From Dusk till Dawn: Bobbio on the left/right dichotomy

Hugo Drochon
University of Nottingham
hugo.drochon@nottingham.ac.uk

Abstract

In his seminal 1994 book *Left and Right*, Bobbio defined the left as favouring equality, whereas the right favoured inequality. Whilst that distinction retains all of its intellectual purchase, Bobbio was also open to theorising the centre as either the 'included', 'inclusive' and 'transversal' middle. Building on Bobbio's work, this article posits that a centre/extremes opposition is a better way of conceptualising political change, after which a left/right divide re-establishes itself on the basis of the creation of a new centre. To do so it will explore the birthplace of the left/right divide, namely the French Revolution, to argue it was not the only – or indeed dominant – opposition at the time, turning then to the 2017 French presidential election, which opposed Emmanuel Macron to Marine Le Pen, to underline how the centre/extremes opposition continues to capture something fundamental about our contemporary politics. It will conclude by asking whether Bobbio's notion of the 'inclusive' middle is the best way for the centre to hold today.

Introduction

The centre is under attack. On the 23 June 2016 the United Kingdom voted to Leave the European Union, although almost all of the main political parties – Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National Party (SNP), Plaid Cymru and the Green Party – alongside the sitting Prime Minister David Cameron and his Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne, had campaigned in favour of Remain. Arrayed against them was the still-marginal UK Independence Party (UKIP) and rogue members of the Conservative Party, which remained neutral on the question, such as Boris Johnson and Michael Gove: the former widely credited with political opportunism, which contradicted the stance he had previously taken as Mayor of London (he famously penned two versions of his regular *The Daily Telegraph* column, one in favour of Remain, the other for Leave).[1]

The Brexit vote was not only an anti-elite and anti-establishment vote, but also one against what had been the centre-ground of UK politics since 1973, namely membership of the European Union and its predecessors, which all the political forces in the country, with some notable dissension in their ranks (Tony Benn in Labour, the Eurosceptic wing of the Tories), formerly supported.[2] A few months later, in November 2016, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States having decried the Washington DC 'political establishment', including those in his own party, to chants of 'drain the swamp'. 2017 saw the rise of populist anti-EU parties, on both the left and the right – think Jean-Luc Mélechon and Marine Le Pen in France – across Europe. Politics, it seemed, was no longer a contest between left and right, but opposed instead the forces of the centre against those on the extremes.

Writing at a different time – in 1994 during Silvio Berlusconi's first short-lived government (he had resigned by the end of the year) – the Italian political theorist Norberto Bobbio set himself a different task in his *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction*, namely to defend the continued existence of a meaningful left/right divide against those who argued the opposition had become obsolete.[3] As Bobbio himself noted, that he should do so precisely at the moment Italy was becoming more polarised – this was the first time since the end of the war that the centrist Christian Democrats did not participate in government – was somewhat ironic, as the country was becoming more polarised: Berlusconi's coalition was firmly on the right, with alliances with the federalist Northern League, ancestor to today's Matteo Salvini's populist *Lega*, in the north, and with the post-fascist National Alliance (heir to the Italian Social Movement) in central and southern regions (the fact Forza Italia had opposing allies in the north and the south ultimately doomed the coalition).[4] Part of this shift was a result of an institutional change: Italy had just moved from a proportional representation model to a first-past-the-post system, seemingly reproducing a more oppositional form of politics reminiscent of Westminster, with its benches of government and opposition arrayed against one another, as opposed to the Italian parliament the Montecitorio, which was much more graded along its amphitheatre form.[5]

Against those who claimed that the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signalled the 'end of ideology' – an ideological claim in itself, as Bobbio was quick to point out[6] – or that society was now too complex to be captured by a simply binary, Bobbio objected that the left/right divide still had currency because that opposition centred around a

fundamental disagreement concerning equality that continues to motivate politics: the left favours equality whereas the right favours inequality. This distinction, Bobbio underlined, was a *relative* one: left and right were not absolute 'substantive' or 'ontological' concepts that have their own, intrinsic, characteristics, rather they appear on an axis that changes over time, with the emergence of new ideas and movements such as socialism, fascism, green politics etc.[7] They define themselves vis-à-vis one another, but are mutually exclusive – 'antithetical' as Bobbio puts it – as one cannot be both on the left and on the right at the same time (although some try to do so, which we will return to). Together they capture the totality of human existence – they are a 'dyad' – from which one cannot escape.[8]

This totalising view Bobbio drew from Carl Schmitt's infamous friend/enemy distinction, which, according to Bobbio, captured the fundamental dichotomy of existence.[9] He contrasted it to other oppositions, namely between moderates and extremists, explaining that both extremes – on the left and the right – ultimately merged, in what has since been termed the 'horseshoe thesis', into a rejection of democracy.[10] Moreover, what fundamentally differentiated moderates from extremists was *method*, whereas left and right differed on *values*, a stronger distinction.[11] Indeed, whilst other types of distinctions could exist – high/low, top/bottom, front/behind, open/closed, visible/invisible – these were ultimately *secondary* divisions, which didn't capture the whole of politics in the way the left/right division does.[12] Sometimes suggested opposites are not even that: Bobbio explains how the opposite of tradition should be innovation, and not emancipation as usually posited, and again the opposite of emancipation should probably be paternalism, not traditionalism or conservatism.[13] Finally, liberty and equality – another possible opposition – do not play on the same plane. Liberty is a personal condition, equality is a social one: if 'X is free' makes sense to us, 'X is equal' does not, because X needs to be equal to something else.[14]

This brings us back to the left/right divide, which is relational. It has three further features: it is descriptive, namely that someone can describe a position as being either left or right without judging it, as opposed to more loaded oppositions (open v closed perhaps); it is evaluative, in the sense that once agreed on the description one is free to judge it positively or negatively (equality might be positive for the left, but considered a levelling down for the right);[15] and it is historical, in that it changes over time, and subsumes within it not only new movements but new oppositions that are proposed from time to time.[16]

Whether equality is the right way to divide the left from the right has given rise to much debate, in Italy itself,[17] in the UK – where Bobbio had a respectful exchange with Perry Anderson in the *New Left Review* over Tony Blair's 'New Labour'[18] – and in the US, where the more common divide is liberal and conservative.[19] It is not the object of this article to determine whether equality is the correct dividing line between left and right, although we can note that for Bobbio equality was not simply an economic value, but a more general social value too (witness his different sections on feminism, immigration and animal rights).[20] Rather, it is enough to underline how the left/right divide still captures something essential, as Bobbio had argued almost thirsty years ago, about our politics today, whether it is Joe Biden's leftwards move since coming to office on a moderate ticket, or the continued left/right Labour/Tory divide in the UK (with Keir Starmer being to the right of Corbyn but still to the left of Blair, and Johnson being to the right of Cameron). Even in countries where the 'centre' is thought to dominate – in France under Emmanuel Macron, or the technocratic government of Mario Draghi in Italy[21] – the left and the right still helps make sense of the political landscape: as Bobbio had written, the fact that the centre can exist at all is because there is a left and a right to position itself between; 'its very existence and *raison d'être* is based on this antithesis'.[22]

If the left/right divide holds, the aim of this article is instead to question whether that opposition is the best way to conceptualise political change. Excellent work has been done notably by Jonathan White to apply Bobbio's distinction to what Mathew Humphrey, David Laycock and Maiken Umbach have termed the 'meso' level of political analysis, namely examining how politicians and journalists use these left/right categories in public discourse to position themselves in contemporary debates.[23] This is in contrast to the more abstract, canonically defined 'macro' level (think Hobbes, Locke etc.), and the vernacular 'micro' level of everyday political discussion. Perhaps Bobbio's *Left and Right* has already achieved 'canonical' macro status, and what this article proposes to do is to look at a 'macro', 'meso' and 'micro' level of how political change happens over time: how the third 'historical' feature of the left/right opposition Bobbio identified comes to occur. That is to say, it will look at political change from both an analytical point of view and also at how political agents themselves use these categories of change, alongside how that divide passed into everyday language. Building on Bobbio's theorisation of the centre, it will argue historical change should not be understood through the left/right divide but instead through a centre/extremes

opposition, to return to our opening gambit. It is only after this centre/extremes antagonism has been settled that a left/right divide reimposes itself through interpreting what the new centre ground of politics is: there is a – limited – temporal dimension to the centre/extremes opposition. As Bobbio himself puts it: the left/right dawn follows the dusk of the centre.

To do so, this article will first explore Bobbio's three-dimensional theory of the centre – the 'included', 'inclusive' and 'transversal' middle – underlining how Bobbio's overall approach is compatible with an 'ideologies' approach as developed by Michael Freeden.[24] Second, it will turn to the birthplace of the left/right divide – the French Revolution – to show how this was not the only, and sometimes not even the dominant, divide at the time: during the Terror Robespierre's supporters sat across the highest benches of the National Assembly ('The Mountain') and were opposed to those directly below them, the 'Plane' or the 'Marais'. This will be the abstract 'macro' moment of analysis, followed by a 'meso' moment, focused on the agents, which examines the 2017 French presidential election that pitted Emmanuel Macron against Marine Le Pen, two candidates that explicitly rejected the traditional left/right divide, proposing instead new ones: progressives v conservatives for Macron, patriots v globalists for Le Pen. In conclusion, it will ask whether an 'inclusive middle', which transcends the old left/right divide and creates a new synthesis – a new centre-ground – is the right way to face the extremist forces released onto the world today.

I: The Centre

It is not Bobbio who had the strongest influence on the development of Freeden's theory of ideology – that honour seems to go instead to Reinhart Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte*[25] – but certainly Bobbio's account of the left and the right, at least, appears quite compatible with it.[26] And by ideology Bobbio, of course, still understands it primarily as the ideologies of the twentieth century – fascism, communism etc.[27] – although he is also open to using the term to describe people's contemporary and everyday political positions.[28] Yet like Freeden's account, Bobbio's theory of the left and right is that they are not static, but evolve – this is the historical dimension.[29] Moreover, they have a core, namely equality for the left and inequality for the right, that dominate peripheral or secondary oppositions, and are able to welcome new concepts with their bosom.[30] Finally, left and right give different meanings to the same

term: equality, as we saw above, 'which is a traditional element in the ideology of the left, is considered levelling down by someone on the right'.[31]

Alongside this classic inter-ideological conceptual competition, Bobbio offers a stark example of what Freeden terms intra-ideological competition, a form of 'decontestation' of concepts during the breakup of the Italian communist party:

> It would in fact be difficult to establish which faction was the left and which the right, because the old guard which could be considered the right on the grounds that conservatism is right-wing and change left-wing could at the same time be considered the left on the grounds of its greater commitment to the struggle against capitalism. On the other hand, the more innovative faction could claim to be the left of the party because it is more favourable to change, but its programme could be considered more right-wing according to traditional criteria.[32]

Additionally, Bobbio's defence of the continuing relevance of the left/right opposition is in tune with the micro/meso/macro levels of analysis developed by Humphrey, Laycock and Umbach. Bobbio's first insistence on why the opposition retains political valence is because of its use in everyday language:[33] although political terminology is sometimes imprecise, ambiguous or ambivalent,[34] nevertheless, 'the people who use the words "left" and "right" do not appear to be using words unthinkingly, because they understand each other perfectly'.[35] This chimes well with Humphrey, Umbach and Zeynep Clulow's emphasis on the 'vernacular' of political language.[36] The 'meso' level is in full force in Bobbio's 'Reply' to his critics, where he writes that the distinction persists not simply on road signs, but also 'pervades newspapers, radio, television, public debates and specialised magazines on economics, politics and sociology', or again 'in relation to politicians, parties, movements, alliances, newspapers, political programmes and legislation'.[37] What is interesting to note here is how Bobbio uses not only different levels, but also different registers: the former humorously, concluded that even holidays had been divided in left and right-wing holidays,[38] and the latter more seriously, when it comes to public debate: another layer of analysis worth reflecting on, and that offers an alternative avenue through which to explore the relation and articulation between the different levels of analysis.

Last, but not least, Bobbio offers a canonical confrontation between Rousseau and Nietzsche on equality, worth quoting at length:

> In his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men*, Rousseau argues from the premiss that men are born equal but are made unequal by civil society, that it is society which slowly imposes itself on the state of nature through the

> division of labour. Conversely, Nietzsche works on the premise that men are by nature born unequal (and this is a good thing because, among other things, a society founded on slavery as in ancient Greece was a highly developed society precisely because it had slaves), and that only a society with a heard morality and a religion bases on compassion and submissiveness could make them equal. The same degeneration which created inequality for Rousseau created equality for Nietzsche.[39]

Although the aim of Bobbio's book is to defend the continuing validity of the left/right distinction, he gives a lot of space to the existence of a centre. In the context of a debate on whether the left/right is still a compelling distinction, and whether equality is indeed the dividing line, that aspect to Bobbio's theory has often been overlooked,[40] yet it is the aspect Bobbio starts with in his first chapter on 'A Challenge to the Distinction'. There he immediately concedes that the left/right distinction does not in the least preclude a 'continuous spectrum which joins the left and the right, or of intermediate positions where the left meets right'.[41] That central position between extremes he dubs the 'centre'. And he takes the thought further, explaining that in dyadic conception of politics he has been exploring the centre would be an 'excluded centre', as everything by essence needs to be either left or right. But a dyadic conception can open up to a triadic one, in which there might be an 'included centre', in which the 'intermediate space between the left and the right…is neither one nor the other'. No bother: 'black and white are divided by grey, and day and night are divided by dusk. Grey takes nothing away from the distinction between black and white, and dusk takes nothing away from the distinction between day and night'.[42] The possibility of a centre depends precisely on the existence of a left and right in the first place, otherwise what would it be the centre of?

This move from dyadic to triadic Bobbio had explored before, from the second page of his book. He had set out to show – although not yet specifically named, Schmitt's imprint is all over this passage – that all fields of thinking are marked by a dyadic cut, whether it is society/community for sociology, market/planned for economics, public/private for law, classical/romantic for aesthetics, or indeed transcendent/immanent for philosophy.[43] Left/right – and this was to be Bobbio's biggest claim – was to be found not solely in politics, but everywhere, in a reiteration of Schmitt's essential friend/enemy division. Dyadic distinctions can be either antithetical, as left/right are, or complementary; either conflictually divergent or harmonious that fuse into a superior whole. Politics is conflictual, but dyadic thought,

Bobbio continues, can generate triadic thought, and the form the latter takes will depend on whether the dyadic conception was oppositional or complementary in the first place: if the former (oppositional), then the triad will come about through a dialectical synthesis – a negation of the negation –, or in the latter (complementary) through composition.[44]

It is the transition from dyadic to triadic that opens up the way for Bobbio's second 'centre' (the 'excluded centre', by its very nature, isn't one): the 'inclusive middle'. Whereas the 'included middle' tries to find a space for itself between the left and right – and when it becomes completely dominant can relegate the two to their extremes (Bobbio may have had Italian Christian Democracy in mind here)[45] – the 'inclusive middle', as a triad, tries to go beyond the two opposites, incorporating them into a higher synthesis. Instead of two mutually exclusive totalities like two (left and right) sides of a coin, here we have a dialectic totality.[46] As it proceeds from an opposition the synthesis is not a compound, which would have emerged from a harmony, but it is 'something entirely new'.[47] It is not a 'mediated third' but a 'transcended third'. And whereas the 'included middle' realises its essence through driving out the left and the right from the middle-ground, the 'inclusive middle' feeds off both to give birth to a new entity. So if the logic of the 'excluded middle' is 'either…or', and that of the 'included middle' 'neither…nor', for the 'inclusive middle' the formula is 'both…and'.[48]

This 'inclusive middle', needless to say, is reminiscent of the 'third way', towards which Bobbio showed some reservation, as we'll have the occasion to return to in part 3. But this brings us to Bobbio's third centre – the '*transversal* third' – which he associates with the eruption of Green politics. This is a third that does not sit in the middle of the left/right or tries to sublimate it into something new, but moves *through* the spectrum itself.[49] If this move through the spectrum produces a temporary reduction in the authority of the original left/right dyad, it does not, according to Bobbio, signal its obsolescence: over time ecological positions will end up splitting into right-wing or left-wing greens – or even centrists ones! – or the Green Party will end up taking its place on the left/right continuum.[50]

II: The French Revolution

As Bobbio notes on numerous occasions, the left/right divide was born during the French Revolution.[51] Indeed, it is because the left and right dates from this time that for

Bobbio it is equality that determines their opposition: one of the three from the revolutionary slogan 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' (we've already seen why Bobbio separates liberty out from equality, and he explains that of the three, the third is the most 'indeterminate').[52] For this view Bobbio relies on Marcel Gauchet's magistral study '*La droite et la gauche*', first published in Pierre Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire*, although Bobbio cites the independently republished version.[53] The book made such an impression on Bobbio that he would return to it in his 'Reply to the critics', directly quoting Gauchet's closing line that left and right 'have become universal political categories. They are part of the basic notions which generally inform the way contemporary societies work'.[54]

A number of points are worth noting here. The first is that for Gauchet, the existence of the left/right divide is possible *because of the existence of a centre*, and not the other way round as it is for Bobbio: that the centre exists as an intermediary between the left and the right that encompass everything. As Bobbio himself quotes in his notes: 'the firm establishment of this couple involves a *ménage à trois*. There is a left and a right, because there is a centre'.[55] As Gauchet explains, there is a 'centrist reflex'; that the first element that is thought of is the centre, to which the left and the right *react*.[56] And this tripartite division of politics – the *ménage à trois* – will determine French politics well into the twentieth century: for the nineteenth century the opposition was between the '*blues, blancs, rouges*', namely the republicans, the royalists and the socialists. Left and right remained something like a term of art within parliament itself, to designate someone's *relative* position within the national assembly. It is only at the beginning of the twentieth century that the left/right divide enters common language and becomes an identity: *being* left or right-wing, instead of *being* physically – i.e. *sitting – on the* left or the right (of the assembly).[57]

For Marc Crapez, it is with the Government of Émile Combes (1902-1905) that the passage of the left/right divide into the vernacular took place, in part in response to the Dreyfus Affair of 1894, when a number of writers and journalists started using the terms to designate either side of the conflict, and it was subsequently re-imposed on much of the history of the nineteenth century by historians such as René Rémond in 1954, who developed his thesis of the 'three rights' born of the French Revolution: legitimists (counter-revolutionary) Orleansist (liberal) and Bonapartist (authoritarian).[58] Indeed the Third Republic, according to Crapez, must be understood as a centre rather than a dualistic opposition: the centre was the Republic, which

gathered all the left/right forces within its parliamentary bosom, and was opposed to both the royalists and socialists who rejected it and wanted to replace it with something else. The socialists and the royalists were outside the parliament, and thereby outside the left/right divide. Moreover, they were also not always located where we might usually think them to be: at first socialism, because nationalist, was placed on the extreme right.[59]

The centre, therefore, needs to be understood as a form of government, fighting against non-democratic forces trying to overthrow it.[60] And that centre does not disappear with the *ministère Combes*, but continues well into the second half of the twentieth century: the Fourth Republic's first government established after the war was one of 'national unity', bringing together all the forces of the Resistance: Communists, Socialists, leftwing Catholics, as well as the conservatives closer to de Gaulle.[61] Indeed for François Furet, Jacques Julliard and Pierre Rosanvallon, the Fifth Republic is also an example of *La République du Centre*.[62] It is only when democracy becomes fully established over the course of the twentieth century – with a big scare in the middle – that the left/right divide takes on all its meaning, when the forces that beforehand used to reject democracy (socialists, communists, the far-right) accept to come into the parliamentary system and take up their places within it. And political parties – the modern, highly centralised, bureaucratic and organised form – played a key role in this development, bringing the masses into politics.[63] So yes, the left/right division is valid today, but historically it has probably been more the exception than the rule; the rule being the centre. Bobbio is right to link the left/right opposition to democracy, but there is a longer story to be told.[64] The question remains: what is the centre?

The left/right opposition, *selon* Gauchet, was born on the 8 May 1789. Sent to their respective chambers after the opening of the Estates General to discuss the King's taxes, all three Estates (clergy, nobles, commoners) instead debated whether voting should be done by Estate or by head: the Third Estate had as many deputies as the other two orders combined, and voting by head had been one of the central demands of the 'cahiers de doléances'. To help structure their debate the Count of Mirabeau, himself a nobleman but elected to the Third Estate, suggested they should organise themselves along Westminster lines, with the benches of the government facing those of the opposition. Although that proposal did not go very far, the idea of addressing the President of the session, akin to the 'Speaker of the House', was accepted, although this was done from the rostrum, a key invention.[65] Indeed, the English influence was strong,

with the deputies of the Third Estate rebaptising their chambers the *Communes* in honour of the British Commons. So when on the 8 May, three days after the opening of the Estates General, the deputies of the Third Estate were invited to arbitrate between competing proposals (from Mirabeau and Malouet) on how to bring the three Orders together, they were asked to vote by filing either to the right or to the left of the president of the session, much like at Westminster. But with no government and opposition benches to speak of, the deputies sat back down either to the right or the left of the President, like they had voted. The left/right division of politics was born.[66]

It would be a mistake, however, to think it was the main opposition at the time, or indeed the dominant one: for Gauchet the decisive force throughout the Revolution was in fact the centre, from supporting the execution of the King, to voting in favour of the infamous Comity of Public Safety that instigated the Terror, to finally deposing Robespierre. There were also moments when sides of the National Assembly were deserted: the right after the evisceration of the Girondins, the left after the fall of the Jacobins. But perhaps the most interesting opposition is between 'la montagne' and 'la plaine' or 'le marais'. The Mountain was composed of radical Jacobin deputies who sat across the highest benches of the Assembly, to be closest to the galleries and thus the 'people' – the first populist moment in history – whereas the Plain sat on the lower benches, closer to the tribune, and were considered to be the most numerous grouping. The Mountain was Robespierre's strongest support during the Reign of Terror, whereas the Plain was, in short, the centre.[67]

If the Girondins took their name from the fact that many of their deputies came from the Bordeaux area, this geographical aspect is also important for the distinction between the Mountain and the Plain, who took their names from Parisian topography. The *Montagnards* were drawn from the clerical milieu of the hill-top Montagne Sainte-Geneviève, on the Left Bank, and used to meet in the Cordeliers Convent, whereas the deputies from the Plain and the Marais – the *Maraisards* – came from the financial milieus of the Right Bank, from the Marais as it is still known today – giving rise to their derogatory nickname the '*crapauds*' (the toads) – to the flat plains between Place Vendôme and the Palais-Royal, where the stock market was located, and their usual meeting place was the Feuillant Monastery.[68] Given the growing interest of time and space in conceptual history, and indeed political theory more generally, this geo-spatial political divide is worthy of further consideration.[69]

What it most noteworthy of the Mountain is that they composed the majority of the Committee of Public Safety during *la Terreur*, which in effect ruled France from 1793-94. Having voted in the Committee of Public Safety, the centre-ground, understood as the government, had in effect moved from the bottom to the top of the assembly; had moved to the extremes. The extremes, in this configuration, had become the new centre: they were the government. After the fall of Robespierre and the onset of the Thermidorian reaction of 1794-5, many of the Montagnards were either executed or purged from the Convention. But unlike the Jacobin left that was left disserted (no pun intended), the Mountain remained in a much-reduced form known as *la crête* (the 'crest').[70] The Plane, needless to say, continued, and regained its power as the government of the time.

This moment shows us is that sometimes it is not left/right that is the main opposition driving political change, but instead a form of centre/extremes, where even the extremes can become the middle-ground of politics or government. So instead of a left/right horizontal axis, what we have here is more akin to a top/bottom – or indeed bottom/up – vertical axis, with the centre in the middle: it is important to remember that during the French Revolution the Plane was not simply battling the radical Jacobins within Parliament itself, but was also trying to put out uprisings throughout the country – think the Vendée – and indeed external enemies at its borders (Britain, Austria, Prussia). Paris, then, the top – which in this instance brough together both the Mountain and the Plane – was opposed to the countryside (bottom), and foreign powers (out). There is always more than one extreme, like we saw when the Republic (blues) was opposed not simply to the Royalists (blancs) but also the Socialists (rouges). And this top-bottom opposition is repeated throughout French history, when after World War II de Gaulle pushed for a modernising project from the (Parisian) centre, which met with much resistance and countervailing forces from the periphery, like *poujadisme*.[71]

Integrating Bobbio's different 'middles' – included, inclusive – into the schemata, we can see that the centre can play both, classically, on the horizontal left/right axis, but also on a vertical top/down one too, each time playing the central role.[72] If for Bobbio, as someone who saw himself as of the left, equality was the 'pole star' that guided his thought and action,[73] another star reveals itself here, that of the centre, which can be located in the middle of x and y axis.

III: Macron v Le Pen

In the final showdown, the 2017 French Presidential election opposed Emmanuel Macron, a former Socialist Minster of the Economy under Francois Hollande, to Marine Len Pen, daughter of the infamous far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. In their election campaign, both rejected the traditional left/right divide, oscillating between saying they were 'neither left nor right', both at the same time, or going beyond it. Macron's most famous line was '*en même temps*', offering positions that were left and 'at the same' time on the right, whilst claiming the old French left/right divide between the Socialists and Republicans (Nicolas Sarkozy's party) was *passé*, and a new synthesis was needed. Marine Le Pen had coined the neologism, borrowed from her father, 'UMPS', sending back-to-back the older right-wing UMP party (Jacque Chirac's *Union pour un movement populaire*) and the Socialists (*Parti socialiste*), yet claiming she was also 'neither left nor right', whilst her symbol, a blue rose, combines the PS's symbol of a red rose with the colour blue, historically associated with conservative movements.[74]

From a sociological point of view, both can claim to have voters on the left and on the right. Macron garnered the 'centrist' voters – what Bobbio called the 'moderates' – from the centre-left through to the centre-right, from the ashes of the old socialist and conservative parties, who have yet to fully recover from it. Le Pen had for her the traditional far-right who had voted for her father, namely the anti-tax, anti-elite, anti-Parisian, anti-Parliament, anti-Jewish and anti-immigrant small southern Catholic shop-keepers who had emerged during the short-lived Poujadist movement of the 1950s, when Le Pen senior first cut his political teeth, and the '*pieds noirs*', the white European settlers who had been forced out of Algeria during the war of independence.[75] But since taking over the party from her father and 'de-demonising' it, formally expelling him from the party in 2015 over his Holocaust denial and expunging skinheads and any other types of extreme groups from party rallies, she's been able to rally the old communist vote in the north, where she first got her political break, serving in the regional council in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, the old mining region that have suffered so much from deindustrialisation. There she saw the opportunity to expand the FN (*Front national*, since re-baptised the *Rassemblement national*) vote: whilst immigration remained the main platform in the south, in the north she would marry it with economic nationalism. This has been highly successful and the RN now records over 30 per cent of the working-class vote, much to the detriment of the Socialist Party.[76]

Instead of left v right, both candidates presented new political cleavages. For Macron it was progressives v conservatives, for Le Pen it was patriots v globalists.

Previously candidates mutually recognised each other as being on the left or on the right, but here, in a complicated language game reminiscent of Nietzsche's revaluation of 'good and bad' into 'good and evil', each side refused the pejorative connotations the other attempted to attribute to them.[77] So Macron refused the 'ultra-liberal' globalist tag Le Pen tried to pin him with, presenting himself instead as the progressive, pro-European candidate, and Le Pen rejected the 'reactionary' label Macron tried to ascribed to her, claiming instead she is the only candidate who wants to truly 'conserve' the French values of secularism and social welfare in the face of international finance and migration.

What is noteworthy here is that both candidates claim to be defending the middle ground against an extreme: Macron focused on the conventional European centre ground against the far-right nationalist extreme, whilst Le Pen portrayed herself as fighting for the French middle ground against the perceived extremes of the EU. (Note that the other 'extreme' at play during the election, namely Mélenchon's far-left *La France insoumise*, which finished fourth, also rejected the EU as currently constituted. Francois Fillon, the traditional conservative candidate, finished third.) Coming from their respective vantage points, both of these positions seem plausible. As Dominic Cummings, the director of the Vote Leave campaign during the EU referendum, pointed out in an influential – and extremely long – blog post, subsequently reprinted in *The Spectator*, explaining how the Brexiteers won, outside the Westminster bubble many policies that offer themselves as mainstream can be perceived as extreme. Free movement of labour even for criminals: extreme. The bailout of banks: extreme. Financial deregulation: extreme.[78] Much like Le Pen's policies can be described as extreme, the centre has often been described as extreme too.[79]

We can now see how the centre/extremes opposition is distinct from Bobbio's left/right one. First, although the centre and extremes define each other vis-à-vis one another, they are perhaps not as 'antithetical' as Bobbio takes the left and the right to be – Macron and Le Pen claiming, at least in one formulation, to be both left and right at the same time. And because their aim is to capture the 'centre' – and not simply to distinguish themselves from one another – the line to clearly demark them is harder to draw: witness Macron's Interior Minister, Gérald Darmanin, telling Le Pen she was 'soft' on immigration. Moreover, there is porosity not only between the centre-left and the centre-right, but also at the extremes too, again in contrast to the left/right, with voters who, for instance, voted Mélenchon (on the far-left) in the first round and Le Pen

(on the far-right) in the second, confirming the 'horseshoe' thesis. In terms of the three further features – descriptive, evaluative, historical – it is clear that the centre/extremes opposition is not a descriptive one (there is no mutual or objective recognition) but is immediately loaded when looking at the terms Macron and Le Pen attribute to themselves and to one another, and of course the 'evaluative' claim is that both are representing the centre. Finally, the historical dimension takes a different form: not simply that the centre/extremes positions change over time, depending on which 'centre' is in power, but furthermore it is when the conflict between centre and extremes is resolved that a left/right opposition re-establishes itself in relation to what the new centre is.

Bobbio expressed a degree of scepticism towards the 'inclusive middle' that proclaimed to transcend the usual politics of the left and right, questioning whether there is in reality much difference between the 'inclusive middle' and the 'included middle', which turns out to be simply the centre of the left/right axis. As he writes:

> The 'included middle' is essentially practical politics without a doctrine, whereas the 'inclusive middle' is essentially a doctrine in search of a practical politics, and as soon as this is achieved, it reveals itself as centrist.[80]

Bobbio's exchange with Anderson in the *New Left Review* revolved around the question of whether the centre, in this specific case Blair's 'New Labour', can be anything other than right-wing, given the nature of the political and capitalist economic system, according to Anderson's unrepentantly Marxist view.[81] Yet Bobbio was willing to defend Blair on two counts: that his manifesto promised to challenge inequality, a hallmark of the left according to Bobbio, and to reform or abolish the House of Lords.[82] Indeed, although Bobbio dismissed the 'inclusive middle' as a form of 'political fantasy', nonetheless his ambiguity towards the notion is underlined by the fact that he recognised that the ideal he had advocated for all his life, namely 'liberal socialism', was a form of 'inclusive middle'.[83]

Bobbio was quick to point out too that the 'third way' need not be only on the left, but could also be on the right: he gives the example of the 'conservative revolution' that appeared after the First World War.[84] In a later note Bobbio discussed Zeev Sternhell's controversial *Ni droite ni gauche* thesis that fascism grew out of a merger of socialism and nationalism, that is to say 'between a typically left-wing ideology and a typically right-wing ideology'.[85] As Bobbio remarked, the book *Ni droite ni gauche* could as easily have been called "*both* right and left", because it is a synthesis of two

opposing ideologies.[86] This brings us back to Le Pen's National Rally, which tries to combine both left in right, either in its symbol (blue rose), ideology (anti-tax libertarianism and economic protectionism) and electorate (far-right and far-left communist), with the one exception is that the RN has so far accepted to play the democratic game (although Sternhell underlined how the French far-right in the end came round to accepting elections).[87]

What this discussion reveals, however, is that *both* Macron and Le Pen can be considered 'third ways'. This means that their opposition is not (solely) along the traditional left/right horizontal axis, but rather on a vertical centre/extremes one, as we saw previously, with both the centre and the extremes trying to incarnate the centre, much like the Plane and the Montagne did during the French Revolution.

In reality Bobbio's description of the 'inclusive middle' seems to capture quite presciently Macron's rise to power. 'A triadic combination is always the product of a crisis', Bobbio writes, 'and hence a fear that an antithesis has exhausted its historical vitality'. Macron arose in response to the 'populist' wave that was crashing through the West, from Brexit to Trump, with the old Socialist and Republican parties in France seemingly no longer fit to face Le Pen, who was surfing that wave. 'The theory of the "inclusive middle", Bobbio continues, 'can be interpreted as the synthesis of opposing positions with the intention in practice of saving whatever can be saved of one's own position'; or Macron saving what he can from the left and the right from being gobbled up by Le Pen.[88]

The question then is whether Macron, as Anderson has charged, has been ruling from the right, and certainly there's reason to believe so, from his economic policy (suppression of the wealth tax) and the *tournant sécuritaire* he has made through appointing Darmanin his Interior Minister, a former Sarkozy-protégé. Yet at the same time he's eschewed any sort of 'neo-liberalism' non-interventionism, unconditionally guaranteeing businesses and jobs during the pandemic ('whatever it takes'), pushed for a massive European investment plan, recognised France's responsibility in a number of colonial matters – an important topic for the left –, and supporting a number of social-liberal reforms (a sort of left-wing identity politics). He has, moreover, decided to close the ENA (*École national d'administration*), the highly prestigious and selective training school for future senior bureaucrats and politicians, of which Macron himself is a graduate, to appease anti-elitist sentiment, although what has been brought into replace

it – the ISP (*Institut du service public*), might turn out to be another ENA in all but name.[89] *Plus ca change*…

Conclusion

There is no doubt that left and right continue to inform our political imagination, and Bobbio may be right that it is around the notion of equality that that battle will continue to be fought.[90] But it would be a mistake to think it is the only opposition around – or even the dominant one – either historically or conceptually. As we have seen in the French case, it is rather the centre that was the dominant force at least up to the beginning of the twentieth century, at which point the left/right division passed from internal parliamentary politics into everyday language, replacing the more usual *bleu/blanc/rouge*. The stabilisation of democracy had an important role to play there, with political movements that usually stood outside (bourgeois) democratic politics, whether communism or the far-right, investing the parliament, meaning an opposition that might best be characterised as centre/extremes – parliament versus non-democratic forces – transformed itself into a left/right opposition.

Although this historical story is somewhat absent from Bobbio's account, the theorisation of the centre is certainly not, notably through his notions of 'included', 'inclusive' and 'transversal' middle – a theorisation that has perhaps been overlooked. And the resources Bobbio provides to think about the centre are extremely rich, from dyadic to triadic, the paradoxical dialectical unity that emerges from the antithesis, to the circumstances in which a 'third way', to the left or to the right, can appear. So whilst Bobbio is surely right to underline the enduring relevance of the left/right divide, this article has sought to show that a centre/extremes opposition might be a better way to conceptualise moments of deep structural political change.

Brexit, for instance, started as a marginal position at the extremes of the political configuration to become the new centre-ground of UK politics, to which all parties need to adapt. After the Trump years Joe Biden, who ran on a 'moderate', or what we might term a 'centrist', ticked, is now president of the United States, and indeed appears to be pursuing a much more radical, and perhaps left-wing, agenda, that was at first expected of him – providing more food for thought on whether the centre is necessarily to the right. But the forces that brought Trump to power have not disappeared, and the hold he has on the Republican Party is still strong: witness to recent unseating of Liz Cheney, who had consistently been critical of Trump. What the Republicans fear is to lose the

voters Trump had been able to bring in: voters who don't usually recognise themselves in the party, nor indeed in the usual left/right divide, and who might be considered to be on the fringes – or 'extremes' – of the political system (conspiracy theorists, alt-right etc.). Faced with this populist wave, Emmanuel Macron decided to concentrate the forces of the (moderate) centre against the dual threat of Le Pen and Mélenchon, building a coalition and government that drew from the two traditional left and right parties (Socialists and Republicans).

In Italy, to return to Bobbio's homeland, 2018 saw an unlikely alliance between the Five Star Movement and the League, two populist parties on the left and on the right (respectively) who can easily be described as being on the extremes of the political system, came together to form a government, appointing an independent, Giuseppe Conte, as Prime Minister. If in France it is the centre that formed the government, in Italy it is the extremes. Now, in a classic tale of Italian politics, a technocrat Mario Draghi, former President of the European Central Bank, has been appointed Prime Minister, with the support of all the political forces of the country, whether on the centre or the extremes. This type of centrist government is closer to the one Bobbio was familiar with before the change of the voting system and the arrival of Berlusconi, in a much more polarised world, in 1994.

The existence of a centre did not trouble Bobbio:

> No problem then: black and white are divided by grey, and day and night are divided by dusk. Grey takes nothing away from the distinction between black and white, and dusk takes nothing away from the distinction between day and night.[91]

Night gives way to day; dusk to dawn. After the tumults of the centre and the extremes, the left/right divide will naturally re-establish itself, as surely as day follows night: Labour and the Tories have taken their positions via Brexit, the Democrats and the Republicans via Trump, and the recent regional elections in France saw the traditional left and right parties re-gain dominance. Once Draghi has finished his mandate the left and right will position themselves in terms of what he has achieved. The same might be said of Macron, if he gets re-elected in 2022: the left and the right will position themselves in terms of what Macronism amounted to.

Dawn will follow dusk, but during the night it is the forces of the centre and the extremes that battle it out to determine who the new day belongs to.[92] And if we want

the centre to hold, it is towards a new synthesis we must look: what Bobbio called the 'inclusive' middle, strong enough to ward off the forces of the extremes.

---

[1] J. Elgot, 'Secret Boris Johnson column favoured UK remaining in EU', *The Guardian*, 16 October 2016.
[2] R. Saunders, *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[3] N. Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996). The book was revised 1995, and the English translation is from the second edition. On Bobbio see R. Bellamy, *Modern Italian Social Theory. Ideology and Politics from Pareto to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); R. Bellamy, *Croce, Gramsci, Bobbio and the Italian Political Tradition* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2014); N. Urbinati, 'Liberalism in the Cold War: Norberto Bobbio and the dialogue with the PCI', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 8, no. 4 (2003), pp. 578-603; and J. W. Mueller, 'The Paradoxes of Post-War Italian Political Thought', *History of European Ideas* 39 (2013), pp. 79-102. On Bobbio and Cold War Intellectuals see Craiutu and Griffo's contribution to this special issue.
[4] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 87
[5] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 6.
[6] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 3.
[7] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 56
[8] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 2.
[9] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 32.
[10] On Bobbio and moderation see A. Craiutu, *Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in an Age of Extremes* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). See further H. Drochon, 'Aurelian Craiutu, *A Virtue for Courageous Minds* and *Faces of Moderation*', *Journal of Modern History* 90, no. 4 (2018), pp. 918-921.
[11] Bobbio, *Left and Right*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 27.
[12] Bobbio, *ibid*., pp. 11-12, 33.
[13] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 50.
[14] Bobbio, *ibid*., pp. 76-77.
[15] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 37.
[16] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 1.
[17] See Bobbio, 'A Reply to the Critics' (1995), *ibid*., pp. 87-101;
[18] P. Anderson, 'A Sense of the Left', *New Left Review* 1, no. 231 (1998), pp. 73-81; N. Bobbio, 'At the Beginning of History', *ibid*., pp. 82-90; P. Anderson, 'A Reply to Norberto Bobbio', *ibid*., pp. 91-93. Anderson's first commentary on Bobbio remains one of the best English-language ones around: P. Anderson, 'The Affinities of Norberto Bobbio', *New Left Review* 1, no. 170 (1988), pp. 3-36. Anderson would subsequently publish *Spectrum: From Right to Left in the World of Ideas* (London: Verso, 2005). On New Labour see A. Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); *The Third Way: Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); and *The Third Way and Its Critics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000). See further K. Soper, 'Conserving the Left: Reflections on Norberto Bobbio, Anthony Giddens and the Left-Right Distinction', *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 94, (1999), pp. 67-82.
[19] On the left/right divide in North America see C. Cochrane, *Left and Right: The Small World of Political Ideas* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015) and B. Swedlow, 'Beyond liberal and conservative: Two-dimensional conceptions of ideology and the structure of political attitudes and values', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 2 (2008), pp. 157-180.
[20] Bobbio, *Left and Right*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 54, 69-70, 86.
[21] C. Bickerton and C. Invernizzi Accetti, *Technopopulism: The New Logic of Democratic Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
[22] Bobbio, *Left and Right*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 5.
[23] J. White, 'Left and Right as political resources', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 16, no. 02 (2011), pp. 123-144; J. White, 'Left and Right in the economic crisis', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 18, no. 2 (2013), pp. 150-170; M. Humphrey, D. Laycock and M. Umbach, 'Mediating between macro, meso, and micro morphologies: adaptation and application in political ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 24, no. 2 (2019), pp. 113-120.

[24] M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[25] Freeden, *ibid*., pp. 117-124; M. Freeden, 'Ideologies and conceptual history', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 2, no.1 (1997), pp. 3-11.
[26] On the relation between theory and ideology in Bobbio's thought, see the contribution by Pazé and Cuono to this special issue.
[27] Bobbio, *Left and Right, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 3.
[28] Bobbio, *ibid*., pp. 49-53, 72.
[29] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 1.
[30] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 12.
[31] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 37.
[32] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 30.
[33] Bobbio, *ibid*., pp. 5, 35.
[34] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 52.
[35] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 29.
[36] M. Humphrey, M. Umbach and Z. Clulow, 'The political is personal: an analysis of crowd-sourced political ideas and images from a Massive Open Online Course', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 24, no. 2 (2019), pp. 121-138.
[37] Bobbio, *Left and Right, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 90-91.
[38] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 90.
[39] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 68.
[40] An exception is P. Anderson, 'A Sense of the Left', *op. cit.*, Ref 16, p. 73.
[41] Bobbio, *Left and Right, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 5.
[42] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 5.
[43] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 2.
[44] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 2.
[45] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 5.
[46] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 7.
[47] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 8.
[48] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 8.
[49] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 10.
[50] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 11.
[51] Bobbio, *ibid*., pp. 39, 60.
[52] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 72.
[53] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 105, no. 3.
[54] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 92.
[55] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 105, no. 3.
[56] M. Gauchet,'La droite et la gauche' in P. Nora (Ed.) *Les Lieux de mémoire* II (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 2538.
[57] Gauchet, *ibid*., pp. 2533-2601.
[58] M. Crapez, 'De quand date le clivage gauche/droite en France?', *Revue française de science politique*, 48, no.1 (1998), pp. 42-75. On Rémond see R. Rémond, *Les Droites en France* (Paris : Aubier, 1982) ; *Les droites aujourd'hui* (Paris : Audibert, 2005).
[59] Crapez, *ibid*., p. 74.
[60] M. Biard, 'Entre Gironde et Montagne. Les positions de la Plaine au sein de la Convention nationale au printemps 1793', *Revue historique* 3, no. 631 (2004), pp. 555-576.
[61] H. Chapman, *France's Long Reconstruction: In Search of the Modern Republic* (Cambridge[MA]: Harvard University Press, 2018).
[62] F. Furet, J. Julliard and P. Rosanvallon, *La République du Centre : La fin de l'exception française* (Paris : Calmann-Levy, 1988). For centrism throughout time, from Mirabeau to Macron, see J. P. Rioux, *Gouverner au centre: La politique que nous n'aimons pas* (Paris : Strock, 2020).
[63] H. Drochon, 'Robert Michels, the iron law of oligarchy and dynamic democracy', *Constellations* 27, no. 2 (2020), pp. 185-198.
[64] Bobbio, *Left and Right, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 16, 21, 39.
[65] P. Manow, *In the King's Shadow: The Political Anatomy of Democratic Representation* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).
[66] Gauchet, 'La droite et la gauche', *op. cit*., Ref 53, p. 2535.
[67] Biard, 'Entre Gironde et Montagne', *op. cit*., Ref 57; M. Duverger, 'L'éternel marais. Essai sur le centrisme français', *Revue française de science politique* 14, n°1 (1964), pp. 33-51; P. Higonnet, 'The Social and Cultural Antecedents of Revolutionary Discontinuity: Montagnards and Girondins', *The*

English Historical Review 100, no. 396 (1985), pp. 513-544; P. Serna, *La République des girouettes : 1789-1815 et au-delà. Une anomalie politique : la France de l'extrême centre* (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2005); A. Soboul (Ed.), *Actes du Colloque « Girondins et Montagnards »* (Paris : Société des Études Robespierristes, 1980).

[68] L. Maitrier, 'Gauche – droite. La localisation urbaine et l'origine des partis politiques', *La Revue du M.A.U.S.S.* 10 (1997), pp. 319-351.

[69] B. Ewing, 'Conceptual history, contingency and the ideological politics of time', *Journal of Poli:tical Ideologies*, published online 10 December 2020; W. Steinmetz, M. Freeden, and J. Fernández-Sebastián (Eds.), *Conceptual History in the European Space* (New York: Berghahn, 2017).

[70] F. Brunel, 'Les derniers Montagnards et l'unité révolutionnaire', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 229 (1977), pp. 385-404.

[71] Chapman, *France's Long Reconstruction, op. cit.*, Ref 57. See further H. Drochon, 'De Gaulle's Long Shadow: The making and unmaking of France's Fifth Republic', *The Nation*, 18 February 2020.

[72] Thanks to Jonathan White for this insight.

[73] Bobbio, *Left and Right, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 82.

[74] See M. Lorimer, '"Ni droite, Ni Gauche, Français!" Far right populism and the future of Left/Right politics', in Lise Esther Herman and James Muldoon (Eds.) *Trumping the Mainstream: The Conquest of Democratic Politics by the Populist Radical Right* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 145-162; F. Haegel and N. Mayer, 'So close, yet so far: the French Front National and Les Républicains (2007-2017)' in *ibid*, pp. 222-245; L. E. Herman and J. Muldoon, 'There's something about Marine: strategies against the far right in the 2017 French presidential elections' in *ibid*, pp. 246-270. See further H. Drochon, 'How Emmanuel Macron can hold the centre to beat Marine Le Pen', *New Statesman*, 11 March 2017.

[75] Chapman, *France's Long Reconstruction, op. cit.*, Ref 60, pp. 75-108.

[76] J. Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016), pp. 131-153; H. Drochon, 'Who will vote for Marine le Pen? The issues that could divide the Front National', *New Statesman*, 18 April 2017.

[77] F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[78] D. Cummings, 'On the referendum #21: Branching histories of the 2016 referendum and 'the frogs before the storm'', *Dominic* Cummings's *Blog*, 9 January 2017; D. Cummings, 'How the Brexit referendum was won', *The Spectator*, 9 January 2017.

[79] T. Ali, *The Extreme Centre: A Warning* (London: Verso Books, 2015); P. Serna, *L'Extreme centre ou le poison francais, 1789-2019* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2019).

[80] Bobbio, *Left and Right, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 8.

[81] Anderson, 'A Sense of the Left', *op. cit.*, Ref. 16.

[82] Bobbio, 'At the Beginning of History', *op. cit.*, Ref. 16.

[83] Bobbio, *Left and Right, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 8. See also N. Bobbio, *The Future of Democracy: A Defence of the Rules of the Game* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); N. Bobbio, *Democracy and Dictatorship: The Nature and Limits of State Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989). N. Bobbio, *Which Socialism? Marxism, Socialism and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); and N. Bobbio, *Liberalism and Democracy* (London: Verso, 2005). See further N. Urbinati, 'The Importance of Norberto Bobbio', *Dissent* 51, np. 2 (2004), pp. 78-80; C. Mouffe, 'Towards a Liberal Socialism?', *Dissent* 81 (1993), pp. 81-87; and C. Yturbe, 'On Norberto Bobbio's Theory of Democracy', *Political Theory* 25, no. 3 (1997), pp. 377-400. On Bobbio's liberalisms see Sciara and Ragazzoni's contributions to this special issue.

[84] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 9.

[85] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 107, no. 6. On Sternhell see Z. Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire : Les origines françaises du fascisme 1885-1914* (Paris : Seuil, 1978) ; *Ni droite ni gauche : L'idéologie fasciste en France* (Paris : Gallimard, 2012) ; *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1994) ; and 'Fascism: Reflections on the fate of ideas in twentieth century history', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 5, no. 2 (2000), pp. 139-162. For a discussion see Salvatore Garau, 'If liberalism steps into the fascist synthesis: the diverging views of Zeev Sternhell and Ishay Landa on the origins of fascist ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19, no. 1 (2014), pp. 60-77.

[86] Bobbio, *ibid*., p. 107, no. 6. On the far-right 'third way' see S. Bastow, (2002) 'A neo-fascist third way: The discourse of ethno-differentialist revolutionary nationalism', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 7, no. 3 (2002), pp. 351-368 and A. Spektorowski, 'The New Right: Ethno-regionalism, ethnopluralism and the emergence of a neo-fascist "Third Way"', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 8, no. 1 (2003), pp. 111-130.

[87] H. Drochon, 'The closing of the conservative mind: Between revolution and reaction', *New Statesman*, 30 October 2019.

[88] Bobbio, *Left and Right, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 8-9.

[89] K. Willsher, 'Macron announces closure of elite school that hothoused French leaders', *The Guardian*, 8 April 2021. See further Drochon, 'De Gaulle's Long Shadow', *op. cit.*, Ref. 58.
[90] For an alternative view see M. Giglioli, 'Norberto Bobbio's Right and Left between Classic Concepts and Contemporary Crises' in Ana Rite Ferreira and João Cardoso Rosas (Eds.), *Left and Right: The Great Dichotomy Revisited* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 24-37.
[91] Bobbio, *Left and Right, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 5.
[92] On light/dark, God/Devil, sacred/profane see Bobbio, *ibid.*, pp. 33, 41-42. See further B. Dewiel, 'Athens versus Jerusalem: a source of left-right conflict in the history of ideas', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 1 (2004), pp. 31-49 and Roberto Farneti, (2012) 'Cleavage lines in global politics: left and right, East and West, earth and heaven', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 17, no. 2 (2012), pp. 127-145.