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12/31/2017--I am working on a new book, to be titled, A Universe of Self-Government: Democracy After the Age of Trump. Here is a sample from the Preface, which will serve as a look back at the past year, and a look forward as well. (With a nod to my son, who contributed several lines).

It was the worst of times. It was a time of Presidential candidates most people did not want. It was a time of anger and distrust. Of circling the wagons against outsiders. A time of racism and misogyny. It was a time of big business—big oil, big tech, big drugs, big money. It was a time of trashing the Earth and fleecing the consumer. It was a time of denial and permission. Of impulse. A time of payback and manipulations, foreign and domestic. A time of vulgarity. It was a time when the Republican Party could nominate a likely pedophile for the U.S. Senate.

It was a time of the outsized flaws of the man who gave the age its name—the Age of Trump.

And yet. It was a time when Republicans would join with others of good will to defeat Roy Moore. A time when women discovered a new voice and African-Americans named white nationalism. When cities acted to protect the climate. When free trade and science found defenders. When the first fragile shoots of decency reappeared. When we learned that Presidential action alone proved insufficient and that bad ideas have consequences. We learned the connection between deplorables and deportables. We learned that no one is to be demeaned. No one left behind.

It was a time of recovery. The beginning of After the Age of Trump.

How do we prepare for After Trump? It will be difficult. In December, 2017, the columnist David Brooks began an intermittent series reminding Americans of the grandeur of democracy, which, he wrote, Americans no longer know how to defend. He began with the 1938 defense of democracy by Thomas Mann, arguing democracy's unique emphasis on the dignity of man as made in the image of God.

Brooks' effort is beautiful, but pointless. For we need to understand why these classic democratic sources no longer speak to us. What is needed is not remembering, but inquiring as to why we forgot in the first place. Now, there is no God in whose image we are made. There remain many religious believers. But that kind of God is no longer a source of cultural renewal. God's supporters are fighting defensively, for a lost status quo. And the whole Biblical tradition of classic liberalism lies in tatters around us.

Americans of all types retain a common acceptance and faith in democracy as a way to do what is right, but we find ourselves disgusted at the path it takes to get there. I hear people talk about their confusion and frustration with a democratic system that seems lost. Yet somehow through all the confusion, there is a deep dedication to the core of democracy. I often wonder what is at this core and how it is that justice seems to creep through. Where does justice come from? How can we have justice if everyone has a right to their own point of view? Has the idea of universal truth died?

Democracy needs a new foundation—one that speaks to this age. That foundation will have to be the universe itself. Thomas Mann will always have an honored place. But our starting point must be elsewhere.