

Left and Right

The Significance of a Political Distinction

Norberto Bobbio

Translated and Introduced by
Allan Cameron

The University of Chicago Press

NORBERTO BOBBIO is Emeritus Professor of Legal and Political Philosophy at the University of Turin and the author of *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, published by this Press in 1993.

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637
Polity Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom

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First published in Italy as *Destra e Sinistra: Ragioni e significati di una distinzione politica*
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Printed in Great Britain

05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98 97 96 1 2 3 4 5

ISBN: 0-226-06245-7 (cloth)

ISBN: 0-226-06246-5 (pbk)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bobbio, Norberto, 1909–

[Destra e sinistra. English]

Left and right / Norberto Bobbio : translated and introduced by
Allan Cameron.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0 226-06245 7 (alk. paper). ISBN 0 226-06246-5 (pbk. :
alk. paper)

1. Right and left (Political science) 2. Political sociology.
3. Political science Philosophy. I. Title.

JA83.B6413 1996

320 5—dc20 96 26392

This book is printed on acid free paper

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Introduction

When this book was published in Italy just before the 1994 elections which brought Berlusconi's short-lived right-wing alliance to power, it took the country by storm, selling over 200,000 copies in a year, making it the overall bestseller in Italy. It remained the bestseller in the non-fiction category for many months thereafter. As Norberto Bobbio himself points out, if Italians were looking for assistance on how to vote in Italy's dramatically changed political landscape, they would have been sorely disappointed: the book is purely concerned with an analytical distinction, and its relevance goes far beyond Italy and its political vicissitudes.

The paradox which the author points out is that, while the left/right distinction is increasingly being challenged in Italy, the Italian parliamentary scene has shifted from a spectrum of parties dominated by the centre to a more polarized system in which two coalitions face each other, a stark choice between left and right. Such a situation is, of course, familiar in English-speaking countries which have a marked preference for the first-past-the-post electoral system (Italy abandoned proportional representation in favour of this system before the last elections). In many ways, Italy has acted as a barometer for Western Europe in

the post-war period, reflecting general trends in a more acute form. When the Marxist left's star was rising in the late sixties and early seventies, it seemed to rise higher in Italy; and when apathy and a general disorientation on the left took over in the eighties, Italy seemed to outperform other countries in its cynicism and its contempt for a political system whose corruption was becoming increasingly clear. While the left has been weak in America for some time, this trend towards the suppression of the left/right distinction through an atrophy of the left is a more recent development in Europe.

The eighties witnessed Republican control of the White House and Conservative dominance in Britain; and in 1982 Helmut Kohl became chancellor of West Germany, a position he still holds. As a leading economist commented on the British situation: 'Conservatism was not only hegemonic, . . . it seemed the only game in town anywhere.'¹ Even where the left retained the reins of power, it was not in a radical mood, and where it was in opposition, its socialism was increasingly muted. Everywhere the right appeared to have taken the initiative, and when the decade culminated with the dramatic demise of communism, it was perhaps not altogether surprising that some people began to talk with euphoria of 'the end of history' and the final victory of a particular form of state – namely, the capitalist 'liberal' democracy. This trend continues, and today we see the left alliance in Italy, which is dominated by the ex-communists, being led by an ex-Christian Democrat technocrat and university lecturer, with a programme of cuts in public spending, privatizations and greater flexibility in the work-force.

Norberto Bobbio sets out in this book, first to refute the idea that the left/right distinction is in any way a thing of

the past, and then to argue for his own definition of that distinction.

The challenge to the left/right distinction and its survival

In times when the left and the right appear evenly balanced with a more or less equal possibility of holding the allegiance of large sections of society and therefore attaining power, the question of whether the distinction is relevant does not really arise. But when either the left or the right becomes so powerful that it seems to be 'the only game in town', then both have their reasons to connive in the destruction of the left/right distinction. The dominant side clearly has an interest in arguing that 'there is no real alternative'. Less obviously, the weaker side also has an interest in rejecting or at least playing down the difference, as can be seen from the tactics currently being adopted by some parties of the left. If it feels that its traditional policies have attracted so much public opprobrium, it may decide to recycle itself as something totally new, something which goes beyond the traditional distinction (neither left nor right, or combining the positive values of both sides to produce a modern, innovative movement). While it is clearly the right which has been in the ascendant in the eighties and nineties, Bobbio emphasizes that there have been periods in history when it was the right that wished to dissolve itself in order to survive. After the fall of Fascism, there was a wave of support for collectivist ideals, particularly in those countries which had experienced Nazi occupation. In order to become a powerful force in politics, such traditionalist parties as the Italian Christian Democrats had to cast

themselves as neither left nor right, and pay at least lip-service to such values as social cohesion.

The fact that all these claims to have superseded the left/right distinction fail to materialize once the parties in question move from the realm of rhetoric to that of practical politics begs the question of why the distinction has proved so enduring. The first and most important point here is that 'left' and 'right' are not absolute terms, as Bobbio discusses at length in chapter 5. There is a clear example of this fundamental characteristic in British political history: Chartism is rightly considered a left-wing movement of the first half of the last century, but fifty years after its demise, its demand for universal manhood suffrage would have been less than radical in light of the incipient suffragette movement, and would now appear downright reactionary. The simple fact is that what is left or right in one period is not necessarily so in another. This is proof not of their emptiness as political terms, but simply of their relativity. Left and right do not represent two sets of fixed ideas, but rather an axis which shifts considerably from one generation to the next. All words change their meaning slightly over time, but while socialism, for instance, is anchored to some form of common ownership, the left/right distinction existed before socialism became a major force in European politics, and continued to exist in countries which claimed to have adopted socialism as the basis for their economic systems.

The distinction has also proved enduring because politics is by its nature antithetical, and the development of democracy has assisted the formation of parties and the growth of bipartisan systems, or at least the polarization around two main political blocks. Bobbio often refers to the distinction

as a dyad, by which he means a distinction covering the whole of the political universe (everything in politics must be either left or right) whose twin components are antithetical (nothing in politics can be both left and right at the same time).

The left/right metaphor originated in the French National Assembly of 1789, and proved extremely appropriate. Left and right represent a spatial dyad with which we are all familiar (an object must be either on our left or on our right, and cannot be both; furthermore, there is an area directly in front of us where it is not very clear whether the object in question is on the left or the right, and this can be equated with the centre); but there is no reason to believe that history could not have come up with an alternative metaphor, and indeed the relative positions of the French deputies in relation to the president were only chance (although the position of more conservative nobles to the right was perhaps a reflection of their dwindling privileges). Clearly the success of left and right is due not to the felicity of the metaphor, whatever its forcefulness, but to the fundamental nature of the political distinction which it has come to express.

The nature of the distinction

Having defended the distinction, Bobbio then moves on to argue that the left tends towards equality and the right tends towards inequality. This theory has caused considerable debate in the Italian press, and the alternative proposals are discussed in detail in Bobbio's 'Reply to the Critics' at the end of the book. A more recent example will suffice

to demonstrate the simplicity and effectiveness of Bobbio's suggested criterion for the distinction. When Alessandro Pizzorno, a university professor, was interviewed in February 1995, he expressed his disagreement with the equality/inequality criterion, and suggested inclusion/exclusion in its place.² The attraction of such a distinction in a world of increasing economic polarization is clear. The essential question for Pizzorno is membership of a collective identity, but Bobbio's response was that although inclusion/exclusion is a valid distinction, it is only partial, and is in any case entirely covered by the equality/inequality distinction. Awarding full citizen's rights to immigrants could be seen as an example of inclusion, but it also means that society no longer perceives a difference of nationality as justifying a different allocation of citizens' rights, and is therefore also egalitarian.³ Inclusion/exclusion covers discrimination between discrete groups, but cannot deal with more graduated distinctions. Free health care is clearly an egalitarian policy, because it gives those with lower incomes access to an essential service, but it is not inclusion. Pizzorno put forward his criterion because of a particularly pressing problem in the late twentieth century, but practically accepted the limitations of his own argument when he admitted that 'historically Bobbio is right'.

Few political philosophers who have dealt with this subject have failed to note the close association between equality and the fundamental concept of justice. Bobbio argues that justice relates to two principles: legality (adherence to the law) and equality (treating like as like). While justice is an ideal, equality is a reality. In the seventies he wrote:

It is not in itself either just or unjust that two billiard balls are perfectly the same [*uguali*]. The realm of the application of justice, or rather socially and politically significant equalities, is to be found in social relations between individuals and other individuals, groups and other groups, or individuals and the group, according to the traditional distinction which goes back to Arisotle, between retributive justice (which involves relations between the parts) and distributive justice (which involves relations between the whole and the parts or vice versa).⁴

Before examining Bobbio's criterion any further, it is necessary to clarify the meanings of 'equality' and 'inequality', and, as we are dealing with a translation, to be sensitive to the original Italian and how this may differ from the English. While in Italian there is nothing strange in stating that billiard-balls are *uguali*, in English to say that they are equal is nonsensical. An Italian dictionary will give the first meaning of *uguale* as 'identical' or the sameness of two or more objects, while an English one will start with 'of the same value or amount'. This ambivalence has informed much of the debate over the nature of equality, and poses the important question of whether the opposite of equality is 'inequality' or 'difference'.⁵ Translation has spread debates, terms and ambivalences from one language to another, particularly in the field of political philosophy, and 'difference' is now proposed as an opposite to 'equality' in English, principally as an anti- or post-socialist value. The confusion surrounding these terms, whereby equality, as the supposed opposite of difference, is identified with uniformity and a single world-view, has become the justification for the 'post-modernist' equation of the left with totalitarianism. This has been countered by arguments that equality and difference are entirely compatible.⁶

The question of whether the opposite of 'equality' is 'difference' or 'inequality' is essentially a matter of how you define 'equality'. Bobbio makes clear that only in dogmatic utopian theories does equality ever mean 'equality for everyone in everything', an imposed or regimented 'sameness' across society, which appears to be something similar to 'simple equality' as defined by Michael Walzer. In fact, just as Bobbio argues that 'equality for everyone in everything' is so impractical as to be meaningless, so Walzer states that 'equality literally understood is an idea ripe for betrayal'.⁷ Bobbio has invented the word *egalitarista* for the advocate of this rigid formal equality, and I have translated this as 'egalitarianist', which seemed the logical parallel neologism in English.

Egalitarianism can therefore be divided into a kind of utopian regimentation and a more pragmatic approach which asks three fundamental questions: Between whom? In what? On what basis? All social organization involves elements of equality and inequality, and the difference between left and right is a question of degree within a particular cultural and historical context. While inequality may be considered the opposite of this pragmatic equality, difference could be considered the opposite of regimented equality. Difference is a positive quality, particularly in the affluent West, because it implies the freedom of each individual to develop his or her particular nature.

Norberto Bobbio is at pains to point out that feminism is not about difference, but is in fact a classic example of an egalitarian struggle. Women won the right to vote because society acknowledged that there was no difference between men and women in the fields of politics and citizenship

which could justify their disqualification from voting rights. Other forms of disqualification have gradually been removed, and, leaving aside the question of how much remains to be done, most people would agree that this egalitarian struggle has given women more freedom to develop their own individual natures than in the past. Thus egalitarianism too could fairly claim to create conditions for individual choice. Bobbio quotes Massimo Cacciari, a leading Italian philosopher, who argues precisely this: 'Equality is a part of our quality of life, like income, the environment and public services. . . . Equality *makes diversity possible*, and makes it possible for everyone to count as a person, quite unlike that abstract totalitarian idea of equality which means the elimination of those who are not the same.'⁸

Freedom is about the individual and the individual's ability to be different or autonomous within clearly defined limits which fall short of the state of nature. While equality is a social good, freedom is an individual good, as Bobbio convincingly argues ('I am free' is an intelligible statement, while 'I am equal' is not). Freedom may be claimed by both left and right, but one of the central arguments of this book is that freedom does not belong exclusively to either.

The other distinction

Bobbio divides the political universe along two fundamental axes: the previously discussed distinction between equality and inequality, as expressed by the terms 'left' and 'right', and the distinction between liberty and authoritarianism.

The ideal of liberty is the other great ideal which has guided Europe since the Enlightenment.⁹ Liberty, in the modern sense, represents a complete break with the past and with the organic concept of the state, the Aristotelian model whereby the whole is more important than the parts.

Bobbio is unusual on the left in perceiving individualism not as a negative value, but as a product of the modern state, the rejection of the organic concept of the state and the development, however imperfect, of human rights. Without going into all the categories of human rights which Bobbio has defined elsewhere,¹⁰ it will be sufficient for this argument to state that the two principal categories are libertarian rights and social rights, which to some extent are in conflict with each other. The left, which is generally associated with social rights, has long accused the right of breaking up the community through its over-emphasis on the individual's libertarian rights at the expense of the community's wider interests; while the right has accused the left of the same thing, on the grounds that it is supposed to have undermined religion and traditional values, which bind society together. This latter argument is rather weak because, as Bobbio points out, there are plenty of right-wing atheists and left-wing believers; the association of the right with traditionalism is understandable, but often misleading. More recently, the right has come up with the more coherent argument that the implementation of social rights in the modern welfare state has undermined the sense of community by removing an individual's personal responsibility for his family and community. Leaving aside the questionable concept of a previous golden age in which the community cared for all its weaker members, it is certainly true that the welfare state tends to treat each citizen as an

individual. It raises taxes from the individual at national level, and distributes benefits to the individual, usually in accordance with clearly defined national criteria. According to Bobbio, increasing individualism relates to the abandonment of the organic concept of the state and the rise of human rights and democracy, wherein the individual citizen exercises his political power in the total isolation and privacy of the polling booth. The rise of individualism therefore relates not to the left/right distinction, but to the distinction between liberty and authoritarianism. Once religious freedom had been accepted in the wake of the religious wars following the Reformation, the wholly organic state and the homogeneous community it governed ceased to exist in their purest forms. The process has continued since then, and both the left and the right feel an undoubted sense of loss, the former because of a weakening in social cohesion, the latter because of a weakening in social hierarchy. In spite of that shared sense of loss, neither the moderate left nor the moderate right would wish to return to a truly organic concept of the state. In any case, community in its more positive sense is a purely cultural phenomenon, and it is difficult to see how it could ever be imposed (at best it can be encouraged).

It is thus an essential aspect of Bobbio's thought that the modern political universe is made up of two entirely separate axes: left/right and liberty/authoritarianism. The rise of liberty in its current, individualistic sense is the great achievement of the modern era, and although it is not part of the left/right distinction, it is its cause, because through the establishment of the rules for a democratic political contest, it has allowed the alternation of government between the left and the right.

Moderates and extremists

In Bobbio's theory, the two axes in politics combine to produce four categories: the extreme right, the moderate right, the moderate left and the extreme left. The extremists are authoritarian, and do not accept the rules of democracy, and although the moderate left and moderate right disagree over the question of equality, they accept the same rules for the political game.

Obviously the political spectrum could be further fragmented, especially if the centre is taken into account. However, these are Bobbio's main categories, and he makes clear his distrust of the centre, which wields disproportionate influence by holding the balance of power, and is often opportunist. On this point, he recently cited the example of the Italian Socialist Party, an indeterminate political force which allied itself with the right at national level and the left at local level where this would give them political office.

The equation of extremism with authoritarianism is probably the most contentious aspect of Bobbio's model. By shifting between extremism in the sense of authoritarianism and extremism in the sense of extreme policies, he implies that an extreme egalitarian or inegalitarian position necessarily involves contempt for the rules of democracy. He takes several historical examples of extreme egalitarian views, particularly in relation to private property; and according to his model, the proponents of these views must also have been authoritarian. Yet one of them at least was a thoroughgoing democrat: Winstanley coupled his extreme egalitarianism with a belief in universal suffrage, yearly parliaments and absolute religious freedom, while Cromwell

had more moderate views on the left/right axis, but never believed in universal suffrage or religious freedom, and ended up a dictator. Part of the problem may be the application of the model to a historical period in which democracy as we now understand it was itself a revolutionary demand. However, in defence of Bobbio's model, it could be argued that Winstanley was more democratic because he did not enjoy political power, and that if he had had the opportunity to impose his ideal society, he could only have done so by force. Although he was an enlightened revolutionary in that he did not believe that you could force men to be free, he did dedicate *The Law of Freedom* to Cromwell with the words: 'You have the power . . . to act for common freedom if you will: I have no power.'¹¹ Winstanley was certainly aware of the army's political importance, and it is a matter of pure historical speculation what he would have said or done, had the diggers become a serious political force. It certainly seems logical to suppose that the further one's political position moves to the left or the right of the general consensus over the right mix of equalities and inequalities in any given age or society, the more difficult it would become for that position to be enacted through the democratic process. On the other hand, a distinction has to be drawn between a political thinker who describes an ideal society, although he knows that there is little chance of it becoming reality in the immediate future, and the revolutionary who wishes to impose his ideal society tomorrow, whether or not society agrees with him.

The question of consensus is clearly pivotal when it comes to democracy. One could quite reasonably support the collectivization of agriculture, while abhorring the brutal way in which Stalin went about it. During the Second World

War and after it, many countries took the quite extreme egalitarian measure of rationing staple products; but while undoubtedly an irritant, this was not perceived as oppressive, because it enjoyed consensus.

One last note of caution in judging the possible extremism of an egalitarian measure concerns the question of scarcity in an economy (as in the case of rationing). Most people would recoil at the idea of a society in which everyone had to wear the same clothes, the egalitarian measure which most deprives citizens of their individuality (a common feature in literary utopias and anti-utopias). However, in an extremely impoverished country, even this Draconian measure, which smacks of prison and army barracks, could find some justification in that where resources are scarce, they have to be distributed rationally and efficiently so that all citizens can acquire such an essential commodity as clothing, however drab.

As a society becomes more affluent, equality can shift from being an equal lack of choice to an equal freedom of choice. This takes us back to Cacciari's contention that equality engenders freedom and to Walzer's concept of 'complex equality'. Clearly, inequality alters too in the shift from economic scarcity to affluence.

The relevance of Bobbio's left and right

It would be impossible in a short introduction like this to do justice to the complexity of Bobbio's views on human rights, democracy, equality and liberty. This book deals primarily with the last two, but the first two are never far below the surface. Liberty can only survive where there are both

democracy and human rights, and the latter must be positive rights recognized in law and preferably upheld by a constitution. If equality is perceived on a global scale, its task has barely begun, and that view parallels the view on human rights expressed by Bobbio in *The Age of Rights*.

In the twentieth century, and perhaps for much longer, the history of Western Europe has involved a general trend towards equality, which continues to this day. Of course, there have been set-backs, periods of rapid change and periods of complacency. It is even argued that equality or near equality has already been achieved in some industrialized countries. However, Bobbio emphasizes in his conclusion that, apart from the persistence of clear inequalities in the West, particularly in the economic field, the widening gap between the Third World and the West continues to present the left/right dichotomy in its starkest form.

The relevance of this book to the left in Europe could not be more apparent. In Britain, the strategy of 'New Labour' seems almost modelled on Bobbio's definition of a third way based on submerging the left/right distinction and somehow transcending it – an often repeated tactic which, according to Bobbio, can never actually be put into practice, whatever its efficacy as a means of survival when the other side appears to be particularly in the ascendant. However, suppression of one's political identity is no guarantee of success at the polls: Alleanza Democratica, the left-of-centre coalition in Italy presented a programme which included drastic cuts in public spending, privatization, federalism and direct elections for the executive, but lost an election it had previously been expected to win. The electoral advantages of dramatic policy shifts for tactical reasons have yet to be proved.

Left and Right is not a moral tract, but the defence of a pair of analytical categories and an investigation of the criteria on which it is based. Once that distinction has been reasserted, it is then possible to make an individual choice between the two, a choice that is primarily moral. This book also reasserts the belief that humanity has choices and the ability to create its own future; while the opposite argument, which claims that the left has been defeated definitively or is simply obsolete, means that there is no real choice for the electorate, other than that between different groups of technocrats whose efficiency and honesty may differ but whose fundamental approach is the same. Destruction of the left/right distinction leads to alienation from the political system, as can be seen in the United States, which tends more than Europe towards an indistinct bipartisan system. Ultimately, it would also undermine the democratic systems and related human rights which, whatever their limitations, constitute the part of our often cruel and wasteful history that we, as Europeans, can be proud of.

Allan Cameron

Preface to the First Italian Edition

Never has so much been written against the traditional distinction between left and right, which is now thought to have run its course and to be completely without meaning, always supposing it had one in the past.¹ At the time of writing this work just before the Italian general election, the political scene is witnessing an unprecedented polarization between two alliances which proclaim themselves to be on the left and the right, and are preparing to battle fiercely for government of the country under these two banners.

So do left and right still exist? And if they still exist and hold the field, how can it be said that they have lost all their meaning? If they are still meaningful, then what is their meaning?²

For many years, I have been collecting material on this topic, which has fed an endless debate, and given rise to the most varied and contradictory theories. Yet I fully realize that this collection is like a few drops in an immense ocean. Many of the pages of this book were written some time ago and never published, although the theories they put forward have been presented in seminars and public debates.³

The current confusion has been added to by the fact that the significance of 'left' and 'right', the two keywords in this political debate, is continually being rejected on the basis of varying arguments, yet we still do not seem to be able to do without them. Even today, these two words are so charged with emotional significance as to inflame spirits on both sides, and are used to laud one side or vilify the other. I felt therefore, that this was a favourable moment to look over these ideas, put them in order, add a few notes and publish them.

While performing this task, I have attempted to avoid the influence of changing opinions, which are often extemporized in newspaper or magazine articles. If you were to listen to these, you would run the risk of not understanding why the left/right distinction has survived in spite of so many refutations or, indeed, the loves and hates which continue to keep it alive.⁴ I have examined successive arguments for and against advanced by the various adversaries, the justifications which from time to time are used in favour of either the demise or the survival of the distinction, and the criteria invoked by those who have defended it. I have given particular attention to those writers who have developed a personal, well-documented analysis to justify their criterion.

As a conclusion to the interpretations and observations gradually developed throughout the book, I have explained in the last two chapters⁵ what in my opinion is the irreducible, inescapable core of the dichotomy, which is therefore constantly recurring, as well as being ideal, historical and existential. I have examined things with a certain detachment, and do not set about making a judgement. I do not ask myself who is right and who is wrong, because I see no

point in confusing a historical assessment with my personal opinions, although I make no secret of which side I feel closer to.

Turin, February 1994

N. B.

1 A Challenge to the Distinction

1 ‘Left’ and ‘right’ are two antithetical terms which for more than two centuries have been used habitually to signify the contrast between the ideologies and movements which divide the world of political thought and action. As antithetical terms, they are mutually exclusive, and together they are exhaustive within that eminently conflict-riven universe. They are exclusive in the sense that no doctrine or movement can be both left-wing and right-wing at the same time. They are exhaustive in the sense that a doctrine or movement can only be either left-wing or right-wing, at least as far as the more rigid application of the twin definition is concerned, as we shall see later.

The antithetical pair, left and right, can be put to descriptive, axiological or historical use, as I have often said of what I call the ‘great dichotomies’ which divide up every field of knowledge. They are descriptive in that they can summarize two sides of a conflict, evaluative in that they can express a positive or negative value-judgement of one side or the other, and historical in that they can indicate the passage from one phase to another in the political life of a

nation. Their historical use can, in turn, be either descriptive or evaluative.

The opposition between left and right represents a typically dyadic way of thinking, which has been variously explained in psychological, sociological, historical and even biological terms. There are examples in all fields of thought; the all-inclusive distinction or dyad dominates every discipline. In sociology it is society/community, in economics market/planned, in law public/private, in aesthetics classical/romantic, and in philosophy transcendent/immanent. Left/right is not the only distinction in the political sphere, but it is encountered everywhere.

There are distinctions in which the two constituent terms are antithetical, and others in which they are complementary. The former interpret a universe as a composition of divergent entities which oppose each other, whereas the latter interpret a harmonious universe composed of convergent entities which tend to fuse into a superior whole. The left/right pair belongs to the first type. Given that triadic thought is often generated from dyadic thought or represents, as it were, a development from it, the transition from one to the other will differ according to whether the dyad one starts from consists of antithetical or complementary terms. In the first case the transition occurs through a dialectical synthesis or negation of the negation, in the second case through composition.

The following reflections arise from the assertion that there is no longer any relevance to the distinction between left and right which, over the two centuries since the French Revolution, has been used to divide the political universe into opposing camps, an assertion which has been made repeatedly in recent years, to the point of becoming a cliché.

It is now *de rigueur* to quote Sartre who, it appears, was one of the first to argue that left and right were empty vessels. They are no longer supposed to have any heuristic or classificatory value, and emphatically no evaluative application. Often they are referred to with a certain irritation, as though they represent one of the many linguistic traps which political debate can fall into.

2 There are various reasons for this opinion which is gaining increasing currency, and countless examples could be produced every day. Let us look at a few.

The first doubts about whether the distinction had disappeared, or at least ceased to have the same descriptive force, arose from the so-called crisis of ideology, and therefore the pointlessness of contrasting the ideologies involved. The objection which can easily be raised is that ideologies have not disappeared at all, but are still very much with us. The ideologies of the past have merely been replaced by others which are new or claim to be new. The ideological tree is always green. Besides, it has been shown repeatedly that there is nothing more ideological than declaring the demise of ideologies. Then again 'left' and 'right' are not just ideologies. To reduce them to purely ideological expressions would be an unjustifiable simplification: they indicate opposing programmes in relation to many problems whose solution is part of everyday political activity. These contrasts concern not only ideas, but also interests and judgements on which direction society should be moving in; they exist in all societies, and it is not apparent how they could disappear. Naturally, one could reply that such contrasting positions exist, but they are not the same as those encountered when the distinction was created, and during the period of its

success these positions have changed so much as to make the old names anachronistic and therefore misleading.

Recently it has been argued that, since the concept of a left wing has been so drastically emptied of its descriptive powers as to be one of the least informative expressions in political usage, the time has come to replace the old pair of terms with a more appropriate one: that of progressives and conservatives.¹ But some have taken a more radical stance, rejecting any residual dichotomy in their vision, and arguing that this last dichotomy is one of those 'follies' of political jargon, which we must free ourselves from in order to form new groupings, based not on positions, but on problems.²

3 Secondly, it is argued that the division into two distinct and opposing political camps has become inappropriate, and the resulting political spectrum insufficient, in the increasingly complex political world of large-scale societies, particularly large-scale democratic societies which tolerate and indeed presuppose the existence of a multitude of pressure groups and interest groups which compete with each other (and which on occasion oppose each other, and on other occasions make common cause with each other; they converge on some points and diverge on others, like dancers joining together and then turning their backs in an elaborate choreography). Basically, the objection is that in a multi-faceted democratic society, in which many forces are at play, which agree on some points and not on others, and permit a great variety of alliances, problems cannot be posed in antithetical form as one thing or another: either left or right, and if it is not left-wing, it must be right-wing, or vice versa.

This objection strikes home, but it is not decisive. The distinction between left and right does not at all preclude, even in everyday language, the existence of a continuous spectrum which joins the left and the right, or of intermediate positions where the left meets the right. These positions make up a central area between the extremes which is well known as the 'centre'. If one wanted to flirt a little with the terminology of logic, one could say that while the dyadic concept of politics can be defined as the excluded middle, according to which politics is divided into just two parts, which are mutually exclusive, with nothing in between them, a triadic concept can be defined as the 'included middle', according to which there is an intermediate space between the left and the right which is neither one nor the other. In the first case, the two terms, which have an 'either . . . or . . .' relationship, are contradictory; whereas in the second case, in which the intermediate area can be expressed as 'neither . . . nor . . .', they are opposites. 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.

4 The fact that in many democratic systems with high levels of pluralism the 'included middle' can become so all-embracing as to relegate the left and the right to the extreme margins of the political system does not in any way invalidate the original antithesis. As the centre is defined as neither left-wing nor right-wing and cannot be defined in any other way, its very existence and *raison d'être* are based on this antithesis. The duration of dusk varies according to the season and the latitude, but its duration in

no way affects the fact that its definition depends on the definition of day and night.³

Identification of this intermediate space allows for a more graduated interpretation of the political system, as the centre which is closer to the left, the centre-left, can be distinguished from the centre which is closer to the right, the centre-right. Equally, on the left, one can distinguish between a moderate left which tends towards the centre and an extreme left which is opposed to the centre, and on the right, a right wing which is attracted towards the centre and a right wing which distances itself so much from the centre as to be equally opposed to the centre as to the left. If it is then considered that whatever way the centre is divided up there is still a centre which remains intact and could be defined as the centre of the centre, a spectrum emerges with a range of positions.

It need hardly be said that fragmentation of the political system is assisted by the adoption of proportional representation. This fragmentation can be clearly seen in a chamber of deputies shaped like an amphitheatre, in which the various positions are represented, moving from the extreme right to the extreme left. However, the distinction which divides the elected representatives in each sector is still between left and right. While in the British parliament, one has to sit either on the left or on the right, reflecting the great left/right antithesis, representatives in a parliament like the Italian Montecitorio are graded from right to left (or vice versa). However, the nostalgia for a first-past-the-post electoral system (whether based on one or two ballots) which has arisen in recent years and has led to repeated attempts at reform and a referendum, reflects a desire to return to a bipolar political system. This campaign, which

has finally achieved success through an act of parliament, is proof enough that a dichotomous interpretation of politics persists even in a fragmented system, whatever views might be expressed, and leaving aside all doctrinal arguments. Besides, what better proof could there be of the persistence of this dichotomy than the presence, even where there is pluralism, of a left wing which tends to perceive the centre as the right wing in disguise and a right wing which tends to perceive the same centre as a cover for the left which does not wish to show its true colours.

5 Allow me another digression: the 'included middle' is not the same as the 'inclusive middle'. The 'included middle' attempts to find its own space between two opposites, and although it inserts itself between them, it does not eliminate them, but draws them apart, prevents them from coming into contact and brawling, and dispenses with the stark choice between left and right by providing an alternative. The 'inclusive middle' tends to go beyond the two opposites, incorporating them in a higher synthesis, and therefore cancelling them out. In other words, left and right cease to be two mutually exclusive totalities like two sides of a coin which cannot both be seen at the same time; they become two parts of a whole, a dialectic totality. This can be distinguished from a mechanical totality, which consists of a combination of compatible parts that join together precisely because they are compatible, and from an organic totality, in which the individual parts are a function of the whole, and therefore not antithetical but convergent in relation to the centre. Dialectical unity, on the other hand, entails a synthesis of two opposing parts, one of which is the assertion or thesis and the other is the negation or

antithesis. This synthesis is not a compound, and represents something entirely new. While the 'included middle' could be expressed by the formula 'neither . . . nor . . .', the 'inclusive middle' could be abbreviated to 'both . . . and . . .'.

In political debate the 'inclusive middle' is usually presented as an attempt at a third way – that is to say, as something which transcends the politics of left and right, unlike the centre, which is simply in between the left and the right. In practice, the third way is in the centre; but in theory, it claims not to be a compromise between two extremes, but to supersede them both, and therefore it accepts and suppresses them at the same time (in contrast to the 'included middle', which rejects and separates). It is not, then, a *mediated third*, but a *transcended third*, where the first and second entities are brought together in their interdependence and suppressed as unilateral assertions, rather than being separated and left to survive in opposition to each other. Every middle entity presence of the other two entities, but the 'included middle' realizes its own essence by driving them out, and the 'inclusive middle' by feeding off them. 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.

The history of political thought – or perhaps I should say, political fantasy – can produce thousands of examples of such third ways. I have insisted on this point, perhaps more than necessary, because the crisis of the left has led to the recent success of the ideal of liberal socialism, which is a typical expression of 'inclusive middle' thought. A triadic combination is always the product of a crisis, and hence a

fear that an antithesis has exhausted its historical vitality. Every form of synthetic thought is somewhat paradoxical, because it attempts to bring together two opposing sets of ideas, which have always proved to be incompatible, and therefore alternatives. The paradox is justified by the fact that all forms of synthetic thought always prove to be fruitless once they are put into practice unilaterally.

Another example of this synthesis of opposites occurred on the right, in an equally serious period of crisis. This was the ideology of the conservative revolution which followed the First World War as a response by the right to the subversive revolution which had brought the left to power in one vast country, and threatened to spread elsewhere.⁴ For the purposes of our argument here concerning the opposition between left and right and its possible disappearance, the theory of the 'inclusive middle' 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 by drawing in the opposing position and thus neutralizing it.

6 A third reason for rejecting the traditional opposition between left and right and claiming its demise is the view that it has lost a great deal of its descriptive value, because the continuous development of society and the creation of new political problems (political in the sense that they require solutions through the traditional instruments of political activity – that is to say, activity aimed at collective decisions which, once they are taken, become binding on the entire community) have produced movements which cannot be categorized in terms of the traditional opposition between left and right, as claimed by the movements

themselves. The most interesting current example is that of the Greens. Are the Greens on the left or the right? If we use the criteria usually adopted for making this distinction, it appears that sometimes they are on the left and sometimes on the right, or that they are neither left-wing nor right-wing. The Greens could be defined as a *transversal* movement, which has become a political buzz-word, albeit a pejorative used in another context. This is because green issues run through all the enemy camps, and pass effortlessly from one camp to another, thus proving that in practice there is a third way of subverting the dyad, in addition to being *in the middle* (the centre) and going *beyond* (synthesis). This moving *through* the spectrum entails a reduction in the authority of the dyad, rather than its rejection or obsolescence.

The best proof of the ubiquity of the green movement is the fact that all parties have adopted the ecological theme without changing any of their traditional political baggage. They have perhaps merely added to it. No one today would dare to challenge the rights of nature, which are perhaps an unconscious anthropomorphization of the natural world. These are the rights which nature should expect of humanity, and this relationship implies duties which humanity must accord to nature (without entering into the argument of whether a right precedes an obligation, or vice versa). There are various explanations for this radical shift in attitude to nature (particularly in the West) from a perception of nature as something purely to be dominated and as a passive instrument of human needs to the idea of nature (even inanimate nature) as a subject, or at least an object which should not be used arbitrarily, but within the dictates of reason. According to a somewhat metaphysical or reli-

gious interpretation, nature belongs to the world not created by man, and, like man, is a free agent within it, acting alongside other free agents. A more pragmatic and utilitarian point of view asserts that since man is obliged to live in a finite universe whose available resources for survival are limited, these resources should be used with due consideration to their eventual exhaustion. Given these different philosophies based on opposing value systems and concepts of the world, it is quite possible that the spread of ecological movements will not make the traditional left/right split anachronistic, but that, instead, this split will be reproduced within the various ecological movements, which are already troubled by internal divisions, despite their recent appearance. It is a question of whether human beings have a duty to other beings besides themselves, or to other human beings, in particular to future generations; or, in other words, whether these restrictions are imposed on humanity from outside or are imposed by humanity on itself. This question will introduce a distinction between right-wing greens and left-wing greens, and has in part already done so.

7 Humanity's dramatically increased ability not only to exploit nature and subject it to its own needs, but also to manipulate it and deflect it from its normal course; has created moral and legal problems (such as bio-ethics) which will increasingly require political decisions (as previously defined); and as these will be completely different from any decisions taken in the past, it appears that, whatever their true nature, they will not fall into the traditional categories of left and right, which arose when these problems were unknown to political movements. As these

problems are eminently moral, responses to them have reflected either laxity or severity, a distinction which generally divides the moral world. However, this distinction does not fit well with the distinction between left and right. Is laxity left-wing or right-wing? Is severity left-wing or right-wing?

There is severity on the left and laxity on the right, and also vice versa. The two dichotomies cannot be superimposed. The most problematic example of this cross-over is the question of abortion. In general, the abolition of abortion is part of the right-wing political programmes, and the left is prevalently pro-abortion. It has been pointed out to me that this attitude appears to contrast with one of the general definitions of the left: that the left defends the weak. It could be argued that of the mother and the foetus, the foetus is the weaker of the two. In reply, it can be argued that it is undoubtedly weaker than the mother, but that the mother is weaker than the father, who, in most cases, has forced her to become pregnant. It is no coincidence that the pro-abortion campaign was strengthened enormously by the spread of feminism, which has been favoured by left-wing parties.

8 But these are all *secondary* arguments. The principal reason for challenging the left/right distinction is much more important from a historical and political point of view. The two terms of an antithetical distinction support each other: if there were no right wing, then there would be no left wing, and vice versa. In other words, the right exists because there is a left, and the left exists because there is a right. Consequently, proving the irrelevance of this distinction does not require proof of its inappropriateness (i.e.

there is no point in dividing the political world on the basis of opposing ideologies if there are no more ideologies), its deficiency (i.e. it is insufficient to divide the political world into two poles when it has been shown that there is a middle entity – whether it is intermediate or at a higher level does not matter), or its anachronism (i.e. new political programmes, problems and movements have entered the political scene since the distinction was created, fulfilling a useful role). It is quite sufficient to diminish the authority of one of the terms and cease to recognize its existence: if all is left-wing, then there is no right wing, and conversely, if all is right-wing, then there is no left wing.

Two terms in an antithesis do not always have equal force; nor is it necessarily the case that one is always stronger than the other. Their respective force can change according to the point of view and according to the criteria used to measure it. There are pairs in which the stronger term remains the same: in the distinction between war and peace, it is war which, so far, has remained the stronger term, and the proof is that peace has traditionally been defined as *non-war*, as something that comes after a war (as in Grotius's *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* or Tolstoy's *War and Peace*); and in the distinction between order and disorder, the stronger term is order. In the antithesis between left and right, which is restricted to the political sphere, the respective force of the two terms is not established once and for all; it depends on the period and the circumstances, unlike in biology, followed by religion and ethics, where *right* is considered the stronger term. In Italian history, the right was predominant after Unification, but this was followed by a period in which the left was predominant. The two parts continue to exist, and base their *raison d'être* on the

existence of the other, even when one prevails over the other, and the scales tip more and more in favour of one or the other. When Fascism, which was considered a right-wing movement, came crashing down (and rightly so for the majority of world opinion), the star of the left rose so high that the right seemed to have disappeared, or at least to have lost so much of its standing as to put into question its survival.

In a situation of that kind, it is not at all surprising that some of the minority groups and movements which, according to established political terminology, would have been defined as right-wing, started to argue that the traditional left/right distinction no longer had any useful function, that it had become obsolete, and that the political struggle had to go beyond left and right. It should be noted that this alleged obsolescence of the left/right distinction was presented as its total repudiation and distortion, rather than as a synthesis which incorporated two opposites and, by incorporating them, brought out the truth of each. It is clear that in a situation in which one becomes so predominant as to leave little room for the other to be taken seriously as a political force, undermining the left/right distinction becomes an obvious expedient for hiding one's own weakness. 'Has the right been defeated?' 'But what is the point of posing the question in these terms', asks the defeated side, 'if the distinction between left and right has run its course?' In a universe in which the two opposing parts are interdependent, in the sense that existence of one presupposes the existence of the other, the only way to invalidate the adversary is to invalidate oneself. Where the whole has become what was previously a part, the distinction has completed its task; everything

must be started anew, and the distinction must be transcended.

9 Every day we are now finding evidence that the strong and weak parts have been inverted in the left/right distinction, following the dramatic events of recent years which have dissolved the communist regimes (for many years they were held up as the relentless advance of the left in the world, or were considered by those who had fought against them as the most radical expression of the left and the most extensive historical implementation of the ideas and campaigns of the left). The left is on the way down, and the right is on the way up. Now the argument that the old distinction should be put in the attic is mainly being put by groups and movements which claimed to be left-wing when the wind of history appeared to be blowing in their direction, and which were considered, judged, condemned and slandered as such by their adversaries. Until not so long ago, you could still ask the question: Is there still a right wing? After the fall of the communist regimes, the same malicious question can be heard in an inverted form: Is there still a left wing?

I don't think anyone would be able to list all the conferences and public debates that have taken place in recent years in response to this question, such as: 'The Crisis of the Left', 'Doubts on the Left and About the Left', 'The Left in Difficulty', or 'The Death Throes of the Left'. The problem can best be summed up by the English title of a conference held in Turin in December 1992, which used the pun 'What is left?' The responses varied from the radically negative opinion that 'The left no longer exists' or 'The left has been buried under the ruins of the Soviet Empire' to the

hopeful, positive conviction that 'If the left is understood in its original meaning, then the collapse of the Bolshevik system is a triumph for the left which will reopen the possibilities buried under a tyrannical system in 1917.'⁵

The collapse of the Soviet system did not bring about the end of the left, but simply the end of a left-wing movement over a specific historic period. This much-debated aspect begs the question of the many varieties of left-wing or, for that matter, right-wing.⁶ Clearly the argument that there are many varieties of left wing supports the traditional left/right distinction, and the dyad will survive its current crisis. It has been correctly pointed out that the first democratic elections in Eastern Europe occurred without the competing parties dividing into parties of the left and the right. But even those who have used this argument as clear proof of the disappearance of the left/right distinction, have had to recognize the anomalousness of the transition from totalitarianism to democracy, and admit that when the democratic institutions are more established, it is quite probable that the parties will again group around the traditional poles.⁷

10 Finally, the last, and perhaps most decisive, reason for rejecting the left/right distinction does not refer to two conflicting parts of a whole which stand or fall together (if there is no right wing, then there is no left wing). It is the claim that the two labels have become purely fictitious, and that the left-wing and right-wing movements, faced with the complexity and novelty of current problems, say more or less the same things, formulate more or less the same programmes for consumption by their electorates, and propose the same immediate ends. According to this argument,

left and right no longer have any reason to exist, not because at a certain stage one has excluded the other, but because there are no longer the (alleged) differences which would merit the distinction of different names. These names therefore end up engendering a false belief in a distinction which in reality no longer exists, and provoking artificial and misleading disputes. This is particularly true of the political conflict in Italy, where one increasingly hears the opinion from observers not involved in the fray that there is little reason for such persistent animosity, because the opposing sides are arguing for the same things; or, rather, that the left is in such difficulty that it has adopted the ideas of the right in order to revamp itself, thus invalidating the traditional differentiation.⁸

As could be shown by other accounts, this confusion on the left and denial of their own existence does not entirely correspond to reality. For a definitive response, I refer the reader to the final chapters in which I attempt to resolve these doubts.

2 Extremists and Moderates

1 Whether or not the arguments against the left/right distinction examined so far are correct, one eminently verifiable fact appears to corroborate them, and facts are always more stubborn than even the most subtle arguments. The fact we are faced with is the way that thinkers, who are held up as models to be lived by, and the chosen few *maître à penser* drift from right to left, or vice versa, according to the wishes of their own disciples. It will be sufficient here to refer to the most spectacular examples. Nietzsche, who inspired Nazism (we are not concerned here with whether this inspiration derived from an incorrect interpretation or, as I believe, one of the possible interpretations), now often flanks Marx as a father of the new left. Carl Schmitt, who not only inspired but for a period provided theoretical guidance to the Nazi state, has been rediscovered, at least in Italy, and honoured especially by left-wing scholars because of his opposition to Hans Kelsen, the major democratic theoretician in the great constitutional debate of the Weimar Republic. Heidegger's sympathies with Nazism have been thoroughly documented, even though his ad-

mirers (on the left and the right) deny this or attempt to play it down; yet he is now considered to be the interpreter of our time, not only in Italy, but also and especially in France by philosophers who claim to be on the left. As is well known, there has been an attempt in the opposite direction, by a few theoreticians of the neo-Fascist right, to appropriate the thought of Antonio Gramsci. Although this attempt proved to be somewhat elusive and short-lived, there was a current called 'right-wing Gramscism' among those who tried to give the right a new image and a new dignity.

Contrasting interpretations of an author are by no means new, although they are more evident in this difficult period for the traditional ideologies and the subsequent doctrinal confusion. George Sorel is the most famous precedent, which can explain the apparent paradox. The author of *Reflections on Violence* played an inspirational role for left-wing movements, and this led to the creation of Italian revolutionary syndicalism which had a few – very few – moments of glory in the history of our socialist movement. In latter years he became an admirer of both Mussolini and Lenin, and many of his followers in Italy became Fascists. His greatest admirers in Italy were two honest conservatives, Pareto and Croce, who have been given various labels, but could never be defined as 'left-wingers'. I have already referred to the conservative revolution, and Hitler defined himself in an article for *Völkische Beobachter* of 6 June 1936 as 'the most conservative revolutionary in the world'. Less well known is Alfredo Rocco's speech to the Italian parliament in which he asked 'to be recognized as the antithetical conservative revolutionary' (but the statement shows that he was perfectly aware of the paradox).

The example of a revolutionary conservative like Sorel, and particularly the last two examples of conservative revolutionaries, allow us to question the way in which positions both of the left and the right (according to a declaration or interpretation made after the event) have been used to inflict another blow on the left/right distinction. We are now faced with a completely different problem, which needs to be considered, especially in view of the importance I give it in the final chapter. What the revolution and the counter-revolution have in common has nothing to do with their belonging to two opposing sides traditionally termed left and right. If this *were* the case, then people would be right to say that we should abandon terms which can no longer distinguish between antithetical cultural and political positions. What revolutionary and counter-revolutionary writers, and their respective movements, really have in common is that within the opposing sides they both belong to the extremist, rather than the moderate, wing. The distinction between extremism and moderation does not coincide with the left/right distinction, in that it answers to a fundamental criterion which is entirely different.

As soon as one considers the problem, it becomes immediately clear that the distinction between extremist and moderate has very little to do with the nature of the ideas professed, but rather concerns their radicalization, and therefore different strategies for their implementation in practice. This explains why revolutionaries (on the left) and counter-revolutionaries (on the right) can tap into the same writers, because they share them not as thinkers of the left or the right, but as extremists of either the left or the right, who are thus distinguished from moderates of the left or the right. If the distinction between left and right is different

from the distinction between extremists and moderates, this means that the opposing ideologies can have points of contact and agreement at their extremes, even though they are still quite distinct in terms of the political programmes and final objectives which define their position *vis-à-vis* the left/right distinction. Ludovico Geymonat, who called himself an extremist (of the left) on the occasion of the so-called refoundation¹ of the Italian communist Party, entitled a collection of his political writings *Against Moderatism*.² In his opinion, the moderate parties which were established after the Liberation represent the so-called constitutional spectrum, which runs from the communists to the Christian Democrats, and they renounce revolutionary change of the society inherited from Fascism and are happy with democracy. The neo-Fascist Solinas wrote in the extreme right-wing magazine *Elementi*: 'Our tragedy today is moderatism. Moderates are our principal enemy. Obviously the moderate is a democrat.'

These two quotations clearly demonstrate that a left-wing extremist and a right-wing extremist share a rejection of democracy (they share an object of hate, if not one of love). Their rejection of democracy brings them together, not because of their position on the political spectrum, but because they occupy the two extreme points of that spectrum. The extremes meet.³

2 The rejection of democracy is not the only point of contact between the 'opposing extremes'. From a philosophical point of view – that is to say, a more general interpretation of the world and history – there is a strong anti-Enlightenment element in every form of political extremism. I refer not only to the anti-Enlightenment of

historicist origin, which found expression in a politically conservative current from Hegel to Croce and a politically revolutionary current within Marxism (Italian Marxism has always been historicist), but also to an irrationalist anti-Enlightenment current which is particularly significant at the moment. This irrationalist, anti-Enlightenment current can be divided into a religious current, which includes such writers as De Maistre and Donoso Cortés, who are often much respected today, and a vitalist current, which includes Nietzsche and Sorel. It is this latter current, which combines best with the left, while the former, fideistic current, is consciously and irreducibly traditionalist and reactionary, precisely because it originated as a 'reaction' to the breakdown in the sacred historical order thought to have been created and guided by an inscrutable Providence, and was a re-evaluation *noli altum sapere sed time* ('do not know anything but fear'), as against Kant's *sapere aude* ('know how to be bold').⁴

If we look at the question in terms of the philosophy of history – that is, the forms and methods by which we interpret historical development (progress or retrogression? cyclical or stationary movement?) – we find that moderatism is gradualist, and believes that action should be guided, metaphorically speaking, by growth of an organism from its embryo according to a pre-established order; whereas extremism has a catastrophic vision, whatever its objectives. Extremism interprets history as progressing by sudden leaps forward and clean breaks, which leave room for human intelligence and forcefulness (in this sense it is less determinist than moderatism). The 'catastrophe' of the October Revolution (an event produced by a conscious

collective will) could only be remedied by the counter-revolutionary 'catastrophe' (the warning signals of incipient Italian Fascism were the *squadre d'azione* - 'action squads'): communism and Fascism feed into each other. The theory of opposing extremisms (which for moderates are not opposing but analogous) was substantiated on a small scale during the period of Italian terrorism, the so-called years of lead, during which Italian society was kept in a continuous state of alarm by terrorist acts perpetrated by both extremes of the political spectrum. On the much grander scale of universal history, this theory of extremes is the basis for the historical debate over the 'European civil war', in which, according to Nolte, a protagonist, Bolshevism and Fascism (or Nazism) are interlinked, the latter being an inversion of the former, the reaction which follows the action, the revolution in reverse, but still a revolution, the catastrophe which follows the catastrophe.

3 Naturally there is no sense in asking oneself which of the two concepts of history is the true one: both are the product of historical 'prophecy' (in the sense that they are based not on facts or conjectures, but on premonitory signs and extrapolations over long periods). This is history whose method of evaluation is not the extent of the truth, but the extent of its power to engender action; it thus has nothing to do with the history of historians, which teaches nothing. In other words, the more history is explanatory on the basis of data and hypotheses, the less it is instructive. At the very most, one can admit that various historical interpretations are themselves historically determined. The history of last century was mainly peaceful, and during that period, Europe carried through the first industrial

revolution, which was never a revolution in the true sense of the word, and never appeared to be catastrophic. Industrialization was accompanied by and interdependent with an unprecedented development in the applied (or technologically useful) sciences. The nineteenth century therefore favoured the idea of gradual progress, with various irreversible stages which had to be passed through, as argued by such diverse figures as Kant, Hegel, Comte and Marx, whatever form their prophetic history took in a century which produced countless examples of prophetic history.

The twentieth century, however, presents a very different picture: the first two total, world wars in the history of humanity and a third war without armies actually fighting (but still threateningly drawn up on the battlefield), communist revolutions in Russia and China, the violent creation of Fascist regimes and their equally violent demise, the rapid process of decolonization following the Second World War, and the disintegration of the communist world, which was no less rapid and unpredictable. *Sapere aude* has now assumed a 'demonic face'. This century has therefore encouraged the antithetical vision of historical upheaval, or catastrophe, which has even raised the fear of an end to history, or, if not an end, then an irreparable degradation of beneficent nature (irreparable for human destiny). This historical view, which is even shared by less apocalyptic observers who wish to be impartial, is taken as evidence of the end of the modern era, which has been characterized by the idea of progress, and the birth of a new era which has for the moment been designated as 'post-modern', though one hopes that a more appropriate and meaningful name will eventually be coined.

4 The extremists on opposing sides also have much in common on moral questions and in their doctrines of virtue, and have similar reasons for opposing the moderates: the heroic, warrior virtues of courage and boldness, as against the virtues of prudence, tolerance, calculating reason and patient mediation, which extremists consider distastefully commercial. However, the latter virtues are essential in market relations and in that more wide-ranging market of ideas and conflicting interests which constitutes the essence of democracy, given its reliance on compromise. It is hardly surprising that extremists of both the left and the right despise democracy for the virtues it fosters and requires for its survival. Their terminology agrees in defining democracy as 'mediocracy', meaning government both by the middle classes and by mediocrities. Democratic mediocrity was a typically Fascist theme, but it can be found in revolutionary radicalism of any form. Piero Gobetti's assertion is a particularly good example: 'Outside government, a reasonably capable *mediocracy*, which decides in advance that it can assume the role of assisting the people, attempts to corrupt direct action with reforms and conciliation, and to deceive rebels with conciliatory proposals which retain their enlightened and educative role.'⁵ Mediocrity is thus associated with reformism, the peaceful resolution of conflict and, more generally, a pragmatic view of politics and political conflict. I happened to read an article by a left-wing writer who spoke of 'the idiocies of contractualism' (a statement which practically made me leap out of my chair).

This contrast between the warrior and the merchant inevitably leads to the justification of violence, or possibly even its exaltation: for the revolutionary left, it is the

purifying violence which finally resolves humanity's problems, acting as the 'midwife of history' (Marx), and for the reactionary right, violence is the 'only way to clean up the world' (Marinetti), to quote just one of countless, monotonous examples.

5 Although the radical rejection of democracy as a practice and a value system is not the only point of contact between extremists of left and right, it is certainly the most persistent and significant. Before Fascism came to power for the first time in Italy, as a response to Bolshevik threat, it first appeared as a radical ideology in France towards the end of the nineteenth century, and was itself partly a response to the Paris Commune, a revolution which was not only threatened, but attempted, although it was a general experiment in a revolution that could never be. In an important study of the history of French Fascism, *Ni droite ni gauche*,⁶ the birth of this ideology, correctly defined as pre-Fascist, is typified by a fierce reaction against bourgeois democracy, which was equal and symmetrical to the same reaction by maximalist socialism. For both sides the scapegoat was social democracy – or, in other words, the moderate version of the left, because it had accepted the rules of bourgeois democracy and had subsequently been corrupted by it.

In spite of all these similarities, which justify the use of the same writers by both sides, and allow Barrès to claim that 'Sorel was the intellectual father of Fascism', Fascism and communism still represent the great antithesis between right and left in this century. Strangely, not only have they failed to eliminate the distinction, they have made it even sharper. This is, I repeat, very strange. The only explanation, in my opinion, is that the criterion whereby one distinguishes

between left and right does not coincide with the one whereby one distinguishes between left and right within the two camps themselves – that is to say, between the extremist and moderate wings. The fact is that Fascism and communism are mutually exclusive, in spite of their common enemy, democracy, whose rules allow the left and the right to alternate in government. They are mutually exclusive because they reproduce in a specific form the principal features of what so far has typified the left and the right (which we will discuss later).

6 Of the many third ways discussed, there has even been one proposed between socialism and liberalism, but no one has ever conceived of one bridging communism and Fascism, because it would be inconceivable. The one thing that they have in common, which is to intensify the principal features of their ideology and take them to their extreme conclusions, is precisely what makes them doctrinally irreconcilable and in practice incompatible. An alliance between Fascists and conservatives, or the extreme right and the moderate right is possible, albeit in a situation of *force majeure*; and Italian Fascism came to power as the result of just such an alliance. On the opposite side, a similar alliance between communism and socialism was only mooted in the popular democracies, and accomplished somewhat more fully in united action by Italian socialists and communists after the Liberation. An alliance between communists and Fascists would be a historical absurdity. The difference between extremism and moderatism mainly concerns method, whereas the antithesis between left and right mainly concerns values. The difference over values is stronger than the one over methods. This explains why in a

serious historical crisis, an alliance between extremists and moderate right-wingers can have some success, as occurred with the Fascist regimes, where the moderate right felt obliged to accept the supremacy of the extreme right. This kind of alliance would not be possible between right and left extremists, because they would disagree on values, not methods. Similar constraints explain why at the end of the Second World War, the fear of a return to the pre-war *status quo* induced the socialists, at the cost of a painful and destructive split, to ally themselves with the communists – that is to say, the extreme left.

Of course, there was one spectacular example of an alliance between Fascism and communism: the non-aggression pact and partition to the mutual advantage of Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, but it was essentially a short-lived tactical alliance, which had no ideological consequences other than the formation of a few small groups of Nazi Bolsheviks, who were politically insignificant.⁷

3 The Left/Right Distinction Survives

1 The terms 'left' and 'right' continue to be very much part of political terminology, in spite of all the arguments from various quarters which are used to challenge it; and although the arguments have not changed, they are more frequent in these confused times. The people who use the words 'left' and 'right' do not appear to be using words unthinkingly, because they understand each other perfectly.

A great deal of the debate between political writers over the last few years has centred around the question: 'Where is the left going?' Debates on 'the future of socialism' or 'the rebirth of the right' have become so frequent as to be repetitive and tedious. The old left is constantly being reassessed in order to found a new left (but it is still the 'left'). Alongside the old defeated right has appeared a 'new right' which seeks vengeance. Democratic systems with several parties are still perceived as semicircles ranging from right to left, or vice versa. Expressions such as 'the right in parliament', 'the left in parliament', 'right-wing government' or 'left-wing government' have not lost any of their

meaning. Within the parties themselves, the currents which compete for the leadership in various periods and situations are still defined by the old names of 'left' and 'right'. When we discuss politicians, we have no hesitation in labelling them as left-wing or right-wing. For example, Occhetto is on the left and Berlusconi on the right.

There has always been a Christian Democrat left. The leadership of the Movimento Sociale¹ has recently been taken over by a faction (led by Pino Rauti) which claimed that it wished to move to the left. Even in such a minuscule, lifeless party as the Liberal Party,² the leaders have always been divided between a left and a right.

The terms 'left' and 'right' were little used, or used with great care, during the breakup of the Italian communist Party; but this was due to the fact that only the word 'left' had positive connotations within a party which assumed a leading role within the international left-wing movement. Neither of the factions contending for the leadership would willingly have accepted being defined as the right of the 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.

We are faced with a paradox: at the same time as this proliferation of writings which cast doubt on the left/right distinction, reject it or often ridicule it for the reasons

examined in the previous chapter, this same distinction now has greater currency than ever before in Italian politics and culture. The reason for this is the referendum which rejected the electoral system which has until now obstructed the alternation of governments which is essential to good representative government, and adopted the first-past-the-post system. It is now hoped that this reform will bring about a drastic reduction in the number of parties, a definitive end to centrist governments, and the introduction of the much-hoped-for alternation between governments. But alternation between whom? Naturally, we are talking about alternation between left and right, or, more specifically, between an alliance formed around the Partito Democratico della Sinistra³ (which means the Democratic Party of the Left) and another alliance consisting of the Northern League, Alleanza Nazionale (ex-Movimento Sociale Italiano) and Berlusconi's Forza Italia.⁴ The former can only be defined as the left, and the latter as the right. The fact that not all those in the first alliance want to be labelled left-wing, and not all those in the second alliance want to be labelled right-wing (everyone chooses the label which brings in the most votes) does not in any way disprove the fact that Italy is moving towards a political system with a more well-defined division between left and right.⁵

2 It is not at all surprising that a dyad, or dichotomy, is the most common way of representing the political world, which is, by its very nature, antagonistic and divided into opposing sides (parties, interest groups, factions, and in international relations, peoples and nations). We can easily recall some famous historical examples: patricians/plebeians, Guelphs/Ghibellines and Whigs/Tories.

War, an essential dichotomy (*mors tua vita mea*), is the most extreme manifestation of the 'friend/enemy' distinction, which in turn is the most abstract way of representing politics as something antagonistic. There is no room for a third party in war, whether it is external or internal. A third party can only appear as an intermediary to end hostilities and establish peace. War, like a duel, can only have two contenders (it does not matter whether they have allies), and one side must win, and one side must lose. A war in which there are neither winners nor losers is a war which has not fulfilled its purpose. Third parties who do not get involved are defined as neutral, in that they do not support either side, and are not involved in the hostilities. From the moment they become involved in the conflict, they become allies of one side or the other. There can only ever be two sides to the conflict, however many the allies.

Given the single great dichotomy between friend and foe, the inevitable reduction of conflicts to two opposing sides, or the attraction of various potential contenders towards just two poles, which could be termed bipolarization, is based on the principle that the friend of my enemy is my enemy, whereas the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Where there are only two possible positions, and one must either be a friend or an enemy (for this best expresses a polarized view of politics), there are four possible combinations for polarizing more than two initial contenders: a friend can be either the friend of a friend or the enemy of an enemy, and an enemy can be either the enemy of a friend or the friend of an enemy. Seemingly unnatural coalitions and alliances, both in international relations and between parties within a single state, are in reality the natural consequence of dichotomic logic. This dichotomy, which is clearly

expressed in war, an extreme example of human relations, is also found in traditional religious and metaphysical perceptions, including those of the natural world (light/darkness, order/chaos and ultimately, God/Devil).

3 It was pure accident that the names given to the two political poles were 'left' and 'right'. As is well known, the use of these two words goes back to the French Revolution, at least as far as national politics are concerned. It is an extremely banal spatial metaphor, whose origin was pure chance, and whose sole function was to name the dichotomy which has prevailed in politics for two centuries, and has prevailed because it is essential. The name could change, but the original, essential dichotomy would remain.

The domination of the left/right distinction right up to the present day, in spite of repeated challenges, does not preclude the existence of other spatial metaphors, which are less comprehensive and concern particular situations. A high/low distinction is used for the upper and lower houses of the British parliament, for the higher and lower clergy in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and for an extremely useful theory of government whereby power proceeds from bottom to top or from top to bottom. According to a hierarchical view of politics (which exists alongside the antagonistic one), there is an in front/behind distinction. The *princeps*, as suggested by the original meaning of the word, comes in the first row, and is followed by all the others, who are in fact called 'followers' or the 'retinue'. From the Leninist viewpoint, which is literally a princely concept of politics (as in Gramsci's 'Modern Prince'), the party is the vanguard of the proletariat, and 'vanguard' necessarily implies the existence of a rearguard. The distinction which concerns the

visibility of power and the way in which collective decisions are taken is between open and closed: the most relevant historical example is the contrast between the visible government of democratic states and the invisible government of a sovereign's secret cabinet which admitted only a few trusted friends, since the affairs of state had to be completely closed and inaccessible to the great mass of subjects. The most common metaphor in relation to the difference between programmes and positions held in any given political battle between parties and movements is the near/far distinction, whereby the centre-right is close to the right, the centre-left close to the left, the left is further away from the right than from the centre, and so on. In an extremely fragmented party system such as the Italian one has been up till now, the level of political affinity becomes particularly important after an election, when shifts in voting patterns are assessed, because shifts between parties which are closer to each other are considered more probable.

Some of these metaphors, such as the high/low distinction, reflect a vertical universe, and some, such as the in front/behind and near/far distinctions, a horizontal universe.

4 The temporal metaphor, as well as the spatial one, holds an important position in political terminology. It makes it possible to distinguish between innovators and conservatives, progressives and traditionalists, and between those who look to the rising sun of the future and those who are guided by the inextinguishable light of the past. There is nothing to prevent the spatial metaphor which gave rise to the left/right distinction from corresponding to the temporal metaphor as far as one of its more frequent meanings is concerned.

Of course, it has to be said straight away, in order to avoid pointless objections, that the prevailing use of the left/right pair to designate the principal antithesis which governs all the other political antitheses, does not mean that it is univocal, or indeed that it remains unchanged through time. Some conflicts become less important, or even disappear, while others emerge. As long as there are conflicts, there will be polarization, although the principal antithesis may become secondary, and vice versa, as time passes and circumstances change. There is still polarization, even though the great historic changes of recent times might quite legitimately create the impression that much of the antagonism has gone. One has only to think of the great antithesis between the North and the South which will increasingly dominate the political scene for the foreseeable future, although it is a simplification, like all distinctions applied to complex relations in human society.

5 So far I have limited myself to establishing the continued use of the distinction. I now wish to demonstrate that 'left' and 'right' have a descriptive meaning and an evaluative meaning, which, as with all other political terms, are not very precise, because on the whole they are taken from everyday usage. The descriptive meaning, although variable, is never so variable as to take on two meanings which are completely contrary. Only under Big Brother do words have the opposite meaning to that in their common usage, but then the purpose of this distortion is to deceive the receiver of the message and make communication impossible. Conversely, words used in current political jargon can be ambiguous, giving rise to different possible interpretations, and perhaps increasing the number of people who

would find the message palatable, but never to the point of reversing the accepted meaning.

As far as the evaluative meaning is concerned, the positive connotation of the one must imply the negative connotation of the other, precisely because the two terms describe an antithesis. But which is axiologically positive and which axiologically negative depends not on the descriptive meaning, but on the two opposing value-judgements which are made of the things described. This has considerable consequences for the use of 'left' and 'right' in political and other terminologies, such as religious usage, where 'right' always has a positive connotation and 'left' a negative one. Not all dyads are axiologically reversible. The left/right pair clearly are not reversible in common usage, although they are in politics.

To be precise, a polarized view of a given universe implies that, taken together the two parts describe the whole of that universe, in the sense that every entity within that universe must belong to one of the two parts, leaving no room for a third alternative; but at the same time, the two parts are axiological opposites, because if you attribute a positive value to one of them, then the other necessarily assumes a negative value. On the basis of this descriptive either/or, every entity within the universe belongs to one or other part of the dyad. On the basis of the axiological either/or, each part has the opposite sign to the other, but there is no objective reason why one should always represent good and the other always bad. The fact remains, however, that as soon as one is raised up to represent good in a given context, the other necessarily comes to represent bad.

The neutral observer, such as the historian or the sociologist, considers it his specific task to illustrate the descrip-

tive meaning; consequently, he will demonstrate which groups are considered by themselves or others to be on the right or the left in a given situation. Activists, on the other hand, tend to attribute a positive value to their own political programmes and a negative one to those of their opponents. This difference between the neutral observer and the activist means that repeated surveys of what is meant by left and right are not always reliable, and their usefulness is therefore somewhat doubtful. Precisely because the left/right distinction has very strong axiological connotations, people who belong to either side will tend to define their own side with words that are axiologically positive, and the other side with words that are axiologically negative. To give a straightforward and immediately understandable example, equality, which is a traditional element in the ideology of the left, is considered levelling down by someone on the right. Inequality, which for someone on the left is a statement of fact without ideological connotations, becomes hierarchical order for someone on the right.

However, in spite of the caution with which we must treat these two terms, surveys confirm that the left/right distinction is still very much in use.

4 In Search of the Criterion which Governs the Distinction

1 If the distinction between left and right continues to be used in spite of repeated challenges, the problem shifts from proving its legitimacy to an examination of the criteria proposed for that legitimacy. In other words, what is the reason, or what are the reasons, for the distinction, given that 'left' and 'right' are used to designate differences in thought and political activity? It should be remembered that the left/right distinction was first attacked because it was thought that the criteria that had been used until then were not clearly defined, or had become misleading as time had passed and circumstances changed. Luckily, there are not only detractors, but also many more exponents than in the past, who have put forward their own answers to the question of the possible criterion or criteria; and as there is more consensus than dissent, the distinction is to some extent reinforced.

Laponce, a professor at Toronto University, wrote the principal work on this subject in 1981. The book, *Left and*

*Right. The Topography of Political Perceptions,*¹ summarizes previous analyses, and constitutes a basis for further research. He makes some general, thought-provoking observations about the spatial metaphors used in political language, mainly distinguishing between the vertical spatial axis (higher/lower) and the horizontal one (left/right). As I pointed out in the previous chapter, there are others, but for the moment we will limit ourselves to these two.

Laponce considers the vertical axis to be more dominant than the horizontal one, which originated with the French Revolution, when the horizontal was supposed to replace the vertical. It should perhaps be observed that although in reality the names 'left' and 'right' were coined during the French Revolution, this was certainly not the origin of the horizontal concept of politics, if by this expression we mean the conflict between two opposing sides which is the essential and therefore persistent aspect of political strife or politics as strife. The vertical and horizontal dimensions of politics are separate, as they represent two different, independent relationships in the political universe. Normally both dimensions coexist, but either one can disappear in extreme situations: the first can disappear in a civil war, and the second in a despotic system in which there is a single power at the top and divisions are not permitted at the base. Laponce states only that the horizontal metaphor has never completely eliminated the vertical one. It should be added that it has never eliminated it for the simple reason that it could never eliminate it. The two metaphors have different descriptive functions, and the total sphere of political relations is only represented by both together.

Another curious and arguable notion is that the left/right distinction is particularly important in a democracy,

because elections divide the competing groups into two opposing camps. Leaving aside the consideration that it is only a particular type of electoral system, rather than electoral systems in general, which fosters the division into two opposing camps, it is a much more universal principle than the electoral system which produces dualism in a democracy: it is the principle of majority rule, whereby every kind of collective decision necessarily involves a majority and a minority.

Besides, there is duality in politics far beyond this particular kind of regime. Carl Schmitt, who defined politics so aptly as the realm of the friend/enemy relationship that I have already mentioned, compared this relationship with others, such as true/false and beautiful/ugly, although this involves a certain misrepresentation or contamination between different levels. But we must make a distinction, which Laponce apparently failed to make, between the friend/enemy and other comparable dualities, in which one term is always positive and the other always negative, and the left/right pair in which both terms can have either a positive or a negative connotation, according to the ideologies and movements they represent, and hence the persons and groups which appropriate them. If you state that false is the opposite of true, or ugly the opposite of beautiful, you are conferring negative connotations on 'false' and 'ugly'; but if you state that left is the opposite of right, or vice versa, this does not involve any negative value-judgement of either the left or the right, because a negative axiological judgement of an opposite depends exclusively on a positive axiological judgement of the thing opposed.

It is true that before becoming a political metaphor, the original meanings of left and right were univocal, because

right always had a positive connotation, and left always a negative one. This single polarity can still be found in the majority of metaphors using this pair, as, for example, in religion, where the good sit on the right of the Father and the evil on the left. But political terminology is not univocal, because both left and right can represent the positive side or, conversely, the negative side of the distinction, depending on which side makes the judgement. The positive and negative value-judgements of the left and right are integral features of the political struggle, where the spatial metaphor has completely lost its original meaning, which represents areas without axiological connotations, because sitting on the right or on the left no longer refers to a common father, but only to the speaker, a neutral institution.

Laponce even argues, without, in my opinion, any factual basis, that, unlike in traditional and especially religious terminology, where left represents the bad side, in political terminology the left is always associated with highly positive attributes such as the future, creativity and justice. While the majority of non-political cultures are dominated by the right wing, at least in the West, contemporary political culture is, according to Laponce, dominated by the left wing (but most of his examples refer to French elections between 1880 and 1970). The observation that the right does not have any publications corresponding to magazines like *New Left* and *Keep Left* has been disproved by the growth in recent decades of a militant and ambitious *nouvelle droite*. The fact that Laponce considers this domination of the left to be a negative feature of our time demonstrates the ideological orientation of his study, although this is not explicit.

Nowadays ideological trends are analysed very accurately, and well-documented surveys are carried out at different times and in different countries. These studies are dominated by the division between religion and politics, religion being considered the positive element in history and politics the negative one. The dominance of the left is supposed to be proof of the negative nature of politics. If one were to take this theory, which is implied rather than fully expounded, to its logical conclusion, there would clearly be a perverse correlation between the positiveness of the left and the negativeness of politics. Laponce skilfully manipulates the different proposed distinctions which emerge from the various surveys, and uses the contrast between religion and politics to give particular emphasis to the fact that the distinction between left and right ultimately turns out to be a distinction between the sacred and the profane, in which other distinctions find their place: the distinction between hierarchical order and egalitarian order, and the distinction between a traditionalist outlook favourable to continuity and a progressive outlook favourable to the new and to a break with the past. Laponce's book continually asserts that religion is right-wing and atheism left-wing. In reality, the distinction he proposes ends up as the distinction between the vertical dimension and the horizontal dimension, which initially appeared to be a distinction quite different from the one between left and right, as left/right was defined by contrast with the high/low distinction. At the end of the book, the superimposition of the limited question of the left/right distinction on the more general and demanding distinction reaches the point of representing the struggle between religion and politics almost as the struggle between good and evil, in which the final triumph

will belong to religion, in spite of any battles lost along the way.

When you compare the results of Laponce's study and his insistence on the contrast between the sacred and the profane, with the variety and complexity of ideologies and movements defined as either left or right and the way these are interwoven, you immediately realize how partial and inadequate they are, especially as far as defining the right is concerned. In Europe, there is a reactionary, right-wing tradition which is religious, which includes De Maistre, Donoso Cortés and Carl Schmitt, but there is also an irreligious and pagan right, which uses religion to its own advantage as an *instrumentum regni*. All the *nouvelle droite* which has appeared in recent decades is irreligious, and does not draw on any of the religious sources of the traditional right. If you then take into account the distinction between extremists and moderates discussed in the previous chapter, you have to consider a moderate right which has a completely secular view of politics. I am thinking of people like Vilfredo Pareto, whose affinity for the established right took him in later years to the threshold of Fascism, but whose ridicule of religious beliefs has caused him to be compared with Voltaire, and with good reason.

The attribution of an irreligious, even atheistic view of life and society to the entire left is also unsound. Precisely the consideration of egalitarian ideology, which Laponce believes to be one of the principal features of the left, compels us to recognize that egalitarianism inspired by religion has had an extensive role in revolutionary movements, from the English levellers and the followers of Winstanley to liberation theology. Conversely, there has been a tradition of inegalitarian thought, of which Nietzsche was the ultimate

expression, which considers egalitarianism and its political products, democracy and socialism, as the harmful effects of Christian teaching.

5 Other Criteria

1 Dino Cofrancesco is the Italian scholar who has dealt most frequently with this subject, and who merits particular attention for his shrewd analysis. He believes that the Manichaeian interpretation of the left/right distinction ended with the desecration of the Marxist–Leninist faith; but this does not mean that it has lost all meaning: ‘On careful reflection, the liberation of mankind from unjust and oppressive power . . . is still the nucleus of the left as a “political category”, which is capable of resisting any attempt at demystification.’ On the other hand, even the right ‘represents something typically human’, because it expresses ‘one’s roots in the soil of tradition and history’.¹ According to this new interpretation, tradition takes on the primary role in defining the right wing, and not the sacred, as Laponce claims; while the left is characterized by the concept of emancipation, which is also a value (and, like ‘tradition’, a positive value). The reference to tradition in its various meanings is therefore a constant feature of the left/right dichotomy.

Cofrancesco defends the legitimacy of the left/right distinction against all its detractors, old and new, quite rightly in my opinion. In a historic context in which the right is

more challenged than the left, he pays more attention to defining the right. He believes that a definition which is not contingent, incidental or subject to the variety of historically determined positions must aim at identifying the mental attitude and inspirational idea: in a word, the 'soul' of those who profess to be right-wing (this is of course also valid for those who profess to be left-wing). The soul of the right can be expressed succinctly in the motto 'Nothing outside or against tradition, everything within and for the sake of tradition'. If, then, it can be said that there are different ways of being on the right, this depends on the different meanings of 'tradition'. Cofrancesco points out six of them: tradition as an archetype, as the ideal of a crucial or decisive era in the history of mankind, as loyalty to one's nation, as historical memory, as a common destiny, and finally as an awareness of the complexity of reality. Various movements, or even personal political positions, can emerge from these different interpretations of the term; but the common soul can explain the historical transition from one to another at different times – for example, the transition 'by quite a few activists of the conservative right from a traditionalist to a totalitarian position during the inter-war years'.²

Cofrancesco is not so much interested in compiling a collection of opinions from persons or groups who profess to be either left- or right-wing, since such opinions would be mostly partial, emotive and influenced by ideology; rather, he wanted to develop a critical distinction between the two concepts. By 'critical', he means an evaluative or merely descriptive analysis which avoids loading the terms 'left' and 'right' with mutually exclusive value-judgements, but which takes into account that they are not absolute con-

cepts, but historically relative. In other words, they are 'only two ways of cataloguing different political ideals', and therefore 'not the only terms and not always the most significant'.³ According to Cofrancesco, 'critical use' of the two concepts is possible only if one forgoes conceiving them as indicators of concrete historical totalities, and instead interprets them as underlying attitudes or intentions according to the definition of Karl Mannheim. Thus one can only explain the confusion or overlaps which lead one to suspect that the distinction was incorrect from the very beginning, or has become useless in a given historical context in which right-wingers and left-wingers find themselves in the same camp, if the two terms are interpreted as referring to a profound intention, an attitude which remains constant, independent of the system of government adopted. I would call this attitude a 'mentality', and although the word is not used by Cofrancesco, it has become much used by a certain school of historians.

According to this approach, 'the right-winger is primarily concerned with safeguarding *tradition*, and the left-winger on the other hand wishes, above everything else, to *liberate* his fellow human beings from the *chains* imposed on them by the privileges of race, class, rank, etc.'⁴ 'Tradition' and 'emancipation' can be interpreted as final or fundamental aims, and as such cannot be renounced by either side; but they can be achieved by different means in different times and situations. As the same means can be adopted from time to time by the left and the right, they can consequently coincide or even change sides, without however ceasing to be what they are. Yet it is precisely this possible use of common means which gives rise to confusion and hence motives for challenging the distinction.

Using appropriate historical examples, Cofrancesco examines a few themes which, in spite of superficial and prejudiced opinion, are not in themselves either left- or right-wing, because they belong to both sides, although the common theme does not cancel out the underlying distinction. Examples of such themes are militarism, secularism, anti-communism, individualism, technical progress and the use of violence. As everyone can see, this is a differentiation between an essential difference which concerns the ideal inspiration, the profound intention or mentality, and a series of non-essential or only assumed differences, often used polemically in short-term political struggles. If these non-essential differences are taken to be essential, they can be used for incorrect assessments of the nature of the left/right distinction, and then to reject the distinction when it temporarily fails to fit a given situation. The fact that the relationship between the essential difference and the non-essential differences is one between constant final values and variable instrumental values which are therefore interchangeable can be understood from the assertion that 'liberty and authority, affluence and austerity, individualism and anti-individualism, technical progress and the craft ideal are considered in both cases to be *instrumental values*, which are to be promoted or rejected according to the support that they can give either to tradition or to the emancipation from some privilege'.⁵

Cofrancesco adds a cognitive distinction to the evaluative one based on mentality, without suggesting any conflict between them. This is a distinction between what he calls a classical or realist attitude and a romantic or spiritualist attitude. The former attitude belongs to the critical observer, the latter to those who treat politics as an emotional

experience. Of the six great ideologies which came into existence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, three are classical and three romantic. The classical ideologies are conservatism, liberalism and scientific socialism, and the romantic ideologies are anarcho-libertarianism, Fascism (right-wing radicalism) and traditionalism.

Having asserted that these six ideologies cover the entire field, at least in terms of ideal categories, Cofrancesco goes on to show that the distinction between left and right does not coincide with the distinction between classical and romantic types. He considers the possible combinations, and concludes that two romantic ideologies, traditionalism and Fascism, are right-wing, and one classical ideology, conservatism, is also right-wing, and that one romantic ideology, anarcho-libertarianism, and one classical ideology, scientific socialism, are left-wing, while the remaining classical ideology, liberalism, can be left- or right-wing according to the circumstances.

Although Cofrancesco does not take a position on the left/right distinction, and appears to judge it impartially, he does not hide his preference, as a historian and a political analyst, for the classical rather than the romantic approach to the left/right distinction. He almost seems to be saying that it does not matter whether one is left or right, as long as one approaches political problems in a classical rather than a romantic manner. This appears to be particularly the case when it comes to joining in the concrete political debate in Italy and choosing which side or sides should be supported by the intellectual.

Even a writer who rejects ideological argument in favour of critical and analytical argument touches on an ideal proposal, and I would add that he could hardly avoid doing

so with such a disputed, politically exacting, yet pervasive distinction: 'Italian political culture must recover its sense of discrimination, analytical zeal and an appetite for classification, and it must lose its preference for signing declarations and joining the fray even when there is confusion over what is being disputed and the available information is uncertain and controversial.'⁶ This amounts to the assertion that if one approaches the left/right distinction with an analytical method and an impartial spirit, then this is already an indication of a political orientation which is a separate distinction from the left/right one, but is of itself a political position, implying a choice between one side or the other.

But it has to be asked whether this definition of the distinction (tradition on one side, and emancipation on the other) is really a pair of opposites, as it needs to be if it is to represent the antagonistic world of politics. The opposite of tradition should be innovation, not emancipation. Equally, the opposite of emancipation should be order imposed from above or paternalistic government, not tradition or conservatism. Both pairs of opposites, tradition/innovation and conservatism/emancipation ultimately reflect the common and not very original distinction between conservatives and progressives, which is considered, at least ideally, as typical of the parliamentary system and as the principal division between opposing parliamentary groups. But the use of a noble term like 'tradition' for the right wing, instead of conservatism or hierarchical order, and the use of an equally noble term for the left like emancipation, rather than innovation, can perhaps be considered the key to this critical, intentionally non-ideological attitude which Cofrancesco imposed on his studies from the very begin-

ning. His use of two axiologically positive terms, instead of one positive and one negative, led him to risk weakening the contrast between the two sides, turning the two terms into two separate entities, rather than opposites.⁷

2 Whereas Cofrancesco starts by distinguishing the essential element in the left/right distinction from the non-essential ones, Elisabetta Galeotti starts by distinguishing the contexts in which the distinction is used, which are supposed to be the following four: everyday language, ideological language, historical and sociological analysis, and the study of social imagery (she includes Laponce's work in the last category and comments on it in depth).⁸

Galeotti's new interpretation of the distinction is based on ideological analysis, and again the purpose is to identify the more comprehensive and universal concepts which would make it possible to classify with maximum simplicity and thoroughness the ideologies which have dominated the last two centuries. Her conclusions are in part the same as Laponce's, and the chosen terms are 'hierarchy' for the right and 'equality' for the left. Here again the opposites are not what one would expect. Why hierarchy, not inequality?

Galeotti is worried that the use of the weaker term 'inequality', rather than 'hierarchy', would shift liberal ideology too far to the right, because although liberalism does not share the egalitarian ideas which typify the left, and therefore is in some ways anti-egalitarian, it should not be confused with ideologies for which inequality between human beings is natural, intrinsic and unavoidable, which should be termed 'hierarchical', not 'anti-egalitarian'. This is like saying that there are two forms of 'anti-egalitarianism',

depending on the kind of inequality which is acceptable. The social inequalities which liberalism can tolerate are supposed to be quite different from the inequality referred to in hierarchical systems. Liberal society, whose inequalities are generated by the free market, is not a rigidly hierarchical society.

There is a clear distinction between liberal inequality and authoritarian inequality, and it is useful to emphasize this; but whether this distinction has anything to do with the distinction between left and right is, in my opinion, more arguable. Perhaps one should say, not so much arguable as a matter of opinion. Political terminology is inherently imprecise, because it is drawn mainly from everyday language; and not only is it imprecise in description, but it contains many words which are ambiguous or even ambivalent in the values they express. Take, for instance, the word 'communism', according to whether it is pronounced by a communist or an anti-communist. In every political disagreement, an opinion – by which I mean the expression of a conviction whether private, public, individual or belonging to a group – has its roots in a charitable or uncharitable frame of mind, an attraction or an aversion to a person or an event. This partiality is unavoidable, and permeates everything; but it is not always recognized, because it attempts to hide itself, even on occasion from the person who expresses it. The opinion that one is doing an injustice to liberalism if one places it too far to the right is the opinion of someone who makes a positive axiological use of 'liberalism' and a negative axiological use of 'right-wing'.

The study of left and right that I am discussing at the moment concerned the new radical right, for which the author has a profound aversion (quite rightly, in my opi-

nion); yet she does not hide her sympathies for liberal thought. While the context of the study is such as to accentuate the negative aspects of the right, the writer's attitude implies that liberalism is a positive ideology. One suspects that the shift in the criterion from the right to the left and from 'inequality' to 'hierarchy' is an expedient, albeit unconscious, to keep liberalism from becoming tainted with the disapproval widely associated with the right in a certain historical climate.

One cannot argue over opinions. One can only observe in historical terms that since socialist parties have appeared in Europe, liberal ideologies and parties have been considered either right-wing, as in Italy and France, or in the centre, as in England or Germany (American liberals are again a different case). I am therefore tempted to cast doubt on the usefulness of replacing a criterion based on a simple and clear contrast between equality and inequality with a less comprehensive and therefore less convincing criterion based on equality and hierarchy, merely to protect one's favourite ideology from disparagement. It seems to me that this is another interesting and fairly significant example of an analytical and an ideological attitude being combined, as previously discussed. It demonstrates yet again, if there were any need, the intrinsic difficulties of the problem and the many reasons for the elusiveness of the left/right distinction which were discussed in the first chapter.

It would perhaps be more useful to try to understand the reasons for an opinion rather than the opinion itself. The main reason for this correlation, in my view, is the wish to confine the right wing to the subversive right; but there is another device for what you might call saving liberal ideology, which is to distinguish between the subversive right

and the moderate right, corresponding to the subversive left and the moderate left. This solution has the twin advantages of using a balanced criterion and not abusing everyday language.

Galeotti deals with another extremely interesting question which has caused considerable confusion, because of the usual lack of an analytical approach to political problems. This problem concerns difference. It is argued that the discovery of difference, the essential theme of feminist movements, has subverted the left/right distinction. Galeotti rightly points out that this is not the case: difference is compatible with right-wing ideology, as would be expected, but is equally compatible with left-wing ideology, given that egalitarianism – that is, the levelling out of all differences – is only the left's ultimate design, more ideal than real. For the left, equality is never absolute, and always *secundum quid* – that is, according to one's work and one's needs.

It is incredible how difficult it is to explain that the discovery of a difference has no relevance to the principle of justice, which requires that the equal should be treated equally and the unequal unequally, and therefore recognizes that aside from those who are equal there are those who are considered unequal or different. The question of who is equal and who unequal is a historical question which cannot be answered once and for all, because the criteria used for uniting the equal and dividing the unequal are constantly changing. The discovery of a difference is irrelevant to the question of justice when it can be demonstrated that this difference justifies a different treatment. The greatest egalitarian revolution of our times has achieved equal rights for women in the more advanced societies in many fields, starting with politics, then the family, and

finally the work-place, but the confusion has been such that it has been carried out by movements which emphasized in an extremely polemical manner the different identity of women.

The category of difference cannot stand on its own in relation to the question of justice, for the simple reason that not only are women different from men, but all men and women are different from one another. Difference only becomes important when it is the basis for unjust discrimination. However, the injustice of discrimination depends not on the difference, but on the recognition of the lack of good reasons for the unequal treatment.

3 As in the case of Elisabetta Galeotti, Marco Revelli's various historical and critical reflections on the left/right distinction were occasioned by the debate over the 'new right'.⁹ No previous work can match the breadth of Revelli's historical horizon and the extensive development of his arguments. As I have said on many occasions, one of the reasons for the critical situation in which the left/right distinction finds itself is its refutation by those wishing to re-establish the right at a time when it appeared to be in difficulty following the fall of Fascism. The birth of a new right was in fact confirmation that the old distinction still exists, as the term 'right' designates one of a pair, the other being 'left'. As I have repeated many times, there cannot be right without left, and vice versa.

Revelli also investigates the various arguments used to refute the distinction, these arguments being historical, political, conceptual and so on.¹⁰ Convinced of the problem's complexity, he examines the various ways in which the distinction can be observed, and distinguishes between the

different criteria used, and when they were adopted in history.¹¹ Revelli's wide knowledge of the complexities of the debate allows him to examine and put forward a complete phenomenology. It is worth commenting on a point which Revelli makes in relation to the initial question of the nature of the distinction, also referred to by the authors previously discussed.

The two concepts 'left' and 'right' are relative, not absolute. They are not substantive or ontological concepts. They are not intrinsic qualities of the political universe, but are situated in 'political space'. They represent a given political topology, which has nothing to do with political ontology: 'One is not "left-wing" or "right-wing" in the same way as one is "communist", "liberal" or "Catholic".'¹² In other words, 'left' and 'right' are not words which designate immutable meanings, but can signify different things in different times and situations. Revelli uses the example of the shift in the nineteenth-century left from a liberal movement to a democratic one, and again to a socialist one. The content of the left is defined in terms of the content of the right. The fact that left and right are opposites simply means that one cannot be on both the left and the right at the same time; but it says nothing about the content of the opposing sides. The opposition remains, although the two opposites can change.

'Left' and 'right' developed as political terms during the nineteenth century and through to our own times in order to represent the polarization of conflict in the political world. However, the political world can be – and indeed has been – represented by other pairs of opposites, some of which have a descriptive value, such as 'progressives' and 'conservatives', and others of which have little descriptive

value, such as 'whites' and 'blacks.'¹³ The white/black pair only indicates a polarity, in so far as one cannot be white and black at the same time, but it gives us no idea of either's political orientation. The relativity of the two concepts can be shown by observing that the indeterminate nature of the two and their subsequent ability to shift around mean that a given movement which is left-wing in relation to the right can, by shifting to the centre, become a right-wing movement in relation to the left, which has stayed put, and conversely, a right-wing movement can, by shifting to the centre, become a left-wing movement in relation to the right, which has not moved. In political science, it is well known that in times of particularly high social tension the leftward trend and the symmetrical rightward trend cause the formation of a left which is more radical than the official left and a right which is more radical than the official right. Left-wing extremism pushes the left to the right, and right-wing extremism pushes the right to the left.

Another observation is warranted by the entirely appropriate spatial image suggested by the use of 'left' and 'right': when it is stated that the two terms constitute an antithesis, the metaphor which comes to mind is the two sides of a coin, without specifying which of left and right is heads and which tails. The familiar expressions which are used to describe their positions are 'on this side', 'on that side', 'on the one hand', 'on the other hand', 'in one way' and 'in another way'. However, the above examples of shifts between left and right do not polarize the left and the right, but place them on a continuous line, and they change from one to the other by degrees. The only image which cannot be used for a dyad is a sphere, as Revelli observes, or a

circle. If one draws a circle from left to right, every point is on the right of the one before it and on the left of the one that comes after, and conversely drawing from right to left. The difference between the coin metaphor and the circle metaphor is that the former perceives the political world as divided in two, or dual, whereas the latter allows for a more pluralistic image, made up of several segments along the same line. Revelli correctly points out that any political force which occupied the entire political space would cancel out any distinction between left and right, as occurs in a totalitarian regime which does not allow any internal divisions. Such a regime can be considered left or right only, if at all, in relation to other totalitarian regimes.

Once it has been established that left and right are not ontological concepts, but are instead two spatial concepts without a specific and constant content, it has then to be asked whether they are therefore empty vessels which can be filled with anything at all.

If we examine the previous interpretations, we cannot avoid noting that, in spite of the differences in the premisses and the methodologies used, there is a certain family resemblance between them, so they often appear to be variations on a single theme. The theme that recurs in all the variations is the distinction between a horizontal or egalitarian perception of society and a vertical or inegalitarian perception of society. Of the two, it is the former which maintains the more constant value. One could almost say that the left/right distinction revolves around the concept of the left, and that the variations are based upon the different possible opposites to the principle of equality, which can be variously the inegalitarian principle, the hierarchical principle or the authoritarian principle. Revelli himself appears to

attribute particular importance to the criterion of equality versus inequality on which all the others are 'founded', after having listed five criteria for the left/right distinction: in relation to time (progress-conservatism), in relation to space (equality-inequality), in relation to the agents involved (autonomy-heteronomy), in relation to function (upper classes-lower classes), and in relation to epistemology (rationalism-irrationalism). He also observed that these elements rarely coincide. As the founding principle, equality is the only criterion that withstands the test of time, and resists the steady breakdown to which the other criteria have been subjected. This breakdown has reached the point where the very distinction between left and right has been questioned. The only way to reaffirm the distinction is to 'reorganize' the criteria, 'starting from the secure value of equality' or based on the 'critical importance of equality as a value'.

6 Equality and Inequality

I On the basis of my reflections so far, which, if nothing else, are, I believe, pertinent to our times, and a scrutiny of the papers over the last few years, I believe that the criterion most frequently used to distinguish between the left and the right is the attitude of real people in society to the ideal of equality. Together with liberty and peace, equality is one of the ultimate goals which people are willing to fight for.¹ My analytical approach to this argument completely precludes any value-judgement on the relative merits of equality and inequality, because such abstract concepts can be, and are, interpreted in very different ways, and their relative merits depend on these interpretations. The concept of equality is relative, not absolute. It is relative to at least three variables which have to be taken into account every time the desirability of equality or its practicability are discussed: (a) the individuals between whom benefits and obligations should be shared; (b) the benefits or obligations to be shared; (c) the criteria by which they should be shared.

In other words, once the principle of equality has been accepted, no proposal for redistribution can fail to respond

to the following three questions: Between whom?, Of what?, On the basis of which criteria?²

As can be easily imagined, an enormous number of egalitarian permutations can be obtained by combining these three variables. The subjects can be everyone, many, few or even just one. The criteria can be merit, need, rank, work and many others, including the absence of any criterion at all, which characterizes the maximalist egalitarian principle, which I would call *egalitarianist*: 'To everyone the same amount'.³

None of these criteria are exclusive: there are situations in which two can be considered together. However, one cannot escape the fact that there are also situations in which one must be applied to the exclusion of the other. In families, the prevailing criterion for the distribution of resources is need, rather than merit; but merit is not excluded, and nor in authoritarian families is rank. According to Marx, the final stage of communism should be governed by the principle 'To each according to his needs', on the basis of the belief that it is in their needs that human beings are most naturally equal. In school, whose purpose is to be selective, the criterion of merit is exclusive, as it is in entrance exams for the civil service or private organizations. In public limited companies, dividends are distributed on the basis of the number of shares held by each shareholder, just as in politics, seats in parliament are assigned according to the number of votes obtained by each of the political forces, although the calculations vary according to the electoral laws. The criterion of rank is used in allocating places in a ceremony or an official dinner. Occasionally, the criterion of age prevails over that of rank, or is adopted where the candidates are of equal merit. The

maxim 'To each his own', which by itself is meaningless, requires specification of not only the subjects it refers to and the benefits to be distributed, but also the exclusive or principal criterion which must be applied in relation to those subjects and those benefits.⁴

Doctrines can be assessed as more or less egalitarian according to the greater or lesser number of persons involved, the greater or lesser quantity and worth of the benefits to be distributed, and the criteria used in distributing these benefits to certain groups of persons.

In relation to the number of persons, universal male and female suffrage is more egalitarian than only universal manhood suffrage. Universal manhood suffrage is more egalitarian than suffrage limited to literate males or by a property qualification. In relation to benefits, social democracy, which gives all its citizens social rights as well as libertarian rights, is more egalitarian than liberal democracy. In relation to the criterion, the maxim 'To each according to his needs' is, as I have already said, more egalitarian than 'To each according to his rank', which characterizes the hierarchical state to which the liberal state is opposed.

2 These introductory arguments were necessary because when we say that the left is egalitarian and the right is inegalitarian, we certainly do not want to say that to be left-wing one needs to proclaim that every single person is equal in all things irrespective of any discriminating factor, because this would not only be a utopian vision, to which, admittedly, the left is more inclined than the right, or perhaps to which only the left is inclined, but, what is worse, it would be a proposal which could not possibly have

any rational meaning. In other words, the assertion that the left is egalitarian does not mean that it is egalitarianist. The distinction must be made clear, because it too often happens that those who consider equality to be the distinguishing characteristic of the left are accused of being egalitarianists, due to insufficient understanding of the ABC of egalitarian theory.

An egalitarian doctrine or movement which tends to reduce social inequality and make natural inequalities less painful is completely different from egalitarianism, understood as 'equality for everyone in everything'. On another occasion I quoted a passage from Dostoevsky's *The Devils*: 'Sigalev was a clever man, of a cleverness similar to Fourier's, but bolder than Fourier and stronger than Fourier. He invented equality.' I commented that as the ideal society desired by Sigalev was governed by the principle 'Only the necessary is necessary', he had invented not equality but dogmatic egalitarianism.⁵ Of course, such egalitarianism is related to equality, but what political ideology isn't related to equality to some extent?

Equality in its more radical formulation is a common feature in utopias, just as a merciless inequality is the admonitory and premonitory sign of 'anti-utopias' ('All men are equal, but some are more equal than others').⁶ Egalitarianist utopias include the one by the founding father of utopias, Thomas More, in which it is stated that 'so long as there's private property the worst sort of people will have the best living conditions, and the much greater and better part of the humanity will suffer the inevitable and distressing burden of poverty and misfortune', and Campanella's utopia, the City of the Sun inhabited by philosophers 'who resolved to live communally

in accordance with philosophy'. Egalitarianism inspired the millenarist views of heretical sects which fought for the advent of the kingdom of God and the peasant revolts led by Thomas Münzer, who, according to Melanchthon, taught that all property should be held in common, thus making 'the populace so wicked that they no longer wanted to work'. In his invectives fired with revolutionary passion, Winstanley preached that the rule of kings was 'a government of scribes and pharisees who never consider themselves free unless they are lords of the earth and all their brothers', and he contrasted it with republican government, which was 'the government of justice and peace, which makes no distinction between one person and another'. This extreme egalitarianism is the core of utopian socialism, from Morelly's *Code de la Nature* to Fourier's 'natural harmony'. It is to be found in Babeuf's declaration 'Are we not all equal? This principle is irrefutable because, unless we are affected by madness, we cannot say it is night when it is day. Well then, we wish to live and die equal just as we were born: we want real equality or death.' Although Babeuf considers anyone who rejects extreme egalitarianism to be 'mad', those who reason on the basis of popular opinion have argued repeatedly throughout history that egalitarians are mad people who believe in doctrines which are abhorrent in theory and (fortunately) unfeasible in practice. However, the persistence of the utopian ideal in the history of mankind (we could hardly forget that Marx too desired and foretold the transition from the realm of need to the realm of liberty) is incontrovertible proof of the fascination that the egalitarian ideal exercises on all people in all countries and in all times, along with the ideals of liberty, peace and affluence (the Land of Plenty).

3 Natural inequalities exist, and while some of them can be redressed, the majority cannot be eliminated. Social inequalities also exist, and while some can be redressed or even eliminated, many, particularly those for which the individuals are themselves responsible, can only be discouraged. Although it is difficult to distinguish which actions an individual is responsible for, as every judge knows from having to decide questions of innocence and guilt, it must at least be admitted that the status of a natural inequality or a social inequality which depends on birth into one particular family rather than another, or one part of the world rather than another, is different from an inequality which depends on different abilities, different aims, and differing degrees of effort to achieve them. The different status cannot help but influence the way they are treated by public authorities.

It therefore follows that when we say the left has a greater tendency to reduce inequalities, we do not mean that it intends to eliminate all inequalities, or that the right wishes to preserve them all, but simply that the former is more egalitarian, and the latter more inegalitarian.

I believe that this different attitude to equality and inequality has its roots, and therefore its possible explanation, in a reality which we all understand, although it is difficult to dispute and equally difficult to verify. I am not referring to this or that basis for sharing, the application of a criterion to one group of people rather than another, or a preference for distribution of one particular benefit rather than another; what I am referring to is a general attitude which is essentially emotive, but liable to be rationalized, an inclination whose roots can be found in the family, society or culture. This attitude or inclination is inescapably

countered by another equally general, emotionally inspired inclination.

The factor which I am taking as a starting-point for my argument is the following: human beings are both equal and unequal.⁷ They are equal in some respects and unequal in others. The most obvious example is that they are equal before death, because they are all mortal, but unequal in relation to the manner of their death, because everyone dies in a different way. Everyone speaks, but they speak thousands of different languages. If not everyone, then millions and millions of people engage in a relationship with an unknown hereafter; each one worships his own God or gods in his own way.

This incontrovertible fact can be analysed by asserting that human beings are equal when considered as a genus and compared as a genus with another genus such as an animal or another living being, from which they are distinguished by a specific and particularly significant characteristic, such as the long tradition by which man is defined as a *rational animal*. They are unequal if considered as individuals, one by one. The equalities and inequalities between human beings are factually true, because they correspond to irrefutable empirical observations. The apparent contradiction between the two postulates 'All men are equal' and 'All men are unequal' depends exclusively on the fact that in the manner in which they are observed and assessed, and in the conclusions which are drawn, we put the accent on either what they have in common or what makes them different. We can then correctly define as egalitarians those who, while not ignoring the fact that people are both equal and unequal, believe that what they have in common has greater value in the formation of a good

community. Conversely, those who are not egalitarian, while starting from the same premiss, believe that their diversity has greater value in the formation of a good community.⁸

It is very difficult to know the complex origin of this fundamental choice. But it is precisely this conflict between fundamental choices which, in my opinion, characterizes so well the opposing camps which for a long time we have been in the habit of calling left and right: on the one hand, people who believe that human beings are more equal than unequal, and on the other, people who believe that we are more unequal than equal.

This distinction between fundamental choices also relates to a different assessment of the relationship between natural equality/inequality and social equality/inequality. An egalitarian bases his beliefs on the conviction that the majority of the inequalities which most outrage him and which he would like to see removed are social, and as such can be eradicated. The anti-egalitarian, on the other hand, bases his beliefs on the conviction that they are natural and cannot be eradicated. The feminist movement is an egalitarian movement, and, leaving aside the veracity of its position, its strength derives from the fact that it has consistently argued that the inequalities between men and women, although not without natural origins, are the product of customs, laws and coercion by the stronger, and are therefore socially modifiable. The latter demonstrates what is considered another feature of the left: its 'artificiality'. The right is more willing to accept the natural and that second nature constituted by custom, tradition and force of the past. The artificiality of the left does not yield to obvious natural inequalities which cannot be attributed to

society, as in the case of the release of mental patients from psychiatric hospitals. The harshness of nature is matched by the harshness of society, but on the left there is a general tendency to believe that man is capable of correcting both.

4 This distinction between the different evaluations of natural and social equalities can be demonstrated by referring to two writers who best represent the egalitarian ideal and the anti-egalitarian ideal: Rousseau and the anti-Rousseau, Nietzsche.

The contrast between Rousseau and Nietzsche is reflected in the attitude they adopt to the naturalness and artificiality of equality and inequality. In his *Discourse on the Origin of the Inequality among Men*, Rousseau argues from the premiss that men are born equal but are made unequal by civil society, that it is the society which slowly imposes itself on the state of nature through the development of the division of labour. Conversely, Nietzsche works on the premiss 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 herd morality and a religion based on compassion and submissiveness could make them equal. The same degeneration which created inequality for Rousseau created equality for Nietzsche. Just as Rousseau saw inequality as artificial, and therefore to be condemned and abolished for contradicting the fundamental equality of nature, so Nietzsche saw equality as artificial, and therefore to be abhorred for contradicting the beneficent inequality which nature desired for humanity. The contrast could not be starker: the egalitarian condemns social inequality in the name of

natural equality, and the anti-egalitarian condemns social equality in the name of natural inequality. Let the following quotation suffice: natural equality is 'a nice piece of mental reservation in which vulgar hostility towards everything privileged and autocratic, as well as a second and more subtle atheism, lie once more disguised'.⁹

5 I have developed the theory in this book that the distinction between left and right corresponds to the difference between egalitarianism and inegalitarianism, and ultimately comes down to a different perception of what makes human beings equal and what makes them unequal. However, the idea is so abstract that it can only be used to distinguish two ideal types.

If we come a little more down to earth, we see the difference between the two ideal types translated in practice into a different assessment of what is relevant to the justification or repudiation of discrimination. In order not to remain an empty formula, the golden rule of justice, 'Treat like as like, and unlike as unlike', requires an answer to the question, Who is alike and who is not? The dispute between egalitarians and inegalitarians consists in arguments put forward by the two sides for and against the proposal that characteristics belonging to individuals within the group under consideration constitute grounds for equal treatment. The right of women to vote was not recognized when there were thought to be differences between men and women that justified a different treatment in the attribution of political rights: such differences as a more emotional nature, the lack of a specific desire to take part in political life, dependence on men, etc. To take an extremely topical example, in a period of increased migration between rich and poor

countries, and therefore of meetings and clashes between peoples of different customs, languages, religions and cultures, the difference between egalitarians and inegalitarians is manifested in the degree of importance assigned to these differences in the recognition of certain fundamental human rights. Again, the degree of discrimination is based on the degree of importance attributed to certain forms of diversity, which some consider grounds for different treatment and others do not. One hardly needs to add that this difference of opinion over a specific situation has its roots in the previously mentioned differing tendencies to identify either with that which unites humanity or that which divides it. The egalitarian tends to play down the differences, the inegalitarian to overstate them.

Article 3 of the Italian Constitution is a typical example of the principle of relevance. This article is a kind of summary of the achievements from centuries of struggle inspired by the egalitarian ideal, achievements attained by the gradual elimination of discrimination based on differences which were once considered relevant and were slowly eradicated for various historical reasons, achievements which were championed by egalitarian movements and doctrines.¹⁰

If, then, today we cannot distinguish between left and right when considering constitutional achievements, this does not mean that left and right have not contributed to attaining them, or that once a certain kind of discrimination is made illegal, both left and right consent to this with the same conviction.

One of the most significant achievements of the socialist movements, which for a century have been and are still, for the moment at least, identified with the left, is the recognition of social rights alongside libertarian rights, although

they are beginning to be challenged. These were new rights which first appeared in constitutions after the First World War, and were enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international charters which followed. The reason for social rights such as the right to education, the right to work and the right to health care is egalitarian. All three aim at reducing the inequalities between the haves and the have-nots, or making it possible for an increasing number of individuals to be less unequal in relation to other individuals who are more fortunate by birth and social condition.

I repeat again that I am not saying that greater equality is a good thing, and greater inequality a bad thing. I am not even saying that greater equality is always and in all cases to be preferred to other benefits, like liberty, affluence and peace. I simply want to emphasize through these historical examples that there is an element which typifies the doctrines and movements which are called and are universally recognized as left-wing, and that this element is egalitarianism, by which we mean a tendency to praise that which makes people more equal rather than that which makes people less equal. At a more practical level, this would mean encouraging policies which aim to make those who are unequal more equal, rather than a utopian society in which all individuals are equal in every single thing.

7 Freedom and Authoritarianism

1 Equality, as the highest, or even ultimate, ideal of an ordered, just and happy community, and therefore both an enduring social ideal and a recurring theme in political theories and ideologies, is often coupled with the ideal of freedom, which is also considered to be supreme and ultimate.

Both terms are highly emotive when they are used, as is usually the case, as loosely descriptive terms, as in the famous trinomial slogan ‘Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité’ (the third one being the most indeterminate). It has been said that the popular expression ‘All men are equal’ has a purely suggestive meaning, given that no question concerning equality can be properly considered without first posing the three questions: Between whom? In what? On what basis? In the same manner, the exhortation ‘Everyone must be free’ is purely emotive, unless you first respond to the question, ‘Everyone, truly everyone?’, and then justify the exceptions, such as infants, the insane or even slaves by nature, as Aristotle argued. Secondly, one needs to establish what is meant by ‘freedom’, as on the one hand, there is freedom of

the will in relation to the dispute between free will and determinism, and on the other, there is freedom of action, the particular concern of political philosophy, which distinguishes between various forms of freedom, such as negative freedom, freedom of action proper, and freedom as autonomy or obedience to one's own inner principle.

2 Only by answering all these questions is it possible to understand why there are situations in which freedom (but which freedom?) and equality (but which equality?) are compatible and complementary in the conception of an ideal society, others in which they are incompatible and mutually exclusive, and yet others in which they can, and should, be balanced one against the other. Recent history has provided us with the dramatic example of a social system which sought equality formally and in many ways substantially (yet only partially, and falling far short of its promises) to the detriment of freedom in all its senses (except perhaps freedom from need). At the same time, we continue to see before us a society which exalts all freedoms, economic freedom above all others, without worrying, or worrying only slightly, about the inequalities which arise from it in this part of the world, and even more visibly in more distant parts.

But there is no need to refer to this great historical divide which has separated the followers of the two dominant ideologies for more than a century, socialism and liberalism, in order to realize that neither of the two great ideals can be taken to its ultimate conclusions without implementation of the one restricting the other. The clearest example is the contrast between the ideal of liberty and that of order. It has to be admitted that order is of common benefit in every

society; hence the opposite term is 'disorder', which has negative connotations, like 'oppression', the opposite of 'liberty', and 'inequality', the opposite of 'equality'. Yet, historical and everyday experience teach us that they are both beneficial, though in conflict with each other; thus a good society must inevitably be founded on a compromise between the two, in order to avoid their extremes, either the totalitarian society or anarchy.

There is no need, I repeat, to refer back to the great historic conflict between communism and capitalism, because there are infinite examples of minor cases of egalitarian measures which restrict liberties and of libertarian measures which have increased inequalities.

An egalitarian law which required all citizens to use only public transport in order to reduce traffic would be detrimental to the right to choose the means of transport of one's own choice. The single secondary school system¹ which was established in Italy for all children after leaving primary school, in order to meet the demand for equality of opportunity, has restricted the freedom to choose between the various types of school that previously existed, at least for some people. Even more restrictive to freedom of choice would be the implementation of the egalitarian demand, which the left should not abandon if it is to be coherent, that all young people from whatever family be required to do manual as well as intellectual work in their early years. An egalitarian regime which obliged all its citizens to wear the same clothes would prevent each person from choosing his or her preferred clothes. Generally speaking, because it has to be imposed, every extension of the public sphere for egalitarian purposes restricts freedom of choice in the private sphere, which is intrinsically inegalitarian, because the

private freedom of the rich is immeasurably greater than that of the poor. Loss of freedom naturally affects the rich more than the poor, whose freedom to choose a means of transport, a type of school or a way of dressing is normally restricted not by public decree, but by their economic situation within the private sphere.

Equality, it is true, has the effect of restricting the freedom of both rich and poor, but with this difference: the rich lose a freedom which they actually enjoyed, whereas the poor lose only a potential freedom. One could give endless examples. Everyone can observe in their own home how greater equality between husband and wife in the care of their children restricts a husband's freedom compared with the past, at least within the family, although this is due to changing patterns of behaviour, rather than legal compulsion, and for the moment the obligations are purely moral.

The fundamental principle of the form of minimal egalitarianism expressed by liberal doctrine, whereby all human beings have equal right to equal liberty, with some justified exceptions, implies that everyone must restrict their own liberty in order to make it compatible with the liberty of others, and to allow others to enjoy the same liberty. The state of liberty in the wild, which could be defined as a state in which one's freedom increases, the greater one's power, is the state of nature described by Hobbes and rationalized by Spinoza, and is a state of permanent war between everyone for their own survival. The only way to escape from this reality is to suppress natural liberty or, according to liberal doctrine, to regulate it.

3 The meaning of the expression 'equal liberty' has also to be determined, because it is used as if it were clear, while it

is in fact vague and ambiguous. It is vague, because, as has often been observed, there is no liberty in general, but only individual liberties, such as the freedoms of thought, of the press, of economic activity, of meeting and of association, and in each case you have to specify which one you are referring to. It is ambiguous, because having equal freedom to everyone else could just mean having all the same freedoms as everyone else, or having the same liberties with the same possibility of enjoying them as everyone else. It is one thing to possess the same freedoms as everyone else in an abstract sense, and quite another to enjoy each freedom to the same degree as everyone else. This difference has to be considered, because liberal doctrine asserts the former in principle, but liberal practice cannot ensure the latter unless it intervenes with restrictive egalitarian measures and therefore alters the general principle.

I do not mean by this that an egalitarian measure always restricts freedom. The extension of voting rights to include women did not restrict the freedom to vote for men. It may have restricted their power in the sense that support for a government no longer depended only on them, but the right to vote was not restricted. Equally, recognition of personal rights for immigrants does not restrict citizens' personal rights. The cases involving the form of equality referred to earlier require a law which imposes an obligation, and therefore restricts liberty. In other cases, all that is required is the attribution of rights to those who previously did not have them.

Finally, there is a simple observation which needs to be made, although it usually isn't: the two concepts of liberty and equality are not symmetrical. Whereas liberty is a personal condition, equality is a relationship between two

or more entities. The proof is that the statement 'X is free' is meaningful, while 'X is equal' is not. Hence the unfailingly comic effect of Orwell's famous maxim: 'All men are equal, but some are more equal than others'; yet the statement that everyone is free, but some are freer than others is not in the least humorous, indeed it is entirely understandable. Thus while we can understand Hegel's assertion that despotism is a type of regime in which only one man is free and everyone else is a slave, it would be senseless to say that there was a society in which just one person was equal. This explains why freedom can be considered a personal good, unlike equality, which can only be a social good. It also explains why equality of freedom does not preclude the desirability of other forms of equality, such as equality of opportunity or income, which require forms of levelling out, and can therefore come into conflict with the equality of freedom.

4 These brief reflections on the two extremely important values of equality and freedom, and the relationship between them, represent a further step which I felt was necessary in order to define more clearly left and right in terms of the proposed criterion of equality and inequality.² As well as the distinction between equality and inequality which has given rise to egalitarian and inegalitarian doctrines and movements, and which has been the subject of my argument so far, there is another distinction which is no less important historically: the distinction between freedom and authoritarianism which gives rise to libertarian and authoritarian doctrines and movements. As far as the definitions of left and right are concerned, the difference between the two distinctions is particularly important, because one of

the most common ways of describing the right in relation to the left is to contrast the egalitarian left with the libertarian right. I have no difficulty in accepting the existence of more egalitarian doctrines and movements and of more libertarian doctrines and movements, but I would have some difficulty in accepting that this division can be used to distinguish between left and right. There are libertarian movements and doctrines on both the left and the right. The greater or lesser regard for the ideal of liberty, which is implemented through the fundamental rules and principles of democratic governments, and the recognition and protection of personal, civil and political rights, makes it possible to distinguish, within the context of the left or the right, between moderate and extremist wings, as discussed in chapter 2. Although revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries do not share the same overall project for the radical transformation of society, they do share the conviction that 'their project can only be implemented through the establishment of an authoritarian regime, and in the final analysis this is the result of the radical nature of their plans'.³

If it is accepted that the different attitude to the ideal of equality is the criterion for distinguishing left and right, and that the different attitude to freedom is the relevant criterion for distinguishing the moderate wing from the extremist wing of both the left and the right, then one could summarize the political spectrum of doctrines and movements in the following four parts:

(a) On the extreme left, there are movements which are both egalitarian and authoritarian, and of these Jacobinism is the most important historical example, such that it has become an abstract category which can be, and indeed is, applied to different historical periods and situations.

(b) On the centre-left, there are doctrines and movements which are both egalitarian and libertarian, which we could now term 'liberal socialism', and cover all the social-democratic parties with their various political practices.

(c) On the centre-right, there are doctrines and movements which are both libertarian and inegalitarian, which include all the conservative parties. These differ from the reactionary right in that they remain loyal to the democratic method, but as far as the ideal of equality is concerned, they go only as far as equality before the law, which means that a judge must apply the law impartially.

(d) On the extreme right there are anti-liberal and anti-egalitarian doctrines and movements, for which it hardly seems necessary to point out the well-known historical examples of Fascism and Nazism.

Clearly, reality is more complex than this schema founded on just two criteria, but they are two fundamental criteria which, together, constitute a model that can rescue the much-challenged distinction between left and right. This model responds to simplistic objections that the distinction puts together dissimilar doctrines and movements, such as communism and democratic socialism on the left and fascism and conservatism on the right; it also explains why such movements, although dissimilar, can become potential allies in exceptional and critical circumstances.

8 The Pole Star

1 An egalitarian policy is typified by the tendency to remove the obstacles which make men and women less equal (to use the expression used in Article 3 of the Italian Constitution, which has already been referred to). One of the most convincing historical proofs of my argument that the distinctive character of the left is egalitarianism is that a principal theme, possibly *the* principal theme, of the traditional parties and movements of the left, whether communist or socialist, has been the removal of that ‘terrible right’,¹ private property, which has been considered, not only in the last century but since antiquity, as one of the major obstacles to equality between men. Whether this theory is right or wrong, it is widely known that utopian descriptions of an ideal society inspired by egalitarianism prescribe a collectivist society; that when Jean-Jacques Rousseau investigated the origins of the inequality of men, he came out with his famous invective against the first man who, having fenced in his land, cried ‘This is mine!'; that Rousseau inspired the movement called the ‘Conspiracy of the Equals’, which was a merciless opponent of all forms of private property; that all the egalitarian societies formed in the last century, which were often appropriated by the left,

considered private property to be an iniquitous institution which had to be destroyed; that all parties based on Marxism are egalitarian and collectivist; that the first measure taken by the triumphant revolution in the land of the Tsar was the abolition of private ownership of land and business enterprises; and that the two principal histories and critiques of socialism, Vilfredo Pareto's *Les Systèmes socialistes* and Ludwig von Mises's *Socialism* are respectively a critical review and an economic critique and analysis of various forms of collectivism. For the left, the struggle for the abolition of private property and for collectivization has also been a struggle for equality and the removal of the main obstacle to the creation of a society of equals. Even the policy of nationalization, which for a long time was a typical element of the economic policy practised by socialist parties, was carried out in the name of an egalitarian ideal, but in the negative sense of reducing a source of inequality.

The conviction that the principal cause of inequality is the discrimination between rich and poor, introduced and perpetuated by a persistent belief in an inalienable right of private ownership, does not preclude recognition of other causes of discrimination, such as those between men and women, manual and intellectual work, or different peoples.

2 I have no difficulty admitting to the many and varied perversions which have accompanied attempts to put this ideal into practice. Not very long ago, I spoke of this as a 'utopia turned on its head',² in relation to the complete transformation of the grand egalitarian ideal, the communist ideal sought after for centuries, into its opposite, on the first attempt in history to turn it into reality. None of the utopias described by philosophers was ever proposed as a

practical model. Plato knew that the ideal republic, which he discussed with his friends and disciples, was not destined to become a reality, but was real only 'in our debate', as Glaucon said to Socrates. However, when the egalitarian utopia entered history for the first time, leaving the realm of debate for the realm of real things, it turned into its opposite.

But I also added that the great problem of inequality between people and between the peoples of this world is still a serious and intolerable one. I see no reason why I should not also state that it is a dangerous threat to those who are satisfied with the situation. Indeed, as we become increasingly aware every day of conditions in the Third and Fourth worlds, of what Latouche has defined as the 'planet of castaways', so the enormity of the problem becomes increasingly dramatic. Traditional communism has failed, but its challenge remains. Even if we console ourselves by saying that in this part of the world we have created affluence for two-thirds, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that in the majority of countries two-thirds, or even four-fifths or nine-tenths, are experiencing the opposite.

Faced with this reality, there is a very clear distinction between the right and the left, for which the ideal of equality has always been the pole star that guides it. One has only to shift one's attention from the social questions within individual states which gave rise to socialism in the last century to the international social question in order to realize that the left has not only not completed its task, it has hardly commenced it.³

3 Let me conclude my arguments by giving a personal account. I have always considered myself a man of the left,

and therefore, for me, the term 'left' has always had a positive connotation, even now when it is under such attack, and the term 'right', which is now being widely reassessed, a negative connotation. During my life I have on occasion shown some interest in politics; in other words, I have felt the need (I will not say that I felt it my duty, because that is too grand a word) to get involved in politics, and more rarely, to engage in some political activity. The fundamental reason for this has always been an uneasiness over the spectacle of enormous, disproportionate, unjustified inequalities between rich and poor, between those at the top and those at the bottom of the social ladder, and between those with power – that is to say, the ability to determine the behaviour of others in the economic, political and ideological spheres – and those without power. These highly visible inequalities are experienced with increasing awareness as the moral conscience is gradually strengthened with the passing years and the development of tragic events, especially by someone like me, who was born and brought up in a bourgeois family, where class differences are very pronounced. These differences were particularly evident during summer holidays in the countryside, where we city lads played with the sons of peasants. To tell the truth, our friendship was based on a perfect understanding, and the class differences were completely irrelevant; but we could not help noticing the contrast between our houses and theirs, our food and theirs, and our clothes and theirs (in the summer they went barefoot). Every year when we started our holidays, we learnt that one of our playmates had died the previous winter from tuberculosis. I do not remember a single death among my school-friends in the city.

Those were the years of Fascism, whose official political journal, founded by Mussolini himself, was entitled *Gerarchia* (Hierarchy). Populist but not popular, Fascism regimented the country, and suffocated all forms of free political struggle; a people of citizens, which had already achieved the right to participate in free elections, was reduced to a cheering crowd, a collection of subjects all equal in their identical uniforms, but also equal (and content?) in their common servitude. With the sudden and unexpected passing of the race laws, our generation had to face, as it came of age, the scandal of that shameful discrimination which had a lasting effect on me and many others. It was then that the illusion of an egalitarian society favoured the conversion to communism among many moral and serious-minded young people. I know very well that today, after so many years, our judgement of Fascism must be made with a historian's detachment. Here, however, I do not speak as a historian, but solely as an individual, giving a personal account of his political education, which, in reaction to the regime, was greatly affected by the French Revolution's ideals of liberty, as well as equality and fraternity – the 'empty rhetoric', as they were contemptuously referred to at the time.⁴

4 As I have said from the beginning, I shall avoid all value-judgements. My purpose is not to take a position, but to acknowledge a debate which is still very much alive, in spite of constant references to its demise. Besides, if equality can be interpreted negatively as levelling out, inequality can be interpreted positively as the recognition of the irreducible individuality of every person.⁵ All ideals are fired by a great passion. Reason – or rather, the reasoning

that presents arguments for and against, in order to justify one's decisions to others and especially to oneself – comes later. That is why the great ideals can withstand time and changing circumstances, and cannot be reconciled, in spite of the good offices of conciliatory reason.

These ideals are irreconcilable, but not absolute; or at least, this should be the opinion of a good democrat (I am again stressing the difference between moderate and extremist). I have never wanted to hold up my personal preferences as general criteria for right and wrong, although I do not believe I could ever renounce them. I have never forgotten one of the last lectures given by Luigi Einaudi, one of the great teachers of my generation. The superb essay 'Discorso elementare sulle somiglianze e dissomiglianze fra liberalismo e socialismo' (Elementary Lecture on the Similarities and Dissimilarities between Liberalism and Socialism) has been my constant guide. After having outlined the essential characteristics of the socialist and the liberal with admirable skill (and there is no need to state on which side he stood⁶), he wrote that 'both currents are respectable', and 'the liberal and the socialist, although adversaries, are not enemies, because both respect the other's opinion, and know that there is a limit to the implementation of their own principle'. He concluded that 'the optimum is not achieved through the enforced peace of totalitarian tyranny; it is reached through the continual struggle between the two ideals, and the suppression of either would be to the detriment of all'.⁷

The trend towards increasing equality between people is irresistible, as Tocqueville observed in the last century. Every eradication of a specific discrimination which divides human beings into superiors and inferiors, dominators and

dominated, rich and poor, and owners and slaves represents a possible, although not inevitable, stage in the civilizing process. The three principal sources of discrimination, class, race and sex, have never before been challenged as they are in our own times. The gradual recognition of equality between men and women, first within the limited confines of the family and then in the wider political and civil society, is one of the clearest signs of humanity's inexorable progress towards equality.⁸

And what can be said about the new attitude to animals? There are increasingly frequent and lengthy debates over the legitimacy of hunting, restrictions on vivisection, the protection of endangered species, and vegetarianism. These can only be the first signs of a possible extension of the principle of equality beyond the confines of the human species, founded on the awareness that animals are equal to human beings at least in their ability to suffer.

Clearly, in order to comprehend the overall sweep of history, you have to raise your head and look beyond the day-to-day disputes.⁹

A Reply to the Critics (1995)

I was the first to be surprised by the success of this little book. It was not expected even by the publisher, who had just 10,000 copies of the first edition printed. It is still on the non-fiction bestseller list at the time of writing this preface to the new edition, although it is slipping each week.¹ It is no secret that professors usually sell only a few thousand copies of their books, unless they are official texts.

There can be little doubt that sales were assisted by the book's title and the timing of its publication during an election campaign which appeared to contrast the two poles more starkly than any previous election. Some booksellers, when asked why the book was in demand, replied that a few of the purchasers were looking for suggestions and insights, if not a clear indication, on which way they should vote. They would have been disappointed, but it appears that their disappointment was not contagious, since sales continued, at more or less the same rate, for several months after closure of the polling stations and after everyone had made up their mind.

Why have so many people been continuing to buy the book? Can it only be because they have been deceived by its elegant, attractive cover, its compactness, its brevity and its low price? I suspect that some people simply wanted to find out what it was all about.

As its author, I would suggest, albeit tentatively, that the reason for its success was the subject-matter. I say this tentatively, but also with a certain satisfaction, because I could not have hoped for a better argument against those people who for some time have been asserting that there is no longer any interest in the left/right distinction, an assertion which they repeat with untiring and unshakeable conviction.

I have to admit that success with readers was accompanied by a more mixed reception from the critics. There were quite a few reviews, not all of which were favourable, and some of which were downright hostile.² There has not, however, been a full and renewed debate over the left/right distinction and the theories I put forward.³ This is partly due to the haste imposed upon us by the voracious way in which the press deals with newly published books, and partly, I have to admit, because these theories have not always appeared convincing – perhaps due to intrinsic weaknesses, documentary deficiencies or insufficient argumentation. I also received many letters from friends and readers of the newspaper I currently write for, often containing astute observations and useful suggestions.

Leaving aside superficial judgements and personal attacks, which are not worth discussing, and obvious, if unintentional, misunderstandings, my critics can be divided into three groups: (1) those who continue to claim that ‘left’

and 'right' do not now correspond to any reality, and that it is not worth striving to keep the terms alive by giving them a significance which they no longer have, if they ever had one, and my work can thus be considered an attempt at political archaeology; (2) those who believe that the distinction is still valid, but do not accept the criterion on which I base it, and suggest others; (3) those who accept the distinction and also accept the criterion, but do not consider it to be sufficient.

As far as the first group is concerned, the majority do not deny that the distinction once had a meaning, but they believe that the single division between left and right ends up as an over-simplification in an increasingly complicated society in which there are many bases for conflict, which cannot share a single division between two poles.⁴ Then there are those who believe that it was a catastrophic historical event, like the fall of the Berlin Wall, which made the distinction no longer relevant.⁵ While for others, the sterile persistence in keeping the distinction alive is due to a methodological error, the desire to encapsulate the rich and ever-changing substance of history within two conceptual abstractions.⁶

The best way to refute this argument is by the fact that, even after the Wall came down, the distinction continues to be at the centre of political debate. This is truer now than when I first began to address the question, primarily in order to find an explanation for myself. It is completely irrelevant that the Wall suddenly and famously collapsed, exploding all the contradictions within international communism, as well as all the contradictions within the no less international capitalist system (allow me to insist upon an observation which is not welcome to the momentary

victors). The communist left was not the only left; there was – and still is – another left within the capitalist horizon. The distinction has a long history which goes back long before the contrast between capitalism and communism.⁷ The distinction still exists, and not, as someone jested, simply on road signs.⁸ It pervades newspapers, radio, television, public debates and specialized magazines on economics, politics and sociology, in a manner which is almost grotesque. If you look through the papers to see how many times the words ‘left’ and ‘right’ appear, even just in the headlines, you will come up with a good crop; and this is partly due to the fact that these two words of common, and even popular, usage are now not only widely used in political debate, but also figure in relation to all kinds of human behaviour, often in parody.⁹ The republication of a well-known work on the Jewish question recently caused a learned debate over whether the publisher concerned was right-wing.¹⁰ I read that someone raised the question, albeit hesitantly, ‘Pasolini on the right, and D’Annunzio on the left?’¹¹ At a somewhat lower level, the same question was posed for other people: ‘Fiorello a destra, Jovanotti di sinistra?’¹² Then it has been reformulated as ‘Is television on the right, and street activity on the left?’¹³ When I rather incautiously stated in an interview that television is, by its very nature, right-wing, people objected that it is not the instrument itself which is either left- or right-wing, but the content, thus showing that these words still have meaning. Again, at a slightly less serious level, this year, possibly for the first time, holidays were divided into left-wing and right-wing holidays.¹⁴

Clearly there is a humorous side to these questions, but are we to believe that these words can be shifted from one

context to another, without attributing some meaning to them, or, if you like, an aura of meaning that has not been perceived, distinctly, but is sufficient to make these questions appear comprehensible?

Leaving aside such abuses of language, so typical of invasive journalism of both the well- and ill-mannered types, these two vexing words of ours continue to be used seriously in relation to politicians, parties, movements, alliances, newspapers, political programmes and legislation. Is it not the case that the first question we ask when discussing a politician is whether the person in question is on the left or the right? Meaningless questions? Of course, one of the possible answers is that he or she is neither on the left nor the right. But how can one not realize that the reply 'Neither one nor the other' is only possible if 'left' and 'right' have meaning, and questioner and respondent understand what it is, however vaguely? You cannot say that an object is neither white nor black if you do not have the slightest idea about the difference between these two colours. You cannot say that a certain government measure is neither left-wing nor right-wing, if you have no idea of the meaning of these two words, or you believe that they once meant something, but do so no longer. You cannot say that the two words have lost their meaning because a party which was on the right is now following a policy of the left if you do not still believe that these words mean something. No sensible person would ever argue that team X, which until recently had been using method *a*, now uses method *b* used by team Y in order to deny the difference between two ways of playing football. I pose these questions and make these assertions because the majority of arguments used by the distinction's detractors are of this nature. However,

these arguments only show a confusion between abstract ideas and the compromises adopted in their practical application. Equally, one could hardly forget that this largely good-humoured debate has occurred at a time in our country's history when on one side they are shouting 'The right has won' and on the other they are muttering under their breath 'The left has been defeated'. How do those who claim that there are no longer any parties of the left and the right explain the fact that one of the parties on the winning side in the recent election, which is now called the National Alliance, was until recently the National Right (not only does it not hide the fact that it is a party of the right, but it is proud of it) and that the largest party on the losing side is called the Democratic Party of the Left.¹⁵ The notorious distinction is supposed to have lost all meaning precisely at a time when the traditional terminology is being used to designate the two opposing parties.¹⁶

Hopefully, no one will counter with the argument that the persistence of a distinction which has lost its *raison d'être* is just another sign of Italian backwardness. Let us take a look at how Marcel Gauchet finishes his book on the history of this distinction, even though his historical account is restricted to France: 'Irrespective of future events, left and right now have an existence which is independent of the framework in which they originally developed. They have conquered the planet. They have become universal political categories. They are part of the basic notions which generally inform the way contemporary societies work.'¹⁷

As far as the criticisms over method, rather than substance, are concerned, I have no difficulty admitting that the conceptual method of analysis with which I am familiar

may appear irksome to those who have remained loyal to the historical method and believe that the flow of history, the river in whose waters we can never bathe twice, cannot be checked by artificial banks or dykes without losing its power and its own natural characteristics. In my eclecticism, I have never considered the two methods incompatible (I have no hesitation in using the word 'eclecticism', which means 'looking at a problem from all sides', and it is an approach which is reflected at a practical level in my political 'moderation', another word which I am not ashamed of using, as long as it is interpreted positively as the opposite of extremism and not negatively as the opposite of radicalism¹⁸); quite the opposite, I believe them to be mutually beneficial. Those who adopt an analytical approach should never forget that reality is richer than abstract categories, and should continually review them in order to take account of new data or new interpretations of old data; equally the historian must be aware that, in order to understand, describe and order the factual realities that documents reveal, he cannot do without the abstract concepts, which, whether he realizes it or not, are provided by the advocates of analytical judgements. I cannot think of a better demonstration of this mutual collaboration than the recent debate between historians, philosophers and political scientists over whether the war of liberation in Italy was a civil war. The debate seems sterile and inconclusive until you define the essential attributes which distinguish a civil war from an international war.¹⁹ The only way to invalidate my attempt to redefine the left/right distinction is to demonstrate its insufficiency and replace it with another. I cannot see how this can be done without employing, once again, the analytical method.

As I said, the second group of critics includes those for whom the distinction still has a meaning, but who are not sure that the criterion which I adopt is wholly adequate. Let me first make it clear that it was not my own idea that the fundamental rationale of left-wing movements is the aspiration for equality. I took it as the expression of common opinion, and developed it in two of the chapters and notes.

I limited myself to the pursuit of a simple explanation for the origin of this distinction, in order to demonstrate not only its validity, but also its continuing existence through changing historical circumstances that, on the basis of changing views of what is relevant and what irrelevant, change the criteria by which we consider people to be equal or unequal. It is rather the case that those who reject my criterion have abandoned the traditional viewpoint without providing any arguments to justify their preference or refute their opponents' arguments.

It has been argued that non-violence is the main characteristic of the left.²⁰ But the renunciation of the use of violence in order to achieve and exercise power is a characteristic of the democratic method, whose constituent rules lay down various procedures for taking collective decisions through free debate leading to negotiated or majority settlement. This is demonstrated by the fact that government can legitimately alternate between left and right in a democratic system. Moreover, if the left is defined by non-violence, then the right is necessarily defined as the rule of violence, which, according to the other great dichotomy that I believe runs across the left/right distinction, typifies the extreme right, not the right in general. Nor do I find any more convincing the portrayal of the left as tending to create a more open society, as against closed societies which expel

anyone who is different.²¹ Open societies also exist and expand within the institutional framework of democratic regimes. There is hardly any need to underscore the importance of work on the 'open society' by Karl Popper, one of the best-known and most influential theoreticians of democracy. On the other hand, it is true that a right-wing government, while accepting the rules of democracy, does allow and promote less egalitarian policies, as Savater himself admits in telling the story of the new Popular Party mayor of Madrid, who commented in relation to a misfortune affecting a group of immigrants that 'They could have stayed in their own country'.

I would also like to mention Isaiah Berlin, another great contemporary figure, who considers liberalism to be left-wing, as against the excessive power of authority founded on tradition, which he sees as the principal characteristic of the right.²² He argues at the same time that the authoritarian regime in the Soviet Union has rendered the distinction between left and right useless, by usurping the name of the left. My observation is that such a statement demonstrates that 'left-wing' has a positive axiological meaning for the person who made it, but like all political terms, which in any case do not constitute a precise terminology, it can have either positive or negative emotional connotations, according to who is saying it and in what context. This explains why Berlin calls 'left-wing' the liberal doctrine which he prefers above all others, and to whose reformulation he dedicated his most famous and deservedly praised works. In reality, the liberalism about which he is talking, with its favourable opinions on Roosevelt's New Deal and Attlee's Labour Party, is social liberalism, which differentiates itself from the classical liberalism of *laissez-faire* liberal parties

by its egalitarian element, and can thus be counted among the doctrines of the left without any contradiction.²³

Not equality, not liberalism, but liberty is the fundamental characteristic of the left, according to my old friend Vittorio Foa, who has taught me many things. In his conversation with his son Renzo entitled *Del disordine e della libertà*, which has just been published by Donzelli, he recalls his experience as a protagonist in the war against Fascism, and states that it is 'liberty which constitutes the strongest motivating element for the left in this century', while he considers it 'ungenerous' of me to argue that 'the right-wing represents inequality'.²⁴ Let's not play about with words, especially slippery words like 'liberty' and 'equality'. All the same, I think I can safely say that a liberation movement becomes a movement of the left because of the end result it pursues: the destruction of a despotic regime founded on inequality between those at the top and those at the bottom of the social scale, perceived as unjust precisely because it is inegalitarian and constituted hierarchically. It is the struggle against a society in which there are privileged classes, and therefore for the establishment and defence of a society of equals in legal, political and social terms, and against the most common forms of discrimination as listed in Article 3 of the Italian Constitution, which is quite correctly considered to be the greatest contribution by the parties of the left to the constitutional charter. Not all liberation struggles are inherently left-wing or wholly left-wing, including the Resistance, which involved people and movements not of the left (one only has to think of De Gaulle in France). Besides, Foa himself interprets the Resistance in a typically left-wing manner – almost unwittingly, because it is so natural to him – when he

states that 'it appeared quite clear to us young anti-Fascists that you cannot be free unless you get rid of the fundamental social, cultural and moral features of inequality'. According to this interpretation, the Resistance was a struggle not just for liberty, but also for equality. Surely his interpretation was typical of the communists and to some extent the Partito d'Azione,²⁵ precisely because he sees this popular uprising as egalitarian, as well as libertarian. As far as the relationship between the right and inequality is concerned, I have said, and repeated several times that the right is not inegalitarian out of wickedness, and that therefore I am not making a moral judgement when I claim that inegalitarianism typifies movements of the right. Given that Vittorio Foa believes that the inequalities between men cannot be eliminated, or, if they can be eliminated, that this can only be done by suffocating freedoms, and also that inequalities are useful in that they promote the incessant struggle for a better society, it is difficult to see what is 'ungenerous' about such an opinion.

I return again to my arguments distinguishing the emotional and descriptive meanings of a word. I return to it because it is a fundamental point, which appears not to have been taken up by any of my critics. Anyone who considers him or herself to be on the left or the right will associate positive values with one of the two words. This is the reason why neither side is willing to renounce the inclusion of liberty. As I have attempted to show, with better argumentation in the new edition, the contrast between libertarians and authoritarians corresponds to another distinction, which does not coincide with the left/right distinction, but cuts across it. My purpose, from the analytical viewpoint which I have adopted, is to infer the descrip-

tive meaning of the terms from normal political practice and from current learned and popular opinion, irrespective of the emotional meaning. My analysis is completely free of value-judgements, even though, emotionally, I do consider myself to be on the left, as I affirmed in the last chapter which, contrary to my intentions, finished up by making my little book appear like an electoral manifesto. At the time the book was launched, someone wrote that ‘Bobbio has been striving for some time to restore the term “left” and especially the term “right” to full political and moral citizenship’.²⁶ The most common argument used by my critics, according to which the Soviet system is supposed to have disqualified the left and consequently demonstrated the uselessness of the distinction, is completely irrelevant from an analytical point of view. The egalitarian ideal can have very different results in practice. The fact that some implementations of this ideal have performed well and some have not, or that some might be to your liking and others not, is undoubtedly a question whose practical importance I would not challenge, but it is a completely different question.²⁷

Apart from those who criticize the distinction and those who do not accept the criterion, there are the doubters who accept the distinction and do not reject the criterion I have chosen and explained, but believe that it is now no longer sufficient. I am referring particularly to those who, although acknowledging that ‘the ideological crisis, varying criteria of moral judgement, the technical and increasingly complex nature of political problems, pluralism and the segmentation of social affiliations turn each citizen into a political constituent which cuts across the left/right axis’, a view I would certainly share, also believe that, in addition

to the traditional question of equality, a redefinition of the left/right distinction must take into account other criteria, such as 'autonomy, personal identity, cultural pluralism, diversity of origins, radical contextualism of moral values, and the dispersal of the "public sphere" in societies where information technology has affected the means of communication'.²⁸ It is undeniable that the current lack of direction on the left is due to the fact that in the modern world, problems have emerged which the traditional movements of the left never had to face, and some of the assumptions on which they based their strength and their plans for the transformation of society have not materialized. I have myself discussed the question many times.²⁹ No left-winger can deny that the left today is not what it used to be. But as long as there are people whose political commitment is motivated by a profound sense of discontent and distress over the iniquities of contemporary societies, which are possibly less offensive than in the past, though certainly more visible, then these people will keep alive the ideals which have characterized all left-wing movements for over a century.

In conclusion, I would not be so bold as to say that the debate on this much-disputed distinction which took place after the publication of my book has progressed very far. I do not deny my own responsibility for this, in that I did not succeed in following up the review of previous alternative theories and comments with a sufficiently well-documented and reasoned presentation of my theory.³⁰ After serious consideration of criticisms by political commentators and doubts expressed by readers, I have expanded the chapter in which I put forward my central thesis for the new edition. I have updated it with references to books which I did not

know of earlier or which were published later, and I have divided it in two, in order both to clarify further and to justify the importance I attribute to the supreme values of equality and liberty in my interpretation of the 'great division': great in the history of European political struggle over the last century and in my obstinate and strongly held opinion, which is more alive than ever. I do not know if I have succeeded, but I could not avoid replying to my critics. The only way to take them seriously was to correct substantial errors, clarify obscure and ambiguous expressions, and polish up the notes, while not renouncing my fundamental theories, but rather seeking to make them at least more worthy of argument, if not less arguable.³¹

I have written these pages during months in which a debate has been raging, and becoming particularly fierce in the last few days. The debate has been over the nature of intellectuals, and has been confused and irreverent, as is always the case when intellectuals argue among themselves. The discussion has been over whether there is a (naturally perverse) hegemony of left-wing intellectuals and for what reasons, and over how much right-wing culture, which has been marginalized until now, will be able to penetrate society. In this period of transition, there is unprecedented curiosity and interest in right-wing culture, even on the part of people who are not right-wing. It would appear that all the people who have taken part in the debate – and there are many of them – have no doubt that 'left' and 'right' are not empty vessels. These cannot all be senseless discussions. The argument with which I wish to end this renewed invitation to engage in debate is certainly not senseless, and has been put by someone who finds pessimistic enlightenment (an expression I used myself many years ago³²) an attitude

which makes it possible to heed the views expressed in pessimistic writings, while not allowing oneself to be deafened by them. 'Perhaps it is the democratic left which can and must listen to those who teach us that man is evil, but at the same time must be helped in every possible way, even in the most prosaic ways, such as health care and a pension.'³³

Notes

Translator's Introduction

- 1 Will Hutton, *The State We're In* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 58.
- 2 A. Gnoli, 'Caro Bobbio, ecco dove sbagli', *La Repubblica*, 7 February 1995.
- 3 N. Ajello, 'I miei dubbi sulla destra', *La Repubblica*, 10 February 1995.
- 4 N. Bobbio, *Enciclopedia del Novecento* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1977), vol. 2, p. 356.
- 5 Bobbio showed his awareness of this ambivalence in a newspaper article published in 1992, when he stated that the opposite of equality 'was not, as some had argued, "liberty", but "difference" (or inequality)'. Cf. 'Sinistra e destra: una distinzione che non è finita', *La Stampa*, 3 December 1992.
- 6 Cf. M. Rustin, 'Equality in Post Modern Times', in *Pluralism, Justice and Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 17-44.
- 7 M. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983), p. xi.
- 8 M. Cacciari, 'Dialoghetto sulla "sinisteritas"', *MicroMega*, 1993 4, p. 15.
- 9 Fraternity, the other item in the French revolutionary slogan, was perhaps just rhetoric or a more emotive way of saying equality. Brothers are equal, bound by close kinship, and presumably sons of the nation.
- 10 See N. Bobbio, *The Age of Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
- 11 G. Winstanley, *The Law of Freedom and Other Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 285. See also R. Ridden, 'Winstanley

and Freedom', in *Freedom and the English Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 151-68.

Preface to the First Italian Edition

- 1 The best study of the argument that I know was written by Marco Revelli in 1990, but has not been published. 'Destra e sinistra: l'identità introvabile' commences by stating: 'The antithetical and complimentary concepts of left and right have certainly met with a strange fate in the closing years of this century. The two concepts have been transformed in little more than a decade from the fundamental constituent criterion of political argument into ideological scrap suitable for the wax museum, together with the old illusions of an earthly paradise following climactic events and the other cast offs of political activists. Yet this description was once not a *description* of reality, but a *prescription* for action' (p. 1). More recently, some people have even started to question whether we are moving towards an ambidextrous society, 'a society in which, with the elimination of left and right in politics, we are abandoned by the sacred and the profane, high and low, and all the other usual companions' (M. Bettini, 'Le anime perse vanno a sinistra', *La Repubblica*, 31 July 1993).
- 2 The realization by those on the left that the purpose and meaning of the left needed discussion can be dated back to a conference held in Rome in October 1981, whose main contributions were published in *Il concetto di sinistra* (Milan: Bompiani, 1982). In the first essay, 'Sinisteritas', Massimo Cacciari asks not only how the left can be redefined, but also whether there is 'any sense in doing so'. Elvio Fachinelli, Federico Stame, Paolo Flores d'Arcais, Gianni Vattimo, Fernando Vianello, Giulio Giorello, Marco Mondadori, Michele Salvati, Salvatore Veca and Giacomo Marramao all respond to this question. The recurring theme in this book is a criticism of the left for having identified itself with Marxism, offset by the need to rediscover the just causes of one's beliefs beyond the crisis of Marxism, although these were formulated in a variety of manners. Flores d'Arcais, who, it comes as no surprise, was one of the founders of the magazine *MicroMega* whose subtitle is *Le ragioni della sinistra* (The Justification for the Left), wrote in his essay that 'a series of values', not just 'emotions', has traditionally been associated with the concept of the left, and that it is easy to enumerate these values: 'liberty, equality, fraternity'. He concludes: 'There is nothing arbitrary about

- 4 On this subject, with particular reference to Italy, a second, enlarged, updated edition of Marcello Veneziani's *La Rivoluzione conservatrice in Italia* (Milan: Sugar Co., 1994) has recently been published. The first edition appeared in 1987.
- 5 Interview with Noam Chomsky by Stefano Del Re, 'Sfida capitale', *Panorama*, 3 January 1993, p. 133. The challenges to the left/right distinction are now coming mainly from the left. Here I will only refer to a book by C. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven, Progress and Its Critics* (New York and London: Norton, 1991). The first chapter is entitled 'The Obsolescence of the Concepts of Left and Right', and in it the author, who claims to have been on the left, argues that the renewed vigour of the right has thrown the left into disorder, highlighting the worthlessness of the old labels.
- 6 Cf. N. Urbinati, 'La sinistra vive se diventa un arcipelago', *L'Unità*, 3 December 1992, written for the 'What is Left?' conference.
- 7 I took this information from the magazine *ToD. The Working Paper Series*, in the international project 'The Transitions to Democracy in a World Perspective', whose December 1992 issue contained an article by Jan Vermeersch, 'The Left in Eastern Europe', pp. 1–20.
- 8 I am referring particularly to two articles by Ernesto Galli della Loggia, 'Se la sinistra fa la destra', *Corriere della Sera*, 15 December 1993, and 'La differenza necessaria', *Corriere della Sera*, 24 December 1993. The subject of the confusion between the left and the right was taken up in Eric Rohmer's recent film, *L'Arbre, le maire et la médiathèque* (France, 1993). In the film, the mayor defends the rights of the media library (progress), while the rights of the tree (nature) are defended by the teacher. Which of the two positions is on the left, and which on the right? The director appears to give his own reply: 'This "political" film is not putting forward a theory . . . The politics of the left and right are now very similar, only the right has become more violent, as the left was in the seventies. The essential thing today is not to impose this or that regime, as all regimes are imperfect; the most urgent thing is to save the life of the planet, and avoid conflict between people at all costs' (quotation taken from *Scheda di Aiace*, 1993 4, p. 14).

Chapter 2 Extremists and Moderates

- 1 When the Italian communist Party changed its name to Partito Democratico della Sinistra (Democratic Party of the left), a minority

of the more traditional hard line members broke away and established Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Re Foundation) *translator's note*.

- 2 L. Geymonat, *Contro il moderatismo. Interventi dal '45 al '78*, ed. M. Quaranta (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978). It was precisely with this book in mind that I replied to Loris Campetti, in an interview for *Il manifesto* published on 28 May 1991, that I considered myself a moderate, because only the moderate wings of the two opposing sides are compatible with democracy. It is no coincidence that the same newspaper published an editorial on election day, 21 November 1993, entitled 'When, if not now?', which concluded: 'Extremism is wiser and less dangerous than well intentioned centrism. We must not underestimate the importance of today's challenge. Extremism is the wisdom of the present.'
- 3 On 21 December 1994, *L'Italia settimanale* published an article by Filippo Rossi entitled 'Il '68 in rosso e nero' (pp. 51-3), which tells the little known story of an attempt by a group of right wing students to ally themselves with the extreme left 'in the name of anti capitalism and anti Americanism'. At the time, Giano Accame wrote in *Il Borghese* of his respect for the Chinese for having cut 'the umbilical cord of the political parties'. Daria Gorodisky referred to this episode in *Corriere della Sera*, 16 December 1994, in an article entitled 'Sessantotto, Evola e Marcuse uniti nella lotta?'
- 4 I refer here to some ideas which were aired a few years ago in an article, 'L'ideologia del Fascismo', in *Il Fascismo. Antologia di scritti critici*, ed. C. Casucci (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1982), pp. 598-624.
- 5 P. Gobetti, *La rivoluzione liberale. Saggio sulla lotta politica in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), p. 84.
- 6 Z. Sternhell, *Ni droite ni gauche. L'ideologie Fasciste en France* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983). As suggested by the subtitle, this notable work is a history of Fascist ideology in France, which preceded and influenced Italian Fascism, and mainly consisted of a merger between socialism and nationalism or, in other words, between a typically left wing ideology and a typically right wing ideology. It could equally well have called itself 'Both right and left', the synthesis of two opposing ideologies, rather than their elimination. The Italian extreme right often uses a formula which removes any remaining doubt about the possible dual choice between rejection and synthesis: 'beyond both right and left'. All three formulas represent a third way which can be interpreted as both inclusive and exclusive. The one thing that all the various interpretations of this

'third position' have in common is what Sternhell calls 'la rupture de l'ordre libéral' (p. 29) and the associated criticism of democracy. One member of the movement affirms: 'Nous rejoignons (et dépassons quelquefois) la gauche par nos programmes et la droite par nos méthodes' (pp. 240–1), an example of the ideology of transcending other ideologies. This 'third way', which rejects the traditional left/right distinction or maintains a rather vague position by claiming to have superseded the distinction, explains why some people considered in the book changed sides from left to right (as has also occurred in Italy), and in some cases, as with the followers of Sorel, from the extreme left to the extreme right.

- 7 In the mental, rather than political, confusion of Russia today, you can find characters like Alexander Dugin, who preaches the conservative revolution, and boasts that he has translated Evola and Guénon into Russian. He claims to be the theoretician of national Bolshevism (for an account of his recent visit to Italy, see N. Aspesi, 'Va dove ti porta il vento', *La Repubblica*, 26 June 1994).

Chapter 3 The Left/Right Distinction Survives

- 1 Movimento Sociale Italiano; the Italian party whose name and ideals went back to the short lived Nazi puppet state which Mussolini governed in northern Italy in the latter part of the war (Repubblica Sociale Italiana) *translator's note*.
- 2 The Partito Liberale Italiano, which before the rise of Fascism was a major force on the right, has since the war been a tiny party with just a few per cent of the popular vote, although enjoying a degree of power in the *pentapartito*, the five party coalition which for many years dominated Italian politics *translator's note*.
- 3 Partito Democratico della Sinistra is the new name for the Italian communist Party *translator's note*.
- 4 Forza Italia is a new grouping on the right launched by the media mogul Berlusconi *translator's note*.
- 5 I wrote this before the elections on 26–7 March 1994. The electoral campaign was fought principally between two alliances: Alleanza Progressista and Polo della Libertà. However, in the language used by the newspapers and by people in general, the former represented the left, the latter the right, an unprecedented simplification for Italy.

Chapter 4 In Search of the Criterion which Governs the Distinction

- 1 J. A. Laponce, *Left and Right. The Topography of Political Perceptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

Chapter 5 Other Criteria

- 1 D. Cofrancesco, 'Destra/Sinistra. Se cade 10 spartiacque', *Il secolo XIX*, 14 August 1990.
- 2 D. Cofrancesco, *Destra e sinistra* (Genoa: Presso il Basilisco, 1981), p. 34. See also the collection of short essays, *Destra e sinistra, per un uso critico di due termini chiave* (Verona: Bertani, 1984).
- 3 D. Cofrancesco, 'Per un uso critico dei termini "destra" e "sinistra"', *La Cultura*, 3 4 (1975), p. 399.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 403.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Cofrancesco, *Destra e sinistra*, p. 22. Cofrancesco has often returned to this argument over the distinction with further clarifications. I refer to the entry 'Sinistra' in the *Grande dizionario enciclopedico* (Turin: UTET, 1962), and 'Fascismo a sinistra? Quello zoccolo duro che rimanda a destra', *Messaggero Veneto*, 12 February 1991. The small volume *Parole della politica* (Pisa: Libreria del Lungarno, 1993), which was used by Pisa University students in the 1992-3 academic year, contains two brief essays 'Destra e sinistra' (pp. 12-20) and 'Sinistra' (pp. 57-63). These essays put forward a new criterion based on the different attitude to power on the left and the right. For an explanation of this new criterion, see n. 7.
- 7 Dino Cofrancesco takes up this argument in his last book, *Parole della politica*, (Pisa: La Libreria del Lungarno, 1993), and after referring directly to my theory ('Bobbio deserves the credit for attempting to relate the centuries old distinction to the factual observation that "men are equal and unequal in the same measure"'), he argues that the critical factor is *power*, which can be considered either cohesive or discriminatory. The right believes it to be the former, the left the latter: 'Left wingers are obsessed with the abuse of power, and right wingers with its absence. The former fear an

oligarchy, the origin of all acts of tyranny, and the latter fear anarchy, the end of civil society' (p. 17). According to Cofrancesco, analysis of the criterion can be further developed by distinguishing between the three classical forms of power: political, economic and cultural or symbolic. After explaining the advantages of this new criterion, he argues that the great conflict of the future will probably be between individualism and holism (p. 18). The same argument is taken up later (pp. 61-3). See also by the same author, 'Destra e sinistra. Due nemici invecchiati ma ancora in vita', *Quindicinale culturale di conquiste del lavoro*, 17-18 April 1993.

- 8 E. Galeotti, 'L'opposizione destra sinistra. Riflessioni analitiche', in *La destra radicale*, ed. F. Ferraresi (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1984), pp. 253-75. See also E. Galeotti and F. Ferraresi, 'Destra sinistra', in *Lessico della politica*, ed. G. Zaccaria (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1987), pp. 171-83.
- 9 Of all the authors who have discussed the left/right distinction, Revelli is the one who, to my knowledge, has most explored the vast literature on the subject and examined the arguments for and against. He is also the scholar who has most inspired my own reflections and studies, through our joint collaboration at the seminars held in recent years at the Centro Studi Piero Gobetti. Both Revelli's works on the subject are unpublished: the first, 'Destra e sinistra: l'identità introvabile', a 65 page typescript, has been completed; the second, with the same title, 'Destra e sinistra: l'identità introvabile', provisional edition (Turin, 1990), of 141 pages, has not been completed; although its historical and critical section is much more thorough than that in the first text, it lacks a conclusion. My exposition of Revelli's theories is essentially based on the first text, with a few references in the next two notes to the second. I hope that the two works will be published soon.
- 10 In Revelli's second work (see previous note), the reasons for the breakdown of the left/right distinction are presented as the following: historical reasons, such as the much proclaimed endangerment of ideologies; the depoliticization or obsolescence of antinomic thought which originated with Schmitt (Starobinski); the opposite, 'catastrophic' argument of integral politicization or radicalization of the conflict; a spatial reason, according to which politics has undergone a transition from a linear axis to a sphere (Cacciari), making it no longer possible to distinguish between left and right, which have become relative and interchangeable; a temporal reason, based on the increasingly certain acceleration of time (Jünger and Koselleck); the

organicist argument, according to which the organic nature of society cannot tolerate explicit divisions or unstable distinctions. These six arguments are then grouped around two thematic poles: on the one hand, the breakdown in traditional political groupings, and on the other, the idea of society as an organic, monolithic whole, which does not allow any distinctions.

- 11 In the second of Revelli's two works (see n. 9), this argument is further developed. He lists and examines the following criteria: a temporal criterion whereby the left/right distinction refers to a differentiation between stability and change; a spatial criterion whereby it refers to the differentiation between the egalitarian principle and the hierarchical principle; a decision making criterion whereby self management and autonomy are contrasted with heteronomy; a sociological criterion which contrasts power élites and subordinate classes; a gnosiological criterion which contrasts logos with mythos.
- 12 Revelli, 'Destra e sinistra', typescript, p. 30.
- 13 Around 1300 the Florentine Guelphs divided into White and Black Guelphs, and this split was made famous by Dante, a White Guelph who was forced into exile *translator's note*.

Chapter 6 Equality and Inequality

- 1 This belief is widely held even by persons on the opposing sides. In Massimo Cacciari's recent 'Dialoghetto sulla "sinisteritas"', a dialogue between Tychiades and Filopoli, who expresses the author's ideas, Tychiades asks what could convince the affluent to agree to a redistribution of wealth, to which Filopoli replies: 'The existence of the basic conditions for equality, and therefore a policy of protecting the weaker and less protected classes is an essential part of my quality of life.' He goes on to specify that 'equality is a part of our quality of life, like revenue, the environment and public services Equality *makes diversity possible*, and makes it possible for everyone to count as a person, quite unlike that abstract totalitarian idea of equality which means the elimination of those who are not the same' (*MicroMega*, (1993), p. 15). In an interview for *L'Unità* on 27 April 1993, Domenico Fisichella, having forecast the right-wing alliance, declared that 'Bobbio is right, we cannot let the distinction between left and right drop'. Although he admitted that 'cultural elements have been transferred from one side to the other', when questioned

as to whether there were any constant elements which distinguish left and right, he replied: 'Of course. There are constants which define right wing anthropology. While the left is founded on the idea of equality, the right is founded on non equality.' Ernst Nolte, who certainly cannot be regarded as a left wing historian, talks of the egalitarian left as 'an eternal left' which vies with the liberal left according to the times and the historical circumstances. This eternal left is now faced with the huge task of striving 'for the mixture of all races and peoples'. In a previous interview, again for *L'Unità* (11 July 1992), Nolte had declared that the left continues to express the demands for equality, but it must lower its expectations, such as its assumption that millions of immigrants to Europe can be integrated overnight although I would question that the left ever put forward such a demand. Sartori replied to Nolte, in an interview with Giancarlo Bosetti for *L'Unità* (28 November 1993), rejecting the idea that equality can embody the left, because, since the Greeks, democracy has fulfilled this role.

- 2 I have discussed the concept of equality more fully in the entry for 'Eguaglianza' which I wrote for the *Enciclopedia del Novecento* (Rome: Istituto dell' Enciclopedia Italiana, 1977), vol. 2, pp. 355-65.
- 3 In *Inequality Re Examined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Amartya Sen starts with the assertions that the diversity among people is what she calls pervasive, and that there are many ways in which you can reply to the question 'Equality of what?' On the basis of this twin assertion, she argues that there are no theories which are completely inegalitarian, because they all propose equality in something in order to lead a good life. The judgement and evaluation of equality depend on the variable income distribution, well being, freedom, etc. which is adopted in each particular case. She calls these variables 'focal'. Equality in relation to one variable does not correspond to equality in relation to another (pp. 28-30). Consequently, it is as unrealistic to assert that all men must be equal as it is to assert that all men are unequal. The only realistic argument is that some form of equality is desirable: 'Every normative theory of social arrangement that has at all stood the test of time seems to demand equality of something' (p. 12).
- 4 On this subject, I would like to draw attention to the works of Charles Perelman, which I have always greatly valued, although they are less referred to now because of the increasing Anglo Saxon influence in the field since John Rawls. See particularly *De la justice* (Brussels:

- Institut de Sociologie Solvay, 1945), which I commented upon in 'Sulla nozione di giustizia', *Archivio giuridico*, 142 (1952), pp. 16-33, and the Italian translation, *La Giustizia* (Turin: Giappichelli, 1959), for which I wrote a preface. It appeared with other writings on justice in Charles Perelman, *Justice et raison* (Brussels: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1963). I need hardly add that the subject has recently been re-explored in an excellent book by M. Waltzer, *Spheres of Justice. A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
- 5 N. Bobbio, 'Eguaglianza ed egualitarismo', *Rivista internazionale di filosofia del diritto*, 53 (1976), pp. 321-30.
 - 6 Thomas Nagel warns against utopianism, while still rejecting all forms of sceptical abdication to reality, in *Equality and Partiality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Nagel's work is inspired by a 'healthy dissatisfaction towards the iniquitous world in which we live', and he searches for a solution to the problem of justice in a balanced fusion of the irrepressible impersonal ideals and individual motivation. He argues that utopianism sacrifices the former for the latter, and considers it dangerous, 'because it exercises excessive pressure on individual motivations' (p. 21). It should be pointed out, however, that even with utopian theories, you have to be very cautious before applying the principle 'equality for all in everything'. Babeuf's disciple Filippo Buonarrotti wrote *Congiura degli eguali*, one of the works which most exalts equality, calling it the 'sacred equality'. However, equality is only specifically applied to power and wealth. Equality of power is understood to be submission to the laws which are decided by all (here the influence of Rousseau is obvious); and by equality of wealth, he means that everyone should have enough and no one too much (another of Rousseau's principles). As for the answer to the question 'Equality between whom?', 'everyone' does not even include women.
 - 7 Here I am partly restating my lecture given at the Conference on 'Nuova e cultura reazionaria negli anni Ottanta', held at Cuneo on 19-21 November 1982. It appeared under the title 'Per una definizione della destra reazionaria' in the conference proceedings, which were published in *Notiziario dell'Istituto storico della Resistenza di Cuneo e Provincia*, 23 (June 1983), pp. 19-32.
 - 8 The importance of what human beings have in common has been an argument used by egalitarians for a long time. The sophist Antiphon challenged the ideas of the oligarchs by stating: 'We all have exactly the same nature, whether we are Greeks or barbarians. It is sufficient

to observe the natural needs of all men . . . None of us can be defined as a barbarian or a Greek. Indeed we all breathe in air through our mouths and our nostrils' (quoted by L. Canfora, 'Studi sull' Athenaion Politeia pseudo senofontea', *Memorie dell' Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, 5th ser., 4 (1980), p. 44). M. Ostinelli refers to Antiphon and Hippias in *Destra e sinistra: si può dire ancora?*, p. 276.

- 9 F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), §22, 'On the Prejudices of Philosophers', p. 34.
- 10 'All citizens are socially equal and equal before the law, without distinction on the basis of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, or social or personal conditions.' The categories listed are those that the Italian Constitution considers irrelevant as criteria for discriminating between human beings, and they represent very well the stages in the development of equality in human history; but they are not necessarily the only ones. In an article I wrote a few years ago, I referred to two categories: unforeseen discriminations which could become relevant in the near future, and discriminations which continue to be relevant. As far as the first category is concerned, I put forward the fantastic hypothesis that some scientist claims to have shown that extroverts are superior to introverts, and a political group then proposes that extroverts should be authorized to ill treat introverts. This would provide a good reason for legislating that psychological differences, like those listed above, are irrelevant to discrimination between human beings. As far as the second category is concerned, the distinction between children and adults remains relevant to the recognition of certain rights; see my 'Eguaglianza e dignità degli uomini' (1963), now in *Il Terzo Assente* (Turin: Sonda, 1989), pp. 71-83.

Chapter 7 Freedom and Authoritarianism

- 1 *Scuola media*, for 11 to 14 year olds *translator's note*.
- 2 I would like to mention here a few attempts to redefine the left, such as Peter Glotz's sensible and useful proposal in 'Vorrei una sinistra col muso più duro', *L'Unità*, 30 November 1992. Referring to his book *Die Linke nach dem Sieg des Westens* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlag Anstalt, 1992), he wrote: 'I defined the left as the force which strives for restrictions on the logic of the market, or more prudently,

the pursuit of reason, compatible with the market economy; a sensitivity to social questions, that is to say, support for the welfare state and specific democratic institutions; transposition of time into new libertarian rights; effective equality for women; protection of life and nature; and the struggle against nationalism.'

Elias Diaz ('Derechas y izquierdas', *El Sol*, 26 April 1991) considers signs of a left wing identity to be 'a greater propensity for economic policies involving a redistribution of wealth and a proportional levelling out, based more on work than capital; a greater consideration for the organization of that which is public and communally owned, rather than that which is private and individual; prevalence of the values of co operation and working together, rather than those of comparison and competition; more openness towards new social movements and their pacifist, ecologist or feminist demands; concern for the effective implementation of human rights, especially in relation to marginalized groups, old people, children, etc.; insistence on the priority of all the fundamental necessities such as good health, schooling and housing; greater international concern and friendliness towards poor, dependent and depressed areas; and autonomy of free will and rational debate both in majority and democratic decision making and in constructing an ethical system and change not imposed by authoritarian arguments or the dogmas of religious organizations of a charismatic or traditional nature.'

I would also like to draw attention to the article by Giorgio Ruffolo, 'Il fischio di Algarotti e la sinistra congelata', *MicroMega*, 1 (1992), pp. 119-45. He correctly observes that once the party of the left abandoned its messianic message, it slipped into a political pragmatism lacking in principles. The left is frozen, but it is not dead as long as it can acknowledge the still relevant ideals from which it was born. In a later article, he explains that equality cannot be limited to economic conditions alone, but must include other benefits such as access to culture. He asks for a left wing which would make us 'a little less unequal and a little more happy' ('Sinistra è bello', *L'Unità*, 24 October 1994).

Finally Claus Offe takes his cue from the fall of the Soviet system in order to condemn the 'sudden shift to the right in the political spectrum'. The end of socialism, which so many assume, could arise from a lack of supply and corresponding demand; he concludes that the important challenges which Europe faces 'will ensure that in the future the politically motivated will divide themselves into left and right' (from the summary of a lecture given at the seminar entitled

'Marxism and Liberalism on the Threshold of the Third Millennium', which took place at the Goethe Institute of Turin in November 1992, and published in *L'Unità* on 19 November 1992 under the title 'Dopo l'89 sinistra tra miseria e speranza').

- 3 In the first edition, I wrote that the criterion of liberty 'serves to divide the political world in terms of the means or the method to reach certain ends, rather than the ends in themselves'. I was particularly referring to 'the acceptance or the rejection of the democratic methods' (p. 80). E. Severino has observed ('La libertà è un fiore. L'uguaglianza no', *Corriere della Sera*, 9 June 1994) that 'the means is inevitably subordinated to the ends. If the end is equality, liberty as the means is subordinate to equality. Generally, means are perishable and replaceable. It is not so easy to demonstrate that liberty is a perishable and replaceable means.' The observation is pertinent. The difference between libertarians and authoritarians consists in the different appraisal of the democratic method, which in turn is founded on a different appraisal of liberty as a value.

Chapter 8 The Pole Star

- 1 This expression is to be found in Cesare Beccaria's famous work *Dei delitti e delle pene*, in the section dealing with theft (no. 22), which is defined as 'the crime of that unhappy part of humanity which the right of property (terrible, and perhaps unnecessary right) has reduced to a bare existence'. *Il terribile diritto* (The Terrible Right) is the title of a work by S. Rodotà (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990).
- 2 In an article entitled 'L'utopia capovolta', which appeared in the 'Terza Pagina' section of *La Stampa* 9 June 1989, later published in *L'utopia capovolta* (Turin: La Stampa, 1990), pp. 127-30. There is remarkable similarity between my views and those of Thomas Nagel, who wrote: 'Communism may have been defeated in Europe At this historic moment it is worth remembering that communism owed its existence in part to an ideal of equality which remains appealing however great the crimes and the economic disasters produced in its name. Democratic societies have not found a way to contend with that ideal: it is a problem for the old democracies of the West' (Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 5-6). This statement follows on from the argument: 'The problems which generated the clash between democratic capitalism and

- authoritarian communism have certainly not been resolved by the total collapse of the latter, either in the advanced countries or in the world in general.'
- 3 The question of the universalist task of the left is posed in the same terms by the distinction between inclusion and exclusion. The left tends towards inclusion, and the right towards exclusion. See G. Zincone, 'L'estensione della cittadinanza', in *Le idee della sinistra* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993), pp. 75-84, and *idem*, 'La sindrome americana e la sinistra europea', *MicroMega*, 3 (1993), pp. 156-68.
 - 4 An example of the current, but also recurrent, aversion to the egalitarian ideal can be found in the right wing magazine *L'Italia settimanale*, 23 December 1992, pp. 36-7. R. Gervaso's main argument, in his article 'Abasso l'uguaglianza' (Down with Equality) is precisely the one I was previously referring to that is, giving greater emphasis to that which divides human beings than to that which unites them: 'Whether we like it or not, no one is equal to anyone else, and what is worse, or better according to your point of view, is that no one wants to be equal.'
 - 5 It does not surprise me that a liberal can write with complete conviction and without fear of embarrassment that liberalism is against equality and is in fact quite tolerant of disparities in income and wealth. He points out that liberals have never considered inequality in wealth as an evil in itself or an intolerable social evil, because they consider it to be the collateral effect of a productive economy (S. Holmes, 'Il liberalismo è utopismo', *MicroMega*, 1 (1991), p. 41). Holmes's words in a long dissertation make it clear that there is at least one viewpoint which perceives inequalities as not only inevitable, but also advantageous, and sees any attempt to eliminate them as therefore completely in vain. On the other hand, there are those like Matthew Arnold who wrote: 'A system founded on inequality is against nature, and in the long run, breaks down' (quoted by R. H. Tawney, *Equality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), p. 21).
 - 6 Luigi Einaudi (1874-1961), economist, politician and liberal anti-Fascist. He was the first president of the Italian Republic (1948-55) *translator's note*.
 - 7 L. Einaudi, *Prediche inutili* (Turin: Einaudi, 1957), pp. 218, 237 and 241.
 - 8 Two recent opinions: 'One cannot help smiling at the grand distinction between a proletariat which was supposed to be class conscious and therefore an active agent in history, and a lumpen proletariat

which was only capable of peasant revolts, because, on the one hand, we do not know what has happened to the proletariat, but we do know that an enormous international lumpen proletariat consisting of the entire Third World is banging at the doors of history, and whether we like it or not, it is becoming the conscious or unconscious agent of a great biological force' (U. Eco, 'L'algoritmo della storia', *L'Unità*, 22 September 1992); 'Being on the left means being part of the subterranean metropolis. There is something inside me that recognizes social injustice, the balance between the North and the South in the world. Events in Somalia, Yugoslavia and Amazonia are my concern. Being on the left means that it is not a local problem. It is not a question of good administration. It is a global and ecological problem which concerns the survival of the entire planet. To deal with this problem, the left needs a leadership capable of this kind of action' (E. Benciven ga, 'Sto con gli altri', *L'Unità*, 16 November 1992).

- 9 I have maintained these arguments for some time. If I live on, it will probably not be the last time that I state them, for old men repeat themselves. The reader might be curious to know a couple of examples of the many rejections which prove my obstinacy. Both these staunch opponents of the left/right distinction are from different backgrounds. In an article with the paradoxical title 'La sinistra è a sinistra?' (*A sinistra. Laboratorio per l'alternativa sociale e politica*, 1 (February 1991)), Costanzo Preve compares the confusion among left wingers following the fall of communism to Kafka's character who wakes up to find that he has been transformed into a repugnant insect. He denies that the left/right distinction has value at all, and argues that the distinctions which I insist upon are completely useless. In an interview entitled 'L'idea democratica dopo i sommovimenti dell'Est', in *Nuova Antologia*, 126, fascicle 2177 (January March 1991), Gianni Baget Bozzo replied to C. Torlontano's question on the meaning of the left after the bringing down of the Berlin Wall, that 'it means nothing any more', and added: 'I see that the communists have clutched at Bobbio's words like a lifebelt . . . I believe that "left" is an ambiguous word, and at the very most, an area of political agreement, but not a culture. If Bobbio and Dahrendorf, who can not be considered as left wing, have been adopted as the theoreticians of the left, then this is just another way of saying the left has theoretically ceased to exist.' He concluded that 'right' and 'left' might at the very most be used for 'tactical positions which occasionally occur, such as the Christian Democratic Left, the liberal left, etc.' (p. 7).

A Reply to the Critics (1995)

- 1 Soon after its publication, Mauro Anselmo inquired into its success in *La Stampa*: 'Il filosofo best seller. Perché in libreria Bobbio batte tutti?', 23 March 1991, p. 16.
- 2 A. Soggi, 'Divieto di svolta a destra', *Il Giornale*, 28 February 1994; M. Trachi, 'Niente di nuovo nella lezione del filosofo Norberto Bobbio', *L'Indipendente*, 6 March 1994.
- 3 One exception was M. Ostinelli, 'Destra e sinistra: si può dire ancora', *Cenobio. Rivista di cultura della Svizzera italiana*, 43 (July September 1994), pp. 273-8.
- 4 K. Adam, 'Den Aufruhr denken. Richtungskämpfe sind Nachbutfechte', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 May 1994, and *Internazionale*, 1-33 (25 June 1991), pp. 40-1, under the title 'Caro Bobbio, ti sbagli, non ci sono destra e sinistra'.
- 5 L. Colletti, 'Quale sinistra dopo il Muro', *Corriere della Sera*, 20 March 1994, p. 24.
- 6 F. Tessitore, review of *Left and Right in Nord e Sud*, 4 (1994). Also S. Romano, who wrote: 'Le dernier livre de Norberto Bobbio réhabilita les classifications traditionnelles. Mais la réalité politique est plus nuancée' (*Le Monde*, 9 April 1994, p. 8).
- 7 I will refer to just one book: M. Gauchet, *La Droite et la gauche* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).
- 8 E. Sterpa, 'Destra sinistra hanno senso solo nei cartelli stradali', *Il Giornale*, 6 March 1994.
- 9 A well known song by Giorgio Gaber is entitled 'Destra/sinistra', and it contains contrasts of the following kind: 'Having a bath is right wing / having a shower is left wing / a packet of Marlboro is right wing / but if they're smuggled, they're left wing' (G. Gaber and S. Luporini, *E pensare che c'era il pensiero* (Milan: 1994), p. 48).
- 10 The publisher Adelphi reprinted Léon Bloy's *Le Salut par les Juifs*. See R. Calasso, 'Uno scandalo al sole', *La Repubblica*, 2 August 1994, and the comment by F. Fabiani, 'Sulle macerie della sinistra', with the caption 'Is Adelphi right wing? No, just a little snobbish, say Bernardini and Cases'. See also the response of C. Segre, who started the debate, in 'Per me Bloy è un miserabile', *La Repubblica*, 6 August 1994.
- 11 P. Conti, 'D'Annunzio di sinistra, Pasolini di destra?', *Corriere della Sera*, 8 June 1994.
- 12 E. Piervincenzi, 'Serenata alla sinistra perduta', *Il venerdì della Repubblica*, 27 May 1994, p. 50, which starts with 'Fiorello a

- destra, Jovanotti di sinistra? La piazza del karaoke contro la piazza del Peter Pan progressista?'.
- 13 G. Zincone, 'Tivù di destra e piazza di sinistra?', *Sette*, 21, supplement to *Corriere della Sera*, 26 May 1991, p. 20.
 - 14 A. Usai, 'O di qua o di là. Vacanze all'italiana tra destra e sinistra', *La Repubblica*, 27 June 1994. When this book had just been published, *Panorama* (11 March, pp. 10-11) published an article by R. Rosati on the 'subject for the day', jokingly called 'Sei di destra o di sinistra', which started with the words: 'What is actually unfolding is a great duel between the Left and the Right'. This was followed by Nicola Matteucci's opinion to the contrary. 'Without wanting to offend Bobbio, left and right are not values, but meaningless terms. The real contest is between liberty and equality.' Given that Matteucci has often shown that he considers liberty to be right wing and equality to be left wing, left and right cannot be meaningless terms for him either. The difference between Matteucci and myself is that I believe that liberty can be both left wing and right wing, and that the real challenge between left and right is over whether to attribute greater value to equality or diversity. The same magazine returned to the argument on 4 November, with an article on the 'subject for the day' entitled 'Sei di sinistra, destra o . . . ?', which was presented as 'the hottest argument all summer. While waiting for new labels, the Italians continue to be divided.'
 - 15 In January 1995 the Movimento Sociale Italiano dissolved into its electoral grouping National Alliance, or Alleanza Nazionale, in an attempt to distance itself from its Fascist past: The Italian communist Party changed its name to Democratic Party of the Left, or Partito Democratico della Sinistra in 1989 *translator's note*.
 - 16 A recent and severe criticism, which I will have to return to, came from Ida Magli, who challenges not only my criterion for distinguishing between left and right, but, more generally, the use and abuse of dichotomous thought perceived as 'a form of "primary" and "savage" social organization, as Lévi Strauss made abundantly clear', thus demonstrating the 'obtuse refusal to understand' on the part of those who still divide the world into left and right. See *La bandiera strappata. I totem infranti della politica dalla Resistenza a Tangentopoli e oltre* (Parma: Guanda, 1994), p. 87.
 - 17 Gauchet, *La Droite et la gauche*, p. 84.
 - 18 In Leone de Castris's review of my book, 'La sinistra secondo Bobbio. La sinistra secondo noi', which appeared in *Liberazione*, 2 (19-25 March 1994), he perceived precisely my 'moderatism' as the reason

- for disagreement: 'But the fact is that he [Bobbio] is anxious to demonstrate the prudent and beneficial ideas of gradual progress in the time scale of moderatism.'
- 19 See N. Bobbio, 'Guerra civile?' *Teoria Politica*, 8/1 2 (1992), 297–307, written in response to Claudio Pavone's book, *Una guerra Civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità della Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).
 - 20 G. Vattimo, 'Ermeneutica e democrazia', *MicroMega*, 3 (1994), p. 48. Vattimo's polemic is directed against fundamentalism, or, in other words, against violence perceived 'as the unconditional imposition of an ultimate belief which, as the final cause of metaphysics (and also the God of the philosophers) does not tolerate further questioning of whys and wherefores, suspends all dialogue and imposes silence':
 - 21 I refer to Jolanda Bufalini's interview of the Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater, 'Farei così l'identikit del progressista', *L'Unità*, 23 June 1994, p. 2. The same author, in 'La libertà politica come valore universale', *MicroMega*, 3 (1994), pp. 67–72, rejects equality as crippling, but admits 'mechanisms which are designed to mitigate excesses'. He believes that the fundamental value in current political communities is liberty, perceived as autonomy, but that the freedom to prosper is accompanied by a freedom to wretchedness ('*libertas a coactione*' and '*libertas a miseria*'). He defines the left as (a) the insistence on maximum transparency and participation, (b) the universalization of the political establishment of both formal and substantial liberty (by substantial liberty, he means '*libert as a miseria*'). He draws attention to the consideration 'that humankind is the most authentic group we belong to' (p. 71). But it is precisely our common membership of humankind which I consider to be the basis for the ideal of equality.
 - 22 I refer to the conversation between Isaiah Berlin and Steven Lukes published in Italian as *Tra filosofia e storia delle idee. La società pluralistica e i suoi nemici* (Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 1994), and in particular the section entitled 'La sinistra, oggi', pp. 88–96.
 - 23 I would place in this group D. Cofrancesco, who in reviewing my book, returned to the newly proposed distinction which I described in the first edition (chapter V, section 1). He reiterated that the best criterion for distinguishing left and right is in the attitude to power: the right emphasizes that it is unavoidable, while the left condemns its repressive and dehumanizing potential. I cannot accept Cofrancesco's proposal, as such a perception of the left appears to identify it with

- anarchy, which has traditionally been considered just one of the left wing movements. Words have a historical meaning which cannot be completely ignored when it comes to redefining terms.
- 24 Conversely, the son, Renzo, appears to return to the traditional values of the left every time he questions his father on this subject. By contrast with his father's theory, he speaks of 'justice and solidarity', and argues that the function of the left has been fulfilled, because some of its fundamental ideas have been implemented, such as social equality and the combination of individual rights with social rights that is to say, its egalitarian function.
- 25 The Partito d'Azione took over the mantle of the anti Fascist movement Giustizia e Libertà, and a leading member of the movement, Ferruccio Parri, formed the first government after the Liberation. However, the party's influence was to prove short lived, and, lacking any mass base, it disappeared completely after the 1948 elections
translator's note.
- 26 Rosati, 'Sei di destra o di sinistra?', p. 24. In my first interview after the publication of the book, I talked with Nello Ajello about the changing emotional meaning of the terms, according to the time and the speaker, and said: 'It happens that calling oneself right wing is no longer some thing to be ashamed of. After the Liberation, calling yourself right wing was an act of courage, or even impertinence. Today one might almost say that it is an act of courage to call oneself left wing. The left is challenged, even from within. The surge to the left has been followed by a surge to the right. Up till about ten years ago, the left was considered positive and the right negative: today the opposite is true. The evaluative meaning of the terms has changed, but beyond the changing evaluations, they continue to represent two relatively stable realities' ('Gli estremi nemici', *La Repubblica*, 6 March 1994).
- 27 Just as the assertion that the left today is pursuing the egalitarian ideal in words but not in deeds is not an argument against identifying the left with the desire for equality, as A. Jacono maintains in 'Eguaglianza e differenza, il problema è qui', *Il Manifesto*, 22 May 1994, especially if you then imply that the left is failing to carry out its task by so doing. It is necessary to stress yet again that there is no contradiction between the egalitarian ideal and the recognition of diversity. The difference between the left and the right is in the different criteria used to judge who is equal and who is different.
- 28 D. Zolo, 'La sinistra di Bobbio', *L'Unità*, 19 March 1994. Zolo dealt with the question again in greater depth when he took part in the

launch of the first edition in Florence, promoted by F. Focardi, chairman of the club 'In Formazione'. His speech will shortly be published in the magazine *Eidos*. Having demonstrated its strengths and its weaknesses, he clarified the increasing difficulty in distinguishing between right and left in contemporary society, and concluded that the left should increasingly identify itself with the defence of citizens' rights, particularly non acquired rights and rights of autonomy. In relation to social rights, the historic triumph of the left, he argues that any left winger worthy of the name has the duty to resist any attempt by free marketeers to dismantle the welfare state. See also A. Bolaffi, 'L'uguaglianza ci divide', which had the caption 'Uncomfortable truths and a few doubts', and appeared in *Il Messaggero*, 1 March 1994. After introducing my book, which had just been published, as the opening of the election campaign, and quoting Forattini's opinion that 'right and left are categories used for convenience but useless as ideological instruments', he then appears to be quite unconvinced by my theory, and expresses the doubt that my reflections 'stop precisely where one needs to start'. Alright, but where should we start? It seems as if it should be with the recognition of diversities which Bolaffi thinks are incompatible with the right to equality. The important principle of justice *Suum patibile cuique tribuere* is founded on the need to recognize diversity. The golden rule of justice, according to which like people must be treated in like manner, implies that the unlike must be treated in an unlike manner. The criterion dividing left and right derives from the different manner in which like are distinguished from unlike.

- 29 Most recently in *Sinistra punto zero* (see p. 104, n. 2).
- 30 As G. Pasquino showed in his review of my book in *Reset*, 5 April 1994, pp. 76-7.
- 31 Other reviews which have come to my notice include A. Massarenti, 'Bobbio e lo spazio della sinistra', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 6 March 1994; G. Paolini, 'Insieme a Norberto Bobbio a destra e a sinistra', *Il Gazzettino*, 21 March 1994; R. Virgilio, 'Quale eguaglianza?', *Anemos*, 3 (March April 1994), p. 3; M. Ostinelli, 'Eguaglianza, destra e sinistra', *Corriere del Ticino*, 23 April 1994; B. Vasari, 'Ciò che ci distingue. Destra e sinistra: una contrapposizione che conserva intatta la sua validità', *Lettera ai compagni*, magazine produced by FIAP, April 1994; G. Borelli, 'Bobbio fra destra e sinistra', *Arena*, 13 June 1994; B. Lai, 'Destra e sinistra', *L'Unione Sarda*, 18 May 1994.

- 32 N. Bobbio, *Politica e cultura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1955), p. 202.
- 33 C. Magris, 'Cultura: La destra e la sinistra. Il pessimismo contro l'illuminismo', *Corriere della Sera*, 26 June 1994.

