

PART II

Italian Affirmations

CHAPTER 2

Left and Right:

Why They Still Make Sense

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The issue of left and right still warrants reflection. Although widely debated, the topic has yet to be exhausted: the distinction between left and right, displaced from its original political space, and even from the somehow classic opposition between capital and labor, still remains effective and meaningful.

The thesis of this work is that although there have been, and continue to be, many lefts and rights, two broad categories can be identified within this plurality that are general, useful, and meaningful. The goal, therefore, is to simplify through synthesis, not to classify through analysis. We aim to arrive at a radical level of understanding, but not through the politological clarity of ideal types—models constructed according to the needs of the researcher—or through the historical variety of concrete forms. Nor will we proceed through essences or ontologically stable ideal clusters (such as liberty and equality, risk and security, preservation and revolution), or even through transepochal, psychological, or anthropological attitudes. Left and right will be treated rather as different modes, separate but inseparable, opposing but complementary, for accessing the original energy of the modern, through which—in the history, institutions, political ideas, and common feeling of public opinion—modern Western politics is articulated. This means that left and right can be radically thought only through a genealogical procedure that goes back to the ground zero of modern political institutions. This thesis also includes the observation that the categories of left and right do not survive today because of the persistence of the modern political space, with which they came into existence, or because they represent a fundamental dichotomy of society, one that is far more divided and fragmented today. The reason these categories have survived is because through them is expressed a force

and a problem, namely, subjectivity—in the modes we will be describing—which may very well be something more than simply an echo of an original big bang, the fossil radiation that pervades the universe of politics. Rather, subjectivity is one of the contributions of the modern period to the historical continuity of Western civilization, as were the Greek *areté* or the Roman *ius* or Christianity. Of course, if the distinction between left and right is not yet vestigial, it can still become so: in the same way the legacy of the ancient can be evacuated, the West can also lose all the driving force of its institutional ideals. This may well happen, although the major powers that have sprung from it—science, technology, the capitalist mode of production—have extended themselves (of course, in superficial and varying degrees) throughout most of the world. At play in the categories of left and right are specific political, historical, and cultural institutions of the West—secular humanism and democracy to begin with—which, although implicated in them, are not coextensive with the planetary expansion of Western practical skills.

A caveat I would do well to include, then, is that the arguments presented in this work—stemming from an interest in deciphering the intellectual and political forms of the right that currently governs Italy, and which is leaving its mark on the country, although one of uncertain duration—are primarily relevant to Western democracies, where the question of left and right first arose. There is a further caveat to be issued: this is not just another piece on the incidental fates of the left or right, an analysis of their ills, advice (unsolicited at that) on the issues to be addressed by their policies, and in answer to the question whether a moderate or aggressive, institutional or radical praxis is called for. There is no normative intent to this inquiry; if anything, normativity is the object of its reflection. In any case, there is no intention to hand out badges of authenticity to any true left or true right. The purpose of this work is to recognize two cardinal modes in the past, and in the present as well (meaning, even in the rudimentary politics of today). Both are interpretations of original, unavoidable aspects of modernity, so that we cannot say that one is false politics and the other authentic politics. The indeterminacy of politics, its constitutive contingency, makes this impossible.

An Obsolete Dichotomy?

The heuristic, theoretical, and practical obsolescence of the political distinction between left and right has been proclaimed since the 1980s, and with even greater intensity in the wake of globalization following the fall of

Soviet communism. While in the 1980s criticism of the distinction was suspected of being essentially right wing, beginning in the 1990s it was viewed instead as a sign of epochal, structural crisis. In the age of electronics and the consumer society, immaterial labor, and the disappearance of traditional classes, the left-right opposition—an archaic legacy of contrasting ideological arguments played out around the centrality of factory labor—was declared to be a mere lexical holdover, blamed on the incapacity or laziness of the political and intellectual class (the same result comes from reversing the signs, in other words, if you express nostalgia for a world polarized by strong ideologies).¹

In reality, the difference between left and right was determined in the nineteenth century in reference to factory production: it identified the dialectic, at times a harsh one, between those who advocated a prudent slowing down of the inclusive dynamics hardwired into capitalism, and those who advocated their advanced, progressive acceleration (in terms of citizenship, equality, and access to health and education) until its final, eventual overturning or fulfillment. At the beginning of the twentieth century, transformed into the opposition between the liberal logics of the individual and the democratic logics of mass societies—both of which, as Tocqueville saw, had been inherent to modernity—the categorical pairing nonetheless seemed inadequate and stifling to many, like an intellectual and political cage to be broken out of by taking a leap forward, so as to go beyond right and left.² The fascists who held this stance to the bitter end attracted a great deal of the most evolved intellectual adherents in Europe, who at least in the early years were deluded precisely by this position.³ In reality, fascism had actually constructed another right, more radical than the traditional conservative one, by constructing something new, the totalitarian regime; or, if you will, it had realized its plan to go beyond left and right. This was a new political experience, but one that negated the reasons for the very problem leading to its creation (and even if the truth of Western modernity were to be found in this negation, left and right nonetheless lose all meaning in it).

In any case, with the disastrous loss of the war, fascism delegitimized the right in Europe and legitimized the left in all its forms, both communist and (broadly speaking) social-democratic. These seemed to occupy the political space of the left after the Second World War, while the right was forced to present itself as the center (and in many ways to also converge on it). Similarly, forty-five years later, the defeat of real communism would mark not only the end of the extreme left but also the weakening of the

social-democratic left. More generally, the real democracies had indeed won a historic victory over real communism, weakening it, precisely thanks to their profound internal economic and political transformations. But they had come to triumph so full of insuperable contradictions that at the time of their victory, the whole conceptual apparatus of modern politics was almost unusable: the almost complete disappearance from mass democracy of the individual subject, the heart of modernity—made now into the object rather than the subject of new, pervasive powers—was fundamental to this process. The postmodern era of globalization thus witnessed the crisis of socialism as well as the crisis of conservatism, made extremist and populist after the disappearance of its adversary, while witnessing at the same time an internal critique of neoliberalism itself, which was unable to lend a stable form to society.⁴

In short, the end of modernity and the fluidity of the present were supposed to lead to the recognition that both left and right had lost their purpose just as much as they had lost the chain of subjectivities and means to fulfill them. The present and the future were also supposed to have demanded going beyond modern political alternatives, so as to position themselves under the banner of the new: the new left and new right, if the same terminology really had to be used. But, in reality, the new was, obviously, substantially the same, and it differed only by subtle tonalities, by only (slightly) different interpretations of the same political divide. There was the unquestioned centrality of the capitalist mode of production, but of consumption instead of labor, of pluralist parliamentary democracy effectively emptied of its meaning, and of the middle classes, to whose cultural and social mediateness politics was supposed to adapt as a structural and strategic factor, becoming a politics of the center. The cultural and political news over the last twenty years has indeed been full of convergences to the center, of right and left being surpassed, and also of social democracy and environmentalism, proceeding along new third paths, despite all the differences in the various Western political worlds (but also the acceptance of capitalism by the Chinese communist regime, which is no small theoretical and interpretive challenge).

True, there were those who refused to embrace the changes, rejecting the dilution of their power, and who spoke, from the far left, about two rights: the real right and the one the new left was turning into.⁵ Conversely, from the opposite bank, the Italian and French New Right pursued a dif-

ferent way of overcoming the traditional dichotomy: in metapolitical terms, meaning, radically categorical ones, rather than from a merely factual convergence; although not devoid of historical and theoretical awareness, it nonetheless held little practical effectiveness (the new right that has emerged in Italian politics has nothing in common with the New Right). In any case, the mainstream interpreters were nevertheless oriented toward perceiving the blurring of the boundaries and of the contrapositions, and toward the resulting shift of politics into an elsewhere—in which, at best, issues that involved neither the left nor the right should have been able to take on shape and importance, such as environmental issues—challenged if anything by the relics of the old extremisms and, much more, by the emergence of new populist forces, the vehicle of new extremisms, whether ethnic, cultural, or religious in character.

All this is partly true, especially in the obvious perception of the changed geopolitical and also conceptual landscape, but in other important respects it is simply inaccurate. In fact, in the West, the political space continues to be polarized around the left and the right—just think, for example, of the history of the last fifteen years in Italy, Spain, Poland, France, and the United States. This contraposition is no longer fueled by the complex ideological constructs of the nineteenth century or even purely from the positioning of individuals in the industrial space, in the material sphere of relations of production. In any case, the global economic crisis is showing that there is an attempt in politics to regain a central role through a new capacity to regulate the economy, or in general by providing post-laissez-faire regulatory solutions that involve social politics as much as the symbolic and cultural realm. There is no doubt that in this new phase distinctions of left and right are meaningful, from the standpoint of the political forces and their way of presenting themselves as well as from that of the voters' response: in the European Parliament elections held in June 2009, for example, voters were clearly successful in distinguishing between left and right, rewarding the first and punishing the second.

In short, left and right are categories that belong to the politics of the modern era but somehow they continue to make sense in the largely post-modern politics of the global age, which means that something of the modern tradition is also at work in a context that is very different from the one in which they came into existence. This is exactly the problem that calls for an explanation.

Formal Schemas and the Complexity of History

The left-right cleavage only makes sense starting from modernity; in other words, it cannot be used to characterize all the conflicts of power and knowledge that have marked Western history, to explain the struggle between Caesar and Pompey, or the conflict between the Guelphs and Ghibellines. In terms of political history, this means that the opponents engaged in the struggle between church and state, and those who later faced each other down in the space of political economy, are lined up across its divide.

In the first case, the oppositional association between left and right describes the bourgeois, rationalist, and individualist fight against the authorities—as much against the pontiff as against the traditional monarch—on an intellectual path that runs from Hobbes and Locke to the Enlightenment, and from Rousseau to Kant. Politically, it has its high points in the revolutions that affected both sides of the Atlantic, in France and the United States, during the late eighteenth century. The goal was to make politics the space in which human beings are self-governing, where power only responds to human reason and not to other, dogmatic pleas.

In the second case, this opposition describes the change of front, after which the bourgeois world would give itself the goal of preserving the workings of capitalism, with its associated organization of the individualistic, representative-based public sphere—the rule of law—while the socialist world sought, using various strategies, to go beyond this economic and political organization. From this point of view, too, the new front that opened up with Babeuf already participated in the dynamics of the French Revolution and was destined to refine itself with the maturing of the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of Blanc, Blanqui, Proudhon, and Marx. A formal schema can be put together out of this showing the difference between left and right based on the parameters of value (difference or equality between people), politics (authority or liberation, hierarchy or autonomy, state or individual removed from bourgeois alienation), and time (preservation or progress).⁶ In reality, this diagrammatic approach requires far more nuances. The political traditions of left and right are contradictory and anything but unambiguous in their historical reality. In other words, they are not determined by any specific contents (but—this is my thesis—neither are they empty containers that get randomly filled up from one occasion to the next).

It has been observed that the matrixes of the many possible versions of the right appeared on the political scene between 1789 and 1848.⁷ First, the coun-

terrevolutionary Catholics (Maistre, Bonald, the early Lamennais), the kind of right that supports the embedding of politics within an inaccessible foundation which precedes it (tradition, religion, nature, or for the romantics, the nation, and history) and which must be preserved without being criticized by human reason lest the political order suffer a catastrophic collapse. This was a radical right, consistently anti-individualist and anticapitalist, which strictly speaking did not even seek to be right wing: what it wanted was to abolish the modern political space of left and right altogether (without success, of course, actually ending up trapped in it).

With the July Revolution, this right was flanked by another one, that of the Orleanists, in some ways its opposite, which, along with François Guizot, took for granted that the revolution was definitively over and that social and political democracy was a problem to be brought under control. It represented individual initiative capable of creating wealth for individuals and for society, while also selecting the winners and the losers, the fit and the unfit, according to the objective laws of the market and success, guaranteed by the legal apparatus of the state. This was a conservative right. What followed as a development of and reaction to the revolutionary events of 1848 was the Bonapartism of Napoleon III, or the revolutionary right of political leadership from on high, of the plebiscitary head who, by his decision, reorganized the whole body politic of the nation by extralegal and extrainstitutional means. In this particular right, Karl Marx (in “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”) saw a constant of bourgeois politics, namely, that the bourgeoisie, fearing the power of the proletariat, may give up its own liberal, parliamentary, and democratic political forms.

What we have here are different forms of the right: some are confronted with modernity from its outset, while others are formed within it; some are economic and others political; some are moderate and others extreme. But they are the germs of many subsequent versions of the right: ones that have been and are conservative, traditionalist, and reactionary, but also avant-garde, revolutionary, modernist, and futurist; authoritarian, totalitarian, but also anarchic; statist, but also laissez-faire; equally organismic and individualistic. The extreme variety of the different rights, both intellectual and political, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—which were often allied with each other in different power relations, but which also fought bitterly against one another—shows that for them the political space was sometimes fixed, sometimes only slowly evolving, and sometimes even completely unstable, while at other times instead it was dynamic and dizzyingly in motion.

At times the political space was strictly unitary, nationalist, and imperialist, while at others it was broken up into small, xenophobic countries. Just to name a few, the right embraced such disparate figures as Maistre and Scruton, Burke and Maurras, Marinetti and Lorenz, Evola and Schmitt, Stahl and Spann, Malinsky and Guénon, Jünger and Gentile, Céline and Sironi, Eliade and Bishop Lefebvre; and politicians as far apart as Solaro della Margherita and Hitler, Franco and Mosley, Mussolini and Churchill, Rattazzi and Degrelle.

The right has taken every possible position on the main problems and categorical notions of modern politics: the relationship between religion and politics has taken the form, at different times, of politics being founded in religion (the counterrevolutionaries), of the depoliticized internalization of religion (the liberal-conservatives), of the authoritarian instrumentalization of religion by politics, and of the political religions of totalitarianisms. The various right-wing attitudes toward the state are equally far apart, ranging from out-and-out worship (what was called statolatry) to suspicion at its inherent secularism, which had to be balanced by the authority of the church, from the respect for its laws which were viewed as bringing unity and order to the intolerance toward those that hindered or slowed down economic dynamism. Right-wing attitudes to the state have also included a decisionistic overthrowing of its institutional and legal logic (so that the state remains a structure of mere domination) and, finally, open rebellion against its unitary and equalizing pretensions, in the name of territorial differences and regional roots, but also of heroic and exceptional subjectivities.

For the culture of the right, the individual was also sometimes a wolf to keep in check with harsh repressive laws, and sometimes a helpless sheep that had to be protected from the dangers of treacherous enemies; at other times, the individual was the lone hero who, entirely on his own strength, was capable of taking on his destiny. The swings on the part of the right when it comes to the economy are dramatic: at times, with a disdainful, aristocratic-warrior attitude, they have rejected the logics and ethos of capital, an opposition that can also take the form of a nationalistic rejection of the internationalism of capital, attributed to cosmopolitan classes or races (whence anti-Semitism, the socialism of idiots). At other times, they have given unquestioning support to the market as the new earthly Providence; and at other times again, they exercise a watchful and suspicious political governance (sometimes corporate) over its dynamics. With regard to the people, finally, the different rights have manifested their intrinsic plurality

by sometimes abhorring the people as an unclean revolutionary beast, and sometimes coaxing the masses like a docile herd of consumers; now idolizing them as the nation—the source of historical tradition or race, in biological terms—that legitimates any politics of power; now presenting them with the fate of being ruled by wealthy or superior elites, or perhaps by charismatic leaders. Or yet again, they may hold up the people (this is right-wing populism) in contrast to the legal institutions and professional politicians, as the bearers of an essential legitimacy and spontaneous morality.

Between 1789 and 1848, the three basic forms of the left also appeared: the liberals who sparked the revolution, through the theoretical armory of rationalism and the Enlightenment, secularism, and individual rights; the radical democrats, with their egalitarian and moralistic republicanism (that of the Jacobins but also the Mazzinians); and the socialists in their various and often opposing groups: those that would be defined by Marx as utopians, Proudhon above all; the Marxists (destined to be internally divided between revolutionaries and reformists); and the anarchists.⁸ Statist and individualistic, libertarian and authoritarian, even totalitarian, focused on spontaneity or discipline, pauperist or productivist; industrialist or ecologist, bellicose or pacifist, universalist and differentialist, utopian and scientific, from a historical standpoint, the left also seems to constitute a pluralistic universe. The world of the left is one of infinite variety and extraordinary polyvalency, one that on the historical and practical planes has had and continues to have more of a taste for separation than union, more drawn toward fratricidal war than collaboration. The conflicts between Marx and Bakunin, between Lenin and Luxemburg, between Stalin and Trotsky, between socialists and communists, are just a few of the exemplary peak, bloody moments in a political and ideological history marked by division.

Once again, a few conceptual indicators may help to illustrate how deeply divided the polymorphous universe of the lefts really is. On the question of subjectivity, the various lefts can be split into two large camps: those who consider the subject to have precedence over politics, and to be bestowed with an originary autonomy (individual rights); and the other, made up of those who view the subject as engendering itself in the process of historical struggle for emancipation (the collective subjectivity of the proletariat). The first position is liberal-democratic, while the second is the kind of dialectical thought that already at the time of Hegel (considered here not because he can be ascribed to the left but because he is the founder of a tradition of thought) united an enormous value assigned to subjectivity (the phenomenological

theory of the substance-subject that constructs itself through history) with a critique of the abstractness and superficiality of liberalism, thus opening the way to the critique of Marx and Marxisms toward liberal individualism (for not being humanistic enough, since it focuses on the image of the alienated man), with the prospect of developing a fully liberated subjectivity (through the collective subject of the proletarian class, and beyond in the multiform humanity of communism). The issue is clearly rights, which have an a priori status for the democratic left. In the dialectical tradition, on the contrary, human rights cannot escape being historicized (as bourgeois), being made dialectical (as contradictory), and finally sent back—no longer as rights but as the height of practical and concrete being—to the dimension of the realized communism. With all the consequences we are only too familiar with.

The state is viewed with equally strong ambivalence: some on the left interpret the state as an instrument of class oppression, to be fought with a nonalienated, collective force, such as the party. Others, instead of considering it a Leviathan to be struck down, see it as a means to bring a bit of justice into society. Even the universal dimension of the political space—which in theory unites all the left, from liberals to proponents of antiglobalization, passing through the various forms of socialism—has many powerful exceptions: there has often been a country, a nation, a state that has incorporated the idea, and whose mission it has been to propagate the idea throughout the world, the USSR, obviously, being the most extreme example.

In addition, just to make any diagrammatic approach even more impractical and every history even more confused, we must recall the many overlapping critiques from the left and right that have been directed against the concepts and institutions that form the political structure of capitalism, in the forms of both liberal democracy and social democracy. Although their intents and logics may have been different, the convergence has been remarkable, leading to the common use of entire sets of arguments. The ease, for example, with which Lamennais passed from his counterrevolutionary phase to his democratic phase is thus explained by the persistence in him of a constant antibourgeois polemic. Although from opposite political sides and from very different cultural matrixes, we may also recall the assonance between the critiques of parliamentarism issuing from left and right: it is no coincidence that some antiparlamentarian motifs from the Frankfurt School were believed to be influenced by Carl Schmitt, with an antiliberal slant. Or the more or less successful syntheses (Conservative Revolution, national Bolshevism, to say nothing of National Socialism); or the convergence

of left and right, in the first half of the twentieth century, for the purpose of organizational solutions, like planning, to overcome the individualist-based capitalist economy.

Finally, the same political force (for example, liberalism) can play a right-wing or left-wing role from one time to the next according to historical contingencies. The same goes for concepts (for example, the nation) and thinkers (the most renowned example being Sorel). Conversely, seemingly deciding oppositions such as individualism and statism traverse and intersect with the right as much as they do the left. However, despite the inadequacy of formal schemas and the ambiguity of historical content, the left-right binary opposition seems to persist even on the contemporary political scene. What is needed, therefore, is a radical deciphering of the political categories of modernity, not to explain the concrete political choices of individuals or collective subjects or various political forces—largely contingent choices—but to understand how the categories of left and right came into existence and why they are so long-lived. Without resorting to essentialisms, to definitions that apply to all periods, what we require is a genealogy of the concepts of right and left, performed using the tools and categories of a philosophy that is not limited to merely recognizing that the left-right cleavage makes sense in a modern political topology, but which goes back to the roots of a vast, contradictory phenomenology of lefts and rights.

The Origin of Modern Politics, and Its Consequences

The existence of the left-right binary opposition is an expression of the fact that modern politics is originally indeterminate, meaning that its unity does not consist in exhibiting shared structures or foundations. Its unity consists rather in a problem that takes the form of a structural duality. The conceptual building blocks of thought that innervate modern politics, seeing as it had to give up on the traditional idea of Justice—the idea, that is, of an order of being that, if it were not for human sinfulness, directs even the political order—consists in the centrality of the link between disorder as a given and order as a requirement. On the one hand, there is an ominous and unstable reality, the state of nature; and on the other, it is essential to construct a contrivance that gives shape and stability to politics. These are the two, inseparable sides in the modern way of regarding politics.

When interpellated down to its roots, the history of modern political ideas—in its mainstream form of political rationalism—can be interpreted

as a political cosmology, as a series of texts on the construction of order. The element of novelty does not only reside in the epochal compulsion to create order, but also in the fact that its actor, center, and star is the individual subject—rational, free, and equal.

In Hobbes, Locke, Pufendorf, Rousseau, and Kant—in spite of their differences, at times becoming oppositions—the same conceptual structure, the same view of the world, can be found: there is a primary experience (either natural or historical) of disorder, scarcity, and aggression. But at the same time there is also a need for the individual subject to be freed from anxieties and shortcomings. As senseless as it may seem, reality has a seed in itself of rationality and equal human dignity that can be made to flourish within the political contrivance.

There is thus a rationalistic program encoded in the DNA of the modern period. It can be interpreted in a triumphalistic or more skeptical key; seen as a glorification of humanity, or as a lowering of the ends traditionally assigned to politics (to achieve the *summum bonum*, replaced by the *conatus sese conservandi*), a program that can be said to be always belied, in the historical and geographically reality, by the many forms of unequal citizenship or hierarchical inclusion or internal exclusion—the phenomenon of slavery, consubstantial with the birth of modernity, the formation of colonial empires, and the racist construction of domination over indigenous people, the struggle of (and against) dissidents, rebels, the subordination of women—in which the modern political project of Europe was substantiated. And even in Europe (in the West), where modernity unfolded in all its fullness and power, the subject was in fact placed inside forms of a material universal—the capitalist economy—that created powerful forms of inclusion, but in contradictory and hierarchizing ways. All this could lead to the modern project being interpreted as a *dispositif* of domination rather than one of liberation. In effect, what we want to emphasize is that among the effects of this apparatus—and indeed at the origin of the conceptual structure that characterizes the modern era—there is included, and there must necessarily be the possibility, indeed the necessity, for the right as much as for the left.

The most radical critics will say that precisely because they are modern neither one of them is a bearer of liberation; rather, they are both forms of domination. My intention here, however, is simply to show their common roots, their diversity, and their permanence: indeed, the horizon on which the modern is surpassed has so far appeared in spurious forms, in which left and right continue to exist.

In any case, the originary modernity of the right and left, their difference and, at the same time, their sharing of the same origin, their being the two ways in which the modern necessarily manifests itself, has to do with the different radicalism with which they participate in one and the other of the two sides of the originary, structural duality of modern political discourse. A genealogical look at the origin of modern politics (of the modern way of conceiving the origin of politics)—rather than a reference to this or that specific event—is what allows us to establish the criterion of their difference. It is a criterion for recognizing political and ideological positions that were articulated during late modern and contemporary history, even without it being clearly present and made explicit in them or by them. It is a criterion, however, that does not seek to judge the intentions, whether overt or hidden, of the political proposals and forces, but which examines their deep logical, categorical, and reasoning structures.

That said, it is quite easy to see that the lefts, despite their historic variety, have proclaimed themselves the heirs of rationalism and the Enlightenment. They share the greatest attention to the side of the modern consisting in an intrinsic element that is normative but not directly ordering, namely, human nature in its seminal form. Because of the innate qualities that are inherent to human nature—translated, according to the semantics and syntax of modern political discourse, into rights, a more politically spendable and less demanding term than *essence*—it is taken a priori as a value to be affirmed equally for all. The historical development of modernity toward democracy has led the goals of the lefts to consist in conceptions of politics aimed at actively ensuring the freedom of the flourishing of the subject—singular or collective (in freely chosen communities)—in equal dignity. A liberal of the left like John Stuart Mill, when writing his *Autobiography*, could magnify “the importance, to man and society of a large variety in types of character, and of giving full freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions.” Following the same logic, albeit with very different conceptual tools, the young Marx spoke of communism as the dimension that achieves the newly found correspondence between liberated man, society, and nature (“the naturalism of man and humanism of nature both brought to fulfillment”), and which enables work to be a “free manifestation of life, hence an enjoyment of life.”⁹ In short, the norm (which does not necessarily imply normativism) here is the idea that it is good that the seeds of human rationality develop freely, in subjectivities characterized by equality of dignity and autonomy, while renouncing violence, discrimination, and

domination. Here, too, is the idea that Justice is not the order of being, but a project on the part of the subjectivities to emancipate themselves, through politics, from obstacles and constraints. This is a goal, anything but generic and obvious, that brings together liberal politics and radical politics, and which is anything but moderate, because it implies difficult choices in all circumstances. If it is true, as Rousseau expressed it, that man is born free but everywhere is in chains, then politics—which at this point reveals its modern character of being at once instrument and destiny—is assigned the task of concretely realizing humanity.

Therefore, it is thanks to politics that this normativity to be found in the natural world takes shape: human nature is not a given, but an impulse; it is not predetermined but is only a seed of immediacy, which makes the mediation of institutions essential. It should be emphasized that the left does not coincide with the hypothesis of the rationality of the real, but only of its rationalizability with regard to the subject, in terms of equal dignity. Hence the image of flourishing may be misleading: if taken literally, it implies spontaneity, a kind of unidirectional necessity, the same way that starting from a seed inevitably leads to a flower (and only to a flower) and to only one fruit. On the contrary, despite the appearance of essentialism and naturalism that pertains to modern rationalism, the truth of its image of humanity—a truth that was made manifest in twentieth-century thought (in Rawls as much as in Habermas, for example, albeit in different languages)—is indeterminate: rights are in reality a way to name that which is only truly essential; in other words, the free expression of a Self that has the right to be whoever he or she wants to be from one time to the next, or who is not an essence bound to actualize himself or herself according to obligatory schemas, or suitable configurations. This desire of the subject to live according to that which, in each person's interpretation, represents fulfillment is the deep logic of modernism viewed from the left: it is the impulse toward humanist democracy; it is the way we now talk about the pursuit of happiness. This logic contains in itself, by necessity, the equal dignity of the different wills and different projects, with the consequent exclusion of domination and violence (both incidental and structural: from the domination of class to the domination of gender).

In the world of the lefts, this ideal of free development can also be conceived as divine in origin, like a command or grace or an exhortation of God to humankind. The important thing is that human nature must not be interpreted monistically, since it is indeed intrinsically plural and dedicated to the complete autonomy of the multiple subjectivities, or coercively: it

is not legitimate institutions or agencies of meaning—parties, churches, or other—that provide a binding (and thus exclusionary) version of the flourishing of the seeds of humanity, which argue in terms of true human nature, of individual disorder with respect to an objective and imperative order, legitimized by a transcendence that is not accessible to human reason and its critical capacity. The reason for civil and political existence and its legitimation does not reside in anything that transcends individuals.

Normalization and discipline are, of course, well represented in the intellectual world and historical practice of the lefts, as means to achieve the end: their special relationship with the dual origins of the modern can inspire, politically, government control aimed at spontaneity, coercion aimed at liberation (as well as a rejection of any authoritarian means that contradicts the liberating end). The lefts are split on the question of the natural qualities of man (and woman), on the obstacles that impede them, and on the means for emancipating them: but democrats, socialists, communists, anarchists, libertarians, revolutionaries and reformists, and maximalists and gradualists, sectarians or national populists, the militants and the left-wing parties—even in the most bitter, fratricidal conflicts—have in common the idea that all human beings naturally have the right to a human destiny, one that comes through their inclusion in a rational and equal political space that is constructed free from violence and from any arbitrary rule, and whose purpose is the flourishing of multiple life programs, all of which have equal dignity. In this principle of equality lies the risk of abstract universalism that in actuality, but not necessarily, pertains to the left: the risk, that is, of losing the determinacy and concreteness of politics, of ignoring its constitutive contingency, or of overlooking the fact that to politics belongs not only the goal of humankind's free flourishing, but also our grouping together into identity-making collectivities that mutually estrange each other and are potentially hostile. This risk is closely akin to that of constructing a necessity effect, that is, to interpret one's liberating purpose as if it were sustained by an intrinsic providentiality, guided by an immanent teleology, by a philosophy of history to which any contingency can be sacrificed (including the lives of the men and women to be liberated).¹⁰ This is an argument unflinchingly reintroduced by the right, in polemics with the perfectionism of the left and its perverse outcomes (according to Hirschman's rhetoric). However, it must be said, the left is not necessarily biased or naive, and it may very well be aware of human limitations, of the very contingency of subjectivity and politics, of the fact, in short, that the objective spirit is not absolute and is

necessarily tinged with contradiction. The distinguishing trait is not that the expressive development of the subjects is perfectly achievable, in equal dignity, but the fact that this constitutes the primary objective of politics. The left can even accept that the subject is not the origin of modern politics; but in any case it cannot help but consider the subject, in its equal dignity, as the end in itself: if not what is, then what ought to be.

The right, for its part, cannot reject—even if it tries to at times—the space of the political game, the originary mode of interpretation of the real that constitutes modernity. But it entertains a different relationship with it. The right puts the natural seeds of universal subjective rationality in the background, and is defined primarily by the perception of the instability of the real, of its anomic, its incapacity to be ever completely ordered: a contingency, a disorder that can take on the appearance of a threat but also of an opportunity, of a nihilism to be confronted, but also to be used to indefinitely shape reality. The given that the right accepts as insurmountable is not a system of values but the ontological inconsistency of reality: one of the two originating sides of the modern.¹¹

This perception explains many themes that are typical of the right, which does indeed often draw on forms of organismic thought, or appeal to a transcendent order, to an inexorable law that is inaccessible to the emancipatory action of humanity. These sorts of foundations, however—and this is the deciding factor—are not only threatening (because they are not in the measure of man), they are also threatened. The rocky, unyielding, substantialistic foundationism of many of the intellectual expressions of the right—which would like to have politics firmly guaranteed by (and dependent on) God, nature, history, tradition, values, nation, race, destiny, the market—is always accompanied by the theme of permanent aggression against order, the true source from which the right really derives its political energy. Order, therefore, is neither natural nor necessary; the primary experience is that nature is not anthropomorphic but rather unstable, and therefore order must be achieved, certainly, but not so much by means of a rational contrivance as through a relentless fight against anyone who threatens it. The acceptance of disorder—the fact that in nature there are no seeds of anthropomorphic rationality as an original given—holds even where political order is a real dogma: it does not escape a radical thinker like Maistre that every dynastic legitimacy has a mystery at its origin, the illegitimate moment of its inception.

But acceptance of disorder is not only a defensive stance: disorder, evil,

is not just the problem; it can also be seen as the solution, as the main resource that politics has at its disposal. The right is not, in fact, synonymous with preservation or quietism. The continuous thread running through it, the more or less obsessive perception of the instability of the real, since it is devoid of even a seminal normative element in the measure of man, and therefore of its precarious prehuman randomness or of its necessary destiny beyond humanity (which is not the same as Machiavellian contingency, because Machiavelli is located in an early modernity that lies on the other side of, and looks beyond, the dualistic disorder/order device of the modern fully developed into rationalism), is the deep logic of a complex phenomenology. This leads the right to pursue the grim, authoritarian armor plating of political order against its internal and external enemies; to openly accept the risk of instability with the individualism of the economic subject, which relies on the logics of the market (whose presumed objectivity, which in reality is ever changing, is also a model of an unstable foundation of politics), eventually to be mitigated by an order that cannot fail to carry within itself the memory of the natural reality of disorder and to seek, at most, to transform it into the hierarchy (compassionate or not, as the case may be) of the strong over the weak, the victors over the defeated, those who are successful over those who fail; or finally, to resort to nihilism, that radical model of instability by which the right affirms the inconsistency of the real, exhibiting itself in a tough, tragic, extralegal decisionism, but also in imaginative futuristic creativity, or in manipulative illusionism—and this, too, in its festive artificial irresponsibility, is nothing but a sophisticated strategy for addressing an ever-present disorder, for preserving it in reality and sublimating it in fiction. It should be noted that the malleability of reality, its anomic being, is certainly modern: it is the result of the idea that reality has so little objectivity that it is at the disposal of the subject. But it is not a constructivist idea, because this term refers to a particular action on the real that takes place when the desire is to develop the seminal reasons of subjectivity, already present in nature, into a rational political contrivance. Whether they claim to arrive back at the most archaic origin or project themselves into the most visionary future, which they perceive as an opening to a destiny of power or as a tool for administering the existent and its natural logics; whether they make use of technology to consolidate the world or reject it because it manipulates the world too radically; whether they profess the most close-minded, solid values or practice the most unconventional nihilism; whether they manifest themselves in the conservative, middle-class pursuit of security or in the

fascist cult of death; whether they entrust themselves to the market or to the state, the individual or the corporation; whether they compare 1789 to 1914, merchants to heroes, or give themselves over to the most unbridled *laissez-faire*; in every case, right-wing policies are marked by the conviction, more or less explicitly declared and rationalized, that the goal of politics is not to realize the natural norm of humanity by artificial means. Compared to the flourishing of subjectivity in equal dignity, there is always a more important task to accomplish, a more stringent compatibility to be recognized, a more cogent context to be respected, a higher interest to be served, a more realistic goal to be pursued, a more exciting narrative to be staged, a deadly anomie to be averted, a contingency (or conversely, a law) that cannot be overcome.

Thus, when the right makes its theme order, substance, stability, weight, uniformity, and also when it proffers the entertainment of fictional drama or the audacity of the imagination, it always develops the unstable side of the real as its main leitmotif: the harsh underscoring of the need for nonhuman law makes sense because disorder is either undoubtedly a law of nature to be accepted, or it constantly threatens human law. The species of concreteness of which the right is a bearer is to be understood not as ontological solidity, but as immediate acceptance of the disorder of the world and the contingency of politics: the transcendence it appeals to is another name for immanence, for the nonhumanity of reality, unilluminated by any seminal anthropocentric reason.¹²

In short, the dominant given, for the right, is the need for exception, namely, the intrinsic randomness and nothingness of reality: the recurrent polemic against the relativism that would become typical of the left conceals and reveals a deep connection to the relativity of the real, viewed as the primary given, and which is never completely surmountable. This is not the idea (of the left) that free subjectivity is threatened by the disorder of the context, but rather, the idea (of the right) that it is preferable (or at least inevitable) to submit to the context that transcends it: for example, abortion or divorce should be banned because society, to exist, requires the nonfreedom of its subjects; or, at most, abortion or divorce should be tolerated as a lesser evil, but never welcomed and claimed as rights. And conversely, when the left is pursuing change, the continuous struggle against injustice—the revolution, but also progressive reforms—what it has in mind is the intrinsic normativity of human nature: its movement, its continuous transcendence with respect to the given, in reality its *telos* (as the ultimate horizon of meaning) is peace, as stability, finally achieved through justice. The left is thus characterized by

transcendence, not in the strict sense, but rather as critique, as going beyond, as what ought to be; in other words, by the negation of the world as it is, and by the effort to create another, better world, which is already a possibility (although negated at the moment) immanent to the present.

So it is the politics of the left that is guided by the idea that security and stability are possible, even ultimately as the result of emancipatory policies that are far from peaceful and even highly dynamic and conflictual: polemical policies for the political achievement of the natural seeds of human rationality. For the right, instead, despite the emphasis placed on order and tradition, disorder is politically paramount.¹³ At the most—but without falling into simplistic dualisms—on one side, there is hope for peace, while on the other, endless fear or conflict (also diluted in the form of competition); on one side, there is analogy (the possibility that the subject can inhabit a world in his or her own image), and on the other, anomaly (permanent disconnection from the world): on one side, subjectivity (understood as ideal), and on the other, objectivity (defined as the nothing that reality is at bottom); on one side, there is the personal, and on the other, the impersonal (as an active denial of the centrality of the subject); on one side, culture (the *regnum hominis*) and on the other, nature (resistant to any anthropomorphic configuration).

The real is conceived to be extremely malleable by the left, but not entirely so; in other words, only as a possibility to emancipate and educate humankind: the left has in mind a political contrivance (a party, a state, a revolution) that, at least in theory, assists in allowing human nature to flourish, in restoring its autonomy, in dealienating it. In principle, for the left, not everything is possible, since—regardless of how problematically—there is a purpose in the world, a normative grain of reason (and dignity), or at least we can and should behave as if there were. Its restlessness has a peaceful end; its politics (with its hard edges) has a liberating end. When Bruno Bauer wrote that “nothing is impossible for man,” he meant it in an emancipatory sense: we can liberate ourselves from all chains.¹⁴

To the right, however, everything really is possible (and this is good, for the postmodern and futuristic right, and bad for the traditional right), because there is no universally and egalitarian human norm in nature, no matter how implicit, to be developed explicitly in the political order. Because the real is infinitely anomic, unstable, and therefore also, temporarily, malleable, for the right, groundlessness—disorder, conflict, indeterminacy, radical contingency—is the ultimate, untranscendable dimension of politics.

Both left and right can develop these logics in a partial and limited fashion, or with no limits: extreme coercion (pedagogical, the Soviet model; or hierarchical, racial domination) has been carried out as a result of both as well as the paranoid fight against the enemy, whether historical or natural (a conflict that the left also participated in, not only under totalitarianism but also under democracy, in the fight against communism no less, during the Cold War). Permissiveness, prohibition, control, spontaneity, and violence may be as much a part of the right as they are of the left, depending on the circumstances.

Two forms of thought, therefore, both modern, though very divergent (one based ultimately on the exception, the other on the norm), both open, but in different ways, to contingency (the multiple forms of human flourishing, not reducible to a single figure, in one case; the radical senselessness of the world, on the other), and both tempted by the necessity effect (by the effect of the teleological development of history, or by the objective acceptance of nonhuman logics). Some clarification is needed on a few historical and intellectual experiences that seemingly diverge from the general outline we have sketched out thus far.

First, the position of liberalism needs to be defined. Its historical, philosophical, modern, rationalistic origins (practically speaking, beginning with Locke) are the indispensable first step, which consists in making subjectivity and its rights the core of politics. Once this has been established, liberalism can mix itself up with thinking and practices both from the right—where individual freedom can be interpreted in aggressive, derogatory, or hierarchical ways—or from the left, as long as the idea prevails that individual self-determination should be accompanied by the idea of the equal dignity of individuals, and of the political struggle to free them from the constraints that inhibit or prevent their flourishing. In any event, even in its right-wing formations, liberalism has comported itself nobly.

The sober realism of the historic Italian right, the Christian and national patriotism of de Gaulle, the English resistance to the Nazis under the leadership of Churchill, were great human and intellectual experiences, but also transitional forms, the result of specific historical emergencies, of provisional political and economic equilibriums, in which the perception of public duty or extreme threat turned into a real legitimate hegemony of the right. Personages who can be ascribed to this category do exist: Cavour and Einaudi, to provide other examples, despite their different places in history, and the distance that separates the impelling role of Cavour in the construction of

the unitary state from the more defensive position of Einaudi with regard to what is wrong with fascism and to the naïveté that can be found in socialist and democratic projects. They stand on a sort of crest, in an intellectual and political balance, which makes them wonderful and precarious characters whose excellence and political effectiveness have something exceptional, random, and unrepeatable about them—making them anything but paradigms, then.

The political thought of English constitutionalism and then of Scottish skepticism and Enlightenment, which is not historically attributable to the genealogy of the modern outlined here, is actually drawn into the logic of the left-right opposition. On the one hand, there is (for example, in Burke, Hayek, and Scruton) a sort of methodological individualism, but that always transcends the individual and his or her equality in dignity in the name of some logic superior to it (history, the market, tradition, success). On the other hand, there are cases of market governance by the state in terms of social justice (think of the laborism and, in some respects, the Democrats in the United States; the ideology of the American Republicans, though, even with all its individualism, does not accede to the equality of dignity or to the dynamics of liberation, and remains in various ways inscribed within the idea of always threatened orders that transcend the individual, such as the market or religious foundations of politics).

The anticonstructivist polemics that this right engages in against the left hits the mark, but only up to a point and with severe limitations. Taken seriously, the argument should not only apply to the left but also be extended to the historical and conceptual sphere that seeks the existence of a left and right, that is, at the very origins of the modern. For anticonstructivism to cease being ideological, it would have to become truly deconstructionist, in other words, shaped by traditions of thought—from Nietzsche to Heidegger, and from Foucault to Derrida—that in themselves are neither left nor right, because they are capable of revealing the devices originating in modern political discourse from the outside, and of displacing them. A similar, radical goal of arriving at an understanding of the modern beyond its own principles, but in somewhat constructive terms and, in any event, opposed to this one, inasmuch as it was substance-subject oriented, was shared by Hegel, who indeed, as to the intrinsic quality of his thought, transcended left and right. This is shown by his antiliberal polemics but also by his attacks against a reactionary Catholic like Haller and a Germanist like Savigny.

These deconstructionist authors certainly do go about annihilating (or

at least radically historicizing) the more or less naive beliefs of the left and right, attacking faith in the order to be opposed by disorder as much as they attack faith in the subject to be liberated. Yet, despite the fact that they locate themselves, from an intellectual point of view, outside and beyond the left and right, even these thinkers were fatally sucked back into these categories when it came to their individual positions, or the ideological twist their thinking assumed in their lives. While not wanting to do any wrong to Nietzsche and certainly recognizing his ultrahuman effort to be truly impolitic, that is, to remain outside the categories of modern politics, the susceptibility to take sides brought Heidegger's life history—and some of his intellectual traits, transformed into ideology—back into the categories of left and right. Heidegger was certainly capable of positioning himself before the origins of modernity and of brilliantly interpreting it as the fulfillment of Western metaphysics. He was also, therefore, able to predict the fate of subjugation and technical destruction of the selfsame subject who sought via technique to make himself master of the world (which was reduced to an image, to be sure, but not of man). But this superior philosophical vision also led him to overlook every mortal offense humanity has to undergo before recovering from the malady of metaphysics and radically changing its relationship with being (the *Verwindung*). His was a path of fierce intellectual lucidity and political and human blindness.

A kindred thinker, although not part of the same line of thought, and more easily ascribable to the right, is Carl Schmitt. His deconstructionism is powerful and invaluable in revealing the original dynamics of modern politics, its groundlessness (which he defines as “exception” or “political”). In this respect, his work is a great intellectual contribution, and can be welcomed by the left as well (which indeed it was in Italy in the 1970s), as (antidialectical) awareness of the absolute contingency of subjectivity, that is to say, the fact that the subject and action, even those of the left, are determined rather than necessary. But Schmitt is right wing because the source of politics—the original aporia of the modern, by which a politics whose end is the subject cannot have the subject as its beginning, because the beginning is indeterminacy—is interpreted positively, still on (and not beyond) the horizon of modern politics, as a politics of origin, or as a political project that repeats indefinitely the undetermined origin of the modern, which absolutizes and perpetuates the constitutively nonrational traits of rationalism, and which therefore excludes the possibility of the subject as builder of the political order (which in any case is destined to always contain disorder

inside itself, to never free itself from the state of nature) from ever being an individual (if anything, it is the constituent power of the people, or the party). In short, Schmitt not only criticizes liberalism and humanism in their naive forms, he also sweeps away any obstacle to extreme political cynicism, because he delivers himself over to a nihilism that negates the subject in its fulfillment, and even any politics that envisages the subject as an end in itself. For him, anything truly is possible (a relativism that he tried to curb with his frightening *völkisch* roots), precisely because politics is that originary indeterminate negative that makes useless any specific contradiction that revolves around a subjectivity, and which can be surpassed in further freedom.

For every two examples of deconstructionism that ended in the right (however accidental this characterization may be for Heidegger), we can cite many that finished in the left—Foucault and Derrida, of course, but also Deleuze and Rorty, and others (for example, a thinker on a path that runs distant from these but converges with them in a critique of modern subjectivity still in its metaphysical, necessary form as well as in a reassessment of contingency is Adorno). While taking for granted the obsolescence of the concept of a subjectivity that is to be liberated, even discerning the trap of liberation (the discipline, coercion, the continued construction of dispositifs of truth), they acted on the political scene, as if the subject they themselves had deconstructed and desubstantialized (a figure in the sand erased by an ocean wave . . .) enjoyed a sort of fantasy or larval survival, a residual internal force that is less powerful with respect to the tradition of progressive rationalism; as if, in short, in the name of decency and compassion, if not in the name of reason or natural rights, subjectivity still guided the political discourse, at least in dictating concrete options, contingent stances, against violence, cruelty, domination, discrimination, and racism. Deconstructionist radicalism also ends up adopting stances that, if not close to liberal ones, are not contrary to them either. Even if it does not naively embrace the theories of rights and considers them one discourse among others, and no more true than the others, one cannot go against the impulse for the free flourishing of subjectivity. This shows that even if we can think, in theory, beyond left and right, praxis—which is obviously central to the world of politics—prevents it; and it is precisely the presence or absence of the political centrality of the subject and its equal dignity that makes the difference. This is the case regardless of the awareness of the epistemological crisis of subjectivity (which can be narrated through psychoanalysis as well, and the discovery of the original cleaved and desiring structure of the sub-

ject), and regardless even of the historic setbacks of humanism. So strong is the field of attraction emanating from the modern opposition between left and right that even the Catholic Church—which obviously stands outside it, and which was in some respects its original polemical target—is involved in it, although only in historical contingency. It was led to modify its action and theory of the person, which are supposed to stand outside the left-right opposition, sometimes in one direction, and sometimes in another (from Pax Christi to Bishop Fisichella, to give just two examples that are familiar to Italians, or from the theologians of revolution to Lefebvre). Even if the faith and hope taught by Catholic doctrine transcend history, not even the church's authority has escaped the dilemmas that lie on the modern horizon.

It remains for us to analyze how the genealogical criterion we have advanced here interacts with some important parameters in political theory and practice.

As far as the relationship between risk and security is concerned—two categories that in themselves, in the abstract, cannot be ascribed exclusively to either the left or the right, because there are so many highly contradictory examples of them—the categorical explanation provides the reasons for a chiasm, or intersection, that can be experienced in everyday politics as well. The right is in favor of security, in the police sense of public order, a sphere dominated by a perception of threat (especially focused these days on immigrants, viewed as a font of disorder, and whose presence has sparked the conflict between equal dignity and hierarchical inclusion, as the security package of July 2009 showed, resolved more in the direction of the latter). And yet the right supports risk in the economy (a number of aspects make risk inherent to capitalism, even if it does not take the form of a purely competitive market, as shown by the crisis starting in 2008). The right is sometimes for risk in politics, too, when the ontological disorder is expressed in nihilistic, heroic terms (the fascist theme of beautiful death and the heroic theme of adventure and challenge). The left, on the other hand, is in favor of facing the risk of the new and different (immigrants) with an open mind, as an enriching human experience, while it is a tenacious champion of social security, of safety at work and in the workplace, because it views human dignity as at stake in this issue.

As for individualism, by no means does the left adopt it directly: the free flourishing of subjectivities (whether individuals or free associations) is not the same thing as spontaneous flourishing, since in situations of injustice and alienation the latter is actually a synonym for survival of the fittest or

passive adaptation to the context. Hayek, despite the claims he makes for himself, belongs to the right (in his lexicon, a conservative) although he is an individualist (in the past one might have said precisely because he is an individualist, since bourgeois individualism was considered right wing and collectivism was considered left wing). His almost total exclusion of the issue of justice on a human scale (which he discredited as *taxis* and juxtaposed to spontaneous order, to *kosmos*) from politics in reality compromises equal dignity, something that is always connected to free flourishing (also positioning a figure such as Jünger's Anarch, no matter how impressive, outside the left). There is no need, in short, to theorize inequality in order to be right wing: it suffices to practice inequality—which need not be only social and economic but also political, in forms of open hierarchy or exclusionary separateness (under which the friend-enemy relation also falls)—and accept it as inevitable, irremediable, and insurmountable, and to make it the main premise of political order.

Thus, Norberto Bobbio's idea of inequality as the discriminating factor between left and right is empirically true, and constitutes a fairly safe criterion for judging between the two: except that it should be interpreted as the result of a more fundamental difference between left and right, one which lies in the relationship to the two sides at the origin of modern politics.¹⁵ Apart from the fact that equality is an indeterminate concept that should be expressed more precisely as equal dignity, it is true that equality in the normative sense is excluded from the world of the rights. Their power is to be found more in variously combining the inherent instability and fragmentation of the real, accepted as natural and legitimate and temporarily stabilized, through legal ways (so that the order of the right is actually a permanent conflict, resolved only temporarily and randomly by politically reinforced social hierarchies or individual adventures). And it is also true that the pole star of leftist politics is not to be found in a unification that levels out social and political differences, but at least in their delegitimization— allied with promoting the value of existential and individual differences.

As far as the link between subjectivity and context is concerned, finally, it is clear that the left may well know that it is essential to the free flourishing of subjectivity (that is to say, that cosmopolitanism and nomadism are not the only practical option for subjectification): in other words, the left may well be aware of the determinacy and contingency of politics. But for the left, context is never an insurmountable given, nor is it a roothold, because the full expression of the subject—the free, differentiated flourishing of the

individual, in freely chosen collectivities—is a primary duty. Even in the best of cases, however, the right will view this flourishing as determined by (and subordinate to) context: this is what is imposed on the individual as value. And it is a value that is continually threatened, rather than being peacefully foundational, a context that is always potentially chaos: the rootedness of the individual is a duty; it serves to prevent the disorder that stems from rootlessness, the risk of anomie always present and imminent (in reality, it is immanent in the sense that disorder is the only true reality, which transcends the subject). The defective structure of being is responsible for this risk, but even subjectivity itself—a solution for the lefts—is in reality part of the problem of disorder, and certainly not central to the political order. So, ultimately, democracy without adjectives—in line with its modern essence—is the goal of forces variously oriented toward the left (which hardly means that all lefts are democratic in their actual practice); nor does this imply that all rights are antidemocratic, only that their democracy is always qualified as an expression of something else (which can be quite varied: market democracy, authoritarian democracy, national democracy, protected democracy, Christian democracy).

Based on these observations, because the notion of society is the concrete, real ground adopted as the field of investigation and struggle by the left, we can see that the theme of community (in its standard meaning) is basically foreign to the left, which projects it if anything into the future, as communism, or as a regulative ideal of its praxis, and that, in its democratic forms, the left prefers solidarity (a sort of synthesis between altruism and brotherhood). Community is instead a leitmotif of the right, which situates it in the past or in the present—and can also provide it with a robust, natural ontological consistency, but in one way or another, always sees it as threatened by something or someone. Similarly, for the left, the social bond is a dialectical and historical given (the context) that must be overcome and transformed into an act of free will: the social contract, solidarity, cultivated relationality. The common good does not transcend individuals, but is desired by each person as a condition for the flourishing of the all. For the right, instead, the social bond (the common good) is a given to be accepted as natural (God, the nation, race, market, history, civilization), and therefore it makes individuals passive, rendering them vulnerable to all sorts of manipulation and isolation, despite the emphasis that is placed on community.

Our genealogical criterion thus also identifies the underlying reason for the superficial but often well-founded observation that the right is the bearer

of a negative anthropology (namely, political thought in which the subject, in its condition of equal dignity, cannot be central) while the left carries with it a view of human beings that is at least potentially positive. It also explains the closely related fact that political realism is more suited to the right, since it assumes as its principle the nonanthropomorphic side of nature, its total contingency, and from this develops a discourse on man in general, on the necessary limitedness of human expectations (although a school of thought that traverses multiple ages, originating with Thucydides and Tacitus, passing through Machiavelli and Hobbes, and culminating in Schmitt, is nothing but an anachronistic optical illusion, constructed entirely within the chamber of mirrors of modernity, to which the right inherently belongs).

The Global Age and the Italian Case

The global age is distinguished by numerous crises involving the normativity of the subject, its rights, the importance of work, and the state. The decline of the Fordist factory and the social-democratic compromise; the new importance of consumption (the linguistic turn in politics) and of its ensuingly weak, polymorphic, narcissistic, and malleable subjectivity; the collapse of communism, that hyperregulatory model: all these events inaugurated what in many respects is a postmodern era, the iron age of global war, in which the validity of the politically vital categorical distinctions of modernity—interior-exterior, public-private, norm-exception, peace-war—has become highly problematic.

It is an epoch of blurred, uncertain political spaces in which different scales—local, national, postnational, regional, universal, and global—coexist and confront each other. It is a liquid, fluid, unstable, fragmented, insecure world traversed by conflicts, fears, and uncertainties. In this context, politics does not appear in the egalitarian contours originating in rationalism and the Enlightenment, accompanied by the inclusionary institutions of the welfare state; rather, it is structured according to multiple, continuously changing contrapositions and exclusions (de facto or in principle): the difference between friend and enemy, between the West and Islam, between civilization and terrorism, between citizens and migrants, between rich and poor, between educated and uneducated, and between whites, blacks, and colored people. In addition, the public space tends to appear random, as an assemblage of social powers founded on exception and anomaly. The transition from modernity to contemporaneity is the transition from growth to

risk, from progress to labyrinth; it is the crisis of the normative capacity of politics and law (centered on subjectivity), and the triumph of the unstable and ultrahuman normativity of technology and the economy.

In these crisis conditions affecting modern and late-modern neutralizations (the state, in the form of the welfare state), the political forces (public opinion) seem to position themselves with new intensity around the left-right cleavage. In this amorphous, anomic political space, the right was the first to recover its strength and avail itself of this momentous historical opportunity that stretched across a good part of Europe, the first since 1945 (true, there had been Thatcher in the 1980s, but her considerable political weight was exercised mainly in the transatlantic English-speaking world). Entirely immune from nostalgia and wanting anything but to restore past world orders, the postmodern rights—all at work today to a greater or lesser degree depending on the various national political contexts: charismatic and technocratic, foundationistic and nihilistic, personalistic and racist (or biopolitical), nationalistic and localistic—act without prejudice from within the internal diversity and complexity of contemporary societies. They intervene with policies pandering to corporate divisions and alarmist fears, to social resentments and cultural fragmentation, to closures and exclusions (or subordination) of the nonintegrated, and to xenophobias, both overt and concealed. Organizing temporary, hierarchical combinations of social differences; putting forward contradictory policies of freedom of the market (neoliberalism with its savage mobilizing powers) and freedom from the market (state neointerventionism, with its force of stabilization); bringing together fear of competition and fear of the enemy in hopes of winning the struggle for existence, or carving out a protected niche; engaging in egoistic individualism while cultivating collective identities in imagined communities, with folklore and volunteer patrols to create the illusion of being able to recover lost territories and social spaces; inventing a threatening other onto which all tensions are discharged, without offering any rational response to them: all this means that the image of society promoted by the right does not have a project of emancipation at its heart whose norm consists in the equal dignity of all citizens. For the rights, society should remain divided in its different interests and in the variegated drives that traverse it and break it apart; it must find precarious equilibriums based on hierarchy and exclusion (or better yet, based on unequal inclusion): a revolution to keep everything from changing, to ensure that differences remain.

This strategy—expressed with varying intensity—is possible thanks to

the fact that the right interprets reality as ontologically unstable and anomic. Unifying and stabilizing identity-making forms (the nation, religion, life, the local community) that are offered at the symbolic level are actually mobilizing, polemical, and organized around conflict with an enemy, around the exorcism of a communist, Islamic, terrorist specter (although they are also rounded up by traditional agents of meaning, like the Catholic Church, who, by taking some of these propaganda issues seriously, are given the opportunity to intervene in politics, in society, and in individuals).

The Italian case is in some ways paradigmatic of the new opportunities and new forms available to the postmodern rights, and of their ability to shape the real, without being constructivist in the strict sense. The end of the double *conventio ad excludendum* created between 1943 and 1948 (the founding moment of the Republic, initially antifascist and later anticommunist), which was slow to come about, has already led, for fifteen years now, after the destruction of the political system due to the action of the judiciary, to a government in which the regulatory element of the republican political subjectivity—expressed by the association between the parties of the Italian National Liberation Committee and the social-democratic state—was no longer the politically driving factor. In the by-now advanced consummation of the defining traits of modernity—in social anomie and in the obsolescence of the difference between public and private (a difference that in itself is neither left nor right, but which traverses both, just as the alternation of the primacy given at any time to one or the other is not the defining difference, since only the political purpose to which it is directed is a deciding factor)—today the right successfully (in elections, at least) implements a policy managed according to the logics of exception and anomaly, taking the utmost malleability of the world as achieved and for granted. The world is broken down and put back together according to multiple possible combinations that enable the coexistence of symbolic unity and real fragmentation, passive populism and hierarchizing oligarchy, tradition and postmodernity, racism and rhetorics of solidarity, real flexibility and imaginary communitary rootedness, tough political leadership and mass-media dissolution of reality. This *complexio oppositorum* is made possible, in intellectual terms, by the most profound adherence on the part of the rights to the instability of the real, to its radical contingency and, therefore, to the relations of power that actually occur in society. In truth, this is very close to a state of nature (the individualism of the right is egoistic and anomic; it is the private that seeks immediately to be public), while the political state understood as a rational

contrivance is reduced to pure power (not all that powerful in actuality), and almost dissolved in effect by the systematic bypassing of constitutional balances and the very principle of legality.

The immanence that characterizes the right resides equally in its adherence to the world as it really is, and in its compensatory illusion—continuously nurtured—of a dream of individual and group power, of fantasized community, of prosperity and happiness that could come true, if only a few obstacles were removed (the communists, terrorists, migrants, magistrates, corruption bashers, journalists, and many others). And Italians largely share the perception of the world as devoid of rules, other than those that sanction success no matter how pursued, the subordination of the less able, and the exclusion of those who are different. The very centrality of the security issue passes off as obvious what is in fact a hierarchical construction of society, by which the second-last to arrive find partial relief from their subordinate status by means of laws that sanction hardline policies against noncitizens, the last to arrive: what matters is that rather than equality guaranteed by the state, the political guideline now guarantees exception. At most, the idea may be acceded to that it is a good, uplifting thing to soften the hard law of inequality, when possible, with the balm of compassion (but as charity, not as rights). Sentimentality is the surrogate of humanism.

But if the success of the right in Italy is ensured by its ability to tap unscrupulously into state power beyond the horizon of stateness, if the form of Italian politics is an example of the revolutionary force of the right, one cannot fail to mention that its success is mainly due to its leader, Silvio Berlusconi, a singular example of a charismatic storyline of biopower, minidramas, performance, and television populism. Berlusconi's political proposal is that his own person, his own body—transfigured by the virtual apotheosis of the mass media—creates the fusion of the one with the many, and of the many with the one, through love. This is a curious reversal of the Sun King's motto "the state is me." Indeed, Louis XIV defined himself as the personal beginning of the impersonal public machine, while Berlusconi makes his person and his private interests law, just as he renders his own body identical to the all. This is dramatic representation, not political representation, the fruit of an emotional contract lying somewhere between religious mysticism and theatricality: the mystical body of the head—which is simultaneously king and people—is the living and concrete figure of a multitude that sees itself in him, and which in loving him loves itself, boosted but not overwhelmed by feelings of inferiority: the head is simultaneously everyone and

each individual; he is a common man, easy to understand, and someone we can identify with. Thus is established a radical separation between being citizens and being members of the mystical body, and strong competition between dramatic representation and political representation (the parliament). The latter is destined to an increasingly marginal political role, because being a citizen is tedious and difficult, alienating and sometimes depressing; while being part of the mystical body is not as tiring, and it offers joy and happiness: the fusion-transfiguration of the one into the many and the many into the one is vital, optimistic, and expansive (not by chance, the militants of Berlusconi's People of Freedom party have been defined missionaries of freedom, since they are expected to carry its image "into the lands of the unbelievers" [*in partibus infidelium*]). Moreover—and this is true hegemony, combined with real illusionism—the head succeeds in making people believe that defending his interests (and interests of those like him) is in the interest of working people, who reward him heavily in elections. Hence, Berlusconi is doing politics in the strongest sense precisely when he conveys the illusion of going beyond politics in the fullness of the life of the nation, thanks to a daily media plebiscite, thereby incorporating in himself the antipolitical, the prepolitical, and the (allegedly) postpolitical.

More than anything, this political presentation has a deresponsibilizing effect. Political transfiguration has the effect of making what is real coincide, in full immanence, with what is represented: the difference—which was the starting point of modern politics—between what is and what ought to be, between an actual situation and a project, between natural and artificial is abolished; what is real has been transfigured, but left essentially how it is. Rather than criticism, an effort of the imagination and optimism accompanied by individual initiative make problems surmountable; in the event they are not, the fault is to be attributed to scapegoats, to the forces of evil, who are opposed to the forces of good, and who love neither the head nor the people.

Of course, the ends of these policies are those of any right-wing revolution: to change everything so that everything remains as it is. Which today means a design, a rather effective one, to go beyond parliamentary democracy toward an executive made strong and legitimized by the charisma and power of the head, so as to stop the project of democratic equality, and of emancipation, of the republican constitution, so that the current contradictions of society are blocked, so that the increasing gap in power and wealth between the citizens is not bridged, and is not even noticed, suffocated and

transfigured as it is in the new fated community embodied in the body of the head: and since in a community there is no thinking in terms of rights, it is to his compassion that we are obliged if no one is left behind. In concrete terms: this revolution, in these forms, serves to safeguard the person and interests of the head, so that the economic crisis is not managed in the interest of progress and development, and so that its effects are endured by the people as happily (or distractedly) as possible.

From the practical, empirical point of view, the success of these politics structured like a *Gefolgschaft* who is unheroic, but winking in complicity—in which the thaumaturge king encounters the satrap, and unleashes the futuristic power of a populist fantasy that makes the people the political protagonist (but only in words, because in reality, they are increasingly passive)—is made possible by the almost total control of television broadcasting and most of the print media: the right has always been at ease making innovative use of technologies.

We are spared from having to say that the whole world is on the right now: Obama's victory in 2008 in the United States, even though essentially determined by the economic crisis that American public opinion viewed as having been caused by the right-wing government, is proof to the contrary. Yet based on the Italian experience—unusual, to be sure, but significant—it is clear that the right is more at home in a postmodern world because it can energetically play with the modern perception of the profound instability of the real: this is the reason why, in effect, it is able to achieve political, social, and cultural hegemony. Its thinking, hastily put together in the 1980s through the criticism of modern philosophy, but much more through the minidramas of commercial television, intercepts common sense, manipulates it, and, without transcending it, molds and validates it.

The left, on the contrary, is disoriented because every one of its statements is counterfactual, referring to the world not as it is, but as it should be, and at the same time lacking many of the theoretical and political tools necessary for its praxis. Only when it knows what it really wants from politics can it credibly seek to realize, in the circumstances of any given moment, the only goal it really can have: the creation of a form of politics guided by the intrinsic normativity of the flourishing, in equal dignity, of individuals and groups in their concrete differences. Its appeal to conscious subjectivity, to rights, and to what remains of the welfare state, to the public-governmental sphere, can sound behind the times and ineffectual: although in some contexts and in some circumstances it has seemed more realistic and reasonable than the

fantasies of the right, the 2009 European elections showed that the left does exist, that it is different from the right, but unlike the right it is having difficulty evolving adaptively to the new ecological environment and feeling at home and sufficiently flexible and protean in the new, profoundly anomic context of economic crisis. This slowness is confronted, moreover, by the quickness of the right (which, however, is highly unstable in its solutions).

The Present and the Future: Provisional Conclusion

The transition to the postmodern (or global) age has thus transformed the left and the right, causing both to lose their traditional identity and political forms. But even though they both derive their reason for being from the origins of modernity, this does not make them obsolete as political categories. And the past has not been surpassed, not because left and right are permanent acquisitions, but (only) because the modern structural duality of politics—suspended between natural anomie and norm implicit in its subjectivities—has indeed lost its subjects, forms, and horizons, but it has not been replaced by any solid ground, by any new justice, or by a functional equivalent that can act as a yardstick, as a measure, for new political categories, or even by a new polemical front line capable of creating a new horizon of political meaning. In short, while the original duality of the modern has persisted, the structures of its political and institutional architecture have not. Consequently, both pundits and public opinion can still tell from one instance to the next if a position and policy are from the right or left, if they privilege exception or context, or—on the contrary—the latest normativity to enable the subject to flourish. The world interpreted by politics oscillates today between the nothingness of the order of human things (or defending a continuously threatened order to the bitter end) and the perception of a seminal norm that, as a (remote) possibility, consists in subjectivities—if not in their rational essence, then at least in their capacity to suffer and their willingness to live and flourish. Thus, although the world has changed, although the problems vary and solutions are lacking, if politics remains structurally undetermined, if these remain the lenses through which we view politics, if subjectivity as an end in itself can still be the defining trait, at least in political discourse—then left and right continue to determine the political space and to oppose each other.

The agenda of the challenges to be tackled, the new political guidelines to be thought out, is staggering. We are confronted with new forms of rela-

tionship between the universal and the particular, with the dialectic implicit in the connection between humanity and cultures as they present themselves within the political space of the state, which today is called upon to accommodate differences that are far more heterogeneous (although communicating and comprehensible) than the antithesis between capital and labor.¹⁶ We must deal with biotechnologies and their ambiguous biopolitical potential—just one of the multiple powers that enter into the naked flesh of living beings, molding it and shaping it to the point of subjugation—and new options for the possible expression and liberation of subjectivity. It is not a matter of fighting biopower because it distorts the supposed true essence of human nature, but because it may violate the freedom and dignity of the real subject; but then, the prospect of humanity hybridized with technology is in itself neither new nor scary, provided this marriage takes place in the prospect of freedom and maximization of the expressiveness of subjectivity. The challenges also involve managing the refragmentation of the global economy and governing globalization, in a new world order in which the West is no longer the center, and in a plurality of large economic areas. Democracy must be revitalized: by enabling it to address conflicts; by seeking, through the state, to work with the change in scale (apparently required by the denationalization of politics) that (at least in part) places politics beyond the state, in the direction of federation or empire; by interpreting the agents of fluidity and disintegration of international relations (from the power of corporations to migrations to terrorism) using realistic thinking and creative imagination; by deciding between growth and restraint; by overcoming the conflict between nomadic and sedentary peoples that seems to have hypnotized the popular European consciousness.

All the points of this agenda target the subject, capitalism, technique, biopolitics, the environment, and cultures as strategic centers of real contradictions generated at the global level, but which we perceive critically as inside—and as breaching—the local space of the state and the vestiges of its ordering capacity. And if the possible answers to our current challenges still involve the contraposition of anomaly versus norm, exception versus legality, domination versus autonomy, rumormongering or propagandizing versus responsibly speaking out, and inequality versus equality; if, in these new scenarios, the alternative continues to be framed in terms of whether civil and political life should be something normatively different from a jumble of unequal relations, or whether, on the contrary, it can only oscillate between chance and necessity; if it still makes sense to ask whether the last word

should be given to the capitalist economy, which presents itself as a series of bubbles and crises, as an independent entity that shapes itself and demands the sacrifice of people, forms, and orders in order to function, or to the centrality and dignity of subjectivities, affirmed by politics; if the subject, no longer transcendental, of course, but no longer simply deconstructed by critical theorists or turned into an ideological larva, a purely sentimental entity or a consumer or a spectator—in its life, its reproduction, its way of loving, its illnesses, suffering, and death—is still the battlefield between threatening and threatened authority versus freedom, this means that left and right will have a life beyond the modern age, surviving into the global age.

It is by no means to be taken for granted that they will retain their current forms. There is nothing preventing the left—it would actually be desirable if it did—from expressing a humanism that is not naive: a transparent hope, entirely free from the coerciveness of all its old necessity effects, one that is also attentive, however, to real contradictions as they authentically come to exist in bodies and spaces. Similarly, there is nothing preventing the right from putting itself forward as the bearer of a grave seriousness, of a realism that is not cynical, of a nonhumanism that is not also antihuman, of a sense of contingency that is neither ruthless nor ephemeral. Both left and right, if capable of it, should relaunch the normativity of politics and law against the deviations of the economy and technology. The strategic task of the right will continue to consist in coming up with continually new solutions for order—all of which they believe to be foundational and transcendental, but which in reality are transient, conflictual, and anomalous—for problems and threats they know they cannot (and will not) solve at their roots. The left has the task of taking on the existence and value of individuals as they ought to be, and of firmly articulating the rights of the subjectivities, but not in an essentialistic, identity-making way; in other words, not to turn the individual into a weapon against the other, but rather to arrive at it in all its concreteness. And in general, not to just wait until the imaginative bubble of the right bursts, but to actively pursue a new hegemony, that is, to outline a new chain of active subjectivities and effective political means; and to offer a new vision of the world, a framework within which individual and collective energies can find their space, working toward an emancipation that may be conflictual, but not unequal. If it comes down to it, the left must dynamically incite the power of populism, respond to unanswered political questions by establishing a new subject people at the heart of the political, beyond state neutralization.¹⁷ What this means to the left, having

abandoned any pretense of necessity, is to discover a *kairòs*, an opportunity that legitimates another shared undertaking to be pursued, beyond the last creation of the left (or center-left), the welfare state; but, equally, to reinvent the institutional and intellectual tools that will allow us, without making a utopian leap out of it, to pass from the world as it is to the world as it ought to be. Struggle and contingency, mobility and escape, but also a new era for rights, freedoms, and responsibilities, of individuals and collectives, singular and plural: these are the many options that open the way from here to a praxis, with the natural divergences between moderate and radical lefts; and perhaps the clash between unstructured, rebellious subjectivity and institutions is the new name for the traditional dilemma of reform versus revolution.

If and when the original modern structure of politics, balanced between nature and contrivance, is consumed and inconceivable; if and when the ground of politics is radically changed, because subjectivity is no longer a category that holds strategic value for forming the political space, and its flourishing is no longer the key political question; if and when politics is organized around other conceptual axes (for example, polluters against environmentalists, and the ecological crisis is in itself capable of crowding out the left-right cleavage, and of creating a front that unites humanity against nature gone mad, or, more radically, unites man and nature, meaning, all nonhuman living beings, in a new alliance based on restraining growth), then left and right will no longer mean anything, which was how it was for almost the entire historical and political experience of the West. But until then, left and right will continue to say, in a feeble whisper or perhaps out loud, something modern about our postmodern political fortunes.

Notes

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- 1 De Benoist, "End of the Left-Right Dichotomy," 73–90.
- 2 Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*.
- 3 Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*.
- 4 Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*.
- 5 Revelli, *Le due destre*.
- 6 Revelli, *Sinistra Destra*.
- 7 Rémond, *Les Droites en France*.

- 8 Lefranc, *Les gauches en France*.
- 9 Mill, *Autobiography*, 259; Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," 85; Marx, "From the Paris Notebooks," 95.
- 10 Galli, *Contingenza e necessità nella ragione politica moderna*.
- 11 Santambrogio, *Destra e sinistra*.
- 12 Mannheim, *Conservatism*.
- 13 Cofrancesco, *Destra e sinistra*.
- 14 Bauer, "The Capacity of the Present-Day Jews and Christians to Become Free," 149.
- 15 Bobbio, *Left and Right*.
- 16 Galli, *L'umanità multiculturale*.
- 17 Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.