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Centrist Liberalism as Ideology

The French Revolution . . . is the shadow under which the whole nineteenth century lived.
—GEORGE WATSON (1973, 45)

In 1815, the most important new political reality for Great Britain, France, and the world-system was the fact that, in the spirit of the times, political change had become normal. "With the French Revolution, parliamentary reform became a doctrine as distinct from an expedient" (White, 1973, 73). Furthermore, the locus of sovereignty had shifted in the minds of more and more persons from the monarch or even the legislature to something much more elusive, the "people" (Billington, 1980, 160–166; also 57–71). These were undoubtedly the principal geocultural legacies of the revolutionary-Napoleonic period. Consequently, the fundamental political problem that Great Britain, France, and the world-system had to face in 1815, and from then on, was how to reconcile the demands of those who would insist on implementing the concept of popular sovereignty exercising the normality of change with the desire of the notables, both within each state and in the world-system as a whole, to maintain themselves in power and to ensure their continuing ability to accumulate capital endlessly.

The name we give to these attempts at resolving what prima facie seems a deep and possibly unbridgeable gap of conflicting interests is *ideology*. Ideologies are not simply ways of viewing the world. They are more than mere prejudices and presuppositions. Ideologies are political metastrategies, and as such are required only in a world where political change is considered normal and not aberrant. It was precisely such a world that the capitalist world-economy had become under the cultural upheaval of the revolutionary-Napoleonic period. It was precisely this world that developed the ideologies that served during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as both the handbooks of daily political activity and the credos justifying the mundane compromises of such activity.

Was the French Revolution inspired by liberal ideology, or was it rather the negation of liberal ideology? This was a central theme of the French (and world-wide) debate during the bicentennial of 1989. The question, however, is perhaps not very meaningful, because liberalism as an ideology is itself a consequence of the French Revolution, and not a description of its political culture.[1] The first ideological reaction to the French Revolution's transformation of the geoculture was in fact, however, not liberalism, but conservatism. Burke and de Maistre wrote about the Revolution immediately, in the heat of the events, in books that have remained founts of conservative ideology to this day. Of course, the concepts preceded the terms. The term *conservative* apparently first appeared only in 1818,[2] and the noun *liberal* was probably first used in 1810.[3]

1. See Kaplan (1993) for the story of the French debate in all its gory detail. This book makes clear how inconclusive the debate was, largely because the question cannot be posed in these terms. Or rather, the reason the question was posed in these terms was in order to confront the political issues of the late twentieth century rather than to clarify the historical reality. Posing the question in this way makes it impossible to understand the rise and historical role of liberal ideology. In our previous volume, we have discussed how to understand the French Revolution in terms of the historical evolution of the modern world-system (Wallerstein, 1989, chaps. 1, 2).

2. Bénéton (1988, 6) traces the term to Chateaubriand's journal, *Le Conservateur,* and its use in Great Britain as a party label to an article by J. W. Crocker written in 1830. *Reaction* or *reactionary* seem to have entered the vocabulary even later. Tudesq (1964, 2:1028) argues that these terms became common (*se vulgarisent*) only in 1848, but this doesn't really say anything about the issue of first usage.

3. As an adjective with political connotations, the term seems to have first been used during the years of the Directory in France. Cruz Seoane (1968, 157) attributes first use "probably" to Benjamin Constant in 1796 speaking of "liberal ideas." Brunot and Bruneau (1937, 2:660–61) locates the start of its career in Year VIII (1797–98) as a term opposed to *sectarian* and to *Jacobin*. But he also finds its use as a political verb (*se libéraliser*) in the *Ami des Patriotes* in 1791.

Everyone seems to agree that the adjective became a noun in Cádiz in 1810–11, when it was applied to a group of the Spanish Cortés. A member of the Cortés, the Conde de Toreno, writing some sixty years later, says that the public described the "friends of reform" as *los liberales* (cited by Marichal, 1955, 58). Billington (1980, 554, n. 33) says this led to the creation of a *partido liberal* in 1813 (see also Cruz Seoane, 1968, 158). Marichal finds it ironic that "Spain, the least 'bourgeois' country in western Europe, coined the theme word of the European bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century" (1955, 60). But it is not at all ironic: Spanish liberals in 1810 were in the midst of a tempestuous struggle, and ideological clarity served as a political rallying point for them.

Manning (1976, 9) claims that "the original implications of the term liberal, like the term imperialist, were for the most part derogatory." But this is not at all clear from the description of the Cortés. What he may be thinking of is Lord Castlereagh's speech in Parliament on February 15, 1816, in which he said that the Spanish party, though anti-French militarily, "were politically a French party of the very worst description. They had declared they would not admit Ferdinand's right to the throne, unless he put his seal to the principles which they laid down, and among the rest to that of the sovereignty being in the people. The 'Liberals' were a perfectly Jacobinical party in principle" (*Parl. Deb.,* xxxvii, 602, cited in Halévy, 1949a, 82, n. 3). Ferdinand obviously agreed, since he banned the use of the term in the same year (see Marichal, 1955, 60). It comes into French and British political usage in 1819 (see Bertier de Sauvigny, 1970, 155; Halévy, 1949a, 81, n.3), but it would be another quarter century before the Whigs renamed themselves the Liberal Party.

Conservative ideology has been deeply tied to a vision of the French Revolution as the exemplar of the kind of deliberate political change that disrupts the slow-moving evolution of "natural" social forces. For conservatives, this disruptive process had a long and dubious heritage:

> The French Revolution was but the culmination of the historical process of atomization that reached back to the beginning of such doctrines as nominalism, religious dissent, scientific rationalism, and the destruction of those groups, institutions and intellectual certainties which had been basic in the Middle Ages. (Nisbet, 1952, 168–169)

Conservative ideology was thus "reactionary" in the simple sense that it was a reaction to the coming of what we think of as modernity, and set itself the objective either of reversing the situation entirely (the hard version) or of limiting the damage and holding back as long as possible the changes that were coming (the more sophisticated version). The conservatives believed that, by imposing their "rational," deductive schema on the political process, the partisans of revolution (or reform; it makes little difference in the conservative dogma) create turmoil, undo the wisdom of the ages, and thereby do social harm.

Like all ideologies, conservatism was first and foremost a political program. Conservatives knew full well that they had to hold on to or reconquer state power, that the institutions of the state were the key instrument needed to achieve their goals, When conservative forces returned to power in France in 1815, they baptized this event a "Restoration." But as we shall see, things did not really go back to the status quo ante. Louis XVIII had to concede a "Charter," and when Charles X tried to install a true reaction, he was ousted from power and in his place was put Louis-Philippe, who assumed the much more modern title "King of the French."[4]

The ideal solution for conservatives would have been the total disappearance of movements reflecting liberal impulses. Barring that—it did not happen in 1815 and came to be recognized as utopian after 1848—the next best solution was to persuade legislators of the need for utmost prudence in undertaking any political change of great significance. The continuing political strength of conservatism

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4. The Charter conceded by Louis XVIII was politically crucial to his "restoration." In his declaration at St.-Ouen, the future king announced that he was determined to "adopt a liberal constitution," which he designated as a "charter." Bastid (1953, 163–164) observes that "the term Charter, whose meanings in former times had been multiple and varied, above all brought to mind the memory of communal liberties." He adds that, "for those of liberal bent, it evoked quite naturally the English Magna Carta of 1215." According to Bastid, "Louis XVIII would never have been able to win public acceptance had he not satisfied in some way the aspirations for liberty." When, in 1830, Louis-Philippe in turn also proclaimed a Charter, this time it had to be one that was "assented to" (*consentie*) rather than one that was "bestowed" (*octroyée*) by the king.

would be located in the popular wariness that multiple disillusions with reforms would repeatedly instill in the "sovereign people." On the other hand, conservatism's great weakness has always been that it was essentially a negative doctrine. "[Conservative doctrine] was born in reaction to the French Revolution. . . . [I]t was thus born counterrevolutionary."[5] And counterrevolution has been in general even less popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than revolution; it is a label that has been an albatross for conservatives.

Conservatives felt, nonetheless, that they had an unassailable case. The greatest objection conservatives had to the French Revolution was the belief espoused by its partisans and theoreticians that all was possible and legitimate through politics. Conservatives argued, instead, for an organic conception of society, and the "radical inadequacy of the political as a final account of man."[6] Conservatives supported the state insofar as it incarnated authority, but suspected the central state insofar as it might legislate. The consequence was a penchant for localism, in part because notables had greater strength at local levels and partly because inherently less could be legislated at that level.[7] To be sure, this antipolitical bias was not

5. Bénéton (1988, 9), who continues: "[T]he essence of conservatism remains an antimodernist critique by fidelity to its traditionalist convictions, and its fate is impotence to prevent the progressive elimination of the traditional order. . . . Conservatives appeal to history but in a way history gives them the lie" (p. 10). Gash makes the same point: "[Conservatism] was born of reaction; part of the defensive mechanism traceable to the age of the French Revolution which began in 1789" (1977, 21). As a consequence, it would always be limited in its ability to construct any proactive proposals, and eventually would find itself constrained, as we shall see, to become a variant of reformist liberalism.

6. White (1950, 4). See also Quintin Hogg: "The Conservative does not believe that the power of politics to put things right in this world is unlimited" (*The Case for Conservatism,* 1947, in White, 1950, 31). Similarly, Crick defines conservatism as "above all, a renunciation of possibilities in favor of prescription which was born from the lesson or the fear of the French Revolution" (1955, 363). Finally, in the beginning of the twentieth century, Lord Cecil defined political conservatism as deriving from "natural conservatism," which involved the "distrust of the unknown" and the "preference of that to which we are accustomed because custom had actually assimilated our nature to it" (1912, 14).

White (1950, 1–2) shows how this attitude is profoundly antipolitical and, derivatively, anti-intellectual: "Conservatism is less a political doctrine than a mode of feeling, a way of living. . . . What holds this field full of folk together is obviously not so much a body of intellectually formulated principles as a number of instincts, and the governing instinct is the instinct of enjoyment. . . . The political importance of this instinct of enjoyment, this largely thoughtless devotion to the life of here and now in all its richness and variety, is that it puts politics in its place as something secondary or incidental."

7. Roberts (1958, 334) describes the attitude of the Tories in Great Britain: "'Centralization' was an evil word. It evoked the deepest of Tory prejudices and touched the most sacred of Tory interests. . . . The Tories guarded their local privileges vigilantly and defended with equal regard the right of the clergy to educate the poor, the right of the borough to run its prisons, and the right of the parish to repair its roads. . . . The Conservative's attachment to local government arose from many sources: from traditionalism, from vested interests in local power and patronage, from a loyalty to the Church and from a fear of higher rates. The last motive was of no small magnitude."

universal among those who were "counterrevolutionary"; it was merely dominant. Henry Kissinger makes a very cogent distinction between Burkean conservatism (which is what I have been describing here as conservatism) and the conservatism of Metternich:

> To fight for conservatism in the name of historical forces, to reject the validity of the revolutionary question because of its denial of the temporal aspect of society and the social contract—this was the answer of Burke. To fight the revolution in the name of reason, to deny the validity of the question on epistemological grounds, as contrary to the structure of the universe—this was the answer of Metternich. The difference between these two positions is fundamental. . . .
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> It was this rationalist conception of conservatism which imparted the rigidity to Metternich's policy. . . .
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> It was thus that the Enlightenment retained deep into the nineteenth century its last champion, who judged actions by their "truth," not by their success.[8]

Success. This was the clarion call of the liberals. But success in what? This is the key question we must address. Liberalism as an ideology, as opposed to liberalism as a political philosophy—that is, liberalism as a metastrategy vis-à-vis the demands of popular sovereignty, as opposed to liberalism as a metaphysics of the good society—was not born adult out of the head of Zeus. It was molded by multiple, often contrary, interests. To this day, the term *liberalism* evokes quite varied resonances. There is the classic "confusion" between so-called economic and so-called political liberalism. There is also the liberalism of social behavior, sometimes called libertarianism. This mélange, this "confusion," has served liberal ideology well, enabling it to secure maximal support.

Liberalism started ideological life on the left of the political spectrum, or at least on the center-left. Liberalism defined itself as the opposite of conservatism, on the basis of what might be called a "consciousness of being modern" (Minogue, 1963, 3). Liberalism proclaimed itself universalist.[9] Sure of themselves and of the truth of this new world-view of modernity, liberals sought to propagate their views and intrude the logic of their views within all social institutions, thereby ridding

8. Kissinger (1973, 193, 194, 196). The political rigidity of the Metternich position would not, in the long run, serve well the interests of those who wished to conserve their privileges and power. It would in fact get them into deep trouble and into paradoxical forms of disruptive "radicalism," as we shall see happened to the Bonaldian conservatives during the Restoration in France. The Metternichian version of conservatism was revived only in the last decades of the twentieth century. Once again, it may not be serving well the interests of those who wish to conserve privileges and power.

9. "It is to mankind as a whole that liberals have, without major exception, addressed themselves" (Manning, 1976, 80).

the world of the "irrational" leftovers of the past, To do this, they had to fight conservative ideologues, whom they saw as obsessed with fear of "free men"[10]—men liberated from the false idols of tradition.

Liberals believed, however, that progress, even though it was inevitable, could not be achieved without some human effort, without a political program. Liberal ideology was thus the belief that, in order for history to follow its natural course, it was necessary to engage in conscious, continual, intelligent reformism, in full awareness that "time was the universal friend, which would inevitably bring greater happiness to ever greater numbers" (Schapiro, 1949, 13).

After 1815, liberal ideology presented itself as the opponent of the conservative thrust,[11] and as such was considered by conservatives to be "Jacobinical." But as liberalism gained momentum, support, and authority as an ideology, its left credentials weakened; in some respects it even gained right credentials. But its destiny was to assert that it was located in the center. It had already been conceptualized in this way by Constant[12] in the eighteenth century. It was institutionalized as the centrist position in the nineteenth century. And it was still being celebrated as the "vital center" by Schlesinger (1962) in the mid-twentieth century.

To be sure, the center is merely an abstraction, and a rhetorical device. One can always locate oneself in a central position simply by defining the extremes as one wishes. Liberals are those who decided to do this as their basic political strategy. Faced with the normality of change, liberals would claim a position between the conservatives—that is, the right, who wanted to slow down the pace of normal change as much as possible—and the "democrats" (or radicals or socialists or revolutionaries)—that is, the left, who wanted to speed it up as much as possible. In short, liberals were those who wished to control the pace of change so that it occurred at what they considered to be an optimal speed. But could one really know what is the optimal speed? Yes, said the liberals, and their metastrategy was precisely geared to achieving this end.

Two emblematic figures arose in the development of this metastrategy: Guizot and Bentham. Guizot was a historian, a man of letters, and of course a politician. Bentham was a philosopher and an advocate of concrete legislative action. In the

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10. In Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma,* the revolutionary Ferrante Palla always introduces himself as a "free man."

11. Rémond (1982, 16) dates the beginning of the ongoing gulf in France between the politics of conservatism and of liberalism not in 1789 but in 1815, "the moment when right and left became social realities and givens of the collective psyche."

12. "'Liberal' meant for Constant a 'moderate' and 'central' position between the two extremes of Jacobinism (or 'anarchy') and Monarchism ('the fanatics')" (Marichal, 1956, 293).

end, the eyes of both of them were focused on the state. Guizot himself defined *modernity* as "the substitution in government of intellectual means for material means, of ruse for force, Italian politics for feudal politics" (Guizot, 1846, 299). He said it began with Louis XI, and this may be so. But even if it were so, it became fully institutionalized only in the first half of the nineteenth century, precisely when Guizot was in the government of France.

Guizot sought a way to mute popular sovereignty without returning to the divine right of kings. He found it by claiming the existence of an "irresistible hand" of reason progressing through history. By arguing this more political version of the Smithian "invisible hand," Guizot could establish, as a prior condition for the exercise of the right to popular sovereignty, the possession of "capacity," defined as the "faculty of acting according to reason."[13] Only if suffrage were limited to those having this capacity would it then be possible to have a "scientific policy" and a "rational government." And only such a government would eliminate the triple menace of "the return of arbitrary government, the unloosing of popular passions, and social dissolution" (cited in Rosanvallon 1985, 255–256; see also 156–158). The reference to science is not casual, but fundamental. Manning (1976, 16, 21, 23) develops the links between liberal ideology and Newtonian science. He shows the derivation of what he argues are the three principles of liberal ideology from Newtonian thought: the principle of balance, the principle of spontaneous generation and circulation, and the principle of uniformity. First, the stability of the world "depend[s] upon its constituent parts remaining in balanced relationships." Second, "any attempt to transform the self-moving society into the directed society must necessarily destroy the harmony and balance of its rational order." Third, "we may expect democratic institutions to materialize in human societies whenever they reach the appropriate level of development, just as we may expect any physical phenomenon to materialize given the principle of its sufficient condition for its occurrence."

13. Rosanvallon (1985, 91, 95), who goes on to point out how this viewpoint distinguished Guizot and the other *doctrinaires* from Bonald on the one hand and Rousseau on the other: "[They] sought to introduce into political thought a sociological point of view which integrated as an irreversible and positive fact the achievement of civil equality and the full recognition of the modern individual. This overcame the antagonism between reactionary thought and liberal-democratic thought, consciously removing philosophy from what was considered to be the vicious circle of their confrontation. . . .

"Capacity being a faculty, and not a quality, it has both a personal and an impersonal dimension. It enables one to distinguish those who are endowed with it, the capable, from the rest of the population, without the latter being able to incorporate themselves in it or take total possession of it." The principle of capacity thus allows one to unite stability and social mobility, order and movement. "We must fix the things themselves," wrote Guizot, "and men will find their places around them" (p. 97).

In short, Guizot supported neither Louis XVI (or Charles X) nor Robespierre, for neither was a rational choice. And of the two, Guizot (and his epigones) probably worried about Robespierre and Rousseau more. "What is still generally called 'liberalism' in the beginning of the nineteenth century was an attempt to conceive of politics against Rousseau. Revolutionary terror was the child of political voluntarism (*artificialisme*); everyone agreed with that analysis" (Rosanvallon, 1985, 44).[14]

Guizot's reputation faded, sullied no doubt by his increasingly conservative role in the July Monarchy, and is only today being resuscitated by France's political neoliberals. But Bentham's reputation as Great Britain's quintessential liberal has never ceased to be asserted (and acclaimed).[15] Guizot's triple menace was equally there for the Benthamites, of course, but they were perhaps even more adept at countering it.[16] It was the great French Anglophile and liberal Elie Halévy (1900, iii–iv) who pointed out how Bentham took a starting point actually not too different from that of Rousseau but had it end up not with revolution but with classic liberalism:

> England, like France, had its century of liberalism: the century of the industrial revolution across the Channel was the equivalent of the century of the French Revolution; the utilitarian philosophy of the identity of interests that of the juridical and spiritualist philosophy of the rights of man. The interests of all individuals are identical. Each individual is the best judge of his own interests. Hence we ought to eliminate all artificial barriers which traditional institutions erected between individuals, all social constraints founded upon the presumed need to protect individuals against each other and against themselves. An emancipatory philosophy very different in its inspiration and in its principles but close in many of its practical applications to the sentimental philosophy of J.-J. Rousseau. The philosophy of the rights of man would culminate, on the Continent, in the Revolution of 1848; the philosophy of the identity of interests in England in the same period in the triumph of Manchesterian free trade concepts.

On the one hand, for Bentham, society was the "spontaneous product of the wills of its individual members [and therefore] a free growth in which the State

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14. Rosanvallon adds in a footnote (p. 45, n.2): "'Liberalism' must thus be distinguished radically from a democratic liberalism founded on the concept of human rights."

15. Eric Hobsbawm (1962, 228) calls the Benthamite philosophic radicals "the most self-consciously bourgeois school of British thinkers."

16. Roberts cautions about giving too much direct credit to Bentham. "What indeed was so remarkable about Bentham was not so much his influence over numerous men, but the foresight, the clarity, and the logic with which he expressed those truths which other forces, far stronger than his own ideas, would bring to pass" (1959, 207). But this is generally true of early ideological statements. They are cogent expressions of views that reflect the underlying metastrategy of political forces that are often incapable of articulating clearly, even to themselves, exactly what policy they are following. The early ideologists thus may not be the actual initiators of the metastrategy. It is only later that these ideological statements are utilized as a mode of socialization and of rationalization.

had no part." But at the very same time—and this is crucial for Bentham and liberalism—society was "a creation of the legislator, the offspring of positive law." State action was therefore perfectly legitimate, "provided the State were a democratic State and expressed the will of the greatest number."[17]

Bentham shared Guizot's penchant for scientific policy and rational government. The state was the perfect, neutral instrument of achieving the "greatest good of the greatest number." The state therefore had to be the instrument of reform, even of radical reform, precisely because of the triple menace:

> Bentham and the Benthamites . . . were never complacent about the condition of England. They were "Radical Reformers," and they worked hard at their reforms: by working out detailed blueprints for them; by propaganda, agitation, intrigue, conspiracy; and if truth be told, by encouragement to revolutionary movements up to—but not beyond—the point where resort to physical force would be the next step.[18]

We come here to the heart of the question. Liberalism was never a metastrategy of antistatism, or even of the so-called nightwatchman state. Far from being

17. Halévy (1950; 3:332). The proper use of the state, not too little but not too much, was an evident concern, but the Benthamites did not lack in self-confidence. "[N]one knew, or thought they knew, better that those second-generation *laissez-faire* philosophers, the Benthamite Utilitarians, how to regulate most efficiently and least wastefully" (Evans, 1983, 289).

18. Viner (1949, 361–362). Viner lists the many reforms with which the Benthamites, after the death of Bentham, were associated: fundamental law reform, prison reform, suffrage (including women's suffrage), free trade, reform in colonial government, legalization of trade unions, general education at the public expense, free speech and free press, secret ballot, appointment and promotion of the civil service on merit, reform of local government, repeal of the laws of usury, general registration of titles to property, safety code for merchant shipping, sanitary reform and preventive medicine at public expense, systematic collection of statistics, and free justice for the poor. Bentham also advocated birth control before Malthus. As we can see, this is a mixed list, including elements associated with implementing laissez-faire, protection of civic rights, intrusion of the government in the workplace, and the provision of social rights to individuals. What all of these had in common was the need to adopt legislation and, ultimately, the enforcement of these reforms by the state.

Perkin (1977, 107) emphasizes the importance of the element of enforcement in Benthamite reform: "the injection of the vital x-ingredient, the appointment of administrative officers who were the chief link in the recurring chain of feedback." See also Roberts (1959, 207): "[Bentham] saw more comprehensively than his contemporaries the necessity of an expanded administrative state."

It was Dicey (1914 [1898]) who portrayed Bentham as exclusively the great advocate of laissez-faire. Brebner (1948, 59–60) said this was a myth. Even those, however, like Parris (1960, 34–35), who think that Brebner overreacted merely argue that the "twin themes" of laissez-faire and state intervention were "equally characteristic of the middle years of the nineteenth century" and that "it is not necessary to assume that they were in contradiction to each other." The reason, for Parris, is obvious: "The main principle of Utilitarianism was what its supporters themselves believed and

contrary to laissez-faire, "the liberal state was itself a creation of the self-regulating market" (Polanyi, 1957, 3). Liberalism has always been in the end the ideology of the strong state in the sheep's clothing of individualism; or to be more precise, the ideology of the strong state as the only sure ultimate guarantor of individualism. Of course, if one defines individualism as egoism and reform as altruism, then the two thrusts are indeed incompatible. But if one defines individualism as maximizing the ability of individuals to achieve self-defined ends, and reform as creating the social conditions within which the strong can temper the discontent of the weak and simultaneously take advantage of the reality that the strong find it easier than the weak to realize their wills, then no inherent incompatibility exists. Quite the contrary!

Great Britain and France had been precisely the two states where relatively strong state machineries had already been created between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. But these states did not have a deep popular legitimacy, and the French Revolution had undermined what legitimacy they had. Nineteenth-century liberalism set itself the task of creating (re-creating, significantly increasing) this legitimacy and thereby cementing the strength of these states, internally and within the world-system.

Socialism was the last of the three ideologies to be formulated. Before 1848, one could hardly yet think of it as constituting a distinctive ideology. The reason was primarily that those who began after 1789 to think of themselves to the left of the liberals saw themselves everywhere as the heirs and partisans of the French Revolution, which did not really distinguish them in the first half of the nineteenth century from those who had begun to call themselves "liberals."[19] Even in Great Britain, where the French Revolution was widely denounced and where "liberals" therefore laid claim to a different historical origin, the "radicals" (who were more or less the future "socialists") seemed at first to be merely somewhat more militant liberals.

In fact, what particularly distinguished socialism from liberalism as a political program and therefore as an ideology was the conviction that the achievement of

asserted—the principle of utility. The application of this principle led to considerable extension both of laissez-faire and of state intervention simultaneously." Ruggiero (1959, 99) says substantially the same thing: "Bentham's projects of reform, though demanding considerable activity on the part of the state, do not and are not meant to contradict the principles of individualism, but only give them a necessary complement."

19. Plamenatz points out that, although there were four factions in France among those opposed to the July Monarchy whom one might designate as being on the "left" and who later supported the Revolution of 1848, the term used to refer to them collectively at the time was not *socialists* but *republicans* (1952, 47, and passim).

progress needed not merely a helping hand but a *big* helping hand, without which achieving progress would be a very slow process. The heart of their program, in short, consisted in accelerating the course of history. That is why the word *revolution* appealed to them more than *reform,* which seemed to imply merely patient, if conscientious, political activity and was thought to incarnate primarily a wait-and-see attitude.

In sum, three postures toward modernity and the "normalization" of change had evolved: conservatism, or circumscribe the danger as much as possible; liberalism, or achieve in due time the happiness of mankind as rationally as possible; and socialism/radicalism, or accelerate the drive for progress by struggling hard against the forces that were strongly resisting it. It was in the period 1815–1848 that the terms *conservatism, liberalism,* and *socialism* began to be widely used to designate these three postures.

Each posture, it should be noted, located itself in opposition to something else. For conservatives, the target was the French Revolution. For liberals, it was conservatism (and the ancien régime, whose revival the conservatives were thought to seek). And for socialists, it was liberalism that they were rejecting. It is this fundamentally critical, negative tone in the very definition of the ideologies that explains why there are so many versions of each ideology. Affirmatively, as a positive credo, many varied, even contradictory, propositions were put forward within each camp, each affirming itself as the true meaning of the ideology. The unity of each ideological family lay only in what they were against. This is no minor detail, since it was this negativity that succeeded in holding together the three camps for 150 years or so (at least until 1968).

Since ideologies are in fact political programs to deal with modernity, each one needs a "subject," or a principal political actor. In the terminology of the modern world, this has been referred to as the question of sovereignty. The French Revolution asserted a crystal clear position on this matter: against the sovereignty of the absolute monarch, it had proclaimed the sovereignty of the "people."

This new language of the sovereignty of the people is one of the great achievements of modernity. Even if for a century thereafter there were lingering battles against it, no one has since been able to dethrone this new idol, the "people." But the victory has been hollow. There may have been universal agreement that the people constitute the sovereign, but from the outset there was no agreement about who were the "people." Furthermore, on this delicate question none of the three ideologies has had a clear position, which has not stopped their supporters from refusing to admit the murkiness of their respective stances.

The position that seemingly was least equivocal was that of the liberals. For them, the "people" was the sum of all the "individuals" who are each the ultimate

holder of political, economic, and cultural rights. The individual is the historic "subject" of modernity par excellence. One can credit the liberals at least with having debated extensively this question of who this individual is in whom sovereignty is located.

Conservatives and socialists ought in principle to have been debating this issue as well, since each proposed a "subject" quite different from the individual, but their discussion was far less explicit. If the "subject" is not the individual, who, then, is it? It is a bit difficult to discern. See, for example, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (in White, 1950, 28):

> The nature of man is intricate; the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity; and therefore no simple disposition or direction of power can be suitable either to man's nature, or to the quality of his affairs.

If one didn't know that this was a text attacking French revolutionaries, one might have thought it was intended to denounce absolute monarchs. The matter becomes a bit clearer if we look at something Burke stated almost two decades earlier (1926 [1780], 357): "Individuals pass like shadows; but the commonwealth is fixed and stable."

Bonald's approach was quite different, because he insisted on the crucial role of the Church. His view shares, however, one element common to all the varieties of conservative ideology: the importance they confer on social groups such as the family, guilds (*corporations*), the Church, the traditional "orders"—which become for the conservatives the "subjects" that have the right to act politically. In other words, conservatives gave priority to all those groups that might be considered "traditional" (and thus incarnating continuity) but rejected identifying conservatism with any "totality" as a political actor. What has never in fact been clear in conservative thought is how one can decide which groups incarnate continuity. After all, there have always been arguments around contending royal lineages.

For Bonald (1988 [1802], 87), the great error of Rousseau and Montesquieu had been precisely to "imagine . . . a pure state of nature antecedent to society." Quite the contrary, "the true nature of society . . . is what society, public society, is at present."[20] But this definition was a trap for its author, because it so legitimated the present that it virtually forbade a "restoration." Precise logic, however, has never been the forte or main interest of conservative polemics. Rather, conservatives were concerned to issue warnings about the likely behavior of a majority constituted by adding up individual votes. Their historical subject was a far less active

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20. As Tudesq notes (1964, 235): "The Legitimist opposition to the July Monarchy was an opposition of notables to established authority." Were the Legitimists not thus contradicting Bonald's dictum?

one than that of the liberals. In their eyes, good decisions are taken slowly and rarely, and such decisions have largely already been taken.

If conservatives refused to give priority to the individual as historical subject in favor of small, so-called traditional groups, socialists refused to do so in favor of that large group that is the whole of the people. Analyzing socialist thought in its early period, G. D. H. Cole (1953, 2) remarked:

> The "socialists" were those who, in opposition to the prevailing stress on the claims of the individual, emphasised the social element in human relations and sought to bring the social question to the front in the great debate about the rights of man let loose on the world by the French Revolution and by the accompanying revolution in the economic field.

But if it is difficult to know which individuals constitute the people, and even more difficult to know of what "groups" the people are constituted, the most difficult thing of all is to know how to define the general will of the whole people. How could one know what it is? And to begin with, whose views should we take into account, and how?

In short, what the three ideologies offered us was not a response to the question of who the appropriate historical subject is, but simply three starting points in the quest for who incarnates the sovereignty of the people: the so-called free individual, for the liberals; the so-called traditional groups, for the conservatives; and the entire membership of "society," for the socialists.

The people as "subject" has had as its primary "object" the state. It is within the state that the people exercises its will, that it is sovereign. Since the nineteenth century, however, we have also been told that the people form a "society." How might we reconcile state and society, which form the great intellectual antinomy of modernity?

The most astonishing thing is that when we look at the discourses of the three ideologies in this regard, they all seem to take the side of society against the state. Their arguments are familiar. For staunch liberals, it was crucial to keep the state out of economic life and to reduce its role in general to a minimum: "*Laissez-faire* is the nightwatchman doctrine of state" (Watson, 1973, 68). For conservatives the terrifying aspect of the French Revolution was not only its individualism but also and particularly its statism. The state becomes tyrannical when it questions the role of the intermediate groups that command the primary loyalty of people—the family, the Church, the guilds.[21] And we are familiar with

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21. See the discussion of Bonald's views in Nisbet (1944, 318–319). Nisbet uses *corporation* in the sense of "associations based on occupation or profession."

the famous characterization by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* (1976 [1848], 486):

> [T]he bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.

These negatives views of the state did not stop each of the three ideologies from complaining that this state, which was the object of their critique, was out of their control and said to be in the hands of their ideological opponents. In point of fact, each of the three ideologies turned out to be in great need of the services of the state to promote its own program. Let us not forget that an ideology is first and foremost a political strategy. Socialists have long been under attack for what has been said to be their incoherence in that most of them, despite their antistatist rhetoric, have always striven to increase state activity in the short run.

But were conservatives more seriously antistatist? Were they regularly opposed to achieving reforms by state action? Not at all, in reality. For we must take into account the question of the "decline of values," which conservatives have seen as one of the central consequences of modernity. To reverse the perceived current decadence of society, to restore society to the purer state in which it existed before, they have always needed the state. It has been said of one of the great English conservatives of the 1840s, Sir Robert Peel, that "he believed that a constitution issuing in a strong executive was essential to the anarchic age in which he lived" (Gash, 1951, 52). This comment in fact applies more generally to the practice of conservative politicians.

Note the way in which Halévy (1949, 42–43) explains the evolution of the conservative position vis-à-vis the state during the "Tory reaction" in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

> In 1688 and in the years following, the King regarded himself, and was regarded by public opinion, as the Sovereign. It was always to be feared that he would make his sovereignty absolute, and the independence of his authority enjoyed by all the powers of the State constituted a deliberate limitation of the prerogative, a system of constitutional guarantees against royal despotism. At the opening of the nineteenth century it was the people who in America, in France, in England even, had asserted, or were about to assert, the claim to be supreme; it was therefore against the people that the three powers now maintained their independence. It was no longer the Whigs, it was the Tories who supported institutions whose significance had changed, while their form remained the same. And now the King presided over the

league formed by the three powers for the defence of their autonomy against the new claimant for sovereignty.

The analysis is limpid. Conservatives were always ready to strengthen the state structure to the degree necessary to control popular forces pushing for change. This was in fact implicit in what was stated by Lord Cecil (1912, 192): "[A]s long as State action does not involve what is unjust or oppressive, it cannot be said that the principles of Conservatism are hostile to it."

Well then, did not at least the liberals—champions of individual freedom and of the free market—remain hostile to the state? Not at all! From the outset, liberals were caught in a fundamental contradiction. As defenders of the rights of the individual vis-à-vis the state, they were pushed in the direction of universal suffrage—the only guarantee of a democratic state. But thereupon the state became the principal agent of all reforms intended to liberate the individual from the social constraints inherited from the past. This in turn led liberals to the idea of putting positive law at the service of utilitarian objectives.

Once again, Halévy (1950: 99–100) clearly pointed out the consequences:

> The "utilitarian" philosophy was not solely, nor even perhaps fundamentally, a liberal system; it was at the same time a doctrine of authority which looked to the deliberate and in a sense scientific interference of Government to produce a harmony of interests. As his ideas developed, Bentham, who as a young man had been an advocate of "enlightened despotism," was converted to democracy. But he had reached that position by what we may call a long jump, which carried him at a bound over a number of political doctrines at which he might have been expected to halt—aristocracy, a mixed constitution, the balance of powers, and the doctrine that the statesman's aim should be to free the individual by weakening the authority of the Government and as far as possible dividing its powers. In Bentham's view, when the authority of the state had been reconciled by a universal or at least a very wide suffrage with the interests of the majority there was no further reason to hold it suspect. It became an unmixed blessing.

And thereupon, the conservatives became now the upholders of the genuine liberal tradition: the old system of aristocratic self-government, with its unpaid officials, against a new system of bureaucratic despotism administered by salaried officials.

Is it possible, then, to think that Benthamism was in fact a deviation from liberalism, whose optimal expression is to be found rather in the classical economists, the theoreticians of "laissez-faire"? No, because we shall see that, when the first Factory Acts were passed in Great Britain, all the leading classical economists of the time supported the legislation—a phenomenon spelled out (and approved) by none other than Alfred Marshall (1921, 763–764), the father of neoclassical

economics. Since that time, the great bureaucratic state has never stopped growing, and its expansion has been sponsored by successive liberal governments. When Hobhouse wrote his book on liberalism as an answer to that of Lord Cecil on conservatism, he justified this expansion in this way: "The function of State coercion is to overcome individual coercion, and, of course, coercion exercised by any association of individuals within the State" (1911, 146).

No doubt the justifications that each ideology invoked to explain its somewhat embarrassing statism were different. For socialists, the state was implementing the general will. For conservatives, the state was protecting traditional rights against the general will. For liberals, the state was creating the conditions permitting individual rights to flourish. But in each case, the bottom line was that the state was being strengthened in relation to society, while the rhetoric called for doing exactly the opposite.

All this muddle and intellectual confusion involved in the theme of the proper relation of state and society permits us to understand why we have never been entirely sure how many distinct ideologies came into existence in the nineteenth century. Three? Two? Only one? I have just reviewed the traditional arguments that there were three. Let us now look at how one can reduce the three to two.

It seems clear that in the period from the French Revolution to the revolutions of 1848, the "only clear cleavage" for contemporaries was between those who accepted progress as inevitable and desirable, and thus "were globally favorable" to the French Revolution, and those who favored the Counter-Revolution, which took its stand against this disruption of values, considering it as profoundly wrong (Agulhon, 1992, 7). Thus the political struggle was between liberals and conservatives; those who called themselves radicals or Jacobins or republicans or socialists were regarded as simply a more militant variety of liberals. In *The Country Parson* (*Le Curé de village*), Balzac (1897 [1839], 79) has a bishop exclaim:

> Miracles are called for here among an industrial population, where sedition has spread itself and taken root far and wide; where religious and monarchical doctrines are regarded with a critical spirit; where nothing is respected by a system of analysis derived from Protestantism by the so-called Liberalism of to-day, which is free to take another name tomorrow.

Tudesq reminds us (1964, 125–126) that in 1840 a Legitimist newspaper, *l'Orléanais,* denounced another newspaper, *Le Journal de Loiret,* as a "liberal, Protestant, Saint-Simonian, Lamennaisian paper." This was not completely wild, since, as Simon notes (1956, 330): "[t]he Idea of Progress, in fact, constituted the core and central inspiration of Saint-Simon's entire philosophy of thought" (cf. Manning, 1976, 83–84).

Furthermore, this liberal-socialist alliance has roots in liberal and egalitarian thought of the eighteenth century, in the struggle against absolute monarchy

(see Meyssonier, 1989, 137–156). It continued to be nourished in the nineteenth century by the ever-increasing interest of both ideologies in productivity, which each saw as the basic requirement for a social policy in the modern state. "Both Saint-Simonism and economic liberalism evolved in the direction of what we call today economic rationalisation" (Mason, 1931, 681). With the rise of utilitarianism, it might have seemed that the alliance could become a marriage. Brebner speaks with sympathy of the "collectivist" side of Bentham, concluding (1948, 66), "What were the Fabians but latter-day Benthamites?" And he adds that John Stuart Mill was already in 1830 "what might be called a liberal socialist."

On the other hand, after 1830 a clear distinction began to emerge between liberals and socialists, and after 1848 it became quite deep. At the same time, 1848 marked the beginning of a reconciliation between liberals and conservatives. Hobsbawm (1962, 117) thinks that the great consequence of 1830 was to make mass politics possible by allowing the political triumph in France, England, and especially Belgium (and even partially in Switzerland, Spain, and Portugal) of a "moderate" liberalism, which consequently "split moderates from radicals." Cantimori, analyzing the issue from an Italian perspective, thinks that the question of a divorce was open until 1848. Until then, he notes (1948, 288), "the liberal movement . . . had rejected no path: neither a call for insurrection nor reformist political action." It was only after 1848 that a divorce was consummated between these two tactics.

What is crucial to note is that after 1848 socialists stopped referring to Saint-Simon. The socialist movement began to organize itself around Marxist ideas. The plaint was no longer merely poverty, susceptible to repair by reform, but the dehumanization caused by capitalism, whose solution required overturning it completely (see Kolakowski, 1978, 222).

At this very time, conservatives began to be conscious of the utility of reformism for conservative objectives. Sir Robert Peel, immediately following the Reform Bill of 1832, issued an electoral manifesto, the Tamworth Manifesto, which became celebrated as a doctrinal statement. It was considered by contemporaries as "almost revolutionary," not merely because it announced the acceptance of the Reform Bill as "a final and irrevocable settlement of a great constitutional question," but because this position was announced to the people rather than to Parliament, which caused a great "sensation" at the time (Halévy, 1950, 178).[22]

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22. Halévy quotes an article that appeared in the *Quarterly Review* of April 1835 (vol. 53, p. 265), entitled "Sir Robert Peel's Address": "When before did a Prime Minister think it expedient to announce to the *People,* not only his acceptance of office, but the principles and even the details of the measures which he intended to produce, and to solicit—not from parliament but from the people—that they would so far maintain the prerogative of the king as to give the ministers of his choice not, indeed, an implicit confidence, but a fair trial?" (1950, 178, n. 10).

In the process, conservatives noted their convergence with liberals on the importance of protecting property, even though what interested them about property was primarily the fact that it represented continuity and thus served as the foundation for family life, the Church, and other social solidarities (see Nisbet, 1966, 26). But beyond this practical convergence, there was the concrete menace of real revolution—a fear they shared, as Lord Cecil noted (1912, 64): "For it is an indispensable part of the effective resistance to Jacobinism that there should be moderate reform on conservative lines."

Finally, we should not entirely neglect the third possible reduction of three to two—conservatives and socialists joining hands in opposition to liberals—even if this seems the least likely theoretically. The "conservative" character of Saint-Simonian socialism, its roots in Bonaldian ideas, has often been noted (see Manuel, 1956, 320; Iggers, 1958a, 99). The two camps could come together around their anti-individualist reflex. Equally, a liberal like von Hayek denounced the "socialist" character of the conservative Carlyle's thought. This time, it was the "social" side of conservative thought that was in question. Lord Cecil (1912, 169) did not in fact hesitate to declare this affinity openly:

> It is often assumed that Conservatism and Socialism are directly opposed. But this is not completely true. Modern Conservatism inherits the traditions of Toryism which are favourable to the activities and the authority of the State. Indeed Mr. Herbert Spencer attacked Socialism as being in fact the revival of Toryism.

The consequence of liberal-socialist alliances was the emergence of a sort of socialist liberalism, ending up with two varieties of liberalism. The conservative-socialist alliances, more improbable, were originally merely passing tactics. But one might wonder whether one might not think of the various "totalitarianisms" of the twentieth century as a more lasting form of this alliance, in the sense that they instituted a form of traditionalism that was both populist and social. If so, these totalitarianisms were yet another way in which liberalism remained center stage, as the antithesis of a Manichean drama. Behind this facade of intense opposition to liberalism, one finds as a core component of the demands of all these regimes the same faith in progress via productivity that has been the gospel of the liberals. In this way we might conclude that even socialist conservatism (or conservative socialism) was, in a way, a variant of liberalism—its diabolical form. In which case, would it not be correct to conclude that since 1789 there had only been one true ideology—liberalism—which has displayed its colors in three major versions?

Of course such a statement has to be spelled out in historical terms. If during the period 1789–1848 there was a great ideological struggle between conservatism and liberalism, conservatism failed in the end to achieve a finished form, as we shall see. After 1848, liberalism would achieve cultural hegemony in the world-

system and constitute the fundamental core of the geoculture. In the rest of the long nineteenth century, liberalism dominated the scene without serious opposition. It is true that Marxism tried to constitute a socialist ideology as an independent pole, but it was never entirely able to succeed. The story of the triumph of liberalism in the nineteenth century is the theme of this volume.

Sir Thomas Lawrence, *Prince Metternich.* This photomechanical print reproduces a portrait by the British painter of Klemens Wenzel, Prince von Metternich, the leading figure of the reactionary Holy Alliance during the period 1815–1848. (Courtesy of Prints and Photographs Division, U.S. Library of Congress)