanalytical Association in his book, *The Mind of Watergate*, called this refusal by a president and his supporters to tell right from wrong, a “compromise of integrity,” an unscrupulous political strategy in which the end justifies the means.

After explaining these reasons for why 94% of Republicans support Trump, a number of my liberal friends look at me blankly and repeat, “I can’t understand why anyone would vote for Trump.” Obviously, it isn’t that they can’t understand these explanations. But reason doesn’t matter to them. Like Trump’s followers, nothing will convince them there is any legitimate reason to vote differently from the way they would, regardless of what “the other” viewpoint is. In other words, narcissistic tribalism dominates the Democratic political psyche just as it does the Republicans’.

Now let’s turn to Joe Biden. The Democratic Party, with its emphasis on a large welfare government, focuses on caretaking and provision to the detriment of supporting self-reliant careers and businesses. It is skewed toward socialism, meaning governmental provision rather than capitalism. Government welfare, like Medicare for all, requires high taxes, which Republicans argue, steals money from the individual and gives it to an unwieldy bureaucracy that is less effective than private enterprise in delivering services. Moreover, they maintain that high taxes severely hurt business and consequently, the economy. Many of them are voting for Trump to protect their pocketbook. The Democratic Party supports small businesses but not large corporations that are already highly profitable. It wants to reduce the income gap between the one percent of Americans who own 40% of the country’s wealth, and restore the middle class. COVID has made the income gap significantly greater. What the Democratic Party doesn’t quite realize is that in the human psyche, the need for self-reliance and autonomy is as important as the need for provision and caretaking, and for almost half of America. This omission has allowed Donald Trump and the Republicans to become the symbol of the American dream for the working poor who used to vote democratic. He trumpets (no pun intended) his ambition to make as much money and acquire as much power as he can. And this is what America has classically stood for, as Emma Lazarus Statue of Liberty

poem welcoming immigrants suggests, “ Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Which implies the freedom to pursue the dream of Horatio Alger, the opportunity to work hard and become rich. Although the Democratic Party strives to help immigrants and poor Americans become economically solvent, it tacitly denigrates the goal of becoming rich and living an opulent, lavish life.

Democratic President Bill Clinton, a right of center Republican, came the closest to representing the self-reliant, entrepreneurial spirit in the Democratic Party. And because he made this ideological compromise instead of adhering to the customary Republican-Democratic split between patriarchy and matriarchy, he was able to cross the aisle and make political compromises with Republicans that benefitted both political parties and the country. He left his presidency with a huge budgetary surplus in contrast to Trump’s 3.1 trillion dollar deficit.

Although substantially leading in the polls and leading in almost all the swing states, Joe Biden has generally been considered a lackluster candidate by both parties. At 78, he is the oldest presidential candidate in American History. He has been part of the Washington establishment as a Senator and Vice-President and has lost the democratic presidential nomination twice. In contrast to President Trump’s flagrant ego-centricism, Joe Biden is generally regarded as a good, empathic man, but lacks Trump’s attention-getting, charismatic appeal. He frequently hesitates and fumbles to avoid stuttering, and has a history of making gaffes that politically hurt him. Toward the end of the last debate, he indicated that his goal was to abolish the use of fossil fuels by 2025 when he meant 2035. This may have cost him the election in Texas and Colorado, which economically depend on oil production. Afterward he tried to correct himself by telling reporters he meant ending subsidies to oil companies. When in fact, he does intend to eventually replace fossil fuel energy with renewable energy through solar panels, wind turbines and water.

However, in his presidential campaign, he has been remarkably assertive and articulate. Biden wants to unify rather than divide the country, unlike Trump who seems to represent only his Republican tribe and people who validate him. Biden has chosen a black East Indian woman, Senator Kamala Harris, as his vice-presidential running mate, which places her a heartbeat away from the presidency.

In the past, Joe has offended black people, like Anita Hill in the Clarence Thomas Senate hearing, and he was against school busing for racial integration, for which Kamala Harris attacked him in their debate. He has been accused of touching or caressing women without their invitation. He was shocked and said he was only trying to be caring. But he knows that he has to be more respectful of women's boundaries.

Joe has always been a strong believer in our democracy and a defender of the working class, and probably never anticipated he would have to compete against an authoritarian president. Most Americans also never believed we would be capable of electing an autocratic leader, like an Adolph Hitler or Benito Mussolini. But the recent fragmentation of the national psyche has made us surprisingly vulnerable to authoritarianism. In 2016, Stanley Feldman and Jonathan Weiler's research concluded that economic hardship and terrorist threats from foreigners increased Americans' "authoritarianism"- the need for a strongman to impose order, security and deal harshly with terrorist threats.

Trump was starting to sound fascistic in his first campaign when I published a blog on May 17, 2016, in Internationalpsychoanalysis.net entitled: "Trumping American Democracy: The Frightening Rise of a Fascistic Authoritarian."

I said, "...fascist governments are dominated by a dictator, who usually possesses a magnetic personality, wears a showy uniform and rallies his followers by mass parades, appeals to strident nationalism and promotes suspicion or hatred of foreigners or "impure" people within his own nation, such as Jews in Germany. Identification of government with a single charismatic leader (a cult of personality) is the cornerstone of fascism. Such governments are politically right-wing." However, we can also identify left-wing fascism in Putin's Russia and Xi's communist China.

"As a charismatic leader, Trump appeals to a large swath of enraged right-wing Republicans, including white blue-collar workers, evangelicals, Tea Party members and the Ku Klux Klan.

"The psychological seedbed of fascism is extreme frustration and anger, often triggered by an economic depression and a shattering blow to a nation's self-esteem. This results in a pervasive sense of national despondency and helplessness. By idealizing a fascistic national leader and identifying with his perceived power, an economically

depressed nation attempts to triumph over its feelings of humiliation and futility. In the process of merging with the idealized leader, people often lose their capacity to think independently. This is what happened to so many Germans who identified with Hitler as their savior. The fascist leader lifts his people's depressed spirits by disowning and projecting their national sense of weakness and inferiority into minority groups whom he scapegoats for these unacceptable traits. ...Through such violent displacement, the fascist vicariously evacuates and ethnically cleanses his nation's unbearable self-loathing while cathartically expressing its frustrated rage.

“The major cause of being swayed by what appears to be a fascistic leader is the fact that America had barely recovered from the 2008 recession. Although it had fared better than virtually any other country economically, many Americans, especially in the rust belt, had lost their jobs to outsourcing and were depressed and enraged over a gridlocked political establishment that had not helped them but enabled the rich to get richer. Moreover, America's pride as the strongest country on earth had been severely wounded by its military failures in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, continuous terrorist threats from ISIS and Al Qaeda and the nuclear specter of North Korea and Iran. This made our nation ripe for an authoritarian savior. This same fascistic pattern is occurring all over Europe in economically challenged countries who are threatened by an influx of Muslim refugees” and now COVID.

It should be noted that foreign terrorist threats, such as from ISIS in Iraq and Al Qaeda have been substantially quelled under President Trump's effective leadership.

Arguably, the most dangerous sign of Trump's authoritarian demagoguery has been his fear- and hate-mongering against minority groups and racial protests against the police killing of unarmed black men and women. In his election campaign, Trump is appealing to his base and white collar Republicans, including suburban white women, by warning that minority protestors will invade their neighborhoods and ruin their way of life.

Autocratically, President Trump has virtually assumed control over the justice department through the appointment of Attorney General William Barr, who effectively serves as his personal attorney instead of representing the diverse interests of the American people. In addition, Trump tried to commandeer the FBI by firing director

James Comey for not dropping the investigation of General Flynn and his probe of the Russian influence supporting Trump's campaign in the 2016 election.

The Republican Party has become a party of Trumpism that resembles a cult of personality. Fellow Republicans are fearful of disagreeing with him for their own political survival. Those who have worked for him, no matter how high their political or military position, have learned that they must comply with his constantly fluctuating mood states and decisions, or risk being fired. Nonetheless, some prominent Republicans have dissociated themselves from Trumpism, like pundits George Will, Bill Krystal and former RNC Chairman, Michael Steele, as well as members of an anti-Trump Republican group called, The Lincoln Project. Some anti-Trump Republicans say they will vote for Biden with the hope of eventually restoring the dignity and integrity of a Republican Party that has traditionally stood for reason, decency, morality, family and economic prosperity. As Republicans witness Biden's rising popularity, some are jumping ship, like Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska who anticipates a senatorial bloodbath in the election.

This brings us to the issue of scientific, objective evidence versus fiction. It is shocking that so many Americans are susceptible to believing the disinformation of an autocratic president. As noted earlier, when a country's psyche is in chaos, the public yearns for security and protection. The true believers of Trump's base are inclined to accept whatever he says as gospel, without objective scrutiny. In the political novel, *Animal Farm*, George Orwell highlighted how dictators manipulate the public through disinformation and doublespeak to achieve their Machiavellian ends.

Thus, President Trump complains of fake news about anything he disagrees with while making up his own fake news that supports his political and personal interests. In the last debate he blamed Joe for the corruption that he freely indulges in and lied about almost everything. This past July, the Washington Post estimated that Trump told more than 20,000 lies in his presidency. But these lies don't seem to matter to his adoring tribe.

Unfortunately, his prevarication has evolved into a malignant normality in which Americans have grown so accustomed to his lying that they are no longer shocked by it. Many worry that this has indelibly corrupted our political dialogue and that America will never recover. But we should remember that Thomas Jefferson leveled malicious, false accusations against Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, calling the latter a

hermaphrodite, and that hateful political discourse has waxed and waned throughout American history.

Extremist conspiracy theories like right-wing QAnon are arguably the acme of savage politics. QAnon proclaims that there is a deep state cabal of Democrats within the government and Hollywood elites, witnessed by an anonymous person named Q, who perform Satanic rituals, commit pedophilia and cannibalize children with the ultimate aim of seizing control of the government. Last year, this group accused Hillary Clinton of organizing such satanic rituals at a pizza parlor, a ripple effect of 2016's "Pizzagate." And only President Trump, QAnon's anointed savior, can expose this nefarious cabal and destroy it. QAnon's paranoid delusion is motivated by extreme aggression. Its manifest content indicates the projection of murderous oral rage, perverted sexuality, and diabolical authoritarian domination. It resembles the ghastly anti-Semitic tropes of the middle ages, of Jews drinking the blood of Christian children at Passover Seders to revitalize and strengthen themselves, and causing the black plague. Similar, calumnies appeared in the 1903 Russian publication of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion that accused powerful manipulative Jews of an insidious plot to take over the world. Hitler used this anti-Semitic bile as data for his grotesque caricatures of Jewish venality to justify the Holocaust.

Ironically, QAnon accuses actor Tom Hanks, who has portrayed such good characters like Mr. Rogers and Woody in Toy Story, of pedophilia and child trafficking. Bizarre reaction formations predominate in which the good are actually bad and the bad, good. Thus, someone good, like Tom Hanks is accused of deceptively masking his demonic identity and someone callous and hate-filled like Trump is perceived as good because he is authentic. The underlying nihilistic belief system is that the world is evil and therefore anyone who appears to be good is fooling you.

When Trump was asked by Savannah Guthrie, the moderator of his October 15th Town Hall, why he didn't denounce QAnon, he said he didn't know what QAnon was and refused to believe her when she explained it to him. He added that the one thing he did know was they were against pedophilia, and he's against pedophilia. And he likes that they say nice things about him. His hunger for adoration motivates him to like anyone who likes him, no matter what they might stand for, such as the racist Proud Boys and the

neo-Nazi protestors in Charlottesville. White House sources say that this makes him easy to manipulate. On the other hand, he ultimately listens to no one but himself.

When pressed by Guthrie, he reluctantly said he's against white supremacy but then quickly countered, "You didn't ask Joe Biden to denounce Antifa for their violence in blue state cities." And perhaps this has some credibility. We might question why some blue state mayors and police chiefs have allowed Black Lives Matter protestors to occupy police departments, and city territory? Is this a reaction formation to their unconscious racism that leaves Americans unprotected with insufficient law and order?

It's important to realize that Trump's administration is merely a regressive glitch in the long arc of American history. Multiculturalism is destined to represent the majority of Americans in the future. And as diverse Americans increasingly empathize and identify with "the other," which includes Democrats and Republicans, and xenophobia fades into obscurity, America's psyche will regain its capacity for reason, ethics and compromise. But unfortunately, our internal conflicts involving splitting and unconscious rage will inevitably rear their ugly head, obstructing the integration of dependency and autonomy as they are projected onto our democracy's landscape. And this will periodically leave Americans longing for an authoritarian savior to repair our fragmented national identity. Until Republican and Democratic parties work through their ideological conflicts through adaptive compromises, our nation's political psyche will remain fractured and divided, continuing to unleash Pandora's box of chaos and rage. And I haven't even gotten to science vs. science fiction in climate change, voter suppression, or Rudy Giuliani and Borat!