Prutsch, Markus J. "Introduction." *Caesarism in the Post-Revolutionary Age*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. 1–12. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474267571.ch-001>>.

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Introduction

1.1 Object of Research

Debates about the “legitimacy” and “essence” of political rule and the search for “ideal” forms of government have been at the very heart of political thought ever since its beginnings in the Ancient World. Discussions on how a balance between “just” and “effective” government might best be achieved have been particularly intense and controversial, as have those on the need and danger of dictatorship, the scope and limits of democracy, and on whether there might be some sort of “natural” sequence of regime types. The latter view, for example, was articulated within the various cyclical theories of political evolution (*anacyclosis*), the first of which date back to Greek and Roman constitutional theory.

The richness of these debates stands in contrast to an often astonishingly simplistic and ahistorical view on these matters in the post-Second World War era. The idea that today’s Western world represents the outcome of a more or less linear development towards liberal and representative democracy, in which specific inalienable values are upheld, and that the rest of the world is inescapably animated by and moving towards that model, has become deeply entrenched in Western political rhetoric and public debate since 1945. In other words, that view that the nature of (Western) democracy is essentially geared towards some sort of finality antithetical to “dictatorship” has become commonplace. Even so, the teleological assumption of a long-term breakthrough of liberal democracy from the eighteenth century onwards is one-sided and at the same time problematic, because it disregards the complexity of historical developments, and also neglects both the explicit and the implicit tensions, contradictions and conflicts that (Western-style) democracy continues to face even today.

The shortcomings of what may be labelled a “democratization imperative” are evident in the difficulty of providing persuasive explanations for the totalitarian experiences of the twentieth century, since they construing them simply as temporary aberrations or “historical exceptions” that prove the “democratic rule” is far from satisfactory. On a contemporary global scale, they are also empirically mirrored by the fact that political systems considered undemocratic or only partly democratic still outnumber those regarded as fully democratic, with a clear tendency toward diminishing global democracy over the last few years,¹ thus putting into perspective how pervasive the charms of democracy might have been beyond the frontiers of the “West”. However, shortcomings are also palpable in the West, since the image of today’s

Western world as a group of mature and stable democratic states is itself dangerously deceptive. Europeans and Americans alike must allow for critical questions to be raised with regard to their own political systems and ideals: Does “formal democracy” necessarily guarantee “real democracy”, so that democratic institutions and practices actually function where they are claimed to exist and have been implemented? Is it always possible to make a clear distinction between pluralistic and autocratic regimes? Do liberal society and economy on the one hand, and authoritarian polity on the other, mutually exclude each other? And, perhaps most important, do the “masses” really desire “democracy” as if by nature, to the exclusion of other possibilities?

On closer examination, the borderline between democracy and “non-democracy”—to use the perhaps least prejudiced counter-term—seems less clear than might first appear, as does the appeal of democracy as such. It can plausibly be argued that we are living through a distinct crisis of democracy in its liberal-representative form, something evident in growing alienation from parliamentarism, as indicated by widespread public distrust towards parliamentary institutions and procedures. However, also democracy as such is exposed to constant and serious threats. Subtle encroachments on public and political liberties, as well as more or less obvious attempts to steer public opinion by instrumentalizing the media may be cited as examples, alongside widespread susceptibility to populist politicians claiming to be the “voice of the people” or the “crisis manager” nations need, which frequently corresponds with openness to “strong leadership”.

Such openness is not exclusively found on the “periphery”, where the examples of Russia, Ukraine or Turkey demonstrate the fragility of democracy in states often described as “transitional” by social and political scientists. Even in the very heart of “the West”, including the European Union, the crisis—or rather imponderability—of democracy is manifest. Hungary and Poland are cases in point, where the respective governments have successfully pushed for curtailing oppositional forces in politics and society by restraining media pluralism, politicizing the judiciary, or revising the constitutional order to benefit the ruling party. Whether one is inclined to regard these policies as autocratic or just as a means for more “efficient” governance;² it remains the case that these developments have been undertaken by democratically elected governments entrusted with a majority in parliament. One might argue that politics does not necessarily reflect what electorates originally wanted their governments to accomplish, or that it is merely specific conditions such as a brief experience of post-dictatorial government that favor the authoritarian. But the most convenient explanations are not always the most sustainable ones. To contrast an innocent—or possibly inexperienced—electorate with a disobedient government, or to portray Hungary, Poland and other “sinners” as special cases, is one such convenient view and does not reflect the intricacies of our contemporary world, where (liberal) democracy has been put on the defensive.

Evidence speaks a clear language: the desire and preparedness for authoritarian forms of government is now widely present throughout the globe, including in Western democracies. In Europe, for example, the results of a study published in early 2011 show that in Portugal, which was hit particularly hard by the public debt crisis, no less than 62.4 percent of respondents expressed their active support for the idea of authoritarian leadership, and also in long-established democracies like Great Britain

and France more than 40 percent took the view that their country needed a “strong man” in power regardless of parliament or election results (41.8 percent and 43.2 percent respectively). Even in Germany with its traumatic experience of National Socialism one third of the sampled population (32.3 percent) was of the same opinion.³

What can be deduced from such empirical findings? If nothing else, they are a reminder that our present age is not far from the brink of authoritarianism: not only are reckless politicians advocating for it out of personal lust for power, whatever the desires of the people might actually be, but a considerable number of citizens long for authoritarianism or are at least indifferent towards it even in Western democracies. “Natural” distinctions between “good democracy” and “bad dictatorship” seem to fade in the presence of widely-felt anxiety about the future, which is nurtured by dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs and the almost omnipresent sense of “crisis”, be it economic, political or cultural, real or imagined. Yet is the relativization of such distinctions really a particularly “modern” phenomenon? Hardly so. Consequently, an historical analysis of palpably ambivalent attitudes towards authority seems a promising, and possibly indispensable, starting point for attaining a better understanding of present-day conditions and the future prospects of (democratic) politics.

World history exhibits a continual and dynamic clash of values, rather than a gradual creation and preservation of clear normative commitments; over time, these clashes have occasioned a range of theoretical and institutional compromises that have resulted in stability and fragility alike. This may be said of all periods of history, but perhaps the nineteenth century in particular; an age, in which fundamental departures from traditional understandings of society and politics were discernible, as manifest in the shift from a monarchical and dynastic to a democratic concept of legitimacy. It was also an age in which a multitude of clashes among different value systems became manifest within intellectual production and political action on a global scale, prefiguring much of our contemporary world. Against this background, the present enquiry sets out to challenge simplistic assumptions of smooth political-institutional development and overly optimistic democratization narratives by problematizing anew the complex relation between democracy and dictatorship, notably from the late eighteenth century onwards. More concretely, it aims to analyze the extent to which democracy emerged as compatible with dictatorship in political thought and practice during the revolutionary period and its aftermath.

Claims for potential compatibility between democracy and dictatorship might appear daring in view of the strict “illegitimacy” ascribed to the latter in political theory after the Second World War, but this is much less the case when earlier usage is taken into account. In 1923, for example, the German jurist Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) argued in his *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus* that a democratic concept of legitimacy could be perfectly compatible with the establishment of dictatorship. An individual leader could act, or at least decide, in the name of those represented no less than a representative parliamentary body could:

[...] The notion of parliamentarism appears to be something essentially democratic. But despite all its coincidence with democratic ideas and all the connections it has to them, it is not [...] If for practical and technical reasons the

representatives of the people can decide instead of the people themselves, then certainly a single trusted representative could also decide in the name of the same people. Without ceasing to be democratic, the argument would justify an antiparliamentary Caesarism.⁴

At the time Schmitt made this statement, his contentious claim that democracy and rule of the one were not incompatible had a long and intricate intellectual history behind it; a history, that is part of a more general debate about the nature and viability of modern statehood, the relationship of modern society, constitutionalism and representative government to classical forms of rule, and—more abstractly still—the potential links between the ancient and the modern world. That debate was a product of the kinds of experiences being opened up by the emergence of modernity, and the political options conceived to manage it. The term used by Schmitt in 1923 to characterize an alternative system of government, situated somewhere between democracy and dictatorship, reflects the struggle to make sense of the (modern) present by relating it to the (ancient) past: “Caesarism”. It refers to the regimes of the Roman Emperors created out of the late Republic and more particularly to the person of Julius Caesar, but also evinces intrinsic “novelty” because the term was only coined in the nineteenth century. Contemporary lexicographic entries widely reflect that dual and ambiguous nature of “Caesarism”.⁵

“Caesarism”⁶ assumes the guiding conceptual role within this study because of this inherent ambivalence, alongside the term’s suitability in comparison with other alternatives. That said, what follows will not offer any clear-cut definition of the term, and neither will it provide a straightforward “conceptual history” (*Begriffsgeschichte*). While both approaches have their strengths, they have immanent flaws, too: to agree *a priori* on an authoritative definition and classification of Caesarism and thus create an “ideal type” might provide a handy list of features against which certain historical phenomena and statesmen could be easily “checked” as to whether they match the model or not. Yet any pre-definition of what Caesarism actually means would inevitably be highly constructed and overlook the dynamic history of the Caesarism discourse, hence de-historicizing the results obtained.⁷ A “lexicographic” history of “Caesarism” focused on the changing uses of the concept over time would set out a clear research agenda, but at the same time run the risk of failing to encompass instances in which the same issues might have been addressed using another terminology, such as “Bonapartism”. In other words, focusing exclusively on one term disregards the fact that active usage of a specific term does not necessarily coincide with its full conceptual range or its membership within a family of related concepts. This also holds true for Caesarism, which is embedded in an extensive semantic field of both adjacent and oppositional concepts and has a far longer lineage than its sudden appearance as a discrete word in the 1840s might suggest.⁸

With this in mind, the present inquiry will take a less straightforward approach to the analysis of “Caesarism”, which will neither be understood as a rigidly fixed category nor as a particular form of government characterized by unequivocal features; rather, it will be shown to be as a “floating” and “open” political concept describing certain visions of political rule positioned amidst the conflicting priorities of “effective rule” and “political mass participation”, and at the crossroads of dictatorship and democracy more generally. Why “Caesarism” and related concepts of rule and government became

central at particular historical moments in the wake of the “revolutionary experience”, what they basically signified, and which hopes and fears were associated with them by contemporaries are all key concerns in what follows.

Notwithstanding the need to underscore the fluid and often ambiguous nature of seemingly lucid political concepts, a basic preconception of Caesarism is indispensable: defining the conceptual framework conditions helps to reify the object of research and avoid the danger of indulging in “whateverism”. Against this background, **three main traits** will be considered integral to the concept of Caesarism within this study:

- I. Caesarism as a political and politico-theoretical phenomenon incorporating both “democratic” and “dictatorial” elements. More particularly, it is assumed that Caesarism combines authoritarian leadership by one with an underlying democratic—usually “plebiscitary”—legitimization by the people, with intermediary representative bodies either absent or neutralized. Accordingly, Caesarism has an intrinsically anti-parliamentarian dimension.
- II. Caesarism as an essentially (post-)revolutionary phenomenon. While the desire to reconcile monocratic⁹ and democratic premises surfaces in human history throughout the ages, it was only with the radical shift away from a traditional and toward a predominantly democratic legitimization of rule under the slogan of “popular sovereignty” in the American and especially French Revolution—a period accompanied by fundamental economic, social and cultural changes—that this challenge became politically and conceptually pivotal. This claim also substantiates the starting point chosen for the investigation: the late eighteenth century.
- III. Caesarism as embedded in a pronounced and fundamental “crisis”. Regardless of whether this crisis is real or constructed, Caesarism is inseparable from the perception of an acute “moment of danger” and “exception(ality)”. The most widespread arguments in favor of dictatorial forms of government have coincided with a “state of exception(ality)” and crisis, blazing the trail for “unconventional” regimes to assume power. At the same time, however, it is the (potential) excesses of power accompanying or following in the wake of such a “state of exception(ality)” that have also provoked outright rejections of Caesarism as a viable political alternative.

What is to be expected from an inquiry revolving around the concept of Caesarism as categorized above? Ideally, a more nuanced and realistic understanding of the nature of politics in the “modern age”, and of the delicate intricacies of democracy in particular.

The idealized narrative of political-institutional progress from absolutism to parliamentary democracy, with monarchical-constitutional systems perhaps seen as a temporary stepping-stone between the two, clearly disregards the complexity of historical development; especially the fact that multiple alternatives to transform politics existed in the (post-)revolutionary period, including one in the direction of autocratic yet genuinely modern-style leadership. While the democratic spirit invoked by the American and French Revolutions in the second half of the eighteenth century was increasingly difficult to ignore, there was a continual risk that constitutional law, parliamentarian control

mechanisms or liberal values would lose out to a distinctively monocratic element assuming comprehensive power. This was particularly the case in times of increased susceptibility to radical political “solutions” such as revolutionary upheaval, economic calamity or rapid socio-economic change; in short: in times of “crisis”.

Traditional divine-right and absolutist monarchy was increasingly less likely to be a sustainable model in the longer term, since its foundations had been shattered by enlightened philosophy and revolutionary experience had deprived it of its mystique. Even so, the monarchical element had by no means lost all of its significance by the early nineteenth century. The increasing complexity of social and political life generated a desire for new forms of “rule by one” and “personalized leadership” that differed considerably from the pre-revolutionary period. Regimes that reinterpreted the old idea of rule essentially being “monarchical” and “by one” in ways that were in line with the spirit of the time had particular appeal: regimes managing to make the “rule of the one” fit with the demands of the “modern age”, political participation of the “people” (however defined), progress, innovation, national power and social welfare. One potential means to bring these demands together was a democratic-plebiscitary form of autocratic leadership, to be subsumed under “Caesarism”. For such Caesarism to work, however, a suitable leader was required. But who would best fit the role of a new type of leader in an age geared more towards the future than the past?

The decline of tradition and customs as *the* classical basis for legitimate rule together with mounting public expectations regarding politics made alternative forms of legitimacy all the more important. According to Max Weber’s classical distinction of “pure” sources of political legitimacy, these were mainly rational-legal and charismatic forms, both of which can legitimately claim to be revolutionizing powers.¹⁰ The growing rational-legal underpinning of rule found its clearest expression in the wave of legal codifications taking place throughout Europe from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, above all in the many constitutions enacted in the wake of revolutionary upheaval, which made people such as the German liberal Karl von Rotteck (1775–1840) declare the nineteenth century to be “the age of constitutions”.¹¹ Alongside rational authority, based on the popular perception that a government’s power derives from established (constitutional) norms, charismatic authority was also becoming potentially more important, embodied by individuals who seemed to be natural leaders and guarantors of progress or stability by their sheer personal magnetism and their exceptional attributes.¹²

It was not impossible for traditional monarchs to assume—or, if “charisma” is taken as an integral element of any kind of political rule, to reinforce—the role of a “charismatic leader” and adapt their style of government accordingly, as a number of nineteenth century figures such as the Russian tsar Alexander I illustrate. Yet even more than the rational-legal it was the charismatic element that created possibilities for newcomers and *homines novi* from outside the established political class unseen before in history. The road to power was paved by gaining the status of a popular hero or national saviour; a process favored by the growing political “mass market” and its corresponding media serving as a tool for the charismatization of the leader and as the link between him and the “people”. In combination with a democratic-plebiscitary underpinning, charismatic rule wielded potential advantages: while it incorporated

the “popular moment”, it promised better decision-making capacities than either parliamentary democracy, which was still struggling against the reproach that it tended towards anarchy, or constitutional monarchy with its systemic dualism between monarch and parliament. Charismatic-plebiscitary forms of rule also implied an ability to transcend existing boundaries, legal, ethical or otherwise, provided the leader successfully managed to argue that it was for the benefit of the “nation” or “whole”. The option of abandoning—at least temporarily—conventions and the rule of law, whether to justify a “necessary” *coup d'état* or to declare a state of emergency, was not least due to the pseudo-religious traits of charismatic leadership. If charismatic leaders were seen as the “prophets” of a new era, chances were high that their political ambitions and promises would be perceived more as a creed than a simple political program, especially in the (post-)revolutionary age. There, the “cult” of heroic leadership—which could even nurture Messianic traits and the notion of a community of fate—compensated for traditional forms of religiosity that were increasingly exposed to secularizing tendencies.

It therefore seems vital to maintain charisma as a key category of Caesaristic discourse and government, even if the term itself only gained analytical relevance in the twentieth century. Charisma also applies to those two figures in modern history who are regarded as *the* representatives of what many sharp-eyed analysts of European politics have seen as a qualitatively new type of rule growing out of the Revolution and at the same time representing a reaction against it: Napoleon I and Napoleon III. It was their seizure and exercise of power that essentially triggered an interest within nineteenth-century political theory and philosophy about the issue of “Caesarism”. For this reason alone, these two assume a pivotal role in the present inquiry.

1.2 Scope of Study

While in twentieth- and partly also twenty-first-century scholarship different national variants of “Caesarism” and especially French “Bonapartism” have been examined in some detail,¹³ works focusing on the broader European context and theorizing in-depth studies on the background of and impetus for the phenomenon and its repercussions have largely remained a *desideratum*. This gap seems all the more astonishing in view of the considerable interest in the topic on the part of nineteenth-century observers, but it can be explained by at least two things: first, Caesarism does not fit into the aforementioned Western *topos* of long-term democratization and parliamentarization; second, the totalitarian experiences of the twentieth century have absorbed much of the attention in research Caesarism might otherwise have continued to receive.¹⁴ More recently, a growing scholarly interest in Caesarism can be observed,¹⁵ spurred on by political developments that challenge long-established narratives of political progress and pose anew the question of whether and to what extent democracy and authoritarianism are mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the current discussion has not yet reached anything like the intensity of the debates about Caesarism throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Moreover, the rediscovery of Caesarism has mainly yielded works focusing on the intellectual and conceptual history of the term, therefore addressing only one—albeit crucial—dimension of the phenomenon

and largely leaving aside the dynamic relation between political discourse and “real politics”.

With this in mind, the present study will deliberately refrain from an individual case study method, nor will it attempt an exhaustive comparative analysis of various national facets of “Caesarism”. Instead, it will elaborate on general trends in interpretation and perspectives of development and present a broader picture of Caesaristic discourse *and* politics in a European framework. The approach chosen for this task is “theoretical”, and simultaneously explicitly “historicizing”. The assumption is that “Caesarism” can be perceived as something contingent upon concrete conditions at specific moments in history, that is a political, social or economic phenomenon in the narrower sense, but not exclusively so because the phenomenon is also rooted in broader spiritual-intellectual currents indicated by the term “modernity”. Regardless of more particular explanations of the phenomenon that may be put forward, the challenges of the modern age remain evident, especially regarding the realm of politics and the underpinning legitimations of rule. In this context, the study aims to help delineate the underlying structures, contingencies and contradictions that generated Caesarism as a particular expression of “political modernity”.

While this enquiry is intended to supplement existing explanations of “Caesarism” by analyzing the phenomenon at a more general level, this does not necessarily imply abstraction. Rather, the specificity of the subject within its particular time period will be emphasized in order to explain broad tendencies and long-term implications. Contemporary definitions of “Caesarism” and related concepts will be drawn upon to provide insight into the extent to which these terms and concepts were connoted in a negative or positive way, and whether—and why—there was craving for Caesaristic rule among contemporaries. The underlying assumption is that the “signature” of an era can best be grasped by taking the debates and intellectual discourse, that is the “self-diagnoses”, of the time as a starting point.¹⁶ These shed light on existing concepts of “future” and perceptions of “historical development” during the period.¹⁷ Within this framework, a two-fold standpoint on the subject will be taken: on the one hand an “internal”, focusing on the understanding and legitimization of Caesarism by rulers and politicians commonly associated with the term; on the other an “external”, dealing with the perception and theorization of Caesaristic forms of government by contemporary political observers. What will have to be shown in this context is that right from the beginning debate was exceedingly heterogeneous. While the implications of a putatively new regime type embodied by Napoleon Bonaparte and others would occupy politicians and theorists for the rest of the nineteenth century and beyond, there was no agreement at all as to the actual benchmark to be used in assessment, nor even about the actual terminology referring to the phenomenon: whether it might best be characterized as “Napoleonism”, “Bonapartism”, simply “dictatorship”, or perhaps “(modern) Caesarism”; whether it was foremost a national, particularly French, phenomenon, or a universal *signum* of the era, characteristic of all post-revolutionary societies; whether it was a transient aberration on the path of history or more its *ultima ratio*; whether it was more about “progress” than “regression”; and whether it was a rescue from anarchy and revolution, and thus the salvation of “reason”, or rather a hindrance and misdirection of development.

No matter how rich the self-diagnoses of the time might be, however, their study remains superficial without an accompanying “**historical analysis**”, which explores and judges the past from the present. Historical distance from our objects of research might carry a risk of retrojection, with former epochs being interpreted and understood according to today’s standards and methods; nevertheless, distance also affords the opportunity to assess historical phenomena differently and sometimes perhaps also more astutely than contemporaries of the period. Caesarism is no exception, since the experiences of the twentieth and twenty-first century have provided us with abundant material for insight and reflection unavailable to nineteenth-century observers.

In the present volume, the importance of a “historical analysis” is understood in yet another, perhaps more pragmatic respect: dealing with Caesarism primarily as an intellectual and “ideological” problem runs the risk of emphasizing just one aspect while neglecting the Machiavellian moments, material interests and actual politics—components without which the phenomenon cannot be adequately grasped. In order to minimize this danger and strengthen the “historical” dimension of the inquiry, the theoretical focus will be contextualized to underscore the specific configurations in which Caesarism came into being and was debated: not only by referring to (geo-) political, social and economic framework conditions in which debates took place, but also by addressing institutionalized forms of Caesarism and the policies of such regimes—though without any claim to offer exhaustive accounts of these regimes. Not only does this approach add a complementary dimension, it demonstrates the interplay of political discourse and political practice, as well as their reciprocal contingency. “Political ideas” and “concepts” are accordingly understood as embedded in and affected by existing settings, and part of an ongoing communicative process in actual historical moments inasmuch as the result and object of concrete political action and institutions. The present study is less a conceptual history or history of political thought *sensu stricto*, than it is a political history seeking to bridge political theory and political practice. Factoring in “concrete politics” is essential, since the role of empiricism for theory formation has tended to be neglected in Caesarism scholarship, increasing the risk of Caesarism becoming an empty formula for all kinds of “authoritarian rule”.¹⁸

With regard to the **temporal and spatial limits of the present study**, there are no clear-cut “natural boundaries”. This permits a certain degree of freedom, but also potential reproach for arbitrariness. As for the temporal limitation, preceding comments on Caesarism being an essentially (post-)revolutionary phenomenon fix a starting point in the late eighteenth century; a period, in which older lines of discourse (republicanism, absolutism, Enlightenment) clashed with a set of new ones.¹⁹ More specifically, the examination will start with the French Revolution, taken as a culmination point of the Revolutionary Age in which the collision of democratic and monocratic imperatives was demonstrated even more distinctly than in the preceding American Revolution. It was from the French Revolution that Napoleon Bonaparte emerged as a key point of reference for most subsequent analysts of Caesarism. Setting a temporal endpoint is perhaps more difficult, since it could be argued that we are still living in a version of “post-revolutionary modernity”. Nevertheless, rather than expanding the analysis to encompass the whole twentieth

century, the First World War and the 1920s will serve as a general terminus: firstly, since the Great War and its political repercussions are widely accepted as a historical caesura; secondly, because the debate on Caesarism declined with the growing scientification of the term and the ensuing discourse on totalitarianism, respectively. Nevertheless, in what is conceived as an outlook chapter, the relation between Caesarism and totalitarianism as well as the long-term legacies of the Caesarism discourse will be examined, if only in outline.

A particular challenge has been setting spatial limits. Given the underlying understanding of Caesarism as an essentially universal phenomenon, it would certainly be desirable to investigate it in a pan-European or even global perspective, allowing for a well-balanced analysis of Caesaristic languages and practices employed in various national contexts. But even within a collaborative project this would hardly be manageable, particularly not for a timespan encompassing more than a century. For this reason, my focus will be on two national cases: France and Germany, which were both formative for the Caesarism discourse in the nineteenth century. This focus allows for the examination of patterns of transfer and reception between the two cases, though an “entangled history” of France and Germany in the proper sense of the word cannot be offered. Other national cases in specific periods will occasionally be taken into consideration as well, with an aim to providing a more complete picture of the significance of Caesarism in the (post-)revolutionary age.

In summary, the following issues of the (post-)revolutionary age emerge as **central research objects** of this study:

- The ambivalent heritage of the Revolution, popular and monarchical sovereignty, processes of democratization and radicalization, change and preservation, and the resulting problems and strategies of political legitimization.
- The changing foundations of political legitimacy and the shifts between traditional, rational and charismatic forms of rule; developments taking place within the context of changing patterns of “faith” and expectations of salvation characterized by an increasing desire to *Immanentise the Eschaton*,²⁰ that is to create a sort of “heaven on earth” within history.
- The importance of an emerging “public sphere”—as manifest, for example, in the emergence of mass media and political parties—for negotiating power, setting new frameworks for the exercise of power and promoting the emergence of new styles of government.
- The repercussions of industrialization and social change, as well as nationalism and imperialism on the organization of rule and political institutions.

In order to shed light on these issues in a structured manner, the inquiry is specifically arranged around the following **research questions**:

1. What was the context in which discourse on Caesarism developed and grew?
2. To what extent and by the use of which arguments was Caesarism seen as a specifically “new” form of political rule by contemporary observers and politicians, and what flaws and perils, but also possible strengths and promises, were considered inherent in Caesaristic regimes?

3. How great is the convergence and/or divergence between the politico-theoretical discourse on Caesarism on the one hand, and “Caesaristic politics” as well as institutionalized expressions of such politics on the other?
4. What is the long-term legacy of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourse on Caesarism, and its relevance for the contemporary world?