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Left and Right in the Economic Crisis

Jonathan White

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Two decades after the Cold War, the political traditions of Left and Right were widely deemed to have fossilised. Many saw them as unable to express vital alternatives, and only distantly related to contemporary political life. This article examines how far this remains true in the light of more recent upheavals. It looks at the key divisions of opinion to have emerged from the 2008- economic crisis, identifying important differences concerning in what sense it a crisis (the production of disorder vs of injustice) and how it can be explained (acts of moral or intellectual transgression vs a pattern of adhesion to problematic doctrines and practices). It goes on to argue these differences can be seen as extensions of older Left-Right dichotomies, albeit articulated with a second division between technical and normative reasoning. The article concludes with a discussion of the challenge political actors face in positioning themselves coherently according to these divisions.

Moments of political and socio-economic crisis are an interesting time to explore ideological change, being commonly the catalyst to a rupture in belief.¹ Established ideas and alignments are placed in question, while new ones are apt to emerge. One thinks historically of the fracturing of the Left after the Russian Revolution, or the emergence of the New Right following the 1970s oil shock – changes of deep significance for those who confronted these movements as well as for those who propelled them. If we take the broadly pragmatist view that value differences emerge – certainly with most urgency – in response to problematic situations rather than as a steady stream of divergent opinion, the significance of crisis moments seems evident.

How then can we map the political divisions which the 2008- Crisis – of the global economy, of the state, of the eurozone² – has produced? To what extent have important oppositions emerged, and insofar as they have, to what extent are they continuous with older patterns of the kind traditionally associated with Left and Right? The present moment invites investigation of this kind, as a widely acknowledged rupture in the socio-economic frame. The extent and nature of the political divisions it produces is a matter of added significance given recent decades have been widely, probably wrongly, diagnosed as showing evidence of ideological convergence. Under such conditions, the terminology of Left and Right has been cast by many as moribund.³ A moment of crisis acts as a critical test then: is the decay of the old framework confirmed, or is it set to re-emerge in new colours?

In what follows, taking Europe as my target of study, I argue the Crisis has indeed produced important dichotomies, centred on key questions to do with in what sense the

situation is actually a crisis and how one should understand its origins. I propose a key distinction on each point: as regards the nature of the Crisis, between those who emphasise the *disorder* it engenders and those who emphasise its contribution to *injustice*, and as regards its origins, between those who emphasise acts of moral or intellectual *transgression* vs a long-term pattern of *adhesion* to problematic doctrines and practices. These dichotomies can be seen as extensions and reconfigurations of older Left-Right dichotomies, as I seek to show. Yet at the time of writing they remain focused on retrospective diagnosis rather than forward-looking prescription, as we see when trying to identify meaningful differences as regards how the Crisis might be overcome. To that extent they are somewhat flimsy ideological formations – half-formed, possibly transitional.

As this summary indicates, my strategy is to seek to map the divisions the Crisis is producing and only then in a second step to examine whether these can be related to earlier distinctions conventionally regarded as of a Left-Right kind. The aim is to establish whether one can plausibly *arrive* at a Left-Right dichotomy via a set of intermediary categories more intimately linked to the context in question. An alternative approach, proceeding in reverse, would be to start from the assumption that ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ have an empirical referent in today’s world (identifiable e.g. by recourse to the self-definitions of political actors and the lineages of political thought) and move on to examine the impact of the Crisis on the configurations these terms describe (e.g. the changing fortunes of political parties). There is an important methodological choice to be made here, and the prior approach seems superior in several ways. First, it leads us to formulate an argument engaging directly with the sceptical position there are no meaningful Left-Right divisions today. It requires us to examine what, if anything, forms the substance of political oppositions – to build them from the ground upwards, as it were, minimising the extent to which we simply infer them by extrapolating from times past. Second, it is well suited to the fact that political thinkers and actors in today’s world often avoid using the terms Left and Right. If our task is to uncover oppositions which are not presented explicitly in Left-Right terms, it makes sense to avoid the premature application of this vocabulary. Third, such an approach allows us to avoid suggesting the Left-Right framework is exhaustive: we can examine whether there exist divisions of a Left-Right kind without feeling compelled to deny there may be others which are not of this kind, and which may require alternative schemes of representation.⁴

Attempting this type of overview poses obvious challenges. First, we are in the middle of a potentially transformative moment. The meanings of Left-Right are likely to be unsettled, and we lack the historian’s perspective. Second, even if we acknowledge our observations are

provisional, it may be impossible to tell a general story of Europe as a whole. No doubt the dominant political oppositions vary across countries; but even within any given setting, they will be different for people of different political persuasion, for definitions are themselves a political matter. So one should expect no consensus on these questions, and an account such as the following must be selective. But these challenges should not deter us – indeed, there is a sense in which it is *more* feasible to attempt this type of general analysis in times of crisis than calm. Crises are shaped by landmark events which produce common sets of reference-points for those who experience them, and which may thus lend structure to political disagreement. It is in such moments, if at all, that it is valid to seek broad patterns in the contours of political division.

Competing Diagnoses of the Crisis

Situations of societal upheaval are, as we have noted, often the spur to the differentiation of political opinion. At the most general level, one may connect this to the way a sense of crisis tends to produce a felt need for diagnosis and prescription. Situations of disturbance call for the intervention of opinion: this idea is present in the medical origins of the concept of crisis, and persists in its social and political applications.⁵ That such opinion will appear in plural form is not given, at least in the short term: as the social psychologists tell us, under the pressure of novel events the phenomenon of ‘group-think’ – a heightened concern for consensus and mistrust of alternatives – may be accentuated.⁶ While typically associated with small, cohesive groups, it can characterise political communities as a whole in moments of great stress, e.g. in the early phases of war. But over a period of time one can expect some kind of differentiation to follow, especially insofar as the crisis is held to persist.

Once a situation has been defined as a crisis – a point on which there may be plenty of initial dispute – several concerns are likely to weigh on those involved. I regard these as general to most crisis situations of the modern age – they are core issues on which opinion is very likely to form – though they will of course be supplemented by others in the particular instance. We can express them in the form of three questions. First, *in what sense is it a crisis?* What is the nature of the problems it produces or reveals? Second, *what caused the crisis?* Were there deep causes in play, or was it the outcome of more contingent factors? Third, *can the crisis be overcome, and if so, how?* Clearly, not all who are party to the situation may feel equally pressed to find answers to these questions: some may avoid an

analysis of causes lest it implicate them as bearing responsibility, while others may have something to gain from the crisis and feel no desire to seek solutions. But in public discourse as a whole, these are questions which are likely to recur, and narratives responding to them can be expected.⁷

We can use these basic questions to identify a number of salient positions in today's Europe in response to the present Crisis. I shall give prominence to the first two questions, as responses to them are currently the most stable and developed, though I shall integrate elements of the third, to do with the possibilities for overcoming the Crisis, as we proceed. For clarity of expression I sketch these positions first as ideal types, before linking them to particular voices and ideological traditions. These types are developed on the basis of intuition, reflection and empirical observation – an impressionistic approach, but one justifiable given the aim is not to present the reader with unfamiliar information but to provide an organising framework for ideas which are omnipresent at the time of writing. The relevant evidence will be mainly ideational – concepts, narratives, embedded assumptions – but as promoted by visible actors, be they political parties, social movements or individual opinion leaders, as opposed to as theoretical possibilities.⁸ Perhaps empirical developments alone will never be sufficient to settle questions to do with the durability of Left and Right: there is an inescapably political dimension to moves to affirm or deny their persistence, and we are dealing ultimately in the currency of claim and counter-claim.⁹ But even so, there is value in examining what backing such claims can invoke.

To introduce the main contours of our discussion: concerning the first question – in what sense is the Crisis a crisis? – we see two principal lines of response. The first holds that it is a crisis in the sense that it produces *disorder*. It entails the malfunctioning of a system, generally understood to be an economic one. Such arguments tend to cast the problem in terms of volatility, inefficiency, unpredictability, and in the extreme case disintegration. These accounts need not be limited to economic behaviour – political forms of unrest such as protests and rioting may equally be in view – and they need not overlook matters of human suffering, but the emphasis is consistently on how such developments produce instability. The solutions sought have a technical character, often presented as value-neutral or oriented to values which do not need explicit elaboration. By contrast, a second line of reasoning holds that the Crisis is a crisis in the sense that it produces *injustice*. It entails outcomes deemed normatively rather than functionally (or merely emotionally) unacceptable – outcomes which, for reasons of principle, need to be corrected or at least given some kind of ethical justification. In this view,

issues of right and wrong are at stake. As we shall see, a variety of voices in today's Europe can be associated with both these positions on the essence of the Crisis.¹⁰

As regards the second question – what caused the Crisis? – again we can identify two main positions. The first locates its origins in the failings of specific actors – essentially, in bad decisions. In one form or another, it is a critique of *transgression*, be it the violation of good judgement, reason, or moral norms. Coupled with a concern for *disorder*, it may be phrased as a critique of competence – e.g. the competence of financiers, central bankers, government officials, decision-makers in international institutions, and public commentators. When coupled with a concern for *injustice*, it may be phrased as a critique of moral conduct – e.g. of the greed and irresponsibility of certain sectors of society, the corruption and self-interest of politicians, or a more general dislocation of elites from popular moral codes and everyday concerns. Either way, one sees criticisms addressed to a wide range of actors of state and economy for having deviated from that which is expected of them. The second line of thinking, in contrast to a focus on transgression, locates the origins of the Crisis in conformity to a wider set of practices which are themselves problematic. It is the pattern, not the deviation from it, which is the source of misadventure. A critique of *adhesion* thus forms the basis of such accounts. As that to which adhesion is displayed, these narratives generally evoke a combination of material structures, the incentives they produce, and the ideas underpinning them. Concepts such as the market, capitalism and neoliberalism tend to figure prominently. Coupled with a concern for *disorder*, one can expect arguments of the kind that the market has internal contradictions, necessitating sustained intervention to avoid breakdown or the search for alternative economic models. Coupled with a concern for *injustice*, the focus is likely to be on unfair distributions of resources, forms of domination and exploitation by the powerful, and the alienating effects of commodification and market competition.

With these distinctions we are able to conceive, in abstract form, four strands of opinion concerning diagnosis of the Crisis, expressed in tabular form below. They are not quite mutually exclusive – one can hold that the Crisis produces injustice and disorder at the same time, and has its origins in some combination of transgression and adhesion – but they entail quite distinct points of emphasis and hybrid positions are likely to show tensions.

What caused the Crisis?	ADHESION	TRANSGRESSION
What makes it a Crisis?		

DISORDER	(3)	(1)
INJUSTICE	(4)	(2)

Let us now examine these positions in turn, looking more closely at the patterns of argument associated with them and the actors around whom they cluster.

Four Strands of Opinion on the Crisis

(1) Disorder / Transgression

This can be regarded as the minimal account of the Crisis, in that it both eschews explicit evaluations of principle and locates the origins in contingent mistakes rather than structural imperatives and systematic error. It is the least critical of the status quo. The Crisis is presented essentially as a period of turbulence, something to ride out and perhaps to learn lessons from, but largely a self-contained event rather than one revealing the failure of a template.¹¹ ‘Recovery’ is the outcome desired. The restoration of order is ultimately about the restoration of confidence that certain transgressions will not be repeated. Technical rather than ethical questions are to the fore, and the language used is likewise technical, raising questions we shall return to concerning the intended audience.

A leading version of the argument locates the core of the Crisis in high public and private debt, and the difficulty of pricing this debt. The attendant market uncertainty and unpredictability are said to inhibit risk assessment and the calculation of returns on investment, producing system volatility as sentiment swings sharply between ‘exuberance’ and caution.¹² Concerning the origins of this predicament, a central place is given to macro-economic mismanagement. Excessive public spending is highlighted.¹³ The finger is pointed at governments across Europe, notably at previous incumbents, but especially at key countries of the eurozone periphery – Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Ireland. In some cases, notions of bad house-keeping mix with intimations of corruption and tax evasion – a second form of transgression. Public regulators, including international regulators, may be accused of failing – or not being allowed – to do their job properly,

enabling dubious practices to continue.¹⁴ Transgressions in the private sector may also be noted, particularly in the fields of banking and credit rating.¹⁵ However, given such accounts do not impugn the fundamentals of the system, they tend to be advanced by those sympathetic to the monetarist and private-sector-oriented economic model generally considered ascendant on the eve of the Crisis. Their critics tend to refer to them as ‘neoliberals’: the label is useful, but it should be noted that only sometimes are we dealing with unqualified advocacy of free-market economics. Often the hostility towards state intervention is more selective and domain-specific than the purist would demand.¹⁶

This diagnosis of the Crisis has been fairly dominant in Europe’s political institutions, notwithstanding the local variations a more microscopic investigation would reveal. It has been articulated by governing party elites, officials of the European Commission, International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank, as well as by many opposition parties. In treating the Crisis as the consequence of mismanagement, ill-discipline and imprudence, the suggestion is that the pre-Crisis order was not inherently unstable, but rather that it is in need of perfecting.

As far as policy-making prescription goes, if over-spending and dubious investing was the cause of the Crisis, this is where reforms must be targeted. The reduction of public spending is prescribed, with the centre-piece of these efforts being the ‘austerity’ programmes of balancing state budgets through cuts in expenditure, especially in the ‘unproductive’ field of social welfare. A crucial element in these moves is the effort to restrict the agency of those deemed to have provoked the Crisis: this means a degree of banking sector reform, but in particular the limiting of policy options available to eurozone governments – hence the ‘debt brake’ spending restraints introduced with the 2012 Fiscal Compact. Reassuring major investors of the soundness of public finances and states’ capacity to bear existing debts is presented as necessary for the restoration of system stability. Although the diagnosis of the Crisis is minimal in the sense indicated, it may nonetheless lead to quite radical calls for change – albeit conceived as reforming the pre-existing model rather than revoking it. It is change as *intensification* rather than substitution. Concerns to do with efficiency trump those to do with justice, and the moral condemnation of market outcomes is likely to be deemed superfluous given it supposes alternatives which do not exist. Though one finds some important variations – notably concerning how determinedly to pursue low inflation – generally it is technical reforms for the sake of greater system stability which are sought.

(2) Injustice / Transgression

This position resembles the previous in its focus on mistakes: it locates the origins of the problem in human transgression rather than in the demands of an anonymous system. It is generally sympathetic to the market in its undistorted form. But it pairs this stance with a more ethically involved perspective.

One of the prime expressions of this view has been amongst thinkers generally characterised as communitarian-conservative (or ‘one-nation’ conservative), as found in the media and to some degree party politics. A clear instance was a July 2011 newspaper article by the British conservative journalist Charles Moore, widely disseminated in Britain and beyond.¹⁷ Under the title ‘I’m starting to think that the Left might actually be right’, Moore argued ‘that a system purporting to advance the many has been perverted in order to enrich the few.’ Moral outrage, in contrast to a merely technical concern to restore order, is characteristic of this piece and the many like-minded interventions which followed.¹⁸ A widespread ‘demoralisation’ or ‘moral disintegration’ are at the heart of the Crisis for these conservative thinkers – be it the behaviour and morality of those at ‘the bottom’, who have lived beyond their means or who break the law, or those at ‘the top’ such as bankers and politicians, beset by greed or vainglory.¹⁹ There is a concern to foreground the interests of ‘society’, as distinct from the interests of the market actor or the state.²⁰

Similar ideas have been prominent around Europe: in Germany, a largely sympathetic follow-up piece was published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* quoting Moore’s title as its own.²¹ Rather than seek to defend the policies of Europe’s ruling elites, the author calls for a renewed ‘bourgeois’ critique of unrestrained markets. It is the middle classes who are to be valorised, in contradistinction to the wealthy beneficiaries of austerity. Similar sentiments can be found in the Christian Democratic tradition, notably as articulated by a prominent member of the German CDU (Erwin Teufel) who, like Moore, urges the need to reconnect with the everyday concerns of the majority.²² The necessary remoralisation of the party’s politics takes religious form: it involves rediscovering the ‘C’ in the CDU.²³ Again, sympathetic newspaper and blog commentaries have followed.²⁴ While these communitarian arguments display local variations, they are clearly distinct from our previous category. The distance from the broadly neoliberal position seems clear: it is the difference between a Thatcherite ‘greed is good’ and a moralising ‘greed is bad’.

Such arguments have not been restricted to conservative commentators and politicians. Similar views are to be found in some social-democratic parties. Variations on them are also evident in what are typically referred to as far-right populist parties. Such

parties build support by drawing a sharp divide between cultural out-groups and a favoured in-group, casting themselves as the last hope of the latter. The Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, the Vlaams Belang in Belgium, the Front National in France, or Jobbik in Hungary, are notable examples, like the Dutch Pim Fortuyn List before them.²⁵ In recent years they have tended to define themselves principally not on economic questions but on issues of cultural identity and values, e.g. the place of Islam in western societies: today they are coupling their culturalist message with an economic narrative addressed to the origins and consequences of the Crisis. They fit the category under discussion well because their message involves moral outrage directed at specific actors – corrupted elites, internal or external ‘peoples’ which pose a threat to ‘us’ (cf. *Bild Zeitung*’s notorious portrayals of Greeks) – without this extending to a fundamental critique of a system.²⁶ Their target remains transgression.

Do common prescriptions emerge from this assembly of voices? In general one sees a desire for what might be called ‘capitalism with a human face’. There are calls for restraints on finance capital, the promotion of small business, and emphasis on responsibility and just rewards. In British Conservative leader David Cameron’s words, it is a vision of ‘moral capitalism’, guided by the maxim that ‘we should use this crisis of capitalism to improve markets, not undermine them’.²⁷ In many accounts one senses a longing for the more homely market of Adam Smith’s butcher, brewer and baker, a world of strong community ties. There are calls to prevent future transgressions (e.g. with new banking regulations) and to hold those responsible for past ones to account (e.g. by jailing individuals²⁸). Distrust of the globalised economy frequently mixes here with scepticism towards the euro and the European Union, presented by many as political folly. Where European integration is not opposed outright, there may be calls to shrink the extension of ‘Europe’ to a core of the morally upstanding – that is, the economically prudent.

(3) Disorder / Adhesion

This category is populated by those who see the Crisis in mainly technical rather than normative terms – focusing in the first instance on its implications for the functioning of a system – and yet who see the origins of the turbulence as deeper than mere transgression. In a variety of ways, it is argued that the Crisis arose from adhesion to a faulty framework, be this active commitment to an erroneous economic doctrine, acquiescence in the build-up of structural imbalances, or conformity – perhaps scarcely willed – to a set of fundamental, socio-economic ‘laws’. Many such perspectives have something of a minority, ivory-tower

quality – too critical for policy-makers, who are likely to see themselves as working within narrower constraints, yet too dry for mass appeal. But though their natural constituency may be small, they are an intellectually substantial array.

One such line of thought is to be found amongst demand-side economists, for whom the Crisis is a reflection of major imbalances in the economy and the distorted rationality that encouraged them to emerge. Key points in such an argument may include the long-term weakening of organised labour; the decline of Europe's manufacturing base; a deepening imbalance in levels of industrialisation between the continental core and periphery; a related imbalance in trading power; increasing socio-economic inequalities; the growth of private debt; excessive faith in market deregulation; an uncritical outlook on the financial sector; and a persistent orientation towards 'neo-mercantilist' competition policy. Rather than castigating individuals and countries for taking on debt, this perspective emphasises the incentives which led them to do so, perhaps even the functional necessity for the system of their having done so in order to prop up demand and thus delay the impending crisis. Such acts are treated as symptomatic rather than transgressive. They are indicative of a wider regime, as use of terms such as 'privatised Keynesianism'²⁹ implies. A rich contemporary articulation of such arguments on a European scale can be found in the writings of the EuroMemorandum group of economists.³⁰ As noted, the critiques expressed are far-reaching, but generally of a technical kind: while 'social justice' features in the subtitle of a key publication, the focus is generally on questions of functionality rather than the values in play.

The work of contemporary Marxist economists also deserves mention, as voiced at various public workshops and forums.³¹ Some share with the aforementioned an analysis of the Crisis centred on the rise of finance capitalism, increasing inequalities, low demand, and the unsustainable credit mechanisms designed to cope with these tendencies.³² Others focus rather on the implications of technological change and a decline in profitability.³³ Common to them, and in sharp contradistinction to our previous two categories, is the emphasis on long-term trends and associated patterns of behaviour as the generators of the Crisis. Again, these Marxist accounts are quite technical: normative concerns surely underlie them, but are not the focus of analysis, and insofar as some texts show a tendency towards historical determinism, normative questions become epiphenomenal.

Not all such diagnoses of the Crisis yield policy prescriptions: some address the likely future trajectories of the economic system in a quite structuralist fashion, with only rather general remarks on human agency and technological innovation.³⁴ But several more

immediate proposals can be heard: as ‘programmes that address fundamental structural problems of capitalism today’, the Euromemorandum group calls for public investment (nationally and through the European Investment Bank), banking reform, taxes on wealth and financial transactions, a coordinated wage policy, industrial policy aimed at developing the European periphery, a reduction in working hours, the creation of a publicly-owned ratings agency, and other moves away from free-market economics and the associated emphasis on competitiveness, deregulation and privatisation.³⁵ Calls for minimum wages (national or global), a basic income for all citizens, and the reduction of dependence on fossil fuels (cf. the ‘Green New Deal’) are also to be heard.³⁶ They are technical remedies, not packaged for ease of public consumption.

(4) Injustice / Adhesion

The final category combines far-reaching accounts of the origins of the Crisis, centred on macro-level patterns rather than contingent choices, with attention to its normative implications. These views come in a variety of forms – sometimes centred on a critique of the market, finance and big business while the role of the state is discounted or celebrated; sometimes including a critique of the state as reproducing wider power relations. Such differences echo older divisions between socialists and anarchists. While there is some affinity with category (3), these strands are distinct from those previously examined.

Socialist and social-democratic parties, as well as social movements, are the key places where such arguments may be found (in many cases in parallel with elements of position (1) and (2)). Ed Miliband, leader of the British Labour Party, provides a flavour in his speech to the 2011 Labour Party Conference. He talks of ‘the failure of a system’, of ‘an economy and a society too often rewarding not the right people with the right values, but the wrong people with the wrong values.’ It is a critique of the incentive structure and the injustices it has spawned. ‘Good times did not mean we had a good economic system. We changed the fabric of our country but we did not do enough to change the values of our economy.’ He explicitly rejects moves by the Conservatives to blame contemporary crises (including the August 2011 riots as well as economic decline) merely on lax moral standards: ‘I’m not with the Prime Minister [Cameron]. I will never write off whole parts of our country by calling them sick. We are not a country of bad people but great people. [...] But with such great people, how have we ended up with the problems we face? It’s because of the way we have chosen to run our country. Not just for a year or so but for decades.’ Long-term adhesion to mistaken practices lies at the heart of the Crisis. Such a

perspective is not wholly structuralist – blame can still be apportioned to those who had the power to reproduce or abandon these practices (hence emblematic villains in the political and financial world may be evoked) – but individual actions are systematically located in a larger pattern of behaviour.

This type of deep-running analysis of the Crisis remains relatively rare in the parliamentary parties of Europe, though it has become pronounced in certain countries – notably in Greece amongst anti-austerity parties like Syriza, also in France with the appearance of Mélenchon’s Left Front and in the Netherlands in the shape of Roemer’s Socialist Party. It has been a familiar feature of social movements for some time, particularly amongst the alter-globalist movements of the late 1990s. If there is novelty to be found in the period since the Crisis broke, it is in the renewed intensity of such critiques and the renewed emphasis on *economic* forms of injustice. While these were never absent in recent decades, they were somewhat marginalised by internal debates and by landmark events such as September 11th 2001. One sees their resurgence in the resistances to the austerity programme, especially in the countries of southern Europe (the *indignados* in Spain, the *aganaktismenoi* in Greece) but also in the Occupy movements more generally. Interestingly, such ideas even appear to have currency in post-communist Europe, as indicated for instance by protests in the Czech Republic in April 2012.³⁷

In terms of prescription, these perspectives tend to be associated with calls for far-reaching structural change not unlike those outlined under category (3). The systematic redistribution of wealth and productive resources is a prominent goal, as many of the Occupy movements have called for.³⁸ The austerity policies promoted by and through the EU are opposed, even if the principle of European policy-making may be endorsed. If there is an additional element distinctive from category 3, it lies in an emphasis on political participation and democratic decision-making. One sees calls for the extension of democratic practices into spheres of life where they are currently weak or excluded (e.g. the workplace, institutions of macro-economic management), alongside the development of cooperative rather than competitive economic structures. Fighting injustice is presented as a project to be pursued through inclusion and mobilisation. Notions of ‘civil society’ may be invoked here, bearing a certain resemblance to ideas we have discussed under heading (2).

Four families of opinion emerging in response to the Crisis have been described in this section, and can be entered into our table as below.

What caused Crisis? What makes it a crisis?	ADHESION	TRANSGRESSION
DISORDER	(3) Closest ideological traditions: demand-side liberal economics; contemporary Marxist economics Articulated by: critical economists	(1) Closest ideological traditions: supply-side liberal economics (neoliberalism and its variants) Articulated by: ECB, IMF, EU Commission, ruling-party elites
INJUSTICE	(4) Closest ideological traditions: Socialism; New Left; Environmentalism Articulated by: Social-Democratic party factions, socialist parties, Green parties, social movements	(2) Closest ideological traditions: Conservatism; Christian Democracy, Social Democracy (some strands); nationalist populism Articulated by: opposition parties, ruling-party factions, popular media

Evidently this type of ordering suppresses some potentially important distinctions within each category. One might be troubled for instance by the pairing of Marxist approaches with economics of a Keynesian variety. One might query the proximity of Conservative and Social-Democratic views, at least given their diversity of lineage. There are two points to bear in mind, however. First, these clusters should be treated as contextual in character: they are readings of a particular set of historical events. In such moments the divergences may be less significant than the commonalities, especially where a quite different set of views is hegemonic. Second, within each of the strands of opinion identified, it may be possible to make internal differentiations by reintroducing the *same* set of distinctions at a new level of analysis. Thus one might seek to separate, within the Disorder / Adhesion category, positions which are especially technical from those with display normative elements, and positions which are strongly structuralist from those focused on problematic turns in economic thought and which thus reimport notions of transgression, albeit on a different scale from category (1). There is, in other words, a fractal-like quality to these distinctions, and they should not be thought of in absolutist terms.³⁹

A Left-Right Divide?

The perspectives we have described are contextually defined, shaped by the diagnostic questions the Crisis presents. They express the opinions of a particular moment. Let us now return to a point we began with – whether such positions can be seen as continuous with older Left-Right divisions. Although there can perhaps be no definitive answer to such a question – the historical contours of Left and Right are a matter of some disagreement, as is the application of historical categories to the present⁴⁰ – still one can venture the argument that our table does capture Left-Right divisions, with the left-hand boxes broadly corresponding with familiar positions of the Left and the right-hand boxes with those of the Right.

Before developing this point, let us recall some of the debates concerning the structure of the Left-Right opposition. There have been a number of celebrated intellectual efforts to identify a cross-temporal core to it. One of the most promising sees it as centred on the level of commitment to rectifying inequality, with the Left defined by its inclination to seek this and the Right by its scepticism towards such efforts, either on grounds of feasibility or desirability.⁴¹ Empirical research suggests the Left-Right distinction is often interpreted by lay citizens in terms of diverging attitudes towards the institutions of state and market.⁴² Attitudes towards historical change – i.e. stability vs progress – are another familiar rendition of the distinction. Here I do not wish to isolate one of these dichotomies as the enduring core, since the key question for our purposes is not whether each expression of Left and Right can be subsumed under a single categorical distinction, but whether they display *elements* of continuity sufficient for us to treat them as integrated traditions. If we borrow Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance, we are likely to answer in the affirmative. Whether or not there is a single element which all conceptions of Left and Right share, we can say that all recognisable conceptions include elements which others share (particularly those most proximate in time and space), sufficient for us to speak of Left-Right traditions.⁴³ I will proceed from the view that the Left-Right distinction has very often had something to do with attitudes to the rectification of inequality and – as a related but not derivative point – attitudes to the market; the ensuing divisions have, however, generally been interlaced with other distinctions, narratives and clusters of concepts in different periods and places, as fostered by the specifics of historical experience and debate, such that one must speak of Lefts and Rights in the plural.⁴⁴

If we take this view of the Left-Right opposition, it seems possible to treat the diagnoses of the nature and origins of the Crisis we have described as intelligible in Left-Right terms. Box 1 in the table (Disorder / Transgression) can be treated as a position of the Right insofar as it makes a minimal critique of the market and has very little to say on matters of

inequality. Its diagnosis of the Crisis locates it mainly in human error, suggesting that equality of distribution, as a structural property, is accorded no major role in the functionality of the system. Likewise it is accorded no normative worth, for this is an account addressed to problems of disorder: indeed, one of the appealing qualities of the well-functioning market for adherents of this perspective may lie precisely in the possibilities for substituting exchange relations for ethical deliberation. More generally, an account centred on transgression tends towards underwriting the order whose standards it claims have been violated. To be sure, it may well idealise those standards, exaggerating the extent to which they were ever in force – it is often said that neoliberal rhetoric precedes the reality by some distance.⁴⁵ But through its denunciation of transgression, it reveals the ideal to which it is committed. We shall say more on the politics of ‘austerity’ in a moment. It may furthermore be noted that, if this was the main discourse of European policy-makers in the years following the outbreak of the Crisis, it coincided with the ascendancy of political parties conventionally identified as of the Right.⁴⁶

Box 2 in the table (Injustice / Transgression) can again be associated with a fairly sympathetic view of the market and a quite limited concern with inequality. Many nationalist-populist parties of the current period focus their moral outrage on unjust rewards – e.g. the fact of supposedly lazy and crooked southern Europeans raiding the wealth of the hard-working northern taxpayer. Such narratives generally do not include calls for a more equal distribution of wealth – even where state intervention is advocated – for they are premised on the idea that people are not natural equals (that they divide between the honest hard-workers and the dishonest free-riders): the call is for the distribution of wealth to better reflect that fact. As such these may be regarded as positions of the Right. Things are a little more complex when we turn to the communitarian-conservative strands of opinion as discussed, since here one does see some kind of critique of inequality and of existing market practices. There is a clear effort to take distance from the pre-Crisis order, and an acceptance that the consequences of the Crisis are scarcely to be given normative defence. But it remains a critique of *excesses* of inequality and of the *perversion* of the market. To suggest a system has been ‘perverted’, as one hears Moore do, is to imply the distortion of something which in its natural state remains wholesome. While the largest inequalities are treated as unacceptable, it is emphasised that these have been generated contingently by inappropriate behaviour – the greed of financiers and the ‘super-rich’, the laziness of the able unemployed, the profligacy or corruption of politicians (at home or in the European South), or the carelessness of regulators. Such behaviour is not merely symptomatic of the system but constitutes a culpable choice. The

benefits of the well-functioning market and of ‘non-excessive’ inequality in cultivating individual responsibility are affirmed. The position remains recognisably one of the Right.

Box 3 in the table (Disorder / Adhesion) captures a perspective with more to say on inequality. Although in its pure form it does not take a principled stand against inequality, it will often criticise it on functional grounds. It may be argued, for instance, that inequalities introduce inefficiencies such as low demand, due to the limited spending power of poorer classes in society, and that this makes events such as the Crisis and the associated political instabilities predictable phenomena.⁴⁷ Market innovations which stave off such crises – e.g. the making available of credit to those on low incomes – are regarded in this view as simply exacerbating the crash when it comes. Adhesion to an economic doctrine which denied such realities is presented as one of the contributing factors to the Crisis. As we see, this position need not be wholly hostile to the market, but it is in no way indifferent to inequality, tending to treat this as a public good. It would seem to be a position of the Left.

Finally, Box 4 (Injustice / Adhesion) would likewise seem to be a leftist position. It is attuned to how existing structures systematically produce inequalities deemed normatively unacceptable. Again, commitment to an ideology which neglects this is seen to accentuate injustice. This perspective is not, to be sure, based on the thought that *all* inequalities are unjust, but that unacceptably large inequalities are systematically generated under the current arrangement. The political parties and social movements with whom it is generally associated are conventionally associated with the Left – albeit not *all* of those conventionally so positioned adopt this discourse, or adopt this discourse alone.

One concludes that the major divisions of opinion produced by the Crisis can be read in Left-Right terms. They express variations on older Left-Right themes, refracted through the prism of diagnosing the nature and origins of the Crisis. Specifically, the adhesion-transgression distinction we have described points to diverging evaluations of the market model towards which the pre-Crisis order could be seen – both by advocates and critics – as tending, and towards which the post-Crisis order might continue to move. We shall shortly complexify this observation, but for the moment it can be said that a Left-Right division of some sort is evident.

If this is so, it would seem to mark a deviation from the period immediately preceding the Crisis. In one line of argument, presented forcefully by sociologists in particular, Left and Right had ceased to be live and meaningful traditions by the beginning of the new millennium, lingering merely as old-fashioned labels. The divisions of the day were petty and unprincipled

– to hunt foxes or to fox hunters, as it seemed in Britain – and had little or nothing to do with the great questions on which Left and Right had traditionally been divided. While some figures at the margins might fight the old battles, they were but an eccentric few. As divisions of opinion with mass resonance, Left and Right were exhausted.⁴⁸ The differences of viewpoint we have recorded go some way to questioning this interpretation, indicating that meaningful disagreements concerning inequality and the market remain possible in conducive circumstances. We see positions of the Left with a renewed focus on matters economic rather than cultural, and a lively debate on the Right concerning how best to extol the virtues of the market without merely producing an apology for the Crisis. At the prompt of events, opinion polarises.

This is not to say though that present-day Europe exhibits a sharp and simple Left-Right opposition. As we have suggested, the differences of diagnosis are more pronounced than those of advocacy. Moreover, arguably one of the major tendencies of the period lies in the political decoupling of the communitarian Right from the neoliberal Right (boxes 2 and 1 in our table). This corresponds to a more general division between normative and technical perspectives which can be seen on both Left and Right, and which the Crisis seems to be promoting. These are points examined further in the final section.

The Political Challenge

We have argued that the strands of opinion which have so far formed in response to the Crisis, as well as displaying a Left-Right complexion, divide according to whether they see the essence of the Crisis as the production of disorder or injustice. The disorder-based approach is a technical one which seeks to side-step questions of value; the injustice-based one places these centre-stage. How does this second line of difference fit with the Left-Right division observed, and with what political implications?

One way to read the disorder/injustice opposition is as expressing a difference in intended audience. One can fairly argue that one set of narratives is aimed primarily at experts, being expressed in a form and vocabulary impenetrable to most and glossing over quotidian concerns, while the other is targeted at a mass public. A bifurcation of audience runs through the Left-Right scheme we have described, as reading our table along a vertical axis indicates. This is important because it is central to the political challenge facing movements and parties

in the coming years. Certain internal divisions are likely to recur, while unexpected alignments may emerge or be imputed from afar.

The disorder-centred diagnoses tend to be expressed in economic language and suppose a level of economic literacy in the addressee. Such interventions appear mainly intended to influence various kinds of elite – market investors, ratings agencies and decision-makers in government and international institutions. (This is clearest in the case of the rightist ‘austerity’ message, often presented explicitly by its proponents as necessary to ‘reassure the markets’; but in part it is true also of the leftist alternatives, insofar as these respond to doubts amongst market actors concerning the growth-generating capacities of the austerity programme.) Sometimes these messages seem intended to have a direct performative effect: the very fact that they are uttered by a speaker with decision-making authority can be expected to influence the behaviour of others. Sometimes, for example when voiced by academics, they may be intended to persuade more indirectly. Generally the intended audience is a specialised one however. Such narratives are rarely used to rally the voting public. If they are intended for public ears at all – and the austerity programme does have its public face – one may speculate that it is rather to *de*-mobilise the public, couching decisions in an inscrutable language so that they carry an air of inevitability, are weakly susceptible to public criticism, and are seen as properly the business of elites. It is a risky strategy, of course, since messages which foster public disengagement may in the longer run create the appetite for things more spicy.

The injustice-centred diagnoses by contrast seem designed to carry mass appeal. By focusing on the wrongs which the Crisis produces, and not just the inefficiencies, they introduce a note of passion. Both in their leftist and rightist manifestations, they have a populist streak to them, articulating interests said to be general (those of the people, the majority, the public, the ‘99%’) in contrast to the vested interests of an elite. They are also at least minimally democratic, being grounded in the assumption that decision-making needs normative justification and cannot simply refer to unarguable system requirements. These critical tendencies are informed by the perception that public opinion is increasingly hostile to policies introduced by diktat as necessary responses to system imperatives. They are attempts to articulate and shape genuine dissatisfactions. Those parties which express such arguments in an unadulterated form – certain parties of Left and Right as highlighted – show evident capacity for mass mobilisation, as the Greek elections of Spring 2012 made clear.⁴⁹

The division between technical and normative discourses that runs through the Left-Right scheme is one of its characteristic features today. The Crisis coinciding with, and partly a result of, the extreme complexity of today’s economic system, the opinions it has generated

are marked by their embrace of complexity or refusal of it. On the Left, this internal division is soft (prescriptive ideas recur across the two clusters),⁵⁰ but on the Right it is pronounced – most likely because the neoliberal position (1) has widely been viewed as institutionally hegemonic and therefore a more urgent target for differentiation. At the level of practical politics, this technical-normative split creates major challenges for many parties, especially those formed before the Crisis and those with aspirations to hold office, as they seek ways of combining both discourses. The need to balance a technical emphasis on restoring system order (to gain ‘credibility’ with the relevant market and institutional actors) with a normative regard for justice (to achieve a level of public support in elections and the media) may produce intra-party divisions, as visible in many European Conservative, Christian Democratic and (especially Third-Way) Social Democratic parties. It may produce sharp shifts in policy emphasis over the electoral cycle, as parties in an election campaign gesture towards normative commitments they have little intention of adhering to later.⁵¹ This dislocation between the technical and the normative can be seen as the ideological expression of what party scholars have termed the gap between ‘responsibility’ and ‘responsiveness’.⁵² The recruitment of experts who can speak technical discourses may produce divisions with those members and supporters for whom questions of principle should remain to the fore. Many parties do not fit exclusively into one box in our table, in other words – and in the post-Crisis world this is one of their major challenges. Those who *can* be assigned fairly straightforwardly – including certain pro-austerity parties, nationalist parties and socialist parties – are the ones which can hope to win the support of the market or the public, even if not both.

Focusing on this technical/normative division running vertically through the table also sensitises us to some of the unexpected affinities and alliances to be found in contemporary political practice. When commentators of the Right such as Moore suggest that ‘the Left might actually be right’, they express the sense of distance from the austerity programme which is common to injustice-focused perspectives of both Left and Right. The political dominance of the former in the period immediately following the emergence of the Crisis has presented a common adversary. Opposition to EU bailouts, both in ‘donor’ and ‘recipient’ countries, has produced similarly cross-cutting alliances of convenience. Efforts to institutionalise the austerity programme in the form of the EU ‘fiscal compact’ (January 2012), if enduringly successful, are likely to create further commonalities of predicament between principle-based positions of Left and Right, as they are both kept at a distance from institutional power. A major political axis would then pit technocratic administration against oppositions of principle of all shades.⁵³ Clearly this would not obliterate the significance of the Left-Right divide – it

matters greatly whether the major opposition of principle is of the Left or Right – but it would obstruct its expression in institutional arenas. It would also further encourage the existing tendency for these dissenting groups to be lumped together as one, by media commentators and political opponents alike, under headings such as ‘populism’ which minimise the important differences that exist.

Let us note in addendum that the transnational dimensions of the Crisis add a further feature to the political challenge. The political agendas associated with the positions we have described can be pursued to varying scopes. They can be pursued at a European level or national level, as well as others more global or local. This introduces potential disagreements *within* each of the strands of opinion, e.g. as socialists of a European and national orientation clash. One might assume that some of these strands of opinion have a ‘natural’ scope implied in them: the right-wing Injustice / Transgression perspective might seem naturally a nationalist or regionalist one, given the degree of moral denunciation directed at foreign countries (e.g. Greece) and the scepticism towards the European Union. Yet logically, all the Left and Right orientations we have discussed permit transnationalisation of their arguments. Even mobilisations in the name of ‘the people’ are indeterminate in their scope, as they need not define ‘the people’ in ethno-culturalist or statist terms. In many cases, the decision whether to adopt an integrationist or separatist approach is one primarily of strategy rather than principle. While nationalist, ethnicist or sovereigntist arguments may be appealed to, they are often secondary to a calculation of which level of engagement offers the best prospect of achieving goals of a Left-Right kind.⁵⁴ Hence the scope for disagreement with parties and movements of the same orientation, and the political challenges of transnational coordination.

Conclusion

As we examine the strands of opinion which the Crisis of 2008- has produced, we find important distinctions concerning what makes it a crisis, what caused it, and – less markedly – how it may be overcome. While the language of Left and Right is only sporadically invoked by actors themselves, the resultant divisions have a discernible Left-Right complexion, if we understand this to be a matter of views concerning the acceptability of inequality and the desirability of the market in its ideal form. The distinction between accounts of the Crisis centred on *transgression* and *adhesion* is crucial in this respect. Notions of ideological convergence and the obsolescence of the Left-Right scheme seem premature therefore. Yet

one must talk of Lefts and Rights in the plural, with internal divisions between them. Indeed, one of the transformative aspects of the Crisis seems to be the way it heightens some such divisions. One sees new formations emerge in contra-distinction to positions on both sides of the divide, producing a line of division which runs perpendicular to the Left-Right axis. In particular, while remaining quite distinct from positions of the Left, on the Right one sees the place of the market and the acceptability of inequality becoming a divisive issue – just as 1968 and 1989 loosened the commitment of many leftists to a state-led economy.

In sum, the present moment appears to be a time of transition, one in which political ideas and the coalitions that accompany them show signs of being recast. Gramsci's famous notion of the 'interregnum' seems apposite,⁵⁵ while a less familiar point of comparison might be the *rite of passage*.⁵⁶ The Crisis may be thought of as a form of ritual, one that enables actors to take distance from old political identities and adopt new ones, at the same time within a framework of continuity. Many political parties find themselves pulled in competing directions by these contending currents of opinion, and a period of volatility is the likely consequence.

If political and socio-economic rupture acts as the spur to ideational differentiation, one may expect these divisions to stabilise, and ultimately fade, should the Crisis start to recede. The legacy of a world-historical event can be seen as the temporary fixing of those political views to which it gives definition, followed by their subsequent fracturing and the fading of the divisions produced. How the Crisis will recede, and in particular who has the authority to declare that it has done so, remain unclear at the time of writing. For now and for an indefinite period, we see the moving silhouettes of political discord.

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Notes and References

¹ Here I treat situations of crisis as separable from the ruptures in belief they may occasion. Note though that where no such ruptures are forthcoming, some might question the application of the term crisis. On the interplay between its intersubjective and objective dimensions, see Jürgen Habermas, **Legitimation Crisis** (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), pp.1-3.

² In the midst of a crisis, it is hard to decide what it is a crisis of. One assesses it using the same inherited ideas and reference-points the crisis itself may undermine. To capture some of its mystery and unknowable scale, as well as to keep things simple, this paper will refer to it in the singular and with a capital 'C', as the Crisis.

³ See e.g. Anthony Giddens, **Beyond Left and Right** (Cambridge: Polity, 1994); Frank Furedi, **Politics of Fear: Beyond Left and Right** (London: Continuum, 2005). For the opposite conclusion – that tendencies towards ideological convergence have made the Left-Right idiom more necessary than ever, see Chantal Mouffe, **On the Political** (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁴ A useful overview of these debates is Peter Mair, 'Left-Right Orientations', in R. Dalton and H.-D. Klingemann (eds.) **The Oxford Handbook of Political Behaviour** (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp.206-222.

⁵ Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, 'Crisis', **Journal of the History of Ideas** 67 (2) (2006), pp.370ff.

⁶ I. L. Janis, **Victims of Groupthink: a Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes** (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

⁷ Making a similar proposition, see Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart and Allan McConnell, 'Crisis exploitation: political and policy impacts of framing contests', **Journal of European Public Policy** 16 (1) (2009), p.82.

⁸ Following Norberto Bobbio, **Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction** (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), p.1, we can treat the Left-Right framework as comprising a mix of 'ideas and movements'. Actors naturally may display multiple, sometimes contradictory, ideas: the relationship between the two is to a degree free-floating.

⁹ White, Jonathan (2011), 'Left and Right as Political Resources', **Journal of Political Ideologies** 16 (2), pp.123-44;

White, Jonathan (2012), 'Community, Transnationalism and the Left-Right Metaphor', **European Journal of Social Theory** 15 (2), pp.197-219.

¹⁰ The distinction as presented excludes certain lines of argumentation, notably the optimistic view that the Crisis *corrects* imperfections rather than generates them. In neo-Schumpeterian manner it may be suggested such moments of turmoil remedy the misallocation of value, weed out what is unviable, and generally provide opportunities for societal renewal. Such reasoning has been fairly rare in public discourse, particularly as the Crisis has become protracted, but its retrospective appeal cannot be discounted.

¹¹ Rather than as a deep-seated crisis, this perspective is likely to see the events of the day as one of capitalism's periodic crashes – an interruption rather than a break, albeit an especially harsh one given today's increasingly globalised conditions. For reflections on the crash / crisis-of-capitalism distinction, see Andrew Gamble, **The Spectre at the Feast** (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.5ff.

¹² See e.g. the report by the High Level Group on Financial Supervision in the EU (the 'De Larosière Report'), Brussels, 25th February 2009, pp.7-8.

¹³ A succinct account is given by IMF chief Christine Lagarde in an interview with *The Guardian*, 25th May 2012: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/25/christine-lagarde-imf-euro>.

¹⁴ For one such analysis of the origins of the Crisis focusing on weak fiscal and monetary policy in Europe and the US, see the European Commission report 'Economic Crisis in Europe: Causes, Consequences and Responses', *European Economy* 7, 2009, pp.12-13. See also the De Larosière Report (**op. cit.**, Ref. 12), p.3, pp.10ff.

¹⁵ European Commission 2009 (**op. cit.**, Ref. 14), p.13.

¹⁶ Colin Crouch, **The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism** (Cambridge: Polity, 2011); David Harvey, **A Brief History of Neoliberalism** (Oxford: OUP, 2005); Rachel S. Turner, **Neo-Liberal Ideology: History, Concepts and Policies** (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008); Gamble 2009 (**op. cit.**, Ref. 11), pp.70ff, and pp.143ff for a discussion of where neoliberalism shades into 'neoconservatism'. Note that broadly similar economic arguments, though again with a somewhat greater role envisaged for the state, in some European countries go under the heading Ordoliberalismus.

¹⁷ Charles Moore, 'I'm starting to think that the Left might actually be right', *The Telegraph*, 22nd July 2011.

¹⁸ Peter Osborne, 'The moral decay of our society is as bad at the top as the bottom', *Daily Mail*, 11th August 2011; Roger Scruton, 'Unreal Estate', *OpenDemocracy*, 12th September 2011. For commentary on the take-up of moral critique on both sides of the political spectrum in contemporary Britain, see James Forsyth, 'Who are the undeserving rich?', *The Spectator*, 1st September 2011.

¹⁹ *Daily Mail* journalist Osborne speaks of 'moral disintegration in the highest ranks of modern British society. [...] An almost universal culture of selfishness and greed has grown up,' and the country 'needs a moral reformation' (Osborne 2011, **op. cit.**, Ref. 18). Also in moralist vein, see Scruton, 2011 (**op. cit.**, Ref. 18): 'the elementary moral truths of debt and obligation were forgotten and ignored so thoroughly during the last 10 years.'

[...] what we are seeing, in both Europe and America, is a demoralisation of the economic life. Debts are no longer regarded as obligations to be met, but as assets to be traded.'

²⁰ A more theoretical, and somewhat idiosyncratic, elaboration of such arguments is in Phillip Blond, 'Rise of the Red Tories', *Prospect*, 28th February 2009.

²¹ Frank Schirrmacher, 'Ich beginne zu glauben, dass die Linke recht hat', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5th August 2011.

²² Erwin Teufel, 'Ich schweige nicht länger', 2nd August 2011: 'The CDU needs to be the party of ordinary people again [author's trans.]'

²³ Christian arguments have similarly re-emerged in Britain, as voiced e.g. by the Archbishop of Canterbury: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15550015>.

²⁴ Constantin Seibt, 'Der rechte Abschied von der Politik', *Tages-Anzeiger*, 8th August 2011; Michael Spreng, 'Die Politik und das Monster', blog entry, 13th August 2011; Uwe Jean Heuser, 'Anständig zahlen', ZEIT Online, 18th August 2011, www.zeit.de/2011/34/01-Finanzkrise-Reiche/komplettansicht.

²⁵ Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

²⁶ One might view critiques of the design of the eurozone and calls for its abolition as going beyond a critique of transgression to a critique of adhesion (i.e. to a long-standing and mistaken process of European integration). Yet the call tends to be for a reversion to the status quo ante: doing away with the euro and / or the EU is presented as returning society to the straight and narrow, not transforming it: it thus has the character of a critique of transgression rather than adhesion.

²⁷ Cameron, speech on 'moral capitalism', London, 19th January 2012.

²⁸ See e.g. Allison Pearson, 'What we need now is a banker behind bars', *The Telegraph*, 25th January 2012. In Britain, the much-discussed idea of removing a banker's knighthood illustrates a variation on the theme of individual condemnation and punishment.

²⁹ See Colin Crouch, 'After Privatised Keynesianism', *Compass: Think Pieces*, No. 41 (2008).

³⁰ See www.euromemo.eu. For a diagnosis of the origins of the Crisis, see EuroMemorandum 2012 pp.19ff.

³¹ See e.g. the annual Marxist festivals in London (<http://www.marxismfestival.org.uk/>), where several of the figures mentioned below have spoken.

³² E.g. John Bellamy Foster, *The Great Financial Crash: Causes and Consequences* (New York: Monthly Review, 2009); David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (London: Profile, 2010); with a US focus, Gérard Duménil & Dominique Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard UP, 2011).

³³ Guglielmo Carchedi, *Behind the Crisis: Marx's Dialectics of Value and Knowledge* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

³⁴ Cf. Carchedi, *op. cit.*, Ref. 23.

³⁵ Cf. Euromemorandum 2012, *op. cit.*, Ref. 30, pp.3-4.

³⁶ An analysis of some such proposals can be found in Robin Blackburn, 'Crisis 2.0', *New Left Review* 72, Nov/Dec (2011).

³⁷ 'Czechs stage huge anti-government rally in Prague', BBC News, 21st April 2012: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17799937>

³⁸ As the statement of the Occupy London group put it, 'We do not accept the cuts as either necessary or inevitable. We demand an end to global tax injustice and our democracy representing corporations instead of the people. [...] We want structural change towards authentic global equality. The world's resources must go towards caring for people and the planet, not the military, corporate profits or the rich'. Occupy London, Statement, 16th October 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/oct/17/occupy-london-stock-exchange-occupylsx>.

³⁹ For a discussion of the fractal structure of divisions of opinion in the social sciences, see Andrew Abbot, *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences* (London: W. W. Norton, 2004).

⁴⁰ On some of the political issues at stake, see White 2011, *op. cit.*, Ref. 9.

⁴¹ 'Whatever its language, form and following, [the Left] makes the assumption that there are unjustified inequalities which those on the Right see as sacred or inviolable or natural or inevitable and that these should be reduced or abolished' (Lukes 2003, *op. cit.*, Ref. 9, p.17). Cf. Bobbio 1996, *op. cit.*, Ref. 8; Perry Anderson (1998) 'A Sense of the Left', *New Left Review* 231, pp.73-81; Alain Noël and Jean-Philippe Thérien, *Left and Right in Global Politics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008).

⁴² Dieter Fuchs and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, 'The Left-Right Schema', in *Continuities in Political Action: A Longitudinal Study of Political Orientations in Three Western Democracies*, ed. M. Jennings et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), pp.203-34.

⁴³ Wittgenstein's other metaphor, of the rope fibres, is equally instructive: the continuity of the rope lies not in the continuity of each fibre, but in the continuity of their interweaving.

⁴⁴ Cf. Marcel Gauchet, 'Right and Left', in Pierre Nora (ed.) *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French past, Vol.1, Conflicts and Divisions* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994).

⁴⁵ See e.g. Crouch 2011, *op. cit.* Ref. 16.

⁴⁶ In a critical period from 2010 to late 2011, not only was the Centre-Right a majority in the European Parliament, but not for a century had such parties so dominated the national parliaments of Europe: only in Slovenia, Greece, Austria, Cyprus, and Denmark did a party of the Left retain power. Party-based classification can be misleading – social democratic parties are conventionally treated as leftist, yet those which committed themselves to a ‘Third Way’ in the 1990s and early 2000s might equally be regarded as Centre-Right – but in this case such observations merely underline the Left’s predicament.

⁴⁷ See e.g. Euromemorandum 2012, **op. cit.**, Ref. 30, p.27, where austerity measures are explicitly criticised for making inequality worse, though with an emphasis on the functional rather than normative consequences of unequal societies: ‘In accentuating social tensions, already under stress due to the crisis, austerity policies lay the ground for political tensions, if not instability, as right-wing populism grows stronger.’

⁴⁸ Furedi 2005, **op. cit.**, Ref. 3; Giddens 1994, **op. cit.**, Ref. 3.

⁴⁹ Even if these narratives have potential mass appeal, communicating remains a challenge. In recent years, just as in the mid-nineteenth century (Gauchet 1994, **op. cit.**, Ref. 44), many political actors have been reluctant to couch their appeals in the vocabulary of ‘Left’ and ‘Right’, something which may hinder their visibility. If the Left-Right division discussed is to be recognisable as such to more than a politically-engaged minority, it is likely that more political actors will need to position themselves and others with explicit use of these terms (White 2012, **op. cit.**, Ref. 9).

⁵⁰ The dislocation between denunciations of capitalism centred on its tendency to self-destruct versus its tendency to produce injustice was if anything stronger in the nineteenth century, expressed e.g. in the contrasting works of Marx and Proudhon. For one discussion, see Sheri Berman, **The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe’s Twentieth Century** (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp.23ff.

⁵¹ For an analysis of the Dutch Labour Party in these terms, see Daniel Finn, ‘Order Reigns in the Hague: the Dutch elections and the Socialist Party’, **New Left Review** 77, Sept/Oct/ (2012), pp.80-1.

⁵² See Peter Mair, ‘Representative versus Responsible Government’, **MPIfG Working Paper** 09/8 (2009).

⁵³ Proposing this as the main axis of the age: Slavoj Žižek, **Living in the End Times** (London: Verso, 2010), p.ix.

⁵⁴ British euroscepticism on the Right bears clear traces of this: calls for the repatriation of decision-powers from Brussels have tended to be focused on economic and social rights legislation such as the Working Time Directive, which are more easily undone at the national than European level.

⁵⁵ See Gramsci’s 1930s observation, ‘the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously [...]. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear’ (Antonio Gramsci, **Selections from the Prison Notebooks**, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), p.276).

⁵⁶ Arnold van Gennep, **The Rites of Passage** (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).