NEGATIVE IMPACT OF POLITICAL EXCEPTIONALISM ON NATIONAL TRUST AS EVIDENCED BY THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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Abstract
The correct identification of the abuse of political power during the COVID-19 crisis remains a challenge because officially declaring the pandemic allowed political representatives to exercise additional power disguisable as the maintenance of functioning social order under the principle of preserving humankind. One way to observe the abuse of power in its excess is the degree of compliance exhibited by the people who laid juridical restrictions for the purpose of combating COVID-19. The behaviour of political representatives was evidence of political exceptionalism, for political representatives, as decisive authorities, were the first to disregard measures introduced without suffering negative consequences. Such abuse catalysed the collapse of trust in state communities, but has for its true result the consolidation of the class system in which the ethical value of trust is played out. In this paper, I discuss how the behaviour of state representatives demonstrates the existence of political exceptionalism based on the class system and what this means for the persistence of national trust.

Keywords: covid-19, pandemic, exceptionalism, sovereignty, trust, morality, ethics, class system

1. General Context of the Socioeconomic Divide

The COVID-19 crisis quickly became synonymous with a new economic crisis. The discourse on this topic was fuelled by most international institutions dealing with finance. The representative statement can be found in the World Bank's World Development Report 2022 entitled "Finance for an Equitable Recovery":

"The COVID-19 pandemic sent shock waves through the world economy and triggered the largest global economic crisis seen in more than a century." (World Bank Group, 2022: 25)

Yet the richest top 1 % of the population gained approximately 63% on the total world income since 2020, that is, about six times more than the rest of the population altogether (Christensen *et al.*, 2023: 8). The word *crisis*, then, cannot refer to the "world" in its entirety, it can only refer to anyone but the top 1% of the population. The deepening of the economic gap

between rich and poor was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but what we should note is that this deepening took place under a political government that ruled over both the 1% and the 99%, and that the political establishment did not draw any real consequences from the economic turmoil of the 99%.

There is not a single study or report that highlights any form of economic collapse among politicians. Rather, two phenomena have come to the fore in the last twenty years: the increase in the participation of very rich businessmen in political leadership – Donald Trump and Silvio Berlusconi being the symbols of this process – and the emergence of so-called stealth politics, the superficial indicator of which is the increase in the participation of private capital in public political campaigns without the billionaires being open about their political preferences. An impressive study of stealth politics in the United States, representative of the global trend, underlines this:

"Recent work by Gilens and others has made clear that affluent Americans and organized interest groups (especially business groups and corporations) have far more influence on the making of US government policies than average citizens do. In fact, when one statistically takes account of what affluent Americans and organized interest groups want from government, the average American's wishes appear to have virtually no influence on policy making at all. If affluent Americans have a lot more political influence than average Americans, it is not much of a logical leap to infer that truly wealthy Americans probably have still more clout. And that the very wealthiest billionaires have the most policy-making power of all. Indeed, it seems possible that most or all of the influence apparently exercised by Gilens's 'affluents' is actually exerted by a small subset of wealthy Americans among the affluents: by billionaires and their wealthy allies." (Page, Seawright and Lacombe, 2018: 135)

If any damage was done to the social set we can "politicians" during the COVID-19 crisis, then it was exclusively political in nature, *political* in the sense of "exercise of the power of the state" (Wolff, 1998: 3), For example, as one report anticipated during 2021, "political leaders from major powers like the US and China may seek to use the crisis to find advantage in an ongoing contest for hegemony in the global political order", and, as "COVID-19 risks inflaming tensions between India and Pakistan over Kashmir […], we could see further entrenchment of the militarized status quo, as well as local efforts to highlight the inadequacy of Indian governance in Kashmir" (Bonotti and Zech, 2021: 13–14). No damage other than

what themselves, among themselves, caused by political decisions, is again visible in the example of Trump, whose mismanagement of US during COVID-19 crisis caused damage to his political image, but overall he made significant financial profit during the four years of presidency, securing existence to his family circle.

The political approach to reality of COVID-19 merely confirmed the usual political decision-making that seems to generally disregard the factual experience of social life as embodied in the persons who form the majority of the social structure to be governed. Given the scope and medium, it is not possible in this paper to discuss the reasons why the majority of the population tolerates this behaviour, thereby reinforcing the behaviour with obvious negative consequences for the existential stability of the majority of individuals. With this in mind, this paper explores one aspect of the emergence of the continuity of the class system rooted in the economic divide by highlighting the difference in power to deny legal mechanisms used to prevent sovereign exceptionalism without negative personal consequences.

2. Political Exceptionalism, Exemplified by Croatian Experience

The multiple means of rejection of measures used by states to officially combat the spread of coronavirus during the pandemic COVID-19 were present to varying degrees around the world and across all social groups. In countries where we cannot speak of explicit state terror and the subjugation of citizens, the problem boils down to the question of how much trust people have in the competence and good intentions of government bodies and whether they believe in the meaningfulness of the concept of political leadership. Trust in the "world", which is in many cases the matter of social framework secured by the cultural institutions, not least by governmental institutions, is the culmination of one of the crucial ethical values. As Kolnai remarked insightfully:

"'Casting one's bread upon the waters' may be highly problematic from the practical and sometimes from the moral point of view; but inasmuch as it springs from, and reveals, virtue, it is a very high virtue indeed. It expresses that attitude of trust in the world which, unless it is vitiated by hare-brained optimism and dangerous irresponsibility, may be looked upon, not to be sure as the starting-point and the very basis, but perhaps as the epitome and culmination of morality. It is closely tied up with the demotion of our concern about Certitude and Safety in favour of a boldly, venturesomely aspiring and active pursuit of Value-infinitely remote from

a craven acceptance of Disvalue and from the placing of practical success, comfort, 'adjustment' etc. above Right, moral sensitivity, purity and sense of dignity." (Kolnai, 1973–1974: 105)

This gives rise to the difference in the assessment of the ethical behaviour of politicians and non-politicians who have gone against the policies that have been put in place: the only way to maintain a healthy political community, just as the only way to maintain the ethos of the community, is to be an exemplary model of the right behaviour that contributes to the meaningful continuation of the chosen way of organised life by providing persistence in trust.

If the goal is not to deceive, the ideal behaviour is always defined by the one who frames the behaviour - the initiator and originator of the request to behave is forced to embody the behaviour in order to establish the meaningfulness of the request. If I insist that it is morally right to help older people in their daily lives and that all members of the community should do so, more than that, I oblige them to do so, then I cannot affirm the ethical significance of that obligation and strengthen the community by acting otherwise. From the perspective of non-politicians, politicians are entities that can exercise power from the highest level to enforce ethical norms of behaviour and codify obligations in such a way that a breach of them will result in sanctions. The way this is done is not consistent with the totality of the polity, because there is no systematic dialogue and no growing consensus among the individual members of the polity that could flow back into the community as an ethical principle through the political representatives. It is therefore understandable that non-politicians choose to 'disobey' government directives, and there are various social and legal mechanisms to counter this, for better or worse. If, on the other hand, members of the political establishment that issued the directives choose to ignore the directives or favour some groups over others in their implementation, they destroy the purposefulness of the directives by ruining their moral authority. If the organisers of the community subsumed under the unifying identity cannot demonstrate this unity, then no unity is possible and stratification is reinforced.

At the time, United States' Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and United Kingdom's Prime Minister Boris Johnson were among many politicians who ignored directives they themselves imposed upon the population (Lederman and Williams, 2020; BBC, 2022). The two, representative of many others, were observed holding large private parties while imposing opposite restrictions on their population, with no consequences. This kind of political behaviour

was universal, and it happened in the Republic of Croatia as well. In Croatia, the initial measures followed the Wuhan model, and although some of the phenomena observed elsewhere were repeated in Croatia, such as the unnecessary over-purchasing of toilet paper and food supplies, the majority of the people followed the measures and held the scientists in high esteem (atypical for Croatia). It was a completely new atmosphere for Croatia, a positive atmosphere, but it lasted only a few months. As the tourist season approached, the measures were weakened despite the increase in COVID-19 cases, which in itself caused confusion and attracted criticism, but the real turnaround took place in July, when the measures were all but lifted and a "victory" against COVID-19 was declared for the purpose of holding parliamentary elections throughout the country.

This behaviour continued and was then adopted by the people, especially by teenagers and young adults who held numerous large gatherings and parties in public places without adhering to any measures. In unsurprisingly typical fashion, the Catholic Church in Croatia, which has immensely good connections to the Croatian political establishment and is occasionally seen as superior because of its political influence, was also favoured by not being sanctioned for masses with many participants. When some of the original "heroes of science" who insisted on strict measures sided with the Church in this regard because of their personal convictions, this triggered another social division. The penultimate hypocrisy occurred in March 2021, about a year after the Corona crisis began, when Milan Bandić, a long-time near-autocratic mayor of Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, died of heart failure. Three days later, a large funeral took place, the largest in recent history, in defiance of all directives related to COVID-19, with speeches delivered by prominent political figures. The reason why this was the moment of penultimate hypocrisy lies in the fact that many funerals were held in the previous year and severe restrictions were imposed on families, so that only some people were allowed to attend the funeral of their family member, friend or co-worker. When two months later, in May 2021, the measures were again lifted to hold local elections state-wide, all sense was lost and the community of trust that had barely been achieved shattered. Naturally, the conspiracy theorists and radical anti-vaxxers became more present in mediating social interests in the wake of their disrespect for the public, especially because of the enforcement of new measures related to compulsory vaccination, which raised public anger. This has in practice confirmed Nussbaum's emphasis on anger growth:

"… living with trust involves profound vulnerability and some helplessness, which may easily be deflected into anger." (Nussbaum, 2016: 94)

But this public anger did not manifest as organised political resistance to the current political establishment, rather, the Croatian nation turned on itself socially. In that regard, Nussbaum's rational suggestion that

"… [t]he focus should be on establishing accountability for wrongdoing, as a crucial ingredient of building public trust, on expressing shared values, and then on moving beyond the whole drama of anger […]." (Nussbaum, 2016: 13)

… makes sense only if politicians see themselves as servants to the nation. At least from the events in Croatia, which are more or less in line with what was happening around the world, we cannot conclude that. Rather, we can conclude that politicians think of themselves as a class of citizens in their own right, the most important class, firstly because of the exceptions to laws and regulations they constantly make without suffering the same consequences as the rest of the citizens, and secondly because of their ability to enforce laws and regulations, which distinguishes them from more powerful organisations, e.g. religious or corporate, which are actively involved in the political class and cannot be disregarded by the political class. This supremacy of the class comes to the fore especially when processes that define its already dominant status are challenged. This is what we can call "political exceptionalism". The concept of exceptionalism in politics usually refers to a particular political entity or form that considers itself superior to other existing political forms or entities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of strategies of national exceptionalism was particularly emphasised in the context of contemporary competitive politics:

"COVID-19 has enabled national exceptionalism narratives built around 'how well we managed the crisis', even if the 'we' refers to a range of different conceptualizations of nationhood, from a patriarchal, autocratic Putinesque, Trumpian, Erdoganian, Bolsonarian and Johnsonian 'I as we' to a far more matriarchal communitarian defined 'we' where highly profiled examples include Angela Merkel and Jacinda Ardern. Broadly speaking, the pandemic has boosted the image of national leaders as exceptional leaders for exceptional times, even if such projections wore thin as the pandemic wreaked havoc in badly managed countries." (Jensen and Loftsdóttir, 2022: 182)

In the context of the Republic of Croatia, a post-Yugoslav country, this behaviour could be seen at the most superficial level of public commentary on how much better or worse "we" are in comparison to, first, other post-Yugoslav countries, especially Serbia; second, leading countries in the world, given the inferiority complex; and third, within the country itself, as several of Croatia's major regions compete with each other in creating the image of a superior approach to reality, most clearly between the North and the South.

I would suggest moving from this kind of understanding of "political exceptionalism" to an understanding of political exceptionalism in terms of a class exceptionalism characterised by the use of the political. Through the use of the political, the subject itself is granted superiority and considers itself the most important class of citizens. The property relations are completely equal; the subject is broader. Analogous example:

"American exceptionalism [Political exceptionalism] is thus the notion that the United States [politicians] was born in, and continues to embody, qualitative differences from other nations [citizens]. Understanding other nations [citizens] will not help in understanding it; understanding it will only mislead in understanding them. […] The accuracy or inaccuracy, the truth or falsity, of the propositions allegedly constituting this exceptionalism are not important." (Shafer, 1999: 446)

This type of shift was theoretically applied elsewhere, e.g. in Sally Weintrobe's analysis of climate changes as related to "neoliberal exceptionalism" (Weintrobe, 2021), but we have to think of it distinctly in terms of class exceptionalism because, for example, it manifests within the nation that may on its own consider itself exceptional in relation to other nations. It transcends the state of national units, as can often be seen in the way political communication between ruling initiates in war. Much like the king pieces in chess as opposed to other pieces, the politicians are intended to talk and not physically fight each other while the assembled masses fight in the mud until one strangles the other.

In this respect, exceptionalism is to be understood in a threefold manner. First, the exceptionalist behaves as if they are much better and greater than the rest, as if they rise above the rest; second, as if they are able to operate in a state of exception; and third, as if they should make an exception of themselves. The meaning of these three characteristics have their root in the core word, in the Latin *excipere*, *to withdraw from*, *to take out*, in which lays the negation of the system from which a thing was taken out through an objection. During COVID-19 crisis,

the politicians continuously inscribed enrolled and derolled themselves in and out of the state of exception they themselves created, which means that they were able to act on the social system from the free perspective of the creator. This is possible because the world has been transformed into a political world in which society appears as a political society, a society guided by the political:

"In political society, politics has become virtually total. Nothing in it has remained unpolitical in principle; no independent areas, spheres or systems exist whose politicisation would be excluded if they had not already become political. Unlike in the past, 'nature', 'gender', 'health' or 'homosexuality', for example, are now political concepts and objects. In the face of politics that has historically become total, being political has become the decisive determinant, the essence of today's society, next to which other qualities recede in importance." (Greven, 2000: 12)

In political society, the figure that bears the modifier becomes the figure that defines the world. Whether politicians are necessary or not is debatable, but regardless of this dispute, society is designed to assume that it is maintained by the political. The paradigm of competitive politics merging with techno-determinism reinforces this framing, and with the merging of billionaires and corporations with the political realm, the economic world does not replace the political world, but the political spills over into the economic: Corporate leaders must govern and regulate. Although the ulterior motive may be economic, the need to engage politically defines the action and controls its presence in the decisive group. This enframing allows exceptionalist behaviour to continually validate itself by being able to exist, even though it continues to explicitly prohibit non-politicians from having the freedom to decide for the community.

This state of exception is thus extra-juridical and has properties of a sovereign nature. It implies an entity that can always make an exception to itself in ruling the world, but the original idea from which this behaviour derives – god – is different from earthly experience. An exception that a god might make is grounded in the fact that God is exceptional. An exception that a politician will make is based on the belief that being a politician is exceptional. For this reason, it is important to remember that truth or falsehood do not matter to the exceptional – they are exceptional precisely because the ordinary does not apply to them. Although the ideal and the real differ, both – gods and politicians – act as deciders of the order with which they do

not identify. This makes them the sovereign, the principle (*superanus*). The final chapter discusses some aspects of sovereignty in political exceptionalism in the context of the community of trust.

3. Sovereignty in Political Exceptionalism and Consequences for Trust-Based Communities

Carl Schmitt argued that the political always manifests itself as "intensity of an association or dissociation of human beings" guided by a motive which leads to "the decisive human grouping" (Schmitt, 2007: 38). The conception of the decisive human grouping Schmitt extended into a lawful framework of the state and limited to conflict management (the friend-enemy relation). But in the factual realisation of this decisive grouping where it understands itself as "politicians", the decision that the grouping carries out has a multitude of layers.

The sovereign group defines themselves against the Other – everyone else who is not the decisive group. The ordainer of the state, the decisive group, is recognised solely by its ability to make a decisive move. However, this ability is embedded in the framework that sustains it, and thus depends on infrastructural security. If the political is maintained at the level of the state, then the enemies are other states. This is the matter of "external autonomy", but it also manifests in "internal hierarchy" (Spruyt, 1994: 3). When it comes to the level of citizens, the enemies are non-politicians: this is evident in any situation where a state entity is threatened, and the state – the politicians – also have two institutions of physical force, the army and the police. This layer defines the class property in which all politicians are a distinct group of citizens who are exceptional in that they have the power to decide for the entirety of the state and have means to protect and harness that power. At the level of their class, the friend-enemy relationship is defined among different political groups within their class who compete for access to decision-making power. These were already present in the earliest examples of sovereign states (cf. Spruyt, 1994: 28).

The power of political decision in itself holds the exceptionality. It is not otherwise possible to be understood as sovereign, as the principal. But rolling into and out of the state of exception is of a corrupting character when compared with the fundamental meaning of operating in the state of exception. Schmitt influential definition of the sovereign – "that which decides on the state of exception [*Ausnahmezustand*]" (Schmitt, 2005: 5; cf. Günsoy, 2015:

173–174) – had meaning only in the sense of exit in the grave situation in order to maintain the stability of the state:

"The exception, which is not codified in the existing legal order, can at best be characterized as a case of extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state, or the like. But it cannot be circumscribed factually and made to conform to a preformed law." (Schmitt, 2005: 6)

This power or possibility serves to nullify the necessity of that power. A responsible sovereign does not want the state of exception because it means instability of the state. It will, thus, be forced to consider exercising the state of exception, and the state of exception will no longer be exercised of its own volition once the state equilibrium has been reached. Thus the act of the sovereign has a threefold effect: it confirms the decisive authority and thus gives orientation to the state, it affirms that it can be trusted because it confirms its identity through the ethical act, and thus maintains the community of trust under it. Political exceptionalism, on the other hand, corrupts this sovereign power by applying it to the particular (the class) rather than the whole (the state), by exercising its power when it is not necessary and not suspending it when stability is at stake. Essentially it exploits the foundation of trust:

"Where one depends on another's good will, one is necessarily vulnerable to the limits of that good will. One leaves others an opportunity to harm one when one trusts, and also shows one's confidence that they will not take it." (Baier, 1986: 235)

The official proclamation of the pandemic did not call for a state of emergency. In fact, no state of exception or emergency was declared in Croatia, but the decisive group imposed severe restrictions only to make itself the exception when it benefited its class. To make an exception of oneself from what all should subjugate to, means to think of yourself as exceptional, to have "the power to enforce its exaggerated entitlement to see itself as ideal", "have whatever power and possessions it craves", and "not feel morally troubled about this" (Weintrobe, 2021: 19). In systems where sovereignty is explicitly denied, the sovereign character of the decisive grouping is revealed again when politicians present themselves as the decisive group and then contradict the measures they themselves have introduced.

On the surface, we could say that the corruption of heads of state is unethical because it favours one group over all others while being their representatives, for all the reasons that have to do with justice, fairness, equality, equity or human rights. Be that as it may, I propose to

consider the deeper implications of political exceptionalism: it negatively affects community stability by damaging the level of trust that the community has developed under national identity. Luhmann's insight that trust has a social function of reducing complexity helps us understand the problem of political exceptionalism:

"… trust, by the reduction of complexity, discloses possibilities for action which would have remained improbable and unattractive without trust – which would not, in other words, have been pursued." (Luhmann, 1979: 25)

In a community that trusts itself, members neither waste time and energy nor experience exhausting negative states such as fear and insecurity in relation to the sphere encompassed by trust, and communal efforts are effective to this degree. An example of this phenomenon is a community in wartime, where the problems of trust manifest at both the macro and micro levels: from the impossibility of prospering economically due to the destruction of infrastructure, to migrants experiencing an existential crisis as they move through unfamiliar country along unfamiliar routes, to soldiers who manage to get an hour's sleep on the battlefield because they trust their fellow soldiers to look out for the environment. The underlying mechanism is the reinforcement of the particular identity to which the activity is oriented. In time of war, this sharpening of the sense of fundamental identity – of belonging to a particular national, ethnic, combat or other group – reaches the level where a tiger distinguishes between itself and (all) the "Other".

Luhmann, who argued well that "trust always extrapolates from the available evidence", followed Georg Simmel in that trust is "a blending of knowledge and ignorance" (Luhmann, 1979: 26). Suurendonk confirmed that in the recent study, ultimately stating that "if there is one common denominator in all of the various scientific works on trust, it is that trust always involves knowledge of some kind" (Suurendonk, 2022: 61). The belief in knowing that one can be trusted is the key mental operation that establishes a positive base for an effective action. This is why trusting someone depends on the extent to which we consider them not being a stranger, the "other". Suurendonk categorically claims that "if strangers refer to 'completely unknown others', then the answer must be no, it just is not possible to trust strangers" (Suurendonk, 2022: 61), and this truly is so – if the "other" is absolutely unfathomable in their presence as an out-sider, as an unwanted and unexplored *extra*, then no trust can be established.

If I do trust a stranger, I already found a basis for the growth of that trust, physical, value-based, or otherwise.

"The possibility to trust, or more specifically, the existence of some minimal amount thereof, must have already been there, so that one's sense-data can then be judged as to either accord or discord, to varying degrees, with one's trust requirements." (Suurendonk, 2022: 62)

That being said, contemporary states essentially operate at the level of ensuring the effectiveness of their populations by grouping them under a national identity and specific preferences for that identity, through a decisive group that promotes that identity. Competitive politics and national exceptionalism, as demonstrated during COVID-19, have validated this strategy. This is how "we" know "them", and when a sovereign entity – a decisive group of politicians who non-politicians want to know only by their utilisation of their purpose as politicians – performs an act that makes an exception to the government of the nation to which they themselves belong, they exhibit the characteristics of a stranger. The first impression is that they appear to see themselves as an exceptional class. The mechanism is the same as in a personal relationship where one person eventually finds out that the other has been leading a secret life, without regard for the other person. The first moment in the process of the breakdown of the relationship is not the realisation of the implications of this fact, but the realisation that the person in question is in fact a stranger to them. Especially during the COVD-19 crisis, the Croatian community, and not only it, was confronted with the constant realisation that the decisive group is a stranger to the nation, a stranger that formed their own class.

Since the decisive group represents the nation, the breakdown of trust in the process of alienation undermines not only its authority in running the state, but also the common identity of the people within the state, national or otherwise. The end result of political exceptionalism for a trusting community has two implications depending on the nature of the community involved. If the community is proactive, the political in the community will find footholds elsewhere and move to replace the corrupt sovereign.

"It may be that economic considerations can be stronger than anything desired by a government which is ostensibly indifferent toward economics. Likewise, religious convictions can easily determine the politics of an allegedly neutral state. What always matters is only the possibility of conflict. If, in fact, the economic, cultural, or religious counterforces are so strong that they are in a position to decide upon the extreme possibility from their viewpoint, then

these forces have in actuality become the new substance of the political entity." (Schmitt, 2007: 38)

The replacement temporarily provides footholds for the consolidation of trust. However, when political exceptionalism takes place in a passive community, which Croatia, for example, has become in the last 25 years, the impossibility of forming an alternative decisive group means that the head of state is a stranger with whom the population cannot establish a relationship, but is forced to deal with. If the population cannot establish a relationship with those who direct the state, they cannot orient themselves to the state. Consequently, living in a particular state becomes an accidental necessity, and the only way for the population to gain a foothold is to create a personal community of trust, which leads to an infinite variety of private interests nation-wide. Thus, under a corrupt state, the trusting community turns into an interest-based society at best and a competitive agglomerate at worst, destroying the ethos of communal sharing. However, this disunity has an opposite effect on the decisive group – because it remains a group and thus a class. One of the negative consequences of this is that a fair contributor to the state community cannot succeed in life without somehow being connected to the class of politicians – without making an exception of themselves.

Ethically, in terms of biocultural evolution in comparison to primates, this behaviour is retrograde because we have managed – as *homo sapiens* – to culturally create a better, more meaningful alternative to individual-centred evolutionary approach to the survival of species. Although we share a great evolutionary history as cooperative primates with other of our kind, primates in general deploy two mechanisms in their life cycles that may be considered contradictive: on the one hand, we foster cooperative behaviour (Scott Curry, 2016: 29–30), but on the other, we heavily invest energy (resources) in as close a circle of kin as possible and foster taking care of particular individual organisms over others (Scott Curry, 2016: 30–31) – with these 'others' being accepted into the circle if they contribute to the sustainability, e.g. in terms of gene pool variety or hunting. The self-centredness reflects in at least two ways, first, the limitless consumption of mother's bodily resources by the unborn, second, the preference of one individual over everybody else, usually one's child or one's love partner, into which all resources are invested. This is a usual behaviour among primates (cf. Joyce, 2006: 19–20; de Waal, 2003: 12), and these mechanisms we countered through cultural evolution of solidarity and higher meaning of life, a meaning that goes beyond pure calculation of interest broadly

arranged materially to resemble species. But corruptive political exceptionalism endorses precisely the mechanisms that are typical of lower primates – it is, thus, a cultural setback.

This cultural setback, to conclude this contribution, is the result of the negative impact of political exceptionalism. It certainly manifests in many ways, but I wanted to highly emphasise how the consolidation of the class system of politicians that establishes itself through exceptionalism disvalues trust at the level of nation – a large system – because the lack of trust on the level of social system drives the macroscopic flourishing of selfish, protective behaviour, hindering the possibilities of prosperous alternative to the continuance of history of violent, negatively competitive humankind that does not base its primary activities on truth. COVID-19 pandemic brought to the fore the selfish politician's behaviour oriented towards their class that made of them strangers who lie to the public, and since they are the creators of policies and laws ("Law gives a double benefit: it keeps us safe without, and it permits us to care for one another, unburdened by retributive anger, within." (Nussbaum, 2016: 4)), their selfishness by necessity pulses through the social infrastructure as distrust.

"A system in which truth is an important value promotes the protection of important human entitlements better than one that does not care so much about truth – above all because truth in these matters protects well-being and promotes trust, both between citizens and between citizens and the government." (Nussbaum, 2016: 192)

If the strangers to their own people represent the order in which they work for their own benefit whilst lying to the public, then the order is that of selfishness and distrust which will mediate through national social structures. In effect, the nation becomes estranged towards itself from within its own order, and it will conceal alternative possibilities for the, instrumentally, economic advancement, and morally, advancement of humaneness.

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