

et qui n'est donc pas en consonance immédiate avec l'esprit démocratique. D'autre part, cette thèse ne nous permet pas de juger du contenu de la parole et de l'action qui se manifestent dans l'espace public; il devient impossible de distinguer, à partir d'un tel critère, le bon citoyen du démagogue. Pour Castoriadis, la démocratie grecque est donc inséparable d'un contenu substantiel dont la clef se trouve chez Thucydide, dans la célèbre «Oraison funèbre» de Périclès. Ce que vise la *polis* démocratique, suggère ce dernier, c'est la création d'un type de citoyen qui vit dans et par l'amour de la beauté, dans et par l'amour de la sagesse et dans et par l'amour du bien commun et de la cité elle-même. Selon Castoriadis, cette réponse concrète de la démocratie athénienne constitue un «germe» qui, en dépit de la portée somme toute limitée de son horizon d'autonomie (du moins du point de vue de l'universalisme moderne), doit continuer à inspirer notre imagination du projet démocratique.

Étant donné l'envoûtante force suggestive qui se dégage de ses hypothèses et la rigueur implacable avec laquelle il mène son enquête, il n'est pas facile de contredire celui que Pierre Vidal-Naquet aimait à appeler «notre Étranger d'Athènes». Pourtant, il semble bien que sa démarche repose sur un postulat méthodologique on ne peut plus contestable. En effet, sa tentative «de saisir l'esprit de ce processus, en faisant comme si les significations imaginaires qui arrivent à une affirmation pleine et forte dans l'Athènes du V<sup>e</sup> siècle en déterminaient dès le départ le sens profond» (72–73) est suspendue à un pari périlleux qui tend à exposer l'intelligence des oeuvres et des événements à l'arbitraire du sens que l'interprète impute à l'histoire. Or, ce qui rend admirable le travail de Castoriadis, c'est qu'il réussit à repousser les risques que son «projet de compréhension total» porte en creux, en faisant montre d'une sensibilité extraordinaire tant pour la densité propre des oeuvres que pour ce qui déborde et contredit le processus qu'il cherche à reconstituer. N'empêche que la sublimité même de l'image qu'il nous propose de la Grèce ancienne devrait suffire à instiller le doute dans l'esprit du lecteur.

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### **Left and Right in Global Politics**

Alain Noël and Jean-Philippe Thérien

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Alain Noël and Jean-Philippe Thérien have written an outstanding text, one that could well serve as a primer in contemporary international history, told from the vantage point of the left–right distinction (or, better, continuum) in politics. They have not, in my opinion, made a significant contribution to the development of international relations theory, yet the book reads so well and covers so much ground, it is certainly worth the time of any student of global politics.

*Left and Right in Global Politics* is very well written (the co-authors have worked together before) and engaging, a delight to read for specialist and non-specialist alike. The editing is superb, and we should in my view be collectively appreciative of Cambridge University Press for its willingness to use footnotes, which makes referencing a pleasure (though a cumulative bibliography was surely in order).

Asserting that, contrary to popular belief after the precipitous rise of the so-called “third way” in liberal politics, the left–right distinction is alive and well, the authors take us on a very concise history of world events from 1776 to 2007, with the theme of the left–right continuum deftly connecting the chronological dots. They combine political economy, public policy, and political theory, detailing the development of conservative and progressive political currents among the major powers and within

the struggle for ownership of the United Nations. More should have been said about the transforming roles of both Russia and, especially, China, as well as the anomaly of the Clinton Administration's bombing campaign against Serbia. But the breadth of this text is quite impressive, given its length.

The authors assert, quite rightly, that globalization as a phenomenon does not transcend the left–right split but exacerbates it in terms of prognosis and advocacy. But is this really a “universal cleavage,” as the authors contend? Does the narrative of left–right not impose a false dichotomy on people and events, forcing procrustean perspectives upon highly nuanced human beings and institutions? To be fair, the authors are well aware of this potential charge, and the book is all the more remarkable for its studious efforts to avoid such a simplistic trap. The main thrust is that “the left–right cleavage expresses enduring and profound differences about equality, and equality is one of the most fundamental issues of controversy in any political community” (3). Rarely do the authors go over the top in their enthusiasm for a left–right dichotomization, though they occasionally do, claiming for example that in response to neoliberalism, the “global left fashioned a new discourse, which was consistent with the emerging domestic preoccupations of social democrats, and was heard everywhere, from the corridors of major international institutions to the slums of Third World cities” (175). Depending on where you stand, this statement is either overly optimistic or patently absurd.

But that may well be the point: depending on where you stand often translates into how one places oneself on the left–right continuum. In this sense, left and right remain, as a borrowed phrase would have it, the “core currency of political exchange.” The question is not whether the left–right divide is an accurate historical empirical referent, but whether it retains utility as a classificatory tool. The authors demonstrate, quite convincingly, that it does and that we can indeed view world politics (and all it entails) as a struggle between left and right-leaning elements.

This does not, however, break much new theoretical ground; the authors bemoan the lack of explicit left–right language in the formal study of international relations (IR), but I would suggest the literature has simply incorporated assumptions of left and right into the discourse. The problem emerges only in the penultimate chapter, when the authors claim that using a left–right continuum to understand IR theory would be some sort of innovation. While they concede that the “ontological and epistemological issues that divide international relations scholars today are obviously too complex to be reduced to an opposition between progressives and conservatives” (227), they nonetheless proceed to do little more than this, underplaying the complexity of all the major streams of IR thought.

But at the core of this book is a fundamental truth: left and right are still the dominant ways we think about politics today, and discussions about global governance and foreign policy reflect this continuum as well. This offers a convenient, if perhaps not quite as universal as the authors assert, way of reading both history and current events.

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### **Amérique latine, les élections contre la démocratie?**

Olivier Dabène (dir.)

Les Presses de Sciences Po, Paris, 2008, 381 pages

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«Seuls trois pays n'ont pas voté entre octobre 2005 et décembre 2006» (page réf.), tel est le constat se trouvant à la base du livre *Amérique latine, les élections contre la démocratie?* publié sous les Presses de Sciences Po en 2008. À la sortie de cette

The political "left" and "right" were first used during the French Revolution of 1789 when members of the National Assembly divided into supporters of the king to the president's right and supporters of the revolution to his left. One deputy, the Baron de Gauville, explained, "We began to recognize each other: those who were loyal to religion and the king took up positions to the right of the chair so as to avoid the shouts, oaths, and indecencies that enjoyed free rein in the opposing camp." Thus, from the outset, we see we can use the terms left and right accurately, but the complexity of politics and human behavior often requires us to apply the terms in some comparative and absolute terms per entity or ideology. REIGN OF TERROR: The French Revolution, Part III.