John Pocock's reply to the question: Why Trump?[1]

1. Introduction

At the time I'm writing this (March 2024) Trump is likely to win the Presidential elections in November this year.[2] If so, It will mean the end of the world-order as it came into being in the years after the end of World War II. History will be pushed into new directions. What the new world-order (or dis-order if you prefer) will be like is hard, if not impossibe to say. Nevertheless, one can have one's more or less plausible suspicions. Moving from one world-order to a new one requires each component of the old one to be coordinated in a new way to all of the others in a trial and errror fashion. The implication is that there will be a shorter or longer period of global chaos before the new world-order has crystallized out again and the vacuum created by the US's withdrawal from world polics has been filled again by others. Unless this global chaos results in a World War III.

Two features of this still largely unknown new world-order are not hard to predict. In the first place, democracy in the US will be exchanged for a presidential, auhoritarian autocracy. This prediction is all the more likely to become true since democracy is already for quite some time on its way out in the US.[3] The Economist's Democracy Index had demoted in 2016 already the US from 'a full democracy' to 'a flawed democracy'.[4] Thanks to the the Republican Party's success in dismantling the machineries of democratic government the US rapidly becomes ever more a DINO (a 'democracy in name only', to paraphrase the extremist

[1] Or: *De la Démocratie en Europe*

[2] The polls are now: 49% for Trump versus 45% for Biden. Or, more accurately, Biden is expected to win 224 and Trump 314 of the electoral votes. The elections will be an unprecedented landslide victory for the Republicans..

[3] Since the early nineteenth century there has been a long tradition in the US opposing freedom and democracy: the more democracy there is, the more freedom wil suffer. See Annelien de Dijn, *Freedom. Un Unruly History*, (Cambridge (Ma): Harvard University Press, 2020); 298 – 310; 323 – 330. The idea is that the will of the many will inevitably curtail the freedom of the few. The openly anti-democratic intentions of the present Republican Party (think of their love of gerrymandering and their efforts to prevent certain groups of the electorate from casting their votes) builds on this typically American tradition (though in England someone like Sir Henry Maine and Édouard de Laboulaye in France were sensitive to the idea as well).

[4] The index distinguishes between (1) 'full democracies' (24 countries with 7.8 percent of the world population), (2) 'flawed democracies' (50 countries with 37.6 percent) , (3) 'hybrid regimes' (34 countries with 15.2 percent) and (4) 'authoritarian regimes' (59 countries with 39.4 percent of the world population). Economist Intelligence, *Democracy Index 2023: Age of Conflict*; 4.

Republican's habit of maligning their less extreme opponents within the Republican Party as RINOs). In the Democracy Index of 2024 the US scores now number 29 (just one place above Netanyahu's Israel) on its list of 167 countries (North Korea, Myanmar and Afghanistan scoring lowest). The Index deftly summarizes the predicament of democracy in the US as follows:

> A country crying out for change is the US. If the election comes down to a contest between the president, Joe Biden, and the former presifent, Donald Trump, as looks likely, a country that once was a beacon of democracy is likely to slide deeper into division and disenchantment. A lot more than a 'get out the vote' campaign is required to inspire voters, including the 80m or so Americans who routinely do not vote. Nothing short of a major change in the agenda of politics, and a new crop of political leaders will do. [5]

The US traditionally perceived itself as 'a city on a hill' – the phrase John Winthrop used when in March 1630 the Massachusetts Bay colonists embarked on the Arabella to settle in what now is Boston. Winthrop's intenton was to instill on the colonists the awareness that 'the eyes of all people are upon us', as it it is with 'a city on a hill'. John F. Kennedy quoted Winthrop in 1961 to suggest to his fellow-Americans what their mission was in this world. He was followed by Ronald Reagan (!) on several occasions, Barack Obama in 2006 and most recently by Mitt Romney when he in 2015 clairvoyantly warned the Republicans that America would cease to be 'a shining city on a hill' if Trump were elected president.

Trump has announced already that if elected he will be a dictator for one day. Self-evidently the idea is absurd. There have never been and will never be dictators for just one day. The aspirant dictator for one day will discover he will also have to be a dictator for the next day and for all the days to come in order to insure his decisions to be realized against the oppositon his plans will inevitably provoke.

Furthermore, Trump has never been a supporter of the NATO – to put it mildly – and recently stated that he would encourage Putin to do whatever ' the hell he wants to do' with the allies the US has in Europe. Words matter, as we know since Draghi's declaration in July 2012 that the ECB will do 'everything it takes' to uphold the euro. This is why Trump's utterly irresponsible pronunciations have undermined already the credibility of article 5 of the NATO-treaty as soon as he will be president of the US. In sum, if Trump becomes president in 2025 this will de deathblow to the already tottering American democracy and mark the isolationist withdrawal of the US in itself, leaving its former allies in Europe and in Asia to fend for themselves in their struggle with the authoritarian regimes threatening them.

[5] *Democracy Index*; 16

2. Circumstantial causes

Needless to say, the greater the metamorphosis of the political realities of our time is, the more urgent the question how such a total overthrow of them has been possible. There will be universal agreement, I suppose, that the US is the place to begin with if we wish to address that existential question. As always with this type of questions we should discern between more circumstantial causes and those with a larger and more encompassing scope.

The most prominent of the former raises the not so difficult question why Biden is doomed to lose from Trump. Trump has been described as a pathological liar, as a cheating egotist, as a narcissistic psychopath ready to sacrifice everyone for his own self-interest, as a stupid and ignorant bully every sensible person would avoid like the plague, as a business failure owing his wealth not to talent and insight but to an unprecedented and ruthless career of swindling banks, the IRS, his business-partners and, more generally, just anyone having been so imprudent to enter his self/centered universe, as someone who is given to the public avowal of the most outrageous, preposterous, irresponsible, primitive and thoughtless outpourings, each of which would mean the immediate political death of any traditional politician - and so one can go on for quite some time.

All these characterizations of Trump may well be true (as I think they are). But uttering them in the belief that doing so on the right place and the right context might unmask Trump's sinister plans and save both the US and the rest of the world from the disasters that can be expected from him, is a fatal error. Railing against Trump is a natural and understandable impulse and let everyone indulge in it if he expects a temporary relief from doing so. But it is useless. Neither Trump-lovers nor Trump-haters will change their view of Trump if exposed to a denunciation of Trump's actions and beliefs as long and as well-documented as you might wish to have it. The Democrats will not do so since it only repeats what they knew already and the Republicans will see here only one more transparent attempt to vilify their idol.

What truly matters is that the majority of the American electorate devotely prostrates itself in worship of Donald Trump as if he were a second Christ. Indeed, the Republican Party did not refrain from officially presenting him as such. The hard fact is, however, that he can do no wrong for them. Because wherever he is, he sucks all of the oxygen out of the room, as the Americans like to put. It may be that Trump does not have many talents, but he has just this

one: he is a born demagogue. He has the Churchillian face and body-language to support his presence wherever he is – and he knows it....

Compare this to Biden's performance in public. Even when he addresses his audience with the best, most convincing and eloquent texts that his speechwriters could prepare for him, everyone listens to him while anxiously awaiting the moment that he will get lost in his words or when his voice will descend into an ununderstandable murmuring. Biden may well be one of the best presidents the US has had in the last few decades – a president who may boast of having achieved against the odds more than most of this Democrat predecessors (including Obama). But he cannot inspire the present American electorate. And this is decisive. Add to this that he lost the Black vote – without which a Democratic candidate cannot hope to win the presidency - because of his unconditional support of Israel even when the horrors inflicted by the Israeli's on Gaza's civilian population went far beyond what a substantial part of the Democrat electorate is willing to accept.

Biden's reiterated claim that only a vote for him and the Democratic Party can rescue the US from Trump's assault on democracy by Trump and the Republican Party may well be correct[6], but it is a bit naive to believe that this will be of much help to him. For many Americans will vote for Trump since they gradually came to the not implausible conclusion that the kind of democracy they happen to have in their country is incapable of improving their hopeless fate. The American Dream has not materialized for them; they find themselves in the class of the losers – which entails for Americans the loss of all self-respect – and they feel that there is no hope that they will ever escape from that social black hole again. So if democracy did nothing for them, why should they care about democracy? So their bet is: let's see what a Trumpian autocracy might achieve; worse than it is now it can never be!

Or to put it in a different, and probably more constructive way, focusing on Trump and on all that is indisputably so reprehensible in the man is indisputably part of what should be done to rescue the country from an irreversible disaster. But it is naive to believe that this might contribute to averting a secund Trump Presidency. It is, therefore, more fruitful to see Trump as merely a *symptom* of the disintegration of American democracy. Seeing things this way invites us to ask ourselves how this disintegration of American politics (that paved the way for someone like Trump) was possible.

This approach will get us from the merely circumstantial to the deeper causes of the decay of American democracy - a decay in which Trump could and does thrive. The approach will

[6] Recall Hillary Clinton's prophetic message to her voters in 2015 that only *she* stood 'between them and the catastrophe'.

involve the following two issues. Firstly, European democracies have, admittedly, a difficult time as well after the death of political ideology. But even then a European Trump and a major political party derailing so completely as the present Republican Party in the US are wholly unthinkable in the European context.

In order to explain this striking asymmetry between the present performance of democracy in the US, on the one hand, and in Europe, on the other, I shall focus firstly on the issue of the crucial differences between the American Constitution and its counterparts in Britain and on the European Continent. Self-evidently, this raises, secondly, the question: how to account for these differences. Put differently, what are the weaknesses of the American Constitution that may explain why democracy in the US is now in a crisis that it may not survive, whereas European democracies are for the time being sufficiently robust to meet the big challenges of our time? John Pocock's *opus magnum*, his *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* of 1975 will provide us with an answer to that (urgent) question. Pocock's analysis of the birth of the American Constitution is, basically, that it was a compromise between two political positions that dominated political thought in late eighteenth century America: 'Court' and 'Country'. 'Put briefly, the former remained relatively close to how Britain was ruled at that time, whereas the 'Country' ideologists had in mind an America inspired by the virtues of simple, hardworking farmers. The compromise, as codified in the American Constitution was heavily biased towards the 'Country' ideology. As we shall see below, this is the source of the present crisis in American politics - a crisis that in all likelihood will mean the end of American democracy.

3. Weaknesses of the American Constitution

No believer in democracy will contest the view that in a democracy the government is meant to serve the citizen and that it is not the other way around. So if a substantial part of both the Republicans and the Democrats is desillusioned about the performance of the American State (one of the rare things both agree about) the complaint should be taken seriously. One must be open to the diagnosis the American State has become dysfunctional – and that precisely this is where Trump comes in. Indeed, the spectacle presented by the present Congress strongly suggests that at least this essential part of the American State is broken beyond repair. And so it will remain whatever the outcome of the elections in November 2024 will be like. If Biden wins the elections there will still be a Trump and a Republican Party. The myth of the 'stolen elections', and so on, will then be reinvigorated again and old and new lies will continue to

poison the American body politic and prevent its democracy from functioning satisfactorily. If Trump wins, American democracy will go through the worst crisis since its birth two and a half centuries ago (I deliberately include the Civil War here).

Having arrived at this stage the obvious thing to do is to compare American democracy with its European counterparts. Why is American democracy in such bad straights while European democracies are, admittedly, not in optimal shape either but still doing reasonably well, while some of them (e.g. Greece) even function better than ever before? When looking into this we will find, firstly, that European democracies were always open to adapting themselves to changing circumstances, whereas for Americans the Constitution is a kind of secular Bible stating political 'truths' that are believed to be valid for eternity and, secondly, that both deal differently with the issue of sovereignty. Let me explain.

Who or where is the sovereign in the US? In the US (as in most European democracies) sovereignty is ordinarily identified with 'we, the people' for the simple reason that this is the etymological meaning of the word 'democracy'. The fact that even Putin and Xi Jinping might agree with the idea of the people's sovereignty suggests already that the etymological meaning of the word 'democracy' is a poor guide for understanding what it actually is. Our so-called democracties are, in fact, elective aristocracies, that is, political systems in which the electorate elects those who decide about the nation's legislation. [7]

However, unlike European democracies the American Constitution prefers to take the word 'democracy' as literally as possible. And this is not a good idea. For the thesis of popular sovereignty can never be more than a slogan without any practical significance – unless one has 'le courage de ses opinions' and opts for direct democracy. [8] For if the people is divided against itself, as typically will be the case, who is then the sovereign? The majority? That answer would have deeply displeased the Federalist authors of the Constitution, since one of their main aims was to prevent an unrestrained rule of the majority.

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[7] See F.R. Ankersmit, 'What if our representative democracies are elective aristocracies?', *Redescriptions 15* (2011); 21 – 45.

[8] Recall the chutzpah of the famous three words with which the American Constitution begins: 'We the people'. But who wrote and signed the Constitution? Not the people. But the people's representatives. And there is a momentous difference – as Rousseau already insisted - between 'the people' and 'the people's representatives'; a difference as big as that between a direct democracy and an elective aristocracy. The idea that the people is sovereign in a representative democracy is a myth. And even if all of 'the people' believe in it, it still remains a myth.

Furthermore, just think of this. Many revolutions were an attack by the people on its representatives and meant to be just this; but the very idea of a revolution of the people against itself is nonsense. In sum, the very term 'representative democracy' is an oxymoron and ought to be replaced by the unexceptionable phrase 'representative government'. We ought, therefore, respect the political wisdom of the writers of the text of the 'Declaration of Independence' of 1776: it does not begin but ends with a 'we' – and this 'we' is correctly stated to be 'We, the Representatives of the united States of America'. See also note 6.

The President, perhaps? No option, either, for this would make the President into a new George III, albeit for four years only. The President's power is therefore balanced (or clipped) by Congress and the Supreme Court, all the more so if the latter gets a taste for ruling from the bench - as presently is the case. Congress, then? But Congress can never wholly overrule the President. So, again, who or where is the sovereign in the US? Perhaps *everywhere* in the political system? But as we all know what is everywhere is *nowhere*.

In sum, if the President (who is elected for four years) and Congress are at loggerheads with each other there is no sovereign to decide in the conflict. An appeal to 'the people' during a presidency is excluded by the Constitution. The only option left is to go to Court with it if the nature of the conflict leaves room for doing so. But this route has never been tried and big political conflicts should not be decided by law, anyway. Congress might decide for an impeachment procedure. But what if the President's position in the conflict can impossibly be framed within such a procedure? The nation's government is then stuck in an impasse that may last until the President has served his term. Government may, therefore, be paralyzed for four years if the worst comes to the worst. No sensible constitution should leave room for such a dire situation.

The Constitution's silence about where sovereignty is to be situated *in practice* (apart from the constitutionally useless slogan of the people's sovereignty) will get its revenge as soon as one part of the government – the President, the Senate or the House of Representatives - refuses to do business with the other two. As we know now this may happen – and then the machinery of government comes to a grinding halt: Congress does not have the sovereign power to send the President home, nor has the President the power to do this with Congress.

The defining feature of European systems of representative government is that it situates sovereignty on a place chosen in such a way that no conflict that is fed into the machinery of government can remain undecidable. And they do so by locating sovereignty in the rules determining the nature of the dialogue between the legislative and the executive power - including the possibility of an appeal to the people in case this dialogue does not result in an outcome acceptable to the legislative power. Sovereignty in European democracies is not located in the people, not in the monarch or a president, nor in any other part of government, but in the rules fixing their interaction in a way defining how to proceed in *each* conceivable situation. Sovereignty is procedural. Rules for how the State shall function as fixed in the nation's constitution are the boss – they decide how to decide who is wrong and who is right in each conceivable kind of political conflict.

In other words, the main difference between the American and the European democratic State is that the latter can deal with such situations, since they have a conception of where, in the actual political practice, sovereignty is to be found. Namely, in this permanent debate between the government and the people's representatives as assembled in Parliament. This constitutional fact even covers the extreme situation if Parliament is no longer on speaking terms with the government - as presently is the case in the US. The incumbent government is then simply sent home by Parliament and after elections have taken place the latter (and not the people) will then install a new government. All of this is part and parcel of the procedures of normal functioning of parliamentary government in Europe.

American democracy lacks this option since the American constitution leaves no room for a debate between government and parliament. In the US both can only establish that they are in conflict with each other and write each other non-binding letters suggesting how to overcome their disagreement. But if for whatever reason the other party is not interested, that's the end of it. Nor can anyone compel a non-constructive partner to disclose for the enlightenment of the people the real reason for its unwillingness to cooperate with the other.

Put differently, on the constitutional locus where European democracies constantly make sovereign decisions reflecting compromises between government and parliament, American democracy has a complete vacuum. The former have a platform where they fight out their differences in public. Is the gap between goverment and parliament truly unbridgeable (a rare thing to happen), the conflict is submitted to the electorate; elections will be called and a new government will replace the former. Political decision-making in the US is paralyzed in case of such an unbridgeable conflict. One will have to await the next elections – that may be still years away – before the machinery of government can start working again. This is a fatal shortcoming for a modern State and its citizens.

Needless to say, accounting for the asymmetries between the American and the European variants of the democratic State puts more on the agenda that can be dealt with within the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, in order to avoid being accused of reckless and unfounded speculation I must say a few words about it.

The European democratic State is an uneasy mix of royal absolutism and medieval representation. Many kings and princes lost their crown after 1789 but absolutism was not abolished in the revolutionary storm. Royal absolutism was robbed of what made it detestable by granting sovereignty to the medieval three estates or 'États Généraux' representing the nobility, the clergy and the Third Estate. Though with three qualifications: 1) nobility and clergy were included in the Third Estate, 2) sovereignty was removed from the people to the

interaction between government and parliament and 3) with this step the people represented forfeited the right it had had in the Middle Ages, before the advent of absolutism, to reject any agreement made by their representatives with the prince if it considered the agreement at odds with its interests. In England (2) and 3) were effected by the transformation of the medieval notion of 'the King in Parliament' into the thesis of *parliamentary sovereignty* as argued in the 18th century by Burke[9] and William Blackstone in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* of 1765 to 1769.

In what probably still is the best book on constitutional monarchy and, more generally on parliamentary government – Walter Bagehot's *The English Constitution* of 1867 – Bagehot's addresses the issue of the 'cabinet', hence, that part of government consisting of the King's ministers and functioning as the *trait d'union* between the King and Parliament. Bagehot defines the 'cabinet' as follows: 'by that new word we mean a committee of the legislative body selected to be the executive body. The legislative has many committees, but this is the greatest'.[10] Hence, the cabinet's members are both the *King*'s ministers *and* members of Parliament and next, being the latter they have the obligation to justify their actions in Parliament in a *permanent* dialogue with all of the other members of Parliament. In this way the King is permanently present in Parliament whereas, on the other hand, the will of Parliament will always prevail over his. Absolutist royal sovereignty was now transformed into parliamentary sovereignty. This, then, is how England moved from medieval government, via the Tudor's and Stuart's attempts to royal absolutism towards the sovereignty of Parliament and modern representative government .

On the European Continent the same transition was made for the first time in the constitution of September 3 1791 that transformed France from an absolutist monarchy into a constitutional monarchy. Chapter III section 4 of the Constitution defined the interaction between the King and his ministers and Parliament. Though the King still remained a major player in the domain of politics (thanks to his infamous 'suspensive veto') he was put under guardianship of the 'Assemblée Législative', so to speak. Self-evidently, the construction comes close to that of 'the King in Parliament'.

But of more interest (not only for France but for all of Continental Europe) are the so-called Doctrinaire Liberals of the beginning of the 19th century. One should think in this context of a group of parliamentarians, statesmen, political thinkers and high civil servants

[9] E. Burke, Speech at the conclusion of the polls in id., *The works of Edmund Burke. 12 Vols. Vol. 2* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1866), 95, 96.
[10] W. Bagehot, *The English Constitution. Introduction by Richard Crossman* (London: Fontana Press 1993), 68.

such as Pierre Paul Royer-Collard (1763 – 1845), François Guizot (1787 – 1874), Charles de Rémusat (1797 – 1875), the duke Victor de Broglie (1785 – 1870) and the highly original historian Prosper de Barante (1782 – 1866). The name Doctrinaire Liberals is a complete misnomer, for these people were anything but doctrinaire and always in search for the 'juste milieu' between more extreme positions – wherever that might be. To understand this search it must be recalled that Restoration France was divided to the core between those who wanted to return to the Ancien Regime, those who believed that the work of the French Revolution had been halted prematurely, those who believed that France should be a republic and the monarchists where the latter were divided, again, between Legitimists, Bonapartists and after 1830 the Orleanists. The doctrinaire liberals saw it as their main task to safely pilot France between the rocks of these irreconcilable positions without provoking any of them to begin a new revolution. No mean enterprise, considering how France moved in the nineteenth century from revolution to revolution.

How did they hope to succeed in squaring this political circle? In the first place they saw the 'Assemblée Législative', or Parliament as a kind of theatre, or stage on which the representatives of hostile groups in society could fight out their conflicts with words – while being watched by the people - instead of having to resort to actual weapons, rebellions or to any other form of public violence. Social/political conflict was thus sublimated in parliamentary debate, so to speak. Not only did this take away most of the pressure existing in actual political reality, but it also paved the way for compromises that no one had believed to be possible. In this way the Doctrinaires found the 'juste milieu' between the Ancien Regime and the Revolution. And after 1870 the same Doctrinaire construction succeeded in preventing a class war between the socialist working class and capitalism – as elsewhere in Europe. A very impressive achievement, indeed!

Their genius was to hold on to sovereignty while cutting it loose from any person, group or social/political class: they put all their cards on 'the sovereignty of Reason' ('souveraineté de la Raison').[11] Royer-Collard defined the notion as follows:

[11] The idea had been proposed already by Benjamin Constant in his *Commentaire sur l'ouvrage de Filangieri* of 1822. Main line in Constant's argument here is that sovereignty is always limited and that Reason defines these limitations. Only in this way the excesses Jacobinism could be avoided. Undoubtedly, a praiseworthy proposal. But perhaps the Jacobins – and other advocates of the inevitability of the absoluteness of sovereignty would reply that in that case Reason – thanks to its competence to decide about the limits of sovereignty must then *sui generis* be the absolute sovereign. So absolute sovereignty having been ushered out of the backdoor then re-enters again from the front-door.

> 'j'appelle de la souveraineté à une autre souveraineté, la seule qui mérite ce nom, souveraineté supérieure aux peuple comme aux rois, souveraineté immuable et immortelle, comme son auteur, je veux dire la souveraineté de la raison, seule législateur véritable de l'humanité'[12].

Hence, on the one hand, the doctrinaires accepted sovereignty, but on the other, they rejected both popular and royal absolute sovereignty. Guizot even inferred 'the sovereignty of law' (i.e. the rule of law) from Royer-Collard's *trouvaille*:

> 'La souveraineté de droit n'appartient à personne, parce que la connaissance pleine et continue, l'application fixe et imperturbable de la justice et de la raison n'appartiennent pas à notre nature imparfaite. (…) Ce que je dis, c'est que le gouvernement représentatif n'attribue la souveraineté de droit à personne, que tous les pouvoirs s'agitent dans son sein pour le découverte et la pratique fidèle de la règle qui doit présider à leur action et que la souveraineté de droit ne leur est reconnue qu'à la condition qu'ils la justifieront incessamment'[13].

On the face of it, this may seem, at best, a mystification and, at worst, a kind of constitutional dummy teat. However, in fact it was a brilliant invention. In the first place, putting sovereignty out of reach of any individual, class of individuals, institution, and so on, had the inevitable effect of 'disseminating' it all over the body politic. Guizot again:

> 'La puissance a quitté les individus, les familles; elle est sortie des foyers qu'elle habitait jadis; elle s'est répandue dans la société toute entière; elle y circule rapidement, à peine visible en chaque lieu, mais partout présente. Elle s'attache à des intérêts, à des idées, à des sentiments publics dont personne ne dispose, que personne même représente assez pleinement pour que leur sort dépend un moment du sien'. The result was: 'une société électrique où tout se sait, se propage, où des millions des hommes de condition pareille, de sentiments analogues, connaissent réciproquement leur sort'[14].

But more important is a second consequence. Reason can only do what it is for if there are people who can say what Reason tells them to say and others who can and are ready to listen to the voice of Reason. Since no one can claim Reason for him or herself sovereign Reason can only make itself heard in a permanent dialogue of all who are involved in political decision-making. It follows that no institution of government can afford to remain deaf to the

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[12] Quoted in H.G. Hoogers, *De Verbeelding van het souvereine. Een onderzoek naar de theoretische grondslagen van politieke representatie*, Deventer 1999; 154

[13] F. Guizot, *Histoire des origines du gouvernement représentatif. T. II*, Brussel 1851; 72-73, 83 - 84,

[14] Quoted in P. Rosanvallon, *Le Moment Guizot*, Paris 1985; 38, 40. Much the same was observed by Mark Bovens some time ago about our contemporary democracies: 'important social changes are not the result of political choices, but of the activities on international concerns, of research centres, laboratories or hospitals. One may think here of the far-reaching consequences of bio-technology, information technology or of genetic research. More than ever before our countries have become 'a republic of corporate bodies' instead of a 'republic of citizens'. Complex private or (semi-)public organizations and not the politician, let alone the citizen, decide, intentionally or unintentionally, about the structuring of important parts of society [my translation (F.A])'. M.A.P. Bovens a.o., *De verplaatsing van de politiek. Een agenda voor democratische vernieuwing*, Amsterdam 1995, 16; see also, M.A.P. Bovens, De centrumloze democratie en het primaat van de politiek, *Openbaar Bestuur 1* (1996); 2 – 7.

others and that no constitution may isolate institutions from each other. This, then, was the legacy of the Doctrinaire Liberals to the democracies on the European Continent.

Clearly, the political experience and wisdom European statesmen had acquired by the numerous political upheavals and revolutions of the nineteenth century was inaccessible to the writers of the American Constitution of 1789. They were brilliant men, no doubt about that!, but their Constitution was the product of the drawing board rather than based on a wide 'expérience vécue' of all that can go right or wrong in a complex democracy such as ours.

This, indeed, may make us aware of what is, arguably, the fatal weakness of the American Constitution. As Bagehot observes:

> When the Secretary of the Treasure of the Federal Government wants a tax he consults it with the chairman of the Financial Committee of Congress. He cannot go down to Congress itself and propose what he wants: he can only write a letter and send it. (..) But such a chain of communications is liable to continual interruptions; it may suffice for a single tax on a fortunate occasion, but will scarcely pass a complicated budget (..). [15]

The absurdity is that the President never ever enters Congress – apart then from delivering, n.b. at the invitation of Congress, once a year his State of the Union. Nor can the President's ministers discuss with Congress their plans in an open and public dialogue, in a process of give and take in which finally a compromise is reached acceptable to all.[16] The way in which the British government in England and the democracies on the European operate on a daily basis is wholly absent in the US. It makes American democracy into an antediluvian, or pre-modern political animal if compared to European democracies. The explanation is, again, that Europe went through countless revolutions since the French Revolutions, that its countries permanently felt the urgency of adapting themselves to changing socio-political realities,

[15] Bagehot, *English Constitution*; 72.

[16] The Doctrinaire's political theory, summarized with the statement that political debate is the *sine qua non* of permanent (parliamentary) debate, was also, and most cogently defended by The English parliamentarian William Gerard Hamilton (1729 – 1796) – better known by his misleading name 'Single Speech Hamilton – misleading, since actively participated in parliamentary debate – in his posthumous *Parliamentary Logick* of 1808. His main argument was that you do not discover or define a political problem in the way a physicist may discover the Higgs-particle or DNA. These things existed already before physicists discovered them. But this is different with political problems: political problems only come into being and acquire their contours only become visible thanks to political debate *ad utremque partem* between the executive and the legislative, between the King's ministers and the House of Commons. The political problem is not something *given*, but an artefact that has to be *made* with the greatest care and witht utmost attention to even the mimutest detail, as if it were a work of art. A nation without parliamentary debate is necessarily ignorant of its political problems. The US has no platform for this quasi-aesthetic 'creation' of the political problem and lacks, therefore, an indispensable instrument for political problem solving. Worse still, the members of the present Republican Party in the US have, in fact, murdered democracy already in their country by their rejection of bipartisan debate (Trump will take care of the rest). Political representation is needed not only for revealing the will of the people (*this* we knew already), but *also* for defining the nation's political problems in the course of the ensuing parliamentary debate (this insight is unknown in the US because of the limitations of the country's Constitution).

knowing that failing to do so might provoke future revolutions, whereas the US stubbornly stuck to the Constitution it gave itself in 1789 while believing that there the ultimate answer was to be found for each conceivable problem it might encounter for as long as the country would exist. Sheer political pride – to put it mildly.

Having stated as much we do well to recall the *Democracy Index*'s author's remark about the present US: 'Nothing short of a major change in the agenda of politics, and a new crop of political leaders will do.' Indeed, the intrinsic weaknesses of the American Constitution have now revealed themselves. We will all agree, I suppose, that no organization - whether public or private - can acquiesce in what have proven to be its manifest shortcomings. It follows that *if* the Trump-episode would turn out to be an episode only, it is the highest duty of American politicians to their country and its citizens to proceed to the admittedly difficult and challenging, but most timely and deeply patriotic task to thoroughly review the American Constitution. Democracy has not fared well in the US in the last three to four decades. The Constitution has proved to be a less secure protection of the American citizen's democratic freedom and of his rights than the writers of the Constitution had hoped and expected.

The wise man is always prepared to take notice of the experience of others. And it is no different in the domain of government. If Scandinavian democracies and those of new Zealand, Switzerland and the Netherlands always score highest on the democracy index only a misplaced overestimation may harden the American politician in the conviction that there could not possibly be a message in this indisputable fact for him or her.

4. Governance/govermentality and populism

Many bad things have been said about absolute monarchy. But it is not a lie. It is what it is: *quod placuit regi vigorem legis habet*. And the king's subjects have no choice but to obey. Many good things have been said about democracy. But it is a lie. Not the people, but its representatives rule. The lie is nowhere more prominently present in a democracy than in the heart and mind of the people's representatives. It can even be said to find its expression in the permanent conflict between the heart and the mind of the people's representative. In his encounters with his electorate the speaker's heart will be speaking. He will tell them that he will fight to the bitter end to realize for his voter's interests, that he has made them into his own and that the voter could not have a better advocate than he. He then goes to Parliament and will then appeal to his mind in order to achieve what he regards as the best possible

compromise for his constituents. The compromise can only be the outcome of a careful weighing of the interests of his own constituency against those of others – what the representative's constituents will often regard as a betrayal of their cause. The constituent's ardent advocate has now transformed himself into a cold and non-empathetic judge – which is how the representative will be appraised by his constituents if he tells them that they can forget about a substantial part of their wishes and will have to comply with rules or laws which they detest.

Self-evidently, both the people's representative and his constituents will find this a depressing aspect of democracy. So the question arose how to overcome this unsatisfactory situation. The solution was found in political ideology. Ideology defined some indefinite point on the horizon where both the voter and his representative hoped to arrive together in course of time. The deal was that the voter would always vote for this representative (or his party) while his representative promised to do all he could to get to the point on the horizon as soon as possible. This might not always work as hoped, but this did not prevent the voter and his representative from feeling that they cooperated on a joint effort. So the deal between both the voter and his representative made sense and both had good reason to be satisfied with it. And, yes, this functioned excellently for more than a century in European democracies.

But, alas, all political ideologies died around 2000, they were all replaced by neo-liberalism. When the Baroness Thatcher formulated her TINA principle her claim was that 'there is no alternative' to neo-liberalism. And so it still is, though a few other items have since then been added to neoliberalism. Everyone (apart from those earning their money the oil and agricultural industries) knows that there also is no alternative to slowing down climate change (and since 2022) to rearmament in order to keep the Russians out.

So we're now back to square one again. Since no one conceived up till now of a feasible plan for how to shore up again our tottering democracies, we must think of a model of politics guaranteeing that we can safeguard the fruits of democracy that we have learned to appreciate. This, then, gets us to governmentality and governance; both of them, by the way, antedating democracy's loss of appeal.

It is always - correctly - emphasized that governmentality and governance are different things. But as the two words suggest, there is common ground – and where this is absent the difference does not exclude the assessment appraisal that they complement each other. The common ground of both is captured well the following sentences taken from Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man* of 1734:

> For forms of government let fools contest,
> What'ever is best administer'd is best.
> For modes of faith, let graceless zealots fight,
> His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

Clearly, the idea is that if a reliable and trustworthy administration is guaranteed it makes no difference whether you live in a democracy or under any other kind of regime. The question whether a trustworthy administration is possible only in democracy is skilfully avoided together with the question whether this trustworthy administration could exist without any type of government altogether. It is unlikely, though, that the theorists of governmentality and governance would be prepared to go as far as that. If only because both hope to approach the frictionless interaction between the citizen and the government once effected by political ideology as closely as possible. Nevertheless, in both cases their attitude towards democracy remains strangely ambiguous. On the one hand, Mark Bevir, one of the most influential theorists of governance argues for an:

> 'empowered deliberative democracy builds on three key principles. The first is a focus on specific, tangible problems. (…) The second principle behind empowered deliberative democracy is the involvement of individual citizens alongside public officials. (…) Finally, the third principle behind empowered deliberative democracy is a reliance on deliberative procedures. Ordinary citizens are to agree solutions to tangible problems in dialogue with one another'[17].

But he writes elsewhere:

> 'we might have to reject the cozy image of a representative democracy in which a sovereign parliament debates and promotes the general good and passes legislation that dictates policy outcomes – politics is more chaotic than that. But we need not return to liberal constitutionalism and the courts to tame the chaos, protect rights, and secure tepid accountability through public acceptance of outcomes. Instead of forsaking democracy for a formal rights-based legalism in a hollowed-out state, we might return to new forms of opportunities of participation in a new decentered system of governance'.[18]

I would not hesitate to see this is as one of the most revealing passages in Bevir's many writings. He openly tells us here 1) that we should reject representative democracy, 2) liberal constitutionalism as well and 3) that accountability is a merely 'tepid' instrument from which little is to be expected. In return from this we Bevir's get empowered deliberative democracy in which individual citizens will deliberate with Shell, Amazon, Google, Microsoft or big companies that were privatized by the state or with organizations in the so-called public-private scetor (PPS). It will be obvious that if we give up, with Bevir, the protection of the

[17] Bevir, *Democratic Governance*; 117. See also, *Theory of Governance*; chapter 10.
[18] Bevir, *Democratic Governance*; 171.

citizen provided by representative government, the citizen's fate will be as hopelesss in his struggle with these huge organizations as if he had been thrown in basin with hungry crocodiles.

The picture painted by govermentality is even less pleasant. Now even the citizen's soul is at stake. Governmentality was put on the agenda by Michel Foucault in a number of lectures he read in 1977 and 1978. According to Foucault ruling a state should not primarily be associated with the state and its officials, for

> 'to govern a state will therefore mean to apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and the behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and goods'[19].

The secret of govermentality is to make people do out of their own free will what the state wants them to do. The idea is that by means of a number of quite specific 'techniques', developed by the state, the citizen should be formed or educated in such a way that it simply does not occur to him to do things the government disapproves of. So, paradoxically, government would even no longer be needed! Indeed, this goes a lot further than government in the classical sense; governmentality conditions the citizen such a way that all his beliefs and actions will serve the state´s interests. It must remind us of the propaganda or brainwashing the totalitatarian state appeals to in order to kill all opposition to itself.

But what Foucault has in mind is a bit more subtle. When he discusses governmentality he does not think of brute oppression but rather of a state of affairs in which any potential conflict between state and citizen will no longer be perceived by the citizen. For Foucault himself this is a dystopia, but the citizen whose beliefs and actions are guided by govermentality might well experience their socio/political world as a utopia that has been realized. Recall now that after the death of political ideology the big problem was how to get the state, the citizen and his representatives on one line again. Clearly, governmentalitiy shows how this aim could be achieved.

Foucault is strangely silent about how governmentality may succeed in doing all this. However, in this context it is enough to recall that psychology has always been the social science closest to his heart. In all likelihood he had here in mind the following passage from Freud´s *Civilization and its Discontents*:

[19] Michel Foucault, Governmentality, G. Burchell, C. Gordon, P. Miller eds., *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality. With two Lectures and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, Hampstead 1991; 92.

> Another question concerns us more nearly. What means does civilization employ in order to inhibit the aggressiveness which opposes it, to make it harmless or to get rid of it, perhaps? (...) His [i.e. the individual's (F.A.)] aggressivenes is introjected, internalized; it is, in point of fact, sent back to where it came from that is, it is directed against his own ego. There it is taken over against the rest of the ego, as super-ego, and which now, in the form of 'conscience', is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy on other, extraneous individuals. (...) Civilization, therefore, obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it, and setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city.[20]

Freud's structural conception of the self divides it up into three components: 1) the id (the source of our aggressive instincts), 2) the ego (the self as we are aware of it) and 3) the superego (the garrison that civilization has quartered in ourselves in order to prevent it from socially and politically undesirable behavior. It is of importance in this context to recognize that the ego is unaware of both the id and the superego: so all that the ego thinks and does, he will see as having their source in his own rational self. Foucault introduces this into his govermentality: the 'mentality' of 'govermentality' is the kind of behavior the government succeeds in exacting from the citizen thanks to the garrison it implanted in the citizen's and whose existence is unknown to both the government and the citizen himself.

These comments on governance/govermentality were not primarily meant to inform the reader about them but rather to expose what picture of the citizen and his relationship to the state is implicitly or unintentionally expressed in these two theories. That picture is deeply depressing, to say the least. It presents the citizen as the helpless prey for the big tech companies, for banks, the oil industry, while the state not only offers him little or no propection against these giants, but even corrupts him by installing in his mind these quasi-Freudian 'garrisons' telling him how to behave. Even when he, the citizen, thinks he is at his best – i.e. bravely does what this garrison wants him to do – he is, unwittingly, the slave of others. Considering this may help us to understand populism a little better and why Trump is an antagonist who is not so easy to beat. Less easily, at least, than many Democrats believe.

Whole libraries have, by now, been written about populism. So below I focus exclusively on populism in the US and, more specifically, on where it matters to the comings and goings of the Republican Party and of Trump specifically in order to mobilize for their own cause the kind of voter as identified by governance and governmentality theorists. In brief, the kind of voters described by Hilary Clinton in 2015 – with more sociological than political wisdom – as 'the deplorables'.

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[20] S. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents. Newly translated and edited by James Strachey* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961); 70, 71.

These ‘deplorables’ have now found out for themselves that existing political reality is wholly at odds with Lincoln’s so eloquent promise in his Gettysburg Address that democracy is ‘a government of the people, for the people and by the people’.[21] So they can only conclude that something must somewhere have gone awfully wrong and that democracy has to be taken away again from those who have misappropriated it. This is, in the end, what populism is all about. As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser put it:

> ‘populism is defined here as a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale of the people’[22].
> .

Populism, thus defined, inspires a double simplism. Firstly, who can blame the populist voter, after having listened to Lincoln, to see in the checks and balances built into our political systems the ‘corrupt elite’s’ favourite instrument to block the realization of the people’s will? As Pelinka put it:

> ‘populism is a general protest against the checks and balances introduced to prevent “the people’s” direct rule. The beginning of modern populism was a radical understanding of democracy a government by the people, beyond the distinction between majority and minority, beyond limitations “the people” are told to respect’[23]?

Secondly, and perhaps even more importantly, if this corrupt elite stands in the way between what the pure people sees as its legitimate desires and interests and their realization, what else could this possibly mean but that the corrupt elite has its own interests that are irreconcilable with those of the people? And is this not what we mean by *being* corrupt, or by *having been corrupted*?

As most theorists of populism will agree, there are according to the populist voter three closely related sources of the corruption of the people’s interests: 1) globalism, 2) neoliberalism and 3) democracy. Globalism has robbed the citizen from the protection that used to be offered to him by the nation-state. He is now in the helpless plaything in the hands of huge transnational forces. Above all those of neoliberalism having worldwide the consequences that the poor become ever poorer and the rich ever richer. And, lastly, with the

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[21] Quoted in G. Pascino, Populism and Democracy, in D. Albertazzi and D. McDonnell, *Twentieth-First Century Populism,* London 2008; 15.
[22] C. Mudde en C. Rovira Kaltwasser, Populism and (liberal) democracy, in id. eds., *Populism in Europe and the Americas. Threat or Corrective for Democracy?*, Ca mbridge 2012; 20
[23] Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*; 8. Striking is the Rousseauist undertone is this definition of populism suggesting already that populism and democracy are branches of one and the same tree.

death of political ideology political parties don't even have plans for how to protect the people from a corrupt elite that has been bought with the huge profits of globalism and neoliberalism. Globalism, neoliberalism and democracy are for the populist voter much like the three 'Gewaltigen' (i.e. monsters) – named 'Raufebold' ('robbing boldly'), 'Habebald' ('having soon') and 'Haltefest' ('holding on to it') - mentioned by Goethe at the end of *Faust II*. They corrupted the elite and made it forget about the freedom of the citizen and the nation and about the latter's true interests.

5. American populism

Let us now turn to what is specific of American populism. Doing so requires us to consider the ideology of 1) the Tea Party, 2) the Freedom Caucus and 3) Steve Bannon. The Freedom Caucus, also know as the MAGA Squad, must be mentioned because of the disproportionally large influence it presently has on the Republican Party and on American politics. The Republican Party now has 222 seats in the House of Representatives while only 46 are in the hands of the Freedom Caucus. In spite of its relatively small size its will is decisive in the Party. Nobody can oppose them unpunished, as Kevin McCarthy found out. With regard to their ideology the main thing is that they will do whatever Trump tells them to do. And for the rest it will suffice to quote John Boehner (who was ousted by the Freedom Causus as Speaker of the House on September 25, 2015); 'they can't tell you what they're for. They can tell everything they're against. They're anarchists. They want total chaos. Tear it all down and start over. That's what their mindset is'.[24] Note, finally, that the Causus called itself the Freedom Caucus and not the Democracy Caucus. The explanation is that there has always been in the American extreme right a tradition that was ready to sacrifice democracy for the freedom to do as one wishes, unless explicitly prohibited by a far-away minimal state for whom interference in the citizen's affairs is an option of the last resort.[25]

The Tea Party, born in 2009, is of more interest. Its main aim was the intrinsically respectable call for lower for a reduction of the national debt and federal budget deficit through decreased government spending and opposition to Obamacare for fiscal reasons and because of the conviction that each American is responsible for his or her own fate in this world and, last but no least, by pure self-interest. More generally, it advocates a turn away from social issues in favour for exclusively economic ones. Because of its choice for small

[24] See: https://en.wikipedia.org.wiki/Freedom_Caucus; 2.
[25] See note 3.

government principles the Tea Party adherents opposed Obama's TARP Program that was meant to restore financial stability after the Banking Crisis of 2008/2009. The Party supported conservative family values, right to work legislation, tighter border security and opposed amnesty for illegal immigrants.[26] Though this was never explicitly part of the Party's program it has been accused of an underlying racism. The Party urged an originalist return to the political thought of the Founding Fathers and a belief in American exceptionalism with an isolationist undertone. It was never more than a movement with a shifting membership never exceeding 1,000 and gradually decreasing to a mere 600 members; it ceased to exists in 2016. In spite of its infinitesimally small membership most Republican and even 20% of the Democrats sympathised with the Tea Party. What rested of the Tea Party was taken up in the Freedom Caucus – though with the qualification that the program of the former had never taken the form of the internecine quarrels and a reckless nihilism that would become so typical of the latter.

The Party's name deserves special attention. Obviously, the name refers to the December 1773 Boston Tea Party expressing the American colonials anger about what was perceived of as the mismanagement of their interests by the British government in London. What was, perhaps, good for England, was definitely not good for the colonies. The latter had their own political logic and the Tea Party showed that one had become aware of this. In sum, the Tea Party wanted to make clear to 'Washington' that they looked at it with the same dislike as the American colonists looked at 'London' in 1773.

Finally, then, Steve Bannon who has often been regarded as providing Trump with a powerful political ideology that the totally illiterate real estate magnate Trump could impossibly have devised himself. Bannon was prominently present at the beginning of the Trump presidency, but since then he has receded into the background. Nevertheless, he recently announced that he was still in touch with Trump almost every day. Well, perhaps, or perhaps not. Bannon went to Harvard Business School for his MBA; he was not trained as a (political) philosopher but was an autodidact in that field. Like most autodidacts he lives, therefore, in a highly idiosyncratic philosophical universe created by himself. The big names of a Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel or even a Nietzsche are conspicuously absent in the political cocktail Bannon prepared for himself – and the same is true of the icons of American democracy such as Washington, Jefferson or Lincoln. Liberty, equality, truth and reason have no meaning for Bannon. He took the main ingredients for his political cocktail,

[26] See: https://en.wikipedia.org.wiki/Tea_Party_Movement; 1,2.

instead, from a number of unsavoury racialist, fascist, and religiously radicalist, if not outright theocratic thinkers such as Jean Raspail, Charles Maurras, Julius Evola and René Guénon. Their ideas are marshalled for a quasi eschatological battle against what Bannon calls 'the Beast' or 'the face of Evil'. In fact, he should have spoken of 'the faces of Evil' in the plural since he calls up for merciless attack on almost each aspect on the modern Western world – most prominently the Godlessness of the West, its secularism, globalism, the admission of non-white immigrants, the 'establishment', the 'deep' or 'administrative state' and, last but not least, the EU[27].

> In speech after speech, interview after interview, movie after movie, Bannon connects his prophecy of the coming 'radical upheaval', with aggressive, often violent, apocalyptic confrontation. 'I want to bring everything crashing down, destroying all of today's establishment', he declares, menacing not only the left but moderate forces on the right as well. Bannon characterizes himself as a Leninist, and he has winked at the Weathermen, the militant Maoists who tried to foment the violent overthrow of capitalism in the twilight of they sixties.[28]

Anger, fury, frustration, resentment and a bitter hatred of what he regards as 'the elite' resonate in all his speeches and interviews. This may help explain the paradox that a billionaire like Trump could fall in love with Bannon (whose capital is estimated to be somewhere between fifteen and fifty million dollars). Trump has always been painfully aware of the fact that the moneyed New York aristocracy always regarded him with contempt as a vulgar 'nouveau riche'. So both shared a deep resentment of 'the elite'.

It is all very ugly, indeed. Taking note of Bannon's ideas will have on the mainstream intellectual the nauseating effect of getting near to a cesspool from which the cover has been removed. But precisely this may help to understand why Trump and his voters in the Midwest who will guarantee his victory in November 2024 are so much kindred spirits. In their recent book *White Rural Rage. The Threat to American Democracy* Paul Waldman and Tom Schaller have culled a not so sweet-smelling bouquet of the American citizen in 'fly over country': racist, xenophobic, anti-democratic, election denialism, Covid denialism, opposed to free speech and an independent press, pro violence, Christian-nationalist, anti gay, without respect for Congress and the courts and, above all, burning with rage, anger and resentment. [29] This, then, is the gospel preached by Trump to his devoted worshippers in the backward areas of rural America – areas that are, alas, strongly overrepresented in Congress. A fact that has

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[28] Jeffrey C. Alexander, Raging against the Enlightenment: the Ideology of Steven Bannon *asaculturesection*; 24 – 28. Bannon felt tempted to put his ideas on paper so they have to be distilled from the lectures, interviews with him and from the movies he made.

[29] Paul Waldman and Tom Schaller, *White Rural Rage. The Threat to American Democracy* 2024

been common knowledge for ages, but that Democrats never bothered to put on the agenda - in all likelihood out of fear to provoke the ire of their Republican opponents.[30].

But to return to Bannon: there are *two* Bannons. On 17 November 2017 Bannon gave a seventy-five minutes speech to the Oxford Union in Oxford. It was a brilliant and masterful speech, very well documented and presented with an unparalleled eloquence. One can make no greater error than to mistake Bannon for a fool. But even more bewildering than all of this is the following : there was absolutely nothing in the speech that could not have been said by Bernie Sanders. In this speech America's extreme right and its extreme left coincided. So how, on earth, has this been possible in the contemporary US? How is it possible that Sanders and Bannon (at his better moments) wholly agree about what is wrong with the contemporary US and about what brought the country on the edge of the abyss it faces in 2024, whereas the remedies they recommend could impossibly be more opposed? That's the big question which we shall, finally, address.

6. John Pocock's reply to the question: why Trump?

Pocock's work offers a profound and thought-provocative answer to that question. I have in mind here his famous opposition between the so-called 'Court' and 'Country' tradition. He derived this opposition from Florentine political thought he associated mainly with Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Hence the title of his *opus magnum The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* of 1975. Machiavelli had drawn in his *Discourses on Livy* and *The Art of War* his political inspiration from Roman history and from what Romans had believed to be conditional for keeping a state – a republic in their terminology - 'healthy' and, alternatively, what were the causes of its decay. A 'healthy' republic was possible only if its citizen possessed the virtue to identify with the public interest. Decay set in as soon as private interests begin to prevail over the public interest. Clearly, the opposition was directly related to that between a republic and a monarchy. Statesmen and politicians in a republic serve the public interest, whereas the monarch and his ministers allegedly have only their own interest in mind.

[30] Add to this the fact that because of their unshakeable conviction that their Constition is the revelation of an eternal political truth, Americans never ever considered the possibility of introducing proportional representation (whereas, again, European democracies easily shifted from a district system to proportional representation), and it will be clear that sooner or later the moment would come on which the American Constitution would openly manifest itself in all its nakedness. That moment has come now. Unfortunately at the same time that Putin decided to restore the Russian Empire. An accident never comes alone, as they say.

Add to this the topos of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus. While Cincinnatus was plowing his fields he reluctantly satisfied the urgent request to serve Rome, was appointed dictator and after having saved Rome in its war with the Aequi in 458 BC he returned to his plough again in a matter of a few days. Clearly, virtue is to be found amongst the farmers cultivating their fields and emphatically not in the cities where the Prince's court is a breeding bed of corruption. It will now be clear what we should associate with the Court vs Country opposition that was mentioned above already.

Pocock studies in his *The Machiavellian Moment* republican thought from Machiavelli to, roughly, 1800. Whereas it was never very popular on the European Continent (Montesquieu being a notable exception), it became quite influential, if not dominant in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Political disputes were preferably phrased in a republican terminology. The terminology lost most of its appeal with the victory of parliamentary government: Parliament stood, on the one hand, for the Court, whereas on the other, it represented the people living in the Country. Thus a political regime had come into being to which the Court vs Country anti-thesis could no longer be meaningfully applied. This was different in the thirteen American colonies: these were 'country' *only*, so to speak. This may explain why that terminology was still very much alive and kicking when the Federalist Founding Fathers wrote the American Constitution and why the Americans have it in their political genes, whereas it is for contemporary Europeans a mere curiosity considered to be devoid of any value or practical meaning for the solution of their political problems.

It is, therefore, of all the more interest to focus on Pocock's analysis of the American Constitution in the light of this Court vs Country opposition. As I will try to show below, this may, at least partly, clarify why the American body politick is presently in a state of decomposition – with the gravest consequences not only for the country itself, but for each country whose fate is intertwined in whatever way with that of the US.

So let's listen to what Pocock had to say about the 'Court ideology' as it developed in England and was expressed in the Federalist thesis defining the American Constitution:

> Where the Court thesis locates sovereignty in a parliamentary monarchy, self-balanced by the distinction between executive and legislative but held together by the influence which the former wields in the latter, the Federalist thesis locates it in the represented people and maintains the separation of power with a rigor which is republican rather than merely Country (…) Where the Court thesis appealed to a version of history in which there were pragmatic adjustments and no fundamental principles, the Federalists could and did claim to be founding a Republic in an extra-

> historical and legislative moment – one of *occasione*[31]– in which the principles of nature, including balance and even virtue, were being reaffirmed. [32]

In opposition to the Court thesis the Country ideology – imported in the US from England just like its counterpart – strongly insisted on the idea of a perennial conflict between virtue and the powers of corruption. Thomas Jefferson was even quite explicit about what the word 'virtue' should mean in this context: 'those who labour the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age or nation has furnished an example'.[33] Clearly, Jefferson appealed here to the Cincinnatus topos mentioned above and to the agrarian program of the two Gracchi in Rome at the beginning of the first century BC. This concept of virtue[34] would be immensely reinforced in the nineteenth century by the conquest of the West and the myth of the Frontier. It could thus become an integral pary of America's self-definition.

In sum, virtue was to be found in the 'country' and emphatically not in the cities, allegedly cultivating self-interest only. And, next, though it was recognized that it was, alas, impossible, to radically and forever root out all corruption in the affairs of government the latter should be so constituted as to leave to it as little room as possible :

> The implication was that the people, being propertied and independent, were by definition virtuous, but that their representatives were constantly exposed to the temptation of power and corruption; it was therefore necessary that the representation should return regularly to the represented, to have virtue renewed (*ridurre ai principii*[35]) by the choice of new representatives if necessary. (…) Virtue consisted in a particular being's regard for the common good, and was contingent upon his association with other particular beings who regarded the same good through different eyes. (…) The act of choosing a person to act for me [i.e. the choice of a representative (F.A.)], one with whom I asserted an artificial identity, would never be the same as that of recognizing a person who acted with me, and with whom I formed a natural association.[36]

So the Court vs Country opposition revealed representation to be, so to speak, the weak spot, in all government: corruption has its source on the trajectory from the virtuous citizen to

[31] 'Occasione' is the title of a poem by Machiavelli; it symbolizes the talent of recognizing what is the right moment to do something or to achieve some desirable goal. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); 168, 169.
[32] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; 525.
[33] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; 532.
[34] Explain the difference between 'virtue' and 'virtù'.
[35] That is: a return to principles. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; 205
[36] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; 519.

government. What happens on that trajectory is decisive. As is clear already from the fact that the 'horizontal' association I may have with you ís more 'natural' and trustworthy than the 'vertical' relationship existing between the citizen and his representative. Hence, in the Country-tradition – that is far more prominent in the American Constitution than the Court thesis - the trajectory between the citizen and his representative should always be kept as short as possible. Or, to put it differently, the 'point of gravity' on that trajectory should be as close as possible to the citizen. It must be emphasized, furthernmorem that this way of conceiving of the relationship between the citizen and his representative does not in the least exclude demagoguery. The very opposite is the case: a demagogue is successful to the extent in which he succeeds in wiping out the distance between himself and his grassroots. This is how talented demagogues like Hitler and Trump have seized - and will seize power. Whereas the Court position is, on the whole immune for demagoguery, since it is indifferent about the distance between the voter and his representative as long as all the constitutional rules for their relationship are respected.

Anyway, the writers of the Constitution saw it as their main task to define what political representation should be like within the parameters of their republican thought. Their answer was, essentially, to conceive of 'the sovereign people' as a homogeneous whole from which each suggestion of a distinction between those who are destined to rule (such as a hereditary or 'natural' aristocracy) and those who are destined to be ruled, is removed:

> The crucial revision was that of the concept of the people. Instead of being differentiated into diversely qualified and functioning groups, the people was left in so monistic a condition that it mattered little what characteristics it was thought of as possessing; and the various agencies of government – still essentially the legislature, the judiciary, and executive of separation theory – were thought of as exercised, not immediately, by social groups possessing the relevant capacities, but mediately, by individuals whose title to authority was that they acted as representing the people. All power was entrusted to representatives, and every mode of exercising power was a mode of representing then people.[37]

This, then, is why in the US the members of Congress, judges and the President are all elected directly by the people: each of them – in legislation, the judiciary and in the executive - represent the people albeit each time in a different quality.

There is, however, one qualification to all this of truly most momentous consequences. Up till now, there has been a lot of talk about virtue and corruption – categories that few political philosophers on the European Continent from the eighteenth considered to be of any, let alone of decisive significance. But in the context of the Country vs. Court vocabulary it is

[37] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; 517.

absolutely central. The American Constitution was the brainchild of above all James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. Whereas the former was predominantly a Country ideologist, the latter stood for the Court thesis. Now, Country ideologists deeply distrusted representation since the people's representatives were always tempted to corrupt the people's true will and intentions. And so it was with Madison. So he could acquiesce in representative government only on condition that the legislative, the executive and the judiciary had no chance to 'corrupt' each other. This offered, for him, sufficient safeguard against the emergence of factions – which is what republicans like Madison feared above of all in government.

Obviously this required the strictest possible separation of the three powers of government - as we saw above already. Here, then, we may discern what one might call the original sin of the American Constitution - from which most of its other major defects can be derived.[38] Observe, in the first place, that sovereignty evaporates in that Constitution.[39] For suppose there is a conflict between the President and Congress – the possibility of such a conflict being carefully preserved by the strict separation of powers – there is no sovereign to decide it. An appeal to the allegedly sovereign people is possible only once in four years – which robs the people's sovereignty from any practical meaning for most of the time. For

[38] At this stage a comment on Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des Lois* of 1748 is called for. We have all been taught at secondary school about the separation of the three powers. But two things were not told to us. Firstly, that Montesquieu most cogently formulated about the separation of powers in Book 11, Chapter VI, entitled 'De la Constitution d'Angleterre'. So we all believe that it was the practice of government in eighteenth century England that Montesquieu had in mind when writing that chapter. That may well have been the case. We'll never know. This gets me to a second, and more important consideration. Namely, that if this actually was Montesquieu's intention, he could not possibly have been more wrong about the practice of government in eighteenth century England. For there was no strict separation between the executive and the legislation in eighteenth century England. On the contrary, since Walpole, or even since the Glorious Revolution all legislation was the outcome of the dialogue between the executive (the King) and Parliament. This is what William Blackstone had in mind with parliamentary sovereignty in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765 – 1769). Madison was undoubtedly acquainted with Blackstone's *Commentaries* since the work was immensely popular in the American colonies. But when urging a strict separation of powers in the American Constitution he seems to have strangely forgotten what he must have read in Blackstone.

[39] Though criticism is not my aim in this essay, I should say, nevertheless, that Pocock pays to little attention to the concept of sovereignty. Admittely, he could reply that the political theorists in the Republican tradition discussed in his book rarely took up the issue of sovereignty. This was different on the European Continent. Absolutism made sovereignty for European political theorists into a category impossible to ignore. For them the crucial question was how to conceive of placing the people on the place of the absolute monarch. It follows that, in contrast to the US, absolutism and sovereignty were never really given up. European political theorists asked the, above all, how to make absolutism and the sovereignty into the servant of the people. The solution was to fuse absolutism with the assemblies of the Medieval Third Estate and to make the state of the abolutist monarch subservient to it. France made this leap from the Middle Ages to modern representative government in a mere one and a half month – in the period from 5 May (the opening of the assembly of the Estates General) to 20 June when the members of the Third Estate plus some representatives from the nobility and the clergy declared themselves to be the representatives of the nation.

Moreover, by taking their point of departure in sovereignty political philosophy on the European Continent allowed it to come to deeper and, above all, more practical insights in the problem of the relationship between the modern state and its citizens than was possible in the Republican paradigm studied by Pocock. More attention for the issue of sovereignty might have enabled Pocock to come to a more evenhanded assessment of the Republican paradigm and the theorists exemplifying it.

either there is a government - and then the people's sovereignty is an empty shell, or the people exercises its sovereignty on election day, but then there is no government. After election day there is a President and a Congress having *both* a mandate of the allegedly sovereign people, that they may therefore legitimately use in order to block each other's decisions – and then the country can only sit it out and wait till the next elections. As presently is the case, now that the country's government is paralyzed by a dysfunctioning Congress. In sum, apart from the elections on one day each four years the US (at which day the sovereign is, indeed, the people) has no sovereign power in the strict sense of the word. The American State has no safety break, so to speak. This is why mutual execration can all too easily reach the extremes that nowadays so sadly disfigures political disagreement in the US: if a political system is deaf for some politic conflict what rests one but to impotently swear each other as well as one can? Reason is then deafened by anger.

Where you have winners, there are losers. If Madison was the winner, Alexander Hamilton was the loser in determining the ideology of the Constitution. Pocock sketches Hamilton's position as follows:

> Alexander Hamilton appears to his Republican and Jeffersonian adversaries a figure defined in ominous outline by every tradition in which corruption threatened the republic. He desired to establish a Bank of the United States, and a class of fundholding public creditors who would be directly interested in upholding the government of the republic and the influence of its executive in Congress (…) To the extent - not inconsiderable – to which Hamilton saw government as conducted by a strong executive which could get its way in the legislature, the means he was seen as promoting seemed to make for a reversion to the system of parliamentary monarchy, which all agreed could not get its way without influence, but which Madisonian Federalism – to say nothing of more radically republican schools of thought - had insisted on abandoning as corrupt and unnatural.[40]

Hamilton correctly recognized that in order to support its overseas expansion Britain needed a government that would serve the private interests of its citizens – surely, also a way of thinking of the public interest or the common good – but in which Republicans like Madison could only discern the triumph of corruption. Moreover, parliamentary government with its allegedly corrupt practice of making the pursuit of public interest dependent on corrupt transactions between the King and factions in Parliament might suit Hamilton, but to which Madison would never be willing to debase the government of the American Republic. So Madison and other defenders of the Country thesis discerned in Hamilton's vision of the Republic's future a surrender to the Court tradition. And they considered it to be a flagrant denial of 'the spirit of 1776' and of all the ideals in whose name the American Revolution

[40] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; 528.

had been fought. For them 'Hamilton was a false prophet and even a kind of Antichrist: he looked east, not west' (i.e. to London and not to what agriculture might achieve in the vast territory between the Alleghenies and the Pacific)[41], worse still, they deeply resented Hamilton's picture of the future of an America as 'predestined to become a commercial and military empire, of a sort to which the figure of Caesar was indeed appropriate'[42], in sum, as an empire rather than as an agrarian country living off what it produced itself in isolation from the rest of the world. Had Hamilton won the debate about the Constitution, the US would have copied Britain's parliamentary sovereignty – and there would have been no Donald J. Trump threatening to transform its government into an autocracy based on lies, ignominy and resentment. Trump is Madison's legacy.

Self-evidently, the outcome of the Court vs Country debate in the US was not hard to predict: the 'Country' thesis was, above all, associated with virtue and 'Court' with corruption. Now, who would prefer the latter to the former? And the American Constitution was arranged accordingly - alas.

The contrast with European democracies could not have been greater: as we saw above, the executive and the legislative are compelled there to continue their dialogue under all circumstances until the moment has come at which the latter decides to send the cabinet home. But that decision is not taken lightly since it also entails the dissolution of the legislative itself and, hence, new elections. Sovereignty is then taken over in the dialogue between a new government and a new legislative assembly. Think of Britain's parliamentary sovereignty that is activated each time Parliament is in session. Recall, moreover the Doctrinaire's brilliant argument explicitly argument stating that sovereignty can never be in the possession of *any person or group of persons* (including that magic entity: the people) but is immanent in the rationality of parliamentary debate as expressed in the thesis of the 'souveraineté de la Raison'. And recognize, above all, that it has been the miraculous fusion of the extreme legal rigor of Bodin's and Hobbes' notion of sovereignty, on the one hand, with the extreme flexibility of parliamentary debate, on the other, that enabled European democracies to overcome the truly oceanic social conflict between labour and capital. A conflict surpassing in size and complexity all that the American state has ever been willing to face – including the Civil War whose stakes were, after all, clear to anyone.

I deliberately spoke a moment ago of what the American state 'was willing to face'. For even more important than all that has been said up till now is that American Constitution

[41] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; 534.
[42] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; 529.

is politically or ideologically biased. Whereas European constitutions are strictly neutral machines for the solution of social and political conflict and cultivate that neutrality as well as they can since it is recognized that their very credibility depends on their success to uphold the strictest neutrality, the American Constitution has a preference for specific kinds of conflicts reflecting what the country was like at the end of the eighteenth century (such as the right of, or the ban on carrying arms) whereas it tends to turn a blind eye to more 'modern' ones – such as the conflict between labour and capital. The latter conflict was no less prominent in the US than in Europe – perhaps even more so – but it fitted poorly in the political machinery of the Constitution and the ideology it exemplified and it was thus, apart from some abortive attempts to do so, never really taken up.

In order to recognize what this kind of prejudice may amount to I'd like to remind the reader of Bernard Groethuysen's *Origines de l'esprit bourgeois en France* of 1927[43], one of the great, but unfortunately almost forgotten history books of the first half of the previous century. With powerful but accurate strokes Groethuysen paints in this book the conflict between the traditional Christian *Weltanschauung* and what the bourgeoisie put in its place in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Groethuysen's main idea is that there was no room for any compromise in this conflict since the bourgeois and typical bourgeois concerns had no real overlap with the Christian *Weltanschauung*. The poor and the powerful had their trusted and fixed role in the order that was presupposed in the Gospel. But the advent of the bourgeoisie presented Christianity with something that had not and could not possibly have been foreseen in the Gospel: 'le Dieu des Chrétiens, en créant le monde et en préparant l'avènement de l'Église, ne semble pas avoir prévu qu'un jour le bourgeois y réclamera sa place et qu'il voudra y jouer un rôle important'[44]. And so is is with the American Constitution - the political Bible for the American. The Country and Court opposition defined what would be the country's main agents, namely the farmer and the merchant. But the working-class proletariat was not part of the Country and Court ideologies and therefore fell by the wayside. Up till this day. This was, again, different in European democracies since their constitutions are machines for conflict-solving in which one can feed just anything that society wants it to digest.

This may explain why Bannon and Bernie Sanders could come to so entirely different remedies for America's present diseases. Both agree that the present American state is unable to adequately deal with them. And both are right about this. Bannon infers from this observation the conclusion that the American state had best be completely destroyed in the hope that something

[43] Bernard Groethuysen, *Origines de l'esprit bourgeois en France* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1927).
[44] Groethuysen, *Origines*; 168.

better will arise on its ruins. Well, to a certain extent this makes sense. But more constructive is Bernie Sander's proposal to introduce socialism in the American political system. Better still would be to make room for social-democracy since this would require the importation in the US of a European style of government.

As will be clear from the foregoing a political ideology is hidden in the American Constitution (whereas European democracies want to avoid this at all costs). The nature of that ideology, thus Pocock, will remain hidden to us as long as we take the text as it is. Pocock urged us, therefore, to see the document as expressing the self-image of the US at the time of its birth at the end of the eighteenth century. The preponderance of the (Madisonian) Country party over the Hamiltonian (Court) party in the Constitution was not some arbitrary whim that could easily have been the reverse – no, it reflects how the Americans of that time saw themselves. Hence, as a predominantly agrarian country inhabited by Jeffersonian peasants 'who labour the earth and are the chosen people of God'. Peasants, that is, who had neither understanding of, nor sympathy for the world of commerce and industry – i.e. a world in which they could only discern undeserved material gain, swindle, moral decay and the relinquishing of Christian values.

In the Midwest, in 'fly over country' as it lay sandwiched between the strongholds of the Court party in the East and the West coast - in brief, in 'Trump-country' – the Country ideology persisted untroubled for as long as it could safely ignore the existence of a world beyond its trusted boundaries. But this was no longer possible when Goethe's three 'Gewaltigen' mentioned above - globalism, neoliberalism and a failing democracy - started to destroy their world while offering no protection against these new unsettling realities. This provoked a powerful nostalgia for a world that was now irretrievably lost. As it is with nostalgia generally, the reaction was understandable, but at the same time condemned to ineptitude. We cannot return to a lost past. The awareness of this impossibility fulfilled those who knew themselves to be the helpless victims of a new and dreaded future with fear and hatred of all who had thrown them wittingly or unwittingly out of their lost paradise – all the more so, since they know that for them, unlike John Milton's Adam and Eve, there is not even the promise of an ultimate redemption. This gave to the Country ideology a tremendous boost, thus reviving in the US the political experience of some two and a half centuries ago.

Taking all this together, Pocock would answer the question 'why Trump?' as follows. He will begin with pointing out that what we now see in the US is, basically, a re-enactment of the thirteen colonies' war of independence with England. The Midwest with its devoted Trump-voters stands to 'Washington' as the thirteen colonies stood to 'London'. The Midwest

represents the Country ideology while 'Washington' and the big cities on the East and the West coast exemplify the Court thesis. Needless to say, this way of presenting the political present can only favour the cause of the Republican Midwest at the expense of 'Washington' and the urbanized Democrat US. The Republicans may claim for themselves the successes of the American Revolution against 'London'/'Washington', whereas the Democrats – as happened to Hamilton already – can be accused of advocating a basically un-American political regime.

Next, one may discuss whether this re-enactment of the country's past in the present should be regarded as resurrection or rather as a re-awakening of the Court vs Country opposition. Presumably rather the latter since it never was far away. But whatever be the truth about this, it cannot be doubted that it resulted in a truly unprecedented re-ideologization of American politics. Obviously, there have always been political differences between the Republicans and the Democrats. But from a European perspective these differences were insignificant to the point of non-existence. Think of what separated Moscow oriented communist parties from their liberal-conservative opponents in most European parliaments. That was a quite different kettle of fish! But what separated these parties in Europe in the 1960s and 1970 is mere peanuts if compared to unbridgeable gap between the Republicans and the Democrats in the contemporary US. In order to secure their grip on their voters in the Midwest the Republicans succeeded in striking a barrel filled to the brim with hatred and anger and they thus unleashed a more radical ideologization of the country's politics than it had ever known since the Civil War.

Now, recall that ideological disputes cannot be decided with an appeal to the Truth. Ideological debates are about what is to *count* as truth. The truth of the Democrats is the fake-news of the Republican and vice versa. Democrats may therefore prove a hundred times that it simply not true that the elections were stolen by Biden but each time the Midwest Republican will see it as proof of the depravity and the mudslinging of the city dweller for whom truth is what his interests tell him to believe. Next, Democrats may sing the praises of Biden's political and economic achievements again and again but it will all be like water off a duck's back for the Republican. Finally, for the Midwest Republican grassroots it is a matter of course the members of the Freedom Caucus are right when accusing the Biden administration of 'weaponizing' the Department of Justice against Trump. It only increases their readiness to identify with Trump: as he is persecuted by the elite's weapon of the judiciary so are they the victims of Goethe's three monsters Raufebold, Habebald and Haltefest that the elite in the

cities and, above all, in Washington carelessly unleashed upon them.[45] It makes one wonder whether a country can survive if it can no longer agree about some absolute basic truths. Not surprisingly, some fear a new Civil War.[46] Only a Democrat President blessed with the rhetorical talents of a Cicero might, perhaps, overcome the conflict of these two so extremely divisive political vocabularies. Only a President capable of passionate plea convincing all Americans that there exists a truly American political vocabulary uniting Country and Court, Republican and Democrat alike, and in which all American can recognize the essence of their collective past, present and future. [47]

The ideology of a constitution normally is a 'weak' force. As long as normal life in a state can unproblematically be conducted few people, if any, will be aware of it – just as the fish only knows that he was swimming in the sea if it is pulled out of the water. Similarly, if citizens become convinced of having been thrown in a socio-political reality seeming to bely all of their beliefs about what is right and what is wrong, they will conclude that all of their life has been a lie. Their political behaviour will then reflect their existential confusion and despair.

6. Conclusion

The American Constitution has been the main protagonist in this story. Not surprisingly so. In the first place, it opened the way for Trump's victory since its authors asked the wrong question when writing it. They did not ask the question what constitution would succeed best in solving the nation's existential problems and to do so in such a way that *all* parties involved in them will either happily or grudgingly comply with the government's solution. Instead they focused on the, in our eyes outlandish problem of how the Constitution could serve the cause of virtue or virtue and prevent the triumph of corruption. Since the Founding Fathers framed

[45] Trump repeatedly exclaims at his rallies "I am standing between you and 'them'". Demagoguery, of course, but it creates the strongest possible bond between the Leader himself and his simple-minded followers. No less effective is Trump's idealization of 'the people'. When doing so he relies on an implicit reference to the Cincinnatus topos and to Jefferson's myth of the farmer as the American counterpart of Rousseau's 'noble savage'. Similarly with democracy: Biden's and the Democrat's insistence on the danger Trump embodies for democracy will fall flat on Trump's grassroots in the Midwest. Their angry reply will be: *your* democracy is not *our* democracy.

[46] So does Trump himself. On the first day of his Presidency – when he will be a one-day-dictator (as he publicly announced already) – he will extend the insurrection act of 1807 in such a way that the President has the right to deploy the army whenever and wherever he wishes to do so against civilians he regards as 'rebellious' or as 'insurrectionists'. A first step towards Putin's Russia - as Trump will wholeheartedly agree.

[47] Gavin Newsom – the present governor of California would fit the bill, in spite of the present dip in his popularity in that state. But with a suicidal poll denialism the Democratic Party holds on to the almost aphasic octogenarian Joe Biden.

all politics in the language of classical Republicanism as modernized by Machiavelli and Guicciardini we can, on the one hand, understand their fascination for this outlandish issue - but the result has been a Constitution allowing for the possibility of a domestic crisis of the size it presently faces. In European democracies sovereignty is located in the ongoing dialogue between executive and legislative and between the parties mutually. So a party consistently refusing to participate in that dialogue – like the present Republican Party – would only marginalize itself and deny to itself a role in defining the sovereign will. Such a party would give *carte blanche* to the executive. Moreover, locating sovereignty in parliamentary debate is a powerful break on radicalization, for effective power is there always to be found in the centre. The breath-taking speed with which the GOP radicalized under Trump would thus have been impossible. Hence, had Hamilton been successful with his effort to introduce a British-style government in the US, a phenomenon like Trump would have been unthinkable in the US.

Next, the Constitution is politically biased. The capital versus labour conflict did not fit into its ideological make. Needless to say, this is entirely different with the conflict between the rural, agrarian Midwest and the big cities in the East and the West coast – exemplified, above all, by Washington. This conflict fits in the Country vs Court ideology of the Founding Father (and Jefferson) like a key in its lock. This is why that conflict met with no resistance at all in the American political system and could take on proportions exceeding by far its actual economic and socio-political importance. And, next, why it could radicalize so incredibly fast. Add to this that the Republican Founding Fathers, for all their learning of the history of Rome and of classical political theory, forgot about the Aristotelian and Polybian topos of the *anakykloosis toon politeioon* – hence, the theory that the monarchy will degenerate into a despotism, that an aristocracy will degenerate into an oligarchy and that a democracy will degenerate into an ochlocracy. This degeneration has now taken place on each level, with Trump in the role of the despot, the Republican party in that of an oligarchy caring more abut their jobs than the country's interest and, finally, the transformation of virtuous agrarian of the Midwest into an angry ochlocracy storming the traps of the Capitol. Thus the blind spot the Constitution made happen what fell outside its so narrow Republican scope.

Alas, these complaints about the American Constitution come too late in the day. For it does not have much longer to live anyway. The Heritage Foundation and other rightist think-tanks are already working on a new one accommodating for a Trumpian autocracy.

Let's for once, adopt the Republican's political language. We may then say that the US will share the fate of all those who have been too late with reforming the state in time.

Though there have been exceptions to that rule. Think of Rome in the first century BC when it moved from one civil war to the next and when it seemed to be destined to political suicide. It was clear that the Republican constitution had to be replaced by a new one suitable for ruling an Empire comprising most of the known world. Rome then had the incredible luck that it could appeal at precisely that moment to the man who arguably has been the greatest statesman of all times: Caesar Augustus.[48] But where Rome had Augustus, the US has … Donald J. Trump, of all persons. It is hard to think of a more captivating, more humiliating and sadder picture of that great country's present and future predicament.

Frank Ankersmit
Glimmen, 12 March 2024

[48] For an excellent exposition of Augustus's political genius, see the masterful Adrian Goldsworthy, *Augustus. First Emperor of Rome* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014).