Prutsch, Markus J. "'Bonapartism' as Hazard and Promise." *Caesarism in the Post-Revolutionary Age*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. 47–66. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474267571.ch-003>>.

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“Bonapartism” as Hazard and Promise

3.1 Political Legitimacy in Post-Napoleonic Europe

At first glance, the general political situation in Europe seemed to be quite clear in 1814/1815: with Napoleon’s military defeat, the Revolution had finally been overpowered, its ideological foundations shattered, and the victorious anti-Napoleonic forces could feel free to turn the clocks back. Practically all over Europe the practice and language of “Revolution” was compromised, and among conservatives and liberals alike the concept of “popular sovereignty” served to denote—and indeed demonize—all the burdens, crises and sacrifices Europe had suffered in the previous quarter of a century. It was hard to find active advocates of radical political, social or economic change; instead, the main discourse of the time was about durable peace, reconstruction, or at most reform.

Despite the fact that the partisans of the Revolution were on the defensive, however, hardly anywhere on the continent did restoration policies have the character of pure reaction or a return to pre-revolutionary conditions. For the most part, the old—or, as in the case of France, “new old”—monarchical elite of Europe was aware that trying to undo the fundamental changes in practically all areas of public life that had been taking place during the previous decades was a dangerous if not impossible endeavor.¹ There was widespread agreement that albeit in different forms and to differing extents, all European states had to face up to the legacies of the Revolution, no matter how much the traditional elites might loathe this heritage. A particular challenge was to find a way of reconciling post-revolutionary societies’ expectations of both a constitutional state and the preservation of the political as well as legal innovations generated since 1789 with monarchical claims for personal government and sovereignty characteristic of the previous centuries. This challenge gave rise to the concept of “monarchical constitutionalism”, which might justifiably also be characterized as “constitutional monarchism”;² first of all in France, where the need to come to terms with the Revolution was most immediate. The new monarchical constitutional order made the monarch the dominant political power and declared him the sole holder of the *pouvoir constituant*, yet was based at the same time on a written constitution providing for civil liberties and allowing citizens to partake in the political, and above all legislative, process. The restoration of the Bourbons in 1814 on the basis of the *Charte constitutionnelle*³ thus became, as the Revolution itself had been, an act of European importance; an act which might now serve as a key to coming to terms with the revolutionary epoch permanently.

Constitutional monarchism became a nineteenth-century model on a European scale, and constitutional systems following the example of the *Charte* were set up, e.g., in the United Netherlands (1815), Congress Poland (1815), the Southern German states of Bavaria (1818), Baden (1818) and Württemberg (1819), or later Spain (1834) and Greece (1844).⁴ A key element of the *Charte* and its successors was the—at least formal—repossession of constituent power and hence sovereignty by the monarch. Seen from this angle, the traditional legitimacy of the *Ancien Régime* in terms of the doctrine of divine right seemed to have been reinstated, and the constitutional guarantees a mere means to disguise this radical break with the revolutionary past. Such a view, however, is misleading and ignores the Janus-like nature of constitutional monarchism, which was the institutionalized acknowledgment that the way in which monarchical rule could be legitimized had fundamentally changed.

In France, where the ties between the former dynasty and French society were of a highly fragile nature, the monarchy had to be given new foundations. Accordingly, Louis' guarantee to uphold the achievements of the Revolution in the *Charte* was a political necessity: concessions had to be, and were made.⁵ In so doing, the main source of legitimacy essentially shifted from "tradition" to "law" and thus became "rationalized", despite the fact that the political rhetoric of the Restoration continued to play on the *topoi* "custom" and "divine right".

This ambivalence did not go unnoticed, especially among those who had hoped for a complete departure from the "revolutionary spirit" after Napoleon's fall. One such person was Joseph de Maistre, who in a letter from St. Petersburg, dated July 18, 1814, referred to the contradictions of the Restoration by emphasizing that it would be entirely wrong to believe that Louis XVIII had returned to the throne of his ancestors. Rather, he had only jumped in Napoleon's seat and continued the Revolution by other means.⁶ Since 1814 marked a "royal Revolution", but a revolution nevertheless, the Bourbon Restoration was a project far from perfect in the eyes of de Maistre and of other reactionaries and conservatives: the granting of comprehensive legal guarantees, the constitutional restriction of monarchical power, but above all acknowledging the social order created during the revolutionary and Napoleonic age, were just too far removed from their anti-revolutionary ideology. The restoration of the monarchy, which de Maistre had intended to become the exact "opposite of the Revolution",⁷ had now turned into a political compromise.

Post-Napoleonic constitutional monarchism left rulers with different playing cards, giving political legitimacy a new character. It was no longer possible to found rule exclusively upon the idea of an "authority of the past" that had been distinctive for the pre-modern age and served as a regulator for political life. Rather, political institutions were now forced to reassert their legitimacy by continuous action, activity and innovation. Monarchs, favored by their legal abstraction into "constitutional bodies", were increasingly judged from a rational perspective, in which former awe for the office holder was now replaced by pragmatic respect. Within an increasingly "functional" understanding of monarchy,⁸ the main factor of legitimacy of the rulers was their ability to meet public expectations. In former days, indeed, monarchs might tell and write about freedom or constitutional government, and yet go on governing like a

despot; but in the nineteenth century "the royal amateurs would now be taken at their word, and their pleasant speculations turned into anxious realities".⁹

The framework within which monarchical power could be exercised after the revolutionary experiences was aptly characterized by Talleyrand in his final report on the Congress of Vienna, addressed to Louis XVIII and written immediately after Napoleon's Hundred Days.¹⁰ The "principle of legitimacy", Talleyrand pointed out there, was endangered most by those of its supporters who confused "source" and "exercise" of state power and would therefore mistake "legitimate" for "absolute" authority.¹¹ He stressed that it was of vital importance that the exercise of power was adjusted to the *Zeitgeist*. Fighting the spirit of the time was doomed to failure: the nature of legitimacy had changed, and "divine right" was no longer a reliable basis for monarchical rule.¹² At the present stage of history, only rule that guaranteed the happiness and peace of its subjects would be legitimate. The virtues and positive traits of the sovereign monarch alone would not suffice. It was stable institutions which had to be set up as reliable cornerstones of trust. In Talleyrand's eyes, yet more was needed to ensure their durability:

It would be pointless for institutions to guarantee people happiness. Even if they did, they could not inspire confidence without establishing that form of government that contemporary general opinion considers the only one capable of reaching this goal.¹³

Yet which form of government would indeed correspond best with public opinion and be thus truly "legitimate" and most apt to achieve the aim of guaranteeing the "luck of the peoples" was anything but self-evident, remaining a matter of fierce debate even during the Restoration period. It was in the context of debates on forms of political legitimacy and how to organize political—and particularly monarchical—power that politico-theoretical reflections on the classification and assessment of the Napoleonic experience continued and advanced after 1814/1815. At the end of the day, "Napoleonism" shared a fundamental similarity with constitutional monarchism notwithstanding obvious differences between the two: while they were diametrically opposed in terms of defining the ultimate holder of "sovereignty" and "constituent power", they equally represented attempts to reconcile the legacy of the Revolution with monocratic rule.

In *De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation* of 1814,¹⁴ Constant suggested that despotism was an antiquated form of domination. He argued that what had been created in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic age were regimes that penetrated and controlled society far more than ever before, their power to mobilize citizens deriving from revolutionary and democratic energies unleashed in this form for the first time. While "usurpation" used existing "despotic" governmental structures, it did so by creating an unprecedented form of oppression made possible by demagoguery, propaganda, and mass conscription. In other words, Constant theorized a regime type which aligned itself with a series of "negative models" of government in Western political thought,¹⁵ but which at the same time was distinctively new.

Constant was not alone in his judgement that the concepts of tyranny and despotism were inadequate to define—and indeed criticize—the system of government created in

the wake of the eighteenth century's Great Revolutions. Among the authors arguing in the same vein after 1814/1815 was François Guizot (1787–1874), who embedded his reflections on the Napoleonic age in a broader theory of political sovereignty and legitimacy. Of the two main anti-Napoleonic schools of thought in the Restoration, namely royalism and liberalism, Guizot was the main representative of the latter together with Constant. His position, however, differed from Constant's in several respects.

When Guizot sought to revive the use of history in political argument during the Restoration, he actually neutralized the democratic position of other thinkers such as Sieyès by adopting a theory of legitimacy theoretically diverse and at the same time politically pluralistic. While assuming that two different criteria for legitimacy could be applied, either conformity to reason and justice, or else the acceptance over time of a regime by the people, Guizot's theory of legitimacy actually rested on the postulation that any unchecked power was illegitimate.

The cornerstones of Guizot's theory were set in his famous lectures on the *History of Civilisation in Europe* (1828) and the *History of Civilisation in France* (1828–1830), in which he revamped the concept of legitimacy in such a way as to maintain it as the standard for a pluralist theory of justice, reason, and right in politics.¹⁶ At the same time, he declared legitimacy based on birth and inheritance, i.e. essentially the claims of the Bourbon legitimists and ultras, to simply one element of "legitimate sovereignty". For Guizot, political legitimacy was indispensable to the progress of European civilization; but as a matter of historical fact, no *one* system had ever dominated Europe, all of them had some—though limited—right to recognition in the present. In addition, Guizot also afforded a definition of legitimacy in terms of "reason". In his view, legitimacy had nothing to do with absolute power and was incompatible with the personal will of any individual or group. This, in turn, also demarcated political illegitimacy:

[...] the merest common sense will acknowledge that the sovereignty of right completely and permanently can appertain to no one; that all attribution of the sovereignty of right to any human power whatsoever, is radically false and dangerous. Hence arises the necessity for the limitation of all powers, whatever their names or forms may be; hence the radical illegitimacy of all absolute power, whether its origin be from conquest, inheritance, or election.¹⁷

Guizot essentially identified four types of "illegitimate"—since "absolute"—power held by men: "feudal despotism", "religious despotism", "monarchical despotism" and "democratic despotism". He made a clear distinction between feudal despotism on the one hand, and religious and monarchical on the other. While theocratic and monarchical despotism had more than once obtained the consent of the population subjected to it, feudal despotism had always been repulsive and odious. This was since feudal despotism was altogether different: "it was the power of the individual over the individual; the dominion of the personal and capricious will of a man. This is, perhaps, the only tyranny of [*sic!*] which, to his eternal honour, man will never willingly accept."¹⁸ This left "democratic despotism" as the fourth type of illegitimate power.

Guizot argued that the worst form of democracy was one based on the delegation of supreme power by the people to a representative. In his *History of Representative Government in Europe* (1820–1822), Guizot had openly denounced the theory of representative government and, more particularly, the idea that an agent could represent the people having abdicated their power to the full extent of their inherent sovereignty. Guizot found that this concept, which he identified both with the Convention and with Napoleon,¹⁹ was, "obviously, pure and unmixed despotism, rigorously deduced from the principle that wills are to be represented in government". The declaration that "the elect of the sovereign is itself sovereign" had to lead almost necessarily to the "destruction of all responsibility in power, and of all rights belonging to the citizens".²⁰

What called for explanation, though, was how Napoleon had managed to compel overwhelming allegiance despite his "illegitimacy", as Guizot had himself defined it. The answer to this question lay in the double nature of "great men", among whom Guizot did not hesitate to count Napoleon in the same breath with Charlemagne. Starting from the premise that great men were not "merely a burden and a useless wonder to mankind" and a "sterile scourge, or at very best, [...] a burdensome luxury", but played a fundamental role in the development of (Western) civilization, in his *History of Civilisation in France* Guizot pointed out that "the activity of a great man is of two kinds". Correspondingly, two stages could be distinguished in his career, thus outlining what was to become a common theme in the nineteenth century. In a first stage, he would understand the necessities of his time better than other people, "its real, present exigencies; what, in the age he lives in, society needs, to enable it to subsist and attain its natural development". By understanding these necessities better than any other person of his time and knowing better than any other how to wield the powers of society, and direct them skillfully towards the realization of this end, his power and glory would proceed: "it is in virtue of this, that as soon as he appears he is understood, accepted, followed; that all give their willing aid to the work which he is performing for the benefit of all."²¹ This was the source of his legitimacy.

After this initial stage, however, with the "real wants" of his time satisfied to some degree, the great man would refuse to stop: "The ideas and the will of the great man proceed further. [...] He aspires to extend his activity and influence indefinitely, and to possess the future as he has possessed the present. Here egoism and illusion commence." For a while people would continue to follow, believe and obey him on the face of what he had already achieved. Sooner or later, however, they would discover that they were being forced in a direction in which they have no desire to move. This in turn would force the great man to use ever more arbitrary means: "he now seeks to employ the public force in the service of his individual ideas and desires; he is attempting things which he alone wishes or understands." Disquietude and uneasiness were the consequences: "for a time he is still followed, but sluggishly and reluctantly; next he is censured and complained of; finally he is abandoned and falls; and all which he alone had planned and desired, all the merely personal and arbitrary part of his work, perishes with him."²²

Applied to Napoleon, Guizot emphasized that when Napoleon had seized power in France, the imperious want of the French nation had been the safeguarding of national

independence against foreign aspirations and civil life at home. "To put her, in a word, into the possession of independence and order, the only pledges of a long future, this was the desire, the general thought of the country." This Napoleon had understood and achieved. Yet when this was accomplished, he proposed a thousand other projects, which he aimed to push through by all available means—ultimately with dramatic consequences for his reign:

Potent in combinations, and of an ardent imagination, egoistical and thoughtful, machinator and poet, he, as it were, poured out his activity in arbitrary and gigantic projects, children of his own,—solitary, foreign to the real wants of our time, and of our France. She followed him for some time, and at great cost, in this path which she had not selected; a day came when she would follow no further, and the emperor found himself alone, and the empire vanished, and all things returned to their proper condition, to their natural tendency.²³

For Guizot, who propagated a constitutional redefinition of political legitimacy, Napoleon exemplified a form of democratic illegitimacy that derived from an absolutist application of the theory of popular sovereignty. This did not imply, however, that illegitimate forms of government were all in vain right by definition. On the contrary, all forms of government would have their moments of historical necessity, including the "system of Bonaparte", which—as Guizot declared in 1818—had been "a violent method of getting out of the Revolution, as the Revolution had been a violent method of getting out of the *Ancien Régime*". But while ascribing historical use and need to the Napoleonic regime, Guizot shared Constant's characterization of the system being just a temporary phenomenon: "the system of Bonaparte could have never been anything else but an ephemeral system."²⁴ In his view, the regime had merely fulfilled its civilizing purpose—no more, no less.

For Guizot, this was even truer after the Revolution of 1830 and the establishment of the July Monarchy, in which he played a decisive part, and which in his eyes was lastingly to guarantee the true postulations of 1789: a liberal-constitutional monarchy, rejecting both excessive monarchical claims to sovereignty and power and the doctrine of unlimited popular sovereignty. Abiding by the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty, the new regime rested on a revised, more liberal version of the Constitutional Charter, while continuing to adhere to a strictly limited franchise. For any kind of "plebiscitary leader" there was neither room nor need therein.²⁵

The fact that key figures of French intellectual life such as Constant, Madame de Staël and Guizot collaborated in designing a new negative regime type during the Restoration that was personified by Napoleon does not imply, however, that their critical view of the Napoleonic regime was unchallenged. Despite the unfavorable political circumstances during both the Restoration and the July Monarchy, Bonapartist ideas actually continued to receive considerable support not only in parts of the broader population, but also among many contemporary writers and scholars. Stendhal's *Vie de Napoléon* (1817–1818) and his *Mémoires sur Napoléon* (1836–1837) are prominent literary examples of a favorable, indeed venerating assessment of Napoleon and his form of government.²⁶

In his *Vie de Napoléon*, written as a direct refutation of Madame de Staël's portrait of Napoleon in her *Considérations*, Stendhal (1783–1842) defended the "military despotism" that was installed by the coup of 18 Brumaire as the best alternative. Without it, "France had, in 1800, the events of 1814 or the Terror".²⁷ In the conclusion of his work, Stendhal described Napoleon as "the human being most admired for his talents since Caesar", and drew analogies also to other historical figures such as Alexander and Frederic the Great, "people alongside whom he will be placed and whose glory will shine every day".²⁸ His *Mémoires sur Napoléon*, written around twenty years later, argued in a very similar vein. Therein, he defended not only Napoleon's political, legal and social achievements, but also his regime *per se*, and stressed the great parallel which by then had already become somewhat commonplace: "I experienced a kind of religious feeling", Stendhal remarked, "when writing the first sentence of Napoleon's story. It is, indeed, about the greatest man who has appeared in the world since Caesar [...], the most amazing man who has appeared since Alexander [...]"²⁹

The identification of Napoleon with Caesar and other great characters of world history was a common feature of the "Napoleonic myth" and "cult" in France, which gained in strength the bigger the gap to the historical events and the susceptibility to glorification and idealization became. But appreciation, if not adoration, of Napoleon and his "system" was not confined to France. It could also be found beyond its borders, including Germany, where after 1814 a remarkable change in public attitude towards Napoleon, which had been almost unanimously hostile during the *Befreiungskriege* ("Wars of Liberation"), started to take place.³⁰ This was particularly due to the bitter disappointment felt among broad parts of the population, but especially among the educated middle-classes (*Bildungsbürgertum*), who felt their hopes both for national unification and comprehensive political and social reforms had been betrayed by ever harsher reactionary policies in the newly founded German Confederation.³¹ Even the constitutionalization processes, which had so promisingly picked up pace after the enactment of the French *Charte* in 1814 and culminated in the proclamation of new constitutions in Southern Germany (Bavaria, Baden and Württemberg), soon abated. Above all, Austria and Prussia, the two most powerful and dominant German states, remained without any formal constitution and turned towards increasingly repressive measures in order to keep the national and liberal forces under control. The enactment of the Karlsbad Decrees in 1819³² and of the *Wiener Schlussakte* in 1820³³ in the Confederation, burned the bridges for political cooperation between rulers and the liberal *Bürgertum*. For the latter it became clear that the ruling classes were not going to make any serious efforts for reform and change voluntarily. In view of the "Metternich system", it was no wonder that the wish for a radical political solution was on the increase, even though it was almost impossible to formulate such views publicly due to strict censorship, as was popular desire for "great men" as Napoleon had represented one. In the early 1820s, Johann Georg Rist (1775–1847), a writer and Danish official from Holstein, wrote to the German publisher Friedrich Christoph Perthes (1772–1843):

Even if the world generally seems to be no less evil than it used to be, it still lacks one thing entirely, it lacks great, significant personalities, standing out from the

crowd, representatives of a nobler and stronger humanity, those in whom the individual can eagerly mirror himself and take pleasure.³⁴

On another occasion, Rist sagaciously highlighted the factors that helped the former “Scourge of Germany” become a heroic figure:

Who has ever hurt the Germans more than Napoleon, and yet the people’s instinct again seeks out precisely this man among the ruins under which he lies buried, and even now counts him among the heroes; because he was taken out of their midst and had brought forth a mythical time of upheavals and acts of violence, which in our sober times seem almost unbelievable.³⁵

Quite similarly, another friend of Perthes pointed out that “the transformation of sentiment towards Napoleon verges on the unbelievable”, and Perthes, being an ardent patriot who had distinguished himself during the period of Napoleon’s supremacy by his steady resistance to French pretensions, had to acknowledge in his response that: “Napoleon will still become the idol of the period. Already many are longing for such a despot to appear anew. It would not be impossible for their longing to be satisfied; for out of [public] sentiments like those predominating today, dragons arise.”³⁶

It comes therefore as no surprise that the Revolution of 1830 further intensified these tendencies. The French July Revolution proved the apparent political tranquility in Germany and elsewhere to be fallacious, with revolutionary uprisings taking place in various parts of Europe (Belgium, Poland and Italy), including several German states like Brunswick, Hesse and Saxony. Metternich’s hopes for achieving stabilization by means of “political paralysis” had been dashed, but a policy change did not ensue. Instead, the German Confederation introduced even harsher reactionary measures in the wake of 1830, both with regard to fundamental rights and the scope of constitutional government: whilst the *Zehn Artikel* (“Ten Articles”) of July 5, 1832 were a means to suppress the liberal movement by further limitations of civil liberties,³⁷ the *Sechs Artikel* (“Six Articles”) of June 28, 1832 sought to interpret existing constitutions more rigidly than ever before and to enchain the parliamentary opposition.³⁸ These reactionary measures were later specified in the *Sechzig Artikel* (“Sixty Articles”) of June 12, 1834.³⁹

In view of the Revolution, which in Germany only brought further repression and continued political stagnation, the longing for a personified “liberator” grew even faster. Under the impression of the events, even Perthes became convinced that “France is in need of a great despot and Europe in need of a great man”.⁴⁰ The Napoleon cult became a projectory for suppressed hopes and expectations in German society. This was particularly true for the new liberal-democratic movement of the Young Germany (*Junges Deutschland*) in its anti-legitimist self-understanding. For them, worshipping Napoleon was a means to keep liberal ideals alive. Not quite unusual was also the conviction that only some sort of “national-democratic dictatorship” could sweep away the Metternich system.⁴¹

Perhaps the most prominent supporter of Napoleon—or rather of the ideal of him—among the Young Germans was Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), who had described the French Emperor effusively as early as 1828:

every inch a god! [...] His name even now sounds to us like a word of the early world, and as antique and heroic as those of Alexander and Caesar. It has already become a rallying word among the peoples, and when the Orient and the Occident meet, they fraternise on that single name.⁴²

Heine's literary occupation with Napoleon Bonaparte did not confine itself to elevating the man and his glory, but advocated a broader viewpoint and agenda. On the death of Napoleon's only son, the Duke of Reichstadt and former King of Rome, in July 1832, Heine underlined that faith in Napoleon and his political program was not bound to any blood line:

[...] for those Bonapartists who believe in an Imperial resurrection in the flesh, all is at an end. Napoleon is for them only a name, like that of Alexander of Macedon, or Charlemagne, whose direct heirs died early in like manner. But for the Bonapartists, who believe in a resurrection of the spirit, there now blooms the best hope. For them, Bonapartism is not a transferral of power by begetting and primogeniture; no, their Bonapartism is now free from all animal admixture; it is for them the idea of an autocracy [*Alleinherrschaft*] of the highest power, applied to the best condition of the people, and he who shall have this power, and will so apply it, him they will call Napoleon II. As Caesar gave his name to absolute rule [*bloße Herrschergewalt*], so the name of Napoleon will be bestowed on a new Caesardom [*Cäsarthumb*], to whom he alone has the right who possesses the highest ability and the strongest will.⁴³

This passage in Heine's work is remarkable as it is one of the early instances that "Bonapartism" is actively used as a politico-theoretical term, depicting a specific, though "depersonalized" political program, ideology and category of rule. Bonapartism and Napoleonism had occasionally been used before, but more casually to describe attachment to or support for Napoleon's policy and his dynasty. In this context, for example, James Mackintosh (1765–1832) had talked of "Napoleonism, which is now become so general, chiefly, perhaps, as a sort of anti-Bourbonism" in 1814,⁴⁴ and Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) of the "remains of Bonaparteism [*sic!*]" in 1815.⁴⁵ But it was only in the 1830s that Bonapartism began to assume the character of a political concept,⁴⁶ and it is revealing that the use of this politicized "-ism" by Heine comes at a time when the person referred to and his immediate descendants are no longer alive.

Noteworthy is not only the conceptual change reflected in Heine's writings, but also the conciseness with which he pictures "Bonapartism" and relates it to "Caesarism" (literally "Caesardom", *Cäsarthumb*), both terms which were soon to become frequently used and a common part of intellectual discourse.⁴⁷ For Heine, the democratic element was certainly a crucial one in his understanding of Bonapartism. Yet he did not see Bonapartism as an ideal form of government *by* the people, but much more so *for* the people: "The best democracy", Heine later wrote in his book on Shakespeare (1838), "will always be that where one person stands as incarnation of the popular will at the head of the state, like God at the head of the world's government, for under that incarnate will of the people, as under the majesty of God, blooms the safest human

equality, the truest democracy".⁴⁸ Heine did not confuse democracy with egalitarianism either; he understood it in terms of "equal opportunity", merits and accomplishments being the main criteria of social status and advancement. It was exactly these elements which made the political system of Napoleon Bonaparte so splendid and appealing; a ruler, whom Heine characterized as a type of "Saint-Simonian emperor":

for as he [Napoleon; MJP] reached the highest power by his intellectual superiority, so he contributed only to the advancement of men of capacity, and aimed at the physical and moral well-being of the more numerous and poorer classes. He reigned less to benefit the third estate, the middle class, the *Juste-milieu*, than the men whose means consisted of hearts and hands alone; and even his army was a hierarchy whose grades of honour were gained solely by intrinsic value and capacity.⁴⁹

Bonapartism was not about social levelling down, but allowing the "rule of the best", i.e. those with the greatest merits; an attitude, which Heine would continue to consistently defend in the forthcoming decades. Such views made him dislike a great social (world) revolution, which he saw approaching and feared. As early as 1842, Heine saw "communism" and "rule of the proletariat" looming dangerously on the horizon: "Communism is the secret name of the terrible antagonist which sets proletarian rule in all its consequences in opposition to the bourgeois regime of today. It will be a terrible conflict."⁵⁰ In an almost prophetic tone, he saw "the demons of overthrowing unbridled", an upheaval which would finally culminate in "the European, the world Revolution, the gigantic battle of the disinherited with the aristocracy of possession":

in that free will be no question of nationality or of religion: there will be but one fatherland, the earth, and but one religion, that of happiness on [this] earth. [...] Perhaps there will be only one flock and one shepherd, a free shepherd with an iron crook and one great herd of men all shorn and all bleating alike. Wild and gloomy times come roaring on, and the prophet who would write a new Apocalypse would have to imagine new beasts, and those so terrible that the old symbols of St. John as compared to them will seem like soft doves and amorettos. [...] The future has an odour as of Russian leather, blood, blasphemy, and much beating with the knout. I advise our descendants to come into the world with thick dorsal skins.⁵¹

Heine saw Bonapartism as a potential preventer or terminator of chaos and civil war, particularly communism.⁵² He was clearly ahead of his time in his understanding of the historical role a "new Caesar" could play in a time of social revolution.⁵³ This was not only because the "red menace" was not yet all too obvious in 1842, but also because the "European Restoration" was still sufficiently functional, above all the Metternich system in the German Confederation. But in the not too distant future the Revolution of 1848 would radically change the general framework.

During the *Vormärz* period, Heine was not alone in reasoning about the state of political affairs, the potential nature of a future Revolution, and the role of Caesar figures therein. Also among those German contemporaries who did not share or even

vehemently opposed Heine's enthusiasm for Napoleon and Bonapartism, debates on these issues gathered momentum long before 1848. This was especially since the events of 1830 had proven that the Revolution was anything but over. While the answer to the question which direction future developments would—and even more so should—take varied, the common denominator of the "anti-Cesaristic discourse" was that a new Caesar was neither desirable nor inevitable. In 1832, for example, the conservative Karl Ernst Jarcke (1801–1852) considered the merger of absolutism and Revolution, which had been perfected by Napoleon and "by virtue of which state authority can at any moment dispose of the full extent of all capacities of each individual in the entire country", as a virulent danger of his time.⁵⁴ But while the identity of absolutism and Revolution was a risk inherent in every modern polity, there was still reasonable hope that established institutions might avert the worst. Among these institutions was not least the church, which the historian Johann Friedrich Böhmer (1795–1863), another catholic-conservative author, called the best guarantee against revolutionary and Caesaristic aspirations in 1847: "We are heading for a new Caesarism. Thanks be to God that at least the old Church has never bowed before Caesarism and has always been victorious in its opposition to it."⁵⁵ This was one of the very earliest documented appearances of the term "Caesarism", even though the usage was more casual than theoretical. Its political meaning, however, was already distinctive.⁵⁶

Other contemporaries considered traditional hereditary monarchy as a viable means to thwart Bonapartism and Caesaristic ambitions. Among them was the aforementioned Friedrich Christoph Perthes (1772–1843), who elaborated on the clash of desires for freedom and mastery in 1834:

Despite its liberalism, the whole world longs to be ruled. Such longing is also ancient, as ancient as mankind itself; but since the rule of powerful individuals must always be despotic, we must thank God that in order to protect human freedom, history has created monarchs, that is fictions of powerful individuals, and endowed them with the power to render the truly mighty individuals harmless.⁵⁷

While Perthes thus declared monarchy a bastion against the rule of "grand individuals", whose aspirations necessarily ended in tyranny, he suggested at the same time that the cutting line between monarchy and Bonapartism could not be easily drawn, and that even traditional rulers had to be endowed with certain "Caesaristic" traits. This seemed all the more true in times of accelerating change.

For many German liberals, it was this obvious change in European societies which served as a source of optimism that "rule of the one" in general and forms of dictatorship in particular would steadily lose in importance. A good example of this mindset, which followed the beaten track of Constant, is the 1837 entry "Dictator, Dictatur" in Carl von Rotteck's and Carl Theodor Georg Philipp Welcker's *Staats-Lexikon oder Encyklopädie der Staatswissenschaften*,⁵⁸ perhaps the most notable and influential piece of German nineteenth-century liberal writing.

Drafted by Wilhelm Schulz-Bodner (1797–1860), the entry acknowledged dictatorial rule by one individual as a historical—and, indeed, almost natural—phenomenon, which had become particularly important in the recent past:

Over the centuries, the constitution of the Roman Empire had transformed from a kind of kingdom into a free state [*Freistaat*] and finally into imperial rule. Recently, we saw essentially the same cycle of events in France compressed within a few decades, and finally Napoleon played the dictatorial role of Caesar and Augustus. And as everywhere similar causes produce similar effects, as the distress of pressing conditions can make unconditional trust in and reckless devotion to the will and leadership of an individual into well-recognised needs and a duty of self-preservation for an entire people, thus the phenomenon repeats in the most recent American wars for independence, so that individual generals—Bolivar among them—knew for a time how to unite an unlimited and undisputed power in their person during the struggle for freedom and in the interest of that struggle. Even in the struggle for independence of the North American Free States, budding freedom was at the point of seeking support in dictatorship.

Thus, Schulz-Bodner acknowledged the close relationship between democratic revolutions and dictatorship, which were not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, his article abstained from elaborating further on the nature of this relationship, and provided an optimistic outlook for the future:

Notwithstanding these most recent experiences, it can be asserted that in the recent cultural history of the civilized peoples, all the driving forces aim at increasing the individual's self-regard [*Selbstgefühl*] and making room for a greater number of developing talents by expanding the external conditions for general educational cultivation. But this self-regard is not keen to submit blindly to the unlimited will of an individual, and every developing talent, limited and conditional, will stand on the side of acknowledged effectiveness.

According to Schulz-Bodner, modern civilization was, in effect, unfavorable both to the emergence and the upkeep of dictatorial rule:

It is rather the defining feature of our times that the relevance of the individual is swiftly disappearing in relation to that of the masses; that the creators of a people's fate are no longer individuals but rather the people themselves.⁵⁹

Schulz-Bodner's faith in the formative power of the masses, which would eventually make great individuals obsolete, did not mirror the *Zeitgeist*. It stood in sharp contrast to growing fears of a radical "social revolution" and widespread contemporary appreciation of "great men", be it in popular hero and specifically Napoleon worshipping, or in theoretical works, which in the tradition of Hegel argued the eminent role of "world historical figures" and "heroes".⁶⁰ The most pointed contribution in this respect was a British, namely Thomas Carlyle's (1795–1881) *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1840), in which he elaborated on the importance of heroic leadership. In Carlyle's view, which had already been voiced in *The French Revolution: A History* (1837), chaotic events demanded dynamic "heroes" to control the competing forces erupting within society. Only they could master events and direct spiritual energies, i.e. the hopes and aspirations of the people, effectively.

Carlyle compared a wide range of different types of heroes—"divinity", like Odin, "prophet", like Mohammed, "poet", like Dante and Shakespeare, "priest", like Luther and Knox, and "man of letters", like Johnson, Rousseau and Burns—, but considered the "heroic leader" embodied by Cromwell and Napoleon as the most important:

he to whose will our wills are to be subordinated, and loyally surrender themselves, and find their welfare in doing so, may be reckoned the most important of Great Men. He is practically the summary for us of *all* the various figures of Heroism; Priest, Teacher, whatsoever of earthly or of spiritual dignity we can fancy to reside in a man, embodies itself here, to *command* over us, to furnish us with constant practical teaching, to tell us for the day and hour what we are to *do*.⁶¹

Blind confidence in the power of democratization, as expressed in the *Staats-Lexikon*, not only ignored the prevailing appeal of a "saviour", but also neglected the potential dialectic of democracy and despotism. Not all liberals of the time, however, shared this naivety, among them Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859). He specified those forms of total domination posing a potential threat to modern democracies, which he considered to be "the" form of government for the future, and thus made an important contribution to theorizing modern Bonapartism and Caesarism sociologically without actually using the terms.⁶²

Tocqueville, who as a young man had attended Guizot's lectures on the history of European civilization, went beyond the Restoration consensus that democracy was by its very nature illegitimate. Instead, Tocqueville acknowledged that Bonapartist dictatorship as one form of illegitimate government could be the outcome of attempts to achieve democracy, but he refused to concede that it was inevitable, as thinkers like Constant and Guizot had argued before him. Although he felt no less antipathy than they had done for the Reign of Terror and the Empire, Tocqueville came to different conclusions about the possibility of combining democracy with liberty and popular sovereignty with the guarantee of individual rights. In his view, only in a democracy modern men could learn to respect rights, and only by participating in government would they be able to identify with it.

While Tocqueville admitted that democracy—explicitly in its American form—had substantial merits, it was at the same time, by its very nature, subject to a number of potential dangers. In two of the last chapters of his classic account of the democratic system of the United States, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Tocqueville held forth about the type of despotism democratic nations had to fear and the possible means to safeguard liberty in an egalitarian society.⁶³ During his stay overseas, Tocqueville had become convinced that "a democratic social state similar to that of the Americans could offer singular opportunities for the establishment of despotism", a danger also clearly evident in Europe, where "[at the time of my return] most of our princes had already made use of the ideas, sentiments and needs that arose from that social state, in order to expand the circle of their power."⁶⁴

Given the specific character of modern (Western) society, which in Tocqueville's eyes was unprecedented in history,⁶⁵ he had come to the conclusion that modern despotism, too, was distinct from everything that had been encountered before:

[...] the type of oppression by which democratic peoples are threatened will resemble nothing of what preceded it in the world; our contemporaries cannot find the image of it in their memories. I seek in vain myself for an expression that exactly reproduces the idea that I am forming of it and includes it; the thing that I want to speak about is new, and men have not yet created the expression which must portray it; the old words of despotism and of tyranny do not work.⁶⁶

Drawing a comparison with antiquity, Tocqueville argued that despotism in a modern egalitarian society would differ from and far exceed the degree of control ever achieved when Roman Caesarism was at its height. The emperors may have possessed “an immense power without counterbalance” which they often happened to abuse “in order arbitrarily to take away a citizen’s property on his life”. However, while their tyranny “weighed prodigiously on a few”, it “did not extend to a great number; it was tied to a few great principal matters and neglected the rest; it was violent and limited”.⁶⁷ Else despotism if it came to be established among modern democratic nations, where it would be “milder”, though, but more extensive, degrading men without actually tormenting them.⁶⁸ Similar to Constant in his *De l’esprit de conquête et de l’usurpation* of 1814,⁶⁹ Tocqueville saw the danger of modern despotism by virtue of the fact that it allowed rulers to penetrate more habitually and more deeply into the private lives and minds of individuals than those of antiquity had ever been able to do.

Government in a modern democratic society could—and to a certain extent indeed had to—rely on a centralized administration to make its will prevail throughout its realm, hence potentially regulating both private and social life. The inner mechanisms of a democratic society *per se* were favorable to the genesis of a paternalistic, nevertheless menacing, “guardian”:

I see an innumerable crowd of similar and equal men who spin around restlessly, in order to gain small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each one of them, withdrawn apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others; [...] Above those men arises an immense and tutelary power that alone takes charge of assuring their enjoyment and of looking after their fate. It is absolute, detailed, regular, far-sighted and mild. It would resemble paternal power if, like it, it had as a goal to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary it seeks only to fix them irrevocably in childhood; it likes the citizens to enjoy themselves, provided that they think only about enjoying themselves.⁷⁰

Having seized each individual citizen and fashioned him according to its own desire, the sovereign power now extended across the whole of society: “it covers the surface of society with a net of small, complicated, minute, and uniform rules, which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot break through to go beyond the crowd; it does not break wills, but it softens them, bends them and directs them.”⁷¹ But why would people in a democratic society accept such tutelage? For Tocqueville, the answer lay in “two hostile passions” by which people would be incessantly tormented: the desire to remain free versus the need to be led. Unable to destroy either the one or the other, they worked hard to satisfy both at the same time:

They imagine a unique, tutelary, omnipotent power, but elected by the citizens. They combine centralization and sovereignty of the people. That gives them some relief. They console themselves about being in tutelage by thinking that they have chosen their tutors themselves.

Many contemporaries would all too easily accommodate this compromise between "administrative despotism and sovereignty of the people", thinking that they have "guaranteed the liberty of individuals when it is to the national power that they deliver that liberty".⁷² All things considered, Tocqueville came to the conclusion that despotism was "particularly to be feared in democratic ages":

I believe that it is easier to establish an absolute and despotic government among a [democratic] people where conditions are equal than among another, and I think that, if such a government were once established among such a people, not only would it oppress men, but in the long run it would rob from each of them some of the principal attributes of humanity.⁷³

However, he did not feel this implied that an egalitarian democratic society was doomed to failure, or that the central power directing a democratic people had to be debilitated: "It is not a matter of making it weak or indolent, but only of preventing it from abusing its agility and strength."⁷⁴ Since the political world was changing, merely new remedies had to be sought for new evils:

To fix for the social power extensive, but visible and immobile limits; to give to individuals certain rights and to guarantee to them the uncontested enjoyment of these rights; to preserve for the individual the little of independence, of strength and of originality that remain to him; to raise him up beside society and sustain him in the face of it: such seems to me to be the first goal of the legislator in the age we are entering.⁷⁵

Convinced that both liberty and equality were within the realms of possibility, Tocqueville vehemently opposed two "equally fatal ideas" among his contemporaries: on the one hand those who "see in equality only the anarchical tendencies that it engenders", being afraid of their free will and themselves; on the other those who:

alongside the road that, starting at equality, leads to anarchy, have finally found the path that seems to lead men invincibly toward servitude; they bend their soul in advance to this necessary servitude; and despairing of remaining free, they already adore at the bottom of their heart the master who must soon come.⁷⁶

What Tocqueville achieved with his *De la démocratie en Amérique* was thus not only to provide a key work of democratic theory and one of the founding moments of political science, but also an empirically based study on the precariousness of democracy and the character of despotic rule under the conditions of modern societies. He consciously analyzed a new phenomenon, for which classical terminologies no

longer seemed appropriate. At the same time, however, Tocqueville abstained from using the terms Bonapartism or Napoleonism, which might have challenged the universality of the tendencies he observed. The new despotism he saw looming—a specific “total(itarian) democracy” with a sovereign dictator at its head—was neither the result of a perversion of progress, as many liberals might argue, nor the outcome of decline, as conservatives might claim, but a latent possibility of modern civilization. To Tocqueville, the future was anything but predestined. Since “the world that is rising is still half caught in the ruins of the world that is falling, and amid the immense confusion presented by human affairs”, no one could say which institutions and ancient mores would eventually remain and which would ultimately disappear:

This new society, which I have sought to portray and which I want to judge, has only just been born. Time has not yet set its form; the great revolution that created it is still going on, and in what is happening today, it is nearly impossible to discern what must pass away with the revolution itself, and what must remain after it.⁷⁷

1848 spectacularly furnished proof for Tocqueville’s conviction that the Revolution was still going on. It was in the context of the European revolutionary upheavals that the discourse of “Bonapartism”, “Napoleonism” and “Caesarism” reached a height and that the chances in the political arena for ambitious individuals to seize power and take the role of “Caesaristic” leaders increased. This was in contrast to the post-1814 period: while debates on the Napoleonic regime, illegitimate forms of rule, and the need or danger of a heroic saviour had been vivid, such figures had been of marginal importance in European politics. Above all, this was due to the European great power’s paradigm of stability under the umbrella of the Congress System, which did not leave much room for political change.

Even the Revolution of 1830 had not considerably altered the general framework and itself was lacking in radicality, resulting in perhaps more “liberal”, nevertheless still monarchical political systems just as before. France and Belgium are two revealing examples in this respect: in both countries the preference for reform rather than radical change or even a republican experiment was motivated by the political classes’ fear of foreign intervention, but also by the widespread belief that a constitutional monarchy would best suit their own—that is predominantly bourgeois—interest and needs. This was not without popular, indeed populist, attributes, with Louis-Philippe in France a case in point with his emphasis on the popular origins of his reign, his self-characterization as “King of the French” rather than “King of France”, and his attempts to invoke a national spirit. Still, his reign could hardly be compared to that of Napoleon before him, manifest among other things in the denial of plebiscitary means for legitimizing the regime change of 1830 and the persistence of hereditary monarchy.⁷⁸ It was only in 1848 that time seemed to be ripe for a “new Caesar” in the European context and in France in particular.

3.2 Conclusions

Napoleon’s fall in 1814/1815 marked the military victory of the anti-revolutionary powers after almost a quarter-century of continued wars and turmoil in Europe, yet

anything but a return to "business as usual". This was true for both political theory and the sphere of actual politics.

The Revolution and the Napoleonic Age had created precedents which even Europe's monarchs could not avoid. A *modus vivendi* had to be found with the legacy of the previous decades in order to secure stability and order. The revolutionary paradigms of and calls for "change", "political participation" and "constitutional government" had been all too powerful and pervasive to be neglected. Perhaps the most explicit attempt to reconcile the pre-revolutionary with the revolutionary heritage was the model of monarchical constitutionalism, first put into practice by the French *Charte constitutionnelle* of 1814, which was to become a successful "export model": a regime type claiming sovereignty and constituent power exclusively for the hereditary monarch perceived in traditional terms, i.e. the core of legitimist thought, but at the same time making concessions to representative forms of government and offering the nation possibilities for political participation, even if only limited ones. Louis XVIII in France and other fellow rulers in Europe thereby nourished the hope to have conserved the true nucleus of monarchical government and preserved it for the future. In point of fact, however, monarchical constitutionalism amounted to an institutionalized avowal of the crisis into which traditional monarchies had slipped.

The doctrine of the "divine rights of kings" might still serve its purpose for monarchical propaganda, but was no longer a sound and unchallenged basis for the justification of rule. Faith in a divinely-ordained political system and hereditary rights of the ruling dynasty alone were not a reliable guarantee for the preservation of the monarchy. What became a growingly important factor in acknowledging an authority—the *Legitimitätsglaube* ("belief in legitimacy"), as Weber would later define it⁷⁹—were good governance and the ability to meet public expectations. Whether they wanted or not, monarchs were increasingly driven by external circumstances and turned from subjects into constitutional "objects", playing a powerful, albeit functional role, which was ultimately dependent on popular opinion.

Acknowledging that after the Revolution even monarchical rule could not have the same character as before paved the way for a broader debate on the nature and organization of government, the relation between Revolution and counter-Revolution, democracy and dictatorship. For many observers in the post-Napoleonic age the old discourses carried associations which they felt were inadequate to convey the new reality that had burst forth around them. They realized that a chasm had opened up between the language they had inherited from the eighteenth century and the current situation they found themselves in, resulting in an intensified search for new terminological coordinates. Since "legitimacy" was not something to be taken for granted, the most fundamental question now was which form of government could claim to be "legitimate" and why, by implication defining "illegitimate" or "degenerate" rule. These debates provided new impulses for dealing with the Napoleonic experience as well, eventually resulting in the birth of Bonapartism and Napoleonism as political concepts, later to be followed by Caesarism.

Most authors in the post-1814 age, particularly during the French Restoration period, considered Napoleon Bonaparte's regime to be the opposite of legitimate rule. Such rule was widely considered to be embodied by a constitutional monarchy averting

political extremes,⁸⁰ even though there were clear differences of opinion concerning the exact delimitation of regal and parliamentary powers between royalism and liberalism. An advocate of constitutional monarchy among contemporary French liberals was not only Constant, but also Guizot, who declared political legitimacy to be *the* key issue of the progress of Western civilization. Starting from the premise that any form of unchecked power was reprehensible, Guizot denied sovereignty to any of the major claimants: the monarchy, the Church, the aristocracy or the people. He also denied that any of these groups could delegate absolute power to an individual or assembly. Therefore he also branded the “democratic despotism” represented by the Napoleonic regime as one form of political illegitimacy. Guizot acknowledged that while Napoleon might have been an illegitimate ruler, he had nevertheless been a popular one, enjoying significant support. This, however, was not necessarily a contradiction, especially because Guizot distinguished the earlier, brighter phase in Napoleon’s career from the later, darker one; a dichotomy which in his view was significant of all great men, who suffered from an almost natural hubris: great men pushed important matters and were hence important for the progress of civilization, Guizot argued in picking up a key element of Hegel’s philosophy of history,⁸¹ but they lacked the ability to hold their ambitions after initial success and conducted themselves more and more tyrannically over time. Their fall was thus predestined. However, what made Napoleon’s rule illegitimate at the end of the day was not so much his individual conduct, but the very foundations of his rule: usurpation of power and a misguided notion of the popular will. For Guizot, as for other contemporaries, Napoleon was the necessary outcome of the Revolution and one possible result of desires to achieve unlimited popular sovereignty, which made them most reluctant to democratic aspirations of any kind. This became obvious in the July Monarchy with its limited concessions to the sovereignty of the people and perpetuation of the restrictive franchise of the Restoration.

While the concepts of Bonapartism (and Napoleonism, respectively), plebiscitary dictatorship and Caesarism were taking shape in the political thought of the time, not all observers shared the critical attitude towards Napoleon and his regime, nor the belief that the eschewal of “political extremes” was the best available alternative. This was not only true for France, where Stendhal and others actively promoted the legend of Napoleon and portrayed the emperor’s “military despotism” as without any alternative, but also other parts of Europe. Germany, too, was an elucidating example in this respect.

The German case demonstrates the direct link between unaccomplished political and national expectations and a radical change of attitude towards Napoleon within a short period of time. While Napoleon had served as the personification of evil and object of collective hatred during the Wars of Liberation, this negative image changed to the opposite the more averse to reform and the more oppressive the Metternich system became. To have a “heroic leader” and “liberator” of the kind Napoleon had allegedly been for France was the wish of a growing number of people also in Germany. This was the case to an even greater extent after 1830, a period which—rather than in an expected liberalization boost—only resulted in even further repression, with the sustained political-institutional stagnation being all the more evident and dramatic

since it was in sharp contrast to the ever faster social change taking place during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Against this backdrop, especially the movement of the Young Germans argued for a radical break with the existing monarchical order, considering a kind of "national dictatorship" as one conceivable alternative. It was around this time and under the active involvement of Heinrich Heine that Bonapartism and Napoleonism respectively started to get used as politico-theoretical concepts, of a political "supra-program", obviously borrowing from the name giver, though, but no longer immediately bound to his person or actions. This was facilitated by the fact that in the meanwhile both Napoleon and his only legitimate son had died, thus helping to "transcend" the terms and uncouple them from dynastic considerations. In Heine's understanding, Bonapartism represented the ideal of a polity *for* rather than *by* the people, the top and amalgamating element of which was a glorious leader to which the whole people could look up to. Such a leader would be the guarantor that a new state order would essentially be a meritocracy and not degenerate to a "rule of the equals", but remain a "rule of the best". For Heine, this was all the more important given the dangers of a new and even more radical social (world) Revolution that he saw looming on the horizon.

Not all German contemporaries shared Heine's enthusiasm for Bonapartism. But even many critics, including conservatives, did realize that the appeal of Bonapartist and Caesaristic-type government grew out of the unresolved conflict between love of liberty on the one hand, and the craving for mastery on the other. Tellingly, it was in this context that the issue was raised as to whether traditional monarchies, too, should incorporate Caesaristic traits, and princes turn from rulers to leaders to ward off potential Bonapartist usurpers. In contrast, for many liberals in Germany and elsewhere, the attraction of Bonapartism as well as of personalized leadership would wane sooner or later anyway due to the growing maturity of Western societies and ever more democratic political systems. However, the naive idea that the problem would sort itself out was not shared by every liberal, least so by Alexis de Tocqueville.

In his celebrated *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Tocqueville offered new explanatory approaches to the hidden dialectics of democracy and despotism, and elaborated on the particular importance of such dialectics for the modern age. Unlike earlier forms of despotism, the probable "administrative despotism" in modern democratic societies would do without too much violence and open arbitrariness. It would hence look mild, but under this smoke screen actually have a comprehensive, indeed almost total and highly corrupting character. Like others, Tocqueville identified the reason why people would bow to "complete tutelage" in common desires for leadership and guidance. Such desires were no less, if not even more, present in modern than in traditional societies.

Overall, Tocqueville's work fits well into what can be considered a characteristic feature of political discourse in the "European Restoration" period after 1814; namely an increasingly prevalent understanding that Bonapartism and Napoleonism were detached from their eponym and needed to be considered first and foremost as a structural problem of the modern age. These terms—together with the nascent Caesarism, which even more distinctively marked the turning away from a concrete person of contemporary history⁸²—developed into a watchword for a new form of

government distinguished by the duopoly “strong leadership” and “popular foundation” in an environment of crisis, while leaving broad scope for its actual form; a form of rule which—depending on the viewpoint of the observer—could be seen as a means to break out of fossilized and set political structures, a guarantee for stability or preventer of radical (social or political) upheaval, but also as a result of errant doctrines of revolutionary thought or permanent challenge and danger for modern societies. For all of these interpretations, 1848/1849 was to provide illustrative material.