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## **Reset or Revolution? Contemporary Problems of Political Stability and Some Ancient Solutions**

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### **Abstract**

In this article I take a critical look into the challenges faced by the contemporary social, political, and economic scene in Europe and the United States after nearly eighty years of political stability. I question the sources of the anger, frustration, and distrust toward national and supranational institutions that are visible both on the streets and in the light of numerous public opinion polls. I argue that political and legal stability—the driving force and most desirable product of Western democracies—is becoming a problem. Through the tendency to permanent, often hereditary, marginalization of large groups of the population, a stable political system calls into question the ideals of equality, freedom, and political agency. I present examples of ancient political solutions to problems that arise from prolonged stability: Mesopotamia, Greece under Solon, and the Old Testament. These cases serve as examples of financial, social, and legal adjustments carried out in ancient societies to resolve tensions generated by the toxic effects of long-term stability. I question the possibility of a modern equivalent to this kind of "reset," which would de-escalate the existing conflicts.

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The West has seen an unprecedented seventy-eight years of peace. Post-war Euro-Atlantic order has guaranteed stability and prosperity that were unthinkable before. But if it is so difficult to overestimate the advantages of this stability, why is it being challenged on a level not seen before? Where does all the anger and frustration come from? What did the advocates of the Western order miss and why is their talk of peace, security, rule of law, progress, and prosperity being dismissed by various kinds of political rebels? Why, in countries that have achieved spectacular political and economic success, does such a large group of citizens declare distrust toward the European Union?<sup>1</sup> Why is nearly half (43 percent) of the American population expecting a civil war?<sup>2</sup> Why do the majority of Europeans believe that the EU will fall apart in the coming decades and that war may break out between member states?<sup>3</sup> Why is the most important and probably most successful post-war political project of the West is so universally questioned?

### **Stability—A New Problem**

European history has repeatedly been interrupted by political upheavals and natural disasters. Wars, coups d'état, assassinations, revolutions, terror, resettlement, migrations, market crashes, famines, epidemics—they turn upside down the lives of every generation. To remedy the situation, political thought has tried to harness the problem of economic and political instability since antiquity. “Remember,” says Cicero, “that establishment of a State which is stable enough to endure for ages requires by far the highest intellectual powers that nature can produce.”<sup>4</sup>

Ever since, politicians have looked into politics, law, economy, and security for ways to reduce the ephemeral nature of political entities, to consolidate peace, and to ensure political continuity. Although specific solutions might differ, the main driving force behind all of them was to get away from the terror of the unforeseeable and the changeable toward the comforts of stability that is potentially safe, just, and prosperous. If we imagine politics as a factory—its main product would be stability. If the world of politics were going anywhere, it would be toward a certain form of stability. Stability has always been the goal, albeit unattainable.

There is a fine line between relative calm and prolonged stability. That is why, in the past seventy-eight years, we (i.e. residents of the West today) may have missed some fundamental changes—we may have overlooked the fact that we are living in the reality that everyone was seeking but no one has ever experienced. Having dealt with so many of the old problems, we find ourselves in new territory, answering questions and threats we have not known before. And we begin to realize that, to our surprise, progress is not the only variable of political order. We realize that political and legal stability comes at a price and is not equipped with built-in safety valves.

Our view of European history firmly rooted in the political ideals of today's West makes us think of stability as the absolute good, the one that places all other political goals second. To understand why political, economic, and social structures of the modern world are being increasingly questioned by people in the West, we need to see whether stability itself, after almost eighty years of peace, has become a serious problem that we somehow overlooked. And what if the main political challenge today is the stability of the established order that turns against large groups of citizens and takes away their dignity, freedoms, and hopes for a better future? Could unadjusted stability have become toxic and inhumane?

### **Desire for a Revolution**

Whatever the representatives of the political establishment in Europe and the US tell us, the fact is that the populists, who in the past were on the margins of the political scene in the West, have

now taken center stage. Movements that are being described as populist differ in many ways: they may be on the left or right of the political spectrum, openly Christian or non-religious, anti- or pro-Russian, conservative or progressive. But is there a unifying principle other than their deep contempt for the political elites? Are these movements nurtured by the same wave of Euro-Atlantic social and political expectations? And if so, how do we explain their strength, durability, and vigor?

Many factors tell us that this time it is not only the matter of a new voice finding a place on the political scene, but a total rejection of post-World War II status quo. The new dynamic is not about demanding improvements in some aspects of the political system. These are also not the political aspirations of the new elites anymore or even calls for some changes in the current redistribution model of wealth and prestige. They reject the system in its totality. The disappointed, the embittered, the furious—they have had enough!

Polls conducted in February 2019 in Austria, France, Spain, Germany, Poland, and Italy by Institut d'études opinion et marketing en France et à l'international for *L'Atlantico*, show that almost 40 percent of people in France, 20 percent of Germans, and 14 percent of Poles think that the only way to the betterment of their lives is revolution. It is not about being critical or distrustful toward the system, but its total rejection. It is a hope for some kind of brutal reset. Assuming that the respondents understand what the violent, dark, and irrational paroxysm known as 'revolution' is, we need to appreciate that every fifth German and four out of ten French people are in favor of a forceful demolition of the existing order. This is not pessimism, but desperation. To seek revolution after the lessons of European history in the twentieth century is to feel utterly helpless. Some respondents may take revolution as a metaphor for some kind of fundamental change, but even in this case it is clear that stability—the most precious product of politics—is seen as the main obstacle in making things better. Let us not be fooled, this is not a handful of lunatics. Why is revolution the only agent of change they believe in?

## **End of Hope**

I believe we do not fully appreciate the experience of the 2007 and 2008 economic crisis, which undermined the social trust and hope that keeps us all going. It did not turn the system upside down, yet it shook the foundations of the liberal or rather neo-liberal West. The axiom of endless progress, the dogma of steady growth, has collapsed. The crisis undermined the belief that tomorrow will be a better day. It was not the stock exchange or real estate market that suffered but the very core of the optimistic metaphysics of the democratic-liberal world, of the soothing message of purpose and hope for a better future. Prior to the crisis, belief in progress and a better future softened the brutality of the system and allowed one to make sense of fortunes made on speculation; it kept together the theodicy that called for sacrifice and at the same time promised better pay and a better life to those whose standards of living fell below those of the wolves of the Wall Street.

Why did hope die? The crisis did not affect the system but hit the most vulnerable. In the positive-case scenario, the poor were to get less, but always more than the day before. In the negative-case scenario, it turned out that they have to bear the costs. Stability turned out to be more important than solidarity. In the name of stability, governments saved the institutions responsible for the madness in the subprime mortgage market, while protecting the interests of the richest.

The rich and the wealthy came out of the crisis without major losses while the poor got poorer. And how about the community? If one measures trust in the existing order with the level of hope for a better life within a generation, the result is devastating. It may well be that stability was saved

at the cost of hope. According to Pew Research Center (August 11, 2022) the prevailing mood in the largest European countries is pessimism: 53 percent of Germans, 72 percent of people in Great Britain, 78 percent of the French, 76 percent of Italians, and 72 percent of the Spanish people think that the financial situation of the next generation will be worse than the situation of the parents of the respondents.<sup>5</sup> The crisis of the hope that was the unifying principle of the system is plain to see.<sup>6</sup> And there does not seem to be any new unifying principles.

## **Stability versus Democracy**

Focusing on stability makes it difficult to see the negative effects of continuation. What do we miss? It seems that during a prolonged period of peace, democratic states generate conflict that they cannot manage in the long run. The conflict is between the status quo safeguarded by law and politics and the intuition based on the principle of equality and freedom. Politics that successfully stabilizes the legal and economic system automatically consolidates hereditary differences in wealth, income, social standing, education, and power share. Simultaneously, through education and the ethos of democracy, politics strengthens the need for freedom and equality defined not only as equality under the law or equal opportunities, but as political agency that allows one to choose and control any form of power.

In fact, we are facing the tension between justice and freedom that Plato says is typical of democracies. To this tension, the post-war political system added a third factor: time. Time—or more precisely, stability—transforms this otherwise positive tension into conflict. As Plato tells us, the right kind of balance between justice—an aristocratic element—and the more popular element of freedom protects democracy against anarchy. More importantly, it reinforces the existing order without canceling freedom and equality, the main virtues of democracy. By keeping in check the capriciousness and volatility of *demos*, which threaten the state order, law protects democracy against its potentially self-destructive element. For example, law protects against tyranny or against mob rule (ochlocracy).

The post-war system of democratic states that follows the same model and is built on the rule of law, is now being destabilized by its longevity—the balance shifts toward the aristocratic element in the system, toward the principle of justice. After seventy-eight years of peace, the system that maintains the stability in fact begins to conserve the mechanisms of inheritance of differences and divisions. In practice, this means the cancellation of egalitarianism and the advent of the increasingly undemocratic rule of law. Due to the time factor—a variable that may have seemed irrelevant at first—the democratic component of an aristocratic-democratic mixed system becomes fiction. The new generation has no chance for every one of its members to have a fresh start from similar positions, and equality and freedom (especially positive freedom) become empty slogans.

Although Thomas Piketty claims that the modern concentration of capital is similar to that at the turn of the nineteenth century, thanks to the democratic culture of equality, we feel the discrepancy between the egalitarian ideal and the aristocratic practice that we find hard to accept. The growing awareness of differences and inequalities is in stark contrast with the declared ideal of the political system and hyper-democratic rhetoric in the field of education and culture. Politics reproduces continuity and strengthens egalitarian ideals of democratic culture. At the same time, it also highlights the problem of injustice in the prevailing order. The paradox is that politics places itself in the dock. And there's the rub<sup>7</sup>—this is the source of the unbearable tension between the law and general intuition about justice; this is where the revolt begins that will not be settled by minor adjustments.

What seems to be fueling political revolt is the call for a reset. At stake is the reversal of the effects of prolonged stability, an almost mythical comeback to the point of departure in which existing divisions and differences do not cancel the egalitarian principles of democracy. The protesters see this crisis through their feeling of a radical lack of political agency. On a systemic level, this means a deficit of democratic legitimization of the current status quo. The polls show a growing disappointment with the state of democracy. According to Pew Research Center, the large majority of the population of major European states voice dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in their countries: 43 percent of Germans, 55 percent of the British, 51 percent of the French, 70 percent of Italians, and 81 percent of the Spanish.<sup>8</sup> The tensions run high. Those who revolt are not concerned with the banks, with immigration, with the price of fuel—they call for a reset of political and social order that erases the solidified differences. They want to get rid of the system that casts some into inherited poverty and second-class citizenship and makes others members of the unsinkable elite regardless of their talents and personal merits.

The proper addressee of their aggression, reluctance, and frustration is therefore the political system that takes away their chances to start with a clean slate, without inherited debts. I speak of debt not only in economic terms, but also in social, political, and cultural terms—a loan that one never took but that one has to pay off throughout a lifetime and then hand over to one's children and grandchildren. Therefore, the first requirement in a reset is shaking off those broadly defined burdens, obligations, and subordination. The problem is that stability preserves poverty as well as privilege. Hopes for equality and political agency will not be fulfilled without limits on the privileges of the beneficiaries of the system. That is requirement number two.

The problem is essentially political. It is about power, the sense of agency, and reclaiming reality that has slipped out of the democratic system of checks and balances. The idea is perhaps best illustrated in the Leave slogan “Take back control.” It is about taking back control over the formal and especially informal centers of power that function beyond the control of the democratic mechanisms, beyond the control of the state and international organizations.

Unfortunately, a reset that would make things new does not seem possible within the current rules of the game. I will not dwell on the fact that revolution certainly is not the way to go. Nor am I concerned with the myths of perfect equality and agency. My point is that the current political system cannot meet the requirements of even the slightest form of a reset. The power of democratic policy based on liberal assumptions does not extend over the territory where inequalities are at their worst—social and economic life. Politics may preserve inequalities and at best make slight adjustments but is not able to reset them. The political instruments that the people have during elections do not affect informal power structures. To achieve a peaceful non-revolutionary reset, the existing rules need to be re-defined and that, in turn, calls for a broad political consensus. It would also require the beneficiaries of the current system to exercise self-restraint. There are however no signs of such readiness for self-control among the elites.

### **Political Reset in Action: Mesopotamia, Solon, Old Testament**

The need to reset a system that can no longer settle its internal forces, tensions, and aspirations was not invented by the post-war democratic rule of law. Such a need usually arises in a situation where unadjusted stability becomes toxic and where the void between the intuition of justice and reality becomes unbearable. If, as Aristotle stated, the relationship between the wealthy and the poor is the biggest challenge in every *polis*, the ability to deal with calls for a reset or serious adjustment to cancel excessive burdens, limitations, and inequalities is the highest art of stable politics. Let us have a look at the lessons that the distant past teaches us. The aim is not to study

history or copy those solutions, but to look closely at the basic tenets that allowed them to face the problems of prolonged political stability.

### **Mesopotamia**

The institution of debt canceling in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece has all the features of a reset understood as an act to restore social, political, and ownership balance. Because the debts of impoverished farmers would lead to land, wealth, and power concentration on one hand, and the loss of property and personal freedom on the other, the shaking off of the debts was not a purely financial operation. Archaeologists have found around thirty dues and obligations annulment acts that refer to debts owed by the people to the wealthy officials in the period between 2400 and 1400 BC in Mesopotamia. It seems that the annulment guaranteed the stability of the existing political, social, and economic order. The annulment, paired with release from debt slavery and the obligation for lenders to either pay compensation for or return property taken over for debts, was to guarantee peace and stability and to restore the status quo ante that was destroyed by economic chaos.<sup>9</sup> During the forty-two years of Hammurabi rule, there were at least four events of this kind. Without any exaggeration, they may be primarily associated with the idea of the protection of the weak against the mighty expressed in the royal codex.<sup>10</sup> The second motive behind these events is also clear. Debt annulment strengthened and stabilized the monarchy. By limiting the power of the court officials, it reduced the risk of change within the political order. The political significance of annulment was underlined through a solemn ritual during which clay tablets with the names of debtors were smashed and destroyed.<sup>11</sup>

The periodic annulment of debts suggests that the ownership rules were suspended, though they were considered vital to the order and stability of the system. This Mesopotamian practice testifies to a sense that is absent from the modern world—that the stability of the law does not necessarily entail social stability. What is more, under certain circumstances the unalterable law that is intended to protect the process of wealth concentration may in fact be a destructive factor within the existing order. A partial suspension of the rules, initiated by the ruler, becomes the condition for the stability of the existing power and social structure.<sup>12</sup> The key to understanding this practice is that the stability of the state and its political and social model was believed to be the highest good, far above the rules of the everyday life of the community. Unwise turning of the mechanisms of stability into an absolute could destroy the political order. Discontinuity thus becomes a condition for a continuity.

### **Ancient Greece**

Let us now move over to Greece. The political fame of Solon was built on reforms that in many ways can be seen as a model reset. The Athens of the early sixth century BC saw the growing tension between the wealthy landowners, *the eupatridae* ('of a good father' or 'of noble descent'), and their indebted tenants on agricultural land called the *hektemoroi* ('sixth parters'), who were obliged to give the landowners one-sixth of the yield from the land they worked. The problem escalated and called for an urgent solution.<sup>13</sup> Rising rural population density caused division and shrinking of farms, debt, impoverishment, and debt slavery. By 594 BC when Solon, a eupatrid himself, was chosen archon eponymous for one year and was entrusted with a reform mission,<sup>14</sup> Athens had already lived through several waves of major social and political unrest. According to Plutarch, Solon's mandate to reform came in equal measure from both sides of the ongoing conflict: the wealthy and the impoverished Athenians.<sup>15</sup>

As he took up the role of the mediator (*dialektes*) and lawgiver (*nomothetes*),<sup>16</sup> Solon had to balance continuity and change to satisfy both parties. It was not an easy compromise. On one hand, the impoverished debtors demanded a new land division, redemption from slavery, and the abolition of the rule that forced them to give landowners a sixth of their crops. On the other, the eupatridae, wanted the smallest necessary concessions. How did Solon meet their expectations? He annulled financial obligations, abolished debt slavery, made possible slave redemption, and introduced debt relief for the debtor's farms—all of these were gestures aimed to pacify the *hektemoroi*. At the same time, he kept the old land divisions, which was the solution in favor of continuity. While we mostly remember Solon's 'shaking off' or relief of burdens (*seisachtheja*),<sup>17</sup> few seem to remember the accompanying political and social reforms that made a reset possible and effective. At least two reforms are worth mentioning here: the first is the institution of jury trial (*heliaia*);<sup>18</sup> the second is the close pairing of the citizens' political privileges and duties with one of the four income groups.<sup>19</sup> It seems that both principles were introduced in the second wave of reforms from 592 to 591 BC. The trial by jury limited the judicial monopoly of the aristocracy and strengthened the political agency of the people. The alignment of political duties with income groups removed the poorest citizens from offices and reserved the highest offices for the richest. Once and for all the principle of aristocratic rule with birth as the decisive qualification for oligarchy was replaced by the principle of wealth.<sup>20</sup>

Solon's reforms can be considered a paragon of reset for several reasons. First, it was preceded by the mutual agreement of the parties, which created a 'constitutional moment' that ensured the legality of the fundamental changes within the *polis*. Second, by modifying the systemic monopoly of the eupatridae, the reforms went far beyond the economic and social sphere; in fact, they took into account the political aspirations of the people. Third, the reforms were the minimal required adjustment: they met the expectations of the hektemoroi and at the same time did not cast the eupatridae onto the loser's side. Solon's reset preserved political continuity. In contrast to the reset caused by war or revolution, it was a compromise whereby legal change was introduced in the name of peace and the balance of justice, which both parties believed were the common good.

## **Old Testament**

Yet another interesting example of the institutional reset is the Torah-mandated Shabbat year, traditionally observed in Judaism every seven years, and the Jubilee year once every fifty years.<sup>21</sup> While in the case of Mesopotamia, we may doubt whether these resets were indeed systemic, in the case of Judaism, we are dealing with a tradition that is part of the religious-political system. Both the Shabbat and Jubilee years are connected with the idea of returning to the initial state that degenerates with the passing of time and due to human activity. Their task is to constantly correct the pathologies of stability. During the Shabbat year, apart from the prohibition of cultivating the land and harvesting its crops, there is an obligation to forgive debts and free slaves who have lost their freedom because of poverty.<sup>22</sup> The Jubilee year is not only about rest for people and the land, but a cyclical reset, which legally invalidates unwanted, although inevitable changes. In addition to the forgiveness of debts and the liberation from slavery, during the Jubilee year, the land must be returned to its former owners.<sup>23</sup> It should be stressed that the aim is to preserve, not to destroy, the existing order. The fact that we are dealing with a systemic repair of the negative effects of stability and not an anti-systemic revolution can be seen in the detailed solutions. In order to avoid injustice of the periodically renewed system, it is assumed that the price of land should depend on the time remaining until the Jubilee year.<sup>24</sup>



For adherents of Judaism, the order to observe Shabbat and Jubilee years present in the Torah is of the highest seriousness and sanction. According to the book of Leviticus, God instituted them on Mount Sinai<sup>25</sup> and failure to observe his orders may result in disasters that could affect the entire nation.<sup>26</sup> It is noteworthy that this obligation is not an arbitrary commandment. The idea of returning land to its owner and redemption from slavery is theologically grounded. According to Leviticus, the land of Canaan was a gift from God and remains his possession:<sup>27</sup> “The land also shall not be sold for ever: because it is mine, and you are strangers and sojourners with me.”<sup>28</sup> Also, poverty slavery was permitted only temporarily.<sup>29</sup> Within the set time, the rights of the owner have to yield to the laws of God: “For they are my servants, and I brought them out of the land of Egypt: let them not be sold as bondmen.”<sup>30</sup> The Shabbat and Jubilee years are thus a way to honor God as liberator.<sup>31</sup> It is a form of tribute that serves as a reminder of the non-absolute nature of man-made laws. The basis of this reset is freedom that cannot be taken away forever and the basis of this freedom is the relationship between Israel and God.

The tradition of Shabbat and Jubilee years suggests that stability does not protect against decay, contingency, and uncertainty. In other words, stability does not have any eschatological features—it does not mark the end of history. That is why keeping order requires certain regular hygiene—a constant restoring of the order. Adjustments are not acts against stability, but rather political tools that help to maintain stability. But beware! A reset is the temporary suspension of the rules; it does not erase them. Flexibility is the condition of continuity. Like all human reality, no rules are perfect. Problems may appear when we break the rules as much as when we respect them. Rules are not for their own sake and if they lead to injustice, they ought to be suspended. Neither are they bad—it is thanks to the rules that the world escapes anarchy after the reset.

From the perspective of political philosophy, the biblical model of reset may help to understand why secular politics tends to absolutize its own rules and procedures, even those that cause a serious crisis. As we have seen in the model that gives primacy to divine laws above human laws, the instituted structures can remain flexible and their adjustment does not give an exceptionally dangerous impression that the political order is based on shaky grounds. The reference to God means that the relativization of some principles reproducing political stability need not pose a threat to the entire system. Where a higher principle is missing, whenever the specific laws are being changed, there is the fear of losing points of reference. This is why in secular models of politics, the mutability of rules remains a sort of mystery. The rigidity of the laws—their seriousness, alleged immutability, and absolutization— may tend to be seen as a security requirement.

## **Conclusion: Waiting for Solon**

All of these examples serve to explain why a serious adjustment of the system today is so difficult. We have neither a power strong enough to carry out a reset (as in Mesopotamia) nor a universally accepted religious reference point that would support deep reforms of the political order (the case of the Old Testament). Things are not improved by the fact that our diagnosis of the origins of the crisis differs depending on where we stand in it and we do not have a single vision for the future. The third case remains. The question is: do we have a chance for an agreement similar to the one that brought the parties to the Athenian conflict together?

Unfortunately, the contemporary conflict between the people and the functional aristocracy—branded as the conflict between the ‘populists’ and ‘oligarchs’—has become a sort of war with only one side destined to win. That is obviously nonsense. The idea of a world without ‘them,’ either without the ‘dark, needy mob’ or without the ‘corrupted elites’ is a dangerous fiction. Why?

Because a conflict that is defined as existential blocks any hope for the de-escalation that is a condition for a reset and leaves only two ways out. The first is non-liberal dictatorship. The second is a form of post-liberal dictatorship that will keep the power and status quo of the current elites in the name of stability, but will radically limit the citizens' freedoms (of expression, association, and peaceful assembly) and will introduce a sort of permanent state of emergency pretending that it is a temporarily suspended democracy. Both solutions are repulsive. To avoid them, the system has to regain its balance because conflict escalation will only generate chaos and tyranny. We can already see the first symptoms of the two scenarios in Europe. To take a different route, we need an agreement between the modern hektemoroi with today's eupatrids. What makes this so difficult?

Ancient examples show clearly that modern politics has a marked tendency to absolutize stability and to regard every aspect of the legal order as unalterable. Paradoxically, despite legal positivism and sworn egalitarianism, the modern West behaves as if laws—especially of the economy—came down from heaven and the elites were born on Olympus. Unfortunately, thinking that stability is an absolute makes us unable to address the hardships and aspirations of large social groups, solidifies differences, and divides.

This absolutist approach legalizes changes that are increasingly seen as unjust. Stability and rule of law will be protected by those who embark on decisive reforms and not those who chant the rule of law mantra. In the end the rigid system destroys the thing that it aims to protect. The West needs the courage and gesture of Solon, the cutting down on debt, changes in redistribution logic, counteraction to capital accumulation, and reforms in the Western legal system that would lead to real democratization and the agency of the people. If we seek to avoid violent social unrest and dangerous changes to the political system, we need an honest reset. Whether such fundamental reforms are possible seems to be one of the key issues for restoring and preserving the post-war political order.

Is reset possible? I am not optimistic about it. Not only that there is no necessary common social consent for it, but that it is not even being considered. As I read that more than 60 percent of Americans believe that political divisions are deepening and political violence will grow, and that the only proposed political solution to the crisis comes down to the principle of "more of the same," I find optimism difficult.<sup>32</sup> At the moment, the so-called populist parties are buying us time. Contrary to what the old political elites think about them, modern-day populists (unwittingly) play the role of *katechons* who hold back the revolutionary Armageddon. As long as they persuade people to cast their votes rather than burn down cities, we have time to work out a reset. It can be said that a painful, long-lasting conflict is a necessary condition for an agreement, because only the fear of further losses will prevail over attachment to the current status quo. But even if it is true that the West needs time to mature to make changes on Solon's scale, it should be remembered that delaying reforms increases the risk of worst-case scenarios. One thing is clear—this will not last forever.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> On trust and distrust in the EU in eighteen member states, see Standard Eurobarometer 97 Summer 2022, Public Opinion in the European Union, First Results, Fieldwork: June–July 2022, accessed February 9, 2023, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/ebsm/api/public/deliverable/download?doc=true&deliverableId=83378>.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor Orth, “Two in Five Americans Say a Civil War Is at Least Somewhat Likely in the Next Decade,” YouGovAmerica, August 26, 2022, accessed February 9, 2023, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2022/08/26/two-in-five-americans-civil-war-somewhat-likely>.

<sup>3</sup> This is what 51 percent of Germans; 58 percent of people in France, Italy, and Poland; and 40 percent of people in Spain think. *European Council on Foreign Relations-YouGov survey*, Susi Dennison and Mark Leonard, “Seven Days to Save the European Union,” European Council on Foreign Relations, May 16, 2019, accessed February 9, 2023, [https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_seven\\_days\\_to\\_save\\_the\\_european\\_union/](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_seven_days_to_save_the_european_union/)

<sup>4</sup> Cicero, *On the Republic*, trans. C.W. Keyes (1928), Book 3, section 7, <http://www.attalus.org/cicero/republic3.html>

<sup>5</sup> Laura Clancy, Roseline Gray, and Bao Vu, “Large Shares in Many Countries Are Pessimistic about the Next Generation’s Financial Future,” Pew Research Center, August 11, 2022, accessed February 9, 2023, <https://pewrsr.ch/3AeDg7G>.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, all except people in Germany, think that the current situation is worse than twenty years earlier. Overall, 46 percent of Germans, 53 percent of the British, 56 percent of the French, 72 percent of Italians, and 62 percent of the Spanish people have agreed with this statement. Richard Wike, Janell Fetterolf, and Moira Fagan, “Europeans Credit EU with Promoting Peace and Prosperity, but Say Brussels Is Out of Touch With Its Citizens,” Pew Research Center, March 19, 2019, accessed February 9, 2023, [https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/03/19/europeans-credit-eu-with-promoting-peace-and-prosperity-but-say-brussels-is-out-of-touch-with-its-citizens/pg\\_2019-03-19\\_views-of-the-eu\\_0-05/](https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/03/19/europeans-credit-eu-with-promoting-peace-and-prosperity-but-say-brussels-is-out-of-touch-with-its-citizens/pg_2019-03-19_views-of-the-eu_0-05/).

<sup>7</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.

<sup>8</sup> In addition, 58 percent in the US and 44 percent in Poland. Richard Wike, Laura Silver, and Alexandra Castillo, “Many Across the Globe Are Dissatisfied with How Democracy Is Working,” Pew Research Center, April 29, 2019, accessed February 9, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/04/29/many-across-the-globe-are-dissatisfied-with-how-democracy-is-working/>. In a European Council on Foreign Affairs (ECFA) YouGov survey, 41 percent of Germans, 79 percent of people in France, 68 percent of Italians, 79 percent of the Spanish people, and 55 percent of Poles agree with the statement “our states are failing”; Jarosław Kopeć, “Badani w 14 krajach UE: Unia chyli się ku upadkowi, a pomiędzy jej krajami wybuchnie wojna,” BIQdata, May 16, 2019, accessed February 9, 2023, <http://biqdata.wyborcza.pl/biqdata/7.159116.24788525.badani-w-14-krajach-unia-chyli-sie-ku-upadkowi.html>

<sup>9</sup> Michael Hudson, “The Lost Tradition of Biblical Debt Cancellations” (1993), 8–9; <https://armstrongeconomics-wp.s3.amazonaws.com/2015/10/Debt-Cancellations.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Eric Toussaint, “The Long Tradition of Debt Cancellation in Mesopotamia and Egypt from 3000 to 1000 BC,” CADTM, September 2, 2012, accessed February 9, 2023, <https://www.cadtm.org/The-Long-Tradition-of-Debt>.

<sup>11</sup> Toussaint.

<sup>12</sup> Eric Toussaint claims that the Mesopotamian crisis after 1400 BC was closely related to the collapse of the model effectively preserved by the reset.

<sup>13</sup> Kazimierz Kumaniecki, *Historia kultury starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu* (Warszawa: PWN, 1964), 73–81; Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles, and Ideology*, trans. J. A. Crook (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 29–32; Benedetto Bravo and Ewa Wipszycka, *Historia starożytnych Greków*, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 1988), 237–47; Benedetto Bravo, “Reformy polityczne Solona a struktura wspólnoty obywateli ateńskich w okresie archaicznym,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 87 (1966): 169–205.

<sup>14</sup> Plutarch, *Solon*, chapter 14:1–3; see also: Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 1, section 29.

<sup>15</sup> Plutarch, *Solon*, chapter 14.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution*, chapter 5, section 2; Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 1, section 29; Plutarch, *Solon*, chapter 14.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*, Book 1, chapter 2, section 45.

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution*, chapter 7, section 3; and probably also chapter 9, section 1.

<sup>19</sup> Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> I believe that the myth of Solon’s beginnings of democracy can be associated with the establishment of the law courts of the people. Even if the path from aristocracy to democracy did indeed lead through plutocracy, the political privileges of the rich do not make for a democratic mythology. It is different in the case of the law courts. In his analysis of the Athenian democracy in the fifth century BC, Christian Meier shows that the distribution of influence on the judiciary is the best indicator of the actual proportion of aristocratic and popular elements; Christian Meier, *The Greek Discovery of Politics*, trans. David McLintock (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). The principle of direct correlation between an increase of the people’s control over the courts and the growth of

democracy in the fifth century BC is perfectly illustrated by the gradual reduction of the powers of the Areopagus in favor of the judicial powers of the people, which seems to be an instructive example from a modern perspective.

<sup>21</sup> Exodus 23:10–11; Leviticus 25:2–12.

<sup>22</sup> Exodus 21:1; 23:10–12; Leviticus 25:1–7; Deuteronomy 15:1–18.

<sup>23</sup> Leviticus 25:8–55.

<sup>24</sup> Leviticus 25:13–16.

<sup>25</sup> Leviticus 25:1.

<sup>26</sup> Leviticus 26.

<sup>27</sup> Leviticus 25:38.

<sup>28</sup> Leviticus 25:23 (Douay-Rheims).

<sup>29</sup> Exodus 21:2–6; Leviticus 25:40.

<sup>30</sup> Leviticus 25:42. See also Leviticus 25:55 (Douay-Rheims), “For the children of Israel are my servants, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt.”

<sup>31</sup> Exodus 20:1–2; Leviticus 25:10; 25:55.

<sup>32</sup> Orth, “Two in Five Americans.”