„Is the left-right distinction still useful for political orientation?”

Abstract:

In this essay, I intend to address the question of the contemporary relevance of the left–right distinction in politics. To begin, I will examine the fundamental possibility of providing an answer to this question. I will then offer a concise overview of the origin of the terms and their historical and philosophical differentiation. The third part will examine, why the political picture today has changed and why this is a reason to rethink the political field among the spatial metaphor of left-right distinction. Therefor I will focus on the history of democracy, aiming to clarify the essential aspects of left-right-oriented judgments or positions and to situate these within a contemporary context. The fourth part will present a comparative discussion concerning the justification for adopting a political position as such. The final part will explore, by way of metaphorical analogy with quantum physics, why the spatial metaphor has to be completed. The impossibility of non-positioning, and the dependence on contextual relationality will be pointed out. Finally, the division of the inquiry into several parts leads, within each section and as a continuous sequence, to the conclusion that the left-right distinction is certainly–in awareness of its limitations and difficulties–a metaphor of actual utility for political orientation.

Introduction:

The question in view, “Is the left-right distinction still useful for political orientation?”, has already been extensively debated within political science and philosophy. Thus, what arises is not only the question itself, but also what there remains (still!) to be said about it today – and how.

I will ultimately argue that the left–right distinction, understood as a spatial metaphor, continues to possess genuine analytical and practical value for political orientation. To arrive at this conclusion, the inquiry must be structured into several parts.

In the first part, I will clarify how the question under consideration may be meaningfully articulated and why—despite the conceptual difficulties involved—I will nevertheless attempt to do so.

The second part will survey the principal philosophical accounts of the left-right distinction, with particular emphasis on the contributions of Norberto Bobbio (1994)[1], an Italian philosopher of law and political science, whose work in the 1990s remains seminal.

The third part will outline several fundamental features of democratic systems, highlight relevant contemporary developments, and show why the political landscape has undergone significant transformation over the past thirty years—transformations that render the left–right distinction a useful tool for reinterpreting the present situation.

The fourth part will address a potential objection: namely, that taking a determinate position along a spectrum defined by two opposing poles may be inherently inappropriate or overly reductive.

Finally, in the fifth part, I will argue that the spatial metaphor of left and right distinction requires supplementation through additional reflection on spatial characteristics as revealed in quantum physics, and I will indicate the new dimensions of the metaphor that such a perspective makes available.

1. How can the question under consideration be addressed in a coherent way?

As already mentioned, the question of interest–if the left-right distinction still useful for political orientation–has already been discussed extensively. Before I will enter into *what* we still can say about the topic, I will first examine *how* I can do it.

According to Werner (2022) any assessment of the outcomes of one's erotetic pursuits–that is posing questions and seeking answers–must focus on larger unities rather than isolated questions. This means that the problematization of a given issue or phenomenon existing in the world does not boil down to just asking a question about it, but already brings forth a more complex composed of the relevant question together with possible answers. Moreover, each such *question-answer pair* may appear unintelligible or wrongly posed when detached from a broader erotetic context, meaning other such pairs targeting a correlated issue. All such pairs are therefore meaningful only insofar as they are integral parts of the said broader system—the entire "erotetic game", as it were.[2]

Since it is, in principle, impossible to construct a comprehensive picture of the complete question under consideration, I shall confine myself to developing a single question-answer pair. The answer I offer in the form of this essay is therefore to be understood as the way in which I grasp the question in this specific situation—within the limitations of scope and in relation to my present temporal and spatial situatedness. The conscious limitedness of the conditions is perfectly consistent with the statement of this essay and especially with the fifth part: I cannot avoid of taking a position. It thus does not constitute a claim to absolute truth, but rather a claim to a *cutout* of this specific question-answer pair within a certain awareness of limitations.

This approach is closely related to Wittgenstein's position (1958), according to which the meaning of a word is constituted in many cases by its use in language[3]. Not only the meaning of each individual term within the titular question, but also the question as a whole, is subject to usage—and thereby to the act of giving an answer. Within this philosophical tradition, I intend to develop a new and adequate conceptual framework that may invite further reflection and continuation by others, situating myself within a series and network of question-answer pairs that, only in their totality, constitute the entire *erotetic game*.

Werner Stegmaier (2019)–under consideration of the erotetic game and my outlining–formulates a specific "question-answer pair" that elucidates both the meaning of the "philosophy of orientation" and, by extension, the term "orientation" itself. By developing a processual concept of orientation within an already oriented individual, and by examining the potential for abstraction from individual orientations as well as the conditions under which universalisations become possible—and often necessary—he establishes the philosophical foundations of human orientation. Within his work, which itself constitutes a philosophical inquiry and thereby becomes part of the philosophy of orientation, Stegmaier reveals the potential inherent in the human capacity for orientation— even while remaining aware that orientation can never be fully certain of itself, not directed toward the attainment of truth, but reaching beyond it.[4]

Nevertheless, within his *philosophy of orientation* Stegmaier advances a spatial metaphor (strongly connected with the dimension of time) grounded in a consciously paradoxical formulation: every (human) orientation requires a standpoint that is, on the one hand, undeniably "given," yet, on the other, not given at all, since it cannot be conclusively grasped. One cannot entirely leave this standpoint, one's own subjective and human standpoint, yet at the same time one can leave it—one can change it (one is even forced to do so in the sense, that it will never remain identically, even not for a day). From this paradoxical standpoint, which first of all is the standpoint of one's body in the world, a perspective becomes possible.[5]

The fact that Stegmaier introduces with his *philosophy of orientation* a spatial metaphor as a general philosophical instrument—and that I shall now examine whether another spatial metaphor (the left–right distinction) can prove useful for political orientation—is of particular significance. Especially in the fifth chapter, I propose a new level of reflection: not in order to resolve the paradoxical structure of the spatial metaphor, but rather with the aim of completing it.

In pursuing this inquiry, if the left-right distinction is still useful for political orientation, I will however refrain from explicitly discussing either *political* or *philosophical orientation*, and I will deliberately avoid employing these terms, since the essay itself constitutes an *act of orientation* in its very form and method.

2. An overview about the historical, philosophical and political context of the left-right distinction

In this initial step of approaching the inquiry, I will examine an essential part of the question itself, namely the *left–right distinction* as such.

2.1. The spatial metaphor is one of many metaphors.

Norberto Bobbio (1994) offers a detailed discussion on the left-right distinction. The use of the terms "left" and "right" within the political discourse originates in the seating arrangement in the French National Assembly of 1789 during the French Revolution.[6] Generally, they represent a spatial metaphor, one that does not exclude other spatial figures of thought—for example, high–low (as in upper house/lower house), forward–backward (as in avant-garde/rear-guard), or surface–depth (as in the visible and invisible dimensions of governance within a democracy). The horizontal metaphor has never entirely displaced the vertical one; both are typically present simultaneously. Furthermore, political language also employs a temporal metaphor distinguishing between progressives and traditionalists.[7]

The opposition between right and left constitutes a typical dyadic pattern of thought. The assumption that the distinction between left and right as an antithetical dyad has lost expressive force is often grounded in the so-called crisis of ideologies—the thesis that political groups are now formed less by positional alignment than by shared problems, interests, and value conceptions. Moreover, the increasing complexity of political order seems to render a sharp division between two opposing poles inadequate and insufficient for an accurate understanding of contemporary political reality. This observation aligns with the view that in a pluralistic society, such as a democratic one, an antithetical mode of questioning may no longer be analytically useful.[8] In part 4 of this essay, I will engage in an in-depth discussion of the objection raised by pluralistic accounts.

Dyadic pairs may be antithetical or complementary, which also determines the nature of their transitions—whether by dialectical synthesis and negation of negation, or, in the case of convergence between complementary terms, through unification. The idea of an antithetical dyad, however, presupposes that there exists no space of the center between the two poles of left and right. If this middle space is conceived as an included third, a triadic vision emerges, transforming contradiction into opposition.

In this context, we may analogously juxtapose the dyad of black and white to the spatial left-right metaphor.[9] Setting aside for a moment the physical fact that white, in the optical sense, designates a surface that reflects all colours, whereas black designates one that absorbs all light and thus all colours, meaning that both "black" and "white" are already abstracted terms, we can nevertheless regard black and white as the two outer extremes of a grayscale continuum. Within this continuum, black and white stand in opposition. Black cannot simultaneously be white and vice versa, just as neither black nor white can be gray. Yet together they delineate the outer limits of the entire spectrum of gray shades and therefore, taken as black, white, and the intermediary gray, constitute a triadic structure.

This center may be understood either as an included third (neither–nor) or as an inclusive third (both–and). Were one to assume that even this center itself requires a further center, the triad becomes a pentad—a process that could, in principle, continue until the multiplicity of political systems gives rise to a multiad.[9]

The two terms of a dyad always sustain one another: the right exists only insofar as the left does, and vice versa. Each loses its meaning with the dissolution of the other. Thus, if everything is left, nothing is right, and conversely. A force that occupies the entire political field abolishes the very difference between them.[10] Historically, the questioning of this distinction has arisen not only from its fragmentation into a multiadic spectrum, but also from the domination of one pole that annihilates the other, as occurs in totalitarian regimes.

Not all dyadic pairs are balanced in semantic or evaluative strength. Often one term is dominant or carries a normative valuation (e.g. war–peace, order–disorder). In the political dyad of left and right, however, no inherent dominance is prescribed—unlike in biological or religious language of left-right distinction.[11] Whereas the distinction between right and left in both biological (right versus left hand) and religious contexts (the right side of God versus the left) is often imbued with moral connotations of good and bad, the political dyad of left and right is not inherently anchored in such evaluative frameworks.

A genuine end of the left-right distinction would thus only be conceivable under the condition that the entire political spectrum concerned itself with identical problems in identical ways—that is, under conditions of perfect unanimity. I will come back to the aspect of a system in perfect unanimity in part 4 of this essay.

Yet seen the mutual exclusion of the two extremes, arising from the radical exaggeration of their defining ideological traits, is itself marked by a shared feature: both coincide in their distance from the center and, in this sense, exhibit a common anti-democratic tendency.[12] As will be shown later in this section, both the far left and the far right can exhibit anti-liberal orientations toward the governed, thereby departing from foundational democratic principles.

As history shows, in the cases of communism and fascism, such extremes can even converge, forming coalitions or non-aggression pacts.[12]

2.2 The criteria for distinction

To understand and withstand historical crises of this dyad, as Bobbio (1994) argues, it becomes necessary to identify a criterion capable of distinguishing the left from the right. Bobbio discusses a wide range of such criteria. Drawing on Lapouce–who argues that during French Revolution the horizontal order replaced the strong position of the vertical order (absolutist monarchy with a strict, hierarchical social order), without repressing it completely.[13] Bobbio furthermore draws on Dino Cofrancesco, according to whom the *sacred* (right) and the *profane* (left), as well as *tradition* (right) and *emancipation*/*innovation* (left—emancipation from racial, class, or status privilege), may be assigned to the two camps. Though they may be assigned not exclusively, since the means to an end may vary according to historical circumstances. A distinction between the romantic/spiritual/emotional and the classical/rational cannot be clearly ascribed to either pole, since both traits are present in each.[14]

Elisabetta Galeotti identifies *hierarchy* (right) and *equality* (left) as the fundamental pair of opposites. Yet the question of who counts as “equal” and who as “unequal” poses a historical problem that cannot be conclusively resolved.[15]

According to Marco Revelli, the concepts of left and right are not absolute but relative: their meanings shift according to historical time and context. He maintains that while one cannot be both left and right simultaneously, extreme positions tend to arise in moments of heightened social tension.[16]

The most frequently cited criterion of distinction between left and right, Bobbio (1994) argues, lies in their respective attitudes toward the ideals of *equality* and *freedom*. Equality, in this sense, is a relative notion dependent upon at least three variables: (1) the subjects among whom goods are distributed, (2) the goods themselves, and (3) the criteria by which such distribution is carried out.[17]

Bobbio links equality of goods with equality of rights or opportunities, deriving from this connection the three variables. As already noted in the discussion of Galeotti the historical problem of equality remains unresolved.

The egalitarian left does not, however, proclaim that all individuals are equal in every respect. Both camps acknowledge that people are simultaneously equal and unequal; the right tends to hold that individuals are ("by nature") more unequal than equal, whereas the left maintains ("contrary to nature") that they are more equal than unequal.[17]

This difference in attitude toward the naturalness or artificiality of equality and inequality is most vividly expressed, according to Bobbio (1994), in the contrast between Rousseau and Nietzsche. Since the Declaration of Human Rights, the criteria for equality have been tied to social rights (education, labour, and health) as egalitarian foundations. The left views private property as the principal obstacle to equality.[18] On the other side, those who challenge the rightward placement of liberalism, given its defense of private property and of a hierarchically structured and thus unequal society, may do so on the basis of a positively inflected notion of liberalism combined with a negatively charged sense of right.[19] These considerations underscore the complexity of reconciling equality with private property. Conceiving private property as a social right may shape the very notion of equality, yet it does not clarify how this principle ought to be applied. While private property is often understood as supporting equality of opportunity, the opposing view—that private property stands in tension with such equality—reveals that equality of goods, rights, and opportunities are deeply interconnected, even if they cannot be regarded as identical.

Compared to the criterion of equality, the criterion of freedom seems to differ less with regard to goals than to means or methods. Under certain conditions, the use of violence to achieve equality is not rejected but even demanded as an effective instrument for radical transformation of society.

Despite the great variety of political realities, Bobbio proposes these two fundamental criteria yield the following horizontal fourfold division of left-right distinction[20]:

Extreme-Left egalitarian and anti-liberal	*Center-Left* egalitarian and liberal	*Center-Right* non-egalitarian and liberal	*Extreme-Right* non-egalitarian and anti-liberal

2.3 The empiric approach

Detlef Jahn (2010) examines longitudinal and cross-national data to assess left–right positions across an extended temporal span and a wide range of countries. To this end, he reviews various existing left–right indices and develops his own in an attempt to overcome their limitations. Jahn concludes that numerous factors influence the measurement of the left–right dimension, thereby underscoring the need for further empirical and methodological refinement. He argues that the left–right distinction should be understood primarily as a theoretical construct, and that its empirical investigation ought to proceed in a more deductive manner than has commonly been the case. The left–right dimension, according to Jahn, is both historically and locally contingent, varying in salience and meaning across time and national contexts. [21]

To estimate the empirical importance of the left-right distinction, Jahn proposes a quantitative approach based on the ratio between the number of left-right-related statements and the total number of political statements analysed. Jahn offers a suggestion with a tabular overview about core left-right statements[22]:

Left		Right
Socialism	Liberal	Conservative
Nationalization Controlled Economy Economic Planning Market Regulation	Welfare State Limitation Free Enterprise Economic Orthodoxy	Traditional Morality Social Harmony National Way of Life

This tabular overview, however, leaves the unequivocal classification of the quantitative reference data unresolved, as it does not offer clearly defined criteria for both political statements and left–right–related statements. As the overview suggests, Jahn relies on an abstract synthesis rather than on concrete propositions, thereby rendering his account internally inconsistent.

He further argues that any valid index should rest on definitional criteria that clearly distinguish this ideological dichotomy from others, while also maintaining temporal and cross-national validity. Expert judgments are included as a priori assessments of what constitutes "left" and "right."[21]

Jahn's findings indicate that while the left–right distinction displays a degree of stability across time and space, it remains inherently context-dependent. Previous scores thus continue to play an important role in measurement, even as the conceptual meaning of "left" and "right" remains ambiguous—a point at which Jahn refers to Bobbio's (1994) reflections on the enduring interpretative flexibility of the dichotomy. For this reason, Jahn proposes a two-tiered analytical strategy: first, the construction of a general index derived from political philosophy, applicable across countries and historical periods—the "core" of left and right; and second, a context-sensitive analysis designed to identify country- and time-specific components. Only by subsequently integrating these two dimensions, he argues, can a composite left–right index be produced that adequately reflects both universal and contextual aspects of political reality.[21]

Intensive examinations of the left–right distinction, from both theoretical and empirical perspectives, conclude that the dyad exhibits a certain stability while simultaneously remaining context-dependent—embedded within specific local and temporal frameworks. Consequently, a continual reconfiguration of the left–right distinction takes place, grounded in its preceding problematization. Such a process is sustained by both political and scholarly practice and must be regarded as not only necessary but also desirable.

In the following part, I will outline why the current configuration of the political field differs markedly from earlier contexts, and I will argue that the left–right distinction, as a spatial metaphor, can serve as a valuable heuristic for reducing and organizing this heightened complexity.

3. The actual context

We have seen that the left–right distinction is but one among several spatial metaphors; that although it is neither unequivocal nor necessarily binding, there are nevertheless identifiable criteria for differentiating between “left” and “right”; and that any such classification is inevitably shaped by country- and time-specific circumstances, making it fundamentally context-dependent. I will now turn to the question of why the contemporary political landscape represents a particularly novel and significant case. To this end, I will first take a step back to consider key developments in the history of democracy, then examine the impact of the ongoing information and digital revolutions, and finally conclude by showing how the left-right distinction, as a spatial metaphor, can (“still”!!!) serve as a useful framework for addressing these new challenges.

3.1 The history of democracy and the key role of balance of information between rulers and ruled.

Stasavage (2020)[23] provides an extensive account of the historical evolution of democracy. He argues that even in the most autocratic regimes, no ruler has ever governed entirely alone. While the original meaning of “demokratia” — the notion that the people should govern themselves [24], stands in contrast with the modern democracy, which is representative rather than direct: citizens no longer govern without rulers, but through them. The degree of independence between rulers and the ruled therefore becomes a decisive factor in assessing democratic form and function and distinction from autocracy.

Hannah Arendt in this concern, namely the independence between rulers and the ruled, distinguishes between the concepts of *power* and *authority*. According to Arendt, *power* arises “from below” and is characterized by a communicative and associative structure, that is by the capacity to act in concert and in mutual agreement. *Authority*, by contrast, which may be vested in a person or an office, presupposes an unquestioned recognition by those from whom obedience is demanded. Both concepts, however, operate independently of any presupposition that action is necessarily undertaken in the interest of the citizens.[25] Even if the distinction between *power* and *authority* has been and can be criticized for its lack of conceptual clarity, it nonetheless delineates a differentiation between a *bottom-up* and a *top-down* order of governmental force.

According to Stasavage (2020), early forms of democracy were widespread across human societies and, in fact, occurred about as frequently as autocracy. Democracy was not a singular invention of ancient Greece and not an optimizing development of historical evolution, but rather appears to have emerged as a recurrent, perhaps even natural, mode of human collective organization, as well as autocracy. Such early democracies tended to persist in small-scale settings, in the absence of centralized bureaucratic institutions, and without many of the technological developments associated with complex civilizations. [26]

Stasavage(2020) further contends that technological advances diminished the informational advantage that local communities once held over rulers. Agricultural improvements led to greater population densities, which in turn limited individuals’ “exit options” and facilitated the rise of more efficient bureaucratic apparatuses. As a consequence, rulers increasingly gained the capacity to monitor, tax, and control their populations, thereby undermining the conditions that had once sustained participatory governance. [27]

In early democratic contexts, rulers were often in a relatively weak position vis-à-vis those they governed. Environmental factors also played a crucial role: the variability of terrain and harvests, the extent of territorial knowledge, and the effectiveness of bureaucratic institutions all shaped the balance of authority. As Stasavage (2020) notes, political authority depended not only on formal power but equally on informational asymmetries - on who possessed the more accurate and comprehensive knowledge. [28]

The transition to modern democracy expanded political participation, extending suffrage irrespective of gender or race.[29] Yet, as Stasavage (2020) observes, modern democracy has been more likely to take root in regions that share structural similarities with the conditions of early democracy—namely, where the historical absence of a strong, centralized bureaucracy prevented the consolidation of autocratic rule through an overpowering executive authority.[30]

3.2 The informational and digital revolution

Stasavage (2020) identifies the invention of writing as a decisive event in the establishment of bureaucratic control, and thus as a force that ultimately counteracted democratic governance.[31] At this point, a bridge can be drawn to the present. A comparable and equally transformative development has occurred with the invention of the internet and the subsequent displacement of economic, informational, and communicative processes onto digital systems and platforms.

Stegmaier (2019) also notes that life in a modern society renders any escape from certain functional systems of communication—such as the systems of economics, politics, law, and mass media—impossible. The latter, in particular, produces a professionalization of communication, insofar as information becomes a monetary commodity on information markets. [32]

Vogl (2021)[33] describes a transformation within the contemporary order of capitalism towards a fusion of communication technology, financial and information economy, in which data and attention have become the central resources, leading to a fusion of capital and communication.[34] He argues that this development has shifted money creation, liquidity provision, and credit operations increasingly toward the financial markets, which are now dominated by a tightly networked financial oligarchy consisting of some twenty to thirty major corporations. This concentration has significantly weakened the regulatory capacities of central banks and national institutions. Information itself has become the currency of the financial system.[35] Markets no longer primarily rest upon material production, but upon the processing of expectations and probabilities - in other words, upon the dynamics of information.[36]

Vogl conceptualizes platforms such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon not merely as sites of consumption, but as engines for the generation of data that are subsequently monetized (including data concerning health and medical care). He analyses the emergence of a new "power of control" — control through information and data—operating beyond the boundaries of state institutions. He observes that territorial attachments are dissolving, and a cosmopolitan, transgovernmental, universal mode of operation governed by its own rules and dependencies is emerging.[37] Platforms and financial actors thereby create their own infrastructures, institutions, norms, and systems of dependency. The contemporary regime of truth seems based on this redistribution of control, organized through valuation, clicks, and visibility. Truth, in this sense, is replaced by "affective value" and by the algorithmic logic of selection.[38]

Vogl further demonstrates how ressentiment—affect-based judgment—becomes the driving social energy of digital capitalism. Users are bound to digital systems through emotional engagement, creating an alliance between capital and ressentiment that undermines both economic and political mechanisms of regulation, thus, a logic of valuation derived from financial and informational markets becomes the paradigm of a general representation of the world.[39]

Vogl's analysis is deeply grounded in the Western context. Opposed to the U.S.-liberal capitalist model, a second dominant platform ecosystem has emerged in China[40]—politically controlled, yet equally comprehensive in scope. The COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the recent revolution in generative artificial intelligence, have accelerated this evolution. The United States and China now share dominance across all levels of the ongoing communications revolution, marked by their leadership in artificial intelligence, software, cloud infrastructures, digital networks, semiconductor production, and control over raw materials and essential resources. [40]

If we consider the historical development of democracy, as Stasavage (2020)[23] does, in terms of the informational dominance of the people over the rulers, the contemporary redistribution of information flows produces an entirely new constellation of data generation and control. The citizen now intervenes in structures of power not only as a political agent, but ubiquitously as a digital user (thus, consciously or not as data-producer but less as data-owner).

When we reflect upon political positioning and distribution of power within the current condition of technological, informational, and socio-economic globalization—what Vogl (2021) calls *circulation of information* as the paradigmatic form of capitalist economy [41] —a new complexity arises concerning the spatio-metaphorical introduction of the left–right distinction discussed in part 2 of this essay: Concepts—which Jahn offered as political statements within the left-right distinction—such as market regulation, social harmony, economic planning, free enterprise, traditional morality etc. require renewed definition and localization within this transformed global framework.

One might object that this very condition renders the left–right distinction obsolete. Yet, the strong conceptual bond between the left-right-distinction and the underlying notions of equality and inequality, as well as of a liberal and non-liberal attitude among human individuals remains intact—precisely because of, rather than despite, these redefinitions.

In 2025, governments worldwide indeed entered new dimensions of political action. The European Commission, for example, imposed fines of 120 million euros on corporation X, citing, among other issues, deficiencies in transparency and false statements regarding verification mechanisms.[42] In Australia, the world's first state-mandated social media ban for adolescents under the age of sixteen came into force in December 2025.[43]

We have entered conditions in which not only the very notion of *information* undergoes an important redefinition, but in which the globally increasing density of populations is no longer merely observed—it is actively desired by the process of *circulation* itself. The system can secure its own persistence only within a certain range of growth, a range shaped not solely by the size of the population as consumers but also by their role as producers of data. The globally increasing density of population hits the worldwide difficult management of open or non-open borders, while on the other side a new "exit strategy" is the system's own logic suggested, a corresponding inscribed within the global operative framework, namely the by private and public and mostly internationally implemented projects concerning colonization of other planets. But as every new planet—as well as every new state—would be a new territory, but not a new "data-planet", genuine exit strategies, mentioned from Stasavage (2020) as one of the key aspects of power distribution beside possess of information, appear increasingly unattainable, if not altogether devoid of viable alternatives. The two main criteria regarding power distribution seem to fuse to one.

Furthermore, international relations have acquired renewed significance, particularly through the complex interlacing of international institutions, transnational corporations, and global market processes. Vogl (2021) designates this phenomenon as a form of "transgovernmental agency," emphasizing a dispersed yet coordinated field of power that transcends the traditional sovereignty of nation-states.[37] Governments worldwide are thereby confronted with a profound reconfiguration of authority, one that demands a reconsideration of left–right differentiation in the attempt to articulate and structure an emerging global order.

Vogl (2021) draws on the financial market as a system of anticipations, wherein the future is continuously constituted by expectations regarding the future itself. These anticipations assume a performative and generative force, insofar as they shape the very realities they seek to predict.[44] Such reflexive dynamics of expectation are sustained not only by financial actors but also by governments and citizens, even if in a non-symmetric distribution of power.

A particularly striking development in this regard can be observed in Albania[45], which has become the first state worldwide to appoint an artificial intelligence to a ministerial position. The virtual minister, named "Diella", developed from Microsoft and OpenAI, is tasked with overseeing the allocation of public contracts, thereby contributing to anti-corruption efforts—a central prerequisite for the country's prospective accession to the European Union. "Diella", despite announced neutrality, officially remains subordinate to premier minister Edi Rama's responsibility. This occurrence offers a completely new dimension of reflexion on the discussed topic.

3.3 The need for reduction of complexity

The persistent ambiguity of the all the in part 2 mentioned categories and criteria as well as the embedding in the actual context continues to disclose their philosophical as well as political significance, both within the sphere of domestic policy and in the domain of international relations. Within the highly complex configuration of contemporary power structures, we can likewise observe an increasing necessity for reduction of complexity, a process that inevitably gives rise once again to the left–right distinction as a spatial metaphor, thereby underscoring its contextual contingency. The present global context demands, more than ever, a renewed engagement with the question of political positioning; in this regard, the left–right distinction remains a vital and metaphorically potent instrument for structuring political discourse.

In the next part, we will examine whether adopting an extreme position—something implicitly contained within the left–right metaphor, particularly at the outer ends of the spectrum—can be regarded as an inappropriate or problematic mode of political agency.

4. Is the left-right distinction useful as "position taking" per se?

In this part, I will compare political position-taking with Alvin Plantinga's (2000)[46] defense of exclusivist commitment within religious discourse. Although one might object that religious claims are not directly comparable to political claims—particularly given their differing relations to truth—I argue that the advantages of this comparison outweigh the force of this objection, which ultimately proves less substantial than it initially appears. It ultimately clarifies why taking a position—even an extreme one—cannot, in itself, be deemed objectionable and thus underpins the left-right distinction as a spatial metaphor for different political claims. The purpose here is not to call into question democracy or the political center as such at the level of content. Rather, it is to show that their principled claim to represent plurality and rationality independently of substantive truth claims becomes epistemically neutral when subjected to a systematic line of reasoning, such as that developed in Plantinga's defense of exclusivism (2000)[46]. I will therefore engage in a detailed examination of Plantinga's work, as the rigor and structure of his argumentation provide a valuable framework for defending political position-taking understood as a stance in its own right.

4.1 We do not concentrate on the content of a claim but on the claim as a stance/position.

Alvin Plantinga (2000) undertakes a defense of religious exclusivism, which holds the belief that only one specific religion is truth and deeming other faiths false, against the critiques and objections advanced by pluralist thinkers, which claim for the peaceful coexistence, acceptance and mutual respect of diverse religions and beliefs within a society. At the beginning of his discussion, Plantinga reflects upon his student years, describing how, during a period of growing pluralism at the university —particularly within the faculty of philosophy—the question concerning the truth and validity of a multiplicity of positions, and consequently of the diverse answers to philosophical problems, presented a profound intellectual challenge.[46]

In his defense of exclusivism, Plantinga's central aim is to demonstrate why the clear and committed adherence to a *particular* position need *not* be regarded as intrusive, irrational, unjustified, unfounded, or even oppressive or hegemonic. At this point, I wish to draw a connection between religious, political, and philosophical modes of thought.

Pluralism and *exclusivism* may be conceived as two fundamental paradigms that manifest themselves across all domains of discourse, without necessarily leading to a conflation or dissolution of the distinct boundaries among these spheres.

The crucial point here is the need to distinguish between two levels of reference. On the one hand, there is the level of content, at which pluralism permits a multiplicity of religious positions and beliefs. I will call this level in part 5 of this essay "common-sense understanding of pluralism". In the political sphere, this corresponds to a democratic attitude—regardless of whether one differentiates between government for the people and government by the people, or between direct and representative democracy. In its foundational principles, democracy embodies the ideal of representing a plurality—indeed a majority, yet still a broad diversity—of interests. In this sense, democracy may be understood as a system grounded in political plurality, in contrast to authoritarian regimes. Similarly, the political center—located between the extreme right and the extreme left—can be conceived as a disposition that affirms diversity within the parameters of democratic order. All of this takes place on the level of content. At this level, plurality generates well-known challenges: the unresolved problem of conceptualizing the whole as something more than the sum of its parts, the potential marginalization of minorities, and similar issues. Yet these are not the concerns at stake here.

On the other hand, there is the level of stance, which abstracts from substantive content. At this level, pluralism, democracy, and the political center each occupy a clearly defined position that, by definition, regards its own standpoint as valid while classifying opposing positions as erroneous. It is precisely at this level that the left-right distinction becomes operative and demonstrates its analytical usefulness. Even though any point of departure ultimately requires a substantive claim, relational positioning facilitates coalition building and public communication under conditions of pronounced information asymmetry. At this more abstract level, the left-right distinction thus retains its analytical value and practical utility.

Bobbio (1994) argues that authoritarian standpoints better describe the distinction between extremists and moderates for both the Right and Left positions.[47] Both extremes are, however, constitutive for the self-definition of the center: relative to the right it appears left, and relative to the left it appears right. Yet no position attains a definitive demarcation or a fully determinate definition of itself, nor can any claim an exclusive hold on truth.

My intention is not to ascribe to Plantinga a scope beyond his explicitly religious framework, but rather to extend his formally logical line of reasoning into other domains of thought, thereby elucidating a rational basis for positioning between democratic and non-democratic systems, between a centrist stance and the more radical positions of the left or the right, as well as the relations among these positions. Thinkers who regard democracy and the political center as grounded in a principle of plurality should be equally aware of their own logical inconsistency, insofar as they place this pluralistic standpoint on the same rational plane (at the level of stance) as any other exclusivist position—whether of the far left or the far right. In this sense, the full spectrum of the left–right distinction is not merely useful for political discussion, but, in purely formal-logical terms, necessary.

Plantinga articulates (at the level of content) two theses of faith, each of which may be affirmed either independently or conjointly, thereby delineating the conceptual framework within which confrontation with theoretical opponents takes place. These two theses may be stated as follows:

"(1) The world was created by God—an almighty, all-knowing, and perfectly good personal being (one that holds beliefs; has aims, plans and intentions: and can act to accomplish these aims).

and

(2) Human beings require salvation, and God has provided a unique way of salvation through the incarnation, life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of his divine son."[48]

The plural appropriation and interpretation of these theses give rise to a global religious diversity (including agnosticism), accompanied by attendant difficulties in interreligious dialogue and, at times, by violent conflict. Exclusivism denotes the position that ascribes truth to a particular faith commitment while judging incompatible positions—therefore including other religious convictions—to be false. For this reason, exclusivism itself becomes the principal target of critique: it is frequently accused of being irrational, self-centered, and epistemically unjustified in matters of faith, or of exhibiting intellectual arrogance and elitism. Moreover, it is often charged with fostering a pernicious pride and with embodying imperialistic or oppressive tendencies.

Accordingly, the question at issue is not whether the faith theses (1) or (2) are true or false as such, but rather whether the stance of exclusivism itself can be sustained as epistemically and morally legitimate.

When democracy reproaches a totalitarian system—or, analogously, when the political center accuses the extreme right or left—of regarding opposing convictions as false, and of thereby adopting an irrational, egocentric, and unjustified position marked by intellectual arrogance, this judgment does not, strictly speaking, concern the substantive content of any given governmental program (regardless of its particular content or its claims to truth). Rather, it concerns the legitimacy of the *stance* itself. In this sense, democracy—or the political center—reproduces within its own framework precisely the same accusation it levels against its counterpart: namely, that a non-pluralist position is false.

In his essay, Plantinga (2000) distinguishes between two broad categories of accusation: one formulated in moral or ethical terms (according to which exclusivism is morally wrong), and another articulated in intellectual and epistemic terms (according to which exclusivism is irrational and unwarranted). Plantinga further refines the definition of exclusivism by stipulating that a person qualifies as an exclusivist only if they satisfy condition C—namely, that they are aware of the existence of other religious positions and are conscious of the fact that there is no rationally compelling argument capable of demonstrating the truth of their own position to adherents of another.[49] I would further propose, concerning both the original and the analogous reflection, that notwithstanding the impossibility of proving truth, the existence of truth itself—independent of human cognition or reference—remains a necessary presupposition. Agnosticism remains among the possible positions, yet it cannot evade the problem of the condition for assumption of the existence of truth, understood as something independent of human reasoning.

4.2. Is the comparison between religious claims and political claims reasonable?

The juxtaposition between democratic and non-democratic forms of government, or between the political center and the extremes of the left and right, cannot therefore be grounded in the pursuit of absolute truth.

According to Hannah Arendt (2015), one does not move within the political realm by advancing an absolute claim to truth; such a claim, Arendt argues, is in fact destructive in that context, since the mere reporting of facts cannot bring about any action-specific transformation of the world. Within political practice, opinion possesses a practical, action-guiding significance. Whereas facts, in Arendt's view, pertain only to the past, a situation of action necessarily encompasses both the present and the future. In her analysis, Arendt draws a clear distinction between opinion and organized political lying.[50]

In this respect and rethinking the observation of Vogl (2021) in part 3, that truth–in political fields as well–today seems based on affect-based judgment through valuation, clicks, and visibility ("affective value" facing an algorithmic logic of selection) a comparison with the religious question of faith is indeed tenable.

Furthermore, even democracy itself is founded upon the mathematical impossibility of devising a perfect voting system that can coherently aggregate the preferences of multiple individuals into a single collective decision—an impossibility formally demonstrated by Arrow's theorem and in its further discussion by Amartya Sen.[51] No electoral system (this counts not only for the political election but for any situation of collective choice) can satisfy all fairness criteria simultaneously; thus, we know that no perfectly fair and democratic procedure for collective decision-making can exist. Consequently, we are not operating within the domain of truth, but rather within the sphere of incomplete knowledge regarding collective judgment—even under conditions of intense social democracy, thus a direct democracy and not a representative democracy. For instance, if every political decision were to be determined not through a simple yes/no referendum (as the question itself would have to be proposed by direct democracy too and the Arrow's theorem is guilty starting from three possible alternatives and two voter), but rather by a ranked-preference popular vote—one in which forced successive binary choices are applied to a complex formulation of governance.

4.3 Moral and irrational objection to exclusivism/positioning.

Addressing the moral objection to exclusivism—that an exclusivist deems their own position true and another false—Plantinga (2000) identifies three possible attitudes one may adopt in response: [52]

(a) the continued affirmation of one's own position,

(b) suspension of judgment, or

(c) assent to the denial of one's own position.

According to Plantinga (2000), denial would lead to precisely the same situation—namely, to the conviction of one's own truth and the falsity of the opposing position (so long as unanimous agreement does not prevail). Consequently, such denial would not constitute any moral improvement. Plantinga considers the alternative of suspension of judgment as a morally more acceptable stance, which he terms *abstentionist pluralism*. Yet even the moral act of abstention entails a tacit commitment to a preferred course of action (that of abstaining itself) and thus entangles us in an analogous fundamental difficulty: there can be no escape from some form of preferential stance.[52]

Plantinga (2000) thus demonstrates that exclusivism cannot be successfully challenged on moral grounds, since alternative positions collapse under the weight of their own or an equivalent objection. He therefore rejects the claim that the mere affirmation of a position not demonstrably provable amounts, in itself, to arrogance or egocentrism.

Furthermore, Plantinga (2000) addresses the accusations of irrationality and lack of justification directed against exclusivist belief, noting their affinity with the moral-ethical critique. Is exclusivism epistemically unwarranted? An epistemic duty pertains to the possession of sufficient evidence for truth. The faith theses underlying exclusivism, in this sense, cannot fulfill such an epistemic duty by demonstrably attesting to their truth. After all, the falsity of these theses cannot be proven in this manner either.

Despite epistemic parity (as likewise found in ideological, political, and philosophical disputes), there persists an internal conviction—a faith-like assurance—concerning the correctness of one's own position. Indeed, analogous to the moral dimension previously discussed, it becomes apparent that the very claim of an epistemic stalemate would itself presuppose a kind of epistemic superiority on the part of the claimant, thereby resulting in the same circularity it purports to avoid.

Plantinga (2000) subsequently addresses the accusation of the irrationality of exclusivism, for which he distinguishes five related, yet conceptually distinct, senses of the term *rational*.[53]

He first refers to Aristotelian rationality, according to which the human being is characterized as a rational creature. Consequently, Plantinga (2000) rejects the charge that it would be unreasonable to regard the exclusivist as a rational human being. [53]

Secondly, he considers rationality in the Cartesian sense—as a source of a priori accessible knowledge and self-evident beliefs. An exclusivist would be irrational in this sense only if there existed *indubitable* insight into the counterarguments against their position. In the absence of such self-evident disproof, the accusation of irrationality remains unjustified.[53] In this sense political disputes *can* differ from religious ones, but only in reference to empiric questions, for ideological or philosophical positions – thus abstraction—uncertainty remains unaltered, as well as reflecting philosophically upon this affirmation itself.

Thirdly, deontological rationality denotes an intellectual obligation grounded in rational duty. This version of the charge has already been addressed under the moral dimension and, accordingly, is also dismissed by Plantinga (2000) as untenable.[53]

As a fourth conception, Plantinga (2000) introduces instrumental or teleological rationality—the sense in which human action is evaluated by its purposiveness and causal efficacy. Could the faith theses be deemed irrational in this pragmatic sense? Given the manifold purposiveness and functional significance of religious belief, irrationality could arise here only if the faith theses (1) and (2) were demonstrably false. Since these theses are not falsifiable, the criterion of instrumental rationality cannot be invoked against exclusivism.[53]

Finally, Plantinga invokes a fifth sense of rationality—rationality as mental soundness—that is, the cognitive and psychological integrity of an individual, which may be impaired through mental or neurological illness. In this sense as well, the exclusivist cannot be accused of irrationality, since condition C presupposes precisely such reflective mental soundness and self-awareness.[53]

In his concluding discussion, Plantinga (2000) turns to the justifiability of the exclusivist position. The question of the origin of one's conviction that (1) and (2) are true may indeed admit of diverse explanatory accounts; however, this does not impinge upon the fundamental *possibility* that (1) and (2) themselves are true.

4.4 The legitimacy of adopting a position along the left–right spectrum reinforces the validity of the left–right distinction itself.

The intention here is not to undermine democracy or the political center as such (at the level of content), but rather to demonstrate that the very *principled claim* of democracy—to represent plurality and rationality independently of substantive truth-claims—is, when examined through a structured argumentation such as Plantinga's defense of exclusivism (2000), rendered epistemically neutral. Every position, including that of pluralism or diversity itself, necessarily entails a *stance* or *positional commitment*. Only when this awareness is grasped in a logically and rationally coherent manner does genuine dialogue between positions become possible. Building on this observation, *position-taking per se*—independently of the concrete content of particular theses, which in political reality are often subject to fluctuation—through the spatial metaphor of the left–right distinction and when conceived as an act of engagement within that spectrum appears both reasonable and useful for political reality.

5. Completing the spatial metaphor: an analogy between quantum physics and the left-right distinction

As we have seen, the left-right distinction is a concept that is difficult to grasp, yet it continues to persist as a structural feature of political discourse. How, then, might an analogy with quantum physics illuminate the difficulties inherent in this question? Since the left–right distinction is framed as a spatial metaphor, this approach invites an examination of spatial dimensions more broadly, which in turn necessitates a brief engagement with physics. I will begin by introducing some general considerations from quantum physics, with particular attention to the spatial characteristics attributed to quantum phenomena. This discussion will not address ontological properties; rather, it will remain strictly at the level of metaphor. Having clarified the relevance and contemporary validity of the spatial metaphor underlying the left–right distinction, and having shown that adopting a position as a stance is rationally and logically coherent across the entire spectrum, I will now argue for the necessity of completing this spatial metaphor within the philosophical discussion.

5.1 Introducing a new state of an entity within the spatial perception.

Quantum mechanics is perhaps the only rationally accessible domain in which a singular entity—a quantum—can exist in two opposite states simultaneously, or in neither of them. Lee Smolin (2019) interprets quantum mechanics through the dichotomy of realism and anti-realism, arguing that while quantum theory yields accurate statistical predictions, it offers no definitive account of individual events. A quantum system evolves over time in two distinct ways: most of the time it develops continuously and deterministically in a non-definite state; yet when it is subjected to measurement, its state collapses abruptly into a definite one—a process known as the collapse of the wave function. Quantum mechanics, however, predicts only probabilities for these outcomes, such as the likelihood of finding a particle at a specific point in space.[54]

The enigma of the quantum world thus lies in how the collective, the probabilistic distribution of possible outcomes, determines the individual instance. Smolin, referring to Wheeler, acknowledges—though not uncritically—the notion that observation or perception participates in the constitution of reality.[55] This underscores the relational character of existence.

I do not intend to examine the question of whether measurement alters reality or not and, consequently, whether an external observational standpoint is possible in quantum physics. This issue remains open to interpretation within the scientific community and continues to prompt further philosophical inquiry.

5.2 Human thinking operates within a macroscopic system.

What then does this analogy suggest for understanding the left-right distinction in politics? The left-right distinction, after all, employs a spatial metaphor.

A spatial attribution, in the physical sense, is bound to the properties of space or spacetime. Human sensory perception is essentially tied to the physics of macroscopic systems, which is why the distinction between two points occurs either through coordinates or through another form of spatial relational reference, such as left and right.

At this point, we may again refer to the analogy of the black-white dyad discussed in part 2. Human sensory perception, such as perceiving "black and white" (or triad if including gray) rather than the full spectrum of colours that are reflected or absorbed or photons moving with speed of light, already constitutes an abstraction of a far more complex informational system. Abstraction, in this concern, is to be understood as a "process of forming general ideas or concepts by extracting similarities and general tendencies from direct experience, language, or other concepts"[56].

The human cognitive and perceptual apparatus performs such reductions of complexity through processes of abstraction, a phenomenon observable across many domains of human existence. The left-right distinction, as a further abstraction of spatial relational reference, appears particularly intuitive within the framework of everyday human interaction. This simplicity stems not only from the physiological limitations of human perception but also from the deeply embodied familiarity with binary structures: human beings possess two hands, two feet, two eyes, two ears etc. Such pairs of oppositional identities within a spatially relational system serve to simplify and structure the information of relatedness. We remember here too, the standpoint, which Stegmaier (2019) refers to, which first of all is the standpoint of one's body in the world and makes a perspective possible.[5]

In this sense, the left-right metaphor exemplifies the human tendency to navigate complexity by constructing meaningful oppositions that make the world, and one's position within it, conceptually graspable and intelligible.

5.3 A microscopic level allows a superposition of characteristics of locality.

The perception of the quantum level, by contrast, depends on the scientific investigation of microscopic systems, which makes it possible to conceive of entities that *do not possess definite spatial properties* (prior to measurement). Only at this level does the conceivable possibility emerge that an existing entity could be in a "superposition" of two opposing states at the same time. While "left" and "right" are not standard quantum states, two possible spatial locations can be treated analogously and can coexist in superposition prior to observation.

This fundamental conceptual possibility (that an entity may exist in a state of superposition) further opens the metaphorical analogy that such a superposition can be maintained only in isolation from external systems that induce decoherence or measurement. It thus corresponds to an *individual level of existence* that is not yet forced into a well-defined (for example, localized) state.

I further conclude (not in an ontological but in a metaphorical sense), that only an isolated political system can be compared to superposition of a quantum system that exists in no definite state of spatial situatedness—neither left nor right. When this system enters into relation with another (through observation, measurement, or, in political terms, through interaction) it does assume a determinate position. The act of observation itself is crucial in quantum physics. Analogously, political interaction could depend on the macroscopic system within which the relation occurs. The left-right distinction, then, may be understood as a relational construct between political systems, meaningful only within the broader relational complexity of the macrosystem in which it is situated.

At this point, I would like to return to Plantinga's (2000) argument[46] discussed in part 4 and extend it through the analogy with quantum physics. In Plantinga's framework, exclusivism may be understood as a well-defined epistemic state—a commitment to a determinate position that affirms certain beliefs while rejecting incompatible ones as false. Pluralism, by contrast, seen from the common-sense understanding seems to resemble the quantum state of superposition: an indeterminate configuration in which multiple, even opposing, possibilities coexist prior to observation or measurement. Plantinga denied this common-sense understanding by arguing that the pluralist position is a well-defined preference position too.

When this analogy is transferred to the political domain, the left–right distinction appears as a spatial structure of such epistemic determinations. The political center, situated between the extremes of the far left and the far right, constitutes a relational system of well-defined yet interdependent positions. The political center, though seemingly neutral, remains spatially determined—left in relation to the right and right in relation to the left. It therefore cannot be described as a (metaphorical) true "superposition".

5.4 In political discourse no system can exist in an isolated state.

A genuine (metaphorical) *superpositional* state within the left–right discourse (as well as a pluralist or abstention position in the common-sense understanding of religious questions) would require complete isolation: a political system existing without any correlation to another, unaffected by interaction, observation, or mutual reference. In this sense, even extremist systems such as communism or fascism could be described as "superpositional", but only in their imagined isolation — as long as they remain "unobserved" within the relational field of political discourse. Yet once they enter into relation with other systems—through comparison, opposition, or interaction—they, too, collapse into "well-defined states", analogous to exclusivist positions and analogous to a measured quantum particle.

Ultimately, this analogy suggests that every political system, insofar as it interacts with others, is necessarily drawn into a–metaphoric spatial—field of relational determination. This shows the unavoidable contextuality of the left-right distinction. True neutrality, or "common-sense understanding of pluralism" (metaphorical "superposition"), could exist only in absolute isolation—a condition impossible within the inherently interactive reality of politics. This analogy constitutes the left-right distinction once more as a legitimate tool within political discussion. From these considerations it also follows that the philosophical debate on the left-right distinction as a spatial metaphor stands to benefit from completing the conceptual picture with the simple yet fundamental possibility that an entity (a quantum) may exist in a state of superposition—not in spite of, but indeed precisely because, in the metaphorical application to political systems such a condition may not be feasible.

Conclusion:

All perspectives on the question of whether the left–right distinction remains useful for political orientation - namely,

(2) the historical, philosophical, and political analysis of the distinction underlines the historical persistence and context adaptability;

(3) its relation of the actual political context to the history of democracy, the role of information, and the digital revolution;

(4) the left-right distinction as an act of position-taking per se shows the formal legitimacy of stance-taking across the whole spectrum; and

(5) an analogy between the superposition states of locality in quantum physics and the left-right distinction as a spatial metaphor illustrates the relational determination of political positions through interaction and completes the spatial metaphor;

converge on the answer *yes* and the conclusion that a continued examination of this question, and thereby of political orientation itself, is both necessary and justified.

The question—like the very subject of inquiry—will persist precisely because of its constitutive significance as an integral element within a broader system, that is, within the totality of the "erotetic game" as well as the "cosmos of orientation". This ongoing relevance is further reinforced by the problematized, globally interconnected reality in which all domains of human concern—political, economic, social, scientific, artistic and religious alike—are increasingly interwoven.

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