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Min REUCHAMPS

Cahier n°15 - Bipolarity in Alexis de Tocqueville's, Karl Marx's, Friedrich Nietzsche's, and Michael Oakeshott's Political Theories

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INTRODUCTION. 1

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville argues that passions for both equality and liberty constitute the chief attributes of liberal democracy. 2 In the same century, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels –followed by Lenin in the 20th century– contend that history is chiefly characterized by the conflict between those who own the means of productions and those who don't –those who produce. 3 In *Beyond Good and Evil (BGE)* and in *On the Genealogy of Morals (OGM)*, Friedrich Nietzsche describes the whole of history as a permanent bipolarity between the strong –committed to the master morality of good vs. bad– and the weak –committed to the slave morality of good vs. evil. 4 Michael Oakeshott, in *The Politics of Faith and The Politics of Scepticism*, suggests that, since the fifteenth century, modern politics can be characterized by two –logically opposite and yet practically complementary– styles of politics: the politics of faith and the politics of scepticism. 5

Although they disagree on the characterization of the poles themselves, all four philosophers describe politics as a bipolarity: a dynamic between two poles. 6 In this paper, I shall attempt to describe –and then reflect on– the dynamics of bipolarity in these four major works of political theory. Six sets of questions inform the essay. 7 First, was there ever a time in which the political poles identified by the author were either nonexistent or different from the currently predominant or ultimate ones? If so, then why and what were the characteristics of that time? Second, what characterizes the political poles? Are the apparent poles more complicated than what meets the eye upon a first reading? Does the author reveal dimensions, levels, or different incarnations of the poles, or in fact more than two poles? Third, are the characteristics of the poles altered in any way by either political actors, or by way of their confrontation or interaction with one another? If so, how? If not, then why not? Fourth, does the identified bipolarity spontaneously create a political equilibrium or evolve into another, or is intervention required to produce an equilibrium or evolution? Fifth, if the latter, does the author recommend such intervention? Does the author give a normative teaching or assess the identified poles? Sixth, is the bipolarity theory valid? Does it accurately describe politics?

The paper opens with the discussion of the first two sets of questions –i.e. the characterization of politics by Tocqueville, Marx, Nietzsche, and Oakeshott. The second section focuses on the intricate dynamics between the poles and on the mediation occurring between them –i.e. the third and fourth sets of questions. The fifth sets of question –i.e. whether the author gives a descriptive or a normative teaching– informs the third section of the paper. In the conclusion, I attempt to offer a personal view to the final question –i.e. the validity of the bipolarity theory offered by the four philosophers– and try to answer it in the Belgian federal context.

THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE POLES.

According to Tocqueville, men's passions for both equality and liberty chiefly characterize liberal democracy. Yet, he points out the tension between the two poles: where there is liberty, inequality results, indicating inequality among men; by contrast, where equality is enforced, mediocrity rather than excellence results. 8 To figure out why democracy was working more successfully in the United States than in France is the rationale of *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville opens his book

with a dramatic declaration: “among the new objects that attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, none struck my eye more vividly than the equality of conditions.”⁹ Thus, after a nine-month trip in the United States, Tocqueville claims that, although liberty and equality are inherent to democracy, equality –meaning equality of conditions– predominantly characterizes modern democracy. Equality has a momentum since men are driven by a passion for equality. Nevertheless, this predominant passion for equality threatens the other facet of democracy: freedom. Therefore, liberty needs to be maintained (or introduced) in order to counter-act this soft despotism of equality.¹⁰ In addition to this main bipolarity between equality and liberty, Tocqueville observes the successful incorporation, in the United States, “of two perfectly distinct elements that elsewhere have often made war with each other”: the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom (*i.e.* moral satisfaction versus material well being).¹¹

In contrast to Tocqueville whose poles are tendencies, Marx defines his poles in material terms. The whole of history can be characterized by a struggle between, on the one hand, those who own the means of production and, on the other hand, those who don't (and therefore, in order to survive need to work for the former).¹² The concept of *dialectical materialism* is helpful to apprehend Marx's thought. The phrase dialectical materialism was actually coined by Hegel. According to him, history progresses dialectically –*i.e.* by way of internal contradictions: thesis-antithesis-synthesis– and history is shaped by ideology –*i.e.* either religious or political ideas.¹³ Borrowing this phrase from Hegel, in *German Ideology*, Marx gives the concept of dialectical materialism a particular emphasis. Although he agrees on the dialectical progression of history (by way of a clash between classes which leads to the next stage of history through revolutions), Marx denounces the notion that ideas exist independently of the material world. Indeed, material conditions shape ideas and men's conduct. Human beings are products of their environment, especially their material environment.¹⁴ Therefore, Marx argues that “consciousness does not determine life, but rather life determines consciousness.”¹⁵

What's more, the modes of production generate a superstructure which includes religion, morality, the conception of the private and the public, the laws of classical economics,¹⁶ and marriage¹⁷ as well as political institutions. In a circular mechanism, the superstructure promotes and perpetuates the repartition of the modes of production. This material world generates an economic system in which human beings participate either as owners of the means of production or as producers.¹⁸ Marx adds that “the division of labor only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labor appears.”¹⁹ Furthermore, “the greatest division of material and mental labor is the separation of town and country.”²⁰ Therefore, a modification of the material conditions will modify both owners and workers' consciousness. This change will free everyone from their state of alienation.

Similar to Marx, Nietzsche characterizes his poles in terms of two opposite groups. Yet, whereas the former describes the two poles in material terms, the latter identifies moral commitment as fundamental to politics. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche endeavors to expose the true nature of man through the course of history: the will to power, “which is after all the will to life,”²¹ is the essence of man. Indeed, “life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker.”²² Hence, Nietzsche characterizes the whole of history as a permanent bipolarity of the strong vs. the weak: that is to say the world is divided between those who are strong and those who are weak, simply defined by the extent to which in their nature they have the disposition to be master or slave.²³ Moreover, must men not only will but also create values. Therefore, the permanent bipolarity of strong vs. weak generates two competing value-systems, *i.e.* two historical bipolarities. On the one hand, the strong generate a specific moral system: the master morality of good vs. bad. On the other hand, in reaction to the former bipolarity, the weak have developed their own value-system: the slave morality of good vs. evil.

Oakeshott, unlike Nietzsche, focuses not on the individual level but rather on the political level. According to him, ever since the fifteenth century, European modern politics can be characterized by two –logically opposite and yet practically complementary– styles of politics: the politics of faith and the politics of scepticism. Since then, they have coexisted and have manifested themselves in practice (political action and activity), talk (political discourse), and writing (political philosophy).²⁴ This characterization of modern politics as a “continuous scale”²⁵ linking two poles is comprehensive: European politics has moved between these two poles for the last five hundred years.

On the one hand, “in the politics of faith,” explains Oakeshott, “the activity of governing is understood to be in the service of human perfection; perfection itself is understood to be a mundane condition of human circumstances; and the achievement of perfection is understood to depend upon human effort.”²⁶ Thus, an omnipotent government is needed in order to direct the activities of its subjects, “either so that they contribute to the improvements which in turn converge upon perfection, or (in another version) so that they conform to the pattern imposed.”²⁷ On the other hand, the politics of scepticism “has its roots either in the radical belief that human perfection is an illusion, or in the less radical belief that we know too little about the conditions of human perfection for it to be wise to concentrate our energies in a single direction.”²⁸ Therefore, the office of government is to maintain arrangements, the “superficial order,”²⁹ within which every citizen can safely pursue its own end.

To sum up, the four philosophers describe politics in terms of two opposing tendencies (for

Tocqueville), groups (for Marx and for Nietzsche), and dispositions (for Oakeshott). Nonetheless, their historical perspectives differ widely: while Marx and Nietzsche endeavor to characterize the whole of history, Oakeshott studies the last five hundred years, and Tocqueville starts with the American and French Revolutions. Considering the purpose of the paper –describing and reflecting on the four bipolarity theories– it is worth exploring these differences.

Tocqueville does not describe politics in terms of philosophical poles justified by reason but rather in terms of political poles. These poles are not eternal but historical. According to him, the American and French Revolutions have given birth to the liberal democracy which is uniquely characterized by demands for both liberty and equality. In fact, these two major events of the 18th century are the consequence of the democratic revolution which started with the demand for equality in the eleventh century A.D. 30 Foremost, this democratic revolution is not a mere accident: it is inevitable, it is “an accomplished fact.” 31

Oakeshott, like Tocqueville, is concerned only with modern politics and not with the whole of history. Modern politics, for Oakeshott, are “those habits and manners of political conduct and reflection which began to emerge in the fifteenth century and to which our current habits and manners are joined by an unbroken pedigree.” 32 Moreover, Oakeshott focuses on the modern politics of Western Europe, and in particular on British politics because that is where the character of modern politics was born and bred.

Foremost, the poles in both philosophers' political theory intrinsically complement each other. In Tocqueville, equality and liberty are the two facets of the political life; neither liberty nor equality exists on its own. Likewise, in Oakeshott, politics are more or less influenced by both the politics of faith and the politics of scepticism: 33 “they are ... the ‘charges’ of the poles of our political activity ... and our political activity has been at all times ... the resultant of both these pulls and not merely the consequence of one.” 34 Yet, in each theory, one pole seems to take ascendancy over the other: equality over liberty, the politics of faith over the politics of scepticism. This *état de fait* is not without danger. For instance, Tocqueville argues that the passion for equality shall lead to mediocrity and to, even more dangerous, the tyranny of the majority. Oakeshott is very afraid of the predominance of the politics of faith, since if pursued exclusively, it shall ultimately lead to totalitarianism. 35 Hence, practically, between two types of government, Oakeshott prefers the civil association over the enterprise association. Indeed, the former establishes an association that tries to maintain a certain unity while establishing proper distances between its members –i.e. the politics of scepticism. The latter presupposes a single, unifying purpose for all its members –i.e. the politics of faith. 36

The very beginning of the history of man notwithstanding, 37 Marx's theory comprehends the whole of history. History is characterized by the hostile antagonism between classes over the means of production which leads to the next stage by way of revolution. In the economy of Antiquity, masters oppressed slaves through coercion. A few centuries later, in feudal economy, lords oppressed serfs through responsibility. 38 On the ruins of the feudal system, the capitalist economy has generated the clash between employers and employees –also referred to as bourgeois vs. proletarians– mediated by cash. In this capitalist society, everyone –including capitalists themselves– has a defective consciousness because it is a product of the superstructure. 39 Men are historical beings shaped by the economic system in which they participate either as owners of the means of production or not. Moreover, whether any individual is among the owners or the workers is simply a matter of luck. For that reason, the economy should neither reward nor punish someone for attributes which he inherited by accident. Above all, both the proletarians and bourgeois are victims of the capitalist system: everyone is alienated. 40 This unbearable situation will inevitably lead to the revolution of the proletariat which will establish a communist regime. 41

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche scrutinizes the whole of history to capture and convey the human soul as well as the morality it has generated. To understand the value of morality, he undertakes to dig into the origin of our morality, of our moral prejudices; that is his genealogy. 42 Doing so, he offers a poetical history rather than a linear chronology of events. 43 Nietzsche claims that he has a “historical spirit,” 44 which is suprahistorical and transcultural. As a physician of culture, he offers a diagnosis of culture for which he shall recommend a prescription –to be discussed below. In fact, Nietzsche writes a polemic, as indicated by the subtitle of his work: a polemic against “the ever spreading morality of pity,” 45 which has come to prevail. Indeed, the struggle between the two competing moral systems has animated the last two thousand years of history. Since the origin of history, man has strived “to grow, spread, seize, become predominant” 46 for man is living and life “simply is will to power.” 47 This nature of man and the differences in value, physical strength, and the strength of the soul explain the main characteristic of aristocratic society: a hierarchy led by a few noble men. 48 These noble martial aristocrats (the strong) created a “pathos of distance” 49 with the rest of mankind, i.e. the weak, which they despised. Mere indifference characterized the attitude of the noble men towards the weak. This ruling group defined itself as the “good,” defining the common people by default –or better, by indifference– as the “bad;” thus appeared the master morality: the opposition between good and bad, or between noble and contemptible. 50 Yet, Nietzsche adds immediately “in all the higher and more mixed cultures there also appear attempts at mediation between these two moralities, and yet more often the interpenetration and mutual misunderstanding of both, and at times they occur directly alongside each other –even in the same human being, within a single soul.” 51

Both Marx and Nietzsche characterize the whole of history and describe how their bipolarity has evolved throughout the centuries. According to Marx, man's life changed dramatically when the notion of private property was introduced. Since then, history has been a succession of clashes between classes, punctuated from time to time by a revolution. For Nietzsche, although noble martial aristocrats had dominated the world for several centuries, after a two-thousand year struggle, the weak and their morality finally prevailed. Furthermore, both philosophers are very interested in understanding the true nature of man as well as how to liberate him. Chiefly, unlike Tocqueville and Oakeshott, Marx and Nietzsche do not contend that the poles intrinsically complement each other and that there should be an equilibrium between them. Rather, they maintain that one has triumphed –the weak in Nietzsche (even though the bipolarity between the strong and the weak is permanent)– or that one will eventually triumph –the proletariat in Marx. This victory will lead to the abolition of the poles, *tout simplement*.

THE MEDIATION BETWEEN THE POLES.

In his work, Tocqueville “wishes to expose to broad daylight the perils that equality brings to human independence” because he “firmly believe[s] that these perils are the most formidable as well as the least foreseen of all those that the future holds.”⁵² But he does not “believe them insurmountable.”⁵² As he proceeds, the author of *Democracy in America* describes the features of American democracy that oppose (*i.e.* mediate) the great force of equality. These features are the structure of the American government (for instance, the division of power) and the democratic institutions (the federal form, the township institutions, and the judicial power –especially the lawyers and the juries).⁵³ These measures –which Tocqueville found in the United States– are needed to preserve freedom; otherwise people become passive and, therefore, eventually lose their liberty.

Despite these measures, Tocqueville strongly fears a more hidden as well as greater danger: the tyranny of the majority.⁵⁴ Indeed, he observes that his contemporaries love equality so much that they are ready to sacrifice liberty: “they want equality in freedom, and if they cannot get it, they still want it in slavery.”⁵⁵ Yet, in the United States, in addition to the democratic institutions, associations and the press mitigate the danger of equality. Before American independence, “township government, that fertile seed of free institutions, had already entered profoundly” the habits of the inhabitants of the New World.⁵⁶ Both juries and lawyers contribute, via a process of interaction, to educate the citizens about their rights and the laws.⁵⁷ Moreover, the legal world emphasizes forms and order which demarcate boundaries and thus, protect freedom. Above all, Tocqueville forcefully maintains that associations (from the smallest club to the main political parties) combat the threat posed by the excessive passion for equality. The art of association is the “mother science.”⁵⁸ The associations acting as intermediary powers compensate for the absence of an aristocracy.⁵⁹ Tocqueville notes that, in the heart of democratic America, lawyers show an aristocratic inclination,⁶⁰ that parties have an aristocratic foundation,⁶¹ and that “when plain citizens associate, they can constitute very opulent, very strong beings –in a word, aristocratic persons.”⁶² Furthermore, they prepare citizens to participate politically and keep them aware of the *res publica*, thereby keeping freedom alive. Last but not least, the press not only informs people but also persuades and fosters debates: “the press is the democratic instrument of freedom par excellence,” which fights the tyranny of public opinion.⁶³ All these features that Tocqueville discovered while visiting America enervate the tension between the two attributes of democracy.

Like Tocqueville, Marx encourages the art of association. However, unlike Tocqueville, he argues for a specific association, that is the association of the proletarians. To foster this association, communists play a crucial role. Communists, who were once bourgeois,⁶⁴ are needed to instruct and educate proletarians about why they are miserable and how the system wants to blind them. Thus, communists raise the consciousness of the workers. They encourage the proletarians to seize the means of production, to take over the private institutions; this will eventually lead to communism.⁶⁵

Marx's revolutionary idealism and advocacy for the use of violence notwithstanding, American lawyers for Tocqueville and communists for Marx share a common function of raising awareness among their fellow countrymen (for the former) and among the proletarians (for the latter). In other words, they play a major role in the mediation of their respective bipolarities. What's more, both lawyers and communists show an aristocratic inclination. According to Tocqueville, the lawyers “form a sort of privileged class among persons of intelligence” and “[a]dd to this that they naturally form a body.” Tocqueville concludes: “hidden at the bottom of the souls of lawyers one therefore finds a part of the tastes and habits of aristocracy.”⁶⁶ If the notion of aristocratic inclination is not understood *sensu stricto* but rather as an inclination to pursue an ideal, communists appear to be aristocratic by their function of raising the consciousness of the proletarians.

Nonetheless, the intervention of the communists in the class struggle seems to be in tension with Marx's characterization of history. On the one hand, Marx argues that communists are needed to raise the consciousness of the workers. But, on the other hand, he presents history as spontaneous. One stage of history follows the previous stage without deliberate action since each stage generates internal contradictions that the particular economic conditions of that stage cannot address. Therefore, Marx contends that these contradictions lead to the collapse of the stage. A new economy

is founded upon the ruins of the previous. For instance, in the capitalist economy, the production is so efficient that economy produces more than what the consumers can buy (for the wages are not high enough to pay for the goods and moreover, workers do not have enough time). Hence, capitalists try to deal with this situation by, for example, offering credits, *i.e.* they try to generate demand for the goods being produced. Finally, since supply exceeds demand, workers are laid off. It is followed by a downsizing of the economy which has consequences also for the members of the bourgeoisie who, after having lost their jobs, become part of the proletariat. This increasingly difficult situation encourages the proletariat to mobilize and eventually engage in a revolution. In short, material forces spontaneously move history.

In *The State and Revolution*, Lenin gives more details about the intervention: "by educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat which is capable of assuming power and leading the whole people to socialism, of directing and organizing the new order, of being the teacher, guide and leader of all the toiling and exploited in the task of building up their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie." 67 Thus, communists need to guide the proletariat to the revolution. Foremost, Lenin considers a violent revolution inevitable: "the substitution of the proletariat for the bourgeois state is impossible without a violent revolution." 68 The state is the organ of domination *par excellence*. The inherent contradictions of the capitalist system need to be controlled and suppressed: the state is the result and the function of these inherent contradictions.

Marx's communists share a common feature with Nietzsche's priestly aristocrats: both groups were once part of the group that they are now fighting. Whereas communists were once bourgeois, priestly aristocrats separated themselves from the martial noble aristocrats. According to Nietzsche, the Jews are in fact the priestly aristocrats. As any human beings, the Jews strived to create their own values and will themselves to power. To do so, nonetheless, they used their canniness (their intellect) instead of physical strength. 69 Out of resentment (Jews lacked vigor and physical strength), they dared "to invert the aristocratic value-equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God) ..., saying 'the wretched alone are the good, the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good ... and you, the powerful and noble, are on the contrary the evil...' ... the Jews there beg[an] the slave revolt in morality." 70

According to Nietzsche, in order to get this inversion of morality accepted, the Jews cunningly utilized one of them, Jesus of Nazareth. By the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Jews wanted to appear senseless and cruel. Therefore, their attitude provoked, as a reaction, a tide of compassion; however, generating such an expression of resentment was actually the *raison d'être* of Jesus Christ's crucifixion by the Jews in order to promote their –slave– morality and to stress the evilness of the master morality. 71 Following this cunning plot (or "the secret black art of truly grand politics of revenge" 72), the oppressed masses, explains Nietzsche, responded to Christianity because they were seeking meaning for life which was offered by the slave mentality embodied by Jesus Christ. Thus, human beings transformed from being noble men, characterized by power and willingness, to becoming *bonhommes*, characterized by good nature and little stupidity. 73 Finally, after two millennia of rivalry, the slave morality has triumphed over the master morality. 74

Unlike Marx and Nietzsche who present their bipolarities in terms of two groups of human beings, Oakeshott offers a bipolarity between two dispositions, two styles of politics. The politics of faith and the politics of scepticism are "the 'charges' of the poles of our political activity, each exerting a pull which makes itself felt over the whole range of movement... they provide at once the limits and the impetus of our political movement." 75 Yet, Oakeshott contends that we need to "hold back from the extremes;" 76 mediation is needed. The Character of the Trimmer that Oakeshott borrows from Halifax endeavors to combine the two styles of politics; that is to keep the boat afloat. The Character of the Trimmer is a doctrine of moderation. So, the opposition between the two politics "has been mediated in practice." 77

One could argue that *moeurs*, as described by Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*, play a similar role of mediation. Indeed, *moeurs* or habits of the heart fashion the character of Americans and transform them into citizens. In this regard, Tocqueville emphasizes the importance of the way that religion shapes mores chiefly through the family: "religion directs mores, and it is in regulating the family that it works to regulate the state," especially, "it is woman who makes mores." 78 Religion inculcates habits of restraint which complement democracy: "these habits of restraint are to be found in political society and singularly favor the tranquility of the people as well as the longevity of the institutions it has given itself." 79 Indeed, in the United States, "the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom, which elsewhere "always move in contrary directions," are united intimately with one another: they reigned together on the same soil." 80 The complete separation of church and state enables this peaceful union and above all, this separation ensures the stability of democracy. 81

DESCRIPTIVE OR NORMATIVE TEACHING?

The reading of Oakeshott's essays shows a tension in his view of the function of political philosophy. On the one hand, political philosophy must be understood as "an explanatory, not a practical, activity." 82 Philosophy clarifies the world in which we live or the assumptions that people make when they undertake various activities. In other words, the activity of philosophy gives the key to

understanding human activities in regard to their own pursuits, whereas the task of the government is to keep the ship afloat. The philosopher cannot contribute to politics as such. Thus, strictly speaking, philosophy is not relevant for political practice: the philosopher ought to be disengaged and not engaged in the political round. On the other hand, it seems that he admits that the very activity of clarification does, at the end, shape our moral values. In *The Politics of Faith and The Politics of Scepticism*, he exhorts –and helps– us to undertake the enterprise of clarifying the poles of political activities. This enterprise can give us eventually some kind of illumination that can potentially guide us in the political arena. Indeed, according to Oakeshott, once one understands the character of the two poles, one will see the danger of pursuing one to the exclusion of the other. Therefore, in the contemporary world, since the politics of faith is dominant, it is our political role to emphasize the importance of the politics of scepticism. 83

Similarly to the first interpretation of Oakeshott, Tocqueville does not present a blueprint. Rather, as a student of the science of politics, he asks the question of the nature of politics, its features, and its function. His answers are by no means theoretical, let alone ideological. However, he offers practical (this is what politics is all about) prescriptive recommendations. Tocqueville, inspired by the American experience, contends that *moeurs* or habits of the heart which shape democratic institutions as well as civil society can best combat the threat of the tyranny of the majority –i.e. the negation of freedom. In a realm of politics divided between demands of equality and demands of liberty, he argues for a moderate attitude since the poles are the two fundamental and inherent facets of democracy. Oakeshott recommends the principle of moderation (the Character of the Trimmer), too –this is the second interpretation of Oakeshott.

Nietzsche, as a physician of culture, starts with a diagnosis of the nature of man. As mentioned above, he sees a permanent bipolarity between the strong and the weak. Both groups developed their own distinct moral values. Nonetheless, the priestly aristocrats have succeeded –after a two-thousand-year struggle– to invert the aristocratic equation. Upon the slave morality of good vs. evil, Christianity has developed and brought the ascetic ideal. 84 Christianity posits God and what is true is God; it is “the highest court of appeal.” 85 However, this preoccupation with truth –a will to truth born in religion– has given birth to science which has paradoxically led to the death of God. Indeed, science has given other explanations for the world and our existence, and thereby science killed the ascetic ideal. The death of God has left man in a state of nihilism, a crisis of meaning 86 in which man can only will nothingness. 87 Therefore, in such an abyss, such a state of nausea, Nietzsche encourages us to create our own values if we want to continue to live; science, on the contrary, does not create values. 88 Nonetheless, the creation of values presupposes nihilism, i.e. destroying what one creates. Thus, living a Nietzschean life is embracing the willingness to live through an eternal recreation of what one creates. This is the opposite of a life of “promises keeping” –which is a creation of Christianity. 89 Nietzsche urges man to tell a “genuine, resolute, ‘honest’ lie;” 90 that is a lie that acknowledges the death of God and that there is no true morality. Above all, only strong men, who are very few, have the ability to lead such a Nietzschean life.

Nietzsche offers the reader a descriptive teaching –his genealogy of morals– as well as a normative teaching –the Nietzschean value– creating life in order to overcome the state nausea caused by the death of God. Likewise, Marx presents both a description and a prescription. The whole of history is characterized by class conflicts. The current stage of history sees the conflict between the bourgeois and the proletarians. Both groups suffer under capitalism; only communism will fulfill human beings. Indeed, as “species beings,” human beings thrive only by way of interaction with one another. This interaction truly satisfies us. 91 Communism as a system will fulfill us because we will realize our desire for association through work with each other –and we will become socialized men. 92 To establish such a system, according to Marx, there is only one solution: the communistic revolution. Therefore, Marx and Engels conclude the Manifesto of the Communist Party with: “Let the ruling class tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!” 93

Yet, Marx remains vague about what communism will be like since consciousness is a product of historical change and cannot anticipate the future. Moreover, he is not willing to provide us with an utopia –he does not want to be an utopian. However, in a short passage of *The German Ideology*, Marx gives a glimpse of what communist society would be: “nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.” 94

Lenin gives more details about the communist society. He distinguishes the first phase from the higher phase –using Marx's terms. During the first years (although he does not mention how long this phase is going to last), society still bears the marks of the old society, but above all “the means of production are no longer the private property of individuals. The means of production belong to the whole of society. Every member of society, performing a certain part of socially-necessary labor, receives a certificate from society to the effect that he has done such and such an amount of work. According to this certificate, he receives from the public warehouses ... a corresponding quantity of products. Deducting that proportion of labor which goes to the public fund, every worker, therefore, receives from society as much as he has given it.” 95 Thus, a period of transition is needed in order

to enable man's consciousness to be reconstituted by the new environment –set by the revolution of the proletariat. 96 Eventually, “the economic basis for the complete withering away of the state is the high stage of development of communism in which the antithesis between mental and physical labor disappears, that is to say, when one of the principal sources of modern social inequality ... disappears.” 97 Therefore, the communist society will be a classless society where everyone will produce according to their abilities and receive according to their needs. Foremost, as species beings, men will be entirely fulfilled 98 for men will be acting together.

CONCLUSIONS.

In this paper, I have endeavored to describe the characterization of politics by four major philosophers. Although Tocqueville, Marx, Nietzsche, and Oakeshott understand politics in terms of a bipolarity, they largely diverge on the characterization of the poles. Whereas Tocqueville argues that passions for both equality and liberty constitute the chief attributes of liberal democracy, Marx describes the whole of history as a conflict between two classes –the owners of the means of production and the workers– which is culminating in a clash between the bourgeois and the proletarians. Nietzsche contends that history is chiefly characterized by a permanent bipolarity between the strong –committed to the master morality of good vs. bad– and the weak –committed to the slave morality of good vs. evil. Oakeshott suggests that, since the fifteenth century, European modern politics have evolved between two poles: the politics of faith and the politics of scepticism.

What's more, the bipolarity theories are in fact more complicated than what meets the eye upon a first reading and, on the basis of their respective descriptive teaching, the four philosophers suggest a normative teaching. While in Tocqueville and Oakeshott the poles intrinsically complement each other and, thus, need to be mediated in order to avoid the ascendance of one over the other, in Marx and in Nietzsche the tension between the poles leads eventually to the triumph of one of them. Moreover, Nietzsche emphasizes the role of individuals in history. It is to each one of us to go through the state of nausea and upon this background of nihilism to create one's own values. Marx predicts that communists will educate the proletarians and lead them to the communistic revolution but in the broader context depicted by his historical materialism. Tocqueville believes that both institutions and men mitigate the predominant passion for equality and therefore preserve freedom. Oakeshott does not recommend an intervention *per se*, but rather he argues for moderation between the two poles of politics.

To conclude tentatively, one last question needs to be addressed: the validity question. I consider Oakeshott's bipolarity between the politics of faith and the politics of scepticism to comprehend Tocqueville's, Marx's, and Nietzsche's characterization of politics. Although these three bipolarity theories are valid and show, as described throughout the paper, an internal coherence, they can aptly be read in the framework proposed by Oakeshott.

Tocqueville is a skeptic. 99 He is very much afraid of the passion for equality, which reflects the politics of faith and may lead to the abolition of freedom. In a passage of *Democracy in America*, cited above, 100 he observes that his contemporaries love equality so much that they are ready to sacrifice liberty even though it leads to slavery. In order to avoid such an extreme, Tocqueville advocates the principle of moderation, especially at the local level. 101 In fact, the structure of the American government and the democratic institutions (the federal form, the township institutions, and the judicial power –especially the lawyers and the juries) as well as associations mitigate the faith-driven passion for equality.

In contrast, Marx, Engels, and Lenin propose in their political philosophy a version of the politics of faith. Since the material conditions shape us, we should strive to change our material environment. This can only be done through a violent revolution which would establish first the dictatorship of the proletariat and then a communist regime. This is the only solution to man's history which is chiefly characterized by a conflict between two classes. Since politics equal conflicts, they argue that we should go beyond politics and thereby conflicts would vanish. 102 To do so, as communists themselves, they offer man a blue print with both theoretical and practical teachings. Foremost, they encourage man to undertake an enterprise association which pursues a single, unifying purpose for all its members. This is a reflection of the politics of faith.

Nietzsche's philosophy is not political *per se*. Yet, he maintains that justice as well as all the social conventions that currently prevail is a creation of the weak in order to protect them against the strong. In contrast, the strong do not need any form of government. On this regard, Nietzsche's nihilism appears to be an extreme form of the politics of scepticism. To overcome this state of nausea, Nietzsche offers an individual solution by the endless (re)creation of one's own values. Here is an important interrogation raised by reading Nietzsche whether it is humanely possible to live the way he asks us to live.

Above all, can Oakeshott's bipolarity theory be helpful to capture today's politics in general and Belgian politics in particular? At first sight, in the Belgian political turmoil, the bipolarity appears to characterize chiefly the political dynamics. Moreover, it seems that both Flemish and Francophone political parties need to mediate the tension between nationalist discourses advocating the division of

the country –politics of faith– and consensual discourses of living together in a federal system –politics of scepticism. However, a closer look at the Belgian federal dynamics disrupts this dichotomous vision of Belgium. Indeed, most of the political actors show dispositions for both the politics of faith and the politics of scepticism. First of all, the main bipolarity –even though it should be nuanced– of Belgium is to be found in the linguistic cleavage between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking Belgians. On this basis, one cannot argue that one community comes closer to either the politics of faith or the politics of scepticism. In both communities, which do not form homogenous entities, one can find marks of both politics. For instance, among the Francophones, the citizens who support the return of the unitary state –as it was before 1970– seemed to stand on the side of the politics of faith. On the other hand, those who argue for a federal state which accommodates the Belgian diversity stand on the side of the politics of scepticism.

Furthermore, if taken as a whole, the Belgian federal dynamics seem to fit in the overarching framework proposed by Oakeshott. It evolves between two poles or two main tensions which could be characterized by Oakeshott's politics of faith and politics of skepticism. The former seeks perfection or translated in Belgian terms there is a single best solution for the future of Belgium, be it for some the independence of Flanders, for others the return of the unitary state. By contrast, the latter rejects any search of perfection but rather favors multiple ends and it is the role of government to maintain a political structure which enables this diversity of goals. In the Belgian context, to some extent, this position can take the form of a federal system which would let its components to follow their own will– however, it appears quickly here that a boundary should be set up somewhere otherwise the diversity might break down the unity of the whole.

Finally, a pluralistic view of the society or of the political actors could help apprehend the complexity of social and political relationships. If a comprehensive bipolarity theory can be powerful since it posits all political activity occurs in a dynamic between two poles, real politics reminds us everyday that it is no so linear. It is the task of the political scientist to endeavor to apprehend this complex multilinearity or, perhaps better, multipolarity.

Notes de base de page numériques:

1 This paper was initially prepared for presentation in the "Seminar in Political Theory (PO691)", Pr. Judith A. Swanson, Boston University, Spring 2006. The author was at the time a Fellow of the Belgian American Educational Foundation (B.A.E.F.) and a Fellow of the Francqui Foundation.

2 Tocqueville Alexis (de) (1835 and 1840), *Democracy in America*, translated and edited by Harvey C. and Winthrop Delba, Chicago, University of Chicago press, 2000.

3 See, Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, New York and London, Norton and Company, 1972; Christman Henry M. (ed.), *Essential Works of Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?" and Other Writings*, New York, Dover Publications, 1987.

4 Nietzsche Friedrich (1886), *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Kaufmann Walter, New York, Vintage Books, 1966; Nietzsche Friedrich (1887), *On the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Kaufmann Walter, New York, Vintage Books, 1967.

5 Oakeshott Michael, *The Politics of Faith and The Politics of Scepticism*, edited by Fuller Timothy, New Haven, London, Yale University Press, 1996.

6 In this essay, Marx, Engels, and Lenin are considered as one philosopher.

7 These sets of questions were suggested by Pr. Judith A. Swanson.

8 Thus, there is also a tension between democracy and aristocracy (understood as opposed sets of values, ways of life, rather than as forms of government or for the latter as class *per se*).

9 Tocqueville Alexis (de), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

10 Thus, Tocqueville declares that "I would like, I think, have loved freedom in all times; but I feel myself inclined to adore it in the time we are in" (*Ibid.*, p. 666) and he continues "equality suggests to men several penchants very dangerous for freedom to which the legislator ought always to keep his eye open" (*Ibid.*, p. 669).

11 Tocqueville Alexis (de), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

12 This class struggle is complemented by other bipolarities or dichotomies: for instance, between town and country, and especially the division of labor between town and country. Another bipolarity is the division between material and mental labor. These different forms of division of labor are just so many different forms of ownership and follow class relations; See, Marx Karl, "The German Ideology," Part I, in Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 146-200.

13 In *Philosophy of Rights and Reason and History*, Hegel maintains that ideas shape material world through the agency of man's Reason.

14 See, Marx Karl, "The German Ideology," in Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 148-151.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

16 Such as the notions of free market, demand and supply, wages, and profits. These concepts further the capitalist society.

17 Marriage promotes and perpetuates a division of labor that serves the capitalist system.

18 By means of production, Marx means anything from the first tools (as a hammer) to plants and

factories. Means of productions are called in Marxian language instruments or forces of production. Those forces of production create modes of production.

19 Marx Karl, "The German Ideology," in Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 159.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

21 Nietzsche Friedrich, *BGE*, 259, p. 203.

22 *Ibid.* (emphasis in the original).

23 See, e.g., Nietzsche Friedrich, *OGM*, "Good and Evil, Good and Bad," pp. 24-56; Nietzsche Friedrich, *BGE*, 257-260, pp. 201-208.

24 Oakeshott Michael, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35. Timothy Fuller demystifies Oakeshott's superficial order: he describes it as "a formal arrangement overlaying a deeper, more comprehensive array of human relations which lives and moves and has its being apart from any governmental design, and which no government will ever fully comprehend and subdue. The principal task of the superficial order is to maintain the deeper order and to 'improve' it in the sense of adjusting its explicit arrangements as changing circumstances seem to require," Oakeshott Michael, *op. cit.*, pp. xix-xx.

30 Tocqueville Alexis (de), *op. cit.*, pp. 3-6.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 13

32 Oakeshott Michael, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

33 In this respect, according to Oakeshott, Locke is "the most ambiguous of all political writers of modern times; a political sceptic who inadvertently imposed the idiom of faith upon the sceptical understanding of government" (*Ibid.*, p. 83).

34 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

35 "The unsought (but nevertheless unavoidable) accompaniments of this style of government [politics of faith]," Oakeshott observes, "have often been pointed out. Where 'perfection' is identified with 'security' the common condition of the subject will be one of slavery [...]" (*Ibid.*, p. 100).

36 In the editor's introduction Timothy Fuller refers to Oakeshott's essay *On Human Conduct* where Michael Oakeshott explores the civil association and the enterprise association. Whereas the latter "presupposes a single, unifying purpose", the former, as a colony of porcupines, is based "on civility and procedure rather than on a uniting purpose to which only some will ever willingly grant approval", Fuller Timothy in Oakeshott Michael, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

37 In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Engels describes how communal was life at the very beginning of history, see Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 734-759.

38 See, Marx Karl, "The German Ideology," in Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 151-155.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 148-151.

40 Nonetheless, according to Engels and Marx, the situation of the proletarians is more difficult: "not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the over-looker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself" (Engels Friedrich and Mark Karl, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 479).

41 The third section discusses further the communist regime.

42 Nietzsche Friedrich, *OGM*, "Preface," pp. 15-23.

43 However, he goes chronologically from the ancient Greeks to modern science.

44 Nietzsche Friedrich, *OGM*, "Good and Evil, Good and Bad," p. 25.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

46 Nietzsche Friedrich, *BGE*, 259, p. 203.

47 *Ibid.*, 259, p. 203 (emphasis in the original).

48 *Ibid.*, 257, pp. 201-202.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Ibid.*, 260, p. 204.

51 *Ibid.*, 260, p. 204 (emphasis in the original).

52 Tocqueville Alexis (de), *op. cit.*, p. 672.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 274.

54 In democratic republics, Tocqueville explains, tyranny proceeds in this way: the master [the majority] says: "you are free no to think as I do; your life, your goods, everything remains to you; but

from this day on, you are a stranger among us. You shall keep your privileges in the city, but they will become useless to you; for if you crave the vote of your fellow citizens, they will not grant it to you, and if you demand only their esteem, they will still pretend to refuse it to you. You shall remain among men, but you shall lose your rights of humanity" (*ibid.*, pp. 244-245; see also, *ibid.*, pp. 235-249).

55 *Ibid.*, p. 482. He is much afraid that "un ancien régime remplace un ancien régime" (Tocqueville Alexis (de) (1854-1856), *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, Paris, Flammarion, 1993).

56 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 251-264 and p. 274.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 492; for a general overview, see, *ibid.*, pp. 479-500.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 648.

60 *Ibid.*, pp. 251-258.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 668.

63 *Ibid.*

64 Marx and Engels refer to communists as "a small section of the ruling class [that] cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class..." (see Engels Friedrich and Mark Karl, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 481).

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 481-485.

66 Tocqueville Alexis (de), *op. cit.*, p. 252 (emphasis in the original).

67 Lenin, "The State and Revolution," in Christman Henry M. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 288.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 285.

69 Nietzsche Friedrich, *OGM*, "Good and Evil, Good and Bad," 10, pp. 36-39.

70 *Ibid.*, 7, p. 34 (emphasis in the original).

71 *Ibid.*, 8, pp. 34-35.

72 *Ibid.*, 8, p. 35 (emphasis in the original).

73 Nietzsche Friedrich, *BGE*, 260, p. 207. *Un bonhomme* is literally a good human being.

74 Nietzsche Friedrich, *OGM*, "Good and Evil, Good and Bad," 7, p. 34.

75 Oakeshott Michael, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

77 See Timothy Fuller's introduction to Michael Oakeshott's book (Oakeshott Michael, *op. cit.*, p. xv). The editor continues: "Oakeshott's intent was to show the basis for maintaining an equilibrium, or as he famously put it 'an even keel' for a ship set sail on a boundless and bottomless sea" (*ibid.*).

78 Tocqueville Alexis (de), *op. cit.*, pp. 278-279.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 279.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 282.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 283. In contrast, the "intimate union of politics and religion" in Europe explains why democracy is not working as successfully as it is in the United States (see, *ibid.*, p. 521).

82 Timothy Fuller quotes Michael Oakeshott from *Political Education* when he introduces *The Politics of Faith and The Politics of Scepticism* (Oakeshott Michael, *op. cit.*, p. vii).

83 See, *Ibid.*, pp. 121-133.

84 Nietzsche Friedrich, *OGM*, "What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?," pp. 97-163.

85 *Ibid.*

86 In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche refers to "nausea."

87 Nietzsche Friedrich, *OGM*, "What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?," 24-25, pp. 148-156.

88 According to Nietzsche, "Gay science" is the art of creating values for oneself.

89 See, Nietzsche Friedrich, *OGM*, "Guilt, Bad Conscience, and the Like," 1-7, pp. 57-69.

90 Nietzsche Friedrich, *OGM*, "What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?," 19, p. 137.

91 Thus the notion of individual rights emphasizes individuality rather than humanity, competition rather than compassion; individual rights are pernicious, erode communality, and above all, pit one against one another; see, Marx Karl, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 75.

92 Marx Karl, "Capital," Vol. 3, in Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 441.

93 Engels Friedrich and Mark Karl, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 500.

94 Marx Karl, "The German Ideology," Part I, in Tucker Robert C. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 160.

95 Lenin, "The State and Revolution," in Christman Henry M. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 341 (emphasis in the original).

96 "Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" (see, Lenin, *op. cit.*, p. 335). Lenin gives the characteristics of the dictatorship of the proletariat: no standing army, like a post office, elected officials, abolition of official bureaucracy, no separation of power, production according to ability, among others (see, Lenin, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-291).

97 *Ibid.*, p. 343 (emphasis in the original).

98 Therefore, religion won't be needed anymore.

99 See, Oakeshott Michael, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

100 Cf. *supra* note 53.

101 Oakeshott writes in a foot note that "Halifax, Burke and de Tocqueville are notable examples of the pursuit of this principle [of the mean] in respect of the local and subsidiary" (Oakeshott Michael, *op. cit.*, p. 125, note 5).

102 Elaborating on the practical proposals that suggest removing the ambiguity of politics by abolishing their complexity, Oakeshott writes: "Marxism, for example, is a simple-minded project of this kind: it bids us forsake all manners of political activity save that which is appropriate to a certain version, the Baconian version, of the politics of faith" (*ibid.*, p. 120).

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